



# Abolish Carceral Technologies: The People's Response

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In March 2019, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) released its audit of LAPD's two predictive policing programs: Operation LASER and PredPol. For Operation LASER, the OIG found major abuse of power from the police in targeting and surveilling people without cause, resulting in LAPD shutting down the program soon after. For PredPol, the OIG was unable to complete a comprehensive review of its program, citing flaws and discrepancies in the data LAPD provided.

It has taken the LAPD seven full months to write a mere seven page response to the audit, a response that does little to address the concerns raised by the community about the fundamental flaws of predictive policing programs. LAPD's responses focus primarily on collecting more data, doing more analysis, and implementing more policing, all while avoiding taking responsibility for their negligence, harm to community, and the inherent racism of predictive policing.

This People's Response to the LAPD's OIG audit response intentionally highlights not only the elements that the LAPD has chosen to respond to, but also that the LAPD has ignored. This is the People's Response, and we will not have our narrative determined by a department that does not, and has not, served the people.

## ■ 1. DATIFICATION OF OUR LIVES

By turning lives into data points fed into an algorithm, the LAPD claims that their policing is objective and neutral. However, no policing is neutral.

- **LAPD's evaluation metrics reflect their intent to harm.** When the measure of a program's effectiveness is quantified in number of detentions, "enforcement activities", and arrests, we see LAPD's intent to harm and how community members are dehumanized. This ignores how arrest, surveillance, and incarceration perpetuate cycles of trauma and harm and lead to displacement of folks from the community. What does it say about a program that removing a person from their community is deemed a success?
- **Our lives cannot be datafied.** PredPol was born out of the theorizing of Jeff Brantingham, a UCLA Professor of Anthropology, that a universal math model/algorithm could predict archaeological foraging of stone.<sup>1</sup> Brantingham wrongly assumes that human behavior can be operationalized and simplified into a universal mathematical model/algorithm; on the contrary, our lives and stories will not and cannot be datafied. There are numerous factors contributing to human action and no algorithm can measure and account for all of them.

## ■ 2. LOCATION-BASED POLICING

Location-based policing is racist; locations are segregated based on race as a result of a long history of redlining, displacement, and gentrification.

- **Location-based policing is racist.** LA's long history of segregation and racist housing policies makes location a proxy for race. The OIG audit found that Predpol patrols spent the longest time in Central, Hollenbeck, and Southeast—all areas that are majority low-income Black and Brown communities.

- **Location-based policing is about targeting people.**

LAPD manuals reinforce the narrative that a person in what LAPD deems a “gang-area” may be a gang member. Since at least 2004, LAPD has maintained “frequents gang areas” as a point on their list of criteria for documenting a person as a gang member. Of 60 cases examined by the OIG in a 2019 audit of CalGang, in 73% of cases where a person was entered into CalGang by LAPD, one of at least two “indicators” of gang membership and/or gang association required for entry was “subject has been seen frequenting gang areas.”

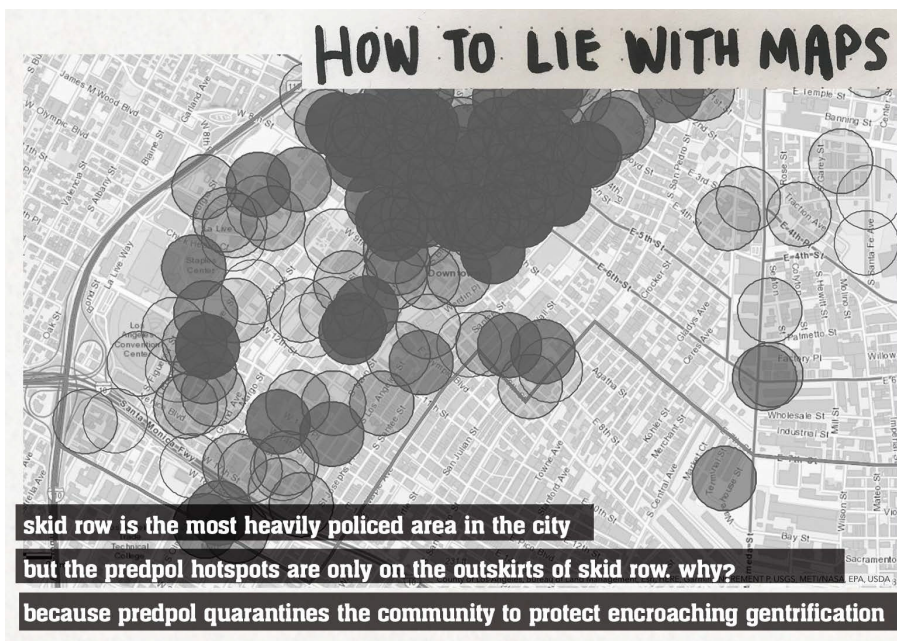
- **Location-based policing is digital redlining.**

