

A line of police officers in riot gear, including helmets and face shields, stands on a street. They are holding clear riot shields with the word "POLICE" printed on them. The scene is outdoors on a clear day, with a street sign for "Cave Creek" and a "HARLEY-DAVIDSON" sign visible in the background. The officers are positioned in a line, facing towards the camera.

Blood on the Sand

The DOJ Investigates
the Phoenix PD

Counterflow Distro
Summer 2021

of daily life; mainstream schemes to reform prisons and defund the police offer only the dispersal of their functions into society, increasing rather than decreasing their presence. The police cannot be reformed precisely because of what policing seeks to accomplish: the violent and total enclosure of the possibilities of life.

It is clear what is happening with this Department of Justice investigation of Phoenix PD. The legitimacy of the state and the police are in question; they've been in question for years but the crisis finally came to a head last summer with the death of George Floyd and the activity of millions in response. Now, the Biden regime seeks to restore this legitimacy with symbolic gestures, empty rhetoric, and by doing the bare minimum to placate his moderate base. By creating the image of "going after" one of the most violent police departments in the country, he pushes forward his agenda of restoring social peace. But make no mistake: social peace has always meant social war; it has always meant the theft and measure of our lives, the vast emptiness of work, wage labor, commodity production and consumption, and crushed dreams. When they offer us social peace, we must burn the bridges they are building.

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tions: officers from TPD prefer to hang back and simply contain the demonstration while keeping tabs on those they deem problematic. Then, as the march disperses and these problematic individuals find themselves alone, they are swiftly kidnapped by TPD. Once in custody, there is no telling what might happen. In April of 2020, Carlos Ingram-Lopez was murdered by three Tucson police officers while in TPD custody. Again, in March of 2020, Damien Alvarado was similarly murdered in custody. Both men suffocated to death, saying “I can’t breathe” in their final moments, just like Eric Garner did before them and just like George Floyd would soon after. This is the legacy of “progressive policing” in Tucson.

Ultimately, there is no stopping police violence shy of total abolition because policing is violence. The police – and policing considered more broadly as the logistics of social management – exists as an attempt to define the possibilities of our lives in all possible moments in space and time. Every action that falls outside of the conceptual reality that policing seeks to actualize and defend (i.e. the conceptual realities of settler-colonial capitalism) must be neutralized and eliminated. Thus, our capacity to determine our lives according to our own desires is stolen away from us and our creative capacities are strangled. It does not matter if policing is approached in an overtly aggressive manner or in an ostensibly “progressive” and “friendly” manner; the theft & limiting of our lives necessitates violence all the same. Those who fall through the cracks of this system or go against it entirely are either warehoused in prisons or gunned down in the streets. Increasingly, the carceral project has generalized into broader society, with daily life being evermore regimented, surveilled and controlled. The world around us is being supplanted by a manufactured digital dystopia in which our every interaction and experience can be monitored & mediated; the pandemic has created a new state of exception that has allowed novel forms of bio-political capture

Blood on the Sand

The DOJ Investigates the Phoenix PD

On August 5th, 2021 the Department of Justice announced that it would be conducting an investigation into the Phoenix Police Department, citing concerns over excessive use of force, violations of first amendment rights, and poor treatment of the houseless, among other things.

The Phoenix Police have gained nationwide notoriety in recent years for their status as being on of, if not the most violent police departments in the country. Dozens are murdered at the hands of PPD every year and countless more are brutalized and kidnapped. It is within this context and the aftermath of the George Floyd Uprising that the Biden administration is now seeking to re-legitimize the police and the federal government by taking up a sympathetic, reformist posture. Thus, we see the Department of Justice preparing the facade of accountability for the most violent police force in the United States. However, it does not take much to break this veneer and to see what it for what it really is: an empty maneuver that offers nothing but the continuation of the counter-insurgent project.

On the campaign trail, Biden took up the mantle of police reform as one of his key issues, opportunistically seizing upon the unprecedented frustration with the police that erupted with

the death of George Floyd. Now, his administration seeks to make good on his promises in an effort to quell the dissent he capitalized upon. This has been part of the Democratic Party's playbook for decades and should come as no surprise. What's different this time is that the illusion of progress has been shattered in an unprecedented way. In the wake of the George Floyd Uprising, what has been laid bare for all to see is that neither Biden nor his Department of Justice will resolve police violence for one simple reason: policing is violence. The contemporary history of policing not just in Phoenix, but throughout Arizona is a testament to this fact.

A Recent History of Policing in Phoenix

In light of the announced investigations, Mayor Kate Gallego and PPD Chief Jeri Williams are putting on a friendly face and stating that they welcome the investigations and any insights that they might provide. After all, Gallego is one of the liberal heroes of the local Democratic Party and Chief Williams is in favor of police reform and improving "community-police relations." Was it not Chief Williams who marched with protestors in the midst of the George Floyd Uprising? Was it not her officers that knelt alongside demonstrators? Surely, then, these investigations could only be beneficial to her and her supposed agenda of police reform. Let's cast aside these assumed agendas and goals, however, and look into the recent past of Williams' career from before her time in Phoenix to now.

