



COMMITTEE COMMENTARY

For years, claims of racial profiling by police have been routinely denied by police officials. The Cincinnati police shooting death of Timothy Thomas, an unarmed black 19-year-old, sparked days of civil unrest in 2001. This prompted NBC's *Dateline* to launch a 14-month investigation probing the underlying causes and circumstances of this incident. They discovered that the shooting of Thomas had been precipitated in part by unpaid minor traffic tickets for 21 non-moving violations. Many observers have pointed to such tickets as evidence of police misuse of the traffic code as a pretext for random and unwarranted searches of cars for drugs or guns, since these infractions cannot easily be spotted as police watch cars drive by. Not relying on anecdote, *Dateline* analyzed, under open record laws, 300,000 tickets issued by Cincinnati police and more than 4 million from a dozen cities nationwide. The result: In almost every city, "police pulled over and ticketed blacks for non-moving violations at a rate higher than whites." In Cincinnati, *Dateline* found police ticketed black drivers three times as often as whites. For moving violations, however, *Dateline* found that black and white drivers are charged much more equally. This searching statistical analysis, and the penetrating interviews of police and citizens, raise disturbing questions about a practice too long ignored as unproven. By bringing this "pattern of suspicion" to light, *Dateline* has made a valuable contribution to public awareness.

NBC *Dateline* | New York, New York
John Larson, *Correspondent*
Jason Samuels and Andrew Lehren, *Co-producers*
Neal Shapiro and David Corvo, *Executive Producers*

EXCERPT

CORRESPONDENT JOHN LARSON: In any given year police stop millions of Americans, but it is who they stop and why that is at the heart of the racial profiling debate.

OFFICER DAMMERT: We've been labeled as racists. And I wholeheartedly know that that is not true. Does anyone honestly think that I would work in a place that is overwhelmingly African-American if I was racist towards them?

LARSON: Nonetheless, you'll soon see how even with the best of cops—and Officer Dammert is that, hand-picked by the department to escort *DATeline*—how even with Cincinnati's finest, aggressive, proactive policing can breed anger and charges of racial profiling.

DAMMERT: OK. Guy in a black hoodie, right in front of Alberts Market, just saw us and headed straight into the store.

LARSON: Officer Dammert has just seen a young black man in a sweatshirt turn away from him, and decides—for that reason alone—the young man is worth talking to.

DAMMERT: Can I talk to you for a minute, sir? How you doing?

MR. SHORT: All right.

DAMMERT: Do you have any ID on you?

SHORT: No.

DAMMERT: Do you have anything on you you shouldn't have? You looked like you were trying to avoid me.

SHORT: No, I'm just—I'm on the phone.

DAMMERT: No. You saw me coming and you took off around the corner. And then saw me and started walking again. You got some weed on you, man? It's just a ticket.

SHORT: No, I don't have nothing on me.

LARSON: It's called "stop and talk." Ask a few questions, see if he'll consent to a search. It's all perfectly legal.



Jason Samuels



Andrew Lehren

DAMMERT: You ain't got no warrants, right?

SHORT: No. No.

DAMMERT: OK. You got a job?

SHORT: Yeah.

DAMMERT: Ah, OK. Spread your legs for me.

LARSON: The man has done nothing wrong, hasn't broken any law. But does he fit a certain profile?

SHORT: I didn't do nothing, man.

DAMMERT: Well, if you didn't do nothing, man, you ain't got nothing to worry about. OK? And I do—I do appreciate you cooperating with me, all right?

SHORT: Yeah, man.

DAMMERT: Mr. Short, alright? I am just out here trying to get dope off the street, man.

SHORT: I mean—but, I mean...

DAMMERT: This is how we do it, Mr. Short. Thanks for your cooperation.

LARSON: The young man is let go. No incident report is filled out. There will be no record the stop ever happened.



"A Pattern of Suspicion" premiered on NBC on April 9, 2004. Check listings for rebroadcasts. Visit <http://www.msnbc.com/id/4703833/> to watch video clips and access data on "ticketing by race in 12 cities" and other information.