



“Powering Up with Power of Two: What does Defunding the Police Mean?”

The term “Defund the Police” is one that incorporates into its formation many intersecting issues in our city and in our nation’s history. In order to lay out the framework for understanding the issues underlying this call to action, it is useful to look at the larger systemic issues that have led to the overpolicing of BIPOC communities, often with lethal consequences. To do so, Power of Two has put together the following reference source that also includes information from our community partner, VOCAL NEW YORK’s “Caring and Compassionate New Deal for New York City. (CCND)”. (<https://www.vocal-ny.org/publications/ccnewdeal>)

To begin, the CCND looks at the call to defund the police as a reallocation of the funds currently given to the law enforcement and carceral systems and, instead, as funds that should rightfully be allocated instead into initiatives and programs that deal with the housing and mental health/substance abuse that are currently policed instead of addressed. As noted by the CCND, “increased policing has proven itself, time and again, to be an ineffective and dangerous way to address issues of homelessness, mental health needs and substance abuse. We need a massive investment of resources and a restructuring of government agencies to tackle homelessness, mental illness and high-risk drug use. **These are the intersecting issues - along with systemic racism - that underpin our criminal legal system**, disproportionately burden low-income communities of color, and entrench the marginalization of hundreds of thousands of our fellow New Yorkers.”

Currently, \$14 billion in New York’s tax dollars are used to prop up the city’s law enforcement, courts and corrections systems. \$11 billion for the NYPD, \$456 million for the five district attorneys and the citywide Special Narcotics Prosecutor and \$2,6 billion for corrections. The NYPD operating budget “is more than the city spends on health, homeless services, youth development and workforce development combined. Currently, for every dollar allocated to the NYPD and city corrections, 29 cents are given towards the department of Health, 19 cents towards Housing Preservation and Development and a penny towards workforce development.

Despite the massive operating budgets of these law enforcement and carceral systems “the continued existence of mass homelessness and record-high rates of fatal overdoses - after decades of criminalization- shows the inability of police, courts and jails to solve these issues. The vast majority of police hours are spent doing things that a growing majority of people believe should be done by another profession. Across the country **just 4 percent of police hours** are spent addressing “violent crime”. Responding to mental health calls, homelessness and drug use should not be the purview of the police. The police, with unlimited resources have failed to end these social ills.



As an entity steeped in a racist beginning, the police forces of the country have continued the work of racial oppression by targeting the most marginalized communities for punitive actions that have caused trauma, tangible harm and death within these same communities, aided by the outsized financial might of their operating budgets. A reallocation of funding must begin immediately.

The criminalization of BIPOC communities is one that has several intersecting players aiding in this mission, including the NYPD, the Media and the War on Drugs along with systemic racism and its ensuing issues of poverty and disenfranchisement.

Additional points of reference below.

THE RACIST HISTORY OF THE POLICE FORCE AS AN INSTITUTION

Police forces originated in the Southern states as slave patrols to track down escaped slaves. [1] The first slave patrols were founded in the Carolina colony in the early 1700s and by the end of the century, every slave state had slave patrols who worked to: apprehend escaped slaves and return them to their owners; unleash terror to deter potential slave revolts; and discipline slaves outside of the law for breaking plantation rules. [2] After slavery was outlawed in 1865, police enforced Black Codes that specified how, when, and where freed slaves could work and how much they could be paid. Other Black Codes restricted Blacks' rights to vote, dictated how and where they could travel, and where they could live. The new Black Codes of the 1880s, also known as Jim Crow laws, prohibited Blacks and whites from sharing public spaces, such as schools, libraries, bathrooms, and restaurants.

THE MEDIA'S ROLE IN FRAMING CRIMINALITY AS A BLACK AND BROWN TRAIT

For various reasons, media of all types offer a distorted representation of the lives and reality of Black and Brown people. In turn, reckless media consumption negatively affects the public's understanding and attitudes related to these communities. These distorted understandings and attitudes lead to negative real-world consequences. Studies have shown that portrayals of Black men and boys can be expected to promote antagonism towards them and promote exaggerated views and expectations of race-based socioeconomic disparities. Repeat consumption of media not only leads to autonomic responses and hostility towards Black and Brown individuals, it leads to conscious patterns that directly affect the likelihood of being hired or promoted; directly affect the likelihood of school admission; directly affect school grades, treatment within the justice system, chances of getting loans, and so much more. [3]



THE DRUG WAR AND THE ENSUING MASS INCARCERATION

The United States is home to less than 5% of the world's population but nearly 25% of its prisoners. That is due in part to the overly harsh consequences of drug convictions. Over 1.6 million people are arrested, prosecuted, incarcerated, placed under supervision and/or deported each year on a drug law violation. Because of the “war” on drugs, we have laws that double down on punishment and attempts to control people. This drug war logic means low-income people are denied food stamps and public assistance for past drug convictions, people who are even suspected of using drugs are evicted from public housing and discriminated against in the private sector, qualified people have to pass a drug test unrelated to employment before they are offered a job, non-citizens are deported for infractions that citizens are only ticketed for, students are kicked out of school because of random drug screens, and parents lose custody of their children even when they are following drug treatment requirements from the child welfare agency. This is the Drug War in action. [4]

ENGINEERED POVERTY AND LACK OF SERVICES AS A BACKGROUND TO CRIME

The word *welfare* is now commonly used pejoratively, often used to describe economically and socially marginalized populations. Lost in these contemporary understandings of welfare is the association of welfare with *wellbeing*, particularly collective and economic wellbeing. Over the last several decades, criminal law enforcement goals, strategies, and perspectives have grown entangled with the welfare system and the criminalization of welfare recipients entails a long historical process of public discourse and welfare policies infused with race, class, and gender bias. Throughout the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, the value of the welfare grant, adjusted for inflation, declined dramatically. It became increasingly hard for welfare recipients to cover their basic expenses with welfare grants. Unable to survive on welfare checks and facing barriers to employment, many welfare recipients turned to other sources of income, whether help from kin or participation in underground labor markets. [5]