

An Abolitionist Critique of Violence

Allegra McLeod†

[W]here life is precious, life *is* precious.

—Ruth Wilson Gilmore¹

The violence experienced by young people of color in the city is multidimensional—both interpersonal and structural. So many of the young have to swallow their rage as they are surveilled in stores and on the streets, as they are targeted by cops for endless stops and frisks, as they are denied jobs, as their schools are closed, and as they are locked in cages by the thousands. For some, the violations and the deprivation turn outward. The instrumental use of violence by some young people becomes a rational adaptive strategy in response to racial and economic oppression. For some of the young people I've worked with, the specter of death is a constant companion. A young man who has been behind bars for most of his formative years has told me on more than one occasion that he was always certain his life only held two viable possibilities: “die in the streets or die in prison.”

—Mariame Kaba²

† Professor, Georgetown University Law Center. I wish to thank Sherally Munshi, Erum Kidwai, Saba Rewald, and participants at the University of Chicago Law School's Symposium on violence for their engagement with this project. I am also most grateful to the abolitionist organizers, writers, and thinkers whose work to confront violence expands our collective imagination and contributes much to the realization of a more peaceful and just world.

¹ *The Case for Prison Abolition: Ruth Wilson Gilmore on COVID-19, Racial Capitalism, & Decarceration*, DEMOCRACY NOW (May 5, 2020), <https://perma.cc/9GEG-LEPS>.

² Mariame Kaba, *To Live and Die in “Chiraq”*, in *THE END OF CHIRAQ: A LITERARY MIXTAPE 9, 10* (Javon Johnson & Kevin Coval eds., 2018).

INTRODUCTION

In the midst of deepening inequality in recent years, gun violence has surged in impoverished neighborhoods.³ As police killings continued apace, with more than one thousand people in the United States shot to death by police in 2020, both state and interpersonal violence have devastated families and communities across the country.⁴ In popular and legal discourse, gun violence—or urban violence, as it is sometimes euphemistically termed—is most often conceptualized exclusively in terms of intentional attacks that result in harm. Less often, popular accounts focus on the pathologies of shooters or the need to better regulate guns. But these popular conceptions of violence are too narrow in that they do not recognize the larger context that precipitates and sustains violence concentrated on particular racialized bodies in places subjected to economic disinvestment, extraction, and militarized intervention.⁵ Meanwhile, a myopic, decontextualized focus on bodies and bullets without attention to

³ See Neil MacFarquhar, *Murders Spiked in 2020 in Cities Across the United States*, N.Y. TIMES (Sept. 27, 2021), <https://perma.cc/PTF4-M2MB>; Aaron Chalfin & John MacDonald, *We Don't Know Why Violent Crime Is Up. But We Know There's More than One Cause*, WASH. POST (July 9, 2021), <https://perma.cc/E74L-FHET> (“In America’s largest cities and, in particular, the most economically disadvantaged neighborhoods within those cities, the rise in violence has been the most pronounced.”).

⁴ See *2020 Police Violence Report*, MAPPING POLICE VIOLENCE, <https://perma.cc/4DQZ-SZTK> (showing that in 2020, 1,126 people were killed by police in the United States, with 96% killed by police shootings); see also Julia P. Schleimer, Christopher D. McCort, Aaron B. Shev, Veronica A. Pear, Elizabeth Tomsich, Alaina De Biasi, Shani Buggs, Hannah S. Laqueur & Garen J. Wintemute, *Firearm Purchasing and Firearm Violence During the Coronavirus Pandemic in the United States: A Cross-Sectional Study*, INJ. EPIDEMIOLOGY (July 5, 2021), <https://perma.cc/727S-D5A4> (discussing the rise in interpersonal firearm violence during the coronavirus pandemic: “The pandemic has also exacerbated factors that contribute to interpersonal violence—including financial stress, trauma, and strains on community resources—particularly among Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color, which already experience a disproportionate burden of interpersonal firearm violence.” (first citing Thomas D. Sequist, *The Disproportionate Impact of COVID-19 on Communities of Color*, NEJM CATALYST (July 6, 2020), <https://perma.cc/FPG6-HD93>; and then citing Marissa A. Boeck, Bethany Strong & Andre Campbell, *Disparities in Firearm Injury: Consequences of Structural Violence*, 6 CURRENT TRAUMA REPS. 10 (2020)).

⁵ See, e.g., Bill Hutchinson, *At Least 43 People Shot, 6 Fatally, in Violent Chicago Weekend*, ABC NEWS (Sept. 19, 2021), <https://perma.cc/CF7C-FST6>; Charlie De Mar, *With Gun Violence at Crisis Level in Chicago, Victims Hope Crackdown on Straw Purchases and Gun Trafficking Has an Impact*, CBS CHI. (Sept. 6, 2021), <https://chicago.cbslocal.com/2021/09/06/chicago-gun-violence-trafficking-straw-purchase-crackdown>; cf. Julia Sudbury, *A World Without Prisons: Resisting Militarism, Globalized Punishment, and Empire*, 31 SOC. JUST. 9, 10 (2004) (“[W]e need to be wary of the limitations of single-issue politics that seek to separate racist repression at home from militarism abroad, or gender violence in the family from state violence against whole communities.”).

the broader landscape of violence produces inadequate, unjust approaches in response.⁶ An abolitionist critique of violence, by contrast, offers a more accurate and expansive account of the material realities of violence—its causes and consequences—and enables more meaningful ways of reducing violence.

Calls for abolition animate a vital constellation of social movements in the United States and around the world.⁷ Movement participants have worked to end the violence of imprisonment and policing and, importantly, to create more equitable, just, and peaceful forms of collective existence through mutual aid and care; violence prevention; restorative and transformative justice regimes; and cooperative, nonextractive, and solidaristic economic practices.⁸ Through this work, participants in contemporary abolitionist movements have offered a deep reconceptualization of violence and expansive ideas about how to address violence.⁹

An abolitionist critique of violence begins from the premise that, in order to stop violence, we must expand our understanding of violence beyond individualized disorder and the immediate scene of interpersonal harm. Consequently, an abolitionist critique of violence focuses on the racialized political, economic, militarist, and environmental roots and manifestations of violence.

⁶ Cf. Hutchinson, *supra* note 5 (“So far, nothing seems to have curbed gun violence.”).

⁷ See, e.g., *About*, CRITICAL RESISTANCE, <https://perma.cc/5F7D-8KFS> (“Critical Resistance seeks to build an international movement to end the Prison Industrial Complex by challenging the belief that caging and controlling people makes us safe. We believe that basic necessities such as food, shelter, and freedom are what really make our communities secure.”).

⁸ See, e.g., ANGELA Y. DAVIS, ARE PRISONS OBSOLETE? 105–15 (2003) [hereinafter ARE PRISONS OBSOLETE?]; Mariame Kaba with Kelly Hayes, *A Jailbreak of the Imagination: Seeing Prisons for What They Are and Demanding Transformation*, in WE DO THIS ’TIL WE FREE US: ABOLITIONIST ORGANIZING AND TRANSFORMING JUSTICE 18, 20 (Tamara K. Nopper ed., 2021). See generally ANGELA Y. DAVIS, FREEDOM IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE: FERGUSON, PALESTINE, AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF A MOVEMENT (Frank Barat ed., 2016) [hereinafter FREEDOM IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE]; RUTH WILSON GILMORE, CHANGE EVERYTHING: RACIAL CAPITALISM AND THE CASE FOR ABOLITION (Naomi Murakawa ed., forthcoming 2022); JESSICA GORDON NEMBARD, COLLECTIVE COURAGE: A HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN COOPERATIVE THOUGHT AND PRACTICE 11–15, 213–37 (2014) (highlighting the benefits of cooperative business ownership and democratic economic participation for marginalized communities); *Critical Resistance: Beyond the Prison Industrial Complex 1998 Conference*, CRITICAL RESISTANCE (2018), <https://perma.cc/7LBZ-BGX6>.

⁹ See, e.g., ARE PRISONS OBSOLETE?, *supra* note 8, at 105–15 (examining the history and functions of prison and arguing for “decarceration” in which a “continuum of alternatives to imprisonment” replace the existing carceral system); Mariame Kaba, *So You’re Thinking About Becoming an Abolitionist*, in WE DO THIS ’TIL WE FREE US, *supra* note 8, at 2. See generally FREEDOM IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE, *supra* note 8; GILMORE, *supra* note 8.

An abolitionist critique of gun violence necessarily recognizes the relation of both state and interpersonal violence to the weapons industry, which produces millions of firearms each year.¹⁰ Weapons companies, which are overwhelmingly supported by military spending, also flood consumer markets with guns.¹¹ Many weapons from the vast military stockpiles of munitions in the United States go missing, surfacing periodically in violent street crimes.¹² Meanwhile—as thousands have been killed in U.S.-subsidized military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, and elsewhere—defense contractors’ profits have soared, and the U.S. military has contributed more than any other single entity to greenhouse gas emissions¹³ and the consequent climate crisis. The effects of ecological catastrophe disproportionately affect the economically disenfranchised communities most devastated by gun violence.¹⁴ In turn, the impact of climate change in dispossessed neighborhoods is correlated with increased levels of interpersonal violence in those same neighborhoods.¹⁵ More generally, the proliferation of weapons and militarized violence fosters a widespread public inurement to violence, as extreme and pervasive cruelty all too often passes unaddressed.

