CONFRONTING UNJUST POLICING:

A Primer for
Systemic Reimagining

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isometric

In what ways is injustice embedded within our culture and institutions?

Artwork: Shirien Damra / Instagram: @shirien.creates

Foreword by Waqas Jawaid
Partner, Isometric Studio

The Worth of a Human Life

ON MEMORIAL DAY IN 2020—a day honoring people who have sacrificed their lives while fighting for American values like freedom, equality, and justice—a 46-year-old Black American man was killed in Minneapolis, Minnesota during an arrest for allegedly using a counterfeit $20 bill.

His name was George Floyd.

George was suffocated to death by police officers in broad daylight. For eight minutes and forty-six seconds, a police officer pressed his knee on George's neck while his partners held down George's body and fended off horrified bystanders.

George pleaded with the officers that he was claustrophobic and that he could not breathe.

He was already handcuffed. In his last moments, he called for his deceased mother.

George's murder is not the first nor the last case of overwhelming and unjust violence inflicted on a Black American by a police officer for a minor offense or for no offense at all.

This primer addresses urgent and necessary questions: In what ways is injustice embedded within our culture and institutions? How can we begin to situate this violence within America's historical context? And how can we critically evaluate and creatively reimagine the systems of our country to ensure that every American can live a truly free life?
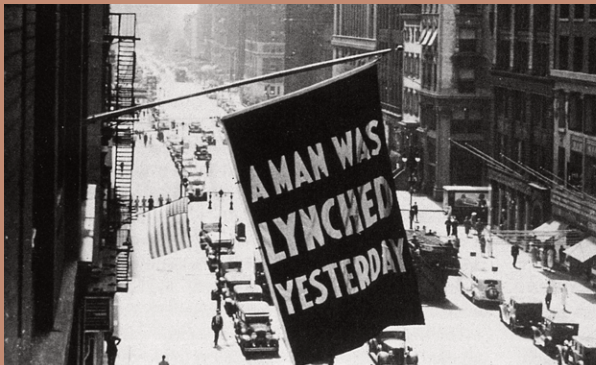
Contents

An iconic protest flag flown outside the headquarters of the NAACP in 1938. Credit: Library of Congress.
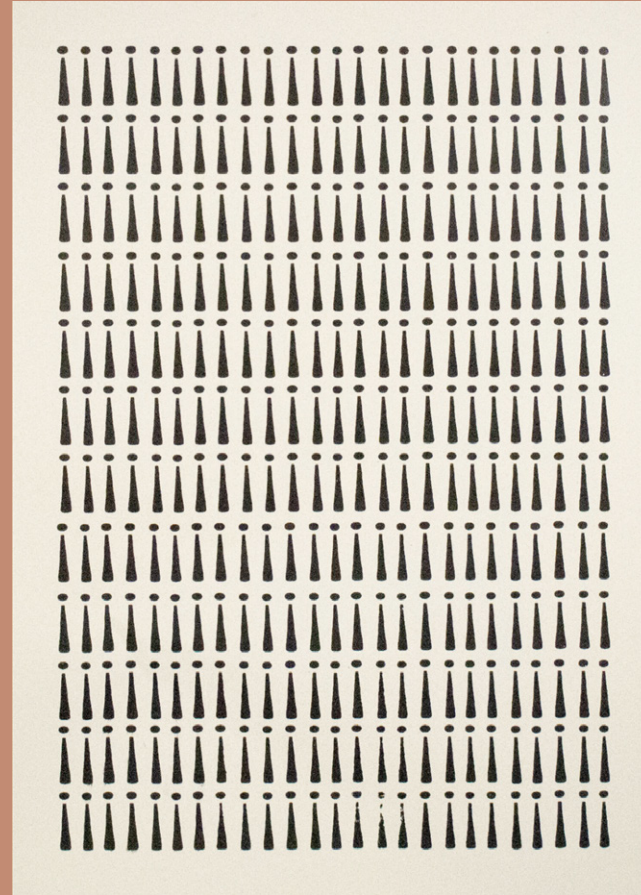
Art by Jarrett Key   Silkscreen on Paper   "Apartment"   2019   Collaboration with Merrick Adams

Introduction

01

What's in this chapter

○ The goal of this primer is to inform and support communities to improve our institutions.

○ This primer is meant to build on and contribute to the work of activists in the fields of social and racial justice.

○ Systemic reimagining is a process of critically assessing a system, keeping what works, and changing what does not.

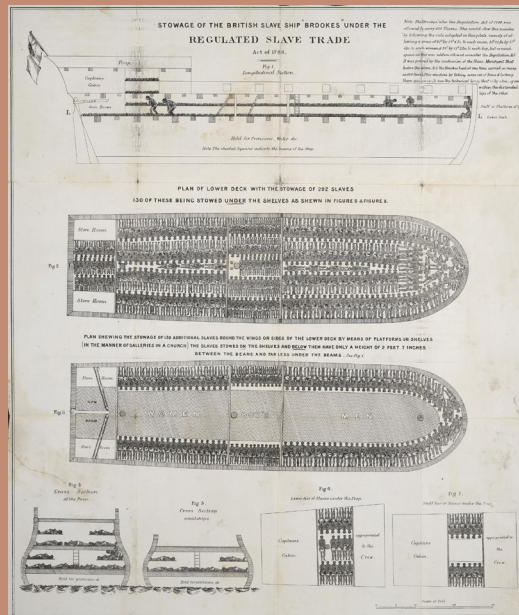# Fighting injustice is scary. But for many of us, there is no choice.

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A plan of the British slave ship *Brookes,* showing 454 slaves on board after the Slave Trade Act of 1788. The *New York Times*' 1619 Project meticulously charts out the sustained discrimination and violence against Black Americans since before the country's inception.

YOU'VE READ ALL OF THE STATISTICS, think pieces, and activist posts, and you agree that the policing system is wildly unjust and needs to change. But how can we possibly change law enforcement? Don't we need police officers for public safety? And what about violent offenses, like murder and rape?

When we began writing this primer, the city of Minneapolis had agreed to activists' demands to "defund" and "dismantle" the police in the wake of the George Floyd murder. It has since walked back these promises, acceding to fears that abolishing the police would result in anarchy and violence—anxieties stoked by the Trump administration to demonize the Black Lives Matter movement.

However, even prominent Black leaders like Ras Baraka have labeled the "defund" movement as a "bourgeois liberal" idea that

risks harming Black communities. If you are reading this primer, you are likely wondering if there is any way forward in a debate that has become so polarized and intractable that nothing seems to change. Like you, we are tired of waiting for "reforms" that seem to make little impact.

This primer argues, however, that we need to move beyond convenient catchwords like "defund," and to name and define the specific resources we offer as replacements.

This primer provides tangible steps for how we can reimagine unjust systems from the ground up, examining and illustrating meaningful alternatives.

While we don't have all of the answers, we aim to show how scholars and activists have tackled these very issues by placing them within the context of history and lived experiences.

We cannot escape the reality that fighting injustice is scary. But for many of us, there is no choice. Understand that, and don't let fear stop you from imagining what a more just world looks like. We must be creative—but we must also be brave!

FREE

" A world I dream where Black or white whatever race you be, will share the bounties of the earth and every man is

Poetry from Langston Hughes

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"I Dream a World"

1941, Harlem

Artwork: Jarrett Key   "Warrior at Rest"   2020
36" x 72"   Oil on Cement (Fresco)

●

What is the goal of this primer?

For generations, artists, writers, activists, and researchers have done important and groundbreaking work to shine light on issues of police violence, the prison-industrial complex, and the ways in which systems of schooling, policing, and carcerality are intimately tied to racism, white supremacy, and capitalism. Our goal is to document these endeavors to reimagine ways in which a more just society could emerge from the current oppressive system. We share examples of current and past efforts to effect change, which we can use as models and resources for thinking about what is possible. We hope to contribute to the ongoing collective work of many others by examining the throughline of racism in America's institutions.

It would be impossible to present here a comprehensive overview of all of these perspectives, and that is not our goal. Rather, this document is meant to be a primer for those interested in openly confronting the unjust systems we inhabit and creatively imagining alternatives for our communities.

The March on Washington for civil rights in 1963. Photo: The Granger Collection.

School

Police

Everyday Life

Prison

Court
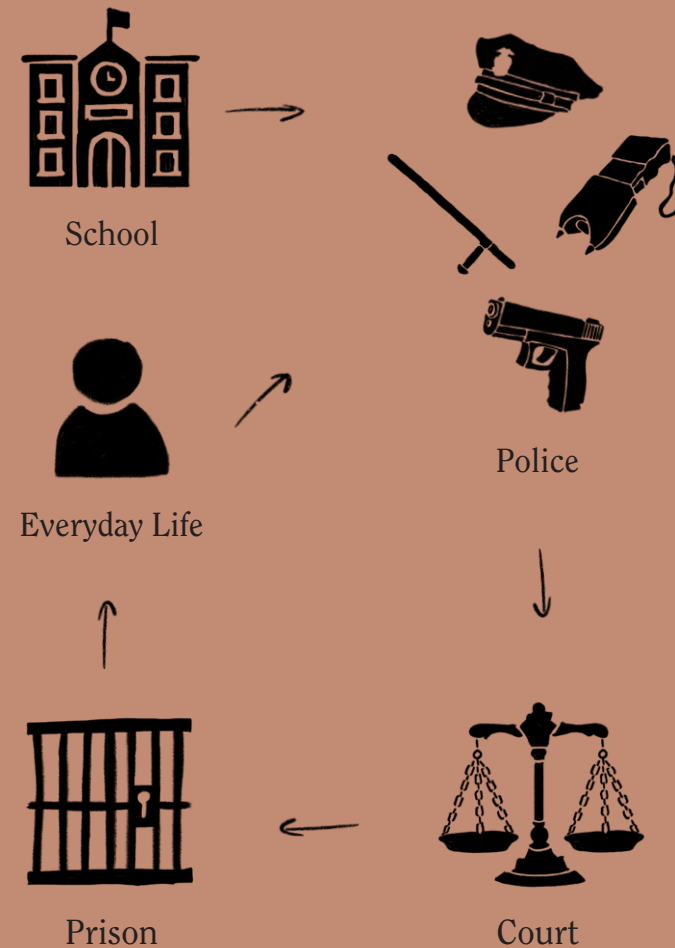
An incorrect presumption of guilt can often trap Black Americans in a cycle of institutional control and incarceration.

