

POLICING AND RESISTANCE IN THE U.S.

AN INCOMPLETE TIMELINE

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Adapted from "Policing and Resistance in the U.S. An incomplete timeline compiled by the Chicago Prison-Industrial Complex Teaching Collective and Chain Reaction: Alternatives to Calling Police, initiatives of Project NIA"

Colonization and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

Resistance: Armed resistance, including revolutions like that in Haiti, cultural survival

1500_{CE}

1500s-1800s:
Colonial forces import European justice systems to what is now the U.S.

Including sheriffs, constables, and night watches. They were unpopular entities whose jobs included taxing and elections alongside law enforcement.

1492:
Colonization of the Americas by Europeans begins.

Brutal militia force is a routine part of land-grabbing, along with later forcing Indigenous peoples into working for colonizers in mines and agriculture.

1100s-1800s:
Use of “night watches” in Europe and its colonies.

Civilian groups of men required by law to patrol the streets at night. They were unpaid, often unwilling, and apparently “frequently drunk.”

1100s:
Origins of the Sheriff in England.

Sheriffs were representatives of the crown who sat in on local affairs to make sure laws were actually being enforced (previously, localities had relied on collective enforcement efforts of citizens; the Sheriff’s role thus extended the power of the crown). These unpopular figures were also tax collectors, at least initially; later forms included coroner, justice of the peace, and constable.

1600_{CE}

1619:
Enslaved Africans are first brought to Virginia.

1600s-1700s:
Establishment of Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Use of force and control of bodies institutionalized into economic systems of the Americas.

Militias, Patrols, and White Supremacist Consolidation of Power

Resistance: Armed resistance, escape and subversion, cultural survival

1700_{CE}

1703: Boston passes a curfew law for all Blacks and Indigenous people.

Establishes race as a defining criteria in law enforcement in the new colonies (even non-slavery ones).

1700s-1800s: Reform of London Watch to resemble a modern police department.

Pay, round-the-clock hours, and hierarchical command were established. As in the U.S., establishment of actual “police departments” was based on growth in property crimes.

1700s onwards: Southern cities such as Charleston, Savannah, New Orleans, and Mobile form paramilitary groups tasked with the control of enslaved people.

With the goal of preventing and repressing rebellion. Slave patrols and militias often work together. In the U.S., these organized patrols are the first proper antecedents to “modern” police forces.

1680s:
South Carolina passes a law that allows any white person to capture and punish a runaway slave.

In 1690 a law was passed that required whites to act in this role. Slavery and white supremacy were so fully institutionalized in the American South that, as one author put it, “White supremacy served in lieu of a police force.”

1800_{CE}

1859:
Oregon Becomes a State

Oregon was the only free state admitted to the Union with an exclusion clause in its constitution. Repealed in 1926, but the language remained in the constitution until 2002.

1843-1857:
Black Exclusion Laws

Oregon prohibited slavery, but incorporated a clause into the state Bill of Rights prohibiting black people from being in the state, owning property, and making contracts.

Mid-1800s: Police in the U.S. coalesce into one relatively uniform type.

Previous law enforcement models such as guards, watchmen, militias and slave patrols begin to coalesce into city-run, 24-hour police.

Early 1800s: Pass laws were passed in several Southern states.

Requiring all Black people to carry passes and allowing for arrest of any Black person without a pass, regardless of their status.

1776: Formation of a nation-state in U.S. colonies.

National militia unifies in effort to remove the British and a national constitution provides for maintenance of military and National Guard.

Emancipation and Reconstruction

Resistance: Building Black political power, suffrage, legal reforms and increased accountability, armed resistance

1872:
First Black police officer in Chicago

1870: 15th Amendment ratified, giving black men the right to vote.
Oregon does not sign on until 1959.

1868: 14th Amendment passed, granting citizenship to “all persons born or naturalized in the US”
Oregon does not sign on until 1973.

1860s-70s:
Reconstruction and a rapid gain of political power by Blacks in the south is met with extreme legal and extralegal backlash.
Including violent vigilante and militia action against Black people attempting to vote or run for office. Southern “law enforcement” is often indistinguishable from white supremacist vigilante groups.

