

Policing in the United States 1845-Present

Colonization and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Era: 1100s-1800s

Resistance: Armed Resistance, Revolutions, Cultural Survival

1100s: Origins of the “Shire Reeve” or Sheriff in England. Sheriffs were representatives of the crown who sat in on local affairs to make sure laws were actually being enforced (previously, localities had relied on collective enforcement efforts of citizens; the Sheriff’s role thus extended the power of the crown). These unpopular figures were also tax collectors, at least initially; later forms included coroner, justice of the peace, and constable.

- 1100s-1800s: Use of “night watches” in Europe and its colonies: civilian groups of men required by law to patrol the streets at night. They were unpaid, often unwilling, and apparently “frequently drunk.”
- 1492: Colonization of the Americas by Europeans begins; brutal militia force is a routine part of land-grabbing, along with later forcing Indigenous peoples into working for colonizers in mines and agriculture.
- 1600s-1700s: Establishment of trans-Atlantic slave trade; use of force and control of bodies institutionalized into economic systems of the Americas.
- 1500s-1800s: Colonial forces import European justice systems to what is now the U.S., including sheriffs, constables, and night watches. They were unpopular entities whose jobs included taxing and elections alongside law enforcement.

Militias, Patrols, and White Supremacist Consolidation of Power: 1680s-1800s

Resistance: Armed Resistance, Escape and Subversion, Cultural Survival

- 1680s: South Carolina passes a law that allows any white person to capture and punish a runaway slave. In 1690 a law was passed that *required* whites to act in this role. Slavery and white supremacy were so fully institutionalized in the American South that, as one author put it, “White supremacy served in lieu of a police force.”
- 1700s-1800s: Reform of London Watch to resemble a modern police department: pay, round-the-clock hours, and hierarchical command were established. As in the U.S., establishment of actual “police departments” was based on growth in property crimes.
- 1703: Boston passes a curfew law for all Blacks and Indigenous people, establishing race as a defining criteria in law enforcement in the new colonies (even non-slavery ones).
- 1776: Formation of a nation-state in U.S. colonies; national militia unifies in effort to remove the British and a national constitution provides for maintenance of military and National Guard.
- 1700s onwards: Southern cities such as Charleston, Savannah, New Orleans, and Mobile form paramilitary groups tasked with the control of enslaved people, with the goal of preventing and repressing rebellion. Slave patrols and militias often work together. In the U.S., these organized patrols are the first proper antecedents to “modern” police forces.

- Early 1800s: Pass laws were passed in several Southern states requiring all Black people to carry passes and allowing for arrest of any Black person without a pass, regardless of their status.
- Mid-1800s: Police in the U.S. coalesce into one relatively uniform type. Previous law enforcement models such as guards, watchmen, militias and slave patrols begin to coalesce into city-run, 24-hour police.

Property Control and Order Maintenance Era: 1840-1940

Progressive Era: Reform and Bureaucratization to Protect Elite Interests

Resistance: Armed resistance, growth of urban social movements, immigrant and labor union organizing, reforms

- 1845: Establishment of first unified and uniformed police force in NYC. Boston and Philadelphia follow.
- 1865: Emancipation of enslaved people. Emancipation is followed immediately by passage of laws controlling Black people's public movement and work; emancipation also stipulates that slave labor may continue for those convicted of a crime, creating an incentive for whites in power to arrest Black people in order to exploit their labor and prevent their entry into wage labor and political power (13th Amendment).
- 1860s-70s: Reconstruction and a rapid gain of political power by Blacks in the south is met with extreme legal and extralegal backlash, including violent vigilante and militia action against Black people attempting to vote or run for office. Southern "law enforcement" is often indistinguishable from white supremacist vigilante groups.
- 1872: First Black police officer in Chicago
- 1882: Chinese Exclusion Act is passed, banning all Chinese laborers from entering the United States and preventing residents from naturalizing. This marks the first major piece of legislation restricting immigration to the U.S. followed by several laws restricting immigration through quotas and mandatory registration.
- 1885: In New Orleans following a levee workers' strike, the mayor suggests to police to arrest any Black man who "did not want to work."
- Late 1800s: Increased urbanization leads to decreases in serious crimes, but increase in elite fears of working-class rebellion. "The crisis of the time was not one of law," writes Kristian Williams, "but of order—specifically the order required by the new industrial economy and the Protestant moralism that supplied, in large part, its ideological expression."
- 1886: Haymarket Riot. After an Anarchist throws a bomb at police at a workers rally in Haymarket square in Chicago, police riot against demonstrators, killing at least a dozen. Seven police are also killed. Raids on activist community ensue, and ultimately 8 men are convicted as examples. Four of them are murdered by execution.
- 1905: Pennsylvania State Police the first state police agency is established in response to private police forces used by mine and mill owners to stop worker

strikes and the inability or refusal of local police to enforce the law. By 1930s, every state had some form of state police agency.