Who prepared this primer?

This primer is a collaboration between Isometric, a Brooklyn-based design studio led by queer people of color, and Megan Wicks, a Black Ph.D. student at Princeton University. It features reproductions of artworks by Jarrett Key, a Providence-based Black artist whose work integrates movement, language, and music.
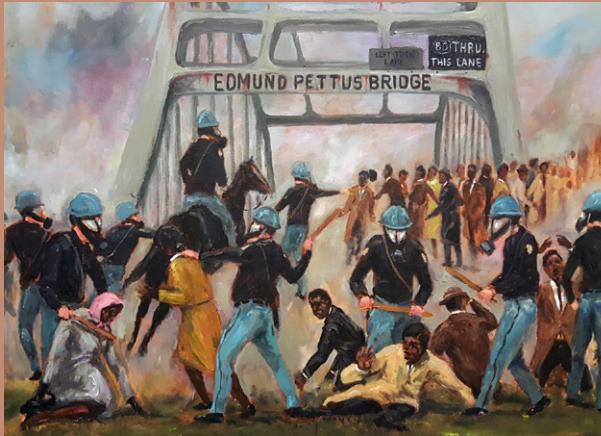
Police brutalizing peaceful protesters marching for the right to vote. Artwork: Ted Ellis / "Bloody Sunday—Selma, 1965".

Black Americans are 3 times more likely to be killed by police than White Americans.[1]

White Americans

Black Americans

Black Americans are 6 times more likely to be sentenced to prison for the same crime.[2]

1. "Mapping fatal police violence across U.S. metropolitan areas" / Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
2. "Slavery to Mass Incarceration" / Equal Justice Initiative

Who is the intended audience?

Our intended audience is anyone who is concerned about the current situation and looking for ways to contribute to the work of social change—whether that's running for political office, starting a petition to change local policies, or creating art that tells stories of marginalized communities.

We approach this work with the humility that not every person will agree with all of the perspectives shared in this document.

Yet, we also know that the work of challenging our long-standing assumptions is an intimate, personal kind of work that requires love and emotional connection.

We hope you will fully and openly engage with the issues in this primer, and continue to have difficult and important conversations with the friends, colleagues, and family members around you.

NYC action in solidarity with Ferguson, MO. Photo: The All-Nite Images / Flickr.

Activists showing solidarity around intersectionality in the Black Lives Matter movement, 2020. Photo: Pratiti Tiyas / Twitter: @pratititiyas

What do we mean by systemic reimagining?

Media attention has focused on activists' demands for "defunding" or "dismantling" of police departments, and cities such as New York City and Minneapolis have attempted to implement policy changes that divest resources from police to community programs. Black Lives Matter activists contend that a house with a broken foundation cannot stand, arguing that the police in its current form should be abolished and reconstituted in the image and service of local communities.

We must creatively examine a complex system, deconstruct its logic, keep what is working, and change what is not.

The terminology of "defunding" has faced intense politicization and derision by both conservatives and some Black leaders including Al Sharpton, who has admonished "latte liberals" for endangering Black communities by depriving them of public safety. This line of criticism may threaten to reinforce the unacceptable status quo, as it has become clear that decades of "reform" have not rooted out the racism that leads to unjust policing. Still, leaders like Ras Baraka in Newark have avoided the heated language of "defunding" while proposing holistic systemic reimagining—a total, ground-up reconsideration of public safety that allocates funding and delivers results for the Black community. Our goal is to amplify this nuanced approach that reckons holistically yet carefully with the value of human life.

In these pages, we have tried to be as accurate, reflective, and rigorous as possible. If you have doubts or worries, we encourage you to do your own research, have conversations, and come up with your own ideas. We hope to open up the conversation to a diversity of voices, such as community organizers, incarcerated people, scholars, poets, activists, and Black people in our lives as we work together toward a shared goal of a more just and equal world.

A History of Unequal Justice

02

What's in this chapter

○ Policing began as slave patrols in the South and as protection for white business and property in the North.

○ Unjust policing is a symptom of the historical impacts of capitalist and white supremacist culture.

○ The "few bad apples" logic is unfair to communities and police officers, as it avoids confronting systemic problems.

POLICING AS A REFLECTION OF THE ANXIETIES OF ELITES

Illustration of the effects of the Fugitive Slave Law, passed in 1850, which reinforced the power of slave owners and slave-catchers. Credit: Universal History Archive / UIG via Getty Images.

A History of Oppression

MODERN AMERICAN POLICING has roots that can be traced back to slavery and business interests. In the South, slave patrols morphed into police after the abolition of slavery, and the prison-industrial complex was born as freed Black people were arrested en masse for petty and often fabricated crimes. This system of mass arrests was a form of social control and an exploitation of the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery except as a form of punishment. Black people were no longer enslaved by plantation masters, but they could effectively be enslaved by the state if they were arrested.[1]

The first official police department was established in Boston in 1838, almost 30 years before the Emancipation Proclamation ended slavery in the South. While policing in the North wasn't tied to slavery, it was nonetheless economically motivated and designed to protect the interests of the business elite at the expense of the working class, the poor, Black and brown people, and immigrants—overlapping social categories that existed at the bottom of the economic ladder and thus were the most vulnerable.[2]

This system continues to this day. The United States has the largest prison population in the world, with the highest number of Black people relative to their proportion of the general population.[3] An analysis of policing and other institutions reveals parallels between the contemporary prison system and slavery of the past.

1.   *13th* documentary / dir. Ava Duvernay ⊡
2.   "How the U.S. Got Its Police Force" / *TIME* ⊡
3.   Criminal Justice Fact Sheet / NAACP ⊡

Perspective—

"Organized police forces arose specifically when traditional, informal, or community-maintained means of social control broke down. This breakdown was always prompted by a larger social change, often by a change which some part of the community resisted with violence, such as the creation of a state, colonization, or the enslavement of a subject people.

In other words, it was at the point where authority was met with resistance that the organized application of force became necessary.

Industrialization changed the system of social stratification and added a new set of threats, subsumed under the title of the 'dangerous classes.' Moreover, while serious crime was on the decline, the demand for order was on the rise owing to the needs of the new economic regime and the ideology that supported it."

Excerpt from "The Demand for Order and The Birth of Modern Policing" / Kristian Williams ☐

" When someone asks me about violence, I just find it incredible because what it means is that the person who's asking that question has absolutely no idea what Black people have gone through…since the time that the first Black person was kidnapped from the shores of Africa.

— *Angela Davis, activist, philosopher, and author*

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Image: *The Black Power Mixtape 1967–75,* dir. Göran Olsson (film still).

☐

An Incomplete Timeline of Policing in America

1861–1865
The Civil War was waged over the South's secession and fight to preserve slavery.

1862
The Emancipation Proclamation federalized the freedom of more than 3.5 million enslaved African Americans.

1865
The 13th Amendment prohibited slavery nationwide except as a punishment for crime.

1960s
Policing faced a serious crisis as it became the focus of intense scrutiny. Crime rates increased as demand for police services rose.

1968
The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders—the Kerner Commission—characterized police misconduct at the time to include brutality, harassment, and abuses of power.

2012–2020
Cell phone videos reveal horrific violence against Black Americans, including Trayvon Martin, and the Black Lives Matter movement is born. In 2020, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and several other Black Americans are killed by police officers or vigilantes, with little recourse for equal justice. COVID-19 ravages the Black American community, which is overrepresented among "essential workers."

1838
The first publicly funded, organized police force with officers on duty full-time was created in Boston.

1600 **1700** **1800** **1900** **2000**

1708
The first formal slave patrol was created in the Carolinas.

1880s
All major U.S. cities had municipal police forces in place.

1954–1968
Black leaders including MLK Jr., Malcolm X, and Marian Anderson led the Civil Rights movement. The movement was mostly nonviolent and resulted in laws to advance equality. Many protests led to direct confrontations between the public and the police.

The Civil Rights Act of 1957 allowed federal prosecution of any person who tried to prevent someone from voting.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 guaranteed equal employment for all, limited the use of voter literacy tests, and allowed federal authorities to ensure public facilities were integrated.

1619
After a Dutch ship brought 20 Africans ashore at the British colony of Jamestown, Virginia, slavery spread quickly through the American colonies.

1850s–1950s
Southern police departments enforced "Jim Crow" segregation laws as vigilante-style organizations. They controlled freed slaves who became laborers working in an agricultural caste system, denying them equal rights and political access.

1877–1950
More than 4000 Black Americans were lynched across 20 states in public acts of racial terrorism, intended to instill fear across Black communities. Government officials frequently turned a blind eye or condoned the violence.

" **We have to tell the truth and be courageous enough to tell the**

TRUTH

about what we've done and who we are. Then, we can free ourselves into imagining a different world and imagining ourselves differently.

—Eddie Glaude, Jr.

●

Chair, African
American Studies,
Princeton
University

● Artwork: Jarrett Key   "Jarrett Dancing"
9" x 12"   Oil on Cement (Fresco)   2020

Policing as social control

In *The History of Policing in the United States*, Gary Potter writes: "It is incorrect to say the late 19th and early 20th century police were corrupt, they were in fact, primary instruments for the creation of corruption in the first place." The rhetoric of "crime prevention" allowed police officers to monitor "bad individuals" and preemptively target marginalized populations that were viewed as dangerous. At the same time, many forms of crime went unpunished for social elites. Police often protected illegal dealings of the wealthy, which included excessive influence from politicians and engagement in election fraud.