A Public Records request found that hotspots were most prevalent in the areas of Downtown bordering Skid Row. PredPol’s anti-homeless bias is making Skid Row a de-facto containment zone - pushing our rising homeless population into a smaller and smaller space. This is an intentional act by the city to continue to expand and gentrify Downtown, using police to remove long-time residents in favor of wealthier transplants.

- **Location-based policing is pseudoscience.**

LAPD claims Predpol reduces crime by 7.4% in study sites, but this is based on 2012 - 2013 experimental data<sup>2</sup> reported by Predpol Inc and

LAPD. This represents a clear conflict of interest as PredPol Inc has a financial interest in claiming that its technology works. The study was also conducted by the same people who created Predpol and 5 of the 7 UCLA researchers who conducted this study also held stock in Predpol. The only two known empirical studies assessing predictive policing systems (where the researcher was not monetarily invested in a particular outcome of the study) found that predictive policing programs increased enforcement, but had little impact on the reduction of crime.<sup>3 4</sup>



### ■ 3. “OFFENDER”-BASED POLICING

**Offender-based policing is racist and presumes criminality. People are swept up into databases that can be used for future agendas.**

- **“Offender” based programs = “guilty until proven innocent.”** Funded by the City of LA, person-based tactics and data assume and assign criminality with the intention to surveil, control, and contain. LAPD claims PredPol is not racist because it is “location-based”... which means even the LAPD knows that person-based policing is racist!

- **We still do not know the impact of Operation LASER.**

LASER was the most recent person-based program LAPD implemented, which was dismantled in April 2019 due to police abuse and there still has not been an investigation into the harm and impact of the program.

- **We cannot trust LAPD to stop tracking people.** LAPD claims they will not track “Chronic Offenders” anymore but during 8 years of Operation LASER, LAPD relentlessly gathered and compiled data on community members using

Automatic License Plate Readers (ALPR),<sup>5</sup> Field Interview (FI) Cards,<sup>6</sup> and other forms of surveillance.<sup>7</sup> Now they refuse to dispose of the data,<sup>8</sup> claiming it will be incorporated into the “habitual offender” database.

- **LAPD manipulates data and data-driven strategies.** It was revealed that LAPD divisions were modifying offender bulletins in the LASER program and removing advisory language approved by the city attorney, and using the program in unapproved ways.

- **LAPD wants to further target people on parole and probation.** Black folks are more likely to receive harsher sentences compared to whites for the same offense,<sup>9</sup> are disproportionately represented among the population on parole or probation,<sup>10</sup> and also have their probation revoked at higher rates than white probationers, even after accounting for criminal history, seriousness of the crime and other factors.<sup>11</sup> LAPD wants to use data that specifically targets communities of color and exacerbates racial disparities.

### OUR DEMANDS ③ HEARING ON LASER

LASER'S GONE...



... BUT THE DATA'S NOT.

THE DATA COLLECTED BY LAPD UNDER OPERATION LASER IS RACIST AND TARGETS BLACK, BROWN, AND POOR COMMUNITIES. WE DEMAND LAPD PURGE THIS DATA!

