



# THE HISTORY OF POLICE VIOLENCE IN RALEIGH AND THE STRUGGLE AHEAD

## 1970-1991

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*Slave patrols and constables eventually gave way to paid police forces; in cities like Richmond, Raleigh and Charleston, police performed many jobs, but until the Civil War, their primary task was controlling slaves.<sup>1</sup>*

***Historian Sally E. Hadden***

<sup>1</sup> Sally E. Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 84.

# INTRODUCTION

In March of 2020, when thousands gathered in downtown Raleigh to demand justice for **George Floyd, Breonna Taylor**, and **all victims of police violence**, the Raleigh Police Department (RPD) responded to protesters with tear gas, rubber bullets, and other violent and inhumane tactics. While many wanted justice for Floyd and Taylor, protesters and community leaders began to connect the national movement against police violence to local police brutality cases and unjust killings of African Americans.



Prior to the uprisings for Floyd and Taylor, RPD shot and killed **Akeil Denkins** and **Keith Collins**. In 2016, without properly identifying him, RPD slammed a 24-year-old African American on the ground and arrested him. <sup>2</sup> It was later revealed that the officers wrongfully identified him and to cover up their mistake and brutal treatment of an innocent person, charged him with resisting, delaying, and obstructing a public officer (RDO). For many, the acts of violence and brutality shown by RPD over the last couple of years, comes as no surprise.

The department has a long history of brutalizing and terrorizing African Americans. To reveal how common police brutality is in Raleigh, this pamphlet is a brief history of police violence and how people have fought against it. Although brief, we hope the examples provided will demonstrate the urgent need to develop community-based solutions to this ongoing and often deadly problem.

We do not consider this pamphlet to be a comprehensive or definitive history of the RPD's treatment of African Americans. Rather, we hope it plays a small role in closing a historical gap in our people's struggle. While we identify the origins of Raleigh's police department, it is primarily focused on police brutality struggles in the late twentieth century (1970s-1990s) and the work of the Raleigh Black United Front. We hope this historical document will inspire the Raleigh community to join the current struggle against police violence and help transform our city.



## **A HISTORY OF BRUTALITY:**

**WILLIE FRAZIER, CHARLIE WHITE, PHIL MCLEAN, AND TONY FARELL**

As historian Sally E. Hadden has noted, prior to the Civil War (1861-1865), the Raleigh police department was responsible for enforcing laws that protected and maintained the institution of slavery. It appears that after the Civil War, and the abolishment of chattel slavery, the department remained committed to over policing and preventing the progress of African Americans.

In 1969, civil rights leader Golden Frinks of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (the organization that Dr. King belonged to) told a crowd in Raleigh that “he was tired of police brutality.”<sup>3</sup>



Hundreds gathered to protest the beating of a 36-year-old Black woman, **Mrs. Sara Jane Davis** on Fayetteville Street by a Raleigh police officer. The beating of Mrs. Davis was bound to happen. Not simply because of RPD’s racist founding and brutal history, but more directly, because of decisions from the city in the 1950s. In a 1952 article for The Carolinian, Raleigh’s historic African American newspaper, James A. Shepard informed readers of a decision from the city manager and police chief to increase the number of police officers in Raleigh’s African American community.

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**3** While the civil rights movement fought against segregation, voter suppression, and white supremacy, also included in the movement’s demand was an end to police brutality. At the March on Washington in 1963, Dr. King stated “We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of unspeakable horrors of police brutality.” Furthermore, during voter registration campaigns and other civil rights activity, civil rights activist not only experienced violence and opposition from the Klan but also from local police departments who sought to maintain the white supremacist world order.

Shepard firmly opposed this decision and warned that the city was trying to “imitate the police of wake forest who spend ninety five per cent of their time in the Negro district, intimidating, terrorizing and assaulting the residents.”<sup>4</sup>

Beyond the beating of Mrs. Davis, what Shepard had cautioned against had become a reality for African Americans decades later. According to journalist Ed Williams, between 1976 and 1982, white police officers with the Raleigh Police Department “have shot and wounded at least 13 people, four of them fatally.”<sup>5</sup> Nine out of the 13 brutalized by RPD were African Americans and all four who were killed were African Americans. Two other reporters, however, argue that the police actually killed 16 people during that time period. Despite there being a difference in the numbers, the number of police shootings were still unacceptable and African Americans suffered the most.

On June 4, 1976, while being searched, **Joe Randy Smith**, a 21-year-old African American, was shot in the back by officer J.T. Knox. The officer claimed it was an accident and received no disciplinary action from the department. In 1980, police shot and killed **Willie Frazier**, a 31-year-old African American at his home who allegedly, “had a knife.” One year later, in 1981, officer Josh N. Tarrington shot 19-year-old, unarmed African American **Charles White** in the back during a foot chase. The officer claimed he tripped and the gun fired accidentally. An internal police investigation concluded that the officer's gun fired “accidentally.”

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<sup>4</sup> James A. Shepard, “Negro Made Target in Big Crime Crackdown” *The Carolinian*, August 30, 1952.

