

REIMAGINE JUSTICE

**EXECUTIVE SESSION
ON THE FUTURE OF
JUSTICE POLICY**

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WHAT MAKES A CITY SAFE: VIABLE COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGIES THAT DO NOT RELY ON POLICE OR PRISONS

The Square One Project aims to incubate new thinking on our response to crime, promote more effective strategies, and contribute to a new narrative of justice in America.

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**MEMBERS OF THE
EXECUTIVE SESSION
ON THE FUTURE
OF JUSTICE POLICY**

In the months after police officer Derek Chauvin murdered George Floyd in Minneapolis, the streets in cities and towns across the United States rang out with calls to “defund the police.” In the period since, people have organized steadily to turn those outcries into policy.

At the same time, major urban centers have seen an uptick in violence, including fatal shootings, that has elevated the urgency of demands for viable solutions to create neighborhood safety.

These trends are often talked about as being in tension with one another, as though defunding the police might be viable but for the fact of pressing safety challenges that, it is often assumed implicitly, require more police. The reality is otherwise. Divesting from law enforcement is not simply compatible with the aim of reducing interpersonal violence in communities, it is a prerequisite for doing so. To make sense of why we have to understand what causes violence in the first place so we may be positioned to develop solutions that end it.

A law enforcement response to violence assumes that violence is caused by individuals who have to be either intimidated out of acting on their desires to cause harm or contained if that intimidation fails. It posits a person-by-person, block-by-block state force versus “individual wrongdoer” dynamic that makes for good TV drama but terrible public policy. With an individualistic focus, it generates solutions that control, punish, isolate, and even kill those regarded as dangers.¹ The ‘solutions’ this system offers—from policing to incarceration to parole—fail in part because the underlying assumptions about what causes interpersonal violence are inaccurate, and there is no surer way to fail to solve a problem than to misidentify what the problem is in the first place.

 **DIVESTING FROM LAW ENFORCEMENT IS NOT SIMPLY COMPATIBLE WITH THE AIM OF REDUCING INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE IN COMMUNITIES, IT IS A PREREQUISITE FOR DOING SO**

What this individualistic focus fails to account for is the presence of structural violence. Rather than being reducible to a person's character, interpersonal violence is most systematically produced by institutions, laws, and practices that harm groups of people and shape the conditions of their lives. At a societal level, interpersonal violence emerges as a collective result made nearly inevitable by systemic barriers to living wages, clean water, or nourishing food; underfunded schools; and poor health and mental health infrastructure (Reiss and Roth 1993; Kennedy, Kawachi, Prothrow-Stith, Lochner, and Gupta 1998; Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, Schmeelk-Cone, Chavous, and Zimmerman 2004). This set of conditions—chosen explicitly or implicitly by a society and carried out in policy and practice—is called structural violence because deprivation and poor health are themselves instances of grave harm. But even more literal than that, one of the harms such inequity causes is that it creates the conditions known to generate interpersonal violence.

Because violence is a structural problem, it will require structural solutions. Until we decide as a society to invest in structural solutions, inequity will continue fueling the fire of violence like a hose full of gasoline. And while that happens, we will still have to work to solve the problem of interpersonal violence even within those conditions because people's survival will depend on it. The structural conditions in the United States, defined as they have been for centuries by precisely the choices that generate violence, mean we should not only ask the question *Why is there so much violence in certain neighborhoods?* but also *Why isn't there more?* When we ask that, it leads us to explore how people have understood the reasons for violence and how to limit it, so that they can carve out solutions that keep them alive while also fighting to become the society everyone deserves. □

POLICING AND VIOLENCE

Structural violence is not, and has never been, equally distributed.

Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color have been, since the United States' founding, the primary targets of this state-sanctioned divestment from community wellbeing and investment in criminalization and premature death, which has been secured continuously by state and state-sanctioned violence including slavery, lynching, and police brutality (Blackmon 2009; Hartney and Vuong 2009; Schwartz 2010; Coates 2014; Equal Justice Initiative 2017; Alexander 2020). This generations'-long violence has defined the character of the United States and generated its wealth (for some) since its inception.

Among the greatest contributors to this structural violence is policing. Policing in the United States has long been entwined with racist, colonialist, and sexist violence and control. It is not simply that police have never provided meaningful protection to Black communities, Indigenous communities, Latinx communities, Asian American communities, other communities of color, migrant people, disabled people, queer people,

or trans or gender non-conforming people. It is also that police, since their inception, have enacted grave harm in ways that were not incidental to their roles, but definitive of them.

The behaviors and aims of police departments, as we know, are all recognizable in the early formations of "slave patrols," where plantation owners first pooled their own resources and then collectively animated the resources of their local governments to ensure enslaved people who tried to escape or rebel were returned and punished brutally in the joint names of the state and the white "property" owners. True to their formative mission of protecting white wealth and ensuring racial hierarchy, these same law enforcement formations and the government agencies that established and empowered them arrested people into systems of convict leasing, upheld Jim Crow legislation, both carried out and abetted lynchings, and enforced segregation, and they continue to enact widespread and often fatal brutality against those they are purportedly tasked with protecting and

serving. Simultaneously, they use force to suppress resistance that would challenge and change these conditions and harms. The United States is founded and built upon this violence, and any attempt going forward to create a society characterized by justice and democracy must acknowledge and repair this harm. But the argument for doing so is not simply a moral one.

It is pragmatic. The thin narrative line upheld by cop drama propaganda, police unions, and legislators riding “tough on crime” campaigns to victory was interrupted by the surge of movement pressure in the summer of 2020, where both the brutal present and its lineage in history finally displaced the myths for many who had shielded themselves from reality. We have a chance not only to break once and for

all with the myth that police serve the interests of public safety, but also with their associated entitlement to monopolize conversations about violence prevention and safety. Now we have the opportunity to seat others at the head of the public safety table—those who are producing and have long produced safety: community residents; healthcare workers; those most impacted by gun violence; educators; and people providing housing, community development, and economic development in cities and towns across the country. □



NOW WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEAT OTHERS AT THE HEAD OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY TABLE—THOSE WHO ARE PRODUCING AND HAVE LONG PRODUCED SAFETY

POLICING AND SAFETY

Addressing interpersonal violence as a structural, economic, or public health concern, rather than a concern for the criminal legal system to resolve, sounds discordant in a society that has conditioned us to associate policing and prisons with safety.