Abolitionist organizers in Chicago and elsewhere underscore these connections between interpersonal violence, militarism, environmental harm, and social abandonment, and they highlight how the harms of interpersonal violence relate to the threats posed by environmental toxicity, policing, and other causes of

¹⁰ See BUREAU OF ALCOHOL, TOBACCO & FIREARMS, DEPT OF JUST., FIREARMS COMMERCE IN THE UNITED STATES: ANNUAL STATISTICAL UPDATE 2021, at 1–2 (2021), <https://perma.cc/MM4K-47R4>.

¹¹ See Louis Uchitelle, *The U.S. Still Leans on the Military-Industrial Complex*, N.Y. TIMES (Sept. 22, 2017), <https://perma.cc/GAR4-B2R4>; Matt Valentine, *How Military Guns Make the Civilian Market*, THE ATLANTIC (July 28, 2014), <https://perma.cc/SW8U-8B8L>.

¹² See *infra* Part II.C.

¹³ See NETA C. CRAWFORD, WATSON INST. FOR INT’L & PUB. AFFS., PENTAGON FUEL USE, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND THE COSTS OF WAR 2 (2019), <https://perma.cc/BK5D-Y2LH> (“[T]he DOD is the world’s largest institutional user of petroleum and correspondingly, the single largest institutional producer of greenhouse gases (GHG) in the world.”).

¹⁴ See RACHEL MORELLO-FROSCH, MANUEL PASTOR, JAMES SADD & SETH B. SHONKOFF, THE CLIMATE GAP: INEQUALITIES IN HOW CLIMATE CHANGE HURTS AMERICANS & HOW TO CLOSE THE GAP 5 (2009), <https://perma.cc/M3EV-MQQG> (examining “the disproportionate and unequal impact the climate crisis has on people of color and the poor”); Malini Ranganathan & Eve Bratman, *From Urban Resilience to Abolitionist Climate Justice in Washington, DC*, 53 ANTIPODE 115, 115 (2021) (noting “the unequal raced and classed geographies of extreme weather events”).

¹⁵ See Paul M. Reeping & David Hemenway, *The Association Between Weather and the Number of Daily Shootings in Chicago (2012–2016)*, INJ. EPIDEMIOLOGY (June 22, 2020), <https://perma.cc/Q9LT-9T69>.

premature death imposed on people in disenfranchised neighborhoods. For instance, in the McKinley Park community on Chicago's Southwest Side, which has been affected by both aggressive policing and interpersonal gun violence, residents are seeking to shut down an asphalt plant, MAT Asphalt.¹⁶ The plant has spewed pollution into the surrounding area for several years, harming the health and well-being of neighborhood residents and exacerbating stress and suffering.¹⁷ As part of this campaign, protesters have sought to increase community control—including over police—and to reduce funding for criminal law enforcement while expanding resources for environmental remediation and other local projects on the South side of the city.¹⁸ “We want MAT out of McKinley Park and for the city to reestablish the Department of the Environment, but the City says there’s no money,” one organizer explained. “That’s about \$1.8 billion a year to fund CPD, but there’s no money to fund the Department of the Environment, fund our neglected schools, fund the west and southwest side communities, reopen mental health clinics.”¹⁹ Another organizer added: “Safety does not mean more police in our communities. Safety means a community full of resources and opportunity. . . . Safety means having basic needs met like health security, food security, job security, universal healthcare. Remember issues like poverty and violence are created.”²⁰ Abolitionist organizers thus call for a redirection of military spending and resources allocated to militarized criminal law enforcement to public initiatives that promote human flourishing in order to reduce violence and equitably and sustainably improve our collective quality of life.²¹

¹⁶ See Nausheen Husain, *Many Industries Call the Southwest Side Home. McKinley Park — Where a Controversial Asphalt Plant Built Four Years Ago Has Sparked Complaints About Noxious Odors — Is Pushing Back.*, CHI. TRIB. (May 28, 2021), <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/environment/ct-environmental-justice-mckinley-park-asphalt-plant-20210528-bc352axgnzbqtlxf4yw6tj64nu-story.html>.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ See Alex Arriaga, *Chicago's Climate Apartheid*, S. SIDE WKLY. (Aug. 19, 2020), <https://perma.cc/2VDF-BS65>.

¹⁹ Aaron Cynic, *Activists March Through McKinley Park to Demand Environmental Justice*, THIRD COAST REV. (Aug. 17, 2020), <https://perma.cc/4SXM-DG84>.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ See, e.g., THE RED NATION, *THE RED DEAL: INDIGENOUS ACTION TO SAVE OUR EARTH* 11–12 (2020), <https://perma.cc/KDA4-XAD9>:

Where will we get the resources to achieve these monumental tasks? We call for a divestment away from police, military, prisons, and fossil fuels (four of the biggest drains on public spending) and reinvestment in common humanity for everyone, including health, dignity, and wellbeing, as well as the restoration of Indigenous lands, waters, airs, and nations.

This Essay engages the critical reflections, writing, organizing, and imaginative visions of contemporary abolitionists so as to offer a fuller account of the causes of violence and ideas that promise worthwhile change. Part I considers violence with particular attention to the city of Chicago, which has long been vexed by inequality and violence as well as by a misguided reaction to violence organized overwhelmingly around militarized criminal law enforcement. At the same time, Chicago has contributed much to abolitionist movements' efforts to realize more just alternatives. Part II examines in greater depth the sources of violence—in longstanding, historically entrenched practices that have created and maintained racialized poverty, economic inequality, and gun violence; in contemporary legal and economic arrangements from urban planning to tax policy; in militarism and its widespread deadly consequences; and in a closely related disregard for the earth, our natural environment, and the well-being of all those who inhabit our planet. Finally, Part III begins to explore the creative work of contemporary abolitionists confronting violence by building solidaristic and equitable economic alternatives, proliferating peaceful and constructive approaches to violence that do not rely on militarized criminal law enforcement, reallocating resources from militarism toward human flourishing, and commencing a just transition to more environmentally sustainable forms of organizing human life on earth.

I. VIOLENCE IN CONTEXT

Entrenched racialized inequality and poverty predict premature death caused by interpersonal violence.²² In Chicago, homicides occur overwhelmingly in the city's most impoverished communities, and criminalized acts of violence, like shootings,

²² See RUTH WILSON GILMORE, *GOLDEN GULAG: PRISONS, SURPLUS, CRISIS, AND OPPOSITION IN GLOBALIZING CALIFORNIA* 28 (2007) ("Racism, specifically, is the state-sanctioned or extra-legal production and exploitation of group differentiated vulnerability to premature death."); RICHARD G. WILKINSON, *UNHEALTHY SOCIETIES: THE AFFLICTIONS OF INEQUALITY* (1996) (demonstrating that unequal societies are characterized by increased rates of premature death); William Alex Pridemore, *A Methodological Addition to the Cross-national Empirical Literature on Social Structure and Homicide: A First Test of the Poverty-Homicide Thesis*, 46 *CRIMINOLOGY* 133, 133 (2008) (finding "a positive and significant association between a nation's level of poverty and its homicide rate"); Lisa Stolzenberg, David Eitle & Stewart J. D'Alessio, *Race, Economic Inequality, and Violent Crime*, 34 *J. CRIM. JUST.* 303, 311 (2006) ("[C]ontrolling for racial segregation, city disadvantage, and a variety of other factors, interracial economic inequality had a strong positive effect on the overall violent crime rate, and more specifically, on the Black-on-Black crime rate.").

are generally most strongly associated with concentrated poverty and inequality.²³ These communities are also disproportionately subject to environmental pollution and toxicity as well as lack of access to healthcare, quality housing, quality education, food, and other basic necessities.

The idea—popular among some criminologists—that more policing will reduce gun violence in cities assumes implicitly that underlying conditions of resource deprivation and entrenched racialized inequality are not subject to fundamental change, meaning that expanding criminal law enforcement is the most plausible and readily available response to violence.²⁴ Yet the most crucial factors to reduce violence are to eliminate entrenched racialized poverty and inequality and to dismantle the economic, political, military, surveillance, and carceral systems (among others) that hold existing inequality and violence in place.

But the primary response to interpersonal violence, particularly gun violence, has consistently been militarized criminal law enforcement, which diverts public resources from the most desperately impacted communities to the coffers of the criminal legal system while doing little if anything to stop the associated suffering. As Chicago spent hundreds of millions of dollars on militarized policing, former mayor Rahm Emanuel closed fifty schools in 2013 on the South and West Sides of the city, extending a pattern that began decades earlier.²⁵ In the epigraph to this Essay, Mariame Kaba—an abolitionist organizer, writer, and thinker who lived and worked in Chicago for many years—explains that violence in Chicago is produced and exacerbated by a lack of access to quality education and remunerative employment and by degrading and routine police interactions with young people in resource-deprived communities, all of which breed rage and

²³ See Earl Fredrick III, *Death, Violence, Health, and Poverty in Chicago*, 19 HARV. PUB. HEALTH REV. 1, 1 (2018) (“Gun violence in Chicago is a public health emergency largely driven by poverty and inequity.”).

²⁴ See, e.g., Jonathan Klick & John M. MacDonald, *Hire More Cops*, CITY J. (Aug. 4, 2020), <https://perma.cc/BC2B-4V4H>.

