

Community Control Over Police

A Proposition



Pan-African Community Action

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About PACA

Pan-African Community Action (**PACA**) is part of a historic and global movement for Pan-Africanism, or the liberation and unification of Africa, and of African people on the continent and in the diaspora, under the economic system of socialism.

As part of the Pan-Africanist movement, PACA is a grassroots group of African/Black people organizing for community based power.

PACA undertakes to build community led power through **political education** and **participatory programs of action** that avow and advance our

- 1). human right to informed consent and self-determination and
- 2). collective community control over the elements of **land, political systems, economic systems, systems of justice** (such as police and judicial), **social systems** (such as education and culture) and **ecological systems**.

In order to realize this shift in power, PACA is helping build a movement led by the most impacted of our communities, which we understand to be **low-income and working class African women** and other low-income and working-class African communities that are marginalized, such as those who are queer, trans, or disabled.

PACA is explicitly anti-capitalist. We stand against all forms of race, class, gender and sexual orientation based oppression.

We stand for full community access to the resources necessary for a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of individuals and families, including: food, clothing, housing, medical care, and necessary social services. We also believe that all people have the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond one's control.

PACA Tools of Analysis

- **Pan-Africanism.** PACA recognizes the primacy of Africa in solving the problem of oppression and exploitation for African people everywhere on earth. Because “until Africa is free, no African can be free,” we must struggle for the liberation and unification of Africa under the economic system of scientific socialism.
- **Black communities in the US are a domestic colony.** African people constitute a domestic colony inside of the United States, oppressed and exploited to serve the economic interests of capitalists and the social interests of the broader white community. We must end colonial domination and replace it with self-determination for African people.
- **The core issue is POWER, not racism.** Understanding that Black communities are a domestic colony, it is clear that the core issue confronted by African people is not the subjective and immeasurable attitudes of racial prejudice, but the concrete issue of power and control. We do not pursue inclusion in an exploitative system or oversight of oppression, but power and control over the forces that impact our lives.
- **Capitalism is inherently exploitative.** Capitalism is the exploitation of one human by another, enforced by oppression, for the purpose of profit. Capitalism is leading to the destruction of the earth's ecology for the purpose of profit. Because capitalism is inherently exploitative, it cannot be reformed into good.
- **Intersectionality.** Exploitation and oppression is not one dimensional and neither is our analysis. Black women's experiences are different than that of Black men or white women. LGBTQ issues intersect with other identities and class statuses. Most importantly, ending white supremacy and patriarchy will not end capitalism and ending capitalism will not end white supremacy and patriarchy.
- **Organization is imperative.** PACA understand that the only way to end the exploitation and oppression of African people is through organization. Organization is the only way to build a new society to replace the existing one. We understand organizing to be a science and pursue a scientific understanding of organizing and social transformation.
- **Dialectical and Historical Materialism.** PACA recognizes that history is a process that can be understood. Further, we assert that history is advanced by material conditions that can be significantly influenced by organized human activity. The scientific process of understanding history, predicting potential future outcomes and actively shaping those outcomes is Dialectical and Historical Materialism.

Community Control over Police: A Proposition

By Max Rameau
Pan-African Community Action

Introduction

While it might be fair to say that the police enjoy support among the majority of the white population, the police enjoy no such support among the majority of Black people, who endure more frequent and harsher interactions with cops than whites.

To be sure, white support for the police decreases proportionately with income. That is to say, poorer whites tend to support the police less because the police interact with them differently than with their wealthier white counterparts. By the same token, support for the police among Blacks tends to increase proportionately with increases in income, wealth and other privileges. Overall and within each economic strata, however, white support for police is higher than Black support.

Similarly, largely as a consequence of physical or sexual assaults by men against them, many women find themselves in need of protection against assaults and most often turn to the police because there are few other legal or viable options. At the same time, low-income Black, Latina and Native American women can find themselves in need of protection from assault and, simultaneously, fear being dismissed, belittled or even assaulted by the very police they turn to for protection from assault. In instances of familial or intimate partner violence, women often fear that instead of acting as a third party mediator, police will brutalize the person that they want protection from and, simultaneously, want to protect.

This tension between needing an institution for protection and living in fear of that same institution is compounded among gay, lesbian and transgender people, who experience scorn and sexual assault at the hands of police at even higher rates than cis-gendered women. While these tensions are disproportionately visited upon under and working class people, they exist across class lines based on identity or perceived identity.

