

Police Incentives Matter

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"For every bullet the German police fired on duty in 2016, American police killed 10 people," writes Jason Brennan for *MarketWatch*.

"Even overwhelmingly white states like Wyoming and Montana imprison citizens at higher rates than authoritarian Cuba."

What is going on here?

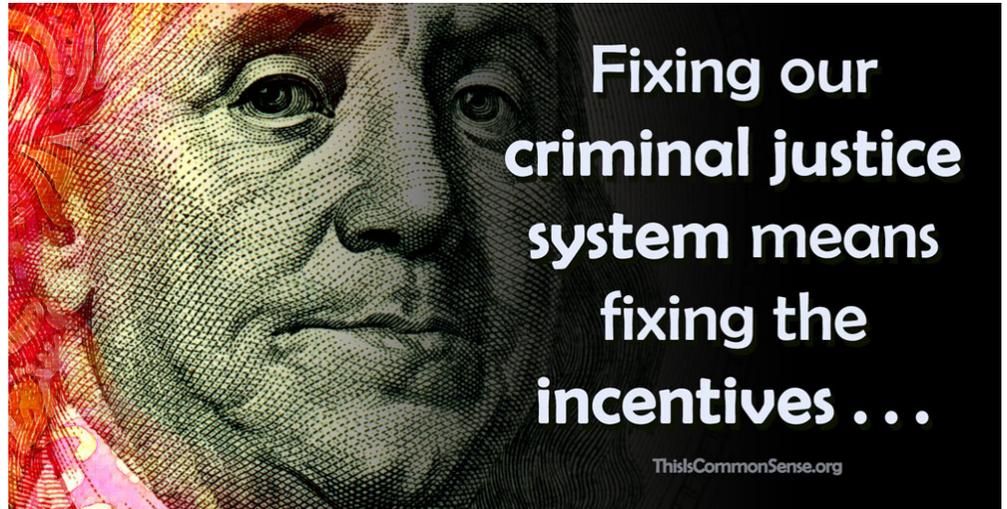
And by *here* I mean "these United States of America."

Well, Brennan, who is the Robert J and Elizabeth Flanagan Family Professor of Strategy, Economics, Ethics, and Public Policy at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business, has an answer.

"What matters even more than black and white is green," he writes, referencing the current

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protests and riots sparked by coverage of the George Floyd killing by Minneapolis police. "Fixing our criminal justice system means fixing the incentives."



Professor Brennan points the finger at a number of federal programs:

- The 1981 Military Cooperation with Law Enforcement Act "authorized and incentivized the U.S. armed forces to train police in military tactics" while the 1990 National Defense Authorization Act established a pipeline from the military industrial complex to local police forces.
- The drug war set up police theft of private property via civil asset forfeiture, and encouraged federal drug warriors to share the loot with local police departments.
- In many localities, direct election of prosecutors leads to campaign boasts about prosecution stats and long sentences, even when these policies make us less safe.

There's a lot here to mull over, and you may not agree with everything Brennan argues, but the basic point is quite clear: "Even if we magically erased all racism overnight, the U.S. would still be harsh and violent" — and that because our politics has skewed incentives all wrong.

Getting rid of programs and laws that disincentivize good policing is a must.

This is Common Sense. I'm Paul Jacob.