

# **American Police Officers: Does knowing who they are help explain why they kill Blacks?**

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## **Abstract**

Over the last several years, the killing of Blacks by white police officers in America has drawn a great deal of attention from many sectors in society. A number of cases involving police murder of Blacks have been captured on video and broadcast around the world, giving the issue more international attention than it has ever before garnered. In this article, the authors use data gleaned from an elaborate survey given to a group of newly minted police officers who are employed in a police department that has a history of policing Blacks more harshly than any other race of people. The police department is located in a major city in the midwestern region of the United States. The more than fifty police officers in the study are an accurate reflection of the socio-economic makeup of the city, thus making for some promising insights. It is the authors hope that the data will help explain why white police officers kill Blacks at the rate at which they do.

**Keywords:** United States, police officers, brutality, Blacks, African Americans, Racism

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American Police Officers: Does knowing who they are help explain why they kill Blacks?

I have witnessed and endured the brutality of the police many more times than once—but, of course, I cannot prove it. I cannot prove it because the Police Department investigates itself, quite as though it were answerable only to itself. But it cannot be allowed to be answerable only to itself. It must be made to answer to the community which pays it, and which it is legally sworn to protect, and if American Negroes are not part of the American community, then all of the American professions are a fraud.

**James Baldwin<sup>1</sup>**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Having spoken to and interacted with scores of police officers over the years, clearly, being a police officer is a stressful and sometimes thankless, not to mention, dangerous job. There is no street-level bureaucrat with whom the average American citizen interacts or sees more frequently on a daily basis than a police officer who can be seen cruising the streets 24 hours a day, seven days a week in most, if not all the of the country's major cities<sup>2</sup>. Not surprisingly then there is also no street-level bureaucrat on whom the American people call on consistently in their time of need more than the American police officer. Police officers are called on to assist with any number of matters—from helping women drivers change a flat tire, to attending to victims of automobile accidents to mediating domestic disputes. Unfortunately, rarely are police officers credited for the good deeds they do on a day-to-day basis.

Most often, when police officers find themselves in the public eye, it is to point out the mischief in which they are involved. Specifically, when police are featured in the news, more often than not, it is due to an encounter with a motorist or pedestrian that has gone terribly wrong. Over the past several years the issue of policing has been the subject of much national debate, due to the disproportionate number of people of African descent who have been shot and killed by police officers and/or who have died mysteriously while in police custody.

### **Police killings of Blacks**

While the number of black<sup>3</sup> fatalities at the hands of the police is disconcerting and the graphic images of unarmed Blacks being slaughtered in the streets is horrifying, this development is not a new and emerging phenomenon<sup>4</sup>. Over many years, African Americans have cried police brutality abuses only to be ignored largely because many Whites refused to believe that police officers were capable of committing the unspeakable acts with which Blacks charged them over multiple decades. With the invention of smart phone video (and social networking apps) however, Whites can no longer feign ignorance of the devilish manner in which some police officers, particularly in urban areas, over- police and employ-extra-legal force against citizens in black communities. Video footage of police use of force against Blacks being shown around the globe for all to see is now a common occurrence. Such graphic and disturbing footage of African

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1 Baldwin, James. "A Report from Occupied Territory." The Nation July 1966. Accessed on November 29, 1966.

2 Lipsky, Michael. *Street-level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2010.

3 The words Black, African American and African descent are used interchangeably throughout this article according to sound and context as well as to avoid redundancy.

4 Harris, Ron and Matthew Horace. *The Black and the Blue: A Cop Reveals the Crimes, Racism, and Injustice in America's Law Enforcement*. New York: Hachette Books, 2018.

Americans being slaughtered by police officers makes it nearly impossible for anyone to say that they are unaware that these things happen. Again, people are now able to view “the damning evidence” on their smartphones, and as hard they may try, few of them are able to rationalize away the murder of Black people by white police officers.

The relationship between black citizens and the police has always been a contentious one. Indeed, there is a centuries’ long ignominious history between law-enforcement and the black community here in the United States. A brief discussion of that history helps to put contemporary concerns in their proper context. For generations the formal, officially approved role of the police, both in the southern “slave” and often in the northern “free” states, was that of oppressor, keeping slaves in their place, capturing and returning runaways to their owners, and later enforcing extralegal Jim Crow segregation laws and codes. In fact, the early role of many southern police in the “slave patrols” formally included inflicting corporal punishment on offender (runaways or disobedient slaves) without prior judicial process<sup>5</sup>. Law enforcement officers have been killing Blacks with impunity since their arrival to America in 1619.