It is true that sometimes a near-term, localized increase in police presence can have the effect of decreasing rates of reported violent crime. This immediate palpable effect, alongside the vast narrative that equates policing with safety, are why calls for more police come not only from white property owners who want police to secure the perimeter around their neighborhoods from people of color they deem a threat to their security, but also, and often urgently, from Black and Brown community members who have buried too many of their own. But these temporary reductions in documented instances of interpersonal violence miss the full picture—which must include the vast and permanent losses alongside these limited, and often impermanent, gains.

There is substantial debate about the empirical evidence establishing policing's effect on interpersonal violence, including critical questions about how durable the impacts attained by such force are and whether targeted place-based enforcement strategies are merely displacing violence to other blocks or neighborhoods. What is critical is less the resolution of this debate and more so an expansion of our assessment of policing's impact beyond simply any near-term reductions in reported interpersonal violence. The immediate and lasting harms that result from increased enforcement also must matter as we quantify the total harm a neighborhood experiences and the total effects of policing. These include near-term, medium-term, and intergenerational effects on the people and families who are arrested and punished as a result of the increased enforcement.

Loved ones of those incarcerated suffer emotional loss and associated mental health effects, economic destabilization, displacement from permanent housing, disruption to neighborhood relationships and support systems, disruption of caregiving relationships, and more.

For those incarcerated as a result of police presence, the effects include all of the above, as well as the negative effects of incarceration, including but by no means limited to loss of freedom, of loved ones, and of connection, exposure to violence, limited access to health and mental health care, and often lifelong restricted access to education, employment, and other pathways to a sustainable, legal living wage.

Even for those who are not arrested and punished, the presence of a militarized police force in one's neighborhood is itself traumatizing, reinforcing for residents the notion that they are viewed as inherently dangerous, incapable of civil coexistence and conflict resolution, and so far outside the center of society and its binding social contracts that their neighborhoods have to be occupied in order to be secured.

Residents who know police have killed people cannot help but fear that the slightest interaction with an officer could end in the loss of their life or the life of someone they love, so the presence of police everywhere also implies the presence of death everywhere. The effects of these experiences—what police presence inscribes in people's psyches and bodies—long outlast whatever time period the neighborhood maintains its "hot spot" status. Moreover, increased police presence has far-reaching corrosive effects on the shared sense of dignity, efficacy, power, and belonging that are not only human entitlements, but also core underlying conditions for the long-term production of safe neighborhoods.

If policing is not the way to produce safety, what is? The bottom line is that the answers will be structural, systematic, and as far-reaching as the harm and divestment that has generated interpersonal violence in the first place. □

WHAT *DOES* PRODUCE SAFETY?

The movements fighting to defund police are right to recognize policing as an obstacle to safety and stability.

In seeking to end violence, it is imperative that we ask, *What is currently producing safety?* and *What are the barriers to the expansion and greater efficacy of those strategies?* Effective solutions to violence are located in thousands of local community endeavors to foster the safety, healing, and material wellbeing of people most impacted by violence (One Million Experiments 2021). Everywhere across the country, people are intervening to prevent violence, interrupt violence, hold people accountable for violence, and help people heal from violence.

Some of their solutions are housed at non-profits. Others are more informal, including neighbors who rush to crime scenes as soon as—if not before—the police arrive, to help minimize retaliatory violence and support people in the early crushing moments of grief. They include elders who hold circle processes in their homes to address harms police, courts, and prisons cannot or will not ever reach. They include healers who provide remedy and power to survivors when neither was found in the courts. These neighbors, or “solutionaries” to borrow a phrase from Grace Lee Boggs, are everywhere and always have been (Boggs 2013). Communities—especially those of color historically subjected to violence and inequity—would not survive without these contributors to safety.

ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AS A PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN

Our country's criminal court system is not designed or equipped to offer trauma-informed healing to survivors of violent crime—nor should it. Crime survivors are more likely to be low-income, young people of color, and they experience significant challenges in recovery and healing; eight in ten report experiencing at least one symptom of trauma (Alliance for Safety and Justice 2016:4). With a criminal court system that often treats survivors of gun violence as suspects in their own trauma, recovery can be extraordinarily difficult. Researchers and practitioners are increasingly aware of what people who have experienced the criminal punishment system firsthand have long known: investigations, prosecutions, and court processes are hardwired to mete out punishment, not facilitate holistic, trauma-informed healing for survivors of violence.

Fortunately, researchers, practitioners, and local leaders are moving away from individualized notions of violence and toward public health-based approaches to understand the structural causes of violence. These approaches focus on preventing injury or death by addressing underlying social determinants of health, centering the needs of people most impacted by violence, and providing

support for navigating trauma. According to the Centers for Disease Control (2021), social determinants of health are “conditions in the places where people live, learn, work, and play that affect a wide range of health and quality-of-life risks and outcomes.” Examples include transportation options; employment and education opportunities; safe housing; and access to healthy food, air, and water. Of course, these conditions are shaped by the distribution of resources and power at local and national levels. Poor, majority Black and people of color communities in cities across the country have been subjected to severe retractions in public investment in areas that promote health, such as education, housing, and public transportation. Yet these same communities have borne the brunt of state investments in systems of criminalization, policing, and incarceration.

Since the early 1980s, medical and public health researchers have recognized violence as a public health crisis in that violence behaves like a chronic, recurrent disease process that is preventable. A white paper written by the National Network of Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs (NNHVIP) (2019) provides a comprehensive overview of this framework. It holds that interpersonal violence is an epidemic that disproportionately harms young adults, 15–34 years old (and is the leading cause of death for young adults in that age range), and disproportionately affects Black and Latino men and boys (NNHVIP 2019). Black men and boys aged 15 to 34, who make up two percent of the U.S. population, comprised 38 percent of people who died as a result of gunshot injuries in 2016.

