REIMAGINING BLUE

THOUGHTS ON LIFE, LEADERSHIP,
AND A NEW WAY FORWARD IN POLICING

FORMER
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INTRODUCTION

I woke up on June 1, 2020, and for the first time in my twenty-seven-year career, I questioned whether I wanted to be a cop anymore. I have had peaks and valleys throughout my professional life, but even on the worst days, I never considered leaving. June 1 was the day after the riots that erupted all over the nation in response to the murder of George Floyd, and I drove around my city assessing the aftermath. Our businesses were looted and burned. Remnants of broken glass from the windows that were smashed adorned the streets. Bricks that were pried up from the sidewalks and thrown at our officers were scattered all over the downtown. The scene looked like war.

I suppose it was war. Derek Chauvin's knee on the neck of George Floyd caused the nation to bubble over in anger and emotion and declare war on the entire police institution. My first reaction was that of defensiveness. Chauvin did not represent the best of law enforcement, and I couldn't understand why the rest of us were being punished for his transgression. Aurora is the second largest city in the state of Illinois, and our officers weren't making negative headlines. Our officers have worked diligently to build relationships in our community. Our officers have been trained to a standard of conduct that places value on human life and de-escalation. But none of that mattered because in a flip of a switch, we became the common enemy.

I've worn a police uniform since I was twenty-one, and each day that I have pinned my police star onto my chest, I have felt proud. I've always loved the feeling I get when I walk out into the world in my uniform. I stand up a little taller because I feel fearless and confident with my arm patches flanking my shoulders and my rank insignia displayed on my collar. I feel powerful but not the kind of power over another. I feel the kind of power that affords me the authority to protect people from bullies. I have the power to take evildoers into custody and strip them of their freedom so they can't harm their victims anymore. Even though I'm small in stature, people listen to me because of the uniform. I have used my power for good, and as I look back on my

career, I can say that I have never abused my position or my badge. I have wanted to be a police officer my entire life, and I have loved every moment of it.

When I started as a police cadet in 1991, the Rodney King incident had just occurred, so it was my first indoctrination to unrest. It didn't compare to George Floyd, but even as a wide-eyed seventeen-year-old, I understood that police action could send a ripple effect across the nation. Every negative action by a police officer results in all of us being painted with a broad brush. I remember hanging out at the front desk of the police department listening to the cops talk about Rodney King. At that time, it was accepted practice to give a person who fled from the police a "what for" as a result of the effort involved in chasing them. Whether it be a foot pursuit or a vehicle pursuit, I was told by a veteran cop that running away gets the offender a few blows once you had them in custody. This was what it was like in the '90s in policing. The cops seemed to downplay the incident despite the riots that were occurring. Maybe they were unaffected because the rioting was relegated mostly to the LA area. Or maybe I wasn't paying close enough attention to the national policing stage at that time. I was so focused on my corner of the world, and I was so happy to be working at the police department, and I believed everything the officers told me. I remember hearing several members of the public talk about Rodney King. "That's what happens when you run from the police." When I watched the video of King, I fell in line with what the cops were saying. It wasn't racial in my mind. I don't care who you are; you don't run from the police. As I look back on that incident now, I see it far differently. It's a clear and undeniable act of excessive force. I was seventeen years old and was consistently told by my cop dad and my cop colleagues that you don't question authority, so it felt accepted to impose consequences when it occurred. For context, that was also the era of corporal punishment. I got paddled at school, and I got the belt at home. I shudder at those practices present day, but back then, leaving welts on a child's behind wasn't considered child abuse as it is now. Cops weren't the enemy for the most part, and there wasn't a crisis in policing like there is now. And policing evolved over the years for the better. In my own midsized department, I saw a formal police accountability division emerge. Policies became more stringent surrounding the use of force. Squad cameras were installed to record officers' actions. Community policing was adopted, and we were trained to engage our residents. More women and minorities joined our ranks. Our profession got more professional, and I saw it happen with my own eyes.

Rodney King and George Floyd are bookends to my career, and now I'm

questioning my own sanity because it feels like the rest of the world didn't see us get better. But we did get better, and I am here to convince you of that.

