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Quis Custodiet Ipsos Custodes?:

Literary Journalism as a Response to Police Violence against African Americans

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Abstract

This study assesses the function of literary techniques in four examples of literary journalism about police violence against African Americans, namely Ta-Nehisi Coates' "A Beautiful Life," Jelani Cobb's "Policing the Police in Newark," William Finnegan's "The Blue Wall," and Jake Halpern's "The Cop." Drawing on interdisciplinary research, I will demonstrate how the writers use devices like narration, scene-by-scene construction, dialogue, and figurative language to address and/or counteract factors that inherently complicate this specific subject. The accumulative function of these devices is that the writers create texts that resist oversimplification of use-of-force incidents (UFIs). The devices enable them to dramatize causative explanations behind, competing claims about, and factors that possibly influenced UFIs. They furthermore use these techniques to explore how and why people (certain police officers, Breonna Taylor's mom, Darren Wilson, etc.) interpret UFIs the way they do. This process of meaning-making is central to this particular subject because it is inseparable from deeply divided perceptions of American society and the police. The texts furthermore portray the writer-reporters themselves as observers, participants, and interpreters. They thereby self-consciously draw attention to the inescapable, subjective status of the journalist. These texts thus provide an understanding of UFIs that is simultaneously factual, philosophical, and emotionally immersive. They exemplify how the synthesis of literature and journalism fosters a mode of public reflection that is uniquely equipped to interrogate social injustice in contemporary American culture.

Key words: Literary journalism; Literary techniques; Ta-Nehisi Coates; William Finnegan; Jelani Cobb; Jake Halpern; Police violence; Police brutality in the US; The New Yorker; Vanity Fair; New Journalism; Magazine journalism.

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"[I]f you would see the horizon from a forest, you must first build a tower. If the horizon will reveal most of what is significant, an hour of examination can yet do the job – it is the tower which takes months to build. So the Novelist working in secret collaboration with the Historian has perhaps tried to build with his novel a tower fully equipped with telescopes to study – at the greatest advantage – our own horizon. Of course the tower is crooked, and the telescopes warped, but the instruments of all sciences – history as much as physics – are always constructed in small or large error; what supports our use of them, now, is that our intimacy with the master-builder of the tower, and the lens grinder of the telescopes (…) has given some advantage for correcting the error of his instruments and the imbalance of the tower. May that be claimed of many histories?"

- Norman Mailer, *The Armies of the Dead*

"Can we really be friends if we don't believe
In the same things, Assassin?"

- Terrance Hayes, *American Sonnets for my Past and Future Assassin*

1. Introduction: Meeting the Lens Grinder

During the George Floyd protests in 2020, one of the protestors scrawled a famous Latin phrase from Juvenal's *Satires* on the walls of Washington, D.C.: "Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?" ("Building the Dream"). In this context, the phrase is often translated as "Who polices the police?" (Kaste). It is the embodiment of the question how persons in positions of power – and in this specific case, the police – can be held accountable. The ancient Latin, however, is ambiguous, as it lends itself to another translation that has quite a different meaning. Prof. Els Rose, a specialist in the field of the historical development of Latin, pointed out to me that an equally valid translation would be: "Who will guard the guards themselves?" Instead of suspiciously questioning how powerful individuals ought to be controlled, it poses a question that is completely different in tone: Who will look after the police when they are the ones that are supposed to look after everybody else? In other words, who has got their back?

Juvenal's words are thus – while being stretched to their semantic limits – prone to be exploited for two completely different causes, as they neatly reflect both Black Lives Matter's desire to increase police accountability for their violence against African Americans and Blue Lives Matter's aim to provide more public support for the officers and their work. The contemporary response to both variants of the question, however, could be the same. The medium of journalism has the potential to offer a platform in the public sphere that simultaneously has the ability to scrutinize the power that police officers have and to convey a realistic understanding of the complex social environment in which the officers operate.

Reporting on police violence against African Americans, though, is a difficult task. It is a politically sensitive, racially charged, and emotional issue that often involves stories of grief, death, unnecessary violence, racism, policing methods, clashing perspectives, protests, deeply divided perceptions of the world, and the very nature of democracy itself. Not only

that, but it is potentially dangerous for the reporters in question. On April 19 2021, multiple journalists engaged in covering the death of Daunte Wright in Minneapolis were assaulted, harassed, and allegedly wrongfully arrested by law enforcement (Klein). The work that journalists do, however, plays a vital role in the functioning of a healthy democracy. As political theorist Walter Lippmann explains in *Public Opinion*, "[t]he world we have to deal with politically is out of reach, out of sight, out of mind. It had to be explored, reported, and imagined" (18).

Writing in 1921, Lippmann foreshadowed the nature of contemporary reporting on police violence against African Americans when he wrote that "the function of news is to signalize an event" (226). Regina Lawrence analyzed the coverage of police violence that appeared in the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* in the 1980s and 1990s, and concluded that the vast majority of said coverage was event-driven journalism, as journalists represented reality through their reporting on individual events that were deemed newsworthy (Lawrence 6). This approach to newswriting relies heavily on the journalist's and news outlet's judgment of what is deemed important, which generally determines the structure of the articles as well. Mainstream newswriting (MN) often takes on an inverted pyramid structure that includes the most important information in the first paragraph (the lead paragraph) and from thereon gives other information in decreasing order of importance (Whitaker et al. 22). This model requires journalists to immensely reduce the complexity of events in order to provide a summary that is as simple as possible.

Literary journalism (LJ) is a genre that is, to a large extent, not bound by the constraints of the previously described MN model, since its approach to news and what constitutes as news itself is radically different. It is a form of creative nonfiction that explores contemporary issues and subjects in a distinctly literary way, as it infuses news stories with such elements as experimental narration, dialogues, poetic diction, and switches in

perspectives (Wolfe 11; Boynton xii; Sims 2). This approach to journalism stems, according to Doug Underwood, from a tradition of American magazine culture that has its roots in the nineteenth century, which saw the establishment of outlets like the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's Magazine*, in which canonical nonfiction writings by Henry Thoreau and W. E. B. Du Bois first appeared (270). These outlets, along with more recently established periodicals such as *The New Yorker* and *Esquire*, countercultural outlets like *Rolling Stone*, and politically active publications like *Ms. Magazine*, functioned as the incubators of the New Journalism (NJ) movement of the 1960s (Dennis and Rivers 12; Underwood 272). These periodicals provided (and still provide) spaces for nonfiction content that is, according to Underwood, "too inventive, iconoclastic, or outspoken to fit into the made-to-order formats of ordinary journalism" (270). Several NJ texts about African Americans and the police have already been canonized, such as Joan Didion's "Sentimental Journeys," which originally appeared in the *New York Review of Books*, and James Baldwin's "A Report from Occupied Territory" and "Notes of a Native Son," which were published respectively in *The Nation* and *Harper's Magazine*. An editorial that appeared in the latter magazine in the late 1960s neatly articulates the rationale behind such LJ: "For *Harper's* magazine is dedicated to the idea that fine writing need not buckle under the pressure of a deadline, nor should literature be solely confined to the dim distant past or the recent inventions of a novelist's mind. It can deal with the now – with the angers of our time, the beautiful beginnings of a changed society, and the sad vestiges of a violent past" (qtd. in Weber 25). These words still resonate decades after they were published, and indeed in the 2010s another generation of literary journalists were involved in reporting and exploring the angers of their time.

This thesis examines four case studies of contemporary LJ about police violence against African Americans, namely Ta-Nehisi Coates' "A Beautiful Life," Jelani Cobb's "Policing the Police in Newark," William Finnegan's "The Blue Wall," and Jake Halpern's

"The Cop." This thesis does not attempt to form any kind of judgement about the exact nature of police violence, nor does it try to settle any normative question about news coverage of such violence. It rather seeks to assess the function of literary techniques in LJ about police violence against African Americans. First, drawing on research from Literary Theory, I will identify and define techniques that differentiate LJ from MN, so that their function can be more readily made explicit in the case studies. Secondly, I will define police violence, and elaborate on the factors that inherently complicate narratives of police violence against African Americans, combining findings from Criminology, Sociology and African American Studies. After that I will address how these complications tend to be incorporated in MN because of that genre's specific constraints and demands, using research from Media and Communication Studies. The third and final chapter combines the interdisciplinary theoretical background with observations from the annotated editions of the four texts in the appendices. This chapter examines how LJ addresses the aforementioned complicating factors, and how the writers use literary devices to address and/or counteract these factors. Ultimately, this will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of *who*, exactly, polices the police and guards the guards; *who* – in the words of Norman Mailer – the master-builders of the towers are and how they grind their lenses; and what the function is of the way they approach and construct this specific societal problem.

2. The Art of the Fact: Differentiating Literary Journalism

This chapter examines which factors differentiate works of literary journalism (LJ) from straight or mainstream news stories (MN) in the American written-news landscape, of which my primary texts are all products. The relationship between written news and literature is fraught with tension. "Newspapers are not literature," (185) asserts David Randall in *The Universal Journalist*, a textbook used in Journalism education. At the opposite end of the spectrum we find Tom Wolfe, who wrote that the LJ of the New Journalism movement would essentially "wipe out the novel as literature's main event" (22). This debate can be reproduced on a spectrum; at one end there are journalists solely concerned with producing factual accounts in a diction traditionally associated with mainstream news, and at the other journalists who create newswriting that is distinctly literary. This spectrum imputes an absence of boundaries between the two ends, as they share many similarities (e.g. thorough research, a real life subject as opposed to invented material, and the avoidance of imprecise or clichéd phrasing [Lounsberry xiii]). The difference between them then can be understood in terms of characteristics. LJ has a central characterising feature that includes an array of different sub-features, all of which are rarely present in MN.

Although literary journalism remains a contested term, there is a consensus that LJ uses literary techniques in its newswriting (Wolfe 11; Boynton xii; Maguire and Dow 4; Denis and Rivers 5; Johnson xi; Sims 2; Lounsberry xv). Literary techniques in this case refers to the broadest, most amorphous sense of the definition, which is consistent with Wolfe's postulation that "it was possible (…) to use *any* literary device" (29; my italics) in New Journalism (NJ). However, Wolfe also asserted that four distinctive techniques especially contributed to the absorbing literary qualities of NJ: scene-by-scene construction, extensive use of dialogue, a third person point-of-view that captures a particular emotional reality, and the recording of significant and symbolic status details (28). As NJ evolved

throughout the 1990s and 2000s, a new wave of American journalists identified by Robert Boynton as the New New Journalists (NNJ) represented a more matured style of LJ, as they were less concerned with testing the limits of language and form (Boynton xii). However, Roberta Maguire and William E. Dow point out that American LJ is not limited to just these two movements, and they emphasize that certain techniques are more inherent to LJ in general, that there exists "a new formalism (and poetics) specific to literary journalism" (3). In other words, just because literary journalists *can* use every technique that the poet or the novelist uses does not at all mean that they practically do so because of the varying constraints and demands of their medium.

Although the consensus remains that LJ uses literary techniques in its newswriting, it should then be added that for various reasons some techniques are more frequently used than others. The following are mentioned by at least one major work of scholarship on NJ, NNJ, and LJ (Wolfe; Boynton; Maguire and Dow; Denis and Rivers; Johnson; Wilson; Weber; Sims): homodiegetic second-order narratives, an internal focalisation that captures a given subject's point of view, narrative storytelling through a meaningful scene-by-scene construction, extensive use of dialogue, and symbolizing figurative language. These five different techniques are all in their own way connected to the specific constraints and demands of LJ.

The reportorial nature of LJ first of all requires that the writer engages in some act of reporting or observing. In narrating these witnessed situations the writer can either deliberately include or exclude themselves from the story. This thus produces either homodiegetic (e.g. Joan Didion's "Slouching Towards Bethlehem") or heterodiegetic narratives (e.g. John Hersey's *Hiroshima*). Homodiegetic narratives intrinsically include the writer-reporter in the story-world, which means that the writer-reporter has a role and a place in the text. The role of a writer-reporter is by their very nature, of course, to report, and they

thereby generate what Christopher Wilson terms second-order narratives. A second-order narrative is, according to Wilson, "a coexisting literary story about *how* the text we're reading ostensibly came to be researched and written" (347). In other words, such texts provide "both accounts of *being* immersed and *how* such immersion was enacted" (347). This self-conscious inclusion of the genesis of the text fulfils two different functions. Wilson argues that this primarily provides a transparent rendering of the specific methodology behind a given work of reporting (347). It furthermore draws attention to the subjective consciousness that is situated between the reader and the described events, that is, the journalist. Subjective here refers not to the claim that the journalist might be opinionated or biased, but rather to the underlying assertion that they is a subject with a mind that is different from other minds and therefore fundamentally incapable of omniscience. Thus the homodiegetic style relays the principle that, in the words of literary journalist Dan Wakefield, reporters are "individuals after all, not all-knowing, all-seeing Eyes but separate, complex, limited, particular 'I's'" (18 qtd. in Weber). Although the style of the homodiegetic narratives tends to fluctuate heavily (e.g. the flamboyance of Wolfe's "The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby" is in stark contrast with the subdued style of Gay Talese's "Frank Sinatra has a Cold"), the two underlying principles remain constant.

The vacuum that arises from the exclusion of the writer-reporter in heterodiegetic narratives is filled up by the other involved party, namely the subject(s) of the text in question. MN is, in covering a certain subject, predominantly concerned with answering the so-called "five Ws and an H": What? Who? Where? When? How? Why? (Randall 198; Whitaker et al. 24). This emphasis on physically ascertainable facts corresponds to the absence of a particular (internal) point of view, which generates texts that have camera-like external focalisation. New Journalists, however, were, according to Wolfe, dissatisfied with just answering these questions, and they began experimenting with techniques in order to

present events "through the eyes of a particular character, giving the reader the feeling of being inside the character's mind and experiencing the emotional reality of the scene as he experiences it" (46). Wolfe identified the technique with which the writers accomplished such feats (e.g. Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*) as the third-person point of view (46). The existence of LJ texts that use the same principle (that is, an immersive point of view other than that of the writer-reporter) but in a first-person point of view (e.g. Ta-Nehisi Coates' "A Beautiful Life") suggests that Wolfe's definition is a misnomer. The common denominator here is not the narrative point of view, but an internal focalisation that captures a given subject's particular interior state. Although this device – especially the use of the interior monologue and free indirect discourse – has regularly been the subject of controversy, Ronald Weber argues that such portrayals of interior states "can be harmonised with the factual basis of journalism since the material is derived from reporting. The writer simply interviews the subject about his thoughts and emotions as well as everything else, then renders the response in dramatic form" (15-16). This internal focalization captures a particular emotional reality of an individual, which has as underlying assumption that lived experience can communicate truth.

Another technique that is fundamental for LJ is narrative storytelling through a meaningful scene-by-scene construction. Wolfe identified his version of this concept as "telling the story by moving from scene to scene" (46). He argued that New Journalists used this technique because it endowed their writing with the absorbing qualities of the realist fiction by Balzac, Dickens, and Gogol (46). John S. Hartsock uses the related concepts of narrative and plot to describe the meaningful sequencing of scenes in LJ (1). A narrative consists "of a set of events (the story) recounted in a process of narration (or discourse), in which the events are selected and arranged in a particular order (the plot)" ("Narrative"). The concept of the story, when applied to LJ, refers specifically to the events that the journalists

report on and the plot to the particular order in which the they narrate them. Hartsock, drawing on Reader-response Theory, asserts that literary journalists use plot to trigger processes of meaning-making because their narratives supply the reader with questions like: "Why are such scenes placed adjacent to each other? What is their affinity and relationship to previous scenes as well as to those that follow?" (16). An example that illustrates this is Wolfe's "Las Vegas (What?) LAS VEGAS (Can't hear you! Too noisy) LAS VEGAS!!!!," in which he juxtaposes scenes from Las Vegas casinos and the Strip with scenes from Las Vegas mental hospitals and rehabilitation centers. Here Wolfe organises his reporting in a particularly meaningful way that obliges the reader to work out why these two different locations are juxtaposed and selected for the reader to interpret. Thus Wolfe's use of narrative and plot or scene-by-scene construction leaves the reader with a problem or complication to resolve, namely the connection between the narrated events.

Often directly connected to such scenes in LJ is an extensive use of dialogue (Wolfe 45; Weber 36). The (inter-)action that forms the basis for a scene is primarily either physical or verbal. Dialogue is thus inherently connected to these scenes because dialogue encompasses the verbatim recording of the "spoken exchanges between or among characters" ("Dialogue"). The extensive use of dialogue in LJ stands in stark contrast with the direct quotations often used in MN (Whitaker et al. 188). The latter kind generally illustrates or supports a concrete claim, fact, opinion, or event (Whitaker et al.188), whereas the former, according to Wolfe, involves "the reader more completely than any other single device. It also establishes and defines character more quickly than any other single device" (46). Although his superlatives should be approached with care, his argument still holds that literary journalists primarily use dialogue not to directly support a central claim but because its emotionally revealing qualities contribute to characterization. Everette E. Denis and William

L. Rivers cite as an example of this device an exchange between a director and an actress from Gay Talese's "The Soft Psyche of Joshua Logan":

> "Don't raise your voice, Claudia," Logan repeated.
>
> She again ignored him.
>
> "CLAUDIA!" Logan yelled, "don't you give me that actor's vengeance, Claudia!"
>
> "Yes, Mr. Logan."
>
> "And stop Yes-Mr.-Logan-ing me."
>
> "Yes, Mr. Logan."
>
> "You're a shockingly rude woman!"
>
> "Yes, Mr. Logan."
>
> "You're being a beast."
>
> "Yes, Mr. Logan."
>
> "Yes, Miss Beast."
>
> "Yes, Mr. Logan."
>
> "Yes, Miss Beast" (qtd. in Dennis and Rivers 28).

