

# IS THERE HOPE FOR THE FUTURE?



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The National Police Association's free Law Enforcement education series is designed for home school, classroom, or independent learning. As part of our nonprofit educational mission, it prepares you for careers in public safety. This series is authored by [Chief Joel F. Shults, Ed.D.](#)

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## Table of Contents

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- 1** Bruised, not Broken
  
- 5** Updates on Police Recruiting
  
- 9** Can Ingratitude Kill Democracy?
  
- 12** The 750,000 Law Enforcement Officers Who Did Their Jobs Professionally This Week Represent Actual Police Culture
  
- 15** Pushing the Pendulum of Change
  
- 18** New Rules for Today's Police
  
- 22** The Long Road Back to Support for the Police
  
- 25** The Mexico Lesson
  
- 28** Is it time to be fed up with crime yet?
  
- 31** Civilian Heroes Abound
  
- 34** About The Author



## Bruised, not Broken

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Every house, vehicle, and individual is in need of maintenance. To let periodic adjustments and repairs go unattended on anything is to ensure the eventual loss of its value.

The same is true with democracy. What happens when our way of governing, including the primary purpose of maintaining peace and order, gets torn down when it merely needs a tune up? We've seen the answer to that question in recent times with the destructive over reach of criminal justice reforms that have, as they say, tossed out the baby with the bathwater.

Law enforcement is but a sliver of the criminal justice system. It is bounded very appropriately by numerous constraints that have worked remarkably well before the interference by a cascade of criticism and legislative meddling.

The first constraint is the Constitution. Made applicable to all government agencies through the 14th amendment after the Civil War and strengthened by Supreme Court decisions throughout the 1960s, the Bill of Rights governs police behavior. Accused and arrested persons have protections ensured by due process, by access to legal advice, by protections against unlawful seizures. Many citizens do not fully understand that the prohibition against unreasonable force is found here since the right to be free from unlawful searches and seizures applies to arrests, not merely to the seizing of physical evidence.

These Constitutional provisions expressly require a review by impartial judges resulting in arrest and search warrants. Every search and arrest require a warrant except in those circumstances where it is allowed by legal exemption. In practice, the urgency of most police encounters results in arrests and searches without a warrant under conditions of exigency where obtaining court review is not reasonable or possible.

In those cases, the officers' actions must be reasonable, defensible, and based on facts known to the officer at the time of their decisions. Those decisions are then swiftly reviewed by judges and prosecutors. If officers' actions are determined to be unreasonable, there are penalties in play. One of those is that the evidence may be rejected under what is known as the exclusionary rule, and that evidence cannot be used against the arrested person. This is the reason that cases may be dismissed by a prosecutor, or the case may fail if it goes to trial without the excluded evidence. This provides a very strong incentive for officers to do the right thing.

Another consideration in an officer's mind is that they are subject to criminal prosecution on both the state and federal level if they violate a suspect's rights. Even if they escape criminal prosecution, they are still subject to civil action to be sued for monetary damages for rights violations. Knowing that the police are faced with these penalties and attempt to do their jobs in good faith, the courts created the rule of qualified immunity as a level of protection for officers who face difficult decisions where policy and law are unclear. Despite the incorrect interpretation of this doctrine, qualified

immunity is not automatic and, even if granted initially, can be denied in subsequent judicial proceedings.

Legislators in many states and in Congress have attempted and sometimes succeeded in removing this vital review of police actions.

Another constraint on law enforcement is the law itself. A police officer does not have the privilege of deciding what laws to disregard, although many activists and law enforcement administrators choose to make the decision to let some offenders go without enforcement action as seen in so-called social justice riots, and increasingly protecting illegal and even violent offenses by certain groups such as the homeless, substance abusers, and the mentally ill. This kind of screening and decision making had been filtered in due process with the judicial system. Now the pressure to not enforce certain laws against certain people has been mandated by some administrators and prosecutors.

We recognize that discretion exists throughout the system. Not every traffic stop results in a citation. Not every case proceeds past the prosecutor. Not every sentence from a judge is the same for every similar offense. These are built in to the system, not to be usurped at the political whim of activists. This leaves the police, who are faced with the realities of the moment, in a very tenuous position when making a decision. Will they be disciplined, fired, or prosecuted for a decision that never reaches the courts for an objective review? The result has been played out in the numbers of new violent crime victims. Police officers who are not

allowed to do the job they were hired to do cannot protect the public.