- 1914-1924: police repression of labor organizing/strikes.
- 1912: Bread and Roses strike by IWW in Lawrence, MA. 100 children to be sent to Philadelphia for the duration of the strike. Police detain, beat and arrest mothers and children. When taken to Police Court, mothers refuse to pay fines and are imprisoned, drawing national attention to working conditions in Lawrence.
- 1919: Chicago Race Riot. The riot began after a white man threw rocks at Black people on a segregated Southside beach. Black WWI veterans were active in protesting police violence.
- 1920-1933: Prohibition. Policing was about enforcement and dealing with organized crime.
- 1920s-1930s: IWW and other unions particularly active. Police are routinely employed as a shield between unions and corporations, breaking up strikes and threatening labor organizers with violence.
- 1890-1930: Progressive Era reforms lead to “kinder, gentler” system and reforms of local corruption in city governments. Police departments become more disciplined and hierarchical as a result. Progressive reforms also lead to innovations like the probation and parole systems, legalizing bureaucratic state intrusion into poor people’s homes. Urban professional social services and public housing are also invented, often working in tandem with these new reformed government systems such as child welfare and the juvenile courts.
- 1900-1940: Formation of state police forces begins as a response to union actions. Large corporations had employed their own private forces, and reformists saw this as unsavory while corporations saw it as expensive. State Troopers are the solution.

Crime Fighting Era: 1930-1970

Birth of Civil Rights Movements

Resistance: Armed resistance, non-violent tactics inspired by anti-colonial revolutions abroad, solidarity with anti-colonial movements, legal reforms, rioting

- 1930s: J. Edgar Hoover and US Bureau of Investigation get expanded crime fighting responsibilities. Renamed to FBI, establish academy to train local police.
- 1943: Detroit Riots. Arrests of several Black people after a skirmish and a rape accusation leads to days of white rioting against Black people met with Black rioting against whites. According to Thurgood Marshall, the police “used ‘persuasion’ rather than firm action with white rioters, while against Negroes they used the ultimate in force: night sticks, revolvers, riot guns, sub-machine guns, and deer guns.”
- 1942-1946: Japanese Incarceration. Between 110,000 and 120,000 people of Japanese descent, 62% of whom are American citizens, are forced out of their homes and imprisoned in inland government “camps”. Signed into effect by President Roosevelt after Imperial Japan bombs Pearl Harbor, internment relies

- on collaboration between different authorities including the executive branch, the military, the Census Bureau and local police.
- 1940s-1950s: McCarthyism and the Red Scare. Anti-Soviet sentiment and a government-produced fear of nuclear war and Communism are rallied as a justification for blacklisting and surveillance of anyone who is a suspected Communist—a pre-cursor to “anti-terrorism” policy today.
 - 1950: Schools begin creating their own security forces to crack down on property destruction and vandalism.
 - 1950s: Emergence of the Civil Rights Movement as we know it, which uses civil disobedience strategically in national campaigns. Non-violent protestors, most of them Black, are routinely met with violence.
 - 1950s onwards: COINTELPRO, a secret FBI program, active in monitoring and disrupting Civil Rights and Black Power activities for two decades. COINTELPRO is ultimately a key player in dismantling the radical movements for justice that emerged in this era.
 - 1955-1956: Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Height of Struggle for Racial Equality and Self-Determination

Resistance: Armed Resistance, Black Nationalism, LGBT and Women’s Liberation Organizing, Peaceful Demonstration, Rioting, Legal Reforms

- 1960s-1970s: After decades of quashed attempts, police themselves are finally able to form unions. State concessions to police create further unity up and down the police hierarchy.
- 1961: Southern Freedom Riders met with police violence, notably in Birmingham, AL, where the riders were arrested and removed. When they returned on Mothers Day of that year, they were beaten by Klansmen while police looked away.
- 1964: On July 10, a group of African American men in Jonesboro, Louisiana led by Earnest “Chilly Willy” Thomas and Frederick Douglas Kirkpatrick founded the group known as The Deacons for Defense and Justice to protect members of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) against Ku Klux Klan violence.
- 1964-1967: Uprisings in NYC, LA, Detroit and Newark, NJ in response to police brutality against the black community.
- 1965: Selma to Montgomery march (Bloody Sunday, March 7, 1965)
- 1966: Black Panther party formed
- 1966: Miranda v Arizona
- 1966 and 1969: Compton’s Cafeteria and Stonewall rebellions. Queers resist police harassment.
- 1967: Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders: found that reasons for civil unrest included unemployment, job and housing discrimination, inadequate social services, unequal justice and police actions. Kerner Commission found that police were committing acts of brutality, harassment or abuse, they had little training or supervision, community relations were poor and failure to employ black officers. Formation of police subculture, emphasis on hierarchy and following orders, officers not on streets and regular contact with people is limited.
- 1968: Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act establishes Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. Feds can funnel millions of dollars to local law

