



FBI Director: “Ferguson Effect” Endangering America’s Cities

In the year since the riots in Ferguson, Missouri, public sentiment toward law enforcement has deteriorated. And violent crime has risen in many of America’s cities which had been seeing those numbers decline.

As groups such as Black Lives Matter call for the murder of anyone wearing a badge — and some take up that call with violent effectiveness — the implication is that “Blue Lives Don’t Matter.” In the midst of this, police officers and deputy sheriffs all over the country have found themselves responding more slowly with force in dangerous situations. Fear of being featured in the next viral YouTube video or eviscerated in media reports has many of them taking just a little longer to react.



The “Ferguson Effect” has changed both the level of violent crime and the way law enforcement deals with it. And citizens in America’s cities are paying for it.

CNN.com [reports](#) that FBI Director James Comey (shown) stated, “Far more people are being killed in America’s cities this year than in many years,” and pointed out that the level of restraint to which many police officers and deputies feel compelled to hold themselves is partly to blame. He asserted that much of the death toll in America’s cities is among “people of color,” adding, “it’s not the cops doing the killing.”

His remarks were part of a speech he gave at the University of Chicago Law School, of which he is a graduate. While Comey seems to understand the real issue of law enforcement feeling “under siege,” he did not acknowledge the part his previous remarks — critical of local and state law enforcement — have played in creating the so-called Ferguson Effect. There is no effect without a cause, and Comey shares the blame in that cause.

Any honest attempt to understand the Ferguson Effect must begin with what really happened in that city. In other words, what is the Ferguson Cause?

One real issue that keeps getting lost in the mix is that the Ferguson Effect is based on a lie — a lie told by anti-police race-baiters and picked up by national media. It was given a veneer of credibility by the federal government from Comey to Obama. The lie is that Officer Darren Wilson did something wrong when he shot and killed Michael Brown on August 9, 2014. As *The New American* previously reported, the facts of what happened that day were ignored in favor of the anti-police narrative. As we noted then:



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on November 4, 2015

Initial reports — which have since been shown to be false — were that Officer Wilson shot Michael Brown even though Brown was surrendering and had his hands in the air. As Deputy Chief of Police Tracy Basterrechea in Meridian, Idaho, told *The New American*, once erroneous information gets out — and the media run with it — people find it difficult to believe the actual truth:

You have to try to get the [complete] information out first because when the misinformation gets out, that's the information that sticks. That is what happened in the Ferguson shooting. The misinformation got out and was the first thing people saw, and so it became "the gospel."

What was *not* initially reported — and was largely ignored by most media even after the facts were known — is that Brown and an accomplice had just robbed a convenience store of several packs of small cigars, assaulting a clerk in the process. When Officer Wilson saw them walking down the street, he recognized them from the description of the suspects. He blocked them with his police SUV and Brown then reached into the open window to attack the officer. Brown and Wilson struggled for Wilson's sidearm until it was discharged inside the SUV. Brown and his accomplice, Dorian Johnson, ran away, and Wilson pursued them on foot. Brown then turned and charged toward Officer Wilson, who ordered Brown to stop. When he did not, Officer Wilson shot him several times.

Because of the widespread reporting of false information, the Ferguson shooting became a springboard for anti-police sentiment. It was seen as a clear case of racism: A white police officer shot an unarmed black "teenager." The mainstream media and the "Black Lives Matter" crowd never mentioned that it could have been self-defense. White cop, black "teenager": racism. The facts were not allowed to get in the way of the narrative.

So the cause of the Ferguson Effect is the Ferguson Narrative, which is a lie. The result, as John Nolte [reported for Breitbart](#) back in May, is catastrophic:

Gun violence is up more than 60% compared with this time last year, according to Baltimore police, with 32 shootings over Memorial Day weekend. May has been the most violent month the city has seen in 15 years.

In Milwaukee, homicides were up 180% ... Through April, shootings in St. Louis were up 39%, robberies 43%, and homicides 25%. "Crime is the worst I've ever seen it," said St. Louis Alderman Joe Vacarro at a May 7 City Hall hearing.

Murders in Atlanta were up 32%... Shootings in Chicago had increased 24% and homicides 17%. Shootings and other violent felonies in Los Angeles had spiked by 25%; in New York, murder was up nearly 13%, and gun violence 7%....

Shooting incidents are up 500% in an East Harlem precinct compared with last year; in a South Central Los Angeles police division, shooting victims are up 100%.

People are dying and law enforcement officers are second-guessing themselves as they respond to very real dangers. In his Chicago speech, Comey referred to the prevalence of YouTube videos which have fanned the flames of the Ferguson Effect. He said, "In today's YouTube world, are officers reluctant to get out of their cars and do the work that controls violent crime? Are officers answering 911 calls but avoiding the informal contact that keeps bad guys from standing around, especially with guns?"

As part of a [special report](#) on *Police Under Fire* for the print version of *The New American*, this writer interviewed several police officers around the country. Recently retired Sergeant John Slater in the



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Richmond, Virginia, area explained that he never feared the citizens who videoed the officers under his command. There have been many situations, he noted, where citizens would use a smartphone to video what was happening with police. He said:

I would approach them and identify myself and give my badge number and tell them that I was glad to see what they were doing. I'd tell them, "You have every right to do this. I'm glad you're doing it. If you don't exercise this right, you may lose it." Most of the time, they would put the phone away, which isn't what I wanted, but they aren't going to get a bunch of hits on their video if someone isn't getting their rights violated.

Slater's point is valuable as the insight of someone who has lived with the reality of having his every act scrutinized. How reliable is the perception that people draw from the videos of police brutality and heavy handedness? Are those videos an accurate reflection of day-to-day reality, or are they just the extreme exception that gets shown simply because it is extreme? Where are the YouTube videos of officers unlocking cars or changing tires for people, or searching for lost children, or spending their own money buying groceries for families in need? They don't exist — even though anyone who knows any policemen knows those things happen frequently. They don't exist because they aren't likely to go viral. That, along with Comey's previous comments and major media spreading misinformation while ignoring real facts, has created a skewed narrative.

And because the narrative is so skewed, police officers are second-guessing themselves at times when milliseconds may mean they will be "the second one to pull the trigger," as Sergeant Slater put it. He said that in his last few months before retiring in May 2015, there were officers under his command who told him that their reflexes and reactions were slower because they feared being accused of acting wrongly. Even though they are following department policies and doing their jobs properly, they do have concerns that they could be the next leading story because of either a misunderstanding or a false accusation. Or both.

As Comey is now acknowledging the Ferguson Effect as a reality, one is left to wonder where he is going with this. Now that the poison he helped inject into America's cities is taking effect, what antidote will he offer? And what will it cost America's citizens?

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