1865:
Emancipation of enslaved people.
Emancipation is followed immediately by passage of laws controlling Black people’s public movement and work; emancipation also stipulates that slave labor may continue for those convicted of a crime, creating an incentive for whites in power to arrest Black people in order to exploit their labor and prevent their entry into wage labor and political power (13th Amendment).

1886:
Haymarket Riot.
After an Anarchist throws a bomb at police at a workers rally in Haymarket square in Chicago, police riot against demonstrators, killing at least a dozen. Seven police are also killed. Raids on activist community ensue, and ultimately 8 men are convicted as examples. Four of them are murdered by execution.

1885:
In New Orleans following a levee workers’ strike, the mayor suggests to police to arrest any Black man who “did not want to work.”

Late 1800s:
Increased urbanization leads to decreases in serious crimes, but increase in elite fears of working-class rebellion.
“The crisis of the time was not one of law,” writes Kristian Williams, “but of order—specifically the order required by the new industrial economy and the Protestant moralism that supplied, in large part, its ideological expression.”

Progressive Era: Reform and Bureaucratization to Protect Elite Interests

Resistance: Armed resistance, growth of urban social movements, immigrant and labor union organizing, reforms

1900^{CE}

1912:
Lawrence Textile Strike (Bread and Roses).
This notorious strike over the work week and pay for textile workers in Massachusetts leads to heavy police repression and the murder of strikers, many of whom are immigrants and most of whom are women.

1900-1940:
Formation of state police forces begins as a response to union actions.
Large corporations had employed their own private forces, and reformists saw this as unsavory while corporations saw it as expensive. State Troopers are the solution.

1890-1930:
Progressive Era reforms lead to “kinder, gentler” system and reforms of local corruption in city governments.
Police departments become more disciplined and hierarchical as a result. Progressive reforms also lead to innovations like the probation and parole systems, legalizing bureaucratic state intrusion into poor people’s homes. Urban professional social services and public housing are also invented, often working in tandem with these new reformed government systems such as child welfare and the juvenile courts

1934: Oregon adopts a non-unanimous jury system to keep religious, ethnic, and racial minorities from being able to block majority verdicts.
Only one other state, Louisiana, allow conviction of most felony defendants with a 10-2 vote.

1920s: Oregon had the largest Ku Klux Klan membership per capita of any state

1920s-1930s:
IWW and other unions particularly active.
Police are routinely employed as a shield between unions and corporations, breaking up strikes and threatening labor organizers with violence.

1919:
Chicago Race Riot.
The riot began after a white man throwing rocks at Black people on a segregated Southside beach. Black WWI veterans were active in protesting police violence.

Birth of Civil Rights Movements

Resistance: Armed resistance, non-violent tactics inspired by anti-colonial revolutions abroad, solidarity with anti-colonial movements, legal reforms, rioting

1940_{CE}

1950_{CE}

1943: Detroit Riots.

Arrests of several Black people after a skirmish and a rape accusation leads to days of white rioting against Black people met with Black rioting against whites. According to Thurgood Marshall, the police “used ‘persuasion’ rather than firm action with white rioters, while against Negroes they used the ultimate in force: night sticks, revolvers, riot guns, sub-machine guns, and deer guns.”

1940s-1950s: McCarthyism and the Red Scare.

Anti-Soviet sentiment and a government-produced fear of nuclear war and Communism are rallied as a justification for blacklisting and surveillance of anyone who is a suspected Communist—a pre-cursor to “anti-terrorism” policy today.

1950s onwards: COINTELPRO,

a secret FBI program, active in monitoring and disrupting Civil Rights and Black Power activities for two decades. COINTELPRO is ultimately a key player in dismantling the radical movements for justice that emerged in this era.

1950s: Emergence of the Civil Rights Movement

as we know it, which uses civil disobedience strategically in national campaigns. Non-violent protesters, most of them Black, are routinely met with violence.