Source: *"The History of Policing in the United States," Gary Potter* ⊡

Military police protecting the White House in Lafayette Square, May 2020. Photo: Rosa Pineda.

This runaway slave ad from 1857 is a dehumanizing representation of Black bodies as a tradeable commodity— a notion that persists in our culture today.

Perspective—

"The aims and means of social control always approximately reflect the anxieties of elites. In times of crisis or pronounced social change, as the concerns of elites shift, the mechanisms of social control are adapted accordingly. So, in the South, following real or rumored slave revolts, the institution of the slave patrol emerged.

White men were required to take shifts riding between plantations, apprehending runaways and breaking up slave gatherings.

The police provided a mechanism by which the power of the state, and eventually that of the emerging ruling class, could be brought to bear on the lives and habits of individual members of society.

Excerpt from "The Demand for Order and The Birth of Modern Policing", Kristian Williams ⊡

White homeowners in Detroit protest Black tenants
moving into nearby federal housing, 1942.
Photo: Arthur S. Siegel / Library of Congress.

Policing as a weapon to preserve an unjust society

In the run-up to recent presidential elections, candidates including Nixon, Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Clinton, and Trump all weaponized fear among white suburbanites that their communities would be invaded by Black "criminals." They labeled Black teenagers as "super-predators" and demanded that police preserve "law and order." This white supremacist narrative demonizes Black people, leading to racial profiling and violence.

Perspective—

"Affluent, white suburbanites may seek protection for their children in ways that legitimate carcerality for others who serve as the specter of criminality and 'deserving' harsh punishment, and often use their money, power, influence, and racial status to evade accountability for real harms they commit.

While we are told the suburb gives us a model of the world we're fighting for, looking to the affluent, white suburb for quick inspiration can only work if we ignore the logic and design of racial capitalism and carcerality we seek to undo."

Excerpt from "Abolition is Not a Suburb," Tamara K. Nopper ⬈

Confederate
Flags

Revisionist
Education

Hollywood
Depictions

Valorizing
Enslavers

Missing
Memorials

Racism in institutions is reinforced by and reflected in racism in our culture and environments.

A few "bad apples" or systemic racism?

Violent incidents of police brutality are sometimes explained away as isolated events involving a small number of "bad apples" within law enforcement—and not the result of broader systemic racism. The facts, however, are incontrovertible: Black Americans are five times as likely to report they are stopped unfairly by police and are three times more likely to be killed by police, relative to white Americans.[1,2] And yet, an August 2020 survey found that 81% of Black Americans want the same or an increased level of police presence in their communities, demonstrating that there is not widespread animus towards police, despite a fundamental distrust among Black adults that they will be treated fairly by law enforcement. Most Black Americans instead want targeted change: more than 90% favor "specific reforms aimed at improving police relations with the communities they serve and preventing or punishing abusive police behavior."[3]

Deploying the "bad apples" excuse is not only a distraction from the root causes of violence. It is also harmful—both for police officers and the communities they serve.

It elides the trauma and concern of Black Americans who worry about the safety of their children in their own neighborhoods, and it throws individual police officers under the bus to protect a wider system that justifies racial profiling and violence.

Protestor decries the "bad apples" policing theory. Photo: FiftyShadesofNo / Reddit.

1. "10 things we know about race and policing in the U.S." / Pew Research Center
2. "Mapping fatal police violence across U.S. metropolitan areas" / Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
3. "Black Americans Want Police to Retain Local Presence" / Gallup

Reimagining Unjust Systems

03

What's in this chapter

- Systemic racism is embedded in institutions, including schools, police, courts, and prisons.

- We identify key elements in each of these four institutions that make them disproportionately harmful to minorities.

- We recommend specific changes and adjustments to each of these institutions in order to better serve their constituents.

SCHOOL

Students prepare signs ahead of the New York City school boycott to desegregate schools, held on Feb. 3, 1964. Photo: Frank Hurley / NY Daily News Archive.

SPACES OF INEQUALITY

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS SHOULD BE spaces of learning and nurturing for children. For Black kids, however, school is often the first site of stereotyping, mistreatment, and violence. Discrimination against Black students takes many forms:

— higher rates of discipline, suspension, and expulsion for the same behaviors as peers

— restrictions on Black hairstyles and clothing

— policing of Black speech, such as African American Vernacular English ("Ebonics")

— textbooks and curriculums that teach revisionist and incomplete histories

In addition, the presence of school police or "resource" officers, security cameras, and metal detectors in many schools have the effect of intimidating Black students, who are subjected to higher proportions of arrests and suspensions. Schools with a large percentage of non-white students are more likely to use measures like these than other schools with comparable crime and discipline issues, which leads to greater incidence of serious punishment as well as fear in the classroom.

Many minor situations escalate into excessive force and arrests by school police officers. Some describe the ongoing process of pushing students of color from schools into the criminal justice system as the "school-to-prison pipeline."

Source: "The Parkland shooting fueled calls for more school police. Civil rights groups want them removed." / Vox ⤢

Nadera Powell, 17, said that Black students experience the presence of school resource officers as a tangible threat that says to them, "We have you on watch. We are able to take legal or even physical action against you." Credit: Bethany Mollenkof / New York Times. ⬀

Case Study —
Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools

Incidents involving the excessive punishment of Black girls in schools have come into the spotlight in recent years. In Orlando, a police officer arrested and zip-tied the wrists of a six-year-old girl at her school. Overall, Black girls are much more likely to be perceived as older and to be punished more harshly than their white counterparts. Activists and artists are now examining the experiences of Black girls and how many are criminalized in the classroom.

The documentary *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* tells the story of Samaya, a second-grade girl who is regularly disciplined and eventually bullied by her teacher to the point where she wants to commit suicide.

The teacher drags and leaves Samaya outside of the school, so she walks to a highway, thinking of jumping down.

During her time outside, Samaya goes to a Walmart, but they don't let her in because she is unaccompanied by a parent. She then walks to a fast food restaurant and asks for a glass of water, and someone there calls the police. When the operator asks how old Samaya is, the caller says she is about 12 years old, overestimating Samaya's age. She is seven.

Sources: *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* / dir. Jacoba Atlas ⬀

"New Documentary Examines How Black Girls Are Disproportionately Punished in Schools" / NPR ⬀

1. DESEGREGATE

The Supreme Court declared racial segregation unconstitutional in the 1954 ruling *Brown v. Board of Education.* However, **half of students still attend racially segregated schools,** where more than 75% of students are either white or non-white.[1] Educational quality is tied to ZIP codes, and the reality of economic disenfranchisement through redlining and racial segregation maintains a highly unequal public education system.[2]

1.   "Still Separate, Still Unequal: Teaching about School Segregation and Educational Inequality" / New York Times ☐
2.   "Redlining and its stealth impact on Education" / Next Ed Research ☐

Reimagining the Education System

2. FEDERALLY & EQUITABLY FUND

Funding between school districts varies drastically. Half of education funding is from property taxes and other local taxes, which means that the socioeconomic status of a district influences the amount of financial resources it has. While states try to fill the funding gap for poorer districts, they often fail to do so. In total, **non-white school districts received $23 billion less** than white school districts in 2016.

Source: "Why U.S. Schools are Still Segregated — and One Idea to Help Change That" / NPR ☐

3. TEACH ACCURATE HISTORIES & ANTI-RACISM

States set the curriculum taught in schools, and a majority use Common Core standards, which rely primarily on decades-old works by white authors. **The history of slavery and civil rights is often sanitized.** Curricula should include the writings of Black, Latinx, Native, and Asian authors and incorporate anti-racist perspectives.

Source: "Student activists want change — and they're starting in the classroom" / Vox ☐

4. CELEBRATE BLACK STUDENTS & CULTURE

Dress code policies, such as restrictions on hair length for boys, and braids and twists for girls, are discriminatory against Black students. **They are disproportionately punished for violations, which can lead to missed classes and put them behind their peers.** In a report on D.C. schools, high schools that were more than 50% Black had a greater number of dress code restrictions. Schools should instead celebrate Black students by embracing diverse self-expression.

Source: "Dress Coded II: Protest, Progress and Power in D.C. Schools" / National Women's Law Center ☐

5. NURTURE CHILDREN AS CHILDREN

Black students are three times more likely to go to schools that employ police officers rather than guidance counselors. They also face a greater chance of arrest and violence from school police than their peers for similar infractions.[1] Black children who are the same age as white children are viewed as significantly older when suspected of the same crime and are disproportionately punished: **Black boys are 18 times more likely to be tried as adults than white boys.**[2] Children of all races should be treated as children, deserving of innocence and dignity.

1.   "The Parkland shooting fueled calls for more school police. Civil rights groups want them removed." / Vox ☐
2.   "Consequences When African-American Boys Are Seen As Older" / NPR ☐

POLICE

Police in riot gear during the Ferguson protests. Photo: Jamelle Bouie / Flickr.

AN UNCHECKED FORCE

WHAT DOES IT MEAN when we hear that the police are becoming increasingly militarized? Police standing in formation while wearing riot gear is a familiar image to the public, as is the use of equipment such as flash grenades, military-grade guns, and tanks. While tear gas was banned in warfare by the Geneva Protocol of 1925, the police's use of this and other chemical agents to disperse protesters is still regular protocol.

In some ways, then, the police are deploying instruments and tactics of war with less accountability than the military.

This was notable in the recent Lafayette Square incident, where President Trump ordered chemical agents to be used to disperse peaceful protestors for a church photo-op. Researchers have suggested that the police have adopted an 'us' vs. 'them' perspective toward protestors, in effect treating the people they ostensibly are supposed to protect as foreign enemies.[1]

Overreaching police departments are common today, but this wasn't always the case. Originally, they were meant to respond to crime, but as time went on, police became a force for surveilling the public under the guise of "crime prevention." The people labeled as "potential criminals" were often Black or from other marginalized groups that the elite wanted to suppress. Combine this with the power to arrest people arbitrarily, and policing becomes a perfect system of control.

