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Blue Rage: A Critical Cultural Analysis of Policing, Whiteness, and Racial Surveillance

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Blue Rage: A Critical Cultural Analysis of Policing, Whiteness, and Racial Surveillance

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Communication
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ABSTRACT

      This dissertation is an interpretive project deploying critical media analysis and interpretive qualitative methods to examine televisual and cinematic performances of policing. I use interpretive qualitative inquiry to explore blue rage, policing, and whiteness. By highlighting the racial surveillance which undergirds policing, I analyze blue rage as a critical race concept that addresses the affective policing of racial resentment and racial solidarity among law enforcement. My media analyses demonstrate the ways that whiteness is operationalized through law and order and criminal justice. Analyzing cinematic and televisual depictions of the police and racist surveillance, I address policing—as a profession, as a (governing) practice, and as a popular representation. This project attends to the ways that white supremacist violence undergirds practices and media artifacts in everyday life. In defining blue rage, I offer a lens through which scholars can better understand issues of police violence as embedded in representation and not simply existing in literal police encounters.

CHAPTER ONE:

BLUE RAGE: POLICING AND RACIAL VIOLENCE

In the darkness, my car fishtailed. I fumbled with the radio dial to find more news about a

killing. At home, I tuned from the car radio to midnight television to hear that a local police

officer was shot in the line of duty. In my bedroom blackness, the Bay News 9 banner blared with

images of stoic uniformed cops, flashing blue and red sirens in front a ring of yellow tape

marking the scene. It is familiar.

"Where did it happen?" I pressed, impatient with the robotic reporter. "Who's dead?" I

fumbled to find my phone. No messages from my parents. They'd wake me with an alarming text

if my brother had made the "ultimate sacrifice." "Officer shot dead in Tampa. Suspect in

custody," the news ticker read. Wrong city. Stomach unclenched, I exhaled, relieved.

My dissertation is an interpretive project deploying critical media analysis and

autoethnographic inquiry to examine televisual and cinematic performances of racialized

surveillance (Browne, 2015). I explore the intersection of race, violence, and policing in popular

media texts that stage narratives of racist surveillance. I attend to racialized surveillance and

policing as a profession, as a (governing) practice, and as a popular representation. By

highlighting the racial surveillance which undergirds policing, I define blue rage as a critical race

concept that addresses the affective policing of racial resentment and racial solidarity among law

enforcement.

Using blue rage, I extend critical whiteness studies with particular attention to the ways that whiteness becomes invisible through violence and policing. A central question guides my dissertation: How is blue rage represented, experienced, and performed? I take up the following research questions to interrogate blue rage and racist police violence:

(1) How is blue rage experienced as a governing practice that sutures whiteness with policing?

(2) How is policing as a profession represented as a racial project in popular media?

(3) How is policing performed as racialized surveillance in popular media?

My dissertation offers three main contributions. First, I include blue rage as a concept for whiteness studies in particular and race and ethnicity broadly. Second, I extend textual experience and embodied textual analysis in qualitative inquiry (Durham, 2014). Third, I update the archive about race and representation with attention to cop dramas and police narratives in news and entertainment media in media and cultural studies. Using interpretive analysis, I advance cultural studies in communication through an investigation of discourses of power and knowledge (Ono, 2009, p. 74-75) to explore policing as a racial project. My media analyses demonstrate the ways that whiteness is defined through law and order and criminal justice. The scenes analyzed highlight the ways that white persons (as attached to whiteness) are shown to be rational/reasonable, objective, innocent and superior. The white characters are idealized through the racial project of policing.

Framing policing as a way of being underscores the ways that blue rage informs contemporary rhetoric of informal and formal policing constructing difference through race. The use of blue allows me to invoke policing as a profession, a governing practice, and a popular representation. By rage, I attend to the affective dimensions of racial violence and racialized

surveillance present in the desire to police, the (supposed) need to govern through law and order. Accordingly, blue rage is not merely contained within official law enforcement capacities. It operates through performance and representation.

By highlighting a variety of fictive texts that depict policing, I "capture how racial formation processes occur through a linkage between structure and representation" (Omi and Winant 2015, p. 13). My attention to representational texts, which explicitly reject conversations of race in favor of discussions of crime and justice, extends cultural studies with particular attention to the ways that whiteness becomes invisible through violence and rage. That is, whiteness becomes a social relation that informs surveillant (formal and informal) practices which are deployed as necessarily just, policing regimes. Contemporarily, this is given a particular salience "accelerated by the events of 9/11, [where] identity…has shifted to identification to…benefit those in power" (Silva, 2016, p.162). As race becomes a principle means by which criminality and justice is distributed, whiteness is animated as the principle cultural litmus by which a moral citizenry is identified. As a concept, blue rage makes visible the ways that white rage is uniquely tethered to policing which mark bodies of color as legible and in need of violent control. By attending to the ways that white supremacy is systemically imbricated into policing and racialized surveillance (Browne, 2015), I highlight the racist pivoting which seeks to inculcate whiteness, which becomes an analog of policing, from scrutiny.

By analyzing cinematic and televisual depictions of the policing and race, I address policing—as a profession, as a (governing) practice, and as a popular representation. I take up the work of Hall, Clarke, Critchers, Jefferson, and Roberts' *Policing The Crisis* (1978). This cultural studies text offers a compelling blueprint by which narratives of crime control and

justice underlie an "authoritarian consensus, a conservative backlash: what we call the slow build-up towards 'soft' law-and-order society" (Hall et. al, 1978, p. viii). Like *Policing the Crisis*, I am less interested in the specific contexts of criminal justice and more invested in exploring the "conditions of existence" of crime control and "law and order" (Hall et. al, 1978, p. ix). I define the concept of blue rage developed from African American theorist Carol Anderson's concept of white rage. My project attempts to highlight the very racist practices that allow policing to "stand in all its common-sense immediacy" (Hall et. al., 1978, p. ix).

Conceptual Framework

Blue rage is as a critical race concept that addresses the affective policing of racial resentment and racial solidarity among law enforcement. Blue rage extends what Carol Anderson described in *White Rage* (2017) as a racist backlash attempting to instantiate and stabilize the dominant racial order. Reacting to President Trump's openly racist rhetoric and alt-right demonstrations, Anderson attends to the ways that white rage operates in the halls of power. Blue rage brings together Anderson's attention to the everyday white rage and focuses on the ways that policing is sutured to the dominant racial order

I unpack policing by addressing its racial underpinnings and by demonstrating the intersections of formal and informal violence using blue rage. I attend to representations that are acceptable expressions of violence by white men whose identity provides a "license" to police. I read white rage as a constitutive principal of racist policing and racialized surveillance. Like white rage, blue rage is also articulated through institutional practices. I pinpoint two distinct but often overlapping race-gender representations of blue rage: formal and informal. Formal is legal, rational, and honorable. It is a rage rescripted as stoic masculinity. Informal is emotionally driven, extralegal excessive violence. It is a rage that is volatile but socially acceptable expression of white masculinity. These two visions both articulate the ways that white rage is

normalized across varied performances. This contributes to critical race and ethnicity studies by making visible the nuanced ways that whiteness operates as violent control. Moreover, through these variations on rage, my project demonstrates the ways that police violence is reproduced as necessarily just and common sense through its connection to white benevolence.

Whiteness and white rage move "through bureaucracies...It's not the clan…" (Anderson, 2017, p. 3). Whiteness is a racial project which marks bodies of color as abnormal and makes whiteness natural—the litmus by which all bodies are measured. Through racial othering, whiteness seeks to maintain hegemonies of economic and social organizing which maintain hierarchical power relations. If racial formation is the larger sociohistorical process of race making, then racial projects are the micro level processes and patterns which legitimize racial meaning. Specifically, racial projects define "what race means" in particular cultural and political contexts (Omi and Winant, 2015, p. 125). By attending to the ways that racial meaning emerges, racial projects demonstrate the ways that "social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized [according to the] racial meanings [that] are embedded in social structures" (Omi and Winant, 2015, p. 125). Whiteness is defined as the "unraced center of a racialized world" (Wray & Newitz, 1997, p. 3); it exists as a standard against which all other racial constructions are considered (Dunn, 2018). This relationship, wherein race and violence are articulated through Black criminality and white rage, is the foundational tenant of blue rage.

Whiteness "disregard[s] racial hierarchy" and smooths discussions of white supremacist exploitation (Gallagher, 2003, p. 26). Through the racial project or colorblindness, whiteness makes race visible as cultural "styles and products[;]…commodities or experiences that whites and racial minorities can purchase and share. It is through such acts of shared consumption that race becomes nothing more than an innocuous cultural signifier" (Gallagher, 2003, p. 26).

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Through whiteness, color-blind ideology emphasizes systemic change and legal parity so as to render invisible the violent racializing practices and histories of racist domination. Through these practices, whiteness is invisible (Dunn, 2018). That is, it operates "as a constellation of processes and practices rather than as a discrete entity (e.g. skin color alone). Whiteness is dynamic, relational, and operating at all times and on myriad levels" (DiAngelo, 2006, p. 56). By silencing discussions of domination and upholding narratives of liberal, democratic legal equality and racial parity, whiteness perpetuates racist orientations which undergird it as a racial project intent on upholding a racist hierarchy.

That whiteness is tethered to racial authority, so too policing is connected to common sense practices of authority and culture making (Durham, 2015, p. 254). By highlighting policing practices as sites of white supremacist ideology, I argue that legal and extralegal policing operate as discrete methods by which to "reposition whiteness" as a dominating paradigm, feared to be disappearing in a globalizing society (McIntosh et al, 2019, p. 3). This myth of white genocide informs the contemporary political climate; this is especially visible in Donald Trump's invocation of white supremacist, masculinist discourses that advocate the imagining of an America in decline from migration and a surge of bodies of color (Ott and Dickinson, 2019). This is not to suggest that white rage and racist policing are necessarily new; instead, by attending to contemporary white supremacist rhetoric, my project sees white supremacist hegemonies deployed throughout the history of policing and surveillant practices.

Furthermore, police violence is used to discipline and mark bodies for violent disciplinary, control. By bridging questions of surveillance and identification, with issues of white rage and resentment, my project highlights post-racial, color-blind mythologies that see contemporary race relations as already solved (Bonila-Silva, 2010; Gallagher, 2003; Hughey,

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2012). Attending to particular instances of racist violence, and mediated visions of racist and racializing surveillance, I argue that neoliberal multiculturalism functions as a guise to obscure the racist social relations of policing (Belcher, 2016, Bernasconi, 2014).

As a racial project, whiteness emerges in direct relation to political, economic formations. W.E.B. DuBois powerfully highlighted the American sociohistoric contexts by which race was animated through labor and capital; accordingly, slave labor necessarily "monopolize[d] economic, social and state resources" as belonging to "white laborers" (Twine and Gallagher, 2008, p. 8). Through racialized labor, which saw the Black body as exploitable on non-human, "the material rewards of whiteness were substantial…Whiteness granted workers racially exclusive footing on the first rung of America's expanding industrial mobility ladder…and created the ability to accumulate and transfer intergenerational wealth" (Twine and Gallagher, 2008, p. 8). Whiteness organizes social structures and cultural practices of signification through racist domination. As a racial project, whiteness thus emerged as "simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute recourse (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines" (Omi and Winant, 2015, p. 125).

While marking bodies of color through difference offers an overview of whiteness as a racial project, it also functions to discursively shift hegemonies of power (legible in cultural, economic, and political discourse) so as to reify whiteness and tether it to a logic of natural dominance and innocence. While whiteness offers a coherent racial project, as a social category it is necessarily complex in the ways that it "shape[s] the ways in which human identities and social structures are racially signified" (Omi and Winant 2015,p. 13). As political and cultural shifts occur, racial projects adapt so as to continually calcify racial formations. Whiteness

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provides an important case study as a racial project even as legal machinations toward racial equity are developed and enforced. Through systemic change, whiteness produces "contemporary racial inequality… through 'new racism' practices that are subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial" (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, p. 2).

Kumarini Silva and Eduardo Bonilla Silva address the articulation of whiteness under postrace. For Silva (2016) whiteness uses racial fear to construct a demonized racial other, an amorphous block of bodies of color, in need of violent control. Additionally, Bonilla-Silva uses the term "new racism" for postrace to refer to the subtle operations of whiteness in institutions and signifying practices that are not (superficially) based in labor and exploitability (2010). Through new racist ideology, whiteness attempts to flatten racial conflict that emphasizes the dismantling of visible segregation and discrimination thus rendering race-based difference "illegal" and therefore unnecessary to combat (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Through this color-blindness, whiteness portrays America as "a level playing field" (Gallagher, 2003, p. 23). If contemporary society is imagined as just and racially neutral through whiteness, then racial difference is made passé.

