

Discussion group to read The End of Policing

[The End of Policing \(2017\)](#), by Alex Vitale

How the police endanger us and why we need to find an alternative

Summary (from the Verso Books website)

Recent years have seen an explosion of protest against police brutality and repression—most dramatically in Ferguson, Missouri, where longheld grievances erupted in violent demonstrations following the police killing of Michael Brown. Among activists, journalists, and politicians, the conversation about how to respond and improve policing has focused on accountability, diversity, training, and community relations. Unfortunately, these reforms will not produce results, either alone or in combination. The core of the problem must be addressed: the nature of modern policing itself. “Broken windows” practices, the militarization of law enforcement, and the dramatic expansion of the police’s role over the last forty years have created a mandate for officers that must be rolled back.

This book attempts to spark public discussion by revealing the tainted origins of modern policing as a tool of social control. It shows how the expansion of police authority is inconsistent with community empowerment, social justice—even public safety. Drawing on groundbreaking research from across the world, and covering virtually every area in the increasingly broad range of police work, Alex Vitale demonstrates how law enforcement has come to exacerbate the very problems it is supposed to solve.

In contrast, there are places where the robust implementation of policing alternatives—such as legalization, restorative justice, and harm reduction—has led to reductions in crime, spending, and injustice. The best solution to bad policing may be an end to policing.

Schedule:

Suggested discussion questions will be posted the day before our group meets! If you have a question you’d like to submit, do so here: <https://forms.gle/9bqtAT4Kx7yurFmFA>

Date	Reading
Friday June 19, 3-4:30pm	Ch 1 - The Limits of Police Reform Ch 2 - The Police Are Not Here to Protect You
Friday June 26, 3-4:30 pm	Ch 3 - The School-to-Prison Pipeline Ch 4 - “We Called for Help, and They Killed My Son”
Friday July 3, 3-4:30 pm	Ch 5 - Criminalizing Homelessness Ch 6 - The Failures of Policing Sex Work

Friday July 10	Ch 7 - The War on Drugs Ch 8 - Gang Suppression
Friday July 17	Ch 9 - Border Policing Ch 10 - Political Policing

Things to ponder before, during, and after reading:

It is inevitable when reading about systems that we think about how they affect our own lives. Let's try to approach these reflections with openness. Suggestions for things to reflect on as you read:

- When you were growing up, how did you feel about the police? What did you learn about their roles in society? Where did those ideas come from? Do you still believe these notions? Why / why not?
- How has policing affected your life, personally? How has privilege or lack thereof shaped this experience?
- Have you ever felt the need to "call the cops" ? Why or why not? If you did call, were there any alternatives? Are there situations where police are the only option? Why or why not?
- For each chapter, what, if anything, new information surprised you? Why?

About this group:

This discussion group is a safe space for people to learn and ask questions. You don't have to identify with any particular political group to participate. We operate under the idea that there are no stupid questions.

This group is hosted by the Socialists of Caltech.

Related reading:

NPR interview with Alex Vitale

<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2020/06/03/457251670/how-much-do-we-need-the-police>

Michael Moore interview with Alex Vitale

<https://rumble.media/episode/episode-90-no-more-police-state-featuring-alex-s-vitale/>

["Defunding, disarming, defeating and abolishing the police"](#)

["The End of Political Policing: why riots, the far-Right and shoplifting shouldn't be policed"](#)

"Ruth Wilson Gilmore Makes The Case For Abolition":

<https://theintercept.com/2020/06/10/ruth-wilson-gilmore-makes-the-case-for-abolition/>

Discussion Questions:

Week 1 (Chapters 1 and 2):

- Police reform is a hot topic of conversation these days. What sort of reforms do you hear about the most? What does Vitale say about their effectiveness?
- Have you ever gone through an implicit bias training? What was your experience like?
- How does Vitale define "community policing"? What is the idea behind it and how is that different from how it plays out in our society?
- Police are often portrayed in popular culture in a positive light, as Vitale notes in chapter 1. What are some examples of this in the media that you consume? Can you think of any counter-examples? How do you think this shaped your view of the police growing up?
- What are some of the reasons it is so hard to prosecute police for misconduct?

Other recommended readings:

<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3769-the-end-of-political-policing-why-riots-the-far-right-and-shoplifting-shouldn-t-be-policed>

<https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674286078>