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Critical Policing Studies: Toward a "Fully Social" Framework

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Abstract
Despite mass protests, demands to defund the police, and a range of institutional reforms, historic patterns of abuse and violence in US policing persist. This article calls for a renewed and reinvigorated critical policing studies to give leadership in the search for remedy. Fifty years ago, Taylor, Walton, and Young envisioned a "fully social theory of deviance" to guide a new critical criminology. How do our policing studies frameworks—evidence-based policing, democratic policing, police abolitionism—hold up to a "fully social" standard? Here, the article critiques the extant frameworks and also proposes one possible new direction in policing studies that would incorporate insights from the field of labor studies and rank-and-file politics.

Nearly a decade after police-triggered uprisings in Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore, and three years after millions protested the police murder of George Floyd (Buchanan, Bui, and Patel 2020), the USA is at an effective impasse over what is to be done about the country's systemic patterns of police abuse. In 2021, Congress Democrats tried to pass comprehensive reform through the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act (US Congress 2021), but were blocked by Senate Republicans. Meanwhile, the left alternative of defunding the police, as a stepping stone toward police and prison abolition (Critical Resistance 2020; Kaba and Ritchie 2022), was broadly rejected by the public, as indicated in polls (Crabtree 2020; Saad 2020), elections (Bailey 2021; Blake 2021; Craig 2021), and police budgeting decisions in most US cities (Holder, Akinnibi, and Cannon 2020).

Can critical criminology—and within that, a critical policing studies (CPS)—help the country find remedy for its perennial policing crisis? Can we fashion a "public criminology" that, in the words of Elliott Currie (2007: 176), effects a "vigorous, systematic and effective intervention in the world of social policy and social action?" The present essay imagines that we can—and with a focus on US policing. Though not proposing a specific plan for change, it does offer pertinent reflections and potential new directions. The essay's driving theme is that good theory matters; and it asks that we—critical criminologists, critical policing scholars, progressive scholars and activists generally—produce a theory that is equal to the task of fighting police violence, and more.

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Fifty years ago, Ian Taylor, Paul Walton, and Jock Young published *The New Criminology* (1973/2013), or what has been called "the Bible of 1970s radical criminology" (Reiner 2012: 35). The book presented a burning critique of the major frameworks in criminology and sociology. Its concluding chapter called for a "fully social theory of deviance" that was a fusion of criminology, Marxian political economy, and socialist goals. As the authors put it in their later volume, *Critical Criminology* (1975: 44), "We have argued for a criminology that is normatively committed to the abolition of inequalities in wealth and power." My offering here attempts, more modestly, to do the same in policing studies. It identifies and critiques three policing studies frameworks—*evidence-based policing, police abolitionism,* and *democratic policing*. Democratic policing, as described here, is actually not a single framework, but a cluster of concepts. The essay contends that none of our frameworks—including democratic policing, itself a progressive and worthy aim—have fashioned a compelling remedy to police abuse. It does suggest that our collective advocacy and search for answers could be much enhanced by engaging Taylor, Walton, and Young's notion of a fully social theory, which here simply means a policing studies that reflects a more complete view of the world.

The first section below outlines further the context of crisis and reform in US policing since the 2014 Ferguson uprising. The succeeding three sections then critique the aforementioned three policing studies frameworks. A concluding section suggests one possible new direction for policing studies, in keeping with the theme of the fully social, and that would incorporate insights from labor studies and rank-and-file politics. The essay takes US policing as its entry point, while recognizing that police abuse is a global problem and that CPS is a global field of inquiry (Bonner et al. 2018).

US Policing Crisis and the Search for Remedy

A recent *Washington Post* headline aptly sums up the state of the US policing crisis and reform: "Fatal Police Shootings Are Still Going Up, and Nobody Knows Why" (Rich, Tran, and Jenkins 2023). The outcome of mass protests and official responses over the past decade would certainly seem to confirm the *Post*'s observation. In December 2014, President Barack Obama responded to protests over police killings in Ferguson, New York City, and elsewhere by appointing the Task Force on 21st Century Policing. The panel's report (President's Task Force 2015), highlighting "procedural justice," accountability, and non-biased policing, would become a national police chief "playbook" (Robinson 2020: 229) and the country's most significant police reform initiative in decades. Many major city police agencies would change policy and trainings to reduce excessive use of force (Stephens 2019), and some would claim success. Yet, overall progress nationally has been questionable. The Washington Post (n.d.), which has tracked fatal shootings by US police since January 2015, has found the figures holding steady at roughly one thousand people killed per year, and rising to 1,096 in 2022 (Rich, Tran, and Jenkins 2023). Such killings are typically termed justifiable and defensive by local police departments; but the violence in US policing is nonetheless well-established (Geller and Toch 1996; Zimring 2017), and with figures that tower above those of comparator countries.[1] A national persistence in other dimensions of