Perhaps the victims of lawlessness will raise their voices before our system of justice collapses. We don't treat a bruise by amputation.



## Updates on Police Recruiting

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A recent study makes the police recruiting crisis sound even bleaker. A sample headline reads “Recent college grads are ‘emotionally’ unprepared for 9 to 5 jobs, study shows”. The research cited was conducted by a team who conducted an online survey of over 1000 adults between the ages of 22 and 28 who had earned a four-year college degree. Among the culprits are social media, gaming, political and cultural divisiveness, pandemic disruptions, and other factors associated with a rise in suicidality, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.

Other studies indicated that participation in the workforce by men ages 24-54 is matched only with the Great Depression Era, with the biggest drop in the 25-34 age group of men. The obvious and distressing difference is that in 1940 workers were begging for jobs, whereas today jobs are begging for workers. While theoretically, women would make up half of the population of police officers to represent their presence in the population, young men still make up the majority of police recruits in most cadet classes. Their absence from the pool of candidates contributes greatly to the recruiting crisis.

The Army is also suffering from a dearth of qualified volunteers for enlistment. The last fiscal year saw recruiters missing their goal by 25% reducing the branch’s strength by 10,000 soldiers, with projections that will see that shortage double. Youth obesity rates

have increased, test scores have declined, and interest in military service has decreased significantly.

When today's police officers are asked if they would choose police work again or recommend it to others, their answers of "No!" are more frequent and emphatic today than ever before. The number of men and women who are physically and mentally fit, have no significant substance use issues, and have no significant criminality in their background is small enough. Finding those with a spirit for adventure, service, and sacrifice in the face of today's hypercriticism of police and a general disdain for authority and traditional institutions is a challenge that seems insurmountable.

A host of strategies are being used across the country to address police recruiting. For example, a recent class of 39 Philadelphia police recruits includes several middle-aged graduates, ages 47, 55, and 44. These newly minted police officers, most of who are older than their academy instructors, bring a level of enthusiasm and maturity that can serve an agency well for many years.

In New Orleans, a strategy to replace some police officer roles with civilians to increase the number of officers on the streets netted only three hires out of fifty available positions. Meanwhile, the numbers in uniformed police ranks keep slipping as New Orleans' murder rate is increasing.

In Seattle, a city in a state that has been notorious for kicking away support for law enforcement, 180 officers left the police department in 2020, and 66 more officers have left so far this year. "I have about 1,080 deployable

officers. This is the lowest I've seen in our department," said Police Chief Adrian Diaz. Meanwhile, in a poll that should make politicians shake, the great majority of Seattle voters want more cops and more money for public safety. State legislator Joe Schmick admits "We're handcuffing (police) and our communities just aren't as safe as they once were." Whether recruiters can overcome the recent years' anti-police sentiments remains to be seen.

LAPD Chief Michel Moore traveled to Glendale, Arizona to visit baseball's spring training facility. His purpose was not to catch some rising stars before they become famous but to catch the attention of some of those hopefuls who might turn to law enforcement with the famous law enforcement agency. With a personnel shortage of 300 officers, the Chief had hopes that some of the audience might join others from ex-athletes from the NFL and NBA. "Going into that sport, they have attributes like teamwork, athleticism, and emotional intelligence that if they hadn't thought of coming in and transitioning those into law enforcement, they should," Moore said.

With bigger cities competing for officers, smaller agencies are losing officers to the allure of higher pay and better benefits. In Michigan City, Indiana, for example, Chief Steve Forker says his agency has become a training ground where officers can gain experience to be hired at an immediate pay increase. "Currently at three years on LaPorte (Indiana 12 miles away) Police Department, they're at \$68,000. Three years at the Michigan City Police Department, currently \$54,631. That's a \$14,000 difference."

Incentives such as better assurance of disability benefits, housing allowances, child care, and hiring bonuses can help. But what the law enforcement profession needs the most is a restoration of public confidence and support to stir the hearts and minds of those who can step up to serve in a noble cause.

