

INTRODUCTION

For the past few years, our nation has been engaged in a broad and passionate discussion about crime and policing. It is a dialogue that is as important as it is difficult. It is also one that defies simple answers, as tempting as those might be. We need better, more informed conversations about this important subject—even if those discussions may at times make us uncomfortable.

Over two years ago in a speech at Georgetown University, I spoke of the need for law enforcement to confront several “hard truths,” including the sometimes ugly aspects of our history, the existence of unconscious racial bias, and the realities of cynicism and mental shortcuts in police work. I also argued that law enforcement is not the root cause of problems in our hardest-hit neighborhoods. And since that speech, I have talked to law enforcement leaders across the country about their anxieties and the challenges they face. These leaders are concerned about increases in violent crime in major cities across America, with far more people of color as victims. These leaders also worry about the safety of their officers, an alarming number of whom have been killed in the line of duty.

We need more transparency and accountability in law enforcement, but we also need to better understand the violence occurring in the communities we serve. And for this, we need more information and deeper inquiry. For its part, the FBI is improving the way this nation collects, analyzes, and uses crime statistics and data about law enforcement’s use of force. But law enforcement cannot do this alone. I hope that academics, such as the ones writing in this issue of the *Columbia Law Review*, will continue to talk about this crucial national issue, honestly and openly.

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