[1] Police killed two people in Japan, three in England and Wales, and eleven in Germany, in the most recent year of available data (Jones and Sawyer 2020).

police abuse, such as racism and racial profiling (Baumgartner et al. 2018; Davis 2018) and over-arrest (Natapoff 2018), is also in evidence.

The 2020 Floyd murder in Minneapolis, involving four officers in a nine-minute incident under a bystander's video recording, served as a powerful reminder of reform's pattern of failure. The Minneapolis Police Department had in prior years carried out many of the nationally recommended reforms—procedural justice and anti-bias trainings, police-community trust dialogs, and an early intervention system to identify problem officers (Vitale 2020). It was, in part, this very context that made police defunding and abolition, rather than reform, so compelling to many activists. The public at large still preferred reform. In a July 2020 poll, 58 percent of Americans, and 88 percent of black Americans, saw the need for "major changes" in policing, with strong support for various specific reforms (Crabtree 2020). But there remain more questions than answers about why police violence persists in spite of reforms, and what is to be done about it.

Given the predominance of abolitionism in today's movement against police violence, versus the official posture of reform, it is striking how little debate between these has appeared in the scholarly literature or left press.[2] That the massive Floyd protests were met by two opposing national legislative plans—the reform-based George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, and the abolitionist BREATHE Act (http://breatheact.org)—could have sparked a rich activist and scholarly dialog. Such did not occur. The defeated Floyd Act sought to address such issues as racial profiling, use of force, police militarization, data collection, and national standards. BREATHE, developed by the national coalition, Movement for Black Lives, seeks by contrast to end most federal funding for police, shutter some federal law enforcement agencies, and establish robust social programs such as job, housing, and health-care guarantees. The proposal is widely endorsed by left groups, but has rallied few supporters in Congress.

Much debate *has* been seen at the local level, in the community or at city council meetings, in response to defund-the-police campaigns (Swan 2020; Mays 2020; Taylor 2022). This was particularly intensive in Minneapolis (Rao 2020, Eligon 2020), where voters rejected a November 2021 ballot measure to replace the police department with a public health-oriented department of public safety (Bailey 2021). But not much debate has appeared in venues where in-depth, scholarly exchange is possible. The dearth of such exchange contrasts with the fierce policing debates among leftists in England in the 1980s. These pitted left realists, who called for "taking crime seriously" and democratizing the police, against radical critics who regarded the police as unalterable servants of the capitalist class and held that violent crime was exaggerated by the media and politicians to foment rightist ideology and moral panic.[3] The British debates remain profoundly pertinent today, certainly in the USA, and deserve study. We turn now to critique of the three frameworks.

[2] One sharp and helpful exchange, on police defunding in the United Kingdom, did appear in the *Howard Journal of Crime and Justice* (Fleetwood and Lea 2022; McElhorne et al. 2023; Fleetwood and Lea 2023).

[3] Seminal left-realist works are Lea and Young (1984), and Kinsey, Lea, and Young (1986); critiques are Bridges and Gilroy (1982), and Gilroy and Simm (1985). On policing and moral panic in 1960s and 70s Britain, see Cohen (1972/2002) and Hall et al. (1978). A recent helpful application of left realism in rural policing contexts is Nolan, DeKeseredy, and Brownstein (2022).

Evidence-Based Policing

Evidence-based policing (EBP), and its larger school of evidence-based criminal justice, is the most influential scholarly framework in the policing field. It includes a vast literature (e.g., Knutsson and Thompson 2017; Mitchell and Huey 2019); research centers such as the U.K.'s Cambridge Centre for Evidence-Based Policing, and George Mason University's Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at George Mason University; and is the dominant model taught in university criminology and criminal justice programs. The evidence-based approach guides *Criminology and Public Policy,* the flagship policy journal of the American Society of Criminology, and it also guides research under the US National Institute of Justice. EBP was the guiding framework behind Obama's policing task force.