Violent victimization is sometimes considered a “recurrent disease” because people who experience assaultive injuries are often re-injured. In cities it is estimated that up to 41 percent of patients treated for violent injury are re-injured within five years. Further, being a victim of violence “also significantly increases the likelihood of engaging in violent behaviors against others, oftentimes as retaliation for the initial injury” (NNHVIP 2019). Violent injury also impacts mental health, with many individuals experiencing PTSD, depression, and substance use disorders after the

violence—which may add another layer to the PTSD they experience from living in environments that produce chronic stress (Parker 2017). And yet adequate mental health services are rare. The epidemic of interpersonal violence results in premature death and disability among young people, and this in turn leads to further community destabilization, poverty, increased incarceration (and its attendant negative impacts), and more violence.

To be clear, while public health frameworks for understanding the factors that drive interpersonal violence are useful, they are not free of racism. Often the disease-based model can justify the identification and removal of those deemed most “sick” or “contagious.” This framework has been used to isolate, coerce, and punish those most likely to experience violence—that is, Black and Latino boys and men—even as it has centered healing, trauma-informed care, community ties, material support, and dignity. We focus on the latter interventions here, acknowledging that the field of public health is deeply implicated in creating and upholding racist logics and systems, and in justifying oppression and punishment.

PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACHES TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE IN PRACTICE

Public health approaches to addressing violence include credible messenger and violence interruption programs to prevent violence, hospital-based programs that seek to interrupt cycles of violence, and more. Save Our Streets (S.O.S.) in New York City supports people who have experienced violence to use their credibility and relationships to mediate conflicts before they escalate to gun violence, and to respond immediately after individual shootings to help prevent further violence. Hundreds of violence prevention organizations are doing a version of this work in neighborhoods across the country, including Communities Partnering 4 Peace in Chicago, Advance Peace in Richmond, the Jersey City Anti-Violence Coalition Movement, Newark Anti-Violence Coalition, and others. Many of these programs include economic stability—helping to meet people’s basic needs—as a key component of violence intervention, as we will discuss in the next section.

In the mid-1990s, community organizations in Oakland and Milwaukee teamed up with hospital staff to create the first hospital-based violence intervention programs, which applied the credible messenger model in a new, high impact setting (NNHVIP 2019).² The theory goes that hospitals are on the frontlines of a public health crisis of violence and that, when hospitals only treat someone’s acute physical injury (providing surgery after gunshot wounds, for example), many people are likely to be reinjured because PTSD and underlying social determinants of health have not been addressed.

Too often, medical teams treat violence and harm in the same way that our criminal punishment system does: viewing harm and injury as the result of loathsome individual behavior. But with the advent of hospital-based violence intervention programs, of which there are now more than 35 across the United States (many part of a network called Health Alliance for Violence Intervention [HAVI]), hospital staff and their community partners can do more than sew someone up and send them home knowing that they will likely return to the hospital, harm someone else, or end up in prison or the cemetery after another incident (NNHVIP 2019).³ Instead,

the approaches taken by these programs address high levels of interpersonal violence that are embedded within a broader context of structural violence. Policing, criminalization, and incarceration exacerbate poverty and worsen other social determinants of health. We will only break that cycle with interventions that center the needs of the members of our community most vulnerable to this cycle and that focus on trauma-informed healing, rather than incarceration.

Hospital-based violence intervention programs include ones like Detroit Life is Valuable Everyday (DLIVE) at Detroit Medical Center-Sinai Grace Hospital (Lee 2018). The program involves the DLIVE team connecting with appropriate youth and young adult patients who have sustained an injury and leveraging the energy of that moment to initiate

a therapeutic relationship and engage in a healing transformative journey. DLIVE provides a range of trauma-informed supports that include integrated mental health therapy, transportation, housing, employment opportunities, and other critical social determinants of health domains. DLIVE focuses on delivering this support in a trauma-informed way to mitigate barriers and prevent re-traumatization. This may involve DLIVE providing resources directly (e.g. transportation, mental health support) or facilitating support via partnerships with like-minded community partners (e.g. legal advocacy and community lawyering). Programs like DLIVE are consistent with a structural approach to understanding violence and are guided by the question: What supports are needed to ensure that this does not happen again, and that that young person can be healthy and well? In the widespread absence of trauma-informed healing supports for survivors of violence, DLIVE has created a model for holistic care and healing.



BUT WITH THE ADVENT OF HOSPITAL-BASED VIOLENCE INTERVENTION PROGRAMS, HOSPITAL STAFF AND THEIR COMMUNITY PARTNERS CAN DO MORE THAN SEW SOMEONE UP AND SEND THEM HOME

Since mid-2018, DLIVE and the Detroit Justice Center (DJC) have joined forces to provide holistic support to youth and young adults who have sustained acute violent trauma such as gunshot wounds. In June 2018, DJC and DLIVE formed a medical-legal partnership so that DLIVE members could receive assistance with removing legal barriers such as suspended licenses, outstanding warrants, tickets and fines, criminal records, and more. This partnership helps minimize how the criminal punishment system undercuts DLIVE's success by reinforcing the barriers and harm DLIVE works to transform. So far, DLIVE and DJC have already provided holistic support to more than 25 clients, furthering their shared goals of preventing future incarceration, and facilitating pathways toward success and prosperity. The organizations have also helped their shared clients—mostly Black men in their 20s and 30s—avoid re-injury, resolve court obligations, obtain employment, and reconnect with their children.

Studies of hospital-based violence intervention programs have demonstrated the profound promise and success rates of hospital-based programs when it comes to preventing reinjury, violent harm, and criminal legal system involvement; decreasing PTSD symptoms; and more (NNHVIP 2019). So far, five randomized control trials have studied the link between participating in a HVIP and future risk of reinjury, and the results have been encouraging. In a trial in Baltimore, for example, there was a difference in re-hospitalization of 36 percent in the control group compared to 5 percent in the group that participated in the HVIP (NNHVIP 2019:8).

The takeaway is clear: if we want to interrupt cycles of violence, we need to invest in programs that center credible messengers and promote public health and safety. More broadly, we need to invest our resources in improving social determinants of health that determine community risk levels for violence and create the conditions where people can be safe. Fortunately, organizers are creating pathways for doing just that.

