



6. "Justifications": Police, and other extrajudicial killers, typically justify their murders with a variety of reports that end with them "having no choice but to use deadly force to defend themselves or others." It is difficult to know the extent to which they actually believe their rationalizations. A growing body of literature⁴ points to the systematic militarization of police forces inside the U.S. They do not view themselves as protectors of the community or even law enforcers. Rather their recruitment, training, programming, policies for promotion—their culture—has transformed local police forces into

⁴ See FAQ section of this Report which cites "Overkill" by Radley Balko at <http://www.cato.org/publications/white-paper/overkill-rise-paramilitary-police-raids-america> and his current writings for Huffington Post and Peter Cassidy's writings, including <http://www.copi.com/articles/gstorm.html>. And check a Michigan State University bibliography on the rise of military policing is at <http://staff.lib.msu.edu/harris23/crimjust/swat.htm>

occupying armies, where they view community members as the enemy. This us-vs-them mentality—layered with white supremacy, creates an “enemy” who is “semi-human,” demonized and feared. This is why they shoot-to-kill for all sorts of crimes (real or imagined) that would never earn the perpetrator the death penalty in a court of law. Here are the reasons they give so that their homicides are ruled “justified”: (*In some cases, police attempt to “justify” their killing with more than one reason or with only implied reasons. In those cases, we coded a case according to what seemed to be the most specific, pressing aspect of their argument. Check the Tables for details.*)

✓ Some 146 or 47%, nearly the majority of officers, security guards and vigilantes who fatally shot Black people in 2012 did so because they “felt threatened”, “feared for their life”, “were forced to shoot to protect themselves or others”. Most famously, Zimmerman made this claim to justify his shooting of Trayvon Martin. Police report, after police report reflect the same fear of Black people—especially young Black men. Police “feeling threatened” and perceiving that they have lost control are two sides of the same coin. And when a white supremacist (or an officer of color who has been trained by the white supremacist institution) perceives he or she has lost control, the impulse is to reassert their power by any means necessary. Grieving family members and community members invariably ask, “Why did he have to shoot him in the head? The back? The chest? Why couldn’t the cop just talk him down, or back up (if the suspect had a little knife) or tase him, or shoot out the tires etc etc.” The answer is that the officer is a soldier trained to kill anyone who is perceived as a threat to his control.



✓ In a variation of the police’s lethal response to the problem of losing control, 45 (14%) officers fatally shot “suspects”, because, they said, those people fled. In traditional policing to protect the community, a fleeing suspect may be detained and charged with the misdemeanor of resisting arrest. But with militarized policing, the fleeing “suspect” is treated as an enemy combatant and to be executed without trial.

✓ In other variations of the rationalization of “feeling threatened”, the data show more specifically: 16 (5%) alleged the suspect drove their cars towards the officers. Another 23 (7%) claimed the “suspect” pointed a gun at them, 9 (3%) allegedly reached for their waistband and another 9 (3%) allegedly lunged at them. Very frequently, witnesses dispute these claims. It is unfortunate that the corporate media usually only gives voice to the police version of events.

✓ Some 12 (4%) people died when police crashed into them or caused them to crash. And in an additional 4% --miscellaneous or no rationalizations were given.

✓ That leaves only 42 or 13% who were involved in situations where the “suspect” fired a weapon either before or during the officer’s arrival. It is in this group that we find that some of the killings that may actually be actually justified. (*See next section*)