

Breonna Taylor. Elijah McClain. George Floyd. Say their names.

Global protests are evoking long-awaited conversations regarding Black lives and the oppression that marginalized communities still face today under the eyes of the law. Throwing tear gas and shooting rubber bullets at protestors is adding fuel to the furious cries to defund police. We have tried reform: body cameras, de-escalating training programs and anti-bias training. These attempts at police reform are not enough. We can and should defund the police and put that money into services that can **prevent the lives we are losing**. Daniel Prude. Atatiana Jefferson. Aura Rosser. Say their names.

Despite the abolishment of slavery with the ratification of the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment to the American constitution in 1865, Black lives are still being denied their rights as U.S. citizens (“The Senate Passes the Thirteenth Amendment.”). Isaac Bryan, the director of UCLA’s Black Policy Center, explains that the police system in the United States was established around the purpose of capturing escaped slaves; he says, “That history is engrained in our law enforcement” (Andrew). Yes, slavery was abolished, but the Jim Crow laws enforcing racial segregation in Southern United States took its place. In 2017, police departments received approximately \$114.5 billion nationwide from state and local governments. \$111 billion (97%) of that budget went towards paying the police officers their salaries and their benefits (“Defund the Police - Top 3 Pros and Cons.”). Do we, the community they serve to protect, deserve only 3% of their funding?

“To Serve and Protect” is a motto that remains unfulfilled (“The Origin of the LAPD Motto”). A case in point is Charleena Lyles, a Black woman, who called 911 to report a burglary but was shot dead in front of her son within 3 minutes of the officers arriving at her house in Seattle because they thought she had a knife. The officers, Jason Anderson and Steven McNew, now live their lives with impunity after a lawsuit filed against them by Lyles’ family was

dismissed by the city of Seattle. Philip McHarris, a doctoral candidate in sociology at Yale, says that the idea that police are here to keep us safe needs to be dismantled. This is especially true for those being targeted by police in low-income communities. Budgets can be reallocated to trusted services that encourage security, including mental health services, community programs and education reform. They can be reallocated to shelters for those who are victims of gender-based violence and sexual assault. Reallocated to emergency services for those under mental distress so that they do not have to rely on the police – armed police – to “help” them. We need to reduce contact between the police and the public in order to avoid elevated threats towards marginalized communities (“Defund the Police – Demands.”).

Why is it that people of colour are still being wronged and targeted every single day despite our efforts towards police reform? Having officers wear body cameras, having them go through a training program or attempts at diversifying a police force is not enough to reform a system that was literally built on the intention of patrolling slaves (Andrew). Sam Levin writes in the Guardian that “New York banned chokeholds. Seattle required de-escalation training. Los Angeles restricted shooting at moving vehicles”. He states that body cameras as an attempt at decreasing police brutality have shown no statistical evidence that proves the reduction of force. Sacramento established a body-camera initiative costing them \$1.5 million, yet Stephon Clark, a 22-year-old Black man, was shot in his grandmother’s backyard three years after the wearing of body cameras was implemented. Additionally, Seattle arranged for a “progressive model for crisis intervention and de-escalation training” with the purpose of training officers to deal with harmful situations in a nonlethal manner. The officers who murdered Charleena Lyles completed this training program (Levin).

Could George Floyd have lived if he were a white man? And if Breonna Taylor was a white woman, could she have woken up to see the next day? We will not stop fighting for change and we will not stop demanding to defund the police. We can and should build a better community in which children coming from low-income families

can go to school and where people do not have to rely on armed officials to help them if they are under mental distress. If the police are defunded, maybe Black men and Black women can feel safe going on walks at night, wearing hoodies and sleeping in their own bed. John Mattingly and Myles Cosgrove, among many other officers who are clearly guilty of murder, walk free – they must be arrested (Joseph and Sanchez).

Alton Sterling. Botham Jean. Philando Castille. Say their names.