



Assembly of the Sacred Wheel

STATEMENT OF BELIEF AND ADVOCACY ON THE FIGHT AGAINST SYSTEMIC RACISM IN THE UNITED STATES

Original approved by the leadership council of the ASW on Jan. 17, 2015. <http://www.sacredwheel.org/public-statements.html>
Revision and update approved by the leadership council of the ASW on June 5, 2020.

It is soul-wrenching that in the five years since this Statement of Belief and Advocacy was first published that abuse of power, use of excessive/lethal force, violation of civil rights, discriminatory enforcement of the criminal code, wealth disparities, targeted defunding of needed programs, voter suppression, and too many other forms of oppression of Black and Brown Americans have persisted unabated. Mainstream media, social media posts, surveillance cameras, ongoing social research, and the uncountable personal stories of the lived experiences of Black and Brown Americans has exposed these systemic and literal assaults on life and human decency in greater frequency and severity.

We are called now to reaffirm our support of antiracist efforts and reforms to eliminate systemic racism. It is reprehensible that so little progress has been made to change and heal the United States of America's centuries long history of systemic racism. Every American, every spiritually aware person, should find this intolerable and must act.

It is an additional tragedy that, in this time of world pandemic, Black Americans and their supporters must risk infection and death by Covid-19 (which disproportionately affects Black Americans) to protest dying of racially targeted lethal force by law enforcement.

To address an aspect of the protests used to divert attention from the more significant outrages being protested, it must be stated that there is a fundamental difference between destruction of property and abuse of, assault on, and lethal harm to living souls. As documented repeatedly on film by on-the-ground news reporters (themselves assaulted frequently by law enforcement) and protesters with phone cameras, when violence against living beings has occurred, it has *most often* been perpetrated by law enforcement too often meeting the protest about use of excessive/deadly force with *more* excessive/deadly force:

- Provocation of peaceful protesters;
- Assault of citizens on their own porches;
- Tazing and assaulting non-protesting Black students simply driving near the protest;
- 'Drive-by' pepper-spraying of peaceful citizens on side of the road;
- Assault and illegal arrest of minority news reporters;
- Police vehicles driven into crowds of protesters;
- Inconsistently enforcing curfews with no-warning use of tear gas and rubber bullets;
- and-
- Deployment of military equipment for intimidation of protesters.

It remains the belief of the Assembly of the Sacred Wheel that abuse of power, racism, discrimination, marginalization, and dehumanization in all forms, are the manifestations of profound soul sickness. It has persisted throughout human history in one form or another and will until the soul of humanity is evolved beyond it. Each time it is perceived anew, it is the duty of those possessing awareness to fight, transform and heal this sickness and the horrors it produces - to work with Higher Heart to not only lessen manifest suffering and injustice here and now, but open the way for the influence of true higher-self in human consciousness.

There is no doubt that the blatant and systemic abuse in US culture directed against Black and Brown Americans and other people of color, now and throughout our history, is the result of such a soul sickness. And in this moment, the rallying cry against injustice, inhumanity and soul sickness is **Black Lives Matter**.

The Assembly of the Sacred Wheel bows our heads in mourning for all those that have lost their lives, their loves, their children, their partners, and, too often, their hope. We stand in support of all those continuing the fight for change and those that have lost loved ones to injustice and violence. We continue to raise our fists in outrage at this continued assault of life and join the voices demanding change.

This crisis affects all of us, but, undeniably, Black Americans are and have been affected most.

This national failing has permeated our history and this failure crosses social, ethical, moral and spiritual arenas. It must be addressed now, unequivocally and bravely, on as many levels as possible. Before one more Black American is killed, on video, in broad daylight, in front of witnesses crying out for it to stop, by police officers that fear no accountability.

It is the moral obligation of every White American to understand White privilege, its role in maintaining and promoting racist practices, and the myriad ways in which it manifests in American life to advantage White Americans and deprive Black Americans of opportunity for a quality of life equal to those of Whites. It is a moral duty to speak out against injustice, educate policy makers, and advocate for change that is in keeping with positive spiritual tenets and common human decency.

To be clear, silence from a place of privilege is a failing of character and spirit, for the ongoing threat to the lives of Black Americans it perpetuates. It is not enough to be passively 'not racist'.

Such willful ignorance equals complicity in the destruction of the principles that could make the United States of America more the beacon it should be.

