

Kami Chavis, J.D.

Associate Dean for Research and Public Engagement Director of the Criminal Justice Program at Wake Forest University

Winston-Salem, NC, US

Professor Chavis has substantial practice experience and writes and teaches in areas such as criminal justice reform, police accountability.

Description

Kami Chavis is a Professor of Law and Director of the Criminal Justice Program at Wake Forest University School of Law. In 2015, she was appointed as a Senior Academic Fellow at the Joint Center for Political And Economic Studies. She has substantial practice experience and writes and teaches in areas related to criminal law, criminal procedure and criminal justice reform. After receiving her J.D. from Harvard Law School, she worked as an associate at private law firms in Washington, D.C., where she participated in various aspects of civil litigation, white-collar criminal defense, and internal investigations. In 2003, she became an Assistant United States Attorney for the District of Columbia, involving her in a wide range of criminal prosecutions and in arguing and briefing appeals before the District of Columbia Court of Appeals. Professor Chavis frequently makes presentations on law-enforcement issues and is a leader in the field of police accountability. Her articles have appeared in the American Criminal Law Review, the Ohio State Journal of Criminal Law, The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, the University of Alabama Law Review, and the Catholic University Law Review, and other legal journals. Her research focuses on using Cooperative Federalism principles and stakeholder participation to implement sustainable reforms in the criminal justice system. She writes in the areas of police and prosecutorial accountability, federal hate crimes legislation and enforcement, and racial profiling. She was elected to the American Law Institute in 2012.

She is a frequent contributor to national and international media outlets and has appeared on CNN, CTV, and NPR. She has written for the New York Times and the Huffington Post, and has been quoted in the Wall Street Journal, BBC News, U.S. News and World Report, International Business Times, Deutsche Welle, and other outlets regarding police accountability and the structural reform of law enforcement agencies.

Industry Expertise

Education/Learning, Legal Services, Research

Topics

Criminal Law, Criminal Procedure, Criminal Justice Reform, Civil Litigation, White-Collar Criminal Defense, Internal Investigations, Police Reform

Affiliations

American Law Institute : Elected Member, The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies : Senior Academic Fellow, Law Enforcement Leaders to Reduce Crime and Incarceration : Founding Member, The Center for Prosecutorial Integrity : Advisory Board Member, The Constitution Project : Co-Chair, Southeastern Association of American Law Schools : New Scholars Committee, American Bar Association : Academics Committee on the Criminal Justice Section, American Bar Association : Criminal Procedure Evidence and Police Practices Committee

Education

Harvard Law School

1999

J.D. Law

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

1996

B.A. Arts

Media Appearances

What we know about the details of the police shooting in Charlotte

The New York Times

2016-08-25

"If there was a weapon in his hand, then the case for using lethal force becomes stronger," said Kami Chavis, a law professor who is the director of the criminal justice program at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C.

But she also noted that there have been cases in which a person was unarmed "but it was determined that a reasonable officer could have viewed whatever it was in their hands as a weapon." In many of those cases, officers were cleared of criminal conduct.

"Even if the officer was mistaken about what he had in his hand, and yet it was reasonable, it could be deemed a justified shooting," Professor Chavis said.

Police videos fail to quiet protests in Charlotte

The Wall Street Journal

2016-08-25

Kami Chavis, a former assistant U.S. attorney who directs the criminal-justice program at Wake Forest University School of Law in Winston-Salem, N.C., said she hopes the recent protests in Charlotte and other cities will prompt new police training programs and, potentially, far less frequent use of lethal force. "We're going to see more public outcry until we have a cultural shift in the tactics that some law enforcement agencies use," she said.

Does video of Keith Scott bring new facts to light?

MSNBC

2016-08-23

Kami Chavis, director of the Criminal Justice Program at Wake Forest, and Jim Cavanaugh, MSNBC law enforcement analyst, join MSNBC's Steve Kornacki to discuss the video of Keith Lamont Scott, released by his family.

Why police departments don't always release body cam footage

Time

2016-08-17

"There are all kinds of reasons why a police department might not want to release it right away," says Kami Chavis, a professor of law at Wake Forest University who studies police accountability. "The key is to developing a comprehensive policy, because you have to balance all of those competing interests."

"When there is an officer-involved shooting, I think police departments should err on the side of releasing that footage after they've made sure privacy concerns are protected," Chavis says. "There's been so much distrust and a history of tensions between some communities and police. This can help the public in terms of increasing transparency."

CMPD, already bigger than peer cities, wants to add officers for community policing

The Charlotte Observer

2016-01-02

Kami Chavis Simmons, director of the Criminal Justice Program at Wake Forest University, said departments may need more officers to build stronger community relationships amid national concerns about police use of force.

"Culturally, police organizations are going to have to change," Simmons said. "They have to have a guardian mentality rather than a warrior mentality. A lot of these vulnerable communities need the partnership of the police - it's just redefining public safety."...

Homicides in Charlotte rise to a 6-year high

The Charlotte Observer

2016-01-01

Kami Chavis Simmons, the head of Wake Forest's criminology department, said recent high-profile police shootings of minorities may be intensifying the disparity. Crime victims and witnesses in minority neighborhoods may be less willing to cooperate with officers, leaving violent criminals on the street for longer, and increasing the chance that they'll commit more crimes.

"If you can't trust the police officers, it is very difficult to form partnerships and for people to want to cooperate with them," she said...