The view of the inferiority and devaluation of black life is a part of the fabric that is American democracy<sup>6,7</sup>. That was made clear when Thomas Jefferson, one of the nation’s founding fathers and principle author of the Declaration of Independence wrote in “Note on the State of Virginia” that Black people are inferior to the Whites in the endowment of both body and mind<sup>8</sup>. More than two centuries later, some Whites sadly continue to subscribe to this way of thinking. Unfortunately, this kind of thinking manifests in the way that white police officers have always dealt with Blacks in America<sup>9</sup>. Case in point: many years ago, in 1982, when Daryl Gates, former chief of police for the city of Los Angeles, California, was asked why several Blacks had, in such a short period, died as a result of police chokeholds, Gates responded, “because the arteries in the necks of black people do not open up as fast as they do in normal people” (p. 32)<sup>10</sup>.

Since the proliferation of the cellphone camera in the 21st-century, more and more police murders of Blacks have been captured on film giving some the erroneous impression that the shooting deaths of Blacks by white police officers is a new phenomenon<sup>11</sup>. Nothing could be further from the truth. In other words, the 2000s are not very different from previous eras. What is different is that, due to technological advancements, ordinary citizens being shared over social media, sometimes resulting in millions of viewers throughout the world, are capturing more incidences of police abuse of power on video. Even still, we contend that only a small fraction of the killings and misdeeds are being caught on video.

Blacks have always been more likely to be shot and/or killed by police officers than Whites or any other ethnic group. Blacks are also more likely than others to be killed disproportionately to their numbers in the population. For example, in 2019, 24% of all police killings were of Blacks

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5 Murphy, William and B. Wood. *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1984.

6 Mills, Charles W. *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997.

7 Jordan, Winthrop D. *The White Man’s Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States*. England: Oxford University Press, 1974.

8 Jefferson, Thomas, *Notes on the state of Virginia*. 1792. Ed. William Peden ,New York: W.W. Norton, 1982

9 O’Donnell, Lawrence. *Deadly Force: How a Badge Became a License to Kill*. New York: William Morrow, 2018.

10 Turque, Bill, Linda Buckley and Lynda Wright, “Brutality on the Beat,” *Newsweek*, 25 March 1991, p. 32.

11 Jeffries, Judson L. and Charles E. Jones, “Using Cell-Phones to put rogue cops on front street: Citizens in Search of Justice.” Vol. 3 Critical Issues in Justice and Politics (October 2010): 23-43.

American Police Officers: Does knowing who they are help explain why they kill Blacks?

when just 13% of the total US population is African American.<sup>12</sup> Blacks were killed at nearly double the rate of their total population. Thirty years earlier in the 1980s, Blacks were nine times more likely than Whites to be killed<sup>13</sup>. In the 1970s, Blacks were seven times more likely than Whites to be killed by the police<sup>14</sup>. And in the 1960s, one of the most volatile decades in American history, Blacks made up 51% of the people killed by police officers despite making up only 10% of the total population<sup>15</sup>.

## Lynching, Scholarship and Unexplored Questions

Since American slavery was abolished in the 1860s, police murder of Blacks has in the minds of many African Americans replaced lynching as the country's preferred method for keeping blacks subjugated—meaning keeping blacks in their place. Some of the murders resulting from police use of extra-legal force have been the subject of scholarly inquiry. Writers and scholars have attempted to explain the circumstances around which the killing occurred, as well as the impetus for the amount of force employed by the officer. Many times, what most scholars, but certainly not all, have neglected to do is provide a portrait of the police officer in question with the intended purpose of attempting to identify characteristics and/or traits that may explain in part why the officer reacted so forcefully.

Despite the mountain of scholarship that exists on policing, which includes numerous case studies<sup>16,17,18</sup> involving police shootings and murder of Blacks, a number of important questions remain unanswered such as: What do we really know about the people who become police officers who take an oath to “serve and protect? What were their reasons for becoming police officers? What are their positions on matters pertaining to tolerance of others? How do they feel about people who look different from them, especially black people?

