

The Role of Police in a Racist-Capitalist Society. Defunding and Dismantling the US Police Being Fiercely Debated

Amid the national unrest law-enforcement has been documented committing further acts of misconduct and brutality

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Since the videotaped violent murder of African American George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, there has been an upsurge in antiracist and anti-police brutality demonstrations and rebellions spanning across the United States.

When Darnella Frazier, the 17-year-old woman who captured this horrendous police action on her cellphone and later posting it to social media, the debate around the role and status of police forces came to fore.

Floyd's killing represented a long legacy of systematic racist violence directed towards African Americans by law-enforcement agents and vigilantes. These deaths at the hands of police, racist organizations and individuals are often allowed to take place without any legal consequences for the perpetrators.

Other high profile cases involving the shooting deaths of Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia and Breonna Taylor in Louisville, served to heighten the level of social tensions leading to a myriad of expressions which oppose the historic treatment of African Americans. One issue which has created much concern from the perspective of the U.S. ruling class is the idea of defunding or even dismantling the police.

Slogans raised by demonstrators over the period since May 25 labelling police as inherently racist and brutal, are being reflected in the debates taking place throughout the corporate media. Hosts and commentators begin from the perspective that the calls for the defunding and dismantling could not really mean what it suggests. How could U.S. society maintain order without law-enforcement agents?

Nevertheless, the Minneapolis City Council in the aftermath of the rebellion which set the stage for national protests, voted to dismantle the current police force on June 7. Prior to this announcement, the Minnesota state government announced a wide ranging probe into the operations of the Minneapolis police in light of the death of Floyd and many others over decades.

The French Press Agency wrote [in an article](#) that:

“The council of the U.S. city of Minneapolis voted late Sunday (June 7) to dismantle and rebuild the police department, after the death in custody of George Floyd sparked nationwide protests about racism in law enforcement, pushing the issue onto the national political agenda. ‘We committed to dismantling policing as we know it in the city of Minneapolis and to rebuild with our community a new model of public safety that actually keeps our community safe, Council President Lisa Bender told CNN.”

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey stated before a crowd gathered to honor George Floyd in a “Defund the Police” rally that he was opposed to dismantling the existing department. After saying this he was rebuked by many within the audience. Just days later, the police chief of Minneapolis, Medaria Arrandondo, in addressing a press conference, reported that the agency had suspended contract talks with the local union representing the cops.

Numerous municipalities are debating the ideas related to defunding and dismantling of law-enforcement in its present form. However, at present only the Minneapolis City Council has passed such a pledge to dismantle and rebuild on what is said to be a better system of public safety.

Other cities are discussing [reductions in funding for the police departments](#). These municipalities include Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, San Diego, Los Angeles, Dallas, Austin, St. Louis, Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., New York City, Baltimore, Durham and Hartford.



Chicago demonstration calling for defunding the police

In Camden, New Jersey where the police department was dismantled several years ago in favor of a County-wide system (CCPD), there are mixed reviews over the current situation. There were indications that crime had been reduced and better police-community relations were the concrete outcomes.

Adversely, at least one assessment of the restructuring of police services in [Camden](#) reveals that these measures were enacted alongside cuts in public services. The availability of low-income housing and other amenities to assist the working class and impoverished coincided with the law-enforcement restructuring.

Keith Benson, an academic studying the overall social conditions in Camden, wrote in Business Insider:

“In 2010, Camden had roughly 77,000 residents; today, the number is closer to 70,000. In addition to fewer people, there are also fewer public housing complexes, less affordable housing, and fewer Section 8 offerings within city limits. There is also a widely held suspicion among Camden residents that violent crimes are going unreported in media and reclassified at department headquarters as nonviolent offenses. This is on top of the spike in abuse-of-power allegations against the CCPD since its inception and the beatings of residents captured on camera and viewable on YouTube.”

Consequently, the calls for defunding and dismantling must be viewed within the broader context of the economic and social conditions prevailing in the municipalities. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the growing problems of mass unemployment, school closings and the burdens placed on urban areas directly resulting from the decline in tax revenues, necessitates in a capitalist system, that widespread austerity measures are inevitable.

Some will look at the disproportionate spending on law-enforcement and the criminal justice system as a source for reducing public budgets. Of course, the opposition to such proposals either for economic or political reasons, will be formidable considering the recent unrest which has swept the U.S.

Police Brutality Escalates During National Unrest

There have been innumerable reports of misconduct and brutality in the midst of the mass demonstrations and rebellions around the U.S. In New York City, police were condemned for the excessive use of force and unwarranted arrests of those exercising their right to free speech and assembly.

