Center For
POLICING EQUITY

# *Co-Founder and President Phillip Atiba Goff Biography*

**Phillip Atiba Goff** is the inaugural Franklin A. Thomas Professor in Policing Equity at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. He is the co-founder and president of the Center for Policing Equity (CPE), and an expert in contemporary forms of racial bias and discrimination, as well as the intersections of race and gender. Dr. Goff serves as one of four Principal Investigators for the CPE's National Justice Database, the first national database on racial disparities in police stops and use of force.

More recently, Dr. Goff led the CPE in becoming one of three Principal Investigators for the U.S. Department of Justice's National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice, which will contribute information to the National Justice Database.

Dr. Goff conducts work exploring the ways in which racial prejudice is not a necessary precondition for racial discrimination. That is, despite the normative view of racial discrimination—that it stems from prejudiced explicit or implicit attitudes—his research demonstrates that situational factors facilitate racially unequal outcomes.

Dr. Goff's model of evidence-based approaches to justice has been supported by the National Science Foundation, Department of Justice, Russell Sage Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Open Society Institute-Baltimore, Atlantic Philanthropies, William T. Grant Foundation, the COPS Office, the Major Cities Chiefs Association, the NAACP LDF, NIMH, SPSSI, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Mellon Foundation among others. Dr. Goff was a witness for the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing and has presented before Members of Congress and Congressional Panels, Senate Press Briefings, and White House Advisory Councils.

Good morning Congressman Cummings. Congressman Conyers. Congresswoman Lee. Congressman Richmond. Mr. Jenkins and Boldin. And to all of you who have chosen to spend your morning on this important topic. Before I begin my remarks, I feel compelled to mention that I was born in the greatest city in the history of the world, Philadelphia, of course. And I am a lifelong member of Eagles Nation, the family of the greatest NFL franchise in the history of the sport. Fly, Eagles Fly!

Today, I am here in my capacity as a research scientist and president of the Center for Policing Equity. In that capacity, I have dedicated the majority of my adult life to using social science in the pursuit of a more democratic society. But before I was a research scientist, I was Black. And so I am here because of science, but I am also armed with the experiences so familiar to Black men and boys around the country. The lies told about Black men and boys—the myths about our intellect, our loyalty, and our temperaments—those are part of the reason we are here today. And I, like so many others, have worked my entire life to become evidence of the truth—even in the face of those lies they tell about men and boys who look like me.

It is in that spirit of truth telling and myth busting that I, as a research scientist and as a Black man, would like briefly to share three myths currently holding us back from achieving racial progress in policing.

The first myth is that we cannot move forward because there are no national-level data on policing.

It is true that no federal agency currently collects data on what police officers actually do in the streets—despite collecting data on crimes civilians commit. And it is also true that without measuring a problem, it is often nearly impossible to craft a solution to it. But it is not true that, because the federal government does not collect the data, no one has them.

The Center for Policing Equity hosts the National Justice Database, the nation's first and largest database of police officer behavior. With commitments from police departments serving roughly one-third of the United States by population, the National Justice Database collects and standardizes data on police stops, use of force, and officer's racial orientations. This effort—which was slow going when we began it some five years ago—has recently been bolstered by a partnership with Google. This partnership will soon allow us to reduce the time between a chief's decision to participate in the Database and a chief receiving our analysis of racial disparities from six months to a period closer to six minutes. In other words, we are rapidly approaching a time when there will not be a plausible excuse for departments not knowing how to address issues of race in their communities. To say we cannot do better because we do not have data is quickly becoming an outdated claim. And it is currently a myth that holds back progress.

The second myth I want to address is the too-often repeated claim that crime drives all police behavior and, therefore, that crime explains racial disparities in policing outcomes. Let me say this plainly: It does not.

While crime plays a large role in explaining racial disparities, crime is not sufficient to explain the elevated rates at which Blacks and Latinos are stopped, searched, and targeted

for coercive force. These findings are robust beyond the Center for Policing Equity's own report of this past summer, and represent the best science on these phenomena across jurisdictions, research methodologies, and time periods. What this means is that we should be skeptical of those who blame communities alone for how they are treated. It also means that attacking crime without addressing police culture will not fix the problem.

The third myth I want to address is the inverse of the last. That is, just as crime does not sufficiently explain racial disparities—policing is not the only cause either. Here is what I mean:

If we imagine that there is racial bias in policing, then why would we imagine that there is no racial bias in housing, education, employment, or healthcare? And if someone experiences racial bias in housing, education, employment, and healthcare, that is all going to happen before any individual contact with law enforcement. When you think about it like that, it becomes clear that racial disparities in policing must also be the product of racial discrimination upstream of any individual stop.

Let me frame it another way: No chief would last very long if every time someone called 9-11, they heard "Nah. You're probably just racist. We're not coming." In other words, the biases of a community will necessarily be reflected in the behavior of police. When the laws of this land are racist, it is the job of police to enforce them.

That means that responsibility for the damage we see done by policing in some communities cannot belong solely to law enforcement. The responsibility for policing

inequalities must be claimed by all of us. We own this. As a democracy. As a nation. If it continues, then it continues because we allow it. We now have the capacity to collect, standardize, and analyze police data in ways that reveal racial bias where it occurs and disambiguates responsibility for disparities between police and upstream factors. Armed with the knowledge we are gaining from the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice, a project led by the Center for Policing Equity, the National Network for Safe Communities, the Yale Justice Collaboratory, and the Urban Institute in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Justice, we also know that there are interventions that simultaneously improve officer safety, reduce crime, and increase community trust. In other words, there are no excuses for not getting better. No amount of executive branch investment or disinterest in criminal justice reform removes the ultimate responsibility from the people of this nation. And no lies we tell about police, Black and Brown men, women, and children—no lies we tell about America make them the truth.

Inequality in policing is a fixable problem. It requires that we add our collective will to what science has already taught us. That we add our resolve to the truth.