I have been at my police department in Aurora, Illinois, for thirty years. I still chose to be a cop despite the LA riots after the Rodney King incident in 1991. Through the unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. Through a 2019 mass shooting in my own city, when I witnessed the good my officers could do. Despite all the negative headlines, I believe in policing when our officers are at their best, but I am struggling with the things that happen when we are at our worst. And I'm struggling with the hatred toward police because it's not fair to the great cops who are aligned with the law and serve their communities selflessly. I worked my way up through the ranks in my department to become the first female lieutenant, commander, and chief, and this book chronicles my life in law enforcement and my personal struggles with my profession and myself. As you will learn, I have strong feelings about various issues of the day, especially as they relate to policing, but in order to understand my opinions, you need to understand who I am and where I come from. These musings are a compilation of my childhood and personal experiences intertwined with my professional life. This book is an anthology of my trek through leadership and life. It is not arranged in chronological order because my stream of consciousness doesn't cooperate in that way. My hope is that by reading this chronicle of my imperfect journey, you will begin to see the vantage point of a person who wears a police uniform. I have found that cops are some of the most misunderstood people, and I hope you walk away with a better understanding of the policing profession from my viewpoint.

I'm a cop, but I'm critical of cops because I don't suffer from the "blind loyalty" affliction that many do. I'm also critical of people who make it their life's work to break the law and harm others and our society, and I believe vehemently that a nation without law enforcers would crumble into chaos and anarchy. These musings will probably upset people on both sides of the issues, and I'm okay with that. I'm not here to make friends. I'm here to offer you a perspective into my world and the complexities of being a cop and a boss of cops. My heart has been cracked open, and what is spilling out might surprise both of us.

CHAPTER FIVE: POWER

Almost all the headlines and articles about the George Floyd murder made mention of "power." The discourse surrounding Floyd's murder focused on the power gap between Floyd and Chauvin. The term "power" gets slung around in many different arenas. I hear it commonly used to describe control of others in a negative way. We often hear of the term "abuse of power" and its correlation to the police or other government officials. Al Gini describes power as possessing the capacity to control or direct change. That description doesn't label power as negative, and it's true that all forms of leadership make use of power. Leadership is about creating meaning in people's lives, and it can be toxic and fear based or moral and just. This is the dynamic of power, and Gini rightfully asks, "Will it be used wisely and well?" Therein lies the struggle. To say that someone possesses the capacity to control or direct acknowledges that he is in a position of power over another. One doesn't have to have a formal title to be in a position of authority to influence, but it's arguably difficult to abuse power without holding a position of leadership or authority.

I have watched the powerful very carefully, and the way people act in each lot in life is telling of their character. How a person wields his or her power is so revealing. Power feels good. It feels good to have a command presence where people actually listen and comply. I'm only a police chief of a midsized organization, but I understand that the title of chief affords me power. The operative word in that sentence is "title" because it isn't referring to the individual. It's the position I hold. When I was first appointed, it was strange to hear people calling me "chief." Now, I rarely hear my actual name anymore. I have formal authority by rank, but I also had power before I attained any rank. I thought of myself as powerless as a rank-and-file officer because I fell at the bottom of the hierarchy structure, but I realize now that wasn't true. My badge gave me power over others. I understand that my believing I had no power was an illusion.

I can see how some people become hypnotized by power. When I ask someone to

do something, they do it. It's magical and empowering. When I attend events, I get introduced and have to stand up and wave. I even found that I receive preferential treatment at restaurants and businesses. To say the chief patronizes an establishment carries clout, so people capitalize on it. Here's the rub. It has nothing to do with me. All the perceived power is attached by others to the position. I am enlightened to this concept, so it's easy for me not to believe that there is something special or unique about me. Many people in positions of power get sucked into the flattery and elitism, and they begin to believe they are better than everyone else. They get addicted to people kissing their asses. I view over-the-top compliments and flattery the same way I view insults and bullying. I discard both. I don't think it's healthy for a person to believe what people say on either end of the spectrum. Even in this example, it is more about a position than anything else.

