



**Opinion** Stephen Lawrence

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# Duwayne Brooks and the Lawrences are not alone in needing answers

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There must be a public inquiry into all those spied on and smeared by police. The 'Life on Mars' defence is not enough

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**T**hirteen years ago [Duwayne Brooks](#) walked free from court after a charge of indecent assault (reduced from attempted rape) was thrown out before the defence had to utter a word. It was the culmination of years of smears, arrests and spurious charges against Brooks, who was attacked with his friend Stephen Lawrence when Lawrence was murdered by a group of racists in 1993.

I followed Brooks over the seven-month period from when he was arrested until he was cleared, and the [Guardian published a story stating that Brooks had been the victim of a police vendetta](#). The Guardian's lawyers weren't too happy with the word vendetta, but the police didn't sue.

Now we know why. Thanks to the revelations of the [former undercover police officer Peter Francis](#) we have discovered just how systematic that vendetta was. Francis worked for the Metropolitan police's Special Demonstration Squad, a unit tasked with spying on "political groups", and was asked to dig up dirt on the Lawrence family and associates.

Brooks was the surviving witness to a murder that the police had failed to investigate properly because it couldn't, or didn't want to, believe that a young man could be killed simply because he was black. Of course, he was ripe for a good smearing - the police wanted to show that Lawrence and Brooks were bad boys.

In [2006, Brooks received substantial damages from the Met](#) after starting a claim for wrongful arrest and negligence. If the case had gone to court the role of the SDS might have emerged.

Brooks and the Lawrence family are not alone in needing an explanation. It almost became the norm in the 90s to smear those who had challenged the police or died in their custody. In 2004 [Delroy Lindo](#), a black activist and friend of [Winston Silcott \(who was wrongfully convicted of the murder of PC Keith Blakelock\)](#), received £80,000 in compensation from the Met - he had been arrested 37 times in 12 years and charged 11 times without being convicted. Perhaps the SDS kept an eye on him?

When [Roger Sylvester died in 1999](#) after being restrained on his stomach by six police officers he was portrayed as a feral, naked, crack-addicted giant prowling the streets of Tottenham - in fact he was an average-sized naked man with mental health problems locked outside of his house, with no traces of cocaine in his system. When Scotsman [Harry Stanley was killed by police in the same year](#) after leaving a London pub carrying a table leg and being mistaken for an Irishman with a sawn-off shotgun he was demonised as a feckless drunk.

At inquests, police barristers used a "Life on Mars" defence. Yes, coppers were a rum lot in the old days, but not now. Yet, after the [Met killed Jean Charles de Menezes in 2005](#), journalists were told the "suspected terrorist" was wearing a suspiciously heavy or padded jacket with wires sticking out, that he ran from the police and jumped a ticket barrier. None of which were

true. There have been well [over 1,000 deaths in police custody over the past 40 years](#), and in so many cases the pattern has been similar - victims are portrayed as violent, terrifying, drug-addicted, drunk.

The Met also has considerable form in smearing its own. In 1998, weeks after [Detective Sergeant Gurpal Virdi](#) complained about a sloppy investigation into a racist stabbing, he was found guilty by an internal inquiry of sending National Front hate mail to black colleagues, and sacked. He was later reinstated and compensated, but by then his career was ruined. Virdi was a member of the Black Police Association, which campaigns against racism within the police. Over the years, many of its leading members have been systematically smeared.

On Monday, [Neville Lawrence called for another public inquiry](#) into the police investigation of his son's murder. But for confidence to be restored in the police, something more wide-reaching is needed - a public inquiry into all those who have been spied on and smeared by the SDS (and other units in other forces). The squad needs to come clean over just who it has dug dirt on during its existence, why and to what effect?

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