ADDRESSING INEQUITY AND MEETING PEOPLE'S NEEDS FOR ECONOMIC WELLBEING

When community members who experience the brunt of violence, policing, and incarceration are asked how they would create safe, healthy, livable neighborhoods, their answers are remarkably consistent—and they align with the social determinants of health discussed above. As the Durham Beyond Policing Coalition found: “When we surveyed Durham residents in 2016 and 2017 about how they would spend the \$71M allocated to build the new DPD headquarters to keep their communities safe, they said they wanted affordable housing, healthcare access, good jobs, and better public transportation. They wanted to address structural problems.” People want to address the underlying structural factors that Durham organizers call “criminally unlivable contexts” (Durham Beyond Policing Coalition 2020).

When the Detroit Justice Center asked Detroit teenagers how they would spend the \$533 million being spent on a new jail complex in the city in 2018, not one said that the city needed more police or jails. Instead, they asked for mental health support, restorative justice mediation centers, public transit, affordable and accessible public housing, investments in quality schools, and well-paid teachers (Corey 2018; Detroit Justice Center and Designing Justice+Designing Spaces 2019).

In a 2015 study led by the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, over 20 organizations across 14 states surveyed 1,080 people who had been incarcerated or who were relatives of people who had been (deVuono-powell, Schweidler, Walters, and Zohrabi 2015). Two-thirds of families in the study had difficulty meeting their basic needs due to a loved one's incarceration. When asked how they would like to see the United States reinvest the \$80 billion that we spend on “corrections” each year, respondents prioritized education; job training, creation, and placement; and affordable housing. People know what drives destabilization, lack of safety, and violence, and they know what types of investments and resources will address root causes and promote safety and wellbeing.

Research in urban planning, design, and community development demonstrates that economic development and land use affect violence (Tsao and Davis 2015). A research report by the Prevention Institute outlines how decisions about the use of resources, particularly the use of land, drive community safety and determine risk and wellbeing. Risk factors that contribute to high levels of interpersonal violence include neighborhood poverty, lack of economic opportunities, high alcohol outlet density, residential segregation, lack of public transportation, and high rates of prison re-entry without adequate supports. This latter factor reveals how greater investment in the criminal punishment system works against the development of community infrastructure to prevent and respond to violence.

Employment and economic opportunities, parks and recreation facilities that allow people to socialize and build strong networks, quality schools, and accessible opportunities for cultural and artistic expression (“accessible” meaning that community centers can be used by all people, are well-maintained and well-lit, offer quality programming, and are open after school and on weekends) prevent community violence (Tsao and Davis 2015). However, communities that experience high levels of violence do not simply lack these resources; they also have been subjected to deep investments in institutions that make communities unsafe. Jails *produce* poverty, job loss, evictions, lack of housing, neighborhood instability, violence, trauma, debility, and death—they make communities less safe and healthy. Where incarceration rates are high, community social and economic wellbeing decline. Meanwhile, the misery associated with incarceration costs us over \$1.2 trillion each year, once the impact on other systems like foster care and housing and the costs to families is considered (Chicago’s Million Dollar Blocks N.d.; The Prisoner’s Alliance with Community 1997; Center for Nu Leadership on Urban Solutions 2013; deVuono-powell, Schweidler, Walters, and Zohrabi 2015; Schoenherr 2016).

A number of violence prevention programs are meeting people's basic needs for economic wellbeing, social supports, and housing as part of a coordinated strategy to reduce incidents of violence. In Chicago, Heartland Alliance's Rapid Employment and Development Initiative (READI) program (2020) is squarely focused on connecting men most impacted by gun violence to supports that may ultimately help reduce gun violence in the city. The one-year program includes supports such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), paid transitional jobs, and wrap-around support services. The program's Housing for Justice pilot recognizes the importance of safe, stable housing (an essential social determinant of health), and it helps participants locate suitable housing, provides a rental subsidy, provides ongoing landlord mediation, and supports the participant to continue increasing their economic opportunity (Rapid Employment and Development Initiative Chicago 2020).

Advance Peace in Richmond is another violence interruption program that emphasizes improving the health and economic wellbeing of individuals involved in gun violence. Like other violence interruption programs, Advance Peace connects people (mostly Black men between 14-27) with mentorship, internships, job training, and support services. Moreover, it sends outreach teams to intervene in conflicts. Participants receive a stipend to help meet economic needs and travel together to places such as Washington, DC, South Africa, and Mexico. Unlike other programs (like Ceasefire, a focused deterrence strategy), the program does not share information from participants with the police or threaten punishment for non-compliance with the program. As one participant put it, "When I knew they weren't the police, that's when they gained my trust" (Rani 2017). From the time Advance Peace began in 2010 until 2017, firearm assaults causing injury or death were reduced by two thirds in Richmond. These programs exist, they work, and they do not require police or threats of punishment.

ORGANIZING AND BUILDING POWER TO SHIFT RESOURCES AND PROMOTE COMMUNITY SAFETY

Organizers across the country provide models for how we can shift resources away from policing and incarceration and toward institutions, infrastructure, and programs that make communities safer. Addressing structural violence comes down to deciding how resources are spent—which means it comes down to power. A number of organizations are building community-level initiatives to prevent and address violence and shifting public resources through organizing campaigns.

In Colorado, formerly incarcerated people and their allies, in an effort led by the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition, have won millions in community reinvestment for housing, jobs, reentry supports, and health care in an effort to prevent violence and create communities where people can thrive. Colorado's Transforming Safety Initiative, launched after the state legislature passed the Justice Reinvestment Crime Prevention bill with bipartisan support in 2017, focuses

on preventing crime in the first place by investing in economic and community development in specific neighborhoods—North Aurora and Southeast Colorado Springs—most impacted by crime and incarceration. The program works with members of those communities who identify safety priorities and solutions and, in turn, direct investments toward community organizations that provide supports such as housing for formerly incarcerated people. For example, the Second Chance Center's Providence at the Heights (PATH) housing project, which opened in 2020, provides 50 supportive low-income housing units, including a common area with beautiful views of nature, trauma-informed relaxation rooms, a kitchen for cooking classes, a barbershop, counselors, and assistance with connecting to community-based health care, treatment, and employment services (Second Chance Center, Inc. 2020).