These are just some of the questions, that if posed to police officers, and answered truthfully could go a long way in helping us understand why policing of Blacks disproportionately ends in deadly encounters. Therefore, in this paper we argue that a look at the background and other salient characteristics of those who become police officers may reveal why white American police officers kill Blacks at such an alarming rate.

## Significance of Research

Why is this research important? In 2020 alone, in the midst of the worst pandemic the world has seen in a century or more, we have seen hundreds of thousands of protesters of all walks of life emerging from large cities and small towns throughout the nation and world saying this is important, black life is important, and the unlawful killing and murdering of Blacks by police

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12 William Roper Black Americans 2.5 X more likely than whites to be killed by police 6/2/2020 Statistics

13 Nelson, Jill, “A Special Report on Police Brutality: The Blacks and the Blues,” *Essence* 16 1985, pp. 91-156.

14 Pinkney, Alphonso. *The Myth of Black Progress*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

15 Takagi, Paul, “A Garrison State in ‘Democratic’ society.” *Crime and Social Justice* 1 (1974): 29.

16 Smith, Earl, Chaney, Cassandra & Ray Von Robertson. *Police Use of Excessive Force against African Americans: Historical Antecedents and Community Perceptions*. United States: Lexington Books, 2019.

17 Davis, Angela. *Policing the Black Man: Arrest, Prosecution, and Imprisonment*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2017.

18 Moore, Leonard N. *Black Rage in New Orleans: Police Brutality and African American Activism from World War II to Hurricane Katrina*. Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2010.

must end. Moreover, if putting an end to the unlawful killing of black motorists and pedestrians by white police officers is something that we as Americans are committed to doing, then it would seem that research such as this might yield some important findings. If nothing else research projects such as this one might prompt officials to call for the following:

- a) more extensive background checks for applicants
- b) psychological testing with an eye towards identifying both implicit and explicit racial bias
- c) as part of the interview and hiring process meaningful conversations about some of these cases that includes the aspiring officer, but also respected black community members for whom these concerns are of paramount importance

Adopting these kinds of measures may be less draconian than abolishing police departments altogether, which is what some concerned citizens have been calling for. Others have argued for the end of policing as we know it<sup>19</sup>. The latter option seems more realistic than the former, although what that would look like is to be determined. At any rate, by establishing the types of invasive screening methods mentioned above, it is possible that applicants could be weeded out early in the interviewing process, thereby thwarting any possibility of them becoming police officers and doing harm to those with whom they come in contact.

## METHODOLOGY

The data for this article is extrapolated from a larger survey designed to get a sense of police officers' perceptions about their role in society. Several years ago, a group of newly sworn-in police officers from a fairly large American city<sup>20</sup> (with a population of more than 300,000 residents) located in the Midwestern state of Ohio were given a survey that compromise several components—matters ranging from questions about the respondents' background to questions about the officers' ability to handle certain situations. We should note that the city in question is known for having a police department that is one of the most murderous in the country.

We were fortunate to be able to gain the cooperation of a police department for a study of this type. Historically, American police departments are very insular agencies that typically do not allow outsiders, especially researchers (unless they are forced to by officials in state and/or federal government), access to their men and women in uniform. That we were afforded this kind of access is unprecedented. Be that as it may, officers were asked questions on a wide range of topics. Each police officer was strongly encouraged to answer/respond to each and every question or statement. Any survey that lacked responses to two or more questions/statements was ruled incomplete and omitted from this study. It is important to note that this group of officers were a fairly accurate representation of the city's socio-economic make-up, making for a robust and rich data set.

For the purpose of this research only those questions that pertain to the officers' background, their experiences with black people and their perceptions of black people were used for this

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19 Vitale, Alex. *The End of Policing*. New York: Verso, 2018.

20 This city is the third largest city in the state of Ohio and has a population of 2,137,406, if one includes the entire metropolitan area.

American Police Officers: Does knowing who they are help explain why they kill Blacks?

article. Each question required the respondents to respond on a Likert<sup>21</sup> scale. The officers were promised complete anonymity. In other words, any and all responses were held in strict confidence. The goal is to generalize the findings, not single out any one officer about his or her perceptions and/or thoughts. The idea is to get a sense of the kind of people that police departments are hiring.

