

## Call to Action Ten-Point Plan to Curb Police Abuse Center for Democratic Culture, University of Nevada Las Vegas

"The past is never dead," observed William Faulkner. "It's not even past." We are going through yet another cycle of race-related violence because as a nation, we have failed to take full responsibility for America's racist past, make amends to its victims, and end systemic racism plaguing our institutions. We failed to heed the evidence confirmed by numerous studies that nothing provokes communal outrage like an assault on human dignity that goes unpunished. That is why today we mourn the death of George Floyd, the latest victim in a seemingly endless toll of African Americans whose lives were cut short by gross abuse of police power.

If public rage inflames our cities and towns, it is in part because Congress stands aloof in the face of persistent police misconduct. Our legislators refuse to limit the scope of "qualified immunity" the Supreme Court granted to police officers, effectively conferring "unqualified impunity" on unscrupulous officers of the law. Loath to be seen as weak on crime, politicians decline to put teeth into laws compelling the overhaul of police precincts known for their abusive practices or strengthen the power of civilian boards overseeing disciplinary actions against rogue officers.

We stand with Terrence Floyd, brother of the murdered Minneapolis man, who urged Americans to shun chaos and destruction as undercutting the fight against racism. At the same time, we urge our fellow citizens to recall how in the 1960s, the entrenched powers demanded civility from Blacks as a price of admission to full citizenship while terrorizing civil rights activists, with local police aiding and abetting murderous segregationists.

The militarized force federal authorities threaten to unleash on demonstrators protesting police brutality is sure to stamp out the remnants of trust essential for communal peace. Those with experience of community building know that when trust is broken and government officials settle on brute force to stem public discontent, disorder and mayhem are sure to follow.

Public declarations serve their purpose, and we commend our colleagues at this university and around the nation speaking against racism. But avowal of principles gets us only so far, which is why we urge to implement a practical agenda and ask our community to unite behind the following action plan.

1. Mandate local, state, and federal agencies to compile a comprehensive list of civilians killed or seriously injured by police. Demand every politician take a stand on the issue, and then work to defeat those who support the U.S. government's staunch refusal to create a comprehensive database on hundreds of unarmed civilians killed each year by police.

2. Require law enforcement officers to wear a body camera. Treat the failure to activate the equipment during a confrontation with civilians as a code violation triggering an automatic administrative review. And if such a confrontation results in serious injury or death of civilians, consider the failure to turn on a body cam as an aggravating circumstance.
3. Since the Supreme Court refuses to designate as “excessive” chokeholds and other extreme policing techniques, compel local authorities to ban them. Direct police training programs to red flag such techniques as potentially lethal and improper when deployed against unarmed civilians. Order re-training throughout the precincts censured by review boards for systematic violation of civil rights.
4. Publicize names of police departments and administrators that still use chokeholds, hogties, and other deadly or dehumanizing techniques against unarmed civilians. Demand accountability from elected officials and administrators who fail to rein in rogue officers in police precincts with established records of abuse.
5. Pass a federal statute limiting the use by law enforcement agents of “qualified immunity” which allows rogue officers to escape punishment in nine out of ten police misconduct cases. Make this legislation that could serve as a bulwark against racialized police violence a priority in the upcoming presidential and congressional elections.
6. Void contracts with police unions that refuse to hold their members accountable for well documented acts of police misconduct. Overhaul police recruitment and training programs to make sure those joining the police core represent the best of our communities. Conduct an environmental scan of police institutions and confront systemic racism wherever it raises its ugly head.
7. Revamp laws and regulations governing civilian boards that sit judgment on police brutality. Increase the number and diversity of public representatives on civilian review boards, allow public representatives to participate in disciplinary review at every level, and strip police department heads of the power to overturn civilian board recommendations.
8. Ban police from using militarized force in community policing. Inventory military-style equipment used by each police department and designate specific circumstances under which it could be deployed. Work with civilian experts to rid the police of unwarranted gear that has no place in community policing and is certain to fan anti-police sentiments.

9. Police are members of communities they patrol. Make sure police organizations interface with community every step of the way. Invite law enforcement officers to join marches with an eye to protecting demonstrators peacefully exercising their First Amendment rights. Such collaboration will restrain malcontents bent on destroying public property and opportunists embarked on a looting spree. It will also curb false-flag operators seeking to provoke an anti-Black backlash.

10. Racial disparities in law enforcement institutions are part of century-old injustices undergirding our economic, political, and legal system, and any stab at reform will meet with limited success as long as broader societal disparities remain in place. In recognition of this fact, strive to identify and eradicate a range of biases affecting unequal treatment the police accord to people with different ethno-racial, socio-economic, mental health, and other backgrounds.

We are painfully aware that many proposals to reform community policing have floundered in the past. It is our hope that this time our nation has reached a tipping point and is ready to tackle in earnest systemic racism which hobbled our Union from its inception and continues to befoul our public life. The practical agenda outlined above can serve a starting point.

Dmitri N. Shalin  
Professor and Director  
UNLV Center for Democratic Culture

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On behalf of Center associates and community organizers