

Critical Moment

Detroit by Detroiters

Ron Scott Talks On Police Brutality, Detroit One And More

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(<https://criticalmoment.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/ron-scott1.jpg>) Like many urban cities, Detroit's police department doesn't have the best reputation for treatment of city residents. The riots of '67 wouldn't have been such a bloody affair without police escalation, nor would any of the bouts of civil unrest that followed. To this day, the Detroit Police Department has an active 'consent agreement' with the federal government, due to numerous reports of civil rights abuses. With ever expanding powers and surveillance technology, we need to keep an eye on the police as much as they're an eye on us.

Formed nearly 20 years ago, the Detroit Coalition Against Police Brutality has taken an active role in mediating relations between the police and regular people, and at times between the people themselves. Critical Moment recently sat down with their spokesman and former Black Panther, Ron Scott, to talk about their work, police brutality and the upcoming Aiyana Jones trial.

Critical Moment: Tell us a little bit about the coalition and its work, what you guys do.

Ron Scott: When it was founded back in 1996, it's purpose was to deal with the immediate forms of police brutality, like police beating up people, the whole system and the culture of violence, blue wall of silence, shootings, murders, attacks and so on. Both in the interpersonal basis in terms of police attacking citizens and also people attacking people who were activists and politically focused. What we do every day is take complaints from citizens. We also investigate cases where there may have been police wrongdoing. We have a program for young people in the summer where we train them for peace, developing peace zones for life, which is our major program. That is, we found that when we were investigating certain cases, we found families where there had

been violence between the two or where police, in one case, shot one person, and the women in question had called the police on this young man because of domestic violence. Most cases where police are called are domestic violence or substance abuse, so the parents of the young man who was killed wanted to attack the young woman. We had to mediate that effort; we had to in fact have two funerals. Within that context, we started the peace zones for life program. Plus, the people in the community had been calling out. They said, 'well you deal with police brutality, you talk about what the police are doing. What about what the people are doing in terms of social violence to us? What about people breaking into our houses? What are you doing?' And you can't ignore that. But you have to have a positive and progressive response. The response is not a militaristic one, that you call the police and have them come in, like they're coming in now with multi-jurisdictional task forces and busting in people's houses. We educate, deal with public policy, organize demonstrations where needed, support families when they need therapy as well as political support and we're engaged in our radio program – which is a weekly presentation of issues, both locally, nationally and internationally. We also interact with lawyers and judges to try to get remediation and transitional change within the criminal justice system, which means we advocate for prisoners. I speak in a lot of prisons and jails, and we have restorative justice activities to bring people out of the prisons. That's just a few of the things that we do.

CM: How would people listen to your radio program? What channel should they turn to?

Ron: Our program is on WDFN "The Fan" which is on 1130 on the AM dial at 10am, Sunday mornings.

CM: How common is police brutality in Detroit and the region, Southeast Michigan?

RS: Very common. I can give you some statistical references but let's put it this way: people think of police brutality like the Rodney King type situation. It's not always like that, given the fact that now, certain laws and certain rulings in federal court have allowed for the slippage of the fourth amendment – the right to privacy. Now, if an officer perceives, for instance, that you have an open bottle in the back of your seat or they believe they smell marijuana or whatever then they have 'reasonable suspicion', which is a lesser standard than probable cause, to go through your car or whatever. They now will stop them, especially young black men, and make them get out of the car.

Young men don't know what their rights are. You don't have to get out of the vehicle, unless there is a reasonable suspicion that something has happened. And they'll just pat them down. We have stop and frisk situations, they refer to it as 'search and seizure' here, where people will be stopped and arrested for a lot of reason. Basically the reasons tend to be economic, because at any time 40% of the population in Detroit may have a warrant. But that's economic because you have over 50% who may be unemployed and if you don't go to court to pay a traffic ticket or child support or whatever, then you're a fugitive. There are fugitive task forces where they're basically Gestapo. They're basically nothing but a new form of Gestapo. They'll go in with masks and guns, like the ones that killed Aiyana Jones. Kick in doors, go looking for people and some of them are multi-jurisdictional, meaning they're not just Detroit. They're Oakland county, Macomb county, FBI, all the alphabets together. And of course that manifests itself on the southwest side of Detroit in going after people who are supposedly "illegals" – people who are undocumented.

