

TALKING POINTS



Rethinking the Police *An Officer's Confession and the Pathway to Reform*

November 21, 2023 | \$18, 208 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0612-2

A former police officer lays out a history of the US police, showing how it has developed a culture of dehumanization, systemic racism, and brutality. He himself is white, and he describes his own blindness to the culture he was a part of, and how he gradually came to see the toxic culture around him, largely through the ministry of his black church. In the second half of the book, he lays out a positive vision of police work as servant leadership.

Grappling with Broken Police Culture

In the wake of George Floyd, the tensions between minority communities and the police may have never been greater. Black Lives Matter and Defund the Police have placed a spotlight on the police and more specifically force used against minority populations. Also, the recent focus on Critical Race Theory has created an even greater interest in systemic racism—from both those arguing for its strong influence and those questioning its existence. This book enters the nexus of all these issues

- What this book does:
 - Assumes that police reform is possible and advocates for it.
 - Believes that, for all its failures, the police department remains an important institution in a healthy society.
 - Invites all to recognize the role and importance of a healthy police department in society.
 - Examines and critiques the culture of police departments
 - Takes the stand that rebuilding the police from the ground up would be impossible.
 - Holds police departments to a high standard.
 - Sees the police as an institution that needs to train people to use force in responsible, qualified ways.
 - Embraces a philosophy that would empower community policing.
- What this book does NOT do:
 - It does NOT call for defunding or abolishing the police.
 - It does NOT offer an uncritical defense of the police or their actions.
 - It does NOT dismiss all (or even most) police officers as violent, racist, or corrupt.
 - It does NOT disrespect police officers or the work they do.
- Why this book is important:
 - Daniel Reinhardt is someone with the inside experience of the police department, and the humility and self-awareness to scrutinize a culture that he himself was long a part of from a Christian perspective.
 - There are many views on this subject, and while not all readers will agree with Reinhardt's approach or recommendations, this book and his posture are valuable contributions to a conversation that our society, Christians included, badly needs to have.

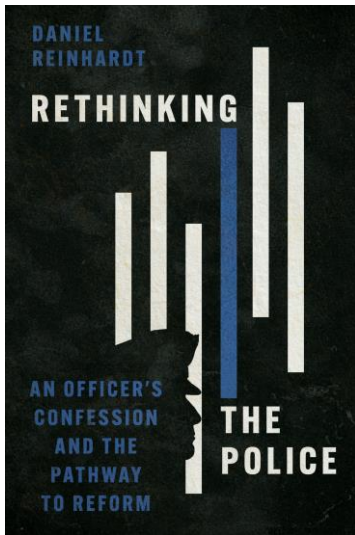


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"In *Rethinking the Police*, Daniel Reinhardt speaks not as an outsider but as an insider who served as a police officer for twenty-four years, retiring as a lieutenant. With vulnerability, storytelling, and invaluable research, Reinhardt offers a thoughtful critique addressing attitudes and practices that contribute to a negative police culture within the United States. Please look at the author's path forward if you want to see both policing and communities thrive."

—Jamaal Williams, lead pastor of Sojourn Church Midtown and president of the Harbor Network

Advocating for Police Culture Change

I am a white male and was a police officer for twenty-four years in a racially diverse urban community. I was born and raised in the same community and lived most of my life in the city where I served. As a teenager, my high school had a dense population of African Americans. My wrestling team was coached by an African American man and most of the athletes were African Americans. Although only a few Caucasians earned spots on the team, I was fully welcomed and even loved. I developed friendships with my teammates, some of which have endured to the present day. After high school, I married an African American woman, and we have now been married for over twenty-eight years and have six children.

I am acquainted and even immersed to some extent in a diverse cultural context. I also have deep and meaningful relationships with African Americans. Yet sadly, neither my experiences nor my context freed me from the blindness and moral enslavement of police culture. For decades, I refused to accept what was painfully obvious for so many—police brutality against minorities is not an issue of a few isolated and disconnected incidents but a systemic condition of a compromised institution.

I began my law enforcement career at twenty-two years of age. I spent four months in the police academy, learning laws and standards of conduct as well as training in defensive tactics, driving, and firearms. The academy also indoctrinated me into a particular culture. For the most part, police academies are managed by police officers, and the training is shaped by the stories and experiences that the instructors tell. As a cadet, you're not just learning the curriculum, you're absorbing the officers' attitudes, vocabulary, and mannerisms, and the instructors are seasoned cops, which is the future every cadet hopes to achieve. I remember one instructor whose extensive experience in street crimes captivated me. As a young man, I admired him and hoped to be just like him. Looking back, I can see how my experience in the academy began to reshape my thinking, speech, and even who I perceived myself to be.

After the academy, I spent four months with training officers. Approximately eight months after I first walked in the door of the police department, I was on my own in a police cruiser. My grasp of the power I possessed did not run much deeper than a single, superficial thought: I cannot believe they are letting me do this. Within my first year of experience, I found myself involved in car chases and fights with suspects who resisted arrest. I was on the scene at bar brawls and arrived in the aftermath of rapes and murders. On one occasion, I witnessed an officer shot and later stood less than fifty feet away as two other officers killed the suspect. This was my new normal, yet I still had not meaningfully reflected on the implications. But then something happened during one of my night shifts that forced me to reckon with the power I possessed.

