S.A. Resolution #30

Calling For the Disarmament of the Cornell University Police Department


ABSTRACT: This resolution is calling for the disarmament of the Cornell University Police department.

Whereas, The policing system in America is rooted in racism, slavery, corruption, and violence, particularly against Black and Brown people, which has been commonplace since the institution’s inception;

Whereas, American law enforcement as we know began as slave patrols and union busters where squadrons of white volunteers that enforced laws related to slavery by capturing and returning enslaved people who had escaped, crushing uprisings, and punishing enslaved workers believed to have violated plantation rules;

Whereas, Police have upheld and enforced racist laws since slavery, the black codes, and the Jim Crow laws;

Whereas, Ugly Laws were enacted as early forms of policing that primarily targeted low income and people with disabilities;

Whereas, Ugly Laws essentially “prohibited people with noticeable physical disabilities from visiting public spaces;”

Whereas, Ugly laws disproportionately targeted folks at the intersection of race, income, and disability status;

Whereas, After the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, slavery took on the form of prison labor camps, several of which were located on the grounds of former plantations;

Whereas, The prisoners in these camps were not safeguarded by the Fourteenth Amendment thus denying any type of protection from the harsh, unpaid labor that characterized these prisons;

Whereas, Policing was henceforth racially motivated, preying on almost exclusively young Black men, causing these prisons to be filled based on the racist predispositions that remained during the Reconstruction era;
Whereas, This exploited workforce soon after were subjected to “convict leasing” which allowed for plantation owners to buy back previously enslaved peoples for a small fee that went to the state;

Whereas, To this day, the exploitation of prison labor is continually perpetuated, predominantly targeting Black neighborhoods to sustain these racist systems which disproportionately police and incriminate Black individuals;

Whereas, Police in the Jim Crow Era were integral in the mandatance of separate public spaces for blacks and whites, such as schools, libraries, water fountains and restaurants. Police routinely subjected Black Americans in violation of such laws, or who dared to deviate from social norms, to intense beatings and other forms of police brutality;

Whereas, Police actively subjected peaceful protesters during the Civil Rights era to violence through acts involving use of police dogs, fire hydrants, batons and other means of physical violence, with the goal of suppressing protest and maintaining the existing racial status quo;

Whereas, Policing on college campuses started as a way to break up student movements before they grew large enough to effectively pressure the administration to win change;

Whereas, Recent incidents suggest that policing in higher education continues to utilize the violent tactics used to suppress the Vietnam War and civil-rights activists;

Whereas, Recent incidents include campus police pepper-spraying a row of passive, seated students, unlawfully detaining students, murdering innocent unarmed people (including one during a period of distress due to mental illness);

Whereas, The need for weapons has increasingly come into question as a result of the violent crime rate on college campuses decreasing 27 percent from 2004-2010. Despite such a decrease, more sworn officers with firearms (94 percent), chemical or pepper spray (94 percent), taser-like devices (40 percent), and in some cases military-grade equipment, have been simultaneously added to college campuses;

Whereas, The most common crimes at peer institutions, such as Harvard University, appear to be mostly (95%) property related as opposed to those crimes requiring campus police to be heavily armed. Further, at schools like SUNY Cortland, school administrators condemn an armed police force for creating an unnecessary aura of power and domination on campus, as opposed to a role of helpers, protectors and problem solvers;

Whereas, Unarmed police officers are similarly effective as armed police officers in deterring crime through patrol (American Society of Criminology’s Director of the Division of Experimental Criminology);
Whereas, Unarmed uniformed private security guards have a crime deterrent effect through patrol (ASA DEC);

Whereas, An alternative solution to policing can take the form of targeted community investments, such as investing into more CAPS staff and making mental health services more accessible to the campus community;

Whereas, The police should not respond to calls concerning mental health crises or medical emergencies, which should fall under the jurisdiction of EMTs and social workers, who are more equipped and trained to handle these situations;

Whereas, Decriminalization helps reduce crime. CUPD should not respond to situations concerning alcohol and drug abuse, including patrolling parties or being called to dorms when RAs smell marijuana. Rather, alcohol and drug use should be decriminalized so that medical professionals will instead respond appropriately when students require support related to substance abuse;

Whereas, Such alternatives target and prevent the roots of crime rather than what police forces do, which is merely reacting to and reproducing crime;

Whereas, Portland State University disarmed their campus police this fall. Their officers will now conduct patrols without firearms, but are still permitted “non-lethal” tasers. The university has a “Reimagine Campus Safety Steering Committee” dedicated to providing recommendations on campus safety without armed officers. This policy change was in response to the fatal shooting of Jason Washington on the PSU campus. Cornell should not wait for a tragedy to disarm CUPD;