One's relationship with the police, then, is not merely a function of personal preference, but is deeply rooted in realities of class, race, sex and gender, or perceived gender, identity. One's disposition towards the police, then, is not merely an individual choice, or a trend fueled by social media, but rather a consequence of lived class and group identity experiences. The pandemic of police brutality, therefore, cannot be addressed on the individual level, but only on the structural level.

For the majority of American history, the evolution of the structures and institutions of policing occurred not just outside of the participation of Black people, but in a manner and direction that is fundamentally antagonistic to the development of the Black community. The institution of policing began as private patrols of white men tasked with capturing runaway slaves. Not incidentally, those patrols were often rewarded with the bodies of Black women. After the Civil War, slave patrols morphed into an organized government structure tasking white men with enforcing the Black Codes, a series of laws crafted to criminalize and control the population of former slaves, including any imagined infringement upon the sanctity of white women.

The police are not simply here to stop crime and make our neighborhoods safe. The police as an institution with a defined role in society cannot be properly understood outside of the context of class, race and gender.

Black Communities as a Domestic Colony and Police as an Occupying Force

In his ground breaking 1967 “Where do we go from Here” speech, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. argued that beyond the laws and customs of segregation, “the problem that we face is that the ghetto is a domestic colony that’s constantly drained without being replenished.”

That same year, the seminal book *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*, by Stokely Carmichael (later known as Kwame Ture) and V. Charles Hamilton forcefully argued that Blacks “stand as colonial subjects in relation to the white society. Thus institutional racism has another name: colonialism.”

While traditional colonies are lands geographically distant from the controlling metropole- think of African or ‘new world’ colonies and their European metropole- the primary aspects of colonialism are not distance, but exploitation and oppression.

Majority Black communities in counties or cities are, however, forcefully segregated and provide those in power and those who identify with that power. These communities are sources for cheap labor in factories or government jobs. They serve as a dumping ground for cheap or unsafe products, such as the meat no longer good enough for nice neighborhoods, used clothing that can be resold instead of trashed and housing that turns a profit without the need for repairs. They provide the functional equivalent of raw materials in the form of ‘customers’ in for-profit prisons or bodies to justify government contracts in health, social services or a number of other sectors. And the residents of Black communities provide the powers-that-be and middle class white communities with an eternally useful bogey-man for any range of social ills.

In form and in function, Black communities are a domestic colony inside of the United States. If Black communities are a domestic colony, then that colonial relationship of exploitation and oppression is enforced by an occupying force: the police.

The harsh reality is that the relationship between US police forces and residents of low-income Black communities more closely resembles that of the US army and citizens of Iraq or Afghanistan than of the police and residents of wealthy majority white gated communities. In both ghettos and invaded countries, residents fear- even hate- the occupiers, but have no say in how that force carries out its mission to ‘protect’ them. In both instances, the job of the occupying force is to defend business assets from poor people. Most telling, when cops or soldiers murder a colonial subject, the entire occupying force protects their own, the media demonizes the dead while humanizing the murderer, the colonial government protects their armed representative from any semblance of justice and citizens of the metropole, who also benefit from the colonial relationship, rally in support of their troops.

In practice, the police serve as a hostile occupying force, enforcing the colonial status of Black communities in America. The undemocratic nature of policing undermines the ambitions of Black and other communities to exercise self-determination.

Because colonial occupation is inherently unjust, attempts to reform the occupation is inherently futile.

Working at peak effectiveness, community relations boards help the occupiers better communicate the terms of occupation with the occupied. When granted teeth, civilian oversight boards help insure that the occupiers adhere to the rules of occupation established by the occupiers. Even if all police were properly trained to the highest standard imaginable, the result would be an occupation by a well trained force.

End the Occupation and Shift Power

Virtually all theories of democracy and laws governing international human rights concur that functional democratic institutions must be firmly grounded in the informed consent of the governed. By definition, however, no people grant consent to colonization or occupation. In practice, Black people in American have never been afforded the opportunity to grant consent to an armed force empowered to stop, detain, arrest and even take the life of members of our community.

In the face of protests against police brutality and abuse, the real question, then, is not about community relations, civilian oversight, appropriate levels of training, or even well intentioned slogans. The core issue is one of democratic power. For all of the complexities of this time- and there are many complexities- the underlying issue is one of power.

The fundamental function of police in any society is to enforce the will and mores of those in power, whether that will is formally encoded in law or informally ingrained in social custom. Because they are the enforcement wing of the system, any campaign whose primary objective is to convince the police to disobey the will of those in power- to disobey their boss- and, instead, adhere to the wishes of those with no power, is not only illogical, it is doomed to fail.