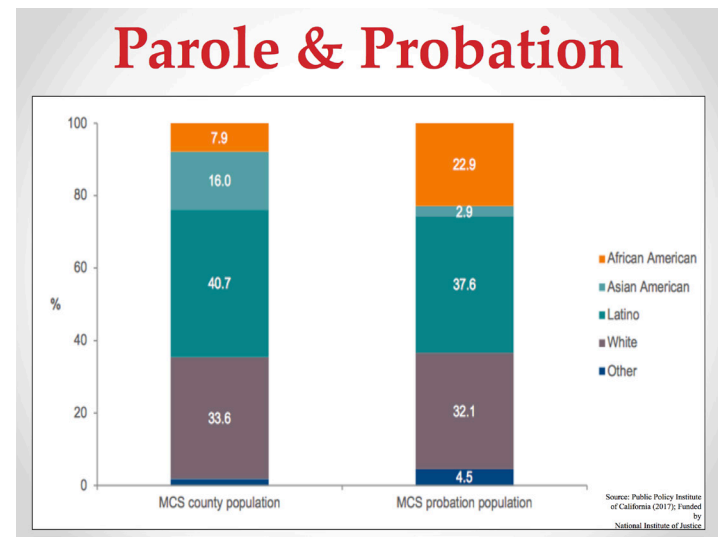
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL AUDIT OF LAPD'S DATA DRIVEN PROGRAMS, DEMANDED BY STOP LAPD SPYING + OTHER COMMUNITY GROUPS  
THE OIG AUDIT DID NOT INTERVIEW ANYONE LIVING IN A COMMUNITY SUBJECT TO THESE PROGRAMS. HOW CAN THEY SAY LASER WAS HARMLESS?



WE DEMAND A PUBLIC HEARING ON THE HUMAN IMPACT OF OPERATION LASER THAT CENTERS ON THE PEOPLE DIRECTLY IMPACTED BY LASER. WE DEMAND REPARATIONS FOR THE RACIST HARMS CAUSED.

• **LAPD doesn't take responsibility for the databases it takes advantage of.** Data created by LA county is used by LAPD, but LAPD tries to point fingers at the County to separate itself from the street to jail pipeline. LAPD is a main conduit for placing people into custody of the sheriff department, regardless of who created the database, and arrests of homeless folks and the racial disparities in arrest continue to be skewed.

• **Like crime itself, recidivism is a social construct, not an "evidence-based" fact.** Recidivism is influenced by policing practices: people are obviously more likely to be arrested if they are being targeted. The concept of recidivism is thus biased, and researchers are increasingly critical of using recidivism as an outcome to measure "police intervention."<sup>12</sup>



## 4. CITY HALL AND ACADEMIC COMPLICITY

The city must divert resources away from the LAPD and into sorely needed basic services. Academics must refuse to contribute to LAPD's life threatening technologies.

• **The City is complicit.** Mayor Garcetti and the City of Los Angeles are complicit in the violent policing of Black, Brown, and poor communities through their endorsement of PredPol and predictive policing. The City diverts resources to policing technologies while the communities they surveil do not have their most basic needs met in terms of housing, and access to health care, food, services, and clean water, land, and air.

• **Academia is complicit.** Academics like UCLA professor Jeff Brantingham created PredPol, and now LAPD is calling on academics to justify the continued use of PredPol through evaluation of the program. Any study that is conducted in relation to the LAPD is not impartial and cannot accurately depict impact on community, and asking for more time to collect data allows LAPD to continue delaying taking accountability for PredPol's direct community harm.

• **Academics must reject LAPD partnerships.** Academia that values ethical and empirical rigor is mutually exclusive with academia that collaborates with the LAPD. Over 450 faculty and students across 75 universities [have signed onto a letter](#) denouncing the research for its ethical implications and because it naturalizes policies and practices that disparately impact Black, Brown and poor communities. Academia will remain complicit in harming Black, Brown, and poor communities unless all researchers in all sectors make the same commitment.



## ■ 4. REPORTING AND OVERSIGHT

**Crime reporting methods invent crime and criminals on LAPD's terms, and generate data that can be manipulated and stored indefinitely. Oversight cannot fix the potential for harm.**

- **Crime is a social construct.** Crime is defined by the state and those in power. Crime stats describe police behavior, not community behavior. We reject LAPD's definition of crime, and their notion that "crime" can objectively defined, measured, or that it is evenly enforced and prosecuted.
- **The Police Commission profits from data-driven policing.** LAPD will form an Executive Review Committee with 2 members of the Police Commission to "collaborate and discuss the impacts of data-driven policing strategies," but the Police Commission cannot be trusted to work on behalf of community interests when LA Police Commissioner Sandra Figueroa-Villa took \$7500 from Predpol!<sup>14</sup> Further, In October 2017, the community overwhelmingly rejected LAPD's proposed drone program, but the Police Commission voted 3-1 in favor of the program. In a justification

of his "yes" vote, Steve Soboroff framed the community's opposition as "a universal and categorical distrust of the men and women of the LAPD." He added, "I have a general trust and respect for the men and women of the police department, so I will vote for this policy as amended."<sup>15</sup>