In this piece these lines are not used as a statement-like quotation exemplifying, for instance, a claim about the harsh conditions under which actors are working. They rather, as Talese later wrote, reveal "something of the character of Logan and Miss McNeil in ways that I could never have done had I approached the subject from the more conventional form of reporting" (qtd. in Dennis and Rivers 37). They furthermore illustrate how dialogue facilitates action in scenes, since the dialogue dramatizes an incident during the rehearsal.

The fifth literary technique encompasses the instances of figurative language that symbolize, and thus stand for or represent, something else beyond the accepted literal sense of the word(s) in question. This groups together a widely different set of techniques that contribute to a unifying symbolizing undercurrent (Sims 2). According to Wolfe, the most

salient of these techniques was the inclusion of "details (…) symbolic of *status life*" (47). The recording of details such as outfits, turns of phrase, manners, and eating habits signifies not just their literal meaning, but also reveals something about "the entire pattern of behaviour and possessions through which people express their position in the world or what they think it is or what they hope it to be" (47). However, Wolfe's obsession with status (Boynton xii) might have limited him from expanding the application of this symbolic use of language to matters other than status. This is something he merely hints at when he writes that Hunter S. Thompson's reporting was centered around finding a "single psychological or sociological insight that would sum up all he had seen, the single golden *aperçu*" (41). The aim of this reporting style – and of including that single golden aperçu – is aptly summarised by David L. Eason when he writes that literary journalists often treat events or incidents as "symbols of some deeper cultural trend, ideology, or mythology. The significance of an event emerges not from its uniqueness but from its enactment of cultural paradigms" (146). Eason argues that these descriptions possess a metaphorical force because they – the vehicle – exemplify a certain societal phenomenon or pattern – the tenor. Mark Z. Muggli extrapolates Eason's argument, and he groups together a widely different set of techniques that possess a similar metaphorical force, such as "the metonymy, simile, emblem, literary image, symbol, icon, parable, and microcosm" (Muggli 407). An example of such a parable can be found in Joan Didion's "Holy Water," where director Sam Peckinpah's difficulty in arranging the water for a day's filming functions as "a California parable" (Didion 224). A poignant example of a symbol can be found in Terry Southern's "Twirling at Ole Miss," which initially seems to be about a baton twirling competition in Mississippi, but takes a U-turn in its second half when it morphs into a dissection of institutionalized racism. The story ends with a description of two drinking fountains, one of which, Southern reveals earlier in the piece, is "boldly marked 'For Colored'" (185). These two examples do not have the function of literally describing the

difficulties of filming a Hollywood blockbuster or a piece of infrastructure in the public space respectively. Instead, they are representative of the nature-dominating mindset of American entrepreneurs and the trivialisation of racism in the public sphere respectively. Thus, Muggli argues, all the aforementioned categories of figurative language share the unifying principle that one image, symbol, story, concept, or detail can represent or stand in for something other than the literal words used in the description (407). That something is, because of the reportorial nature of LJ, usually a specific cultural trend, pattern, or ideology.

3. Competing Narratives: Police Violence against African Americans in the Public Sphere

This chapter seeks to define police violence, and elaborate on the factors that specifically complicate narratives of police violence against African Americans. I will contextualize and examine the conflict from both the perspective of the police and the African American community. After that I will address how these complications tend to be incorporated in MN because of that genre's specific constraints and demands, and discuss how competing groups attempt to define the meaning of specific incidents in MN.

The nature of policing itself requires officers to occasionally use physical coercion against civilians, and police theorists discern three different kinds of coercion: use of force, unnecessary force, and brutality (Lawrence 19). Police use of force is a legitimate and necessary part of the officer's job, whereas brutality is intentional and malevolent misconduct, and unnecessary force "is usually a training problem, the result of ineptitude or insensitivity" (Skolnick and Fyfe 19-20). What is deemed to be brutality thus depends on constitutional legitimacy (i.e. was the use of force legally justified?) and proportion (i.e. was the use of violence excessive given the specific situation?).

While these distinctions may be easy to define conceptually, determining whether an use-of-force incident (UFI) was legally justified has in practice proven to be challenging (Cockcroft 56). Allegations of brutality often involve a kind of swearing match between the alleged victim(s) and the officer(s) about whether it was necessary or not (Lawrence 21). The former almost ubiquitously claims innocence, whereas the latter appeals to a fundamental aspect of policing, namely the notion of discretion (Cockcroft 56). This denotes the officers' individual judgement whether to act or not when someone "'looks out of place' or offends the officers' 'conception of order'" (Skolnick 46), which is practically a subjective benchmark (Cockcroft 56). Determining whether use of force was excessive has, according to Regina

Lawrence, proven to be an equally "difficult question to settle definitively" (20). Civilians who observe police exercise physical force to subdue people who do not wish to be subdued are often discomfited by what they see because police use of force, in the words of one officer, simply "looks terrible" (Bonner qtd. in Lawrence 21). Precisely because such use of force "rarely, if ever, photographs well" (Skolnick and Fyfe 37), even the appropriate use of force may seem, to witnesses, disproportionate to the danger that the individuals form. Determining whether police use of force is brutality thus depends greatly upon the perspective from which the incident is recounted.

The act of labelling police use of force as brutality is furthermore complicated because it depends on whether police brutality is understood as something that occurs randomly and only occasionally or as a widespread and common phenomenon (Lawrence 36). These two explanations are often termed "bad apple" and "rotten orchard" theories respectively, and they juxtapose individual and institutional agency and influence (Cockcroft 126). This distinction is of consequence because if brutality is caused by problems inherent in the contemporary system it means that not just individual members of the system but the system itself has to change.

Although there is no academic consensus regarding the possible nature of such a systemic failure, a prevailing explanation suggests that brutality is systemically aimed at specific groups – particularly African Americans – and is thus racist in nature (Lawrence 42; Davis xi). This racist problematization of police brutality is not a new phenomenon (Davis xi), but it received considerable attention in 2012, when Trayvon Martin's death inspired Black Lives Matter (BLM) (Davis xiii). This movement has as central contention that officers disproportionately stop, harass, arrest, or kill African Americans for no other reason than the color of their skin. Angela Davis provides numerous statistics that seem to support these claims: African Americans are 2.5 times more likely to be arrested than whites, 21 times more

likely to be killed by police than whites, and are disproportionately stopped and frisked (Davis xv). However, a causative connection has to be established for these statistics to be supportive of this type of systemic racism. Researchers have asserted that not only explicit discriminatory hostility of individual officers plays a role, but also a phenomenon known as implicit bias, which refers to unconscious mental processes that generate associations between various racial groups and certain characteristics and traits (Hutchins 108; Alpert et al. 407; Russel-Brown 137). These biases have far-reaching implications on police decision-making. As Song Richardson puts it, “an officer might evaluate behaviours engaged in by individuals who appear black as suspicious even as identical behaviour by those who appear white would go unnoticed” (2035). These biases, fuelled by stereotypes of black criminality in American culture, are difficult to escape and provide one explanation of the racially disproportionate policing statistics (Epp et al. 40).

However, this systemic racism theory is not without its critics. Heather Mac Donald, for example, puts forward a different causative explanation of the racial differences in policing outcomes. She argues that other researchers often overlook that there are racial differences in crime rates as well: “Though blacks are 13 percent of the nation’s population (and whites, 62 percent), blacks’ violent crime rates would predict that at least a quarter of the victims of police killings would be black” (73). Although Mac Donald’s argument should be approached with caution since she does not provide a reference for these statistics, her assertion that crime rates have to be taken into account as well because of its influence on law-enforcement activity is a legitimate concern. She opposes the causative explanation that African Americans are disproportionately subject to police use of force due to explicit racism and implicit bias, because, in her argument, this demographic supposedly commits a disproportionate amount of crimes, which then requires an appropriate response in police use of force.

Thus, whether instances of police use of force/brutality are problematized as systemically racist in nature depends, as Lawrence puts it, "greatly upon which voices and views the media emphasize" (18). The power of news media to determine whose voices are granted legitimacy is termed status conferral (Whitaker et al. 8). In this specific case news media can, on the one hand, confer legitimacy to official authorities because of their routinized distribution of authorized news stories (Lawrence 64). On the other hand they also provide a platform for stories and claims made by critical non-officials, e.g. residents of minority and urban communities, expert academics, and activists (Lawrence 36). Journalists are provided with storytelling possibilities when non-official sources provide an account that competes with or challenges the narrative provided by official sources, and this forms an important initial clue for journalists in their process of determining what becomes news (Lawrence 100).

This inherent ambiguity causes various groups, institutions, and ideologies to struggle over the problem definition and construction of a social reality in the news arena (Lawrence 45). This social reality is constructed through a device termed framing, which refers to how a certain story is presented (Whitaker et al. 8). Framing influences how audiences think about an issue: "Is there an inherent "good guy" or "bad guy" in the story? Whose version of events gets top billing?" (Whitaker et al. 8). Framing is influential in contemporary MN, because, in the midst of the fragmented experience of daily life, an event has to be made to mean something in order for it to become news, and this is efficiently accomplished through the rapid identification and contextualisation that framing provides (Lawrence 45).

These processes also apply to coverage of police use of force. Police and political officials tend to supply individualizing 'bad apple' claims in order to contain the impact of the event, whereas critical non-officials generally claim that brutality is a patterned 'rotten orchard' problem that has its roots in police racism, poor management, or inadequate

accountability (Lawrence 15). Lawrence argues that specifically the systemic racism explanation has an advantage in the newsroom because it “translates into easily understood news scripts” (42), which resonate with a Civil Rights ‘master frame’ (Benford and Snow 133). Other causal and more complex theories behind police brutality are less useful in the news arena precisely because they are not able to offer a single locus of control or point of leverage to solve an issue (Deborah Stone 283). As Lawrence concludes, “the most newsworthy causes are those with more identifiable black hats: racist police officers, insulated police chiefs, politically compromised prosecutors (73).” The victims stand in stark contrast with these figures. Individuals such as Rodney King, George Floyd, Michael Brown, and Breonna Taylor arguably become what Lance Bennett and Lawrence term news icons (Bennet and Lawrence 23). News icons arise when certain events become so widely publicized and thus representative of hotly debated political and cultural issues that their often compelling imagery remains etched in the public memory long after they occur (Lawrence 140).

The general rhetorical function of images in newswriting is that they efficiently contribute to constructing public problems, especially if the problem in question affects groups of people that are prone to being positively stereotyped, such as children or ‘hard-working Americans’ (Schneider and Ingram 334). Likewise the minimal addition of an adjectival descriptor such as ‘African American,’ ‘Caucasian,’ ‘hard-working,’ ’15-year old,’ or ‘aggressive’ changes the image and thereby the frame of an incident, and with that the construction of a public problem. An analysis of *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* coverage of UFIs in 1985-94 showed that journalists nearly always add an adjective related to an ethnic or racial minority to describe a non-white victim (Lawrence 108). Equally, an omission of such an adjective changes the frame as well. A similar analysis of *NPR*’s coverage of UFIs in 2015-2020 demonstrated that the phrase ‘unarmed black man’ appears 82

times, whereas the phrase ‘unarmed white man’ does not appear at all (McBride). Kelly McBride asserts that journalists use the former phrase “without being completely aware of it (…) to indicate an episode in the wide arc of unjustified violence by white people against black people.” These three words thus become journalistic shorthand or code for a much larger narrative, since their minimalist descriptions evoke a news script that reaches far beyond the literal meaning of the words.

To summarize, narratives of police use of force against African Americans are inherently complicated to report on because, first of all, the meaning of the incident often depends on the actor that recounts the UFI. Victims almost ubiquitously claim innocence because the UFI would not even have been a news item if the victim agreed with the police’s conduct in the first place. Police officers are unlikely to admit for legal reasons that race or ethnicity played a part in a UFI. Witnesses do not resolve the ambiguity of the situation because even the appropriate use of force may seem disproportionate. The definition of police brutality itself is furthermore innately contestable and it depends on whether it is understood as a ‘rotten orchard’/systemic or ‘bad apple’/individualizing phenomenon. Apart from that, the data sets that prove that African Americans are disproportionately killed, arrested, stopped, and frisked are not solely explained by the fact that police officers engage in explicitly racially motivated hateful behavior. Other causative theories such as implicit racial bias, poor management, inadequate training, and perhaps even more as-of-yet unidentified factors play a role as well. However, a more complex and multilayered causative theory is less useful in the news arena because it is not able to offer a single locus of control or point of leverage to solve an issue. The very nature of MN requires rapid identification and contextualization of a problem, and because the racist systemic explanation is able to provide a single locus, it translates well into news scripts. Last of all, the nature of MN also requires minimal descriptions because of constraints of the medium. However, the reductionist

description of the involved individuals as ‘unarmed black man’ or ‘Caucasian police officer’ automatically carries a weight that goes far beyond the literal meaning of the words and involuntarily invokes polarizing imagery.

4. Literary Journalism about Police Violence against African Americans

This chapter assesses the function of the feature that sets LJ apart from MN, namely the use of literary techniques, and especially the ones identified in chapter 1. Their use is identified in the annotated versions of a small corpus of feature stories about UFIs against African Americans. The following four texts make up that corpus:

- Ta-Nehisi Coates' "A Beautiful Life." (*Vanity Fair*, September 2020 issue)
- Jelani Cobb's "Policing the Police in Newark." (*The New Yorker*, June 28 2016)
- William Finnegan's "The Blue Wall." (*The New Yorker*, August 3 & 10 2020 issue)
- Jake Halpern's "The Cop." (*The New Yorker*, August 10 & 17 2015 issue)

These pieces were selected because they fit the description of LJ, and were all published in two major outlets of contemporary LJ, namely *The New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair*. They furthermore represent a diverse selection of writers, since the authors have backgrounds in four different literary genres; respectively, the novel, literary criticism, New New Journalism, and the graphic novel. The annotated versions (see appendices A-D) contain footnotes that are divided into the following six categories with their own accompanying abbreviations: homodiegetic second-order narrative (HOMOD.), internal focalisation that captures a given subject's point of view (INTERN.), narrative storytelling through a meaningful scene-by-scene construction (SCENE), extensive use of dialogue (DIALOGUE), symbolizing figurative language (FIG. LANG.), and other literary techniques (OTHER). The following section examines their context-specific function through close reading analyses, and the subsequent section assesses how they allow the writers to respond in their own way to the factors that innately complicate this topic.

4.1 The Function of Literary Techniques in the Feature Stories

Three pieces have a homodiegetic narrator, and they contain the following second-order narratives: Cobb rides along with two police detectives for one of their routine patrols,

Finnegan joins officers protecting a statue in front of the American Museum of Natural History, and Halpern spends several days with the cop who shot Michael Brown, Darren Wilson. These homodiegetic second-order narratives first of all provide a transparent rendition of the reporters' methodologies, including their observations regarding and interactions with the subjects. Finnegan, for example, acknowledges that he was struck by something that two Black N.Y.P.D. officers said independently of each other (57), whereas Halpern reveals how he confronted Wilson with his apparent use of racially coded language (48). These narratives furthermore draw attention to the journalists themselves. The reporters acknowledge their subjective status, for example, when Finnegan writes that police officers experience hostility both in "the workplace of the low-income neighborhood and in the crosshairs of constant criticism by clever academics and articles like this one" (54), or when Cobb provides the following interpretation: "When I asked one officer how he makes the decision to stop someone, he described a set of criteria that constitute a gut instinct, not reasonable suspicion." He does not directly quote the officer's answer, but instead offers an interpretation that is distinctly his own. Thus these homodiegetic second-order narratives allow the writers to incorporate the actions of observing, participating, and interpreting in the text and simultaneously point towards the fundamentally subjective nature of these actions.

Only Coates's piece has an internal focalisation that captures a given subject's point of view, namely that of Tamika Palmer, Breonna Taylor's mother. The line separating Palmer's narrative and Coates' writing, editing, and organizing is thin and at times non-existent. The opening paragraphs indicate that the text is Palmer's "attempt to illuminate the life that was taken" (44), and Coates renders her story – as told in a series of interviews with him – in dramatic form. His specific use of first-person internal focalisation capture the reminiscent and colloquial qualities of Palmer's story, for example: "And I don't really remember people ever calling the police. I remember people *not wanting to call the police.* I remember stuff

happening and somebody would be like, *Call the police,* and people were like, *Fuck the police. They not helping us*" (44). Coates establishes a reminiscent and intimate mood through his inclusion of conversational phrases like 'stuff happening' and his use of italics to indicate Palmer's impersonations. He uses this emphasis on memory to show that Palmer's lived experiences ostensibly influence the way she thinks about Taylor's murder. Thus the first-person internal focalisation in this case illustrates how an individual is bound to use memories in their attempt to make sense of an incident.

All the pieces use narrative storytelling through a meaningful scene-by-scene construction. Coates' and Halpern's texts exemplify how it can be applied in two entirely different ways, since the former uses it to explore the processes of meaning-making from one specific point-of-view and the latter to examine the multifarious forces at work in a single incident. Coates starts his narrative in medias res with the night of Taylor's murder, but then uses an analepsis as Palmer recounts the events that led up to the murder. The moment at which the analepsis occurs is particularly meaningful. The paragraphs leading up to the analepsis do not mention that the police killed Taylor (44). The analepsis itself takes the reader back to Palmer's childhood, and specifically the moments when she began to develop her distrust for the police. The function of the sudden switch from present tense to past tense and from crime scene to childhood memory is that Coates obliges the reader to work out the connection between those two moments in time. He thus uses narrative to reveal how Palmer's childhood experiences influence the way she interprets Taylor's murder. Halpern's use of narrative is especially meaningful in his reconstruction of the events leading up to the death of Michael Brown. Halpern uses parallel time lines when he recounts how Wilson and Brown respectively became involved in the incident. When these two timelines coalesce, Halpern writes: "The most thorough account of what happened next comes from the Justice Department's report on the incident, which is eighty-six pages long" (51). His next paragraph

presents two competing descriptions of Wilson's and Brown's first encounter alongside each other. After this he pauses the narrated time and, with the aid of experts in the fields of police practices and African American Studies, dissects the meaning of both Wilson's and Brown's behavior, e.g. why Wilson parked his car in front of Brown and how Brown probably interpreted this gesture. After this the narrative resumes, based on Wilson's court testimony, evidence, reports, and witness statements, but Halpern acknowledges the epistemological limits of his research: "It is impossible to know what Brown and Wilson then said to each other—or why the situation escalated so quickly" (51). Halpern also repeatedly uses pauses in the narrated time, for example when he explains state-of-the-art research regarding implicit racial biases and how that concept could have possibly influenced the course of events (52). He uses parallel time lines and pauses in narrated time to recount how the incident developed and escalated, reflect on the underlying processes that could have possibly influenced the outcome, and explore the limits of what is knowable. Halpern refuses to simplify what happened, and uses narrative to tackle the complexity of the situation.