²⁵ See Carlos Ballesteros, *Chicago Has Nearly Tripled per Capita Police Spending Since 1964*, DATA SHOW, INJUSTICE WATCH (June 9, 2020), <https://perma.cc/B963-C78T> (“Chicago is spending more on policing per person than at any time in the last half century despite a persistent drop in crime over the last two decades, while the vast majority of murders remain unsolved.”); Noreen S. Ahmed-Ullah, John Chase & Bob Selter, *CPS Approves Largest School Closure in Chicago’s History*, CHI. TRIB. (May 23, 2013), <https://perma.cc/KHC2-XCLR>.

despair.²⁶ The primary focus on criminal law enforcement as a response to violence neglects these other factors, and, in fact, the associated austerity measures represented by school closures worsen the underlying conditions that drive violence.

A. Strike Forces and a New War on Guns

Despite an increasing recognition of the futility of militarized criminal law enforcement responses, Chicago and other municipalities have sought, most recently with federal support, to curb gun violence by using “strike forces” that arrest and criminally prosecute people selling weapons in violation of federal law. According to President Joe Biden, who has promoted strike forces as a solution to the homicide crisis, this approach entails “taking on the bad actors doing bad things to our communities.”²⁷ “If you willfully sell a gun to someone who’s prohibited,” President Biden conveyed, “my message to you is this: We’ll find you and we’ll seek your license to sell guns. We’ll make sure you can’t sell death and mayhem on our streets.”²⁸

Chicago is to play a prominent role in this federally subsidized campaign, with similar interventions planned around the country.²⁹ In July 2021, after a weekend during which fifty-six people were shot and eleven killed, Chicago Police Department superintendent David Brown announced the city’s strike-force initiative to stop gun violence by relying on a team of fifty police officers assigned to apprehend “gun traffickers, straw buyers, unscrupulous licensed firearms dealers,” and others involved in facilitating the illegal flow of guns to Chicago.³⁰ In the first half of 2021, thousands of people were arrested on gun charges in the city, but, according to Brown:

[t]he point of this investigations team—which is new and unique, and a first in its class—is to get the gun before it hits the streets at the trafficking level. . . . These third parties

²⁶ Kaba, *supra* note 2, at 10; see also Mariame Kaba, *I Live in a Place Where Everybody Watches You Everywhere You Go*, in *WE DO THIS 'TIL WE FREE US*, *supra* note 8, at 88, 90 (“Young people of color feel under siege in their neighborhoods, consistently hassled, harassed, targeted, surveilled, and racially profiled.”).

²⁷ Colleen Long & Jonathan Lemire, *Biden Targets Law-Breaking Gun Dealers in Anti-crime Plan*, ABC NEWS (June 23, 2021), <https://perma.cc/77FB-BJ3C>.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ See *Biden’s Plan to Reduce Gun Violence to Provide Funds, Resources to Chicago*, NBC CHI. (June 23, 2021), <https://perma.cc/RS3C-CVL5>.

³⁰ Bill Hutchinson, *Chicago Unveils Gun Violence Plan After Another Violent Weekend*, ABC NEWS (July 19, 2021), <https://perma.cc/P4ZT-ZA9C>.

need to hear me loud and clear: We're coming for you, and we're going to try to charge you with the highest charge we can, if not in the federal system, then at the state attorney's office.³¹

Brown warned: "Do not buy guns for violent people is our message, or you will pay the price for them by doing what we hope to be serious time. . . . Blood is on your hands, and we're coming for you."³² The Chicago Police team, which will work closely with federal strike forces, aims to trace every illegal gun identified in Chicago to the individual who sold the firearm or purchased it for someone else. Mayor Lori Lightfoot also set aside a \$1 million fund for a gun trafficking tip line, which will offer "significant payouts" to residents who offer tips leading to arrests, indictments, or convictions of those dealing in illegal firearms.³³

The bellicose language used by city and federal officials to describe strike-force programs echoes the militarist rhetoric of the war on drugs despite the widespread understanding that warlike approaches to the public health crises of drug addiction and violence have largely failed.³⁴ Further surveilling and then arresting, prosecuting, and incarcerating more young people from Chicago's most disadvantaged communities does not actually promise to reduce violence. As Takenya Nixon Brail, a Chicago resident, explains, "Policing makes *my* community less safe and less healthy."³⁵ A Black woman survivor of crime and police abuse who lives in a neighborhood afflicted by heavy police surveillance and violence, Nixon Brail's critique of this criminal law enforcement strategy is worth quoting at length:

Not only does policing fail to prevent violent crime, it creates conditions that allow for even more violence.

. . .

The Chicago neighborhood where I live and have owned a home for the past 11 years has been identified as one of the most violent areas in the city. The city's answer has always been to increase police presence. . . . The police who look at

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.*

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ See generally ELIZABETH HINTON, FROM THE WAR ON POVERTY TO THE WAR ON CRIME: THE MAKING OF MASS INCARCERATION IN AMERICA (2017); THE WAR ON DRUGS: A HISTORY (David Farber ed., 2021).

³⁵ Takenya Nixon Brail, *Rising Crime in Cities like Chicago Should Not Lead to More Policing*, TEEN VOGUE (July 1, 2021), <https://perma.cc/HP69-UWPC> (emphasis in original).

me suspiciously while I'm on my morning run in my neighborhood have made me feel trapped, unwanted, and afraid — and I still hear those gunshots.

...

We often hear and, increasingly with smartphone footage, see the physical violence that is inflicted by police. But we don't talk as much about the psychological violence of policing: the fear, anxiety, depression, and trauma to citizens.

...

Given all of this, perhaps the most damaging and enduring consequence of continued investment in the police — despite their proven (and admitted) inability to prevent crime even with the billions we still send their way — is that communities continue to *not* get the kind of investments that truly do prevent violence and promote health.³⁶

Even proponents of militarized policing—or strike forces—appear to recognize the inadequacy of more policing as a response to violence and the pressing need for other sorts of investments of the kind that Nixon Brail describes as essential to improving health and stopping violence. In announcing the strike forces, for instance, President Biden explained that “community-based anti-violence programs would be part of the plan,”³⁷ and he noted that existing Chicago programs offered examples of alternatives that he would like to support. President Biden suggested that a “study found that a program offering high school students in Chicago a good summer job, and an adult mentor and behavioral therapy, led to a 45% drop in violence.”³⁸

Police leadership, too, acknowledges the limitations of the strike-force approach. Brown acknowledged that it would require “a lot of luck” for his gun-pipeline intervention to be successful.³⁹ At the same time, he characterized the focus on prosecuting firearms traffickers as enabling criminal law enforcement to intervene “on the front end of this,” suggesting an understanding that the antecedents of violence must be addressed.⁴⁰ Again, though, little attention is devoted in popular, legal, and much academic discourse to what constitutes the “front end” of violence.

³⁶ *Id.* (emphasis in original).

³⁷ *Biden's Plan to Reduce Gun Violence to Provide Funds, Resources to Chicago*, *supra* note 29.

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *See Hutchinson*, *supra* note 30.

⁴⁰ *See id.*

Moreover, minimal resources are dedicated to alternative projects addressing the root causes and contexts of violence as funds are instead allocated to conventional criminal law enforcement.⁴¹ The psychological violence of policing that has left Nixon Brail feeling “trapped, unwanted, and afraid” persists and is exacerbated by the disinvestment in community development that tends to result from allocating public resources primarily to criminal law enforcement.⁴²

B. The “Our City, Our Safety Plan” and Its Undoing

While Chicago’s strike-force approach largely neglects the root causes of violence, one exception to this pattern is Chicago’s comprehensive plan for reducing violence. The “Our City, Our Safety” plan, published in 2020, recognizes violence as an “equity issue.”⁴³ Lightfoot wrote the following in introducing the plan: “I understand that violence is a complex issue. It has persisted in Chicago for many years because the underlying causes—systemic racism, disinvestment, poverty, failed policing, lack of social services—have gone unaddressed, and the use of policing as the primary solution has failed.”⁴⁴ The plan is thus “committed to ending violence through a multi-faceted, comprehensive, collaborative, and sustained public health approach that addresses violence from all angles.”⁴⁵

The plan itself identifies the problem of violence in Chicago fundamentally in terms of social inequality:

We know a great deal about the nature of violence in Chicago. An overwhelming number of homicides in the city are gun-related and victims are disproportionately African American and Latinx males. . . . In 2019, . . . 50 percent of the city’s shooting victimizations occurred within 10 community areas that comprise 15 percent of the city’s population. These neighborhoods are located on the South and West sides of

⁴¹ See, e.g., Long & Lemire, *supra* note 27 (“[President Biden is] encouraging cities to invest some of their COVID-19 relief funds into policing and pushing alternative crime reduction steps such as increased community support and summer jobs for teenagers.”); Biden’s *Plan to Reduce Gun Violence to Provide Funds, Resources to Chicago*, *supra* note 29.

⁴² Nixon Brail, *supra* note 35.

⁴³ CITY OF CHI., OUR CITY, OUR SAFETY: A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TO REDUCE VIOLENCE IN CHICAGO 2 (2020).

⁴⁴ Lori Lightfoot, *Forward* to CITY OF CHI., *supra* note 43.

⁴⁵ *Id.*

Chicago where poverty, low educational attainment, and poor health outcomes including shorter life expectancy are concentrated.⁴⁶

The plan goes on to elaborate five “violence reduction pillars”⁴⁷: “Empower and Heal People,”⁴⁸ “Protect and Secure Places,”⁴⁹ “Improve and Advance Policing,”⁵⁰ “Affect Public Policy,”⁵¹ and “Plan and Coordinate.”⁵² The plan asserts that the “only effective way through these crises—the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic downturn, and the spike in violence—is for Chicago to address the underlying systems of inequity and racism that fuel them.”⁵³

Although the plan appears rhetorically to transition to a public health model to address violence and states that violence is a problem of racial inequity, the available resources allocated by the city after more than a year have continued to concentrate overwhelmingly on policing, prosecution, surveillance, and incarceration. The plan “proposed flooding the 15 most violent community areas with resources—not just violence intervention programs but help with jobs and housing and health,” yet the city administration failed to devote extra resources to some of those neighborhoods, and gun violence increased in most of them.⁵⁴ The city’s own online reports reflect the administration’s failure to

⁴⁶ CITY OF CHI., *supra* note 43, at 2.

