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BLUE LIVES MEMORIALIZED: COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND THE PRODUCTION OF
IDEOLOGY AND INJUSTICE IN AMERICAN POLICING

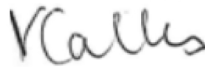
BY

DOUGLAS HYATT PEACH

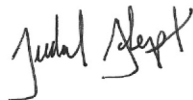
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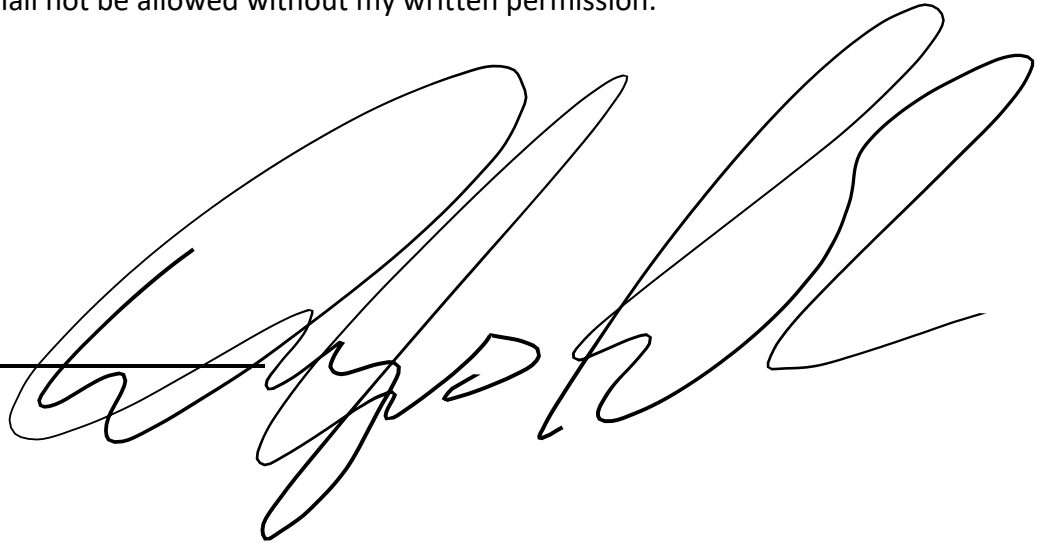
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Date: 4/7/2020

BLUE LIVES MEMORIALIZED: COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND PRODUCTION OF IDEOLOGY
AND INJUSTICE IN AMERICAN POLICING

BY

DOUGLAS HYATT PEACH

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Eastern Kentucky University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

2020

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DEDICATION

First and foremost, this work is dedicated to my beloved partner, Amanda. She has been a continual and colossal source of inspiration, fierce intellect, unbridled opinion, and encouragement. The sound of her laughter and her sense of humor are wholeheartedly two of my favorite things I have ever experienced in this world. If it were not for her, I would never have been able to achieve any success. I am forever lucky we found one another, and for our little family of misfit riot girls.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first came to college as a precursor to finding a better paying profession and, if I am completely honest, not explicitly for an education. I was lucky enough to find both from some of the most knowledgeable and passionate professors at Eastern Kentucky University and specifically within the Justice Studies program. What I did not expect, and could not foresee, was finding such insightful mentors who would then go on to become even more: great friends. I could not have completed my education or this thesis without them.

I cannot express enough how much my current and former chairs and mentors, Dr. Bill McClanahan and Dr. Travis Linnemann, have done to foster my scholarship through their constant and diligent mentorship. Without their inspiration and willingness to engage, their support, and their sage suggestions, I may have not lasted a whole semester, much less continued on past what I felt was a particularly rough beginning, and for that I will be forever grateful.

In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Victoria Collins and Dr. Judah Schept for their tremendous contributions to my education in both my undergraduate and graduate studies. Both are exceedingly thoughtful and relatable in and out of the classroom and their ability to foster understanding of complex material with astute discussions made every day outstanding.

I consider myself very lucky.

Thank you all.

ABSTRACT

Police memorials are physical objects in public spaces, objects which seed our own cultural and personal ideologies, beliefs, and behaviors and which command our collective attention. Using qualitative research methodology, this visual ethnography looks at the unique and inherent power of police memorialization through the 2015 death of officer Daniel Ellis of the Richmond, Kentucky police department and the subsequent actions of the surrounding community and state officials. The purpose of this study was to document the widespread visual culture and iconography associated with memorialization, including the origin and placement of physical memorials made in honor of Ellis, thin blue line apparel worn at community events held in his honor, and the overabundance of stickers bearing the badge number of Ellis seen throughout the community, and to explore the cultural meanings associated with these memorialization practices. Informal social interactions while researching were documented to help with contextual information gained in this research. The effects of memorialization upon the broader community are explored through informal interviews and photographic documentation. The cultural production of police subjectivity is shown to be undertaken through memorialization, which fosters a sense of banal nationalism, provides narrative justifications for police power, and strengthens a generalized acceptance of violence of police.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. METHODS.....	4
Visual and Narrative.....	4
III. THE DEATH OF DANIEL ELLIS.....	6
Community Reaction.....	7
The State Response.....	13
IV. MEMORIALS.....	15
V. MEMORIALS AS MEDIA.....	17
The Thin Blue Line.....	17
The National Law Enforcement Memorial.....	20
Just the Facts: TV COPS and Final Cut.....	22
Copaganda.....	24
Blue Life.....	27
VI. FIELD NOTES.....	28
The First Bench.....	28
The Courthouse.....	30
The Restaurants.....	34
3,1000lbs.....	37
The 3 rd Annual Daniel Ellis Memorial 5K.....	41
The Paddy Wagon.....	47
VII. CONCLUSION.....	48

REFERENCES.....52

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1 Daniel Ellis’s patrol car, #457, parked in front of Madison County Police Department.....	12
2 Commonly used photo of Daniel Ellis after his death	14
3 Commonly used photo of Raliegh Sizemore, Jr.	15
4 Drive-thru window of Monty’s Spirits, Madison County.....	34
5 One of thirteen Daniel Ellis memorial benches, Madison County.....	36
6 Brass dedication plaque on courthouse memorial bench, Madison County Courthouse.....	38
7 Steak and Shake restaurant front door with memorial sticker, Madison County.....	43
8 Memorial bench outside Lake Reba playground, Madison County.....	45
9 Facebook advertisement for Daniel Ellis’s memorial ale.....	46
10 Detail of the bottom of Goodwood Brewing memorial ale	47
11 Thin blue line. Memorial sticker, Daniel Ellis 5K.....	49
12 Woman with temporary memorial face tattoo, Daniel Ellis 5K.....	50
13 Head to toe memorialization, Daniel Ellis 5K.....	51
14 “Ricky”.....	52
15 Cement truck used to memorialize Ellis being washed.....	54

I. Introduction

This visual ethnography began, in actuality, before I entered into the graduate program at Eastern Kentucky University. It began, unbeknownst to me at the time, from simply living, working in, and observing Richmond, Kentucky at the time of Daniel Ellis's murder and thereafter. I can remember distinctly where I was, what I was doing, and the community's reaction to Ellis's death much the same way I personally remember reactions to the larger national tragedy of September 11, 2001.

The community's reaction to the death of Ellis was that impactful. Moreover, though, its relevance endures, having found a place in the local mythos where it will likely not be forgotten any time soon. Ellis's death is one of the only local events comparable to that larger national tragedy, based solely on the explicit response to it. These reactions highlight the social importance and reverence for the police and can easily be seen in the emotional fervor of those living within the city of Richmond, as well as from those in a much broader national arena.