- enforcement, helped thousands of cops pay for college, paid for technological innovations such as computers and communication devices.
- 1968: first police SWAT team established in LA.
 - 1968: the American Indian Movement (AIM) is founded in Minnesota to address poverty, housing, police harassment and treaty issues affecting the indigenous community in the US.
 - 1968: Police repression of the protests at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Although many are injured and killed, this moment is an important watershed in that police mob violence was captured on camera and distributed internationally. Even Chicago police officials are forced to admit things “got out of control.”
 - 1969: Murder of Fred Hampton in Chicago. FBI works with Chicago police to commit premeditated murder of BPP leader Fred Hampton in his house on the South side.

Order Maintenance and Suppression Era: 1970s-present

Backlash Against Activist Movements, Control of Urban Spaces

Resistance: Armed resistance, continued non-violent resistance, rioting, struggle for political power including more Black voices within police forces and mainstream politics

- 1970: Kent State and Jackson State murders. Four college students at Kent State in Ohio and two college students at Jackson State in Mississippi are murdered by police during anti-war protests. The four white students’ killings are national news, while the murder of the two black protestors is downplayed by the media and historians. Both events, though tragic, helped to strengthen anti-war sentiment throughout the country.
- 1970s: Radical Black Power movement and other groups such as the Young Lords and the Gay Liberation Front are routinely infiltrated and criminalized by police and FBI. These movements are eventually torn apart in the process, forcing activists into either more mainstream politics and tactics, or permanent incarceration and marginalization.
- 1970s-80s: through federally funded “drug war” programs and surplus equipment from the military, paramilitary police units, SWAT teams and anti-drug task forces begin springing up.
- 1971: Detroit police creates the notorious STRESS anti-crime unit, which stood for Stop the Robberies Enjoy Safe Streets. This unit over a two year period was responsible for the deaths of over 30 individuals in the city, most of whom were Black.
- 1971: Attica Rebellion. Men locked up in Attica prison in New York State stage a massive rebellion in response to deplorable conditions and violent treatment by guards. The Black Panthers support the Attica prisoners in advancing a list of demands, but the immediate protest ends in a massacre of prisoners by state police called in to quell the rebellion.
- 1972: Chicago Police Torture begins. Under the leadership of Police Commander Jon Burge, at least 135 African-American men and women are tortured by

Chicago Police between 1972 and 1991. By the time the issue is brought to the surface, the statute of limitations is up for a torture trial.

- 1973: The town of Wounded Knee and the Pine Ridge reservation are occupied for 71 days by members of AIM.
- 1979/1980: Miami Riots. The police murdered a Black salesman named Arthur McDuffie after a chase. When three officers were acquitted by an all-white jury in Tampa (the case was moved by a judge), crowds rioted in Miami. Seventeen were killed and nearly 500 injured.

New Conservatism and the Drug War

Resistance: Media and legal campaigns to expose corruption and racism, rioting, peaceful demonstration

- 1980s: “Drug War” begins at Reagan’s urging, setting up urban communities of color as both victims and perpetrators in an ongoing process of criminalization. Crack-cocaine shows up in these communities while the feds look away. Many police raids, especially in South Central LA.
- 1987: First gang injunction against Playboy Gangster Crips in West LA.
- 1988: STEP Act. Street Terrorism Enforcement and Protection Act. The act provides for felony prosecution of active gang members, felony penalties against adults who coerce youth into joining a gang, and possible life terms in prison for murder convictions involving drive-by shootings. It also outlines penalties for graffiti vandalism and sale of illegal weapons. Other provisions call for publication of a gang-prevention resource guide for community organizations and in-service teacher training in preventing gang violence and drug abuse.
- Late 1980s: ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) begins to use civil disobedience to draw attention to the growing AIDS crisis and demand government support for research and aid to victims. Police suppress protests, but ACT-UP is successful in getting AIDS on the map as a social justice issue.