In Atlanta in 2019, after pressure from formerly incarcerated women and their allies, the City Council moved to shut down the City Detention Center and repurpose it as a hub called the Center for Equity, Wellness, and Freedom, where residents would be able to access health care, housing, child care, and more. The Atlanta activists fought to reduce pretrial incarceration, end cash bail, eliminate city ordinances that criminalize poverty, and cut city contracts with Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The jail population shrank from over 1,000 to less than 100, and they began to articulate a vision for how the city could reallocate the \$32.5 million it was spending each year on the jail to meet communities' needs. The repurposed center would seek to do just that, putting the City of Atlanta out of the "jail business," as Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms put it after the city council's historic closure vote.

In Chicago youth organizers with the #NoCopAcademy campaign paved the way for more recent calls to defund the police, which are gaining traction in the city. In fall 2020 over 38,000 residents participated in the city's budget survey and 87 percent called for shifting funds away from policing and toward community services and public

health (Ritchie 2021; City of Chicago Office of Budget and Management 2021). Chicago organizers are also building up sustainable local economies that do not rely upon oppressive extraction and criminalization. On the southside of Chicago, a coalition of organizations called Just Chicago is building a solidarity economy with the hope of creating a non-exploitative local economy and public spaces that are safe and inviting. The planned elements include community land trusts, worker-owned cooperative businesses, participatory budgets, and public banks (Moore 2020). Another organization in Chicago, Equity and Transformation (EAT), was founded by and for formerly incarcerated and marginalized Black people to empower those working in the informal economy to transform social and economic conditions in the city. EAT's project includes a guaranteed income pilot, helping Black and Latinx people navigate the process for cannabis dispensary licensure, advocating for the Illinois BREATHE Act, and more (Equity and Transformation Chicago 2021).

Organizers recognize that it's not just about the absence of police, but the presence of other protective factors and supports that will help make policing, criminalization, and incarceration obsolete. In Detroit in the summer of 2020 after the killing of George Floyd, youth organizers with 482 Forward launched a campaign to get the police out of Detroit schools, calling for complete defunding of the Detroit Public Schools Consolidated District (DPSCD). In addition, the young people called for the creation of a committee of parents, students, union leaders, youth development experts, administrators, and community leaders who would oversee the defunding of police and security; create a holistic safety plan for schools that includes restorative justice training, peer-to-peer de-escalation training, and school safety initiatives; and evaluate the school district's educator training, curriculum and district practices to ensure they are anti-racist, anti-adultist, and trauma-informed (482 Forward N.d.).

Durham Beyond Policing, which has provided a model for organizers in other cities to reallocate public money from policing to true public safety, summarizes what is at stake:

Cities and counties represent a local social contract to pool collective resources for the public good.

We create cities like Durham based on a principle that we can live safer, more joyful lives by relying on the collective rather than the individual. Public safety thus entails an ongoing commitment to sustaining community through relationship building and accountability, not by severing people's ties to community and disposing of them. Our public resources are best used in the service of bolstering the integrity of communities, rather than undermining them."

**Durham Beyond Policing
Coalition 2020.**

We face a choice now to follow the lead of local organizers and community builders who are offering pragmatic visions for how to meet people's needs and create safer communities, or to keep pouring money into institutions that police, prosecute, and cage people—and that have never produced safety.

HEALING PAIN

Addressing violence in ways that do not center punishment leads us to consider differently and more centrally the needs of those harmed by it. This is not labor, to say the least, the criminal punishment system is, or should be, positioned to do. And even beyond its benefit in reducing future harm, healing work is critical in itself: people are entitled to healing simply because they were hurt. Investing in healing work affirms the value of the person who was harmed and the values of the community that were breached when that person was hurt.

Groups across the country are taking up this healing work where government systems have failed to do so. One example is Detroit Heals Detroit, which exists to foster healing justice for youth in ways that transform their pain into power. With a goal to combat trauma, they use healing centered engagement to share their “greatest vulnerabilities with the rest of the world while simultaneously working to dismantle oppressive systems for marginalized Detroit youth” (Detroit Heals Detroit 2020).

Some of the most powerful models for such healing have deep roots in indigenous and other cultural traditions. The National Compadres Network (2017) works through the Healing Generations Framework, which promotes familial community healing and addresses persistent community strife through retreats, gatherings, and the incorporation of indigenous culturally based practices. Core principles of the Healing Generation Framework include placing culture and healing at the center of all service development and implementation; an intergenerational focus on elders, fathers and the extended kinship network, or Compadres, in taking responsibility for young men in the community; the long-standing traditional Huehuetlatolli (wisdom of the elders) and círculo de palabra (talking/healing circles) as natural approaches to reclaim the dignity, health, character, and strength of boys and men, their families and communities; and principles of Un Hombre Noble (Noble Men), where honorable men are true to their word, have a sense of responsibility for their wellbeing and the wellbeing of others in their círculos and the greater community, while building on their positive cultural traditions. At the programmatic level, La Cultura Cura, or Transformational Healing, is a method for healing and healthy development which is inextricably linked to restoring one’s cultural identity as the foundation of wellbeing for individuals, families,

communities, and society alike. It employs a multigenerational process of learning and remembering one's true and positive cultural values, principles, customs, and traditions.

In Albany, Urban Grief, founded by Lisa W. Good, responds to the traumatic impact of community violence, death, and loss through community education, crisis response, victim advocacy, and grief support (Urban Grief 2020). She understands that violence will not end if it remains unhealed, and creates spaces for people to process their grief in a context of chronic loss and pain.

Similarly, mothers across the country who have lost their children to violence have organized groups to support each other in healing. Some of that work is the grueling labor of grief, and for many, it extends to working collectively to prevent others from experiencing similar loss. Many of these groups (some of which are small non-profits, some of which are just individuals with an unfaltering dedication to the work) gather in the network Mothers in Charge. Led by Philadelphia-based Dr. Dorothy Johnson-Speight, Mothers in Charge is a violence prevention, education, and intervention-based organization that advocates for and supports youth, young adults, families, and communities affected by violence (Mothers in Charge 2020). These groups form a powerful counterpoint to many of the more familiar advocacy configurations of crime victims who call for more policing and more incarceration. Instead, these groups recognize how the systems of policing, incarceration, and surveillance not only failed to protect their children but often contributed to the loss of their lives. Rather than punishment, these groups, in the names of their children, call for a transformation of our responses to violence that centers prevention and healing.



