



Community Organizing and Activism: Confronting Injustice in Public Spaces



➤ Police Accountability & Civil Rights

“Be mindful of that glorious legacy from all the different movements.”

– Lewis Pitts, Retired Civil Rights Attorney

OVERVIEW

Police violence in the U.S. has risen 50% since 2008 with Black Americans 2-1/2 times more likely to be killed by the police as compared to whites, according to a Rutgers University study (<https://www.pnas.org/content/116/34/16793>). Though the information is alarming, it is not new. Injustices aimed at African Americans have persisted since the time of slavery. White supremacist violence, disenfranchisement, and exploitation have woven their way into inequitable punishments meted out as early as elementary school, policing practices, and incarceration policies.

According to the Sentencing Project, “Sentencing policies, implicit racial bias, and socioeconomic inequity contribute to racial disparities at every level of the criminal justice system. Today, people of color make up 37% of the U.S. population but 67% of the prison population” (<https://www.sentencingproject.org/>).

As communities grapple with how to hold police accountable, individuals like Lewis Pitts and groups including Black Lives Matter, the NAACP, the ACLU, and the League of Women Voters are calling for greater community oversight of police actions through Civilian Review Boards. Such boards would put democracy back in the hands of citizens to: determine public safety policies and procedures best suited for their communities; confront and curb the upward trend in use of police force; and redress incidents of racial bias through training and other mechanisms.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can citizens and the police work together to improve public safety?
2. What is community policing and how does it work?
3. How can police body cameras and citizen cell phone recordings be used to improve policing?
4. What has been the impact of federal funds used to provide military equipment to local police agencies?
5. What ideas do you have to improve police-citizen relationships?