EBP may be considered "non-critical" in that its view of policing inclines away from wide-ranging social critiques as pursued in the critical criminology tradition. Also, it tends to tether to its funding sources, such as the National Institute of Justice, which can limit the scope of questions asked by EBP scholars. Holdaway (2020), in his entry in Critical Reflections on Evidence-Based Policing, distinguishes between sociologies "of the police" and "for the police," and identifies EBP—or specifically that of the Cambridge Centre—as being for the police.

EBP's core notion is faith in science—which would not in itself distinguish EBP from leftist or Marxist approaches to understanding the world. But there are disagreements over what constitutes good science and social science. EBP favors a hyper-quantitative science, aligning with the positivist criminology that is ably critiqued by Jock Young in *The Criminological Imagination* (2011), as well as in the *Critical Reflections* anthology (Fielding et al. 2020). Young points out the various foibles, flaws, and misuses of numbers and methods that often characterize positivistic social science. He observes as well the relationship between positivism and neoliberal politics, and how this bore on criminal justice policy as it developed from the 1980s forward: "The war against crime, drugs, terrorism demands facts, numbers, quantitative incomes and outcomes; it does *not* demand debates as to the very nature of these battles" (21, emphasis in orig.). Kevin Morrell and Michael Rowe, in their contribution to *Critical Reflections* (2020: 117), similarly challenge EBP and its technicism from a democratic and ethical perspective. EBP's focus on "specific outcomes in relation to particular practices" ignores more fundamental issues such as "what are the police for?" and "who call the shots?" (117). The treatment here adds my own reading of EBP as reflected in the Obama task force report (President's Task Force 2015) and related evidence-based publications.

As it appears in the Obama task force report, and in a recent *Renewed Call to Action* issued by the former task force members (21CP Solutions 2023), EBP is a well-intended framework that has progressive aspects. Its policing vision replaces the traditional "warrior" model that stresses the enforcement of laws with a "guardian" model that highlights solving problems collaboratively with the community (Rahr and Rice 2015). This includes several policing priorities outlined by the task force: transparency, accountability, building trust with communities, reducing racial and other biases, training and monitoring to minimize use of force, and applying best practices when responding to people with drug addictions or mental health crises. The task force report also observes that "the justice system alone cannot solve many of the underlying conditions that give rise to crime," and thus recommends that the president "promote programs that take a

comprehensive and inclusive look at community-based initiatives that address the core issues of poverty, education, health, and safety" (President's Task Force 2015: 8).

In their *Renewed Call,* the former task force members affirm the original report's model of accountable policing and rebuilding of police organizational culture. They also elaborate on the need to address racism and poverty, as called for in the 1968 Kerner Commission report produced under President Lyndon B. Johnson:

> The Kerner Commission recommended a transformative framework to end institutionalized anti-Black racism; stop brutal, racially repressive policing; and, critically, carry out a Marshall Plan level of massive investment to end what President Johnson called "ghetto conditions that breed despair and violence" ….
> (21CP Solutions 2023: 2)

The authors regret that the government largely rejected the Kerner recommendations and instead "chose policies that increased mass incarceration rather than mass investment in poor communities." Instead of community policing, they observe, "governments invested in unwinnable wars on drugs and gangs that produced more of both, pitted police against community, and further dehumanized traumatized residents" (ibid.: 2).

If EBP, as expressed by the former task force, favors a humane model of policing, the reduction in mass incarceration, and the tackling of poverty and racism, then is it really so different from critical policing studies? If its research methods are too narrowly quantitative or mechanistic, but its conclusions are nonetheless in the same general spirit of CPS, then perhaps the critics of EBP (e.g., Fielding et al. 2020) are making too much fuss. On the other hand, and as argued here, there may be some assumptions in EBP that are centrally operative but unstated in the literature, and which are more problematic.