⁴⁷ *Id.* at 5.

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 26 (“Ensure that all residents can pursue opportunities to thrive without fear of violence by providing prevention and intervention supports that are available to individuals of all ages and levels of risk.”).

⁴⁹ *Id.* at 40 (“Reduce the ‘safety gap’ between safer communities and those most affected by violence by reclaiming public places as safe spaces within communities and by promoting community wellbeing with stable housing, amenities, commerce, and opportunities.”).

⁵⁰ *Id.* at 46 (“Increase police legitimacy in communities where trust has eroded by ensuring humane, effective, and constitutional law enforcement practices and by fully implementing the spirit and letter of the consent decree and related reforms.”).

⁵¹ CITY OF CHI., *supra* note 43, at 56:

Ensure that laws and policies that govern the city reflect the values, aspirations, and safety of residents by collaborating with stakeholders to implement local policy, and advocate for state and federal policy and legislation related to public safety and violence prevention, with a special focus on criminal justice reform, gun regulation, and equitable quality of life.

⁵² *Id.* at 64 (“Facilitate the development of realistic, actionable plans by promoting alignment on strategy and action among public, private, and community-based efforts to prevent and reduce violence and by ensuring a citywide commitment to rigorous planning and consistent coordination.”).

⁵³ *Id.* at 3.

⁵⁴ See David Struett, *Nearly a Year into Lightfoot’s Anti-violence Plan, Many of Chicago’s Most Dangerous Neighborhoods Are Doing Worse*, CHI. SUN-TIMES (July 25, 2021), <https://perma.cc/GGN5-LDA6>.

allocate any supplemental resources to neighborhoods on the Far South Side, with the West Pullman community area receiving none of the \$36 million made available under the plan for the year as of summer 2021.⁵⁵ Fatal shootings in West Pullman increased by 566% between summer 2019 and summer 2021.⁵⁶

According to Lance Williams, an urban studies professor at Northeastern Illinois University: “It’s a solid plan. . . . The problem is that there are no resources attached to the plan to make it actionable. The city’s approach is just to PR their way through the shootings.”⁵⁷ The absence of resources to realize the agenda described in the *Our City, Our Safety* plan may be explained in part, of course, by the primary emphasis on the new war on guns and the strike-force initiatives as central means of responding to violence.

The lead author of the *Our City, Our Safety* plan, Susan Lee, who was then deputy mayor of public safety, had years of experience working with violence-prevention organizations and was retained to move Chicago away from a police-focused response to gun homicides.⁵⁸ But Lee resigned her position only days after publishing the plan. Lee was replaced by John O’Malley, who has spent his career in criminal law enforcement, having worked on the Chicago Police Board and more recently as the director of security at an investment company.⁵⁹

After receiving over \$1 billion in federal stimulus aid during the pandemic, Lightfoot elected to spend \$281 million on police-personnel costs.⁶⁰ It is unclear how much, if any, of that federal stimulus money will be allocated to those neighborhoods identified as most in need in the *Our City, Our Safety* plan.

Apart from the problems with implementation and resource allocation, the *Our City, Our Safety* plan remains overwhelmingly focused on the pathologies of the poorest neighborhoods in the city as if the problems of inequality, violence, and poverty originate there. The failure to devote promised funds to communities in need and afflicted by violence exposes the limited potential of proposals that leave in place existing investments in criminal law enforcement and other public resource allocations without

⁵⁵ *Id.*

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ Struett, *supra* note 54.

⁶⁰ *Id.*

changing the basic distributive mechanisms that render some neighborhoods destitute while others accrue ever-greater wealth.

The truth is that violence does not implicate only those most destitute communities but is produced by legal and policy choices—in housing policy, education policy, tax law, urban planning, military spending, economic planning, and environmental policy—that are made elsewhere, primarily in wealthy communities by powerful elites. These sources of violence—the true front end of violence—cannot be meaningfully confronted by focusing primarily on criminally prosecuting gun sales in indigent communities (in Chicago and other cities struggling with gun violence) or by increasing other forms of militarized policing. The front end of violence will only be effectively dismantled by confronting violence—which includes the systematic allocation of wealth and resources away from impoverished neighborhoods and toward others that hoard wealth and opportunity—at its sources. To confront these sources of violence, we must look elsewhere.

II. THE SOURCES OF VIOLENCE

Confronting the sources of violence requires a deep and broad analysis of the past and present, both locally specific and global in reach. This entails exploring histories of violence, persistent legal and economic policies that continue to entrench violence, militarism, and other sources of harm perpetrated against the planet and its inhabitants. Engaging these sources of violence together begins to suggest a path toward more meaningful redress and reduced violence.

A. Histories of Violence

The factors that give rise to violence in Chicago and elsewhere emerged over a long history in which vast wealth and land holdings were generated through enslaved labor, forced removal of indigenous peoples, and exploitative low-wage work carried out by people of color in economically precarious positions and poor whites. Likewise, gendered dimensions of violence also have a long history that is grounded in sexual and gender inequality. These forms of inequity have been deepened and reinforced through legal regimes of residential segregation and subsidies to

wealthier white communities as well as through labor discrimination and other practices that entrench inequality.⁶¹

The University of Chicago itself was founded through an 1856 land grant by Senator Stephen A. Douglas, a slaveholder whose personal fortune was extracted from the labor of approximately 150 enslaved people on a Mississippi plantation, enabling him to donate ten acres of land in 1857 (valued at \$60,000, which would be \$1.2 million in 2018).⁶² Douglas and his overseers subjected the people under his control to vicious beatings, working conditions that killed dozens, family separations, and forced migration.⁶³ The University of Chicago borrowed against the land donated by Douglas to build its original Gothic campus and establish a large endowment.⁶⁴ The University of Chicago thus owes its existence and enormous affluence in significant part to slavery. It also bears mention that the university is currently located adjacent to dispossessed neighborhoods predominantly populated by Black people, many of them descendants of enslaved people, who live in areas of concentrated racialized poverty and violence.

More generally, as has now been extensively documented, the great wealth throughout the United States, including throughout the North, may be traced to enslaved people in the South who cultivated cotton, sugar, tobacco, and other raw materials under a regime of racial and gendered terror and violence. These products were then sent to the North to be turned into finished goods.⁶⁵ The banking and insurance industries were also forged through the trade in enslaved people and the products of their labor, further

⁶¹ See Sherally Munshi, *Dispossession: An American Property Law Tradition*, 110 GEO. L.J. (forthcoming 2022).

⁶² Caine Jordan, Guy Emerson Mount & Kai Perry Parker, “A Disgrace to All Slave-Holders”: *The University of Chicago’s Founding Ties to Slavery and the Path to Reparations*, 103 J. AFR. AM. HIST., 163, 167 (2018) [hereinafter *A Disgrace to All Slave-Holders*]; Caine Jordan, Guy Emerson Mount & Kai Parker, *A Case for Reparations at the University of Chicago*, BLACK PERSPS. (May 22, 2017) [hereinafter *A Case for Reparations*], <https://perma.cc/54VH-XY8A>.

⁶³ *A Disgrace to All Slave-Holders*, supra note 62, at 166–69.

⁶⁴ See *A Disgrace to All Slave-Holders*, supra note 62, at 169; JOHN W. BOYER, THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO: A HISTORY 58 (2015) (“Several of the largest early gifts to the new University came from donors who were either associated with the old University or acting on behalf of those who did have durable ties.”).

⁶⁵ See Rachel L. Swarns, *Insurance Policies on Slaves: New York Life’s Complicated Past*, N.Y. TIMES (Dec. 18, 2016), <https://perma.cc/5AHP-A867> (“New York City’s merchants helped to finance the nation’s premier export crop, cotton, and the purchase of the land and slaves needed to grow it. . . . [O]ne Southern editor [] describe[d] New York City as ‘almost as dependent upon Southern slavery as Charleston.’”).

tying wealth in Chicago and other northern cities to slavery.⁶⁶ Even before the Civil War, much was owed in Chicago to once-enslaved people and their descendants from whose suffering so much affluence was forged.

During this period, guns became a core part of U.S. culture as a means of protecting white supremacy, maintaining slavery, and effectuating the dispossession of indigenous people, as Professor Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz explores in her account of U.S. gun culture, *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment*.⁶⁷ Dunbar-Ortiz demonstrates that the Second Amendment was not really about arming militias against foreign threats, as standard historical narratives suggest, but instead was designed to empower white settlers to combat slave insurrections and displace Native Americans.⁶⁸

After Reconstruction, white violence and terror—often at gunpoint though also in more banal forms—forced many formerly enslaved people to flee the South to cities like Chicago, where they were pushed into segregated zones of relative disadvantage.⁶⁹ There is an extensive scholarly and popular literature on the effects of redlining, racially restrictive covenants, school segregation, labor discrimination, and police intimidation that, together, maintained for decades a regime of racial segregation, educational inequality, and economic exploitation that has led to current distributions of wealth, privilege, and interpersonal violence.⁷⁰ The history of exclusion and exploitation of lower-income Black people in some of what remain today Chicago's most disenfranchised neighborhoods is relatively well known, but brutal policing and

⁶⁶ See, e.g., *id.* See generally ERIC WILLIAMS, CAPITALISM AND SLAVERY (1944); EDWARD BAPTIST, THE HALF HAS NEVER BEEN TOLD: SLAVERY AND THE MAKING OF AMERICAN CAPITALISM (2014); WALTER JOHNSON, RIVER OF DARK DREAMS: SLAVERY AND EMPIRE IN THE COTTON KINGDOM (2013).