Kumarini Silva exposes race-neutrality or color-blindness by describing policing post 9/11. In *Brown Threat*, Silva rejects a discussion of technocratic governmentality to read the surveillant rhetorics of post 9/11 securitization as the foundational practice that informs contemporary life. For Silva, the post 9/11 culture of fear necessitates a constant, exaggerated vigilance intent on policing the bodies of those who would (supposedly) bring harm to US equilibrium. As "multicultural utopias become staples of visual media, the increased prevalence and reality of marginalization and the coercion of bodies of color as…objects that need policing become less obvious (Silva, 2006, p. 5). Whiteness marks Browness as a threat to white racial

order on an national scale. By focusing on American policing, my dissertation considers the ways that violent racism informs policing through my framework of blue rage. By creating an organized vision of a mass of brown bodies, necessarily constructed as other and dangerous, securitization rhetoric necessitates monitoring and epistemologies of control through everyday surveillance and policing. Accordingly, I argue that a ubiquitous, imagined threat informs the white rage that organizes blue rage under postrace.

My dissertation on blue rage extends the work of Silva, Bonilla-Silva, Anderson, and Gallagher by focusing on the ways that policing (as a profession, a governing practice, and a popular representation) is organized and enacted through blue rage. It contributes to whiteness studies by developing a concept that highlights the racial project of policing. Broadly, whiteness studies seeks to make visible the ways that white supremacy is a constitutive part of social, political, and economic life. Central to whiteness studies is the "premise that racism and white privilege exist" and that whiteness work must reveal the operations therein (DiAngelo, 2006, p. 56). While early whiteness studies attended to micro level processes, contemporary whiteness studies exploded in academic and political discourse with a focus on macro, structural analyses (Gallagher and Twine, 2017). This structural approach highlights the complicated ways that "white supremacy is constantly dodging and pivoting so as to mask inherent power dynamics" (Gallagher and Twine, 2017, p. 1602). Whiteness and white rage move insidiously through formal power structures (Anderson, 2017, p. 3). By expanding white rage as a legitimizing principle which informs policing, I see contemporary policing as a social relation that transcends literal police forces and is instead a concomitant part of everyday social interactions.

As a project invested in analyzing representational constructions of policing and surveillance, my dissertation offers a symbolic means by which to explore law and order. Critical

whiteness provides an important frame for my project. Whiteness studies seeks to make visible the ways that white supremacy is a constitutive part of social, political, and economic life. Central to whiteness studies is the "premise that racism and white privilege exist" and that whiteness work must reveal the operations therein (DiAngelo, 2006, p. 56).

Policing as (Governing) Practice

More than the race-neutral maintenance of law and order, policing can be described as a form of racial surveillance enforced to maintain white supremacy (Owusu-Bempah,, 2017; Gooding-Williams, 2021; Dixon, Azocar & Casas, 2003). Where Anderson's (2017) white rage propels anger into racist action, I highlight blue rage as enacting racialized surveillance through policing. White rage can animate racial violence. It is blue rage where racial violence is legitimated and justified. I construct blue rage as a result of violent white rage which gets deployed to discipline bodies of color and therefore rejects calls for equity and social justice through color-blindness.

I use "blue" to describe policing as a way of life. It carries the color of a profession popularly regarded as not a job but "a way of life." Policing is a historically wrought process as contemporary American policing is directly indebted to slave patrols and necessarily racist hegemonies of labor and exploitability (Browne, 2015). Furthermore, my concept of blue rage, a paranoid performance of racist law and order, adds to a symbolic understanding of the ways that police forces, both literal and symbolic, converge in the everyday, relational interactions of social life. There are several meanings associated with blue. In an American context, it communicates gender as masculine or the ideal citizen-subject; it conveys coolness or calm assigned to officers who are stoic in the face of lawlessness; and, it signifies loyalty to an official oath and unofficial code among police to protect and serve. In addition to its semiotic connotations, blue emphasizes the racialization of policing in which the "thin blue line" separating order from chaos works to police the existing racial order regardless of the identity of

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the officer. It is in these symbolic, semiotic, and cultural significations that blue becomes as a visible marker of white rage and/as affective policing of difference. Through concepts like the "thin blue line," blue becomes a beacon of safety making that renders those who might scrutinize the blue as other.

Policing as Profession

Much of the work on race and policing is done in the disciplines of criminal justice, law, and criminology. In criminological research, quantitative and qualitative studies converge to highlight the racist application of legal frameworks and punitive law enforcement (Owusu-Bempah, 2017, & Cobbina, Owusu-Bempah, Bender, 2016). However, this focus on analysis has resulted in a debate

> Over underlying causes—whether increased participation in crime on the part of African Americans or racial discrimination on the part of police officers and police agencies—persists because criminologists have largely failed to recognize that these are mutually reinforcing phenomena…rooted…in the history of American race-relations (2017, 24).

As a result, the introduction of critical inquiry focusing on intersectional approaches to policing has opened criminological research to "historical analysis of the policing of African American…the discipline may advance research in this area by adopting a constructionist racialization framework" (Owusu-Bempah, 2017, p. 23). The intersection of critical race theory and criminology offers precise indictments of the ways that American law enforcement can work to animate racial difference. As well, this research thread offers compelling public policy positions calling for increased investment

> in disadvantaged communities and distribute resources in a manner that improves the structural conditions known to produce visible crime and police scrutiny.

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Doing so could enhance the safety and well-being of communities while

decreasing the pretexts…for racialized policing (Gaston, 2019, p. 445).

This research usefully addresses the ways that law enforcement and gender, race, and class

intersect to (re)produce cultural narratives of criminality. Carlson (2020) highlights the ways that

Police chiefs construct "violence according to two overarching tropes: (1) gang-and-drug-related

gun violence involving Black and Brown perpetrators and victims in urban spaces and (2) active

shooting-related gun violence involving white perpetrators and victims in suburban and rural

spaces" (p. 399). Through extensive interviews with police chiefs, Carlson's work demonstrates

the ways that even in its contemporary manifestations public law enforcement is a race-making

institution" (2020, p. 401).

My work addresses policing differently by explicitly noting that policing is an

amorphous, multi-nodal racial project. Highlighting policing as profession, governing practice,

and representation highlights the ways that policing is not merely operating in formal encounters

with law enforcement agencies, but is instead present in everyday encounters and media. Central

to my analysis is a consideration of the ways that police culture in the United States are

"inherently organized by a(n) (il)logic of anti-Blackness that necessitates racist violence as a

structural component of its practice" (Goldberg, 2019, p. 521). These white supremacist

hegemonies are made literal in the work of "warrior policing" tactics touted by David Grossman

(and advocate of warrior policing tactics) who begins his pro-violence police trainings with an

emphasis on the ways that policing is "war. We are at war. They are the enemy, and you are not"

(Featherstone, 2017, p. 22). While these warrior seminars represent a stream of hyperbolically

racist paranoia (Philando Castile's murderer, Jeronimo Yanez, was a recipient of warrior training

which emphasized shooting first) and masculine posturing, there are other more discreet

instances of white rage working through policing practices. We see this warrior policing in the violent backlash to control protests and hear it echoed in the all lives/ blue lives matter movements. Accordingly, the Black Life Matters movement is regarded as a divisive project seeking to delegitimize post-racial utopianism.

Policing in Popular Representations

Violent policing is ubiquitous. Police involved shootings are a fixture on nightly news alongside murders that are perpetuated in the name of policing and social securitization. Blue rage is the defense that Michael Drejka invoked during the murder of Markeis McGlockton in 2018. A self-appointed arbiter of law enforcement, Drejka frequently harassed Clearwater, Florida citizens for moving violations and parking illegally (Varn, 2019). But, when Markeis McGlockton pushed a verbally abusive Drejka away from his vehicle, girlfriend, and five year old son and family, Drejka shot and killed him. The ensuing trial showing Drejka invoking his "reasonable fear of death" and proclaiming self-defense. Significantly, Drejka's defense hinged on the idea that McGlockton was responsible for his own death because he was illegally parked and therefore a criminal in need of violent control (Jacobs, 2018; Varn, 2018). These deaths and acts of continued, real racial terror warrant critical scrutiny. This project attends to the representational nature of blue rage. By focusing on the representational, my project locates blue rage as a cultural phenomenon, a social relation that permeates mediated culture. That is, I am interested in exploring the ways policing is popularly represented as a commonsense racial project today.

The intersection of media and criminological research is a robust area which usefully highlights the preponderance of racist imagery in televisual programing that covers law enforcement. The crime genre is a ubiquitous media form represented through cinematic, televisual, and local crime reporting. As Dixon (2017) notes, "The content carried by the news

has been shown in both laboratory experiments and in surveys to increase stereotypical thinking"

(p. 777). Not surprisingly, media analysis finds that victims, perpetrators, and types of crimes

appear as endemic to communities of color and render white bodies as innocent or in need of

protection (Dixon & Linz, 2000, p. 568). These analyses of televisual crime and news reports

note the ways that crime related media are organized through genre conventions to cultivate

perceptions of "local crime risk" (Callanan, 2012, p. 105). As cultural artifacts, "television police

procedural and the police film allow crime narratives, as public myths, to expose and express the

social mores and ideological norms of a society" (Arntfield, 2013, p. 401).

Blue rage is visible in both literal and figurative representations of policing. For example,

in Chapter Two, I explore the serial television drama *Blue Bloods*. Through this popular text,

race and violence are tied to Black criminality and white rage. I echo antiracist activists from the

non-profit media advocacy group Color of Change. In their 2020 report, *Normalizing Injustice:*

The Dangerous Misrepresentations, Color of Change contends that scripted television crime

shows perpetuate dangerous racist stereotypes. Writing about the challenge of stereotypical

representation, Color of Change notes,

> The problem with the crime and legal genre is the seemingly limitless prevalence
>
> of… truly irresponsible and dangerous misrepresentations. Ultimately, most of
>
> these series license law enforcement to do whatever they think is right to catch the
>
> bad guy, and they bend over backwards to justify and rationalize the actions of
>
> law enforcement and prosecutors no matter how many people get hurt along the
>
> way (Color of Change, 2020, p. 11).

Furthermore, televisual representations of policing "do not depict the reality, causes or

consequences of [racial] disparities accurately…these series, and perhaps the genre as a whole,

may be a driver of pervasive misperceptions and attitudes about safety, crime, punishment, race and gender" (Color of Change, 2020, p. 27).Vigilante policing is always rendered justified through whiteness and articulated through assumed de-raced or race-neutral rhetoric of law and order. Color of Change identifies its racial underpinning. Police violence is just because it is connected to whiteness.

Blue rage is whiteness masquerading as law and order. Accordingly, society is framed as needing constant vigilance to maintain control and balance. By constructing blue rage, my project highlights the very racist practices that allow policing and racialized surveillance to "stand in all its common-sense immediacy" (Hall et. al., 1978, p. ix). Blue rage bolsters the dichotomy of white innocence and Black guilt (Gallagher, 2003). Accordingly, color-blindness functions as a technology of postrace that binds the police officers under blue (Chun 2009; Nakamura, 2009). That is, blue becomes the color by which race and violence are articulated in policing. Therefore, blue rage works to erase white rage because it is justified by the symbolic justice orientation of the badge. Further, blue brings together difference under whiteness—a whiteness that has the ability to police, surveil, and regulate the racial order.

Interpretive Methods

I use interpretive methods to examine representations of blue rage in film, television, and everyday life. Instead of a dehumanized media studies where the experiences and positionality of the analyst are rendered invisible to create a clean, objective analysis, I deploy textual experience (Durham, 2014) to engage in sustained inquiry. This interpretive method attends to experiences where "bodies and texts meet…aiming to illuminate the crisis of representation between the so-called real and the symbolic world" (Durham, 2014, p. 13). In the case of blue rage, racial terror and the necropolitical power of policing present a vital moment to explore the relationship between the real and symbolic. I use blue rage to examine whiteness and white masculine

violence using autoethnography. Instead of entrenching textual analysis in opposition to explorations of the self, textual experience, the "active, interpretive process of bridging lived experience with living memories embedded in words, acts, objects…hinges on interpretation, interaction, and relationality" (Durham, 2014, p. 62). I deploy an embodied, experiential method of representational analysis. As the critic, the analyst, my experiences saturate my analysis. Textual experience (Durham, 2014) requires that I collapse supposed objective analysis and instead attend to my subject position as an analyst. Examining blue rage as interpretive analyses of policing practices and racist hegemonies embedded in representational texts is an invitation to consider the everyday instantiation of blue rage.

 I use media analysis and autoethnographic inquiry to explore blue rage, policing, and whiteness. I analyze varied media texts including the film *Death Wish,* the television show *Blue Bloods* (2010) and the song "What it Means" as salient artifacts from which to examine cultural conflict and phenomenon (Walters, 1995). It is not my contention that the chosen visual and sonic texts are the most important examples of blue rage. Rather, by selecting popular texts, which cut across genres and varied levels of critical significance, the interpretive analysis is organized around demonstrating the ways that blue rage is a ubiquitous surveillance practice that informs everyday contemporary life and increases calls to police bodies of color.

