

In Praise of Cops

by Earl P. Holt III

Law enforcement is nearly unique as a profession, and only fire-fighting and military combat share its defining feature: all three professions are required to enter highly dangerous environments and confront and neutralize the source of those dangers. Like the other two professions, the more diligently law enforcement performs its tasks, the greater the potential risk they incur for loss of life or serious physical injury.

In all other professions, to incur potentially fatal levels of risk is evidence of negligence, not diligence, professionalism or heroism. Most jobs in the private sector have a great deal of capital invested to minimize the risk of physical harm. On the other hand, the failure to confront risk is usually an indication of negligence or cowardice in law enforcement.

At a time when nearly any routine “stop-and-frisk” can become a foot chase into unfamiliar, dark and dangerous places -- and almost any traffic stop can become a high-speed vehicle chase -- the cop on the street is expected to pursue such potentially dangerous offenders with little consideration for his own safety.

He is also expected to occasionally kick in doors without knowing what’s behind them, pursue armed and violent criminals down dark alleys, and engage in those harrowing high-speed traffic pursuits. Any of these situations could prove fatal, as 458 such incidents did in 2021 to U.S. law enforcement at all levels, each of whom was killed in the line of duty.

According to the FBI, so-called **“unprovoked attacks”** -- where an officer is murdered without ever having made contact with the perpetrator -- **“outpaced all other circumstances of felonious officer deaths.”** The **Fraternal Order of Police** indicate these **“Ambush-style attacks”** increased approximately 126 percent in 2021 from the previous year.

Law enforcement has always been something of a “*political football*” since the earliest days of the Roman Centurions. When a particularly savage crime or series of crimes occur, public officials, the news media and the civilian population bring a great deal of pressure to bear on police to ease the public’s fears by finding and arresting the culprit.



On the other hand, political authorities and the courts are increasingly likely to interfere with the police in the performance of their job. This was a recurring theme in the movie *Dirty Harry*, and it was as true then as it is now. Political officials, the courts and the police often have very differing priorities when it comes to their jobs, and these different priorities frequently hinder law enforcement.

Another consideration confronting law enforcement is the hypocrisy inherent in state and federal prohibitions against so-called “*racial profiling*.” While black are synonymous with violent crime in America and commit 90% of all murders here, police must pretend that blacks are no more likely to engage in violent crime than any other demographic.

No police officer worth his salt accepts this ridiculous constraint on his conduct, although they must all pay it lip service.

As a result, at any given moment the majority of any urban police force is concentrated in areas where most crimes occur, and these are invariably its black areas. IN FACT, THE PERCENTAGE OF A CITY OR COUNTY'S BLACK POPULATION IS A BETTER PREDICTOR OF VIOLENT CRIME RATES THAN ANY OTHER VARIABLE EVER STUDIED BY CRIMINOLOGISTS.

Finally, the availability of video equipment in the form of smart phones or hand-held cameras has added a new complexity to the policeman's already difficult task. As the arresting officers in the Rodney King incident learned to their dismay, dispensing a well-deserved dose of "*street justice*" can be a *career-ender* if it happens to be videotaped.