



BOOK REVIEW

Jeff Smith, *Ferguson in Black and White* (Amazon Kindle Single, 2014). Radley Balko, *Rise of the Warrior Cop: The Militarization of America's Police Forces* (New York, NY: Perseus Books, 2013).

The August 19, 2014, shooting death of 18-year-old Michael Brown at the hands of a Ferguson police officer sparked a series of protests, discussions, and debates that far transcended the boundaries of the Missouri town. From messages conveyed through community demonstrations to the opinions disseminated over the airwaves by talking heads, the incident sent a shockwave across the United States and reignited discussions related to race relations, civil rights, and law enforcement in the United States.

Jeff Smith, an assistant professor at The New School and former St. Louis City representative in the Missouri State Senate, approaches the Ferguson case through an examination of its context, offering insights into both the past and present of the region along the veins of geography, economics, and politics. His piece, *Ferguson in Black and White*—released November 21, 2014, as a Kindle Single—offers an examination of the structures, politics and psychological underpinnings that form the basis of the present unrest experienced in Ferguson, while also sharing insights into the conflict itself gathered through dozens of interviews. Smith writes: “In St. Louis, the decisions of the past created the conditions of the present, which have imbued so many residents with a nihilism about the future”—a statement that perhaps best captures the need for such a retrospective.

Smith opens the short piece by sharing the various accounts of what happened during the interaction between Michael Brown and Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson, accounts that, at times, varied significantly. He then includes some details about similar instances in other parts of the country that involved the killing of African American men by Caucasian police officers, seeking to lay the foundation for an analysis of what factors in Ferguson in particular (citing St. Louis's history, economics, politics, leadership structure, and culture) set it apart from the range of other jurisdictions that have played host to similar incidents. Smith's interviews (with sources running the gamut from community members to legislators) reveal some of the modern tensions between police and the community in Ferguson, tensions related to everything from traffic stop procedures to arrests and complaints regarding use of force. Smith next probes into the evolution of the St. Louis region, and in particular the racial power disparities and the history of segregation that have persisted over time. Of Ferguson, Smith writes, “it was a ‘sundown town’ from which blacks were supposed to disappear after dusk.”

The piece then returns to the case of Michael Brown, offering a discussion of the various factors that continue, to this day, to limit the potential for black political power and exacerbate the divide between government—police included—and the community, both in Ferguson and in its surrounding area. Finally, Smith offers a range of possible solutions that could address some of the root causes of the rage that has come to a boiling point in this Missouri town. From municipal consolidation to law enforcement overhaul, education to jobs and economic opportunity, the policy recommendations are embedded in the historical trends and the varying impact they have had on the region.

Thus, *Ferguson in Black and White* offers readers an accessible, quick read that details some of the historical context surrounding the recent events in Ferguson that was somewhat lacking in most

popular media accounts of the Michael Brown incident and the protests that followed it. Moreover, the perspective of an urban policy professor and former state senator offers a unique take on many aspects of the subjects it touches upon—economic stratification, political power disparities and divides, and race relations—that serves to enhance the overall value of the work. While the piece is slightly dated, with references to a grand jury decision that has since been made public, the core content of the publication remains relevant, and perhaps more important given the protests and conversations that followed its release.

Ferguson in Black and White lends itself well to readers, both academics and students, interested in the fields of public policy, criminal justice, economics, and political science, as well as those curious to learn more about the racial divide that remains in many parts of the country. It can also be added to the reading list for policymakers who seek to become more informed about the context in Ferguson that led to the powder-keg response that followed the Summer 2014 incident and the subsequent protests and grand jury decision. The recommendations outlined by Smith offer value to policymakers and other practitioners who might seek to better identify similar contexts in their own communities, and to learn from the lessons that Ferguson offers.

Closely related to the events in Ferguson—and a strong result of the protests and debates that followed them—is the renewed, widespread interest in the subject of police procedure and the tactics used by modern-day American law enforcement agencies, a topic that is paid generous attention by investigative journalist Radley Balko in his book, *Rise of the Warrior Cop: The Militarization of America's Police Forces*.

Rise of the Warrior Cop explores the history of American law enforcement and the evolving tactics employed by police agencies across the country, leading from the very theoretical and practical basis for the creation of such agencies to an evaluation of the “now dominant military culture within modern police agencies” (p. xii). From a discussion of *posse comitatus* and the increasing role of the American military in domestic components of the “War on Drugs” to chronicling the institution of SWAT teams in urban and suburban police agencies, the publication touches on a range of historical developments in policing and criminal justice. Various vignettes offer support for some of the concerns Balko and his interviewees offer throughout the text, while a “by the numbers” feature offered throughout the book helps to provide data and evidence of some of the developments it discusses.

The book, a product of both historical research and a series of interviews and investigations conducted by the author, is a thoroughly engaging work that leads readers down a complex road of increasing depth. By introducing stories of actual events—derived in some cases through case files and interviews, and in others from the sometimes limited press clippings available—Balko’s book succeeds in drawing in the audience, and in helping to illustrate the various impacts that come about from public policies related to policing and crime suppression and prevention. An award-winning journalist who has written about issues related to the criminal justice system and civil liberties, Balko is able to flex his subject-matter muscles, so to speak, in offering a detailed analysis of what has become a dominant trend in American policing. As Balko concludes, “police today are armed, dressed, trained, and conditioned like soldiers. They’re given greater protections from civil and criminal liability than normal citizens” (p. 334).

Balko’s book offers value to academics as well as ordinary citizens seeking to learn more about modern policing tactics. Whether for a course at the undergraduate or graduate level, or merely for personal enlightenment, this volume offers a comprehensive and well-sourced retrospective on the history of American law enforcement and modern developments that have provided local police departments across the United States with military equipment and, in some cases, a quasi-military mindset. This book should be especially appealing to those teaching criminology and criminal justice, urban affairs, public policy, and civil liberties. Balko’s book should also be of use to policymakers and practitioners, especially for its policy and reform recommendations.

The writings of both Smith and Balko shed light on the historical underpinnings of the Michael Brown shooting, the ensuing controversies, and the trial. The books highlight the enduring racial

disparities that exist in the United States, the continued disconnect between police and the communities they serve, and the way tensions are exacerbated by militaristic tactics that have been part of the police response to particular incidents. Both works do a good job in supplementing the usually shallow reports offered in the mainstream press, making the books valuable for those seeking to delve into the root conditions that underlie present tensions.

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