## Can Ingratitude Kill Democracy?

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Thanking our police officers is more important now than ever. When we are thankful, we exercise hope. We encourage good. We expect things will get better as we celebrate what has been accomplished. When we thank a police officer for their service, we don't have to assume there are no flaws in their character and no bad actors who wear a badge. But we celebrate those willing to serve and protect. We acknowledge the sacrifice they make away from family, away from regular hours and restful sleep, and away from peace of mind. We celebrate laws and leaders that hold lawbreakers accountable and the idealism that seeks to make that accountability real regardless of wealth or power. When we are thankful for first responders, we give thanks for a government that does what we could not do in isolation. That collectively we share in the provision of safety and protection for our neighbors

Every year the holiday of Thanksgiving is both revered and mocked. The skeptics and cynics emphasize that the first European settlers brought disease, war, and trespass to the natives who helped them. The pessimist sees the whole day as mythology. They want children to stop singing about it, and definitely don't want them making construction paper pilgrim hats.

That America can declare a day of giving thanks in light of these critics says a lot about our nation. It does not say we are blind to history, it says that good things are often built around imperfect things. It does not say that we are unrepentant about injustice, it says we can see it

with an eye toward being better, however painfully slow that might be. It says that in the midst of hardship and culture clashes we can build good things and celebrate them.

Americans optimistic about the future created a holiday about an event that only half of the settlers survived in those first harsh seasons. Lincoln proclaimed during a brutal Civil War that “It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American people. I do, therefore, invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a Day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens. And I recommend to them that, while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation, and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility, and union.”

Our liberty is at risk because it seems a generation has lost its appreciation for it. Like villagers with torches and pitchforks threatening a misunderstood creature, naysayers attack our Constitutional republic as the

reason for their discontent. The miracle of the founding documents is indeed stained by retention of slavery, a sin for which we continue to suffer, but in that same document lay the seeds of change. Accepting the proposition that all men are created equal has guided us toward greater equality.

The concept of being endowed by our Creator with inalienable natural rights that include life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness has been twisted into an expectation that the government ensure and provide such happiness, not merely to keep government from obstructing that pursuit.

I am thankful for the ideas about liberty that were the foundation for the American Revolution. In pursuit of those ideals I am thankful for the processes that move us forward. Because of that gratitude, it grieves me to see credibility given to the deconstruction of those ideals so that we would even consider allowing the government the power to be the sole provider of our health, wealth, and shelter. What began as charity has become a right. Not like the rights endowed by our Creator, but rights created by government so that they can be removed or conditioned at will.

In this season of thanksgiving, I am grateful for my country and its turbulent history that makes us still the envy of those seeking freedom and opportunity. I'm grateful for those away from their homes and comforts in readiness to rescue me in times of desperation. Despite all of the challenges and all of the opposition to their calling, I am grateful for those holding that thin blue line.

## The 750,000 Law Enforcement Officers Who Did Their Jobs Professionally This Week Represent Actual Police Culture

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When a physician is found to have abused a patient, or an attorney is prosecuted for stealing from a client's trust fund, or a network morning news show host is fired for sexually harassing female subordinates, we don't see everyone in those professions scrambling to say they are sorry for the actions of their colleagues. Even though law enforcement is represented by over 18,000 independent police agencies comprised of at least 750,000 individual police officers, contacting an estimated 62 million citizens every year, "The Police" somehow becomes a monolithic institution when it comes to blaming officer misconduct.

The federal Bureau of Justice Statistics affirms that whites are more frequently contacted by police than any other group by race, with no significant difference in the percentage among blacks and whites who experience police contacts. Admittedly a slightly higher percentage of black citizens (2% to be precise) experience non-deadly use of force or being handcuffed during a contact, and that within the mere 3% of all contacts where such force was used. Routine handcuffing was the most frequently reported use of force. Having a gun pointed at a citizen during a contact was reported by fewer than 1% of persons during a police encounter.

In a report from the U.S. Department of Justice Programs that cited a study of representative police



agencies' use of force in arrests as reported by both officers and arrested persons, the data showed that 95% of arrests involved no display of a weapon by police. The study also showed that 85% of arrests involved no use of force tactic at all other than handcuffing. Officers used no more than a conversational tone in over 66% of arrests and shouted or cursed in fewer than 2%.

When police officers and police leaders make the well-worn statement that police misconduct represents an extremely small portion of the professionals working in law enforcement, they are not making a blanket defense to protect their own pride and reputation. They are speaking truth.