<sup>5</sup> Ed Williams, “In six years, city police have shot 13, four fatally,” *Raleigh Times*, September 3, 1982.



The following year, in 1982, officer L.C. Howard shot and killed 29 year old **Phil Stanley McLean** who previously had been diagnosed with a mental illness.<sup>6</sup> Howard shot McLean six times. Prior to interacting with McLean, police knew of his history with mental health struggles.

A decade later, in 1991, police shot another African American, **Tony Farrell**, an engineer at WRAL-TV.<sup>7</sup> A white Detective, James Glover, with his gun drawn and in plain clothes and an unmarked car, mistook Farrell for a Black “robbery suspect.” Glover never put his blue lights on or identified himself as an officer. As a white man in plain-clothes pointed a gun at him, Farrell, who was **not** the “robbery suspect,” thought he was being robbed. As any victim of a robbery would do, Farrell cranked his car and tried to drive off as quickly as possible. The detective fired his gun and shot Farrell in his leg. Detective Glover was not indicted and received no disciplinary actions for shooting Farrell, an innocent man who had nothing to do with the so-called “robbery” case.

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<sup>6</sup> Ed Williams, “Civilian Review may be sought by black group,” The Raleigh Times, September, 4, 1982.

<sup>7</sup> Dudley Price, “City Council seeks probes by SBI, FBI into shooting,” The New and Observer, 1991.

In addition to Farrell, the white officers in the Smith, Frazier, White, and McLean case were not charged, nor did they receive any disciplinary action from the department. **It is important to note that the community did not accept these acts of police violence.** They fought back and demanded an end to a problem that has impacted African Americans for centuries. The history of resistance to police violence in Raleigh has a contemporary importance and should be central to the conversation on police violence.

## A COMMUNITY FIGHTS BACK: THE RALEIGH BLACK UNITED FRONT

In November of 1980, representing the newly formed Raleigh Black United Front (RBUF), Rev. James Williams demanded the Raleigh Police Department be held accountable for the death of **William Frazier**.<sup>8</sup> He urged the council to consider an independent investigation and develop a citizens' grievance commission. Rev. Williams had roughly 40 community members there to support him. They chanted a "stop killer cops."<sup>9</sup> Again in 1981, after **Charles White** was shot in the back, RBUF returned to the city council, opposing the department's "reckless and brutal acts against the Black community."<sup>10</sup> At this meeting RBUF demanded that the police chief resign, the officer who shot White be suspended and prosecuted, and the city pay all of White's medical bills (which they won but demanded more be done).<sup>11</sup>

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**8** RBUF members consisted of various community members: teachers, ministers, postal workers and others.

**9** David McKinnon, "Protestors chant while council hears police brutality charges," *The News and Observer*, November, 5, 1980.

**10** Rick Warner, "Heineman should resign position, Black United Front tells council," *The Raleigh Times*, 1981.

**11** "Black leaders: Paying medical bills of suspect not enough," *The Raleigh Times*, May 14, 1981.

Despite being rejected at the 1980 council meeting and the council refusing to move on its demands, RBUF again demanded the council establish a Citizens Review Board to investigate these shootings and all cases of police brutality.



RBUF's proposal for a Citizens Review Board was comprehensive, realistic, and straightforward. In fact, it was not a foreign concept at the time, cities across the country were beginning to establish Civilian Review Boards. For Raleigh, because the internal investigations conducted by the department had proven to be insufficient and protected officers who unjustly shot and killed African Americans, RBUF suggested the citizens review board "be independent of the police department and without police representation." They further noted that the board "cannot be an impartial or neutral board. It must aggressively represent the interest of the community." According to the RBUF, the board should "consist of a variety of people, yet be representative of those most likely victims of police violence."

Most importantly, the RBUF advocated that the board would be an elected body. The RBUF opposed the appointment structure because of its narrowness and the likelihood that it would lead to a board that has more accountability to political parties and big business rather than the community. The role of the board in RBUF's view would be to:

*Review all cases of police brutality that are reported to it or it should be able to initiate investigations on its own. In order to thoroughly and efficiently carry out its role, the board must have the power to subpoena both witnesses and evidence. After reviewing a case, the Board should make recommendations to the city council for appropriate action. Findings can be forwarded to the District Attorney, Justice Department and Federal Prosecutors in cases of Civil Rights Violations.*

RBUF had collected hundreds of signatures from the community in support of its Citizens Review Board. In 1982, RBUF's demand for a review board gained more traction after the police murdered **Phil McLean** in Boylan Heights. The RBUF and other community groups demanded that the police chief be fired and the officer who shot McLean be prosecuted. RBUF and other organizations organized a march and held a community meeting at Heritage Park with the theme "Who Will be the Next Victim of Police brutality? Will it be you?"

With pressure from RBUF and other African American groups, and there being so many unanswered questions, it was clear there needed to be an independent investigation.

