

THE DANGER IMPERATIVE:

VIOLENCE, DEATH, AND THE SOUL OF POLICING



Policing is violent. And its violence is not distributed equally: stark racial disparities persist despite decades of efforts to address them. Amid public outcry and an ongoing crisis of police legitimacy, there is pressing need to understand not only how police perceive and use violence but also why.

With unprecedented access to three police departments and drawing on more than 100 interviews and 1,000 hours on patrol, *The Danger Imperative* provides vital insight into how police culture shapes officers' perception and practice of violence. From the front seat of a patrol car, it shows how the institution of policing reinforces a cultural preoccupation with violence through academy training, departmental routines, powerful symbols, and officers' street-level behavior.

This violence-centric culture makes no explicit mention of race, relying on the colorblind language of "threat" and "officer safety." Nonetheless, existing patterns of systemic disadvantage funnel police hyperfocused on survival into poor minority neighborhoods. Without requiring individual bigotry, this combination of social structure, culture, and behavior perpetuates enduring inequalities in police violence.

A trailblazing, on-the-ground account of modern policing, this book shows that violence is the logical consequence of an institutional culture that privileges officer survival over public safety.

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"Beautifully written and rigorously researched, 'The Danger Imperative' should transform how we understand policing at its core." —**Monica C. Bell, Yale Law School**

"By looking closely at the working lives of patrol officers and rejecting simple tropes of heroes or villains, 'The Danger Imperative' explains why the institution that is charged with keeping us safe can also cause so much harm."

—**Bruce Western, author of 'Homeward: Life in the Year After Prison'**

"'The Danger Imperative' dominates policing and helps explain why the institution is so resistant to meaningful reforms." —**Patrick Sharkey, author of 'Uneasy Peace: The Great Crime Decline, the Renewal of City Life, and the Next War on Violence'**

"This clear-eyed analysis lays bare how the 'danger imperative'—the preoccupation with violence and the presumption of threat—shapes police culture and guides everyday interactions between police and everyone else. This important and timely book should be on the shelves of anyone interested in understanding policing in this country."

—**Reuben Jonathan Miller, author of 'Halfway Home: Race, Punishment, and the Afterlife of Mass Incarceration'**



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