

Mamdani's Too Pro-Cop For Me

Nsámbu Za Suékama

November 20, 2025

In the civil rights era, the phrase “Black on Black crime” did not have the meaning it does today...

Today, when people use it, it's to suggest that *rather* than be concerned with racist policing, we should be concerned with how most victims of violent crime are preyed on by folks who *look like and live in proximity to them*.

The original phrase “Black on Black crime” was not turning a *universal observation* into a gaslight against concerns about antiblack cops.

Most violence in any community is a matter of opportunity and nearness: which is why most victims of sexual assault are harmed by someone they know, and most robberies are committed against a neighbor, as with shootings and fights. That rings true regardless of so-called racial status.

What “black on black crime” was meant to point out was how: 1) police fill Black neighborhoods in ways they do not for other communities 2) this overpolicing still does nothing for making our neighborhoods safer, thus being underpoliced, and 3) criminal elements in the Black community are only repressed if the victim is white.

That last point is very important. Whereas the liberal wing of civil rights struggle wanted the police to begin protecting Black victims, the revolutionary camps focused on highlighting why overpoliced neighborhoods are ironically underpoliced only until and unless white people or white property are affected.

First of all, the job of policing is to protect a “public” defined by the transition from plantation capital to industrial capital. Slave patrols took up the role primarily to keep personal and private ownings of settlers/conquistadors from being overthrown by the enslaved rebels, runaways, and abolitionists on this land. But as peasants were dispossessed from farms, and the Union looked to expand westward and overseas, the drive to “modernization” introduced a new threat: the lumpen.

These were folks who neither held slave status nor were they proletarian workers: they were unhoused, pauperized, and could only really survive through underground or illegal economies or trade. Whether it was sex work, drug trafficking, or plain theft and expropriation of money, goods, etc. Capitalism is a competitive system though: only one class gets to steal, and that is the Man, and he must do so within parameters of the law (although he can break the laws he wrote

when he wants to, hence even as slave trading became illegal, it still persisted, and after slavery was abolished, some masters still kept people enslaved well into the 1960s). Only capitalists get to commit violence through war and genocide and displacement and only capitalists, those who commandeer the government and own the means of production, get to exploit labor and accumulate resources/power. Police come into the equation to aid the ruling class in this regard.

Lumpen individuals are not criminals. Many are disabled, are youth, are queer/trans, and slip in and out of various forms of waged work and off-the-books labor too. Many proletarians are also lumpenized or in contact with the same, especially in cramped, urban, industrial spaces. This created a degree of hostility towards police among the exploited and underclasses. Now, Black folks have disproportionately been lumpenized since the non-event of emancipation, because outside of the option to be a sharecropper or a prisoner, you had nothing. There was no land for you and very little waged work outside of perhaps becoming domestic house help or a nurse. Most Black people who could find jobs were only paid in tips and informal economies. Slave patrollers joined up in policing because the war against the lumpen by cops was now an extension of a war against the Black people who were uniquely at risk of being lumpenized. Of course, this further grows the prison labor pool. But it also means that we became hyperpoliced.

Again, though, capitalism is competitive, and sometimes that competition is about collaboration. Above ground enterprises in these increasingly industrial centers were absolutely okay with coordinating with criminal organizations. In exchange, the criminal underground could aid the ruling class' advance while also receiving some indemnity from the police. This kind of exchange was most notable in the 80s, when Black people began to suspect that the top of the drug trafficking chain was in cahoots with the police and city or even federal officials, all amidst the disruption of radical movements both in the US and overseas. It should be clear, then, that only a type of lumpen is a target of repression: the ones who threaten the Man's material interest. It is this which explains "Black on black crime." Criminal activities are allowed to run free until and unless it gets in the way of bourgeois interests (or even just the bourgeoisie's image)—then it has to be clamped down. Sometimes that might even mean finding scapegoats, making up lies, whatever can be done, particularly to get rid of subversive elements like Black revolutionaries.

The unity and closeness between lumpenized individuals and workers means that whatever is done to one is done to the other: if the disabled, unhoused, drug addicted, homeless youth, are left alone by cops, but at risk of being trafficked and preyed on by criminals (who work with the cops and the rulers anyway), then that means the average worker will also find themselves seeing predation/trafficking and lumpen struggles out in the open.

In comes the social welfare/service system claiming that to make the "public" safe, police should do their "job" addressing criminals while other institutions provide a social safety net to workers and the dispossessed so that vulnerable populations are off the streets and out of adverse situations.

The problem is, social programs are aimed at having the exploited and underclasses become more adjusted to our condition. Most social programs bear an association with "single motherhood" for this reason: they are an elaboration upon the ways that household reproduction is organized by capitalism.

