

WILL BUNCH

Insurrection a cry for police reform

Capitol riot should spark end to America's white supremacist way of policing.

Even as Wednesday's insurrection was still underway, videos emerged showing that a ridiculous, undermanned U.S. Capitol Police force was woefully unprepared at best and that at worst at least some of its officers were sympathetic to a mob sacking the seat of American governance they'd sworn a vow to defend. After hundreds of the large pro-Trump through fairly easily overwhelmed small gaggles of cops not dressed in riot gear and unable to defend small, easy-to-push-aside metal barricades, some subsequent pictures from inside the maelstrom simply do not add up.

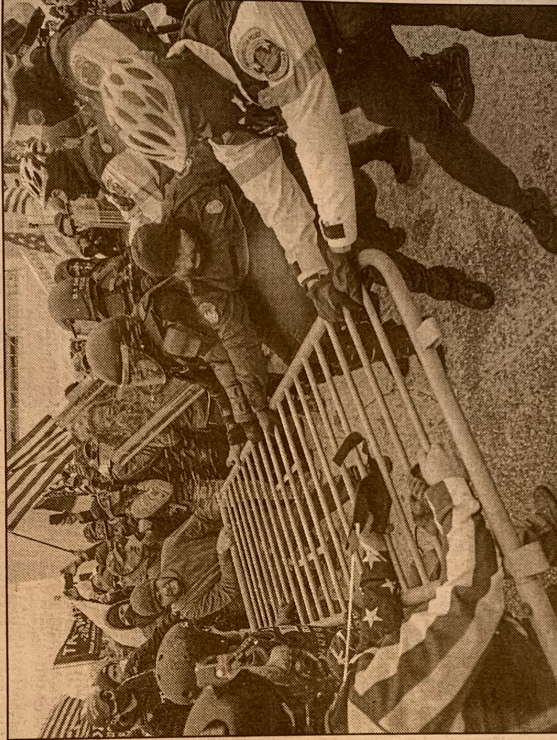
There was, of course, the one still-unidentified officer who took a selfie with a rioter. Another video showed a half-dozen under-equipped officers lining a hallway at the Capitol entrance and doing nothing as dozens of insurrectionists, some armed, barreled past them. The FBI reportedly wants to know how rioters found House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's office, buried deep in the 19th-century maze of the Capitol, in just a few short minutes.

The plethora of videos — arguably the most documented you'll always-remember-where-you-were-in that moment in American history — also captured dozens of officers who bravely fought to protect the Capitol, but were simply overwhelmed. Flags are at half-mast for a fallen hero — Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, also a mili-

tary veteran, beloved by the staffers on Capitol Hill who knew him — who died after a thug hit him with a fire extinguisher.

But the broader fallacy of the way we talk about policing in America is that we focus far too much on the individual actors, both the rotten ones and the courageous ones, and not on the deeply flawed system. We willfully ignore that system's roots in 19th-century slave patrols that sprouted into an institution that too often beats down the peaceful dissenters, yet approvingly waves in right-wing lawbreakers, that sees empowerment of Blacks or marginalized groups as the threat they've sworn to defend against, with a blind spot toward the often violent white supremacy that, frankly, shares a common heritage with their own practices and beliefs.

The most powerful testimony about what really happened with policing in Washington on this infamous Wednesday came from two Black officers in the Capitol Police who spoke with BuzzFeed News about what they witnessed. They said their supervisors had failed to speak in advance of the potential danger — even though insurrectionists had been planning openly on social media for weeks — and failed to issue vital equipment like gas masks. "If you're going to treat a group of demonstrators for Black Lives Matters one way, then you should treat this group the same goddamn way," the second



A pro-Trump mob tries to break through a police barrier at the U.S. Capitol on Wednesday. AP

or even diabolical?

What to make of a stunning report in the Washington Post about evidence that Wednesday's crowd included two police officers from Seattle — who posted on social media from inside the Capitol — as well as one from Zelenople, Pa., near Pittsburgh; the police chief of Troy, N.H., and a sheriff's deputy from Texas ... so far? And were any Capitol Police actively engaged in helping Wednesday's rioters, and did any of those actions rise to the level of a crime?

It's hard to get past the raw, emotional political implications of

what we witnessed on Wednesday, but the tragic events should also serve as the exclamation point on the conversation that started when a Minneapolis police officer knelt on George Floyd's neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds, when we saw how cops had senselessly snuffed the beautiful life of Elijah McClain.

Whose side are the police in America actually on, and how do we fix this? What we saw this week won't be repaired by a ban on choke holds or a couple of extra days of mandated training (not that those things aren't helpful on some level), but instead by a massive reform of how we keep the public safe.

It's time to replace our outdated police departments with a new regime built around real public safety. Let's weed out overt racists and replace them with new officers who not only look like the communities they serve but who arrive on Day One seeking to be guardians of the peace and not warrior cops. Let's deploy these officers when we need them — like, for example, when a violent mob is coming for Congress — but send more fitting public servants like mental health professionals or social workers when we don't. Let's make Jan. 6 the start of a long-overdue comeback not just for American democracy — but for how we police it.

✉ w bunch@inquirer.com
 ☎ 215-854-2957
 🐦 will_bunch