

CRIME STATISTICS WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE

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Author: Donald E. Wilkes, Jr., Professor of Law, University of Georgia School of Law.

Every day government agencies, especially those involved in law enforcement, deluge us with crime statistics intended to impress upon us the view that we are undergoing a crime wave and that more police, prosecutors, and prisons, as well as new and tougher laws, are needed.

These statistics provide us with detailed information on crimes committed private citizens against other private citizens and on crimes committed by private citizens against the police. There is, however, a major gap in these statistics. They do not provide us with information about crimes committed by the police against citizens. Thus, the government's crime statistics carefully shield us from factual data concerning lawlessness in law enforcement. Insofar as government statistics are concerned, there is no lawlessness in law enforcement. No policeman ever kills, shoots, or injures anyone unlawfully. No one is every killed or injured in a high speed car chase carried out by the police. No policeman is ever convicted of a crime. No policeman ever conducts an illegal search or illegally interrogates a citizen. No policeman is ever held civilly liable for violating citizens' rights, or fired, or disciplined.

The truth, of course, is quite different. As we read the newspaper or watch the news on television, we see that American police, more heavily armed and equipped than ever before, often commit illegal acts, including crimes of violence. Can we ever forget the image of Rodney King writhing in pain on the ground as he is beaten by LA police?

Recently, in a police-state tactic, Atlanta narcotics police raided a private home at 2:00 in the morning, and in the process shot dead a small boy. As far as governmental crime statistics are concerned, that never happened, and the boy did not die. From time to time we see stories of innocent people whose houses were mistakenly raided by police. As far as governmental crime statistics are concerned, these incidents did not happen. Recently the Sheriff of Oconee County served time in prison pursuant to a criminal conviction for violating the rights of a citizen. As far as governmental crime statistics are concerned, that conviction never happened. (The sheriff is now back at his job. Would he still be there if he had been convicted of smoking marijuana, instead of allowing a prisoner in his custody to be assaulted?)

The collecting and dissemination of crime statistics has, therefore, become politicized. The law enforcement establishment keeps the statistics that furnish ammunition to those who seek to expand that establishment, and it conveniently omits mentioning statistics that expose its seamy underside or would result in controls on police misbehavior. Until the government ceases to produce one-sided crime statistics, until we have accurate information on lawlessness in law enforcement, we will continue to live in a country that floods us with copious crime statistics except when the criminal is a policeman.