And in that sense, we deal with those forms of police brutality so the general nature of it is, it will normally start with maybe a disrespect on how an officer would normally address someone. As opposed to saying 'sir or madam can I see your license?', they'll use racial epithets or sexual innuendo or some other thing and that escalates. In one case we had, the person was actually taken out of their car and beaten with a baby in the backseat, and then they charged, they tried to say the young man was negligent with the baby in the backseat and tried to get child protective services to take the baby. And then of course when you're beaten, in many cases, officers now have transmitted in the culture that you've assaulted the police and your head is two sizes bigger than it was. And you have assaulting the police and maybe disorderly conduct and failure to obey the lawful order of the police officer. Two of them are misdemeanors; one is a felony, a five year felony or more. So within that context, those are the ways that police brutality manifests itself.

CM: A lot of times police brutality is talked about as being a problem that affects primarily black males. I was wondering if you could talk about the range of people who come in.

RS: As I was telling you recently that young man who was Latino who came in, who was an eight-year veteran of the military, just came back from Afghanistan and Iraq and didn't have a scratch on him walking down the street because he has post traumatic stress disorder and he ended up getting beaten up, beaten badly, nose broken and so forth, that kind of thing. There was a young man by the name of Anthony Scott, who was a young, white, working class guy on the westside of Detroit ended up getting shot and killed. We had another young man up in Warren, Michigan who was a young, white, hip-hop artist – and an excellent rapper by the way – he had an episode, I don't know whether it was drug related or whatever, they took off all his clothes he was naked. He got tasered to death and killed by the Warren police department.

We get a lot of Arab and Middle Eastern victims of police brutality also. Like I said, people who you least suspect, across the spectrum so it doesn't reflect the self in terms of any one person, one case, it tends to predominate in the Detroit area and some places of African American males, but it's not exclusive to. We've gone as far as Alpena, where we had individuals, a young man who was part of the LGBTQ community who was beaten up badly. He wanted to be a dentist and the police crushed his knuckles so now he can't work as a dentist, we actually worked on his case.

CM: Tell us a little bit about the Peace Zones project and what that entails.

Ron: Peace zones for life basically is a program where we use it as a geographical context, but not only geographically. We use it as an ideological framework in terms of how you deescalate violence before it starts, or as it starts. And essentially what we do is we have successfully and in some cases intervened where people were arguing, they may be arguing over any number of things and essentially begin to deescalate the process by stopping it from getting raised to the point of conflict. Usually when you can talk and you can resolve it people will come to some sort of resolution of issues.

We also have sought to reestablish and reconstruct neighborhoods and communities where we have a person who is an authority, usually a person who is an elder, that can resolve conflicts and can speak to everyone. In the case that I told you about where the young man and the families were about to argue, there was one woman on the street and she could always talk to this young man who ended up getting killed. She knew he would drink and he was really upset that night because

he thought his baby's mother was with another guy, so the two of them ended up arguing and I asked the woman, 'why didn't you intervene that night?' She said, "oh I just didn't feel like it.' So we're developing designated people to intervene, people who know what's happening in the neighborhood, who know the people. We're rebuilding neighborhoods, we're rebuilding communities. We also have an economic development base. Once we found out that a number of the incidents of violence happened because of economic underdevelopment, and so therefore we've started local small businesses.

Everything from t-shirts to working on creating other clothing and attire, so people actually have something they can do in their community and for their community, while also maintaining the community. We started a housing board over on the east side, and we recruited some of the people who were part of the underground economy to engage in that. So that means that once we resolve those issues, we had one significant issue, where there was about to be a shooting over on the east side there, one of the areas we were working with over on Van Dyke and Forest, there was about to be a shooting between two people, two young men stole a bike of a guy and the guy was older, he was almost 40, he was upset.