Public defender Emily Galvin-Almanza says that when she sees a case of arrest on a nonsensical basis, the first thing she does is check the police officer's schedule.[2] Police are more likely to make unwarranted arrests near the end of their schedule because processing them is time-consuming but easy, and they can make overtime.

This dynamic is repeated over and over again. Regular police stops for minor issues have become nightmares for Black citizens. SWAT teams meant to serve drug warrants violently break down doors of people who have not been charged with a crime. Strikingly, in a survey of 75 U.S. cities, 60% of police officers did not live in the communities they oversee.[3] In effect, police forces have become an armed occupation for many Black communities.

1. "Militarization Of Police Means U.S. Protesters Face Weapons Designed For War" / NPR
2. Emily Galvin-Almanza / Twitter: @GalvinAlmanza
3. "Most Police Don't Live In The Cities They Serve" / FiveThirtyEight

Case Studies —
## *Police Violence Poses a Constant Threat*

NYPD OFFICER DANIEL PANTALEO KILLED ERIC GARNER on the street using a prohibited chokehold because he suspected Garner of selling untaxed cigarettes.

MINNESOTA POLICE OFFICER JERONIMO YANEZ KILLED PHILANDO CASTILE in his own car on a routine traffic stop because he "fit the profile" of a recent robbery suspect.

LOUISVILLE METRO POLICE FATALLY SHOT BREONNA TAYLOR in her own home on a no-knock warrant raid. Taylor's boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, a licensed firearm carrier, fired once at police thinking they were intruders. Police returned more than 20 rounds, hitting Taylor eight times. No drugs were ever found.
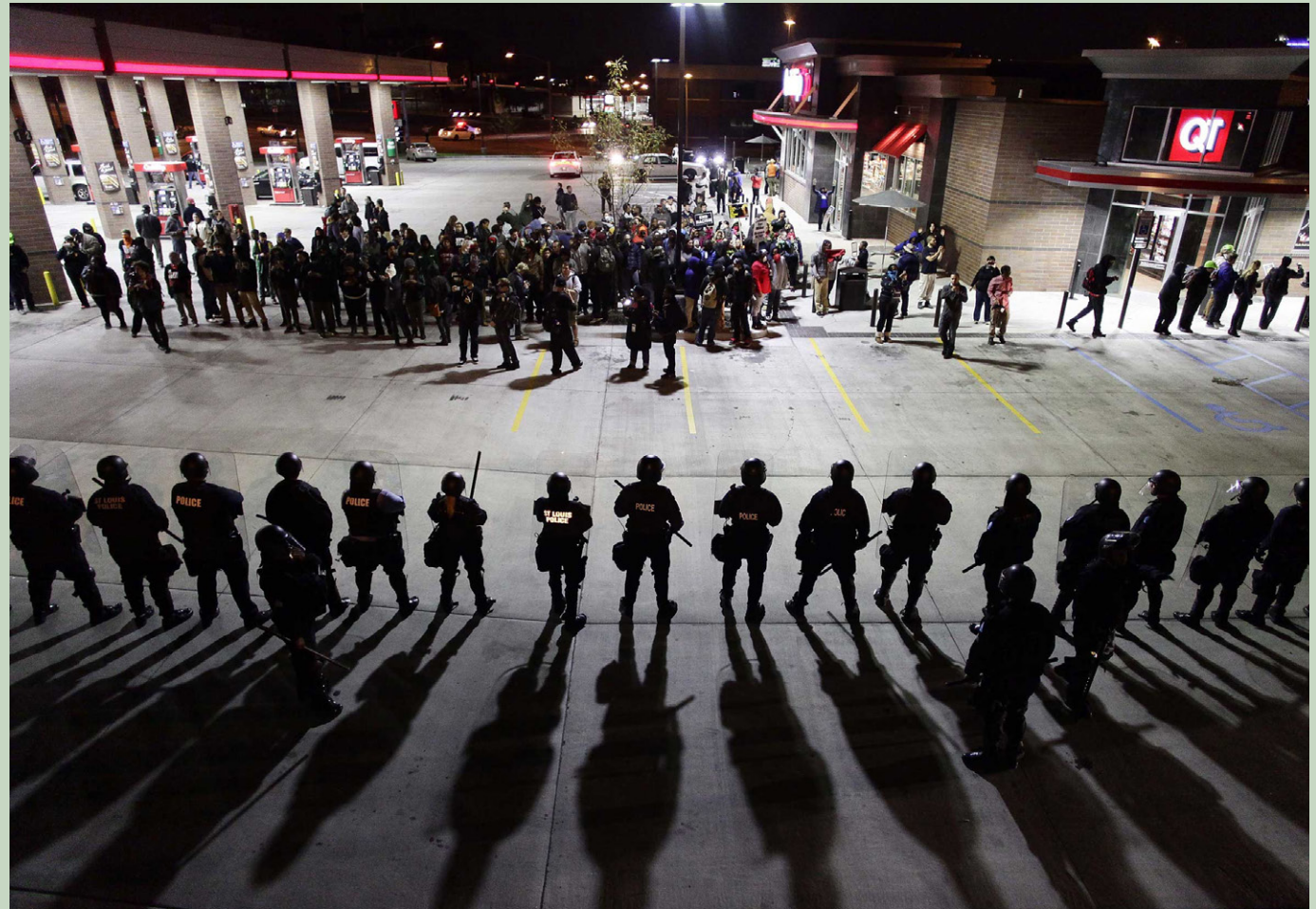
> " It should devastate us all that in 2020 it took a cellphone video broadcast across the globe of a Black man dying from the oldest and most terrifying tool in the white-supremacist arsenal to make a vast majority of white Americans decide that, well, this might be enough.

— *Nikole Hannah-Jones, creator of the 1619 Project*

Image: Police officers in riot gear hold a line in St. Louis on Oct. 12, 2014. Credit: Joshua Lott / AFP / Getty Images.

1. RECRUIT OFFICERS FROM THE COMMUNITIES SERVED

In a 2013 survey of police officers nationwide, 12% were Black, which is proportional to their share of U.S. adults.[1] However, in major metropolitan areas, the percentage of white people on the force is more than 30% higher than in the communities they serve,[2] which means that **white cops are disproportionately patrolling Black neighborhoods.** 49% of Black police officers live within the cities they serve, but only 35% of white police officers do.[3]

1. "Behind the Badge" / Pew Research Center
2. "The Race Gap in America's Police Departments" / New York Times
3. "Most Police Don't Live In The Cities They Serve" / FiveThirtyEight

Reimagining the Policing System

2. AVOID POLICE FOR NON-VIOLENT CRIMES

Police officers currently respond to mental illness crises, homelessness, drug overdoses, and traffic problems. Among the few cities where public data is available, such as New Orleans and Sacramento, only 4% of officers' time is spent on violent crime. On the other hand, about 50% is spent dealing with non-criminal calls and traffic.[1] **Having armed officers handle these non-violent incidents increases the number of police interactions and the risk of dangerous outcomes.**[2]

1. "How Do the Police Actually Spend Their Time?" / New York Times
2. "Unbundle the Police" / The Atlantic

3. INVESTIGATE USE OF FORCE

All cases where police use force should be independently investigated. Currently, **only 33% of officers are part of police departments that require an external investigation for use of force** that leads to serious bodily injury (61% for use of force that leads to death). And when citizens want to file a complaint, it can be difficult: only 35% of police officers are in departments with a civilian-complaint review board.

Source: "Local Police Departments: Policies and Procedures, 2016" / Bureau of Justice Statistics

4. ENFORCE A CLEAR MISSION TO PROTECT LIFE & NURTURE COMMUNITIES

It is critical for police to maintain their mission of serving the people in their communities. Yet, as of 2016, only 42% of police departments had a written community-policing plan.[1] Because of a lack of a humane vision and mission statement, **some departments effectively protect primarily affluent white communities** at the expense of communities of color.[2]

1. "Local Police Departments: Policies and Procedures, 2016" / Bureau of Justice Statistics
2. "New Neighbors and the Over-Policing of Communities of Color" / Community Service Society

5. MANDATE DE-ESCALATION TRAINING

De-escalation training teaches police to use communication techniques and other strategies to defuse high-intensity situations, reducing the likelihood of resorting to disproportionate use of lethal force. As of 2017, 34 states did not require training for all police officers. In a survey from 2015, new officers on average had only **eight hours of de-escalation training, compared to 58 hours of firearms training.**

Source: "Not Trained to Kill: Most states neglect ordering police to learn de-escalation tactics to avoid shootings" / APM Reports

RISE!

Poetry from
Maya
Angelou

●

"Still
I Rise"

1978

"You can shoot me
with your words,
You can cut me
with your lies,
You can kill me
with your hatefulness,
But just like life, I'll

Artwork: Jarrett Key
Tempera Paint on Wall
"Hair Painting No. 24"
2018
Photo: Isabelle Dow

●

COURTS

The Exonerated Five, who as teenagers were wrongfully accused and imprisoned for the rape of a white woman in Central Park. Photo: Michaiah Carter / Netflix.

A PLACE OF RUIN

A BEDROCK PRINCIPLE of the American judicial system is that defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty, based on the Fourth, Fifth, and Fourteenth Amendments. But for many Black Americans, this simply doesn't hold up. Black people are disproportionately charged with crimes they didn't commit. Though they represent only 12–13% of the population, Black Americans comprise 47% of people who are wrongfully convicted and later exonerated. Innocent Black people are wrongfully convicted of murder at seven times the rate and of drug offenses at 12 times the rate of innocent white people.[1]

Moreover, the judicial process constrains Black and Latinx defendants' ability to challenge their charges. Prosecutors have been known to leverage harsh punishments against defendants in order to pressure them to take plea deals, including for crimes they didn't commit. However, the deals offered are also disproportionately harsh: in a study of more than 220,000 cases in New York, "Black defendants were 19% more likely than whites to be offered plea deals that included jail or prison time."[2] A study of 30,807 cases in Wisconsin found that white defendants facing misdemeanor charges were "74% more likely than Black people to have all charges carrying potential prison time dropped, dismissed, or reduced."[3] Defendants who refuse to take plea deals are heavily punished for their decisions. Because Black people often can't afford bail as a result of systematic economic disenfranchisement over generations, they are at the mercy of the court-prison system.