The chosen media sites are intentionally narrowed. There are endless examples of cop dramas and narratives of policing. As well, the white vigilante revenge film is well-trodden cinematic landscape. The ubiquity of these generic sites speaks to the significance of policing and vigilantism narratives in popular culture. As a contemporary site, *Blue Bloods* offers a significant plot device that is central to my analysis and dissertation focus. Specifically, *Blue Bloods* focuses on the policing family. Certainly, other cop dramas highlight familial discord, but

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Blue Bloods is concerned first with demonstrating the intergenerational legacy of policing. Every episode is punctuated by a family dinner scene that reminds the viewer that the show is invested in policing as a way of life.

Death Wish (2018) provides an important counterpoint to the televisual cop drama. Its plot highlights the policing that occurs outside of formal, legal structures. It is not invested in police families or judicial law enforcement structures. Instead, it centers on the ways that policing comes to serve the will of violent racialized rage. *Death Wish* (2018) shows blue rage in the everyday surveillance, scrutiny, and violence against bodies. Additionally, *Death Wish* (2018) operates as a text that has been reimagined over time to reflect particular cultural zeitgeists. The original novel and film reflect 1970s America crime hysteria; in the contemporary *Death Wish*, the film reflects contemporary colorblind narratives about violence and racial surveillance.

My final media site, the Drive by Truckers' song "What it means," was selected because my experience of the song coincided with an epiphanic moment of racial understanding. "What it Means'" interrogative tone and lyrics mirrored my own unsettled questions about allyship and antiracism after the murder of Trayvon Martin. Ultimately, the Drive by Truckers' song offers a salient moment where my life and media experiences collide.

Textual Experience

The main analysis portions of the dissertation will employ textual experience (Durham, 2014) to make sense of the filmic and sonic texts I explore. Textual experience extends artifactual analysis and considers the body of the interpreter in the analytical process (Durham, 2014). This provides a means to explore the formal and technical aspects visual and sonic texts while considering the personal and experiential impacts of blue rage. This hybrid interpretive form foregrounds lived experience to demonstrate the ways that cultural texts inform and are

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informed by identity, the analyses aim to demonstrate the ways that blue rage, a social relation, is socially visible while being textually significant. The textual analyses mirror the hybrid analysis developed by Durham (2014) and extended by Dunn (2018). This approach blends representational, formal media analysis alongside personal, ethnographic approaches to text.

In bridging textual analysis and autoethnography, my project moves between structural analysis in its consideration of texts, but it also engages culturalist traditions through the inclusion of a mystory. In attempting to join poststructuralist and culturalist traditions, my project may fall short of fully engaging with the traditions. However, I offer a layered textual analysis that mirrors the complex ways that blue rage is imbricated into social relations at multiple levels. An orthodox media studies project seems too limiting. It would ignore the affective power of white rage as an analytical framework. Likewise, a purely ethnographic project would limit blue rage outside of mediated artifacts of social life.

One limitation of the project is the focus on textual representations of blue rage and police violence. One could argue that news media and non-fictional coverage of police violence might provide a more direct site of analysis for violence and racialized surveillance. Additionally, quantitative methods which offer a detailed portrait of the instances of police violence could provide additional empirical evidence for the issues my dissertation points to. However, by highlighting the symbolic, fictive machinations of power and racist hegemony, and coupling this with experiential, everyday experiences, the analyzed texts make whiteness and white rage invisible through common sense narratives of law and order.

Chapter Overview

Chapter Two highlights how the CBS drama *Blue Bloods* is structured around blue rage and violent policing; a racist ideology which positions police violence as a necessary panacea for

a society gone awry. This chapter attends to the ways that the show narratively stages the policing as a racial project. Through the intersection of color-blindness, white rage, and policing, this project will identify blue rage as the structuring epistemic frame informing contemporary policing. Additionally, my analysis will be punctuated by autoethnographic vignettes that explore the ways that *Blue Bloods*' narrative is reflected in my own of being blue blooded or a member of a police family. Accordingly, *Blue Bloods'* racist logic is legible through the woven ideology of policing as a common sense, inherently just, practice of securitization.

Chapter three analyzes the film *Death Wish* (2018) attending to the ways that transparent whiteness is presented as cultural panacea for a (supposedly) anti-white world. This section takes up the issue of informal policing and everyday surveillance as a necessary means to make the world safe through blue rage. While *Death Wish* is an obviously racist film, I argue that the film usefully demonstrates the ways that postrace and postsurveillance reify the paranoid white imagination. Ultimately, blue rage is demonstrated as not confined to the police, but is instead a social relation informing stand your ground politics.

My final analytic chapter explores alienation in a law enforcement family and antiracist allyship after the 2012 murder of Florida teen Trayvon Martin. Situated within moments of identity and representation, I use the popular song "What It Means?" by Drive by Truckers (Barbe and Hood, 2016) and my personal experience to address whiteness. Race-evasion and fragility are twin components of whiteness in post-racial America that animate alienation and allyship. Both embodied analyses of pop culture and personal experience describe white identity and white privilege at the interpersonal and intercultural level. This chapter will explore how the discourse of whiteness mediates race across family, policing, and popular culture. This chapter will demonstrate how antiracist allyship can unsettle blue rage.

In the Conclusion, I reflect on policing as a racial project. This chapter highlights the ways that recent, racist, extrajudicial killings of unarmed Black and Brown people serves as a demonstration of the paranoid white imagination (which bolsters blue rage). While many of these murders come at the hands of police officials, it is my contention that blue rage extends into public life and is a conjunctural, racist orientation that sees culture and society as in need of violent surveillance and discipline. Through the concept of blue rage, I offer an interdisciplinary concept which can help disrupt commonsense policing.

Conclusion: Policing Intervention

By making visible blue rage, my dissertation stands as a critical intervention designed to disrupt ways of policing and disciplining which are reinforced through common sense (Gramsci, qtd. Hall et. all, 1978). My project will advance anti-racist practices by highlighting the colluding forces that render police violence inherently just. My project advocates a disruption of policing practices that make policing and racial domination normal. Furthermore, my concept of blue rage, a paranoid performance of racist law and order, adds to a symbolic understanding of the ways that police forces, both literal and symbolic, converge in the everyday, relational interactions of social life. Furthermore, blue rage attends to the ways that police forces converge in the everyday, relational interactions of social life.

Blue rage addresses the affective policing of racial resentment and racial solidarity among law enforcement, and I provide a lens through which communication scholars can better understand issues of police violence as being embedded in representation and not simply existing in literal police encounters. This critical opening is paramount given the visibility of racist police violence, heightened media scrutiny, and ubiquitous technology; the racial hierarchies which undergird this violence are often ignored through law and order.

This reflexive tension cannot be unfurled completely. But, it is often rendered absent from analyses of violence to maintain whiteness as the dominant racial order. But this is a humanizing project. A thickening of the tension between racist violence and policing and anti-racist allyship. Worlds that clash and contradict. Analyses that are underdeveloped and nuanced. An incomplete project in theorizing racist policing which I term blue rage.

CHAPTER TWO:

BLUE RAGE IN *BLUE BLOODS*

In a rural Ohio field with my brothers and father, I carried the weight of lethal power and potential mishap in an unloaded shotgun. I struggled to keep the barrel in the air before I was quickly stopped and reprimanded. "Listen, Wes," my father said in his calm voice. "Even unloaded, we don't point these things at people. This is how accidents happen." I shivered, remembering his warning years later when my brother-turned-cop came home from patrol. He showed me a new, small handgun. It was unlike the rifles we used to shoot cans and rotting vegetables. The Glock 26 was palm sized and cold black metal. It was it nestled on the counter near the microwave near a loaf of Wonder Bread. Like it was no big deal to leave a loaded handgun in the kitchen. Like it was his normal.

"Why do you have another gun," I asked?

"It's small?" he chuckles.

"Is that for your ankle?" I've seen enough cop shows to know that a gun on the ankle is always handy when fighting crime. You can never be too careful, I think.

"No. It's easy to conceal. I don't use it on the job. I have my Glock 17 for that," he says.

His duty-bound preparedness paired with cautionary tales from our father resonate with me as I watch the prime-time family-centered police drama *Blue Bloods* (Green and Burgess, 2010). As familiar as I am with guns, the CBS television show reminds me that policing and

police culture are alien to me- even as they are a part of my family. What is not alien is the casual use of force on *Blue Bloods*. The drama typically shows a uniformed officer drawing a weapon on a threatening suspect. The gunplay is nauseating. It is hard to digest gunplay for dramatic effect during a decade when lethal police force is applied on supposed threating Black bodies. I know that I am watching the white police family on –screen to make sense of mine. It is unsettling. I watch to see how the familial characters in *Blue Bloods* carry the weight of the gun and policing to reinforce whiteness. In this chapter, I examine two episodes of *Blue Bloods,* "Pilot" and "Black and Blue*"* to address blue rage or affective policing in the post-racial era.

Blue Rage as a Critical Race Concept

Blue rage is a critical race concept that addresses the affective policing of racial resentment and racial solidarity among law enforcement under post-race. It is adapted from white rage, which is defined as an inherently benevolent, transhistorical frame of justice and a reaction to "Black advancement" (Anderson, 2016, p. 3). It is reactionary, recenters, whiteness, recognizes moral superiority, and renders rage as justified. Carol Anderson suggests those performing white rage see crime endemic as to poor Black neighborhoods where minoritized people scapegoat police to avoid responsibility for social problems (Anderson, 2016, p. 4). Here, anti-blackness is rooted in colorblindness—a discourse that relies on race to market products in contemporary culture at the same time as it rejects racism to emphasize merit (Bonilla-Silva, 2013, p. 2. Gallagher, 2003, p. 25). Blue rage frames racial resentment and racist violence into the formal and informal structures of policing.

Blue Bloods is a popular television show that represents policing as a profession and practice. In its 10 seasons, it has actively constructed a postrace world where police are essential to maintain law and order. It is a racialized vision of a society gone awry. The pilot debuted

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during the Obama presidency, which supposedly solidified a postracial era for white American (Everett, 2012). *Blue Bloods* focuses on the lives of the Reagans—a multigenerational New York police family where dinner table conversations about commonsense policing are colorblind.

Addressing whiteness and colorblindness, Anna Everett contends that post-race reinforces an apparent wish-fulfillment that imagines America as having arrived at some idyllic race, gender, class neutrality in our civil society. In some important ways we have overcome the divisive identity politics of the past, but in more structural and institutional ways, not so much (2012, p. 165). For *Blue Bloods* and the Reagans, the idealized colorblind America is a reality.

Relying on the profession of the police, the investment in law and order, and the discourse of colorblindness under post-race, *Blue Bloods* is shielded from criticism about racism and extrajudicial violence. The show emphasizes colorblindness under "blue." The Reagans are not racist. Their commitment to law and order, to law enforcement binds them as honorable arbiters of the blue. Blue rage covers racialized violence (justified by the blue uniform) and racial difference (equalized by the blue uniform). Blue becomes the color by which racial violence is legitimated. In a news article, Laura Hudson (2014) aptly states, "acknowledging systemic racism and asking for police accountability is unnecessary at best and treacherous—or even dangerous—at worst" in *Blue Bloods*. The show presents policing as the only practice standing between safety, justice, and family, and an anarchic crime wave of color in the New York city streets. Arnott pushes Hudson's point further noting that *Blue Bloods* is "very slick PR for white supremacy" (2015). Rather than reflecting white supremacy, I explore how *Blue Bloods* takes up blue rage to recenter whiteness, rely on violence, and remove conversations about structural racism by focusing on the white family.

The white family is foregrounded in *Blue Bloods*. The Reagans deal with explicit accusations of racism of police brutality through the show. Race relations and police violence are both explicit and implicit in the show. For example, the Reagan family name itself is a racial signpost that hearkens to a decade when American whiteness is centered and celebrated. It implies a bygone time of prosperity before Obama. The family name also recalls tough crime polices such as the war on drugs. During the decade of Reaganism, there is a rejection of civil rights gain using the language of post-race and multiculturalism (Squires, 2014). The post-racial narratives reimagine historical inequity and racist violence, relying on a "kind of racial amnesia" (Squires, 2014, p. 190). Blue rage finds its force in the colorblind framing of law and order. And *Blue Bloods* presents the popular representation of blue rage.

In addition to the auspicious Reagan name conjuring racist law and order rhetoric, *Blue Bloods'* casting of Tom Selleck as the Reagan family patriarch offers a televisual representation of tough masculinity. Selleck, a small screen icon notable for his stolid delivery and dominating mustache, is a referential nod to his early career work in *Magnum P.I.* (1980). In *Magnum P.I.,* Selleck's informal policing practices offered a seductive, independent and self-reliant vision of masculinity. Forty years later, in *Blue Bloods,* Selleck's Frank Reagan rescripts this masculine performance to become the literal figure head of policing. As chief of police, and the patriarch of a police family, Tom Selleck reprises his career and revitalizes a mythological masculinity that is inherently just, self-reliant, and responsible for maintaining the balance between criminality and safety.