While each Tradition must devise specifically how it will work through faith and practice to support positive evolution, we believe all positive traditions and faiths must acknowledge the need for direct action, advocacy, education and support for those working for change on the front lines. We encourage our members and all that read this to explore these issues vigorously, with honesty and a true desire for deep understanding. We encourage everyone to decide how and when to act in accord with that understanding, bravely and compassionately, at every opportunity.

So Mote It Be

Proposals To Bring About Real Change

Reform Law Enforcement Practice and Criminal Code: Federal and State

- Create, fund, and fully staff a National Commission to investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate all policing incidences that result in death, including murder of bystanders via gunshot or high speed chase. All associated body-cam video, autopsies, and investigation records must be immediately turned over to the National Commission. Officers involved in lethal incidents must immediately be placed on desk duty until completion of investigation by the National Commission.
- Create a national database of police officers' histories of employment, complaints and abuses (substantiated or unsubstantiated), use of firearms, and proven associations with known hate organizations antithetical to unbiased and ethical law enforcement to limit the number of serial law enforcement offenders that can secure employment as officers in other jurisdictions.
- Make calling the police when crimes haven't occurred a felony crime, especially calls that unlawfully discriminate against or maliciously target protected classes (hate crime).
 - Make the caller who targets an individual this way culpable for and an accessory to any lethal police action, including wrongful death, that results from such a call.
 - Allow the target of malicious use of law enforcement for retaliation, revenge, social intimidation, or racist targeting to sue the maker of the call/complaint for civil damages.
- Implement mandatory use of restorative justice practices as the first action for all nonviolent federal criminal offenses prior to incarceration.
- Repeal unconstitutional and unethical civil rights erosions related to the failed 'war on drugs', which has been undeniably targeted disproportionately toward Black and Brown Americans, including but not limited to: no-knock warrants, stop-and-frisk practices, disproportionate policing of Black and Brown neighborhoods.
- Federally, decriminalize minor drug possession and personal use:
 - Implement retroactive expungement of all nonviolent charges stemming from excessive criminalization of drug possession and personal use.
 - Release of all prisoners currently serving time for subsequently decriminalized acts.
- Eliminate mass-incarceration practices that have resulted in the USA in having the highest per-capita rate in the world of citizens that are incarcerated or otherwise under supervision of the correctional system (probation, house arrest, etc.) and that disproportionately affects Black and Brown Americans, such as but not limited to:
 - Three strike mandatory sentencing for non-violent crimes.
 - Pre-trial bail systems that keep poor Americans unjustly incarcerated without conviction while waiting a slow justice process, often destabilizing any remaining connections,

relationships, employment and other factors that may contribute to lower recidivism and higher quality of life.

- Race-coded criminalization and sentencing statutes that are disproportionately applied to Black and Brown Americans, despite similar rates and severities of the same crimes being committed by White Americans. For instance:
 - In the United States, a black person is 3.73 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than a white person is, despite approximately equal rates of use. When convicted Black and Brown Americans receive longer sentences for marijuana possession/use than whites.
 - In the United States, longer sentences are imposed for possession of crack cocaine (disproportionality affecting lower income Black American and other POC) than for powdered cocaine (preferred by higher income Whites).
- Immediate release of all Americans currently serving disproportionate sentences due to racist laws that are proven discriminatory.

Resources to begin exploration: <https://www.sentencingproject.org>

- Repeal law, statute and policies that continue to punish citizens after they have served their sentences, prevent them from returning to full citizen participation, and contribute to unstable reentry into civilian life. Specifically, but not limited to: 1) Restoration of voting rights; 2) Access to public assistance programs to ensure successful reentry (such as housing assistance, government funded employment training programs, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF], and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP]); and 3) Elimination of blatantly racist requirements for drug testing prior to approval for public assistance (research has repeatedly proven that recipients of public assistance abuse substances at rates lower than the general public.)

Resources to begin exploration: <https://www.brennancenter.org> ; <https://naacp.org> ; search 'voting rights'.

- Outlaw all civil forfeiture statutes. These laws are a blatant denigration of rule-of-law and due process and have repeatedly been shown to directly contribute to abuses of authority and corruption in law enforcement agencies using them (and sometimes relying on them for funding.) This government sanctioned organized crime against American citizens must end.

Resources to begin exploration: <http://endforfeiture.com>

- End the 1033 program that distributes military grade equipment to domestic (state and local) law enforcement. Recall of all military equipment distributed to date. As an interim step, implement citizen oversight of use of the equipment that is currently in state and local PD control. The excessive militarization of domestic law enforcement with both tactics and military-grade equipment was well documented in Ferguson and current routine police 'deployments' against Americans. *HB 330, signed into law in Montana in 2015, Bans police from receiving military weapons from the federal government including tanks, armored vehicles, drones, grenade launchers, aircraft. Goes further than Obama's executive order (which Trump repealed).*

Resource to start: <http://aclu.org> (search '1033').

