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Chicago's former police superintendent blames Black Lives Matter for high murder rate

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Full Text:

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Amid speculation surrounding the 762 homicides that took place in Chicago in 2016 - the highest number in two decades - the city's former police superintendent is blaming the Black Lives Matter movement for the murder spike.

Garry McCarthy, who held the superintendent position for four years before getting fired in 2015 after his department withheld dash-cam footage of the police shooting of 17-year-old Laquan McDonald, said on the "Cats Roundtable" radio show on Sunday that anti-police brutality protesters have led to a "state of lawlessness" and a "political atmosphere of anti-police sentiment."

Chicago, where the homicide rate rose by 58 percent from 2015 to 2016, is "probably the worst example of something that has happened across the country," Mr. McCarthy told host John Catsimatidis. Though supporters of Black Lives Matter dispute accusations that the movement encourages violence or other criminal behavior, the tensions in Chicago are indeed representative of a greater widening rift between police and black communities as the Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter movements struggle to find common ground.

"The simplest way to describe it is that we have created an environment where we have emboldened criminals and we are hamstringing the police," said McCarthy on Sunday, echoing a widespread notion that the Black Lives Matter movement has driven a deeper wedge between minority communities and law enforcement.

Meanwhile, the movement's organizers have maintained that their aim is not to promote violence against officers, but rather to peacefully address police bias and systemic racism within the criminal justice system.

"The movement began as a call to end violence and that call remains true today," DeRay Mckesson, a Black Lives Matter organizer from Baltimore, told the New York Daily News in response to McCarthy's remarks. "I am reminded that it was McCarthy's police department that killed Laquan McDonald and hid the video for a year. He bears great responsibility for the public attitude towards the police."

The ideological clash between police and activists has in recent months played out not only in the streets but also in commercial disputes. Last week, the largest police union in the United States asked online retailer Amazon to remove a T-shirt featuring the words "Bulletproof: Black Lives Matter" from its website, accusing the shirts of "commercializing our differences and perpetuating the myths which harm the relationships between the protectors and their communities." Days earlier, Wal-Mart removed the same T-shirt from its website after receiving a similar complaint from the police union. In October, a Blue Lives Matter blog post called for a boycott of Ben and Jerry's after the ice cream maker made a public statement of support for Black Lives Matter.

While such conflicts highlight tensions between law enforcement and anti-police brutality activists, other efforts have sought to bridge the divide between the two camps. In Wichita, Kan., for example, one Black Lives Matter protest in July made headlines when it turned into a community picnic with police. Weeks later, thousands turned out for the 33rd annual National Night Out, a yearly event that connects local police officers with the communities they serve.

Overlap between the two groups further suggests that reconciliation may be possible. Some members of law enforcement have publicly expressed support for Black Lives Matter, saying they don't see supporting the police and supporting the ideas behind the movement as mutually exclusive.

"They're not in conflict," Austin Police Chief Art Acevedo told a local Fox network in 2015. "Just because you believe black lives matter doesn't mean you don't support the police."

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