Household reproduction involves the commodities bought with wages but also the unwaged care-taking labor and domestic upkeep done usually by the wife, children, etc that allow each worker to return to work and to school the next day.

As wages become more scarce, as goods become more expensive, and also as domestic upkeep has to be shouldered by workers themselves and vice versa (hence, many mothers are both homemaker and breadwinner), a tax burden fills in the gap so that the dispossessed can become more accommodated in an increasingly more exploitative and complicated set of productive relations.

So schooling helps with acquiring skills for the workplace in ways that prior to the advent of public education, most learning was done primarily in church or under the household. So also, benefit programs help with feeding and childcare and healthcare and rent so that we have just enough crumbs to stay afloat, unlike in prior years where these were relatively inexistent and the responsibility to “pull oneself by the bootstraps” lay in the home.

The role of household reproduction in what it means to “work hard” under capitalism is precisely why social programs that fill in the gaps therein are conceived in terms of who does or does not have a proper household arrangement, align with a given set of family values, or deserves the aid/support in exchange for their loyalty and obedience dominant norms.

But that’s also why many social programs and various private industries aimed at addressing social issues are so focused on bringing exploited and underclass populations into alignment with the nuclear family, with the conjugal/marital unit, and respectable notions of success.

The disabled become valued in these terms, youth do too, queer/trans folks as well, and any racialized or ethno-religious minority. One deserves programs geared at equity, diversity, inclusion, only based on these grounds. Such technologies of worker-adjustment don’t ever stop the police from shooting the exploited and underclasses, filling our neighborhoods: nor does it ever change the fact that their collaborators in the criminal underground are allowed to take advantage of us, especially of our most marginal and vulnerable community members in the streets.

This was the case even before government and nonprofit services got cut and rolled back: so to blame the problem of underpolicing on “cops having to respond to gaps in the social safety net” is incredibly ahistorical. It’s also just a way to buttress more biased overpolicing, because the idea is that if police can be given the funding and institutional support to “focus on actual issues,” then they’ll rid our neighborhoods of criminal elements—despite the fact that such elements are about either taking advantage of, trying to survive, or trying to abolish the concentrated issues caused by the capitalist dispossession that police are on board with.

It has already been hard enough to explain these things to the assimilation or integration minded members of the Black community. Black revolutionaries have had to parse the meaning of “black on black crime” for decades now. It was made all the more difficult because of the racist misuse of the term. But, to now have self-described socialists standing in our way is going to make things even more difficult. A socialist who refuses to abolish police, much less defund them, is one who doesn’t understand the value form nor the regime/imperative of private accumulation—which forfeits his right to call himself a socialist.

Liberals like Mamdani know this to be the case, which is why they call themselves “democratic” socialists, which is just code for “I want capitalism to remain as is, with a bigger safety net.”

I’m not shaming anyone for voting in a candidate who could make their accommodation to such a period of precarity more secure, nor am I dismissing anyone’s concerns with safety. But

words mean things and especially for Black people we need to be thinking about the implications of any political choices made.

The police are not public servants, or rather the only “public” they serve is that which has been organized by the reproduction of this empire and ultimately of the labor-power that the ruling class needs so it can keep profiting off our lives and our planet.

This fact is why even if Mamdani loses in the election, the city already has plans for a training center where the cops will coordinate with a range of other city agencies, right on down to sanitation. What’s novel about Mamdani’s proposals if it fits right into what city officials plan to move forward on?

And why would institutions that compromise a “social safety net” even need to coordinate with police to address issues that Mamdani says shouldn’t actually concern the police? If these other agencies are better equipped such that the cops should be removed from being first responders and on the front lines, then surely they would be competent without extra funding having to go to the cops, no?

If the issue was truly that the police are being pulled away from their supposed main areas of focus, could they not just do focus on that while the other agencies get the funds to do what they haven’t been doing/able to do? What is the point of bringing the carceral state and social services in closer contact and coordination with each other?

These are not rhetorical questions. Please reflect.

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Retrieved on 13 January 2026 from
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published originally on Patreon, 1 jul 2025—I am resharing this on 20th November, in response to Mamdani's recent win and subsequent moves re: Commissioner Tisch. Much of my sentiments are pushback against celebration of Mamdani by the DSA and other left-electoralists, including within Black radical spaces like MXGM and Cooperation Jackson. The substance and historical basis of my position is also drawn from my and other Black anarchist/autonomist critiques of ideas such as “community control” of police advocated by Pan Africanist & Black ML/M organizers as well as proposals to “defund and reallocate” carceral institutions in favor of “care” institutions that is advocated by many feminists & abolitionist organizers

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