



## RADICAL LEADERS

UNCOVERING OUR PAST  
TO BUILD THE DEMOCRACY

### WE ALL DESERVE



**Key Question:** What does it mean to dismantle the police? How is it done?

**Background** In 1704, the first recognized slave patrol was created in the Carolina colonies to keep the systems of slavery intact for the next 150 years. While the military became a replacement for law enforcement during the Civil War in the South, during Reconstruction the role of slave patrols wasn't wiped out, instead it found a new form. Sheriffs and police departments were put in place in the South, many of whom continued the values slave patrols followed from neighborhood surveillance, to who could join the police force. From this, law enforcement was developed and designed to target Black citizens, and though we may see present-day law enforcement as a recent development, some of the same continuations have been passed down.

First beginning in New York, the "broken windows" policing was used to prevent serious crimes by over-policing and combating less serious offenses. In the 1990s, New York experienced a drop in violent crime rates by 56% and nonviolent crime rates by 65%. At the time, this was credited to Mayor Rudy Giuliani's "broken windows" technique which allowed for police to take more forceful approaches to less serious offenses, in theory, to stop the more serious ones. These numbers resulted in cities across the country adopting this plan, including Newark, New Jersey. This strategy was credited with the reduced crime rates in New York City, but The Chicago Law Review stated in 2006, that there was no evidence to prove this was the reason. Cities across the country were using this tactic in full force, specifically targeting lower-income Black and brown communities, further straining their relationship with law enforcement.

In 2010, the city of Camden, New Jersey was considered one of the most dangerous cities in the country with a continued crime growth in 2011 and 2012. With 40% of its 77,000 population living below the poverty line the city relied heavily on state aid. At this time, the police department was lacking a needed \$14 million in their budget and were forced to lay off half of their force. Though the number of arrests were cut in half, burglaries rose up 65% and murder rates quickly trended upward. With problems within policing piling up in the city, the idea of using a county-led police force arose.

**Case Study:** The events leading up to the 2012 dismantling of the police system in Camden, New Jersey, fell under public safety. The city had 18x the national average of homicides and rampant complaints of excessive force. With 40% of its 77,000 population living below the poverty line, serious action was needed to be taken to protect the citizens of Camden both from crime in the city and also the brutal policing tactics.

Dismantling the police force was an effort from Senator Don Norcross, Mayor Dana Redd, Camden County Freeholder, Lou Cappelli, and Governor Chris Christie, who wanted a force that was cheaper and yet put more officers on the streets. They looked at how law enforcement would handle cases and present themselves in their communities and instead of the police force being run by the city, it would now be controlled by the county. This would build a larger focus on community outreach and meeting the needs of the members that live in those neighborhoods. They moved to get rid of old union contracts and increased presence in neighborhoods, where officers spend more time walking and interacting with members of the community. Based on a state statute that allowed for counties to create their own police departments, cities and towns had the option of using these departments or creating their own. There was pressure, since police unions didn't want a county-led department since they didn't use unions, but Democratic City Council President

Frank Moran stood strong in his convictions that due to the city's crime and money issues, it was the city's "only option."

New policies were designed in collaboration with The ACLU of NJ, the Policing Project at NYU Law School, and the police union to reduce complaints of excessive force focused on prioritizing de-escalation above all else, and ensuring all officers use their bodycams.. The NAACP was also integral in the police reevaluating their use of force policy, both in 2015, when de-escalation became the go-to method, and in 2019, when officers had to intervene when their colleagues were using force without just reason. With these new policies in place in 2012, all members of the Camden police department were fired and rehired with having to retake psychological and physical testing, go through the interview process again, and complete a 50-page application. The new policies stated that officers should only use force as a last resort and were trained in de-escalation methods. To support and ensure de-escalation, officer performance measurement became based on different factors that didn't include the number of arrests or tickets given, but instead were trained on efforts to prevent conflict that work to help both parties involved. As a result of the changes, the city has seen numerous positive and also negative effects of the reimagined police department, but in the beginning, the results were mostly negative. The "broken windows" measures were still being used, with rates of police presence in minor infractions and excessive force that rose.

Though this was the case in the beginning, homicides have gone down from 67 in 2012 to 25 in 2019, and the same went for excessive force complaints, seeing a drop from 65 in 2012 to 3 in 2019. Even with the introduction of 140 additional officers, the police budget has remained at \$63 million. With a violent crime drop of 23% and a nonviolent crime drop of 48% between 2012 and 2018, other cities in New Jersey were experiencing the same drops in crime. The cities of Newark and Jersey City have experienced similar drops in violence, yet they didn't implement the same changes to their police forces seen in Camden.

Looking beyond statistics, the people of Camden have expressed concern with the county-controlled police force. Camden city's population is around 90% people of color while more than half the police force is white. Before these changes, the police force was run by the city, bringing in more officers from the communities themselves, but under county control, more officers have been brought from outside the city.

It is important to take into account the different effects had while looking at Camden as a case study. Though the numbers may speak for themselves, it is important to value the personal statements made by the citizens of Camden and how this change has personally affected them as well. In addition, it is important to point out where the data cuts off and where speculation begins. Given this information, there is no certainty that the reforms to the Camden department produced this drop in crime. There is growing support from activists and politicians across the country, demanding the defunding or dismantling of police forces to ensure the value and safety of all individuals with measures such as mental health, crisis and social workers. With the implementations in Camden, the city has become an example of how to dismantle and rebuild police systems with proven results. But, is it enough and can Camden be used as an example for future use to shape better policies going forward and potentially even complete abolition of the police?

**Reflection Questions:**

- What are the systematic reforms needed to train, support and hold poor police behavior accountable to ensure justice and safety for all?
- Is Camden a good example of reform or only further shows how police need more defunding and accountability?

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