



Jon Guze

KEEPING THE PEACE

HOW INTENSIVE COMMUNITY POLICING
CAN SAVE BLACK LIVES AND HELP
BREAK THE CYCLE OF POVERTY

locke 

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KEEPING THE PEACE

How Intensive Community Policing Can Save Black Lives
and Help Break the Cycle of Poverty

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Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	5
The Late 20th Century Crime Wave Was a Disaster for Blacks and the Poor.....	11
By Focusing on Punishment Rather than Deterrence, the Response to the Crisis Made Matters Worse for Blacks and the Poor	17
Without Moving Quickly to Bring the New Crime Wave Under Control, It Too Will Be a Disaster for Blacks and the Poor.....	25
“Broken Windows Policing”: Good Policy, Bad Name	35
More Cops/Less Crime	41

What Does Intensive Community Policing Entail?	49
Despite the Timing, Intensive Community Policing Should Have Wide Appeal	55
Conclusion	63
Endnotes	67
About the Author	74

Executive Summary

The old saying, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” is particularly apt when it comes to public safety and public order. Unfortunately, for many years our criminal justice system ignored that bit of folk wisdom. Rather than focusing on deterrence — i.e., on preventing crime from happening — it focused instead on catching, convicting, and punishing the perpetrators of crimes after they had been committed.

The economic and social costs of that approach were enormous, and, ultimately, the results were disappointing. Crime and the breakdown of public order continue to be serious problems in the United States, especially for Blacks and the poor, and they are currently getting worse. Unless something is done quickly to bring it under control, the current spike in crime and disorder will lead to the loss of thousands of Black lives and keep millions of people trapped in poverty.

It is time for a new approach to crime control, one that focuses on deterrence rather than punishment. Fortunately, there is a proven method for doing precisely that. *Intensive community policing* — the strategic deployment of large numbers of well-trained and well-managed police

officers in high-crime, high-disorder neighborhoods — is a proven method for deterring crime and maintaining public order. Compared with the punitive approach that was taken in the past, intensive community policing is more effective, more efficient, and much more humane. If we want to save Black lives and help poor people escape from poverty, we should:

- ▶ Hire more police officers
- ▶ Pay them higher salaries
- ▶ Provide them with state-of-the-art training, direction, and support
- ▶ Deploy them as “peacekeepers” in the communities that suffer the most from crime and disorder

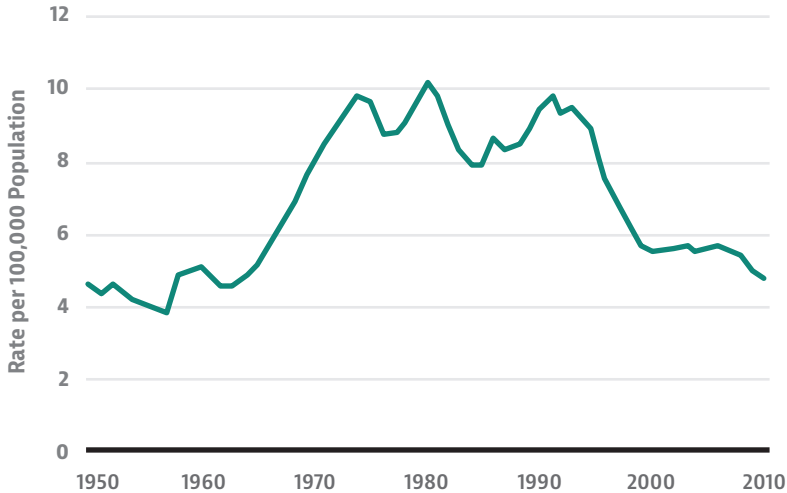
Introduction

In terms of crime and public order, the middle decades of the 20th century were a period of remarkable tranquility. Things began to change rapidly in the 1960s, however. Crime rates soared; drug dealers, pimps, and gang members took over many urban streets and parks; and a series of dramatic urban riots made fighting crime and restoring order national priorities.

These sudden changes shocked and frightened everyone, but the burden of crime and disorder fell most heavily on Blacks and the poor, and for them the burden was crushing. Blacks and the poor were disproportionately likely to be crime victims themselves, which was bad enough. Making matters worse, the crime wave accelerated the flight of middle class white people and successful businesses from the troubled urban centers to the suburbs and left the remaining residents trapped in a cycle of poverty that continues to this day.

America responded to the crime wave by putting a few more police officers on the streets and by putting *a lot more* criminals in prison. Both

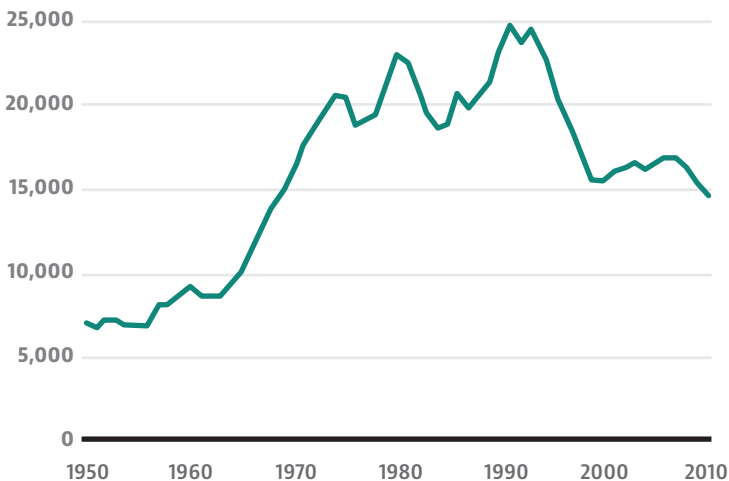
Homicide Victimization Rates, 1950-2010



NOTE: Data are based on annual estimates of homicide from previously published versions of *Crime in the United States*. Data from 1989 to 2008 reflect updated homicide estimates from *Crime in the United States, 2008*. Data for 2009 and 2010 reflect updated homicide estimates from *Crime in the United States, 2010*.

SOURCE: FBI, UNIFORM CRIME REPORTS, 1950-2010

Number of Homicide Victims, 1950-2010



NOTE: Data are based on annual estimates of homicide from previously published versions of *Crime in the United States*. Data from 1989 to 2008 reflect updated homicide estimates from *Crime in the United States, 2008*. Data for 2009 and 2010 reflect updated homicide estimates from *Crime in the United States, 2010*.

SOURCE: FBI, UNIFORM CRIME REPORTS, 1950-2010

approaches probably helped slow the rise in crime, and the crime wave eventually crested in the 1980s and 1990s and then began to recede. In a bitter irony, however, because it resulted in the incarceration of so many Black men, the emphasis on punishment had the effect of exacerbating the poverty cycle for Blacks.

The continuing burden that crime and mass incarceration have imposed on Blacks and the poor would be reason enough to search for an alternative approach to crime control, but recent developments make that search urgent. Levels of crime and disorder began to rise again in 2014, and after declining slightly in 2019, they rose again in 2020, this time precipitously. There are good reasons to believe that this new wave of crime will continue into the future unless something is done to prevent it, and just as with the previous crime wave, the consequences for Blacks and the poor will be dire.

Fortunately, there is an alternative to mass incarceration that is more effective, more efficient, and much more humane. With this alternative



Some communities are plagued by drug dealers who prey on the vulnerable



Gangs wreak havoc on neighborhoods, claiming territory and forcing residents to live in fear

approach — referred to in this report as *intensive community policing* — large numbers of well-trained, well-managed police officers are deployed to act as peacekeepers in high-crime, high-disorder neighborhoods.

Intensive community policing is not a new idea. It is, instead, a revival of an approach that was recommended by some policy analysts as early as 1982. It was not widely adopted at the time, partly because in 1982 no one knew whether the peacekeeping approach would work, and also because no one anticipated that the punitive approach would be as expensive and ultimately counterproductive as it turned out to be. The situation has changed, however, and there is now a large body of evidence showing that increased police presence deters crime and that the benefits that accrue from increased police presence exceed the costs by a significant measure.