Height of Struggle for Racial Equality and Self-Determination

Resistance: Armed resistance, Black Nationalism, LGBTQ and women’s liberation organizing, peaceful demonstration, rioting, legal reforms

1960_{CE}

1960s-1970s: After decades of quashed attempts, police themselves are able to form unions.

State concessions to police create further unity up and down the police hierarchy.
1961: Southern Freedom Riders met with police violence, notably in Birmingham, AL, where the riders were arrested and removed. When they returned on Mothers Day of that year, they were beaten by Klansmen while police looked away.

1966: Formation of the Black Panther Party.

The Party platform includes a demand for “an immediate end to police brutality and murder of black people.”

1965: Watts Riots.

Riots began after a standard “driving while black” traffic stop in the Watts neighborhood of L.A.; police assaulted some bystanders and arrested some people. The crowd’s response led to a 6-day riot in which 34 people were killed and over 1000 injured.

1968: Police repression of the protests at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

Although many are injured and killed, this moment is an important watershed in that police mob violence was captured on camera and distributed internationally. Even Chicago police officials are forced to admit things “got out of control.”

1969: Murder of Fred Hampton in Chicago.

FBI works with Chicago police to commit premeditated murder of BPP leader Fred Hampton in his house on the South side.

1969: Stonewall Riots in New York City.

After a routine raid on the Stonewall Inn by police, gay men, lesbians, and drag queens fight back against police. Rioting goes on for several nights and is said to be the spark for the modern LGBTQ movement in the U.S.

Backlash Against Activist Movements, Control of Urban Spaces

Resistance: Armed resistance, continued non-violent resistance, rioting, struggle for political power including more Black voices within police forces and mainstream politics

1970_{CE}

1972:

Chicago Police Torture begins.

Under the leadership of Police Commander Jon Burge, at least 135 African-American men and women are tortured by Chicago Police between 1972 and 1991. By the time the issue is brought to the surface, the statute of limitations is up for a torture trial.

1971:

Attica Rebellion.

Men locked up in Attica prison in New York State stage a massive rebellion in response to deplorable conditions and violent treatment by guards. The Black Panthers support the Attica prisoners in advancing a list of demands, but the immediate protest ends in a massacre of prisoners by state police called in to quell the rebellion.

1970:

Kent State and Jackson State murders.

Four college students at Kent State in Ohio and two college students at Jackson State in Mississippi are murdered by police during anti-war protests. The four white students' killings are national news, while the murder of the two black protesters is downplayed by the media and historians. Both events, though tragic, helped to strengthen anti-war sentiment throughout the country.

1970s:

Radical Black Power movement and other groups such as the Young Lords and the Gay Liberation Front are routinely infiltrated and criminalized by police and FBI.

These movements are eventually torn apart in the process, forcing activists into either more mainstream politics and tactics, or permanent incarceration and marginalization.

1979/1980:

Miami Riots.

The police murdered a Black salesman named Arthur McDuffie after a chase. When three officers were acquitted by an all-white jury in Tampa (the case was moved by a judge), crowds rioted in Miami. Seventeen were killed and nearly 500 injured.

New Conservatism and the Drug War

Resistance: Media and legal campaigns to expose corruption and racism, rioting, peaceful demonstration

1980_{CE}

1988: Three Portland racist skinheads attack and kill Nigerian immigrant Mulugeta Seraw.

Morris Dees (SPLC) and Elden Rosenthal win a \$12.5 million case against Tom and John Metzger of WAR for their incitement of racist attacks. At that time, it was a record judgment for a U.S. racism case.

Late 1980s:

ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power)

begins to use civil disobedience to draw attention to the growing AIDS crisis and demand government support for research and aid to victims. Police suppress protests, but ACT-UP is successful in getting AIDS on the map as a social justice issue.

1985:

Lloyd "Tony" Stevenson murdered by police in Oregon

Black 31 year-old Lloyd "Tony" Stevenson is suffocated and killed by police using a choke hold. A grand jury found "no cause for indictment." In response to public outcry, police officers made and distributed t-shirts that read "Don't Choke 'Em, Smoke 'Em."