Whereas, The Massachusetts College of Art and Design has an unarmed police force, and the Board of Trustees voted to keep their campus police unarmed in 2019. The MassArt campus police tried to regain their firearms, but a petition of over 550 students and community members urged the Board of Trustees to keep campus police officers unarmed;

Whereas, Students at the University of Chicago founded the #CareNotCops campaign in 2018 with the intention of disarming, defunding, and disbanding the UCPD. The campaign started after the UCPD shot a student on campus who was experiencing a mental health episode; once again, Cornell should not wait for a tragedy to occur to make change. When the University of Chicago refused to engage with students, activists occupied UCPD headquarters for 20 hours. Students are still actively petitioning the University of Chicago to disarm, defund, and disband the UCPD;

Whereas, Students at Harvard University are also calling to disband their university police force. Their demands were reinvigorated over the summer when HUPD officers were spotted in Boston monitoring a demonstration after George Floyd’s death. This resulted in the University releasing an official statement announcing an independent review of HUPD;

Whereas, The Black Students for Disarmament at Yale organization sent an open letter to the Yale administration asking for the disarmament and dismantling of the Yale Police department.
Whereas, This letter came after a Yale police officer fired 16 shots into the car of Stephanie Washington and Paul Witherspoon—two unarmed, Black youth—in 2019. Cornell should not wait for gun violence to occur to disarm the CUPD;

Whereas, Prior to 2005, the SUNY Cortland campus, as well as two other SUNY campuses, did not permit their University Police to carry lethal weapons;

Whereas, The term lethal weapons does not refer exclusively to guns as any weapon such as taser or baton can be used with deadly force.

Whereas, Cornell should look to create more community structures that do not rely upon the armament of CUPD; Alternative mechanisms are put in place in the transition towards disarming the Cornell University Police Department such as, but not limited to:

Whereas, A mental health emergency response team and an alternative blue-light system that would have no affiliation with CUPD that would provide paid jobs filled by unarmed Ithaca community members.

Whereas, To address issues concerning drug and alcohol related medical emergencies, the Cornell University Emergency Medical Response team should not call CUPD if a student is underaged;

Whereas, In the event of an active threat on campus, CUPD should not have weapons because there exist non-armed responses to perpetrators of gun violence;

Whereas, The quick nature of gun violence does not permit for police officers to prevent violence and or harm incurring on other students since mass shootings often stop at the volition of the perpetrator and not because of armed intervention;

Whereas, More weight should be given to the reality and consequences of police brutality and not the hypothetical mass shooting scenarios that rarely occur in the first place.

Whereas, The Student Assembly hosted a Town Hall on 12/08/2020, which was attended by over 200 students, to hear from constituents about campus police disarmament,

Whereas, The express purpose of the Town Hall was to create “space for community members to share their thoughts with SA members on the topic of CUPD disarmament,” and the community’s input added new information to the SA’s understanding of the interests of the student body,

Whereas, The student body displayed an overwhelming amount of support for full CUPD disarmament at the Town Hall, with 51 unique attendees speaking in favor of the resolution and only 7 unique attendees speaking against,

Whereas, According to the Student Assembly Charter, Article IV: Membership, Section 8B, it is the duty of student-elected representatives to “[gather] information about their particular college,” “[represent] their respective constituencies,” and “[vote] according to their needs and desires,”
and in this case the student body has overwhelmingly voiced their need and desire for CUPD disarmament at the Town Hall,

Be it therefore resolved, Supporting data and trends overwhelmingly show that police on college campuses should not have access to lethal weapons as it is unnecessary and proves to increase the likelihood of danger/use of lethal force rather than decrease;

Be it therefore resolved, The SA’s 12/08/2020 Town Hall on CUPD Disarmament provided voting members of the Student Assembly with new information from constituents, namely a strong showing of support for Resolution 11, which justifies the reconsideration of campus disarmament;

Be it therefore resolved, Supporting data and trends overwhelmingly show that police on college campuses should not have access to lethal weapons as it is unnecessary and proves to increase the likelihood of danger/use of lethal force rather than decrease;

Be it finally resolved, Cornell University must take action by immediately disarming the Cornell University Police department of all lethal weapons.

Respectfully submitted,

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Meshach Boyce ‘21
MGFC Ex-Officio Representative, Student Assembly
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<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sherell Farmer '22</td>
<td>Co-Founder, Cornell Students4BlackLives (C4BL)</td>
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Cornell Abolitionist Revolutionary Society
Multicultural Greek and Fraternal Council
Cornell Students 4 Black Lives
DoBetterCornell
People’s Organizing Collective
La Asociacion Latina
Cornell Progressives
Cornell DREAM Team
Men of Color Council
Cornell Asian and Pacific Islander Student Union
Arab Students Association at Cornell
Gender Justice Advocacy Coalition

(Reviewed by: Diversity and Inclusion Committee, XX-XX-XXXX, 12/10/2020)