

UNIONS EVEN CONSERVATIVES CAN LOVE

You know how conservatives (and education reform Democrats like Rahm and Obama and Cuomo) claim that they need to break up teacher's unions because they hurt children of color because they impede efforts to give them a better education?

You never see anyone make the same argument, that cops unions hurt children of color because they ensure that cops who shoot children never get punished for it.

Funny how shooting 12-year olds bearing toys is considered less damaging to children of color than working in an underfunded school.

And cops unions' role in the treatment of brown boys as presumptively criminal goes beyond just the shootings.

Cops unions lobbied to defeat bipartisan interest in demilitarizing cops.

According to Pasco, FOP members reached out to "maybe 80 percent of senators and half the House." Since militarization was at the greatest risk in the Democratic Senate, the disparity made sense. As McMorris-Santoro reported, the departing Senate's blockade on Republican amendments made it impossible for Paul to attach anything to a passable bill. And the clock's basically run out for reform. A new Congress is coming in, but the FOP doesn't see it as particularly likely to dismantle 1033.

And the Saint Louis Police Officers Association is now attacking 5 Rams players who entered the field yesterday with their hands raised in Stop Don't Shoot symbolism.

"The SLPOA is calling for the players involved to be disciplined and for the Rams and the NFL to deliver a very public apology. Roorda said he planned to speak to the NFL and the Rams to voice his organization's displeasure tomorrow. He also plans to reach out to other police organizations in St. Louis and around the country to enlist their input on what the appropriate response from law enforcement should be. Roorda warned, "I know that there are those that will say that these players are simply exercising their First Amendment rights. Well I've got news for people who think that way, cops have first amendment rights too, and we plan to exercise ours. I'd remind the NFL and their players that it is not the violent thugs burning down buildings that buy their advertiser's products. It's cops and the good people of St. Louis and other NFL towns that do. Somebody needs to throw a flag on this play. If it's not the NFL and the Rams, then it'll be cops and their supporters."

As Deadspin notes, SLPOA spokesperson Jeff Roorda has a history of submitting false statements to protect himself and other cops.

I am in no way doubting the importance of police unions. All public sector workers are under attack these days, and while cops are often spared the brunt of those attacks (and exempted from anti-union laws), they need to have representation to defend their interests. I absolutely support that.

But I am cognizant of how critical a cog cops unions increasingly play – and how perfectly this language of “cops against the thugs” captures – in what defense attorney Joseph Margulies describes as the toxic ideology behind our policing.

Policymakers who profess an interest in

criminal justice reform have thus far declined to re-examine the ideological foundation on which the current system was built. They have not questioned, in other words, the essential disposition to view the great majority of offenders as “them”—marauders who must be separated from “us” by any means necessary and for as long as possible. They show no awareness that the entire system was built on a foundation that unleashed the police and directed them to divide, rather than restrained the police and enjoined them to unite. Like any dominant ideology, this foundation operates unseen and unquestioned.

Now that reform is finally in the air, we must acknowledge that the American criminal justice system is flawed at its ideological core, a flaw that no amount of tinkering will fix. The shooting of Michael Brown, like the shooting of so many unarmed African-American men, was the predictable product of the same punitive turn in American life that produced the misguided War on Drugs, the dangerous militarization of local police, and the shame of mass incarceration. Until policymakers are willing to revisit the destructive and divisive ideology of “us” and “them,” and all that it implies, from police practice to sentencing to prison conditions, meaningful reform is impossible.

And the next grand jury will come to the same conclusion as this one.

At a time when so many other working people’s civil society organizations are being attacked, this one remains, intact, a key part of the ideology that subjects the poor rather than protects them. And as income inequality grows, this function of police unions will grow increasingly valuable to the powers that be.