

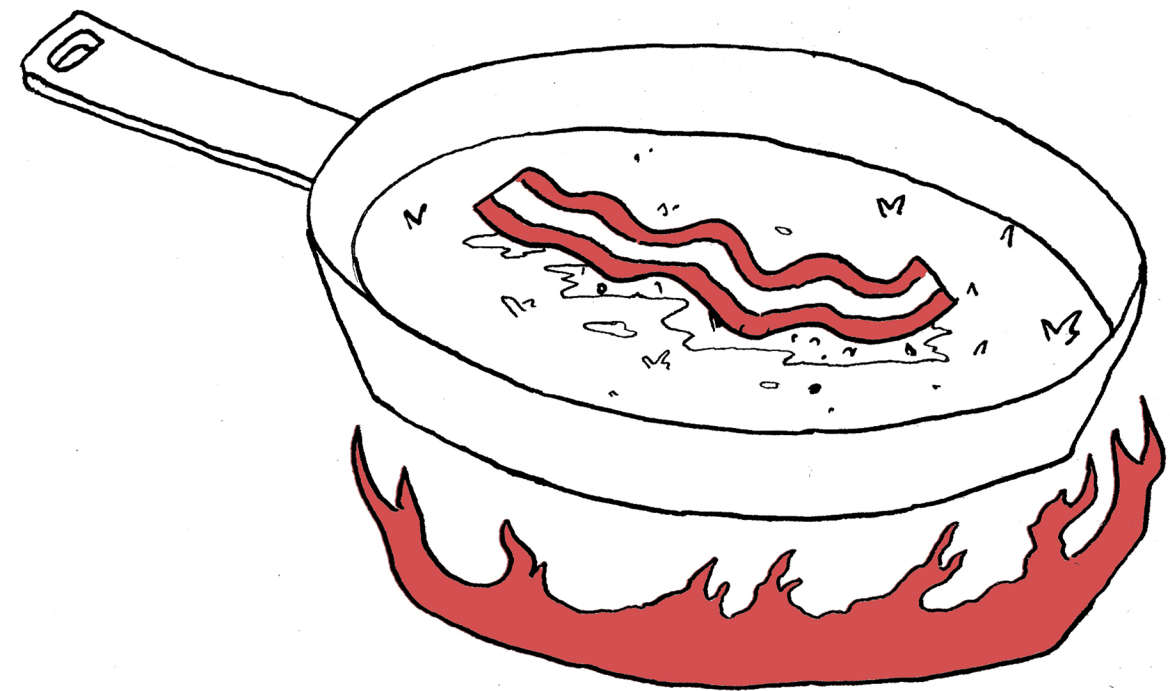


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THE FUZZ

A BRIEF HISTORY OF POLICING



GERTRUDE PEBBLETON

FURTHER READING

Graeber, David. Direct Action: an ethnography
AK Press, 2009

Stafford, Saralee and Shirly, Neal
"Delusions of Progress: Tracing
the Origins of the Police in the
Slave Patrols of the Old South"
itsgoingdown.org Sep 2016

Williams, Kristian. Our Enemies in Blue.
AK Press, 2009.

Today, police and the violence that accompanies
them are as ubiquitous as the rising sea.



