



202-262-5053  
tcfreaj@gmail.com

***“No African Americans take to the streets in protest to demand Whites to love us more. We demand a behavior change!”*** Rev. George C. Gilbert, Jr.

April 2023

## Fatal police shootings are still going up, and nobody knows why.

By Steven Rich, Andrew Ba Tran and Jennifer Jenkins



**There were only 15 days in 2022 when police did not shoot and kill someone.**

The number of fatal police shootings across the country rose again last year, with officers killing 1,096 people, including a 2-year-old girl caught in a standoff.

Last year saw the most incidents since The Washington Post started tracking the deaths in its Fatal Force database in 2015, after a police officer killed Michael Brown, an unarmed Black teenager in Ferguson, Mo.

**There were only 15 days without such a shooting in 2022.**

Since 2017, the number has increased every year, and is now up about 10 percent compared with just three years ago. But criminologists caution that more data is needed to understand what is driving the rise. “It’s hard to know if the increase is meaningful or random,” said Justin Nix, an associate professor of criminal justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. “We really need a better understanding of when police shoot and injure people, but more so when police avoid shooting someone.” The pace stayed consistently high in 2022 compared with prior years. Last year, officers killed about 90 people nearly every month, a tally reached only a handful of times in each of the past seven years.

With more than 18,000 police departments nationwide, it’s difficult to pinpoint a single reason for the increase, experts said. The rate of violent crime dropped steadily after 2016 but has climbed higher since 2020. Last year, 49 police officers were shot and killed in the line of duty, compared with 61 the year before, according to FBI data.

Some experts point to a rise in gun purchases across the country as one factor. Others blame the slow pace of reform in use-of-force policies and the challenge of holding officers accused of excessive force accountable. Ultimately, experts say, each incident is rooted in unique circumstances, complicating efforts to draw meaningful insights.



**The demographics of those killed, however, have remained largely the same: While more White people were shot and killed by police overall last year, Black people were killed at a rate 2.5 times higher based on their percentage of the population.**

The majority of people police shot and killed were armed. And, as in prior years, about one quarter of people killed were in the throes of a mental or emotional crisis. Several incidents drew national scrutiny, such as the death of Patrick Lyoya, a 26-year-old Congolese refugee who was shot in the back of the head by a Grand Rapids, Mich., officer during a struggle after a traffic stop in April. The officer, Christopher Schurr, was fired and has been charged with second-degree murder. Schurr's lawyer has said the former officer, who has pleaded not guilty, acted in self-defense.

In June, a San Antonio police officer shot and killed Andre Hernandez Jr., a 13-year-old boy who police say was driving a stolen car when he reversed and rammed a police vehicle. His mother said her son, known as AJ, had run away

from home after the shooting death of his sister weeks earlier. Last week, a grand jury declined to indict the officer in AJ's death.

The most deadly calls remain those for domestic disturbances. This was the case last year for Clesslynn Jane Crawford, the youngest victim The Post has recorded.

Clesslynn, a 2-year-old girl in Baxter Springs, Kan., was shot by a Joplin, Mo., officer in April after her father took her and her mother hostage in a camping trailer, according to news reports. Her father killed her mother, Taylor Shutte, and fired more than 90 rounds at police. An officer fired a single round into the trailer, investigators said, which struck Clesslynn. She was found dead at the scene along with her father. Police said he killed himself. "This is a horrific outcome to what had already started as a very tragic incident," Joplin Police Chief Sloan Rowland said in a statement. The Kansas Bureau of Investigation is still investigating.

Further complicating an understanding of fatal shootings: Among departments, the number can vary widely from year to year. Two law enforcement agencies in Colorado, the Aurora Police Department and the Larimer County Sheriff's Office, were among those with the largest increases in 2022 — from zero in 2021 to six each in 2022. The Colorado Attorney General's Office found in 2021 that Aurora police had engaged in a pattern or practice of racially biased policing and excessive force. The department entered into a consent decree that included improving its use-of-force policies and training. The Aurora police declined to comment. Two hours north of Aurora, in Larimer County, Sheriff John Feyen said the increase in fatal shootings by his deputies was due in part to an "unprecedented number of critical incidents."