Analysis: *Blue Bloods*

My analysis of *Blue Bloods* centers on two episodes in the first season, "Pilot," and "Black and Blue." These are "symptomatic texts" functioning as repositories for the cultural

zeitgeist (Walters, 1995, p. 6). Additionally, they usefully demonstrate the central patterns of *Blue Bloods*. My analysis attends to character dialogue and conflict.

Pilot: Policing is Natural and Police Violence is necessary

The pilot episode of the CBS police drama *Blue Bloods* is a glamorous and inspirational swearing in ceremony for new cadets. The fictional NYPD Chief, Frank Reagan (Tom Selleck), speaks with resounding authority. Towering over the podium, Frank is framed from a low angle as he declares: "It is with profound praise and gratitude that I welcome you new police officers...And though the city is on the very cutting edge of technology, nothing replaces your unwavering sense of right and wrong and your eyes and ears on the street." (Green, 2010). The opening dialogue sets the stage for the preferred reading of policing: inherent, an instinctual behavior equated with simple delineations of right and wrong. Throughout its 10 seasons, *Blue Bloods* affirms that violence is necessary and that formal police structures provide the primary social safety net organizing contemporary life.

According to *Blue Bloods,* Policing is not merely part of the job, it is being. That is, the title police officer is not a career, but a genetically passed calling. In Frank Reagan's welcoming words, the cadets become tools of control, and surveillance. *Blue Bloods* imagines policing as an ideological frame that transcends identity and power. Accordingly, police violence is inherently justified; and racist police violence is illegible because policing does not intersect race. Frank continues, "Now, we all wear the same blue uniform, carry the same shield." (Green, 2010). Despite the fact that the police wear a variety of uniforms and carry different badges, Frank's words demonstrate the creation of a coherent police identity. This is the making of blue lives.

In *Blue Bloods,* violence is as a commonplace, necessarily just tool of policing. While the random acts of urban violence in New York are always situated as necessarily anarchic and

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criminal, police violence, blue rage, even when it is obviously criminal, is excused (through anti-crime rhetoric) or determined to be just. In the pilot episode, during the weekly Reagan family dinner, a scene which occurs in every episode of *Blue Bloods*, the family takes turns considering Danny's overt violence. The family alliance is initially split, District Attorney sister, Erin, and ex-lawyer/ new cop Jamie, suggest that Danny went too far. As the dinner becomes contentious, Erin declares, "You're supposed to be enforcing the law, not making it up…the laws are there for a reason...to protect society from a police state." Danny responds, "You only know what you think you know." As the two trade verbal jabs, the pater familias, Frank, chimes in, "Nobody's in favor of torture. The issue is the use of enhanced interrogation, is it ever justified…[what if] you got a ticking bomb...Are his rights more important than innocent victims?" As the argument continues the conversation is reframed personally. Danny prods Erin, "Let me ask you...What if it would've been [your daughter]? She had 24 hours left, what would you want me to do...Some guy snatches her, I got a hold of him and he won't talk?" Even the newly minted officer Jamie chimes in, "It's true, I can say whatever I want, but I don't know what I would've done in his position." The Reagans' verbal sparring match affirms *Blue Bloods'* commitment to upholding policing. Like the aforementioned progressive questioning from journalists, critical considerations of violence exist within the world of *Blue Bloods*, but these questions are easily compartmentalized and shown to be without value or significance.

In *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (1978), Stuart Hall and others clarify the relationship between media constructions and the racial logic of law and order. To maintain social control, a crisis of crime must first be constructed. For Hall, this crisis finds its footing a particular "articulator of the crisis…its ideological conductor" (p. viii, 1978). Through *Blue Bloods* racial resentment and anti-police backlash are presented as the crisis in

need of control. But, as Hall further notes, this supposed crisis "functions as a mechanism for the construction of an authoritarian consensus, a conservative backlash" (p. viii, 1978). Through this backlash, daily references to instances of crimes carry the weight of social force. For Hall, the life of a particular perceived social ill makes "a certain kind of social knowledge widely available… it also ma[kes] a certain kind of response thoroughly predictable" (Hall, p. 28, 1978). *Blue Bloods* stages the need and desire "set [society] right" through violent, extrajudicial force (Hall, p. 323, 1978). This social reorganization uses policing as the means to "to move swiftly…charge or hold without charge…to keep society on the straight and narrow" (Hall, p. 323, 1978).

The pilot episode is an instructive early operationalization of blue rage. After finding the man responsible for kidnapping a child, detective Danny Reagan, played by Donnie Wahlberg, struggles to get a confession from the abductor and locate the girl. Despite his partner's admonition, Danny attempts to drown the abductor; this torture successfully forces a confession leading to the safe return of the missing child. This blue rage is not surprising, but rather highlights the ways that policing encompasses "preventive mechanisms and institutions for ensuring the security of private property within public order, including legal uses of and narrative justifications for coercive force" (Singh, 2017, p. 38-39).

Any narrative conflicts involving moral dilemmas of the police are always eschewed, and in the pilot episode of the series, directly after a new Reagan, Jamie, is sworn in as an officer, police chief Frank is questioned by accusatory journalists. During a press conference announcing the search for a missing girl, Frank is asked if the NYPD has been intentionally devoting less financial resources to the investigation because the child is Latina. Stoically, Frank rejects this question as journalistic grandstanding and race baiting. Frank is pressed further when a journalist

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asks, "what is your response to polls that show an endemic lack of faith in police by the Latino community and a slow and steady rise in crime there?" As the journalist extends her microphone, the frame zooms in on Frank's scowling face. Obviously upset by the question, he declares, "I don't respond to polls." This early exchange demonstrates the ways that the plot of *Blue Bloods* introduces discussions of race; but, it does so by vehemently rejecting racism as a serious social issue. Race is always shown to be brought up without merit. According to the world of *Blue Bloods*, race seems to only exist in as far as it is conveniently deployed to divide by nefarious citizens.

    Blue Bloods reinforces color-blindness through policing which is always depicted as a common sense, trans-historically just practice. Through *Blue Bloods* "The color-blind…perspective holds that…institutional racism and discrimination have been replaced by equal opportunity…race as a system which confers privileges and shapes life chances is viewed as an atavistic and inaccurate accounting of U.S. race relations" (Gallagher, 2003. p. 23). This color-blind framing reinforces blue rage, which identifies bodies of color as universally suspect and in need of control.

Black and Blue: Blue Rage and Black Criminality

    Racial violence is articulated through Black criminality and white rage in the episode "Black and Blue." Therein, Frank Reagan has to thwart a race riot after two police officers are pushed down a flight of stairs by Black henchmen protecting a Black church. Policing relies on racializing which links criminality and prejudicial interpretations of group propensities and reifies sanctioned violence. Accordingly, "policing makes race and race has defined the objects of police at the point where relations of force take primacy" (Singh, 2017, pg. 35). This discrimination necessitates the use of violent force as corrective panacea. Of course, this

racialization is not questioned as a white supremacist hegemonic force. Lyndsey Beutin (2017)

terms this racialized police logic as "Racialization as a way of seeing;" this framework links

"slave patrols as an important origin of American policing, 19th century criminology as

an...authenticator ...and indexical representations of truth, and the cultural and institutional

processes of the naturalization of the criminality of blackness" (2017, p. 6). This racializing,

which tethers bodies of color to criminality and suspicion, is valorized in the constant violent

machinations of the Reagans. Wendy Chun's "Race and/as Technology; or, How to Do Things to

Race" expands this reading of race, conceptualizing as a technology "shift[ing] the focus from

the *what* of race to the *how* of race, from *knowing* race to *doing* race" (p. 8, 2009). This shift is a

significant reframing that clarifies the ways the policing narratives do the work of race making.

The racist world of *Blue Bloods* is not subtle; criminality is racialized as a unique

problem for communities of color. The linkage between Black criminality and white rage is

vividly constructed in the episode "Black and Blue." This episode is notable for the ways that it

represents blue rage. Shielded by both postrace discourse and police as a profession, police

officers exerting rage avoid scrutiny and continue reinforce cultural norms of law and order.

In addition to Black criminality the "Black and Blue" represents blue rage through post-

trace. Similar to his justified torture in "Pilot," Danny Reagan is shown to be necessarily violent.

His blue rage is uncontained, verging on vigilantism. This vision of blue rage manifests during

the Reagan family dinner when Danny clarifies, "I am an equal opportunity cop. I don't care

what color you are, what race you are. You break the law, I'm breaking your head." This utopic

colorblindness advances the inherent, non-culturally biased, frame of policing as a naturally just.

The family doesn't balk at this rage. Their reaction demonstrates that this is the normal,

acceptable behavior of police officers.

For the Reagans, Danny's violence does not even register as necessarily out of control. Danny's violence is a hallmark of his policing practice. As a counterpart to Danny's externalized, overt rage, Frank Reagan represents the stoic, controlled vision of white rage that controls systems of power and works through communities discreetly. During the aforementioned dinner scene, Frank adds his own postracial proclamation: "Remember this: white, black, blue, purple we're all the same color on the inside. And in every gospel sermon and prayer in every church, temple and mosque, it all boils down to one sentence: go out of here and treat everybody you meet a little better." Frank extends his son's colorblind violence, clarifying that justice and policing are post-racial. Accordingly, policing, according to *Blue Bloods* erases racial hegemony while highlighting difference (Squires, 2014 and Joseph, 2013). It is not that racial difference is absent. Recall Frank's postracial monologue from the pilot episode. Instead, postrace embraces differences while rejecting the uneven power that defines it.

These two constructions of blue rage converge in the overarching plot of "Black and Blue." This episode centers around a Black church, who is working to support community growth. The conflict of the episode focuses on two police officers who are assaulted by the church's henchmen. In the ensuing scenes, the city is poised on the precipice of a race riot, with Reverend Darnell Potter criticizing police overreach and injustice, and police chief Reagan accusing the Reverend of grandstanding and strategically deploying "the race card." As the police force surrounds the church, Reverend Potter emerges and preaches wildly in view of television cameras and press reporters. From a distance, Frank Reagan stares, poised and calm. Even the mayor, another Black character, appears and aligns with Potter; he also suggests that the police force be removed. But, Frank stands resolute, stating "sending a message to the crowd that assaulting a police officer doesn't have consequences that would be a mistake." Frank's

disdain for Reverend Potter seems out of place for much of the episode as Reverend Potter is only tangentially depicted. Frank makes his disdain clear, declaring that "[Potter] comes from a long tradition of polemicists who serve as lightning rods to simply move the cause forward. At the end of the day, his vision of the Promised Land is his own show on MSNBC." This racist reinterpretation of "promised land" rhetoric is an easy nod to postrace which see racism as a thing of the past. Here, Frank's white rage is poised and controlled. Ultimately, *Blue Bloods* does very little to nuance this rage. In fact, as "Black and Blue" continues, Frank's mistrust of Reverend Potter is legitimized. Reverend Potter turns out to be the charlatan that Frank believed. Potter's church, which supports the affluence of the Black community and is moving drug dealers out of the neighborhood is actually a front for the reverend to grow in popularity. So, as Danny discovers, the race riot was a cynically calculated move by Potter so that he can grow in political popularity. For *Blue Bloods,* racial redress is read as politically calculating and useless.

Through the downfall of Reverend Potter, *Blue Bloods* demonizes Black success and constructs a cynical view of Black anger and racism. The show revels in the idea that Reverend Potter is a criminal. Frank Reagan is shown to have been correct the entire time; simply by looking at Reverend Potter, and his "thugs," Frank is able to instinctively read criminality. And, according to *Blue Bloods,* he is accurate. While this is a clearly racist narrative conclusion, the stakes of the episode elevates this racism. Reverend Potter's fall discounts his earlier calls for police accountability and anti-racist policies. For *Blue Bloods*, criminality, when foisted upon bodies of color, demonstrates the ways that through color-blindness, blue rage "insinuates that class and culture…are responsible for social inequality" (Gallagher, 2003, p. 26). Through Blue rage, *Blue Bloods* ultimately renders calls of racism as devoid of merit; accordingly, anti-police rhetoric is attached to supposed "race-baiting" and "playing the race card." These white

supremacist rhetorical moves dodge any reflexive consideration of police brutality and racism. Instead, these frameworks uphold anti-black hierarchies of power and legitimize racist surveillance through police violence.

With this dodge, *Blue Bloods* idealizes policing through colorblindness and common sense. Accordingly, the show offers a clarion call that sees police malfeasance as the work of individual bad actors. These actors are made exceptional; blue offers an inculcating barrier that silences dissent and creates a simple frame for law and order. Criminal justice is the necessary means to maintain the status quo; through law and order, racial domination is normal.