I worked for a commander who loved power. I had this recurring cartoon image in my imagination of him sitting over a chessboard where the pawns were people in our department. He'd pick us up by the skin of the back of our necks like little puppies and move us all around and knock us off the board, so he and his cronies would have the advantage. The image of us all kicking and squirming as he picked us up and moved us around offered some comical imagery for me until I realized the dynamic was real. He was extremely calculated and very charming, so when you got knocked off, it left you feeling bewildered.

The powerful often feel as though rules don't apply to them, and the commander displayed examples of the "Do as I say, not as I do" phenomenon. He made a big deal about officers' letting their cars warm up. We had a policy about idling cars, and it was his pet peeve when he saw empty squads warming up in the lot of the department. He would bellow about it and call someone to make sure that officer knew he noticed. This is one of those policies that make no sense. In the Chicago area, especially in winter, anyone who has a rational thought understands that the car has to warm up. To depart with a cold engine is not only bad for the car but really uncomfortable for the officer.

One day, I was walking by my administrative assistant's desk, and she asked if I'd seen the commander. I told her I had not. She replied, "Okay, if you see him, let him know the city garage called, and his automatic car starter is done being installed on his squad."

I stopped walking and looked at her. "What did you say?" She repeated the exact same sentence. I think I said what I was thinking out loud. "Are you kidding me?"

Commanders had take-home squad cars, and despite his coming down on the officers who simply wanted to get into a warm car at the beginning of their shift when it was twenty below zero, this joker had an automatic starter installed so he could warm (or cool) his car? The hypocrisy was so thick that I actually started laughing. It was perceived power that afforded him the luxury of the rule bent in his favor. In this case, the rule was more snapped in half than bent, but you get the idea.

There are people who thrive on power, and he was one of them. He harmed our organization because he had power over others, and he could skip over people or knock people down because he was running the board. Even the chief at the time did nothing to rein him in. When I was in his crosshairs, I felt terrorized and helpless because he had power over my career. This is a great sob story, right? I have used words like "terrorized" and "harmed" to describe some bad bosses I've had to endure. Yes, they affected my career and caused a great deal of stress in my life, but the truth is, I don't know the first thing about being harmed. I was a police officer with a great salary and great benefits, and I went home at the end of my workday and complained to my spouse about the commander. We concocted hypotheses about his childhood that might explain his Machiavellian tendencies and concluded that his mom and dad didn't tell him they were proud of him enough. We laughed about it and then went to sleep in our warm bed in our big suburban house.

I'm embarrassed to say that my vantage point of power has been limited to my own narrow scope. I can spout off abuses of power from bad bosses, but I largely thought of these abuses as individually driven. By that I mean it was the person in power doing a bad thing to keep people down in the organization. I convinced myself that the "man" was trying to keep me down! As a woman in a male-dominated profession, I have been a victim of the system, fought the man, and won! I am sitting in the big chair to prove it. I have lived my leadership life combating abuse of power. I have tried to give away as much power as I could at the police department by relinquishing control of systems that were in place. I took the power away from the position of chief for the promotional process. Before, the chief could slash or lower an officer's rating by ten points in either direction with no explanation. I hated the cloak of secrecy that went along with that, so I got rid of it and pushed the power to middle management, who has a better grasp of performance. I have patted myself on the back for giving power away, and I convinced myself that I was a righteous leader in doing so. But I was delusional because the truth is, I have never experienced true powerlessness. Abuse of power is about using authority to unjustly inflict harm upon

another, and I was certain that I was harmed by that definition. But it's relative. I grew up as a white woman who chose to enter a male-dominated profession. I have worn a uniform since I was twenty-one years old, so I have wielded power over others for all of my adult life. Yeah, a few tormentors gave me a hard time, but this was hardly oppression. And I see now that slewing around a phrase like "abuse of power" to describe hardships at work is irresponsible of me now that my eyes are finally opened. I have failed to see (failed to look) beyond my own narrow scope to actual abuses of power. I didn't understand the depth and breadth of power until I started seeking the vantage point of those who have experienced true powerlessness. Only now am I beginning to attempt to understand what I didn't before.

