Community Organizing and Activism: Confronting Injustice in Public Spaces

Criminal Justice Reform

"Activism is going after something that you feel will make your community better."

– Kay Brown, Executive Committee Member
Greensboro's Criminal Justice Advisory Commission

OVERVIEW

Community safety refers not only to modes of effective crime prevention, but also to programs that promote the public's well-being so that residents can build strong, cohesive, vibrant, and participatory communities. Law enforcement remains a central feature of community safety, though turning to the police is not always considered the safest option for some communities. "Repeated and highly publicized incidents of police use of force against persons of color and people with disabilities, combined with a lack of accurate data, lack of transparency about policies and practices in place governing use of force, and lack of accountability for noncompliance foster a perception that police use of force in communities of color and the disability community is unchecked, unlawful, and unsafe" (https://www.usccr.gov/pubs/2018/11-15-Police-Force.pdf). Motorists, too, are subject to disproportionate stops and searches based on race (see data at www.opendatapolicing.com).

Kay Brown is a member of Greensboro, NC's Criminal Justice Advisory Commission that recommends policy changes to redress racial bias and disparate outcomes in policing. She also works with community organizers who want to re-imagine the idea of "public safety" to make their communities better. Kay says that for things to change and become more just, people need to take action, vote, and be included in decision making. For more information on citizen oversight committees, see https://www.nacole.org/.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the most common reasons people in your community call the police?
2. Do police and other first responders treat everyone in your community the same when they answer emergency calls?
3. When you need help, who can you call other than the police?
4. Who determines the policies, functions, and practices for police in your community?
5. What could non-police emergency response look like?
6. What stakeholders should be involved in public safety discussions and why?
7. What programs and policies are needed to ensure community safety for all?