He threatened to shoot the other young guy, and he was saying he was going to shoot him and before it went back and forth, we had intervened three of us from the coalition stepped in the middle and said, 'nobody is going to shoot anyone today.' We had just given a play about peace, and it was interesting. Some of the guys who hang out at the liquor store were watching us as we were going through this process. By the time we got people, these guys to start talking, it took about 20-30 minutes and they initially were angry at us, "we don't know you, who are you?" and so forth. Then one guy said "they're here for peace." So we kept going through this process finally the guys in the liquor store took it upon themselves to say 'wait a minute', to the young guy who stole the bike. 'You go home', we'll take care of this. The other guy was upset, he said 'get out of here right now.' And then they helped to resolve the issue. About forty minutes later the police showed up. We asked the police why they showed up. They were told there was about 30 - 40 people out there fighting. We said 'no we're not fighting, we're resolving the issue.' One of the older cops said, 'I'm glad cuz I was about to get off and I don't need any more work.' The other cop had taken out his gun and run to the back.

The older cop was really kinda funny. He said, 'man, come back here.' Like 'kid get back in the car.' They said, 'good. We're glad you did that.' Those guys became integral to what we're doing in the neighborhood. We have another neighborhood over on Montgomery street where 200 cops invaded the neighborhood, shot a young man one time. We went over into that neighborhood and helped to resolve some of those conflicts. To this day that's one of the safer neighborhoods in the community and the people did it. When we started we sort of served as a, how can I put it... as an igniting factor to create these things. People in the neighborhood went out when we had a focus on peace, they created a park and this park has now become the center of goods that are exchanged in the neighborhood. I talked to some of the young guys who were dealing weed, the older people were upset about it. I said 'alright man, I'm not making a value judgment about anything. Why don't you just move on down? You know, these people some of the older people get upset, and when you get a chance, go out and talk to the older people, help them out.' So that neighborhood has also become an accomplishment for us. So we're really rebuilding neighborhoods, rebuilding

communities and hopefully rebuilding people and politicizing this to the degree that people will take it upon themselves to resolve conflicts. I don't want to say 'self police' but create public safety, as opposed to just calling the police every time there's an issue.

CM: You brought up the issue of joint task forces. A big one that was announced with a lot of fanfare last year was Detroit One, which is a task force that involves the federal agencies as well as local police. What are your thoughts on that and how effective it's been on reducing crime.

RS: It doesn't reduce crime. What they end up getting are people who already have warrants. Most of the murders that take place are done between friends, people who are not necessarily even in the net. What they're doing is they're trying to establish a basis of social control and pacification of neighborhoods. And also if necessary engaging in getting more people into the prison system. They're Gestapos, they're military, they're thugs. As far as I'm concerned, they're the worst essence of what public safety and policing could be, and should be. The old term for police was 'peace officers.' These guys are doing anything but peace. As far as I'm concerned they're also probably not that... fearless.

They give the impression of being fearless. Guys kicking in your door with hoods are gangs. Are just that, a gang. And if one day someone decides to take on the gang then you'll see maybe a difference. But essentially they're getting a lot of money for it. Getting money from the drugs, guns and gangs initiative that came out of the Clinton administration which was back in 1992 and that is what's motivating a lot of this. The prosecutor's office supposedly they're using the so called 'Boston model', where they're going to take the guys, the 5% who are creating the problems. That's a bunch of nonsense. 5%? How are you going to determine what the situation is? It doesn't do anything about the shootings, and what you do is you stereotype and you create a problem with the individuals who are trying to get their lives together and get back out in the community, as opposed to working with them consistently. You go through and use threats and intimidation. I'm looking at the possibility that down the line we may be getting some lawsuits related to this kind of nonsense that's going on. These guys, as far as I'm concerned, they're the most cowardly thugs that I can think of.

CM: Another thing that's come up in the last year or so is 'stop and frisk' and things related to this foundation in New York called the Manhattan Institute, that believes in 'broken window policing.' They try to target little people, little crimes with the effect of discouraging other things. What are your thoughts on this approach to policing?