Conclusion

CBS' *Blue Bloods* offers easy narrative endings and sense making regarding police, violence and fragility. Racism, when included in the narrative of the show, is a problem unfairly leveled at police. *Blue Bloods* interpolates white privilege into its post-racial logic. Through its color-blindness, the show fails to recognize the ways that law enforcement privileges whiteness: the "Reagan's exist within a system that is rigged to favor them, and to erase the problems experienced by people who don't look like them" (Hudson, 2014). Through idealized Reagan era histories of American color-blind multiculturalism, *Blue Bloods* provides significant insight into the contemporary challenge of police accountability and reflexivity. Blue rage renders all calls for redress as inaccurate at best, and criminally malicious at worst. Accordingly, Blue rage imagines police violence and racist violence as the necessary and common sense means for combatting an increasingly dangerous, anti-blue world.

As the Reagans sit down to eat, I can't help but feel jealous. Years of physical and emotional distance has made family dinners impossible. In spite of my critique, I feel a nostalgia for the sanguine vision of "togetherness."

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I see myself in Jamie Reagan's sheepish looks and dower glances. I watch his sullen face, staring into his plate of food, then looking up to his family for validation, and I project myself into the Reagan family dinner. He asks too many questions. Pushes against norms. The words echo painful and I'm taken back in time, talking to my family.

"You just don't get it, man."

"You can't get it. They hate us 'cause we're blue."

I nod. Maybe they are right. I don't get it. Maybe that's just a part of their lives. Even now I wonder how many times I've justified violence, reacted to criticism, recentered whiteness. Blue rage renders violence legitimate in a police family.

"You need to do a ride along, man."

"Then you'll get it."

CHAPTER THREE:

"SOME WHITE GUY WITH A HOODIE": *DEATH WISH* AND BLUE RAGE

In the opening scene of *Death Wish* (2018), an aerial shot highlights the Chicago skyline. As the scene progresses, the camera slowly zooms in on the cityscape. Simultaneously, a series of voices become audible with the first describing a scene of violence, proclaiming another person shot dead in the city. As the dialogue continues, other voices take over the soundscape, describing additional shootings, stabbings, and random assaults. The voices create a cacophonous soundtrack of unrest and discord as they intensify. From here, the frame dissolves into a police car where an officer recklessly drives his partner, bleeding from a gunshot wound, to a hospital. This opening establishes a central tenant: Chicago is a city out of control, chaos reigns and the police are useless.

The original *Death Wish* novel (1972) and film (1974) are exemplary texts of conservative crime ideology (Lenz, 2005, p. 125). Law enforcement is useless and unable to offer just recourse for white protagonists. Law enforcement are feckless in the face of uncontrollable crime for white protagonists. They recognize real justice is waged by willing white men who can cleanse the city of brown and Black crime (Lenz, 2005, p. 132). Instead, Roth's *Death Wish* rejects social controls like the police, and, imagines the ways in which white rage is made necessary in world of social surveillance "where people self-monitor…to maintain a desired balance between publicity and seclusion" (Marwick, 2012, p. 379). That is, the failure

of surveillance and social controls enable (and encourage) the protagonist towards his mission of personal violence which is always in danger of being filmed by cellphone cameras and uploaded to Youtube or caught on CCTV. The film's use of violence and surveillance technologies affirms a neoconservative vision of racialized violence as the consequence of failed social controls. *Death Wish* (2018) uses an imagined crime ridden Chicago as an analog for a contemporary society in need of policing by good guys with guns.

Like *Blue Blood's'* (2010) reanimation of masculinity through Selleck's stolid, mustached Frank Reagan, *Death Wish* (2018) reanimates violent masculinity through Bruce Willis' 1980 hard body action film bonafides. The hardbody action film consists of those…Hollywood action films made chiefly between the 1980s and 1990s that feature a central male hero as the lone protagonist charged with ""saving the day"" (Ayers, 2008, p. 42). As an iconographic action star, Bruce Willis is well known for his roles in the *Die Hard* film series. In his 2008 "Bodies, Bullets, and Bad Guys," Drew Ayers delineates *Die Hard* as a subgenre of the hard body action film where Willis' masculinity is imagined as a repressed hardbody "tamed by society who rediscovers his masculinity and fights against the evil forces of the film (p. 48). Like Frank Reagan for Tom Selleck in *Blue Bloods,* Paul Kersey reprises Willis' masculine mythos through violent policing. Where Willis once stood as a stalwart representative of justi policing, in *Death Wish* (2018), Willis has turned vigilante. This iconographic shift, from formal police officer thwarting terrorists, to an extralegal, personal vigilante offers an important turn for masculine mythos. Through Willis, *Death Wish* (2018) articulates a model of crime control that is enacted through personal, vigilant violence**.**

Blue Rage and *Death Wish*

  Death Wish (2018) offers a straightforward narrative conceit. Wealthy, white Dr. Paul Kersey is a family man who is played the steely Bruce Willis. Kersey spends his time as a surgeon caring for gunshot victims in the emergency room and as a doting father watching his teenage daughter playing soccer. His home is invaded by a valet who steals his address from his car's navigation system. This domestic disruption leaves Kersey's wife dead and daughter comatose. In retribution, Kersey vows to kill the space invaders. This crime narrative is a revenge fantasy for an armed vigilante who can singlehandedly take down criminal networks and eliminate scores of criminals.

  The new film adaptation of *Death Wish* (2018) recasts earlier racial unrest and violence. It offers a cogent stage from which to consider white rage and policing as an informal regulatory practice in the Trumpian era. Through *Death Wish's* plot, I explore policing as a manifold practice of governance. Revenge narratives like *Death Wish* offer a compelling site from which to explore the informal governing practices of policing. This chapter extends the ways that policing might be evaluated and analyzed not only as a social apparatus, but as a cultural practice that is defined and redefined.

  Blue rage is white violence given political and social force. I argue that blue rage is a critical race concept that addresses the affective policing of racial resentment and racial solidarity among law enforcement. It is the enactment of racial boundaries that mark spaces and bodies as alien, unwelcome. *Death Wish* reinforces a vision in which whiteness and violence are redemptive and justified through violence, *Death Wish* reinforces post-racial discourse and colorblind racism in its depictions of informal violence, which is presented as panacea for the crime ridden streets of Chicago.

Death Wish (2018) was panned by critics who declared the film as "uncompromisingly

smug and awful" (Bradshaw, 2018, p. 1). Audiences reacted similarly. The film grossed a

meager $30 million domestically (Bradshaw, 2018, p. 3). In spite of its dismal financial returns

and obvious plot, the remake of *Death Wish* adds an important reflexive framing to the plot of a

family man out for personal justice, which creates tension between the film's depictions of racist

violence and extradiegetic discussions surveillance and crime. *Death Wish* (2018) provides a

cogent sample text illuminating the ways that blue rage animates white violence as effective

policing. *Death Wish* stages racialized violence. Centering race does not make the plot

progressive. Instead, Death *Wish's* moments of diegetic reflection, where character's question

white vigilantism are little more than post-racial dog whistles which assume that having a

conversation about race is *necessarily* racially progressive. Ultimately, the feckless Chicago

Police are content with Kersey's extra judicial violence as officer's declare that he is "doing their

jobs, only faster" (Roth).

> This lax engagement with racist extra judicial vigilantism ignores the ways in
>
> which "white vigilantes…[fight]under a banner of justice endorsed by a System
>
> that… both subtly and overtly, protect[s] and enforce[s] their actions and sanction
>
> punishments" against communities of color (Sloop and Ono, 1999, p. 50).

Death Wish (2018) uses white vigilantism as a base to frame a conservative screed against gun

safety and a valorization of stand your ground politics, ultimately suggesting that a good white

guy with a gun is the necessary means to defending and avenging crimes.

Colorblindness and post-racial white saviorism animate my analysis. According to

colorblind logics, race is no longer a necessary consideration as society has been rendered even

and therefore "Blacks have as good a chance as whites" in securing social mobility and cultural

progress" (Gallagher, 2003, p. 23). This embrace of post-race negates historical systemic modes

of oppression and proclaims that racial inequity "is no longer the central factor determining…life

chances" (Bonilla-Silva, 2013, p. 1). *Death Wish* continually embraces this post-racial logic

through the voice of the actual Chicago radio shock jock DJ Mancow (who plays himself) who

repeats "This isn't about race, it's about justice" (Roth). Mancow's rejection of identity markers

as significant social forces foreground the significance of denial as the primary function of post-

racial colorblindness (Holling, 2011, p. 8). While colorblindness in a white vigilante film is not

shocking, *Death Wish* emphasizes the ways that whiteness renders the violent hero transparent

and able to move between criminal actions and vigilante heroics because his identity is

"overwhelmingly present and... absent" (Dyer, 1997, p.39).

Analysis

  Death Wish tries to suggest that Kersey's violence is anti-crime and not racially

motivated. But the film goes out of its way to depict anti-black violence and reinforces the racist

crime control and law and order rhetoric through blue rage. My analysis highlights three

concepts in *Death Wish*. I highlight The (white) Family Man, The Grim Reaper, and the Ice

Cream Man as important aspects of the films that demonstrate that blue rage is post-racial

violence enacted by white men who are motivated by a supposed benevolent belief in law and

order and compelled to police people and places perceived to threaten whiteness.

The (White) Family Man

  In *Death Wish,* Kersey is explicitly interested in personal retribution, avenging his wife

and daughter; a mission that Kersey says "makes him a man" (Roth). Despite personal

proclamations, Kersey's violence is not retributive and extends well beyond the boundaries of his

personal anger. Kersey believes policing is a personal call to restore order- an order disrupted by

racial outsiders. These racial outsiders threaten the white family and community regardless of their (dis)connection from his familial trauma.

As he tries to work through his trauma, Kersey goes to therapy. Through a scene with a therapist, and moments where Kersey unsuccessfully tries to legally purchase a firearm, *Death Wish* vocalizes pro-gun, racist imagery which A.A. Dowd (2018) described as "right-wing violence porn" (Dowd, p. 2). The racist violence of *Death Wish* offers balm for Kersey's world—one where the white protagonist's home and community are at risk. The racist underpinnings are explicitly noted in the film when Kersey sits in his therapist's office. With an austere look, Kersey's white, female therapist asks how he has been dealing with the loss of his wife. Kersey smiles and quietly chuckles as he reflects on his recent exploits which include murdering multiple people that have nothing to do with the murder of his wife. As Kersey looks up, the therapist gives him a clean bill of health declaring, "well, whatever it is that you've been doing, keep doing it" (Roth). This declaration, that vengeful murder is somehow a curative for personal trauma is framed in the film as an ironic wink to the audience. We are invited to see Kersey's retribution as just and necessary. The police are slow and inadequate. Society is crumbling and personal violence is the only solution. This scene highlights the ways that the racialized violence of the film is just and good. Kersey's revenge is not simply visited upon the three intruders who assaulted his family. Instead, he kills random petty criminals, involves himself in gang conflicts, and ultimately becomes a white interloper. Through the therapists situationally ironic endorsement, Kersey's racist violence is framed as inherently just and ironically laughable. This advances the racist position that neighborhoods of color, and bodies of color, need violent regulation. Kersey's blue rage is justified affective racial animus. Disrupting the supposed chaos of a Black world, Kersey stands as a bolster of the thin blue line.

Blue rage is not without obstacles in *Death Wish. Technological* surveillance (closed

circuit televisions highlights the ways that surveillance technologies are an obstacle that must be

avoided on Kersey's mission of revenge. However, the film foregrounds Kersey's transparent

whiteness as the primary means by which this usurpation of surveillance is possible. After

interrupting an assault in progress, Kersey becomes interested in purchasing a firearm from the

Jolly Roger gun store. Inside, Kersey asks about the process of purchasing a weapon and is given

a litany of bureaucratic paperwork which includes state and local applications, waiting periods,

and a gun safety course. Here, the gun store is presented as a hilariously antiquated path to

violence. Because the film invests so much effort setting up the ways that the streets are filled

with guns, going through the process of filling out paperwork is obsolete. During Kersey's

inquiry, the camera shows him watching himself on the store's surveillance camera. He sees that

he is being watched and recorded. Furthermore, the store clerk notes that whatever bullets he

buys "will be traced back to him" (Roth).

This scene foregrounds the ways that Kersey's "inconspicuousness" in the view of

surveillant technologies "is prized above all else" (Muller, 2008, p. 135). Rachel Hall's reading

of transparency chic, which privileges the mobility of certain (white) bodies, offers a profound

understanding of Kersey's ability to move in an out of crime and violence because of his

whiteness (2015, p. 27). Though Kersey refuses the legal purchase, this scene begins an

important narrative turn in the film which finds Kersey able to engage in both legal and illegal

gun violence. This initial engagement with transparency aesthetics, the ability to exist without

scrutiny, is referenced in the final scene of the film as Kersey defends his home against the men

who wronged his family (Hall, 2015, p. 9). But, in the end of the film, Kersey fights with legally

purchased firearms. As such, the police explain that Kersey was "just defending [his] home,

legally" (Roth). However, every violent act before the final scene shows Kersey committing

illegal violence, with firearms stolen from the people he kills. This easy vacillation between hero

and criminal is even noted by the police who proclaim that they are "satisfied" knowing that

Kersey has been killing people inside and outside of legal parameters. It is because of Kersey's

whiteness that he is able to be read as inherently transparent and able to be both criminal,

operating outside of legal boundaries, and justified (he is the arbiter of justice).