The only way the police can represent and enforce the interests of the Black community- rather than the interests of outside colonial powers- is to shift power so that the Black communities have power over their own police departments.

This historic moment calls for something more significant than additional training or even civilian oversight boards. We must fight for Community Control over Police.

Community Control over Police

Community Control Over Police is both a principle of democratic self-determination and an objective of a social movement determined to end abusive practices that are inevitable in the context of colonial domination. However, while most support the concept of local democratic rule, that abstract idea must be converted into concrete proposals around which the Black community, and the broader social justice movement, can coalesce.

Ending the rampant abuses at the hands of police, and the criminalization of entire segments of the population to feed the prison industrial complex, is entirely dependent upon the creation of institutions and mechanism that enable low-income Black communities to control the priorities, policies and practices of the armed forces patrolling their neighborhoods.

The drive towards Community Control over Police begins by organizing the target city (county or town) into clearly identified policing districts. These districts can be identical to existing commission districts, wards or other political boundaries, or can be drawn up entirely from scratch. The districts should be physically, economically and socially contiguous, enabling Black communities to have their own policing district or districts.

Once each district is delineated, the next phase is to launch a Community Control over Police ballot initiative, wherein each policing district faces a choice: keep their existing police department or start their own. While the rules for launching a ballot initiative differs from one locale to the next, the overall objective is the same in that each community or section of the city has the right to vote for the police department they want.

The process is identical to voting for commissioners, council members or alderpersons for single member districts. Voters in each district receive unique ballots that apply only to their district. Residents of District 1, for example, have no say in the determination of residents in District 5. Residents of the two districts can reach identical or opposing conclusions and one will have no impact on the other.

Do you like how your local police treat you and your neighbors? Vote to keep them. Do you think the police are unfair to you and your neighbors? Vote them out. Both voices can prevail without infringing upon the aspirations of the other.

For the first time, people will have a direct say in who has the right to carry a gun, detain, arrest and use force in their community in the name of the state. For all of the controversy surrounding this proposal, there are few clearer examples of democracy in action. As such, this is a contest all sides of the debate should be eager to wage.

Do you believe Black communities support the police? Great! This is the chance to prove it and temper the voices of dissent. Do you believe Black communities want self-determination? Great! This is the chance to offer an alternative to the two party binary. In the end, some communities will vote out the existing police department and vote to build a new one from scratch.

For those who scoff at the vision of multiple agencies, it is important to note that most county police departments already work with multiple city agencies. For example, in addition to its own police department with jurisdiction throughout the county, Miami-Dade County, Florida has over 30 municipal police departments, at least two universities departments and a railroad police force. Beyond that, there are multiple police agencies with jurisdiction throughout the entire state of Florida and federal departments, such as the FBI, with jurisdiction across the country. Multiple police departments is currently common practice throughout the country.

Because democracy is a process and not a destination, the plebiscite on policing will reinvigorate political participation in many communities as both supporters and opponents of the local police will mobilize their bases. Those organizations engaged in electoral politics and 'get out the vote' efforts will witness a record number of newly registered Black and Latina voters ("So let me get this straight, you are telling me I can vote out the police?").

At the end of the vote, districts satisfied with their police will see no difference in their department. In districts that vote for a new department, the police will retreat to within its new boundaries to allow the new force to serve their new bosses.

To be clear, this vote is not to take control over an existing police department, but to establish a new one. No colony seeks control over the occupying army, they pursue an end to colonialism and realization of self-rule. In this instances, the vote is to establish a Civilian Police Control Board.

A Model: The Civilian Police Control Board

The primary institution for the exercise of Community Control over Police is the Civilian Police Control Board (CPCB).

To be clear, the power of this body is to exercise control and power over the police, not review or oversight. This is not a review board and, at this stage in history, review boards represent a step backwards and one that further entrenches existing power relationships instead of upending them in favor of the oppressed. We are no longer satisfied with the ability to review abuses of our communities, we are in pursuit of the power to end those abuses.

The CPCB must be empowered to **establish police Priorities, set department Policies and enforce Practices** of the new police force. Even though they do not make the laws, every police department, and even each district inside of a department, establishes policing priorities.

For example, police districts serving downtown areas often priorities preventing human beings without homes from damaging allies, sidewalks and parks with their urine, even though they have no where else to respond to calls of nature, and aggressively seek to arrest those who transgress those priorities. The CPCB, by contrast, can prioritize protecting human beings without homes over protecting sections of cement from those humans.