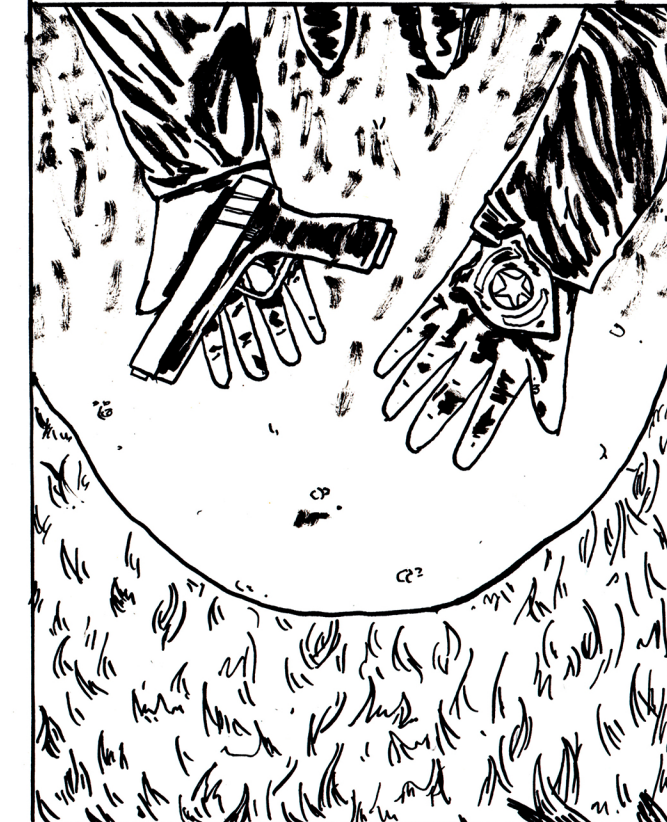
If, for example you attempt to harvest a few cartloads of produce from the grocery store without paying the appropriate amount of tender or attempt to barter a highly taxed item without paying that tax (see Eric Garner) or if you are simply born with melanin and are in the "wrong place at the wrong time," it is highly likely that you will come face to face with this violence.



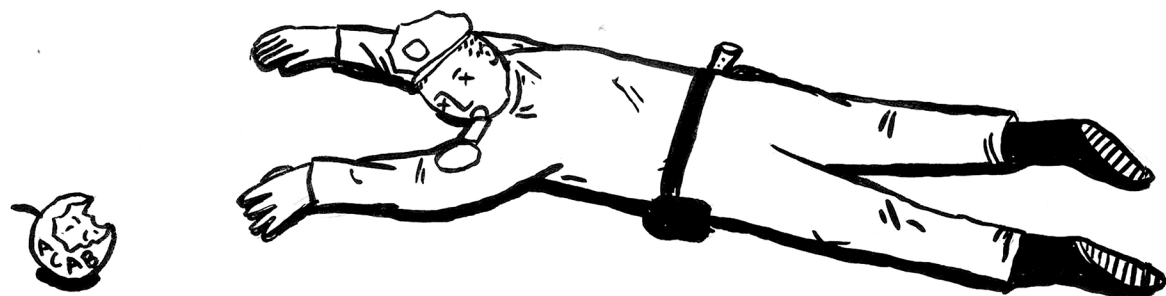
So today, when you hear talk of police reform: Body cameras, federal oversight etc, remember that this is a distraction!



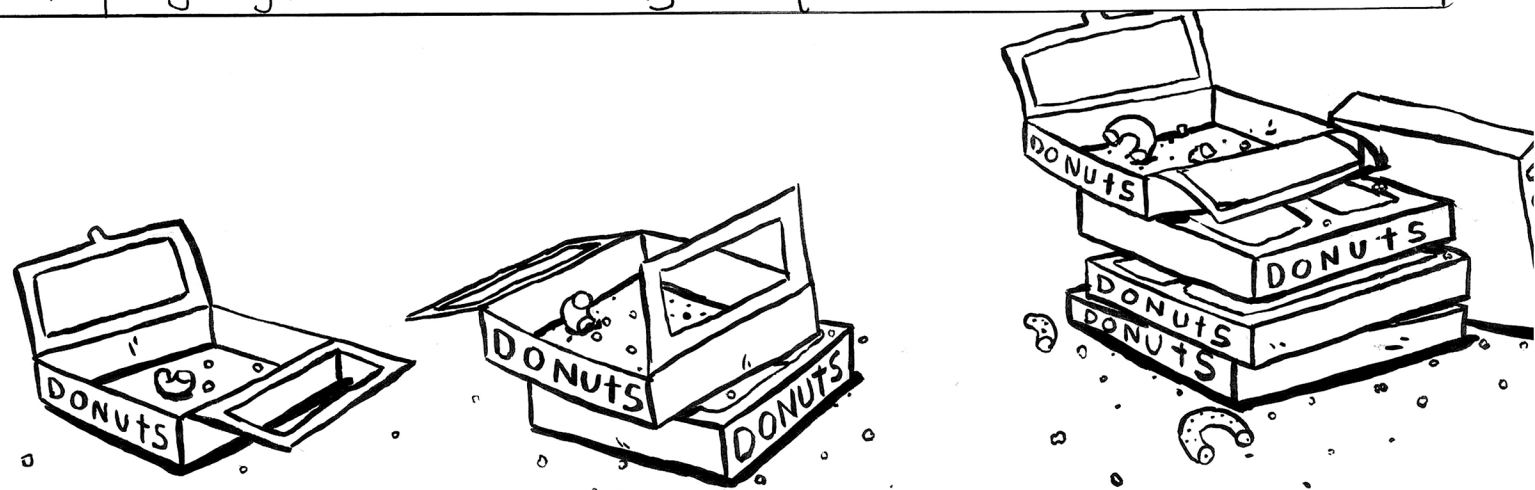
Police are still slave catchers and union busters



