

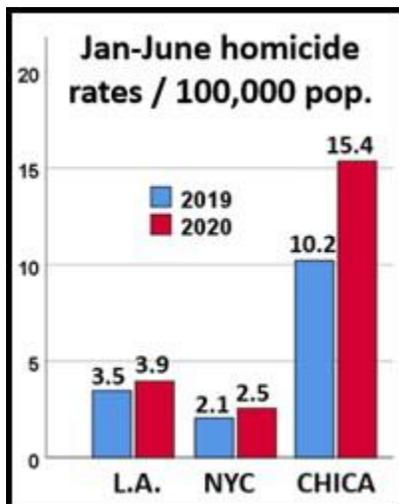
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SHOULD POLICE TREAT THE *WHOLE* PATIENT?

*Officers deal with the symptoms of social decay.
Can they go further? Should they?*



For *Police Issues* by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. “A boy walks to a corner store and is shot in the chest.” One can’t conceive of a more [devastating headline](#). Shot dead in an alley, Otis Williams was only fourteen. Many victims of America’s urban violence are kids. They’re also disproportionately Black and, just like Otis, reside in poor areas long beset by crime and violence.



Otis lived with his mother in Florence, a South Los Angeles neighborhood [whose troubles we’ve repeatedly written about](#). When Los Angeles brags about its crime rate it doesn’t mention Florence. As we mentioned in “[Repeat After Us](#),” aggregate statistics obscure disparities in violence within cities, such as Los Angeles and New York City, that enjoy large pockets of wealth and seem prosperous and safe “overall.” But the recent upswing in violence has drawn notice to both. [Los Angeles’ 157 murders](#) through July 18 mark a 13.8 percent increase over the 138 homicides it recorded during the equivalent period last year. Ditto New York City, [whose count thru July 19](#), 212, reflects a 24 percent year-to-date jump. So there’s a lot less to brag about.

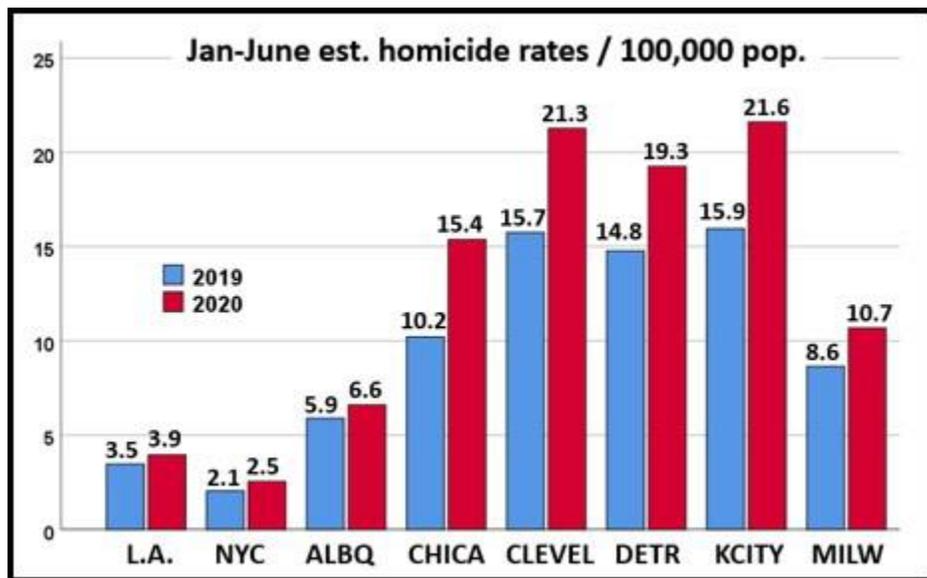
While regrettable, L.A.’s and New York City’s numbers hardly compare to what’s befallen chronically violent places such as Chicago. [As of July 19](#) the Windy City

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recorded an appalling 414 homicides. That's *fifty percent* more than the relatively "measly" 275 murders it endured during the equivalent period last year. To compare, in 2019 New York City had about *twice* Chicago's population but suffered about *half* as many homicides. Chicago also had thirty percent more murders than L.A., a city nearly half again its size in population.

We've become so inured to the mayhem that it might be useful to look beyond the U.S. In 2019 (the full year) 650 persons were murdered in the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.) Its combined population of about 66,650,000 produced a homicide rate of 0.97 per/100,000, less than half New York City's and a mere sliver of Chicago's (look at the below graph. The UK's bar would hardly show.) If that's not shocking enough, "A Lost Cause" compared U.S. and U.K. police officer deaths during 2000-2015. While the U.S. has about *five* times the U.K.'s population, *forty times* as many U.S. law enforcement officers were feloniously killed. (Not-so-incidentally, the disproportion may have something to do with the means. In the U.K., knives and such were used in fourteen of the 21 officer murders, while in the U.S., guns figured in all but seventy of the 831 killings.)