This project seeks to show, through a visual ethnography of one small Eastern Kentucky town, the often-overlooked importance and power of memorialization of law enforcement. In this project I explore the inherent narrative power and the visual dimensions of police memorials, and the effects of such memorialization. I do so hoping to allow for contrast with more typical instances of the ritual of memorialization, and to better understand the practice itself. I explore how and why the innate power of these memorials to officers who have been killed while performing their ascribed functions resonates so powerfully within the community. To

fully understand the impact of memorialization, I draw on visual and popular criminology, media studies, and semiotics in order to explore and document the impacts of our everyday common-sense understanding of how we envision the police inherent within the practice. It is my intention to show how those memorialized attempts to inform the viewer on the overall narrative of police and policing in this country, while at once (re)producing the “thin blue line” ideology.

Further, I wish to show through my experiences in Richmond, how memorials can be understood as a unique form of media, one that can be seen to (re)produce our cultural understandings of police and policing in this country much like their representation in film, television, and news media, but one which subverts the more subjective nature of those media, and perpetuates a mono-myth of policing. I believe the inherent emotionality and narrative that animates memorialization is allowed to rest in that form, where it is less likely to find a critical eye, and (because of this) less likely to be seen, examined or questioned. This project explores that critical avenue by looking at one local instance and attempting to discern an aspect of the epistemology of police, how that knowledge may be visually derived from memorials in both our public private spaces. These commemoration spaces, which inherently contain this often unquestioned ideology, are but one source of this dominant narrative which is conjoined with the idea of righteous police power, one which encourages the viewer to acquiesce to the idea of police as always the her, the victim as always deserving, and that in retirement or in death, the police are the only ones capable of safeguarding us from what lies on the other side of that “thin blue line.”

In the following sections of this thesis I will first supply relevant details on the death of Daniel Ellis as well as the subsequent community and state responses to that death. In order to give context to these events photographs taken from online news sources will be used to illustrate visual aspects of these occurrences and their meaning. After this, I will unpack memorials, discussing their cultural relevance and inherent power. Next, I discuss the mythology of the thin blue line and contextualize memorials as a form of media, in an attempt to dissect how this ideology is tied to memorials to law enforcement and present the reader with examples of both physical and online, or social media, law enforcement memorialization sites. Following this, I discuss the long history of police and law enforcement agencies being given total editorial control with how they are perceived by the public by drawing from the *reality* television show COPS and the much earlier show, Dragnet. After this, I discuss ‘copaganda’, or the power of the narrative with which police demand to be seen. Next, I proffer my field notes, taken while observing and researching this subject from various locations and events throughout Madison County along with informal interviews and interactions with the community. I include photographs taken from online resources as well as those taken by myself to help impart the visual and cultural impact observed. Next, I place the ideology expressed through memorialization of law enforcement within the argument against police violence and corruption. Finally, I theorize in an effort to explain why some may have such a difficult time with contemplating, or even imagining, the police as anything other than righteous saviors, and the victims of whatever forms of violence used on them, as deserving.

II. Methods

This project is a visual ethnography based around the death and subsequent memorialization of Richmond, Kentucky police officer Daniel Ellis. This ethnography's central theme and common thread will be the community of Richmond and the state of Kentucky's reactions to that officer's death, and the role of those reactions in the continuing reproduction of the thin blue line ideology. The research processes used for this exploration were qualitative in method and strictly focused on the events and signs intimated by the community of Madison county. Data was collected in the form of photographs retrieved from online local and national news sources, local photographers, and from original photographs taken by myself. Documenting these memorials and the community interaction photographically enabled me to better display and discuss their visual and cultural significance while, hopefully, allowing the reader to experience visually this particular expression of police culture.

I also present information taken from informal, non-structured and unplanned interactions with the public and with law enforcement officers, which occurred while taking photographs as well as from select discussions and observations had while carrying out everyday, mundane activities in Richmond.

Visual and Narrative

Visual criminological perspectives consider the innate power of spectacle in the visual field (Carrabine, 2012; Brown and Carrabine, 2017), while seeking to uncover the role of imagery and how the optics of criminality are (re)produced. Although significant

attention has been given to the epistemological nature of iconography, symbology, and photographic representation, visual criminological perspectives also look at how symbols and images are contested. While there has been some previous criminological research on memorials (Ferrell, 2003), there has yet to be any significant contributions within criminology to the memorialization of law enforcement.

Visual criminology, similarly, has not yet examined the cultural and political impact of these memorials or explored them as an epistemological foundation that demands we imagine police violence and killing as banal. I believe that the thoughtful examination of the ideology being transmitted by these memorials, and to whom, is crucial to understanding how police are perceived by society, how they view themselves, how they act, and how police are lionized in the US media.

Similarly, narrative criminology (Presser and Sandberg, 2015) has emerged as a theoretical perspective and methodological tendency uniquely suited to unpack the various ways in which narratives surrounding police and policing—as well as the narratives that structure meaning in the experiences of victims and perpetrators of police violence themselves—function to legitimize and justify police and police violence. Consideration of the narratives of police violence and policing alongside the images and visual cultural productions that condition and structure everyday interactions with the police and accounts of police is paramount to yielding a deeper understanding of the values the community holds in regard to police and police work.

III. The Death of Daniel Ellis

*Nothing more, nothing less,
An icon on the wall, decoration and duress.
That which many strive to be,
It's the marble statue staring over me.
And nobody has the will to tear it down,
It determines wrong and right,
But to me it's just a stereotype
And it makes us lose our sight.*

Portrait of Authority, Bad Religion

On Wednesday November 3rd, 2015 Richmond, Kentucky police officer Daniel Ellis, a seven-year veteran of the force in line for a promotion to detective, was attempting to locate and apprehend a robbery suspect along with another officer. The suspect, 34-year old Raleigh Sizemore Jr., was wanted for attempting to mug a woman at a local downtown gas station parking lot and was known to be in violation of his parole for past drug-related offenses. Ellis had tracked his suspect to an apartment in Richmond. Officer Ellis had questioned the man who answered the door, Gregory Ratliff, asking if Sizemore was there, only to be erroneously told no.

While in the process of searching the house, Ellis was ambushed by Sizemore, who killed Ellis with a gunshot to the head. The second officer present then shot Sizemore, wounding him before placing him in custody. Sizemore was then taken to the hospital for treatment, and eventually released to police custody. Officer Ellis was hospitalized at the University of Kentucky Medical Center in Lexington. He died two days later, on the following Friday, leaving behind a wife and a 4-year old son.

A little over two years after the death of Ellis, Sizemore would accept a plea deal for life without the possibility of parole. Ratliff would also accept a plea deal for 30 years in prison for wanton murder and two first-degree charges of wanton endangerment

stemming from his failure to inform Ellis that Sizemore was hiding and armed in a back bedroom, despite his legitimate fear of reprisal.

The Community Reaction

The reaction to the death of officer Daniel Ellis was seemingly one of intense heartbreak and tragedy for the community. What was immediately surprising to me, however, was the level of outpouring from the local community. Richmond, Kentucky is a comparatively small college town with a population of approximately 35,000 people, so witnessing the staggering twelve mile-long funeral procession along with the sobbing members of the community waving and lining the sides of the road in thin blue line hats and shirts, some holding American flags, some holding thin blue line flags, as the procession drove to its destination was an unanticipated spectacle, a visual powerhouse to behold. It was an unprecedented experience for the community. That procession eventually led to funeral services held at Eastern Kentucky University's Alumni Coliseum where seven to nine thousand people would attend. Another two thousand people would be redirected to an adjacent overflow building to attempt to deal with the turnout for that ceremony.

Officer Ellis's police vehicle (see Figure 1) was immediately parked in the front of the Richmond police department and was "packed with flowers" (Press 2015) by fellow officers and from people living in the town and surrounding counties. Along with the flowers his former patrol car was made into an improvised memorial ("Officer killed in line of duty remembered for kindness" 2015) to his service and sacrifice, one that community members quickly filled with letters to his family, signs offering support,

stuffed animals, and even balloons. Community members also immediately began appearing in the station to speak to the officers there, to express their remorse, and to pay their respects to the slain officer, and to pledge their support for the police.