Despite the positive policies sought by the former task force members—toward better policing, less carcerality, social equality, an economic/health safety net—their vision for achieving these is top-down and reliant on the goodwill and beneficence of elites. The work of social change, then, consists primarily of researchers presenting "evidence" to the powers that be. Such is distinct from a critical perspective that sees social movements as pivotal actors, and highlights the importance of collaboration between researchers and activists.[4] In this vein, the former task force members imagine that their guidelines for better policing, shared with policymakers and police chiefs, will in time be incorporated among the nation's 18,000 police agencies. The inevitable cultural resistance to change within police agencies—whether from old-guard management, rank and file, or police unions—will somehow be handled by the well-trained, reform-minded police executive. Thus, again, the intervention of social movements demanding democratization, transparency, and accountability of their local police institution is not central to this project.

Such elite perspective is detectible in Laurie Robinson and Thomas Abt's chapter on "Evidence-Informed Criminal Justice Policy" in the volume, *Advancing Criminology and Criminal Justice Policy* (2016). Note that Robinson, a criminologist, co-chaired the Obama task force; Abt is a criminal justice researcher. The authors describe how government

[4] Currie (2016: 20–21) has written: "The most promising future for criminology involves the maturing and spreading of a truly structural and globally engaged work that not only puts the larger developments in world society at the forefront of analysis, but also works to create new and more effective ways of linking that intellectual work with movements for social change—which includes a concerted effort to move out beyond our usual academic and governmental constituencies to build stronger working relationships with people who are trying to make change from the ground up.".

leaders, as well as criminal justice professionals and NGOs, are increasingly following "evidence-informed" approaches and funding such research as well:

> More than others before them, President Barack Obama and former Attorney General Holder have defended scientific independence and integrity and have advocated for the use of rigorous evidence in evaluating social programs. (14)
> The federal government and NGOs play an important role in identifying promising approaches, assessing them, and then disseminating these strategies to broader policy audiences. (17)

Connecting lawmakers with sound research is without doubt a worthy and important enterprise across many fields. When our strategy for change, however, becomes too reliant on such lawmakers, and lacking the independent power of grassroots movements, the cause can become compromised. Politics and policy can remain under the sway of corporate and wealthy interests upon whom politicians widely rely to get elected, and who tend to look sternly upon the funding of robust social programs.[5]

Robinson and Abt lay out seven steps to ensure that progress on criminal justice reform is sustained (19–21). These focus on aligning politicians and criminal justice professionals with science and research, and producing the necessary data. None of the steps include supporting or linking up with grassroots organizing or social movements. The authors do mention a relevant social movement: "Protests concerning the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, and others signal a deep resentment and mistrust of the criminal justice system among many Americans" (18). Thus, the social movement is viewed as a signal of resentment, but not as a central driver of change.

The general dim view of social movements among EBP scholars is more pithily expressed by Renée Mitchell, co-editor of an award-winning book on EBP (Mitchell and Huey 2019). Mitchell gave a TEDx talk entitled "Research not protests" (Mitchell 2015). Why not research *and* protests? Indeed, given the lack of transparency in policing—and with that, the web of unknowns that perpetuate abuse as a normal condition in so many police departments—one could imagine the need for an army of researchers, integrated with grassroots movements, uncovering how each local institution works and what will be required to effect change.

One such institution that comes to mind is the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD). The MPD in 2009 set up an early intervention system (EIS) designed to flag officers who show performance patterns, such as frequent use of force, that require supervisory attention. Six years later, however, a US Department of Justice (DOJ) review of the MPD found serious flaws in its EIS (Jany 2015). Another five years later, Officer Derek Chauvin killed Floyd by kneeling on his neck and aided by three other officers—which raises questions about whether the department had ever corrected its EIS. Chauvin had had a record of 18 citizen complaints over his 19 years of MPD service, and prosecutors at his murder trial presented evidence that he had restrained people by kneeling on their neck or upper back on eight different occasions (Alfonseca 2021). If indeed a years-long persistent failure of the MPD to build an effective EIS had contributed to the Floyd tragedy, there is likely to be a quite important larger story to uncover about how such failure became possible.

Finally, the kind of deep local investigations required to make sense of police institutions, their patterns of abuse and needed remedies may often go outside the boundaries of conventional research. Trust building and relationship building over time—between

[5] Regarding such political processes at the state level, see Lafer (2017).

scholars, communities, and justice-minded police officers—is needed, especially given the many risks faced by whistleblowing officers.[6] Such is one further reason that social movements and scholar-activist collaboration must be viewed as integral in addressing police abuse: the scope of required research goes well beyond the capacities of our universities, and where grassroots initiatives, investigations, and networking could make vital contributions.