PHOTO CREDIT: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The Watts riots took place in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles from August 11 to 16, 1965



PHOTO CREDIT: ASSOCIATED PRESS

A shoe store in the Watts area of Los Angeles, CA, collapses in flames as the city's wave of violence moves into its fourth day, August 14, 1965

“there is now a large body of evidence showing that increased police presence deters crime and that the benefits that accrue from increased police presence exceed the costs by a significant measure.”

In spite of that evidence, persuading policymakers to spend more on policing at a time when anti-police hysteria is at an all-time high and “defund the police” has become a popular slogan may be difficult. Given what is at stake, however, it is important to try. In the long run, intensive community policing ought to have a wide appeal for one very simple reason: *Compared with catching and punishing offenders after they commit crimes, it is clearly better for everyone if potential offenders can be deterred from committing crimes in the first place.*

The Late 20th Century Crime Wave Was a Disaster for Blacks and the Poor

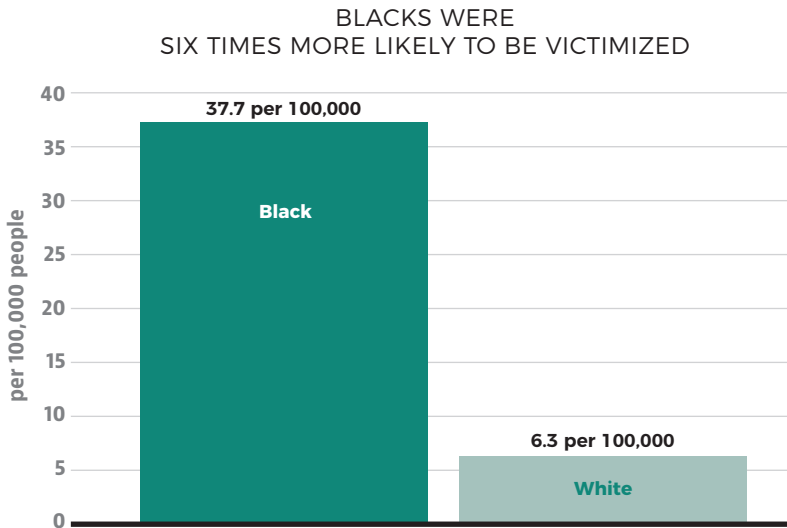


As noted in the Introduction, crime rates soared during the late 20th century crime wave. Between 1960 and 1980, the victimization rate for homicides more than doubled. The victimization rate for other violent crimes rose even faster, from 161 victimizations per 100,000 people in 1960, to the staggering level of 741 victimizations per 100,000 people in 1990.¹

As also noted in the Introduction, the burden of that additional crime fell especially heavily on Blacks and the poor. For example, of the 23,040 Americans murdered in 1980 when the homicide victimization rate reached its peak, 9,767 were Blacks.² Given their relative numbers within the population at the time, that means that the victimization rate for Blacks in 1980 was six times as high as it was for white Americans.³

For the victims themselves, and for their families, the direct costs of the crime wave were considerable and included not just whatever monetary value might be assigned to all the additional lost lives and property, but incalculable amounts of pain and suffering as well. Substantial though

Victimization Rate for Blacks in 1980 Compared to Whites (per 100,000)



SOURCES: FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION, CRIME IN THE UNITED STATES. UNIFORM CRIME REPORTS. WASHINGTON, DC: GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE, 1940-1993 AND UNITED STATES CENSUS BUREAU, [HTTPS://WWW.CENSUS.GOV/QUICKFACTS/FACT/TABLE/US/PST045219](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/us/pst045219).

they were, however, the direct costs of the crime wave were only part of the story. The crime wave imposed indirect costs on all the residents of high crime communities, and the breakdown in public order that went hand in hand with the rise in crime imposed indirect costs as well. As with the direct costs, the burden of all of these indirect costs fell most heavily on Blacks and the poor.

One major indirect cost of the rise in crime and disorder was the climate of fear that degraded the quality of life for the residents of high-crime, high-disorder neighborhoods. In his best-selling memoir, *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates described a childhood blighted by that kind of constant fear:

[T]he only people I knew were black, and all of them were powerfully, adamantly, and dangerously afraid. I had seen this fear all my young life. ... It was always right in front of me.⁴

I felt myself to be drowning in the news reports of murder. I was aware that these murders very often did not land upon the intended targets but fell upon great-aunts, PTA mothers, overtime uncles, and joyful children—fell upon them random and relentless, like great sheets of rain.⁵

The crews, the young men who'd transmuted their fear into rage, were the greatest danger. ... They would break your jaw, stomp your face, and shoot you down.⁶

[E]ach day, fully one third of my brain was concerned with who I was walking to school with, our precise number, the manner of our walk, the number of times I smiled, who or what I smiled at, who offered a pound and who did not. ... I think somehow I knew that that third of my brain should have been concerned with more beautiful things. I think I felt that something out there, some force, nameless and vast, had robbed me.⁷

Maintaining a constant state of vigilance, as Coates did as a boy, is one way of dealing with the presence of dangerous and disorderly people. Avoiding contact with such people by staying indoors is another option, one that is often chosen by older people. Both options impose costs on those who choose them. Coates was quite justified in feeling he had been robbed. He *had* been robbed, not just of his time and mental effort, but of the joy of childhood. Living in constant fear unquestionably does psychological harm to the residents of high-crime, high-disorder neighborhoods, and there is at least some evidence that it does physical harm as well.⁸

Heightened vigilance and staying indoors are not the only ways of dealing with crime and disorder. If one can afford to do it, one can simply move away — or stay away — from the neighborhoods in which the levels of crime and disorder are high. As the crime wave gathered momentum

in the early 1960s, and throughout the remainder of the 20th century, more and more middle-class individuals and families moved from high-crime inner-city neighborhoods to safer and more tranquil suburbs. Many businesses left as well. And because lenders and investors also steered clear of dangerous and disorderly neighborhoods, new families and new businesses failed to take the places of those who left.

The result was fewer jobs and higher rates of unemployment in high-crime neighborhoods. The high rate of unemployment, in turn, meant that fewer young people married and formed families and that more children were born into and grew up in single-parent, welfare-dependent households. Completing the pernicious cycle, the lack of jobs and the prevalence of single-parent households made crime and disorder even more prevalent, which drove even more people and businesses away.⁹ For the predominantly poor and Black residents who remained, the indirect costs of crime — the fear, the unemployment, the inability to form families, and the generally degraded quality of life — were higher than ever.

The Role of Crime In the Poverty Cycle



By Focusing on Punishment
Rather Than Deterrence, the
Response to the Crime Wave
Made Matters Worse for Blacks
and the Poor



In response to the crime wave, American governments at all levels began to allocate more money for crime control. While some of that increased spending was used to hire and deploy more police officers, most of it was used instead to construct and operate more prisons. It is not altogether clear why punishment was made such a high priority. The widespread belief that the leniency of soft-on-crime judges had caused the crime wave probably had something to do with it, as did a frightened and resentful populace's desire for retribution. The musings of an economic theorist may have also played a role.¹⁰ Regardless of the reason, the shift in emphasis was a marked departure from America's past practice, and it remains an anomaly in international terms.