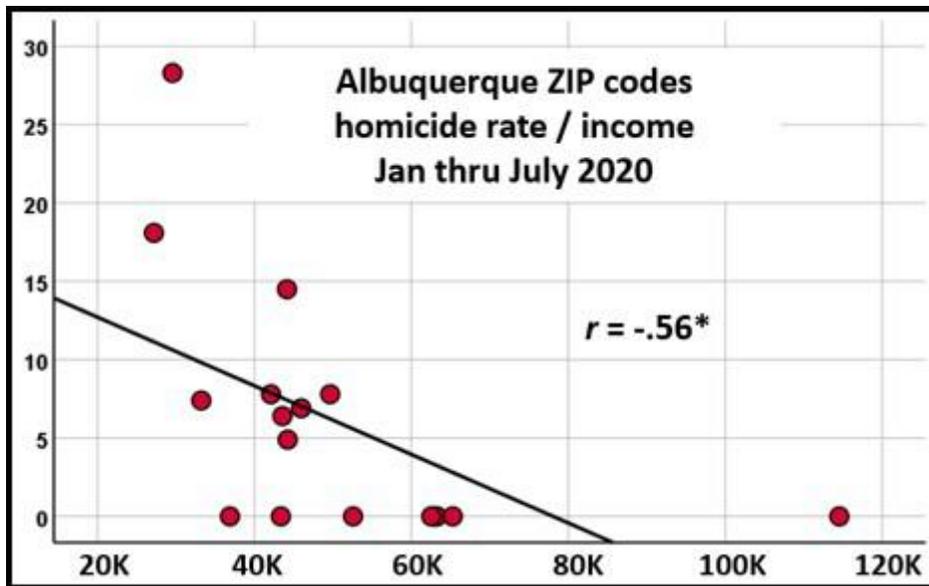
A new Federal initiative, "Operation Legend," intends to deal with the slaughter. Named after LeGend Taliferro, a four-year old Kansas City boy who was shot and killed several weeks ago, the program commits Federal funds and law enforcement



personnel from the FBI, Marshals Service, DEA and ATF to help Chicago Albuquerque, Cleveland, Detroit, Kansas City (Mo.) and Milwaukee battle gun and drug violence. This graph, which compares the homicide rates of "Operation Legend" cities during equivalent periods in 2019 and 2020, confirms that each could use some quality help. (L.A. and NYC are shown for comparison. Gathering the data was a bit tricky, but our numbers should be pretty accurate.)

Who outside Albuquerque would have thought that it had a *murder* problem? Its mayor, the Hon. Tim Keller, [bemoaned his city's descent](#) into crime and asked for State help last year. And with 37 homicides so far in 2020 (there were 33 during this period in 2019) the not-so-placid burg of 560,513 has been backsliding. Ditto Milwaukee, which suffered 63 murders through June compared with 51 in 2019. As for the others, their numbers are even more appalling. Cleveland had 60 killings thru July 7, 2019; this year the toll was 89. Detroit recorded 129 murders through June 18 compared with 99 last year. Kansas City went from 79 murders during the first half of 2019 to 107 so far this year.

We mentioned that aggregate statistics can conceal disparities within communities. That's why posts in our "[Neighborhoods](#)" special section often rely on *neighborhood*



crime rates. We recently placed that magnifying glass on [Portland and Minneapolis](#). As for Operation Legend cities, "[Mission: Impossible?](#)" looked within Chicago. So this time we picked on...Albuquerque! [KOB Channel 4's homicide map](#) showed 37 murders in 2020 thru July

30. They took place in nine of the city's seventeen regular Zip codes. Their population numbers and income figures were collected from [United States Zip Codes.org](#). As expected, the economics of the murder v. no-murder ZIP's proved starkly different. Mean MHI (median household income) for the nine ZIP's with at least one murder (actual range was two to seven) was \$39,969. Mean MHI for the eight murder-free ZIP's was \$62,668. Those means are clearly different and, statistically speaking, significantly so ($p=.015$). And check out that graph ("scattergram"). Note how the Zip codes (red dots) distribute along the income and murder rate/100,000 axes. Bottom line: more money: less murder! (That asterisk on the r correlation statistic - it maxes out at 1.0 - means that the association between income and homicide rate is statistically significant. It's also "negative," meaning that as one goes up the other goes down.)

