

**POLICE**

# ABOLITION

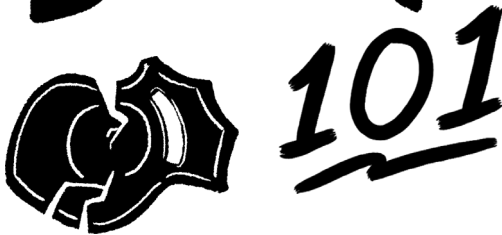
MESSAGES  
WHEN  
FACING  
DOUBTS

A COLLABORATIVE  
**ZINE**

**101**



# POLICE ABOLITION



A COLLABORATIVE ZINE  
ILLUSTRATIONS AND DESIGN  
BY NOAH JODICE

Adapted From MPD150 & Expanded  
Excerpted from the “What’s Next” report, available at:  
*[bit.ly/WhatsNextIC3](http://bit.ly/WhatsNextIC3)*

WE AFFIRM THE POWER, POSSIBILITY, AND NECESSITY  
OF A POLICE-FREE FUTURE. WE ALSO UNDERSTAND,  
HOWEVER, THAT THIS IS A NEW IDEA FOR MANY  
PEOPLE. WHAT FOLLOWS ARE SOME FREQUENTLY-ASKED  
QUESTIONS, AND SOME RESPONSES TO THEM.

## WHAT DOES POLICE ABOLITION MEAN?

**Police abolition is a process of reallocating resources, funding, and responsibility away from police and toward community-based models of safety, support, and prevention.** It is a long-term project that requires shifting our emergency response procedures and putting actual safety-creating systems in place. Our many efforts

at reform, which stretch back over a century, have failed. These have typically addressed only a few parts of the larger system or required the police to assume responsibility for social service delivery.





SO ARE THEY  
GETTING RID  
OF THE POLICE  
TOMORROW?

No. Police abolition is not about snapping our fingers and instantly defunding every department in the world, leaving communities without strategies to create and sustain safety. Instead, we must replace the police with systems that support real wellness and safety. To do so, we focus on reallocating resources from policing toward human needs like housing, child care, and health care.



## WHAT WOULD TAKE THE PLACE OF THE POLICE?

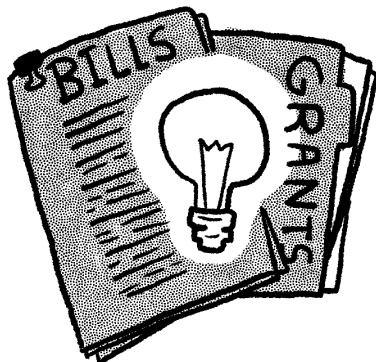
**Police abolition is not about making police officers suddenly vanish, either.** Instead, we actively shift responsibility for community safety to the people who are best equipped to deal with those crises. Mental health service providers, social workers, violence

interventionists, victim/survivor advocates, religious leaders, neighbors, family members, and friends—all of the people who really make up the fabric of a community—are better equipped to respond to crises than armed strangers.

## HOW WOULD THIS HAPPEN?

**Through a community-led staged process of substitution of community-based services for policing through defunding police departments and investing in community-based alternatives and pilot projects, legislative and policy changes.**

Many communities are already relying on non-police intervention and violence prevention programs across the country. Elsewhere in this guide, you'll find examples of programs that we can invest in now and build.



## WON'T ABOLISHING THE POLICE CREATE CHAOS AND CRIME?

**No, because policing is not about crime control.** Such a small proportion of law enforcement activity is related to criminal matters that dramatically reducing policing today would not necessarily impair those functions. Most of the calls they receive do not pertain to circumstances involving violence and harm matters, and the percentage of police effort devoted to violations of criminal law may not even exceed 10 percent. Less than a third of a police officer's on-duty work is related to violence and harm; as little as 6 percent of a patrol officer's time is spent on

incidents that ultimately turn out to be criminal offenses. On average, police officers in the US arrest one person every two weeks. One study found that among 156 officers assigned to a high-crime area of New York City, 40 percent did not make a single felony arrest in a year.<sup>1</sup>

So police do very little of this work, and they often do it badly. When police do respond to instances of harm, they often arrive too late to be able to interrupt harm in progress; intervention by neighbors is more likely to be effective in the moment.



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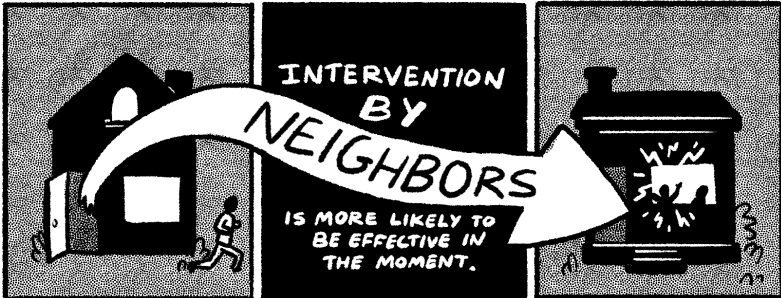
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Though the police offer a false sense of security to the most privileged members of our society, we are facing the reality that police do not solve violence in our communities; they bring violence. They don't make us safe; they undermine our safety. Cops don't just respond to violent crimes. They make traffic stops for broken tail lights; issue citations for so-called "quality of life" offenses like public drinking, "disorderly conduct," and fare evasion; and arrest people for minor drug

offenses. Policing this wide range of "broken windows" behaviors only serves to keep more people—the most vulnerable members of our communities—under the thumb of the criminal justice system. For Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, disabled people, workers, migrants, and LGBTQ people, systems of policing and control have been a primary sources of chaos and crime in our communities, and have failed in bringing safety or justice to our communities.

