

There's a thin line between civilization and savagery... and that line is blue



BILL SPAEDA

Every Friday on my morning radio show on New Jersey 101.5 FM, I dedicate time to honor men and women in law enforcement. My goal is to counter what seems like a cultural norm of spreading fear and hatred of law enforcement officers. Many Hollywood elites and groups like Black Lives Matter have pushed a narrative about police brutality that doesn't add up when you look at the facts and the sheer number of times law enforcement interacts with the public. Bottom line is that although there are prosecutable incidents, for the most part cops are out there every day, standing up for the community, solving problems and taking criminals off the streets.

Too many politicians and media personalities want Americans to believe that two equal sides are at play when reporting on police activity: on one side, people with legitimate grievances against police; on the other, the need to keep law enforcement officers safe. But the sides are not equal. To raise an incident that resulted in a man's death during an arrest to the level of the assassination of officers responding to a 911 call is inaccurate and wrong.

One is the criminal act of murdering someone because they wear a uniform. The other is a mistake based on circumstances. Prosecutors and grand jury decisions continue to reinforce that when someone dies as the result of police action, their death is a terrible accident. And more often than not, it is entirely justifiable.

Many activists in the Black Lives Matter movement would have you believe that racist, poorly trained cops are preying on innocent victims. That narrative is ludicrous and false. The second narrative, that bad cops don't face justice, is equally false. There are numerous examples of cops being charged and convicted after killing someone in the line of duty. Let's not forget the recent case of Michael Slager.

It's critical to put the issue in context. The nation has 900,000 law enforcement officers, who arrest more than 12 million people every year and make tens of millions of traffic stops. Think about their sheer volume of interaction. Questionable shootings and killings at the hands of the police are almost nonexistent from that perspective. Even *The Washington Post*, reporting on the 990 people killed by police in 2015, concluded that the overwhelming majority of those killed were armed and threatening police.

So when you look at the number of times an arrest makes national headlines because an officer is accused of misconduct or brutality, the percentage is infinitesimal. That's not to say that if someone dies it's not serious and shouldn't be investigated. However, when listening to the media, you'd think cops were running rampant, trampling people's rights and killing based on skin color. That is simply not the case.

At the outset of #BlueFriday, I thought that if the media posted stories and gave them Ferguson-style coverage every time a



cop was killed in the line of duty, the narrative would change quickly. With a law enforcement officer dying on the job every 60 hours, there'd be a story every couple of days. I thought we could change the narrative by focusing on the real work cops do and the critical support they offer our communities. We've had some great honorees over the past few months, and I will continue to honor the brave people in law enforcement as long as I have a microphone.

Someone asked me to describe what I do on TV and radio. "Simple," I replied. "Remember how your mom told you to never discuss politics, religion and race in polite company? On a daily basis, I like to cover all three, typically all at once."

Several months ago, in a case of mistaken identity, officers chased a fifth-grader in Newark, guns drawn. They had been chasing an armed robber who eluded them, leading them to chase and confront the young man. It sparked an emotional social media post with a crying kid and mom. Initially, it sounds terrible. How could cops be so aggressive and wrong, mistaking a 10-year-old as the robbery suspect? When you look a little deeper, you learn the kid is large for his age, and after the police lost sight of the suspect, they saw a person running away from them. According to the boy and his family, he was playing basketball when his ball went into the street. He saw the officers running and assumed it was for him — for playing in the street — so he ran.

Thankfully, this didn't end badly. Remember when police in Cleveland killed Tamir Rice? The police were not charged because they had been called to the scene with a man waving a gun and, in the split second the officer had to make a decision, he fired at a kid holding a toy gun. Of course, the gun looked real and the officer had followed procedure. But you can't undo what happened, and a young life is gone.

The reaction from Black Lives Matter and its proponents has been an all-out attack on cops, going beyond specific incidents and using select facts that hide the true picture of law enforce-

ment and the reality of what cops face every day. What's ironic is the sad truth of who is really hurt by the movement. Too often, our cultural dialogue has turned negative toward law enforcement officers. When families are telling kids to be scared of police because of a few tragic incidents (most of which have a reasonable explanation), the vicious circle of increased racial tension and rising crime continues. According to the FBI, 80 percent of crimes in certain areas are gang related. Those are exactly the places that need aggressive policing, like "quality of life," "broken windows" and "stop and frisk."