GROUPS ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE TAKING UP THIS HEALING WORK WHERE GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS HAVE FAILED TO DO SO

Our criminal punishment system responds to the pain that arises from violence by inflicting more pain—this time on the person who caused it. The lessons taught by those who have suffered unthinkable losses is that pain does not demand more pain; pain demands relief, it demands healing. Many survivors find the criminal legal system process—which doubts their memories, forces them to relive their pain, blames them and their loved ones for the harm they endured, places them at heightened risk of retaliatory violence from which it cannot protect them, and does not provide them with answers to their questions or opportunities to shape the outcome of what happened to them—fundamentally retraumatizing (Erez and Tontodonato 1990; Orth 2002; Erez and Ammar 2003; Herman 2003; Herman 2005; Koss 2006; Parsons and Bergin 2010; American Civil Liberties Union 2015; Briones-Robinson, Powers, and Socia 2016). More than half of survivors do not engage the system in the first place, often for those reasons; but many of those who have turned to it for an answer have found it only exacerbated their hurt (Langton, Berzofsky, Krebs, and Smiley-McDonald 2012). These survivors demand and create another way, not typically because they disbelieve in punishment philosophically, but because the punishment system deployed in

their names—and paid for by the resources that could otherwise have been dedicated to them, the survivors—left them with far less than they needed or deserved.

TRANSFORMING HARM

Prevention work is critical, but we will not prevent all violence. Structural conditions continue to generate it, the current system fails to resolve it, and the outcomes of healing the cycles of violence that are already underway will take generations to manifest fully as the kind of mutually life-affirming social relations such work stands to produce. Healing work is essential, but healing is not the only need that arises from an act of harm. At least for now, people will continue to harm each other, and communities and society will need methods of addressing harm when it occurs. Among the most effective methods are ones whose current iterations—restorative and transformative justice—have gained greater traction in recent decades, and even more visibly in recent months, but whose core approaches precede not only this period, but courts and police as well.

Restorative justice processes—in which those impacted by a given harm come together to acknowledge the impact of the harm and reach agreements about how the responsible person can make things as right as possible—are rooted in indigenous practices. These processes have been passed down across generations, and created anew in countless communities and in countless formations. Restorative justice processes, often also called “circles,” include everyone impacted by harm—the survivors, those who caused it, and their support people. The circles identify actions that can help repair the harm and ensure that similar harm—both to the survivor(s) in the process and to others—will not recur.

Transformative justice approaches are consistent with restorative approaches to individual instances of harm, expanding the inquiry about both causes of and solutions to violence to include the larger societal conditions that give rise to violence. As *generationFive* (2007), a collaborative that brings a systemic framework to understanding child sexual abuse and forwards approaches to connecting personal, community and social transformation, describes it, transformative justice “seeks safety and accountability without relying on alienation, punishment, or State

or systemic violence, including incarceration or policing.” Together, these approaches call for responses to violence that stand to actually end it—by addressing interpersonal harm in a way that transforms relationships and behavior, and addressing structural violence in a way that frees people from the conditions that create and perpetuate pain.

Restorative justice has long been practiced both formally and informally, and has been applied systematically over the past several decades as an “alternative” to courts and prisons. Most of these system applications have been limited to nonviolent crime—*theft, vandalism, and harm between people that does not include physical violence.* Some long-standing organizations dedicated to this work, like Restorative Response Baltimore, have expanded to include some more serious harm over time. Still, when restorative justice has been applied to violence, it has been limited primarily to young people in the juvenile or family courts. Impact Justice is working with jurisdictions across the country to support such diversion work based in their formative experience and demonstrated success in the Bay Area, with an aim of reaching into the adult criminal court system.

Common Justice, based in Brooklyn, New York, works exclusively with violent crime in the adult courts. The organization diverts serious and violent felonies such as robberies and assaults from the adult criminal court system into a highly successful restorative justice violence intervention model that serves as an alternative to prison for those responsible for crime and an avenue to healing for those harmed. And countless interventions and community leaders—such as Cheryl Graves and the Community Justice for Youth Institute in Chicago, Mariame Kaba and Project Nia in Chicago and transformharm.org, and Mimi Kim and Creative Interventions—are building responses outside the criminal punishment system to transform violence in ways the system simply cannot.

The application of these approaches to violence in place of incarceration has been largely constrained by a set of political conditions that has limited their expansion. We make a grave mistake, however, if we conflate these political constraints with the actual limitations of such interventions. Because restorative justice has been most visibly applied to nonviolent crime, many people assume that is what it is built for. To the contrary: when we do not apply restorative justice processes to violence, we are squandering one of the most promising solutions to serious harm available to us.

Harm requires repair. Punishment is not repair. Punishment is passive—it is done to us—accountability is active. It requires that we (1) acknowledge what we have done, (2) acknowledge its impact, (3) express genuine remorse, (4) make things as right as possible, ideally in ways defined by those harmed, and (5) become someone who will never cause similar harm again. Accountability is some of the hardest work people can do, and, unlike the passivity of punishment, the labor it requires produces positive change (Sered 2019).



BECAUSE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE HAS BEEN MOST VISIBLY APPLIED TO NONVIOLENT CRIME, MANY PEOPLE ASSUME THAT IS WHAT IT IS BUILT FOR



IN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROCESSES, PEOPLE WHO HAVE CAUSED HARM LOOK INTO THE EYES OF THOSE THEY HURT, LISTEN TO THEIR PAIN, OWN THEIR RESPONSIBILITY FOR THAT PAIN, AND AFFIRM THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO FIX IT

In restorative justice processes, people who have caused harm look into the eyes of those they hurt, listen to their pain, own their responsibility for that pain, and affirm their responsibility to fix it. Punishment shames people, but as Dr. James Gilligan (2003) has taught, shame is a core driver of violence, so its cultivation runs contrary to the interest of safety. Accountability does the reverse: it treats people in their full human dignity, and with that dignity comes an obligation not to disappear, not to escape, not to be isolated or separated or confined, but to make right. Punishment assumes the only thing society can do with someone who has used their power to cause harm is to diminish that person and their power. Accountability assumes instead that that person, upright in themselves, can be required to use that power to correct the harm and make good of it.