Reform Law Enforcement Practice and Criminal Code: State and Local

Most urgently, change must be made to 1) eliminate entrenched racist practices in law enforcement agencies, under state and local authority, that routinely and consistently present immediate threat to the lives of Black and Brown Americans and 2) to ethically engage in partnership with the communities that law enforcement serves:

- Implement mandatory use of restorative justice practices for all nonviolent criminal offenses adjudicated in the state before exercising criminal prosecution.
- Form citizen commissions, comprised of those being policed/served, that work with law enforcement and elected officials to define law enforcement practices and clearly define terms such as ‘excessive force’ and ‘reasonable fear for life’ in practical and reliably enforceable language.
Reference to begin exploration: <https://cao-94612.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/oak062931.pdf>
- Implement mandatory racial sensitivity/implicit bias training for officers, that includes the effects of continuous systemic racism on Black and Brown Americans and the historic misuse of law enforcement to unethically maintain systemic/institutionalized racism throughout American history.
- Implement enhanced law enforcement employment practices:
 - Make it illegal for police departments to hire officers who were previously fired or who resigned while being investigated for serious misconduct and/or excessive force. (*Connecticut HB 7103, 2015*)
 - Yearly “fitness for duty” mental health assessments and investigation of officer associations with known hate organizations.
 - Preliminary employment background checks that disqualify candidates for law enforcement service that have a record of domestic violence; animal abuse, membership/engagement with any known racist hate or anti-government groups; excessive use of force; or military record of excessive use of force.
 - Fire currently serving officers that are convicted of DUI, domestic violence/assault, or any other felony.
- Restrict law enforcement union contracts from interfering with police accountability and ban all police union contracts from having language affecting misconduct investigations, discipline and records.
Resource to begin exploration: <https://nebraskalegislature.gov/FloorDocs/105/PDF/Slip/LB791.pdf>
- Require every police department to report every stop, search, arrest & use of force to a state database, including officer ID, location, perceived race, age, gender, gender identity, disability status. Raw data & analysis must be published yearly. (*AB 953. Passed in CA*).
- Implement mandatory body cameras for all law enforcement officers that cannot be turned off by the officer. Body camera footage of law enforcement abuses must be released quickly and transparently to the public. Immediately fire any officer that disables his/her body

camera, obstructs view of their badge number, or otherwise takes direct action to avoid being held accountable for job performance.

- Ensure immediate suspension of officers and swift local investigation of lethal and non-lethal abuses that includes and is transparent to citizen commissions comprised of those being policed. Ensure swift arrest and prosecution of law enforcement officers and supervisors when abuses are determined. (Lethal events also to be adjudicated by National Commission, mentioned above.)
 - Require any officer who shoots someone to submit to mandatory drug and alcohol testing within one hour of the shooting. (*Illinois HB58. Signed into law in 2017*).

Reallocation of Funding from Law Enforcement to Social Services

The decades-long and immoral defunding of social services, mental health programs, addiction treatment programs, employment programs, and other services needed by Americans has resulted in a vacuum of resources that has encouraged Americans to turn, inappropriately, to law enforcement to respond to these needs. Law enforcement personnel are not social workers, counselors, nurses, teachers, or special needs carers – and receive no or minimum training in these areas. The police are a group of employees uniquely empowered to use force on domestic turf and on their own people in ways that is utterly unacceptable for any other group. Police are trained for and should be limited to ethically enforcing criminal statute honoring the civil rights and human rights of Americans and using force only as a last resort (after de-escalation, etc.) in situations where individuals represent a clear and imminent threat to other citizens.

However, as proper resources have been defunded, Americans now dial 911 as the first (and perceived ‘only’) option for far too many needs outside their proper domain. This has resulted in those in need being perceived as criminals – as the police were called. It is a self-sustaining circle of tragedy. Homelessness has now become criminalized - as has behaviors resulting from mental illness, addiction (a medical condition), and even misbehavior of children at school. All of which disproportionately affect people of color, and specifically Black Americans. This must be reversed.