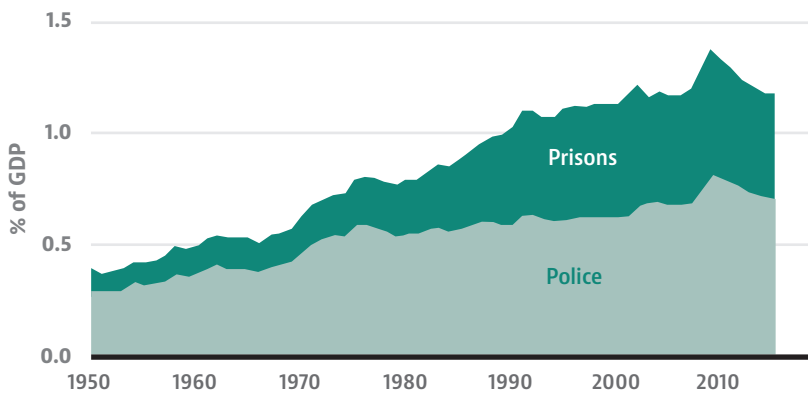
In a recent blog post, libertarian journalist and editor Daniel Bier documented the change in focus. As spending on crime control increased from about 0.8% of GDP in the 1950s to about 1.2% in the 2000s, Bier noted, there was "a relative shift of resources away from police and towards prisons."¹¹ Quantifying that shift, he wrote:

From 1950-1975, the ratio of spending on police vs. prisons stayed around 3 to 1 — that is, for every \$1 spent on prisons, the US spent \$3 on police. But as the US incarceration rate skyrocketed, the ratio plunged to a low of 1.17 to 1, before creeping back to 1.5 to 1 as prison populations leveled off. In 2015, the US spent just \$1.50 on police for every \$1 on prisons.

Bier also noted that, while European countries spend about the same percent of GDP on crime control as the United States, they allocate the money very differently:

Over the last decade (2007-2016), the US spent an average of 0.75% of GDP on police and 0.5% on prisons — a ratio of 1.5 to 1. The EU (as currently composed) spent an average of 1% on police and 0.2% on prisons — a ratio of 5 to 1.

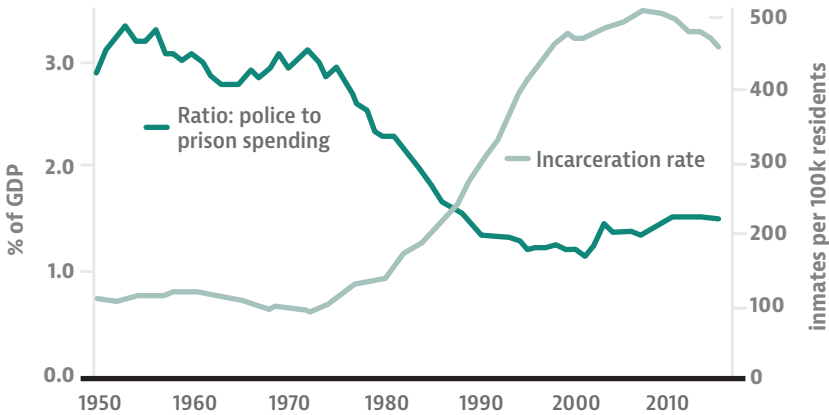
U.S. Police and Prison Spending (1950-2010)



SOURCE: USGOVERNMENTSPENDING.COM (BEA, CENSUS, OMB).

NOTE: THIS CHART ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN DANIEL BIER, "POLICE VS. PRISONS IN THE US AND EUROPE," THE SKEPTICAL LIBERTARIAN (BLOG), JANUARY 9, 2019, [HTTPS://BLOG.SKEPTICALLIBERTARIAN.COM/2019/01/09/CHARTS-POLICE-VS-PRISONS-IN-THE-US-AND-EUROPE](https://blog.skepticallibertarian.com/2019/01/09/charts-police-vs-prisons-in-the-us-and-europe).

U.S. Police vs. Prisons (1950-2010)



SOURCE: USGOVERNMENTSPENDING.COM (BEA, CENSUS, OMB), SOURCEBOOK OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE STATISTICS.

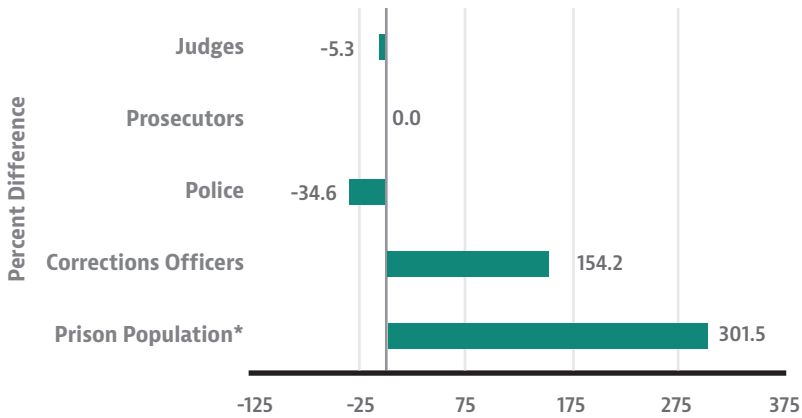
NOTE: THIS CHART ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN DANIEL BIER, "POLICE VS. PRISONS IN THE US AND EUROPE," THE SKEPTICAL LIBERTARIAN (BLOG), JANUARY 9, 2019, [HTTPS://BLOG.SKEPTICALLIBERTARIAN.COM/2019/01/09/CHARTS-POLICE-VS-PRISONS-IN-THE-US-AND-EUROPE](https://blog.skepticallibertarian.com/2019/01/09/charts-police-vs-prisons-in-the-us-and-europe).

While Bier didn't say so explicitly, it is worth noting the implication that Europeans actually spend a higher percentage of their GDP on policing than we do here in the U.S.

What's more, we don't just lag behind other countries in terms of police spending; we also lag in terms of police hiring and deployment. In 2016, the Obama administration released a report called "Economic Perspectives on Incarceration and the Criminal Justice System," which included the chart on the next page:

“ it is worth noting the implication that Europeans actually spend a higher percentage of their GDP on policing than we do here in the U.S.”

Percent Difference in U.S. Rate Relative to Average of the World



* WORLD AVERAGES ARE FOR OVER 200 COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES. ALL OUTCOMES ARE FROM 2007 EXCEPT THE PRISON POPULATION WHICH USES DATA FROM 2015. RATES ARE PER 100,000 RESIDENTS.

SOURCE: UN CRIME STATISTICS, WORLD PRISON POPULATION LIST.

NOTE: THIS CHART ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN "ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES ON INCARCERATION AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM," COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISORS REPORT (WASHINGTON, D.C.: THE WHITE HOUSE, APRIL 23, 2016), [HTTPS://OBAMAWHITEHOUSE.ARCHIVES.GOV/THE-PRESS-OFFICE/2016/04/23/CEA-REPORT-ECONOMIC-PERSPECTIVES INCARCERATION-AND-CRIMINAL-JUSTICE](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/04/23/cea-report-economic-perspectives-incarceration-and-criminal-justice).

Commenting on the chart, the report noted that during the relevant period the United States simultaneously had "the largest prison population in the world and ... employed over 30 percent fewer police officers per capita than other countries."¹²

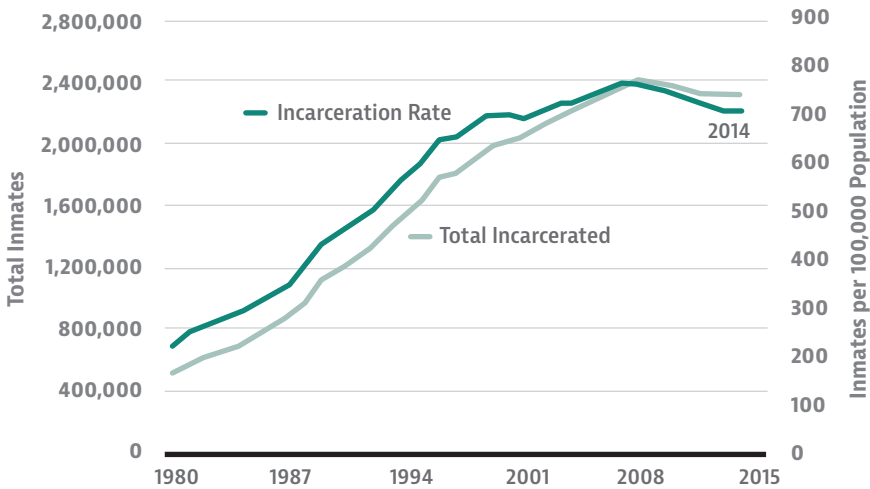
As that chart illustrates, the shift from policing to punishment resulted in an increase in the number of incarcerated Americans that was extraordinary, not just in comparison with other countries, but in comparison with past practice in the United States itself.

