POLICE BRUTALITY AGAINST WOMEN OF COLOR & TRANS PEOPLE OF COLOR:

A CRITICAL INTERSECTION OF GENDER VIOLENCE & STATE VIOLENCE

Learn more about how law enforcement violence is both raced *and* gendered and how to organize for safety in our communities.

FROM INCITE! WOMEN OF COLOR AGAINST VIOLENCE

WHY IS POLICE BRUTALITY AGAINST WOMEN OF COLOR & TRANS PEOPLE OF COLOR INVISIBLE?

In 2006, a police officer in Pennsylvania raped a woman after responding to a domestic violence call. The survivor later said "He had his police uniform on, his gun, his nightstick...I had no choice but to do what he asked me to do."

Also in 2006, a transgender woman reported to the New York City Prisoners' Rights Project that she was told to strip by a court lock-up receiving officer, and, upon refusing to do so before a male officer, was called a faggot and slapped on her buttocks while the officer said that it "didn't feel like no woman's ass".

Since the arrival of European colonists on this continent and the creation of slave patrols — the first state-sponsored law enforcement agencies in the U.S. — Native, Black, Latina, Asian, and Arab women and girls have been and continue to be harassed, profiled, strip searched, body cavity searched, raped, beaten, and murdered by agents of the state on a systematic basis. Also, as TransJustice asserts, "Gender policing, like race-based policing, has always been part of this nation's bloody history."*

However, law enforcement violence against women of color and trans people of color is largely invisible in discussions about police brutality. Similarly, discussions about "violence against women" rarely if ever meaningfully address violence perpetrated by law enforcement officers. **As a result, police brutality against women of color and trans people of color is often unacknowledged, leaving our voices largely unheard and our experiences unaddressed.**

Invisibility occurs in part because government data on racial profiling and the use of "excessive force" by police is not broken down by gender *and* race and does not include information about sexual violence perpetrated by law enforcement officers. This conceals the fact that women and trans people of color experience racial profiling and police brutality in many of the same ways as men of color, and that sexual violence perpetrated by police is a silent yet systemic problem. For instance: **Two studies of law enforcement license revocations in Missouri and Florida found that sexual misconduct was the basis for revocations in almost 25% of cases.**

* TransJustice is a New York City-based political group created by and for Trans and Gender Non-Conforming people of color.

INVISIBILITY OF POLICE BRUTALITY AGAINST WOMEN & TRANS PEOPLE OF COLOR

Also, police sexual violence is rarely reported.
Many survivors don't report their experiences because of

- shame
- fear that they will not be believed
- fear that they will be subject to exposure of their sexual orientation or gender identity
- commonplace threats of violent retaliation by police officers
- fear that they will be deported because they are undocumented immigrants
- fear that they will be charged with a crime if they lodged a complaint against the police because they were involved in sex work or the use of illegal drugs

Some survivors recount that when they attempted to report sexual abuse by law enforcement officers they were literally laughed off the phone or out of the precinct.

An African American lesbian reports being raped by a police officer who forced his way into her apartment at gunpoint and told her prior to assaulting her that he was "teaching her a lesson" because the world needed "one less dyke."

Police brutality against women of color and transgender people of color reveals a critical intersection of sexual and racial violence perpetrated by members of **ALL** sectors of law enforcement, including local and state police, immigration enforcement (such as ICE, Border Patrol, and Customs), Drug Enforcement Agents, the FBI, private security forces, and military forces.

These stories are NOT isolated incidents, but are examples of a **widespread and systemic problem** of sexual, gender, & racial violence perpetrated by law enforcement. They deserve to be heard. Centering the experiences of women of color and trans people of color will create pathways to strengthening all of our movements against police brutality, domestic and sexual violence, gender violence, poverty, incarceration, and militarization.

WHAT DOES POLICE BRUTALITY AGAINST WOMEN OF COLOR & TRANS PEOPLE OF COLOR LOOK LIKE?

Police brutality against women of color and trans people of color can include racial and gender profiling, excessive force, sexual harassment, rape, strip searches, and many other kinds of violence that are designed to humiliate and abuse people based on their gender, race, class, and sexuality.