The attack on Memphis, TN resident Tyre Nichols by a handful of Memphis PD officers represents in no way the training, ethics, and procedures of the law enforcement profession. While citizens must always be careful to urge people to withhold judgment until all the facts are in, the video and swift initial findings of the incident's investigation seem to leave little room for justification of anything but the charges that those officers are facing.

The media was at a bit of a disadvantage in this incident because of the exaggerated narratives they have applied to other high-profile violent encounters. Critics are giddy in claiming systemic racism of all cops and are careful to identify the races of the officer and offender, even if they have to stretch the definitions of race to get the right category of hate in their so-called analysis. The fact that the Memphis officers were black like Nichols

required that the narrative had to shift to “it really doesn’t matter” since all cops are racist because of the badge, not their pigmentation.

The other problem the media had with covering this terrible crime is their use of the word “beating”. For once this term seems to be an accurate label for the way Nichols was treated long after any possible lawful use of force was applied. According to many reporters, the word “beating” applies to any struggle or arrest tactic used to take lawful custody of a violently resisting suspect. The hyperbole used in reporting justifiable force has taken away the impact that the word “beating” should rightfully have in real cases of abuse such as this one.

In one twisted way the questions and accusations of critics and normally supportive citizens over high profile incidents such as this show the unity of law enforcement in the minds of the public they serve. That’s not necessarily a bad thing. Law enforcement officers do want to unite in common goals of maintaining peace and protecting the innocent from the predatory violence of lawbreakers. One thing they are united about right now is the condemnation of unforgivable violence by those few Memphis officers who struck blows to everyone behind the badge, wounding the confidence of those who need quality law enforcement the most.

## Pushing the Pendulum of Change

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American history is the story of episodes of change. One aspect of that history of change is what has happened in the criminal justice system. From having only sheriffs and marshals to highly organized police forces to major federalization of law enforcement, we have seen policing become more sophisticated and effective.

The 1960s brought law enforcement to television screens during riots from civil rights protests and anti-war protests. The images were not good and, much like recent years, attracted the attention of the federal government. As a result of a deep study of American law enforcement and justice, Congress began dumping dollars and developing guidelines and recommendations. For the most part the training, equipment, and education opportunities derived from the funding created major advancements to the profession.

In the 1970s a Supreme Court case *Linda R.S. v. Richard D.* (the facts of which are largely irrelevant) the Court stated that “a private citizen lacks a judicially cognizable interest in the prosecution or non-prosecution of another”. This notion harkened back to the English middle ages when the King decided to cut in on the justice pie. At one time the victims of crime had to go to court and sue the perpetrator to get restitution and justice. Since this was done in the Crown’s court, the King decided that the offense was really against the peace and dignity of his kingdom rather than merely to a single victim. From this we derived the notion that a

criminal violation is against the whole citizenry which is why we hear cases referred to as “the people v. John Doe” or “the state v. Betty Smith”.

While law enforcement became more efficient, the concept of having justice for the individual victim got lost until the victim rights movement. Victim rights legislation created the right of victims to have a say in the process and be afforded compensation without having to file a lawsuit. For decades, legislation has been centered on recognizing the harm to individuals and society from criminal actors.

Fear of crime became a political issue in the 1980s and resulted in another package of federal support for law enforcement in the era of the Clinton presidency. Candidate Clinton had made crime control one of his signature campaign themes along with the economy, while incumbent candidate Bush paid much less attention to justice issues. Armed with enthusiasm about Community Policing and addressing youth and gang violence, the goal of adding 100,000 police officers to the streets and building more prisons correlated with the dramatic decline of crime into the next decades.

We are now seeing the reversal of those gains on controlling crime because of the current trend in justice away from concerns about victims and more toward concern about the criminal. Although some reversals are happening as the public voices increasing concern about more crime, there have been many policies favoring the criminal actor.

The effectiveness of the 1990s anti-crime legislation now causes embarrassment for those who supported more cops and tougher sentencing. The merits of the 1970s federal support for local law enforcement are clear. Now, it seems the efforts to address criminal justice are designed to tear down that progress. Reformers want violent criminals released without having to post bail. They clamor for leniency in sentencing even for those already serving time. They want drug violations to be treated as mental health get-out-of-jail-free passes even as overdose deaths reach new heights. They want fewer police officers with less equipment and fewer tools. They are more enthusiastic about prosecuting police officers than the violent criminals who resist them.