While the extent to which mass incarceration helped bring about the eventual decline in crime rates is contested, it almost certainly had at least a modest deterrent effect.¹³ The costs of achieving that modest level of deterrence, however, were extremely high. It required an enormous increase in public funding, as the preceding charts imply, and it added

considerably to the woes of the poor and Black communities that were already carrying so much of the burden of the crime wave.

Because most of the communities at the epicenter of the crime explosion were poor and Black, a disproportionate number of the criminals who were arrested and incarcerated were poor and Black as well. Newly enacted sentencing laws ensured that they spent extended periods behind bars, during which time, far from being rehabilitated, they tended to be drawn deeper into the criminal ethos. Regardless of whether prison turned out to be a “school for crime,” all of them were left with criminal records that made them more or less unemployable. As a result, the mass incarceration caused by the punitive approach to crime control tended to raise the level of both crime and unemployment in Black and poor communities, which added momentum to the poverty cycle described earlier.¹⁴

Incarceration, 1980-2014



SOURCE: BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS, CEA CALCULATIONS.

NOTE: THIS CHART ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN “ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES ON INCARCERATION AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM,” COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISORS REPORT (WASHINGTON, D.C.: THE WHITE HOUSE, APRIL 23, 2016). [HTTPS://OBAMAWHITEHOUSE.ARCHIVES.GOV/THE-PRESS-OFFICE/2016/04/23/CEA-REPORT-ECONOMIC-PERSPECTIVES INCARCERATION-AND-CRIMINAL-JUSTICE](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/04/23/cea-report-economic-perspectives-incarceration-and-criminal-justice).

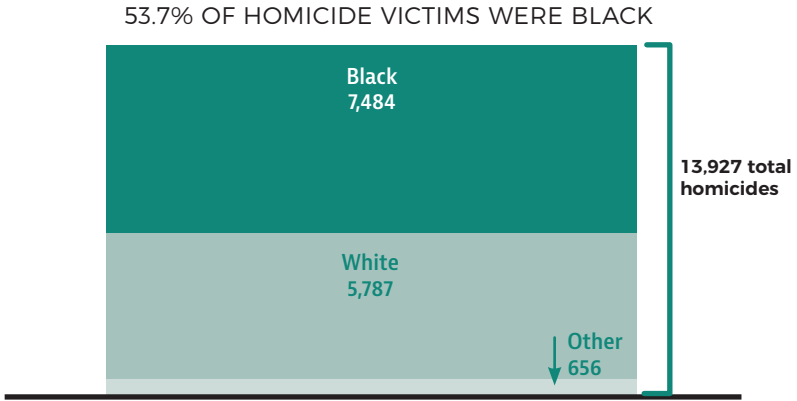
Without Moving Quickly to
Bring the New Crime Wave Under
Control, It Too Will Be a Disaster
for Blacks and the Poor



Crime began to decline rapidly in the early 1990s, but it continued to be a major problem for Blacks and the poor. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, almost 14,000 Americans were murdered in 2019, and more than half of those homicide victims were Black.¹⁵ That means that in 2019, Black Americans were more than seven times as likely to be murdered as white Americans, which is an even higher disparity than in 1980 when the homicide victimization rate was at its peak.¹⁶

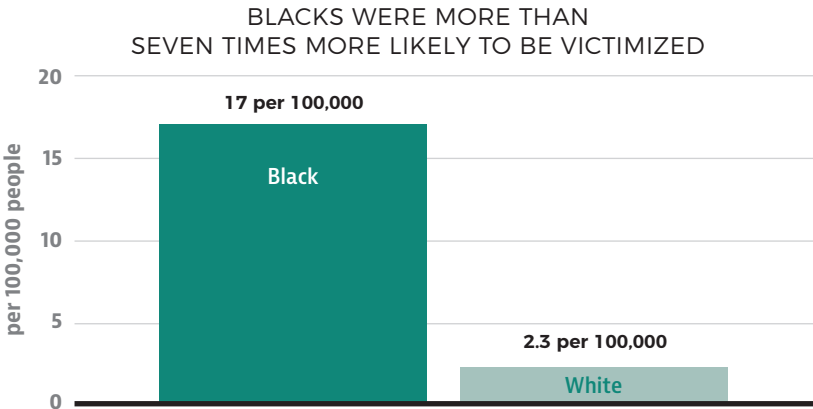
**"According to the
Federal Bureau of
Investigation, almost
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more than half of those
homicide victims were
Black."**

Homicide Victims In 2019, by Race



SOURCE: [HTTPS://UCR.FBI.GOV/CRIME-IN-THE-U.S/2019/CRIME-IN-THE-U.S.-2019/TABLES/EXPANDED-HOMICIDE-DATA-TABLE-1.XLS](https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/tables/expanded-homicide-data-table-1.xls)

Black Victimization Rate Compared To White Victimization Rate In 2019



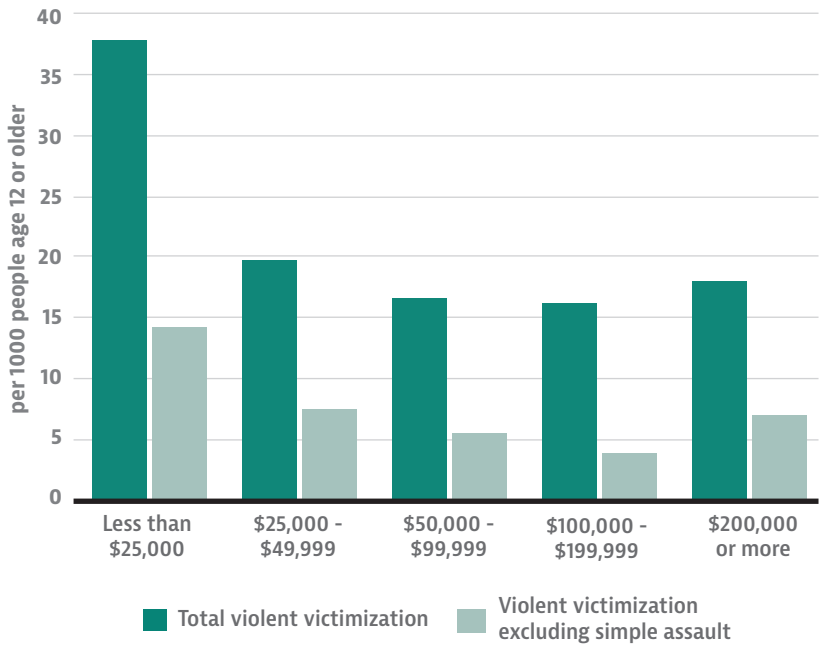
SOURCES: [HTTPS://UCR.FBI.GOV/CRIME-IN-THE-U.S/2019/CRIME-IN-THE-U.S.-2019/TABLES/EXPANDED-HOMICIDE-DATA-TABLE-1.XLS](https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/tables/expanded-homicide-data-table-1.xls); [HTTPS://WWW.CENSUS.GOV/QUICKFACTS/FACT/TABLE/US#](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/us#)

According to the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics, in that same year almost 6 million Americans were the victims of violent crimes other than homicide, and the residents of almost 13 million households were the victims of property crime.¹⁷ Of those millions of victims, people whose household income was less than \$25,000 were more than twice as likely to be victims of violent crime as people who lived in more prosperous households.¹⁸

Because crime and other forms of disorder continued to be so much higher in Black and poor communities, investment continued to lag, jobs continued to be scarce, and the cycle of crime and poverty continued to spin.

