

Community Comment
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~~A police state of mind.~~

Since a young black man was shot and killed by a private citizen, acting as a community watch activist, in the state of Florida, we all became much more aware of the “stand your ground” laws. These laws give legal protection for defending yourself or your property by the use of lethal force. In the last two years or so, we seem to have an increase in, or at least more awareness of Police officers using lethal force on unarmed individuals. Race has been injected in this because these events seem to involve white officers and black citizens.

Just this week, we have another incident where a white officer shot and killed a black man running away from the officer. This time, someone witnessed the action and made a video recording of it. He apparently used his cell phone as a video camera. So far, the officers have received the benefit of the doubt that the lethal force used was necessary. Not this time. The officer was arrested and charged with murder and fired from the force. These actions came quickly and forcefully. One wonders if they would have without the cell phone video.

What gives? What has sparked this sudden escalation of police using lethal force when it seems clear there was no clear and present danger to the officers or bystanders in the area? Is it racial bias? Is it abuse of power? Is it bad training? Is it poor selection in hiring? I don't know but I have an idea.

Since 9-11, we have changed. When our President and Congress enacted the Patriot Act, we changed. We became fearful. We established a huge new bureaucracy called the Homeland Security Agency. We started training officers of the law, from the feds on down, to always expect the worse case. Grants were available to larger cities to get surplus military equipment for city police forces. We have also fought hard against even the most reasonable gun restrictions. The result is that the police are often outgunned in a confrontation with criminals. So, what do we have?

~~We have lost much of our individual privacy. Big brother is watching everything we do.~~ We let our representatives pass these laws and rewarded them by re-electing them. As technology has evolved, what the government didn't legislate, we freely give away on the internet. We give away all kinds of personal information on any old wi-fi and don't seem a bit concerned.

We have trained many police forces to become more military in nature. I grew up believing that “with more power comes more responsibility”. We seem to be practicing “with more power comes more opportunity”.

And race probably does play a part. We may not like to admit it, but we have a long way to go to see equal opportunity for all. Of course we have made progress, but after six years with a black president, I would have expected more. But the blatant disrespect for him, even as a sitting, twice elected President, has been disappointing at best.

America is better than this. But we all need to affect the change we need to make.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.