

Confronting Implicit Bias in the New York Police Department

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An unarmed black man holding a cellphone, [Stephon Clark](#), is fatally shot in his grandmother's backyard in Sacramento and residents ask whether the officers only saw race when pulling their triggers 20 times.

[Saheed Vassell](#), a mentally ill black man waving a pistol-shaped metal car part at pedestrians, is gunned down by police officers on a street in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and the outrage focuses on whether deep-seated prejudices fueled the quick use of deadly force.

Two black men are [led in handcuffs from a Starbucks in Philadelphia](#) and alarm bells go off: Had the officers unconsciously adopted the racial bias of the store employee who called the police?

While explicit bias remains part of the fabric of life in the United States, elected leaders and chiefs of police have increasingly focused on what is often called implicit bias, inherently unintentional yet more pervasive.

In policing, the consequences of such bias can be dire. If officers rely on stereotypes instead of facts, routine encounters can escalate or turn deadly.

Since the killings of [Eric Garner](#) on Staten Island and [Michael Brown](#) in Ferguson, Mo., in 2014, and numerous other deadly encounters between law enforcement officers and civilians, the police — from Seattle to New Orleans to Hutchinson, Kan. — have strained to acknowledge and address the biases that roil, sometimes unconsciously, their interactions with the public.