RACIAL PROFILING:

Women of color and trans people of color are racially profiled by police in many of the same ways as men of color – during traffic stops and on the streets. The few racial profiling studies which analyzed the experiences of women of color separately from those of men of color concluded that "for both men and women there is an identical pattern of stops by race/ethnicity." For instance: **Black and Latina women make up over 80% of women arrested in New York City, a significantly greater proportion than their representation in the general population.**

Racial profiling in the context of traffic stops has been reported by Black women across the country, as well as by Native women in the Southwest, Latinas living in the borderlands, and, with increasing frequency since 9/11, South Asian, Arab and Muslim women, particularly those who wear hijab.

In 2006, New Orleans police officers stopped Jonie Pratt, a Black school teacher, for allegedly running a stop sign two blocks from her house. A witness saw the officers pull Pratt out of her car by her hair, throw her repeatedly against her car, twist her arms behind her, and spray mace in her face. Two more officers arrived on the scene and the three shoved Pratt to the ground and knelt on her back while one of the officers kicked her in the head. Pratt suffered a broken wrist, a black eye, and a haematoma on her forehead as a result of the incident. The witness said the officers refused to believe that Pratt lived in the house that is her home because it is located in a middle class area of the city.

Women of color are also racially profiled in gender-specific ways: as drug users and couriers, as sex workers, and as bad mothers. For instance: **In Chicago, African American women make up 52% of all prostitution related arrests, while only 16% of those arrested in connection with sex work are white women.**

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE:

Physical violence against women of color and trans people of color is informed by racist and sexist stereotypes. Officers often act based on perceptions of Black women as "animalistic" women possessing superhuman force, Latinas as "hot-tempered," Asian women as "devious," knife-wielding martial arts experts, and so on.

Cau Bich Tran, a Vietnamese mother of two, was shot to death by police responding to her call for help in San Jose in 2003. She had locked herself out of her bedroom and called 911 for help getting back in. When police arrived at her home, she was sitting in the kitchen holding a vegetable peeler she had been using to try to jimmy the door open. When she began explaining what had happened, using the vegetable peeler to point to the bedroom door, a police officer standing 6-7 feet away from her immediately shot the 4'11" 90 lb woman in the heart. She was dead within 3 minutes of police responding to her call for assistance.

LAW ENFORCEMENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE:

➜ **Strip searches, visual body cavity searches**, where police make women bend over or otherwise expose their genital area to officers, and **body cavity searches**, where police insert fingers or other objects inside a person's vagina or anus are forms of state-sanctioned sexual violence by police and immigration officers.

The American Friends Service Committee reports that Native women detained in a Maine jail were routinely subjected to visual body cavity searches, requiring women to bend over and expose their genital areas to officers, as a matter of policy while similarly situated white women were not, and that these searches were routinely accompanied by sexualized and racist verbal abuse. The Seventh Circuit court has described visual body cavity searches as "demeaning, dehumanizing, undignified, humiliating, terrifying, unpleasant, embarrassing, repulsive, signifying degradation and submission."

➜ **Sexual harassment and humiliation**: A 2002 report, *Driving While Female*, documented **over 400** cases of sexual harassment and abuse by law enforcement officers in the context of traffic stops across the U.S. in a **single year**. The authors of the report concluded "there is good reason to believe that these cases represent only the tip of the iceberg." Street sexual harassment of women, girls, and trans folks by police, especially in neighborhoods of color, is also a serious problem. Officers also regularly use forms of sexual humiliation, such as forced public strip searches and sexual insults, as a strategy to demean and intimidate.

➜ **Rape and sexual assault:** Police especially target women and trans people of color they think won't report the abuse because they won't be believed if they do, or are engaged in illegal activity, such as sex workers, people who use illegal drugs, homeless and poor women and trans people, and survivors of domestic violence.

➜ ➜ ➜ ➜ WHAT DOES POLICE BRUTALITY LOOK LIKE? RACIAL PROFILING...PHYSICAL VIOLENCE...SEXUAL VIOLENCE...

POLICE VIOLENCE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CALLS

In February of 2004, an LAPD officer was convicted of sexually battery of an undocumented Latina woman who called the police for help because a man was beating her in her home. When the officer responded to the 911 call, rather than protecting the woman from harm, he took her into a bedroom, sexually assaulted her, and then arrested her, falsely accusing her of a crime.