BUT AREN'T POLICE AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE SYSTEMS THAT KEEP VULNERABLE PEOPLE SAFE IN OUR SOCIETY?

NO.

**Like the police, social service providers and the medical-industrial complex have failed in bringing safety or justice to our communities.**

At least 50% of people murdered by the police are disabled people.<sup>2</sup> Over a twenty-year period ending in 2012, 81% of people murdered by San Diego police officers were disabled people.<sup>3</sup>

Disabled people are vulnerable to police violence, but they also suffer at the hands of the “softer” police forces that are social service agencies and medical institutions, which routinely cage and disempower the people they purport to serve. These government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and nonprofit

medical institutions do not keep people safe, either. Children and adults who are neurodivergent or have cognitive disabilities are almost four times more likely to experience violence than their neurotypical counterparts, often at the hands of the people who are supposed to be providing care.<sup>4</sup>

Stigma and ableism justify the violation of people’s basic human rights through mechanisms like involuntary psychiatric treatment, family separation, mandatory reporting, and juvenile incarceration, all of which are proven to be ineffective at best and traumatizing at worst. The mental health system is also built on white supremacy. Writer Edward Hon-Sing Wong also notes that the mental health field’s “participation

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50

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in racial violence and the policing of racialized bodies” has a troubling historical context: psychiatry shares its historical origins with that of the racist science of eugenics. Structural racism only increases the violence to which people are subjected in mental health care.

We cannot make the mistake of trading out one broken system for another, especially when those systems have been complicit with each other and at their cores, were built to maintain the current white supremacist power structures. Rather than focus on

the “treatment” and “care” of disabled folks, we honor the legacy of Disability Justice organizers in imagining communal wellness and safety where no one is caged.<sup>5</sup>

We support the development of, and community investment in, peer counseling, peer crisis intervention and peer coaching support networks, and non-lockdown and non-medicated respite centers. These efforts should be guided by the people most impacted by social service providers. The more accessible our world is, the safer our world will be for everyone.

**BUT,**

**WITHOUT THE POLICE, WHO WILL PROTECT US FROM ARMED BANK ROBBERS, "HOME INVASIONS," MURDERERS, AND SUPER VILLAINS?**

**In this transition process, we may need a small, specialized class of public servants whose job it is to respond to violent crimes.** We also know that some of our community members building restorative justice and transformative justice models have already been addressing “violent crimes.”

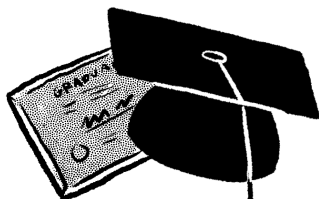
But we can do more to prevent crime by taking care of one another

than by funding more police. Crime isn’t random. Most of the time, crime happens when someone has been unable to meet their basic needs through other means. So to really “fight crime,” we don’t need more cops; we need more jobs, more educational opportunities, more arts programs, more community centers, more mental health resources, and more of a say in how our own communities function.

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AND  
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RESOURCES**



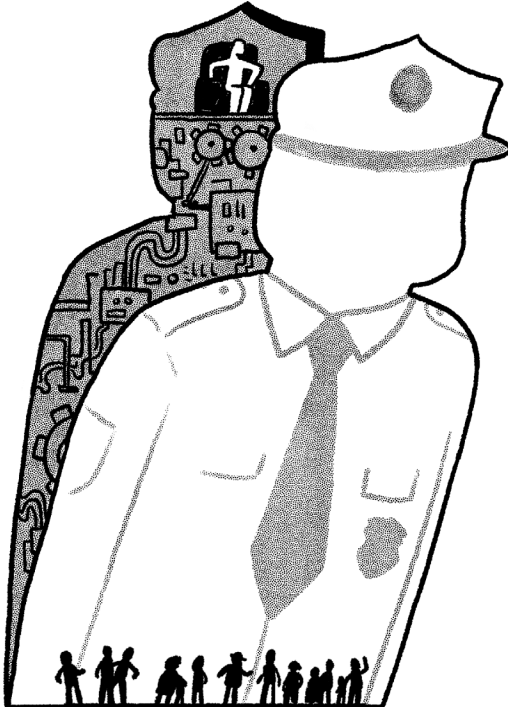
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WHAT ABOUT  
WHITE SUPREMACIST  
VIOLENCE AND  
"HATE CRIMES"?

We can rethink racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, Islamophobic, and xenophobic violence as violence of domination, which we often label "hate crimes." Rather than imagining hate crimes as a problem caused by one person's or group's "hate" of another, we can link individual acts of violence

motivated by hate with the systems of oppression that both nurture and sustain that violence.

Efforts to punish hate crimes have significantly expanded police power. The 2010 Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act expanded the 1968 federal hate crimes sentencing enhancement law to apply to incidents of violence in which a person is targeted because of their actual or perceived gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability in addition to previously "protected" categories of race, religion, ethnicity, or national origin.



The new law also created the pretense, mechanisms, and funding (\$5 million a year) for federal law enforcement to assist local authorities in the investigation and prosecution of violent incidents determined to be hate crimes, made funds available for enhanced police training, targeted young people in specific ways, and added military personnel attacked in direct relationship to their service as a new category of “protection.” (Similar extensions were added to many local laws in the wake of the 2014-15 uprisings in the US through so-called “Blue Lives Matter laws,” creating enhanced penalties for people accused of harming police, probation, and other law enforcement officers.)

Focus on “hate crimes” reinvests in the criminal legal system and the prison industrial complex and gives these systems the power to create meaning through punishment claiming to “acknowledge” the life of the harmed and the “hate” involved in an act of violence. This feeds the common sense presumption that we are both

made safe by the surveillance, containment, and confinement of certain other people deemed “dangerous” to us and the idea that we are at our *most human* or most deserving when recognized by and included in that system. Ironically, as described in *Queer (In)Justice*, hate crime statutes, like other criminal laws, are more frequently mobilized against the people they claim to protect than they are against white supremacists and those served by dominant power relations.