The Grim Reaper

The most obvious moment of blue rage in *Death Wish* occurs when Kersey breaks from

his mission of personal retribution and moves into the community. After stealing a handgun from

a dead Black patient in surgery, Kersey happens upon and foils a carjacking, brutally executing

the white criminals. Following this initial act of vigilante violence Kersey is emboldened. And,

as his violence spreads into the community, so too does his fame. After cellphone video of

Kersey interrupting and killing carjackers goes viral, media conversations serve as voice-over

narrations for the film. That is, conversations between shock-jock radio personalities frame the

scenes of violence. DJ Mancow and Sway Calloway introduce and discuss the popular opinion of

Chicagoans musing on the violence of Kersey, known colloquially as The Grim Reaper.

Vacillating between the two real Chicagoan DJs and their respective, opposing, discussions of

racial violence demonstrate the ways that Roth imagines *Death Wish* (2018) as presenting a

(complex) conversation about race and gun violence (Sharf, 2018, p. 3). But, these supposedly

complex conversations are racially compartmentalized with Black Sway Calloway (a real-life

supporter of gun-control and anti-violence protests) skeptically questioning the Grim Reaper

while the white DJ Mancow embraces white violence as a righteous force. Creating a space for a

dichotomous discussion of racist violence embraces post-race which upholds racial violence as

situational; or, these violent, racialized, moments are symptoms of "individual pathology rather

than an oppressive system" (Projansky and Ono, 1999, p. 150).Individuals are presented as exceptional, bad actors betraying a supposed morality. Blue rage highlights these exceptions as the rule—the arbiters of systemic violence and endemic racial animus. Again, blue presents a barrier of justice that amplifies law and order to quell dissent.

Obscured by his transparent whiteness, Kersey's violent machinations are rendered invisible to social structures and presented as acceptable. The film further reinforces post-racial fantasies through its commitment to constructing Kersey as a white vigilante. Like the characters from *Blue Bloods* in Chapter 2, Kersey acts on the same premises of law and order and justice. Both are "crime fighters" but they work on different sides of the blue line. Kersey demonstrates that official and unofficial policing are necessary. Kersey avenges his wife's death and the symbolic death of his (white) home. The white savior film offers a useful frame for contextualizing Kersey's vigilantism. It is a popular genre in which "a white messianic character saves a lower-or working-class, usually urban or isolated, nonwhite character from a sad fate (Hughey, 2014, p. 1). While *Death Wish* is most indebted to the revenge fantasy genre, Kersey's status as white savior is unquestionable. Throughout the film, Kersey, the white vigilante,

> Go[es] the extra-mile to help people of color who cannot or will not help
> themselves, thus establishing social order, teaching non-Whites right from wrong,
> and framing the White Savior as the only character able to recognize these moral
> distinctions and act upon them (Hughey 761).

It is not merely that the white savior, and Kersey, appear apropos of nothing; For the white savior to materialize, he or she must do so not for the reason of saving a sole person of color. Rather, the chosen person…a darker hue must be contextualized within an overall culture of nonwhite poverty, dysfunction, and pathology from which there is no self-salvation" (Hughey,

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2014, p. 168). By invoking the white savior film, I call attention to the ways that Kersey's blue

rage is tethered to the ways he imagines Chicago as in need of violent force of justice that only

he can provide. A. As a white vigilante film, *Death Wish* helps to repair the myth of White

supremacy and paternalism in an unsettled and racially charged time" (Hughey, 2012, p. 761).

Through its moralizing narrative, *Death Wish* is clearly less about discussing gun culture and

violence than reaffirming white supremacy under the guise of colorblind and post-racial

violence.

The Ice Cream Man

Despite Eli Roth's assertion that the film is about familial justice and righteous violence,

Death Wish's (2018) post-racial ideology is explicit in the scenes when Kersey meets a patient

named Tyler and decides to sidestep his own personal mission of vengeance in favor of policing

the Black community (Schwartz, 2018. P. 3). Hospitalized for a gunshot wound to the leg,

thirteen-year-old Tyler explains his injury to Kersey, muttering "it was the ice cream man"

(Roth). Horrified, Kersey probes Tyler who explains that the Ice Cream Man "says you are not

allowed to walk to school unless you work for him [selling drugs]" (Roth). Close up shots

highlight Kersey's disturbed facial contortions as he develops an interest in thwarting future

violence from the Ice Cream Man. This moment of action for Kersey disrupts *Death Wish's*

superficial revenge plot. While the Ice Cream Man is an obvious villain, he poses no threat to

Kersey. And he has no connection to Kersey's family. As a wealthy white doctor, he is not at

danger of being forced to sell drugs by a neighborhood bully. But, because he recognizes Tyler's

neighborhood, listed on hospital paperwork, as dangerous, Kersey is emboldened to invade and

police the neighborhood. Tyler's terror and inability to live a safe life creates the space for

Kersey to move outside of personal revenge. This post-racial framework is particularly

significant in the context of the film as it "eschews any blatant message of White supremacy

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while...rely[ing] on an implicit message of White paternalism…[saving]the dysfunctional racial others" (Hughey, 2012, p. 761). Through white saviorism, Kersey can move between criminality and heroism; he operates outside the system but is rendered just through his righteous blue rage. Kersey can operate outside of formal policing structures; but he upholds the blue line dividing justice and anarchic criminality. For *Death Wish,* Kersey's violence is a necessary (additional) policing force.

Immediately following Tyler's discussion, Kersey is shown walking into a concrete walled housing project. The scene demonstrates that Tyler's dangerous neighborhood is Black. Debris and people linger on the streets. As the camera zooms out, Kersey is shown from behind, his identity obscured by a hoodie. Loud rap music creates the extradiegetic soundtrack to Kersey's entry, but as the camera zooms out fully, the sound becomes part of the diegetic world of the film. Both the music, and the use of the hoodie are striking as markers of *Death Wish's* engagement with race. Ultimately, the film reduces its racial imagination to "cultural style [which] may be expressed and consumed" by majority culture (Gallagher, 2003, p. 23). In the proceeding wide shot, the neighborhood appears with a variety of stereotypical characters populating the street; men in white tank tops sitting on porches surrounded by lowered cars; these controlling images of dangerous Blackness, which associate bodies of color with criminality, shiftlessness, and laziness foreground Kersey's mission as one of invading and offering an intervention into this spoiled cultural environment (Collins, 1997, p. 144). This white savior imagery saturates the film "enabling an interpretation of non-white characters and culture as essentially broken, marginalized, and pathological, while whites can emerge as messianic characters that easily fix the nonwhite pariah with" (Hughey, 2014, p. 2).

In the next frame the Ice Cream Man, an austere Black man wearing a tank top and brightly colored sneakers, sits on his front porch while two henchmen stand nearby. A small boy runs up and delivers money to one of the henchmen, which reminds the viewer of Tyler's story; the new child is scolded, and it becomes clear that Tyler's shooting was not an outlier or collateral damage but the rule (Bernasconi, 2014, p. 147). *Death Wish* reestablishes that The Ice Cream Man is using violence against other children and his larger community and therefore is presented as a threat to justice, mobility and safety. This is a foundational white savior rendering which perpetuates "Western democratic…tendenc[ies] to embrace a supposed postracial approach to race in terms of law, policy" and crime (Hughey, 2014, p.165). *Death Wish* imagines justice as a straight line. Race, identity, and structural inequality do not factor into Kersey's mission.

As the scene continues, Kersey moves into frame. Approaching the Ice Cream Man, Kersey asks, "are you the Ice Cream Man.". Immediately, the ice cream man pulls out a gold-plated handgun and shouts, "who the fuck are you.". Kersey responds, "the last customer you'll ever have" and swiftly pulls his gun from his waist and kills the Ice Cream Man.. Judge and executioner, Kersey has enacted righteous blue violence, and the viewer is invited to imagine Tyler as free from the violence of the neighborhood villain. But the racial imagination of *Death Wish* becomes clear as the scene continues. Seconds after the shooting, the Ice Cream Man slumping in his chair, his nearby henchmen run towards the cart where the Ice Cream Man stored his money and drugs. As they run, the frame zooms and focuses on a barrage of hands; these hands Black and Brown violently fumble and reach over one another suggesting that the neighborhood locals all rushed in to the steal from the now dead Ice Cream Man. This final shot of greedy hands maintains the racist imagination of *Death Wish*. It is not simply enough to

construct Kersey as a white savior; in the end of this scene, *Death Wish* suggests that Tyler's housing project is rife with criminality.

The Ice Cream Man's death does not bring rejoicing or calm. Instead, the death creates a power vacuum for other, always dangerous, people of color. The inferential racism of this scene, which highlights "naturalized representations of events and situations in relation to… racist premises and propositions… as a set of unquestioned assumptions" offers little in the way of narrative development (Hall, 2002, p. 20). Instead, the hands fighting for control of the Ice Cream Man's money and drugs emphasizes the supposedly perpetual violence and absence of decency plaguing Black neighborhoods. As such, this cycle draws attention away from "how whiteness systemically fuels racism" and instead imagines that white violence is a curative to Black violence (Griffin, 2015, p. 160).

This murder is well outside of Kersey's familial retribution and the racism of this scene is even invoked by DJ Sway Calloway, ever the anti-racist ally, as he describes how the Grim Reaper has "gotten so bold;" and angrily asks his radio listeners "you got a white guy in a hoodie killing Black people and you don't have a problem with that" (Roth)? Here again, Kersey as the white savior is allowed to "intrude upon various domestic areas in so long as those settings are a priori understood as dangerous and backward– like northern urban ghettos;" these spaces "serve as potent stomping grounds upon which the White Savior may enact his messianic missions" (Hughey, 2012, p. 762). Outside of the bounds of familial or personal retribution, and influenced by Tyler's traumatic loss of innocence, blue rage emboldens Kersey to kill.

As formal police structures are introduced into the film, Kersey's whiteness takes the fore as a cloak inculcating him from detection and scrutiny. Following Kersey's violence, detectives press locals for the identity of the killer; a local man can only respond, "he was some white guy

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with a hoody" (Roth). This vague reference, which is repeated in other moments of police inquiry in the film, clarifies the ways that Kersey can maintain his transparency. Here, the "the aesthetics of transparency," where Kersey is allowed to disappear through the adornment of a hoodie, allows "white citizens" to appear "fundamentally different from and somehow more innocent than the ordinary [others]" (Hall, 2015, p. 9). Kersey's adorning of the hoodie during his crimes is particularly salient as the film often frames the hoodie as the object that ushers in Kersey's violent actions. As such, the hoodie becomes symbolic of criminal anonymity. Here, *Death Wish* hearkens to the murder of Trayvon Martin and the symbolic resonance of the hoodie as an "animate thing [that] demonstrates some of the operations of power that deem some bodies criminally other" (Nguyen, 2015, p. 792). However, *Death Wish*'s does not invoke the hoodie to suggest empathy with the murder of Martin or the ways that attire can be read as inherently criminalizing; instead, Kersey's transparency is maintained by the hoodie and he is therefore affirmed as being able to move inside and outside of legal and illegal violence without punishment. It is because of his whiteness, which animates his transparency to systems of surveillance, that Kersey is mobilized as a vigilante.

Furthermore, during the investigation of the Ice Cream man shooting detectives Raines and Jackson walk through the crime scene, and, instead of professional respect, white officer Detective Raines (played with smiling glee by Dean Norris) responds that the murdered Ice Cream Man was "a real Community leader" (Roth). The Ice Cream Man, though criminal and dealing drugs, is prey to the racist imagination of *Death Wish* which forgets that the victims of racism to do not need to lead lives of unblemished innocence to be worthy of defense. Racism finds them "guilty of being Black" (Younge, 2013, p. 2). Kersey violently invades a foreign space because that space, and the supposed nefarious characters within it, are presented as

inherently in need of policing and control. As the detectives wonder what to do about the Grim Reaper, Raines and Jackson look into the nearby crowd standing behind the police tape. In a gap between the onlookers, Raines stares and the camera focuses on two Black children playing on a discarded couch. One child leans back against the couch while the other stands in front. The camera lingers as the child raises his hand in the shape of a gun and continuously shouts "bang, bang, bang" (Roth). Here, we are shown that the children pantomime the death they have just witnessed. In this moment, *Death Wish* attempts to justify Kersey's violence. Instead of a one-off murder, the Ice Cream Man's violence is made endemic of impoverished, Black life. The gaze of detectives Raines and Jackson suggest that they realize that the children are not simply *playing* at recreating violence, they seem to be preparing for the future. This pessimistic and racist reading of the death reenactment is foreshadowed by detective Raines earlier in the film who bemoans the endless growth of "asshole on asshole violence, bangers who retaliate" and the community who "refuses to talk" (Roth).