Three pieces contain examples of extensive use of dialogue, as Coates, Finnegan, and Halpern respectively capture conversations between Palmer and a police officer, two officers guarding the Roosevelt statue, and Wilson and his wife. Finnegan's dialogue particularly illustrates how this device establishes character, facilitates action, and illuminates a certain aspect of the text's subject:

> "You ever read *1984*?" one officer asked. He was fleshy and fair, late thirties, with a Long Island accent.
>
> He nodded at the statue, the closed-down museum, the whole situation.
>
> "Nah," his colleague said. "This is *Animal Farm*."
>
> "Nah," the first cop said. "It's the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Wipe out the past, act like none of it ever happened." He sounded disturbed, disgusted, sad.

"Even the blue whale?"

"Yeah, everything," he said. (57)

This dialogue is not used to illustrate a certain fact about the Roosevelt statue or support an opinion on American cultural heritage. It rather captures the officers' cynicism towards the removal of problematic statues, and shows a specific association they have, as they liken it to totalitarian concepts from Orwellian fiction and Chinese history. This dialogue provides a particular type of information about the officers, something about their character and the way they think and act, which is efficiently revealed through the interaction they have. The rationale behind this is that this type of information contributes to a heightened understanding of the social dynamics in the police force, which is the subject of Finnegan's article.

All pieces furthermore contain instances of figurative language that represent something else beyond the accepted literal sense of the word(s) in question. Although the techniques range from metonymy to simile, and from emblem to symbolic detail, they all share this underlying principle. Coates, for example, uses a twist on the concept of the metonymy, as he continuously refers to the police officers not with a physical quality associated with it – such as 'the brass' or 'the law' – but with the more abstract aspect of "the strangers" (44). This accentuates the relationship between Taylor and the officers in plain clothes who shot her, because they were, on a more abstract level, simply different human beings who did not know each other. Cobb writes that a report, issued in the aftermath of riots caused by an UFI against an African American, contained "a list of recommendations—better communication between the police and the community, improved hiring standards, a more diverse police force—that seem to have been passed down like an Internet term paper to subsequent inquiries into unrest." This simile likens the report to a commonly recognized action, and it represents the more widespread trend of a lackluster approach to police reform. The significance of the report emerges not from its uniqueness but from its enactment of a

cultural paradigm. Finnegan uses an emblem when he recounts how three officers falsely jumped to the conclusion they were poisoned (53). This story has a relatively clear significance and dramatizes an underlying moral point, which is that the officers' training to be hyper-suspicious plants a seed for paranoia, and this paranoia affects the officers later in their career. Halpern, when he introduces Wilson in his article, writes that he was "wearing a hat and sunglasses. He had seen me arriving on security cameras that are synched to his phone" (44). The specific inclusion of these details regarding his outfit and security measures are examples of symbolic details in that they signify not just their literal meaning, but also reveal something about Wilson's position in the world and his attitude towards it. The hat, sunglasses, and video cameras evoke images of an undercover life, and they symbolize anonymity and precaution. These different types of figurative language thus all represent something beyond the literal sense of the word(s) in question. These instances point to events or details that the writers consider to be representative of a wider cultural trend, mythology, or paradigm.

The texts also used other techniques apart from the ones identified in chapter 1, as one kind was used in all four texts (the ellipsis) and a few others were used more than once (chiasmus, apostrophe, metanarrative, colloquialisms, paradox, irony, anaphora). Only the ellipsis will be assessed in depth, but the paradox and the metanarrative will be analyzed together, because their combined use lies at the core of both Finnegan's and Halpern's text. The annotated editions contain brief analyses of the other techniques in the footnotes.

The ellipses in the texts are all used in a similar way, namely that the implication of a preceding sentence or paragraph is omitted. This incites the reader to draw the conclusion for themselves, although the writer ensures that the preceding sentence or paragraph sufficiently clarifies the specific nature of that conclusion. Since all the ellipses in the texts are used in a similar fashion, it is sufficient to analyze only one example in detail. When Finnegan

examines the relationship between police unions and American politicians, he writes that "[d]uring the 2016 campaign, the Fraternal Order of Police, a national union with three hundred and fifty thousand members, had formally endorsed [Donald Trump]. In 1968, it endorsed George Wallace" (55). He does not elaborate on Wallace's relationship with the police, as he continues with a new paragraph that recounts a protest against police brutality in Manhattan in 2020. However, the fact that Finnegan chooses to simply mention Wallace – a prominent segregationist and staunch campaigner for the Jim Crow laws – after his examination of Trump invites a comparison with the latter. The implication of this comparison is omitted, but, given that Trump was president when this text was written, Finnegan sufficiently steers the reader into the direction of the conclusion they should draw: contemporary American politicians bear an uncomfortable resemblance to their overtly racist predecessors. The ellipsis thus has the function of inciting the reader to make a certain mental leap, which stimulates their engagement with the text.

Finnegan's and Halpern's texts both use paradoxes, as, for example, the latter summarizes the conclusions from two different governmental reports: "Wilson had violated no protocol in his deadly interaction with Brown, yet he was part of a corrupt and racist system" (44). This confronts the reader with a self-contradictory state of affairs, which logically elicits the question: how can these things be true *simultaneously*? Halpern then introduces a metanarrative that illustrates how this paradox depends to a large extent upon one's point of view. This metanarrative puts the debatable status of larger, overarching explanations behind individual incidents on display. In other words, he recounts how larger narratives behind UFIs are vastly different for parties like the federal government, Ta-Nehisi Coates, the right-wing magazine *American Thinker*, and police officers:

> Many Americans believe that Wilson need not have killed Brown in order to protect himself, and might not have resorted to lethal force had Brown been white. Ta-Nehisi

> Coates, in his new book, *Between the World and Me*, writing of the psychological impact of incidents like the Brown shooting, says, "It does not matter if the destruction is the result of an unfortunate overreaction. It does not matter if it originates in a misunderstanding." Coates also notes, "There is nothing uniquely evil in these destroyers or even in this moment. The destroyers are merely men enforcing the whims of our country."
>
> Many police officers have defended Wilson, pointing out that cops patrolling violent neighborhoods risk their lives. Some right-wing publications have lionized him. In The *American Thinker*, David Whitley wrote that Wilson "should be thanked and treated as a hero!" (44).

This metanarrative asserts that there is not one party that holds a total interpretational monopoly over the others, since Wilson is both described as a hero and a criminal. The preceding paradox emphasizes that his position is complicated since he acted correctly according to protocol but is part of a malfunctioning system. The metanarrative then emphasizes that the meaning of his individual actions often equally depends one's point of view. These two devices thus work together to raise questions about individual actions vis-à-vis systemic operations, the nature and/or presence of systemic racism, and how one's specific point of view affects these debates. They also point to the constructed and highly politicized way in which various groups, institutions, and ideologies attempt to define societal problems and construct a social reality in the public arena, and, in a bout of self-reflexivity, how the texts that lie before the reader are part of that same arena.

4.2 Literary Techniques as Response to Complicating Factors

This section examines how Coates, Cobb, Finnegan, and Halpern use the literary techniques to respond to the factors that especially complicate this topic. Afterwards I will also address how these techniques counteract two tendencies from MN coverage about this topic.

The first complicating factor is that the involved parties – e.g. police officers, victim(s) (if alive), and witnesses – tend to hold different interpretations of an incident, which generates conflicting theories as to what happened. Halpern's and Coates' texts respond in two different ways to the presence of competing claims, as the former explores the multifarious forces at work in a single incident and the latter investigates the processes of meaning-making from one specific point of view. Halpern uses parallel time lines, shifts in perspective, and pauses in narrated time in his reconstruction of Darren Wilson's shooting of Michael Brown in order to identify exactly where and how the competing claims differ. The product of this is a detailed exploration of the plausible scenarios that continually separates the line between factuality and speculation, but one that is enriched with the character's backstories, their motives, and expert commentary on policing strategies and police-citizen encounters. Coates takes the opposite approach in that he is not interested in multiple points of view but in a singular one. In his piece he examines how Tamika Palmer's childhood has formed her psyche and still influences her attitude towards the police later in life. The text's first-person internal focalisation highlights the importance of her memories, and Coates connects the murder of her daughter to the origins of Palmer's distrust for the police. This completely different response not only acknowledges her biased attitude towards the police, but actively explores it.

Another factor that inherently complicates this subject is that the meaning of a specific incident largely depends on whether it is understood as an example of a 'bad apple'/individualizing phenomenon, a 'rotten orchard'/systemic problem, or as a problem that stems from wider societal attitudes. What all the pieces have in common in their response to this factor is that they put the act of interpreting what happened on display. Instead of automatically accepting one of these three explanations they investigate how and why meaning is given to a certain incident. They do so through two different ways, as they use

homodiegetic second-order narratives to investigate their own processes of meaning-making, and metanarratives and paradoxes to point out how other larger narratives compete in the social arena. The writers presumably favour one explanation over the other, given that they, as journalists, are particularly engaged American citizens. However, as is the case for Cobb and Halpern, the use of a homodiegetic narration and second-order narratives enables them to dramatize how they came to their own conclusions. Thus they construct social realities from their particular point of view, without pretending that they are "all-knowing, all-seeing Eyes" (18 qtd. in Weber). Secondly, the metanarratives and paradoxes in Halpern's and Finnegan's texts dramatize the coexistence of multiple theories that explain UFIs against African Americans. They illustrate how these explanations reflect deeply divided perceptions of American society. The writers use these devices to expose the absence of an interpretational monopoly, which automatically undermines any straightforward, uncomplicated explanation. This means that these two devices also counteract MN's tendency to provide a single causative theory behind such violence.

On top of these two devices, the writers also use other devices to counteract this tendency. They use plot, symbolizing figurative language, and dialogues to examine and represent causative theories that include multiple factors like individual beliefs and character, implicit bias, police management, explicit racism, training, and working culture. For example, Halpern juxtaposes a scene that shows Wilson's disapproval of a junior officer's mediocre training in communication skills with one that depicts Wilson's own dubious communication skills (48). He thus obliges the reader to seek out why these scenes are placed next to each other. The unstated implication is that Wilson is simultaneously aware of a problem with communication and de-escalation training for officers, but does not consider himself to be affected by that problem. This psychological insight exemplifies the philosophy behind Halpern's article, namely that a heightened understanding of a specific person's character

illuminates said person's behavior. The person's behavior in this case includes his deadly encounter with Brown. This encounter is described later in the piece, and this is enriched by this psychological insight because Wilson's meager communication training could have influenced the course of events. This way Halpern uses scene-by-scene construction to dramatize how different factors – even though their precise influence is unclear – could have had a possible influence. Thus this novelistic approach resists MN's inclination to provide a single causative explanation as to what happened, because in this case Halpern dramatizes how such an explanation does not exist.

The LJ approach furthermore resists the tendency to provide minimal descriptions that involuntarily evoke polarizing imagery, like 'unarmed black man.' Indirect methods of characterization, such as internal focalisation, narrated action, and dialogue, negate this process. Although Coates' text initially describes Palmer as "Breonna Taylor's mother" (44), it allows her to transcend this surficial image of the grieving parent. Coates creates a comprehensive profile, since he is interested in much more than her relationship to her daughter, ranging from memories of her grandmother to her opinions on the latest news. He uses internal focalisation to establish intimacy, and uses this to create a sense of emotional vulnerability. Finnegan chooses another approach in his characterisation of Kirk Burkhalter, a police union member, as he withholds any description of his physique for thirty-three paragraphs, and thus completely relies on quotations and narrated backstory. It is only much later that he describes Burkhalter as Black, but that is a necessary description since Finnegan elaborates on the relationship between the Black community and the police unions (56). Halpern enriches his characterisation of Wilson and Dorian Johnson with motives. Both provide competing claims of their encounter. Halpern uses motives to reveal how their reasons for doing so are grounded in their character. That is to say, they are prone to tell things that are beneficial to them, because it would not make sense for Wilson to

acknowledge any racially charged claims or for Johnson to acknowledge any offending behaviour. Instead, Johnson tells how, just before Brown robbed the store, they were immersed in a discussion "about the Bible and God—how you're supposed to be as a human going through life" (51). Although this is not verifiable, it shows how Johnson gives an account in which he is not violent or wild, but rather pious and concerned with religion instead. Halpern reveals that Wilson equally tries to provide a more flattering account, as he writes how he "spotted Brown and Johnson, and called out to them to use the sidewalk. According to Wilson, Brown replied, 'Fuck what you have to say.' (Johnson denies that Brown said this, and claims that Wilson told them, 'Get the fuck on the sidewalk.') (51)." Not only does it make sense for Wilson to describe the situation in a manner that presents himself as a cop who simply reminds a civilian to obey the law and is faced with hostility in return, but it furthermore lays bare how both parties accuse the other of using an offensive swearword in their communication. Halpern thus illustrates how these characters each have their own motives to – however slightly – factually alter the truth to legitimize their own and discredit the other's behaviour. This notion diametrically opposes shallow, motiveless, and polarizing phrases like 'unarmed black man.' In the corpus texts similar images like the 'grieving black mother' or 'righteous cop' are thus, through various devices and methods of indirect characterisation, dismantled and abandoned.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to assess the function of literary techniques in four examples of literary journalism about police violence against African Americans. These texts exemplify a fundamentally different approach to journalism because they are conceived as a story, not as an inverted pyramid. A distinct sense of storytelling is constructed through the use of narration, scene-by-scene construction, dialogue, and figurative language. I have demonstrated that this construction allows the writers to explore how and why people (certain police officers, Breonna Taylor's mom, Darren Wilson, etc.) interpret UFIs the way they do. This process of meaning-making is central to the subject of this thesis because it is inseparable from deeply divided perceptions of the world and the police. Furthermore, these techniques also enable Halpern to create a comprehensive reconstruction of Michael Brown's death. This reconstruction acknowledges the competing claims made by the involved parties and discusses factors that could have possible played a role, but always demarcates the lines between factuality and speculation, the known and the unknowable. The stories moreover have two different types of narration, as three stories dramatize the journalist as observer, participant, or interpreter, and the fourth one uses internal focalization to go underneath the skin of Breonna Taylor's mom. The first type not only transparently renders the journalists' methodologies, but also enhances what Mailer terms the "intimacy with the master-builder of the tower" (232). The reasoning behind this is that, paraphrasing Joan Didion, objectivity cannot be achieved if the reader is not aware of a writer's bias (Didion 4), and a stronger intimacy with the writer-reporters provides the reader with the opportunity to adapt to and understand possible biases in the reporting. Additionally, the writers use different types of figurative language that point out connections between concepts, images, objects, stories, and other symbols of deeper cultural trends. These often inventive connections encourage the

reader to reconsider the way they think about, for example, the police, as Coates continuously refers to the officers that killed Breonna Taylor as the "strangers" (44).

Thus, the accumulative function of this distinctly literary approach to newswriting is that the writers use literary devices to create texts that resist oversimplification. These texts provide an understanding of UFIs that is both rooted in data but also in the lived experience of the involved parties: (former) police officers, victims, family members, activists, and even the journalists themselves. They infuse journalism with something, in the words of Tom Wolfe, "that readers had always had to go to novels and short stories for: namely, the subjective or emotional life of the characters" (35). They are factual, philosophical, and emotionally immersive. They furthermore communicate that, although much can be – and is, indeed – known, there will also be things that remain unknown, and reporters who cover UFIs are not all-knowing and omniscient creatures but remain separate, particular, limited individuals. Nonetheless the texts manage to counteract MN's tendencies to immensely compress the complexity of such issues and offer a single causative theory behind UFIs. Instead of reducing the event to the point of distortion, they fully embrace the complexity of the incident as to regain a degree of subtlety and nuance that might otherwise be lost. It is therefore not unsurprising that I found that devices like paradoxes, metanarratives, and ellipses all had a relatively prominent place in the corpus texts, even though they were not mentioned in a number of eminent works of scholarship on LJ. These devices all add an extra layer to the text, as the writers do not eschew contradictory states, dissect larger, overarching causative narratives behind individual incidents, and incite the reader to make certain mental leaps themselves.

However, there are some practical obstacles that limit the potential and influence of LJ. First of all, paywalls reduce the accessibility of numerous outlets, including *The New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair*. On top of that, a considerable amount of LJ from the first decades of

the 21st century was (and still is) published in a long-form format (Dowling 529). Since there is a comparatively meager time available in each day for paying attention to public affairs, this specifically limits the potential of this type of LJ. There are nonetheless reasons to be cautiously optimistic about its impact. A 2016 study found that American mobile users spent twice the engaged time with long-form journalism compared to short-form (Michell et al.). Although, of course, long-form journalism does not at all equal LJ, there is a substantial overlap between those two forms, and both seem to thrive in the digital social media environment because they are now easily shareable (Dowling 529).

