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BLACK ON BLACK

Are Black citizens better off with Black cops?



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. What first drew our attention to Jackson was [an article in the New York Times](#) about the indictment of three cops for the fatal beating of a 62-year old Black man. And the story became even more compelling when we noticed that each of the accused was Black. As it turns out, so are most of Jackson's cops, including the Chief and his entire command staff.

It began on a Sunday morning, January 13, 2019. That's when passers-by [discovered the body](#) of Anthony Longino, a 62-year old Black pastor, on the steps of his modest church (photo above). He had been shot dead. A few hours later, three officers trolling for his killers spotted 62-year old George Robinson [apparently dealing drugs](#) from his car. Their [official report](#) indicates that an unidentified woman slipped Robinson cash through the window and "scurried" away. They approached and ordered Robinson out. He didn't promptly comply, so they dragged him out. According to [the indictment](#) the force used was clearly excessive, as it included "body slamming George Robinson head first into the roadway pavement as well as striking and kicking George Robinson multiple times in the head and chest."

Robinson, who was recovering from a stroke, collapsed and [police summoned an ambulance](#). Attendants declared Mr. Robinson O.K. After supposedly finding "a large amount of US currency" in the vehicle but no drugs officers cited him for "failure to obey and resisting arrest" and let him go. Robinson returned to a motel room where he had been staying and apparently had several visitors. But within a few hours he was back in the hospital with a brain bleed. He died two days later.

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Officers soon arrested a 22-year old man for the pastor's murder. He confessed, and within a few weeks some good old-fashioned police work led to the arrest of three accomplices, two nineteen and one twenty-three. Within a few weeks an internal investigation by Jackson P.D. and the city's civil service commission (and, supposedly, a review by the FBI) cleared the cops of wrongdoing. One remained on the job at Jackson PD while the two others transferred to the nearby Clinton Police Department. But on August 4, nearly eight months after the incident, as allegations of police abuse beset the U.S., the local D.A. charged the three cops with second-degree murder. Mr. Robinson's family also filed a lawsuit. It alleges that the officers had no reason to act as they did, as "at no time during this event was Mr. Robinson threatening harm to himself or anyone else."

Policing is an inherently messy enterprise with uncertain outcomes. Officer skills vary, and when we throw in the vagaries of cop and citizen temperament and the difficulties of gaining compliance some tragic endings are assured. Still, if Mr. Robinson *was* a criminal, he seems at worst a small-time drug dealer, and the grossly disproportionate outcome left this (thankfully, retired) practitioner's head shaking.

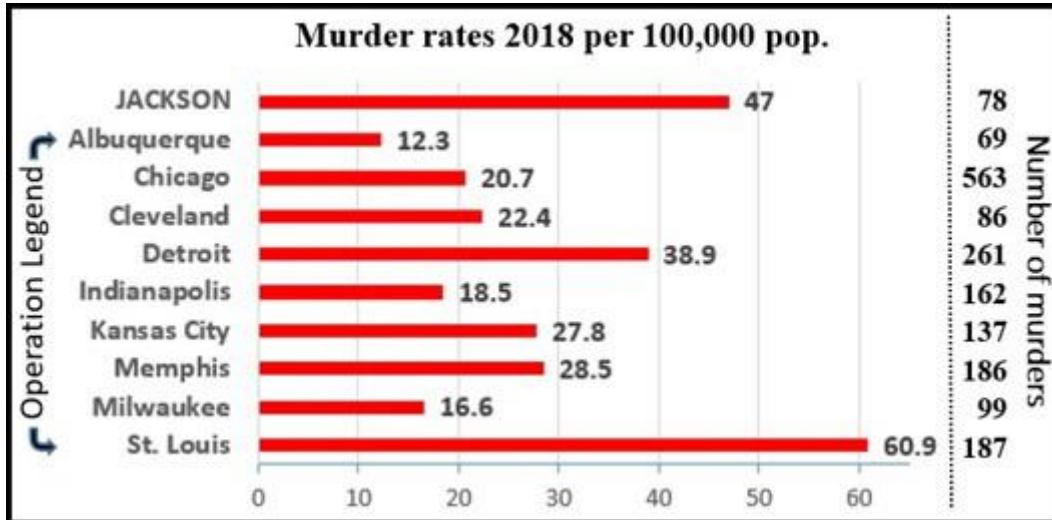
Mr. Robinson was apparently shuttling between a home in the the neighborhood where the encounter took place and a motel room where his girlfriend lived. Other than his being older and frail, we discovered little else of significance. As for the Jackson officers, the *Free Press* (hint: it's not a fan of the police) and other sources reported that the cops were part of a K-9 team that was looking for the pastor's killers. Two were involved in nonfatal shootings in 2017 and 2018 but had been exonerated of wrongdoing. Meanwhile officials in both Jackson and Clinton are steadfastly standing by their servants. "We don't want anything to do with a bad cop and if I thought these guys were bad cops, we wouldn't have hired them," said Clinton's police chief. Its mayor went so far as to suggest that the indictment might have come about because of a sweetheart deal between the Robinson family attorney and the D.A.