Sandra Bland

The officer's actions in the Floyd case are indefensible, but it's not usually that clear. There are many high-profile cases that aren't as definitive. When the story of Sandra Bland's suicide in jail hit the headlines, I remember wanting to know more. Suicides are not out of the ordinary, and as a police officer, I've responded to many of them. They are always heartbreaking to witness, but so are all scenes where someone has died. I heard the same details about Sandra Bland that everyone else did when it flashed on the evening news, and that's what made it more puzzling to me. She was pulled over for a traffic violation, and the officer arrested her for obstruction because she refused to get out of the car. She went to jail and took her own life in her cell. I remember thinking that it seemed like a disproportionate response to a simple obstruction charge, and my fleeting thought was that she must have had some underlying depression or mental health issues for her to have committed suicide. That incident happened in Texas but made the Chicago news because she lived in the Midwest before heading south. I recall thinking it was tragic and horrifying that her story ended that way and wondered what exactly drove her to take her own life—if that's really what happened.

Then, I read Malcom Gladwell's book, Talking to Strangers. I am a Gladwell junkie, and I have read every book he's written, subscribed to his podcasts, and made it my hobby to hang on his every word. In the beginning of the book, Gladwell leads with Sandra Bland's story and recounts the real-time dialogue between Trooper Brian Encinia and Ms. Bland during the traffic stop. By this time, I'd heard the dialogue from the squad camera footage on the news, so I knew how it transpired. In my

assessment, the cop had been polite and communicative, and from what I deducted, she was rude to him. She snapped at him and then lit up a cigarette in her car. He told her to put it out, but she didn't. All she had to do was get out of the car, but she refused to do that, too.

But as the sentences in the book continued to build, I got the feeling that Gladwell was about to bash the cop and suggest he did something wrong. I stopped reading, panicked, and held an inner dialogue with Malcom (we are on a first name basis in my head): "Malcom, don't ruin my love for you. Don't make me put this book down and break up with you. We have a good thing going where you write words, and I read them, and I get smarter and fall deeper in love with you."

Despite Gladwell's already having sold millions of copies of his books, I was certain he would know if I stopped buying them. I stared at the book for a moment and made the decision to press on.

You should have already deduced that I am not one of those cops who automatically sides with other cops. But Sandra Bland's incident was different. She didn't comply. The cop didn't kill her. She killed herself. These incidents are not even in the same stratosphere.

I reluctantly picked up the book and continued reading, and I'm not afraid to admit that my discomfort mounted with every single word I read. Gladwell brilliantly dissected the encounter from the vantage point of both the police officer and Sandra Bland. And as I read, Gladwell transported me to a place that Oprah would call an "ah-ha" moment. For the first time in my life, I was able to transcend into the world view of Sandra Bland. Do not misinterpret my words. I will never know what it is like to move about the world as a person of color. I have lived in my white skin all my life and will never know anything else, but for the first time in my life, I felt the anger that Sandra Bland must have felt when she moved over to the side of the road, so the officer could go around her only to discover that she was being pulled over for failing to signal. That's why she was snippy with him at the onset. What the cop didn't know was that her life had been a tapestry of red tape from other similar violations that caused her a great deal of financial burden. She wasn't a violent offender. And in this case, she was instinctively moving out of the cop's way, believing he wanted to get around her.

But the cigarette. That's where she really went wrong. She lit up a cigarette while the cop was standing at her window. Did she light that cigarette as an act of defiance? Or did she just really need a cigarette in that moment of nervousness? Whatever the

reason, it broke bad when she refused to put it out. It's not illegal to light a cigarette in your own vehicle. It's not even illegal to refuse to put it out if a cop requests that you do so. But it is illegal to refuse to exit the vehicle when requested by a cop. And that's why she was arrested.