RS: I think "broken window policing" is broken. That has never proved to be a deterrent for anything. It suggests that there is a connection between one or the other. There may or may not be, and even if there is one that's connected with the other, that doesn't mean that it is societally motivated. For example, if Joe takes a gun to do something, that doesn't mean he's related to Sam down the street, who may do the same thing. And that's why you've got the situation in New York where it started, with, ironically enough, Bratton who is the new police chief. He was using this in terms of stop and frisk. It ended up being biased because it focused disproportionately on Latino and African American males.

The 'broken windows' theory gives the impression that there are those of us who are good guys and there are those of us who are bad guys. I don't subscribe to that 'good guy bad guy' mentality. There are people who find themselves in situations and circumstances where they either begin to engage in underground activity, as a way of life, because of their direction or they're people who are in the framework where at one time or the other they find themselves at odds with the law. Therefore, to use that as a hammer to hit upside somebody's head, especially motivated by money coming from the federal government, specifically which creates that scenario, is nothing more than a continuation of the encroachment of the military state. The military-corporate state is what we're dealing with. Detroit is a reflection of that. That's why Kevyn Orr, the emergency manager, wanted to try to maintain control of the police. He issued an executive order trying to take away the powers of the police commission here in Detroit. And that's why we're going to get back what the power that was lost from the police commission, and we're going to challenge him for it. In fact, it should probably be indicted for violating the charter.

CM: What do you think about stop and frisk? The city's embracing it while at the same time in New York, I think where it started, they said, "we're not going to do this."

RS: It's situational and it's biased in this nation. Who do you stop, whom do you frisk? You assume that it has a relationship to some resolution of issues. It may and it may not. Why not stop and frisk in Birmingham or Gross Pointe? That doesn't happen, and it doesn't happen for a reason. The class contacts of those neighborhoods and communities will not allow for it. Mr. Jones the executive is walking down Lakeshore Drive, and you said 'hey come over here', stop and frisk. He's going to ask you why you're stopping him. What's the purpose? If Mr. Jones asks you too much, then you've got to worry about your job because he's going to be able to call the mayor and say, 'hey look, they stopped me. I was walking my dog, walking down the street minding my own business.'

But if you're Jamal Smith walking down Conner and somebody stops you, you're supposed to automatically freeze and they'll throw you up against the wall, then you're allowed to be frisked. There's certain things, in terms of Terry v. Ohio, which allows for, what's called a 'Terry stop', going back to 1968 when this decision was rendered. Police can stop you if they had a probable cause that something may have happened and they wanted to stop you and question you about it. Now it's reasonable suspicion. If they believe, if there's history and there's knowledge that something may have happened they can pat you down. What we always say to people is that you can ask them, 'why are you stopping me?', what are they doing, did they have reasonable belief that a crime was committed or was about to be committed. If so, we'd like to see it put in their preliminary complaint report. If so, we'd like to call your lieutenant or sergeant and tell them. If so, is it being documented so we can have an objective record as to what happened. Those are the kinds of things people should ask.

CM: What do you think about the new chief, James Craig?

RS: I think James Craig is a cog in the new development of the police department, trying to make it a militaristic unit. I don't have a personal perspective one way or the other. We've talked, we get along on one level but I don't think he as a person is really as intrinsically significant as are the policies that certain corporate entities want to institute. They want to control the police. They want the to police to suppress certain people, populations, so the people can feel like they want to come

in and invest and be in Detroit. To that end, if politically we have a difference with Craig, we're going to do that. I don't know whether Craig's a good guy, bad guy. Like I said, we talked and he presents a public persona that is embracing. But by the same token we are very reticent and do understand that the corporate agenda is to engage in suppression.

