The Thinning Blue Line

The War on Cops: How the New Attack on Law and Order Makes Everyone Less Safe

By Heather Mac Donald

H e was a “good kid,” a “gentle giant,” a “student who loomed large and didn’t cause trouble.” His hands were raised in a signal of cooperation and peaceful surrender. The white policeman saw that the black teenager was no threat but—compelled by racial or racist motivation—pulled the trigger of his service weapon anyway, firing shot after shot at the defenseless young man, killing him in cold blood.

That is the myth at the center of the “growing crusade against law enforcement” that Heather Mac Donald chronicles in The War on Cops: How the New Attack on Law and Order Makes Everyone Less Safe. The “hands up, don’t shoot” narrative about the shooting of Michael Brown by Officer Darren Wilson was recklessly repeated and amplified by the media, fueling the riots in Ferguson, Missouri, and continuing to persist—despite being irrefutably disproved by the evidence. Mac Donald summarizes what that evidence established:

“Wilson had first seen Brown walking in the middle of the Canfield Drive with another young man. Wilson saw boxes of cigarrillos in Brown’s hands and suspected that Brown was the thief who was reported to have robbed a convenience store and rogued up his owner a few minutes earlier. Wilson asked Brown to move to the sidewalk. Brown responded: ‘F——— what you have to say.’ Wilson called for backup and then tried to block Brown from proceeding. At that point, Brown reached into Wilson’s ear and started pounding him and grabbing for his gun. Wilson fired, and Brown ran off. Wilson gave chase on foot. Brown then turned and charged toward Wilson.” It was then that Wilson fatally shot Brown.

Mac Donald, a scholar at the Manhattan Institute, has collected and expanded a number of her influential essays on policing, crime, and the criminal-justice system in The War on Cops, which provides a devastating rebuttal to the arguments of the anti-law-enforcement movement, and a powerful defense of law-and-order policies. The book tackles a variety of topics, from police shootings to crime rates to “mass incarceration,” all with amazing insight, intelligence, and clarity. Which is not to say that I always found it easy to read.

The truth is not always a happy thing, and right now there are many unhappy realities. In our fifty largest cities, there has been a steep spike in crime, reversing a two-decade-long decline, with homicides in 2015 rising nearly 17%—the biggest increase in a quarter-century. The return of chaos and lawlessness has occurred, Mac Donald argues, because of “a multipronged attack on law enforcement” that includes: a push by the media to blame everything on discrimination; the relentless efforts by activists to end policing tactics that enabled the crime drop of the 1990s and 2000s; and the virulent vilification of the police by the media and activists alike.

Mac Donald finds the last of these the most dangerous, as it leads to the “Ferguson effect”: in the face of great hostility toward the police, we see a decrease in proactive policing and an increase in violent crime. She shows that, while policing and jailing disproportionately affects African-Americans, “all crime commission, whether felony or misdemeanor, is racially disproportionate” (e.g., “young black men commit homicide at nearly ten times the rate of young white and Hispanic males combined”). Who are overwhelmingly the victims of this crime? They are those—so often overlooked—who have most benefited from policing: law-abiding African-Americans living in our inner cities.

I am hopeful that in the new year, under a new president, we will see law and order return across our country. Our fellow citizens deserve to live in peace, free from the fear of crime or violence. I am also hopeful that respect for law enforcement and the vital role that police play in protecting all of us will prevail, as it prevails in the “legions of inner-city residents who fervently support the police and whose voices are almost never heard in the media.” To understand the problems we face—and must confront—listen to Heather Mac Donald, not the mainstream media, as Mac Donald writes about the anti-cop agenda of the New York Times: “Until editors and reporters from the Times start patrolling dark stairwells in housing projects and running toward gang gunfire, their superior concern for black men will lack credibility.”

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NOTE 2

If you don’t follow API on social media—and why not, by the way?—you missed these photo-essays illustrating our past two words of the week. Taylor Dawson narrates:

\[I \text{ learned a posteriori that Katie could devour seven Krispy Kreme doughnuts, in as many minutes, if they were still hot.}\]

**Words and Phrases (You’d Like to Know)**

**Geländesprung**: German: from Gelände, “open fields” + Sprung, “jump.”

“I find myself inquisitively exploring the mandate given by Adam Smith to preserve national monuments. The mind was propelled thataway when in an idle moment during a holiday I searched the wave band of a portable radio in quest of something to listen to. There were waves between twenty and twenty-five options at that location, none of them relaying classical music. It required only a little Cartesian Geländesprung to slight at my conclusion: Isn’t it the responsibility of the government to maintain monuments that are man-made, as well as those given us by nature? Nobody argues against the government’s maintaining Yellowstone National Park. . . . Isn’t it, by the same reasoning, a responsibility of government to maintain . . . Beethoven?”

—William P. Buckley Jr.