⁶⁷ See ROXANNE DUNBAR-ORTIZ, LOADED: A DISARMING HISTORY OF THE SECOND AMENDMENT 29–36, 203 (2018).

⁶⁸ See *id.* at 35–36.

⁶⁹ See ISABEL WILKERSON, THE WARMTH OF OTHER SUNS: THE EPIC STORY OF AMERICA'S GREAT MIGRATION 8–11, 371–78 (2011).

⁷⁰ See, e.g., Fredrick, *supra* note 23, at 3–4 (discussing the history of neighborhood segregation, violence, and health in Chicago). See generally, e.g., WALTER JOHNSON, THE BROKEN HEART OF AMERICA: ST. LOUIS AND THE VIOLENT HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES (2020); RICHARD ROTHSTEIN, THE COLOR OF LAW: A FORGOTTEN HISTORY OF HOW OUR GOVERNMENT SEGREGATED AMERICA (2017); KEEANGA YAMAHTTA TAYLOR, RACE FOR PROFIT: HOW BANKS AND THE REAL ESTATE INDUSTRY UNDERMINED BLACK HOMEOWNERSHIP (2019).

official segregation also shaped Latinx communities in Chicago that remain similarly besieged by violence.⁷¹

By the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, these practices had preserved the concentrated wealth and advantage of mostly white people in affluent communities in Chicago and forced economically disenfranchised Black and Latinx people—who suffer the brunt of violence in the city—into zones of grossly unequal resources.⁷² Chicago is not unique in these respects. Nationally, the median wealth of white families is eight times that of Black families.⁷³ To address the racial inequity and associated violence (noted in Chicago’s *Our City, Our Safety* plan) requires grappling through a serious, persistent, and deep process with the question of what ought to be done in virtue of this history and its persistent legacies.

B. Law and Economics of Violence

This entrenched inequality is also sustained by contemporary economic laws and policies, which continue to distribute wealth upward and are not merely the residue of historical inegalitarian practices. More specifically, contemporary inequality is maintained by a set of laws and policies that could be changed; such changes would make it more feasible to confront at once the violence of racialized economic inequality, the violence of policing, and gun violence.

In numerous areas, current economic law and policy recreate and perpetuate entrenched racialized poverty and inequality such that these regimes must be understood as constitutive of violence. Many states have regressive tax laws under which low-income households pay a greater proportion of their income than affluent households.⁷⁴ Illinois has a regressive flat-rate income tax that

⁷¹ See LILIA FERNANDEZ, *BROWN IN THE WINDY CITY: MEXICANS AND PUERTO RICANS IN POSTWAR CHICAGO* 92–93, 159–70 (2014).

⁷² See Fredrick, *supra* note 23, at 3–6.

⁷³ Neil Bhutta, Andrew C. Chang, Lisa J. Dettling & Joanne W. Hsu with assistance from Julia Hewitt, *Disparities in Wealth by Race and Ethnicity in the 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances*, BD. OF GOVERNORS OF THE FED. RSRV. SYS. (Sept. 28, 2020), <https://perma.cc/26QN-JEFV> (finding white families’ median family wealth to be \$188,200 and that of Black families to be \$24,100).

⁷⁴ See MEG WIEHE, AIDAN DAVIS, CARL DAVIS, MATT GARDNER, LISA CHRISTENSEN GEE & DYLAN GRUNDMAN, *INST. ON TAX’N & ECON. POL’Y, WHO PAYS? A DISTRIBUTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE TAX SYSTEMS IN ALL 50 STATES* 5 (6th ed. 2018), <https://perma.cc/8WQ4-GKX7>.

disproportionately burdens low-income taxpayers and dramatically influences the racial wealth gap.⁷⁵

Additionally, development-financing schemes promoted to reduce historically entrenched inequality have in fact deepened inequity. For example, Tax Increment Financing (TIF) became popular in the 1970s and 1980s as a way for cities to replace Great Society initiatives with public-private partnerships.⁷⁶ The idea was that TIFs would enable development in “blighted” areas.⁷⁷ In Chicago, the TIF program was designed to promote development in economically depressed areas by designating eligible areas as “TIF districts” for a period of twenty-three years, during which any increase in property-tax revenue would go into a TIF fund.⁷⁸ The TIF fund would be reserved for development of that supposedly blighted area.

A considerable portion of Chicago city tax revenues are now reserved for TIF-district-specific development.⁷⁹ Yet critical observers have long noted “that [Chicago’s] TIF [program] lacks transparency and has been used to subsidize development in” areas that do not actually require public subsidies.⁸⁰

In Chicago, more than half of the \$5 billion in TIF development funds collected since 1984 has been spent in relatively well-to-do areas: constructing luxury residential developments, entertainment and shopping venues, and renovating chain hotels that serve tourists and business travelers.⁸¹ Those TIF districts capture property taxes that would otherwise be shared across the city, which results in losses overall to the budget for public schools and

⁷⁵ See 35 ILL. COMP. STAT. 5/201 (1969). The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy rates Illinois as having the eighth-most regressive state and local tax system in the country, with the lowest-income households paying an effective tax rate of 14.4% and the wealthiest households paying 7.4%. WIEHE ET AL., *supra* note 74, at 7 fig.4, 12 (noting that “tax codes that worsen income inequality by taxing lower-income people at higher rates than wealthy people . . . are worsening the racial wealth divide”).

⁷⁶ See Richard Briffault, *The Most Popular Tool: Tax Increment Financing and the Political Economy of Local Government*, 77 U. CHI. L. REV. 65, 69–70, 70 n.21 (2010).

⁷⁷ *Id.* at 78; see also, e.g., Joel Jacobs, *How Chicago’s Controversial TIF Program Took Over a Third of the City*, MEDILL REPS. CHI. (Feb. 22, 2020), <https://perma.cc/9A9M-C6HM>.

⁷⁸ See CITY OF CHI., TAX INCREMENT FINANCING PROGRAM GUIDE 3 (2020), <https://perma.cc/CWY6-S4HU>; Tax Increment Allocation Redevelopment Act, 65 ILL. COMP. STAT. ANN. 5/11-74.4-1 (1961).

⁷⁹ In 2018, Chicago TIF funds captured 12.5%—over \$840 million—of the city’s annual property tax revenues. See Jacobs, *supra* note 77; JAMES SCALZITTI, COOK COUNTY TIFS TO BRING IN NEARLY \$1.2 BILLION CHICAGO TIF REVENUE UP MORE THAN 27% (2019).

⁸⁰ Jacobs, *supra* note 77.

⁸¹ 33RD WARD WORKING FAMILIES, THE CASE FOR ABOLISHING THE TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (TIF) PROGRAM 3 (Nov. 18, 2019), <https://perma.cc/8LP2-UWXP>.

other public programs that would benefit the city's lowest-income residents.⁸² Low-income neighborhoods like Englewood on the South Side, whose TIF district produced only \$22 million in the 2000s, are effectively precluded from sharing in the close to \$2 billion in revenues generated by TIF districts in the Loop, a wealthy area downtown.⁸³

Institutionalized racial discrimination in the housing market created by redlining, contract lending, and racial zoning produced Chicago's racially segregated and impoverished communities,⁸⁴ which are now burdened with funding development projects from their limited property taxes while being denied the TIF benefits that flow to wealthier parts of the city. The University of Chicago in particular has greatly benefited from TIF-sponsored development projects, which have failed to follow through on affordable-housing set-asides and other guarantees that were to flow to nearby longtime low-income residents.⁸⁵ Lightfoot came into office promising significant changes to TIF to make it redound to the greater benefit of Chicago's least advantaged residents⁸⁶—the purported objective of TIFs in the first instance—but these changes by and large have not come to pass.

Focusing on a particular place makes it possible to identify some of the precise ways that law and economic policy maintain entrenched poverty, inequality, and violence, though these problems are national—and international—in scope. For example, in Baltimore (which, like Chicago, is a place that suffers from high rates of entrenched racialized inequality and gun violence), development projects have invited companies to build in the city in exchange for release from tax liability. In Baltimore, TIF has supported the corporate development projects of Under Armour, the athletic-gear company, beginning with \$35 million in tax increment financing for their initial downtown corporate headquarters.⁸⁷ In exchange, Under Armour offered various charitable contributions—including a free water-taxi system for tourists to the harbor and tactical gear and uniforms for firefighters and police.

⁸² Jacobs, *supra* note 77.

⁸³ 33RD WARD WORKING FAMILIES, *supra* note 81, at 4.

⁸⁴ See Fredrick, *supra* note 23, at 3.

⁸⁵ Cf. CITY OF CHICAGO TIF DATA (HYDE PARK), <https://webapps1.chicago.gov/ChicagoTif> (describing university-adjacent projects used to create a hotel for business travelers and commercial development that houses university and other offices and restaurants).

⁸⁶ See Jacobs, *supra* note 77.