1. "Race and Wrongful Convictions in the United States" / National Registry of Exonerations ⧉
2. "Study Reveals Worse Outcomes For Black And Latino Defendants" / NPR ⧉
3. "When Race Tips the Scales in Plea Bargaining" / Slate ⧉

A famous example of this is the story of Kalief Browder, who was kept on Rikers Island for three years awaiting a trial for a crime he didn't commit. At Rikers Island, he was essentially tortured for refusing to take a plea deal.

When cases do go to trial, they are often arbitrated by all-white juries. In 1986, the Supreme Court ruled that peremptory strikes against potential jurors based on race are unconstitutitonal in *Batson v. Kentucky*. Despite this, a 2010 study in eight states by the Equal Justice Initiative found that hundreds of people of color called for jury service were illegally excluded by prosecutors on pretextual bases: "The culture has tolerated this all-white jury, white prosecutor, white judge phenomenon, because that's what people have seen for decades." A separate study by Duke University found that all-white juries convicted Black defendants at a 16% higher rate than their white counterparts, and that the introduction of at least one Black juror reduced this gap to 2%. The courts, as much as any other part of the criminal justice system, are a place of deep injustice—a place of ruin for many Black people.

> " Black defendants are seven times more likely than white defendants to be wrongly convicted of a crime, because they are presumed guilty.

—Yusef Salaam, activist, and one of the Exonerated Five in the Central Park jogger case

1. "Study: Blacks Routinely Excluded From Juries" / Equal Justice Initiative ⤢
2. "Study: All-White Jury Pools Convict Black Defendants 16 Percent More Often Than Whites" / Duke University ⤢

Case Studies —

Kalief Browder

Kalief Browder was arrested at 16 in New York City. A man claimed that he had been robbed, and a police officer searched Kalief, finding nothing. Kalief was taken to the precinct, interrogated, and charged with robbery, grand larceny, and assault. Bail was set above what his family could pay, and they could not afford to hire an attorney. Kalief spent three years confined in a jail on Rikers Island without being convicted, waiting for a trial. He maintained his innocence, and the case was eventually dismissed. Kalief struggled with mental health after being released and committed suicide two years later.

Source: "Before the Law" / The New Yorker ⤢

Photos: Kalief Browder / ABC News (left), and Brock Turner / Associated Press (right).

Brock Turner

Brock Turner was a 20-year-old student at Stanford University. He was accused and convicted of sexually assaulting an unconscious woman. According to Brock, alcohol and promiscuity were largely the factors behind the assault. With a maximum sentence of 14 years for his three confirmed counts of felony sexual assault, he was sentenced to six months and released after serving three. Judge Aaron Persky defended the lenient sentence, citing positive character references, remorse from the defendant, and concern over the impact of prison on Brock. Persky was later recalled by California voters.

Source: "In Stanford Rape Case, Brock Turner Blamed Drinking and Promiscuity" / New York Times ⤢

1. END QUALIFIED IMMUNITY

Qualified immunity granted by the court system makes it difficult for police officers to be sued and held accountable for unjust actions because they are protected if there aren't precedents of similar misconduct. **About 1,000 people are shot and killed by police every year, but only 110 total officers have been charged with manslaughter or murder since 2005.**

Source: "Why It's So Rare For Police Officers To Face Legal Consequences" / FiveThirtyEight ☑

Reimagining the Judicial System

2. ASSESS DATA ON & REDRESS BIAS IN UNEQUAL INCARCERATION

Systemic bias contributes to unequal rates of incarceration, and we must confront the data in order to change the system. People of color are more likely to be charged with crimes that have heavier sentences. In similar situations, **Black defendants are twice as likely to receive mandatory minimum sentences** and are more likely to be charged under habitual offender laws.

Source: "Report to the United Nations on Racial Disparities in the U.S. Criminal Justice System" / The Sentencing Project ☑

3. DEVELOP ALTERNATIVES TO PRISON FOR HEALING & RECONCILIATION

Alternative models of justice are beginning to emerge. Restorative justice focuses on reconciliation between victims and offenders, as opposed to punishment. The two parties come together and address the issue before coming to an agreement. In California's Alameda County, for example, **when felony cases used restorative justice, youth were 44% less likely to commit future crimes.** There are also significant cost savings to restorative justice practices.

Source: "A different path for confronting sexual assault" / Vox ☑

4. REMOVE FINANCIAL BARRIERS, SUCH AS BAIL

Studies on pretrial detention have demonstrated that it increases the chances of conviction and sentencing. Because most releases require bail, **people of color, who have lower average incomes, are disproportionately impacted.** Black people are more likely to be denied bail, have higher bonds, and be detained because they are not able to pay.

Source: "Report to the United Nations on Racial Disparities in the U.S. Criminal Justice System" / The Sentencing Project ☑

5. FIGHT BIAS IN JURY SELECTION

Studies have shown that **all-white juries are more likely to convict non-white defendants than when they have both white and non-white members.** With racially diverse juries, deliberations tend to be more thorough and a greater number of perspectives are shared. Prosecutors should be prevented from peremptory strikes against prospective Black jurors based on their appearance, lifestyle, and where they reside—often arbitrary reasons for race discrimination.

Source: "A Growing Number of State Courts Are Confronting Unconscious Racism In Jury Selection" / The Marshall Project ☑

PRISONS

Incarcerated men return from work in the fields, Louisiana State Penitentiary, 2011. Photo: Gerald Herbert / Associated Press.

SITES OF EXPLOITATION

THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX is a place of profit. While the 13th Amendment prohibited slavery and forced labor, this does not apply to inmates, who are exploited as cheap labor through "job training" programs with the pretext of "rehabilitation." Prison labor is a $70 billion dollar industry used as a method for companies to increase profit because prisoners are paid very little for their work, if at all.[1] In April 2020, the non-profit advocacy organization Worth Rises identified 4,135 corporations that profit from mass incarceration. These include 3M and FedEx, which specifically support prison labor, while many others escape accountability, as disclosure is not required.[2]

Even in cases where prison labor is theoretically voluntary, prisoners are often coerced into working and punished if they refuse. Inmates are generally paid between $0.95 and $4.73 a day to make clothing, manufacture military supplies, operate call centers, harvest crops, and work other low-skill jobs. Up to 80% of these wages are then deducted through taxation and fund the cost of incarceration, such as room and board.[3] Some prisoners in eight states—Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas—are not paid for their labor at all.[1] During the pandemic, prisoners are making hand sanitzer and masks, guarding others against COVID-19 while exposed to dense, inhumane living conditions, unable to see their families, and subjected to price gouging by prisons for soap, phone calls, and food.[5]

For-profit private prisons, which gave a record $1.6 million in political contributions in 2016, mostly to Republican candidates, take the responsibility for maintaining prisons off the hands of the government.[6] Private prisons pay off participating states to manage facilities for 20-year periods, mandating a 90% occupancy rate.[7] This incentivizes states to arrest and incarcerate people—disproportionally Black—in high numbers. Petty crimes are then punished more harshly in order for these states to meet their quotas, maintaining the inflow of exploitable labor.

With a profit motive linked to the expansion of mass incarceration, the prison-industrial complex is not about protecting society or preventing recidivism; it is a form of modern-day enslavement.

1.   "'Prison Slavery': Inmates Are Paid Cents While Manufacturing Products Sold to Government / Newsweek
2.   "The Prison Industry: Mapping Private Sector Players" / Worth Rises
3.   "The Uncounted Workforce" / NPR
4.   "What You Should Know About the Prison-Industrial Complex" / ThoughtCo.
5.   "Crime doesn't pay but prison does, even during a pandemic" / Associated Press
6.   "For Profit Prisons" / Center for Responsive Politics
7.   "Jailing Americans for Profit: The Rise of the Prison Industrial Complex" / Huffington Post

Case Study — *Dominique Morgan*

Below is an exchange between NPR host Darius Rafieyan and Dominique Morgan, a formerly incarcerated musician, author, and activist. Dominique was homeless as a teenager and was incarcerated for what he calls "survival crimes"—theft and forgery. When Dominique entered the Omaha Correctional Center, he worked 12 hours each day as a cook for $2.25 per day. While in prison, he eventually got a job with a company called Oriental Trading:

MORGAN: "If you've ever been to an office party, the tablecloth came from Oriental Trading Company. So we were doing everything from cutting plastic for tablecloths to packaging. And I think at that time, I was making 37 cents an hour."

After his release, Dominique naturally applied to work at Oriental Trading Company—to do the same job he had been working in prison. Ironically, the company refused to restore his employment because of his prison record.

RAFIEYAN: "Dominique was eventually released from prison after being behind bars for nearly 10 years. And after that decade of grueling labor, all they had to show for it was about $300. Initially, Dominique went to Oriental Trading hoping to get their old job back."

MORGAN: "I went and applied there, and they did not hire felons in the community."

RAFIEYAN: "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. So you were working for this company making their tablecloths for 37 cents an hour. And then when you came to get a job with them, they'd say you were unqualified...to do the job you'd already been doing?"

MORGAN: "Yeah."