Police Abolitionism

Abolitionism is quite possibly today's leading critical policing studies framework in the United States. Certainly, it is the framework that ties most closely to the movement against police violence led by Black Lives Matter (BLM) and the smaller but influential group, Critical Resistance. Police abolitionism is a subset of a larger abolitionist ideology, often simply called *abolition*. The larger worldview has a specific US-based version that entails historic links between slavery abolition, police and prison abolition, and socialistic future visions, and which borrows eclectically from the black radical tradition, feminist and queer politics, Marxism, and an anarchistic prefigurative politics.[7] The framework's senior thought leaders are scholar-activists Angela Davis (2005; Davis et al. 2022) and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007, 2022, 2023), who helped launch the US abolition movement through a well-attended conference at Berkeley hosted by Critical Resistance in 1998. Sorting through the amorphous body of work that constitutes abolition is too large a task for the present essay; I attempt that elsewhere (Ryan, forthcoming); McLeod's (2019) summary description from an abolitionist perspective is also highly recommended. Offered here are some brief critical remarks, while engaging the concept of a fully social CPS.

After more than two decades of concerted US abolitionist activism, and some ten years under the globally recognized BLM umbrella, what should first be noted is the impressive achievement of Davis and Gilmore, in having inspired thousands of activists and new leaders and who have clearly born constructive impact. Victories have included holding the line against prison expansion in particular locales (Gilmore 2007); helping elect progressive prosecutors (Bazelon 2020); fomenting change on the policing front (President's Task Force 2015); and the building of anti-racist awareness in schools and communities (Jones and Hagopian 2020). The abolition and BLM movements, collectively, can reasonably be designated a modern civil rights movement, and having sustained these efforts nationally over a lengthy period is no small feat.

Even so, and as discussed at the essay's outset, the nation is at impasse in regard to its policing crisis. And though conventional police reform á la the Obama task force has proved inadequate to the task, the abolitionist alternative has not been compelling to the American public. Police abolitionism does enjoy deep support in US radical left quarters, notably so in the post-Floyd era. Thus, for example, the political platform of the 100,000-member Democratic Socialists of America now includes a commitment to the "horizon of abolition" and calls for cutting police budgets annually "toward zero" (Democratic Socialists 2021). But leftists historically have not theorized the police very well, and

[6] In this regard, see the concluding section, "New Direction for Policing Studies?".

[7] The last item refers to approaches that model or "prefigure" today the kind of future world we wish to build (see Raekstad and Gradin 2020).

for that matter, have little consensus regarding the nature of the state.[8] A predominant left tendency views the police in reductionist and hyper-instrumentalist terms, as seen in the classic work, *The Iron Fist and the Velvet Glove: An Analysis of the US Police,* which held that the police serve as "the front line mechanism of repression." As such, "the central function of the police is to control the working class" (Center for Research 1977: 16). For that reason, in turn—and foreshadowing future abolitionist analyses—*Iron Fist* dismissed the call of the Black Panthers for community-controlled policing as "fundamentally utopian and reformist" (189). Regarding *Iron Fist* and similar works, policing scholar Otwin Marenin (1982: 248) urges "a more complex conceptualization." He points out that "the specific content of laws passed by ruling classes has not always been exploitative or repressive," and that "the police should be studied concretely before arguing their function" (ibid.: 251).

Police abolitionism builds upon and extends further the traditional left understanding of the police. Whereas *Iron Fist* did acknowledge policing's public safety function, identifying it as a "velvet glove" that masks policing's more central repressive purpose (Center for Research: 16), abolitionists disincline to see even a velvet glove. "The role of the police is not to create safety" explain nationally respected organizers Mariame Kaba and Andrea Ritchie in *No More Police* (2022: 17). It is "to establish and maintain a violent social order rooted in white supremacy, patriarchy, wealth accumulation, and the protection of private property over public good." It is owing to this violent and oppressive mission, according to abolitionists, that the police have proved so resistant to reform. None of the Minneapolis reforms worked, sociologist Alex Vitale (2020) wrote in the wake of Floyd. "That's because 'procedural justice' has nothing to say about the mission or function of policing." Their rejection of reform is so certain that some abolition leaders, including the Movement for Black Lives (Movement 2021), publicly opposed the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, a measure that was supported by major civil rights groups and the Floyd family (Leadership Conference 2021; Shear and Fandos 2021).