RBUF pushed for that independent investigation to come from the community, while other Black leaders supported an FBI Investigation. Of course, the council went with the FBI investigation that eventually ruled in favor of the police officer. For the RBUF this was no surprise. From the start, they considered the FBI investigation to be a sham and unproductive because:

*The FBI has been responsible for the harassment of some of the greatest leaders, for example, Martin Luther King, Fred Hampton, etc. The FBI were involved with the Alabama bombings and the spying on Black organizations. They have caused many disruptions.<sup>12</sup>*

Deep into the fight for a civil review board, the struggle against police violence was not the only organizational focus for the RBUF. It connected its fight against police brutality to other societal issues such as: housing, health care, education, welfare rights, draft resistance, organizing Black workers, Black land ownership, and a number of other issues. **In fact, RBUF believed police violence would continue “as long as the police are hired and controlled by those in government who represent the ruling elites.” They concluded “Only a real citizens government, free of the interest of the democratic and republican power brokers and big business, will change this situation.”**

In 1991, days after the shooting of **Tony Farrell**, many took to the streets to demand justice and urged the city to implement RBUF’s decades long request for a civilian review board.

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<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that this statement by the RBUF can be corroborated with historical evidence and declassified FBI files.

While it was clear the detective was in the wrong and broke all protocol, the Department still supported him and believed he acted “in good faith.” No charges or disciplinary actions were brought against the officer. Farrell, Frazier, White, and McLean, are examples that RPD can unjustly shoot and kill African Americans with no disciplinary action. The city gives millions of tax dollars to this police force that is known for its brutality, but refuses to fund the most basic needs of the community and pay workers a living wage.

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TODAY?

In the 1980s, RBUF described the police as an army of occupation in the Black community. This analysis remains true in the current day. **RPD has an overwhelming police presence in southeast Raleigh, an area that is 64% African American and 15% Latino.** With this heavy presence, brutality and intimidation is the norm. In some cases, the violence and the lack of care that police have for African Americans is not only physical violence. For example, in Southeast Raleigh (an area with the most COVID cases than any other zip code in the state) two white police officers conducted a traffic stop and approached the window of an African American (who was masked) with no mask.

After the murder of **Akeil Denkins**, Raleigh Police Accountability and Community Taskforce (PACT), under the leadership of Denkin’s mother, renewed RBUF’s demand for a citizens review board. Similar to when RBUF made the demand, the current city council has refused to act on PACT’s demand for a review board.

The difference between RBUF's and PACT's effort is that the council members representing Southeast Raleigh supported RBUF's efforts to establish a civilian review board. Today, the person representing Southeast Raleigh will not even entertain the idea. There was a time when representatives for Southeast Raleigh advocated for the community and challenged other council members. Unfortunately, that is not the case today.

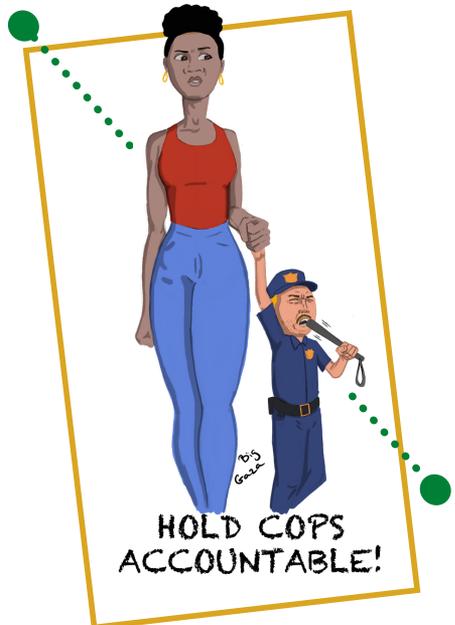


Despite that, Refund Raleigh still believes it is urgent to keep pushing for the civilian review board, but like the RBUF, we must more directly connect the struggle against police violence to the struggle for social, political, economic, and environmental justice. We at Refund Raleigh believe that the struggle against police violence is a struggle for people to be able to make decisions about their own lives. That is, this is a struggle for self-determination! It's a struggle that reveals the failures of current forms of governance. The refusal of the city to establish a review board is another example that confirms the city council's commitment to excluding people from the political process.

Moreover, with a Black police chief, the Black community is still suffering from the same kind of police brutality that would exist with a white chief. Refund Raleigh believes that the solution to our problem is not more Black police officers, nor is it more funding for police. We believe the solution is investing in the community and investing in economic justice! Each year the police budget increases but the support for our community decreases.

**We say do not overfund the police! Fund the People!** Do not fund the police, fund housing for all people! In Austin, Texas, the City Council cut the police budget and used the money to fund housing for people who were houseless. Do not fund the police, transfer funds from the police to housing, mental health workers, and living wages for city workers! For six months, Denver sent mental health experts to 748 incidents and no police were required and there were no arrests.

Police budgets come from taxpayer dollars so we should be able to decide how they are spent. **We need a Refund!** The struggle against police brutality is a struggle for political power, a struggle that we must engage in and one that we must win if we are to make our communities safe from police brutality and murders.





Thank you

## THANK YOU FOR READING!

*Refund Raleigh is a collective of young people who are **organizing** to end police violence and exploitation, **imagining** people-centered solutions to societal problems, and **demanding** Raleigh defund the police and Refund our city!*



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