



Wavelength  
January 2021

Last night, I was at a friend's house for her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday celebration. When I arrived, everyone looked solemn watching a mob of Trump supporters overrun Capitol police and occupy the Senate floor. It wasn't the boozy, celebratory mood I was anticipating. Anyway, Baiz has an affinity for party games, so we piled in her minivan to do a scavenger hunt around downtown Baltimore. We took pictures at the cannon statue atop Federal Hill, outside a pizza joint in Canton, and in front of the pagoda at Patterson Park. After we had returned to her house and had dinner and drinks, we played a board game called Wavelength. Here's how it works:

In Wavelength, one member of a team selects a card with a spectrum of descriptions on it (e.g., "underrated to overrated") and says a noun out loud (e.g., "peanut butter and jelly sandwich). His or her teammates then have to guess where on a meter where they think the noun falls. It's shown in the photo above. It's a fun game—more so if you've had a couple drinks.

On my team's turn, my friend picked the card which said "evidence that God exists" to "evidence that God doesn't exist." She said *cops*. Cops? As in police officers? I asked her boyfriend, who was also on my team, how she felt about cops. "Probably not too good," he said. The birthday girl interjected, "I don't think any of us here feels too good about cops." The meter was located totally to the left, even further left than in the photo above.

In a world with infectious disease, civil war, and child abuse, the evidence that God doesn't exist is...cops? On a day when cops fought a mob occupied the seat of our government, the institution we want to dispel is...cops?

I understand that this is a party game, and that maybe I was overreacting. I expressed none of this at the time. But I wondered, what sort of outlook must she have on the world, that when prompted to offer evidence that God doesn't exist, she says *cops*?

She thinks a couple things. She thinks that police brutality is one of the largest problems that minority communities in America face today. And she thinks that there is something crooked about police generally, rather than individual policemen and policewomen, that renders the whole enterprise of policing unjust. In minority communities, they over-police small misdemeanors and under-police felonies. She thinks that police have done minorities more harm than good. Maybe she read Ibram X. Kendi. Maybe she's sympathetic to the ACAB movement.

I'm not going to examine the validity of these points. I don't mean to imply she's wrong about some of them. That discussion could fill entire books. But I will argue one point.

Amidst riots and media outrage, we ought to keep a sense of problems' scale. Police killed 1,114 people in 2020. Black people account for 28% of this figure, despite being 13% of the population. Police killed approximately 310 black people in the US in 2020. Does this sound like the worst problem black Americans face? The largest problems black Americans face are some of the worst problems *America* faces: addressing wealth inequality, treating coronavirus, and making education and health care affordable. Coronavirus killed about as many black people today as police did last year. So, if you care so much about minority communities, don't focus on what is sensational and scandalous. Focus on what hurts people at scale.

Defunding police means different things to different people: at its most extreme, it means a total disbanding of police forces, and at its least extreme, it means demilitarization and allocation of funding to social workers.

Defunding police might mean worse training for cops. It might mean delays in police response time. It might mean lowering the 32% homicide clearance rate in Baltimore. It might mean attracting fewer quality men and women to the job. It might mean having no one to call when you are in danger. It might mean unchecked proliferation of drug abuse. It might mean depriving minorities of protection from danger. It might mean having no one to engage a school shooter. It might mean having no one stop a mob of Trump fanatics occupying government institutions. Liberals who purport to care about minorities should understand why only 28% of blacks support defunding the police.<sup>1</sup> They should understand that black people want police to retain a strong and local presence.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the problems in minority communities respond to *more funding*, not less. To my friends and liberals of a similar mind, please stop calling for defunding. It is one thing to advocate for police reform, and another to advocate for defunding the police. When you do the latter, you forget that minorities need and want<sup>3</sup> effective police more than anyone.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2021/03/07/usa-today-ipsos-poll-just-18-support-defund-police-movement/4599232001/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://news.gallup.com/poll/316571/black-americans-police-retain-local-presence.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/81-black-americans-dont-want-less-police-presence-despite-protestssome-want-more-cops-poll-1523093>