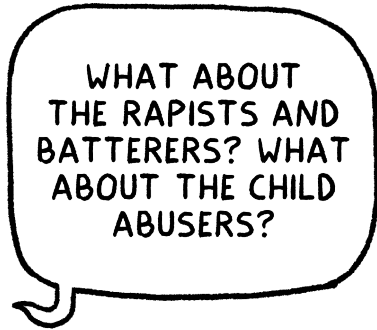
In instances of high-profile hate crimes, the PIC is mobilized not to address the histories of white supremacy, heteronormativity, and xenophobia behind these crimes, but to represent a form of “collective” expression of state protection and national belonging. Hate crime statutes offer no protection against violence and no material change to the conditions that produced it after the fact.

To address the violence of domination we must work to end reliance on the PIC and other

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structures that perpetuate white supremacist violence. We must invest in strategies and structures that protect and sustain our communities. Instead of looking to the police, we can look to examples of community self-defense and amend historical models that have been community-based, but worked in collaboration with police. We can also build on the models developed by feminists of color to address gender-based violence and intimate partner and sexual violence without policing and imprisonment.



**Feminists of color have long suggested that the criminal punishment system is not the best or most effective way to handle the harms caused by sexual violence, not least because the police themselves contribute to sexual and domestic violence.** Beginning in the 1970s, some feminists in the US have fought to criminalize rape, intimate partner violence, and child abuse in the legal system. But the tide has been turning. Mainstream feminist organizations and coalitions against gender violence have begun to listen to feminists of

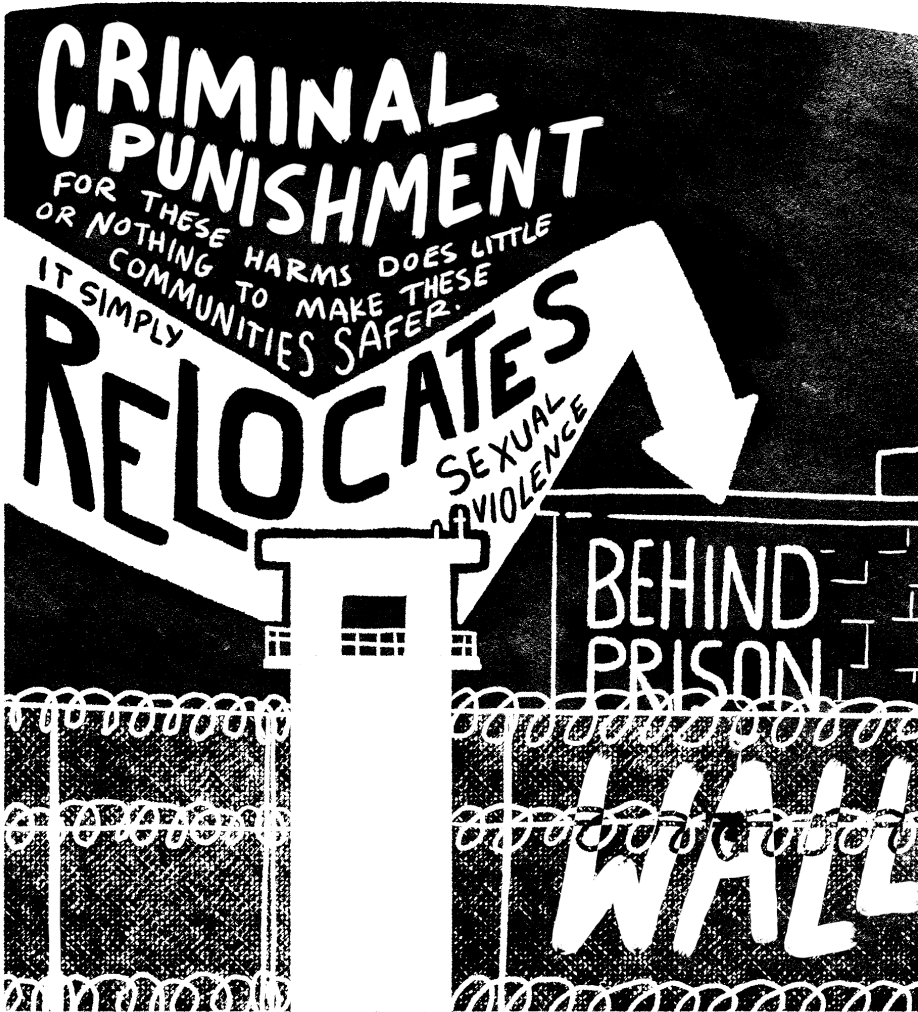
color and LGBTQI DV advocates who have long recognized that laws have failed to protect survivors.

Instead, feminists of color argue that sexual violence, domestic violence (or intimate partner violence), and child abuse must end without expecting policing to keep communities safe. Organizations like **INCITE!** have been fighting against the expansion of law enforcement and police militarization while also creating alternative community accountability and transformative justice responses to sexual and domestic violence. Groups like **generationFIVE**, founded and led by survivors of child sexual abuse, and the **Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective (BATJC)** have recognized that the criminalization of child sexual abuse and the demonization of people who commit child sexual abuse have not made people safer—but has made child sexual abuse go further underground, preventing the disclosure of abuse and foreclosing pathways to accountability and repair. Rather than reducing the risk and rate of child sexual abuse, imprisonment and mechanisms like “sex offender registries” actually increase the risk that people who commit these harms will commit future sexual violence.