We have been taught to depend on police and prisons to address the serious problems of domestic and sexual violence in our communities. However, survivors of color often experience abuse from the very police officers who we call to end violence in our homes. If survivors of color have outstanding warrants, are undocumented immigrants, are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, or are simply perceived as "dangerous" or "unworthy" by police, they may be targeted for more violence by the police themselves. Further, survivors of domestic violence who are erroneously arrested under domestic violence mandatory arrest policies are predominantly women of color. **A study done by the Urban Justice Center in New York found that 66% of survivors arrested under mandatory arrest policies were Black and Latina women.**

It's important for communities of color to develop sustainable alternatives to address domestic and sexual violence in our communities. Community-based systems for safety, support, and accountability are key strategies to avoid potentially dangerous police interventions.

In 1999, Cherae Williams, a 39- year-old African American Bronx resident, called 911 because her boyfriend was beating her. The officers who responded refused to help her, take her complaint, or even get out of their car. Frustrated by their response, she asked for their names and badge numbers. The two white officers responded by handcuffing Ms. Williams and driving her to a deserted parking lot. When they arrived at the lot, the officers pulled Ms. Williams out of the patrol car by her hair, repeatedly shook her and struck her head against the car, and beat her so badly she suffered a broken nose, a broken spleen, and a broken jaw which had to be wired shut. Ms. Williams later testified "[the officers] beat me until I was bloody...They left me there dazed and with a warning. They told me if they saw me on the street, that they would kill me...I called the police to prevent a serious incident, and they brutalized me."

"QUALITY OF LIFE" POLICING

"Quality of life" policing (also known as "broken windows" or "zero tolerance" policing) targets women and trans people of color who are particularly marginalized, including street-based sex workers, homeless people, people with mental illness, and people with a drug addiction, or women and trans people of color who are profiled as such by police.

Women and trans people working in the sex trade particularly report rampant sexual abuse by law enforcement officers. For instance, **a 2002 Chicago-based study of women in the sex trade found that 30% of exotic dancers and 24% of street-based sex workers who had been raped identified a police officer as the rapist.**

In 2004, a Native transgender woman involved in the sex trade in L.A. told Amnesty International researchers that "every night I'm taken into an alley [by police] and given the choice between having sex or going to jail."

As public schools become increasingly militarized, school police are also charged with enforcing "zero tolerance" policies. As a result youth of color experience regular gender and race-based profiling in school.

In a 2005 incident caught on video, Jaisha Akins, a five-year old Black girl, was handcuffed and forcibly removed from her Florida school by police called by school officials because she was "acting out."

WAR ON DRUGS

From arbitrary stops, strip searches, and detentions based on perceptions of women of color as "drug mules" to police demanding sexual acts in exchange for leniency for drug arrests, it's clear that the "war on drugs" has increased police violence against women and trans people of color.

In 1997, Frankie Perkins, a Black mother of three daughters, aged four, six, and sixteen, was on her way home in Chicago one evening when she was stopped by police and choked to death by officers who believed — erroneously, it was later found — that she had swallowed drugs.

GENDER/SEX POLICING

Enforcement of gender boundaries and regulation of sexual conduct, such as policing sex work, are two cornerstones of police interactions with women of color and trans people of color.

PROFILING MOTHERS: Stereotypes of mothers of color as bad mothers contribute to police violence in the context of abuse and neglect investigations disproportionately focused on low-income women of color, forced removal of children by state agencies, and investigations and prosecutions of pregnant women on allegations of delivery of drugs to their fetuses.

HOMOPHOBIC/TRANSPHOBIC VIOLENCE: People of color perceived as not submitting to racialized expectations of gender and sex roles, especially lesbians and trans people, are routinely punished by police with harassment and often extreme violence.

➜ ➜ ➜ ➜ ➜ ➜ ➜ ➜ DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CALLS ➜ "QUALITY OF LIFE" POLICING ➜ WAR ON DRUGS ➜ GENDER/SEX POLICING

IMMIGRATION POLICING & MILITARIZATION

Law enforcement violence is not limited to brutality by state and local police. Systemic violence against women and trans people of color takes place at the hands of immigration officers, Border Patrol, Customs officers, private security forces, FBI and DEA agents, and in the context of both National Guard occupation of local neighborhoods (such as post-Katrina New Orleans), and war and occupation abroad. For example, rape is a routine and systematic tool of militarized policing at the U.S.-Mexico border in the name of "national security."

In 1991, a U.S. Border Patrol agent assaulted and raped a Latina minor waiting for a deportation hearing in Calexico. He told her, "I know what I'm doing. And I am capable of everything and if I want I can rape your mother." He then told her that he wanted to sell her to his friends.

