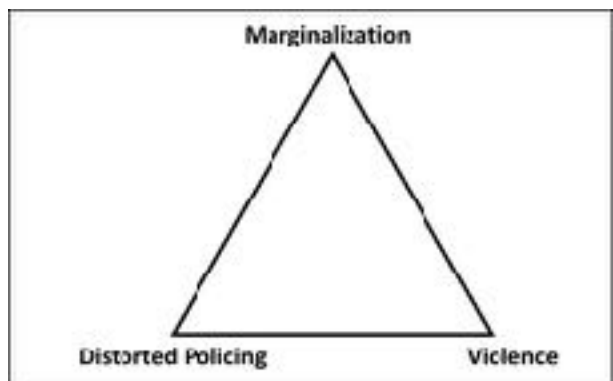


***From Enforcers to Guardians: University of Orange Reading Group***  
**A precis created by Robert Fullilove, EdD, Mailman School of Public Health**

*From Enforcers to Guardians: A Public Health Primer on Ending Police Violence* uses a public health 'frame' to demonstrate the connection between police violence in the United States and public health efforts to promote health and prevent disease. The connection might not appear obvious at first. Readers may question why the courts and other institutions of law and order are not the first line of defense in the face of such violence. However, as the authors note at the outset: "The public health framing that we propose here challenges all of us to recognize that the suffering created by excessive police violence extends far beyond deaths to include experiences with police sexual violence, psychological violence, neglectful violence, and nonfatal physical violence."

The science of public health has developed substantially over the course of the last 100 years. It embraces notions of health, sickness, and disease that go far beyond efforts to locate human wellness in the structure and anatomy of the human body. As noted in the first chapter, social, economic, and political forces contribute substantially to the factors that impact health. If violence begets suffering that, in turn, begets disease, police violence in all of its forms belongs in the domain of public health.

The most obvious starting point for understanding police violence is with its victims. Such violence is not random. Not everyone in the US is vulnerable. As contemporary newspaper headlines do not cease to remind us, the weight of such victimization ostensibly falls heaviest upon young black men. And though this proposition might be debated, what puts these persons at risk is not their gender as much as their membership and their residence in a community that has been marginalized since its creation. Black men and the community to which they belong are the objects of 401 years of efforts to control them and minimize any threat they might present to a system of power that enslaved their forebears. The authors are clear at this juncture in citing the work of Patricia Fernandez Kelly that marginalized communities do not experience the benefits of a powerful group whose mission is "to protect and serve." What they will receive instead is a "distorted" form of policing that uses violence as its most obvious tool to maintain the social order and to protect the privilege of those in power. They point us to a "toxic triad" of marginalization, distorted policing and violence.

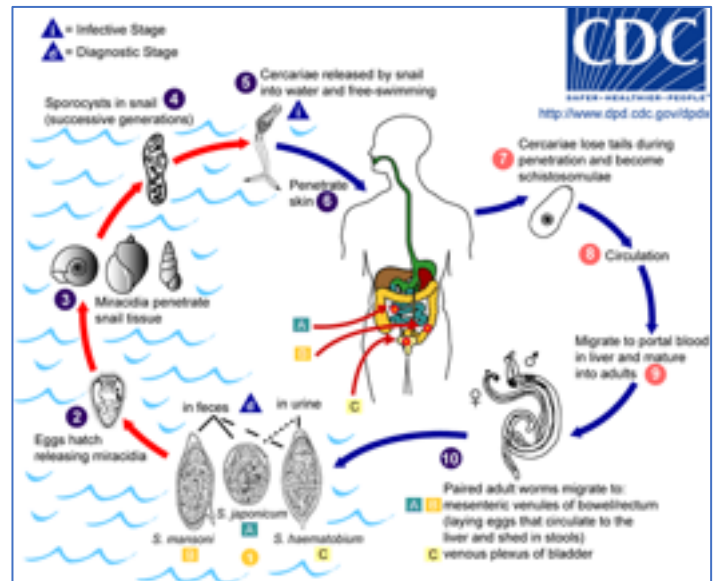


Why has public health as an important social institution been so slow to understand and work to mitigate the problems of police violence? The answers, the authors suggest, is that until very recently, public health workers and leaders were primarily members of the privileged class that saw no reason to question what the police did or how they did it.

The expansion of the public health workforce over the course of the last 30 years to include members of oppressed communities also expanded the practice of examining police violence as a public health dilemma. And the use of a public framing to understand police violence strongly suggests that such framing can be instrumental in the framing of solutions.

And what solutions does *From Enforcers to Guardians* offer? The somewhat surprising answer is “engage the problem as public health has engaged the challenge of....schistosomiasis!” The

schistosome, which kills more than 200 thousand persons worldwide every year, is a canny foe. Its impact on human health involves a parasitic invasion that impacts multiple organs of the body. It is a water borne parasite that exploits modern engineering efforts by thriving in poorly constructed dams. The parasite and the health conditions it engenders cannot be controlled by medications and medical treatment alone. As the authors point out, there is no “magic bullet” that can serve as a solution. Many different institutions must be engaged to control the parasite, disrupt its reproductive cycle, treat the ill and infirm, and prevent future exposures. Rather than create one magic bullet, the solution lies instead with a magic strategy that coordinates the deployment of multiple resources.



What is this magic strategy? As the authors note: *To move away from distorted policing, the magic strategy we propose addresses three major areas: preparing police forces to end distorted practices and enact public safety for all people, thus bringing everyone into the protected circle of guardianship; protecting civil rights and the Constitution; and overcoming the resource deprivation of marginalization.*

That approach will be the subject of our deliberations here.



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