

A throwback to Birmingham

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In April, a dispute over cattle grazing fees led to escalating tensions in Nevada between law enforcement and heavily armed protesters. Despite threats against them, [the cops allowed protesters to assemble anywhere they wanted to on public land](#), provided they were peaceful and didn't impede the feds' work. Days later, when the conflict culminated in a tense armed standoff, federal rangers threatened tear gas but maintained restraint—until local law enforcement defused the situation by backing down.

The protesters were mostly white.

This weekend, protests over a cop's fatal shooting of an unarmed, noncriminal, [not-fatherless](#) teenager led to a massive police militarization—a militarization that began [before](#) any [looting](#) or rioting did—in Ferguson, Missouri, a St. Louis suburb. Here, [cops in riot gear tear-gassed people assembling on their own property](#). Protesters were [shot with rubber bullets](#); a [pregnant woman was forced to lie on her stomach](#). The small town [remains basically under militarized police occupation](#).

Ferguson is mostly black. Its police force is almost entirely white.

It's difficult to imagine the events in Ferguson going down the same way with a white shooting victim and white protesters. It's pretty much impossible to imagine cops exercising restraint in Nevada if the guns pointed at them had been in black hands. Black Americans [shouldn't have to explain why](#) this double standard might make them angry.

And it's hard to square [the police version of what happened to Michael Brown](#) with [multiple eyewitness accounts](#). Predictably, many outlets have been quicker to report on the former. But say for the sake of argument that the police narrative is correct, that Brown was shot—at least the first time—as the result of a struggle over the officer's gun. That doesn't explain why he was shot again and again. It doesn't account for why the police still haven't released more information about the incident. It doesn't excuse media reports that treat protesters like senseless rioters instead of citizens [seeking redress](#).

And it certainly does not explain why, in the aftermath, Ferguson so quickly became a police state. When Dana Loesch made a connection between Ferguson and existing police-overreach fears on the right, [she got a mixed reaction from fellow conservatives](#). It's appalling that someone could [defend the authorities in Ferguson](#) after [criticizing the authorities in Nevada in April](#), but it's not really surprising.

After all, the photos coming out of Ferguson look like Birmingham under Bull Connor. And every time something like this goes down, it becomes painfully clear that there remain some Americans who liked Bull Connor's America better.