Figure 1. Daniel Ellis's patrol car, #457, parked in front of Madison County Police Department. Source: Daniel Ellis Foundation website, nd, <https://www.danielellisfoundation.com>

The images used in the majority of local news media portrayed Ellis as a clean-cut uniformed officer with a slight smile. In these images, Ellis was well lit, legible, and seemingly good-natured, as though he may have let you slide with only a warning or given you a break on the speeding ticket you were due. The predominant image used by media at the time and currently shows Daniel Ellis in full police regalia, uniformed and

full of life, untarnished in the traditional visual mode of the model American police. The police uniform is indicative of the “guarantee of state power” according to Patrizia Calefato (Bonami, Frisa, & Tonchi, 2000) and is a visual marker which distinguishes the two individuals but also reinforces the idea of police as a “watershed between order and disorder.” Visually, the photos used of Ellis are successful in one regard, showcasing a clean-cut appearance one might seemingly see in a local Sunday church service, or in some other local community activity. This image (see Figure 2) of Ellis humanizes and endears him to our sense of community, and to our overall *common-sense* understandings of the presumed sacrifices police make in order to safeguard those same communities. Like all images, these images of Ellis tell a story, one which has a tragic end, but also one which haunts the social imaginary of the community, animating and empowering the thin blue line mythology through the event of Ellis’ murder.



Figure 2. Commonly used photo of Daniel Ellis after his death. Source: ABC News, 11/06/2015, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/kentucky-officer-shot-line-duty-dies/story?id=35013972>

Here, the visibility of Ellis' uniform is essential in the construction and communication of the image of police as the thin blue line separating civilized society from the brutish state of nature (Wall, 2020). The double meaning of uniform, according to David Correia and Tyler Wall (2018), includes not only dress in a more common idea of the word, but is also synonymous with order. This uniformed order hints at the very fabrication of *uniformed order* itself through police.



Figure 3. Commonly used photo of Raliegth Sizemore, Jr. Source: Herald-Leader website, 11/06/2015, <https://www.kentucky.com/news/local/counties/madison-county/article44679477.html>

Juxtaposed with that familial image of Ellis however, the principal image used by that same local news media to represent Sizemore enhanced the narrative of his criminality (See Figure 3). He is shown most frequently in dim light, in front of a Madison County Detention Center size chart which puts him at approximately 6'6". He is shown (presumably) beaten by the police who apprehended him, with one eye almost completely swollen shut and the other less so, but still very much swollen. His face is unshaven, bruised, and noticeably damaged by the implied assault of his arrest. Sizemore stands askew, the hospital gown he wears unkempt and pleated, and in stark contrast to the pressed militaristic dress we see in Ellis's photo.

The immediate narratives contained within these dominant images used of both individuals is purposeful and meant to illustrate the idea of the police as both the undeserving victim and the only force that can protect the average citizen. Easily, mass

consciousness of the town decreed Ellis a hero, deserving of being not only remembered, but remembered in a more potent, aggrandized, and lasting way. The event of his murder, and the idealized version of policing in general was to become a persisting cultural touchstone for this community, one which would represent the intrinsic danger of policing even a relatively small town like Richmond, which had not had an officer death since 1931 when Sheriff Albert Bogie of the Madison County Sheriff's Office was fatally killed in an automobile crash ("Madison County Sheriff's Office, KY"). His memorialization would even foster and (re)produce a sense of banal nationalism within this community. Local businesses, chain restaurants, and farmer's market vendors would all proudly display their allegiance, their reverence, to the police through stickers featuring officer Ellis's badge number: 457. This 457 quickly permeated the town and became ubiquitous not only on law enforcement and emergency services vehicles, but also on the majority of personal vehicles seen in the community of Richmond, Kentucky and the surrounding counties. The idea of not showing support for police even led to some confounding implementations of Thin Blue Line 457 stickers found even on unmarked police cars.

At the time of Daniel Ellis's murder I had just finished my undergraduate degree at Eastern Kentucky University and was working for a medical delivery service transporting oxygen tanks and other medical necessities for patients as needed. My boss at that time, who had very recently relocated to Richmond from South Carolina, was notorious for micro-managing her employees, making sure everyone was dutifully working consistently and never being lackadaisical while working. Despite this, on the day of Ellis's funeral procession every employee, myself included, was expected to participate in the procession by standing along the highway as the procession passed.

Two women who worked in the front office spent the morning making a sign which read “forever in our hearts” adorned with the large black numbers 457 and reddish hearts. Neither of them knew Officer Ellis, neither of them had ever had any interactions with him personally or knew anyone that had.

I stood by the roadside that day watching young children with homemade signs very similar to the one my middle-aged coworkers had made, some of them stoic, some visibly emotional, and some outright crying, tears running down their cheeks as the procession past us. I remember thinking that most of these people were not expected to participate by their bosses like myself, but maybe they were. Maybe they were expected to by their fellow coworkers, by their loved ones, or by the police themselves. Maybe the ideology they had already embraced compelled them all to publicly show their reverence for the idea of police as savior and to express their outrage at the thought of one of these heroes being taken from the thin blue line which supposedly is all that stands between them and utter chaos.

That day was the true beginning to this ethnography, which began without my immediate knowledge of it even happening, and at a time in which I had no plans to attend graduate school. I was simply working and critically observing the reactions of the community I was working in at the time, bearing witness and attempting to make sense of the events happening around me.

The State Response

Ellis's killing, of course, had implications for state power, and the state responded largely predictably. Matt Bevin, who was at the time the Republican governor of the state of Kentucky, frequently cited the killing of Ellis and a Kentucky State trooper at political rallies and quickly signed into legislation the contentious Kentucky House Bill 14, also known as the 'blue lives matter' bill (Watkins, 2017). The bill was introduced by Republican Representative Kevin Bratcher, and referenced the narrative of the thin blue line even without the colloquial name later given to it. This bill, which made the targeting of public safety punishable under the state's hate crime enhancement. This legislation extended the power to stave off prosecution of police for excessive violence by countering that narrative with allegations of their own, with those pro-police narratives now backed by legislative hate crime protections. This legal extension also gave Kentucky judges significant leeway in imposing tougher sentences on those defendants who are deemed perpetrators of violence against police and who may possibly be simply defending themselves against police violence. This legal protection was not only granted to law enforcement, but also other "public safety" workers such as firefighters, emergency medical technicians and paramedics. Largely, these legislative moves followed the example of Louisiana, which passed the first "blue lives matter" bill a month prior to Kentucky.

Previously in Kentucky, and in the majority of states in the US, killing an officer was already a capital offense and was often met with intense public outcry. This extension to the already adequate legal repercussions available was made an option for prosecutors and judges working on cases of violence against police before similar protections were

extended to other more endangered groups such as the trans community (Kidd and Witten, 2008), which still remains unprotected three years after the passing of Kentucky's HB 14.

The supposed reasoning behind implementing hate crime powers of legislation is to facilitate the legal protection of marginalized communities who are known to be at a high risk of violence. These groups normally include communities facing violence because of their race, religion, sexual orientation or their national origin. None of these categories, of course, capture police as a category, but the cultural power of officers who have been killed in the line of duty is boundless, and—as in the case of Ellis and Kentucky's subsequent expansion of hate crime enhancements—often justifies extensions or intensifications of police power.