At the same time, the system of imprisonment that purports to reduce sexual violence actually creates more. The demonization of people labeled batterers and sex offenders has been used as an

excuse for the build-up of prisons and jails, contributing to violence and rape within jails and prisons. Incarcerated adults, women, and youth experience sexual violence from other incarcerated people *and guards*. Criminal punishment for these harms does little or nothing to make communities safer. It simply relocates sexual violence behind prison walls.

Together, communities across the US have begun to address sexual assault, domestic violence, and child sexual abuse through community-based, non-professionalized, collective responses that challenge policing and adopt the frameworks of community accountability and transformative justice as pathways to safety.





Many of these efforts are found in the website **TransformHarm.org**. This guide discusses transformative justice in greater detail in a later section.

A related approach, restorative justice, has also been used to address sexual and domestic violence. Restorative justice programs in the US typically operate in partnership with law

enforcement, but there is increasing recognition of the fact that the vast majority of survivors do not contact the police to address sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and child sexual abuse. A growing number of advocates are bringing together restorative and transformative justice models, arguing that family- and community-based approaches to accountability and safety planning offer more promise than relying on police and courts.



**BUT WHAT  
ABOUT PEOPLE  
WHO SERIOUSLY  
HURT PEOPLE  
IN OUR  
COMMUNITIES?**

**First, we must recognize that the system of policing and criminal justice does not address the needs of survivors adequately.**

Any response to violence that begins with the police already excludes most survivors: 43% of survivors of intimate partner violence and two thirds of sexual assault survivors never call for help for a host of reasons, including the fact that calling the police also puts the survivor at greater risk of rape and battery: as extensively documented in *Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color*, police themselves contribute to sexual and domestic violence. An officer is caught in an act of sexual violence every 5 days, and studies have shown higher rates of sexual and domestic violence among police officers. Additionally, a significant number of instances of violence (physical and sexual, fatal and non-fatal) by police officers against women, queer, and trans people happen in the context of calls for help. Our current responses are not only failing to prevent sexual and physical gender-based violence, they are perpetrating and multiplying it.

Less than half of survivors contact the police, and of those who do, half will drop out of the criminal justice process before their cases make it past the Grand Jury phase. Survivors judge, correctly, that the system we have in place can not be trusted to bring them safety in the aftermath of the harm they survived—and many believe that incarceration, typically the one thing the criminal justice system can offer in the end, has not worked to keep them or others safe. Thus, survivors often choose not to initiate a process that cannot promise them anything of use in the end. Many survivors fear the retraumatization and denial of dignity that comes with reaching out to the police after experiencing violence. Lastly, many survivors want de-escalation, not criminalization. Knowing that a call for help might result in criminal or immigration consequences for their partner, or the removal of their children, is a barrier to involving the police. It is only in developing real solutions to harm that we stand a chance of centering and meeting the needs of all survivors.

**Second, successful community-based responses to violence already exist.** They include informal conflict de-escalation by neighbors, mediation responses that interrupt cycles of retaliation, and responses that leverage the moral authority of respected people in the community to intervene in patterns of violence before they escalate and to hold those who have done harm accountable. These solutions can be credited with substantial contributions to safety now, and they serve not only

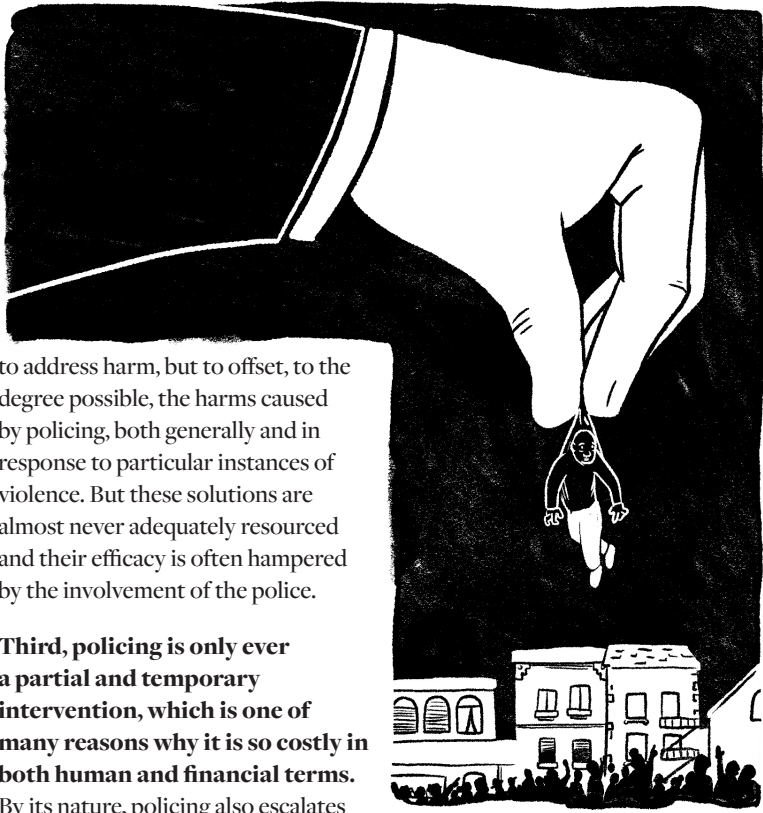
to address harm, but to offset, to the degree possible, the harms caused by policing, both generally and in response to particular instances of violence. But these solutions are almost never adequately resourced and their efficacy is often hampered by the involvement of the police.

