



Chapter 2: Policing and Protester Demands

How do police function in our society today? Learn about the history and contemporary operations of policing in the U.S., as well as what calls for police reform, defunding, and abolishment mean.

Conversation Questions

1. How might your experiences with police have been impacted by where you live, your socioeconomic status, and/or your race?
2. How does the way we learn about police influence our understanding or expectations of their role in our community?
3. How have recent protests affected your understanding of the role of police? What about your opinion on what the role of police should be?

Key Definitions (adapted from Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary)

- *Police* - the department of government concerned primarily with maintenance of public order, safety, and health and enforcement of laws and possessing executive, judicial, and legislative powers
- *Militarization* - to equip with military or armed forces and defenses
- *Brutality* - the quality or state of being harsh, severe, grossly ruthless, or unfeeling
- *Reform* - to amend or improve by change of form or removal of faults or abuses
- *Defunding* - withdrawing funding from; in this context, reducing one budget line (e.g. police and law enforcement) and reallocating to other budget lines (public schools, public housing, health care, mental health care, etc.) within a municipality
- *Abolishment* - to completely do away with something





Read

“How the U.S. Got Its Police Force” by Olivia B. Waxman for *Time*

<https://bit.ly/2Nuv9dW>

This article covers the origins of police in the United States, starting in the early 1700s and explores how police forces grew and expanded to cities across the nation.

“The Deep Roots—and New Offshoots—of ‘Abolish the Police’” by RUAIRÍ ARRIETA-KENNA for *Politico*

<https://politi.co/3hVSMKB>

Arrieta-Kenna offers historical context for the phrase “abolish the police,” and outlines several interpretations of what people may mean when they use it.

“The day police bombed a city street: can scars of 1985 Move atrocity be healed?” by Ed Pilkington for *The Guardian*

<https://bit.ly/3e4L3ru>

Eleven people, including five children, died and a Philadelphia neighborhood burned down in the airstrike against a black liberation group in 1985. Now, in 2020, an effort at reconciliation is under way.

“Defund the Police: America needs to rethink its priorities for the whole criminal-justice system” by Annie Lowrey for *The Atlantic*

<https://bit.ly/2Nvt5IW>

This idea piece discusses how reducing financial investment in surveillance and punishment practices can make way for investing in preventable social services that foster equity and safety in communities.

“What the World Could Teach America About Policing” by Yasmeen Serhan for *The Atlantic*

<https://bit.ly/3fVEY0X>

This article offers insights and lessons from other countries that have disarmed and disbanded police departments.





Watch

***Policing the Police* by filmmakers Anya Bourg and James Jacoby on Kanopy**

<https://bit.ly/2Z7Rq6S>

A Frontline documentary that follows the Newark Police Department in New Jersey as they work toward reform, ordered by the Department of Justice.

***Peace Officer: The Militarized State of American Police* by filmmakers Brad Barber and Scott Christopherson on Kanopy**

<https://bit.ly/2BBm4NU>

A feature documentary about the increasingly militarized state of American police as told through the story of William "Dub" Lawrence, a former sheriff who established and trained his rural state's first SWAT team only to see that same unit kill his son-in-law in a controversial standoff 30 years later.

Listen

"A History of Police Funding" from *The Financial Times'* Behind the Money podcast

<https://on.ft.com/2YutDxS>

Two professors talk about the role that the federal government and federal funding have played in transforming policing in the U.S.

"Running from Cops" from topic podcasts

<https://bit.ly/2Z0SYzA>

A podcast series that investigates the reality show *COPS* and its cultural impact on policing in America.

"The History Of Police In Creating Social Order In The U.S."

from *All Things Considered*

<https://n.pr/2VfYL3g>

NPR's Ailsa Chang talks with Chenjerai Kumanyika, an assistant professor at Rutgers University, about the historical role of police in preserving power and social order.