Recent reports from Atlanta, Georgia, despite the existence of an African American Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, revealed that there were numerous complaints about police abuse against youth involved in the demonstrations and those who were not at all remotely connected to the protests. National Guard and police shot to death an African American businessman in Louisville, Kentucky, David McAtee, while he was outside his restaurant. The victim was not participating in the demonstrations and property damage which took place in the city.

In Detroit, police arrested over 400 people during a three day period as daily marches and rallies were held in solidarity with the movement against the murder of George Floyd and other African Americans. Moreover, the utilization of rubber bullets, teargas, pepper spray and other purportedly non-lethal crowd control weapons has received sharp criticism. Members of the public demonstrating, passersby, journalists and legal observers were struck with these weapons and detained without justification.

Demonstrators in Detroit drafted a series of demands which include the defunding of the

police and the banning of crowd control weapons, were rejected in a June 9 meeting with the corporate-imposed mayor and police chief. Yet in the aftermath of the impact of COVID-19 in the city, which is quite severe, thousands of municipal employees are being laid off, furloughed, having to take reductions in pay, and the slashing of city services. The State of Michigan has already announced the trimming of the public education budget by 25%.

California and Washington, D.C. were often highlighted in the rise of police brutality cases. Sean Monterrosa, 22-years-old of San Francisco, was killed by a Vallejo police officer during the unrest. The officer claimed that he saw Monterrosa carrying a weapon he thought was a firearm and actually turned out to be a hammer.

The [Mercury News said of the incident](#):


“Sean Monterrosa was shot by a Vallejo officer around 12:30 a.m. Tuesday (June 2). The officer mistook a hammer near Monterrosa’s waist for a gun while responding to a report of looting at a local pharmacy, Vallejo police Chief Shawny Williams said last week. The officer was identified by multiple law enforcement sources as Jarrett Tonn, a veteran policeman who has had three prior shootings since 2015. Tonn and several ‘witness officers’ were placed on administrative leave after the shooting, police said.”

President Donald Trump weighed in to the crisis by calling for the deployment of the U.S. military to restore order in the country. He later slandered the 75-year-old demonstrator in Buffalo, New York who was seriously injured when he was pushed down by a special response unit of the police force. After the two officers involved were charged with assault, over 50 members of the police force resigned from this unit and received unconditional support from their union. Trump claimed that the victim, Martin Gugino, was a member of the Anti-Fascist movement (ANTIFA), which was not true. In making such a false assertion the president is signaling his unconditional support to law-enforcement irrespective of the crimes they are committing.

The Role of Police in a Racist-Capitalist Society

Law-enforcement policy towards African Americans has its origins within the slave patrols of the 18th and 19th centuries. African enslavement contributed to the advent of capitalism in Europe and North America, consequently the continuation of policing in its present form will receive support from the highest echelons of the ruling class.

Will be Sold,
Before the door of the Eagle Tavern.
 At 12 o'clock, on Monday the 24th instant,
 A NUMBER OF
VALUABLE



SLAVES;
 CONSISTING OF
 An excellent Carpenter, a Brick Moulder,
 A Tanner, a good Crop Hand,
 2 Women, and 5 children.

*The Women are excellent House Servants
 and young, the Men too are mostly young.*

A credit of Ninety Days will be given, the purchaser giving a Negotiable Note, with an approved endorser, but if the purchaser prefers paying Cash, it will be received, in which case the legal discount will be allowed.

Thomas Taylor.

February 17, 1812.

J. O'LYNCH, PR.

*Printed for the Proprietor
 at the Eagle Tavern
 No. 24. N. York St. N. York.*

Slave advertisement for the acquisition of Africans

An article written by Prof. Connie Hasset-Walker of Norwich University addressed this history saying:

“Policing in southern slave-holding states had roots in slave patrols, squadrons made up of white volunteers empowered to use vigilante tactics to enforce laws related to slavery. They located and returned enslaved people who had escaped, crushed uprisings led by enslaved people and punished enslaved workers found or believed to have violated plantation rules.

The [first slave patrols](#) arose in South Carolina in the early 1700s. As University of Georgia social work professor Michael A. Robinson has written, by the time John Adams became the second U.S. president, every state that had not yet abolished slavery had them. Members of slave patrols could forcefully enter anyone’s home, regardless of their race or ethnicity, based on suspicions that they were sheltering people who had escaped bondage.”



Slave patrols in the United States represent the origins of policing measures for African Americans

The demands for the defunding, dismantling and restructuring of the police are an important development in the mass struggle now making headway in the U.S. The resources allocated to police departments could be utilized for the purpose of improving education, municipal services and infrastructural improvement.

Nonetheless, the underpinning of law-enforcement and criminal justice policies in the U.S. requires a radical deconstruction. These reforms can only be effectively implemented when the capitalist and racist system itself is eliminated and there is the realization of a socialist society.

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