LJ occupies a specific niche in the American media ecosystem. Even though its practices and practitioners vary widely in style and content, the texts studied in this thesis all rectified, in their own way, some degree of distortion that arises when events are compressed into very short messages. While this thesis is limited to assessing the function of literary techniques in LJ, potential future research could rather focus on the effect of these techniques. Drawing on Reader-response Theory, such research could address how readers find meaning in the act of reading LJ, perhaps as opposed to reading MN. This is indeed a logical extension of this thesis since devices like the ellipsis depend to a certain extent upon the reader's ability to conclude and interpret. Another possible direction for future research could incorporate Semiotics into LJ analyses. Roland Barthes made a distinction between journalists – "producers of myths" (238) – and mythologists, but there currently exists a lack of scholarship on the unusual position of literary journalists as both producers and decipherers of myths. Other directions for scholarly inquiry include studies of bodycam footage in more visually-oriented LJ about this subject, the ethical implications of the use of narrative in such writing, or the specific canonization processes of LJ. The *Vanity Fair* issue that featured Coates' piece was nominated in May 2021 for a National Magazine Award for Single-Topic Issue, and Cobb is editing an anthology of writing from *The New Yorker* titled *The Matter of*

Black Lives, which is due to be published in September 2021 and collects reporting and profiles by, among others, Coates, Cobb, Baldwin, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Toni Morrison. The wide variety of different directions for future research only further attests to the versatility of literary journalism, which, as a genre, offers a unique representation and expression of American culture, and fosters a mode of public reflection that is foundational to a civil society and social justice.

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7. Appendix

Appendix A: "A Beautiful Life" by Ta-Nehisi Coates

A Beautiful Life
By Ta-Nehisi Coates

Shortly after midnight March 13, strangers[1] *shot and killed Breonna Taylor in her own home. The strangers claimed to be investigating a drug case. The strangers found no drugs in Breonna Taylor's home. The strangers left their incident report almost totally blank.*

Tamika Palmer is Breonna Taylor's mother. What follows is her attempt to illuminate the life that was taken. To grapple with the nature of strangers. To fill in the blanks.[2]

KENNY CALLS ME in the middle of the night.[3] He says, *Somebody kicked in the door and shot Breonna.*[4] I am dead asleep. I don't know what he's talking about. I jump up. I get ready, and I rush over to her house. When I get there, the street's just flooded with police—it's a million of them. And there's an officer at the end of the road, and I tell her who I am and that I need to get through there because something had happened to my daughter. She tells me I need to go to the hospital because there was two ambulances that came through, and the first took the officer and the second took whoever else was hurt. Of course I go down to the hospital, and I tell them why I am there. The lady looks up Breonna and doesn't see her and says, *Well, I don't think she's here yet.* I wait for about almost two hours. The lady says, *Well, ma'am, we don't have any recollection of this person being on the way.*

So I go back to the apartment. And I am able to get through the street a little more. And when I get up to the apartment, it's still taped off and roped up around. So I tell the officer there that I need to get in the apartment, that something is going on with my daughter. He tells me to hang tight. He tells me hang tight, he'll get a detective over there to talk to me. It takes a little while for him to come. He introduces himself. I don't remember what his name actually is, but he kind of just goes on to ask me if I knew anybody who would want to hurt Breonna, or Kenny, or if I thought they were involved in anything. And I go, *Absolutely not.* Both of them got jobs. They go to work. They hang out with each other. That's about it. I ask where Kenny is, and the detective tells me, *Hold on. I'll be back.*

But it's about another hour or so before he comes back. He asks me if Breonna and Kenny had been having any problems or anything. I say, *Absolutely not. Kenny would never do anything to Breonna.* And then I say, *Where's Kenny. I need to talk to Kenny.* He says, *Well, Kenny's at one of our offices. He's trying to help us piece together what happened here tonight.*[5] We are out there for a number of hours afterward. It's kind of chilly. I leave. I get coffee and come

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[1]FIG. LANG.: Coates uses a twist on the concept of the metonymy, as he continuously refers to the police officers not with a physical quality associated with it – such as 'the brass' or 'the law' – but with the more abstract aspect of 'the strangers.'
[2]OTHER: The paragraph ends with a set of anaphora.
[3]INTERN.: Start of a first-person narrative that has an internal focalisation and captures Tamika Palmer's particular interior state. The line separating Palmer's narrative and Coates' writing, editing, and organizing is thin or and at times non-existent, given that Coates provides no further explanation about his creative process.
[4]SCENE: Coates' organization of Palmer's narrative begins in medias res with a scene detailing the night that her daughter, Breonna Taylor, got murdered.
[5]DIALOGUE: Palmer's reconstruction of the dialogue between her and the detective has multiple functions in that it establishes and defines the two characters and inserts real-time interaction in Palmer's narrative.

back. I'm still standing out there waiting. It's about 11 in the morning when the officer comes over and says that they are about done and they are wrapping up, and we will be able to get in there once they are finished. I say, *Where's Breonna, why won't anybody say where Breonna is?* He says, *Well, ma'am, she's still in the apartment.* And I know what that means.[6]

I'm from Michigan.[7] I spent a lot of time in Detroit. But I grew up mostly in Grand Rapids. There was always stuff happening up there with the police. I was always hearing about them harassing black people or just always something. When I was about 13, I was outside one day with some friends. And the police just came up out of nowhere and started yelling. It was a gang of us, boys and girls, but they wasn't talking to any of us, the girls. They were just kind of screaming at all the boys, *Get on the ground! Get your stupid asses on the ground!* And so we all were like, *What are you doing! We didn't even do anything!* But there'd be stuff like that every day.

I remember being in the car, driving down a street, and being told if the police are behind us, don't turn around and look at them. And if we did get pulled over, don't say anything. Don't move, because they'll try and do something to us. I remember just kind of being told to stay away from the police, like you don't want to have no problems with the police or give them a reason to want to have a problem with you. And I don't really remember people ever calling the police. I remember people *not wanting to call the police.* I remember stuff happening and somebody would be like, *Call the police,* and people were like, *Fuck the police. They not helping us.*[8] I just kind of steered clear of them. I tried not to be in trouble. I got the occasional speeding ticket or something. But for the most part, I never really had to deal with them a lot. I stayed out of their way. When I came to Louisville, it was the same thing.

My mother was born in Alabama. My grandmother died when my mother was 13. She was shuffled around through family. And then, she finally ended up in Grand Rapids with her aunt and uncle when she was in, I want to say, high school. Yes, it was high school. I do know that. My mother took care of everybody. I can remember probably almost everybody in our family living with us at different times. Or even when they didn't, everybody dropped their kids off at my mother's house—cousins and everything. It would at least be six of us at all times, but sometimes it was more. So it was always a houseful. My mother had two sons. And she took in her husband's kids and adopted some kids. And so, I had sisters from that.
My mother cooked all the time. We're all pretty good cooks because of her. We always, whenever there was anything going on, we all had a part to play in cooking and whatever we had to do in the kitchen. My part? Just depended. Holiday-wise, I was in charge of whatever was going on with the dressing. I had to dice up the onions and celery and green peppers and mix it all up and season it. To be honest, I always remember cooking. I don't really remember when I started, because whenever my mother was in the kitchen, she had me in there doing something with her. We did chores. We would clean up. We had to. My mother worked hard—she was a nurse's aide. But she was sick a lot. I think she had her first stroke or heart attack, she was like 33 years.

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[6]OTHER: Coates uses an ellipsis, since the implication of this line is omitted.
[7]SCENE: This paragraph marks the beginning of the analepsis that recounts both Palmer's and Taylor's lives up until Taylor's death. The preceding paragraphs leave the identity of Taylor's murderer undiscussed, but the fact that this paragraph elaborates on Palmer's troubled history with the police suggests that the police might be involved. This is an example of the meaningful sequencing of scenes in Coates' text.
[8]OTHER: Coates' inclusion of linguistic fillers such as 'just kind of' and 'were like' creates a specific colloquial diction.

I WAS A POPULAR kid at school. I don't know how I became popular or why I was that person. Because it wasn't like I was into sports or doing anything like that. But all my life, even to this day, people kind of flocked to me. I don't know what that is or was. I learned to double Dutch at school. I started when I was around 10 or 12.1 had to get my coordination right. But you get popped with that rope a couple times, then you get it together. You gotta watch the rope. You gotta watch the side where you're trying to jump in. When that side of the rope goes back down, that's when you want to try and get in. You need a superlong rope. You gotta learn to turn. You can't be double-handed because then you're going to mess up the flow and such when somebody's jumping and then they going to go off on you because double Dutch is serious. It's a serious thing, and so if you double-handed, somebody's going off on you. Double-handed? Well there's a rhythm to turning the rope right, so if you don't got this rhythm, they call it double-handed, and it makes it hard for people to get in there and get their rhythm, and so then they got a problem with you. I'm pretty good. I ain't doing no flips or nothing, but I can switch up my footwork a little bit, but I ain't flipping and all of that. Double Dutch is serious. There would be double Dutch teams, so people would be teaching you all of this. Even later with Breonna, anything we did, we was playing double Dutch. For whatever reason, my mother told me that my dad was dead. I asked my mother a lot about how he passed away, about who he was, *Do I look like him?* and *Did he pass when I was a baby?* I asked those types of questions, but she just wasn't trying to answer. And so it was just one of those things like, Oh, I just didn't have a dad. And I remember one night, when I was 12, I was at my aunt's house and it was so weird. There was this guy and he kept staring at me, right? And I remember saying something to my mom about it because he just kept staring. And she was like, *Oh, you're fine.* She just brushed it off. And so, later on in the evening, I remember being in the kitchen doing something. And so, the man who was staring came in there and I remember him talking to me a bit, just asking stuff about me. And then he asked me if I knew who he was. And I said, *No.* And so, then he told me that he was my dad and I said, *No you're not. My dad is dead. So yeah....* And he just stood there and my aunt, she was like, *No. That's your dad.* We lived around the corner from her house, and I remember leaving and walking home by myself. But my aunt ended up driving around and getting me and making me come back.

So I talked to him and he introduced me to his wife because she was there, and he said that he wanted to hang out with me some the next day if I would let him, and then we would just go from there. And so the next day I did hang out a little bit. He took me shopping and stuff. And so, then he asked me if I would be willing to come and visit him sometime. And I remember freezing. And he was like, *Well, you don't have to right away, but we'll come and see you more first until you get comfortable to come.* And it just went from there.

I liked Detroit. I started spending summers and breaks there, we would get spring break and winter breaks, and all that stuff. I liked it, but it was weird. It was never like I had to go or, *Now, you've got a dad and you have to do this.* But in the beginning it was just weird.... But then I started to look forward to it. And it became, *Oh, I'm ready to be there.* I was ready for my breaks to come. Sometimes it was just like...getting away from Grand Rapids. There was a big difference from being at my mom's house and being at my dad's house. It was less hood. In Grand Rapids, people mostly rent their homes. Where my Dad lived, everybody pretty much owned their homes. My dad worked for Chrysler until he retired.

I used to always tell my daughters, Breonna and Juniyah, how lucky they were. See I didn't grow up where we were being told how college was important or that you needed to be doing these things to have a career. But I always would stay on my girls. I have this thing I say to

them all the time, *If you don't work, you don't eat.* Meaning, you want to be the best at whatever it is you want to be. If you want to be a hairdresser, be the hairdresser that owns the shop. I don't care what it is. You want to just be the best at whatever it is. And so you will have to go to school, you will have to learn things about yourself and your business and whatever it is you want to do in life. But when I look back, nobody ever said those things to us. I learned them later from being around my dad and them. Because my sisters both, they went to college, and I watched. There were certain things I never wanted for my girls. I never wanted them to feel distanced from me. I always felt like I had to take care of them. So I was just ready to work and do whatever I needed to do to make sure that, like, we wasn't a family moving around all the time. Like, I just didn't want them to have to see the things that I saw or feel the way that I felt coming up.

I got my first job when I was like 15. Babysitting. Well, I always babysat a little bit, even up before 15. Like my mother's friends, you know? We would babysit their kids. But then, I actually went out and got my own babysitting job for this family who had these three little boys. And so, that was my thing. And then, I did that all the way up until I had a baby. I had my own money. It was great. What did I do with the money? Shoes. I have a freaking shoe problem. And my kids have a freaking shoe problem. I remember buying my first pair of Lottos on my own. I thought I was it! I was somebody. You couldn't tell me nothing. Sometimes we would catch the bus out to the mall to get shoes. Or we had a guy we knew, a neighborhood guy. He had a store—Timmy D's. And he was not far from the hood. We would all gang up together, and walk up to Timmy D's.

I met Breonna's father at school. Me and his sister were best friends. Were we boyfriend and girlfriend? Hell no. My first time out the starting gate, I just got pregnant. Like literally. It was terrible, because from the moment I was 12, I had already decided in my life how I never wanted kids. Two things I figured out by then—I never wanted to be in love and I never wanted kids. And so to find out, at 16, I was pregnant was like, *What the hell? That can't be right.* But my mother kept saying I had this bad attitude or something. And I was like, *I don't know what you're talking about.* She made me take a test. And so then I went to school, and then by the time I came home, she was like, *Yeah. You know you're pregnant, right?* And I'm like, *Oh, that's impossible.* My mother was shocked. I hung out with all the boys, but I was very tomboyish. I wasn't, like, boy-crazy. I remember her asking me how I got pregnant. And I told her I didn't know. And she was asking me who was I pregnant by. And I said I didn't know. But my friend—Breonna's father's sister—told my mother. My older sister was sick at the time. And she wanted kids. And she couldn't have kids. And so she just was like, *You've got to have this baby. And I'll help you take care of it. You can just give it to me.* And I was like, *I'm not giving you a baby.* But we didn't know how much longer she would be around. And so she kind of talked me into the whole *you can do this* thing. She passed two years after Breonna was born.

I ended up having an emergency C-section, because I had been in labor for like eighteen and a half hours.[9] Breonna was stuck. It was this big ordeal. And so I had an emergency C-section, and apparently I was asleep forever. Then all of a sudden, I woke up. And they were like, *Do you want to hold your baby?* I'm like, *What?* But I remember holding her and thinking like, *Oh...I'm responsible for her. And I got to do something different.* And I remember thinking how people were waiting for me to screw this up. And I was like, *No. I'm not screwing this one up. Yeah. I got this.* But my whole world had changed. I had to figure life out. Because I

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[9]SCENE: Coates uses meaningful sequencing in that his piece begins with the night of Breonna’s death, but the central event in this paragraph, roughly in the middle of his piece, is her birth.

think prior to that, I was an average, everyday kid. Didn't have a care in the world. Hanging out with our friends, just kind of moseying on through life. I had no cares. And so here I am now with this kid, and it was like, *You're responsible for somebody else. And you got to do something different.*

There were all the people I had to cut out because I didn't want a lot of people around my kid, you know what I'm saying? I didn't really lose any friends. But it changed how I dealt with my friends. I was the first in my group to have a kid, so I had to grow up a lot faster than they did. Breonna's dad wasn't really around. He was young and stupid himself. I graduated from high school and then I started working in a nursing home. I worked full-time and my mom would keep Breonna, so I didn't have any problems with dealing with day care or stuff like that. I was a nurse aide, taking care of older people. It was nice but it would get sad, because they die. And some of these people you get really attached to and some of them don't have family. So it would break your heart sometimes.

Breonna was a good baby. She wasn't a crier. She was a happy baby. She started walking early—like at nine months, so she was just a little person early. I always say she had an old soul. She liked listening to the blues with my mother. She would sing me the blues. It was hilarious. She used to sing "Last Two Dollars." That was her song. We always had these Christmas gatherings. Everybody would be at my dad's. They would do karaoke. And one time my dad said to Breonna, *What do you want to sing?* And she said, *I want to sing Johnnie Taylor, "Last Two Dollars.* " Everybody just fell out, like *Where did this little girl come from?* And everyone was like, *I got to see this.* And they put this song on and gave her the mic and she was just going at it. And I was like, *Oh my God!* Everybody loved Breonna. Who wouldn't love a baby? But literally she was everybody's baby. She was close with my dad. My sister helped out. I remember we would get into arguments because it could be a holiday or something coming up. You want to go and get the baby an outfit and some shoes. She would beat me to the store. Like, *I got her this. She's wearing this.* And I'm like, *Dude! I got this.* And she's like, *Nah. She's wearing this.* And *blah, blah, blah.* Yeah. But it was great.[10]

MY BROTHER, ANTHONY, used to hang out with this motorcycle club. And I would say to him, *Why are you hanging out with these dirty people? What are you doing?* And he'd be like, *Dude, it's not even like that.* So somehow I ended up hanging out with him one night and I realized, *Oh my God, these people in these clubs, there's police officers, there's nurses, there's all different types of people who just enjoy riding motorcycles.* And then, I was like, *Man, I'm going to get me a bike.* I sure did get one—a Honda CBR. I was just nervous about riding, learning how to stop and go. It's a process to learn how to hold the clutch in and give it enough gas, but then it's like, *Okay.* It didn't take me long at all. I'm in a club now called No Haterz. What do I like about it? The freedom. I don't really care to ride from stop sign to stop sign. But when you're able to get on a country road or on the highway and be just cruising, you really enjoy it.

I taught Breonna how to ride a motorcycle. The first major thing I taught her was to stop and go. You hear people tell you, *If you can drive a stick, you can drive a motorcycle.* That's not a true statement. They're two different things. I don't know why people say that. But you do have a clutch, which is in your left hand. You've got to be able to let off this clutch and give the bike enough power to go without stalling it out. Breonna was a quick student. She was

[10]OTHER: This passage about Taylor's childhood contains many colloquialisms such as '[a]nd I'm like,' 'oh my God,' 'literally,' 'nah,' 'yeah,' and 'blah, blah, blah.' The salient inclusion of these colloquialisms contributes to an unfiltered speech-like diction, typically associated with a reminiscent mood.

nervous though. She always worried about perfecting any and everything. But she had it. She dropped my bike a couple of times, though. We were in the parking lot. She couldn't go too fast. I was trying to teach her how to turn around on the bike instead of just stopping and walking it back. But she stalled the bike out once like that and dropped it. She used to say, *We're going to buy us some new matching bikes, Mom.* That was her thing.

