



CAPCR Shout Out

Sex, Drugs & Violence in SLMPD: Lack of Moral Compass Leaves Dept. Directionless
by
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Here are the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department (SLMPD)'s criminal incidents everyone knows about from just the last couple years: [officer shooting another officer](#), alcohol-addled officer involved in [hit and run](#), [officers beating](#) undercover officer, September 17, 2017 [police riot](#), [trading auto accident victims' personal information for bribes](#), drunk [officer shooting young man](#) after hitting on his girlfriend, an [officer shooting an officer](#) during an alleged on-duty game of Russian roulette.

Then there are the lesser known fiascos: sexting while on duty, sex in the basement of the station house, [road rage](#). And now [recent allegations](#) by the St. Louis Circuit Attorney that the head of the unit tasked with investigating police shootings blocked the collection of evidence just last week.

Seven indictments of police officers since the end of November, 2018, all (despite the public safety director's claim to the contrary) for incidents in recent months.

This is more than just random misconduct; it's safe to say the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department is awash in decadence.

It might be easy to blame a younger generation for being out of control. That would not be incorrect. But decadence infiltrates when there is feckless leadership at the top. Mayor Lyda Krewson and her Public Safety Director, Jimmie Edwards, are without fresh ideas, stuck with invoking law-and-order catch phrases and policies that have not made us safer. In 2017 the mayor stood by Chief O'Toole when he encouraged police rioting. We have heard little from her on the issue of public safety since. Judge Edwards [recent defense of police](#) when asked about the alleged evidence obstruction was an amateurish attempt to change the subject and provide false equivalencies.

Beyond generational trends and bad leadership, though, this rot goes to the core of 21st century policing. Police sex, drugs and violence are, as we'll see below, the symptoms of young officers entering a profession whose rationale for being no longer makes real sense even to those on the inside.

Where is new recruits' sense of higher purpose? The noble sentiments (never wholly accurate) to protect and serve? The veneer is gone, the mission adrift in the exposed realities of racism, homophobia, classism and the failed attempts over many decades to arrest-and-incarcerate our way out of the problems unequal distribution of resources has created.

Cultures fall into decadence when they lose their higher purpose. Cynicism and hedonism thrive in the absence of a larger community-held vision. To enter a career in policing when the institution is without moral bearing is to risk falling victim to the same cynicism and hopelessness driving violence in the streets.

While city leaders proclaim the need to build up police presence through more funding and more officers, it is time to ask, Why? For what purpose? To catch the bad guys?

It's true there will always be some bad guys to catch. But in this age of mass incarceration it is increasingly clear that the calls for law-and-order have only resulted in overflowing prisons, lives and whole communities of color destroyed by the racially unbalanced application of punitive laws, and the resulting cycle of violence and despair we see on the streets today. Policing is an ever-growing part of this escalating problem.

We don't need more money put into policing or more officers on the streets. We need to redefine the mission and institutions of public safety so radically that they would be unrecognizable from what they are today.

Let's remember—modern policing was born from two streams. First, there was the Southern slave catcher. Second, there was the urban police force invented in 1830s London to suppress the rebellion against colonialism in Ireland and the class unrest resulting from the Industrial Revolution. These two streams haunt us still today, but they are not the path of the future. The Industrial Revolution has largely run its course. Slavery and its vestiges are hardly justification for policing and are rather a large part of its moral failing. Our sense of what it means to be a “peace officer” needs to change.

Twenty-first century policing can go one of two ways. Either it becomes the hands-on purveyor of the new Surveillance State, continuing in its role as suppressor of the disempowered and the discontent, or it becomes something new—an institution of peace keepers, guardians and problem solvers.

America is in the process of building the Surveillance State and St. Louis is doing its part. We need to change this trajectory by consciously and assertively pushing for a new direction. We can no longer fool ourselves into thinking that half-measured reforms are truly moving us forward—that a veneer of community policing will cut it any longer. No more pretending that

superficial changes like police attendance at community meetings or police athletic leagues will get us anywhere.

We need to start over with new peacekeeping institutions that are grown organically from communities-- of the people, by the people, for the people. Practitioners need to be skilled in mediation, de-escalation, and in non-violently solving community problems before they manifest themselves as crime.

We won't get there immediately. The police are a reflection of the society as a whole. They can't be expected to magically make things right in a society reeling from economic and racial exploitation and the violent reaction that comes from being oppressed. But we can start.

There is an ever growing national push for a new approach toward REAL public safety, ending punitive responses and emphasizing the need to tackle the root causes of crime such as poverty, lack of education, housing, job opportunities, affordable healthcare, and more. There is no current model of policing that is the blueprint for the ideal peace-keeping approach that supports this new vision, but one current model may well be part of the transition that gets us there -- problem-solving policing.

Problem-solving policing already exists and succeeds. It deemphasizes arrests, puts officers' focus on identifying, analyzing and solving community issues in cooperation with partners whose skill sets are best suited to the issue at hand. It rewards those who solve problems and proactively reduce crime, not those who make the most arrests after the harm has been done. Problem solving, if taken seriously and implemented transformatively, could be a first step in determining our new path; it could move us toward manifesting the truth that there can be no peace without justice.

We need to end the decadence--create a new sense of purpose. Imagine new institutions that are actually equipped to cope with a comprehensively transforming society. If not, we may well end up in a Clockwork Orange dystopia where disaffection and violence run rampant inside law enforcement and outside, where surveillance and mind control are the order of the day, and where all personal freedom and responsibility are lost.

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