

“Nothing New Under The Sun”

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These famous words were first written by Kohelet, also known to the Western World as Ecclesiastes. The author, most say King Solomon, bemoaned the sameness of circumstances and the tendency for humankind to repeat its mistakes.

The “Defund Police” movement, which has even reached small towns and municipalities, is nothing new under the sun. When the troops returned from World War II, the emphasis in America was on rebuilding. The baby boomers were an enormously productive generation, who were more interested in their suburban homes than stealing from their neighbors. The few bad apples in that group did not ruin the barrel.

By the 1960s and ‘70s, the cities were in flames. Seeing tens of thousands of Americans brought home from Southeast Asia in body bags, while fighting for civil rights and equality at home, was just too much for the post-World War II generation. The Lyndon Johnson Great Society seemed to promote nothing more than war and government handouts intended to satisfy the needs of political interests in the big cities. The nation both emotionally and economically ground to a halt. Oddly enough, the man who promoted himself as The Savior was Richard Nixon, who had a “secret plan” to bring the United States out of Vietnam. Even the Republican party bought into the concept of economic pump priming to get the economy moving.

The political revolution that occurred in this country post-Vietnam and subsequent to inner city unrest, was to create more robust policing in order to make the cities habitable again. Like it or hate it, the strategy worked. Areas of New York City and the other great cities of the United States became gentrified and of mixed race and nationality. Rudy Giuliani became a popular Mayor based upon his enlarging the New York City police force and the precipitous drop in the crime rate that followed.

Sometimes we forget that the greatest recipient of a decrease in crime is the African-American community, which is usually the major victim of crime. Proper and good policing are not only necessary to an extraordinarily diverse society such as ours, but in fact represents the bedrock upon which a healthy democracy grows.

The current debate as to whether we should have more social workers or more police is a false choice. Police officers are not social workers, and social workers are not going to disarm dangerous criminals. There is a place for each one of these professions, and it should not be a matter of one versus another. Social workers cannot ply their trade in unsafe circumstances. As one involved with the legal system

for a very long time, there is no question that a well-coordinated response by social services and police is the way to go. Counting heads and saying that we should fire 10 police officers and hire 10 social workers is meaningless political tripe.

Excessive police force and misconduct exists. As a child, I remember my mother's best friend marrying a New York City cop. He was at our house one night for dinner, when the adults were talking about the riots in New York City. The policeman turned to my father and said, "We know how to deal with these n---ers. We just take them to the basement of the stationhouse and beat the s--t out of them." My father, conservative Republican that he was, kicked the man out of the house and never spoke to him again. My father's view was that law and order applied to the police as well as to the rioters.

Better trained police, more enlightened supervision, and coordination with other agencies is an absolute must if the citizens of our country are going to have trust in the police departments. In my profession, I have seen cops overreach, abuse their power, while the victims are faced with prosecution and cover-ups.

Unfortunately, most people in the "defund police" debate believe that a one-size solution fits all. Each city and municipality is different, has different populations and different needs. State, local and federal authorities need to do a better job in terms of communication and training. Eliminating police does not make law enforcement better or smarter. It only makes society more dangerous. Flooding neighborhoods with social workers creates neither safety nor stability.

Funding is also an issue. Most states and cities are not in a position to have the necessary police force and an intense environment of social services. Economic reality requires citizen participation and responsibility. To say that this is all on the shoulders of the cops or the social scientists is yet another pulp fiction inflicted upon the public. We all have a duty to talk to our kids and act like responsible citizens. You have to do nothing more than drive on a major, big-city freeway these days to see how crazy people behave in their cars with a reduced police presence. What are we teaching our kids when drivers give other people the finger, curse and scream, cut off one another, and get downright threatening?

The problem with our society is not going to be solved by who wins the debate over police versus social services. A healthy dose of individual accountability and personal responsibility is going to be necessary in order to tackle the most daunting problems in the country.

Although I am not much of a social media wonk, I watched the debate between Cardi B and a critic of hers. If the future of America's young people is to train them with the

lyrics of Cardi B, our future is dismal indeed. How many people reading this op-ed know who Cardi B is, what her lyrics say? How many of our children and grandchildren are listening to them?

It is time for us to work together to solve the nation's problems, rather than to buy into the polarization popularized by our political press.

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