

Recently, an incredibly offensive and distasteful painting was allowed to be hung inside our nation's Capital building, alongside other works of art chosen as first-place winners in a congressional student art competition. The acrylic painting depicts a police officer as a pig in uniform taking aim at African-American protesters. Above the scene, a black and white bird flying, while an African-American protester holding the scales of justice is crucified next to them. The painted protesters hold signs that read "History," "Stop Killing" and "Racism." Anyone who is being intellectually honest knows exactly what the painting is meant to convey.



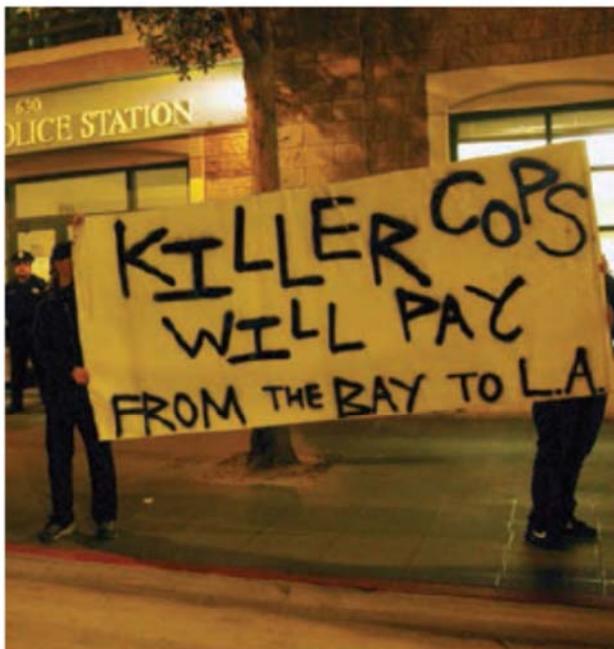
**The problem in our communities is not the police. It is criminals.**

Rep. Lacy Clay, D-Mo., allowed the painting to be displayed inside the Capitol, and when there were requests to have it removed, he responded, "I would never attempt to approve or

disapprove of artistic expression. The U.S. Capitol is a symbol of freedom, not censorship. The young artist chose his own subject and the painting will not be removed.” He went on to say the teen who made the painting was speaking from his own life experience, considering where he lived and its location close to Ferguson, Mo.

I believe we made ourselves clear on the appropriateness of hanging such a painting in a government building. What needs to be addressed now is the belief system, mindset and worldview that allows this type of distorted and biased view of the police to continually be given legitimacy. This overt bias is even evident in the rationale Rep. Clay uses to defend the painting. His argument is that the offensive message is justified based on the artists “life experience” and his proximity to Ferguson, Mo. What exactly does Ferguson have to do with this painting? If anything, Ferguson serves to highlight the devastating effects anti-police bias can have on a community. In the end it was lies, misinformation and half-truths that fueled the violence that nearly burnt that city to the ground. Not the officer’s legal and justified use of force.

Unfortunately, this is the type of juvenile thinking we must deal with. Truth, objectivity and personal responsibility take a back seat to emotion and subjective “life experiences.” The ideas, information and experiences that mold our perceptions of the world are not proof that we see things correctly. Perception is not reality. Reality is reality. The more they condone and validate attitudes of bias against the police, the more they harm the communities they claim to advocate for. When perceptions clash with facts, it should be the facts that win every time.



**When leaders condone and validate attitudes of bias against the police the more they harm the very communities the claim to advocate for.**

Unfortunately, this is very rarely the case when discussing anti-police bias. What is given instead is the perpetual myth that police kill or victimize African-Americans at disproportionate rates. Take, for example the following excerpt from a *Washington Post* article on African-Americans parents teaching their kids how to deal with the police, written by Janell Ross:

*“In 2016, 963 people were shot and killed by police, according to an ongoing Washington Post investigation. Forty-one percent of them—392—were black or Latino. Together, the two groups account for 30.9 percent of the nation’s population. Unarmed black men were overrepresented. Black males continued to represent a disproportionate share of those: 33 percent of the unarmed people killed in 2016 were black males, although they are 6 percent of the population.”*

This is precisely where allegiance to a myth, not reality, shines through. Citing the number of minorities shot and killed by police compared to the percentage of their representation in society is evidence of exactly nothing. The reality is police shootings occur more frequently where officers are confronted with armed or violent suspects. Those suspects are disproportionately African-Americans. According to the Department of Justice statistics in the 75 largest counties across the nation, African-Americans make up 15 percent of the population. Yet, they committed 57 percent of all murders and 62 percent of all robberies.

What should be discussed is the death of African-Americans at the hand of other African-Americans. According to the *Washington Post*’s own study, 96 percent of all African-American deaths by gunfire resulted at the hands of other African-Americans. Only 4 percent were killed by police, with just a fraction of those involving an unarmed suspect.

Anti-police bias and the need to cling to false narratives overshadow what should be at the forefront of dialogue. In 2014, over 6,000 African-Americans were murdered in this country, and the vast majority were killed by other African-Americans. In Chicago alone last year, over 3,100 people were shot. Nearly all of those victims were African-Americans living in urban communities. The problem is not the police. It is the *criminals*, the ones who victimize and terrify these neighborhoods.

If we are to have positive, sustained change, it needs to be built on the truth, not lies that serve a political or social agenda. When the police are made to be the perceived problem, it weakens us all. When personal responsibility is shunned in favor of blaming the police, we are all less safe. When politicians, city leaders and social justice groups perpetuate the false narrative that the police routinely and disproportionately victimize minorities, they ultimately hurt the very communities they claim to fight for.

The truth is this: Every day, across this nation, men and women don their uniforms and head into harm’s way. They do this to protect and serve their communities. It’s time for those communities to recognize that criminals are the enemy, not the police. It is time for the truth to be told. It’s time for the myths to end.

If you have questions, feel free to email me at [RobertHarris@lappl.org](mailto:RobertHarris@lappl.org), or contact me at (951) 415-5943.