Source: "The Uncounted Workforce" / NPR ⎘

Photo: Dominique Morgan, a former inmate, is now an adolescent health educator at Charles Drew Health Center in Omaha, NE. Credit: Dana Damewood. ⎘

1. PRIORITIZE INMATE REHABILITATION

More than 95% of incarcerated people are released from prison and return to their communities after completing their sentences.[1] As a result, it is necessary to examine the function of prisons as a place of rehabilitation rather than solely punishment. **Having a criminal record is a significant barrier that impacts access to employment opportunities, housing options, and public assistance programs.** Without effective education and re-entry programming in prisons, it is difficult for many individuals to successfully re-enter their communities and makes it more likely for them to reoffend.[2]

1. "Reentry Trends In The U.S." / Bureau of Justice Statistics ⬀
2. "From prisons to communities: Confronting re-entry challenges and social inequality" / American Psychological Association ⬀

Reimagining the Prison System

2. PROVIDE MEDICAL & MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Almost half of incarcerated people suffer from mental illness, and two-thirds suffer from addiction or dependency. More than 25% have a serious condition like bipolar disorder. Companies that provide healthcare to inmates make $10 billion per year, yet their profit incentives and effective monopoly result in appallingly deficient care, which leaves many inmates sick and powerless.

Source: "The Jail Health-Care Crisis" / The New Yorker ⬀

3. BAN PRIVATE PRISONS & LABOR EXPLOITATION

In 2016, then-Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates announced that the federal government would phase out private prisons. Trump rescinded this order, the industry boomed, and **private prisons received $2.3 billion in federal immigration and corrections contracts in 2018.** Public outrage over the border crisis has since forced big banks like J.P. Morgan to stop financing private prisons, a first step toward abolishing the despicable practice of profiteering off the backs of inmates.

Source: "Why big banks could be killing private prisons" / CNBC ⬀

4. SUPPORT PRISON EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

People in prison who participate in an educational program are 43% less likely to return after release because they are more likely to find employment. Additionally, there is less violence reported in prisons with college programs. Programs can help to build self-esteem and a sense of community among inmates, restoring personhood and dignity.

Source: "Education Opportunities in Prison Are Key to Reducing Crime" / Center for American Progress ⬀

5. MAKE INCARCERATION A LAST RESORT

Even as crime rates have remained relatively constant over the last 40 years, the number of people who are incarcerated has increased 500%.[1] Both Democratic and Republican administrations have contributed to this change. **Low-level, non-violent offenses should not be punished with incarceration.** In particular, drug-related sentencing disproportionately affects communities of color. Despite equal rates of substance use, Black people are six times more likely than white people to be incarcerated for drug-related charges.[2]

1. "Criminal Justice Facts" / The Sentencing Project ⬀
2. "Ending the War on Drugs: By the Numbers" / Center for American Progress ⬀

Alternative Community Resources

04

What's in this chapter

- We illustrate alternative resources for policing, including restorative justice, community-police collaboration efforts, crisis assistance teams, and community collectives.

- We show examples of organizations that focus on mental health and create an environment of care.

- We demonstrate that these kinds of organizations and programs can lead to improved outcomes, such as reduced police violence, cost savings, and greater public safety.

INSTITUTIONS THAT ARE ACCOUNTABLE AND REFLECTIVE OF COMMUNITIES

Charting a More Just Future

A restorative justice circle at Solano Prison in Vacaville, California. Photo: Jo Bauer.

IN THE MIDST OF DISSECTING all of the particularities of what is broken in our criminal justice system, it can sometimes be difficult to pause and imagine what a safe, healthy, and prosperous society might look like. As people alive in 2020, we must unflinchingly bear witness to injustice, speak out, and work to redress it. Yet, even as we work to make sense of concepts, events, and names we may not have heard of before—redlining, mandatory minimums, plea deals, police unions, qualified immunity, and so forth—it is important that we also find time and space to step back from the entangled web of systemic oppression and imagine alternative systems to ensure the safety and well-being of Black Americans.

The following case studies examine specific methods through which communities have sought to address criminal justice with equity.

The following case studies could become models for future institutions at various scales. However, they should be studied and implemented within a larger ecosystem of care, which can ensure broadly accessible public goods and services such as housing, healthcare, mental health, education, and recreation, among others.
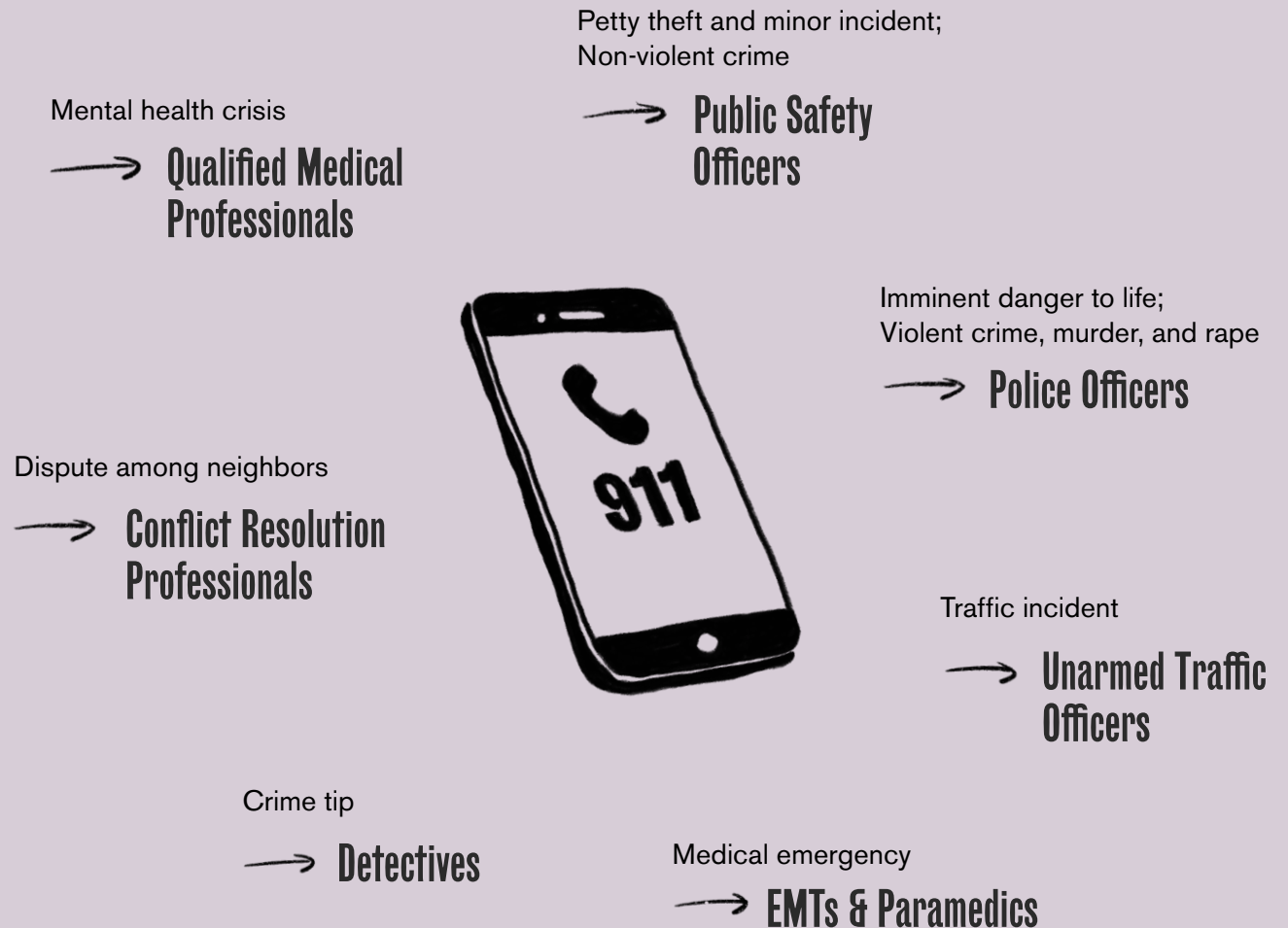
Perspective—

"How can we create alternatives to the police that both empower us to keep one another safe, and encourage us to live lives that are free of violence and oppression?

We have to hold these alternatives to the same standards we demand of existing institutions: they must be democratic, accountable, transparent, and reflective of real community control."

Excerpt from "Alternatives to Police by Rose City Cop Watch, Portland, Oregon, 2008" ⌇

Diagram of a Potential 911 Call —

The vast majority of emergencies do not require armed police to respond. Especially for medical and mental health situations, alternative resources can be imagined to reduce the likelihood of escalation and violence.

Petty theft and minor incident;
Non-violent crime
→ **Public Safety Officers**

Mental health crisis
→ **Qualified Medical Professionals**

Imminent danger to life;
Violent crime, murder, and rape
→ **Police Officers**

Dispute among neighbors
→ **Conflict Resolution Professionals**

Traffic incident
→ **Unarmed Traffic Officers**

Crime tip
→ **Detectives**

Medical emergency
→ **EMTs & Paramedics**

A. Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is a potential response to crime that comes from the traditions of indigenous people of America. A meeting is organized to gather the survivor, the offender, and select representatives of their communities. It is a space for each side to tell their story of what happened, to outline the nature and magnitude of the harm caused, to ensure the offender takes responsibility for their actions, and to build consensus for what the offender can do to repair the damage.[1]

Reparations from such a process might include monetary payments, an apology, community service, or any other actions to justly recompense survivors of the crime.

The goal is for the offender to repair the harm caused and to be discouraged from repeating their behavior.