Black Lives Matter activists protested the legislation (Loftus, 2017) citing the inequality and insensitive nature of the house bill to the larger group of those marginalized communities in need of protection to no avail. Despite police deaths on the job declining over the past four decades (Officer Deaths by Year, 2019), there remains a persistent perception of policing as a dangerous occupation. Since 2000, thirteen officers have been fatally shot in Kentucky. Meanwhile, the FBI reports a 34% increase in hate crimes against transgender people between 2017 and 2018 alone (Srikanth, 2019), with the majority of those victims being black women. The inequality of legal protection for disenfranchised groups versus police organizations within this country comes in sharp focus when placed in juxtaposition.

IV. Memorials

“Ideas and opinions are not spontaneously “born” in each individual brain: They have had a centre of formation, or irradiation, of dissemination, of persuasion – a group of men, or a single individual even, which has developed them and presented them in the political form of current reality.” – Antonio Gramsci

Much like images in general, memorials are ‘everywhere’. They permeate our public and private landscapes and haunt our peripheral attention and sociological imagination (Edgar, 2004). They attempt to advertise and engage the viewer with feelings of remorse, nationality, sacrosanct and fundamental understandings of loss and remembrance. Memorials, however, are intrinsically bound together with the historical narratives expressed through their very existence, transmitting to the viewer a sense of social truth, communicating ideas about who we hold in reverence and why. Often, memorials are produced to invoke a particular form of reverence, summoning and implying a sacrosanct knowledge of sacrifice (see generally: McClanahan 2017, 2019). They implore and demand empathetic reactions. Visually, memorials are often composed in ways that seem to compel a sense of mourning in the viewer, with that sense of loss martialled in order to ensure that the person or historical event being memorialized persists within collective cultural memory.

Memorialization is a process that attempts to satisfy the desire to honor the loss of life, of those who have suffered and died, who have potentially given their very lives for some greater good. It is also, though, a means to examine the past for those who are still living, portals that can perhaps even address contemporary issues. Memorials can either promote social cohesion as a call to arms against police violence, corruption, injustice and discrimination, or they can help crystalize public opinion on those same issues,

serving as a visual display of bellicosity in the face of resistance, a cultural touchstone which can be used to unite or splinter.

Sharon Macdonald (1998) draws attention to the placement of memorials as a form of ‘politics on display’, questioning their dark tourist status against the broader aspect of commemoration, while Lefebvre (1991) takes up the position that these spaces are examples of where history and ideology reside. Epistemologically, our common ability to view the police as infallible heroes may begin in public spaces dedicated to the sacrifice made by officers like Daniel Ellis. Reflecting the will of those in power, memorialization tells the story of our beloved dead, but more importantly it helps to sow the seeds of ideology through intense and sacred narratives of sacrifice and heroism.

V. MEMORIALS AS MEDIA

The Thin Blue Line

The “thin blue line” mythos expresses the idea that police are the only force capable of withstanding the tides of chaos and violence that would exist without them. Here, the hypothetical Hobbesian war of all-against-all that the police believe themselves so dutifully keeping at bay places the non-police citizen into the role of savage immoral monster incapable of overcoming base instincts. This narrative of the police as barricade, holding back feral hordes also constitutes a performative power (Correia & Wall, 2018) and relies on and promises complete social chaos and disorder, a near-constant collapse of society itself, held off only by the civilizing presence of police. Importantly, the police themselves are then the only source capable of determining who resides on which side of that thin blue line dividing good from evil. The theatrical power within the thin blue line ideology embraces the dramaturgical narrative of how police wish to be seen; as infallible heroes. As a mechanism of fear (Poulantzas, 1978), memorials are a device of coercion which can be operationalized by the specter inherent within the threat of violence being committed against our sole protectors like any other form of media. This vision of police as protector stands at the forefront of popular mass media depictions of police, in local communities, and within personally embraced ideologies, and may be transmitted through everyday practices like coming into contact with the material cultural productions of police memorialization.

Within the practice of memorialization lies a sense of right and wrong - of police being exclusively on the side of the righteous and of belonging to the community, but more importantly, of *belonging*. Memorials to law enforcement officers says police are

with you through thick and thin, even in death. Despite statistics which tell us police are not even one of the top ten most dangerous occupations (United States, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019), their memorialization can easily be seen as a practice which is not simply a locus of community grief as much as one that is aimed and politically weaponized, and one which seeks to provide evidence to the contrary.

Stuart Hall theorized that media was encoded with meaning by the creator(s) and then transmitted to the audience where that intended meaning was decoded and interpreted (Hall, 2001). Following Hall, if we can envision law enforcement memorials as a form of media within that theoretical framework, we can begin to see them as a unique and powerful form of media. Memorials transmit a particular narrative, often draped in religious and nationalistic aesthetics of mourning, loss, and sacrifice and are unique in their ability to conjoin elements of racism, banal nationalism (Billing, 1995), and moralistic xenophobia aimed at immigrants and refugees, all the while emboldening justifications (by the police and the community) for whichever forms or levels of violence are deemed necessary by the ‘thin blue line.’

Memorialization practices, then, promote a faith in the police and that faith in turn urges us to accept the ideology expressed in the cultural formation of the thin blue line. Moreover, that same uncritical faith allows us to explain away violence committed by police, and at once limits our ability to come to terms with the facts of police and policing: that these officers are not, and have never been, deserving of the title of hero when weighed against their actions. Both ideologies of allegiance and resistance are transmitted by media, although decoded differently. Belief and faith in the police is manufactured by the police themselves through multiple forms of media which are in turn responsible for

how they are envisioned in our collective imagination, and possibly the roots of our epistemological understandings.

The ritual of memorializing law enforcement officers who have died “*in the line of duty*” achieves an unquestionable, unconditional tone, one which imparts an expectation of reverence for both police officers who may have died violently or from ordinary, unrelated health problems or in the sorts of routine accidents that account for the majority of police deaths (Quinet et al., 1997). Significantly, the ritual of memorialization also extends that ideology and legitimacy to the occupation of policing as a whole. This production of high regard is broad enough to encapsulate those who are presently working as police and for anyone who has ever worked as police. The expressed narrative of one instance becomes the implied narrative of all others in that occupation, imparting to the audience a form of unassailable logic, a logic which frames the current conversation of police violence and a framework which is directly relatable to the ever-present specter of the memorial. Perhaps unconsciously, then, memorials to law enforcement are a powerful sociological force which shapes personal beliefs, ideologies, individual behaviors, and social structure.

NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT MEMORIALS

One of the largest examples of police memorialization resides in a well-traveled public space in Washington, D.C. Looking at the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial, located on a three-acre park in D.C.'s Judiciary Square and surrounded by federal municipal courthouses and office buildings, the powerful message communicated by these memorials can be seen in stark clarity. With the placement of a memorial's location in mind, the intended audience becomes clearer, which allows for a better ability to recognize the meaning and legitimacy being transmitted. And like spaces conditioned by the "museum effect" noted by Smith (2014) and Carrabine (2017), police memorials like the installation described above suggest for their audience the proper mode in which to view the memorial, further establishing and subtly entrenching a narrative of violence favorable to police.

The National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial website states the purpose of the memorial is "to generate increased public support for the law enforcement profession by permanently recording and appropriately commemorating the service and sacrifice of law enforcement officers; and to provide information that will help promote law enforcement safety." The memorial wall is currently engraved with 21,541 federal, state, and local officers' names who have been killed, however the criteria for being included on that list is not publicly available.

Annually, on May 13th during national Police Week, a candlelight vigil is held where names are dedicated formally to the wall for that year. This vigil is attended by more than 20,000 people every year. Given the current rate at which the memorial walls

are being engraved, the memorial wall space available is expected to be completely filled by the year 2050.

