

The American Cop Out: A Poem About Being Black in America

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We asked for food, they gave us police.

We asked for safe and affordable housing, they gave us police and prisons

We asked for better schools, they reduced the education budget and spent more money on police and prisons

We asked for jobs, they allowed corporations to outsource jobs to other countries, and gave us police

We asked for gun control to stop the violence, they gave police semi-automatic weapons and sent them into our streets

We asked for mental healthcare, they gave us police

In the name of public safety, a man was killed for *selling* cigarettes in New York; and,

A boy died for allegedly *stealing* cigars, in Missouri

In the olden days we died for **stealing** pigs and watermelons,

Now its cigars and cigarettes

And since the police go unpunished, civilians kill us over loud music, being loud or simply walking down the street

The wounded die because the money for emergency medical services has been spent on the police

Whether man, woman or child, we are unsafe in our communities because of criminals AND the police

We protest our treatment by the government and the government sends the police

With military tanks, high-powered weapons, tear gas and more police

It use to be water hoses and attack dogs

To make things better they say, why don't more of "you people" get a job with the police

It's a good government job with benefits; benefits that use to come from working a forty hour week on a job that did not involve a badge and a gun and almost limitless power over the life and death of other humans

In a society that creates an endless supply of people who are hungry, homeless, under-educated, unemployed and unemployable, mentally ill, and rightfully angry, the police are charged with controlling and containing the masses,

while a select few, become richer and more powerful,

powerful enough to spend more money on police;

Instead of: on food coops, clean and affordable housing, high quality schools, the creation of living- wage jobs with healthcare and other benefits--like college scholarships and stipends; or, god forbid, free college for all graduates

Instead, the powerful few, authorize the police to **wage war** on the hungry, the homeless, the under-educated, the unemployed and unemployable, the mentally ill, the young, and countless others by claiming their "criminality" is their own fault and can only be addressed if they are policed and imprisoned more.

And so many adopt and support this approach because it is what we know, what we have become use to; and, because we are afraid,

Not just of becoming victims of crime, but of demanding something different from a government that has colluded with corporations to make poor people poorer, sick people sicker, and historically oppressed people the contemporary oppressed, all while talking about economic development and "*public safety*".

This discourse allows the hungry, the homeless, the unemployed, the under-educated, the mentally ill, the young, the rightfully angry; *or, anyone who looks*

like they might be any one of these, to be viewed with suspicion; and, stopped, questioned, searched, arrested, beaten or killed, by the police (and others), because that is both the historical and contemporary American norm.

It is on you/us to build a different future by **demanding** a different response.

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