"We invest heavily in training to ensure that our community members and our deputies stay safe," he said. "Unfortunately, on numerous occasions

last year, suspects made decisions that left deputies with no other options than to use lethal force.” Some departments had fewer fatal shootings last year, including the San Antonio police, who killed five people in 2022, including Hernandez, a decline from 12 in 2021. Last year, the department began training officers to designate roles and responsibilities before responding to calls that have the potential for violence, Sgt. Washington Moscoso said. “We immediately saw a significant decrease in multi-officer-involved shootings,” he said, noting the program was gaining attention from other departments.

Data on fatal police shootings remains sparse. The Federal Bureau of Investigation asks state and local departments to contribute voluntarily to its collection efforts. But in the past eight years, the bureau has recorded fewer police shootings each year even as The Post’s count has increased. In 2019, the FBI started a new use-of-force data collection, which is not yet publicly available. So far, the bureau said that 10,000 law enforcement departments have contributed. But The Post found that more than 200 departments whose officers had fatally shot someone were not on the FBI’s list.

In a statement, the FBI said that it “makes every effort through its editing procedures, training practices, and agency outreach” to ensure its data is accurate, but that local departments are responsible for what they report.

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**True Reparations Are A**

## **National Debt:**

### **Localities and Individuals Should Not Foot the Bill and Cannot Build Systemic Remedies Alone**



An Article Excerpt By William A. Darity, Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen

#### I. An Appropriate Level of Restitution

The specific case for reparations for Black American descendants of United States slavery is predicated on 1) the cumulative damages of slavery; 2) nearly a century-long epoch of legal segregation (known as the Jim Crow era) and white terrorism; and 3) the ongoing harms of racialized mass incarceration, police executions of unarmed blacks, credit, housing, and employment discrimination, as well as the enormous racial wealth gap. We do not assign blame for this litany of harms to specific individuals or institutions. We must emphasize: black reparations are not a matter of personal or singular institutional guilt; black reparations are a matter of national responsibility.

In our estimation, black-white wealth inequality is the most powerful indicator of the full effects of racial injustice in the United States. Black Americans constitute about 13 percent of the

nation's population but own less than 3 percent of the nation's wealth. Although there are many ways to calculate reparations, including an estimation of the present value of the time stolen from the enslaved or the present value of the 40-acre land grants promised – but denied – to the freedmen, we believe that a true reparations policy must make the black wealth share *at least* consistent with the black share of the American population. This will necessitate building the eligible black American level of asset holdings by \$10 to \$12 trillion, or approximately \$250,000 for each black individual.



So, who should pay the bill? In *From Here to Equality*, we argue that the culpable party is the United States government. Authority is constructed and contextual, and all three phases of atrocities catalogued here were products of the legal and authority framework established by the federal government. In many instances, the federal government further sanctioned racial atrocities by silence and inaction.

This means, in turn, that local or piecemeal – little by little – attempts at racial atonement do not constitute reparations proper. In many instances, local initiatives that parade under the label of “reparations” are not that at all. Local government actions called “reparations” – whether at the state or municipal level – frequently constitute an admission that atrocities have been committed followed by

allocations for research, or the construction of centers, rather than compensatory payments to black Americans. However, these scattered steps to stop an ongoing harm do not heal the wound produced by the harm; usually, they do not involve any compensatory payment.

Even if they do afford compensatory payment, a series of local initiatives is highly unlikely to match the minimum bill for black reparations. As we noted above, it will require at least \$10 trillion to eliminate the black-white wealth disparity. Taken separately or collectively, there is no evidence that local “reparations” will come close to addressing the full scope of the measured harm or achieving an appropriate level of restitution.