As its alternative to policing, abolition advances two trajectories. One involves the pursuit of authentic public safety through the institution of racial and economic justice, including the robust social programs that have long been part of a progressive policy agenda and as reflected in the Kerner report (Harris and Curtis 2018). The second, known as "transformative justice" (Kaba 2021; Hayes and Kaba 2023) consists of humane, non-carceral, reconciliating modes of addressing interpersonal harm, together with community-based models of mutual aid and protection. Both of these are worthy trajectories but will require the kind of majoritarian social movements that the US left has still to learn how to build. Asking people to renounce policing, as the primary institution on which they now rely for public safety, and to do so *before* the more adequate alternatives have been secured by our social movements, might not be the recommended organizing formula. Certainly, the matter deserves broad discussion and debate.

Abolitionists take particular pride in adopting a connected view of the world, where the brutalities of policing and incarceration, war and colonialism, unmet human needs and community violence, become one interwoven problem to be addressed through democratic social transformation led by an empowered, organized people who develop new ways of relating to one another. The orientation is well-conveyed in the title of Gilmore's forthcoming book, *Change Everything: Racial Capitalism and the Case for Abolition* (2023). A

[8] On theories of the state, and the continuing debates among Marxist and critical scholars, see Albo, Maher, and Zuege (2021).

geographer, Gilmore (2022: 491) offers "abolition geography" as "a way of studying, and of doing political organizing, and of being in the world, and of worlding ourselves."

It is ironic, then, that abolition, upon close reading, falls so short of the fully social as Taylor, Walton, and Young (1973) imagined it. Proponents document well policing's daily abuses (Ritchie 2017), but do not acknowledge the acts of community service and safety that are also routine in policing. The latter is well-described in law professor Rosa Brooks's (2021) candid account of her four years as a reserve patrol officer in Washington, D.C. Proponents aptly complain of reform's failures and unmet promises (see Vitale 2021: chap. 1), but do not admit of reform's periodic successes, such as cities that achieve sharp declines in excessive and deadly use of police force, as did Washington, D.C. (Bromwich 2016) after a DOJ and monitoring intervention.[9] A habit of selective observation infuses abolitionist thought and scholarship. It also can affect organizing practice and apparently did so in Minneapolis amid the post-Floyd movement, where black residents in the predominantly black North Side called for more police coverage to address rising gun violence—at the same time as abolitionists demanded police defunding and dismantling of the police department (Eligon 2020; Rao 2020). Minneapolis civil rights lawyer Nekima Levy Armstrong (2021), in an op-ed following the defeat of the city ballot measure that would have dismantled the MPD, wrote that supporters of the measure made little effort to listen to black residents' concerns:

> "Nothing about us without us," opponents of the measure said, demanding a role in decision-making to make sure that any solution accounted for both Black people's complex and troubling relationship with the police as well as the disproportionate damage crime and violence do to our communities.

Similar conflict between activists demanding police defunding, and communities of color calling for more, and more responsive, police coverage, was reported in Oakland, California (Swan 2020).

A fully social policing studies, as suggested in both Marenin (1982) and Armstrong (2021), must include a willingness to see complexity—including facts and experiences that may not fit neatly one's presumptions or ideology. Still, critique notwithstanding, abolitionism *has* expanded the fully social in a key way—by addressing police violence and abuse through a grassroots social movement lens and rising to exceptional scope.

Democratic Policing

Democratic policing, as an aim which the radical left has sometimes dismissed, belongs, at minimum, as part of any strategic discussion about fighting police abuse. Even if policing's democratic potential has yet to be well demonstrated, we do have evidence that organized intervention can have democratizing impacts (plural) in other public institutions, school systems being perhaps our best example (Bradbury et al. 2014; Ryan 2016). That policing would be more resistant to democratization or accountability is not, in itself, a good reason to accept things as they are. This section samples from the range of concepts advanced under the heading of democratic policing or "policing in a democracy." It notes their limitations and contends that, at least in the US case, we have yet to develop a compelling model.

[9] See Rushin's (2017) broad study of DOJ interventions in American police departments.