**Third, policing is only ever a partial and temporary intervention, which is one of many reasons why it is so costly in both human and financial terms.**

By its nature, policing also escalates tensions and removes people and problems from the community, rather than finding solutions within the community. It deals with incidents and individuals, not patterns and networks of people, and usually only *after the fact*. Survivors and communities must wait for the police to apprehend one person for one specific thing and to address it as though it is separate from cycles of harm, unhealed trauma, loss, conflict and unmet needs. Because policing and imprisonment exacerbate violence, they generate more harm. By contrast, community-based leaders and groups are positioned to implement solutions that are holistic, informed, individualized, and durable

in ways reactive, armed outside intervention never can be. Once our primary responses to violence actually serve to reduce it, we will have fewer and fewer instances of harm to address and our resources to address them will therefore become more and more adequate over time.

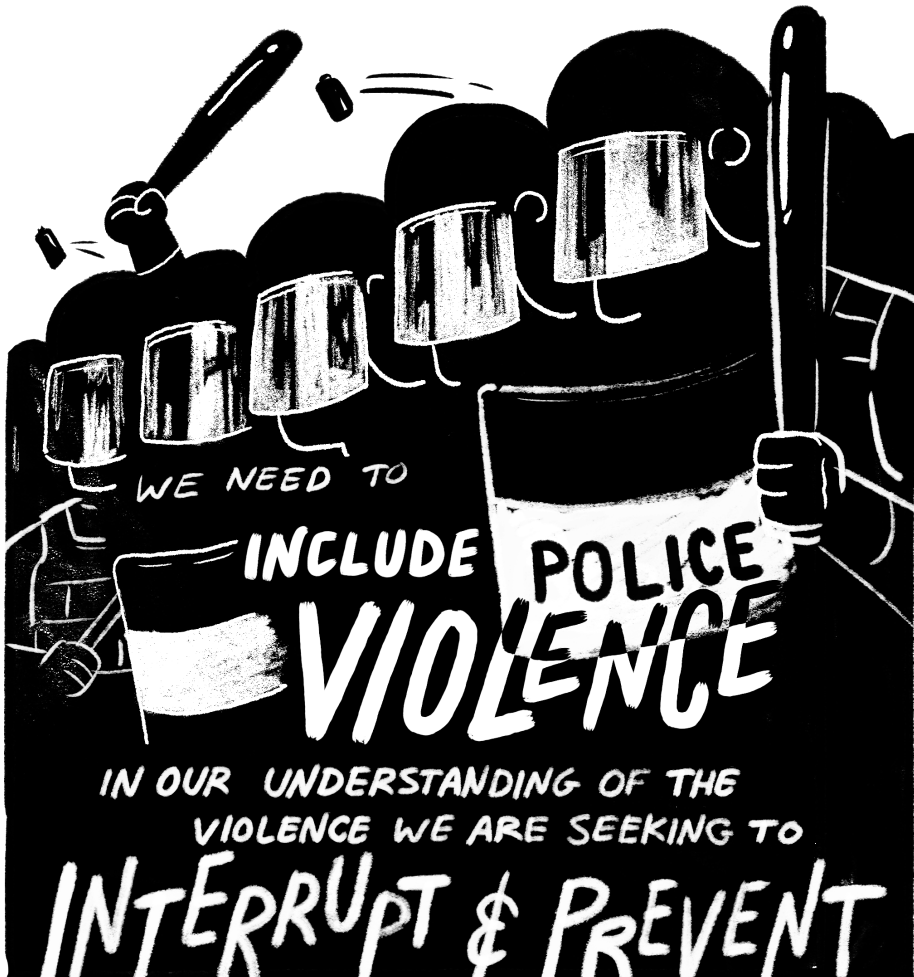
**Finally, because the outcomes of the policing of behavior classified as felonious are inherently tied to incarceration, it will continue to drive the separation, disenfranchisement, economic deprivation, and lasting violence that define jails and prisons—and that in turn drive violence in communities.** Under our current criminal punishment



system, people who cause harm currently have no incentive to admit to engaging in violent behavior and take accountability for their actions. If they do, they will have admitted guilt, which only further embeds them in the cycle of policing and incarceration. Here, the person who causes harm is punished by the state leaving the survivor without the opportunity to receive an apology or engage in a healing process that centers their needs.

BUT WHY NOT  
FUND THE POLICE  
AND ALL THESE  
ALTERNATIVES?  
WHY IS IT AN  
EITHER/OR?

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**It's not just that police are ineffective: in many communities, they're actively harmful, which causes many residents to lose trust in external support and take matters into their own hands, without proper training or supports, thereby feeding cycles of harm.**

The history of policing is a history of violence against the marginalized—American police departments were originally created to dominate and criminalize Indigenous, Black, and communities of color, disabled people, migrants, people in the sex trades, trans and gender nonconforming people, and poor white workers, a job they continue doing to this day. We need to include police violence in our understanding of the violence we are seeking to interrupt and prevent.

And it's bigger than just police brutality; it's about how criminalization, the prison industrial complex (PIC), the drug war, immigration law, family law, civil commitment law, control of reproductive rights and the web of policy, law, and culture that forms our criminal punishment system has destroyed millions of lives, and torn apart families. Cops don't prevent crime; they cause it. Policing is inherently violent and disrupts our communities in ongoing ways.

There is no sense in building up a system that strengthens law enforcement and further implicates the social service agencies and

organizations in the cycle of police violence. The funding and development of social services have often gone hand-in-hand with their close cooperation with the police. Government agencies and nonprofits are perpetually underfunded, scrambling for grant money to stay alive while being forced to interact with police officers who often make their jobs even harder.

In 2016, the Minneapolis Police Department received \$165 million in city funding alone. Imagine what that kind of money could do to keep our communities safe if it was reinvested.

Even people who support the police agree: we ask cops to solve too many of our problems.

**As former Dallas Police Chief David Brown said:**



WE'RE ASKING COPS TO DO TOO MUCH IN THIS COUNTRY...