Were all prison sentences life sentences, this would generate an interesting philosophical debate about human nature. But because the vast majority of incarcerated people come home, the question is a practical one: if someone is not going to be eradicated, if they are going to continue to belong to us and live among us, then how do we want them to change—in the way prison changes

people or in the way restorative justice does (James 2015)? No one who dreams of safety dreams of a neighborhood of ashamed, isolated, injured, disenfranchised people. Then why would we choose a response like prison characterized by shame, isolation, injury, and political and economic disenfranchisement to keep us all safe? Restorative justice disentangles responses to violence from the contradictions inherent in incarceration. It recognizes and develops the dimensions of people—dignity, connectedness, healing, responsibility, agency—that align with the behavior a society hopes to foster, including cessation from violence. It offers a rational, pragmatic, coherent approach to violence that is, unlike prison, positioned to produce near-term and lasting safety.

But the responsible person and the larger community are not the only ones whose interest society has to account for in responding to violence. Society also has an obligation to the survivor. It is actually from this vantage point that the argument for restorative justice displacing incarceration as our primary response to violence is clearest. Despite the dominant cultural depictions of survivors as mostly white and mostly vengeful, the truth is people of color are far more likely to experience violence than white people and the vast majority of survivors across race, when asked, prefer alternatives to incarceration when given the choice.

For instance, at Common Justice, people responsible for violence are only given the opportunity to participate in the program if the survivors of their crimes agree. All of these survivors are people who participated in the criminal court system. They are among the less than half of victims who called the police and are part of the even smaller subgroup who continued their engagement through the grand jury process. They are people who initially chose a path that could lead to prison. They are people who have suffered serious violence—knives to their bodies, guns to their heads, lacerations to their livers, punctured lungs—and have engaged the criminal court system in a way

likely to result in the incarceration of the person who hurt them. Even among these survivors, when Common Justice is offered, 90 percent choose something other than that very incarceration they were initially pursuing (Sered 2019:42).

Ninety percent is a stunning number, especially in the context of the story we have been told about pursuing incarceration because it is what survivors want. And the reality it points to may not be as obvious as it appears. Some certainly choose an alternative process for the reasons we think of first—compassion, forgiveness, the belief that people can change, an experience having caused harm themselves or having loved someone who did, and a desire to be part of transformation. But those are not the main reasons for this overwhelming trend. The main reason is that survivors are pragmatic. Most choose this restorative justice process not out of a philosophical commitment to a certain set of ideals, but because they believe something other than incarceration will better meet their short- and long-term needs for safety and justice and ensure that others do not experience the same suffering.

The evidence supports their beliefs. Restorative justice processes across the country substantially reduce recidivism. Moreover, survivors express greater levels of satisfaction with these approaches than with the criminal court system (Umbreit, Coates, and Vos 2001; National Council on Crime and Delinquency 2015; Baliga, Henry, and Valentine 2017). This makes sense, as these processes provide survivors with the basic things they seek when they have been hurt: answers to their questions, an opportunity to be heard, acknowledgement of the wrongdoing, and a sense of power relative to the outcome of the harm. They want an opportunity to shape the response, restitution and apologies, as well as the return of property and other concrete forms of repair. They want assurance that the person who harmed them will engage in a change process to address their behavior, a basis to believe the person will not commit further harm to them or to others, and the building blocks to form a coherent narrative that can form

the scaffolding for their ongoing healing. All of these factors, it turns out, are the same things the psychological literature identifies as critical for reducing posttraumatic stress.

While survivors' experiences and needs vary immensely, nearly all survivors of violence want two things: to know that the person who hurt them will not hurt them again, and to know that person will not hurt anyone else (Alliance for Safety and Justice 2016). Restorative justice, particularly when practiced in a larger context of transformative justice aimed at upending the conditions that gave rise to violence in the first place, is among the most promising paths to meet those needs. These approaches stand to do what policing and prisons have never done and can never do: deliver on the promise of safety. □



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WHAT WON'T WORK AND WHAT WILL

In the context of all these solutions, it is important to confront why the current dominant approaches—policing and incarceration—do not work.

Violence is fundamentally structural, and policing and incarceration enact and exacerbate large scale structural harm while simultaneously treating violence as though it were discrete, individual behavior. Violence is a public health issue, and policing and incarceration are enforcement-based, not health-based. And, as we have learned too well this past year, public health issues like a pandemic cannot be punished away. Violence results from inequity and loss of opportunity, and policing and incarceration exacerbate inequity and curtail opportunity—both in their immediate application and in the unending collateral consequences that attach to convictions. Violence is the product of pain, and policing and incarceration reproduce, rather than heal, pain. Violence requires accountability and repair, and policing and incarceration systematically separate people from the pathways to both, to the detriment of those responsible for harm and those who survive it. It is not surprising, then, that incarceration has been demonstrated to be criminogenic—meaning

that it is a measurable, statistically significant *driver* of crime and violence (Cullen, Jonson, and Nagin 2011; Gendreau, Goggin, Cullen, and Andrews 2000; Smith, Goggin, and Gendreau 2002; Villettaz, Killias, and Zoder 2006; Nagin, Cullen, and Jonson 2009; Jonson 2010; Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, and Guckenburg 2010; Chiricos, Barrick, Bales, and Bontrager 2007; Mueller-Smith 2015). After all, it has as its core defining features precisely the things that generate violence in the first place.

The community safety strategies we have described above consistently and overwhelmingly demonstrate better results than criminal court interventions in reducing violence, but they are still vastly underutilized when compared with surveillance, arrests, convictions, and incarceration. If we are serious about ending violence, what inhibits us from drawing on and growing solutions to it that are known to be effective?

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Policing and incarceration systematically separate people from the pathways to accountability and repair, to the detriment of those responsible for harm and those who survive it. It is not surprising, then, that incarceration has been demonstrated to be criminogenic—meaning that it is a measurable, statistically significant driver of crime and violence. After all, it has as its core defining features precisely the things that generate violence in the first place.