Further, gendered military violence is rampant in U.S. occupied territories such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Native American reservations. In Iraq and other locations in which the U.S. wages war, there is systematic abuse and torture perpetrated by U.S. guards against women held in detention. Further, women of color enlist in the U.S. military at disproportionately high rates because of poverty, where **75% of all women are sexual harassed and at least 30% are sexually assaulted by other soldiers.**

An Iraqi woman in her 70s had been harnessed and ridden like a donkey by U.S. soldiers at Abu Ghraib after being arrested without charge in July 2003.

In 2006, Zhenxing Jiang, who was then a pregnant undocumented Chinese immigrant woman who owned a restaurant, reported to immigration authorities in Philadelphia for a routine appointment. Within minutes of arriving, she was put in a van and driven to JFK airport in New York for immediate deportation. After hours of waiting in the airport, Jiang asked the immigration officers to let her see a doctor because she was having stomach and back pains, but they ignored her requests and told her she was "not going to get out of this" and would have to have her babies in China. After someone called 911, an ambulance arrived and the immigration officers let Jiang go to a hospital. An ultrasound showed her twin fetuses were dead.

The lines between military occupation and domestic policing are increasingly blurred. For instance, local police departments of major U.S. cities (such as Seattle, Boston, New York, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C.) are trained in aggressive military philosophy, tactics and weaponry, and sometimes taught "counter-terrorism" tactics from the Israeli Army, which is known for its discriminatory policies and its brutality against Palestinian women and children.

In 1999, Redwood City police officers, collaborating with immigration officers, stormed apartments where families were sleeping and paraded them, barely dressed, in the hallway. Two women were forced to raise their blouses exposing their breasts to INS agents, police officers, and fellow family members.

Militarism and other forms of law enforcement violence against women of color and trans people of color are justified using myths about "national security," and "public safety." In fact, both militarism and "order maintenance" policing are tools to maintain U.S. government and corporate interests.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING!

WE CAN ORGANIZE TO STOP POLICE BRUTALITY AGAINST WOMEN OF COLOR, TRANS PEOPLE OF COLOR, AND OUR COMMUNITIES!

- ➜ **BUILD COALITIONS** between anti-police brutality, immigrant rights, LGBT, and anti-violence groups to prioritize police brutality against women of color and trans people of color
- ➜ **DOCUMENT** violence by police, immigration officers, customs, drug enforcement agents, and the military against women of color and trans people of color using interviews, video, and other forms of participatory action research
- ➜ **COLLECTIVELY RESIST** violence by law enforcement agents through base-building and direct action
- ➜ **ORGANIZE** to develop responses to violence in our homes and communities so that we do not have to rely on law enforcement

FIERCE, a NYC organization, organized a copwatch by and for queer youth of color in the West Village.
http://www.fiercenyc.org/what_we_do/campaigns.html#copwatch

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Creative Interventions in Oakland, CA, and CARA in Seattle, WA, are working with communities of color to develop non-police responses to domestic and sexual violence.

In 2002, Sista II Sista, a collective in New York City led by young women of color, created a documentary on police sexual harassment of young women of color in Bushwick, Brooklyn, and screened the documentary on the side of the precinct building.

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In 2001, thirty thousand protesters on the El Paso-Juarez border marched to bring attention to the rapes and murders of women on the U.S.-Mexico border.

INCITE!
WOMEN OF COLOR AGAINST VIOLENCE

INCITE! is a national organization of women of color organizing across the country to stop police violence against women of color, trans people of color, and our communities, and to build safe and sustainable communities.

Please contact us if you'd like to document your story, receive a toolkit on police brutality against women of color and trans people of color, or find out how to get more involved in this work!

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STOP POLICE BRUTALITY

AGAINST WOMEN OF COLOR & TRANS PEOPLE OF COLOR!

POLICE BRUTALITY INCLUDES:

→ RACIAL PROFILING → SEXUAL VIOLENCE & SEXUAL HARASSMENT
→ "QUALITY OF LIFE" & "ZERO TOLERANCE" POLICING → PHYSICAL ABUSE
→ GENDER/SEX POLICING → WAR ON DRUGS → IMMIGRATION RAIDS → BORDER PATROL
→ ATTACKING & ARRESTING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS → STRIP & CAVITY SEARCHES
→ POLICING MOTHERHOOD → MILITARIZATION OF COMMUNITIES OF COLOR IN THE U.S. & ABROAD

LET'S ORGANIZE SAFE & SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES!

Artwork by the amazing Cristy Road, croadcore.org