Bad policing isn't a case of bad apples. it's an institution intentionally constructed to enforce the agendas of those with power and money through violence. police maintain and uphold an economic order which is and always has been highly racialized particularly in the United States



Since its genesis, policing has continued to bloat at a staggering pace, through the war on drugs, the growth of the private prison and weapons industries and a number of other state consolidation initiatives. we now live in a world where extreme state violence is ubiquitous and virtually uncontested there is nothing normal about this.. Anthropologically, this is entirely unique and therefore mutable.

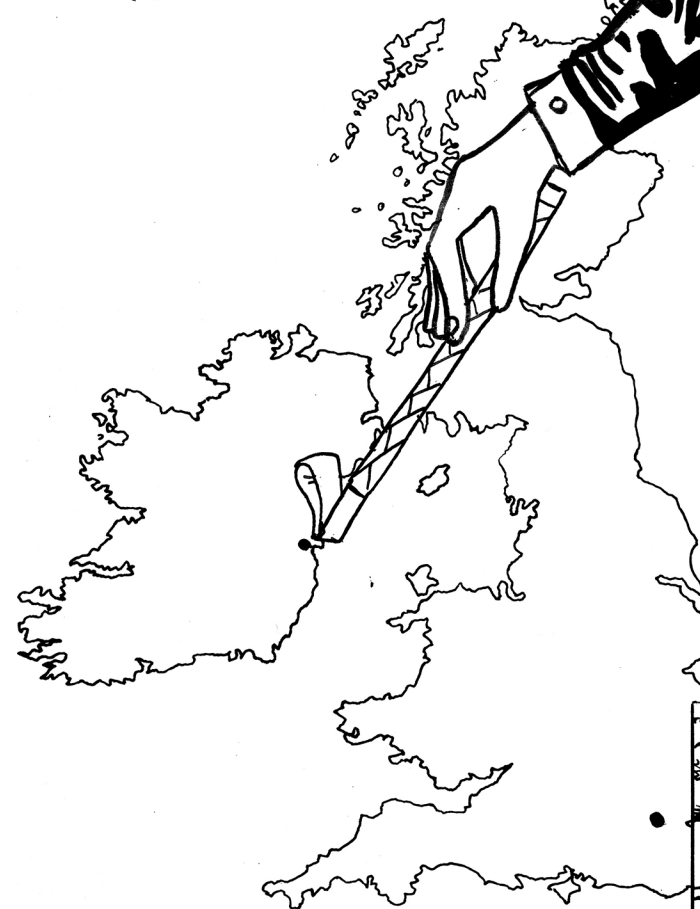


Cracks are beginning to form as people question the role of police in contemporary society. This conversation must be pushed to its logical conclusion.

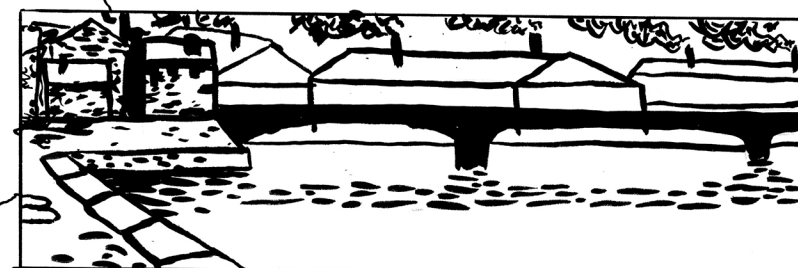


police are an aberration, a nightmare we can wake up from if we force lucidity.

