

FBI director: U.S. at crossroads on race relations

By Eric Tucker, AP

WASHINGTON – The United States is at a crossroads on matters of race relations and law enforcement, presenting “hard truths” that its citizens and police must confront, FBI Director James Comey said Thursday.

Comey used a speech at Georgetown University to offer his most expansive take on a debate that has roiled in the country in recent months about police use of force and interactions with minority communities.



James Comey

The deaths at the hands of white police officers of Michael Brown in Missouri and Eric Garner in New York, as well as the more recent slayings of two New York police officers, have raised difficult issues on both sides of the debate, he said.

One is that police officers who work in neighborhoods where most street crime is committed by young black men may hold unconscious biases and be tempted to take what he called a “mental shortcut” in dealing with suspicious situations.

“The two young black men on one side of the street look like so many others the officer has locked up,” Comey said. “Two young white men on the other side of the street – even in the

same clothes – do not. The officer does not make the same sinister association about the two white guys, whether that officer is white or black.”

But another truth is that minorities in poor neighborhoods too often inherit a “legacy of crime and prison,” a cycle he said must be broken to improve race relations with police.

Comey joined Attorney General Eric Holder in calling for better data about how often police use force. Such information is needed to make sound policy decisions, Comey said.