EVERY SOCIETAL FAILURE, WE PUT IT OFF ON THE COPS TO SOLVE. NOT ENOUGH MENTAL HEALTH FUNDING, LET THE COPS HANDLE IT...

HERE IN DALLAS WE GOT A LOOSE DOG PROBLEM; LET'S HAVE THE COPS CHASE LOOSE DOGS. SCHOOLS FAIL, LETS GIVE IT TO THE COPS...THAT'S TOO MUCH TO ASK.

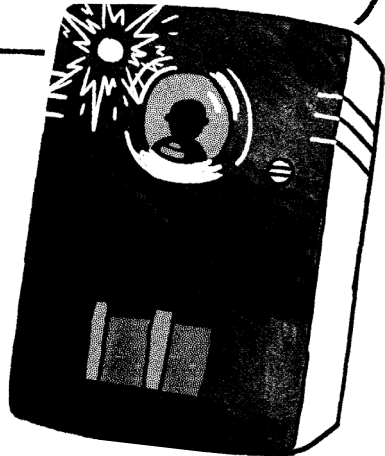
POLICING WAS NEVER MEANT TO SOLVE ALL THOSE PROBLEMS.

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WHAT ABOUT BODY CAMERAS?  
WHAT ABOUT CIVILIAN REVIEW BOARDS,  
IMPLICIT BIAS TRAINING, AND  
COMMUNITY POLICING INITIATIVES?

**There is no way to reform something that is working just as it was designed.**

Policing at its root is anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, and ableist, and it upholds all other forms of supremacy.



Police reforms, while often noble in intention, simply do not do enough to get to the root of the issue. They consume a tremendous amount of resources and deliver little to no justice. Video footage, whether from body cameras or other sources, wasn't enough to get justice for...

**PHILANDO CASTILE, SAMUEL DUBOSE,  
WALTER SCOTT, TAMIR RICE, SANDRA  
BLAND, NATASHA MCKENNA, BRIANNA B.B.  
HILL, DUANNA JOHNSON, AND FAR TOO  
MANY OTHER VICTIMS OF POLICE VIOLENCE.**

In fact, in many of these cases, people view such footage dismissing complaints as “unsubstantiated” because it’s one citizen’s word against a police officer’s. Likewise, a single implicit bias training session can’t overcome decades of conditioning and department culture.

History is a useful guide here: community groups confronting institutional racism in the 1960s demanded civilian review boards, better training, and community policing initiatives. Some of these demands were even met. But these reforms were, across the board, either ineffective or, if successful, dismantled by the police department over time. Even recent reforms are already being co-opted and destroyed: just look at how many officers wear body cameras that are never turned on, or how quickly Trump’s Justice Department moved to end consent decrees (which weren’t actually all that effective anyway). We have half a century’s worth of evidence that reforms can’t work. It’s time for something new.



THIS ALL SOUNDS GOOD IN THEORY, BUT WOULDN'T IT BE IMPOSSIBLE TO DO?



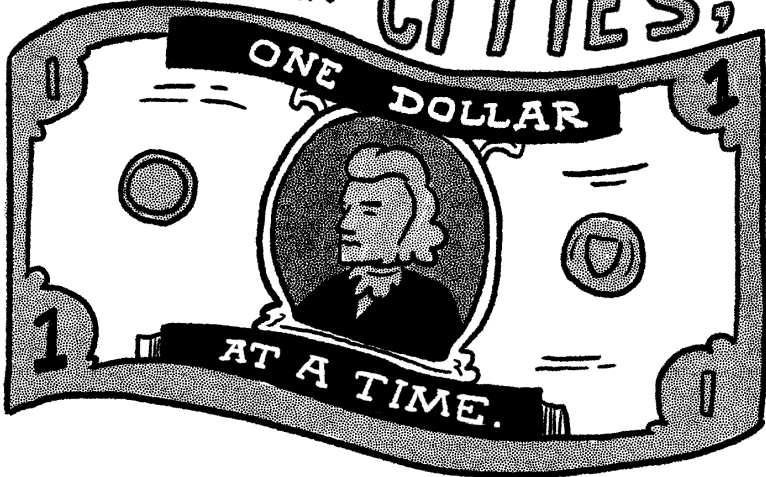


Policing and the other apparatuses of the prison industrial complex are new phenomena. The police, as a global institution, have existed for less than two centuries—less time than chattel slavery existed in the Americas. People have been living and thriving without police on this very land, now known as the United States, for thousands of years. Throughout U.S. history, everyday people have regularly accomplished “impossible” things, from the abolition of slavery to the extension of voting rights to the establishment of the 40-hour work week.



WHAT'S REALLY IMPOSSIBLE  
IS THE PROSPECT THAT THE POLICE  
DEPARTMENTS CAN BE REFORMED,  
AGAINST THEIR WILL, TO ACTUALLY  
PROTECT AND SERVE COMMUNITIES  
THEY HAVE ALWAYS ATTACKED.

**ABOLISHING THE POLICE**  
DOESN'T NEED TO BE DIFFICULT  
AND IT ISN'T IMPOSSIBLE.  
WE CAN DO IT  
IN OUR OWN **CITIES,**



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YOU ALSO MAY WISH TO CONSULT AN ADDITIONAL FAQ  
DOCUMENT, DEAN SPADE'S "COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT POLICE  
AND PRISON ABOLITION AND RESPONSES."