1980s:

"Broken window policing"

This style of policing, in which people receive harsh penalties for low-level offenses, largely affected Black communities. In the years since, no evidence has emerged proving that it reduces serious crime. The policy has resulted in the incarceration of low-level offenders who ostensibly pose no safety risk to the community.

1980s:

"Drug War"

begins at Reagan's urging, setting up urban communities of color as both victims and perpetrators in an ongoing process of criminalization. Crack-cocaine shows up in these communities while the feds look away.

Reforms and Expansion of the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC)

Resistance: Organizing against zero tolerance and racial profiling; rioting

1990_{CE}

1990s-2000s: “Community Policing”

model emerges around the country, encouraging homeowners, business owners, and local police to unify efforts to police the streets. This process is closely tied with urban gentrification, and “in practice certain populations generally get counted among the problems to be solved rather than the community to be involved” (Williams).

1990s:
Passage of hate crimes laws
brings LGBTQ movements into the business of advocating for heavier policing and stricter sentencing, creating a widening divide in the movement between those who are routinely victims of policing and incarceration and those who are not.

1990s:
Racial profiling on the map.
Years of research and activism leads to the popularization of the term “racial profiling” to describe police practices targeting people of color. Police departments are forced to see racial profiling as an issue, and in some cases address the issue through policy changes (though not always in practice).

1990s:
Passage of “Zero Tolerance” policy, racial profiling laws
like Prop 21, “Three Strikes Law” and increasingly extreme enforcement of drug laws support massive growth of PIC. Further criminalization of poverty and of young people of color works to move many of the most economically marginalized into the prison system.

1990:
Police and FBI set up “Earth First” activists Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney
to make them look like terrorists. The pair are acquitted, and in 2002 a jury awards them \$4.4 million in damages for violation of their civil rights.

1991:
Rodney King beaten by L.A.P.D.
King’s brutal beating by police after being pulled over for reckless driving was caught on video.

1992:
Rodney King verdict and L.A. Riots.
Rioting began in the streets of LA after the police implicated in the Rodney King beating were acquitted despite the existence of a video shown many times on national TV.
1999: Murder of Amadou Diallo by New York City Police. Diallo was shot 19 times after reaching for his wallet to show police his ID.

1993:
Roughly 6,500 in prison in Oregon

1994:
Oregon Measure 11
Predetermined sentences for certain crimes (ex: murder, rape, kidnapping, robbery). Teens age 15 and older be automatically charged as adults and face a mandatory minimum sentence if charged with any of 21 Measure 11 crimes. Result: Oregon has the nation’s second-highest rate of sending youths to adult court, with nearly 4,000 juveniles tried as adults between 1994 and 2012. By 2012, black youths were being convicted of Measure 11 crimes at 17 times the rate of white youths.

1994:
“Tough on Crime” bill signed by Bill Clinton.
Aka Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. Twenty-four states pass three-strikes laws between 1993 and 1995

1996:
Formation of the Oct 22nd Coalition to Stop Police Brutality, Repression and the Criminalization of a Generation.
A broad coalition against police repression establishes a yearly day of protest on October 22 which continues to this day.

1996:
The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996
increased penalties on immigrants who had violated US law in some way (whether they were unauthorized immigrants who’d violated immigration law or legal immigrants who’d committed other crimes); tightened the requirements for legal immigration; made it harder to apply for and receive asylum in the US; and increased immigration enforcement. Lays the groundwork for the “deportation pipeline”

1997:
Roughly 8,500 in prison in Oregon

1998:
Critical Resistance conference
brings together over 3,500 activists, academics, former and current prisoners, labor leaders, religious organizations, feminists, gay, lesbian and transgender activists, youth, families, and policy makers to examine and challenge the prison industrial complex. CR activists continue to build a movement to abolish the PIC.

1999:
WTO Protests in Seattle.
Over 40,000 protesters take to the streets to criticize the World Trade Organization and global imperialism; the ensuing police riot leads to several days of violence against protesters that is publicized around the world.