**FINDINGS**

The group is divided into four groups-white women, black women, white men and black men. There were combined 20 women police officers, 17 of whom were white. The white women range from 22 years of age to 39 years old, with the mean age being 27 (see table 1).

An examination of the women’s background reveals that 47% of them are graduates of four-year colleges and universities; 17.6% graduated from a two-year community college with an associate degree, while 11.7% of them earned graduate degrees, meaning an advanced degree. Nearly a quarter of the women received no more than a high school diploma. Nearly all the women who graduated from two-year and four-year colleges, earned their degrees in criminal justice, which suggests an interest in law-enforcement. Of the 17 white women, 64.7% indicated that they grew up in middle class households, which typically means a household with two working parents. Twenty-three percent of the respondents reported having been raised in a working-class home, while 11.7% reported having grown up in an upper middle-class home (see table 1). None reported growing up in a low socioeconomic status household, meaning a poor household. When asked why they decided to join the police force, three major themes emerged:

**Table 1: White Women Police Officers (17), Age: Mean-27**

| <b>Education</b>                                | <b>Class</b>                | <b>I want to bridge differences between different racial/ethnic groups</b> | <b>I have difficulty expressing myself when discussing sensitive issues with people from other racial/ethnic groups</b> | <b>To what extent do you interact with African Americans?</b> |
|---|-----------------------------|--|---|---|
| 23.5%<br>High school graduates                  | 11.7%<br>Upper middle class | 35.2%<br>Very much like me   | --<br>Very much like me   | 35.2%<br>Very much  |
| --<br>Some college                              | 64.7%<br>Middle class       | 17.6%<br>A lot like me   | --<br>A lot like me   | 17.6%<br>Quite a lot  |
| 17.6%<br>Graduate of two year community college | 23.5%<br>Working class      | 35.2%<br>Somewhat like me  | 17.6%<br>Somewhat like me   | 17.6%<br>A fair amount  |
| 47%<br>Graduate of four year                    | --<br>Poor                  | 15.3%<br>A little bit like me  | 5.8%<br>A little like me  | 5.8%<br>Somewhat  |

21 A variety of rating scales have been developed in order to measure attitudes about a range of subjects. The most widely used is the Likert scale, which was invented in the early 1930s. A Likert scale is a five (or seven) point scale which is used to allow the respondent to express to what degree he or she agrees or disagrees with a particular statement.

|                             |  |                             |                                |                       |
|-----------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| college                     |  |                             |                                |                       |
| 11.7%<br>Graduate<br>degree |  | 5.8%<br>Not much like me    | 17.6%<br>Not much like me      | 17.6%<br>A little bit |
|                             |  | --<br>Not very much like me | 41.1%<br>Not very much like me | 5.8%<br>Very little   |
|                             |  | 5.8%<br>Not like me at all  | 17.6%<br>Not like me at all    | --<br>Not at all      |

- a) were influenced by relatives who are, or were police officers
- b) wanted to help people and serve the community
- c) always wanted to be a police officer

The questions and statements that pertain to race relations produced some very interesting results. When asked the following questions about race relations, the white women police officers responded in ways that one might consider promising (see table 1). To the statement: I want to bridge differences between different racial and ethnic groups, 35.2% of the women responded that the statement sounded very much like me, while another 35.2% reported that it sounded somewhat like me. When presented with the statement I have difficulty expressing myself when discussing sensitive issues with people of other racial ethnic groups, 41.1% of the women indicated that the statement was not very much like them. In addition, when asked, to what extent do you interact with African Americans? more than 2/3 indicated “very much” while 17.6 reported “a little bit”. Another 17.6% indicated “a fair amount.”

The number of black women police officers in the group is so small, that to compare the two groups of women is almost an exercise in futility. However, in the interest of transparency and fairness to the reader, we are compelled to present what we found (see table 2). Again, only three of the women were African American.