The United States is not the only country to have a national monument to law enforcement officers killed while on duty. Both the United Kingdom and Australia have similar memorials. Each of these memorials presents a centralized public space where visitors can learn about officers who have died. Each one of these memorials also occupies prominent space within those country's areas of judicial and law enforcement representation. Along with memorials in other countries, there are online sites such as the Officer Down Memorial Page, which enables visitors to the site to report a fallen officer and to have their names and online memorial information placed onto the site for public display and adoration. In a bit of interactive memorialization, the website also allows discussion in the form of a comments section, writing a reflection attached to an officer, or saving a specific officers information to a "your heroes" list. Visitors to the site can also share officer pages directly to their other social media accounts such as Twitter and Facebook, spreading the linked memorial and enabling it to reach an even greater number of viewers.

JUST THE FACTS: TV COPS AND FINAL CUT

One of the longest running depictions of policing in the media is the reality television show COPS, which is a shining example of how the police are allowed to influence our perceptions of their job (Taberski, 2019). COPS shares a tangential association with Dragnet, which began airing in September of 1954 ("AFI CATALOG OF FEATURE FILMS" 2020). Dragnet, presented to its then audience of 30 million Americans with the show's introduction proclaiming that "*ladies and gentlemen, the story you are about to see is true. The names have been changed to protect the innocent*" as "just the facts" was, in fact, the first major collaboration of television and police. Those collaborations, of course, would continue, with both the police and television producers getting something beneficial out of the association. The entertainment industry reaped the financial rewards of televising an interesting drama under the guise of being a realistic insider view of the everyday operations of law enforcement, despite the show being a fictional scripted drama with no foundation in real cases. The Los Angeles police department, which provided fast-tracked approval of shooting permits and actual police officers as extras for the show along with authentic police vehicles, was in turn given full editorial control. The police department at that time were unwilling to give up final cut in how they were to be portrayed then, and that practice continues today with COPS producers and creators acquiescing to law enforcement's desire to keep full editorial control (Taberski "Running from COPS" 2019). In a bid to imply a patina of authenticity to their audience, police are given veto power as to what content makes its way to the audience. In simpler terms, police decide what footage does and does not make air. They control the narrative. They decide how they appear on the show, how good they look

doing their job, and they sign off on every encounter and every word spoken. Producers of COPS describe the show as an “invitational show” (O’Hare, 2010) because their access to the featured agency depends on that police department agreeing to being filmed.

The proliferation of cell phone videos showing police violence and misconduct in recent years should mean that COPS has such incidents as well, given they have been filming the police for nearly 30 years but, according to the creators, they do not. What this means, is that the police may leverage access in exchange for misconduct remaining unavailable, inaccessible, and unaired and unseen by the public. If producers want the police to agree to their *invitation*, then they simply cannot be whistleblowers of police violence or misconduct. Media, then, often conforms to the demands of police in order to maintain access to the product of police images.

Narratives of police as at risk of fantastic violence flowing from the other side of the thin blue line are, of course, essential to the social understandings of police as American heroes under attack. Producing a sense of danger through editorial power is essential to the police. It produces and maintains job security, political power, legitimacy, and various justifications for the use of force. It is crucial to negotiating budgets and salaries, and in positioning police as the only legitimate power that can provide protection. Media, then, is essential in the power of police to enhance its reputation, legitimacy, and validity.

COPAGANDA

Propaganda as we know it molds minds, forms tastes, and elevates ideology to audiences who may not be aware of the intention and agendas communicated while maintaining the illusion that every person is making their own mind up on public questions and matters of private conduct (Bernays, 2018). The word propaganda brings to bear, for many, the idea of brainwashed Manchurian candidates, Soviet “socialist realism” posters, or MK Ultra experiments, but as with most things, the merit in the act depends upon the implored cause. The underlying theme of most police propaganda, or ‘copaganda’, is one of ideological acceptance without protest.

Police agencies transmit messages to the public through propaganda which includes all means by which people transmit their ideas to one another, any of those means being capable of deliberate propaganda efforts, with memorials being one of the oldest. Edward Bernays, who pioneered the techniques of propaganda to shape and manipulate public opinion, referred to the process as “engineering consent”, in this case the public’s consent to be policed.

Intersections of police narrative, violence, and visual productions are used every day by police public relations departments throughout the US and abroad, in narratives generated and disseminated through media such as television and feature films, via social media, and more macro-localized efforts such as the popular “coffee with a cop” or “Santa stop” initiatives (Rice, 2019). All of these propaganda efforts seek to accomplish a form of narrative control, and examples such as those above have been in place and working successfully in the US for years.

In the United States, law enforcement is increasingly beginning to find defining the narrative of policing and fatal police shootings difficult. With the proliferation of video-capable mobile phones that are perpetually connected to the internet and backed up to secure locations by default in real time, the average citizen in a police encounter has relatively new access to agency previously unavailable.

The recorded arrests and deaths of Eric Garner, Laquan McDonald, Philando Castile, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland, and Michael Brown (among others) have highlighted the inherent power of controlling police narratives, narratives which police often exploit to their advantage and employ in the production of legitimacy. Police have been shown time and again to use media to help define and justify these actions. After the police murder of Freddie Gray, the Baltimore, Maryland police department disseminated news of gangs who were determined to kill law enforcement officers (Embrick, 2015). This was eventually proven untrue, and the purpose of the “news leak” was revealed to be to the forestalling of any critical response to police violence.

Memorials for fallen law enforcement officers, of course, also find their place firmly within this system of narrative control. Less formally, the cottage industry of thin blue line merchandise such as shirts, stickers, water bottles, hats, and others various items also help to place the idea of police as hero and savior into focus. These material products are complemented by less material and more fleeting cultural productions including social media sites such as the Officer Down Memorial Page (ODMP), an online database dedicated to honoring America’s fallen law enforcement heroes and preserving more than 24,000 officer’s “ultimate sacrifice.” Narrative control, or *final cut*, is achieved once again through overlooked or misunderstood forms of virtual media such as ODMP.

Physical places of commemoration, unlike virtual sites such as ODMP, are often installed in public locations and are given a place of prominence in the visual hierarchy of public spaces, reaching out to a mostly passive public audience that may find themselves susceptible to the inherently powerful iconography and ideology which these memorials wrap themselves in.

In the US, law enforcement employs fatal violence approximately three times per day (Edwards et al., 2019), while that same figure is closer to the total fatal police shootings reported by year from other countries such as England. And yet, there exists a particular form of reverence for police officers and law enforcement in general within the US and other countries. The incantation of this particular high regard is (re)produced by media such as law enforcement memorials which use their inherent aggrandizement to silence critical responses to police violence.

Memorials - which are an inherently active site of the production and maintenance of collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992) - occupy a distinct place within our communities, often as sites of remembrance and places to pay respect to the dead, but they are allowed to be non-subjective, quasi-official, and simplified one-way discussions which define and call into question what Paul Ricoeur (2002) calls ‘the ethics of memory.’ These are also the places where we acknowledge culturally who our heroes are, but more importantly who they are *allowed to be* in the eyes of the state. These are the places of reverence where we are encouraged to embrace the common-sense, everyday ideas of what police do. These ideological understandings of the so-called “thin blue line” of police permeate our communities and have the capacity to reach thousands in a single day.

BLUE LIFE

The idea of a *blue life*, which is the fundamental basis of both the thin blue line mythology and the “blue lives matter” legislation passed in Kentucky in the wake of Ellis’s death, rests on the premise that there is such a thing. Blue life, though, simply does not exist in any meaningful sense. Instead, it is a mythological idea embraced by a particular subculture and occupation which attempts to use that mythos to gain political, legal, and cultural power. Blue life is a ghostly legal identity that co-opts, denigrates, and mimics the vulnerability of the Black Lives Matter movement while shifting the focus to law enforcement officers as the lives that *matter*, lives that need protection (Staff, 2020). It obscures the violent operations of police by attempting to give it flesh and blood, a physical body which could be harmed instead of the intangible idea it obscures. In the mythology of the *thin blue line*, the thin blue life must always be seen as under fire, threatened from all who would oppose the notion, and allowed to do what it must in order to survive and to continue providing protection for us all (see generally: Wall 2020).

