



# POLICE BRUTALITY IN THE UNITED STATES

Sustainable Development Goal  
[#16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions](#)

## POSSIBLE ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Is the United States' policing model just?
- To what extent are "law and order" and "justice" similar?
- How has the United States' racial history impacted historical and modern policing models?
- How has the United States' responded to internal reports on racial unrest and policing?
- What has defined policing, and what could policing look like?
- If officers are sworn to "protect and serve," then who has been "protected and served" and who has not?

## BACKGROUND

Protests in Minneapolis occurred following the killing of George Floyd by an on-duty Minneapolis Police Officer on May 25<sup>th</sup>. The incident invoked the memories of local tragedies including the death by police of Philando Castile and Jamar Clark. On the same day, Christian Cooper recorded and released video of a woman invoking race in a 911 call in New York City. Video of the modern lynching of Ahmaud Arbery at the hands of 3 white men became public in early May. Breonna Taylor, an Emergency Medical Technician, was killed by a Louisville Metro Police Department officer who shot Ms. Taylor while serving a no-knock warrant on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The conflux of these and other events inspired mass demonstrations across the United States and the world in spite of a pandemic.

Historic and contemporary data show racially based disproportionality; statistically people of color are more likely to experience police violence. Race is a tangibly experienced and legally upheld social construct. Race may have been invented, but it is real and it is felt. The Kerner report, one of the more well-known inquiries into riots following police violence the found:

*"Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white--separate and unequal. ... This deepening racial division is not inevitable. The movement apart can be reversed. Choice is still possible. Our principal task is to define that choice and to press for a national resolution."*

Despite the conclusion and calls to change policing, racially based disparities still exist.

Informal policing in the United States was rooted in racial superiority. Prior to formal police systems, legal systems perpetuated the inhumanity of slavery through Slave Patrols. Originating in the 1700s, Slave Patrols used armed force to sustain systems of human abuse through slavery. Whiteness was the authority of Slave Patrols.

Formal policing began in England. Industrialization and urban growth increased incidents of crime, fear of crime, and a desire for law and order. Prime Minister Robert Peele established the Metropolitan London Police (MLP) in 1829, creating the first modern police force. His basic mission was to develop a trusting partnership with the public, so that the public would cooperate with police investigation and law enforcement, and to purposefully distinguish MLP from a military occupation. Police walked around neighborhoods and got to know their community.

In the United States, Boston in 1838 and New York City in 1845 were first to create police departments. Unlike the MLP, US police effectively belonged to their mayors. These police

departments were deemed effective in communities which held favor with their mayor. However, communities not aligned with the mayor were selectively targeted for intimidation and disenfranchisement due to their political or ethnic identity.

Early reformers separated police departments from the influence of mayors. Through reforms three models of reactive policing have emerged in the United States.: 1. random patrol to create omnipresence, 2. rapid response for apprehension, and 3. reactive investigation, which included police after the fact to find out what happened. These policing reforms distanced police departments from their communities, particularly in urban areas.

Policing in the United States has remained under scrutiny through the Kerner Report, and the discussion has been reinvigorated by calls for defunding the Minneapolis Police Department following the murder of George Floyd.

## RESOURCES

### Personal Stories

- [‘I could have been Mike Brown’: your stories of racial profiling by the world’s police](#) (The Guardian)
- [Being Black is Not a Crime: Yunek’s Story of Police Brutality](#) (ACLU)
- [Dakota Access: Standing Rock protesters tell of violent arrests and police abuse](#) (The Guardian)
- [George Floyd’s Sister On His Death In Minneapolis Police Custody: ‘They Murdered My Brother’](#) (Today)
- [George Floyd’s Brother Testimony to US Congress](#) (Guardian News)
- [Teenager alleges Met police brutality while in police custody](#) (The Guardian)
- [Black women speak out on experiencing police violence](#) (Fusion)
- [9-Year-Old Calls For End to Police Violence](#) (MSNBC)

### Articles

- [The Kerner Report](#) (Eisenhower Foundation)
- [Minneapolis Police, Long Accused of Racism, Face Wrath of Wounded City](#) (NY Times)
- [USA: End unlawful police violence against Black Lives Matter protests](#) (Amnesty International)
- [The psychology of police violence: What makes so many cops have racial biases?](#) (Salon)
- [Report to the United Nations on Racial Disparities in the U.S. Criminal Justice System](#) (Sentencing Project)
- [Americans fight to breathe as society again chokes on racism](#) (The Asahi Shimbun)
- [Keeping cops in check](#) (Bangkok Post)
- [DA: ‘Stand in Solidarity with George Floyd and fire Bheki Cele’](#) (The South African)
- [Chinese media use race protests to criticise US over Hong Kong](#) (Al Jazeera)
- [Police violence enabled by ‘liberal’ US politicians](#) (Asia Times)
- [Authoritarian Governments Are Calling Out American Hypocrisy Over Minneapolis](#) (Slate)

### Data & Maps

- [Open Data Policing](#) (Open Data Policing)
- [These 4 charts describe police violence in America](#) (CNBC)
- [Mapping Police Violence](#) (Mapping Police Violence)
- [Fatal Force](#) (Washington Post)
- [OFFICER INVOLVED SUBJECT-SUSPECT-PERPETRATOR KILLED IN 2020](#) (Gun Violence Archive)
- [Cop in the Hood: A Blog about Policing](#) (Cop in the Hood)
- [NYCLU Stop and Frisk Data](#) (NYCLU)
- [Mapping Police Violence Across the USA](#) (Amnesty)
- [Why Statistics Don’t Capture The Full Extent Of The Systemic Bias In Policing](#) (Five Thirty Eight)
- [Minneapolis Police Use Force Against Black People at 7 Times the Rate of White](#) (New York Times)

### Videos and Audio

- [8 minutes and 46 seconds: The Killing of George Floyd](#) (Graphic and explicit content)
- [Police Shootings and Race](#) (Newsweek)
- [Our Criminal \(In\)justice System?](#) (The Zero Hour)
- [Through Line: History of Policing in the US](#) (NPR)
- [The Glenn Show: Crime, Justice, and Reform | Peter Moskos](#) (The Glenn Show)
- [Understanding the Racist History of Policing](#) (Act.TV)
- [How Can Racism and Alleged Police Brutality in the US Be Brought To An End?](#) (Al Jazeera)
- [Police Violence at Protests Is Undeniable. All the Videos Are Right Here](#) (Vice - Graphic content)

- [Violence and racial discrimination dominate US police force](#) (CGTN - Funded by the Chinese Government)
- [A Former Baltimore Cop Explains Why the Department Targets Black Men](#) (Slate)

#### Helpful Links

- [Eight Can't Wait](#)
- [Reclaim the Block](#)
- [MPD 150](#)
- [Movement for Black Lives](#)
- [Youth in Front](#)
- [Until Freedom](#)
- [MN Freedom Fighters Form A Community Safety Net](#)