**Table 2: Black Women Police Officers (3), Age: Mean-28.3**

| Education                                       | Class                    | I want to bridge differences between different racial/ethnic groups | I have difficulty expressing myself when discussing sensitive issues with people from other racial/ethnic groups | To what extent do you interact with Whites?? |
|---|--------------------------|---|--|--|
| --<br>High school graduates                     | --<br>Upper middle class | 66.7%<br>Very much like me  | --<br>Very much like me  | --<br>Very much                              |
| --<br>Some college                              | 66.7%<br>Middle class    | --<br>A lot like me   | --<br>A lot like me  | 33.3%<br>Quite a lot                         |
| 33.3%<br>Graduate of two year community college | 33.3%<br>Working class   | --<br>Somewhat like me  | --<br>Somewhat like me   | 33.3%<br>A fair amount                       |

American Police Officers: Does knowing who they are help explain why they kill Blacks?

|  |            |                             |                                |                     |
|--|------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| 66.7%<br>Graduate of<br>four year<br>college | --<br>Poor | --<br>A little bit like me  | --<br>A little like me         | --<br>Somewhat      |
| --<br>Graduate<br>degree                     |            | --<br>Not much like me      | --<br>Not much like me         | --<br>A little bit  |
|  |            | --<br>Not very much like me | 33.3%<br>Not very much like me | --<br>Very little   |
|  |            | 33.3%<br>Not like me at all | 66.7%<br>Not like me at all    | 33.3%<br>Not at all |

Their range in age from early 20s to early 30s, with the median age being 28.3. All three were college graduates, two of whom earned a four-year degree in criminal justice, while the other earned an associate degree in nursing at a two-year community college. Two grew up in middle class homes, while one reported having been reared in a working-class household.

All three indicated a desire to help people as the reason for becoming a police officer. When asked to respond to the statement I want to bridge differences between different racial and ethnic groups, one black woman responded, “Not like me at all,” While the other two responded, “Very much like me.” When asked to respond to the statement I have difficulty expressing myself when discussing sensitive issues with people of other racial and ethnic groups the three women responded similarly with one indicating “Not very much like me,” and the other two reporting “Not like me at all”. When answering the question, to what extent do you interact with African Americans? all three indicated “Very much.”

White males made up the majority of respondents, totaling 26. They ranged in age from 22 to 52 and reported much larger variation in their responses than the women. The mean age is 29.

More than half of the men were graduates of a four-year college. Nearly 20% of the white male officers, earned their Associate of Arts degree, having graduated from a two-year community college. Most of them majored in criminal justice, again indicating that a career in law enforcement was in their future. Less than a quarter were high school graduates, while less than 5% attended college at some point in their lives but did not stay long enough to earn a degree.

Probing further, the data revealed that the overwhelming majority of the white male officers were reared in middle class households (see table 3). Only a small percentage grew up in families that would be considered low socioeconomic status, meaning poor. When white males were asked about their willingness to bridge differences across racial lines more than 2/3 indicated such a willingness and nearly 20% reported that the statement sounded “somewhat like me”. In keeping with those findings, when asked to respond to the statement I have difficulty expressing myself when discussing sensitive issues with people of other racial and ethnic groups, more than 40% reported that the statement did not sound very much like them, with nearly 20 persons indicating that it did not sound like them at all. When asked, To what extent do you interact with African Americans? the majority reported interacting with African Americans on a regular basis. Only a small percentage admitted having little to very little interaction. When asked why they chose law-enforcement as a career their responses mirrored those of the women:

**Table 3: White Male Police Officers (26), Age: Mean-29.9**

| Education                                     | Class                     | I want to bridge differences between different racial/ethnic groups | I have difficulty expressing myself when discussing sensitive issues with people from other racial/ethnic groups | To what extent do you interact with African Americans?? |
|---|---------------------------|---|--|---|
| 23%<br>High school graduates                  | 12%<br>Upper middle class | 34.6%<br>Very much like me  | --<br>Very much like me  | 26.9%<br>Very much                                      |
| 4%<br>Some college                            | 65%<br>Middle class       | 11.5%<br>A lot like me  | 3.8%<br>A lot like me  | 30.7%<br>Quite a lot                                    |
| 19%<br>Graduate of two year community college | 19%<br>Working class      | 19.2%<br>Somewhat like me   | 7.6%<br>Somewhat like me   | 15.3%<br>A fair amount                                  |
| 54%<br>Graduate of four year college          | 4%<br>Poor                | 15.3%<br>A little bit like me                                       | 7.6%<br>A little like me   | 19.2%<br>Somewhat                                       |
|   |                           | 19.2%<br>Not much like me   | 15.3%<br>Not much like me  | 3.8%<br>A little bit                                    |
|   |                           | --<br>Not very much like me   | 46.1%<br>Not very much like me   | 3.8%<br>Very little                                     |
|   |                           | --<br>Not like me at all  | 19.2%<br>Not like me at all  | --<br>Not at all  |