Backlash Against Immigrants, Birth of New Movements

Resistance: Organizing against police violence, anti-immigrant policy, racism, and fascism, including the Occupy movement, Black Lives Matter, Antifa, and others

2000_{CE}

2001:
Patriot Act.

Following the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, a federal law is hastily passed that drastically increases the powers of surveillance and profiling for the state.

2003:
Immigration + Customs Enforcement (ICE)

In March 2003, the Homeland Security Act set into motion what would be the single-largest government reorganization since the creation of the Department of Defense in 1947. One of the agencies in the new Department of Homeland Security was the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement or ICE.

2003:
Kendra James murdered by police in Oregon.

Black 21 year-old Kendra James was shot and killed by police during a traffic stop. The murder is ruled “justified.”

2008: Oregon Measure 57
Created mandatory minimum prison sentences for non-violent property offenders.

2009:
Barack Obama becomes President

From 2008–2016, there were more people deported than in any other similar time period in our nation’s history. The three million people deported in those eight years outpaced the total number of people deported from the United States between 1892 and 1997

2009:
Murder of Oscar Grant by Bay Area Rapid Transit police.

Oscar Grant, a young black man, is shot in the back several times by police on a train platform on New Year’s Day. The murder is caught on cell phone video and incites massive protests, followed by accusations and fear-mongering by police claiming violent rioting by Black activists and their allies (in fact, while some present at the protests destroyed property, the majority of the violence was by police).

2010_{CE}

2010:
Jon Burge convicted in Chicago for lying under oath about police torture cases.

2010:
Passage of Arizona’s SB-1070
is the first in a rash of draconian anti-immigrant laws that task local police with immigration enforcement and formalize racial profiling by police and, in Alabama, even by school officials. The events lead to the strengthening of black/brown coalitions against policing and racial profiling.

2010:
Aaron Campbell murdered by police in Oregon.

Black 25 year-old Aaron Campbell was shot in the back and killed by police while having a mental health crisis and trying to comply with commands. A grand jury chose not to indict the officer who killed him.

2010:
Keaton Otis murdered by police in Oregon.

Black 25 year-old Keaton Otis is shot 23 times and killed by police during a traffic stop. The grand jury found no criminal wrongdoing by police.

2011:
New Orleans police convicted in Danziger bridge trial.

Five current and former New Orleans Police Officers are convicted of civil rights violations for the brutal murders of civilians attempting to escape New Orleans via the Danziger bridge during Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The U.S. Justice Department also targets New Orleans for widespread brutality, corruption, and discrimination.

2012:
The New Jim Crow by Michele Alexander is published

2012:
Brad Lee Morgan murdered by police in Oregon.

White 21 year old Brad Lee Morgan is shot and killed by police while having a mental health crisis. A grand jury found the officers did not act “negligently.”

2016:
Christopher Kalonji murdered by police in Oregon.

Black 19 year-old Christopher Kalonji is shot and killed by police after he called 911 asking for assistance during a mental health crisis. The murder is ruled “justified.”

2016:
Measure 11 policy change
Youths charged with Robbery II, Assault II and Kidnapping II can have their case resolved in juvenile court if they plead down to a lesser, non-Measure 11 crime, and the prosecutor deems it appropriate based on a list of aggregating and mitigating factors.

2017:
Donald Trump becomes President

Within a week of his inauguration, President Trump announced that the focus of immigration enforcement would be expanded to include immigrants charged—even if not yet convicted—with any criminal offense. During President Trump’s first 100 days in office, ICE reported a 40 percent increase in arrests compared to the same period in 2016.

2017:
HB 3078

Reduces penalties for certain property crimes defined by Measure 57 (but they remain felonies). Clackamas County DA John Foote sues the state of Oregon over the change.

2017:
Nearly 15,000 in prison in Oregon

2017:
Quanice “Moose” Hayes murdered by police in Oregon.

Black 17 year-old Quanice “Moose” Hayes is shot and killed by police while trying to follow conflicting commands. The murder is ruled “justified.”

2018:
John Elefritz murdered by police in Oregon.

White 48 year-old John Elefritz is shot and killed by police in a homeless shelter while having a mental health crisis.