Domestic violence calls are common at night, but this one would turn out to be anything but. The female victim was screaming so loudly that the dispatchers could hear her as the neighbor across the street reported the incident from their front lawn. I was only a block away when I received the call, but my backup officer was blocked by a train. When I arrived at the residence, I could hear the visceral screaming, and I was alone.

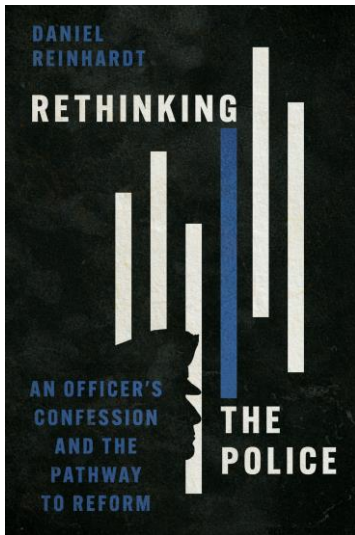


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"With impeccable research and long-lived experience, Daniel Reinhardt is winsome in his words about policing and peace. No matter where you land on issues of policing, systemic racism, justice, and the way to peace, there is something to learn in *Rethinking the Police*. Part confessional and part plea, Reinhardt refuses to demonize any one entity and puts forth a realistic pathway to reform in our communities and world."

—Lore Ferguson Wilbert, author of *A Curious Faith* and *Handle with Care*

I walked up the broken steps that led to the front door, which was open but obstructed by a screen. I pulled it open and stepped inside the residence. Ten feet away, I saw a couch facing the door where a woman crouched as an African American male loomed over her. They were involved in a struggle, and she was screaming. The motion of the man's arms and the intensity of the woman's screams made it clear to me that she was being stabbed. I unholstered my gun and pointed it at the man, yelling for him to stop and to get on the ground. Instead, he turned toward me. In less than a second, he had closed the space between the couch and the doorway, leaving me no time to retreat.

My academy training had taught me that deadly force was the appropriate response to a knife attack. I knew that I could not stop him with my left hand alone, but I had no time to holster my weapon to free my right for self-defense. So I took the slack out of the trigger, preparing to fire.

But I never pulled the trigger.

For reasons that I could not explain at the time, I chose instead to grab the young man's right hand with my left hand, knowing full well it wouldn't be enough to stop the knife. To my surprise, he didn't resist. I turned him toward the wall and handcuffed him. Still, there was no resistance. Finally, I turned him around to secure his knife.

It wasn't there.

Despite my certainty seconds earlier, there was no knife, and there never had been.

Once I realized he was weaponless, I asked him, "Why didn't you listen to me? Why didn't you get on the ground?"

With anger and utter sincerity, he yelled, "I'm tired of her! I came out so you could take me to jail."

I walked the man down the front steps I had crossed only a few moments earlier and placed him in the rear of my police cruiser. When I sat down in the driver's seat, my hands began to tremble, but not because of stress or concern that my life had been in danger. I was used to those feelings by that point. Instead, I trembled at the realization that I nearly killed a man who had no intention to harm me.

For many years, I couldn't explain why I never pulled the trigger and ended that young man's life. My choice was completely inconsistent with my training. I was fully convinced that he was about to stab me and knew I couldn't stop him by grabbing his hand. More than twenty years later, I now see that my faith was a key part of my response. Because I believed that young man was intrinsically valuable and created in God's image, I valued his life. My values countered my training tipping the scales in that encounter, and I am forever thankful they did.

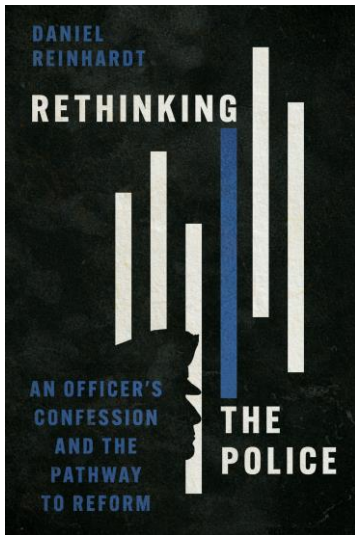


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Here's what I've learned from that call and other experiences over two decades of law enforcement:

Police culture matters. Police officers are shaped by police culture, and that internal culture is present in every experience and every encounter they have as officers.

Internal culture shapes the ways police officers use force. If the culture does not promote valuing people and relationships within the community, the exercise of power—and specifically the use of force—can have catastrophic consequences.

Change is not impossible. Influences both within officers and in the culture of their department can reshape police officers and reorient the choices that they make.