The survivor holds an active role in the process and stands to gain recognition of what happened, restoration of agency and power in the situation, tangible actions to demonstrate the offender's ownership of responsibility, and the promise of behavior change in the future.
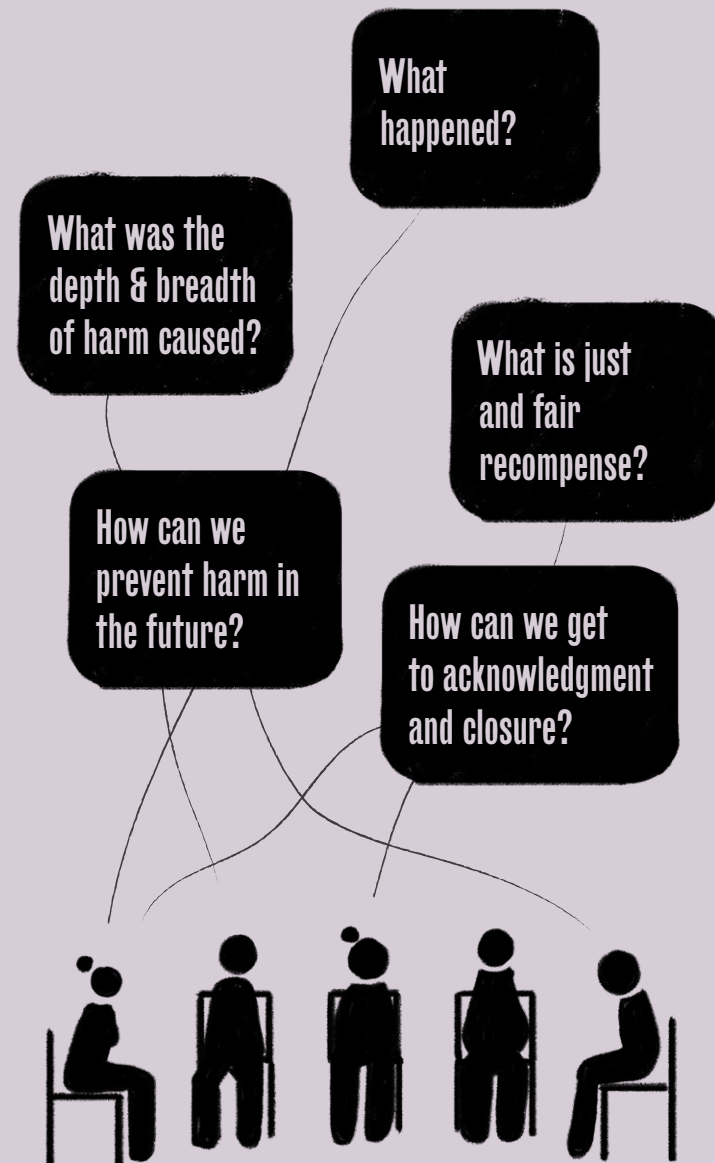
In a recent study of 100 felony cases in California that underwent restorative justice instead of advancing to court proceedings, 91% of participants said they would participate again and recommend the process to a friend. Importantly, those who participated were less likely to commit crimes in the future.[2]

1. "A New Kind of Criminal Justice" / Parade ⌁
2. "A different path for confronting sexual assault" / Vox ⌁

How Restorative Justice Works —

Community members gather with the survivor and the offender. In this format, the survivor can reclaim control over the narrative of what happened, while the offender can take responsibility for their actions.

What happened?

What was the depth & breadth of harm caused?

What is just and fair recompense?

How can we prevent harm in the future?

How can we get to acknowledgment and closure?

Case Study —
Designing Justice + Designing Spaces

DJDS is an architecture firm that creates spaces for restorative justice, where survivors and offenders come together to process and repair the impacts of a crime. Instead of focusing on punishment, restorative justice prioritizes:

- Respect
- Trust
- Healing
- Participation
- Accountability

Our environments elicit responses in our nervous system. They can make us feel overwhelmed or calm us. Because restorative justice conversations are often intense, the environments they take place in are intentionally designed by DJDS to be softer, non-hierarchical, and more conducive to dialogue and listening. For example, the Near Westside Peacemaking Center in Syracuse achieves a "domestic feeling" by incorporating a kitchen with food.

A few other examples include:

ATLANTA CITY DETENTION CENTER Working with cities to repurpose and reimagine existing institutions

ALAMEDA MOBILE REFUGE ROOMS Developing infrastructure for individuals re-entering communities after prison or jail

RESTORE OAKLAND Establishing restorative reinvestments in communities, through centers for job training and education

Sources: Designing Justice + Designing Spaces ☒

"'A whole lot has to get built to end mass incarceration' says Deanna van Buren" / Dezeen ☒

Alternatives to Police by Rose City Copwatch ☒

Restorative Justice Design Strategies —

Whereas prisons are spaces of containment and punishment that infantilize incarcerated people, restorative justice spaces build community-based accountability and agency with the possibility of redemption.
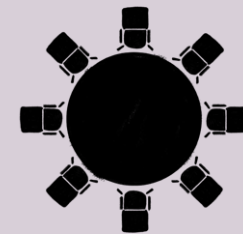

Access to Nature
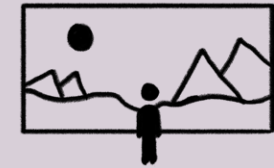
Relaxing Environments and Textures

Healthy Food

Non-hierarchical Spaces

Other case studies include **700 STREET COMMITTEES IN SOUTH AFRICA** which were established to keep peace after apartheid, and **COMMUNITY RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN NORTHERN IRELAND**, a series of community restorative justice projects initiated in the 1990s. Out of 700 cases that the Northern Ireland program took on in its first two years, 90% were successfully resolved.

" **The moment we choose to LOVE: we move against domination, against oppression. The moment we choose to love, we begin to move towards freedom.**

—bell hooks

●

American author, professor, feminist, and activist

●

B. Community–Police Collaboration

Mayor Ras Baraka attends the swearing in of 122 new police officers, December 15, 2017.
Photo: Andrew Miller / NJ Advance.

For Newark, NJ mayor Ras Baraka, policing is both personal and nuanced. His first experience with law enforcement occurred when he was 10 years old: his parents had an argument, and police officers pulled their car over to the side of the road. The next thing he and his siblings saw from the back seat was their father being dragged out of the vehicle and beaten by the officers.

Today, Baraka is the mayor of the city that was the site of the historic 1967 Newark Rebellion. He has led the community to develop active intiatives to redress police brutality.

" We have worked to ensure that the composition of our police force reflects the predominantly brown and Black residents of our city. Many of our officers were born in Newark and many more call it home.

— Ras Baraka, mayor of Newark, NJ

Case Study — *Newark, NJ*

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS with police and residents

NEIGHBORHOOD POLICE COUNCILS

COMMUNITY INPUT on changes to policies

TRAINED "CITIZEN CLERGY" are community residents who take classes on public safety and conflict prevention. They are called to help in uncertain situations and have maintained peace during protests.

THE OFFICE OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION addresses violence as a public health issue and focuses on community-based strategies such as conflict resolution and safe passageway to school. 5% (around $12M) of the public safety budget supports this new department.

A CIVILIAN COMPLAINT REVIEW BOARD would increase transparency and accountability with the power to investigate police misconduct, subpoena documents and officers, review police policies that might lead to abuse, and submit regular reports to the public. However, the board is not yet operating, as its creation is mired in legal proceedings by the police union, which fears it is too powerful.

Results —

Since 2014, there has been an 80% reduction in complaints against officers. This results in cost savings, with money spent on lawsuits for excessive force at a record low. Newark protests in the wake of George Floyd's murder were notable, as police officers were trained to de-escalate confrontations and the vast majority of demonstrations were peaceful.

However, not all initiatives have been effective. In 2019, Black people were 1.5 times as likely to be stopped by Newark police as white people and 2.7 times as likely to be subject to police use of force.

Still, there is general consensus among activists that reforms have led to more trust between the community and the police force, creating a basis for continued collaboration.

Sources: "Ras Baraka on reforms to bring communities and police closer together" / The Economist ⧉

"These New Jersey cities reformed their police – what happened next?" / The Guardian ⧉

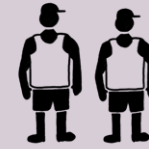## 1967 Newark Rebellion —

Took place two years after California riots.

Two white police officers arrested, beat, and dragged John William Smith, a Black cab driver.

Over 4 days, 26 people died in the riots. Hundreds more were injured.

Regular Roundtables with Community and Police

Unarmed "Citizen Clergy" Response Teams

Community Engagement

$12M

Office of Violence Prevention
5% of Public Safety Budget

Newark, NJ in 2020
Mayor: Ras Baraka

80% Reduction in Complaints Against Police

Cost Savings for City

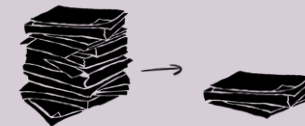BLM BREONNA TAYLOR
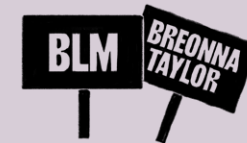
Peaceful Protests in 2020

Investigate Police Misconduct

Subpoena Docs & Officers

Review Police Policies

Civilian Complaint Review Board
Currently blocked by police union

Results: 2014–2020

C. Crisis Assistance Teams

Photo: CAHOOTS website / White Bird Clinic. ⧉

Case Study — *CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets)*

CAHOOTS is a mobile crisis intervention program started by White Bird Clinic in Eugene, OR more than 30 years ago with the goal of community harm reduction. This volunteer-led initiative responds to mental illness and non-violent public safety situations. It is not a law enforcement unit and CAHOOTS teams carry no weapons, focusing instead on non-violent resolution.

CAHOOTS has a contact within the city's police department and is funded by both the city and the county. It adheres to HIPAA privacy rules to ensure confidentiality and to build trust with the community. To explain what the process of seeking help looks like, CAHOOTS maintains clear online and social media communications. The program has built a trusted working relationship with law enforcement through years of continued partnership.
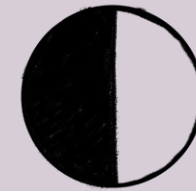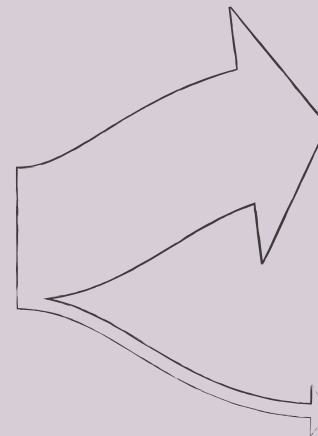

50% of police encounters

in the United States involve situations relating to mental illness

HOW CAHOOTS WORKS

911 or the police non-emergency number dispatchers route the call to CAHOOTS. The CAHOOTS team assesses and responds to situations, the vast majority of which do not require police backup.