What's beyond a doubt is that Jackson is a *very* violent place. Last December, after "nearly two dozen" residents were shot in a single week, a desperate police sergeant lamented that "gun violence is just awful":

Sometimes it is just a way of life...it is definitely something important we need to work on...It is just horrible that people have to live with that...we have to take the steps to change this dramatically!... We certainty need to study this in depth and come up with some decent plans to combat it.

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By any measure, the city’s body count is [truly astounding](#). This graph compares Jackson’s 2018 murder rates with the nine crime-struck cities participating in DOJ’s freshly-hatched “[Operation Legend](#).”



Mr. Robinson’s encounter with police, and the pastor’s murder that preceded it, took place in a particularly downtrodden neighborhood known as “[The Washington Addition](#).” Located within the 2nd police precinct, [its median household income](#) of \$16,500 is one-quarter the national median (\$60,293.) Jackson as a whole fares little better. At \$37,563, its median household income is only three-fifths of the national median. In fact, nearly twenty-seven percent of Jackson’s residents live in poverty, [more than twice the U.S. figure](#) (11.8 percent.)

Jackson Police Precinct	1	2	3	4
*Population (thousands)	70	64	47	45
Murders 2018				
All victims (Black victims)	16 (14)	21 (21)	30 (28)	9 (8)
Mur. rate 2018 /100K pop.	23	33	64	20
Murders 2019				
All victims (Black victims)	22 (13)	23 (22)	25 (22)	8 (6)
Mur. rate 2019 /100K pop.	31	36	53	18
Dominant ZIP (39-)	212	209	213	211
ZIP med. HH inc. (thous)	38	26	23	56
ZIP pct. Black	83	91	98	38
* J.P.D. estimates. 1 st & 2 nd pcts. likely high.				

Full stop. Posts in our blog’s “[Neighborhoods](#)” section frequently remark about the relationship between income, race and crime. (See, most recently, our essay about [Portland and Minneapolis](#).) Might these factors also play a role in Jackson? We gathered precinct murder data using [WLBT’s homicide tracker](#). Counting the “dots” on its precinct maps yields 76 murders in 2018 (the [UCR](#) reported 78) and 78 in 2019.

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[According to the Census](#), eighty-two percent of Jackson's 160,628 residents are Black. Based on the dominant ZIP's, it seems that most Blacks reside in the impoverished 1st, 2nd and 3rd precincts. Most Whites live in the comparatively prosperous 4th precinct, [whose dominant ZIP](#) boasts a median HHI of about \$56,453, only slightly lower than U.S. overall.

Grab a look at the table. Compare murder frequencies and rates between precincts. And within precincts, between Blacks and non-Blacks. (The contrast would have probably been higher but for J.P.D.'s exaggerated population count for the 1st precinct, and possibly the 2nd.) Quibbles about numbers aside, Jackson's Black majority clearly faces appalling odds. Of course, the cops know that.

We approached this incident as we do all: *tabula rasa*. Still, when your author paused while building fancy tables to consider his own experiences carrying a badge, Mr. Robinson didn't strike him as much of a threat. Jackson's cops, though, work in a very unforgiving environment. When the now-indicted officers happened on someone who seemed to be taking advantage of the city's troubles, their exasperation may have led to an overly aggressive response. One that caused an old man to fall and crack his skull. That's not so dissimilar from what happened to [Mr. Martin Gugino](#), the White septuagenarian "peace activist" whose head smashed the pavement after he was pushed aside by a White cop.

Might Jackson's struggle with crime and violence affect how its officers deal with citizens? Could it sometimes lead to poor decisions? Really, how could it *not*?

Normally this would be the place to offer correctives, but we've got another iron in the fire: Kenosha, where most cops and citizens are White. We'll have more to say about Jackson then. Until then, keep safe!