This era of criminal justice evolution has been disastrous, as evidenced by much backpedaling by politicians who see their poll numbers go down while homicide numbers go up. It normally takes decades for attitudes and laws to change and evolve as theories about crime come and go. The public cannot wait for ten or twenty years to pass to return to common sense justice policy. The cost will be measured in deaths, injuries, and dollars.

## New Rules for Today's Police

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Stable employment used to be one of the perks of being a police officer. Today, every officer is one decision away from being torn from their career. The decision doesn't even have to be wrong for the ax to fall. As the law enforcement profession continues to take fire, literally and figuratively, individual police officers and their loved ones must adapt to new threats. Threats from the criminal element, although increasing, are nothing new. Daily threats to their livelihood lurk on every shift. Here are things our police officers from rookie to veteran to chief need to consider.

### Financial security

Debt is a great enemy to individuals and families. According to Forbes magazine, a 2017 survey showed that 78% of American families live paycheck to paycheck. This was pre-covid and didn't just apply to low income families. Most police officers can live as middle class citizens, but the norms of even middle class culture accept high rent and house payments, along with never ending car payments, are to be expected. This attitude is a recipe for disaster. A sudden job loss from injury, suspension without pay, or dismissal can not only stop a paycheck. Relying on off-duty employment as regular income is perilous if it depends on police officer status. Health insurance can be unaffordable on the open market.

Many injured officers can testify to horrible treatment by their employers and worker compensation insurance. Expecting that the agency will take care of their wounded officers is not wise. For many departments, injured officers are simply a burden that is easily cast off and forgotten. Sadly, the expected support of fellow officers can fade as well.

Disciplined financial planning is essential for a police family. Having savings that can carry three to six months of expenses during loss of income is possible with planning and budgeting. Finding part-time employment that develops a new skill or at least is independent of being a police officer can provide additional protection.

## Legal protection

Adding to the professionals in a family's life, like doctors, dentists, and financial planners every police officer should have an attorney, or at least know who they would call. Attorneys who specialize in employment law or defense to lawsuits would be best, unless the issue is a looming criminal charge. Being a part of an existing legal protection plan is worth the cost.

Officers should know their rights, and the history of their agency's treatment of officers who are accused of misconduct. Many officers are idealists, trust their employers, and believe in their own competence to handle legal matters. Facing accusations requires a support network when, to the dismay of many, leadership and even colleagues withdraw from an

officer in trouble. A good attorney is essential in these times.

A factor often forgotten is that when an officer is suspended during an investigation that may last a very long time, the peace officer loses their law enforcement privilege of carrying a weapon. This can be proactively resolved by obtaining a concealed carry permit before it becomes necessary.

## Mental health

One other professional that should be part of an officer's life is a mental health partner. Preventive counseling, especially during the current era, can help reduce anger and anxiety. Officers must assume that their family members are experiencing vicarious stress and may be tempted to hide their anxiety in order to not be a burden to their officer.

A self-check with assistance from trusted friends, family, and counselors can be another proactive step in providing support for a law enforcement career. Depression, substance abuse, and destructive behavior can sneak up on anyone. Planning for prevention rather than waiting for trauma will build resilience and coping skills.

Being part of a non-law enforcement support system is also important. This is difficult for many officers, but being part of a sports league, interest group, or faith group is important. An officer must resist the urge to disregard groups who are not aware of the realities of police work, even though being constantly questioned



about the job is a frequent annoyance. If those group members include critical or hostile persons, finding a new circle can be therapeutic.

## Being prepared

Being prepared for a disastrous event like unemployment or injury with a supportive network can keep officers physically and mentally healthy. Having the security of preparing in advance can take away some of the niggling anxiety that can interfere with quick decisions and traumatic events. Being physically fit will benefit all of these factors, but financial, legal, a social wellness are essentials for today's law enforcement officers.

## The Long Road Back to Support for the Police

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In 2019 I wrote a year-end review piece in another publication asking if antagonism toward the police would subside. That was five months before the death of George Floyd, and just weeks before COVID started hogging the headlines. So, 2020 was obviously not our year. To quote myself in reference to that season: “We thought those in their ivory towers writing theses about abolishing the police would be scoffed into oblivion, then defunding became a reality. We thought we had all of the protections and weapons to control civil unrest, then we were castrated by our leaders. We thought surely rebellion would not happen to our beloved agency, then we found insults on our meal receipts and spit in our drinks. Our “enemies” became our government leaders, our funders, and many who once begged us to be in their schools and neighborhoods. Our coffee oases became dangerous. The bikes we rode and the cars we drove were boycotted because cops used them.”