- a) to help others
- b) were influenced by relatives who are or were, police officers
- c) lifelong desire
- d) decent pay, fulfilling career

Like the white men, the black men varied widely in age, from 22 to 56 years of age, with a mean age slightly higher than that of the white male police officers and noticeably higher than the white female officers (see table 4). The black men’s level of education deferred greatly from that of their white male counterparts. Only 30% possessed a two-year college degree with non-having graduated from a four-year college. Those who did earn a two-year college degree chose criminal justice as their field of study, again, indicating an interest in law enforcement. Despite the fact that less than a third of them earned a two-year college degree, 50% of them reported growing up in a middle-class household, while 30% reported growing up in a working-class household (see table 4). When compared to the white male police officers, a noticeably higher percentage of the African American police officers reported being reared in a low social economic household.

When asked why they elected to become police officers their responses were similar to their white counterparts, with three prominent themes emerging:

American Police Officers: Does knowing who they are help explain why they kill Blacks?

- a) to help people
- b) influenced by relatives who are or have been police officers
- c) only job that ever interested me

**Table 4: Black Male Police Officers (10), Age: Mean-33.5**

| Education                                     | Class                    | I want to bridge differences between different racial/ethnic groups | I have difficulty expressing myself when discussing sensitive issues with people from other racial/ethnic groups | To what extent do you interact with Whites?? |
|---|--------------------------|---|--|--|
| 50%<br>High school graduates                  | --<br>Upper middle class | 30%<br>Very much like me  | --<br>Very much like me  | 80%<br>Very much                             |
| 20%<br>Some college                           | 50%<br>Middle class      | 10%<br>A lot like me  | --<br>A lot like me  | --<br>Quite a lot                            |
| 30%<br>Graduate of two year community college | 30%<br>Working class     | 30%<br>Somewhat like me   | 10%<br>Somewhat like me  | 20%<br>A fair amount                         |
|   | 20%<br>Poor              | 10%<br>A little bit like me   | 10%<br>A little like me  | --<br>Somewhat                               |
|   |                          | 10%<br>Not much like me   | 20%<br>Not much like me  | --<br>A little bit                           |
|   |                          | 10%<br>Not very much like me  | --%<br>Not very much like me   | --<br>Very little                            |
|   |                          | --<br>Not like me at all  | 60%<br>Not like me at all  | --<br>Not at all                             |

When asked about bridging differences between racial groups, 30% of the African American police officers reported that it sounded “very much like them” and the same number indicated that it sounded “somewhat like me.” On the matter of having difficulty expressing oneself when discussing sensitive issues with people of other racial and ethnic groups 60% reported that the statement did not reflect them at all, but 20% said it sounded “a little like them”. As for interacting with other people the black male officers reported a high level of interaction with their own people.

## Discussion

An examination into the backgrounds of the police officers in this sample reveals some interesting findings, particularly when the white officers and the black officers are compared side-by-side. We were pleasantly surprised to see that many black male and white male officers strive to bridge differences between the races. When categories are combined, we see that seventy percent of the black officers versus 65.3% of the white officers believe themselves to be the type of people who are interested in bringing people together. However, those numbers pale in comparison to the white female officers—88% of whom see themselves as bridge builders—when combining from “very much like me” to “somewhat like me.” Two out of the three black women rated themselves as “very much like me” on the matter of building bridges between the

racess, while one said it did not sound like her at all. Historically, women are typically are known to be more compassionate and understanding than men. They are also nurturers by nature and more likely than men to cultivate relations with people, hence it isn't surprising that a higher percentage of women viewed themselves as bridge builders than did the men.