What am I looking for in a bike? I want to know what type of cc's it has. And I'm looking at its height, because most bikes are too tall for me, so I usually have the bike lowered so that my feet can be on the ground a little bit, or at least where I can control it. You can get all kinds of features—rims, custom paint jobs, lights that change while you're riding. Music is a big thing. My bike was lowered and stretched out, so it has this extended swing arm on the back of it. It was built for racing. It has a 1,300-cc motor, one of the bigger motors that you can get on a bike, but then they did some motor work to it and made it even faster.

I first came down to Louisville on a ride with a bunch of friends. We came down from Grand Rapids for the Kentucky Derby. We spent the weekend here and the whole vibe was just different. And so then I told my friend I'm going to come back. So I ended up coming to visit her that next January. And I remember when I got here, I was like, *Dude, where's the snow*? And she was like, *Girl, it don't snow like that here. Shoot, it snows here they're going to shut the city down.* I was like, *What? I've got to live here.* So I went home and told everybody I was moving to Kentucky. But everybody was like, *Shut up, you ain't going nowhere.* I guess that's what so many people say back home, *Oh, I'm moving somewhere.* And they ain't going nowhere. But I was like, *Yeah, okay. I'm telling you by March I'm gone.*
I loved Louisville. The vibe was just different. The people were different. I'm from Grand Rapids-Detroit area, where everybody has an attitude. Everybody walks around with a chip on their shoulder. And here, it was like these random people saying good morning to you. And I'm like, *What's wrong with these people? Why do they keep talking to me? I don't know these people!* It was a big difference. But I loved it. There was always big events for the kids—concerts on the waterfront and stuff. Back home we didn't have anything like that. And my kids loved it, and that was the most important part for me at the time, was that they were happy and that they would be okay here. And they were safe. Back home, I just kind of felt like history was always repeating itself, everybody was teenage moms, and it was corner boys and just whatever else. I would say definitely 75 percent of the boys I went to school with ended up in jail. I didn't expose my kids to a whole lot of stuff. And not to say this toward anybody, but, like, they've never seen struggle. You know what I'm saying? Everything that I dealt with or was around when I was a child, my kids didn't see that.

Breonna was never really a troublesome kid. Only thing is, she would be fine all school year and then in the last few days she would somehow get in trouble with her mouth. I guess by the end of the year she probably had enough of people and so she would be snappy. But I didn't have a lot of problems with her. She was very computer literate. I bought her first computer when she was seven years old and she just loved it. She loved to play double Dutch. And as she got older, she loved cars. Yeah, she's a lot like me. I love older cars. Like a Cutlass and stuff like that. I love Thunderbirds, the old one with the bird on it. Breonna's absolute favorite was the Dodge Charger. She was on her second one—a 2019 Dodge Charger R/T. She was so proud of this car, it was her baby. And she got these pipes on it. It's got dual exhaust so you get the *vroom!* She had just bought this one. I'm in her car right now.

Kenny was a pretty decent kid too. He just was funny to hang around and he worked. His parents were married, so he had a pretty good upbringing himself. In the beginning, they were

just friends. Even before they got into a relationship, Kenny would say, "I'm going to marry her." I'd be like, "Be careful what you wish for, Kenny." I want to say they were together about five years. They had talked about having a baby at some point. And she had just recently started saying, *Yeah, I think l'm almost ready. I just want to get a house first and then go from there.* Because that was the next thing. She got her Charger. And next was the house. Breonna wanted to be a nurse. That was her thing. But her very first job she worked was Steak 'n Shake. She was 15 years old and she worked there for a few years all through school. And then she started working with older people herself. And she liked to drive, like I said before, so she drove this little bus that goes around and gets the older people and takes them places. She drove that for a while. And then she went to do EMT and she did that, but it was a lot. So then she went into the ER and worked as a tech and she absolutely loved it there. And so her goal was just to finish school with being in the ER and be a nurse.

I have so many stories. I think about how I had to tell Breonna how to make chili a hundred times, and she would still call me when she would go to the store. She worked third shift. So she gets off of work at 7 in the morning, and of course I'm at work by then, because I start work at 4,4:30 in the morning, you know? And so Breonna would be in the grocery store at 7 in the morning, calling my phone, and it would be funny because this is what my coworkers will remember the most about her—they always talked about Breonna in the grocery store, calling me like, *Mama, what do I need to buy for chili? Blah, blah, blah.* And I would say *Breonna, can you write this down, because I don't understand why I got to tell you this all the time.* And she would say, *I don't need to write it down, I can just call my mama.* My coworkers would just laugh. But she'd just say, *I need to talk to my mama.* And I'm like, *Girrrll...*

Bossy. She was bossy. Breonna was bossy. She was so OCD. And she was one of them people who didn't talk about other people. If something was going on with you, she'd rather figure out a way to help you than talk about you. She was a hard worker. If she missed work, something was really wrong. She loved being in the hospital, she loved her job, and she loved the people she worked with. Clearly, they loved her. They would always be leaving her little notes about them loving her and loving to work with her. Even when she passed, some of them came to the funeral.[11] *We just can't believe this, we love her so much. We're just going to miss her.*

THE FIRST DAY, we are just all together crying and just trying to figure it out. I am just trying to replay this thing in my head. I am having these thoughts—*Maybe it's not Breonna,* because I never see her, mind you. The police never let me see her. But I know it's her house, you know what I'm saying? But just the fact that I physically haven't seen her.... And then, I can't talk to Kenny. But the last thing I know is Kenny called me and said, *Somebody kicked that door in.* And I'm thinking, *Who would want to do that? What is happening?* My head is all over the place. And the police aren't talking to me or telling me anything. My daughter's dead and they're not telling me anything. And I keep wondering, *Why would somebody do this?* Until I actually learn on the news that the police did this.

It is probably the next day. Someone texts me and says, *Did you see the news?* Of course I didn't see the news. I didn't know nothing about it. I watch everything on my iPad. I google the news station and then I watch the story. And I am like, *Why would they ask if somebody wanted to hurt her?* Now I'm confused. Because you asked me whether I knew someone who

[11]SCENE: These lines mark the end of the analepsis. The text – now in the present grammatical tense – continues with the events that happened after Taylor was shot.

wanted to hurt my daughter.[12] But you did it. Why couldn't you have just told me that the police did this? You asked me if somebody wanted to hurt "them." And Kenny...you said you had Kenny over at the office trying to help you figure out what happened. But come to find out, you got Kenny down here trying to charge him with attempted murder. And Breonna's gone. What the hell?

And I am telling you it kills my whole family. Breonna is like the family glue—even at 26 years old, she is pretty much the glue. And she is bossy. She don't care what is happening, she is going to make sure we get together and have a game night or have a cookout or have something, because we all tend to get so busy and consumed with work and whatever. But she has a personal relationship with everybody, even all my little cousins. They don't call each other cousins. They all call each other sisters and brothers. All the kids, the younger kids, or even the kids her age, looked up to Breonna. And my dad stops turning on the television. Breonna was his first granddaughter. To see what happened, to hear what happened, it breaks his heart and he can't stand it. And Juniyah is depressed. She is just going through the motions. Because she's used to seeing Breonna every day, and arguing with Breonna every other day.

The funeral home calls me when they get her body. The police never let me see her. They aren't talking to me. It's after midnight when I get the call. And they say I can come see her. Everybody is with me. My whole family—my four sisters, my dad, my daughter Juniyah, my sister's boyfriend, my boyfriend, the kids, a couple of close friends. Nobody wants to be left out. And when we see her body, it's just tears and screams. I walk out the home because everybody is just crying. And I am just so pissed off that she is lying there.
On the news they are saying it's a drug raid gone bad. And it's so common to hear these things—*drug raid. Cops met with gunfire. One suspect dead. The other in custody.*[13] And that's how they're describing what happened with Breonna. Breonna and Kenny are drug dealers. That is how it's being portrayed on the news. And I am pissed off because I know how hard Breonna worked. I know that Breonna ain't about that life. Breonna couldn't tell you where to buy a dime bag of weed. She isn't that person on the news. Neither is Kenny. So somebody has to do something. Somebody has to help me. Somebody has to.... Look, I'm a person who believes if you live by the sword, you die by the sword. I am not saying that if somebody shoots you, you should get shot. But I am a person who believes, if you out here selling all these drugs and your house get raided, and you in there doing what you doing...well...you end up in situations and you brought that on yourself. Live by the sword, die by the sword. But that wasn't Breonna's sword. And I cannot let them do that to her. With COVID happening, it feels like they want to just sweep this under the rug real quick. But we will not let this go.

So every morning we all talk, my whole family, we talk like, *Okay, well what's our plan today?* We have started talking to Christopher 2X. He's an activist in the community. We asked him about attorneys and he brought up Lonita Baker. She's my lawyer. But still it takes about two months before people really start paying attention. On one particular morning my sister writes this thing. And it reads something like, *My name is Breonna Taylor. On March 13, LMPD broke in my house and murdered me and no one's been arrested or charged.* She

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[12]OTHER: The apostrophe indicates that Taylor directly addresses the police detective. It is used for emotional emphasis and contributes to an accusatory mood.
[13]FIG. LANG.: The italicized lines are symbolic details in that they represent something else beyond the literal meaning of the words; they exemplify a certain cultural phenomenon, namely news speech. The editorial choice to italicize these lines emphasize their symbolic value.

sends it to me and I say, *Okay, I'm going to post this on Facebook.* Like an hour later, it has like 10,000 shares. It's like a light switch cuts on and all of a sudden this story is everywhere. Two hours later, it has even more shares. And now people are like, *I can't believe they did this!* And now people are asking, *When is the funeral?* I'm like, *The funeral was two months ago.* And the next thing I know there's a protest. I don't even know anything about it. But somebody ends up calling me and saying, *They got a protest going for your daughter. There's all these people down here.* The mayor finally calls—two and a half to almost three months later. He calls because we have hied a lawsuit. So he offers his condolences. And I'm like, *Okay.* And that's it.

I see what happens with George Floyd and I am pissed. I don't know the story. I don't care. This man is telling you he can't breathe, begging you to get off of him. And you put your hands in your pocket like this man is a dog or something. But now people are saying, *This happened in our city too. If Minneapolis can stand up, so can we.* And I think this is about to get crazy. On the one hand, I'm ecstatic that these people are standing up and demanding justice and saying her name. On the other hand, I don't want people to be hurt. I don't want y'all to tear up the city. We still got to live here. And still I understand the anger. Breonna was everybody's sister and daughter. As easily as this happened to Breonna, it could've been anybody else's child. So the mayor calls again. People are getting real antsy, and he doesn't want them to set the city on fire. They are tearing up the city, and he wants me to come and tell the people to stop. But I don't do it. Because I know the people don't want to hear from me. They want to hear from him. They aren't looking for me. They want to talk to him. That's his fight, not mine.

And people are asking me to come to the protests. I am advised to be careful with that because if these protests get out of hand, I'm not wanting to seem like I'm condoning that or something. But people want to see me. They want to say they're sorry. They want to apologize for the police. They want to offer their condolences. They want to apologize for not listening.[14] I can't believe it. People are begging for forgiveness like, *I'm sorry we weren't listening.* I just can't believe it. I felt like with the whole pandemic, Breonna would be forgotten, and we would just get swept under the rug.

And how do I feel then? Like, my God, somebody heard me. Like I finally caught my breath. That's how I feel. Like I finally caught my breath.[15]

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[14]OTHER: This paragraph contains a series of anaphora.

[15]FIG. LANG: The piece ends with a simile. This simile both indicates the up-to-date aspect of the end of Palmer's narrative and expresses something about Palmer's position in the world.

Appendix B: "Policing the Police in Newark" by Jelani Cobb

Policing the Police in Newark
By Jelani Cobb

In July, 2014, the Department of Justice released a report that showed that the Newark Police Department had engaged in a pattern of unconstitutional conduct. According to the report, seventy-five per cent of documented pedestrian stops by the police were not justified. Yet during the three years that the Department of Justice investigated the department, its internal-affairs office dismissed ninety-nine per cent of complaints lodged against officers.

The report came down a month after Ras Baraka, the son of the poet Amiri Baraka, and a former Newark city-council member and public-high-school principal, was sworn in as mayor. Baraka, whom I've known since we attended Howard University together, in the late nineteen-eighties, had a long history of activism against police brutality.[16] In the early nineties, he organized a large Manhattan demonstration against the Rodney King verdict. In 1997, he led a rally in Newark protesting the death of Dannette Daniels, a thirty-one-year-old pregnant woman, who was fatally shot by a Newark police officer during an arrest. The Department of Justice report was released amid an increasingly fraught national conversation about race and policing. Newark's progressives believed that, if police reform could happen anywhere, it would be here, with leadership that took the issue seriously.

On a warm evening last fall, I joined two detectives in the gang unit of the Newark Police Department, Ricardo Reillo and Wilberto Ruiz, for a ride-along, for "Policing the Police."[17][18] We rolled through the city in an unmarked black S.U.V., the driver's window down, a detective's flashlight slicing through the dark.[19] At the time, the officers of the gang unit went out five times per week in unmarked cars, making traffic stops, searching pedestrians, and conducting drug raids. Newark is plagued by drug trafficking and gang violence and has a homicide rate nine times higher than that of New York City. When I asked one officer how he makes the decision to stop someone, he described a set of criteria that constitute a gut instinct, not reasonable suspicion.[20]

On this particular evening, the officers turned a corner onto Stratford Place and a shout went out, alerting the block to their presence. People jumped out of their cars and ran into a decaying building.[21] When the officers followed, they found a dozen people in the hallway and a plastic shopping bag containing heroin packets. But, just as often, that kind of aggressive intervention yields a different result. That same night, the officers surrounded and searched a ten-year-old boy over the protests of his thirteen-year-old brother. They found nothing on him, but presumed he must have gotten rid of a stash of contraband before they

[16]HOMOD.: Introduction of Cobb as the homodiegetic narrator.
[17]SCENE: The start of a scene is indicated by a marker of time. This scene is furthermore meaningfully sequenced, because it functions as an answer to the question elicited by the preceding sentence: What is the state of police reform in Newark?
[18]HOMOD.: Start of the homodiegetic narrator's second-order narrative. Cobb begins both accounts of being immersed and how this immersion was enacted.
[19]SCENE: The scene continues with markers of place and descriptions of actions.
[20]HOMOD.: The homodiegetic narration, through the act of interpretating the officer's answer, draws attention to the subjective consciousness that is situated between the reader and the described events: the journalist, that is, himself.
[21]SCENE: Start of another scene.

rolled up. Ride with them long enough[22] and it becomes clear that "stop and frisk" is a euphemism for something far more invasive. The searches in Newark are public and thorough. In one instance, an officer pulled at a young man's waistband in order to look into his underwear. That search was conducted in the parking lot of an apartment complex, in full view of other residents.[23]

Forty-nine years ago, much of downtown Newark was incinerated during a riot —black residents still insist on calling it a 'rebellion' – that was sparked by the beating by police of an African-American cab driver. Amiri Baraka was pulled over during the riots and severely beaten by Newark police officers, one of them his former high-school classmate. The Lilley Report, which was issued in the riot's wake, made a list of recommendations—better communication between the police and the community, improved hiring standards, a more diverse police force—that seem to have been passed down like an Internet term paper to subsequent inquiries into unrest.[24] Newark did make at least one demonstrable change after 1967: the police force is now thirty-five per cent black and forty-one per cent Latino. When I asked Baraka how a diverse department could receive the same sort of complaints as an almost all-white department, like the one in Ferguson, he replied that the racism wasn't in who was doing the policing; it was in whom it was being done to.[25]

A few weeks after that ride-along, the gang unit stopped a fourteen-year-old boy named Jamod Watkins, who had been sent out shopping by his mother.[26] During the exchange, Ruiz took Watkins to the ground with so much force that he broke the boy's clavicle. Watkins lives in a high-crime area in the West Ward; his stop, which produced no drugs or guns, highlighted the problem with policing in Newark and other places like it. In place of reasonable suspicion, the police have adopted a standard in which all suspicion is reasonable.[27]

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[22]OTHER: Literary technique: apostrophe. The narrator implicitly addresses the reader. The underlying logic is that the reader would come to the same conclusion if they were to witness what the narrator witnessed.

[23]FIG. LANG.: The search in front of the apartment complex is treated as an enactment of a cultural paradigm and is a symbol representative of a wider cultural trend, e.g. the humiliating and thoroughly invasive stop-and-frisk searches.

[24]FIG. LANG.: This simile likens the report to a commonly recognized action, namely the way in which unimaginative internet term papers are handed down. The function of this simile lies not just in its comparison of these two things, but it furthermore indicates that it represents a more widespread cultural trend, namely the lackluster approach to developmental police reformation.

[25]OTHER: Literary technique: chiasmus. The order of terms is reversed in the clause after the semicolon, which functions as a rhetorical device to point attention to the perceived relation between racism and policing.

[26]SCENE: The start of a scene. This scene is meaningfully sequenced, because it elicits the question: What is the connection between this scene and the preceding paragraph? The rest of the paragraph provides that answer, because it is an example of the 'whom it was being done to'-part of the preceding sentence.

[27]OTHER: Literary technique: chiasmus. The order of terms is reversed in clause after the semicolon, which functions as a rhetorical device to point attention to the absurdity of the situation.