So here we are closing in on another year’s retrospection. Can we be optimistic yet? Has the pendulum of anti-police rancor reached its highest arc? Some recent headlines might give us hope.

The Texas House of Representatives has passed a set of laws that empower local law enforcement to enforce border breeches. “Texas has every right to secure our border and protect ourselves,” said state Rep. David Spiller, R-Jacksboro, a sponsor of one of the bills. “As Texans, we have to protect Texas especially when the

federal government will not do so.” The bill has been sent to the Senate after rancorous debate. “Ultimately much more work is needed to secure our border against the hundreds of thousands of illegal crossings each month,” Texans for Strong Borders, a nonprofit conservative advocacy group, said in a statement.

Since the flood from the southern border has been diverted to urban areas, especially where so-called sanctuary cities have been declared, the pressure to control border security to reduce related crime and terror risk in this election year may lead to necessary changes from Washington, D.C.

A 2022 article from CNN is headlined “Once nicknamed ‘Murderapolis,’ the city that became the center of the ‘Defund the Police’ movement is grappling with heightened violent crime. A January 2023 article in the StarTribune news headlined that violent crime declined in Minneapolis last year, but rates are still well above the norm. Just this week the city reported that since losing 40% of its police officers it is five million dollars over its overtime budget. Public Health and Safety Committee Chair LaTrisha Vetaw said she was suffering “sticker shock” from the police department’s request for adding \$5 million to next year’s overtime and event staffing budget, but “The reality is that’s where we are in Minneapolis. We’re paying to have officers on the street,” she said.

In our nation’s capital Mayor Muriel Bowser has introduced legislation to roll back some of the police reform measures that have hamstrung law enforcement amid rising crime in Washington, D.C. The

Comprehensive Policing and Justice Reform Amendment Act of 2022 created “changes that “just don’t match the daily practice of safe and effective policing,” Bowser said. Acting Chief Pamela Smith agrees that reforming the reform measures is needed, after seeing a 39% increase in violent crime over the previous year.

While stating that the previous measures were “well-intended”, the Chief said they jeopardized public safety, were overly broad, and created “...situations where officers are kind of hesitant to go hands-on to apprehend an individual when it is appropriate. It has created circumstances where officers’ credibility has been called into question due to incidental contact.”

It is tragically sad that murder, mayhem, and money are finally driving public opinion back to the need for law enforcement, but this is exactly what most cops predicted.

## The Mexico Lesson

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An Associated Press news article by reporter Mark Stevenson describes the actions of soldiers of the Mexican Army. The story, which I read in the Denver Post November 7th edition, relates how power drug cartels are engaging in extortion of local farmers in addition to profiting from the manufacture and sale of illegal narcotics. Farmers who must pass through the roadways to harvest their crops of limes and avocados are stopped by the gangs at armed roadblocks. After assessing their cargo, or counting their cattle, the farmers are charged extortion prices for the privilege of moving through the roadblock with no shots being fired.

Meanwhile, nearby, soldiers also wait and watch as the transactions take place. Their job is not to do surveillance, conduct raids, arrest gangsters, or protect the farmers. Their job is to be a presence to discourage violence among rival cartels. In some areas, the soldiers have been surrounded by locals and gangs to the extent that supplies must be brought in by helicopter. The criminal enterprise operating in front of them is of little concern in the army's policy of non-aggression.

If it seems shocking that in the undeveloped country within the sovereign nation of Mexico that criminal elements are in control and the nation's armed guardians are kept at a distance so as not to disturb them, you get a vision of what happens when policing stands aside passively. Think it could not happen in the USA? It has and it is.

Headline: June 2020, Seattle Police abandon their East Street Precinct after days of clashing with protestors. Thinking it was some sort of trap, some protest leaders were cautious at first, then began creating the Capitol Hill Police Free Zone which was initially described as a safe and peaceful area where police didn't bother to return. By the end of the month, CNN was reporting multiple shootings, two of them fatal in this peaceful utopian law enforcement-free six square block area of Seattle. An anonymous resident in that neighborhood said it was really good for a week, then turned into a militant cult. Residents had to deal with all of the problems they claimed the police shouldn't be handling. The result was actually more violence against black people, where the crux of the accusation about policing was police violence against black people.

Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant issued a statement demanding defunding of police while, in the same document, demanding that Seattle PD fully investigate the police free zone's homicides and be held accountable to bring the killers to justice. Thanks, council member Sawant, now that we're clear on that. Meanwhile, fire and EMS services were still welcome. But fire and EMS rely on police officers to make sure a scene is safe and remains safe for other first responders, especially at scenes of violent crimes. By July the zone was restored to reality as police moved in to stop the violence.

In March, a murder occurred inside the police-free zone in Minneapolis in the area where George Floyd died. Activists set up a phalanx of checkpoints verifying that persons who wanted to enter the formerly public area

are not police officers. Even as police attempted to enter the area to investigate the shooting, they encountered resistance and the victim, Imaz Wright, was dead before they arrived. The area is still subject to spates of gunfire and requires armed escorts of some who enter, but is still labeled as a place of peace, love, and contemplation. Just keep your head down.

Philadelphia recently declared a return to third-world traffic conditions by barring police from enforcing most traffic laws. If you're expecting headlights, taillights, brakes, and safe speeds without the possibility of red lights flashing in the rearview mirror, just wait for your car insurance rates to be the canary in the coal mine. More crashes, more claims, higher premiums. Since kidnapers, robbers, burglars, drug dealers, and absconders no longer have to worry about being stopped, watch the crime rate creep up, too.

Let's just call these examples of the Mexican Model of Standby Policing. If you see this trend creeping into your town, make your voice known. We need the police.

## Is it time to be fed up with crime yet?

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Anyone observing the cycle of crime can watch the graphs at work. Crime goes up. Laws get more severe and police are empowered to deal with criminal activity. Crime goes down. Laws get watered down, penalties get reduced, and law enforcement gets fewer dollars and support. Crime goes up.

Astute observers will also note that the public's fear of crime, how the media reports crime, and the actual statistics about crime are all different things. One of the greatest success stories in crime reduction happened during the Clinton administration. During his campaign for the Presidency, the major theme was "It's the economy, stupid", but along with that, he tapped into America's increasing fear of crime in the 1990s. Incumbent President George H.W. Bush gave crime little attention in his bid for re-election and arguably lost some traction for that oversight in addition to the economic issues of the day.

Murders had been increasing for most of the 1980s and crime in urban centers was being fueled by the crack cocaine epidemic. Urban crime was spilling into the suburbs with a spate of carjackings that made the specter of violent crime closer to middle-class America and less a distant problem of the inner city. Meth labs were emerging as a drug problem in the southwest.

Clinton's campaign promises were fulfilled with massive federal funding. The emphasis on community policing as a solution to neighborhood crime, funding for the goal



of 100,000 additional police officers on the nation's streets, adjusting prison sentencing, and building more prisons was reflected in state legislatures as well as Congress.

Statistics on violent crime reflect a great deal of success from the 1990s until recent years. Murder rates fell considerably lower and other violent and property crimes followed a downward trend as well. Criminologists struggle to find an exact cause-and-effect relationship between crime and social factors. There is never an era when only one factor changes from year to year or decade to decade that can pinpoint the genesis of crime.

Predictors of crime include poverty rates, population changes, climate factors, trends in alcohol and other drug use, family structures, historical events such as war or internal social conflicts, and changes in laws and social attitudes. Most observers, even critics of the Clinton era crime policies, acknowledge that crime was impacted and reduced after his election.

President Biden, a U.S. Senator at the time and a proponent of the Clinton criminal justice initiatives, shrank back from those successes under criticism that the programs created an unjust inequality in practice. The term "mass incarceration" began to be part of the critique of new federally funded prisons. Harsh sentences for crack cocaine compared to lesser sentences for powder cocaine offenses that penalized black offenders over white offenders raised accusations of racism.

An interesting thing about the Clinton era crime control efforts is that violent crime was already trending downward before the anti-crime campaign. The fear of crime was still high, however, and making crime a political issue attracted the voters' attention. Another interesting feature is that crime appeared to begin dropping before any of the massive legislation had a chance to move from proposals to passage to implementation. This begs the question of what really caused the social shift towards less violent crime.