Go to this link to continue reading:<https://freedmenabsolute.com/2023/02/10/tr-ue-reparations-are-a-national-debt/>

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## **Young Black Women in STEM Discuss Their Real Life Experiences with the CRT Term: Intersectionality**

**By Wayne A. Young**

Four young Black women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) came together to talk about being the intersection of Black and female as they travel life's road. Critical Race Theory (CRT) legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw is often credited with coining the term intersectionality to create a framework to understand the unique experiences of Black females in the United States.

The four young women added being young and being a first-generation college graduate to the roundabout during the Women of Color in STEM online talk sponsored by the Presbytery of Baltimore. From the lively presentation, it also became clear that mistaken identities and low expectations continue to be landmarks on the maps of American Black life.



**All of the women, whom have at least a master's degree, said that delayed gratification has been the necessary driving speed in their lives.**

Jamie Wilkins, Pharm D (A Doctor of Pharmacy) Head, Risk Management Center of Excellence, Worldwide Safety Pfizer Pharmaceutical Company, recalled being told, "You are too young to be in this position." Christina Dunbar, Senior UX (User Experience) Researcher – Google, added her age and being a first-generation college graduate presented challenges she had to also navigate.

"I was not the most tech savvy person going into college," says Dunbar, who initially focused on a career in medicine, until she took organic chemistry. "That is the weed out (class)," she smiled. She continued to cruise past careers from pre-law to social work until she decided to take a U-turn to her interest in a computer interaction program. "It bridges the gap between the social sciences and technology that solves real world problems for people," she explained.

Unlike Dunbar, Wilkins and former Port of Harlem editor Elizabeth Banks, MD, Assistant Professor, Clinical OB/GYN Penn Medicine, started moving down their career paths during their tricycle years.

"Tornado warnings were something that caught my eye even in elementary school," quipped Wilkins.



**Much of Banks focus is on relieving pelvic pain, which she says too many doctors often falsely tell women is natural. "Being a woman that is able to help other women is magical to me," she continued.**

Banks says attending a STEM magnet high school along with outside research in hospitals and volunteer work "really confirmed my (childhood) interest in the area." Today, she added, that being only one of the two percent of doctors who are Black and female and being young often leads patients and colleagues to mistake her as still a student or the person who is cleaning. "Not discounting any of those professions, but that is not just what I do," she says.

All of the women, whom have at least a master's degree, said that delayed gratification has been the necessary driving speed in their lives. For Banks, it meant taking a longer route to creating a family. Nevertheless, she adds, even with spend bumps and now having settled into my career, "having a very demanding work schedule and taking care of a child," has its challenges. Luckily for her and her husband, a cardiologist who had completed his fellowship in a separate city, they were "blessed to find a job in the same health care system" and town.

Banks became the first in her hospital to provide minimally invasive GYN surgery, a relatively new field. Much of her focus is on relieving pelvic pain, which she says too many doctors often falsely tell women is natural. "Being a woman that is able to help other women is magical to me," she continued.



**Critical Race Theory (CRT) legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw is often credited with coining the term intersectionality which she created as “remedial education for judges.”**

Historically Black Morgan State University undergraduate alumnus Kaylin Moody, Engineer, Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Lab, says attending Historically White Johns Hopkins for graduate school had its challenges, too. The schools are both in Baltimore city, but “Morgan State vs. Johns Hopkins culture is very different,” she says.



During her first semester steering around the culturally different Hopkins landscape, she had a grade crash. “I did probably the worst I have ever done in school,” she says.

Her advisor provided Moody the mentoring she needed to “stick it out.” All of the participants valued their mentors, many whom were White. Banks also suggested seeking out podcasts.

When looking for internships, Moody added, “You can try going to the National Association of Black Engineers Conference or maybe the college fair at your school or just asking with one of your professors.”

The Presbytery of Baltimore sponsored the talk to

highlight the intersectionality of being Black and female during Women’s History Month. Critical Race Theory (CRT) legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw is often credited with coining the term intersectionality which she created as “remedial education for judges.”

She explains, “What happens to Black women isn’t the sum total of what happens to Black men and White women. It’s different and sometimes it requires a different approach.” Wilkins, Dunbar, Banks, and Moody’s paths show that their trek through life are not just the addition of Black plus female, but the unique intersection of the two at a roundabout of Black and female.