Policies can include uniform specs, appropriate interactions with civilians and required levels of training around courtesy with people and a use of force matrix. Enforcing practices means that the CPCB must have the power to hire and fire individual police who are not serving the public interest.

With such a broad range of powers, the CPCB would likely have to be a bi-cameral board, with one board dealing with priorities and policies and another with enforcement of practices.

This is Community Control over Police.

The CPCB must be comprised entirely of civilian adult human beings- not corporations or human representatives of corporations- residing in the police district. To be explicit, residing means living in, not owning property in, without regard to citizenship status or criminal history.

While some envision an elected board, we propose something entirely different: a board selected entirely at random among residents of the policing district.

There are two (2) main constraints to an elected board. First, elections in the US are thoroughly corrupted by influences of corporate finance on one side and two party electoral politics on the other. Even if multiple communities were to win control over their police, it is not difficult to imagine that after one or two election cycles, your local CPCB would be a corporate board brought to you by [insert name of powerful corporation here]. For this board to shift power, instead of becoming another institution to maintain power, it must break through the limitations of electoral corruption.

Second, even elections with minimal levels of corporate or party influence, still occur in a social context. In this social context, elected officials are disproportionately white, male and wealthy- the exact population with the highest level of support for the police. We must devise democratic systems that encourage active participation from those least likely to engage, not those most likely to benefit.

Sortition- government by random selection- is the best way to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to exercise power. The rich and poor, straight and gay, male and female, white and Black all have an equal shot at making decisions through random selection. If we believe that democracy is for everyone, then random selection of officials is the best way to ensure each person can exercise power.

Not incidentally, there are numerous studies on sortition, including a few theories that suggest the practice would instill better government in Washington, DC than the current practice of corporate elections.

However, for those with deep reservations about allowing randomly selected people to judge police or engage on this level of decision making, we are willing to meet you halfway. We are prepared to concede the point, publicly support the position that 'randomly selected' people are not qualified to make these decisions and work to find a viable alternative that does not involve unqualified randomly selected individuals.

Right after we empty the prisons.

Guilt and innocence, imprisonment and freedom, even life and death are determined by unqualified randomly selected individuals that we call 'jurors.' Anyone who is not qualified to determine how their taxes are used to arm officers of the state or if those officers have behaved inappropriately with the people they serve, cannot possibly be qualified to determine if someone represented by an overworked public defender or prosecuted by an unscrupulous district attorney is guilty or innocent in a case with any level of complexity. Empty the prisons and we will work together on a a better system for both.

Randomly selected board seats, refreshed on a regular basis, make subversion of the democratic process virtually impossible. Special interests would be forced to bribe entire communities in order to assure some level of voting pattern stability. If bribery is special treatment or rewards for the official in question, randomly selected board members would compel the corrupting force to provide special treatment for every adult in the given community, an act which more closely resembles a perk or amenity than bribery. Kind of like a neighborhood pool or rec center.

Equally as important, the job of ‘qualifying’ community members for board service will fall to social justice organizations. Building robust and wide reaching political education and leadership development programs will make community organizing relevant like never before as we attempt to reach the next board member before their appointment. The person with the deciding vote on the priorities of the police might be the undereducated high school dropout who hangs out near the corner store most of the day. In order to get justice, we would have to politically educate and organize our entire community.

Vision

This movement moment, in which people are rising up against police abuse, presents this generation with a unique historic opportunity to shift powers on numerous levels.

The fight for Community Control over Police has the potential to remove us from the indignity of having to manage the public relations aspects of colonial occupation. A Community Police Control Board holds the potential to not only shift power into the hands of the Black community, but to transform the very definition of power itself. The levers of power will no longer be protected behind velvet ropes, with guards ensuring the exclusive nature of the club by checking for education, diction and money to make sure only the ‘right’ people get close. Every member of the community will have the power to decide how the armed force of the neighborhood is supposed to act.

Once we are able to secure Community Control over Police and ensure that entire communities are empowered to exercise such control, we will be free to re-imagine and re-envision the very nature of policing itself.

Imagine, a low-income Black community with 100 full time, paid community workers with sophisticated communications equipment, access to government information and even vehicles. Now imagine those community workers operating under the control of low-income Black women who form the majority of the control board. By unleashing our power and creative energy, we can institute the new vision of what police can do to serve and protect our communities.

We suspect that this vision, and its implementation, might be so radically different and unrecognizable from what we today call ‘policing,’ that we just might be forced to rename the institution.

But to get there we must fight for power. We must fight for Community Control over Police.