Cops see simply that she refused to get out of the car. Why is compliance so difficult? How dare she not put out the cigarette when asked? And she was rude from the onset of the encounter, and the cop was polite. I have heard myself say that failing to comply is the common denominator to all the bad things happening, and I'm still not ready to relinquish that position. Even if I agree that the cop who pulled over Sandra Bland made a weak traffic stop, that is enough for some to justify failing to comply, but for me it's not. Even if you believe you are being wronged, it is more dangerous to resist or obstruct than it is to comply. That sentence alone is the very essence of the dissenting argument—police have too much power.

And I also concede the fact that I'd think differently if this was the fiftieth time I'd been stopped by the police for minor violations. Isn't that what causes the anger that turns to resisting? Probably. And yes, I agree that the root of the problem is the number of times these individuals were stopped or the minor reasons they were stopped (a disparity when you compare white people pulled over). I hear all of this. But I can't get to a place of accepting that a person should defy and resist. I believe it's putting the noncompliant person at greater risk.

The person who has come closest to swaying me is author Dr. Ibram X. Kendi. I heard him talking on Oprah's Super-Soul Sunday to a group of people about Sandra Bland. He said, "Why was it her job to deescalate the encounter with the cop?" I froze for a moment and analyzed his question. Ms. Bland was pissed about getting pulled over. She was minding her own business trying to get to her destination to start her new life, and she was tired. She was tired of driving and tired of getting pulled over, so when it happened again for something so minor, she wasn't kind to the officer. She was outwardly rude and argumentative, and that caused the officer to mirror her demeanor. But why? Why did he have to succumb to it? Her rudeness toward him is what I believe made him snap about the cigarette. Dr. Kendi questioned why it was her responsibility to deescalate and not the officer's, and I think that brilliant question has caused a shift in my paradigm. It was ego. He got mad because she was mad. She questioned his authority. Did that have to happen? That is the entire premise of Gladwell's book. I realized that Dr. Kendi was asking the same question that Gladwell had asked but in a different way. Had the cop not gotten offended that Ms. Bland was

challenging his power and authority, might the encounter have ended differently?

I was discussing this incident with my mentor and friend, Dr. Vincent Gaddis. He is a professor and subject matter expert on issues of race, class, and social justice, and he is an African American man. He listened to my rant and got frustrated with me:

"You didn't mention race at all!"

"Wait? How do you even know race played a factor? The cop didn't say anything to give that impression. It's all recorded."

"Do you really HONESTLY believe that if Sandra Bland were white, she would be dead?

Dr. Gaddis believed the cop's bias or racism was the power that supplemented his aggressive action. He told me it was disingenuous to discuss this incident without bringing up race, but I didn't bring it up because I can't know for sure what was inside the cop's head.

Police Discretion

Let's unpack this. Yes, there was likely a violation of the law, and it is our job as law enforcement to tend to these matters. However, I am willing to admit that some outcomes are based on demeanor. When I pull someone over, I have the discretion to determine the level of enforcement I assign to the violator. If that violator is respectful and polite, I might not write him or her a ticket if the infraction was minor. However, if that violator gets snippy with me, my pen is going to be put to use. That is the essence of power and exactly what Dr. Kendi was trying to make us see.

Of course, some cops adhere consistently to the law and write as many tickets to kind grandmas and soccer moms as they do to those who mouth off to them. Yes, there are cops who don't care who is behind the wheel, but I am going to push back ever so gently (hard) to say that discretion is in the eye of the enforcer. Applying discretion to serve yourself is a form of manipulation, so the only adaptation made in any situation should be with the best outcome in mind. If someone has violated the law, it is the responsibility of the officer to determine what action will ensure that the violator doesn't do it again. Sometimes a warning will suffice while other times people don't change their behavior until they have to pay a fine. But if a cop isn't thinking in terms of best outcomes, the method they choose to enforce the law will be inconsistent.

I started to reflect and it finally became crystal clear to me. If bias or prejudice of

any form were allowed to creep in, might it be in the gray area of discretion? Even if you are not racist, might you see where possessing power over another could cause issues for a cop who is? Discretion is the space where cops can exercise their power based on their bias against gender, class, or race, and it will be supported by the institution. That is the loophole. And as a cop who has admittedly been influenced by people who weren't respectful (this is a nice way of saying I will write you a ticket if you give me a hard time), I think it's time we illuminate the dark corners of policing and open our eyes to the consequences of this disproportion.

