



RETHINKING COMMUNITY POLICING

**Excerpts from “Community Policing is Not
the Answer” by Philip V. McHarris**

Community Policing at Large

Excerpts from
“Community Policing
is Not the Answer” by
Philip V. McHarris

Proponents of community policing argue that embedding police, particularly in Black communities, can build trust and partnerships

But the strategy is flawed and has drawn resources away from communities that need it and instead directed them toward policing.

Time has shown that community policing is merely an expensive attempt at public relations, after a long history of racialized police violence and injustice, and does little to reduce crime or police violence.

Background

Excerpts from
“Community Policing
is Not the Answer” by
Philip V. McHarris

The 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act established the Department of Justice’s Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) office, which has channeled over \$14 billion to police departments¹ and saturated cities with more police and police resources despite research suggesting the grants have had little to no effect on reducing crime.²

The COPS office was also a significant driver³ behind the emergence of police throughout public schools because it created the COPS in Schools grant program, which ended in 2005.

1 “Grants,” COPS Office, cops.usdoj.gov/grants

2 Worrall & Kovandzic, “COPS Grants and Crime Revisited,” *Criminology* 45, no. 1 (February 2007).

3 “A Brief History of School-Based Law Enforcement,” Texas School Safety Center, Texas State, txssc.txstate.edu/topics/law-enforcement/articles/brief-history.

Background

Excerpts from
“Community Policing
is Not the Answer” by
Philip V. McHarris

But the practice emerged well before the crime bill passed, on the heels of social unrest throughout the country⁴, often sparked by police violence such as the brutal beating of John Smith in Newark, New Jersey, in 1967.

In 1968, the Kerner Commission⁵ reported that nearly half of the urban rebellions since 1965 were sparked by instances of police use of excessive force.

The report also advocated⁶ for the creation of jobs, improved housing, and an investment in education in urban cities. President Lyndon B. Johnson ignored those recommendations in favor of expanding policing and incarceration.

4 Williams & Murphy, “The Evolving Strategy of Police: A Minority View,” (1990).

5 Daniel Geary, “What the Kerner Report Got Wrong about Policing,” Boston Review, May 19, 2016, bostonreview.net/us/daniel-geary-kerner-report-got-policing-wrong.

6 Nicole Lewis, “The Kerner Omission,” The Marshall Project, March 01, 2018, themarshallproject.org/2018/03/01/the-kerner-omission.

Background

Excerpts from
“Community Policing
is Not the Answer” by
Philip V. McHarris

The strategy resurfaced in public discourse in 2014 after unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, following the fatal shooting of Michael Brown, a Black 18-year-old, by a white police officer.

Local law enforcement organized community events in the area such as basketball games and ice cream giveaways.

Community policing, strategies that center having officer diversity to better reflect the demographics of the community, and initiatives that focus on trust, reconciliation, and procedural justice between communities and police have become popular with some city leaders⁷ and mainstream reform organizations.⁸

7 Emma Whitford, “With Crime At Record Lows, Should NYC Have Fewer Cops?” Gothamist, November 05, 2019, gothamist.com/news/crime-record-lows-should-nyc-have-fewer-cops.

8 “Building Bridges Between Police and Communities,” Vera Institute of Justice, vera.org/securing-equal-justice/building-bridges-between-police-and-communities.

Community Policing is a Misguided Strategy

Excerpts from
“Community Policing
is Not the Answer” by
Philip V. McHarris

The positive publicity that may come from giving kids ice cream and playing basketball does not make communities safer.

On the contrary, the strategy further floods communities with police and legitimizes an institution that is centered on punishment and control.

Heightened presence and contact are often disguised under the umbrella of community-oriented policing efforts, such as the addition of officers often called beat cops to continuously patrol the building and area throughout the day and night.

Community Policing is a Misguided Strategy

Excerpts from
“Community Policing
is Not the Answer” by
Philip V. McHarris

Structural racism and poverty also force people to employ strategies that are often criminalized in order to navigate incredibly difficult and complex situations, such as with fare evasion.⁹

Thus, as long as poverty and racial inequality exist, policing will always expose Black people, and other marginalized communities, to higher rates of surveillance, arrest, and violence.

Community policing creates the false idea that police can solve structural issues through building partnerships, but policing has only made those issues worse.

9 Harold Stolper, “When the Police Ignore the Law,” *Criminalizing Poverty* (October 2018).

The Real Work

Excerpts from
“Community Policing
is Not the Answer” by
Philip V. McHarris

Police do not speak to the wide range of concerns around safety that residents have, nor should they try to.

Marginalized communities need resources to thrive. Investing in community policing—or policing more broadly—will not change the underlying, structural context that leads to a lack of safety. Nor will it change the laws that criminalize people for being poor and disadvantaged. The solution to public safety lies in troubling the idea that policing equals safety.

The real work lies in developing alternatives to punishment and policing, not nicer cops.

The Real Work

Excerpts from
“Community Policing
is Not the Answer” by
Philip V. McHarris

The billions of dollars channeled through the COPS office and the crime bill to expand police resources and power could have been invested in community institutions and programs that foster safety and wellness, such as arts and athletic programs, violence interruption initiatives, quality schools, community-led domestic violence support, hospitals, and drug treatment facilities.

Federal funding could also go toward alternatives to policing that may actually cultivate safety.

Reform is not a Solution, Divest and Defund

Excerpts from
“Community Policing
is Not the Answer” by
Philip V. McHarris

Hundreds of millions of dollars are funneled to police departments that agree to make efforts to repair the “broken” relationship between Black people and police. But the relationship was never whole.

For many people that I know, their relationship with the police is irreparable. No amount of conversations or events will fix the relationship, or make them comfortable calling 911 in an emergency.

Divesting from policing and investing in communities will ultimately make people far safer than police ever will.