The problem is not police training, police diversity, or police methods. The problem is the dramatic and unprecedented expansion and intensity of policing in the last forty years, a fundamental shift in the role of police in society. The problem is policing itself.

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The End of Policing

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Conclusion

Policing needs to be reformed. We do indeed need new training regimes, enhanced accountability, and a greater public role in the direction and oversight of policing. We need to get rid of the warrior mindset and militarized tactics. It is essential that police learn more about the problems of people with psychiatric disabilities. Racist and brutal police officers who break the law, violate the public trust, and abuse the public must be held to account. The culture of the police must be changed so that it is no longer obsessed with the use of threats and violence to control the poor and socially marginal.

That said, there is a larger truth that must be confronted. As long as the basic mission of police remains unchanged, none of these reforms will be achievable. There is no technocratic fix. Even if we could somehow implement these changes, they would be ignored, resisted, and overturned —because the institutional imperatives of the politically motivated wars on drugs, disorder, crime, etc., would win out. Powerful political forces benefit from abusive, aggressive, and invasive policing, and they are not going to be won over or driven from power by technical arguments or heartfelt appeals to do the right thing. They may adopt a language of reform and fund a few pilot programs, but mostly they will continue to reproduce their political power by fanning fear of the poor, nonwhite, disabled, and dispossessed and empowering police to be the "thin blue line" between the haves and the have-nots.

This does not mean that no one should articulate or fight for reforms. However, those reforms must be part of a larger vision that questions the basic role of police in society and asks whether coercive government action will bring more justice or less. Too many of the reforms under discussion today fail to do that; many further empower the police and expand their role. Community policing, body cameras, and increased

money for training reinforce a false sense of police legitimacy and expand the reach of the police into communities and private lives. More money, more technology, and more power and influence will not reduce the burden or increase the justness of policing. Ending the War on Drugs, abolishing school police, ending broken-windows policing, developing robust mental health care, and creating low-income housing systems will do much more to reduce abusive policing.

In the twentieth century, two major areas of policing were eliminated when alcohol and gambling were legalized. These two changes reduced the scope of policing without sacrificing public safety. Prohibition had led to a massive increase in organized crime, violence, and police corruption but had little effect on the availability of alcohol; ending it reduced crime, enhanced police professionalism, and incarcerated fewer people.

Similarly, fruitless attempts to stamp out underground lotteries, sports betting, and gambling proved totally counterproductive, empowering organized crime and driving police corruption. Government control and regulation of gambling has raised revenue and undermined the power of organized crime. By creating state lotteries, regulating casinos, and only minimally enforcing sports betting, the state has limited police power without sacrificing public safety. There is no reason the same couldn't be done for sex work and drugs today. The billions saved in policing and prisons could be much better used putting people to work and improving public health.

We don't have to put up with aggressive and invasive policing to keep us safe. There are alternatives. We can use the power of communities and government to make our cities safer without relying on police, courts, and prisons. We need to invest in individuals and communities and transform some of the basic economic and political arrangements in our society. Chemical dependency, trauma, and mental health issues play a huge role in undermining the safety and stability of neighborhoods. People who are suffering need help, not coercive treatment regimes or self-help pabulum; they need access to real services from trained professionals using evidence-based treatments. Even children and teens with some of the most serious personal problems can be helped with sustained and intensive engagement and treatment. They need mentors, counseling, and support services for themselves and their families. These "wraparound"

approaches show promising results and cost a lot less than cycling young people through jails, courts, emergency rooms, probation, and parole.

People adapt their behaviors to a dysfunctional environment where unemployment, violence, and entrenched poverty are the norm. Even after twenty years of declining crime rates, there are neighborhoods where violence remains a major problem. These areas are almost all extremely poor, racially segregated, and geographically and socially isolated. The response of many cities has been further intensive policing. Recent crime increases and social unrest in places like Chicago, Milwaukee, and Charlotte attest to the failure to end abusive policing or produce safety. The most segregated and racially unequal cities in the country are its most violent.

Decades of deindustrialization, racial discrimination in housing and employment, and growing income inequality have created pockets of intense poverty where jobs are scarce, public services inadequate, and crime and violence widespread. Even with intensive overpolicing, people feel unsafe and young people continue to use violence for predation and protection. Any program for reducing crime and enhancing social wellbeing, much less achieving racial justice, must address these conditions. No one on the political stage is talking seriously about this reality. Racial segregation in the United States is as bad today as it has ever been. Poor communities need better housing, jobs, and access to social, health, recreational, and educational services, not more money for police and jails, yet that's what's on offer across the country. From Chicago to New York to California,[1] local politicians continue to hold out more police and new jails as the solution to community problems. This must stop.

These communities also need more political power and resources to develop their own strategies for reducing crime. Concepts like restorative justice and Justice Reinvestment offer alternatives. The money that would be saved by keeping people out of prison could be spent on drug and mental health services, youth programs and jobs in the community. At the same time, offenders could be asked to make restitution to their victims and the community through community service projects, agreements to stay clean and sober, and participation in appropriate programing. The Justice Reinvestment movement also looked to use savings achieved by reducing incarceration rates to invest in high-crime communities.