At the left end of the democratic policing spectrum are the left realists who, within an overarching social-democratic or socialist frame, imagine a "minimal policing," interfaced with a host of other social service agencies (Fleetwood and Lea 2022), and kept accountable through a "liaison panel" that uses community crime surveys to set police priorities (Currie et al. 1990). Another left posture is that of Udi Ofer (2016), formerly of the American Civil Liberties Union, for whom civilian review boards—bolstered with investigative and subpoena powers, secure budgeting, and with advocacy organizations given the right to nominate appointees—are a key mechanism in accountable policing. More centrist perspectives are found under the DOJ's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS). In a COPS-hosted roundtable on "Policing in a Democratic Society" in 2008, participants urged "internalizing community policing as normal behavior at every level of an organization," and forefronting the COPS office as "an action-oriented, highly responsive, and value-driven agency" and the "'brand' that stands for policing in a democracy" (Scrivner 2010: 8, 9).

One broad genre of democratic policing scholarship, which might be called *managerialist,* advises police managers on how to democratize police organizational culture, thereby enhancing buy-in to reform among the rank and file. Aston et al. (2021: 50) explain:

> Our dynamic model of organizational justice suggests that leaders and managers at all levels need to bring in change in an open and consultative way for officers to willingly adopt new methods and procedures….
> "Buy-in" to reforms and police compliance with rules is much more likely when supervisors and leaders are fair, respectful, give officers input, provide growth opportunities and show concern for officers' welfare.

David Sklansky in *Democracy and the Police* (2008: chap. 8) proposes similar change within the police organization, but with a stronger rank-and-file participatory thrust. He remarks: "The dominant mind-set … of nearly everyone who thinks about policing and its problems is top-down management. Good police officers are police officers who follow rules. Police unions, and policing organizing more generally, are obstacles, not opportunities" (156). He then describes several intriguing experiments, including a much cited Oakland, California program in the 1970s, where a peer review unit that counseled violence-prone officers produced a significant decline in police violence over a number of years.[10] Despite Sklansky's democratic aspirations, however, his approach remains subtly managerialist, in that he directs his appeal to the police manager, not to the rank and file. And the initiator and driver of change in his illustrative models is invariably the police chief. Sklansky also emphasizes community engagement, such as through community policing and civilian review boards (chap. 6).

A second broad genre of democratic policing scholarship relies on control through the legislature and may be termed *legalistic*. Law scholars Barry Friedman and Maria Ponomarenko (2015: 104, 105) see something fundamental that unites the wide array of abuses in policing: "a failure of democratic processes and accountability." The authors continue: "Compared to the sprawling administrative codes" that detail the work of other government agencies, "laws governing the police are notably sparse—if they exist at all." Police agencies, the authors note, are not devoid of oversight: the police chief serves at the pleasure of the mayor, police commission or city council, and sheriffs are directly elected by the

[10] The Oakland project is detailed in Toch and Grant's *Police as Problem Solvers* (2005).

people. But "these oversight mechanisms are no substitute for more granular regulation through legislative authorization and public rules."

None of the aforementioned mechanisms for democratization—community liaison panels, review boards, democratically inclined police managers, state regulation—should be dismissed or minimized. Each does, though, carry its limitations. The review boards are generally focused on citizen complaints and alleged misconduct of individual officers, rather than systemic issues. Even if the boards wish to address systemic police department concerns, they are unlikely to have the robust inside view of the department and the political clout that would be needed to analyze systemic problems, formulate solutions, and ensure their proposals are taken seriously.[11] The liaison panels have the advantage of community crime surveys to advise the police department on how it can better serve the public but, like the review boards, have not the political clout. Urging the police chief to democratize can face a range of hurdles: the chief may remain wedded to traditional command-and-control management; may experiment with "organizational justice" but only in a superficial way; may make genuine democratic innovations but then retire or resign, to be replaced by a more conventional chief. Regarding legislation: effective measures may be too difficult to pass; or even if passed, may never be sufficiently "granular" to address the infinite things that can go wrong in policing, and where local democratic venues, mechanisms, and processes will still need building. Finally, all of the foregoing options beg larger questions about democracy and social change that were referenced in the above discussion of evidence-based policing. Specifically: where lay the social movements in our vision of democratic policing? Is our path to a better world based on "change from above" or "change from below?".

New Direction for Policing Studies?

One rich way to expand the fully social in policing studies, and which may open new avenues for the pursuit of democratic policing and challenging police abuse, would borrow insights from the field of labor studies and rank-and-file politics. Pertinent frameworks can be found in *Labor Studies Journal,* in labor ethnography such as Muñoz's *Transnational Tortillas* (2008), and in activist classics such as Slaughter's *A Troublemaker's Handbook 2* (2005).

