



Peace and Justice Studies Association

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Response to Epidemic Racist Violence and Police Brutality

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We write on behalf of the Peace and Justice Studies Association (PJSJA), a bi-national North American peace and justice association of both scholars and activists, to call for action on the dual epidemic of police violence and racism as highlighted in the death and response to George Floyd's murder by a police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota and other officer-related deaths across the country. This paper presents a historical and critical analysis of the disproportionate violence by law enforcement against the black community, followed by some recommendations. There are many additional moral concerns which we see as antagonistic to our vision of peace and justice in the world, which is based on democratic and faith-based principles. PJSJA wishes to advance our vision for cultural, ethnic, geographic, and socio-economic equality under the law and the fundamental dignity and worth of all humans. This paper details our call to action to end institutional, structural, and systematic racism, as highlighted in police brutality.

History of the Problem: There has never been Equality

Race-based violence in North America predates the establishment of the modern Canadian, Mexican, and United States governments. Colonial powers and then subsequently the states, in varying degrees, used genocide and genocidal practices in their establishment. The transatlantic slave trade, combined with colonial practices of displacement and violence, have established significant wealth and durable economic inequalities with dramatic modern presentations. The average white family holds [ten times as much wealth](#) as the average black family. The average white person has more education, more income, more opportunities to invest and grow their wealth, than the average black person. As a result, this economic gap continues to grow.

For the Black community, the establishment of "freedom" and "equality" has been slow in their formation. Both the codification and protection of the slave trade and the three-fifths compromise represent examples of the explicit dehumanization of African personhood in the US Constitution. The Emancipation Proclamation did not establish freedom or put an end to the prejudicial policy. Decades of Jim Crow included thousands of extra-judicial lynchings, and terror groups like the Ku Klux Klan, the oldest in the US, have mobilized to prevent minority groups from enjoying basic civil rights and liberties.

Policing in the US has roots in [slave patrols](#) and [night watchers](#); they would become police departments later. Slave patrols were constructed to manage race-based conflict, most specifically the control over slave populations. They were ruthlessly brutal in their use of power. Where connections between the KKK and law enforcement during Jim Crow were a matter of fact, racial profiling has openly been presented as a tool for law and order in recent decades. Over the years, the [FBI has warned of the increasing threat of white nationalist and supremacist groups](#) infiltrating law enforcement. Further, during the Bush-era War on Terror, and the Pentagon's 1033 program, law enforcement began to get hold of the [technology and equipment of war from the Department of Defense](#). The renewed militarization of the police during this

period lead to further violence against [blacks and other minoritized populations](#) (more on the history of militarization of law enforcement in the section below). There is, therefore, historical and statistical evidence of [US police departments practicing discriminatory and prejudicial operations](#).

The militarization of Law Enforcement

[Historically](#), the federal government has mobilized the military and national guard to expand civil rights and freedom. After the Civil War, federal troops were used to guard reconstruction in the South and to protect civil rights. In 1957 President Eisenhower famously used the national guard to enforce integration in Little Rock, Arkansas. Federal Marshalls guarded [Ruby Bridges](#) during her integration, in 1960, to a white elementary school in New Orleans, Louisiana. Before the Civil War, few cities had police departments in the South. Police departments were established to control freed slaves. In the North, they were built to monitor immigrants and place checks on unions.

This trend shifted in the 1960s, in response to the rebellions and riots occurring across the US grants and crime legislation that established the purchase and use of military resources and weapons. Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams were also established during this period. These heavily militarized forces were primarily directed to respond to black-insurgency. During the War on Drugs which took place over various presidencies, the militarization continued by Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan (in particular). It was more than a metaphor, the war included increasingly violent and dramatic responses, but it was also racialized. Pejorative biases and stereotyping of drug use were frequently directed at communities of color. Discrepancies in punishment present harsher sentencing for minorities than whites.

Civil forfeiture, the confiscation of property from convicted and sometimes suspected drug dealers, has also been used to finance the purchase of more munitions and weapons from the Pentagon. The relationships and connections between community law enforcement and the federal armed forces were fully cemented through the Patriot Act and other responses to the acts of terrorism on September 11, 2001. This redoubled the role of the police in the activities of war by putting law enforcement on the [front line of a War on Terror](#). Police budgets have continued to expand with increasingly lethal arsenals; meanwhile, so many other budgets have experienced decades of cuts.

SWAT teams have expanded roles; they are no longer limited to emergencies. They are now called in response to non-violent warrants. There has been an astronomical increase in drug raids, and the SWAT team is now the first step in many jurisdictions. Cops today are told they are fighting wars, and they believe it. The proliferation of militarized responses has ensured increases in cultural, structural, and systemic violence and [disproportionate impacts on minority communities](#). "Protect and Serve" is not the motto of the warrior cop; policies have created *us and them* [physical and psychological distancing](#). The isolation from communities is experienced on both sides, the public increasingly sees law enforcement as a threat to public safety, and law enforcement increasingly sees combatants instead of citizens.

The manifestation of the problem

Black and other minoritized communities all across the country have generations of grievances of police brutality. The cases and examples are too numerous to list. The March 3, 1991 beating of Rodney King was [captured by a citizen journalist](#) and provided evidence of the long-known truth about the brutal use of violence against minoritized populations. The April 1992 acquittal of officers charged with crimes in that beating set off protests and riots in Los Angeles and across the country. As technology has increased, documentation of episodes of violent events has increased. Evidence of the brutal use of force is made available by body cameras, dashboard cameras, and the ubiquitous use of mobile phones as cameras; however, the problem persists, the [effectiveness of the cameras](#), in terms of [detering or reducing](#) police violence, has not been demonstrated.