The first recognizably modern police force was established in London in the first half of the 19th Century by a man named Robert Peel



Peel modeled the department after the Royal Irish Constabulary an organ he had himself founded a decade earlier to maintain order in Britannia's restive Irish colony. Policing in its earliest form was explicitly informed by the colonial experience, i.e. controlling a potentially insurgent population.



In London this of course meant the burgeoning urbanized and highly exploited proletariat.



North American policing would take a separate but related course owing to its unique historical conditions

In the north, police developed along similar lines as their cousins in Europe to protect a mushrooming system of wage-labor capitalism from threats by the working class (i.e. union organizing)

At the time, the police were cast as the protectors of bourgeois civilization from the ravages of the (mostly immigrant) working class. Today of course, the focus or "threat" has shifted onto poor black and brown people rather than European migrants as whiteness has expanded to include those formerly excluded.



During the 19th century most police work that wasn't directly concerned with smashing unionism involved enforcing laws like vagrancy or disorderly conduct



in other words specifically targetting the poor and other

Though often invisible, state sanctioned violence (or the threat of it) backs up even the pettiest and non-criminal of regulations



Graeber points to fire code regulations used to justify violent eviction of squatters and protestors who are often guilty of the pettiest of regulatory violations (walking on the street) if they refuse they will most certainly be met with violence

they do this to deter people from taking power back, goading people back into a system where they must work themselves to the bone in order to scrape together enough to pay the landlord simply to rest their heads

They do this because it is enormously profitable to maintain this inequity



If even small cracks begin to form in the legitimacy of the state and its bedfellow capital, then the whole rotten system risks collapse

For a broad sociological explanation of the role of police in our time, LSE Anthropology professor David Graeber's definition is particularly useful:

one can only conclude that we are dealing with a group of armed, lower echelon government administrators trained in the scientific application of physical force or the threat of physical force to aid in the resolution of administrative problems.

Police are bureaucrats with guns

They are the active face of the state monopoly on violence.

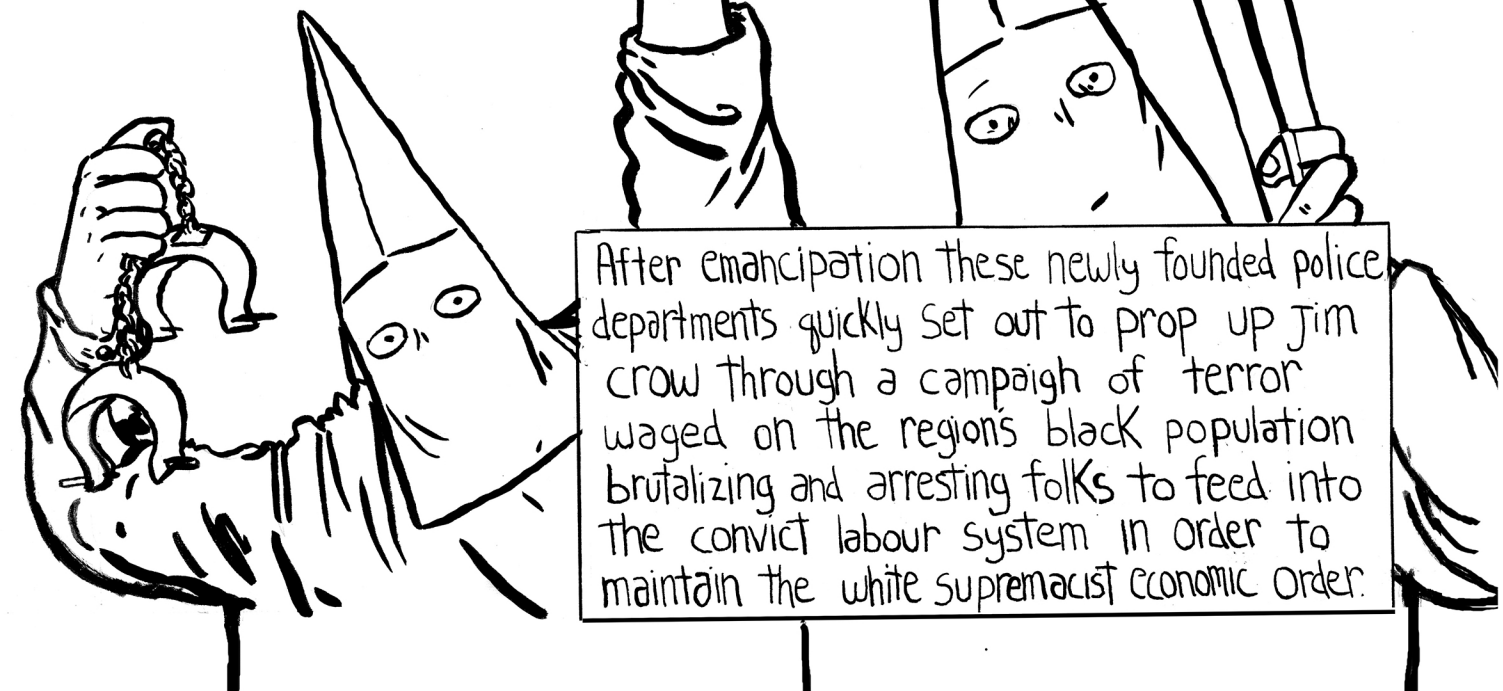
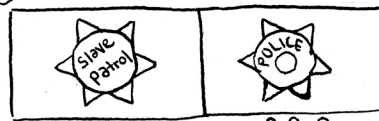
During the same period and in fact even earlier in the south, one finds only slave patrols and "city guards" which were developed to maintain social control over the unique demographics of large parts of the south, that is, a majority enslaved black population and a panicked white minority.