The police will continue to use force, and officers will be in situations like the one I described where their choice is literally a matter of life and death. Unfortunately, this is a consequence of living in a fallen world. We cannot change that reality; however, we can take meaningful steps to ensure officers are shaped in a way that truly promotes valuing the lives of people—particularly people of color.

—adapted from the introduction

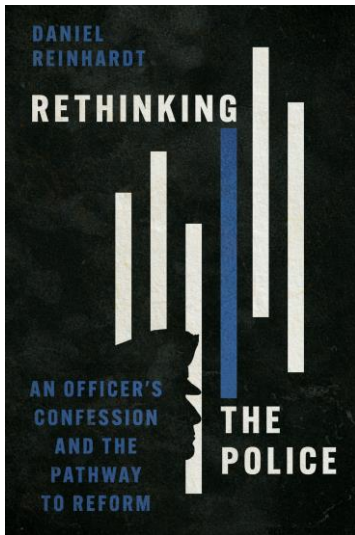


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Q & A



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An Insider's Perspective on a New Policing Model

Having served as a police officer for twenty-four years, retiring as a lieutenant, what is your insider perspective on police culture and the need for reform?

Daniel Reinhardt: Police culture and leadership promote dangerous tendencies in officers that can lead to brutality and biased enforcement through a systemically racist strategy. True police reform entails targeting the internal culture through a countercultural leadership model, one that is unapologetically predicated upon Christian thinking.

What exactly are you calling for, and NOT calling for, in your pathway that promotes change?

Daniel: The book calls for police reform, not defunding or abolishing the police. Even though there are concerning aspects of police culture, the book recognizes the faithful service of the many, if not the majority of, officers. Nonetheless, like any organization, change and reform are often needed. I have a healthy respect for the police, while still having a desire to hold them accountable.

Current police culture promotes social distance, dehumanization, and abuse. Police leadership promotes the same tendencies in its officers. In my view, internal cultural change cannot be accomplished solely by external measures. Police reform is impossible apart from a new leadership model in policing, one that focuses on servant leadership, justice, and community policing.

Do you see the problem in policing as one that is socioeconomic or racial?

Daniel: Certainly, one can make an argument for a socioeconomic explanation. Nonetheless, people of color are being disproportionately targeted. Therefore, although I believe I have presented evidence in this book that at a minimum suggests systemic racism, even if the real root of the problem is socioeconomic, the reform measures expressed in the book remain paramount. In other words, even if you think the problem is socioeconomic, change through cultural reform is still the answer.

What do you say to those that question the scalability of your ideas?

Daniel: Clearly, individual organizational cultures vary, and some police departments are better than others; however, scholars have long recognized a general uniformity in police culture all across the country. I believe the foundational principles outlined in this book, the leadership model and ethic, would meet little resistance if viewed at face value. These are applicable to all police departments.



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BIO



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Retired Police Lieutenant with 24 Years of Service

"Daniel Reinhardt calls people of goodwill to act against police violence, terror, and the inhumane treatment of Black people in America at the hands of the police. He advocates police reforms that focus on internal structures of police organizations, and he highlights the links between systemic racism, police brutality, and the organizational culture of policing with all the frailties of human failure. In the book, the us-versus-them mentality emerges as a component of the police subculture that serves as the normative framework for police-community interactions. Reinhardt argues that the foundation of police violence solutions requires a Christian response rooted in understanding the nature of police culture."

—DeLacy Davis, founder of Black Cops Against Police Brutality

Daniel Reinhardt served as a police officer in a racially diverse urban community near Cleveland, Ohio, for twenty-four years. He began his career in law enforcement at the age of twenty-two. After retiring from the police force as a lieutenant, he was assistant professor at the Heart of Texas Foundation College of Ministry at the Memorial Unit, a prison in Rosharon, Texas. He also served as an assistant pastor in an African American church in an impoverished area. Currently, he is associate director of student life and applied ministry at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the institution where he also received his doctoral degree. He lives in Louisville, Kentucky, with his wife, Yvette.

As he writes in the introduction of his book, Reinhardt is more than just a casual observer, his views on police reform are based on his experiences from the inside. He writes: "Although police brutality has plagued communities for over a century and the tension between racial minorities and the police appears to be worsening, I believe there is real hope for reform and redemption in law enforcement. Please remember, I was fully indoctrinated by a culture that enslaved me to a skewed and dangerous perspective. I am not merely an academic observer. I have tasted and seen police culture in all its sophistication and nuances. I can truly say, 'I was blind, but now I see,' and I fully believe if more people are given the same visibility, we can advocate for change and reform in law enforcement together.

For the readers who love and support the police, know that I do too! Please do not misunderstand me. I am not in favor of defunding the police or arguing that policing is a dishonorable profession. Nor am I arguing that police are the sole reason behind the tension with communities of color or that urban violence is an overblown problem. I realize the journey will not be easy for some, but my hope is that you will weigh the evidence and transition from skepticism to passionate zeal for the redemption of policing.

To my fellow officers, my brothers and sisters in blue, although you may not agree with me, please do not doubt my genuine love for the men and woman who serve their communities. I come from within and am unashamed to count myself as one of you."



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