Two distinct threads of explaining police violence have emerged. In one thread, the acts of violence are blamed on single individuals—bad apples spoiling the bunch. The other thread identifies the structural and systematic conditions which have caused, created, and permitted the violence to occur. In the first case, it is clear that there are implicit and tacit biases held by individuals and that these prejudices have and continue to impact citizens' treatment in prejudicial ways. Individuals have, in public, found ways to weaponize biases to assault innocent persons of color (sometimes with fatal consequences). In this second thread, we see discriminatory policies like racial profiling and [broken windows policing](#), which are always antagonistic in their execution.

Decades of policies and policing have criminalized melanin and poverty. Drug laws and the War on Drugs are examples of the primary pipelines to prison showcasing disproportionate incarceration rates and vastly different sentences for similar crimes across different racial demographics.

George Floyd was accused of buying cigarettes with a counterfeit \$20 bill. He was arrested, restrained, and held in a lethal hold. He complained he could not breathe and called out for his mother. Onlookers pleaded for his life but to no avail. Tony McDade, a transgender man, was shot down without any warning or identification from law enforcement; Ahamud Aubrey was jogging when killed by two white men; Breonna Taylor was shot by cops when sleeping in her bed; Sandra Bland and Philando Castille were killed after they were stopped for minor traffic violations; Eric Garner lost his life when he was held in a chokehold by the police when selling single cigarettes; Michael Brown was unarmed and described by witnesses to have his hands up when shot; Tamir Rice was only 12 years old and playing with a replica toy Airsoft gun when he was killed; Trayvon Martin was killed when walking back home from buying Skittles. The list goes on as evidence grows. Thanks to quick cell phone videos which document how white individuals threaten blacks and other persons of color with police violence for no reason other than the color of their skin, we know that we are dealing with systemic and institutional racism. PJSa joins the chorus of voices calling for justice and condemnation of the use of force and violence terrorizing communities and causing unnecessary death.

When the world witnessed the killing of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer, it literally became the last straw on the (black) camel's back. Protestors took to the streets all over the country. In some places, the peaceful protestors were joined by those who wanted to use violence and loot. Militarized police departments and the National Guard have been utilized in response, and the President has suggested deploying US Armed Forces through the Insurrection Act.

PJSa condemns the undemocratic attempts to stymie the protected right of protest. We also condemn the use of excessive force against protestors in acts of suppression. We see an illegitimate and authoritarian privileging of law and order that undermines basic freedoms in civil rights and liberties.

Recommendations for the problem

We understand that the events in Minnesota are [not an isolated example](#). We share in the desire to address the manifestations of violence at every level. We offer the following evidence-based options for improving policy and procedure and for rectifying historical and contemporary grievances. PJSa offers strategies for equity, just enforcement of the law, superior physical and mental health and safety for both the officers and the public, and more durable peace and security. We also make ourselves available to offer assistance beyond the following recommendations.

Reforms of Policing and the Policies for Law Enforcement

1. Ban the use of choke and strangleholds, especially in cases where individuals are restrained.
2. Require the use of and training in conflict de-escalation.

3. Develop and require continuous anti-bias training (while being fully aware of all the ways these trainings can quickly turn [counter-productive](#)), coach officers in understanding their biases, and limit the harmful impacts of these biases.
4. Require warnings to be made prior to shooting.
5. Exhaust all other means before escalating to shooting or the use of lethal force.
6. Create a "duty to intervene," which would require officers to intervene when they witness excessive use of force and require that use of force be immediately reported to a supervisor.
7. Require all policies to adhere to the Department of Justice guidelines and recommendations for Constitutional practices, like banning shooting at moving vehicles.
8. Create mandatory time off policies, consistent with psychological recommendations, for officers involved in both uses of force and shooting events.
9. End and permanently ban all iterations of racial profiling and "stop and frisk" policies.
10. Create a use-of-force continuum to regulate further and restrict escalations of force for certain offenses or methods of resistance.
11. Require comprehensive reporting of all events where force is used.
12. Review hiring policies to bring more diversity into the force to be more inclusive so the local police force can mirror community demographics
13. Curb "use of force" practices against journalists.
14. Stop militarization. Return military equipment and weapons to the military.
15. Identify and remove members from known hate groups, white nationalists, and white supremacists from all capacities within law enforcement.
16. Modify laws making police first responders in cases outside of their expertise and training.
17. Introduce workshops for bringing cultural change in these institutions.

General Recommendations and Reforms At-Large

1. Increase funding, availability, and access to educational opportunities to minoritized communities.
2. Increase the capacity for educational programs for incarcerated individuals.
3. Bring Peace Education to schools to discuss the history of slavery and black marginalization
4. Engage in an ongoing systematic analysis of the judicial apparatus to identify the presence of "conviction machines" and respond with measures to ensure "equal protection under the law."
5. Remove and replace antiquated vestiges of racial oppression and hatred with those promoting equality; one example is replacing the former slave owner Andrew Jackson on the \$20 bill with abolitionist, activist, and former slave Harriet Tubman.
6. Increase funding and accessibility to Public Defender and other legal aid programs.
7. Begin investigations to use Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (like South Africa and Rwanda) and study Reparations (like Germany) for centuries of racial injustice.
8. Establish a Department of Peace and a Secretary of Peace within the US government.
9. End qualified immunity for certain bias crimes and discrimination.
10. [Defund](#) Police Departments and invest those savings in other areas, like mental health, mediation, and social services, which are better equipped for addressing issues within communities.
11. Evaluate and identify locations where corrupt and/or frivolous agents and departments of law enforcement need reforming, dissolution, or abolition and replace them with or add community policing and restorative justice. (Note: [more police does not equal less crime](#), and [police reform can reduce crime](#).)