The ongoing costs that crime and disorder continued to inflict on Blacks and the poor would have been reason enough to make crime

Comparing 2019 Crime Victimization Rates by Income Level



SOURCE: [HTTPS://WWW.BJS.GOV/CONTENT/PUB/PDF/CV19.PDF](https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv19.pdf), P. 11

"In the year since Floyd's death, homicide has spiked in cities all over the country, and thousands of people, most of them Black, have lost their lives as a result."

deterrence a national priority, but there's another reason that is even more pressing. Violent anti-police protests following the death of George Floyd in 2020 constituted a massive breakdown in public order in themselves, and the cost of the crimes committed during those protests include dozens

of lost lives and billions of dollars' worth of property stolen or destroyed.¹⁹

Bad as that was, however, what followed was worse. In the year since Floyd's death, homicide has spiked in cities all over the country, and thousands of people, most of them Black, have lost their lives as a result.²⁰

Even if this sudden spike in crime were to end tomorrow, additional indirect costs are almost inevitable. Many of the businesses that were vandalized and looted during the protests either have left or will leave. Many individuals and families that can afford to relocate to safer neighborhoods have left or will leave, too. And just as happened during the late 20th century crime wave, those who remain in the affected neighborhoods will find themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty from which there is no escape.

What if the current crime spike does not end tomorrow? Then, just as happened during the late 20th century crime wave, all of the costs — both the direct costs to the victims and their families, and the indirect costs to everyone who lives in high-crime, high-disorder communities — will get worse in the years to come. Sadly, what happened in the cities that experienced anti-police riots prior to 2020 suggests that the crime spike will not end tomorrow. Unless something is done quickly to bring it under control, the level of crime will probably remain high for quite some time.

In their June 2020 study published by the National Bureau of Economic Research, "Policing the Police: The Impact of 'Pattern-or-Practice'

Investigations on Crime,” Harvard University economists Tanaya Devi and Roland G. Fryer Jr. compared crime levels in 27 cities before and after investigations of police misconduct. In 22 of those cities, the complaints that led to the investigations did not receive much national media attention. Investigations in Baltimore, Chicago, Cincinnati, Riverside, CA, and Ferguson, MO, however, were triggered by what the authors called “viral” incidents, i.e., incidents in which the use of deadly force against a Black civilian, “caught national media attention and the cities witnessed protests and riots soon after.”²¹

Devi and Fryer found that the 22 investigations that were not preceded by viral incidents led to small reductions in homicide and total crime. “In stark contrast,” they wrote:

...all investigations that were preceded by “viral” incidents of deadly force have led to a large and statistically significant increase in homicides and total crime. We estimate that these investigations caused almost 900 excess homicides and almost 34,000 excess felonies. The leading hypothesis for why these investigations increase homicides and total crime is an abrupt change in the quantity of policing activity. In Chicago, the number of police-civilian interactions decreased by almost 90% in the month after the investigation was announced. In Riverside CA, interactions decreased 54%. In St. Louis, self-initiated police activities declined by 46%.²²

Think about that for a moment: 900 excess homicides and 34,000 excess felonies in just five cities. Those are huge numbers, but large as they are, they probably do not tell the whole story. Additional research using different methods suggests a full accounting of crime increases following anti-police protests would yield numbers that are even higher.

In “Public Scrutiny and Police Effort: Evidence from Arrests and Crime After High-Profile Police Killings,” Deepak Premkumar studied policing effort in 2,740 police departments, 52 of which experienced at least one high-profile officer-involved fatality between 2005–2016.²³ In the 52

"Any way one looks at those findings, it seems clear that anti-police protests led to thousands of excess homicides between 2005 and 2019."

departments that experienced high-profile officer-involved fatalities, Premkumar found that reduced police effort led to "a significant rise of 10–17% in murders and robberies" as well as "smaller increases in property crime, driven by theft," and in the departments that experienced the highest profile deaths — "ones

that generate at least 5,000 articles of coverage" — Premkumar found "increases of 27% in murder, 11% in aggravated assault, and 12% in burglary."²⁴ With casual academic understatement, Premkumar concludes by observing, "high-profile, officer-involved fatalities impose tremendous crime costs on the involved jurisdictions."²⁵

In May of this year, Travis Campbell published a study of more than 1,600 Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests that took place between 2014 and 2019.²⁶ He found that the use of lethal force by police fell by 15.8% following BLM protests, and that "a decrease in encounters [due to reduced police effort] drove the lethal force reduction rather than a change in use-of-force propensity."²⁷ He also found that "civilian homicides increased by 10% following protests," also due to reduced police effort.²⁸ Campbell did not provide an estimate of the number of excess homicides caused by BLM protests, but as Jerusalem Demsas observed in a discussion of Campbell's findings at Vox, "That means from 2014 to 2019, there were somewhere between 1,000 and 6,000 more homicides than would have been expected if places with protests were on the same trend as places that did not have protests."²⁹

Any way one looks at those findings, it seems clear that anti-police protests led to thousands of excess homicides between 2005 and 2019. Moreover, while the authors of those studies didn't provide any details about the victims, given the demographic makeup of the cities themselves and differential crime rates in general, we can be quite sure that

those victims were disproportionately Black and poor. Nor is the direct suffering of those victims and their families the whole story. Following the pattern described previously, those excess homicides and other crimes coming on top of the often violent protests that preceded them have undoubtedly harmed *all* of those cities' residents by depressing property values and discouraging investment and job creation, and there can be little doubt that the burden of those harms fell most heavily on Blacks and the poor.

Hundreds of violent anti-police protests took place last year.³⁰ Based on those three studies, one might have predicted that those protests would make both crime and the indirect harm it causes worse in the short run, and that is exactly what has happened.³¹ If lawmakers want to ensure that the recent protests don't make crime and the indirect harm it causes worse in the long run as well, they need to do something quickly to bring crime under control and restore public order. As explained previously, reviving the punitive approach employed in the '80s and '90s would be a mistake. Fortunately, as the shrewder policy analysts have been saying for almost 40 years, there's an alternative approach that is better in every way.

"If lawmakers want to ensure that the recent protests don't make crime and the indirect harm it causes worse in the long run as well, they need to do something quickly to bring crime under control and restore public order."

“Broken Windows Policing”: Good Policy, Bad Name



In 1982 — just as America’s alarming late 20th century crime wave was approaching its crest — George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson published an article in *The Atlantic* that raised concerns about the way criminologists and police administrators were responding to the crisis:

From the earliest days of the nation, the police function was seen primarily as that of a night watchman: to maintain order against the chief threats to order—fire, wild animals, and disreputable behavior. ... [A]s the crime wave that began in the early 1960s continued without abatement throughout the decade and into the 1970s, attention shifted to the role of the police as crime-fighters. Studies of police behavior ceased, by and large, to be accounts of the order-maintenance function and became, instead, efforts to propose and test ways whereby the police could solve more crimes, make more arrests, and gather better evidence. ... [T]he link between order-maintenance and crime-prevention, so obvious to earlier generations, was forgotten.³²

"Following the broken-windows metaphor to its logical conclusion, many readers assumed Kelling and Wilson were advocating a zero-tolerance policy towards minor public order offences such as panhandling."

Kelling and Wilson argued that the shift from order-maintenance to crime-fighting had gone too far, and they advocated a return to policies that put less emphasis on the police's role in catching and punishing criminals and more emphasis on its role in maintaining order and keeping the peace.