One barrier is that we believe we have to start from scratch, that the project before us begins with imagining from a blank slate. Fortunately, this is not the case: these solutions are present, and they have long been present. They are the answer to the question “why isn’t there more violence?” These solutions are the reasons for the safety we do have, for the instances when harm diminishes rather than escalates, for the ways people become well individually and together. They are the ways Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color have persisted, healed, and thrived despite centuries of white supremacist violence, both individual and structural. They may not be known to some people in positions with the authority to determine governmental responses to violence, but they are known to thousands, even millions, of people, oftentimes informally and without the labels or categories offered here. They have been handed down across generations and reshaped and regenerated by young people over and over again. It is not wrong to say that a future without violence will require

imagination: it undoubtedly will, and we will want and need more than what we already have. But the notion that we are starting from scratch is fundamentally inaccurate, ahistorical, and racist.

Another barrier to expanding the approaches described here is political. Many of these solutions, particularly when considered alternatives to the criminal punishment system, are seen as “soft” on crime, and being soft on crime has largely been seen as a losing political position. Fear-mongering is a tried and tested campaign strategy for elected prosecutors, sheriffs, mayors, and legislators, and the terrifying (to elected officials perhaps more than anyone) prospect of someone set free into a program subsequently causing further harm lurks in the background of virtually every criminal legal system reform platform. This unifocal approach is shifting, though. Over the past several years, more and more prosecutors—from Chicago to St. Louis, San Francisco and Los Angeles to Baltimore, New Orleans to Brooklyn—are running on platforms about reducing incarceration while increasing safety and racial equity. And they are winning. In a country where one in two people has had a loved one incarcerated, more and more people



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know that the promise of policing and incarceration is not a reliable promise of justice or safety (FWD.us 2018). Some elected officials are getting in line with their constituents, particularly the constituents who will be directly impacted by criminal justice policy and who often make up majorities in their districts.

Indeed, the most significant barrier to the expansion of these solutions is power—political power, narrative power, and economic power. Political power is not only the capacity of a group of people to ensure elected officials act in their interest and the interest of those they love, though it includes that. It also includes the capacity to develop and protect solutions outside of and apart from the state apparatus without the forcible intrusion of the state into problems and their resolution. In this context, it includes the power to define what constitutes safety and to choose what methods will be used to achieve it.

Narrative power is about whose stories shape our culture and how. It is not just about visibility or wide dissemination, though it includes those things, but about broad societal influence and the ability to render certain things possible and others impossible. As Color of Change defines it, narrative power is “the ability to create leverage over those who set the incentives, rules, and norms that shape society and human behavior” (Robinson 2019). We have been fed too many stories that demonize people who commit violence, conflate Blackness and dangerousness, center certain survivors at the expense of others, and foreclose options and imagination. Narrative power is not just about the telling of those stories, but the centering of them in our culture as determinants of what we collectively will do.

Economic power comes down to resources. The state has funded policing and prisons at the expense of schools, hospitals, public health systems, healthy food and clean water, mental health and drug treatment, and other solutions to interpersonal violence. We have systematically divested from the things that reduce violence while simultaneously investing in the things that produce it. Any gains made in reducing

violence through this strategy should be understood as succeeding despite our skewed priorities, not because of them. There is no way out of violence without inverting where the money goes.

Thus far public debate primarily has asked: Can we be safe while defunding the police? Instead, we should ask: Can we be safe *without* defunding the police? We cannot, for two primary reasons. The first is the simplest: resources are not unlimited and the resources for the social supports that actually produce safety have to come from somewhere. While technically we could raise those collective resources through substantial increases in taxation, including on the richest, this approach is unlikely in our current political landscape. The reality is that our budgets are moral documents that require trade-offs. As is, we spend virtually all our safety money on police.

But the second reason would not be surmountable even through taxation or other creative allocation: policing as we know it affirmatively undermines both individual and structural approaches to producing safety. Policing generates racial inequity by force when inequity itself drives violence. Policing responds to harm with separation when safety is produced in connection. Policing inflicts violence

that exacerbates long-standing cycles of individual and collective pain and trauma when healing is fundamental prevention work. And policing drives economic and social disenfranchisement through collateral consequences when the ability to meet one's basic needs and contribute to one's community are key protective factors against violence. The interventions that are succeeding in producing safety now are not only doing so without adequate resources, they are doing so despite the intrusion, interruption, and displacement of their work by police and the criminal punishment system as a whole.

The project of displacing police and prison is not primarily a project of doing less. As abolitionists such as Dr. Angela Davis and Dr. Ruth Wilson Gilmore teach us, the displacement of these systems is primarily a labor of creation, not destruction. To end violence, it is imperative that we ask, what is currently producing safety? What are the barriers to the expansion and greater efficacy of those strategies? And if an honest and rigorous account leads us to see both policing and the resources our society commits to it as culprits in compromising that safety work, then it is our duty to make the shifts needed so that people can and will survive. □

ENDNOTES

1 While law enforcement begins with criminalization and policing, policing is inextricable from the systems to which it is an entry point including prosecution and the courts, incarceration, probation, and parole. These systems not only generally preserve, but indeed often exacerbate the biases, harms, and ethos of policing in their own practices. Policing could not function as it does without the courts affirming its arrests and the prisons that mete out punishment as a result. Policing therefore must be understood as a lynchpin in a larger criminal punishment system that is equally implicated in the larger questions about the role of law enforcement in our country and that bears

proportionate responsibility for the harm caused by these interlocking approaches. It also must be noted that Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which often work in tandem with local police departments, are the country's largest law enforcement agencies. Recognizing the relationship between law enforcement agencies and these broader systems, #DefundPolice campaigns are also calling for the defunding of "jails, prisons, detention centers, immigration enforcement, sites of involuntary commitment and incarceration of disabled people" (Ritchie 2021).

2 Youth ALIVE! in Oakland, California and Project Ujima, a program at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (NNHVIP 2019).

3 To date, there are 34-member programs across the United States and in three other countries, dozens of emerging programs, and a community of over 350 practitioners, researchers and policymakers who meet annually (NNHVIP 2019).

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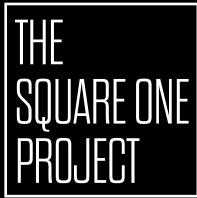
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