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# Memphis police academy cut corners while scrambling to hire, officers say

By Robert Klemko



Five ex-officers charged with beating Tyre Nichols were hired at a time of lower standards and scrutiny, current and former officers say

Years before the brutal police beating of Tyre Nichols, the Memphis Police Department relaxed academic, disciplinary and fitness standards at its training academy in an effort to fill widespread vacancies, opening the door for the hiring of officers who could become dangerous liabilities, nine current and former officers who recruited and trained academy students said. After the city slashed pension benefits in 2014, and as high-profile police misconduct cases across the country began to sour public opinion of the profession, many officers left the department, and fewer applicants expressed interest, according to department statistics and interviews with current and former officers.

Hoping to boost admissions, the department announced in 2018 that it would defer college credit requirements for recruits, allowing applicants with high school diplomas and multiple years of work experience to join the force and pledge to attend college later. The city announced a \$15,000 signing bonus for police recruits in 2021, and in 2022, the

department said it was adjusting qualifying marks in fitness in an effort to exclude fewer applicants.

Additional changes were made but not announced publicly, according to nine current and former academy instructors, supervisors and recruiters, five of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity because they feared reprisals and, in some cases, are still employed by the department. The academy became more lenient in grading, and students were allowed more chances to retake exams — including at the shooting range — after failures that would have led to dismissal under previous rules, the current and former officers said. Incidents of cheating did not always trigger dismissal, as in the past, four officers said. Struggling students were invited to study sessions in which they were taught upcoming test material straight from exam books.

The broad overhaul was implemented by then-Police Chief Michael Rallings and his successor, Chief Cerelyn Davis, under the direction of Mayor Jim Strickland (D). It resulted in larger class sizes at the academy while maintaining high graduation rates for recruits, including the five officers charged with murder in connection with Nichols's death in January. In extensive interviews with The Washington Post, the veteran officers involved in training and supervising new hires said the changes created conditions that made incidents like the Nichols beating more likely.

**“They baby these recruits and do everything they can to help them pass the tests so they don’t lose the body,” said Brian McNamee, a former Memphis police lieutenant and supervisor of training for the department from 2019 to 2021. “That’s a problem. If somebody can’t pass the tests and can’t grasp the material, you don’t want them on the streets policing you.”**

The department didn’t respond to repeated requests for information about the recruits, policy changes and incidents described in this article. Davis, the chief, and Strickland, the mayor, declined interview

requests. Rallings, the former police chief, did not respond to a request for comment.



The Memphis academy, which requires more hours of instruction than state standards, still produced hundreds of quality cops over the seven-year period, the current and former officers said. But dozens of less skilled, poorly trained students joined them in graduation, they said. One student graduated the academy in 2017 after multiple allegations of wrongdoing — including accusations of sexually harassing an instructor, the former instructors said. He resigned two years later after turning off his body camera during a traffic stop and shooting a fleeing suspect, according to department records.

Policing experts said it was difficult to know whether police departments beyond Memphis are making similar changes at their academies because few make information about their training programs public. But they said departments of all sizes are experiencing similar staffing shortages. The Memphis department is nearly 400 officers short of Strickland’s 2017 goal of employing at least 2,300. And it is reeling from the fallout related to Nichols, a 29-year-old Black man who died Jan. 10, three days after being pulled over by officers and pummeled, Tasered and kicked as he called out for his mother. Seven officers have been fired, and five of them are facing second-degree murder and other

charges, a situation that critics of the hiring and training standards at the department say could have been avoided. All the officers have pleaded not guilty. On Thursday, the Justice Department announced a review of the department’s training, policies and activities that relate to using force, de-escalation efforts and operating specialized units.

“We would voice our concerns, and it would go on deaf ears,” said James Lash, a former academy instructor and Crisis Intervention Team coordinator for the Memphis department who retired in 2022. “There were several officers in that group with Tyre Nichols that everybody wondered about when they were in the academy. You reap what you sow.”

