Rethinking the Police Narrative

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Race and its role as a factor in violence has been thrust into the forefront of the American psyche in the form of seething social media and widespread protests, demanding the government to respond to a moral imperative to stop perpetrating injustice against those of color.

Over the past decade, black people being killed by the police have made harrowing headlines, sending people to the streets and internet in outrage. George Floyd’s death has reinvigorated a movement transcending combating police brutality, instead aiming to purge all institutions of racism. In regards to racial violence, their narrative is that there is a war on black people, “all cops are bastards,” and the historical roots of police being racist are still fully intact- essentially, the primary perpetrator of violence towards people of color, especially black people, is racist law enforcement.

In fact, the narrative of the police are at the front lines of a systemic, society-wide “war on blacks” is actually causing an increase in intra-racial violence in black communities, and a decrease in interracial violence – ultimately amounting to more deaths of people of color. In order to address the roots of violence that disproportionally harm people of color, the media-smeared reputation of law enforcement must first redeem itself through fundamental policy changes, so that they can be reinstated where they are needed, in high crime areas.

We should aim to change the way the role of police officer, or law enforcement, is presented to trainees and working officers. News reports and ex-police officers’ testimonies expose the aggressive rhetoric that trainees are imbued with – to view every person as a potential criminal or threat to themselves as officers and to the civilians.
around them, and to not hesitate in using force when danger is perceived as present. As a result, officers seem always on the defensive, ready to escalate into aggression not out of a desire for violence or conflict, but fear and desire for self-preservation that has been amplified by training.

The disparity of accountability between police and other occupations can be illustrated clearly: If a pilot is incompetent and crashes, that pilot is deemed incapable of his job and removed. Conversely, police get away with misconduct through a myriad of structures—ruthlessly protective police unions, Qualified Immunity, unwillingness of prosecution to act, and inadequate misconduct records. A pilot union defending a member after they crashed a plane, or the unique circumstances of the crash preventing the crash from being seen as punishable, sounds ludicrous—yet that is how the police are treated. Almost 25% of police officers fired for misconduct were reinstated through clandestine maneuvers within the court and union, an alarming retention rate of individuals who proved themselves incompetent and dangerous.

In terms of accountability and misguided training, the terrible stigma that has latched onto, and nowadays defines policing, seems justified. Until officers are effectively penalized for wrongdoing, the anti-police rhetoric will continue to cripple communities who need policing.

A main characterization of a crime area is disadvantage and segregation, and more recently, broken relationships between police and their communities. Between 2014 and 2017, violent crime increased for the first time since 2005, predominantly in colored communities. An unmistakable factor in crime’s uptick in 2014 is increased media coverage of police brutality against black people. Overwhelmingly, black communities have been losing their trust in the police, resulting in increased violence in two ways: first, not notifying police as frequently when crime occurs, leading to more unsolved or unregistered crimes; second, residents “taking matters into their own hands” through
violence.

Throughout recent years, following publicized cases of police brutality, calls to 911 decreased across cities for about a year, especially in colored neighborhoods— even if crimes were occurring or increasing in these areas, and allowing this trend to continue. In 2015, following Ferguson, under-policing in South Central neighborhoods in Los Angeles led to a “ghettoside” authority system, where gangs became loci of power and a “no snitch” culture prevented crimes from being reported. Similar patterns can be seen in spikes in gang violence in Chicago’s African-American communities in 2016 after a period of decline, and the dramatic increase in unsolved murders, corresponding with nationwide decline of trust in law enforcement.

Data indicates that renewed, and often visceral, attitudes towards policing, claiming that police intentionally target people based on their race, only hurts people of color. In order to stop this deadly pattern, we must become educated about the nature of race's relationship with violence and think before we speak or act. Although it is tempting to view police violence only through the lens of racism, we must instead use a wider lens of how police are trained, evaluated, and enculturated.


https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/summer16/highlight2.html

https://www.freethink.com/articles/why-don-t-we-solve-murder-anymore