VI. FIELD NOTES

Our cities and countrysides are covered with “black spots” (Rojek, 1993) and sites of pain (Logan and Reeves, 2009).

3-30-18, Madison County Police Department Richmond, Kentucky The First Bench

I decided to begin my ethnographic research in the most obvious space I could think of - the county police station. When I arrive, the doors are locked and the lights are off except those lighting the outside parking lot. It's 8pm on a Friday and it looks like everybody inside has called it quits for the day. After trying the door, the parking lot lights are enough for me to notice the ‘thin blue line’ bench. It sits right beside the front door and looks pristine, like it is brand new - never been sat on once. On closer inspection, all the while feeling like I was about to be accused of doing something I wasn't supposed to be doing, I sit down and notice that the bench isn't made of wood, but it is designed to look like it is. It's plastic, not shiny like I pictured it before seeing it myself, consisting mainly of pale gray horizontal slats except for the one brilliant blue slat which, obviously, represents the thin blue line of police.

I knew before I arrived there was supposed to be a memorial bench for Ellis outside the Madison County courthouse, so I assume they've moved it here to their office headquarters for some reason. I had plans to go take photos of the bench there in the next few days, but the bench seems to have found me first.

I sit on the bench for a bit, and I immediately feel as though I have overstepping, playing with fire a bit. This memorial isn't meant to be sat on, it just happens to be shaped like a bench. It's designed to elicit respect, and it feels disrespectful to sit here, but I do it anyway, feeling a tangible sense of trepidation the whole time. Nothing happens.

Nothing at all. It's just me, sitting in the dark on a quiet road. Just me and the bench, but I can feel the police presence there with me. After sitting there for a bit I think maybe that's what this bench is supposed to do: make us all feel secure by performing a type of dramaturgical security theater for us, evidence the police are there and tasked with protecting us all and to maintain a police presence even in our social imaginations.

After spending some time on the bench out front I get back in my car and drive around the building to see what else might be around I wasn't expecting to see today. Out back there is a long line of various police vehicles, parked end to end. All of them, every single one, has some form of memorial sticker for Daniel Ellis, and a few have more than one. Interestingly, even the unmarked police cars with no noticeable lightbars or identification of any kind all have one of those very same stickers, some displayed prominently on the back window, some in less conspicuous locations like the bumper.



Figure 4. Drive-thru window of Monty's Spirits, Madison County.

On the drive back home, I'm still thinking about how it felt to sit on that bench. As I pull up to the liquor store drive-thru window to order, I come face-to-face with both the worker asking for my order and with another thin blue line sticker (See Figure 4). This time it's in the shape of Kentucky and has the numbers 457—Ellis's badge number—within that thin blue line.

Field Notes from 04-02-18, Downtown Madison County, The Courthouse

I may have overthought everything about being in a high traffic area for police today, knowing that it may very well be “court day” of some kind, and at the very least I would run into baliffs or sheriff's deputies, definitely some kind of law enforcement agent.

I came prepared to take photos despite it looking like rain. Researching the memorial bench, I was surprised to learn there were 13 benches located in various places within Madison County, and I immediately plan to photograph all of them. Finding the memorial bench outside the courthouse is incredibly easy (See Figure 5). It sits to the left of the courthouse, right in front of where I happen to park, flanked by a large no skateboarding sign, and I find myself thinking of some kid discovering his favorite new skate spot (See Figure 6) is a memorial to someone who may have hassled him for skating it, yet another quotidian, and seemingly banal, police interaction which always seems to be visited on the poor and working class, those who cannot afford the

expensive gated communities with their own version of police.



Figure 5. One of thirteen Daniel Ellis memorial benches, Madison County Courthouse.

Today, I brought my larger camera, with a large lens. Anyone who has ever walked around in public with a camera and lens like this knows it feels a lot like what I imagine it might feel like walking down Main Street with a rifle. Everybody can see you. You're highly visible and nobody wants to be shot. Maybe it's because people are scared you're going to take an unflattering photo of them while they're not prepared, or maybe it's just because it's out of the ordinary, but it always makes me feel like there's a spotlight on me. I get some looks from some of the people out front as they walk to court in the rain. It's not really raining, it's more like a mist, and after taking a few photos I'm about to switch to the camera on my phone. That's when I notice the police car. I see him, but

he's clearly watching me. His passenger side window is rolled down and he's looking right at me as I crouch down and take a few more shots.

He drives away slowly and circles the courthouse. I know I'm not doing anything wrong, but the police gaze is powerful. I try to look casual and feel for my wallet. I watch him pull up close to where I'm taking photos with his lights go on. He gets out slowly, deliberately, and in the following order: feet, legs, belly, the rest. Everything about him says military; haircut, demeanor, pressed uniform, gun. Even his teeth look like little white military tombstones. I can't see his eyes because they're behind sunglasses, despite the day being overcast, but I immediately get the impression he's very protective of this bench.



Figure 6. Brass dedication plaque on courthouse memorial bench, Madison County Courthouse.

I don't usually enjoy police interactions, but who does? I learned a long time ago as both a skater and graffiti artist in my teens to avoid them as much as possible. But those interactions also taught me what to say, how to act, and more importantly what *not* to say if I had to. Just like everyone else, I play a part for him. I started before I even got here this morning when I picked out my clothes. No band shirts. No ripped jeans. I'm wearing my old social worker clothes which consists of khaki pants, a white t-shirt, and a grey long-sleeve cardigan to cover my tattoos. He asks what I'm doing, nonchalant. I've been running my lines over in my head since I initially saw him. I tell him as little

as possible; that I'm a graduate student at Eastern Kentucky University, that I'm thinking about doing my thesis on memorials to fallen police officers who have died in the line of duty, and that I'm here taking some photos of the bench. He nods his approval, slowly, and then asks if I know who the bench is there for. I immediately lie and say no, almost before I know what I'm doing. Later, I'll tell myself I lied to hear what he would say, how he would describe it and the person it represented, but I'm not sure now as I write this. Maybe I felt just uneasy enough with the power dynamic, blue lights flashing in public, to acquiesce and defer to his point of view and his authority on the subject.

He takes his sunglasses off as he tells me a shortened version of the story of Daniel Ellis and promptly stops making eye contact with me, seeming to be more concerned with who might be watching or listening to our interaction. People in front of the courthouse look curious but also look like they know to keep their distance, most of them perhaps at the courthouse for a reason that might've originated with this very officer. He scans the immediate surroundings directly in front of the courthouse as though it were a darkened alley as he talks. His recounting lasts a couple of minutes and feels more genuine than posturing. I end up feeling empathy for his loss.

The fact he's stopped looking at me and started to scan the area makes me feel as though I've been validated, given some permission to continue doing a very legal activity. As soon as I think this, he tells me what I'm doing is "important and a good thing." Then he wishes me good luck on my thesis.

I take a few more photos, but the rain's coming down now and the front of the courthouse looks like a ghost town.

Field Notes from 12-01-18, The Restaurants, Richmond, Kentucky

“Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak.”

- John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*

Once a week or so my whole family goes out to eat. Often, we let our three girls pick. Tonight, they chose Zaxby's in Richmond, a place we have never been. They also chose the booth to sit in, all the way at the front of the building, right in the middle.

