

# Which Black Lives Matter?



A demonstrator holds a sign during a protest against racial inequality at Lafayette Park in Washington, D.C., June 6, 2020. (Lucas Jackson/Reuters)

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When the police pull back, violent crime — against blacks — spikes.

While the depraved murder of George Floyd should outrage us all, I believe it continues a misdirected focus on police killings, particularly of unarmed men. According to the *Washington Post* database, in 2019 there were 249 blacks killed by the police: 165 had guns, 33 had knives, and only 14 were unarmed. In 2016, Harvard's Roland Fryer released a study of racial differences in police use of deadly force and found no evidence of bias in police shootings. His conclusions have been echoed by researchers at the University of Maryland and Michigan State University.

By contrast, in 2018, according to FBI statistics, there were 7,406 black homicides. When Floyd was murdered over the Memorial Day weekend, there were 85 shootings and 24 deaths in Chicago. Black Lives Matters, however, has shown little public concern over any of this violence. Indeed, an article in the influential black magazine *The Root* outright defended black activists' refusal to

talk about these homicides:

It is the repeated sleight of hand used to distract and drown out the voices of Black Lives Matter. It is an oft-used “alt-right” refrain and . . . the weapon of choice for the black practitioners of respectability politics.

In 2019, the titular leader of the Black Lives Matter, Shaun King, did make an exception and publicized a non-police murder of a black American. In Houston, a seven-year-old girl was killed in a drive-by shooting, in the same way that other victims are killed every year. What distinguished the murder of this child was that it initially appeared that the perpetrator was a *white* man. Upon hearing about this, King flew to Houston and immediately raised a \$100,000 reward for information leading to the killer’s capture. He did receive such information that led to an arrest. To King’s surprise, the killer turned out to be a *black* man whose gang was retaliating for a previous incident but shot at the wrong car.

Building effective community-police relationships is crucial to lowering homicide rates and reducing the significant racial bias in nonlethal use of force. Despite the current rhetoric, many recent reforms have been quite effective. While police misconduct (and biases) can never be completely eliminated, we can learn from cities where police-community relations are strong.

Criminologist David Kennedy guided Pittsburgh’s launching of a new initiative that better modeled the focused deterrence approach he pioneered and implemented in a number of cities, including Boston. Through community leaders and other neighborhood informants, Pittsburgh’s Group Violence Intervention Unit (GVI) identified more than 500 high-risk offenders. Once a high-risk offender is identified, an officer will visit the offender as well as his or her parents or grandparents. At the meeting, the visiting officer says, “We know what’s going on. You — or your son or grandson — is a shooter.”

If the offender continues to commit crimes, Pittsburgh deals with him harshly. However, if he wishes to turn his life around, services are provided. The GVI unit works with job-training and placement programs, local faith-based organizations, mental-health experts, and multiple families - and housing-related services to help suspects change their lives — “to leave the life.” GVI volunteer coordinator Cornell Jones noted that tattoo-removal services are also offered if needed, because “it’s hard to get any job if you have ‘thug life’ tattooed on your forehead.”

Successes in Camden, N.J., do not fit neatly into the Black Lives Matters narrative. “Its transformation was sparked by corruption and soaring crime, not police brutality,” *Los Angeles Times* reporter Chris Megerian noted this week. “Leaders wanted to put more cops on the street, not defund the police.” The force expanded from 250 to 411 police officers, about 55 per percent white, reorganized at the county level. The key was new leadership that began implementing the same policies that have proven effective in Detroit, Boston, and other cities.

Las Vegas also demonstrated the value of a community-police partnership. Formerly incarcerated, Jon Ponder created Hope for Prisoners, a prison re-entry program that relies on a mentoring alliance made up of Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD) and other local criminal justice agencies. Now, more than 65 officers mentor by sharing their stories of success as well as their personal challenges with ex-offenders. The program concludes with a graduation ceremony at LVMPD Headquarters.

Station Casinos and the Raiders Stadium construction site, among others, have agreements with Hope for Prisoners to hire graduates. Since its inception, the program has an employment rate of 76 percent while experiencing an 8 percent recidivism rate. “Hope for Prisoners is one of the most successful prisoner re-entry programs in the country,” Assistant Sheriff Charles L. Hank III said in LVMPD’s 2018 annual report.

Police reforms are not easy, and they are not always successful, but better policing can be accomplished when police are partners in devising and implementing desired changes. By contrast, the fiercely antagonistic approach of the “Defund the Police” movement is less likely to develop the changes necessary and instead may be a catalyst for increased homicide rates.

In a new paper for the National Bureau of Economic Research, Tanaya Devi and Fryer found that when police were investigated following incidents of deadly force that had gone viral, police activity declined and violent crime spiked. Fryer recently told the *Wall Street Journal* that, in such circumstances, police effectively pull back, becoming less proactive, and curb their interactions with civilians. He concluded, “My estimates show that we lost a thousand more lives, most of them black as well, because of an increase in homicides.”

We should not excuse or overlook police abuse, but it's unfair and unwise to demonize the police. Criminal-justice reform should focus on reducing black homicide rates and, to be most effective, must find a way to develop collaborative relationships with law enforcement. Too many lives are at stake to let the "defund the police" movement stand in the way.

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Source:

<https://www.nationalreview.com/2020/06/defund-police-movement-risks-increased-black-homicide-rate/>

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