Appendix C: "The Blue Wall" by William Finnegan

The Blue Wall
By William Finnegan

In May, just days after a Minneapolis police officer killed George Floyd, Lieutenant Bob Kroll, the bellicose leader of the city's police union, described Floyd as a violent criminal, said that the protesters who had gathered to lament his death were terrorists, and complained that they weren't being treated more roughly by police. Kroll, who has spoken unsentimentally about being involved in three shootings himself, said that he was fighting to get the accused officers reinstated. In the following days, the Kentucky police union rallied around officers who had fatally shot an E.M.T. worker named Breonna Taylor in her home. Atlanta police staged an organized sick-out after the officers who killed Rayshard Brooks were charged. Philadelphia police sold T-shirts celebrating a fellow-cop who was caught on video clubbing a student protester with a steel baton. The list goes on.

Along with everything else about American society that was thrown into appalling relief by Floyd's killing, there has been the peculiar militancy of many police unions. Law enforcement kills more than a thousand Americans a year. Many are unarmed, and a disproportionate number are African-American. Very few of the officers involved face serious, if any, consequences, and much of that impunity is owed to the power of police unions.

In many cities, including New York, the unions are a political force, their endorsements and campaign donations coveted by both Republicans and Democrats. The legislation they support tends to get passed, their candidates elected. They insist on public displays of respect and may humiliate mayors who displease them. They defy reformers, including police chiefs, who struggle to fire even the worst-performing officers.[28] In an era when other labor unions are steadily declining in membership and influence, police unions have kept their numbers up, their coffers full. In Wisconsin, the Republican governor, Scott Walker, led a successful campaign to eliminate union rights for most of the state's public employees. The exceptions were firefighters and police.

Police unions enjoy a political paradox. Conservatives traditionally abhor labor unions but support the police. The left is critical of aggressive policing, yet has often muted its criticism of police unions—which are, after all, public-sector unions, an endangered and mostly progressive species.[29]

In their interstitial safe zone, police unions can offer their members extraordinary protections. Officers accused of misconduct may be given legal representation paid for by the city, and ample time to review evidence before speaking to investigators. In many cases, suspended officers have their pay guaranteed, and disciplinary recommendations of oversight boards are ignored. Complaints submitted too late are disqualified. Records of misconduct may be kept secret, and permanently destroyed after as little as sixty days.

With the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, criticism of the police has become less muted. Calls resound to defund police forces, and to abolish the unions. But the United States

[28]OTHER: Literary technique: anaphora. There is repetition of 'they' or 'their' in these successive lines.
[29]OTHER: Literary technique: paradox. The self-contradictory political state of the police unions is translated to this figure of speech.

has eighteen thousand nonfederal police agencies in its hyperlocalized system, with more than seven hundred thousand officers represented by unions. They will not be easily dislodged.

The Police Benevolent Association of New York City, which represents rank-and-file officers in the N.Y.P.D., is the largest municipal police union in the country, with twenty-four thousand dues-paying members. When the P.B.A. was founded, in the eighteen-nineties, it was a feeble thing, dedicated to raising money for the widows of fallen officers. The job was brutal then. Officers were badly paid, untrained, overworked—and thrown out of their jobs every time political power changed hands. They could plead for a living wage or an eight-hour day, but the rising labor movement wanted nothing to do with them. Cops were strikebreakers or worse; the first unionists killed in the American labor struggle, in 1850, were tailors clubbed to death by the New York police, at Ninth Avenue and Thirty-eighth Street.

After the First World War, the American Federation of Labor began issuing charters to police locals—in Cincinnati, St. Paul, Boston, Los Angeles. Management was horrified. Police were not ordinary workers, the argument went; they were more akin to soldiers or sailors, and unions would divide their loyalties, undermining the chain of command. The Boston Police Strike of 1919, when the nascent union demanded recognition from the city, forced a reckoning. There was extensive looting and reported rape; eight people were killed by the state militia. President Woodrow Wilson called the strike "a crime against civilization," and most of the city's policemen were fired. The fledgling unions in other cities were destroyed, and the cause of police unionization was set back for generations. It didn't help that, in 1937, Chicago cops fired on striking steelworkers and their families, killing ten.

In the early sixties, white racial anxiety helped strengthen the unions' position. The civil-rights movement was gathering force, street crime was increasing, and white flight was transforming cities. Public-sector unions were also flourishing. In New York, the teachers' union secured the right to collective bargaining in 1961—a major victory. The city's police were next. In 1963, Mayor Robert Wagner, Jr., a progressive, signed an executive order granting them collective-bargaining rights. Other cities followed, and police unions were eventually accepted in much of the country.

The N.Y.C.P.B.A. reassured politicians by promising not to strike or to affiliate with any other union, but it quickly asserted its power in other ways. The next mayor, John Lindsay, a Kennedyesque Republican, came into office vowing to establish a strong civilian complaint-review board, to provide police oversight. The P.B.A. mounted an overwhelming campaign against the plan. One poster showed a young middle-class white woman emerging from the subway onto a darkened street, looking frightened, with an accompanying text that read, "The Civilian Review Board must be stopped! Her life . . . your life . . . may depend on it." A TV commercial surveyed damage from rioting in Harlem in 1964, with a voice-over intoning, "The police were so careful to avoid accusations that they were virtually powerless."[30] The P.B.A. leadership was, if anything, blunter. The president, John Cassese, said, "I am sick and tired of giving in to minority groups, with their whims and their gripes and shouting." In a citywide referendum, Lindsay's side was defeated, by a margin of nearly two to one, and New York's mayors have been on notice ever since.

In the city's large, and largely segregated, Black community, police brutality had been a first-order issue for decades. The 1964 riots had been sparked when an off-duty policeman killed a

[30] FIG. LANG.: Literary technique: symbol. These two images from the poster and the TV commercial are representative of a more widespread cultural trend.

fifteen-year-old Black student, James Powell. Activists, led by the N.A.A.C.P. and by Black newspapers such as the Amsterdam News, had been calling for more police accountability since at least the twenties, and for civilian oversight since the forties. Another frequent demand was for the hiring of more Black officers. One of the less-remembered lines in Martin Luther King, Jr.,'s soaring speech at the March on Washington, in 1963: "We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality." When Mayor David Dinkins sought to install a civilian review board, in 1992, the P.B.A. staged a ferocious protest at City Hall, with ten thousand off-duty officers, virtually all white and many carrying guns and drinking alcohol. Demonstrators waved racist placards—"Dump the Washroom Attendant"—attacked reporters and bystanders, vandalized City Council members' cars, stormed City Hall, and overflowed onto the Brooklyn Bridge, where they stopped traffic and jumped on occupied cars. It was a wild performance of police impunity, and the on-duty officers did nothing to stop the mayhem.

Jimmy Breslin was there, reporting for Newsday, and he described a scene of toxic racism. "The cops held up several of the most crude drawings of Dinkins, black, performing perverted sex acts," he wrote. Newsday had more. A city councilwoman, Una Clarke, who is Black, was prevented from crossing Broadway "by a beer-drinking, off-duty police officer who said to his sidekick, 'This nigger says she's a member of the City Council.' " As the rally surged, Rudolph Giuliani, a former prosecutor, stood on a car, leading obscene chants through a bullhorn. He defeated Dinkins the next year and went on to two terms as mayor.[31]

By the end of the sixties, a racialized law-and-order ideology had emerged as a sort of unexamined American consensus, and it has basically prevailed since then, providing the political context in which police unions thrive. In the N.Y.P.D. today, with the arc having bent toward inclusion,[32] people of color constitute slightly more than half the uniformed force. And yet the unions—there are five, for various ranks, with the P.B.A. the largest by far—give a different impression. Their leadership, their politics, and their occasional mass protests, not to mention the N.Y.P.D.'s riot squads, still read as overwhelmingly white. White cops, Black and brown suspects: that remains the dominant paradigm.

Patrick J. Lynch is the president of the N.Y.C.P.B.A. He is fifty-seven, and was recently elected, unopposed, to a sixth four-year term. Lynch, who grew up and still lives in Bayside, Queens, is a cop's cop, banty and brash, clean-shaven, with hair gelled straight back. He's wound tight, and has a commanding shout that he can sustain for long periods at no-questions-taken press conferences. Outrage is his default mode. His officers are never wrong. Anybody who criticizes them is wrong. Mayors are the enemy. Police brass are the near-enemy.[33] Recently, Lynch said, "Pro-criminal advocates have hijacked our city and state. Law-abiding New Yorkers are suffering, and the police officers who protect them are under attack." That was in March, but it could have been anytime in the past twenty years. "Pro-criminal" seems to be code. Lynch says it a lot.

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[31]OTHER: Literary technique: verbal irony. The apparently straightforward event (Giuliani chanting verbal obscenities through a bullhorn, and exemplifying the boisterous attitude of the protestors) is undermined by its context (the fact that Giuliani rose to an eminent position of power, and became mayor of New York City), and the context gives it a very different significance.

[32]OTHER: Allusion to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assertion that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

[33]FIG. LANG.: Details about Lynch's hair, shaving, and his press conferences represent something else beyond the literal meaning of these details; they exemplify a certain societal phenomenon (because only certain officials would typically hold no-questions-taken press conferences) and reveal something about Lynch's character (because clean-shaven men with their hair gelled straight back call to mind a specific group of men).

Lynch and the P.B.A. deliver solid contracts for their members, with generous pay, especially for overtime, and good benefits. New York cops often retire after twenty years of service, with pensions that, according to a 2018 analysis by the nonprofit Citizens Budget Commission, average $74,500, and with plenty of time to start a second career, typically in security. The union—with its hefty political budget, its ability to launch fierce media campaigns, and the fear it can inspire in every politician who does not want to be painted as soft on crime—has also delivered when it comes to public policy. In the sixties, the N.Y.P.D. dropped a longtime requirement that its officers live in the five boroughs, and the P.B.A. has fought off every suggestion that the requirement be revived. And so a majority of its white members live on Long Island or in other suburbs. Dinkins ultimately succeeded in installing a civilian complaint-review board, but its disciplinary recommendations to the department are rarely followed. In public, the union trashes its every step.

The N.Y.P.D. is not the most insular, lawless police department around. It is, in fact, one of the least violent police agencies in the country's hundred largest cities. During the past seven years, according to a database built by a group called Mapping Police Violence, the police in St. Louis have killed fourteen times more civilians, per capita, than New York police have. In New York, police kill Black civilians at 7.8 times the rate of white civilians. In Chicago, the factor is 27.4.

In June, Lynch denounced George Floyd's killing as the "murder of an innocent person." But, even in New York, police killings have gone unprosecuted to an extraordinary extent. In 2014, the Daily News looked at the hundred and seventy-nine killings committed by on-duty N.Y.P.D. officers in the previous fifteen years and found that all those deaths had produced only three indictments and one conviction—which brought no jail time. The reluctance to indict stems partly from the close relationships between the police and local district attorneys—many of whom take campaign donations from the unions—but also from prosecutors' awareness that juries tend to believe police officers.

Lynch's time at the N.Y.P.D. has coincided with a spectacular decline in violent crime. His first assignment when he joined the force, in 1984, included the Ninetieth Precinct, in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The Ninetieth was a bad neighborhood then, with dozens of rapes and murders and more than a thousand robberies a year. Today, it's . . . Williamsburg. The causes of what is often called the New York Miracle are complex and hotly debated; violent crime has fallen in nearly every major American city. New York's police claim credit. Young, white, middle-class protesters, fired up by Black Lives Matter and chanting "I can't breathe," tend not to acknowledge that their gentrified neighborhoods owe something to the cops behind their polycarbonate riot shields.

A sense of being unthanked runs deep in the N.Y.P.D. People protesting police brutality, according to Lynch, "obviously do not appreciate the risk and sacrifice we make for them." Mike O'Meara, who heads the transit-police union, scolded state officials at a recent rally, shouting, "Stop treating us like animals and thugs and start treating us with some respect!"[34] In February, after Mayor Bill de Blasio expressed his sympathies to two police officers who had been shot, the Sergeants Benevolent Association tweeted, "Mayor DeBlasio, the members of the NYPD are declaring war on you! We do not respect you, DO NOT visit us in hospitals. You sold the NYPD to the vile creatures, the 1% who hate cops but vote for you." The S.B.A.

[34]OTHER: Literary technique: verbal irony: The apparently straightforward quote is undermined by its context (the fact that this quote is exactly something that BLM protestors would say as well), and the context gives it a very different significance.

was also responsible for doxxing the Mayor's daughter, Chiara; after she was arrested during a peaceful demonstration in late May, it published the police report, including her height, weight, and address, on Twitter. The City Council member Ritchie Torres described the S.B.A. as "a hate group masquerading as a labor union."

Lynch, for all his choler, is more strategic. He frames every question, whether it's officers' salaries or police violence, as a simple binary. "This is not an issue that's Republican or Democrat," he told a crowd on the City Hall steps last year, about a contract demand. "This is a right-and-wrong issue."[35] At the same event, Justin Brannan, a progressive city councilman, offered another binary: "Don't tell me you're a union guy if you don't support the cops and the P.B.A."

For members, it's possible to appreciate the work the unions do while deploring their rhetoric. Kirk Burkhalter comes from a police family. His father grew up poor, in the South, and joined the force young. Burkhalter joined at twenty-one, a few years after his brother. "It was all I knew," he told me.[36] He was always grateful for the unions' bargaining power: "If it wasn't for that legislative lobby, I wouldn't have grown up with all the benefits I did, the health care, the pension." He started as a patrolman in 1984, the same year that Lynch joined, made his way to detective first grade, and served as a union delegate. He went to college and law school on his own time and, after retiring, became a professor at New York Law School. "It pains me to see what's going on in the Police Department now," he told me. "Those are some of my best friends, the people I grew up with." He says that he understands the unions' defensiveness, but not their vitriol: "Imagine a nurses' union that hated patients, that went on TV and talked about how much trouble the patients give them."[37]

Police unions are prohibited from striking, but they impose themselves through illegal work slowdowns—a tactic known as the "blue flu." New York has staggered through many of them, including at least one directed at de Blasio. It is a protest, typically, against a perceived injustice to the police, but also a taste of the lawlessness to which police could subject their city. How do you like a languid, foot-dragging response to your 911 calls?[38] Feeling unappreciated, officers may even consider deserting their posts entirely. In June, police in Buffalo shoved an elderly demonstrator to the ground with enough force to crack his skull, and then marched past him, expressionless, as he lay bleeding. After the two officers who did the pushing were suspended, pending an investigation, all fifty-seven members of an élite Emergency Response Team resigned in solidarity.

The gradual departure of beat cops, who knew everybody in the neighborhood and whom everybody knew, at least in sentimental memory, has been a big step toward the alienation between police and civilians that one can feel in nearly every big American city. Cops today, sequestered in their patrol cars, are anonymous, minatory, and much more heavily armed than their predecessors. But the good old days of the beat cop were in many ways not so good. One of New York's most famous policemen in the nineteenth century was Alexander (Clubber)

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[35]OTHER: Literary technique: characterisation. this quality attributed to him by Finnegan gives insight into the way Lynch's character influences Lynch's political strategies.
[36]HOMOD.: Introduction of Finnegan as the homodiegetic narrator.
[37]OTHER: Literary technique: characterisation. Burkhalter's individual backstory and opinions explore and flesh out the complex relationship between unions and union members.
[38]OTHER: Literary techniques: rhetorical question and an apostrophe. This question is asked from the perspective of the police unions towards the general public. Finnegan uses this question in order to elaborate on the union's reasoning behind the strikes

Williams, who claimed to have bludgeoned hundreds of miscreants into submission, and was celebrated as a hero in Harper's Monthly in 1887. Violence was—and is—part of the job. In other developed nations, there is nothing comparable to the rate of police killings that we experience—or, in richer communities, countenance. In England and Wales, three or four civilians die at the hands of police in an average year. The U.S. population is larger, of course, but not three hundred times larger.

According to Paul Hirschfield, a Rutgers sociologist who has written about international law-enforcement practice, the difference is partly in the basic work environment. "American police encounter conditions that are more like Latin America than northern Europe," he told me. "These vast inequalities, the history of enslavement and conquest, a weak social safety net. The decentralization. Police are more likely to encounter civilians with firearms here. We don't have the levels of police corruption they do in Mexico, but we are not like other developed countries. The legal threshold for the use of force is lower." Another difference is training. In some Western European countries, police academies are as selective as a good American college. Recruits in Germany study for a minimum of three years, with professors who are experts in their fields. Officers in the U.S. often start work with as little as eleven weeks of training, mostly in firearms and survival. Burkhalter has proposed that existing training be replaced with a two-year curriculum that includes courses in a range of subjects—law, sociology, psychology—and that not all classes be taught, as is current practice, by law-enforcement personnel. "A clear understanding of the nature of the society they will serve, and all its complexities, is fundamental to any member of a service profession," he has written.

Police work is indisputably difficult. Patrol officers are often confronted with people at their worst and their most trying; in a country that has more firearms in private hands than it has citizens, the threat of being shot is real. But, statistically, law enforcement does not make the list of the ten most dangerous jobs in America. Commercial fishing is worse, as are roofing and construction. Studies of patrol officers' service calls have shown that less than five per cent are related to violent crimes.

Seth Stoughton, a former police officer who now teaches law at the University of South Carolina, argues that law enforcement's "warrior problem" begins in the first days of training. "Would-be officers are told that their prime objective, the proverbial 'first rule of law enforcement,' is to go home at the end of every shift," he wrote in the Harvard Law Review in 2015. "But they are taught that they live in an intensely hostile world. A world that is, quite literally, gunning for them. . . . As a result, officers learn to be afraid." This message is then drummed into young cops on the job. The only way to survive is by hypervigilance, addressing civilians in a tone of "unquestioned command," and identifying those who don't readily accede to authority as enemies.