⁸⁷ Lester Spence, *Corporate Welfare Is Draining Baltimore*, BOS. REV. (May 14, 2015), <https://perma.cc/Y43X-U9GN>.

But Under Armour was released from tax obligations under the agreements.⁸⁸ The company reported its pretax profits in 2017 at \$157 million,⁸⁹ but it did not pay any state taxes that year and received \$8.3 million in state tax credits.⁹⁰ In the last several years, Under Armour obtained substantially more TIF funding to pursue an expanded corporate headquarters at Port Covington and a development project for the area, receiving well over \$100 million.⁹¹ But the tremendous subsidies have yielded disappointing results and diminishing returns; the company failed to deliver on the planned luxury enclave, instead deciding in the new COVID-19 landscape to create only 310,000 square feet of new space rather than the 3.9 million square feet of mixed-use development initially promised and retaining only 1,700 employees rather than the 10,000 jobs that had been on offer.⁹² The bizarre current project, composed largely of parking lots and one corporate headquarters building, has been financed in significant part through public subsidies though the project offers little to those in the city most in need.⁹³

Even where projects have been more successful in bringing valuable properties to the Baltimore harbor development district, the city has lost tax revenue and state funding to schools in low-income Black communities. Because of increases to property values in Baltimore owing to high-end development, the state cut funding to city schools, but the city is actually starved for tax income on the same properties that are driving property values up because of deals made with developers.⁹⁴ For example, Harbor East's Baltimore Marriott Waterfront hotel, valued at \$155 million, will pay just \$1 per year in lieu of property taxes for twenty-five years.⁹⁵

An abolitionist critique of violence reconceptualizes this political economy—and the laws and policies associated with racial capitalism that hold it in place—as not just remotely contributing

⁸⁸ *Id.*

⁸⁹ *Under Armour Reports Fourth Quarter and Full Year Results; Announces Outlook for 2018*, UNDER ARMOUR (Feb. 13, 2018), <https://perma.cc/QT73-CEJ4>.

⁹⁰ UNDER ARMOUR, 2017 ANNUAL REPORT 84 (2018), <https://perma.cc/7TV4-RYLJ>.

⁹¹ Mark Reutter, *How a Scaled-Back Under Armour HQ Helps Rescue Kevin Plank's Shaky Port Covington Project*, BALT. BREW (Apr. 21, 2021), <https://perma.cc/BU3J-5URS>.

⁹² *Id.*

⁹³ *Id.*

⁹⁴ See Luke Broadwater, *Baltimore's Development Boom Leads to Loss in School Aid*, BALT. SUN (Feb. 7, 2015), <https://perma.cc/U75D-WKDL>.

⁹⁵ *Id.*

to urban poverty and violence but as inextricably entwined with violence itself. This economic regime holds in place inequality, dynamics of interpersonal harm and advantage, and racially skewed vulnerability to premature death.⁹⁶

Redistributing resources in a thoroughgoing way, changing the extractive racial distribution of wealth and life chances, is a crucial component of redressing violence. Redistributive measures would make it possible to rely on resources to prevent violence that do not threaten the further violence imposed by policing, jailing, and other forms of criminal law enforcement.

C. Militarist Violence

Violence in communities in Chicago, Baltimore, and elsewhere is also fueled by U.S. militarism, so militarism must also be confronted in order to end these cycles of violence. The largest purveyors of violence in the world are organized militaries, military contractors, weapons manufacturers, and militarized police organizations.

A recent Associated Press investigation identified one immediate connection between militarism and gun violence in U.S. cities: at least 1,900 U.S. military firearms were stolen or lost from 2010 to 2019, some of which were later traced to violent crimes in the United States.⁹⁷ The unaccounted-for military weapons include at least 1,179 rifles and 694 handguns as well as machine guns, shotguns, and even grenade and rocket launchers.⁹⁸ The total number of missing military firearms identified in the investigation is necessarily an undercount as certain armed services refused to release relevant information to investigators.⁹⁹

More broadly, the prevalence of firearms in U.S. cities and other suburban and rural areas is attributable to U.S. militarism in that the manufacture of weapons is overwhelmingly subsidized by U.S. military spending and militarized police organizations like the Federal Bureau of Investigations and other criminal law enforcement agencies. The largest purchaser of guns and other weapons is the U.S. military, which provides the lifeblood of the

⁹⁶ GILMORE, *supra* note 22, at 28; *see also* Fredrick, *supra* note 23, at 3–4.

⁹⁷ Kristin M. Hall, James LaPorta, Justin Pritchard & Justin Myers, *Some Stolen U.S. Military Guns Used in Violent Crimes*, AP NEWS (June 15, 2021), <https://apnews.com/article/government-and-politics-business-gun-politics-crime-6caba27108d05a8b7c1860959d1ae130>.

⁹⁸ *Id.*

⁹⁹ *Id.* (“[A]rmy officials resisted releasing information of missing guns when AP first inquired, and indeed that information was never provided.”).

weapons industry.¹⁰⁰ Guns flood legal and unauthorized consumer markets in significant part because of the generous subsidies provided by the military, which sustains and defines the output of the firearms-manufacturing industry.

In turn, heavily armed and militarized policing contributes to and escalates gun violence in U.S. cities as urban denizens respond to the pervasive presence of guns, including in the hands of police, by arming themselves.¹⁰¹ In this context, shootings of civilians by police occur too often; tragically, hundreds of young people also shoot one another.

Military recruiters also prey on young people in low-income communities, particularly low-income communities of color, where adolescents with limited educational and employment prospects are persuaded to sign up to devote their young lives to military service, often fighting foreign wars. Military activity is glamorized, including through the use of Army-sponsored video games targeting children at ever younger ages,¹⁰² and military service is presented as a primary path out of poverty. The armed services then tend to place the most vulnerable youth of color in harm's way.¹⁰³ Research to date suggests that these young people suffer negative physical and mental health effects as a consequence, including increased rates of PTSD, suicide, substance abuse, and depression.¹⁰⁴

Further, militarism both incites and inures us to armed violence by subsidizing and glorifying the proliferation of weapons and by carrying out invasions, armed attacks, drone strikes, and occupations that lead to so many thousands of lost lives. This warfare perpetuates violence on a global scale—diminishing the

¹⁰⁰ See Lou Whiteman, *Investing in Defense Stocks*, MOTLEY FOOL (Sept. 20, 2021), <https://perma.cc/3KXW-LEJL> (“Defense companies get the bulk of their revenue from one customer: the U.S. government.”); Al Root, *Buy Defense Stocks Because Military Spending Is on the Rise, Analysts Say*, BARRON’S (Mar. 14, 2019), <https://perma.cc/J3LV-LMH6> (describing the U.S. government as the sector’s “No. 1 customer”).

¹⁰¹ See Maya King, “*It’s My Constitutional Freaking Right*”: *Black Americans Arm Themselves in Response to Pandemic, Protests*, POLITICO (July 26, 2020), <https://perma.cc/M979-RTNS>.

¹⁰² Jordan Uhl, *The U.S. Military Is Using Online Gaming to Recruit Teens*, THE NATION (July 15, 2020), <https://www.thenation.com/article/culture/military-recruitment-twitch>.

¹⁰³ See, e.g., Sidney Miralao, *Military Recruiters Are Exploiting High School Students’ Financial Insecurities*, INEQUALITY.ORG (Aug. 14, 2020), <https://perma.cc/4MKC-XY2J> (“[F]our years of studies by the Resistance Center in western Massachusetts found that Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, and low-income students were overrepresented among the enlistees most often put in harm’s way.”).

¹⁰⁴ See *id.*

preciousness of all human lives and normalizing the use of weapons and violent attacks to address conflict.

Progressive prosecutors, including San Francisco district attorney Chesa Boudin, along with officials in the Mexican government, have recently sought to address gun violence by suing certain gun manufacturers.¹⁰⁵ This is a productive shift of focus from exclusively criminally prosecuting street-level gun possession by young people with relatively little power and limited choices to linking homicidal violence with militarized weapons-industry groups. These lawsuits have focused especially on rogue weapons manufacturers that market “ghost guns,” which operate with untraceable components, as well as on industry practices that allow for the purchase of large quantities of weapons at gun fairs that are then smuggled to and resold in Mexico among other places.

However, despite the productive shift in focus from individual weapon possession to practices of weapons manufacturing and sales, by singling out a specific subset of bad actors in the industry (such as ghost-gun manufacturers) and particularly dangerous practices carried out by weapons companies, these lawsuits leave unaddressed the broader inextricable connection between militarized weapons production across the board and the crises of violence confronted by communities from Chicago to San Francisco to Mexico. Even if ghost gun manufacturers are no longer able to market their products to particular U.S. jurisdictions or arms sellers can no longer transact in bulk to individuals who then transport firearms abroad, the mass production for profit of millions of weapons each year, the glorification of and inurement to violence, the retaliatory logic of warfare, and the spectacularized degradation of the value of human life on a global scale will continue to fuel escalating cycles of violence, particularly when economically deprived people are driven routinely to underground economies where disputes are resolved by violence.