Whether he's a good guy or bad guy is not the most important thing. He did say one thing, and I hope he changes his perspective. He said he wants cops who love cops. No, we want cops who love people. If we have cops who love people, that begins to narrow the line. We do know some cops who like people and who want to do those kinds of things. They went into law enforcement for some positive reasons. But like I said, we've had a chance to talk. I'm not a big fan of these sweeps that he's doing and so therefore we're moving and we're challenging those kinds of things. There were some prerogatives that existed under the police commission, in terms of things like personnel and so on, that the emergency manager gave him the ability to do. We want to get those things back. We don't think that the chief, no matter how good, bad or indifferent he is should have the right to make personnel decisions singularly by himself because then the culture of the department may or may not be tainted by that.

CM: I know the coalition has been involved with the Renisha McBride case. What do you think about how the case has been handled by the authorities?

RS: I think initially it wasn't handled well by the Dearborn Heights police department. They didn't get all the information that they could. I think subsequently we reached out and we pointed out that we wanted Kym Worthy to do a thorough investigation. They sent their team out and did more of an investigation, and ended up charging what I thought was a reasonable charge – which was second degree murder, possession of a firearm in the commission of a felony and manslaughter, possibly. In that sense it's fine, and I think what the judge said in the preliminary exam was important.

He said that Mr. Wafer had several options. He could've walked away from the door. He could've gone next door to a neighbor. He could've called the police. He could've retreated if he felt that something was happening. Opening the door and blasting her head off was not perceived as an option. We also have pointed out, some people have said that this is a racist crime. It is in the sense that you can talk about the general scenario of racism in America. Nobody knows what was in Wafer's mind we know that he was a member of the National Rifle Association. We've used the term, some people have talked about racial profiling, we use the term 'human profiling.' And I think that's even more egregious in one sense because anybody that came to that door he was going to shoot. We think maybe it might be a greater prospect that he'd shoot a black person but this guy was violent and was a time bomb waiting to go off. We also want to make sure that this case, in relation to the future of the residents of Wayne County, no matter what their ethnicity is, that they feel that a 19 year old girl who is looking for help should not have been slaughtered on the street like an ant that you step on. Within that context we didn't want to have some people make it just a 'them against us' scenario, because it's us for us, and that's the scenario that we've been pushing. We have to find points where we can come together and unify around public safety issues and not necessarily point out only the divisions. Yes, we know about the historic framework of racism and murder in America.

We know about that. We know that this may have a relationship to that. But at the same time, we have to look and make a progressive, forward push in terms of how each one of these situations, how do we find ways to come together and move beyond them. At the case, one thing that was very interesting, one woman I know from Brightmoor who just moved out to Dearborn Heights, who's Jewish, she was telling me how she thought it was terrible because she uses weapons too. She said 'a 19 year old girl didn't have to die like that.' We want to make sure that the jury pool reflects a reasonable reflection on the issue and not necessarily looks at him like, 'oh the jury pool is predominantly white. This is a white guy we've got to kick him out.' We want them to know. And we don't know if whether he would've just shot a black person. It could've been their child, or it could've been their sister, or it could've been them.

CM: You mentioned earlier that there was going to be another court date for the Aiyana Jones trial. Could you talk about that briefly?

RS: February 7th in the courtroom of Cynthia Gray Hathaway. After the hung jury, this new trial starts. It's going to be interesting because one of the guys, who was the lead person in that assault on Aiyana Jones' house has subsequently been caught and kicked off the police department for using his computer for pornography. I don't know whether he'll testify or not. All the cops suddenly were blind, they never did see children's toys in the front yard. It's unfortunately going to be another challenging trial for the family because they're going through a case before that, two weeks before and maybe simultaneously with the father, Charles Jones, and Chauncey Owens, who was the boyfriend of the aunt. They're going to have a trial before that immediately with some of the similar elements coming up. We're hoping that we'll find that Weekley did what he did and his finger did not "slip" on the trigger. Not with that kind of training.

That he blasted and killed Aiyana Jones and blew her head off. We expect to see justice in that case. I think that it would be a sad day in the city of Detroit, now I don't want to predict anything happening, but I'm just saying it's ironic that it's starting at the beginning of Black History Month. And I think the prosecutor and everybody else needs to weigh this. Might be more wise for Weekley to do a plea. Based on the evidence that I've seen before, that whole group that went into that house, and this is why I don't like these militaristic activities, went into that house as a military unit, searching for someone. And the things that they said were so low down and dirty. They said that there were blankets at the window and they knew that was a drug house because that's what you have at drug houses, as opposed to people putting blankets up to keep the cold out. It's terrible.