Crime stats show minorities are more likely to be victims

The Charlotte Observer

2015-12-20

Kami Chavis Simmons, director of the Criminal Justice Program at Wake Forest University, said the fact that groups of people with the most contentious relationship with police disproportionately need the help of officers is one of the biggest challenges of 21st-century police departments.

"Often the poor, urban, minority neighborhoods are experiencing the most crime, and people in those communities deserve to be protected," she said. "The problem is when the police who come into these neighborhoods think that everyone is a criminal."

"It's really not a new problem at all - how do we balance public safety while protecting civil liberties of all citizens?" she said. "The attention and the accountability that we're seeing is what's new. Culturally, police organizations are going to have to change."...

The family of Sandra Bland reaches a remarkable settlement in wrongful death suit

Slate

2016-09-15

"I'm very intrigued by this. It's a creative response," said Kami Chavis, a professor at the Wake Forest University School of Law and director of the criminal justice program there. "But we want there to be some enforceability and some accountability with regard to the improvements. ... If the agreement is breached, what will the penalties be?"

Police Reform One Year After Michael Brown's Death

The Huffington Post

2015-09-08

This Sunday marks the one-year anniversary of a Ferguson, Missouri police officer's fatal shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed 18-year-old suspected of stealing a cigar. When protests over Brown's death erupted in Ferguson, the indelible images depicting the law-enforcement response toward the protestors revealed the depth of the problems existing within our criminal justice system and highlighted long-standing tensions between police and communities of color. While we have made progress in reforming policing, we are still at the beginning and there are many miles to go...

Why Are Hate Crimes So Difficult to Prosecute?

The Huffington Post

2015-02-16

The tragic and violent deaths of students Deah Barakat, Yusor Abu-Salha and Razan Abu Salha, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, have reignited a fierce debate about the propriety of "hate crimes" or "bias-motivated" crimes, as they are also called. Craig Hicks has been charged with first-degree murder related to these deaths. Many community members are outraged that local authorities, who maintain that the deaths were sparked by a dispute over parking, have yet to charge him with a hate crime because all three of the victims, who were shot execution-style in the head, were Muslim...

Articles

Subverting Symbolism: The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act and Cooperative Federalism

American Criminal Law Review

Hate crimes continue to persist in the United States and undermine the traditions and values to which our country aspires. Until recently, however, the stringent jurisdictional limitations of existing federal legislation made it difficult for the federal government to prosecute these crimes. In October 2009, President Obama signed into law the Matthew Shepard James Byrd Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act (the 'HCPA'). The HCPA significantly expands the federal government's authority to prosecute defendants accused of hate crimes because it dispenses with a previous jurisdictional requirement that made it difficult to prosecute many hate crimes. The HCPA also represents an expansion of federal authority because it protects a broader class of victims than pre-existing federal hate crimes legislation...

Beginning to End Racial Profiling: Definitive Solutions to an Elusive Problem

Washington and Lee Journal of Civil Rights and Social Justice

Many Americans have had interactions with police officers and other law enforcement agents, and the majority of these police-citizen encounters occur in the context of traffic stops. Although mildly inconvenient, traffic stops are necessary not only for enforcing traffic rules and deterring traffic violations, but they are generally beneficial for broader public safety concerns. For many people, traffic stops are simply part of life. For many racial minorities, however, especially African-American and Latino men, even a routine traffic stop takes on an entirely different meaning. Historically, the relationship between racial minorities and police has been strained, and many members of racial minority groups believe that law enforcement officers unfairly target them because of their race or ethnicity. It is widely known that many Americans, especially minorities, believe that police officers use race as a "proxy" for criminal involvement...

Cooperative Federalism and Police Reform: Using Congressional Spending Power to Promote Police Accountability

Alabama Law Review

Police misconduct and corruption persist in our nation's local police departments. Recognizing the organizational roots of police misconduct, Congress granted the U.S. Department of Justice (the "DOJ") the authority to seek injunctive relief to implement institutional reforms within local law enforcement agencies. While the federal government's current strategy represents a promising model for reform, the DOJ's efforts cannot reach many local police departments that require intervention. Furthermore, the local primacy of criminal-justice issues, particularly issues related to police practices, implicates important federalism concerns...

New Governance and the "New Paradigm" of Police Accountability: A Democratic Approach to Police Reform

Catholic University Law Review

Despite accusations of racial profiling, only Sergeant James Crowley knows what subjective motivations prompted him to arrest Harvard Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr., for disorderly conduct at his home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on July 16, 2009. ² While reasonable people may disagree about whether Officer Crowley engaged in racial profiling when arresting Gates, it is undeniable that Gates's arrest exposed a long-standing rift between some communities and the police officers who serve them. Following the incident, the divisions that have long existed in the United States between police and citizens became clear...

The Politics of Policing: Ensuring Stakeholder Collaboration in the Federal Reform of Local Law Enforcement Agencies

The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology

Title 42 U.S.C. ? 14141 authorizes the United States Department of Justice ("DOJ") to seek injunctive relief against local law enforcement agencies to eliminate a pattern or practice of unconstitutional conduct by these agencies. Rather than initiate lawsuits to reform these agencies, DOJ's current strategy is to negotiate reforms using a process that involves only DOJ representatives, municipality officials, and police management officials. While there are many benefits of negotiating the reforms, the current process excludes important stakeholders directly impacted by the reforms, including community members, who are the consumers of police services, and the rank-and-file police officers, whom the reforms may adversely impact...

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