The gun culture subsidized by U.S. militarism also maintains and exacerbates racial and gender inequality in other, perhaps less-recognized, ways that further entrench patterns of interpersonal violence. Just as Dunbar-Ortiz identifies the historical origins of the Second Amendment right to bear arms in white-supremacist efforts to maintain slavery and dispossess

¹⁰⁵ See Associated Press, *San Francisco DA Sues 3 California-Based “Ghost Gun” Makers*, ABC NEWS (Aug. 18, 2021), <https://perma.cc/AUP8-KQ53>; E. Eduardo Castillo & Christopher Sherman, *Mexico Sues US Gun Manufacturers over Arms Trafficking Toll*, ABC NEWS (Aug. 4, 2021), <https://perma.cc/MKK6-4MXW>.

indigenous people, so too U.S. gun culture enabled by U.S. militarism continues to hold in place patterns of inequity and inequality. In his evocative and deeply personal essay “Guns in the Family,” historian Walter Johnson offers a powerful meditation on the more recent white-supremacist, hypermasculine attachment to guns in the United States and the relationship of U.S. gun culture to racial inequality and U.S. militarism.¹⁰⁶

Johnson recounts how his childhood near the Mississippi River in Missouri, and especially his relationship to his father, unfolded in significant part in relation to guns—first through hunting excursions, shooting geese and deer. Johnson recalls that the only time that he is able to remember his father hugging him between the age of five or six years old and the day he left for graduate school was when he killed a deer—an experience in which Johnson describes being scared by what he had done, “[b]y the way her brown eye stared up at me from the floor of the forest, by the bubbles in the puddle of blood that had flowed out of her lungs.”¹⁰⁷ For many of the white men of Johnson’s childhood, guns involved a “heady and uniquely American blend of martial culture, white paranoia, and toxic masculinity”; guns and pornography were often hidden together in secret cabinets, “so proximate, perhaps, were the lonely pleasures of fantasizing about mastery and violence.”¹⁰⁸

Johnson concedes, as the NRA lobby proposes, that “guns are tools”; but they are tools

for making emotionally stunted men feel whole; tools for guiding lonely boys along the bloody pathway to becoming violent men; tools for spreading the fearful fantasy of the coming race war; tools for enflaming urban areas in rural states, and making the argument for more cops and more prisons; tools for reproducing male dominance and white supremacy; tools for white male parthenogenesis.¹⁰⁹

Gun violence deepens immiseration in disenfranchised urban communities of color and continues to fuel for the white men Johnson describes a fantasized need “to defend white homesteads and households against a racialized, gendered threat: blacks,

¹⁰⁶ Walter Johnson, *Guns in the Family*, BOS. REV. (Mar. 23, 2018), <https://perma.cc/RRC3-HXT8>.

¹⁰⁷ *Id.*

¹⁰⁸ *Id.*

¹⁰⁹ *Id.*

Indians, women who threaten their husbands' masculinity, kids who won't obey their fathers."¹¹⁰ Johnson concludes that we will not be able to confront our problem with gun violence until we address this combination of toxic masculinity, imperialist violence, militarism, and white supremacy that "produces such pornographic inequality."¹¹¹

D. Planetary Violence

The violence seeded by militarism and legal and economic policy also participates in a violence to our planet, both directly polluting our atmosphere and further entrenching extractive and exploitative practices that especially harm communities already plagued by interpersonal violence. Rising water levels and increased flooding, along with rising temperatures, threaten to render vast regions of the earth uninhabitable and pose particular risks for the most disadvantaged communities, including those in Chicago.¹¹² Militarism and its associated carbon footprint, the consumption practices of those to whom wealth is distributed disproportionately, unsustainable development, and resource extraction are pushing the world toward ecological disaster.

This environmental harm also exacerbates interpersonal violence and is fueling displacement and destruction that portend unprecedented suffering. Recent research suggests that increasing temperatures increase stress—particularly for people who are already in economically precarious circumstances—and are associated with increased shootings.¹¹³ In Chicago, researchers found that a ten-degree-Fahrenheit rise in temperature over the historical average was associated with 34% more shootings, perhaps because the heat makes other conditions that much more unbearable.¹¹⁴ There is both a direct connection between the climate crisis and interpersonal violence as well as a more pervasive connection whereby violence is produced by a form of collective life that perpetuates ecological calamity and that must change in order to confront unfolding environmental crises.

¹¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹¹ Johnson, *supra* note 106.

¹¹² See DAN EGAN, *THE DEATH AND LIFE OF THE GREAT LAKES* 277–300 (2017); Brett Chase, *Flooding Hits Poorest Communities Hardest as Climate Change Intensifies Storms*, *CRAIN'S CHI. BUS.* (Sept. 26, 2019), <https://perma.cc/HR6Q-VKTX>.

¹¹³ Reeping & Hemenway, *supra* note 15, at 5.

¹¹⁴ *Id.* at 3–6.

Ultimately, to address pending environmental catastrophe and the violence that plagues disinvested communities in Chicago, we must imagine alternative ways of life that reduce and alleviate these environmental threats in ways designed not to extract value from the planet and its most vulnerable people for the advantage of the relatively few but to enable more equitable and less violent conditions of collective life. Colette Pichon Battle of the Gulf Coast Center for Law and Policy seeks to rearticulate the climate crisis and the necessary response to it along these lines and in connection to an abolitionist ethic, again tying the problems of overpolicing, racial segregation, and exploitative economic practices that distribute wealth upward to environmental threats:

We must reframe our understanding of the problem. Climate change is not the problem. Climate change is the most horrible symptom of an economic system that has been built for a few to extract every precious ounce of value out of this planet and its people, from our natural resources to the fruits of our human labor. . . .

We must have the courage to admit we've taken too much. We cannot close our eyes to the fact that the entire world is paying a price for the privilege and comfort of just a few people on the planet. It's time for us to make society-wide changes to a system that incentivizes consumption to the point of global imbalance. Our social, political, and economic systems of extraction must be transformed into systems that regenerate the Earth and advance human liberty—globally. . . .

. . . The social restructuring must be toward restoration and repair of the Earth and the communities that have been extracted from, criminalized, and targeted for generations.

. . .

. . . Collective resilience means developing cities that can receive people and provide housing, food, water, healthcare, and freedom from overpolicing for everyone, no matter who they are, no matter where they're from.¹¹⁵

Abolitionists seek to address militarized criminal law enforcement, environmental harm, and economic exploitation together because these practices jointly hold in place the status quo with all its violence. Abolition seeks to create ways of life and forms of

¹¹⁵ Colette Pichon Battle, *An Offering from the Bayou*, in *ALL WE CAN SAVE: TRUTH, COURAGE, AND SOLUTIONS FOR THE CLIMATE CRISIS* 329, 331–32 (Ayana Elizabeth Johnson & Katharine K. Wilkinson eds., 2020).

repair that restore the earth's precious resources, that provide other means of responding to violence without militarized force, and that are attuned to specific human needs in context, redistributing public resources in order to realize these ends.

Resources allocated to militarized policing at home and military interventions abroad are unavailable for those life-sustaining and life-affirming projects that abolitionists are working to build on Chicago's South and West Sides—environmental remediation, high-quality educational programs, healthy food systems, health care, quality affordable housing, and meaningful remunerative employment opportunities. As a consequence, contemporary abolitionist movements have called for defunding not just police but the militarist projects that fuel these cycles of violence and environmental harm.

III. AN END TO VIOLENCE

Abolitionists seek an end to violence by committing to a constellation of interconnected practices. These practices include ongoing efforts to prevent and respond to violence while also working to enable a more democratic politics and economy, end militarism, and make a just transition to more sustainable ways of collective life.

A. Ongoing Prevention and Repair

For abolitionists, prevention and repair consist of both immediate responses to violence in impacted communities and a shift in the political economy at multiple levels to more broadly enable an end to violence. As an immediate response to violence, abolitionists have created violence-prevention programs that bring people at risk of participating in violence to resources that will reduce the risk of those individuals perpetrating harm to others or falling victim to harm themselves. In Chicago, for example, the program Flatlining Violence Inspires Peace operates in seventy-seven of the city's most violence-prone pockets of twelve disenfranchised Chicago neighborhoods.¹¹⁶ The program hires people from the community to serve as “peacekeepers” and offers them stipends and teaches them how to advance peace in these communities, including by negotiating “non-aggression pacts” between

¹¹⁶ Andrew Papachristos, *Addressing Chicago's "Unfathomable Violence"*, NW. INST. POL'Y RSCH. (Aug. 17, 2021), <https://perma.cc/TQ8Z-TKJV>.

rival gangs.¹¹⁷ Similar groups have been embraced by abolitionists around the country as participants work to develop responses to violence locally by encouraging peaceful resolution of conflict on the ground.¹¹⁸ Despite currently limited resources, these groups have demonstrated greater efficacy than criminal law enforcement in curbing violence in the communities where they operate.¹¹⁹ These initiatives hold promise not only because they offer a less violent means of addressing conflict (by building relationships and deescalating disputes rather than using guns and handcuffs and prisons) but also because they build power, leadership, and resources in dispossessed communities.

Adopting this same model, contemporary abolitionists also promote restorative and transformative justice as means of responding to violence after it occurs, thereby more fundamentally confronting the dynamics that drive particular young people in communities to engage in violence.¹²⁰ Circles and Ciphers is one such youth-led Chicago-based organization that convenes peace circles in communities impacted by violence, bringing high-risk young men and women together to make connections to one another and address the root causes of violence in their communities.¹²¹

These local initiatives are tied to a broader movement to address the political economy that fuels violence. From Chicago to Baltimore to Washington, D.C., abolitionists develop alternative forms of violence prevention and response in connection with participatory budgeting campaigns that seek to increase democratic control over local budgeting so as to redistribute resources from criminal law enforcement to efforts that actually help communities become safer and more livable places. In 2017, the Center for Popular Democracy, Law for Black Lives, and Black Youth Project 100 launched a nationwide campaign to track city budgets and demand a reallocation of funds from militarized criminal law

¹¹⁷ *Id.*; see also Pascal Sabino, *Street Outreach Groups Join Forces in Lawndale to “Interrupt Violence Deep in the Trenches”*, BLOCK CLUB CHI. (June 16, 2021), <https://perma.cc/J87S-QVEM>.