### **More recruits, more problems**

Six years before police officer Desmond Mills Jr. swung a baton at Nichols on Jan. 7, Mills was a recruit in the academy’s 123rd session. It was the largest class in recent memory — 110 recruits, compared with 39 the previous session. Instructors who led the session remember it as the beginning of the academy’s decline.

Unimpressed with the recruit pool, they soon abandoned hopes of replicating the previous session’s 79 percent graduation rate, Lash and three instructors said. But 85 of the students graduated, 77 percent of the class, a reflection — according to their instructors — of how the standards had changed. Publicly, city officials celebrated, with Mayor Strickland praising Chief Rallings in a guest column in the Commercial Appeal. “We made rebuilding MPD staffing a major priority — and found innovative ways to make it happen,” Strickland wrote. Early in the 21-week session, a female recruit told academy leaders that a male recruit, Jamarcus Jeames, was bragging that he would soon have sexual intercourse with a female instructor, Lash and three instructors said. While the academy conducted an internal investigation, the female instructor filed a complaint with the city, according to two instructors with knowledge of her actions. Both complaints were dismissed, and after



the session ended, the instructor who filed the complaint was transferred out of the academy, the instructors said. The police department did not respond to questions about the complaints. Jeames denied the allegations but declined to elaborate.

Later in the session, an instructor was told Jeames had been detained by a Shelby County sheriff's deputy after falling asleep in his car late at night outside a restaurant, according to three instructors with knowledge of the situation. The deputy released him because no officer trained to administer DUI tests was available, an instructor was told. Instructors filed a disciplinary charge against Jeames for not disclosing a contact with law enforcement during academy enrollment, a violation of academy rules, but the charge was dismissed, the instructors said. Thirteen months later, in 2018, Jeames shot a man who had fled in his vehicle from a traffic stop and was carrying a pistol. Jeames told investigators the man, Martavious Banks, had brandished the gun before Jeames shot him five times, according to the department. Banks survived. Jeames was not charged, and an internal investigation ruled the shooting justified. But investigators found Jeames violated multiple department policies in the moments leading up to the shooting, including turning off his body camera, according to two officers familiar with the findings of the internal investigation. Jeames resigned from the police force in February 2019. That August, he was arrested by Memphis police for suspicion of public intoxication, assault and driving under the influence. The arrest is not listed in court records, and Jeames said the charges were dismissed.

At the academy, meanwhile, the department maintained its high graduation rates by ignoring rules described in its own policy manual, the current and former instructors said. It allowed students to fail multiple exams without consequences, Lash, McNamee and the other officers told The Post. And when instructors uncovered incidents of students cheating on examinations or during timed physical fitness tests, the inquiries often went nowhere, Lash and three former instructors said. The academy staff

was by then divided into two camps: those who supported or condoned the changes and those who objected, Lash and four officers said. Officers who pushed back were encouraged to transfer. "If you didn't like it, we were told flat-out by several commanders, 'You should put in your paperwork and leave,'" said one former instructor still employed by the department. "You can go back to the car and start humping calls. But if you like having weekends off, you'll do what you're told to do."