Conclusion

With blue rage, I am not simply calling attention to formal police violence. Instead, using *Death Wish* as case study, it is important to recognize the informal governing practices and affective rage that constructs policing as a racial project. Racist characters are part of the tapestry of *Death Wish's* racial imagination. Kersey's racist violence is fueled by blue rage; Kersey's status as "The Grim Reaper" reinforces the law-and-order rhetoric that imagines metropolitan life as dangerously marred by bodies of color. Ultimately, *Death Wish* makes its racist positioning clear: the police detectives' horror of watching children pantomime a reenactment of the Ice Cream Man's death does not end the scene. Instead, the final commentary is provided by DJ Mancow's supposedly common-sense reaction to the crime. He valorizes Kersey's violence and declares, "the Grim Reaper isn't part of the problem, the Ice Cream Man, the drug dealer, is

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part of the problem, and we need people like [the Grim Reaper]to keep the monsters at bay"
(Roth). This final comment, offered as public opinion, absolves Kersey's racist violence and
imagines that a white savior violating communities of color is *necessarily* justified and righteous.
Death Wish's racial imagination obscures historical marginalization in favor of localized
discussions of racial unrest. This ideological dodge affirms the invisibility of white supremacist
logics that stratify social inequities and drive Kersey's violence. Furthermore, *Death Wish's*
endorsement of white violence as a moralizing force allows Kersey to move outside of familial
revenge and into unfamiliar territories to police the racialized dregs of society. Here, Kersey
deploys blue rage against "communities of color with the explicit mission to maintain order
through violence" (Hughey, 2012, p. 762).

As a critical race concept, blue rage marks the policing of racial resentment. This concept
points to the histories and practices of policing that identity and categorize certain bodies and
spaces as needing heightened scrutiny and suspicion. But affective rage is not simply the
purview of formal social structures. Instead, the everyman is free to assume the work of policing
as long as he takes on the mantle of the blue. This supposed law enforcement solidarity sees law
an order and justice as sessile, transhistorical truths that transcend culture. But, through blue
rage, law and order, and the figures who would violently enact it without question can be
challenged.

CHAPTER FOUR:

WHITE ALIENATION AND ANTI-RACIST ALLYSHIP AFTER TRAYVON MARTIN

On the television, another police shooting. One victim, a cop. In the darkness, I wait to see the dead. The cop is a 20-year veteran, and I am relieved. He is not one of my relatives working in law enforcement. I turn off the television and think of my cop siblings; their voices resound in my head.

"You don't understand the danger involved. Cops put their lives on the line every day. You don't get it, when you wear a badge, it's a target; it follows you."

I watched Trayvon Martin's murder unfold on the television too. Days later I started arguing with my family about the racist murder of the teen.

"Zimmerman murdered the kid. He's a racist rent a cop."

My family disagreed, tagging in and out of the conversation. "Well, he [Zimmerman] was standing his ground. And, if he [Martin] wasn't doing anything suspicious, why was he fighting? Why was he walking around in the dark, dressed in black? And, what if it was one of us out there? You'd accuse us of murder?*"*

In the specter of an imagined familial death, my critique is untenable. My support of Martin is a fuck you to the police and my blood. My alliance is outside the family. It is impossible to pinpoint the moment that my family tethered itself to law enforcement. It happened

slowly, attending police academy graduations, and celebrating city-wide community policing

commendations.

I hear my brother's voice, quiet, almost a whisper. "You don't get it. We make the

ultimate sacrifice." He invites me on a ride along. "It's the only way you'll get it."

In navigating my whiteness and trying to align myself as an anti-racist ally, I experience

what Charles Gallagher describes as the "schizophrenic dance that whites must do when they

navigate race relations" (2013, p. 35). My antiracist critique of racist policing operates through a

tenuous ambivalence.

This tension informs my narrative; a critique of racist violence is a critique of family. But

familial deference ignores the ways that policing and whiteness are bound. Policing is a practice

that regulates racial bodies, a profession that privileges internal cop codes, and a popular

patterning that justifies rage and legitimates violence. Living in a police family forges identity

through a lens of colorblindness and fragility. To critique this process, I use media analysis of a

popular music text to demonstrate the ways this fragility is popularly sustained and resisted.

Through critical inquiry, the naturalized collusion of whiteness and policing can be highlighted

and disrupted.

This project is a mystory—a personal narrative invested in exploration, discovery, and

analysis. My story grapples with the tropes that define me. It is my act to disrupt and rethink my

familial narrative (Hart et all, 2004). Theorized by Gregory Ulmer, the mystory explores the

nodes of experience that intersect identity and culture (2003, p.10). As a pedagogical tool, the

mystory is invested in exploring the inventive, representational circuits that choreograph the self

(Ulmer, 1989, p. 82).

My racial formation—the process by which racial identities are lived or transformed—situates my position as an anti-racist ally. When my family became subsumed by a cop culture that could render racial justice and family allegiance incompatible, I had to disconnect. My discomfort describes white fragility or the state when a "minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves" (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 54). My indictment of Zimmerman is coded as a criticism of law enforcement. Instead of offering a criticism of racist violence, my critique is read as an unequivocal indictment of whiteness.

A Mediated Vision of Allyship

I am still trying to get the fear my family describes. To empathize with the fear my family described. I wonder if they struggle with my proposition that the police are fallible. On the radio, the local station plays "What it Means" by The Drive by Truckers. I am ready to change it though. I do not like country music and the single acoustic guitar is grating. The vocalist starts and I have nearly given up. But the lyrics shock me. Pulled into a gas station, I turn up the sound. As the final notes resound, I am confused. The song sways in its messaging. I am left without closure. I search for the song on my phone and listen to again. I look up the lyrics and the song repeats. In the gas station, I realize that "What it Means" verbalizes my familial discord. It highlights my grotesque anti-racist allyship, tangled in ambivalence.

The lyrics allude to the murders of Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and the endless cycle of racist policing—"it happened last weekend/And it will happen again next week." The song "What it Means" questions white allegiance to police violence and demonstrates the complexities of anti-racist allyship. Drive by Truckers released the song on their fourteenth album, *American Band,* to show their commitment to progressive politics. For me, the popular song resists white fragility and rejects American colorblind idealism by critiquing racist policing. The singers offer a resistance model— a model that is complex and

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incomplete under postrace. Reflecting on my narrative about anti-racist allyship and racial

ambivalence, "What it Means" describes the ways representations can create different realties

and normalize experiences. In focusing on policing, my dissertation highlights the ways that

"media exposure...has [an impact] on the recruiting, retention, and public relations practices" of

policing (Arntfield, 2013, p. 389)

Policing and Identity

Judith Nicholson's study of Black mobility locates the problems of policing and

surveillance in a nexus of racist ideologies (2016, p. 553). Accordingly, policing becomes an

extension of the desire to control and articulate normative constructions of safety. For Nicholson,

policing "represent[s] the patriarchal state's dominant whiteness…[which] highlights how

intersections of mobility and race in North America are frequently interpreted

through…blackness" (Nicholson, 2016, p. 554). In a state of surveillance, under constant fear of

violence, profiling and racist policing is naturalized and made necessary. This naturalizing racial

project shapes "the ways in which social structures are racially signified and the ways that racial

meanings are embedded in social structures" (Omi and Winant, 2015, p. 123). Constructing

racial identities through policing articulates a central paradox; that race "becomes both

increasingly central and increasingly invisible" (Silva, 2016, p. 5). My indictment of police

violence, and my family's interpretation of that same violence as justified, demonstrates the

significance of policing as a racial project that obfuscates the racial biases undergirding its

construction. As a family we are divided by a blue line; it dislocates relationships and foments

isolation. Cops are free from scrutiny because that scrutiny is anti-family. This dodge frames

social critique as a taboo rejection of blood. Law enforcement families register racialized police

violence through the frame of justice and safety maintenance. This decontextualized reading of

violence frames police force as inherently just. With this framing, possibilities for transformative critique becomes unnecessary and impossible.

This project considers how allyship is forged, sustained, and (re)presented. Ultimately, the purpose of my allyship is a "decentering of whiteness and dislodging it from the position of dominance and the standard marker and bearer of all that is good, pure, civilized, moral and virtuous" (Dei, 2013, p. 2). Certainly, my own whiteness, the dimensions of my identity that separate me from people of color, are implicated in my scrutiny of law enforcement (Diangelo, 2011, p. 56). Denouncing police violence against Black people does not negate my whiteness no more than proclaiming antiracism alone dismantles racism. I recognize a part of anti-racist allyship is addressing my complicity, ambivalence, and fragility with race relations—even when heated national discussions hit home. It is in this intimate narrative space that I articulate another possibility of critical resistance.

Interrogating Colorblindness

The Drive by Truckers' (2016) song "What it Means?" begins with the death of Michael Brown "running down the street/ When they shot him in his tracks" (Hood, 2016). The message of this sobering account is direct: racist police violence, as evidenced through Brown's unjust death, goes unpunished. While it seems straightforward to open a song about police violence with Brown, by the end of the verse the lyrics take a pedantic postracial turn in its praise of then-Presidential candidate Barack Obama. This articulates the traditional pattern of post-race; "constructing a picture of society where racial harmony is the norm, the color-blind perspective functions to make white privilege invisible while removing from public discussion the need to maintain any social programs that are race-based" (Gallagher, 2003, p. 24). Post-racial discourses make discussions of racial inequality unnecessary: "post-race is discrimination through the backdoor" (Durham, 2015, p. 254). However, the song undercuts this simplistic

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construction in its proclamation "you don't see too many white kids lying/ Bleeding on the street" (Hood, 2016). This insight emphasizes necropolitical racial inequality and articulates a progressive politics negating colorblindness. Through the text of "What it Means?," the Drive by Truckers ask critical questions that interrogate the racist motivations undergirding specific cases of contemporary extrajudicial police killings.

Drive by Truckers' interrogative questions have not been received openly. Instead, the message of Hood's lyrics, that racism motivates police violence, has polarized Truckers' listeners: "Some fans [are] outraged and [have] branded the Truckers as anti-police, while others applauded the shifted focus on race" (Lang, 2016). These criticisms perpetuate the colorblindness that "What it Means?" eschews. Instead of "hid[ing] white privilege behind a mask of assumed meritocracy while rendering invisible the institutional arrangements that perpetuate racial inequality," Hood's lyrics directly engage colorblindness, which sees any movement towards racial equality as equity (Gallagher, 2003, p. 26) Furthermore, that whiteness, as an analogue to policing, is unassailable is at the core of "What it Means?" This central challenge to simplistic conceptions of power and race articulates my personal critique of policing.

"What it Means?" follows an interrogative structure, referencing a flashpoint of violence then challenging colorblindness. This mimics post-racial narration which regards moments of "violence as consequences of bad actors and not actually racial [bias or inequality] and thus maintaining white privilege by negating racial inequality" (Gallagher, 2003, p. 24). "What it Means?" exploits this pattern to counter the colorblind perspective. The position that victims of violence "have done something/ Or else why would he have run" is dodge that comforts the

colorblind; as racial violence unfolds on television and as part of the post racial paradigm, "we

can shrug and let it happen/ Without asking what it means" (Hood, 2016).

Colorblind narratives that see contemporary American society as devoid of racial

inequality deploy a gaze of white supremacy that sees culture outside of context (Nicholson,

2016, p. 556). Post-racial discourse presumes that prejudices have vanished because of discrete

moments of equity. Here again, though, Hood's lyrics deconstruct this reading of culture by

highlighting the barrage of racist violence. Here, we see that violence is a discursive boundary

"mediat[ing] an historical 'colorline' through which 'racialization is understood as the effect of

both intense scrutiny and obfuscation under a white supremacist gaze" (Nicholson, 2016, p. 558).

Police violence enforces conceptions of citizenship and safety. This ignores the ways that

whiteness and white supremacy suture safety and policing.

Pessimism and Narrative Ambivalence

In my initial experience with "What it Means," the song seemed direct. Its attack on

colorblindness and post-race was simple even as the critical scrutiny did not adequately solve my

personal experience of disconnection and discomfort with my family. I still didn't get it. But

"What it Means?" resists simple proselytizing.   Hood's lyrics affirm a dire portrait of

contemporary life; racist violence punctuates life. And, in the end, ambivalence seems inevitable.