Power.

This is the imbalance of power that I am now beginning to understand. But first let's talk about the necessity of law enforcement because I'm not turning on my profession. I believe that in a democracy, there must be people charged with keeping peace and order. In Plato's The Republic, Socrates outlined a utopian society to include the "guardians." He said that democracy must have guardians present to ensure the safety of our citizens and do what is best for the city. The Republic was written in 375 BC, well before the modern police officer existed, but Socrates seemed to understand that guardianship must be carried out by those who care about a community and the people in it.

We are a nation of laws. That is not to say that some laws are not antiquated and riddled in racism, classism, sexism, and all the "isms." When I offered this to Dr. Gaddis, he schooled me again:

"Let me go Kendi on you. Laws or policies are racist or antiracist, so we cannot just say we are a nation of laws; we are a nation of racist laws, sexist laws, and policies. These laws and policies perpetuate the very biases you seek to change."

This is why Dr. Gaddis is one of my most trusted advisors. He assertively forces me to see (look) where I wouldn't if I were left to my own devices. We often meet for breakfast, and he can polish off a plate of bacon and simultaneously compel me to confront my blind self. The crux of the issue that Dr. Gaddis brought up about the laws themselves being racist, classist, or sexist is precisely what requires a shift in thinking. It's about inequity in policing. The "war on drugs" is a great illustration of this. All the white people who got busted with cocaine were not punished as severely as the black people who possessed crack because laws were passed to make sure of that. It's the same infraction from an illegal possession of a controlled substance standpoint, but white people got a slap on the wrist while our jails begin filling up disproportionately with black people because the punishment was far harsher. Cocaine

conjures up images of white guys wearing button-down shirts with the sleeves rolled up cutting white power with a razor blade on a mirror. But crack is different, right? It must be since black people were targeted, searched, arrested, and convicted for the same thing, and many black lives have been ruined because of the disparity. The white guys with cocaine charges are doing just fine. If this example alone doesn't convince you that the system of laws were disproportionate, I don't know what will. The war on drugs was a war on black people. Period.

I doubt this is what Socrates had in mind when he referred to police as the "guardians" of democracy. The demand for criminal justice reform isn't new to us. George Floyd's death may have been the bubbling-over point, but through the years, law enforcement executives and scholars have attempted to fix what was broken. In fact, Socrates is probably laughing in the afterlife with all of his philosopher friends at the present-day phrases we've come up with to describe what he already knew in 375 BC: "procedural justice," "fair and impartial policing," and "police legitimacy" are word salads to say that police officers need to treat people fairly and apply the law consistently so the community they police trusts them. Holy crap, we sure overcomplicate things for the sake of catchphrases and buzzwords, but those words are empty if our actions aren't aligned.

All of this to say that we have failed as guardians if we are (or are perceived as) abusing power. If black and brown people don't feel protected by the police, we are failing. If members of our community feel terrorized by the police, we are failing. My cop tribe needs to listen (hear) the battle cries from the voices who speak for Sandra Bland and others like her and try to understand how we have failed.

Before the death of George Floyd, I thought I understood power, and I genuinely thought I was oppressed by my tormentors: a bad boss, for example. I was so proud of navigating the waters filled with sharks who were out for blood. I convinced myself that I fought the "man" and won and that if I could penetrate the glass ceiling in policing, anyone could accomplish anything. I was so blinded by my own perception of powerlessness in privilege that I couldn't see real and true powerlessness. Even though my police department and my officers didn't kill George Floyd, we represent the disparity of power in policing, and it's about time we open our eyes to the realities of racism by admitting it exists. That is the root of the power dynamic in this country. Many believe that is the root of what went wrong with Sandra Bland and George Floyd. Others believe race had nothing to do with either incident. None of us were inside the head of Chauvin, so we don't know why he put his knee on a man's

neck causing him to die. Chauvin didn't make a racial slur in the process of killing George Floyd, but I could see clearly that he didn't value his life or his humanity. Why not? If a white man was beneath his knee, would he be dead? None of us really know the answer to that, but it begs the question. Biases spring from racism, institutionally and personally. Implicit bias is about racism. If we truly care about fixing racism, leaders need to directly state and confront the issue. But first we need to acknowledge that it exists.