In June, three N.Y.P.D. officers bought milkshakes downtown and didn't like the taste. After they mentioned the incident to their sergeant, they were rushed to Bellevue Hospital. The Detectives' Endowment Association tweeted out an "URGENT SAFETY MESSAGE": "Tonight, three of our fellow officers were intentionally poisoned by one or more workers at the Shake Shack at 200 Broadway." The union went on to excoriate the cowards and criminals and pandering elected officials presumably behind the attack. The P.B.A. also got into the act. The officers "discovered that a toxic substance, believed to be bleach, had been

placed in their beverages," the union tweeted. "We cannot afford to let our guard down for even a moment." Sean Hannity expressed his horror.[39]

Upon further investigation, there was no poison in the milkshakes. Maybe there had been some residual cleaning solution in the shake machine. It happens. The officers were fine, the unions deleted their tweets, and the terrorized Shake Shack workers shrugged it off. The cops reportedly got vouchers for free food and drinks. Police hysteria about fast-food workers tampering with their orders is not limited to the N.Y.P.D.; it has been spreading across the country, to Kansas and Indiana and Georgia. So far, it's all been imaginary.

In less agitated times, police have a more banal reason to be wary of restaurants. "Cops avoid eating in public because they don't want to pick up jobs," Lieutenant Edwin Raymond, of the N.Y.P.D., told me. "People come up to you, want to complain about their landlord, get you involved, when you just want to eat."

Traditionally, the galvanizing issue for social critics of the police was corruption—straight-up graft. Patrick Lynch was first inspired to run for union president by a corruption scandal, involving the P.B.A.'s lead negotiator and crooked lawyers, which sent several people to jail. He was elected, at thirty-six, on a reform ticket. The only serious competition he has faced came in 2015, after a faction of officers was unhappy with his weak defense of the miscreants in a ticket-fixing scandal in the Bronx. They wanted more solidarity around corruption. They lost.

Brutality is different. If we ask for stronger regulation, we're siding with the bad guys.[40] Last year, Lynch told City & State magazine that anti-brutality protesters didn't actually want "reform" (his scare quotes): "Their goal is the end of any law enforcement in New York City, period." Bill de Blasio got crosswise with the police during his first campaign for mayor, when he promised reform. In office, he hastened the end of a stop-and-frisk policy that was rife with racial profiling, and sharply reduced the city's jail population. He also talked about warning his biracial son, Dante, about the perils of being a young man of color navigating police stops—a bit of paternal realism that police received as a slight. But it was the Eric Garner tragedy that really blew up de Blasio's relationship with the N.Y.P.D.

On July 17, 2014, on Staten Island, Garner was allegedly selling loose cigarettes to passersby. Police regarded him and the other cigarette sellers on Bay Street as a quality-of-life problem—a "broken window" that needed to be fixed. Garner was a big man, a Black man, and he shied away from police who came to arrest him. He had done nothing wrong, he said. His friend Ramsey Orta began to film the encounter; without his video, we would not know Garner's name. Officer Daniel Pantaleo, in plain clothes, seized Garner, drove him to the ground, and put him in a choke hold. On the video, we hear Garner cry "I can't breathe" eleven times, as Pantaleo and four colleagues take their time cuffing him. By the time they finished, Garner was inert. An hour later, he was pronounced dead at a hospital. After an autopsy, the city's medical examiner ruled the death a homicide, caused in part by the choke hold.

[39]FIG. LANG.: This part resembles an emblem in that it is a story (about how three police officers falsely jumped to the conclusion that they were poisoned) that contains a clear, fixed, and symbolic significance (regarding the training of police officers to be hyper-suspicious)
[40]OTHER: Specific use of diction, since 'to side with the bad guys' is a colloquialism rather than a formal way of describing the situation.

Patrick Lynch maintains that it was not a choke hold but a “seatbelt”—a non-strangling takedown, which is permitted by the N.Y.P.D. The arrest report filed by Pantaleo’s partner said, falsely, that no force was used. On Staten Island, a grand jury declined to indict Pantaleo. Witnesses who had been called to testify later described the proceedings as focussed less on police malfeasance than on what Garner had done. Pantaleo remained on desk duty. The city rebuffed calls by activists and lawyers for the Garner family to release the officer’s disciplinary record. The department slowed its own investigation to allow a federal civil-rights investigation to proceed. This was evidently a political decision, to let passions cool. The Department of Justice took four and a half years to examine the case, and then, after William Barr was installed as Attorney General, quashed it.

But passions had not cooled. In December, 2014, a drifter with a long criminal record came to New York and murdered two police officers, purportedly to avenge Garner and others, before killing himself. Lynch was incensed. He had been feuding with de Blasio, whom he considered “anti-police.” Now he encouraged on-duty cops to turn their backs on the Mayor when he came to the hospital in Brooklyn where the officers had been taken. At the officers’ funerals, hundreds of police again turned their backs on de Blasio. Polls showed that most New Yorkers disapproved of this display, and many officers apparently felt it was disrespectful of the dead, but none would say so publicly. At a televised news conference, Lynch said that the officers’ deaths had left blood on many hands, but “that blood starts on the steps of City Hall, in the office of the Mayor.”

De Blasio’s enthusiasm for police reform seemed to vanish that night. The rank and file followed up with a two-week slowdown, during which arrests fell by fifty-six per cent. Lynch continued to defend Pantaleo. “He’s a model of what we want a police officer to be,” he told CNN. “He literally is an Eagle Scout.” Pantaleo’s disciplinary record was eventually leaked, and showed a high number of what are called substantiated complaints, including two that helped lead to a lawsuit, which the city was obliged to settle.

After the Justice Department quit the case, in 2019, the N.Y.P.D. finally completed its investigation. That August, more than five years after Garner’s death, the police commissioner, James P. O’Neill, fired Pantaleo. Firing an officer is very rare, even on a force of thirty-six thousand. Lynch’s response: “The job is dead. Our police officers are in distress. Not because they have a difficult job, not because they put themselves in danger, but because they realize they’re abandoned.” Pantaleo is now suing, with the P.B.A.’s support, to get his job back.

Pro-police analysts always talk about bad apples; it’s only a few cops who misbehave—ten per cent, tops. But the problem is that the other ninety per cent inevitably know about their misconduct and thus are made complicit. Why don’t they come forward? Everybody hates a rat, and everybody mentions the Blue Wall of Silence, or something called “police culture.” Frank Serpico, the N.Y.P.D.’s best-known whistle-blower, got shot in the head during a drug raid, under disputed circumstances.[41]

The Wickersham Commission, the first of many Presidential commissions set up to study and explain lawlessness and civil disorder, observed, in 1931, “It is an unwritten law in police

[41]OTHER: Finnegan introduces a metanarrative, as he discusses a narrative about the narrative of police brutality. He dissects how larger story behind the individual instances of police brutality depends on, for example, whether you are a pro-police analyst or not. The larger, overarching explanation or pattern behind the smaller, individual cases (that is, the metanarrative) depends upon one’s point of view.

departments that police officers must never testify against their brother officers." In what modern urban police officers experience as an increasingly hostile environment, both in the workplace of the low-income neighborhood and in the crosshairs of constant criticism by clever academics and articles like this one,[42] it should not be a surprise that cops feel that they have no choice but to cover for one another. No one else has their backs.

Kirk Burkhalter does not see reform as the responsibility of the unions alone. "Police culture," he says, is the product of a "symbiotic relationship" between the police and prosecutors and legislators, and the practice of "putting handcuffs on everyone for every little thing" does not originate at street level. "The officer does not have discretion on whether to arrest in many cases," he told me.

At times, the code of secrecy spreads to elected officials. In Chicago, in 2014, an officer named Jason Van Dyke shot a teen-age boy named Laquan McDonald sixteen times. The police report said that McDonald had advanced on officers with a raised knife. More than a year later, after an activist and a freelance journalist sued under the Freedom of Information Act, the city released a dash-cam video, which showed McDonald not advancing with a knife but walking away. This coverup wasn't perpetrated by the police alone. City leaders knew what was on that video. Mayor Rahm Emanuel, though he denied having watched it, fought for thirteen months to prevent its release.[43]

In the modern labor movement, police unions are outliers, their politics well to the right of even the Teamsters and the building trades. They can make common cause with the movement when union-killing legislation looms, as it briefly did in New York State a few years ago. But when they know they will be spared, as in Wisconsin, they stay quiet even while teachers and nurses and sanitation workers are being squashed.

For the left, one problem with hammering police unions is that the right is doing the same thing. National Review and the Wall Street Journal's editorial page recognize the problems with police unions and accountability, and they duly extend the argument to teachers' unions and municipal workers. Their sentiment is: bust them all. Benjamin Sachs, a professor of labor and industry at Harvard Law School, points to new data showing that, when police have greater access to collective bargaining, it correlates with a long-term increase in police killing of civilians, specifically nonwhite civilians. Strong union towns like Chicago often have a more dangerous police culture than cities with weak labor laws do. In Dallas, for instance, the main police union is not the sole bargaining agent. Several different groups, including fraternal organizations of African-American and Latino officers, sign off on union contracts. The result is both more transparent and markedly less violent policing.

Ben Brucato, a sociologist at Rhode Island College, argues that police unions are crucially different from other labor unions. "These organizations function as lobbies to both resist accountability legislation and shield implicated officers," he writes. A public-sector union is distinct from its private-sector counterparts; its negotiations necessarily include, at least morally, a third party—the public, the taxpayer. And yet many police unions, in their

[42]OTHER: Finnegan uses self-reflectivity, as he draws attention to the subjective consciousness that is situated between the reader and the described events, and he discloses the place and function of this piece in American society at large.
[43]OTHER: The implication of this is omitted. With this ellipsis, Finnegan incites the reader to make the final mental leap themselves, which functions as a way of stimulating reader engagement with the text.

contracts and their ideology, seem to make no provision for this invisible third party. They defend their members against the public, and punish whistle-blowers with even greater zeal than management does. Police unions "represent hundreds of thousands of people, and, except in a very few states, have the ability to organize without any opposition from government," Brucato told me.

Brucato believes that the solution is to abolish police unions. He has a list of ten steps toward that end, including cancelling contracts, mass firings in the event of illegal slowdowns, and federal prosecutions for persistent obstruction of justice. Other abolitionists want to see major labor federations, such as the A.F.L.-C.I.O., sever ties with police unions. Sachs agrees that there is an urgent need for reform, but he suggests considering more procedural steps: limiting collective bargaining to non-disciplinary matters; opening bargaining sessions to the public; encouraging departments to have multiple unions, representing more diverse views. Many analysts emphasize the need for new use-of-force protocols that are known to save lives but that the unions reject.

All of this would require political will of a kind that until very recently seemed unthinkable. In 1994, Senator Joe Biden worked closely with the police unions to help get his big crime bill written. He later gave full credit to the National Association of Police Organizations: "You guys sat at that conference table of mine for a six-month period, and you wrote the bill." (The unions abandoned Biden during the Obama years, when they saw him working on criminal-justice reform.) And who can forget President Trump's performance in 2017, when he leeringly told a law-enforcement crowd on Long Island that he personally didn't mind if they bumped some suspects' heads on car-door frames. The officers applauded. Trump knew his audience. During the 2016 campaign, the Fraternal Order of Police, a national union with three hundred and fifty thousand members, had formally endorsed him. In 1968, it endorsed George Wallace.[44]

In early June, something remarkable happened in New York. As the city erupted in protests against police brutality, the N.Y.P.D. responded with vivid displays of more police brutality. Much of the violence was caught on video. Officers were injured by thrown bricks and bottles, and often seemed tactically confused. They managed the perimeters of some protests calmly, and charged others with batons and pepper spray. Many had tape over their names and badge numbers. Whole lines of police in riot gear seemed to be white. De Blasio, confronted with video of two police S.U.V.s driving into a throng of protesters, blamed the protesters for crowding in. When serious looting broke out for three nights in midtown and lower Manhattan, the police seemed to vanish. One heard that they were told to stand down but not why.

They had been busy elsewhere, certainly, arresting some twenty-five hundred people. Charges ran the gamut. At some point, reflecting the Justice Department's interest in what Attorney General Barr called "outside agitators," the F.B.I. got involved in the questioning of detainees. As the demonstrations entered their second week, an 8 P.M. curfew, the first imposed in New York since the Second World War, gave police a wide field in which to make arrests, some of them seemingly arbitrary, others clearly targeting protest organizers. In the Bronx, police singled out legal observers from the National Lawyers Guild.

[44]OTHER: The implication of this is omitted. With this ellipsis, Finnegan incites the reader to make the final mental leap themselves, which functions as a way of stimulating reader engagement with the text.

In Albany, though, a momentous shift occurred. Civil libertarians, police reformers, and their allies had been trying for years to repeal a state law, known as Section 50-a, that sealed police disciplinary records, making it impossible to know if an officer had a history of misconduct. The public's right to know if its armed employees were abusing their monopoly on violence seemed indisputable, but the police unions had fought hard to keep 50-a on the books. It had never even come up for a vote in committee. Politicians like de Blasio agreed that it should be repealed, but did nothing about it. Antagonizing the police unions just wasn't worth it. Michael Sisitzky, the head of a police transparency and accountability project at the New York Civil Liberties Union, worked on the issue for years. "We didn't know how to frame it," he told me. "It just sounds so wonky—'Repeal 50-a.' Then, suddenly, we started seeing banners at the protests, 'Repeal 50-a.'"

The ideals of Black Lives Matter were now in the political mainstream. Governor Andrew Cuomo said that he would sign any reform bill that state legislators sent him, and a few days later they sent him the 50-a repeal, a new ban on choke holds, and more. He signed. Activists like Sisitzky had prepared the legislation, and the families of those killed by the police, including Eric Garner, had advocated tirelessly; the Legislators of Color caucus had given it a crucial final push. But, Sisitzky told me, "what moved those bills was the massive outpouring of people into the streets demanding action."

For many years, the P.B.A. and its fellow-unions argued that opening police-misconduct records would endanger not only officers but also their families. This was fearmongering: misconduct records would not include home addresses or phone numbers. After these reform bills passed, the unions held a rally under the highway on Randall's Island. Lynch and O'Meara raged, backed by rows of glowering police. After all their service, all their sacrifice, they could not believe that they didn't even get a seat at the table.

I asked Sisitzky about that. "No seat at the table?" he said. "They've always been represented in ways that other organizations can only dream of." Anyway, it wasn't as if they were going away. "The unions will try to reassert themselves, of course." He was right. In July, the P.B.A. sued New York City to block the release of misconduct records, and a federal judge quickly granted a temporary restraining order. Sisitzky's office was barred from releasing records it had already obtained.

But Kirk Burkhalter felt that, at least for the moment, the momentum toward reform was strong enough that the unions should consider compromise. "There's no need for this rift between the unions and the Black community," Burkhalter, who is Black, said. "Black Lives Matter and the P.B.A.—they can each get some of what they want. It's not zero-sum." But time may be running out for the unions, he said: "How long are these lifelong benefits going to last in this climate? You better get on your horse and insure the public has confidence in you, because that's going to be the first thing to go."

After the victory in Albany, New York's police reformers took a couple of days to party, pandemic style, and then turned their attention to City Hall. The city's fiscal 2021 budget would be submitted on July 1st, and the consensus goal among reformers was a billion-dollar cut in the N.Y.P.D.'s six-billion-dollar budget. De Blasio said he was in favor, but nobody trusted him. People camped in the little wedge of park outside City Hall, trying to turn up the pressure.

Joo-Hyun Kang, the director of Communities United for Police Reform, a long-running campaign to end discriminatory policing in New York, was a key leader in the effort to repeal 50-a. Kang has fought the police unions and the N.Y.P.D. for years, trying to get even the names of officers responsible for killings. "People really should have the right to know who's patrolling their streets," she said. "Really, though, egregious police killings are just the tip of the iceberg. It's the daily humiliation, the daily abuse of authority."

Now she had turned her full attention to the city budget. "This is a direct challenge to the outsized power that the police unions have had," she said. "This movement to decrease N.Y.P.D. funding? That's what they're really scared of." She and the other activists took a hard line with de Blasio. "We don't want to see any funny math," she told me. "This is the time to think about what sort of city we want to be."

When the Mayor and the City Council reached a budget deal, the activists were keenly dissatisfied. The deal purported to redirect a billion dollars from police into social investments, but it was full of funny math. It set a thoroughly unrealistic cap on overtime, promising to reduce last year's estimated expenditures of eight hundred and twenty million dollars by two-thirds. It eliminated the N.Y.P.D.'s payments to cops in schools, but only by making the Department of Education cover them. It lacked an across-the-board hiring freeze—even as other municipal agencies were having their budgets slashed, to address COVID-era shortfalls. To the activists' disappointment, many Black elected officials supported the deal. Kang suggested that the council members who voted for it would face progressive opposition. "These councilpersons are going to have races in 2021," she said.

The police unions, already aggrieved by the state-level reforms, were further provoked by a set of New York City statutes passed the following week, which provided new restrictions on choke holds and surveillance and supported the public's right to film police activity. A frightening spike in violent crime—as of late June, murders in the city were up twenty-three per cent over last year—inspired a fierce round of finger-pointing. It was de Blasio's fault. (Lynch to Hannity: "The city has given our streets back.") It was cops not doing their jobs. (Arrests were down dramatically, and morale was said to be low.) It was the bail-reform law, and pandemic mitigation, emptying the jails. It was the judicial backlog. It was the disbanding of a plainclothes "anti-crime unit"—Pantaleo's old crew.

In July, Dermot Shea, the police commissioner, decided to go full Patrick Lynch. In a speech to senior commanders, he said, "People that don't have a clue about how to keep New Yorkers safe suddenly think they know about policing." He called the city's leaders "cowards who won't stand up for what's right." He declared, "We're not giving this goddam city back to criminals."