Young boys in those neighborhoods need to build trust and respect with the officers charged with making those neighborhoods safe. Shame on leaders who cultivate an irrational fear of police among black youth. The entire movement started on the lie from Ferguson, "Hands up, don't shoot," and has been perpetuated by isolating certain statistics to paint a picture of cops preying on unarmed blacks. The false narrative being pushed by the Black Lives Matter movement is harming the very people they claim to represent. Murder among black Americans is high and rising. For nearly 20 years, the crime rates in our cities were dropping, creating the opportunity for families to live without the constant fear of being subjected to horrific street violence. The dramatic change started under Mayor Rudy Giuliani's leadership in New York City, when police policies known as "broken windows," "CompStat" and "stop and frisk" were employed. By the time he left office, murders had dropped from a high of 2,600 in 1990 to fewer than 900 in 2001. Rapes, robberies and assaults all went down, showing a return of order to the city. The trend was picked up in other cities across America, and for the next two decades, crime dropped by nearly 50 percent.

Then Ferguson. A black man who had just been caught on a store's surveillance camera stealing cigars and strong-arming

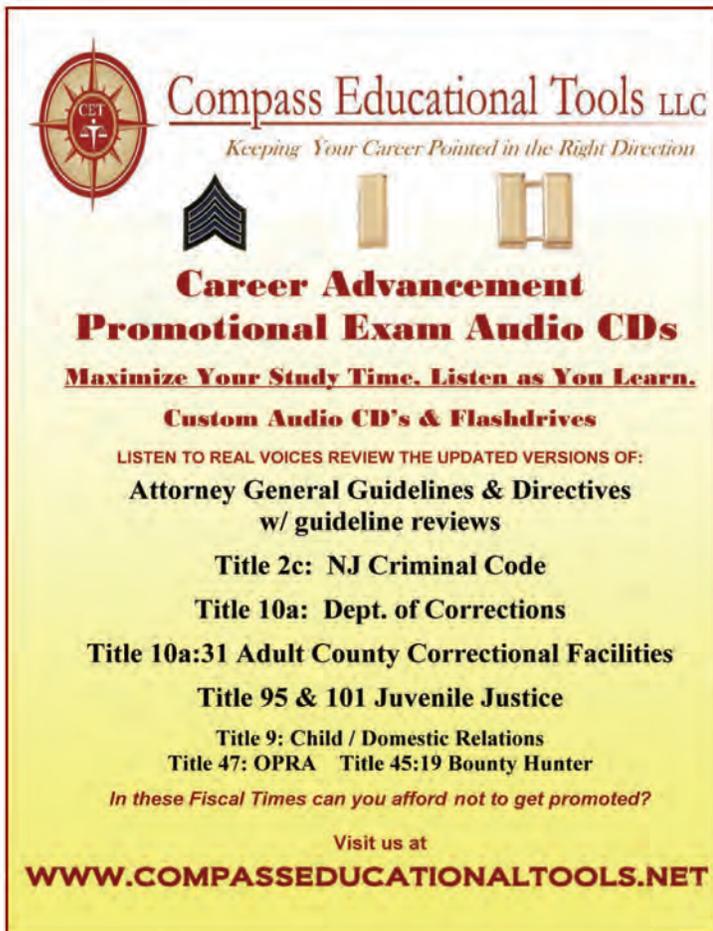
the clerk assaulted a white cop named Darren Wilson. It took only hours for the narrative to start that the officer killed a young man who was attempting to surrender and begging for his life. Then the evidence came into play. Turns out, the man assaulted the officer, went for his gun and was shot as he charged Wilson. No matter, the political movement was spawned and the facts only got in the way. Over the past couple years, police have been under a microscope and new videos continue to surface showing aggressive white cops and black citizens. What's often missing is the context.

America doesn't have a race problem in the way the Black Lives Matter movement would have you believe. The problem is a civil-rights crisis in our cities, where black families are denied access to a safe and prosperous environment because gang violence is on the rise. How can a society move forward if less than three-quarters of the kids in a major city don't finish school? How can a community thrive when its unemployment is 50 percent higher than the national average?

Cities need infrastructure, jobs and public safety. Let's stop making every viral video showing an ugly interaction a testament to a much bigger problem. Instead, the political and community leaders should focus on the much more serious problem of the blood spilling across American cities — most often, young black men dying at the hands of other young black men.

America's cities need more cops patrolling the neighborhoods. More interaction with residents. More arrests of suspicious individuals. There is a very thin line between civilization and savagery...and that line is blue. ♥

Bill Spadea was honored with the Friend in Media award at the 2016 NJ State PBA Valor Awards. He hosts Chasing News on Fox TV and is a morning-drive host on NJ 101.5 FM



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