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Reimagining Blue: Thoughts on Life, Leadership, and a New Way Forward in Policing

Kristen Ziman
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Reimagining Blue *is moving police chief's memoir that proposes a new approach to law enforcement.*

Retired Police Chief Kristen Ziman's memoir *Reimagining Blue* focuses on the strengths and flaws of contemporary law enforcement.

Ziman's father was a police officer, a position that she admired as a child. Still, her childhood was chaotic—in part because of the bars and pool halls that her father frequented. Later, as a "pocket-sized cop with a bouncy ponytail," she faced gender biases, though they didn't keep her from rising through the ranks. Eventually, she oversaw the second largest police department in Illinois, falling in love with a woman along the way.

Ziman's professional struggles are a topic, but so is her perspective that even those who break the law deserve to be treated humanely. She touches on major flashpoints in police-community relations, giving space to both sides. With her engaging stories of everyday encounters between police officers and the public, she is variously a funny and a sad narrator. And throughout, her book works to humanize her fellow police officers, highlighting those among them who care about the people whom they serve.

During Ziman's career, she was present for major events, including a pandemic, a mass shooting, a family suicide, and civil unrest in her community. Contemporary demands to defund the police are also covered, in tandem with accounts of extant racism and police brutality. Ziman, recognizing that systemic racism exists in police departments across the US, makes practical suggestions for handling such challenges; these incorporate her knowledge of human psychology. Her notes for improvement include hiring that reflects the demographics of the area served, often meaning more Black and women officers; making sure that those who are recruited and hired by police departments do not exhibit biases against marginalized populations; and ensuring that "good" white officers stand against racism.

The book becomes discursive with its considerations of topics like gun ownership, which it cofronts in terms of pros and cons. In addition, it covers the Black Lives Matter movement; what the demand to defund the police is really about, and how certain aspects of it may be beneficial; and the deumanizing effecta of labeling other people. Beyond such contemporary coverage, it includes more narrowly personal material, too, as with its accounts of the mentors who encouraged Ziman, both personally and professionally. And it pays tribute to her particular colleagues, whom it credits for taking great risks on the job.

Reimagining Blue is moving police chief's memoir that proposes a new approach to law enforcement.

KRISTINE MORRIS (June 1, 2022)

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