PPD is not the first department that Jeri Williams has been in charge of. Prior to taking her current position in Phoenix, she was previously the Chief of Police of Oxnard PD in California. While chief of police there, she oversaw a number of "improvements" in police-community relations:

- The choking death of Robert Ramirez by Oxnard PD officers on June 23rd, 2012

Justice investigation will yield very little of substance. Predictably, we wager one of two scenarios will occur: 1. The DoJ will find that all of these actions were somehow justified and that nothing should be done or 2. In keeping with Biden's manufactured image as the reformer that will "solve" police violence, the DoJ will find that PPD is indeed horrendously violent, but will suggest lukewarm reforms that will change nothing. The logic of policing will not be challenged (after all, this is the DoJ we're talking about) and nothing will be done to curb the mass violence by police on the streets of Phoenix. In the "best" case scenario, we can expect something along the lines of how policing is conducted just 100 miles south of Phoenix in the city of Tucson. While Phoenix PD fulfills the model of overly aggressive policing, Tucson PD is on the cutting edge of "successful" community policing. Despite this image, according to Tucson-based Civil Seed, from 2013-2020 TPD ranked #13 out of 102 metro police departments for police murders by population. This means that when adjusted for population, Tucson PD outpaces even notorious police departments like NYPD, LAPD, and Chicago PD in police murders. In other words, while Phoenix represents the gold standard of overt reactionary police violence, their sister department has become the gold standard for the progressive counterinsurgency. Regardless of these supposed differences, they represent two sides of the same coin; two different approaches that result in the same types of violence.

This was incredibly apparent during the George Floyd Rebellion. Just like in Phoenix, protestors were brutalized, teargassed, and pepper-sprayed by Tucson's policing apparatus all the same. However, in order to keep their own hands clean, TPD largely limited their own individual violence and instead outsourced it to their friends in the Pima County Sheriff's Department and SWAT teams. This represents a common thread in the way that TPD operates in the face of demonstra-

and assaulting more people at a higher rate than any other police force in the country. This is not to mention the gratuitous violence that PPD has wrought upon demonstrators during popular mobilizations. Prior to the George Floyd Rebellion, in 2017 police brutalized hundreds during a visit by then-President Trump. This occurred once again during the summer of 2020, as it did in much of the country. During one particularly violent night, hundreds were assaulted in a residential area, with police firing tear gas and pepper-spray into people's yards and homes as residents attempted to shelter demonstrators. Some 300 people were arrested that night alone. Finally, in one of the most recent instances of violent repression by PPD, a small group of demonstrators were beaten, arrested, and slapped with trumped up conspiracy and gang charges, threatening them with years or even decades of jail time. The "evidence" that these individuals constituted a gang were that they all wore black and chanted "A-C-A-B." Thus, the "ACAB gang" was willed into existence by PPD.

All of this occurred in the short span of 4.5 years since Chief Williams took charge. However, we should be clear: this violence did not start with Chief Williams and it will not end with her. Furthermore, this violence is far from exclusive to PPD. The history of policing in the Valley of the Sun has been bloody and violent since the beginning and one can find innumerable examples: from SB1070, to Arpaio's tent-city and immigration raids, to Tempe and Scottsdale's histories as sundown towns, the sands of this desert are saturated with blood spilled by police terror. The reason so much focus has been placed on Chief Williams here is simply because despite all of her rhetoric on accountability, reform, and community relations, the terror hasn't stopped.

From the Valley of the Sun to the Old Pueblo

It shouldn't be too much to assume that the Department of

- The shooting death of a mentally ill man named Michael Mahoney by OPD in his own home on August 12th, 2012
- The brutal police murder of Alfonso Limon, Jr on October 13th, 2012
- The beating and in-custody murder of Juan Zavala on June 28th, 2014
- The murder of Meagan Hockaday in front of her 3 kids inside their own home on March 28th, 2015

Additionally, according to the Oxnard-based Todo Poder al Pueblo Collective, Williams also "ruthlessly waged war against the poor: she proudly upheld the gang injunctions that divided our communities; impounded countless cars belonging to undocumented working families; allowed officers to use heavy-handed tactics against residents, non-violent offenders and youth; all while squandering city funds on PR efforts meant to construct a completely false picture of 'improved police-community relations.'" For any Phoenix resident that has experienced or witnessed the violence of Phoenix PD, this should all sound shockingly familiar. It's additionally worth mentioning that up until Williams took the job as Chief of PPD in 2016, she supported the use of chokeholds & admitted to having used them herself. This was, of course, after the choking death of Eric Garner that sparked the now-famous battle cry borne from Garner's dying words, "I can't breathe."

Chief Williams only reversed her stance on the use of chokeholds when it became politically nonviable to continue supporting them while maintaining the veneer of favoring police reform. Given her department's record in Oxnard, it should be no surprise that the police force she inherited in Phoenix would gain the national spotlight as the most violent police department in the country, consistently killing, maiming,