¹¹⁸ See DATA FOR PROGRESS & THE JUST. COLLABORATIVE INST., *THE CASE FOR VIOLENCE INTERRUPTION PROGRAMS AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO POLICING 4* (2020), <https://perma.cc/WS7C-R6TM>.

¹¹⁹ See *New Report: Violence Interruption Programs Provide Effective Alternative to Policing*, THE JUST. COLLABORATIVE (June 22, 2020), <https://perma.cc/4LRP-6WQM>.

¹²⁰ For example, Project NIA, which was founded by Mariame Kaba, promotes alternatives to criminal law enforcement for youth grounded in practices of restorative and transformative justice. *About Us*, PROJECT NIA, <https://perma.cc/BW8E-PSBB>.

¹²¹ CIRCLES AND CIPHERS, <https://perma.cc/9BB9-KTY3>.

enforcement to meeting disenfranchised communities' needs.¹²² In Chicago, the Grassroots Collaborative, a coalition of community organizations and labor unions, developed solidarity campaigns around principles of equity and restorative justice, including a budget proposal reflecting the needs of Chicago's working families that presents a critique of the city's tax policies and development projects that prioritize the wealthy and corporate elite.¹²³ The budget proposal calls for reversing decades of disinvestment from Chicago's minority communities, abandoning failed policies that increase racial inequality, and raising new revenue from large corporations.¹²⁴ Many of the budget proposals are a reflection of the Reimagine Chicago platform, which was developed by Grassroots Collaborative as "an aspirational plan to transform Chicago into a city that works for everybody through targeted community investment, expansion and protection of affordable housing, police accountability, jobs programs, and progressive revenue."¹²⁵

The platform exhorts us to reimagine safety, community investment, healthy communities, revenue, and Chicago's economy.¹²⁶ The platform calls for divestment in police funding and for that money to instead fund restorative-justice efforts in communities and schools. It also calls for free, universal public childcare and for an end to the practices of local polluting industries that use Chicago's communities of color and low-income communities as waste disposal sites. An entire section addresses the use of TIFs and recommends that all unspent TIF dollars be returned to developing schools, parks, and libraries.¹²⁷ These efforts have expanded in recent years, playing an active role in city budgeting processes around the country and pressing mayors and city councils to begin to democratize local budgeting to address the front end, or root causes, of violence.¹²⁸

¹²² See THE CTR. FOR POPULAR DEMOCRACY, LAW FOR BLACK LIVES & BLACK YOUTH PROJECT 100, FREEDOM TO THRIVE: REIMAGINING SAFETY AND SECURITY IN OUR COMMUNITIES, <https://perma.cc/54YS-LLLN>.

¹²³ See *Reimagine Chicago*, GRASSROOTS COLLABORATIVE (Apr. 16, 2019), <https://perma.cc/4QN6-KSS4>.

¹²⁴ See *id.*

¹²⁵ *Gun Violence*, LIVE FREE ILL., <https://perma.cc/YQ3Q-LVYE>.

¹²⁶ *Reimagine Chicago*, *supra* note 123.

¹²⁷ *Id.*

¹²⁸ See Andy Grimm, *As Budget Season Nears, Activists Call on Lightfoot to Cut CPD Funding*, CHI. SUN-TIMES (Aug. 3, 2021), <https://perma.cc/8HYP-VCQH> ("Defund CPD Campaign wants to see police layoffs to free up money for education, anti-violence programs.").

B. Creating a Solidarity Economy

Abolitionists are also working to promote a solidarity economy outside the context of city budgeting and local programming, creating alternative forms of economic life in worker cooperatives, community land trusts, public banking, and other, more democratic economic initiatives.¹²⁹ These efforts promise to create alternatives to extractive economic practices that have produced racialized inequity and dispossession.

The Movement for Black Lives' Vision for Black Lives imagines a robust national program of solidarity-economy projects that could enable an alternative economic framework to regressive taxation and corporate subsidies.¹³⁰ The Movement focuses on reparations in abolitionist terms—ending resource extraction from Black communities through tax, reforming housing and other laws and policies, and providing robust support for access to high-quality education.¹³¹ The vision for an alternative economic framework emerges from solidarity-economy initiatives like worker cooperatives, community land trusts, public banking, and participatory budgeting,¹³² all of which enable an economy that is more equitable and democratically controlled, shifting both resources and power. The BREATHE Act,¹³³ emerging in part from the Movement for Black Lives' Vision for Black Lives, is proposed federal legislation authored by the Movement for Black Lives' Electoral Justice Project that envisions divesting from federal and state criminal legal systems¹³⁴ and investing in universal childcare pilot projects,¹³⁵ universal basic income pilot

¹²⁹ See, e.g., Geoff Gilbert, *Who Plans Our Political Economy? A Solidarity Economy Vision for Democratic Political Economy Planning*, 12 UNBOUND: HARV. J. LEGAL LEFT 3, 101 (2019); GEO Collective, *A Conversation About the Impact of Co-ops in Abolition Work*, GRASSROOTS ECON. ORG. (Nov. 24, 2020), <https://perma.cc/8A9Z-QLPT>.

¹³⁰ *Economic Justice*, MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES, <https://perma.cc/47RZ-NE8D>.

¹³¹ See *Reparations*, MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES, <https://perma.cc/QR9E-T9EJ>.

¹³² See *Economic Justice*, *supra* note 130; *Community Control*, MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES, <https://perma.cc/B3UQ-WUBE>.

¹³³ *The BREATHE Act*, THE BREATHE ACT FEDERAL BILL PROPOSAL (2021), <https://perma.cc/54WW-NAP6>.

¹³⁴ *Id.* at 1–4.

¹³⁵ *Id.* at 63–64.

projects,¹³⁶ Medicare expansion,¹³⁷ and equitable public housing¹³⁸ so as to enable a more racially just social state.¹³⁹

C. An End to Militarism and a Just Transition

Much of this abolitionist organizing embraces a framework termed “invest/divest,”¹⁴⁰ and the Red Nation, a grassroots Indigenous liberation organization, extends this framework to ending the violence of militarism and promoting a just transition to a less violent and more environmentally sustainable future.¹⁴¹ The Red Deal, a project of the Red Nation, takes up abolition as a means of confronting, at once, police violence, interpersonal violence, economic harms, and militarism. The Red Deal envisions divestment from military spending along with investment in dignified work to restore the planet, clean air, clean water, free universal education, health care, and a broader project of decolonization, anticapitalism, and the return of stolen lands or “land back.”¹⁴² All of this could be enabled, the Red Deal explains, by reduced military spending:

We draw from Black abolitionist traditions to call for divestment away from the caging, criminalizing, and harming of human beings *and* from the exploitative and extractive violence of fossil fuels.

But divestment is only half of the equation. What will we do with the resources that will become available once we divest from prisons, military, the detention industry, and fossil fuels?

...

... [I]magine if we had over a trillion dollars to invest in healthcare for everyone? . . . [W]e could end world hunger, illiteracy, child hunger, homelessness, and build renewable energy tomorrow.”¹⁴³

¹³⁶ *Id.* at 79–80.

¹³⁷ *Id.* at 60–61.

¹³⁸ *The BREATHE Act*, *supra* note 133 at 97–98.

¹³⁹ *Id.* On June 28, 2021, Congresswoman Cori Bush introduced the People’s Response Act, “the first piece of federal legislation that is fully inspired by the BREATHE Act framework.” *The People’s Response Act*, THE BREATHE ACT, <https://perma.cc/E2FH-2V6J>; *see also* The People’s Response Act, H.R. 4194, 117th Cong. (2021).

¹⁴⁰ *See* THE CTR. FOR POPULAR DEMOCRACY *et al.*, *supra* note 122.

¹⁴¹ THE RED NATION, *supra* note 21 at 12, 20.

¹⁴² *See generally id.*

¹⁴³ *Id.* at 12–13 (emphasis in original).

The Red Deal and related abolitionist efforts envision demilitarization as a means of facilitating a new relation to the earth that is nonextractive, sustainable, and equitable—a just transition to a more egalitarian and environmentally conscientious future.¹⁴⁴

CONCLUSION

For contemporary abolitionists, to eliminate violence requires addressing its roots in those practices that produced and continue to perpetuate entrenched inequality, racialized poverty, and militarist violence. Entrenched racialized inequality originated and is maintained in the halls of power, not primarily in dispossessed neighborhoods in Chicago or other impoverished communities around the world. It is instituted through economic law and policy, through tax law and housing policy, and through a tradition of armed militarist violence that led to the settlement of this country through the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and that has continued ever since—at the hands of early police forces operating as slave patrols, Klan violence and lynch mobs, and contemporary U.S. police forces that kill approximately one thousand civilians each year. Abolitionists are working to build a world characterized instead by investment of public resources in sustainably improving our collective quality of life, creating equitable economic practices, devoting careful attention to the prevention and repair of harm and violence, enabling high-quality public education and health care, and engaging in environmental remediation rather than militarist adventurism and militarized policing. These are the beginnings of an abolitionist critique of violence and these critical perspectives and strategies ought to inform fundamentally our approaches to working to end violence.

¹⁴⁴ *Id.*