Although labor frameworks rarely appear in policing studies, we do find officer working conditions addressed and sometimes linked to police abuse. Proponents of "organizational justice," for example, have conducted studies showing that how police supervisors treat line staff correlates with how the patrol officers treat citizens (Rosenbaum and McCarty 2017; Van Craen and Skogan 2017). The managerial mode typical in police agencies, Shane (2020: 6) observes, creates "organizational stressors" that officers frequently regard as more onerous than the "operational stressors" related to their work with the public. The organizational environment becomes "an objectionable, stifling atmosphere that must be endured" and which "often leaves casualties of burnout, cynicism, and low performance in its wake" (ibid.: 6). Yet, such studies do not ask questions that would be frontal for a labor studies scholar or union activist—e.g., Have the officers or their unions sought to

[11] Helpful on police monitoring groups and their limitations in Toronto and London is Currie, DeKeseredy, and MacLean (1990: 41–43).

collectively address the punitive modes of management? What is the state of pertinent conflicts or contestations inside the department?

A sharp portrait of the police work environment, its relationship to police abuse, and with an intriguing behind-the-scenes role of the police union, is offered by law professor Erwin Chemerinsky (2001) in his report on the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) in the wake of its late 1990s Rampart corruption scandal:

> The LAPD, like other police departments, has two major cultures: management/command and patrol officers. In the LAPD, the two are often at war. Also, like many other police departments, the LAPD management seeks mistake prevention and accountability from the rank and file through a highly stratified, elaborate discipline system that enforces voluminous rules and regulations, some of them very petty. Such systems attempt to keep officers in line by asserting control over every aspect of their lives and imposing a constant threat of discipline….
>
> The first cost is pervasive alienation of the rank and file. As we have talked to dozens of individuals in the Department, we are stunned by the extent of hostility to the Chief of Police and the command staff. (565)
>
> Officers experience the LAPD's discipline system as an arbitrary, demeaning system of entrapments that burns whistleblowers, fails to stop the big abuses like Rampart, and yet assiduously prosecutes officers for "micro-infractions." (566)

Chemerinsky's report is unusual because it was conducted at the invitation of the officers' union, the Los Angeles Police Protective League. Although the police chief had appointed a board of inquiry to look into the underlying causes of Rampart, the League did not trust that process and feared that "the union and some officers might be scapegoated for a corruption scandal that they thought was a symptom of a larger problem" (Fisk and Richardson 2017: 724). The deep corruption revealed by Rampart appears to have since been remedied (see Domanick 2015). Whether the LAPD has addressed the conditions, such as a punitive managerial culture, that feed corruption is an open question.

What *is* suggested by the available evidence in Los Angeles and elsewhere is that labor conditions in policing are contributing to police abuse. Perhaps too an aggrieved police rank and file could serve as community allies—or more minimally, as vital informants—in a movement for change. A small but influential model of officer activism is that of the "New York 12," a cohort of New York Police Department officers who challenged the NYPD's summons and arrest quotas, citing their racially discriminatory impact (Knafo 2016). New York 12 spokesperson and NYPD lieutenant Edwin Raymond, who ran for city council in 2021, told a reporter: "There are the thousands of members of the service I speak for. Obviously, I'm advocating for the community, but people have no idea how many cops don't agree with the system" (qtd. in Cruz 2021). Raymond also described the wide fear of retribution that makes it difficult for officers to speak out. Black and Latino officer associations work for racial justice in other locales, the Ethical Society of Police in St. Louis (http://esopstl.org) being among the long-established groups.

Critical policing scholars may well be capable of helping America find the way beyond impasse in its policing crisis. The process begins, I propose, with some new conversations and our rethinking of policing studies. The historic posture of the left, and reflected in *Iron Fist*, would link the policing struggle to a broader agenda, driven from the bottom up, toward social transformation. That posture remains fundamentally sound. Our path for getting there, however, requires a certain humility on the part of the left, including the scholarly left. We need fewer assumptions and more readiness to ask questions of all kinds.

Perhaps learning to investigate the police institution in a fully social way may be viewed as a training ground, as a step toward our becoming more effective social change agents.

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