Unfortunately, the title of the article, "Broken Windows," and the metaphor upon which it was based, had the effect of

misleading readers about what Kelling and Wilson were actually proposing. Given that the article included passages such as the following, readers can hardly be blamed:

[I]f a window in a building is broken and is left unrepaired, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken. ... Untended property becomes fair game for people out for fun or plunder and even for people who ordinarily would not dream of doing such things and who probably consider themselves law-abiding. ... We suggest that "untended" behavior also leads to the breakdown of community controls. ... [S]erious street crime flourishes in areas in which disorderly behavior goes unchecked. The unchecked panhandler is, in effect, the first broken window. Muggers and robbers, whether opportunistic or professional, believe they reduce their chances of being caught or even identified if they operate on streets where potential victims are already intimidated by prevailing conditions.³³

Following the broken-windows metaphor to its logical conclusion, many readers assumed Kelling and Wilson were advocating a zero-tolerance

policy towards minor public order offences such as panhandling. That, however, was an overly literal interpretation. What Kelling and Wilson were actually advocating is what has come to be known as “community policing”; i.e., an approach that emphasizes the police’s role in working with local communities to maintain public order in ways that are both feasible and effective given each community’s specific circumstances. Not only does such an approach not require zero tolerance, the opposite is closer to the truth. As Kelling and Wilson said, “The essence of the police role in maintaining order is to reinforce the informal control mechanisms of the community itself.”³⁴

"As Kelling and Wilson said, “The essence of the police role in maintaining order is to reinforce the informal control mechanisms of the community itself.”"



PHOTO CREDIT: KINDEL MEDIA

The essence of the police role in maintaining order is to reinforce the informal control mechanism of the community itself

The broken-windows metaphor and passages like the one quoted on the previous page also had the unfortunate effect of focusing attention on the authors' unsupported claim that a breakdown in public order can actually *cause* an uptick in serious crime. A number of scholars pointed out that there was not much empirical support for that claim, and some have even raised doubts about whether the purported causal relationship even exists.³⁵

It would be rather surprising if unchecked public disorder did nothing whatsoever to encourage more serious crime, but as far as the article's central claims are concerned, it hardly matters. Even if it should turn out that Keller and Wilson were completely wrong about the causal relationship between public disorder and crime, they were almost certainly right about several other things that are much more important.

As we saw earlier in this paper, they were right that neighborhoods that suffer from high levels of public disorder usually suffer from high levels of crime as well, and they were right that, regardless of whether the one causes the other, public disorder and crime harm everyone who lives in those neighborhoods. As we saw in an earlier section, they were right that there had been a major shift in the focus of public safety from deterrence to punishment, and they were right that that shift had gone too far and was itself causing problems. And, as we will see in the next section, they were right that, compared with using the police primarily to catch and punish criminals, using them primarily to maintain order and keep the peace is a more effective, efficient, and humane approach to crime control.

More Cops/Less Crime



On October 7, 1969, the Montreal Police called a wildcat strike. Next morning, the *Montreal Gazette* described the result:

Hundreds of looters swept through downtown Montreal ... as the city suffered one of the worst outbreaks of lawlessness in its history. Hotels, banks, stores and restaurants ... had their windows smashed by rock-tossing youths. Thousands of spectators looked on as looters casually picked goods out of store-front windows.”³⁶

Canadians were horrified by the breakdown in public order that followed the withdrawal of the Montreal police, but they probably weren't particularly surprised. That police presence helps maintain public order and deters crime, and that an announced withdrawal of police presence might lead to an increase in crime and disorder: these are matters of common sense for most people. Common sense can be wrong, of course. Psychological and sociological phenomena are complex and poorly understood, and our intuitions can sometimes lead us astray



PHOTO CREDIT: FLAVIO GASPERINI, UNSPLASH

Violence erupted during the 1969 Montreal riot

PHOTO CREDIT: DONOVAN VALDIVIA, UNSPLASH

Looting and vandalism was common during the 1969 Montreal riot

about such things. Not in this case, however. A large and growing body of academic literature corroborates the commonsensical view of the matter: police presence helps maintain public order and deters crime.³⁷

The Montreal police strike was as close as we're likely to come to a controlled experiment testing the "more cops/less crime" hypothesis, and for obvious reasons it's not likely to be repeated. Nevertheless, researchers have been able to identify other natural experiments in which police presence has varied either

from one region to another or over time, and while the outcomes in such cases are not as clear and dramatic as what happened in Montreal, they have the advantage of providing much larger sample sizes. The vast majority of these studies have found that increased police presence deters crime.

A challenge facing any attempt to determine the causal relationship between police presence and crime is the simultaneity problem. Simply stated, when crime rates rise, politicians and bureaucrats respond by hiring more police officers. As a result, a casual analysis of the relationship between police presence and crime is likely to find a strong positive correlation between expanded police presence and crime, and that correlation makes it hard to determine the actual causal relationship between the two. In 2002, economist Steven D. Levitt published a paper in which he summarized four recent attempts at overcoming the simultaneity problem, including two of his own:

Estimating the causal impact of police and crime is a difficult task. As such, no one study to date provides definitive proof of the magnitude of that effect. Nonetheless, it is encouraging that four different approaches ... have all obtained point estimates in the range of 0.30–0.70. The similarity in the results

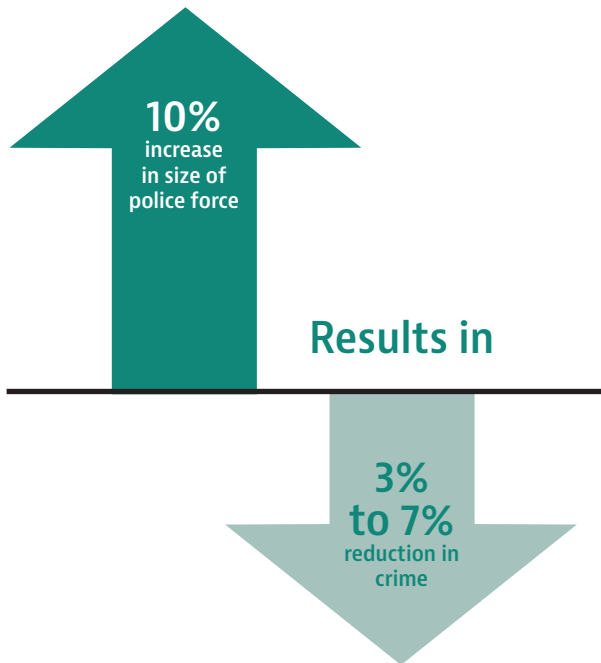
"A large and growing body of academic literature corroborates the commonsensical view of the matter: police presence helps maintain public order and deters crime."

*of these four studies is even more remarkable given the large previous literature that uniformly failed to find any evidence that police reduce crime—a result at odds with both the beliefs and the behavior of policymakers on the issue.*³⁸

When Levitt says the studies all obtained point estimates in the range of 0.30–0.70, he is talking about what economists call “elasticity”; i.e., the extent to which one economic variable changes in response to a change in another variable. An elasticity in that range means a 10% increase in the size of a police force should result in a 3% to 7% reduction in crime.

That estimate of the extent to which crime declines as police presence increases has held up remarkably well.