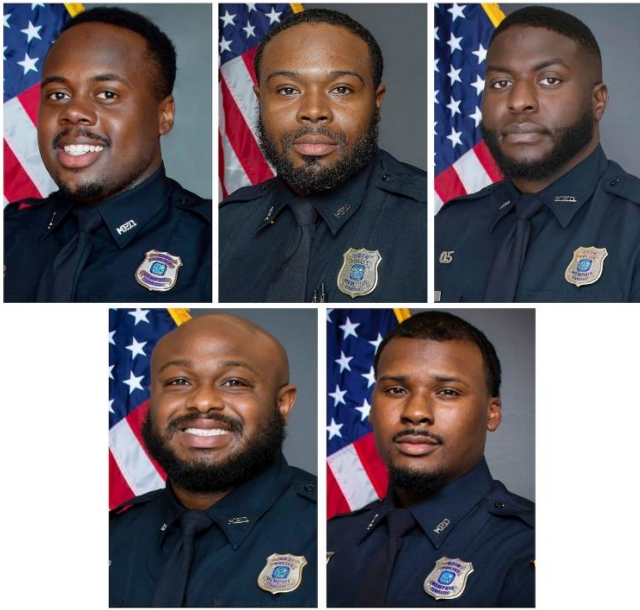
Changes in academy practices were communicated not through emails or in meetings, but by word of mouth on a case-by-case basis, the officers said. And they continued under Davis, who joined the department as chief in June 2021. During the 135th training session, which began in August of that year, firearms instructors told the rest of the academy staff that three recruits failed their final shooting exams, two instructors said. Such a result historically meant dismissal from the academy — a red line that many instructors considered sacred, given the risk involved with employing officers who can't properly use their weapons. Several instructors began processing dismissal paperwork for the three recruits, the two former instructors said. Then they were contacted by a supervisor. "We get a call saying, 'Nope, we're not firing people anymore, tell firearms they're coming back to the class, and they're going to do remedial training,'" said a former instructor who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "As a citizen, I don't know how people feel about that, but I kind of want my officers to be proficient at their weapons." McNamee, the former supervisor of training, said many instructors were crestfallen at the crumbling of standards. "It was disheartening and disappointing to the majority of them," he said. "It's an important job. You're training the future officers on the street who are going to be protecting you and your family."

### **A lack of support**

Alvin Davis, a Memphis police officer since 2000, was transferred to the academy recruiting unit in

2021 after teaching there years earlier. He said he was stunned by how much had changed. Memphis officers participated in 25 recruiting events in 2011 and processed 803 applications. By 2021, the recruiters were going to more than 200 events a year and processing more than 4,000 applications, Davis said. For every person who applied, scores of others ignored the recruiters or insulted them, especially at high schools. “We heard ‘f--- the police’ all the time from the kids at the schools,” Davis said. “It’s not a job that you stick your chest out and take pride in anymore.”

As interest in joining the police waned, supervisors ordered the recruiters to travel. Davis made trips to states including Colorado, California and Florida. He said he eventually grew frustrated, not just because of the changes in hiring standards, but also because of long-standing Memphis practices such as not formally interviewing applicants during the hiring process.



The former officers charged in Nichols's killing, clockwise from top left: Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Haley, Emmitt Martin III, Justin Smith and Desmond Mills Jr. (Memphis Police Department /AP)

“They said it was too time-consuming to do an interview,” said Davis, who retired last year, “so instead of taking the time, you end up hiring these

five knuckleheads who might have told you they wanted to be police so they could beat people up.” The department declined a request to detail its application process for academy admission.

McNamee, the former training supervisor, said the department also has done a subpar job with background investigations of recruits. While many departments seeking to hire former Memphis officers send investigators to review disciplinary files and interview an applicant’s neighbors, colleagues and friends, Memphis doesn’t expend those resources, McNamee said. “They are understaffed in background investigations and overworked,” McNamee said. Another officer charged with killing Nichols, Demetrius Haley, was sued in 2016 by an inmate who alleged Haley beat him unconscious as a corrections officer in Shelby County, which includes Memphis. The suit was dropped after documents were not properly served. The Memphis Police Department and the Shelby County Corrections Department did not respond to requests to disclose details of Haley’s hiring, including whether the inmate’s allegations were investigated. Haley has declined in the past to discuss the lawsuit, and his lawyer did not return an email seeking comment for this article.

Haley and the other four officers charged with murdering Nichols are Black. Each joined the department after the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., in August 2014, which triggered protests across the country and a renewed focus on diversifying law enforcement and revamping police training curriculums. The hiring of Haley and several of the others coincided with a years-long effort in Memphis to field a police force that better reflected the racial makeup of the city. In 2014, the department was 46.7 percent White, while the city of Memphis is 27 percent White, according to Census Bureau data. The department is now 37 percent White, according to the city’s website. Memphis academy instructors said the racial dynamics involved in hiring in recent years — combined with the department’s staffing push —

ruled out disciplinary measures they had once relied upon.

