

What does “abolish the police” mean?

“Abolish the police” borrows the language of the abolitionist movement, which succeeded in abolishing slavery 155 years ago. The modern-day call to abolition is a call to disband police departments and use existing police budgets to fund a new approach to public health and safety:



Why do people want to abolish the police?

1) The racist history of police

The first Southern police departments evolved out of slave patrols. The first police departments in the North were established to bust unions and suppress factory workers.

Policing was made to defend private property, not to create justice between human beings.

Read more:

“Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish the Police” by Mariame Kaba
New York Times, 6/12/2020

“The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness”
by Michelle Alexander

2) Failure of attempts at police reform

Reforms like community-based policing, body cameras, and implicit bias training have been proposed after every cycle of police violence: first in 1897, again in 1967, 1991, and today.

Minneapolis had instituted many of these “best practices” but failed to remove Derek Chauvin from the force despite 17 misconduct complaints over nearly two decades, culminating in the entire world watching as he knelt on George Floyd’s neck for almost nine minutes.

Police culture turns a blind eye to brutality, so officers break rules all the time. Look what has happened over the past few weeks — officers slashing tires, shoving old men on camera, and arresting and injuring journalists and protestors.

3) A vision for a better justice system

A vision of a different society, built on cooperation instead of individualism, on mutual aid instead of self-preservation. What would the country look like if it had billions of extra dollars to spend on housing, food and education for all? This change in society wouldn’t happen immediately, but recent protests — which constitute the biggest civil rights movement to date — show that many people are ready to embrace a different vision of safety and justice.

So how can I help?

Feelings of guilt, anger, sadness, or denial are common responses to understanding one’s own complicity in something bad. How can you transform these feelings into a positive action that fights the problem at hand? The answer is to do something about it. Use your voice, your financial resources, and your capacity to educate others.

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