There are other high-profile cases involving white police officers killing black individuals. But we need to be cautious about assigning race as the root cause to all of the incidents. As sure as Dr. Gaddis breathes, he has no doubt that race played a role in all of these incidents involving police. And the narrative in the media will have you believe that white cops spend a majority of their workday killing unarmed black people. It's simply not true when you break down the actual data. Would it surprise you if I told you that 25 percent of those killed by police are black, and 50 percent of those killed by police are white?[1]

Cops kill more white people than black people. Those who argue in support of cops will rest their case on that fact alone. However, when you break down the demographics, it tells a more complex story. The black community only makes up 13 percent of the US population yet represents 25 percent of police killings. Now we are onto something. But what? There is an absolute disparity, and we are back to concluding that cops kill more blacks. But then we add in another layer of complexity. Blacks are 13 percent of the population, but commit at least 50 percent of the murders and other violent crimes according to FBI data.[2]

According to Statista, cops kill one thousand people on average per year. And most of those shootings are justified—that is, in self-defense or in the process of protecting the life of another. But some are not justified. And some are so convoluted that no one can agree. As the verdict was being announced in the trial of George Floyd, a sixteen-year-old African American female was shot and killed by a Columbus, Ohio, police officer. The girl was attempting to stab two other people with a knife when the officer approached. She was armed with a knife and trying to kill someone, and the police

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[1]*The Washington Post, "Number of people shot to death by the police in the United States from 2017 to 2021, by race," Statista, accessed October 20, 2021. statista.com/statistics/585152/people-shot-to-death-by-us-police-by-race*

[2]*"Arrests by Race and Ethnicity, 2016," 2016 Crime in the United States, Criminal Justice Information Services Division, FBI, accessed October 20, 2021. ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2016/crime-in-the-u.s.-2016/topic-pages/tables/table-21*

officer shot her to stop her. Was it justified? There was public outrage that yet another black person was killed by a white police officer. Had the knife wielding person been white, this probably wouldn't have made headlines. Does the fact that she's sixteen make a difference to you?

A police officer in Chicago was alerted to gunfire and located a person with a gun in a dark alley. The cop chased the offender and gave commands to drop the gun. The offender turned abruptly toward the officer, and the officer fired, killing him. When the officer went to render aid, he observed that it was a young man. The cop reacted by burying his face in his hands and becoming emotional. That young man was Adam Toledo, and he was a thirteen-year-old Hispanic American. The video footage showed that Toledo tossed the gun less than one second before the officer pulled the trigger. It was 2:30 a.m., and Toledo had just fired a weapon at a car, and the officer located him and chased him. The officer saw the gun in his hand and made a split-second decision in a dark alley in the middle of the night. Was it justified?

In both of these instances, the offenders were juveniles. Does that make it more aggravating? It doesn't for me because a knife or a gun in the hand of a juvenile kills just the same as if it were in the hand of an adult.

There are nearly sixty million police encounters per year, and one thousand are killed by a police officer.[3] That makes your odds of getting killed by the police one in ten thousand. That should at the very least convince you that cops aren't cold-blooded killers. But one unjustified shooting is too many. And any police action that is based on race is unacceptable. But I want to make sure that we are all open to dissecting data so we can get as close to the truth as humanly possible. You may feel that these police actions are rooted in racism, but sometimes feelings get in the way of facts. Naturally, if we uncover any police officer using their power to harm a person solely because of their skin color, accountability must be swift and vigorous. We must be open to the reality that racism exists and determine if actions are rooted in bias. But we must also be willing to concede to the fact that many of these police actions are a result of people committing violence (cause) and an officer doing their job to stop them (effect).

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[3]*The Washington Post, "Number of people shot to death by the police in the United States from 2017 to 2021, by race," Statista, accessed October 1, 2021. statista.com/statistics/585152/people-shot-to-death-by-us-police-by-race*

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