

How Community-Oriented Policing Has Affected Minority Communities
and What We Can Do About It
A Commentary

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To the unbiased ear the term Community-Oriented Policing has a good ring to it. One could assume this style of policing is different than the normal/traditional style of policing. The overall objective of policing is to keep the streets safe. We also know for the most part, traditional policing has been reactionary, focused on responding to service calls, handling criminal activity and making arrests. This approach has led to a high number of arrests and convictions in the U.S., which, by the way, is the number one incarcerating nation in the world. The result has been extremely high imprisonment rates of people of color, specifically black and brown males and has created more tensions in communities, especially those occupied by people of color. To address the concern the government and law enforcement have made an attempt to rebuild fractured relationships.

In 1994 during the Clinton administration, Community-Oriented Policing was instituted by the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act to develop problem-solving techniques. Clinton committed approximately \$10 billion to this cause and hired 100,000 new street officers. That sounds great if it is keeping in line with its intended purposes of empowering the community; including community members in the process of developing strategies to address crime; repairing relationships within the community; and preventing crime by having officers physically in the community. Even though Community-Oriented Policing was designed to be a non-traditional means of making the streets safe, data show it has done just the opposite.

The major issue was police who were placed in communities were outsiders and did not know how to interact with the residents. That put a strain on creating and building positive connections, and that strain caused both police and residents to lose hope this non-traditional effort was worth the time. Instead of repairing relationships and preventing crime, more arrests were made resulting in a higher number of black and brown men being imprisoned than during any other decade in history. The police hubs in the communities became holding cells for residents.

Today, the strained relationship between communities of color and law enforcement is as visible as it has been at any other time in U.S. history. Right now is a perfect opportunity to go back to the drawing board and revisit the original philosophies, approaches and strategies of what a successful Community-Oriented Policing program should look like. Let's step back for a

moment. If safe streets are the overall objective, we are going to need buy-in from both the law enforcement community as well as that of the communities they are charged to serve.

The intentions of Community-Oriented Policing are solid and should be the focal point of repairing relationships. Here are a few suggestions:

- Accountability - Law enforcement has to admit there have been mistakes made that have disadvantaged certain communities.
- Understanding - Communities have to be open to accepting the accountability of law enforcement and be willing to listen and work closely with them to reduce crime in their neighborhoods.
- Value - More value must be placed on voices from the community through law enforcement communication and collaboration on strategies to address crime.
- Hiring Practices - Law enforcement must hire more people from the community, and the community must take advantage of the opportunity to become a law enforcement officer.

Community members could be centrally involved in change by becoming part of the system. How can the community understand the nuances of policing without being in the room where the conversations are held? As more attention is being focused on the problems of mass incarceration, the issues related to private prisons and other social justice issues, the time is now to develop more effective ways of building relationships among communities, particularly those of color and law enforcement agencies. Community-Oriented Policing strategies, with some improvements and reconfiguring, offer the opportunity to do just that.