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OK, point made. We've confirmed what social scientists have known for decades: poverty and crime go together like...well, you know. So back to "Operation Legend." Feds have sponsored joint task forces for decades. [According to DOJ](#), agents will apply Federal laws and resources to help local police address "offenses involving firearms and violent drug trafficking organizations." It's intended to assure that serious criminals who might otherwise escape justice get their day in court. Your blogger participated in similar task forces during his Federal career and his presence generated no controversy. But in this hyper-partisan era, with the [brouhaha in Portland](#) framing the moment, it was perhaps inevitable that "Legend" would be disparaged [as yet another effort](#) to distract attention from the hardships that have long beset America's citizens of color. Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, who invited the Feds in, found it necessary to clarify that the outsiders wouldn't be wearing fatigues or chase after rock-throwers:

These are not troops. Troops are people who come from the military. That's not what's coming to Chicago. I've drawn a very firm line against that.

Mayor Lightfoot isn't simply waiting for "Legend." Chicago's explosive murder rate has led its new police chief, David Brown, to form "[Community Safety Teams](#)." Modeled on the well-known "[Hot Spots](#)" approach, their officers will focus on the neighborhoods beset by violence, mostly in the city's South and West. Agencies throughout the U.S. have used hot-spots, and [often with supposedly good results](#). A recent academic finding that hot spots "[is an effective crime prevention strategy](#)" has even led NIJ to bestow [its seal of approval](#). But sending in the cops can be tricky. "[A Recipe for Disaster](#)" and other posts in our "[Stop-and-frisk](#)" special section have cautioned that the bucketfuls of stops produced by get-tough campaigns inevitably generate "false positives," and as these accumulate they can severely irritate the inhabitants of neighborhoods police are ostensibly trying to serve. Carelessness, pressures to produce "numbers" and out-and-out lying by cops striving to look good [made things even worse](#). Blow-back from residents and civil libertarians had led Chicago, New York City and Los Angeles to shut down hot-spots programs. Now that unbearable violence is back, each city has dug out that bad old approach, renamed it ("Operation Legend") and dressed it up in new finery. And so the cycle begins anew.

Alas, even the most skillfully applied enforcement strategies can't remedy the root causes of the crime and disorder that bedevil low-income neighborhoods. Getting there would require a skillful and exceedingly well-funded application of "[social disorganization](#)" theory. But there seems to be little interest in either Red or Blue political quarters for that "[Marshall Plan](#)" we've hollered about. Not that there haven't been some promising moves. "[Place Matters](#)" mentioned [Birmingham's \(Ala.\) comprehensive program](#). One of its components, the "[Promise Initiative](#)," provides

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apprenticeships to high-school juniors and seniors and offers tuition help to those bound for college.

So wait a minute. Is there a role for police here, as well? Can cops help impoverished societies transform? LAPD says yes! Its decade-old “[Community Safety Partnership](#)” program (CSP) has placed teams of mostly minority officers in seven of the city’s low-income housing projects. CSP officers work in uniform but don’t typically conduct criminal investigations or make arrests. They interact with residents, participate in group activities, enable the “safe passage” of youths to and from school, and provide one-on-one counseling and referrals. [An external evaluation](#) by a UCLA researcher, CSP locations enjoy less crime. As one might expect, the constant presence of police “disrupts” gangs and enhances the ability of residents “to gather and enjoy public spaces, facilities, and programs.” However, another [favorable but less glowing review](#) cautioned that despite CSP, “residents generally do not trust the police and expressed concerns about mistreatment, including a lack of anonymity when reporting crimes.”

Seizing the moment, LAPD just transformed CSP into its own Bureau under the leadership of a Deputy Chief. But not everyone’s happy. Indeed, the notion that police should increase their sphere of influence [has badly divided the Blues](#). Connie Rice, the well-known Black civil-rights lawyer who helped found CSP, [praised its expansion](#): “warrior enforcement culture needs to be replaced with this kind of guardian-style approach that rewards problem-solving engagement between officers and the communities they protect.” Her pointedly guarded language didn’t do the trick. No sale, said Paula Minor of “Black Lives Matter L.A.”: “This [CSP] is not a program that needs to be operated by armed, sworn police officers.” Her views were seconded by Hamid Khan. A well-regarded activist who leads the “[Stop LAPD Spying Coalition](#),” he argued that [funds should be redirected](#) from the police to community programs.

It’s already happened. On July 1st. the L.A. City Council [stripped \\$150 million](#) from LAPD’s billion-plus budget, sharply cutting overtime and ultimately reducing officer staffing by 231 positions. These funds are now destined for minority communities; one proposed use is a youth summer jobs program. LAPD managers are caught square in the horns of a dilemma. Violence is up, and officers must continue to face the task of cleaning up the “symptoms” of the social disorganization that characterizes low-income neighborhoods. If attempts such as CSP to treat “the whole patient” are to expand, cops must come from somewhere. So far, CSP’s been funded by outside donors. Will that continue? And if so, would those who feel the cure (policing) is worse than the disease (violent crime) tolerate an *increased* police presence?

That ending’s still being written.