Perhaps when the public simply gets fed up with crime that message reaches the ears of both politicians and those predisposed to crime (and for the sake of this article we'll assume those are two different groups). When the public gets fed up with criminals being hailed as heroes for resisting law enforcement, when the public gets fed up with judges releasing dangerous defendants, when the public gets fed up with politicians coddling leftist ideologies that blame everyone but the criminal for their behavior, then the message goes out.

When offenders know that the police are supported, that prosecutors work for the innocent, and that politicians get votes for being tough on crime, only then will fear be restored to the guilty where it belongs. When politicians stop blaming schools, the police, guns, and society at large, perhaps the accountability they clamor for can return to those who choose to defy decent behavior. It's time to be fed up with crime.

## Civilian Heroes Abound

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Headlines like “Mob Attacks Police”, “Officer Ambushed in Patrol Car”, and “Officer Attacked While Bystanders Film” reflect a terrible trajectory for society. It can be a small thing like a thumbs up, a friendly wave, or an anonymous payment for a cup of coffee or a meal for an officer. It can also be a life-saving intervention when an officer is being overwhelmed by an adversary.

One of the unfortunate side effects of the professionalization of policing is that ordinary citizens have forgotten that they, too, have a responsibility for maintaining peace. The citizen’s arrest is rarely used but reflects a history of good people taking action to maintain order and hold wrongdoers accountable. Most states have statutes that enable police officers to immediately demand that a citizen assist them, imbuing them with police powers for that moment and releasing them from liability when acting in an emergency.

The NPA provides a one-minute educational [public service announcement](#) to encourage bystanders to do something other than videotape an officer in distress. The video clip urges citizens to call 911 on behalf of an officer and ask the officer how they can help, and become a good witness. The video ends with “It’s time to stop filming, and start helping”.

Last year when a San Francisco police officer responded to a threatening male in Chinatown, the suspect appeared to comply but suddenly began to attack the officer and had her on the ground. Bystanders rushed in

to assist her, pulling her attacker away and yelling at him to get off her.

In July of last year a Fredericksburg, Virginia officer was attacked when he attempted to arrest a man on possession of stolen property after responding to a call of a suspicious person. Two bystanders saw the officer being assaulted and pulled the suspect away. "If the two individuals watching nearby had not selflessly taken it upon themselves to assist the officer during the attack, the injuries he sustained could have been much more severe," said Police Chief Layton. "The courage seen by the officer and individuals show we are stronger when we work together." The officer was treated for a head injury.

In May of this year a Porter County, Indiana officer was attacked by a man wanted for auto theft, punching the officer after the man, identified as Christopher Delgado, lied about his identity and began to resist the officer. A passing motorist observed the attack, got out of his car, and grabbed Delgado from behind, assisting the now injured officer in taking the suspect to the ground and getting him in handcuffs.

In March of this year, Salt Lake City police officers were facing increasing assaults on police and resisting arrests. While making an arrest at the Salt Lake City airport, an officer had a suspect on the floor who twisted away and began punching the officer. Once again, a bystander stepped in to engage with the assailant and helped the office complete the arrest after a lengthy struggle.

It doesn't take much internet searching to find young boys and girls operating lemonade stands, running marathons, or giving hugs to support law enforcement. Eight-year-old Brecken made national news in 2018 with his lemonade and cookie sales to raise money for the Blue Springs, Missouri police department. His goal was 15 dollars but raised \$3000. Whether to buy protective vests for K-9s, to support injured officers, or to fund Shop-With-A-Cop programs, these youngsters bring hope to the hearts of those who fear for the future of our country.

American law enforcement has been heavily influenced by the famed English Home Secretary Sir Robert Peel. Peel instituted the London Metropolitan Police, one of the first of its kind. Peel's principles have been taught in police ethics and history classes since the mid-19th century. One of those principles is an understanding that the people are the police and the police are the people. This is essential in a democracy where armed agents of the government are representative of everyone's responsibility to maintain a civil society. In our eagerness to protect the public from having to deal with crime as we professionalize policing, perhaps both the police and the citizenry have forgotten our mutual responsibilities. Thankfully, many are willing to step up and step in to be heroes for our heroes.

## About The Author

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This series is authored by [Chief Joel F. Shults, Ed.D.](#) Joel is a retired police chief. He is an award-winning writer, college professor, trainer, and first responder chaplain.