Using changes in police presence related to terror alert levels in



Washington, D.C., in 2006, Jonathan Klick and Alex Tabarrok published new findings about the effect of police presence on crime in the *Journal of Law and Economics*. They found that “an increase in police presence of about 50 percent leads to a statistically and economically significant decrease in the level of crime on the order of 15 percent, or an elasticity of 0.30.”³⁹ They also found that, “Most of the decrease in crime comes from decreases in the street crimes of auto theft and theft from automobiles, where we estimate an elasticity of police on crime of 0.86.”⁴⁰

In 2015 Klick, along with John M. MacDonald and Ben Grunwald, published the results of another study that reached very similar conclusions using a different methodology. They compared neighborhoods that benefitted from regular patrols by the University of Pennsylvania Police Department with similar neighborhoods that did not receive this additional level of police presence and found that “UPPD activity is associated with a 60% ... reduction in crime.” According to their calculations, that reduction represented an elasticity of 0.33 for aggregate crime and an elasticity of 0.70 for violent crime.⁴¹

Summarizing a variety of studies, including the Klick and Tabarrok study described above, the 2016 Obama administration report mentioned in a previous section of this paper stated:

*Economic research has consistently shown that police reduce crime in communities, and most estimates show that investments in police reduce crime more effectively than either increasing incarceration or sentence severity. ... This research shows that police reduce crime on average, and estimates of the impact of a 10 percent increase in police hiring lead to a crime decrease of approximately 3 to 10 percent, depending on the study and type of crime [and] that larger police forces do not reduce crime through simply arresting more people and increasing incapacitation, instead, investments in police are likely to make communities safer through deterring crime.*⁴²

The Devi and Fryer study referred to earlier, released in 2020, ought to be included in this survey because, while it did not set out to look at the relationship between police presence and crime, its findings tend to corroborate the more cops/less crime theory by showing that, when police respond to “viral incidents” by becoming less active in the relevant community, crime levels rise.⁴³

In another 2020 report, Aaron Chalfin, Benjamin Hansen, Emily K. Weisburst, and Morgan C. Williams, Jr., reported the results of another study of the relationship between police presence and crime. Unlike previous studies, this one disaggregated its results by race:

*We find that expanding police personnel leads to reductions in serious crime. With respect to homicide, we find that every 10-17 officers hired abate one new homicide per year. In per capita terms the effects are approximately twice as large for Black victims. In short, larger police forces save lives and the lives saved are disproportionately Black lives.*⁴⁴

What Does Intensive Community Policing Entail?



If, as the evidence appears to show, police presence deters crime, the solution to the rapidly worsening problem of crime may appear easy: simply hire more police officers and deploy them in a way that ensures they are a highly visible presence in high-crime neighborhoods. In reality, however, community policing is fraught with challenges, and because of those challenges, a successful program of intensive community policing will require not just more police officers, but police officers who are well-trained, well-managed, and committed to high professional standards.

As Kelling and Wilson noted almost 40 years ago, “The essence of the police role in maintaining order is to reinforce the informal control mechanisms of the community itself.”⁴⁵ Clearly, that cannot be done without the support and approval of the law-abiding members of the community. Winning and keeping community support has always been a challenge, especially when it comes to Black communities, and the wave of anti-police outrage that has swept the country since the death of George Floyd has made it very challenging indeed.



PHOTO CREDIT: ASSOCIATED PRESS

Protests against police misconduct have become commonplace

One longstanding reason why relations between Blacks and the police have been strained arose as a natural consequence of the fact that the late 20th century crime wave hit Black communities particularly hard. Because crime rates were so high in those communities, even the residents who had not committed crimes were likely to have family members and friends who had. When forced to choose between the police on the one hand and friends and family on the other, many naturally sided with the latter.

Divided loyalties are not the only source of friction, however. As noted earlier in this paper, the punitive approach to crime control adopted in response to the late 20th century crime wave imposed hugely disproportionate social costs on Blacks. It was perfectly reasonable for them to resent having to bear that burden, and it was reasonable for them to resent other changes in the criminal justice system as well.

Among the most consequential of those other changes was the ramping up of the so-called “war on drugs,” a campaign that began in the 1970s and expanded throughout the rest of last century and into this

one. Fighting the drug war necessitated the extensive use of practices like entrapment, which sometimes led to unjust prosecutions, and even worse, to no-knock raids, which often led to shootouts and deaths. The drug war and other changes that took place around the same time, including the seemingly endless proliferation of newly created and poorly defined crimes, the revival of civil asset forfeiture, and the practice of using fines and fees as a source of revenue, tended to pervert the relationship between the police and the public by turning the police into predators and the public into their prey.⁴⁶

For all those reasons — and no doubt many others as well — persuading Blacks to accept an expanded police presence in their communities could be hard. Reforms aimed at getting rid of as many of these sources of resentment as possible could help. So could many other reforms that have been proposed in recent years, including policy changes regarding such things as the use of force, stops and searches, and diversion, and more fundamental changes such as unbundling, banning public-sector unions, and modifying or eliminating the doctrine of qualified immunity.

Winning and maintaining community support is just one of many challenges a successful program of intensive community policing will have to overcome.⁴⁷ The point is, a successful program of intensive community policing entails more than simply deploying large numbers of police officers in high-crime, high-disorder neighborhoods. Those officers will face daunting challenges. A successful program, therefore, will have to employ officers who are willing and able to adhere to high standards of professionalism, and it will have to provide them with state-of-the-art training, direction, and support. All of those things are possible, but accomplishing them will not be easy, nor will it be cheap.

There are many reasons why intensive community policing will be expensive. To begin with, because it has driven a significant number of officers out of the profession and discouraged many potential recruits from applying, the anti-police hysteria that has gripped the country since the death of Floyd has probably made it impossible to maintain *current* police levels without significant pay increases. To *expand* the number of

police officers will likely require raising pay scales even more. Attracting recruits who can succeed in the daunting task of maintaining public order in communities in which anti-police sentiments are running even higher than usual will likely require raising pay scales further still, and providing them with the training and support they will need will also add to the cost.

If the more cops/less crime thesis is correct, much of the added cost will eventually be offset by savings in other areas, including the costs of arrests, prosecutions, and incarceration, and they will be more than offset by the psychological and social benefits to those who would otherwise have been crime victims and to those who will enjoy more and better economic opportunities. In his research paper "When Brute Force Fails: Strategic Thinking for Crime Control," Mark A.R. Kleiman calculated that a \$5 billion investment in additional police officers would generate about \$25 billion in benefits.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the initial costs will be significant, and policymakers and the public will have to be convinced that those costs are worth paying.

Persuading policymakers to spend more on policing at a time when anti-police hysteria is at an all-time high and 'defund the police' has become a popular slogan may be difficult.

Despite the Timing, Intensive
Community Policing Should
Have Wide Appeal



The study by Devi and Fryer referred to in two previous sections of this paper found that violent protests following nationally publicized incidents involving the death of civilians at the hands of the police led to large and sustained increases in homicides and other felonies in the cities in which the protests occurred.⁴⁹ Anyone familiar with that study could have predicted that the hundreds of violent protests that occurred in cities all over the country following the death of George Floyd would lead to a nationwide spike in homicides and other felonies. Indeed, the author of this report made precisely that prediction within a few weeks of Floyd's death.⁵⁰ As noted earlier, that national spike in violent crime makes the implementation of an intensive community policing program extremely urgent.

Ironically, the widespread sense of outrage that fueled those violent protests and led to the spike in violent crime is a substantial barrier to the implementation of such a program. Indeed, after a year during which anti-police sentiment was at an all-time high and calls to "defund the

police” were common, convincing politicians and the public to pay for a program of intense community policing might appear to be futile. Nevertheless, there are several reasons to be hopeful.

One reason for optimism is the fact that support for higher levels of police spending had actually been growing in the years prior to Floyd’s death. An early example is an opinion piece called “Law and Disorder” that was published by the *Weekly Standard* in 2009. The author, Harvard Law Professor William J. Stuntz, advocated using federal funds to expand local police forces. Stuntz noted that:

the tripling of America’s imprisonment rate in the 1970s and 1980s produced no drop in urban crime. On the contrary, in high-crime cities, the level of criminal violence rose during those two decades. True, crime fell in the 1990s—but as it did so, the rate of increase in the prison population slowed. The notion that increased criminal punishment accounts for the bulk of the crime drop is implausible: If so, why didn’t crime fall more, and sooner? The murder rate in the United States is about the same as in 1966; the imprisonment rate is almost five times the rate in 1966. Apparently, it takes five times as much punishment to achieve the deterrent effect prison terms had more than 40 years ago. ...