The overwhelming majority of white police officers, both male and female reported having little to no difficulty expressing themselves when discussing sensitive topics with people of other races, but those numbers are dwarfed by the black male officers, 80% of whom believed themselves comfortable with discussing sensitive topics with people of other races, including Whites. As for interacting with African Americans; both groups of white officers reported having high levels of interaction with African Americans, over 70% when combining categories 1-3. When the black officers were asked about their interaction with whites, both the male and female officers reported interacting with Whites much more frequently than the white officers interacted with blacks. That whites and blacks would interact with one another fairly regularly is not entirely surprising given that the city is 49.3 percent white and 45 percent black. This type of racial balance would almost certainly encourage a fair amount of interaction between the races. Still, it is also not altogether surprising that the Black officers would have greater interaction with whites than the white police officers would have with blacks. After all, since the business and commerce sectors in big cities are typically dominated by whites, it would be nearly impossible for blacks to conduct business without coming in contact with whites. Conversely, it would not be impossible for whites to conduct business without interacting with blacks, especially since white-owned businesses are typically located in majority white neighborhoods and areas<sup>22</sup>. That would include the downtown area in nearly every major American city.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that the research subjects were members of a police department that has a brutal history of mistreatment of African Americans, it is difficult to identify anything that may explain why white police officers kill blacks at the alarming rate that they do. To our amazement, the findings did not uncover and racial bias or resentment, to speak of, on the part of the white male police officers, those who are mostly likely to employ extra-legal force against an African American motorist or pedestrian. Also, nothing in the findings suggest any racial bias on the part of the white female officers, either. Given the history of this particular police department, how is this possible? Perhaps this police department, irrespective of its sordid history with African Americans, is not representative of other big city police departments throughout the United States. Is it possible that some police officers begin their careers free of racial bias, but over time develop an antipathy toward Blacks that manifests in the mistreatment of African Americans? The answer is yes, but why might this be so? Well, police officers, upon joining the force, are paired with more seasoned veterans to help them learn about and be acclimated to police work. Seasoned police officers tend to be much older than newly minted police officers who have just joined the force. It is widely believed that older adults tend to be more conservative in their outlook than younger adults. It is also well documented that older white adults tend to be less tolerant of other races than younger adults. Because the newly minted officer, also known as a rookie, is teamed with an older, more experienced and sometimes more jaded white police

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<sup>22</sup> Rothstein, R. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. United Kingdom: Liversight, 2017.

## American Police Officers: Does knowing who they are help explain why they kill Blacks?

officer, it is possible that the older officer's views, may over time, influence the rookie, who in turn, may eventually begin to take on the older officer's perspective and begin to police Blacks in a similar manner.

There is also another possibility. The findings may indeed support a contention that the first author has been making for years—that is, that contrary to popular belief, the majority of white police officers are not racially biased against Blacks, that in the main, white police officers do not engage in extra-legal force against Blacks, resulting in death. While the number of Blacks being killed by white police officers is a continuing problem, it is possible that these killings are carried out, not by a large number of white police officers in a given police department but rather a few police officers within a department who repeatedly kill and murder. These are the kinds of police officers who rack up citizen complaints year after year, but instead of being fired, they remain on the police force, often times until they reach retirement age. By the time they retire, some twenty-five to thirty years later, they have a folder full of citizen complaints as thick as a small-town telephone book. This raises the all-important question: Why are these police officers not terminated? Perhaps, because they are often well liked within the Department and because few police officers are willing to report incidents of misconduct on a fellow police officer for fear of being ostracized and labeled as a traitor. Due to an unwillingness to hold their colleagues accountable, those “shoot first and ask questions later” police officers (as small as that number may be) enjoy long careers in their respective departments.<sup>23</sup> Second, some officials within law enforcement, while they would never engage in extra-legal force themselves, believe there is a place for the type of police officer who is willing to police Blacks more harshly than other residents. In other words, some police officials may be of the opinion that in order to keep Blacks in their place, meaning as second-class citizens, there is a value in having the kind of police officer who doesn't hesitate to employ extra-legal force against Blacks, even if it means committing murder. Whatever the case may be, until we are able to find a way to stop the indiscriminate killing of Blacks by white police officers, America's self-proclaimed title as a beacon of Democracy is one that should be relinquished.

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23 To be fair, there are occasions when a police officer is fired due to extra-legal force against a Black motorist or pedestrian. In some cases, however, rather than leave the law enforcement profession altogether, the officer in question secures employment in a different police department, in a different city, but within the same state where the officer continues to rack up complaint after complaint after complaint. If by chance, the police officer is fired from that department, he finds another police department that is willing to bring him aboard.

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