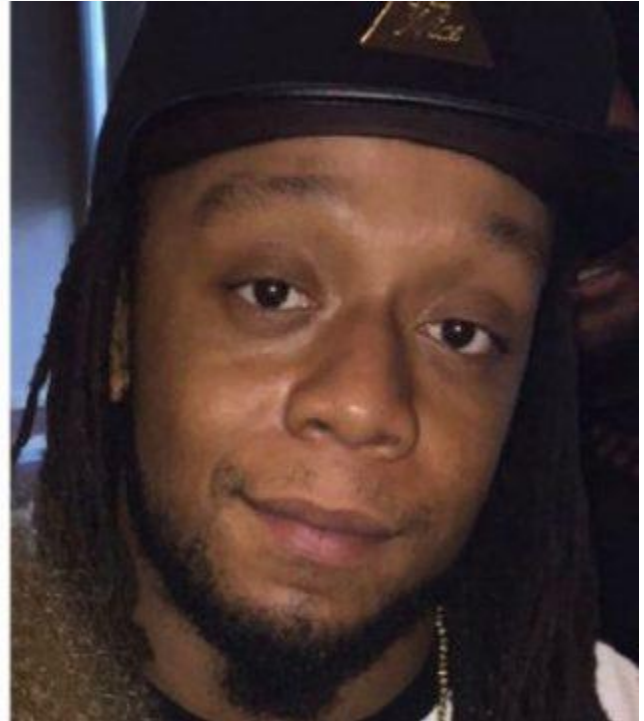


What the last few years in Toronto tell us about our police: Paradkar

The institution of police is not a good system with a few bad apples. It's a rotten system with a few good eggs.



Toronto police said Rinaldo Cole, left, and Dwayne Campbell, right, who were shot and killed at a party early Sunday morning, were “known to police.” Were they known because they’ve been involved in illegal activities as the term implies? Or were they known because they were stopped on the street for doing nothing wrong and had their information documented? We don’t know. (TORONTO POLICE)

By **SHREE PARADKAR** Columnist
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Custodians of safety with a few bad apples? Or institutional oppressors who are above the law?

One is a *Law & Order* view of the police, in which they are essentially a force of good. Individual officers may struggle with internal demons, but they ultimately prevail in their quest to keep society safe. This would be the perspective of those who find the system works for them, who believe all it needs is you to be law abiding.

Perched on the opposite end is the view in which the police are armed thugs with the means to oppress by any means necessary those deemed undesirable, whether because of class, race, religion, skin colour, ability, legal status or sexual orientation. This would be the perspective of those who find their existence criminalized.

The recent developments in the [vicious assault](#) of Whitby teen Dafonte Miller allegedly by off-duty Toronto policeman Michael Theriault is a call for serious reckoning of the role of police in our society.

The account by Julian Falconer, Miller's lawyer, is chilling: Miller and his friends were walking on the street at 3 a.m. toward a friend's house, when they were jumped.

His friends were able to escape. Miller couldn't. He was savagely beaten with a steel pipe.

Durham police showed up in numbers. They didn't take any witness statements. They didn't ascertain if the off-duty cop was drunk. They didn't even call the SIU that is supposed to investigate incidents of serious harm or death in cases involving the police, on- or off-duty.

No, they arrested Miller, and charged him with theft under \$5,000, two counts of assault with a weapon, possession of a weapon and possession related to marijuana.

Is it not the role of the police to keep our streets safe enough for us to walk on them at night? Or is our much-vaunted freedom only available to those deemed worth protecting?

It was Falconer who called the SIU. On July 18, the SIU charged Theriault with aggravated assault, assault with a weapon and public mischief. He has been suspended with pay. Two days later, the SIU laid the same charges against Christian Theriault — the cop's brother, Falconer says. The charges against Miller have been withdrawn.

There are many instances of police overstepping the mark. The brutality they displayed during the G20 summit in Toronto. Their use of excessive force toward people suffering mental illness; Toronto police officer James Forcillo's multiple bullets that killed [Sammy Yatim](#), Constable Andrew Doyle's bullets that killed [Andrew Loku](#).

The casual cruelty Brantford Police Staff Sgt. Cheney Venn [inflicted upon](#) Philip Alafe, who was struggling with sickle cell anemia, depression, anxiety.

The [complicity of the RCMP](#) in tearing Indigenous children away from their own homes to abusive residential schools.

The incarceration rates for Indigenous and Black people that are disproportionate to their populations and the criminalization of people from both groups in ways white people and those with proximity to whiteness are not.

The dismal record of arrests for rape and convictions in assault cases.

You would have to be wilfully obtuse to not see a pattern of deep-rooted dysfunctionality in our police services.

None of this even addresses issues of workplace sexual harassment within the RCMP for which their commissioner tearfully apologized.

Another time, Bob Paulson admitted to a group of First Nations leaders [there were racists](#) in his organization. "I don't want them to be in my police force."

No, sir.

The few bad apples argument does not hold any more. Acknowledging some officers are racists conveniently reduces the problem to a level of individual accountability and absolves the institution of its systemic biases against the already marginalized.

Is it surprising then that people from those groups don't come forward with information for police?

After a [Scarborough house party shooting](#) on the weekend that left two people dead and one in hospital, police said they were struggling to find witnesses.

"We've had very little co-operation from people," police Det. Rob North told reporters. Did people not have much to say because they were in shock processing what had happened? Were they defiantly refusing to speak? We don't know.

The next day police shot off another loaded term. The victims were "known to police." Were they known because they've been involved in illegal activities as the term implies? Or were they known because they were stopped on the street for doing nothing wrong and had their information documented? We don't know.

Yet, Toronto police operate on a \$1-billion plus budget with some of it sliced off for "community engagement." It's as if one hand tries to build relations with the very people the other hand crushes.

If the Dafonte Miller case came to the surface it's because a high-profile lawyer got the SIU involved, leading to a police officer being charged, and that became newsworthy enough for the media to cover. When establishments close ranks they present daunting layers of opacity that require Herculean efforts to dent.

How many such incidents with varying degrees of violence take place far from the public eye will warrant a guess based on your trust in the police.

None of this means there aren't noble individual police officers who are good human beings, highly skilled and perseverant in the pursuit of justice.

What the last few years have shown, however, is the institution of police is not a good system with a few bad apples. It's a rotten system with a few good eggs.

Whom does this institution serve, whom does it protect and who is it accountable to?

Unfortunately, the answers are clear: The privileged, itself and no one.

Shree Paradkar tackles issues of race and gender. You can follow her @shreeparadkar