As I walk to our table with the food I notice a large shadowbox frame directly over the table. In it is what looks like a police officer's uniform from the 1920's or 1930's, with two rows of gold buttons running down the front, a badge still pinned to the uniform, and a hat. The uniform's surrounded by black and white photos of police cars and police officers from what looks like the same period, and from more recent times. I think that no photo there was taken before the 1970's at the latest, but I'm not sure. So, I ask an employee who is cleaning up a table close to ours. He tells me he's "never really paid attention to it before" and doesn't know anything about it. I say thanks and then walk to the counter and ask to speak to the manager, hoping for a different result. I don't get it. He doesn't even know what I'm talking about. I have to point to the frame hanging over my family. He looks at it like it's the first time he's ever seen it so I ask how long it's been there. He says he has been the manager there since opening day a few years ago, so it must have been there since then because he doesn't remember anything changing.

My fourteen-year-old daughter asks me why I was so curious about the uniform as we leave and I'm not sure how to respond. I turn the tables on her, ask her why she thinks I was interested. She tells me it's because they have a uniform up on display and don't know whose it is. She's not wrong.

I leave thinking our collective ideology concerning police is the product of how we see them along with how we experience them, not exclusively in person, but in how we are told through quotidian social interactions and interpretations like the one in this restaurant tonight. Memorials are a universal language. They don't need a translator. They are filled with contextual and narrative information, engaging the viewer visually by telling a simple story they can understand, regardless of their age or their interest.

This isn't the only time I've encountered something similar in Richmond, either. Taking the kids to get milkshakes one warm summer night I spot a 457 memorial sticker on the front door of Steak n' Shake as we enter (See Figure 7). We get a table and order, and before the waitress can head off to the next customer, I ask about the sticker on the front door. She doesn't know what I'm talking about, so I explain which one I mean, but it doesn't ring a bell with her. She offers to ask someone else and I say that'd be great, but she doesn't come back with anything except milkshakes. Nobody she asked knows anything about it other than who it's there to show support for.

As we settle up and pay our bill at the register, I notice the guy taking our money is the manager. I ask him about the sticker, not knowing if our waitress had already asked him. He doesn't know anything about it, and I'm left with only questions. Did someone who works at this restaurant bring the sticker to work and place it on the door themselves? Did someone come around, door to door (restaurant to restaurant) giving out stickers?

Did the sticker cost money, and where does that money go? Was there any of social pressure that accompanied the offer to place it in the window?

I've since been back to that same location several times and have yet to find anyone who knows where the sticker came from.



Figure 7. Steak and Shake restaurant front door with memorial sticker, Madison County.

Field Notes from 04-15-18

3,100 lbs.

I found several articles from local news sources about Daniel Ellis and the 13 benches installed around town to commemorate him. The articles say the benches are made of recycled materials and give a few of their locations, but not all of them. Most of the places given are terribly vague, so I reached out via email to the Daniel Ellis Foundation to see if I can get a list, but they never write me back. I cobble together a list of locations from several different articles, complete with little boxes to check off after I find them. Courthouse, Madison Central school, Glen Marshall Elementary, White Hall Park, White House Clinic, Lake Reba Park, B. Michael Caudill Middle School, Madison County Police HQ, and the Madison County public Library. That's only 9 and I know there are 13.

The placement of the benches, as frustrating as it might be, helps illustrate how this ideology is spread. They're placed purposefully in positions that ensure their cultural meaning is able to be easily spread, and to a specific segment of the population. The benches are in more public schools than any other location, in the same places we send our children to be educated, and I believe it's working. I remember my own kids coming home from school after their classes were visited by police officers who often passed out temporary tattoos, stickers, and even little shiny plastic badges. It was the school children who helped raise more than two thousand dollars and collected 3,100 pounds of

recyclable plastics (Staff "Elementary students create community benches in honor of fallen Richmond officer" 2017)

which were used to make the benches.

These benches reside in public libraries, in front of the county courthouse, adjacent to public bus stops, and scattered throughout Madison county, mostly in public spaces (See Figure 8). Any bench inside of a public school my own children do not attend, continues to remain out of reach to me and my camera.



Figure 8. Memorial bench outside Lake Reba playground, Madison County.

The Goodwood brewery, the very same company that donated to the construction of these memorial benches, has even marketed a Daniel Ellis American Pale Ale, a portion of the sales going to support Heroes, Inc., an organization that supports the families of fallen law enforcement officers (See Figures 9, 10). They plan

on having a release party for the ale in Richmond at The Paddy Wagon, a local pub that takes their name from policing. While on the surface, this sort of marketed memorialization may seem pretty straightforward, only being implemented to help comfort a grieving family who lost a loved one, and a community that values what they understand to be a public servants' sacrifice, I can't stop seeing those other far-reaching results which may be hard for someone to hear who only perceives law enforcement as the heroes they tell us they are, and has been told that since elementary school.

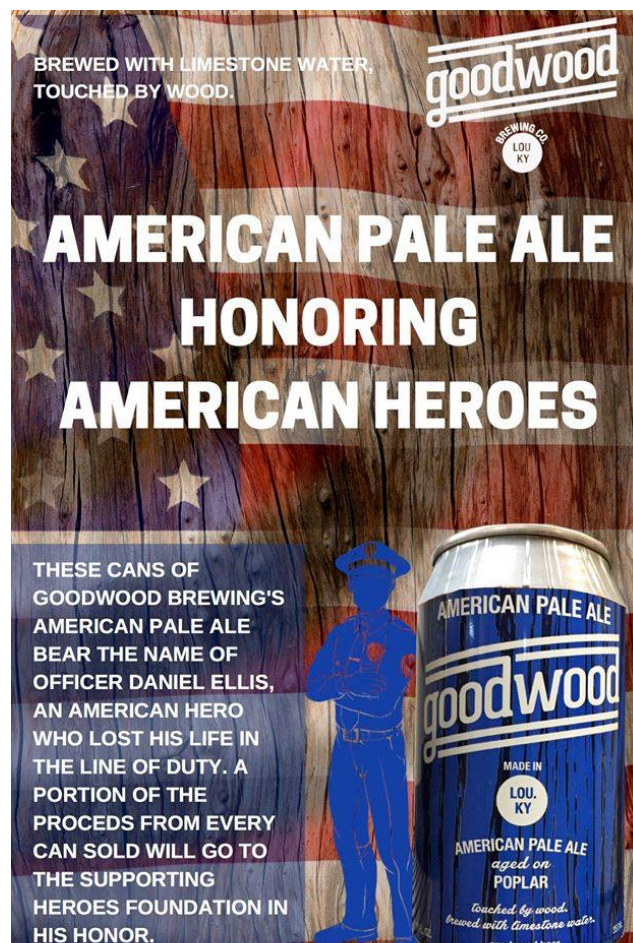


Figure 9. Facebook advertisement for Daniel Ellis memorial beer, 03/27/2018. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/Goodwoodbrewing/>



Figure 10. Detail of the bottom of Goodwood Brewing memorial ale,

04/26/2018. Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BiC0plBBIMp/>

Field Notes from 04-27-2018, The 3rd Annual Daniel Ellis Memorial 5K, Richmond, Kentucky

I get to the 5K race early, maybe an hour before the start time, so I could get the layout of the course the participants would be running. There is no parking. The race is being held at the Richmond Centre, one of the largest shopping areas in the town. I have to park quite a bit away from the crowd, which I can already see milling around, warming up, and setting up tents. A local radio station is here and I can hear the speaker's voice amplified clearly through the closed windows of my vehicle. He's saying how proud he is of all of us for the amazing turnout for this incredible event. He's not wrong. There are a lot of people here, easily the most people I have seen in

one place in Madison County since my family moved here eight years ago.



Figure 11. Thin Blue Line memorial sticker, Daniel Ellis Memorial 5K, Madison County.

As I walk to the starting line, I can see that almost every parked car—from lifted 4x4 trucks to mini-vans—has a sticker bearing the thin blue line iconography. Of the 30 or 40 cars I pass I make note of 3 that don't have one on their window or bumper where I can see.



Figure 12. Woman with temporary memorial face tattoo, Daniel Ellis Memorial 5K, Madison County.