Reforms and Expansion of the PIC

Resistance: Organizing against zero tolerance and racial profiling; rioting

- 1990: Police and FBI set up “Earth First” activists Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney to make them look like terrorists. The pair are acquitted, and in 2002 a jury awards them \$4.4 million in damages for violation of their civil rights.
- 1990s: Municipal school districts begin establishing their own law enforcement agencies in response to an increase in school shootings.
- 1990s: Passage of “Zero Tolerance” policy, racial profiling laws like Prop 21, “Three Strikes Law” and increasingly extreme enforcement of drug laws support massive growth of PIC. Further criminalization of poverty and of young people of color works to move many of the most economically marginalized into the prison system.
- 1990s: Passage of hate crimes laws brings LGBT movements into the business of advocating for heavier policing and stricter sentencing, creating a widening divide in the movement between those who are routinely victims of policing and incarceration and those who are not.

- 1990s: Racial profiling on the map. Years of research and activism leads to the popularization of the term “racial profiling” to describe police practices targeting people of color. Police departments are forced to see racial profiling as an issue, and in some cases address the issue through policy changes (though not always in practice).
- 1992: Rodney King Uprising
- 1994: Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. \$8.8 billion over 6 years to local law enforcement for hiring and acquiring technology, hiring civilians to free up officers and implementing new programs. Forms the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS). Provides resources and training. By 1999 60% of local agencies had a plan to incorporate community policing. Also implements 3 Strikes, Federal Assault Weapons Ban and increases crack down on gang activity (providing money for gang units/gang enforcement).
- 1990s-2000s: “Community Policing” model emerges around the country, encouraging homeowners, business owners, and local police to unify efforts to police the streets. This process is closely tied with urban gentrification, and “in practice certain populations generally get counted among the problems to be solved rather than the community to be involved” (Williams).
- 1996: Formation of the Oct 22nd Coalition to Stop Police Brutality, Repression and the Criminalization of a Generation. A broad coalition against police repression establishes a yearly day of protest on October 22 which continues to this day.
- 1997: Institution of Multi-Agency Gang Enforcement Consortium forms in Fresno.
- 1998-2000: Rampart/ CRASH (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums) anti-gang unit in LA scandal. More than 70 police officers in the CRASH unit were implicated in misconduct, making it one of the most widespread cases of documented police misconduct in United States history. The convicted offenses include unprovoked shootings, unprovoked beatings, planting of evidence, framing of suspects, stealing and dealing narcotics, bank robbery, perjury, and covering up evidence of these activities. Some officers also found to have close ties to Crips gang and to have murdered hip-hop artist Notorious B.I.G.
- 1999: Thousands protest police violence including high profile case of Abner Louima and Amadou Diallo in NYC.
- 1999: WTO Protests in Seattle. Over 40,000 protestors take to the streets to criticize the World Trade Organization and global imperialism; the ensuing police riot leads to several days of violence against protestors that is publicized around the world.

Backlash Against Immigrants, Birth of New Movements

- 2001: 9-11 changes face of policing and surveillance.
- 2001 and 2006: USA Patriot Act expands federal law enforcement authority, especially around surveillance. Homeland security grants programs funnels more money to local police departments. Terror enhancements are used to trump up charges.

- 2002-2014: NYPD establishes Demographics Unit (later renamed Zone Assessment Unit) to engage in a mass surveillance campaign of Muslim communities in the New York area. This campaign lasts ten years, and includes mapping neighborhoods with large Muslim communities, photo and video surveillance, maintaining files on thousands of Muslim individuals in databases and embedding informants within Muslim Student Associations and mosques.
- 2003: Oakland Riders acquitted of misconduct involving kidnapping, beating, and planting drugs on people who were then either charged and did time or paid fines on those drug charges.
- 2009: Tasers first deployed to police.
- January 2009: Oscar Grant killed by BART officer Johannes Mehserle, followed by uprisings in Oakland. Mehserle convicted of involuntary manslaughter in 2010.
- June 2010: North Oakland temporary Gang Injunction takes effect.
- 2010: Jon Burge convicted in Chicago for lying under oath about police torture cases.
- 2010: Passage of Arizona's SB-1070 is the first in a rash of draconian anti-immigrant laws that task local police with immigration enforcement and formalize racial profiling by police and, in Alabama, even by school officials. The events lead to the strengthening of black/brown coalitions against policing and racial profiling.
- March 2011: Secure Communities, a program of Homeland Security that uses partnerships among federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies including shared databases to more effectively deport immigrants by giving ICE access to fingerprints taken at local jails, expands to over 1200 jurisdictions.
- 2011: New Orleans police convicted in Danziger bridge trial. Five current and former New Orleans Police Officers are convicted of civil rights violations for the brutal murders of civilians attempting to escape New Orleans via the Danziger bridge during Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The U.S. Justice Department also targets New Orleans for widespread brutality, corruption, and discrimination.
- May 17th, 2011: STIC wins significant victory by stopping additional injunctions until an independent review is done of the ones in place and getting all "does" removed from injunctions.
- June 2011: John Russo, City Attorney, is forced out of Oakland.
- June 24, 2011: Preliminary Fruitvale Gang Injunction issued.
- July 22, 2011: Largest gang injunction ever is issued by the LA County DA, covering 16 square miles of the San Gabriel Valley
- August 8, 2011 Carlitos Nava is killed in Deep East Oakland. Prompts City Council to try to ram through more gang injunctions, a near 24 hour youth curfew and a loitering ordinance.
- Oct 5, 2011 Hundreds turn out to City Hall and defeat these measures.
- October 25th, 2011: Oakland police and police from at least 10 other departments attack Occupy Oakland protesters after shutting down the camp using tear gas, rubber bullets, flash/bang grenades and bean bags.