[A] different approach has already succeeded. Between 1989 and 1999, the number of urban police officers per unit of population rose 17 percent. Arrests fell by a little more than 20 percent; arrests of black suspects fell by one-third. Crime fell too, and it fell most in the jurisdictions that hired the most cops. In 41 pairs of neighboring states, one jurisdiction increased its policing rate more and its punishment rate less than its neighbor during the 1990s. In the higher-policing, lower-punishment states, violent crime fell by an average of 24 percent. In the lower-policing, higher-punishment group, the average crime drop was only 9 percent. Higher-policing, lower-punishment states outperformed their more punitive, less well-policed neighbors

in all parts of the country. The city that saw the nation's largest crime drop—New York—increased the size of its police force the most. The state that includes that city increased its prison population the least.⁵¹

Similar arguments were advanced by Inimai M. Chettiar in “More Police, Managed More Effectively, Really Can Reduce Crime,” which appeared in *The Atlantic* in 2015;⁵² Matthew Yglesias in “The case for hiring more police officers,” which appeared at Vox in 2019;⁵³ and Megan McArdle in “If we want better policing, we’re going to have to spend more, not less,” which appeared in the *Washington Post* in 2020.⁵⁴ The death of Floyd may have temporarily made such arguments unwelcome, but it did not change the fact that the arguments themselves were sound. The passage of time will eventually make it possible for people to consider those arguments objectively and appreciate their merits.

McArdle’s piece appeared in June of last year, less than a month after Floyd was killed. By that time anti-police protests were taking place on a daily basis all over the country. Many of those protesters were calling for the police to be “defunded,” and at that time many left-leaning policy-makers and many Democratic politicians were inclined to endorse that idea. Those policy advocates and politicians began to distance themselves from it, however, once it became clear that the slogan “defund the police” tended to alienate potential Democratic voters.⁵⁵

Moreover, now that the political implications of the crime spike that followed last year’s violent protests are becoming increasingly clear, many left-leaning policy advocates and politicians are beginning to regret their previous anti-police rhetoric and looking instead for a way to reassure voters that they will do something to reduce the rate of violent crime and restore public order. Because it represents an alternative to the punitive approach that has deservedly fallen out of favor, intensive community policing should be ideal for the purpose.

Yet another reason for optimism is the fact that a large, politically and ideologically diverse group of criminal justice reformers has been working

"By discouraging the kind of conduct that leads to stops, searches, arrests, and criminal charges, intensive community policing will reduce both the number of people who come into contact with the justice system in the first place and the number of people who are ultimately convicted."

on ways to improve police performance and prevent police misconduct for many years. They were working on the problem long before Floyd's death turned police misconduct into a national obsession, and they will still be working on it long after popular attention has moved on to other things. Many of them are active supporters of community policing in one form or another, and some have been strong supporters of the kind of intensive community policing advocated in this report. Also, many of the

criminal justice reformers who are focused on other aspects of the criminal justice system should be happy to endorse such a program because it nicely complements what they are trying to do.

Consider, for example, the reformers aiming to reduce the negative collateral effects of involvement with the criminal justice system, not just on actual offenders, but on those who are merely suspected of having committed an offense. Consider as well the reformers working to help convicted offenders become law-abiding, self-supporting members of the community. All of those are laudable projects, and the more successful these reformers are, the better off all of us will be.

Nevertheless, the old saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," clearly applies in the criminal justice context. By discouraging the kind of conduct that leads to stops, searches, arrests, and criminal charges, intensive community policing will reduce both the number of people who come into contact with the justice system in the first place *and* the number of people who are ultimately convicted. Those

reductions will, in turn, make the goals of all these criminal justice reformers easier to achieve.

The final reason for optimism is the simple fact that, once people understand what's at stake, the emotional appeal of intensive community policing is powerful — and, somewhat ironically, the fact that so many Americans have embraced the spirit of the “Black lives matter” slogan should help. All that would seem to be required is for people to understand three things: intensive community policing will save lives; most of the lives saved will be *Black* lives; and many of the lives saved will be the lives of Black children.

As previously noted, in 2019 Blacks were more than seven times as likely to be murdered as white Americans. That huge disparity has remained fairly constant over a long period of time. Sadly, the disparity in homicide rates for children has been almost as bad. According a Bureau of Justice Statistics analysis of homicides between 1980 and 2008, Black children under the age of five were three to four times as likely to be murdered as white children of the same age throughout the entire period.⁵⁶ Like other homicide victims, most juvenile homicide victims are killed by people within their circle of family and acquaintances. Some, however, are killed by complete strangers. And far too many of them die as a result of street violence that had nothing to do with them at all.

Libertarian activist Leonydus Johnson has been maintaining an online database, including photographs, of children who have lost their lives to street violence.⁵⁷ The database currently includes 78 children who were

"All that would seem to be required is for people to understand three things: intensive community policing will save lives; most of the lives saved will be *Black* lives; and many of the lives saved will be the lives of Black children."

killed in 2020 and 32 more who have been killed as of this writing in 2021. Johnson adds to the database as information becomes available.

Surely no one who looks at those innocent faces — almost all of them Black — can doubt: that these young lives mattered very much indeed. If, as this report has argued, intensive community policing can slow the rate at which Johnson's database is growing, it would be unconscionable not to try it.

Conclusion



The death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, sparked an extraordinary wave of anti-police protests and elicited many proposals for improving America's criminal justice system. Some of those proposals, such as banning public employee unions, ending or reforming qualified immunity, and reducing our currently absurd levels of overcriminalization, are good ideas that ought to be pursued. The proposal to "defund the police," however, is unwise and ought to be taken off the table.

Far from solving problems like police misconduct and overincarceration, reductions in police spending will make those problems worse and will, moreover, inflict additional harm on the communities that have already been harmed the most by the turmoil that followed Floyd's death. Deploying more active-duty police officers in high-crime, high-disorder communities, on the other hand, will result in fewer crimes. Fewer crimes will mean fewer arrests and convictions. And fewer arrests and convictions will mean lower levels of incarceration.

Similarly, higher pay scales for police will attract a larger and better-qualified pool of applicants to police programs. A larger and better-qualified pool of applicants will reduce the incentive for police programs to keep or rehire bad actors and improve the overall level of professionalism. And police officers who maintain higher professional standards will be less likely to misbehave.

Finally, lower crime rates and more professional policing will make it easier to rebuild the neighborhoods that have suffered the most from the recent unrest.

If we want to save Black lives and help poor people escape from poverty, and if we want to ensure that the current spike in violent crime does not spiral out of control, we must stop vilifying the police and calling for cuts in police funding. These things make matters worse for everyone, especially Blacks and the poor. Instead, we should:

- ▶ Hire more police officers
- ▶ Pay them higher salaries
- ▶ Provide them with state-of-the-art training and support
- ▶ Deploy them as “peacekeepers” in communities that suffer high levels of crime and disorder

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About the Author



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Our History

The John Locke Foundation was created in 1990 as an independent, nonprofit think tank that would work “for truth, for freedom, for the future of North Carolina.” The Foundation is named for John Locke (1632-1704), an English philosopher whose writings inspired Thomas Jefferson and the other Founders. The John Locke Foundation is a 501(c)(3) research institute and is funded by thousands of individuals, foundations and corporations. The Foundation does not accept government funds or contributions to influence its work or the outcomes of its research.

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The John Locke Foundation envisions a North Carolina of responsible citizens, strong families, and successful communities committed to individual liberty and limited, constitutional government.

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The John Locke Foundation employs research, journalism, and outreach programs to transform government through competition, innovation, personal freedom, and personal responsibility. Locke seeks a better balance between the public sector and private institutions of family, faith, community, and enterprise.



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