Figure 13. Head to toe memorialization, Daniel Ellis Memorial 5K, Madison County.

The crowd of people are the same. There is a veritable sea of blue and black, everyone present seems to have some variation of the thin blue line iconography on their clothing or temporarily tattooed on their body. Some are wearing whole outfits (See Figure 13), every visible piece branded. I wonder if there are any real legitimate tattoos on people at this event. I spend the rest of the day looking for tattoos off and on, but I never come across any.

I do find Ricky, though. Or rather, “Ricky” (not his real name) finds me (See Figure 14). I’m taking a photo of something or someone else when I’m tapped on the shoulder. I turn around and come face to face with a three-and-a-half-foot tall officer and his grandmother. They both think I work for the local paper and I feel a little bad letting them know I don’t. They’re looking to get photographed for the paper. Ricky’s dressed

in what his grandmother calls his favorite superhero costume. He's wearing a police uniform, one of those 'Smokey Bear' police hats, a large black belt that looks like it is held up with magic, a radio mic, and patches and a badge with Richmond PD on them. He also has a smile as big as his head, and a bright blue stripe running down the legs of his uniform.



Figure 14. "Ricky", Daniel Ellis Memorial 5K, Madison County.

I tell him I like his uniform and tell him he looks very professional. Then I ask what that blue line on his legs means. He tells me "it's for the men who have died to protect us from all the criminals. It's the thin blue line" but it sounds more like tin blue

line. He's visibly proud of himself, and his grandmother and him have taken this whole interaction as a compliment. I ask her if I can take his photo and she agrees. He does too, and his grandmother adjusts his hat and uniform before I take the photo. I take a couple of pictures, get their email address to send them a copy, and we part ways. Throughout the remaining time I'm there I find him being photographed by a few other people, maybe by someone who works for the paper.

After taking some photos of the beginning of the race I move and reposition myself so I can get some photos of the runners in action and whatever else I happen to see. That's when I notice the large cement truck parked along the path. It's humongous. It must stand 12 feet tall. I saw it before this moment, but it's almost like I didn't really notice it. It's the graphics that catch my eye now, the whole truck covered in more of the now familiar thin blue lines and badges, except this truck is easily the largest marquee for that message here or anywhere I've seen. It's staggering. I watch as people take selfies with it. I see couples and whole families take photos with it as their intentional background. I get so distracted watching and their interactions with the truck that I forget to take any photos. I just stand there and watch as people line up to have their photos taken with it.

Later, I follow it back to the cement company and take photos of it being cleaned (See Figure 15) with a few other cement trucks, this one standing out for several reasons, the man working to clean it up dwarfed by the message it carries.



Figure 15. Cement truck used to memorialize Ellis being washed, Madison County.

Field Notes from 11-07-2019, The Paddy Wagon

I interviewed one of the bartenders from The Paddy Wagon in Richmond today. It was the anniversary of the death of Daniel Ellis earlier in the week and I wanted to know if the pub had done any kind of tribute to his memory as I had not seen anything on social media or in the news.

She tells me the bar's co-owner put up a canvas painting with the numbers 457 (and a thin blue line) on the 5th of the month, displayed over the jukebox. He doesn't have to explain to any customer or any worker that has been there before what the painting is there to represent. It's known and simply understood.

She says the staff left out a Jaeger Bomb shot along with a bottle of Bud Light for Officer Ellis, which she understood to be his and several of the Richmond police department's officers favorite drink. It sits at what was his favorite seat in the bar. They prop the chair up so no customers can sit there, reserved for the ghost of Daniel Ellis, but the bartender tells me that "nobody would ever even sit close to it. There's just a kind of social understanding."

VII. Conclusion

In the US, law enforcement uses state-sanctioned, fatal violence approximately three times per day (Edwards, Lee, Esposito, 2019), while that same figure is closer to the total fatal police shootings reported by year from other countries such as England in the United Kingdom. And yet, there exists a particular form of reverence for police officers and law enforcement in general within the US and other countries. The instantiation of this particular high regard is (re)produced by media such as law enforcement memorials which use their inherent aggrandizement to silence dissent and critical responses to police corruption and violence.

The police are but one organization responsible for violence in the US. Despite their successful public relations and fortunate legal defense efforts, law enforcement agencies and their agents are not held accountable for the victimization of the very same population which is expected to genuflect, or bend the knee, to their sacrifice and their state power at thousands of places of commemoration placed throughout our public and private spaces. These *violence workers*, as Micol Seigel (2018) accurately names them are the very same agents who are responsible for beating Rodney King in a spectacular demonstration of police brutality almost 30 years ago. They are responsible for shooting Oscar Grant as he lay face down on a subway platform and for the death of 18-year-old Michael Brown. These are the same *peace officers* who snapped the spine of Freddie Gray in the back of a police transport van. They are responsible for choking the life out of Eric Garner as he proclaimed “I can’t breathe” until he could no longer breath, for shooting Laquan McDonald sixteen times, even after he lay crumpled on the ground. They are the same ones who broke into Fred

Hampton's home and murdered him in his bed, who broke the hands of guitarist and activist Victor Jara in Chile and then asked him to play his instrument for them. They are the ones who interrogated, tortured, and broke the skull of Steve Biko against a cell wall in South Africa.

Despite their professed professionalism, impartiality, and respect for the people they supposedly serve and protect, they are responsible for the disappearance of Argentinian dissidents, and are the same force which served Josef Stalin. They are the same agents of state violence who interrogated Black panthers, and who maintained records on 16 million people in East Germany. They are the same ones who use surveillance to track us illegally using our own personal devices and lock away anyone who blows the whistle on those activities. They fire chemical weapons and deadly rubberized bullets at unarmed activists at demonstrations that they themselves ultimately control the narrative of.

The Police, who are notorious for backing bosses in every strike unless it's a protest of their own, who operate as an occupying force (Baldwin & Weems, 2015) and stand between every person with no food for themselves or their loved ones and the storefront full of food, between every immigrant deemed illegal and their family, who holds the very real *thin blue line* against every homeless person and the warmth of an empty building that would save their lives.

Every police and law enforcement agency tell us they are indispensable, that without them we would all be made victims and murderers in some Hobbesian nightmare. We are told this in both overt and covert ways, via a vast public relations operation, and through the ability of police to control the narrative of their actions and

deeds. We are told the story of their virtue and sacrifice over and over again as we travel through the city. It can be seen on the car in front of us bearing a thin blue line sticker on their back window. It can appear to us as we wait in line at our favorite restaurant and from the person in front of us wearing a shirt which proclaims their solidarity with police as an institution. And it can be seen by our inaction in response to the deaths of young black, brown, and poor people murdered by police.

Embrasure of violent ideological logics regarding the police are necessary and foundational to the work done by the criminal justice system, and willful ignorance is a requirement for social injustice to endure. In order for the police to retain its position as the default heroic force many claim and believe it to be, it must proselytize us away from what we see them do on video or read about in the news. One aspect of that process involves superimposing a mythic lore over the reality of policing through commemoration.

The ritual of memorializing law enforcement officers who have died *'in the line of duty'* achieves an unquestionable, unconditional tone, one which imparts an expectation of reference for police officers. Significantly, the rituals of memorialization also extend that ideology and legitimacy to the occupation of policing as a whole. The production of cultural reverence and regard is broad enough to encapsulate active officers, retired and former officers, police families, and other non-officers working in adjacent fields (e.g. corrections and security officers). The expressed narrative of one instance becomes the implied narrative of all others, imparting a form of unassailable logic, a logic which frames contemporary conversations surrounding police violence and a framework which is directly

relatable to the ubiquitous specter of memorialization. Police memorials, then, are a powerful force which shapes personal beliefs, ideologies, individual behaviors, and social order, and which demands further meaningful and rigorous sociological investigation.

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