

# [Modern policing: the racial challenge](https://assignbuster.com/modern-policing-the-racial-challenge/)

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Recently, a new view of policing has emerged. Rather than being seen as a crime fighter who tracks down serious criminals or stops armed robberies in progress, many police departments adopted the concept that the police role should be to maintain order and be a visible and accessible component of the community. The argument is that police effort can be successful only when conducted in partnership with concerned citizens. This movement is referred to as community policing.
Engaging in community policing does not mean that the crime control model of law enforcement has been neglected. An ongoing effort is being made to improve the crime-fighting capability of police agencies and there are some indications that the effort is paying off. Research indicates that aggressive action by police can help reduce the incidence of repeat offending, and innovations such as computerized fingerprinting systems may bring about greater efficiency. Nonetheless, little evidence exists that adding police or improving their skills has had a major impact on crime-fighting success.
The challenge in community policing is the increasingly multicultural population, which creates a variety of problems for the police, who are expected to enforce a single cultural-racial perspective. The result appears to be tense and strained relations between the police and many ethnic, racial, cultural, and social minorities. Numerous scholars claim that the criminal justice network is in essence racist because of its built-in biases against people of color (Mann, 1993). Consistent with this view is the claim by Gans (1995) that " although most labels for the poor are literally neutral with respect to ethnicity and race, they have actually been meant mainly for immigrants and dark-skinned people in the United States" (p. 16).
Fortunately, there has been some improvement over the years because of a variety of court decisions and civil rights legislation. For example, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, gender, and national origin. Section 1983 of the same act prohibits violations of constitutional rights. This includes discrimination based on race. Despite these advances, further, improvement is necessary. Police agencies need to improve training on race relations, cultural awareness, and public relations techniques. A technique that is gaining popularity among police agencies is the provision of multicultural training either as part of the basic training or as in-service training (Ford & Williams, 1999). Furthermore, the Northeastern University Institute of Race and Justice described an approach in terms of a " community - police task force" which can " open up a discussion about police and community accounts of racial profiling." A COPS Office report argues that " it does not matter how accurate data collection and analysis is if the community does not feel engaged in the process." Along these lines, the Seattle Police Department has undertaken a continuous effort to examine the racial issue. As a report by the department's Office of Professional Accountability (OPA) explained, the SPD has held community forums, analyzed citizen complaints alleging racial bias, and revised both department policies and training related to traffic enforcement. In short, problem-solving in Seattle involves an ongoing effort of self-evaluation and policy change (Walker & Katz, 2004).
Ending racial or ethnic bias in law enforcement is an extremely difficult challenge. There is no consensus among criminologists about the best way to use traffic stop data. Although the police have to take some control and responsibility for improvement, at the same time, society needs to do all it can to eliminate discrimination; education and intergroup activities may be some ways to begin the process.