

The Danger Imperative: Understanding What Drives Police Violence

This unflinching look behind the blue wall is vital for the public, policymakers, and police who want to understand how police violence happens and why.

LOS ANGELES, CA, UNITED STATES, February 7, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Despite advancements in policing safety over the last half-century, contemporary narratives perpetuate the notion of a "war on cops" and escalating violence within law enforcement. Seeking to unravel this apparent contradiction, esteemed sociologist and expert on policing, violence, and public safety, [Michael Sierra-Arévalo](#), embarked on a groundbreaking ethnographic journey delving into the intricacies of modern policing in America. As an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin, Sierra-Arévalo has been interviewed by prominent outlets such as the Los Angeles Times, the Washington Post, GQ, Vox, and NPR for his expert insights.

Scheduled for release on February 13, 2024, by [Columbia University Press](#), "[The Danger Imperative](#): Violence, Death, and the Soul of Policing" represents Sierra-Arévalo's meticulous on-the-ground examination of the underlying forces driving police behavior. Drawing from over 100 interviews and more than 1,000 hours spent alongside officers on patrol, the book sheds light on the mechanisms fostering a pervasive culture of violence within law enforcement institutions. Sierra-Arévalo says, "The puzzle was not whether police were preoccupied with their safety but how this preoccupation was perpetuated and, more importantly, how it shaped inequalities in policing. With time, those questions became the focus of my inquiry and my hours on patrol."

The author argues that contemporary policing is structured by what he calls the "danger imperative," a cultural framework compelling officers to constantly anticipate threats and prioritize their own safety. Rather than treat police culture as a set of values and practices that are "downloaded" by officers through formal training, "The Danger Imperative" shows how the



"The Danger Imperative" by Michael Sierra-Arévalo

preoccupation with violence and officer safety is continually reinforced through ostensibly colorblind mechanisms that elide overt discussion of race, racism, or police bias.

Through a diverse array of logics, symbols, and rituals, police come to understand and practice their work as a constant struggle for survival. Though justified in the name of officer safety, this approach to policing encourages behaviors that damage police legitimacy, violate law and departmental policy, and endanger citizens and police alike. Sierra-Arévalo explains prevailing attitudes among police officers that are summarized in axioms like, "It's better to be tried by twelve than carried by six."

"The Danger Imperative" scrutinizes academy training, departmental routines, and street-level officer conduct to reveal the deeply ingrained inequalities perpetuated by contemporary policing that lead to disproportionate violence against communities of color.



Michael Sierra-Arévalo

In addition to dismantling the "war on cops" myth, Sierra-Arévalo's work explores how dangerous teachings from private training providers are shaping police culture and contributing to violent behavior. Within "The Danger Imperative," he not only diagnoses the systemic issues plaguing modern policing but also offers actionable policy recommendations to address and reverse the cycle of violence and tragedy.

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Beautifully written and rigorously researched, 'The Danger Imperative' should transform how we understand policing at its core.”

Monica C. Bell, Yale Law School

Reuben J. Miller, author of "Halfway Home: Race, Punishment, & the Afterlife of Mass Incarceration" says, "This important and timely book should be on the shelves of anyone interested in understanding policing in this country."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Sierra-Arévalo is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin. His writing and research have been featured in the Los Angeles Times, the Washington Post, GQ, Vox, NPR, and other outlets. From 2020 to 2023, he served on the City of Austin's Public Safety Commission. He regularly speaks to public and expert audiences, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the American Bar Association (ABA), and Harvard University. He holds a PhD in sociology from Yale University.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Published by Columbia University Press on February 13, 2024, "The Danger Imperative: Violence, Death, and the Soul of Policing" is a trailblazing, on-the-ground account of modern policing. It shows that violence is the logical consequence of an institutional culture that privileges officer survival over public safety.

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