

“We are told that the police are the bringers of justice. They are here to help maintain social order so that no one should be subjected to abuse. This understanding of policing, however, is largely mythical. American police function, despite whatever good intentions they have, as a tool for managing deeply entrenched inequalities in a way that systematically produces injustices for the poor, socially marginal, and nonwhite.” – Alex Vitale in *The End of Policing*

At upEND, we examine how policing manifests in the child welfare, or family policing, system. This system “polices” in three main ways: [surveillance](#), [regulation](#), and [punishment](#). These practices predate the founding of the formalized family policing system, or child protective services. The separation of families has historically been used to regulate Black people, Indigenous people, and Latinx migrants’ behavior, upholding the supremacy of the White family by measuring Black, Indigenous, and increasingly Latinx families against a White and wealthy standard of “good parenting” or “healthy families.”

Present-day child removal by the family policing system has much in common with child removal that took place during chattel slavery, at Indian boarding schools, and presently at the U.S.-Mexico border. When child removal originated with chattel slavery, the practice was explicitly justified with anti-Black racial logic. Today, the racism of the family policing system is no longer explicit, it has become more discreet. The way that custody is now policed is much more insidious and framed to blame poor parents for their own poverty and Black, Indigenous, and Latinx parents for their own nonconformity with White parenting norms.

Today, regulation is the practice of altering Black, Indigenous, and Latinx parents’ behavior, cultural norms, and parenting practices to mimic those of White and wealthy parents. This is a practice of social control, grounded in the idea that Black and Latinx parents are unintelligent, dangerous, unclean, deviant, and criminal, and that Indigenous parents are ill-equipped, culturally backwards, substance-dependent, and poor.

“Families that come in contact with the family policing system experience a new iteration of the trauma that previous generations experienced: the stability of their family is uprooted, and family members are forced to fight for their family’s unity.” – Emma Payton Williams in *“Regulating Families: How the Family Policing System Devastates Black, Indigenous and Latinx Families and Upholds White Family Supremacy”*

At upEND, we imagine a future in which we all take on a societal responsibility to bolster healthy family development. We do not blame individual parents’ shortcomings (or racialized groups’ supposed inadequacies) for children’s struggles, instead faulting the cultural and political failures that have fostered an environment that does not nurture families’ health. We fight to see the end of the family policing system and to invest in ongoing efforts to shift towards a model of community child rearing and expanding the social safety net for families (without expanding the network of surveillance and regulation). By expanding the resources available to families and shifting the responsibility of supporting familial health to a communal level as opposed to an individual one, we can support families’ efforts to thrive on their own terms.