During the first week of the 123rd session, in 2017, a car blew past an instructor driving to the academy, going well over the speed limit, the instructor told Lash and others. The instructor told colleagues he caught up to the driver at a stoplight and followed him into the academy, making note of the name on the back of the driver's uniform after he exited the vehicle, Lash and three others said. In a meeting room with the entire class present, instructors identified the student and revealed what he'd done, said Lash, who said he considered the incident a teaching moment. "It's been determined you're a reckless driver," Lash recalled telling the recruit. "What should we do? We're cops. We're supposed to uphold the law." Lash's lieutenant then proffered a pair of handcuffs, and Lash cuffed the recruit and led him out of the room and into a hallway. The recruit burst into tears, Lash said. He described uncuffing the recruit and talking to him about how police operate in a fishbowl. A few minutes later, he said, the recruit was allowed to rejoin the class.

The next day, Lash, his lieutenant and two other instructors were summoned to Rallings's office to explain themselves, Lash said. The instructors were White, and the recruit was Black. Rallings said he'd received a complaint accusing the officers of racial bias and considered the handcuffing unacceptable, Lash recalled. The lieutenant took responsibility, Lash said. He was soon working a midnight patrol shift, his time with the academy cut short. The lieutenant, who is still employed by the department, didn't respond to a request for comment. "We really don't have any support. That's what that said to us," Lash said of Rallings's response to the incident. "They just want somebody there to check the boxes. And for a lot of us, that was really hard. Everybody we train may end up in a car with me." Until they left the academy, Lash and other former instructors said, they were told repeatedly to build a more collegial atmosphere instead of barking orders and criticism in the manner of drill instructors. Advocates for reform in police training argue that

military-style academy training leads to a "warrior" policing mentality. Lash said his verbal barbs were aimed at creating stress so students could learn to avoid overreacting or becoming paralyzed by fear in tense situations. "You do that by being aggressive and using curse words that some people may have not ever heard," Lash said. "Unfortunately, you're going to deal with some unsavory characters on the street. And if you get flustered, are you still going to be able to communicate, move and react the way you need to react? The academy got away from that."

The officers who spoke to The Post offered a rare glimpse into the world of police training, given the secretive nature of law enforcement culture, said Robin S. Engel, senior vice president of the National Policing Institute. She said there's no guarantee the Memphis academy was providing exemplary training even before the culture shift. "There's no consistent standard in police training across the country, or even within states, or even sometimes within a single academy," Engel said. "Unfortunately, we don't really know what works best for police training. They don't share the data, and they often don't look themselves." Anecdotally, former officers who supervised recent Memphis academy graduates described a generation that lacked communication skills, struggled with report writing and hadn't been tested emotionally in the academy. Supervisors said they encountered young officers who described joining the department for the signing bonus and opportunities for overtime pay, rather than a desire to serve the public.



Sierra Rogers, left, who worked with Nichols at FedEx in Memphis, adjusts a memorial for him in January. (Joshua Lott/The Washington Post)

Lt. Chester Striplin retired in 2019, years after helping the academy get accredited nationally. He said he saw a decline in competence in his final years on the force. “They don’t know how to go from zero to a scale of five. They’re always at one of two levels — either zero or 10,” Striplin said of newly trained officers. “And you found that they weren’t able to articulate when to de-escalate the situation that they were in. The supervisors had to be called a lot more than ever before.”

Excessive-force complaints against Memphis officers peaked at 59 in 2020 after the department logged 36, 37 and 39 in the previous three years. That number dropped to 44 in 2021, the latest year for which statistics are available. For many of the former instructors, Nichols’s death has cast changes and problems at the academy in sharper focus. Some said they wonder whether they could have done more to push back. One former instructor who left the academy in frustration said he never felt he could air his concerns without being ignored or punished. “You get this job at the academy, and you think about this incredible responsibility, the thousands of lives you are going to impact through these recruits and what you can teach them,” he said. “And then you find out it’s about quantity over quality, and they’re making up the rules as they go. It’s disheartening.”

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