We must redirect excess funding of law enforcement to sustainable development of neighborhoods that are under-resourced (disproportionately affecting Black and Brown American neighborhoods) to establish reasonably accessible medical services, elimination of food deserts, increase employment opportunities, development of and proper regulation of affordable housing, clean and affordable drinking water, and other necessities required for a reasonable quality of life. It is irrational to decry criminal behavior while ignoring the very immoral inequities that necessitate a violation of the social order simply to survive.

It is essential that the residents of the neighborhood be included in the planning and execution of the development.

The **#DefundThePolice movement** is about redirecting funding from an overly militarized and violent law enforcement model to fund programs that would provide services to those in need and would eliminate or lessen the dependency of Americans on law enforcement to handle situations that should not be their domain and for which they are unqualified.

Resources to begin exploration: <https://blacklivesmatter.com/defundthepolice/>; <https://allianceforbmc.org/crises-act>

Public Education Reform: Federal and State

- Eliminate inequities in public education systems and the diversion of public funds to private education/charter schools. All public schools should be funded equitably and generously by the needs of students. Education funding based on local taxes/incomes disproportionately and unfairly advantage wealthy Americans and disadvantage lower income Americans, which due to the generational effects of systemic racism, are disproportionately Black and Brown. The opportunity to access quality education is crucial to employment, earnings, health, and quality of life.
- Reverse excessive ‘zero-tolerance’ school policies and ‘broken window’ approaches to discipline that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline by:
 - Suspending or expelling Black and Brown children at 3 times the rate of White children.
 - Employing law enforcement officers in schools to arrest children for minor offenses that should be dealt with through school-based discipline.
 - Poorly defining terms that have allowed extreme drift in the interpretation of what is and is not a ‘weapon’, resulting in expelling students, for instance, for ‘making guns’ with their fingers or chewing a Pop-Tart into ‘a gun shape’.

Resources to begin exploration: <https://www.endzerotolerance.org/race-discipline> (click ‘issues’);
<https://dignityinschools.org>; <https://www.aclu.org/issues/juvenile-justice/>

- Expunge all law enforcement and school records of all school age children “disciplined” or arrested by police on school grounds during school hours (including extramural activities) as the result of ‘broken window/zero-tolerance’ discipline practices that default to police involvement rather than educator de-escalation practices.
- Immediately fire any teacher or school administrator that displays racist behaviors or attitudes toward any protected class in grading, classroom exercises, presentation of curricula, or punitive actions.
- Implement a national ‘student bill of rights’ that is mandated at all educational organizations for minors and must be publicly posted.

Resources to begin exploration: Project South <https://projectsouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/7NSBR.pdf>

Civil Rights: State

Implement equitable access to voting/polling sites to minority communities and implement mail-in voting where reasonable access to physical polling sites is not provided. The practice of closing polling sites, disproportionately in Black and Brown neighborhoods and often with little notice, deprives full participation in democracy and is a flagrant assault on the right to vote. The

residents of voting districts must approve any change to opening or closing of polling places one year prior to the change.

Resources to begin exploration: <https://naacp.org> ; <https://www.brennancenter.org>

Equal Access to Resources: Federal

- Enforce existing law prohibiting bank ‘redlining’, a discriminatory practice of providing different amounts of credit or different loan rates to different areas/populations, based on their ethnic-minority composition, rather than on economic criteria, such as the potential profitability of operating in those areas.
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- Resource list for further exploration on next page -

Resources for Further Exploration*

Black Lives Matter
<https://blacklivesmatter.com>

Institutionalized Racism: A Syllabus
<https://daily.jstor.org/institutionalized-racism-a-syllabus/>

The Urban Institute
<https://next50.urban.org/question/structural-racism#structural-racism-promising-solutions>

Southern Poverty Law Center
<https://www.splcenter.org>

American Civil Liberties Union
<https://www.aclu.org>

The Sentencing Project
<https://www.sentencingproject.org>

The Justice Policy Institute
<http://www.justicepolicy.org>

Project South
<https://projectsouth.org>

End Zero Tolerance
<https://www.endzerotolerance.org>

Dignity in Schools
<https://dignityinschools.org>

End Forfeiture
<http://endforfeiture.com>

The Brennan Center
<https://www.brennancenter.org>

Use of Force Project
<http://useofforceproject.org>

Alliance for Boys and Men of Color
<https://allianceforbmoc.org>

**The Assembly of the Sacred Wheel is not associated directly with any of the resources provided and provides these references for your further exploration of the issues discussed without implying universal agreement or endorsement of everything on these websites. It is expected that the reader will pursue many and varied sources of information on these topics to form their own well-informed positions and act accordingly.*