

# Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

## Chicago

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259 reviewed cases, the individual who was shot had access to a gun. This does not mean that these shootings were unavoidable, but it does suggest that many were probably not as clearly unnecessary as

“These police-civilian encounters began as traffic stops for minor violations

McDonald’s.

So, what if anything can be done about “good apples” who shoot?

Better training, many say. There can be little argument that better training is desirable. Some police shootings in Chicago have occurred because officers were physically dragged along after having reached into running vehicles. Some involved officers firing from moving vehicles, or at moving vehicles. Such practices are unnecessarily dangerous and could be readily avoided if officers were better trained to avoid them.

And of course, there is “deescalation,” a buzz word in public discussion of police reform. Deescalation techniques are supposed to help officers defuse or withdraw from potentially violent incidents without jeopardizing anyone’s safety. There is nothing wrong with providing officers with more of this training. But, the emphasis on individual officer training is shortsighted.

Both discipline and training focus on how individual officers

manage critical incidents. That overlooks an important question. How is it that an officer finds himself squared off with a potentially armed individual? To answer that requires thinking critically about departmental choices in particular neighborhoods, not just individual officers’ choices in particular cases.

### It’s Where You Live

The likelihood of getting shot by the police is much higher in some Chicago neighborhoods than in others. Of the 259 police shootings that the IPRA has released information about, nearly 90 percent occurred in minority neighborhoods. That goes a long way in explaining why 80 percent of police shooting victims were Black in a city that is only one-third Black.

The police department and others might point out that the likelihood of getting shot by anyone is much higher in poor Black neighborhoods than, say, middle-class white ones. Incidences of violent crime tend to be much higher in poor, minority neighborhoods. That would seem to explain why police shootings are also higher in those neighborhoods.

Not so fast. The connection between neighborhood violence and police shootings would make sense if shooting victims consisted exclusively of persons who were suspected of violent crime.

But in nearly a quarter of the 259 IPRA incidents, it was the police who stirred the pot. These police-civilian encounters began as traffic stops for minor violations, because someone made a “furtive movement,” or just looked suspicious. Many of these stops were likely of the “stop and frisk” variety that have been controversial in New York City, Chicago, and other

cities. The shootings that occur in the course of these kinds of encounters follow a general pattern. One of the stopped civilians flees and the police give chase. During or immediately after the chase, officers shoot in response to a perceived gun threat.

Even if one believes the officers’ version of an encounter’s final moments when a suspect’s threatening behavior prompted the police to shoot, we should ask whether the initial stop should have occurred at all. And, even if the answer to that question is “yes,” we should ask whether a foot chase was justified, given the harmlessness of the misconduct that precipitated the initial stop.

My review also revealed that plainclothes officers were responsible for nearly 40 percent of on-duty shootings. There is evidence from other departments that such officers are, per capita, responsible for more shootings than uniformed officers. This may be because more aggressive officers are drawn to such assignments. It also seems possible that people have a hard time distinguishing these officers from civilians who mean harm — particularly when plainclothes officers break into an ongoing fight or melee.

Police departments and policymakers must critically examine the relationships between police shootings and stop-and-frisk, plainclothes policing and other enforcement tactics. Doing so will afford insights into how to improve police-community relations in poor, minority neighborhoods. If this is truly reformers’ goal, more aggressive discipline and better training should be components of the agenda, not the whole of it.

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## Census

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zenship question on the once-a-decade census would allow the agency to better enforce Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, which bars the dilution of voting power of a minority group through redistricting.

“To fully enforce those requirements, the Department needs a reliable calculation of the citizen voting-age population in localities where voting rights violations are alleged or suspected,” the letter states. The letter asks that the Census Bureau “reinstate” the question.

### Census Bureau Gathers Citizenship Data in Other Surveys

The full census, however, hasn’t included questions about citizenship since 1950. The Census Bureau has gathered such data in other surveys.

The bureau switched the method of those surveys after the 2000 census.

Today, it conducts the American Community Survey every year, which includes questions about citizenship, along with many other questions.

The survey covers a sample of residents of the United States. Experts said the Justice Department’s letter was misleading.

And they questioned the Justice Department’s explanation in the letter, noting that the American Community Survey produces data on citizenship that has been used in Section 2 cases.

“You could always have better data but it seems like a strange concern because no one in the communities who are most affected have been raising this concern,” said Michael Li, senior counsel at the Brennan Center’s Democracy Program.

*Do you have information about the Trump administration and the census? Contact Justin at [justin@propublica.org](mailto:justin@propublica.org) or via Signal at 774-826-6240.*

We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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