- **LAPD cannot oversee their own programs.** LAPD could not properly manage city-wide implementation of other data-driven tactics e.g. 10 yrs of Operation LASER, Chronic Offender Bulletins, and Predpol. Thus, creating a new data-driven policing unit to maintain citywide oversight all crime-fighting strategies, but the
- **Civilian oversight is not the answer.** These programs are fundamentally created to cause harm. The only solution is dismantling of predictive policing programs, instead of continuing to use city funds legitimize and oversee harmful data-driven practices.
- **LAPD's community feedback plans are manufactured consent.** LAPD acquires community feedback by selectively obtaining feedback from those community members who (in some capacity) are comfortable interacting with police.

## ■ OUR DEMANDS

- **We demand that the LA Board of Police Commissioners stop legitimizing harmful predictive policing programs by attempting to "reform" them.** We demand that the Commissioners heed the concerns and stories of the community and eliminate this arm of state surveillance. Remember, it is under your watch that these inherently dangerous predictive policing programs, made still more dangerous by incompetence, are running rampant in our city. We demand:
  - Immediate ban on deployment and use of Predpol;
  - Full reparations for individuals and organizations whose human and civil rights have been violated
- **We demand funding of community-led and life-affirming programs, not the funding of systems that create conditions that facilitate a person's re-arrest.** We demand an investment in community services that are separate from LAPD, not crime control. LAPD references surveillance of people to "curtail crime," but do not acknowledge how housing, access to medical care and green spaces, and people having their needs met increases community safety and well-being! We demand that the city cease funding these programs and their surveillance technology, and instead grant funding to communities most in need, as well as work to distribute reparations to communities most harmed.
- **We demand a public hearing on the human impact** of Operation LASER by a body with no relation to LAPD, and for those harms that were committed, **we demand reparations.**
- **The community doesn't want more analysis—the community has done the analysis. And the community wants PredPol and all data driven policing programs dismantled.**

### NOTES

1. <https://stoplapdspeying.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Before-the-Bullet-Hits-the-Body-May-8-2018.pdf> pg. 19
2. Page 24, Randomized controlled field trials of predictive policing
3. Saunders, J., Hunt, P., & Hollywood, J. S. (2016). Predictions put into practice: a quasi-experimental evaluation of Chicago's predictive
4. Lum, K. and Isaac, W. (2016), To predict and serve?. Significance, 13: 14-19. doi:10.1111/j.1740-9713.2016.00960.x
5. Los Angeles, California Smart Policing Initiative Reducing Gun-Related Violence through Operation LASER, October 2012
6. Ibid
7. No cost extension 012413.docx
8. In a letter dated Sept. 4th, 2019 from LAPD Police Chief Michel Moore, to Stop LAPD Spying Coalition
9. [http://economics.ubc.ca/files/2013/05/pdf\\_paper\\_marit-rehavi-racial-disparity-federal-criminal.pdf](http://economics.ubc.ca/files/2013/05/pdf_paper_marit-rehavi-racial-disparity-federal-criminal.pdf)
10. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/correctionalcontrol2018.html>
11. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/22746/413174-Examining-Racial-and-Ethnic-Disparities-in-Probation-Revocation.PDF>
12. [https://www.hks.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/centers/wiener/programs/pcj/files/recidivism\\_reconsidered.pdf](https://www.hks.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/centers/wiener/programs/pcj/files/recidivism_reconsidered.pdf)
13. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2018/08/01/the-changing-state-of-recidivism-fewer-people-going-back-to-prison>
14. <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2019-08-29/lapd-commissioner-sandra-figueroa-villa-didnt-disclose-ties-to-city-contracts-or-pred-pol>
15. <https://twitter.com/JournoWes/status/920363609946955776?s=09>