



Date: Tuesday, October 28
Time: Noon–1:00 p.m.
Location: 124 Sparks Building
Lunch will be provided.

Faculty Scholar Resident Talks

Racial Disparities in Police Deadly Force: Thinking through the Moral and Policy Implications

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Police in the US disproportionately kill Black Americans. Social science offers different explanations for the disparities: (1) individual bias by officers, (2) disparate enforcement (more intensive policing in marginalized neighborhoods), or (3) the differential involvement hypothesis (certain racial groups engage in violent crime at higher rates). Those who see such disparities as a pressing injustice primarily favor (1) or (2), whereas those who defend the police against charges of bias tend to favor (3). It is beyond this chapter's scope to resolve whether (1), (2), or (3) best explains the disparities. Regardless of which explanation is true, all imply injustice by the state. That point holds even for (3), the differential involvement hypothesis, which ends up having the most dramatic implications for policy. If racial disparities are due to officer bias or how police deploy resources, police reform is the way to address the problem. The differential involvement hypothesis implies instead the need for broader societal change since violent crime is closely tied to factors like poverty, unemployment, and lack of economic opportunity. In societies marked by structural racism, police reforms are likely insufficient to address racial disparities in police deadly force.