These formations would evolve directly into the police departments of today

Colin Kaepernick

follow



After emancipation these newly founded police departments quickly set out to prop up jim crow through a campaign of terror waged on the region's black population brutalizing and arresting folks to feed into the convict labour system in order to maintain the white supremacist economic order.

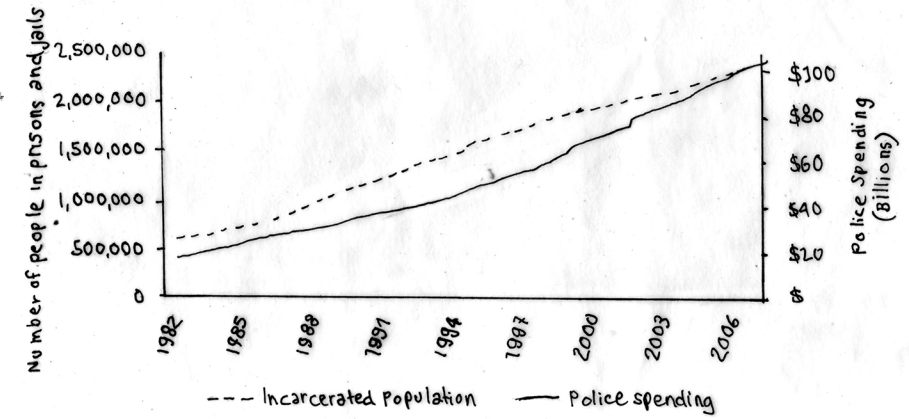
Northern and southern models, while cosmetically different, were both ultimately expressions of a national economic order that was profoundly dependent on violent enforcement to maintain itself.

The fugitive slave Law, for example, required northerners to capture and return formerly enslaved peoples even outside the legally demarcated slave states