Our supposed enlightenment, the post racial ideology that sees post-Obama America as done

with race, is a fiction. Worse, "What it Means?" continues, our cultural icons are without moral

purity. Drive by Truckers' "What it Means?" constructs an indictment of white America as

bamboozled by media constructions and false enlightenment. Here we see "the…race neutral

perspective…that in an environment where institutional racism and discrimination have been

replaced by equal opportunity, one's qualifications" are ultimately more significant than race or

ethnicity (Gallagher, 2003, p. 23). Framing Martin's murder as guilt for an imagined crime,

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bolsters meritocratic myths of colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). My family's words echo, "why was he running around in the dark?" This enables defenders of police inscrutability, which becomes a metaphorical register for whiteness, to demonstrate their commitment to protecting their "moral character against what they perceive as accusations and attacks while deflecting any culpability or need of accountability" (DiAngelo & Ozlem, 2014, p. 115).

Ultimately, "What it Means" articulates ambivalence through moments of narrative unraveling. Just as the lyrics offer a closing argument or interpretation of violence, the question at the core of the song resounds; "What it Means?" is not only an incriminating attack against racist police violence. Instead, the song, through its repeated chorus, questions how we compartmentalize and make sense of racist political violence in contemporary life. "What it Means?" can incite public interrogation and personal introspection about race and policing. The open-ended song title invites me as a listener me to reflect on what whiteness means to me and my police family.

Conclusion

Ambivalence is a departure from anti-racist authorial assurance. "What it Means" focuses our attention on the moments where conversations devolve into accusation and anger. Where some families crumble, the country song creates a zone where we can question both cultural representations and racial identity (Harter, 2013, p. 335). "What it Means?" echoes the ambivalence I experienced after disconnection and discomfort in my police family after the killing of Trayvon Martin. Answers are not direct. Instead of moral clarity, the intersections of race, fragility, and violence create a tenuous site of cultural inquiry.

My ability to question loyalty to my police family and their fidelity to law enforcement is filtered through whiteness. That That I can critique the law enforcement without fear of reprisal is a harsh reality. My sense of safety is itself framed through whiteness (Gallagher, 2003, p. 35).

Familial commitments that declare police violence as just to maintain racial order; tethered

ideologically, whiteness and safety become the framework through which police inscrutability is

sustained. Obviously, my racial privilege is only one of the ways that my, and by extension

Drive by Truckers', criticism of police violence is made socially acceptable. Certainly, there

have been personal consequences for my rejection of law enforcement culture. But, while I point

out issues of racial violence, it is important that I "recall that the privileges and comforts of [my]

position were secured not by peaceful cooperation with the racial Other, but by violent

subjugation of the Other to [my] will" (Craig & Rahko, 2016, p. 294). This reality, that my

ability to offer criticism of racist political forces is based simultaneously in my inhabiting a

space of privilege constructed through white supremacy, is unsettling.

 Superficially, anti-racist movements build bridges offering liberatory engagements to

disentangle dichotomies of belonging and otherness. As an anti-racist project, my work

"trouble[s]and complicate[s] the search for Oneness. Since forms of knowledge and resistance

differ from place to place, we must focus on both commonalities and difference in our

experiences" (Dei, 2013, p. 12). Instead of a clear narrative closure, rejected by "What it

Means?," my antiracist allyship is situated in whiteness and privilege and must be continually

examined. It is not enough to proclaim anti-racist ideologies. Like the Truckers' narrator, my

own antiracist authority is tempered by introspection.

CHAPTER FIVE:

BLACK AND WHITE

It's January 6, 2021. The beginning of a new year. A year that is primed to rewrite the horrors of 2020. A new election. The ouster of a monstrously (human) American president "who's behavior is part of…machinery…of disenfranchisement that existed long before [he] entered the scene" (Dubrofsky, 2018, p. 155). An end to a global pandemic. Racial unrest. Protests. Violence. People of color murdered in their homes, on the streets. Exonerated police officers.

Then I see in my Facebook feed; "What is happening to this country," a friend writes. *Nothing is happening.* I think. Years of writing and thinking about violence, racism, and policing has left me tired. Nothing is new I assure myself.

But the comments continue.

"Prayers for those in the capital" one says.

I turn on the television news. Whatever horror is unfolding will be distanced through the plastic and glass machinery. I've learned that I can compartmentalize the moving images on TV. There is balm in my televisual separation.

I watch as heavily armed swaths of angry white people have stormed the US Capital in a strange, angry coup. An insurrection to rewrite the recent election.

The anger is not new, the seizing of halls of power is not new. The newscasters wonder how this can unfold in America.

It's always been like this, I think.

On the television a single line of police officers is lined up to quell the angry mob, who has already breached the building. The heavily armed, insurrectionist militia seems handled with care. After limited pepper spray and executive evacuations, the enraged terrorists move through the congressional building with limited violent resistance. I remember watching the Minneapolis protests in late May 2020. Tear gas, arrests, physical force used to pry bodies from streets. The difference is staggering. But it is not surprising. And like Donald Trump, it is nothing new. Blue rage, affective racial resentment, provides a lens to highlight the ways that law and order, and the (self) appointed arbiters of justice exist along a simple white supremacist axis of racial life— whiteness is central, normal, good. Bodies of color are aberrant and deserving violent scrutiny. An America that has voted out a vocal white supremacist is in need of violent reconfiguration according to the rioters in the Capitol. While it is easy to highlight the hypocrisy of the Trump loyalists and conspiracy theorists taking selfies in congressional offices, this dissertation project considers the impetus of their rage. That this country and world is in need of a violent hand to reset the racial order so that it more closely represents an idealized sanguine vision of America's past. Blue rage informs the militia who see their works as reinforcing an imaginary border between chaos and law—a boundary that centralizes whiteness.

This dissertation on representations of race and policing is situated in communication studies. This frames blue rage as a communicative phenomenon—rage is represented, reinforced, performed. As a communication studies project, I draw attention to the communicative dimensions of policing. That is, policing is made legible not only as a profession but as an

affective framework and a representational phenomenon. Certainly, the professional dimensions

of law enforcement are central to this project and any analysis of policing; often this is the

dimension that is most visible. In contemporary life, professional policing is the focus of most

police centered discussions. But my interest in race and policing are drawn more from the

affective and representational dimensions. It is too easy to accuse policing malfeasance as the

work of bad professional actors. But, through blue rage, informal policing comes to the fore as a

concomitant part of law and order and justice rhetoric. This dissertation seeks to expand the

conversation of affective policing to create a more nuanced, more human discussion of policing.

The communication discipline foregrounds the interactional, negotiated, and contingent nature of

policing. Taking this disciplinary perspective sees communication

> as a value-laden, political process that creates and sustains oppressive social
>
> structures. These oppressive social structures arise through discursive struggles
>
> among various groups that seek to have the view of reality that best serves their
>
> interests accepted as the dominant view of reality (Mcdonald, 2017, p. 3).

This approach provides a unique grounding for studying policing and race. On one hand, it

allows for structural analysis where institutions are legible through nuanced interpersonal

interactions. As well, it allows artifactual analysis where representational significance and

narrative is highlighted. Additionally, the diverse needs, beliefs, and frameworks of individual

constituents are also brought to the fore as discursive sites. To amplify these negotiated layers of

meaning, this dissertation also contributes to cultural studies broadly. Through cultural studies

informed analysis, I treat "everything as relationally constituted, and every context as defined by

the continual making, unmaking, and remaking of relations" (Grossberg, 2019, p. 46). I deploy

cultural studies to illuminate the "taken for-grantedness [that] renders [everyday life] invisible"

(Morley, 2015, p. 23). I use the concept of blue rage to address the affective dimensions of racial surveillance.

I started writing to heal the chasm between blue blood and family relations. I wanted to know how I could see my family outside of law enforcement. George Floyd's murder asked me to consider the ways that my personal, myopic discussion of law enforcement was part of the tapestry of white America and policing in the US. My analysis chapters began from my interests in violent crime films. As a child, I idolized the white, male action heroes, usually police, that could quickly and simply hand out justice through the barrel of a gun. But when my brothers took on the mantle of law enforcement, my tastes shifted. I feared for their lives. For the lives of my nephews and nieces – for the potential for future pain and grief. At the same time, I began to recognize the repeated images of Black death in my news feed. Citizens were murdered in their cars, in their homes, and on the streets at the hands of police. This wasn't new, of course; but to my liberal, white working-class eyes, it was shocking. I developed the concept of blue rage while the deaths of Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Tamir Rice, and Walter Scott haunted me. Officer involved shootings filled news casts, and I wondered what it was about policing that enabled the violent killings. Through blue rage, I wondered how my family, my brothers, and I might be involved in affective racial surveillance.

In 2019, the murder of George Floyd under the knee of a police officer inspired national and international protests. This forced the conversation of race and policing into the national and local discourse and inspired sustained conversation. This time, the conversation felt more pressing. With protests just outside my city, my research felt strange. As a writer, it became difficult to track the development – to sustain the writing in ways that felt germane. Everything was overwhelming- every sentence felt insufficient.

Methodologically, my analysis of policing and race takes a promiscuous approach to interpretive qualitative methods. My intentional blurring of traditions, a distanced formal analysis of media artifacts informed by and appearing alongside personal narratives, compliments the work of Dunn (2018) and Durham (2014) and Boylorn (2008), where I ultimately unite lived experience and representation. This merger is an unsettling of media analyses which "produce questions which are both banal and unanswerable, such as 'Did Facebook cause the events of the Arab Spring'?" (Morley, 2015, p. 28). I hope to offer a complicated extension of analysis that is informed by embodied experience. If media cannot "be understood independently of the cultural contexts in which they operate," my project takes the personal operations as the space of inquiry (Morley 2009, 2012). Bodies are analytical tools – historied, scarred, and ripe for mis(interpretation). This project advocates that critical work, guided by the idea that "power mediates all human interaction," should suture formal and structural analysis (Mcdonald, 2017, p. 2).

In some ways, this dissertation is about stories – the ones that I used and the ones I tell myself. In this way, media artifacts and autoethnographic stories belong together as "stories…come not merely in the form of…fictions but also in everyday conversation, in everyone's imagined futures and daily projections, and in the construction of identities…through memories and histories" (Johnson, 1986, p. 60). This disrupts the common "clinical" approach to

> race and media, in which varied racial representations are declared to align with either "positive" characterizations or "negative" stereotypes. Such an approach fails to consider questions of production, distribution, and audience interpretation and ultimately substitutes moral analogy for mindful analysis (Hughey and Gonzalez-Lesser, 2020, p. 10).

I wonder how stories inform affective rage – how policing as a representation, a profession, and a governing practice is animated by and through fictional stories.

I mark blue rage as a significant contemporary phenomenon; but I am not suggesting that it is new. Rather, this historical moment, where "blue lives" are foisted in opposition to the Black Lives Matter movement feels particularly prescient. This historical moment is articulated by a blue line that must account for the fact that Black people are more vulnerable to premature death because of police violence. And this policing is not simply present in formal police structures. Instead, the governing practices are strategically deployed through racialized media upholding new forms of racism (Hughey and Gonzalez-Lesser, 2020, p. 6). The necropolitical valence of police force is not new, but the racializing rhetoric of crime control and the support of blue lives have converged. Rejecting social progress through the guise of post-Obama postrace, contemporary life appears as a conflict between the moral and the lawless. Embracing the divisive rhetoric of Trump, contemporary policing is presented as a panacea for socioeconomic unravelling. This historical conjuncture, where blue rage is the affective racial surveillance paradigm de jour "is the product of an accumulation of multiple contexts, lines of force, determination, resistances, and contradictions" (Grossberg, 2019, p. 51).

I write this dissertation as an anti-racist researcher hoping to humanize policing- to put faces to the complicated tapestry of violence. It is too easy to demonize. For years, I struggled to situate myself as an anti-racist in a law enforcement family. Often personal and professional missions present as common-sense truths that need no scrutiny. But through writing, introspection, analysis, and talk, I see myself and my world differently, with more nuance. This change is a commitment, an understanding that life is "a result of the ongoing articulations of relations and assemblages, and their re-articulation in intellectual labor" (Grossberg, 2019. p.

46). Through narrative and narrative analysis, I am rebuilding. But it is a slow, uncertain process. And "one can only embrace the uncertainty and approach it with care" (Grossberg, 2019, p. 46).

By focusing on mediated constructions of policing, I add to the media work that highlights the relationship between media, representation, and violence. Rather than purely representative analysis, I advocate an entangled analytical process that sees the relationship between blue rage on screen and in streets as a "nationalist partnership that…fuses public and private interests that are mutually benefitted by the myths generated through police stories (Arntfield, 2013, p.390). Certainly, televisual and cinematic arbiters of blue rage reinforce the racial hierarchy through media artifacts. If there is a possibility for change, it may occur through exposure. Specifically, the "television police procedural and the police film allow crime narratives, as public myths, to expose and express the social mores and ideological norms of a society" (Artnfield, 2013, p. 401). Highlighting the naturalization of racial animus carried through contemporary policing offers an opportunity to map the ways that blue rage is embedded in the everyday practices, performances, and representations of policing.

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