- February 2013: Kayla Moore, a black trans woman with schizophrenia is arrested and killed by Berkeley police after a call is made for a mental health evaluation.
- July 17, 2014: Eric Garner is killed by officer Daniel Pantaleo in Staten Island, NY after being put in a choke hold. On December 3, 2014 a grand jury decided not to indict Pantaleo.
- August 9, 2014: Michael Brown, an 18 year old unarmed black man was shot by white officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, MO. On November 24, 2014, it was declared that the St. Louis County grand jury had decided not to indict Wilson.
- November 2014-January 2015: Protests against the killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner and ongoing police violence against black communities erupt around the country and last for months.
- November 20, 2014: Akai Gurley is killed in the stairwell of Brooklyn's Pink Houses by rookie police officer Peter Liang.
- November 28, 2014: Blackout Collective members shut down West Oakland BART on Black Friday in support of Mike Brown and in memory of Oscar Grant.
- April 22, 2015: Freddie Carlos Gray Jr is arrested in Baltimore, MD and later dies of a spinal cord injury incurred during his ride in the police van.
- December 2, 2015: 26 year old Mario Woods is killed by SFPD.
- May 2015: Chicago establishes a reparations fund for hundreds of mostly black survivors of police torture during the 1970's through '90s under former police commander Jon Burge.
- July 2015: Sandra Bland is arrested and jailed in Texas for failing to signal a lane change. She is found hanging in her jail cell days later and her death ruled a suicide.
- January 18, 2016: 25 protesters from the Anti Police Terror Project and black.seed shut down the Bay Bridge as part of 96 Hours of Direct Action to reclaim MLK's radical legacy.
- May 2016: Louisiana passes "Blue Lives Matter" legislation to include law enforcement and first responders under its hate crime protections
- July 2016: Police shootings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile launch protests in cities across the country. Micah Johnson is killed by police with an explosive-carrying robot after shooting five Dallas police officers at a protest.
- July 2016: 14-year old Bresha Meadows is arrested and placed in juvenile detention for shooting her abusive father while trying to protect her family.
- September 9, 2016: Over a hundred demonstrators from the Bay Area's Stop Urban Shield coalition successfully lock down outside the Urban Shield weapons and military training expo in Pleasanton, CA
- September 2016-February 2017: Native-led demonstration at Standing Rock over the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) results in deployment of private security, local law enforcement and the National Guard. Police use water cannons, rubber bullets and tear gas to attack water protectors camped out in subzero temperatures. Energy Transfer Partners, the corporation backing DAPL, hires private security firm TigerSwan to digitally track activists and share information with the FBI and local law enforcement.

- November 2016: The American Public Health Association (APHA) issues a policy statement naming law enforcement violence as a public health concern.
- January 27-February 2017: Trump issues Muslim ban, leading to immigrants and travelers detained at airports, quickly followed by widespread protests at airports across the country. Riot police are deployed at many airports.
- February 2017: Trump signs three executive orders aimed at increasing policing.
- February 2017 onwards: Sweeping ICE raids are conducted across the country following threats by the Trump administration to increase deportations.
- March 2017: Portland's TriMet public transit system announces plans to build a new \$11M transit police precinct and jail
- June 2017: Portland police officers request help from Three Percenters in arresting an anti-fascist protestor during a fascist rally in Portland
- June 2017: Kate's Law and No Sanctuary for Criminals Act are passed by the House. The first increases penalties on undocumented immigrants with prior convictions, and the second incentivizes cities to ramp up local law enforcement cooperation with federal immigration authorities.