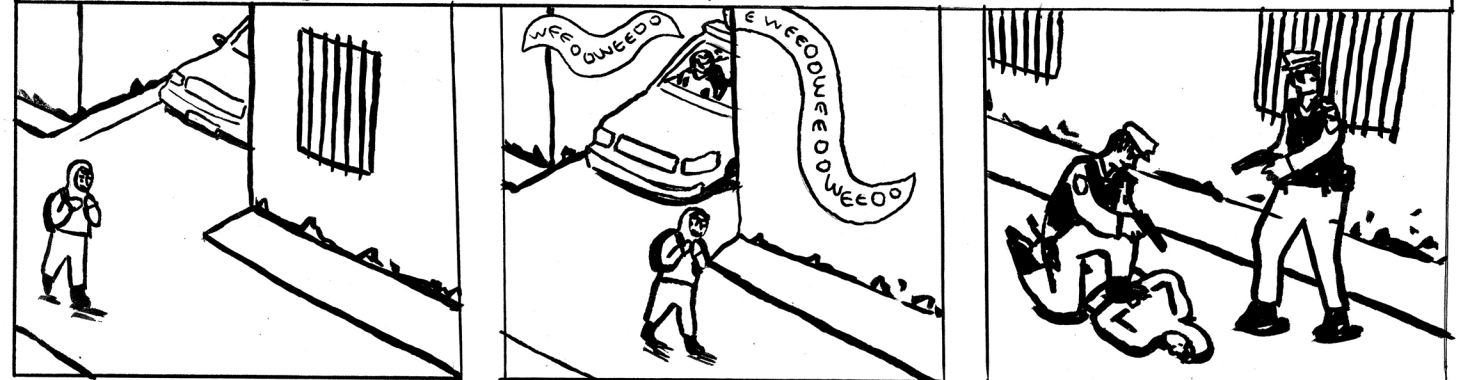


Later, the Great Migration brought hundreds of thousands of black folks to northern cities to work in the rapidly expanding industry and new forms of social control had to be developed

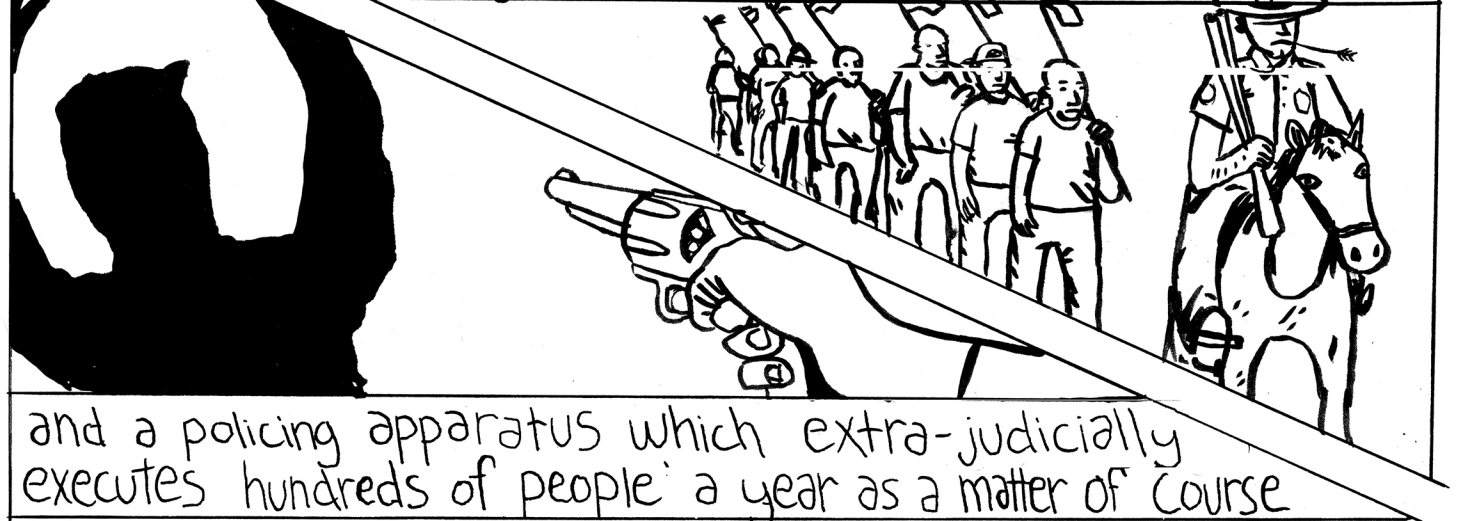
policing in the second half of the 20th Century exploded in kind.



In brief: the so-called war on drugs, broken windows and a slew of other racialized policing methodologies were used to justify a massive expansion of policing in largely black and brown neighborhoods as municipal and social services were cut.



This brings us to where we are today with a slave labor prison system that incarcerates more black people today than under chattel slavery



and a policing apparatus which extra-judicially executes hundreds of people a year as a matter of course