24,000 calls to CAHOOTS in 2019

No police backup needed (23,850)

Police backup needed (150)

De-escalating Crises to Protect Mental Health —

For 30 years, the CAHOOTS program has been rerouting relevant 911 calls to unarmed crisis assistance teams. Team member Kimber Haws explains: "If we can connect someone to resources, or help them have a more supportive evening, we're going to do that every time over jail. And I think Eugene Police are 99.9% on the same page, they don't want to take people to jail that are dealing with gaps in services or mental health issues."

THE CAHOOTS PROGRAM USES TEAMS OF TWO

Mental Health
Crisis Worker

EMT Medical
Professional

CAHOOTS CAN ASSIST WITH NON-CRIMINAL CRISES

- Crisis Counseling
- Suicide Prevention & Intervention
- Conflict Resolution & Mediation
- Grief & Loss
- Substance Abuse
- Housing Crisis
- First Aid & Non-Emergency Medical Care
- Resource Connection & Referrals
- Transportation to Services

CRISIS ASSISTANCE TEAMS CAN REDUCE COSTS

Every year, the city of Eugene saves around

$22.5 million in public safety and hospital costs.

Photo: Crisis worker Kimber Haws (left) and medic Daniel Felts (right) respond to a call in downtown Eugene. Credit: Brian Bull / KLCC.

Sources: CAHOOTS Website / White Bird Clinic ☐

"CAHOOTS At 30 Pt.1 Crisis Response Teams 'Assume Nothing'" / KLCC ☐

D. Community Collectives

Community collectives rely on designated organizations of friends, family, and neighbors to respond to non-violent crimes through preventative and collaborative efforts. Instead of calling the police, collectives call on designated neighbors to arrive quickly, de-escalate the situation, and help figure out a peaceable outcome. This kind of response can be helpful if it is guided by a previously established understanding and protocol.

Note that this is markedly different from armed vigilantes who take the law into their own hands, such as "neighborhood watch" captain George Zimmerman, who shot and killed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, and was later acquitted of all murder charges.

The goal is not to replace the police or for civilians to act as police but instead to shift power back to communities to monitor their own neighborhoods for non-violent offenses.

The origin of such collectives can be traced to the feminist movement and the Rape Crisis Centers that emerged in the early 1970s, when communities recognized that the justice system was not taking violence against women seriously. These centers created databases and flyers, organized educational events and self-defense classes, provided counseling, and shared information with sex workers about unsafe individuals. While they have now largely been institutionalized as nonprofits and funded by the government, community collectives remain a meaningful alternative to police in some cases.

Source: "Alternatives to Police by Rose City Cop Watch, Portland, Oregon, 2008" ⤢

Case Study — *Citizens' Local Alliance for a Safer Philadelphia (CLASP)*

To address crime and police brutality in neighborhoods, a multiracial and mixed-class group of Philadelphia residents organized a collective system to prevent crime in 1972. They developed a community action model that laid out a series of goals and steps to connect neighbors with one another and identify simple collaborative efforts to address criminal activity.

CLASP worked to:

PREVENT BURGLARIES with new locks, lights, homemade alarm systems, and better community ties

ORGANIZE COMMUNITY WALKS by pairs of unarmed neighborhood residents

ALERT NEIGHBORS OF A CURRENT CRIME using flashlights and freon horns, prompting others to join in

Photo: CLASP safety workshop roleplay from the 1970s. Credit: Community Action and Crime Prevention. ⤢

Results —

From 1972 to 1976, there were **600 ORGANIZED AUTONOMOUS BLOCKS** throughout Philadelphia.

People were more **COMFORTABLE SPENDING TIME OUTSIDE.**

There was **75% LESS CRIME** on organized blocks compared to similar police districts.

Sources: "Alternatives to Police by Rose City Cop Watch, Portland, Oregon, 2008" ⤢

"Trayvon Martin Death: Rethinking Crime and the Role of the Police" / Mic ⤢

CLASP Community Action Model —

From 1972 to 1976, a large number of blocks in Philadelphia self-organized to reduce crime and avoid police presence.

Installation of
Street Lights

Block
Agreements

Unarmed Walks
with Freon Horns

Unarmed Walks
with Flashlights

Stronger
Community Ties

Installation of
New Door Locks

Unarmed Walks
in Pairs

Homemade
Alarms

HOW CLASP WORKED

Unlike models of state or vigilante justice, which can lead to racial profiling and violence, CLASP put the responsibility of community protection in the hands of unarmed, autonomous residents of Philadelphia's own blocks.

600 organized autonomous blocks in Philadelphia in the 1970s

Crime decreased by 75%
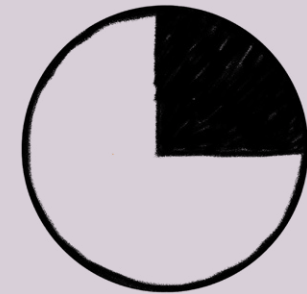
People felt more comfortable spending time outdoors

Case Study —
Sista's Liberated Ground

In the early 2000s, a collective of Brooklyn, NY women of color came together to address gender-based violence at home, at work, and on the streets. They held local meetings and discussed various models of community accountability before creating a vision for Sista's Liberated Ground, a space where violence against women would not be tolerated. Women supported one another to address issues, rather than relying on the police.

Sista's Liberated Ground worked to:

REACH OUT TO THE COMMUNITY with flyers, stickers, posters, and murals

ESTABLISH AN ACTION LINE that women could call to get involved

DEVELOP WORKSHOPS on sexism, conflict resolution, self-defense, and other relevant topics

ORGANIZE GROUPS OF WOMEN to provide support and to intervene in cases of gender-based violence

Results —

A CULTURAL PRESENCE that sent the message that violence against women would not be tolerated

WOMEN ENGAGING IN DIALOGUE about gender-based violence and building relationships in the community

WORKSHOPS PROVIDING TRAINING and an increased understanding of important issues impacting women

Source: "Alternatives to Police by Rose City Cop Watch, Portland, Oregon, 2008" ⧉

Case Study—
SOS Collective

The Safe OUTside the System (SOS) Collective started in 1997 in response to increased street violence and police brutality in New York City. They are part of the Audre Lorde Project, and use community-based strategies to challenge violence toward LGBT people of color.

SOS Collective has worked to:

SHARE STRATEGIES with community members to make spaces safer for LGBT people

EDUCATE LOCAL BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS on methods to stop violence without the need for police

PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR LGBT PEOPLE who have experienced violence in the city

Sources: "Sistas Makin' Moves: Collective Leadership for Personal Transformation and Social Justice" / Sista II Sista ⧉

"Safe OUTside the System Collective" / The Audre Lorde Project ⧉

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On June 14, 2020, more than 15,000 people gathered outside of the Brooklyn Museum to protest violence against the Black trans community. Credit: Cole Witter / MoMA. ⧉

Results —

TRAINING ON BEING EFFECTIVE ALLIES for the LGBT community directed at local leaders

LEGAL SUPPORT for LGBT people affected by excessive policing practices

CITY-WIDE EVENTS AGAINST POLICE BRUTALITY with other POC-based organizations

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Afterword by Andy Chen, Partner,
Isometric Studio, and Megan Wicks

Fighting for Our Shared Future

One of the most toxic and powerful techniques of white supremacy culture is to make us feel powerless to confront injustice. It does this through distraction and misdirection, sowing discord through gaslighting and by constantly trying to flip the script. By focusing public attention on the safety of "suburban housewives" rather than Black Americans who are actually being killed by lethal police force, Trump and his enablers are in effect saying that Black lives don't matter. Those who dare to dissent against this racist strategy are painted as un-American enemies who seek anarchy and violence, though 93% of racial justice protests this year were found to be peaceful.

By making the challenges seem so intractable and consensus so improbable, white supremacy culture maintains an absurd and unjust status quo.

It finds ways to frame Black victims of police violence as the "real" criminals. When Derek Chauvin asphyxiated George Floyd to death with a knee on his neck, the defense memo claimed that

Floyd was committing a felony by trying to use a fake $20 bill, and that he was under the influence of drugs—"acting erratic" with "foam around his mouth." This animalizing description perfectly crystalizes the racist narrative that Black Americans are not merely criminals in need of punishment; they are not even to be regarded as full human beings who are deserving of justice and dignity.

If you are outraged, understand that you are not alone. Your voice matters, and it is up to you to raise it in defense of Black lives. We are with you, and we are here for you. We are a community of literal millions around the world.

One of the most powerful things you can do is to have a conversation about unjust policing with the people closest to you—not an adversarial debate but an intimate sharing about why it matters to you. If you find them helpful, use the insights and examples in this primer as a way to begin a conversation that is as rooted in fact as it is in personal truth.

White supremacy culture thrives in isolation and silence. It withers in the face of our collective imagination.

History has proven that progress is possible but not inevitable. There are loud voices that spew racism from the presidential podium and many more quiet ones that tacitly support it. We believe in the capacity of our fellow Americans to confront and reimagine unjust systems. We can build a more equitable future if these voices shift public opinion to support a culture of empathy and justice. We must do so with an understanding of history and while incorporating a diversity of perspectives—especially of people at the margins.

Anti-racist work intersects with indigenous struggles, environmental justice, feminism, immigrant rights, LGBT advocacy, disability rights, and other efforts. We all benefit from the simultaneous uplifting of these causes. Our struggles are intertwined, as are our futures. We must face injustice in solidarity—with honesty, hope, and creativity.

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Isometric is a New York-based design studio led by queer people of color. We unite graphic design and architecture to create empowering visual identities and spatial experiences.

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