DEEPER  
DIVE  
ON



ABOLISHING  
POLICING





# Deeper Dive on Abolishing Policing

*When fully realized, police abolition dismantles the enduring systems and practices of power that have shaped the global capitalist system since its origins in the 16th century. The institution of policing is so deeply rooted in world-historical forces, the project of police abolition both faces immense challenges and imagines new possibilities.*

*The challenges are rooted in the relationship between police power and the state. Policing is the discretionary power to use state violence in whatever form and toward whatever ends authorities see fit. It is, by design, beyond the law, because policing is not law enforcement, but violence wielded for order maintenance. The social (and/or political, economic, racial, cultural ... ) order that police maintain is the same one that shapes the biases of the law: capitalist class power and white supremacy.*

*But among the possibilities is the chance to build a new world free from violence, free from racialization, free from the misery and endless toil directed at endlessly increasing the profits and power of the few that own the world. If policing is a process of*

*capitalist order making, abolition is the creative practice of building new communal and non-coercive institutions at all levels of society.*

## CHALLENGES

**POLICE CANNOT BE REFORMED BECAUSE THE INSTITUTION IS FUNDAMENTALLY BUILT ON THE STATE'S DISPENSATION TO USE VIOLENCE AS THEY SEE FIT.**

The doctrine of “police discretion” argues that the work of law enforcement cannot be carried out without preemptive blanket permission to use violence in any conceivable situation. Discretion isn’t only an individual prerogative, but organizational and institutional. The courts have consistently refused to define the extent and limits of police discretion because, they say, you can never tell police ahead of time what is “reasonable” or “necessary,” as all situations are always and forever unpredictable. The courts won’t even tell cops they can’t drop a bomb on a building, as they did in Philadelphia in 1985, or use a robot to kill someone with a bomb, as they did in Dallas in 2016.

**POLICE DO NOT ENFORCE  
THE LAW AND ARE NOT  
ACCOUNTABLE TO IT.**

Police *make* law in every interaction by deciding who to approach, question, search, arrest, and who to ignore. Walking too fast, walking too slowly, and being stationary can all be pretexts for a police stop, and police officers invoke law after the fact to justify the way that they decided to restore “order.” From a police perspective, they don’t deal with law. They deal with threats. In theory, Mike Brown had rights under the law but Darren Wilson saw him as a threat, and on the basis of that claim, the law allowed Wilson to murder him in cold blood. Mark Neocleous calls this “the permissive structure of the law.”<sup>6</sup> This means that law will never hold police accountable because the police are explicitly allowed to decide *how* and *whether* to enforce the law, and the legal system empowers police to behave without legal restraint. This is why abolition is the only logical response to police. “Reform” implies that an institution has strayed from its core responsibilities, but the institution of policing is actually *built on* freedom from accountability. “Reforms” make the institution stronger and more efficient by covering it in a veneer of legitimacy.

**POLICE OFFICERS ARE NOT  
THE ONLY FIGURES THROUGH  
WHICH THE STATE EXERTS  
PUNITIVE POWER.<sup>7</sup>**

The term “policing” was first used in the 15th century as part of an elite discussion concerning how the rising states of Europe could promote commerce and encourage people to work for the wage (instead of living a life of communal subsistence). Any representative of the government had police power. In feudal England, the bailiff or sheriff was empowered to oversee peasant labor and enforce debt repayment, which began the association between police and the protection of property. “Policing” was a term used to talk more generally about the work of administering a government until the first half of the 19th century, when the first police departments were formed in cities in Europe and the United States. Even then, police work originally included civil administration, public health, and urban planning: in its first fifty years, the responsibilities of the New York Police Department included everything from street sweeping and boiler inspection to sheltering the homeless and finding lost children.

Today, such functions of civil society are spread out among various government agencies, and the implementation of social policy still retains some of the power of police enforcement. The abiding concerns of state agencies are the very ones initially overseen by the police: the protection of private property, the creation of markets, the regulation of poverty, and the separation of the worthy or deserving poor from

the undeserving and inscrutable “criminal element.” This is why so many people’s experiences with, say, public education or social welfare agencies can be—or usually are—so oppressive: school expulsions and family separations are clearly wielded to enforce these standards.

What’s more, grant funding for social services is often tied to compliance with the War on Drugs or the Violence Against Women Act, for example, making law enforcement a necessary part of service provision. Social policy is not designed to help all people equally. It’s a police project to fabricate order and pacify the population.

**DEFUNDING THE POLICE DOES NOT MEAN RE-FUNDING THE SOFT SOCIAL POLICE.**

We can’t allow the argument for defunding the police to mean that the armed, uniformed police are bad, but the soft social police are good. The paternalistic power embedded in the “helping professions” must be dismantled, and the work that people in this sector do must instead support autonomous and community-embedded services that provide for individual needs. Educators, medical workers, domestic violence advocates, and those working in related fields will need retraining in harm reduction and support in rethinking how to be in service to people without the

restrictions that current liability laws and state appropriations place on their imaginations.

Debates about police reform often invoke the specific role of the social worker. It is all too easy to turn cops into social workers and vice versa, and the social work profession relies on the resources of the state in educating social workers, who may receive their professional training in jails and prisons, but do not study criminal justice content in the classroom. Without appropriate education, social workers entering these spaces risk reinforcing structural oppression.

Social work professionals are sharply divided on the question of the social worker’s role in the criminal justice system. The CEO of the National Association of Social Workers, the field’s largest professional organization, has expressed eagerness to work closely with police departments, stating that “social workers help police excel in fulfilling their mission to protect and serve.” But, as we have illustrated, the mission of the police is not, in fact, protecting and serving their communities, and enlisting social workers in what Beth Ritchie and Kayla Martensen call “carceral services” only ensnares and punishes the people these groups purport to help. Other members of the profession also disagree with this orientation toward policing and criminalization. Abolitionist social work proponents seek to reckon with the profession’s “complicity

in colonization, in racial capitalism and the logics of neoliberalism, and in our relationship to the carceral state, all of which have become core to social work practice.”