CM: What do you think about Edward Snowden's revelations on NSA surveillance?

Ron: Well, I was a member of the Black Panther Party and there was a lot of surveillance that was done on our organization and a lot of other organizations, through the counterintelligence program. At that particular time, technology was not as sophisticated as it is now. I think it is terrible, I think it is a reflection of our age where we have to really change our behavior. You can't put your whole life on facebook. I think you have to have some 'face to face' discussions. I think people have to do what they can in court to challenge and beat back some of these reactionary developments. I think people have to develop other technology to counteract the technology that's being used against them. I think we're living in an overt, corporate military state at this point. I

think everything that we do, everything that we say... it's really my worst nightmare, seeing this kind of thing. I think people, a lot of times don't want to fight because they're oblivious to it, but I think it's important. I always forget the young man's name, who was in Russia, who actually did challenge the system, in terms of releasing...

CM: Snowden?

Ron: Yeah, Snowden. I think he's a hero. I think he's a big time hero. I think he's as much as a hero as Tom Paine... he's my real hero of the American Revolution. He advocated women to vote, freedom for slaves and promoted common sense. Snowden is our new common sense hero. Here's a common, ordinary guy that nobody expected. I don't think he even went to college! He's just an ordinary guy and I think that makes it even more profound. He saw some things that, thank God for some people still having a modicum of courage and humanity, that he felt that he had to do something. And now for that, people want to kill him. I think we need to stand behind him because if the American government can kill someone for trying to protect millions and millions and millions of us and people around the world, that reflects what we really ought to deal with. That's the problem.

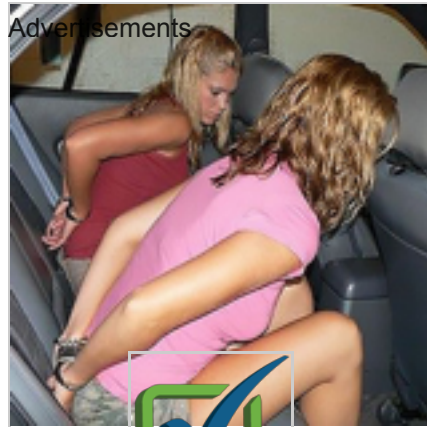
CM: I was hoping you could tell people about the work of the coalition, how people can support the coalition.

RS: Well, obviously we're doing a consistent fundraising drive. We have a paypal account. They can contact us on our website – detroitcoalition.org. And they can reach us at detcoalition@att.net. My personal email is ronrsvp@aol.com. They can reach at the following numbers: 313.399.7345 or 313.963.8116. So then they can follow us, like I said we have a paypal account. People, in terms of some of our activities...

We're going to be involved in doing a forum on stop and frisk, we're going to be doing a taser forum soon. They can assist us with that. We have several fundraisers coming up that are a little more fun than that – we're going to do one with judges and lawyers soon. They can participate in any of those. We really need, we're really reaching out to people who have investigative skills, because we want to do more investigations on a number of areas that would relate to public policy.

CM: Great, Ron. Anything else you want to add?

RS: People need to be vigilant. There was a guy by the name of Sir Robert Peel in England, who was responsible for founding the London Metropolitan Police department in 1829. There is a list of about nine principles of what policing should be, and one of the most significant ones is that 'people are the police, and the police are the people.' The only difference that separates us is the authority we give them. Therefore, if we're the police ourselves then we need to make sure we police the police and make sure that they behave and do what's necessary for us. Sir Robert Peel was saying the reason why the London Metropolitan Police department and Scotland Yard was formed was to protect the people against the military, not to become the military. That's the real thing that I'm concerned about now, that we have to stop the encroachment of militarization. Otherwise the fight is a different fight altogether – it's a military battle.



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