

POLICE PERCEPTION

Trust in law enforcement takes hit as brutality incidents surface

Abbey Marshall | Staff Writer

Michael Brown. Freddie Gray. Eric Garner.

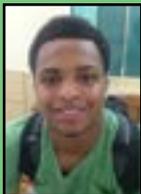
After the events that transpired with these men in Ferguson, Baltimore, and other cities nationwide, media has flocked to report on incidents of alleged police brutality. These situations have caused a decline in public trust of police, according to a 2014 poll taken by USA Today, which reported that two out of three Americans say officers don't do a good job when it comes to "force, fair treatment and accountability". Growing tensions in response to the deaths of African-Americans by the hand of police officers eventually erupted into violent riots in Baltimore, where Freddie Gray passed away in police custody. These riots urge people to address the topic of police and public relations, according to junior DeAngelo Simmons.

Simmons said he believes that police brutality is an issue that is age-old, but is just now being brought to the forefront because of information that is more readily available today than in previous years.

"Police brutality is something that has existed for many years, but it's just coming to our attention because of the social media age," Simmons said.

According to Mason Police Officer Drew Herrlinger, the media's portrayal of these events doesn't necessarily depict the full story.

"It's hard to ignore stereotypes when those stereotypes involve you dying or living...But every cop isn't bad just like every black person isn't a thug."



— DEANGELO SIMMONS
JUNIOR

"There's a rush to judgment," Herrlinger said. "The media is going to publish what sells without looking into it further...They're a business, so they're going to sell what works for them and that's protesting, riot-

ing, things of that nature. Rarely do we see the good that people do every day."

"Are there bad apples? Absolutely...This career field is no different than any other field, it's just that we're out in the public so there's a lot more (attention)."



—DREW HERRLINGER
MASON POLICE OFFICER

Junior Alex Eatrides, however, said the media's interference isn't the issue. According to Eatrides, this topic wouldn't be receiving as much attention without continuous coverage from news outlets.

"I don't think the media has really been blowing it up; I think communities of people are blowing it up and the media is forced to show that," Eatrides said. "The community of Baltimore is really starting to step up and say they've had enough...The media is just showing that it's getting very violent because people have just had enough."

According to Simmons, the growing mistrust of officers is a popular opinion for a particular demographic. Because most coverage has been of the abuse of black citizens, many African-Americans have developed an unfavorable view of law enforcement, Simmons said, and this is largely attributed to the media's presentation of these events.

"It is a race thing," Simmons said. "The black instances are being put to the forefront. I'm sure it happens too with a white cop and a white guy...I don't think (trust of police has) ever been up with black people. There's always been some type of inequality...Most of these police officers have probably been brought up (hearing) stereotypes and it's hard to ignore stereotypes when those stereotypes involve you dying or living...But every cop isn't bad just like every black person isn't a thug."

Herrlinger said he acknowledges that there are a few officers that dis-

respect the profession by creating situations that need to be investigated.

"Are there bad apples?" Herrlinger said. "Absolutely...This career field is no different than any other field, it's just that we're out in the public so there's a lot more (attention), especially with social media and recording devices."

The few police officers that taint the image of law enforcers will be dealt with to the full extent of the law, according to Herrlinger.

"Those people that tarnish the badge are dealt with swiftly and succinctly in the sense that they go through the process and they become a criminal," Herrlinger said. "We are not above the law...Those that don't do the right thing...will be disciplined probably greater than most civilians will be."

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MASON POLICE OFFICER

Simmons said he believes the rocky relationship between law enforcement and the public can be mended by a public apology.

"The police and the government definitely owe the people--and when I say people, I mean everybody: white people, Hispanics, Asians--an explanation and a reassurance that we can trust in them (and) in the future, the proper precautions will be taken," Simmons said.

According to Herrlinger, if both citizens and law enforcement attempt to fix currently poor relations, unity is a possibility in the near future.

"If I had my way...I would make the chiefs of police more accountable," Herrlinger said. "We would have to (do something like) a unity rally...When people come together and they're united, I think that's a powerful statement...America's a powerful country."

Nationwide Incidents

- Cleveland (2014): Cleveland police were suspected of misconduct by the Justice Department after many incidents, one of which included the shooting of two unarmed citizens on a high-speed chase. 137 shots were fired.

- Albuquerque (2014): Justice Department investigated 21 shootings by police. A \$4.25 million settlement was reached for the family of a victim of one of these incidents.

President Obama's plan for police brutality

- "Establish a task force on police accountability": He wants to create an organization that will work with state governments to implement practices to increase police accountability.

- "Demilitarize the police": He wants the government to more closely monitor the use of deadly force and review the program currently in place in response to the killings.

- "Fund body cams for police": A proposed solution to decrease police misconduct is the use of body cameras, however, this is an expensive plan. Obama wants federal funding to be used for these cameras.

- "Convene community meetings": The attorney general is initiating community conversations about the topic of police brutality to discuss possible solutions.

Information from NBC news and colorlines.com