Unfortunately, many of these programs ended up only moving money around within the criminal justice system and excluding communities from any role in the process.[2] The basic ideal remains sound, but new efforts at realizing it are needed and communities need to play a major role in deciding how the resources are used. But not all problems can be solved at this level. Access to decent housing and employment and the ongoing problems of polarized income structures and racial discrimination in housing must be dealt with systemically. Raising the minimum wage, restoring transit links, and cracking down on housing discrimination are big problems that operate largely outside these poor neighborhoods. If we want to make real headway in reducing the concentrated pockets of crime in this country, we need to create real avenues out of poverty and social isolation.

The Black Youth Project in Chicago envisions a program for economic development that would substantially improve the lives of people in high-crime communities as an alternative to relying on police and prisons. Their "Agenda to Build Black Futures" calls for reparations to address the long legacy of systematic exploitation of African Americans, from slavery through Jim Crow and into the current era.[3] Just as importantly, it focuses at length on decent jobs that can sustain a family above the poverty line. That means raising the minimum wage through direct government action, as well as giving workers the right to self-organize for better wages. Most of the advances that working Americans have made in the last century have come through the process of unionization and workplace activism, but in the last thirty-five years governments have moved systematically to reduce worker and union power. Private-sector protections have been largely erased, leading to massive union-busting drives and decimating union membership rates. The public sector retains more protections, but austerity economics have substantially eroded earnings and many Republican politicians and conservative courts are actively moving to break unions and further drive down wages. Unfortunately, many unions have resisted racial integration historically, and some remain incredibly white even today, so government protection of unions in the absence of a racial justice program will not be sufficient.

The Movement for Black Lives has also outlined a plan for economic and political justice that includes greater investment in schools and communities based on priorities developed by black communities.[4] At the

heart of their program is a set of economic justice proposals, including reparations, which would reduce inequality, enhance individual, family, and community wellbeing and protect the environment. They call for major jobs programs, restrictions on free trade and Wall Street exploitation, and vigorous protections of worker rights. They specifically demand that funding for criminal justice institutions should be shifted to education, health, and social services. To make this possible, they demand political reforms and are developing plans for grassroots mobilizations. This is what police reform has to look like if it's going to bring meaningful changes.

Rural areas need help as well. The growth in opioid use is closely linked to the downward mobility of the rural poor and the expansion of the destructive War on Drugs. While simplistic protectionism and jingoistic anti-immigrant mania are unlikely to bring long-term stability, our rural areas must become more economically sustainable and livable, with green jobs, infrastructure development, and nontoxic food production. Reducing subsidies to multinational corporations that move jobs overseas to countries with little in the way of labor rights or environmental protections would also be a good place to start, replacing "free trade" with "fair trade."

None of these initiatives by themselves will eliminate all crime and disorder. They need to be combined and new ideas would need to be developed and tested, but those who would benefit from this process lack the political will and power to do so. US culture is organized around exploitation, greed, white privilege, and resentment. These are derived in large part from our economic system, but even profound economic changes do not automatically produce positive cultural changes, at least not overnight. Cultural norms also impede efforts to change these systems. What's needed is a process in which the very struggle for change produces cultural shifts. By working together for social, economic, and racial justice, we must also create new value systems that call into question the greed and indifference that allow the current system to flourish. We must take care of each other in a climate of mutual respect if we hope to build a better world. One of the more positive aspects of the Black Lives Matter movement has been its embrace of differences of identity and the diversity of people engaged in leading it. We can't fight racism while embracing

homophobia, any more than we can fight mass incarceration by embracing a politics of punishment.

Both of our major political parties have accepted the politics of austerity that globalized capital has imposed on us. The neoliberal movement has been incredibly successful in normalizing the view that the only way to move forward is to unleash the creative power of a small number of economic elites by stripping away all regulations, worker protections, and financial obligations so that they can maximize their wealth at the expense of the rest of us. For thirty years we've been told that the result will be a rising tide for everyone; a trickling down of the spoils—but we're still waiting. Wages and living standards for all but the wealthiest continue to decline. The middle class is being eviscerated, poverty and mass homelessness are increasing, and our infrastructure is collapsing. When we organize our society around fake meritocracy, we erase the history of exploitation and the ways the game is rigged to prevent economic and social mobility.

When people complain about these realities, they are told it's their own fault, that they didn't try hard enough to be part of the glorious "1 percent," that they don't have what it takes and thus deserve to be degraded. This justifies defining all problems in terms of individual inadequacy, calling those left behind the architects of their own misery. Rather than using government resources to reduce inequality, this economic system both subsidizes inequality and criminalizes those it leaves behind—especially when they demand something better. The massive increases in policing and incarceration over the last forty years rest on an ideological argument that crime and disorder are the results of personal moral failing and can only be reduced by harsh punitive sanctions. This neoconservative approach protects and reinforces the political, social, and economic disenfranchisement of millions who are tightly controlled by aggressive and invasive policing or warehoused in jails and prisons.

We must break these intertwined systems of oppression. Every time we look to the police and prisons to solve our problems, we reinforce these processes. We cannot demand that the police get rid of those "annoying" homeless people in the park or the "threatening" young people on the corner and simultaneously call for affordable housing and youth jobs, because the state is only offering the former and will deny us the latter

every time. Yes, communities deserve protection from crime and even disorder, but we must always demand those without reliance on the coercion, violence, and humiliation that undergird our criminal justice system. The state may try to solve those problems through police power, but we should not encourage or reward such short-sighted, counterproductive, and unjust approaches. We should demand safety and security—but not at the hands of the police. In the end, they rarely provide either.

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