

TPD Major: Police Shoot Black Americans 'Less Than We Probably Ought To'

publicradiotulsa.org/local-regional/2020-06-09/tpd-major-police-shoot-black-americans-less-than-we-probably-ought-to

June 9, 2020



Facebook / Broken Arrow Police Department

Maj. Travis Yates of the Tulsa Police Department teaching a class of Broken Arrow Police Department recruits on Jan. 22, 2020.

Please see [this editor's note](#) about a photo change on the story.

Updated June 10, 7 p.m. to clarify a quote and link to a study cited.

Discussing nationwide protests over the killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, a white Tulsa Police Department major said Monday systemic racism in policing "just doesn't exist."

Speaking to talk radio host Pat Campbell on his podcast, TPD Maj. Travis Yates also suggested that, according to his interpretation of crime data, police should actually be shooting black Americans more frequently.

"You get this meme of, 'Blacks are shot two times, two and a half times more,' and everybody just goes, 'Oh, yeah,'" Yates said. "They're not making sense here. You have to come into contact with law enforcement for that to occur."

"If a certain group is committing more crimes, more violent crimes, and law enforcement is having to come into more contact with them, then that number is going to be higher. Who in the world in their right mind would think that our shootings should be right along the U.S. Census lines? That's insanity, right, but everyone's just buying off on this.

"And, by the way, all the research says — including Roland Fryer, an African American Harvard professor, Heather MacDonald, and the National Academy of Sciences, all of their research says we're shooting African Americans about 24% less than we probably ought to be based on the crimes being committed."

Yates expressed displeasure with the largely peaceful protests that have been taking place in big cities and small towns all over the country since Floyd's killing on May 25.

"The officer was arrested the next day. They were prosecuted, they were fired. What are you doing? What do you mean, 'justice?' Justice at this point has been done," Yates said. "Well, then it turned into systematic racism, systematic police brutality.

"This is what they're trying to say that all these changes need to come from: this is why we're protesting, this is why we're rioting. Because of systematic abuse of power and racism. That just doesn't exist."

Without evidence, Yates alleged that journalists and a group he declined to name have financial interests in lying about policing.

"Because of this money, because of the marketing, because of the slick steps they've done, they've made regular Americans believe that cops are just hunting blacks down the street and killing them," he said. "It is so mind-boggling to me, that it is so over-the-top. It's not happening, but everyone believes that it is happening."

Yates is no stranger to racial controversy. In 2016, he faced criticism for an essay in which he declared American police were "at war" and implied Black Lives Matter activists should not be allowed to visit the White House, a move that led TPD's then-chief, Chuck Jordan, to transfer Yates and express vocal disapproval and the group We The People Oklahoma to call for his resignation.

In another 2016 essay, titled "Follow Commands or Die," he assigned blame for police violence onto its victims, writing, "Would we even know where Ferguson was if Michael Brown would have simply got out of the street like the officer had asked him to do?"

In 2018, he suggested in an open letter to Tulsa Mayor G.T. Bynum that any disproportionate policing in Tulsa's black neighborhoods was a result of "fatherless homes" and allegations of racism in policing are "dangerous" and a "great scam."

TPD Capt. Richard Meulenberg said Tuesday afternoon Chief Wendell Franklin was not yet aware of Yates' remarks on the show, and Franklin would determine whether TPD condones what Yates said.

"Everybody's got a right to their opinion. Obviously, he being a major with the Tulsa Police Department, it carries some weight that he has his opinion, and we'll have to just kind of go through this. I mean, I can't speak upon the thing that he talked about here because I don't have the data. I can't refute or substantiate what it is that he said here," Meulenberg said.

Meulenberg said under TPD policy, Yates, a division commander, had latitude to communicate with the public in various forms, including through a radio show or podcast.

"Is he speaking for himself? Or is he speaking for the department? The way I interpret what he has said is that he is speaking for himself," Meulenberg said.

Chris Polansky

Chris joined Public Radio Tulsa as a news anchor and reporter in April 2020. He's a graduate of Hunter College and the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism, both at the City University of New York.