**DEFUNDING THE POLICE  
DOES NOT MEAN PRIVATIZING  
THE FUNCTIONS OF LAW  
ENFORCEMENT.**

We are calling into question not only the legitimacy of public law enforcement agencies, but the broader system of order maintenance to which civil society has deputized them. Simply redistributing the tasks of law enforcement does little more than change the shape of the structure. Private security forces, vigilante groups, and even neighborhood watches and citizens’ patrols are no less deeply invested in maintaining capitalist class power and white supremacy. But they often masquerade as transformative community interventions. We must proactively block the privatization of police as we defund law enforcement and reinvest in community-based projects.

**DEFUNDING THE POLICE  
DOES NOT MEAN SHIFTING  
FROM A REGIME OF MASS  
INCARCERATION TO ONE OF  
MASS SUPERVISION.**

Advocates for police reform often cite the example of Camden County, New Jersey, where the police department was disbanded

and replaced with a new agency committed to “community policing.” But critics like Brendan McQuade have noted that while the face of the new community policing is barbecues, ice cream trucks, and baseball games, it’s really backed by the introduction of new surveillance systems and police intelligence structures. Increased contacts with the community and decreases in reported crime are not the result of efforts to develop meaningful relationships with Camden residents, but of the edict to “proactively address crime conditions” through escalating surveillance and aggressive enforcement of so-called “quality of life” laws.





THE  
ABOLITION  
IS ABOUT

NEW





# OF POLICING BUILDING A WORLD

**The antithesis of police  
is the commons.**

The police exist not just to protect private property but to legitimate that very concept.<sup>8</sup> Defunding the police needs to mean more than shifting budget priorities, and rebuilding the commons doesn't mean expanding "the public sector." It means abolishing the social order and building a new society.

We're not asking for kinder, gentler cops. We're asking for the re-creation of the commons: shared resources, infrastructures, and knowledge to allow communities to self-govern and thrive. The goal is collective flourishing and the common acknowledgment of our shared humanity.

How does this translate into actionable demands? A certain social democratic "common sense" fits in this framing: a universal right to cradle-to-grave care (healthcare,

education, child, and elder care) and a basic right to life (housing, a job or income, etc.). To make these common goods and not forms of social policy that police, they need to be universal and de-commodified. That is, we have to agree that housing and healthcare, for just two examples, are universal human rights—not commodities that the state will selectively subsidize or deny in order to control the so-called "dangerous classes" and force compliance with sexual, gender, and racial norms.

# ACTIONABLE DEMANDS:



UNIVERSAL RIGHT TO  
CRADLE-TO-GRAVE CARE

(HEALTHCARE, EDUCATION, CHILD, AND ELDER CARE)



BASIC RIGHT TO LIFE

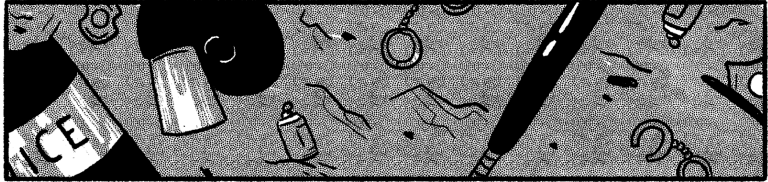
(HOUSING, A JOB OR INCOME, ETC.)

TO MAKE SURE THESE ARE COMMON  
GOODS AND NOT FORMS OF SOCIAL  
POLICY THAT POLICE, THEY NEED TO BE



UNIVERSAL AND  
DECOMMODIFIED

BUT THERE IS ALSO SOMETHING GREATER, A FAINT LIGHT ON THE HORIZON THAT ABOLITIONISTS HAVE LABORED TO DRAW FORTH AND THAT RECENT EVENTS HAVE NOW MADE VISIBLE TO MANY LONG LOST IN THE DARKNESS.



Recreating the commons means more than better social policy, e.g., free education and healthcare, but free access to things that make life worth living: de-commodified and collective means to access arts, culture, recreation, etc. It means more than access to things and services but new conceptions of community. What would our cities and towns be like if they were built to meet varied needs and address conflict in non-punitive, restorative ways?

Some of the examples listed under Existing Institutions that Help Create Real Safety in the full “What’s Next” report ([available at: bit.ly/WhatsNextIC3](http://bit.ly/WhatsNextIC3)) can serve as the building blocks of reinvented commons. At their best, they are community-based institutions and practices for harm reduction and redress. They are examples that point to a future where we can solve our own problems, even the most serious and scary ones.





# Endnotes

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6. Mark Neocleous, *Fabrication of Social Order: A Critical Theory of Police Power*, (London: Pluto, 2000), pp. 93.

7. Markus Dubber, *The Police Power: Patriarchy and the Foundations of American Government*, (New York: Columbia University Press: 2005).

Mark Neocleous, *Fabrication of Social Order: A Critical Theory of Police Power*, (London: Pluto, 2000)

George Rigakos, John McMullan, Joshua Johnson, and Gulden Özcan, "A General Police System: Political Economy and Security in the Age of Enlightenment." (Ottawa: Red Quill Books, 2009).

8. The creation of capital/private property/class and racialization are the same process. Race and, especially whiteness, is relationship to property. In classical enlightenment philosophy, white men are rational subjects that can own property and participate in bourgeois society. Women, people of color, Indigenous people, "nature" are non-rational others. They are objects of police. They are to put into an order by white men and using their police powers (this is what Dubber means when he talks about policing as patriarchal power. It's rooted in really, really, really old, pre-capitalist ideas about the management of household).

FOR THE FULL TEXT AND  
MORE RESOURCES, SEE THE  
"WHAT'S NEXT" REPORT,  
AVAILABLE AT:  
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