De Blasio's response was timid. He said that, while Shea's choice of words was not "constructive," his frustration was understandable. Meanwhile, N.Y.P.D. officers were voting with their feet. Since the protests began, more than five hundred officers have filed for retirement—almost twice the figure from the same period last year. The chief of the lieutenants' union told the Post that the police were feeling "demoralized and abandoned." Another possible factor: many officers had earned huge amounts of overtime, between working the protests and covering pandemic sick days, and their pensions, based on their final

year's salary, were as lucrative as they'd ever be. The office that handles retirements was so swamped that it was seeing people only by appointment.[45]

On a warm recent afternoon,[46] I found myself in colloquy with a half-dozen police officers stationed outside the front entrance of the American Museum of Natural History.[47] They were there for the duration, they said, unhappily. Their assignment was looming above us, in the form of the Teddy Roosevelt statue that has stood in that spot for eighty years.

It's one of the great problematic monuments. Roosevelt sits astride a horse, both of them extra-muscular. He has a pistol on each hip, and a resolute gaze, too noble by half, fixed on the horizon. On either side, and slightly behind him, is a gun-bearer on foot. One is a Native American, in a feathered headdress, his lower half covered by a blanket—you hear him called a "generic Plains Indian." The other is a generic East African, naked, carrying a shield on his back and a blanket over one shoulder. In the revolutionary spirit of the moment, the museum had decided to remove the statue, and the cops were there to prevent its being removed prematurely by a mob. Things were quiet up and down Central Park West. Still, the mood was sour.

"You ever read '1984'?" one officer asked. He was fleshy and fair, late thirties, with a Long Island accent.

He nodded at the statue, the closed-down museum, the whole situation.

"Nah," his colleague said. "This is 'Animal Farm.' "

"Nah," the first cop said. "It's the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Wipe out the past, act like none of it ever happened." He sounded disturbed, disgusted, sad.

"Even the blue whale?"

"Yeah, everything," he said.[48]

Change is coming, and everybody knows it. But Trump and the more reactionary police-union leadership have something in common: they all seem to have missed the last boat out of the bad old days.[49] Patrick Lynch, certainly, is a relic of mid-century policing, when cops were always right and usually white and could take a free hand in Black and brown neighborhoods. The social license of that model of policing has expired. A new generation of officers, mostly not white, waits to take power at the unions.

In New York, the percentage of African-American officers is in decline, as the first big generational cohort retires. But the numbers of Latino and Asian-American officers are still growing. Though it is impossible to generalize, officers of color seem less enthusiastic than their white colleagues about the union leadership. Each one I've asked has described a feeling of not being represented. A fraternal organization of Black officers, called the Guardians Association, has long dissented from the union's hostility to civilian oversight.

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[45]FIG. LANG.: This detail about the office seeing people only by appointment represents something else beyond the literal meaning of those words, as it expresses not just a fact about the retirement office but also carries a more general, underlying paradigm about the state of police officers.

[46]SCENE: The start of a scene is indicated by a marker of time.

[47]HOMOD.: Start of a second-order narrative. Finnegan provides both accounts of being immersed and how this immersion was enacted.

[48]DIALOGUE: This dialogue efficiently establishes and defines the general attitude of the two police officers towards the, in Finnegan's words, 'whole situation': these lines reveal something about their character (since a specific kind of person would make the comparison to Orwell or the Chinese Cultural Revolution), and simultaneously convey a sense of what the protest must have been like.

[49]FIG. LANG.: Literary technique: metaphor. In this case the 'last boat out of' is the vehicle and the tenor is 'the bad old days.'

I was struck by a coincidence in telephone interviews with two Black N.Y.P.D. officers, one of them retired.[50] In both conversations, we ended up discussing the latest local police scandal, in which an officer was caught on video applying a choke hold to someone on the boardwalk in the Rockaways. The officer, David Afanador, had previously been tried for felony assault—he pistol-whipped an unarmed, unresisting sixteen-year-old, breaking his teeth—but he was acquitted at trial. In the new case, he was quickly suspended and indicted for "attempted aggravated strangulation," with no discussion of a grand jury. Both interviewees called my attention to the same detail in the Afanador video: a second officer urging him to ease up. That was what excited them. It was a complicity breach—a small but perhaps indicative case of the ninety per cent reining in the ten. "That's what we want to see," the retired officer said. "That guy's an actual hero."[51] ♦

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[50]HOMOD.: The narrator acknowledges that personal impact that an observation made on him.
[51]FIG. LANG.: This detail about the second officer's response represents something else beyond the literal meaning of those words, as it expresses not just a fact about their behaviour but also represents a more widespread cultural trend.

Appendix D: "The Cop" by Jake Halpern

The Cop
By Jake Halpern

Darren Wilson, the former police officer who shot and killed Michael Brown, an eighteen-year-old African-American, in Ferguson, Missouri, has been living for several months on a nondescript dead-end street on the outskirts of St. Louis. Most of the nearby houses are clad in vinyl siding; there are no sidewalks, and few cars around. Wilson, who is twenty-nine, started receiving death threats not long after the incident, in which Brown was killed in the street shortly after robbing a convenience store. Although Wilson recently bought the house, his name is not on the deed, and only a few friends know where he lives. He and his wife, Barb, who is thirty-seven, and also a former Ferguson cop, rarely linger in the front yard.[52] Because of such precautions, Wilson has been leading a very quiet life. During the past year, a series of police killings of African-Americans across the country has inspired grief, outrage, protest, and acrimonious debate. For many Americans, this discussion, though painful, has been essential. Wilson has tried, with some success, to block it out.

This March, I spent several days at his home.[53] The first time I pulled up to the curb,[54] Wilson, who is six feet four and weighs two hundred and fifteen pounds, immediately stepped outside, wearing a hat and sunglasses. He had seen me arriving on security cameras that are synched to his phone.[55]

Wilson has twice been exonerated of criminal wrongdoing. In November, after a grand jury chose not to indict him, the prosecutor, Robert P. McCulloch, was widely accused of having been soft on him, in part because McCulloch's father was a police officer who had been killed in a shootout with a black suspect. In March, the U.S. Department of Justice issued two official reports on Ferguson. One was a painstaking analysis of the shooting that weighed physical, ballistic, forensic, and crime-scene evidence, and statements from purported eyewitnesses. The report cleared Wilson of willfully violating Brown's civil rights, and concluded that his use of force was defensible. It also contradicted many details that the media had reported about the incident, including that Brown had raised his hands in surrender and had been shot in the back. The evidence supported Wilson's contention that Brown had been advancing toward him.

The Justice Department also released a broader assessment of the police and the courts in Ferguson, and it was scathing. The town, it concluded, was characterized by deep-seated racism. Local authorities targeted black residents, arresting them disproportionately and fining them excessively. Together, the two reports frustrated attempts to arrive at a clean moral

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[52]OTHER: Halpern begins his piece with a description of the setting. His references to dead-end streets, the absence of sidewalks and cars, and vinyl-clad houses evoke a specific image of anonymity in the American suburbs. This image sets the mood for this profile on Darren Wilson's life.
[53]HOMOD.: Start of Halpern's second-order narrative. He begins both accounts of being immersed and how this immersion was enacted.
[54]SCENE: The start of a scene is indicated by a marker of time. This scene is furthermore meaningfully sequenced, because, given the preceding paragraph, it functions as a way of indicating that Halpern as writer-reporter, in this piece, aims to find the answer to the following question: What is Darren Wilson *really* like?
[55]FIG. LANG.: The hat, sunglasses, and video cameras function as symbolic details, as they represent and elaborate on the image of anonymity and precautionary measures.

conclusion. Wilson had violated no protocol in his deadly interaction with Brown, yet he was part of a corrupt and racist system.[56]

The federal government's findings did little to soothe the raw emotions stirred by Brown's death. Many Americans believe that Wilson need not have killed Brown in order to protect himself, and might not have resorted to lethal force had Brown been white. Ta-Nehisi Coates, in his new book, "Between the World and Me," writing of the psychological impact of incidents like the Brown shooting, says, "It does not matter if the destruction is the result of an unfortunate overreaction. It does not matter if it originates in a misunderstanding." Coates also notes, "There is nothing uniquely evil in these destroyers or even in this moment. The destroyers are merely men enforcing the whims of our country."

Many police officers have defended Wilson, pointing out that cops patrolling violent neighborhoods risk their lives. Some right-wing publications have lionized him. In The American Thinker, David Whitley wrote that Wilson "should be thanked and treated as a hero!" Supporters raised nearly half a million dollars on behalf of the Wilsons, allowing them to move, buy the new house, and pay their legal expenses. But, as Wilson knows, such support has only deepened the resentment of people who feel that he deserves punishment or, at the very least, reprimand.[57]

During our conversations, Wilson typically sat in a recliner, holding his baby daughter, who was born in March. He said that, after Brown's death, people "had made threats about doing something to my unborn child." Wilson, a former Boy Scout with round cheeks and blue eyes, speaks with a muted drawl. When Barb went to the hospital to give birth, he said, "I made her check in anonymously."

Wilson said that he had interviewed for a few police positions but had been told that he would be a liability. "It's too hot an issue, so it makes me unemployable," he said. He tried not to brood about it: "I bottle everything up."

The baby has helped Wilson, who also has two stepsons, accept the constrictions of his current situation. It has also allowed him to maintain a pointed distance from the furor that the shooting helped to unleash. He told me that he had not read the Justice Department's report on the systemic racism in Ferguson. "I don't have any desire," he said. "I'm not going to keep living in the past about what Ferguson did. It's out of my control."

Wilson, who is from Texas, is the son of a woman who repeatedly broke the law. His mother, Tonya Dean, stole money, largely by writing hot checks. After completing high school, she married Wilson's father, John, who had been her English teacher. They soon had two children to support—Darren and his younger sister, Kara—but Dean spent wildly. She left John Wilson for another man, Tyler Harris, who ran a Y.M.C.A. They had a child, Jared, and Darren and Kara lived with them. "Tonya had me in debt—almost twenty thousand dollars—

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[56]OTHER: Literary technique: paradox. The self-contradictory findings of the two reports are translated to this figure of speech.

[57]OTHER: Halpern introduces a metanarrative, as he builds a narrative of how the narrative of police brutality is different for such parties as the federal government, Ta-Nehisi Coates, the right-wing *American Thinker*, and police officers. The larger, overarching explanation or pattern behind the smaller, individual cases (that is, the metanarrative) depends upon one's point of view. Halpern positions Wilson as a central player in this metanarrative, and this elicits questions concerning the interpretation of Wilson's acts, free will, the system, and institutional racism. This kind of meta-journalism emphasizes the co-existence of multiple interpretations, and demonstrates that one party does not hold an interpretational monopoly over the other.

that first year," Harris told me. Dean, it seems, often repaid debts to one person by stealing money from someone else.

The family eventually moved to St. Peters, west of St. Louis. When Wilson was thirteen, he stopped trusting his mother altogether, because she stole funds that she had helped raise for his Boy Scout troop. He worried that she would steal what little money he made working summer jobs, so he opened two bank accounts. The first, which had almost no money in it, was a decoy. He put his real earnings in the second, secret account. Wilson also tried to preëmpt his mother's stealing. Once, he warned a friend's parents not to let her inside their house, because she would surely find a way to steal their identities and max out their credit cards.

Dean was loving, Wilson said. "She never wanted to hurt us." He added, "But when it came to money she was going to get it, one way or another." Dean, who had been told by a psychiatrist that she was bipolar, began engaging in elaborate cons, at one point posing as an heiress poised to inherit millions of dollars.

Despite her compulsive thievery, Dean somehow avoided prison. Finally, a judge warned her that if she appeared in his court again she would be jailed. Shortly afterward, in 2002, she died unexpectedly. At the time, Wilson didn't understand what had triggered her death, but he now thinks that it might have been suicide. (Harris suspects that she drank antifreeze.)

At the time, Wilson refused to talk about the tragedy, but his family knew that he was struggling: he started skipping school and hanging out with troublemakers. He graduated, though, and began doing construction work in the St. Louis area. He seemed directionless and unhappy. In 2008, the real-estate market crashed, and he could no longer find jobs. He applied to the Eastern Missouri Police Academy and was accepted. Being a police officer, he reasoned, was a recession-proof career.

Wilson found the classwork fascinating, especially when he and other cadets role-played at handling stressful situations. If they made a mistake, Wilson said, the instructors pounced: "They're—bam!—in your face. Done. 'You're wrong.' 'It's over.' 'That person just died.' " He welcomed the pressure.[58]

Wilson's relatives had worried about how Dean's tumultuous life and death might affect her kids. Wilson's grandmother Susan Durso recalls asking herself, "Are they going to be completely scarred?" Darren Wilson, at least, had found a sense of purpose.

When Wilson applied for a police job, he focussed on the northern portion of St. Louis County. The towns in what is called North County tend to be poorer, and to have a higher percentage of black residents, than other towns in the St. Louis area—such as St. Peters, the broadly middle-class, white town where Wilson grew up. North County also has more crime. Wilson felt that working in a tough area would propel his career. "If you go there and you do three to five years, get your experience, you can kind of write your own ticket," he said.

There are almost fifty municipalities in North County. The officers in some of the towns are not just fighting crime; they also issue countless traffic tickets and ordinance-violation

[58]SCENE: This fragment is meaningfully sequenced in the text. Earlier in the text, the reader is made aware of Wilson's murderous act, and, with this in mind, this specific fragment with dialogue functions as a way of generating the question: Could Wilson's training have affected his decision-making in the Brown case?

citations. The local governments often rely on the fines generated by tickets and violations to balance their budgets. (In 2013, the town of Edmundson, which comprises less than a square mile, issued nearly five thousand traffic tickets.) Police officers, meanwhile, can be paid as little as ten dollars an hour, according to Kevin Ahlbrand, the president of the Missouri Fraternal Order of Police. Ahlbrand says that the low pay can create "unprofessional police officers," adding, "You get what you pay for."

In 2009, Wilson got a job in Jennings, a town on Ferguson's southeastern border, where ninety per cent of the residents are black and a quarter of the population lives below the poverty line. "I'd never been in an area where there was that much poverty," Wilson said. Interacting with residents, he felt intimidated and unprepared.

A field-training officer named Mike McCarthy, who had been a cop for ten years, displayed no such discomfort. McCarthy, a thirty-nine-year-old Irish-American with short brown hair and a square chin, is a third-generation policeman who grew up in North County. Most of his childhood friends were African-American. "If you just talk to him on the phone, you'd think you're talking to a black guy," Wilson said. "He was able to relate to everyone up there."

Wilson said that he approached McCarthy for help: "Mike, I don't know what I'm doing. This is a culture shock. Would you help me? Because you obviously have that connection, and you can relate to them. You may be white, but they still respect you. So why can they respect you and not me?"

McCarthy had never heard another officer make such an honest admission of his own limitations. At the same time, he sensed a fierce determination: "Darren was probably the best officer that I've ever trained—just by his willingness to learn."

McCarthy wasn't surprised that Wilson had difficulty interacting with residents. Police officers are rigorously trained in firing weapons and apprehending suspects but not in establishing common ground with people who have had different experiences. "If you go to an academy, how much is on that?" he asked me. "Basically, nothing." A recent survey by the Police Executive Research Forum revealed that cadets usually receive fifty-eight hours of training in firearms, forty-nine in defensive tactics, ten in communication skills, and eight in de-escalation tactics.

For several months, McCarthy taught Wilson how to walk the beat—coaching him to loosen up, joke, and curse occasionally. He should avoid "sounding like a Webster's Dictionary," never condescend, and never expect people to rat. At first, Wilson says, residents laughed at him, but he followed McCarthy's advice to "just keep going." By the end of the training, Wilson said, he "was more comfortable" on the streets. McCarthy told me, "There is so much distrust in the African-American community toward the police." The only way to overcome it was by establishing bonds with people. McCarthy, who is gay, said that he understood what it meant to be marginalized. "In the United States, where everybody is supposed to be equal, I'm not. So that's a major thing."

McCarthy helped Wilson, in part, by letting him make mistakes. One night, they were patrolling a neighborhood where burglary was common. Wilson saw a car idling on the side of the street, and McCarthy didn't object when Wilson pulled over and asked the driver to show I.D. Wilson ran a check on the man's name; nothing came up, so he let him go. Later, McCarthy asked, "What would've happened if you'd found a gun?" Wilson said that he

would have arrested the man. McCarthy asked him what his case for probable cause would have been, and Wilson couldn't answer. "You'd be screwed," McCarthy said.[59]

McCarthy had spent two years working as a police officer at a predominantly black middle school in the city of Normandy. (Michael Brown attended the school, but not when McCarthy worked there.) McCarthy told me that police officers he knew often disliked working in North County schools, because many students had an "us versus them" attitude. But he loved talking with the kids and "investing in the community." He recalled, "I would do the adopted-student program—take them to basketball games and things of that nature." Many of the kids confided in him about the stress of having to be "man of the house" when a parent worked nights. McCarthy said that his openness made the students more respectful: "I wasn't the police to them, because they knew me on a personal level, rather than what that badge stood for." He said, "People are amazing, and you have no idea what's going on behind that façade until you stop and try to know." Too many cops, he went on, weren't interested in understanding the "root causes" of crime; they preferred to "go on calls, handle the call, and leave."

When Wilson became a police officer in Jennings, he was joining a department that had a reputation for racism. Wesley Bell, a newly elected member of the Ferguson City Council, told me that he used to avoid driving through Jennings "like the plague." This feeling endures. The current mayor of Jennings, Yolonda Henderson, who is black, told me that African-Americans in nearby towns "still say, 'No, no, no, I ain't going over there.'"[60]

Wilson recalls hearing "old-timers" talk about racism in Jennings's past, but their stories didn't make a vivid impression on him. McCarthy, however, said that in the seventies and eighties the Jennings police "did not play." He added, "Basically, they'd beat you." During that period, many blacks from St. Louis moved to North County. Numerous towns there went from being majority white to being majority black. The police forces remained almost completely white.

McCarthy showed me several police logs from those decades, and many entries documented bigotry on the part of Jennings authorities. In April, 1973, a lieutenant described a holdup that had occurred near the police station. The suspects were two black males. At the bottom of the entry, someone had written, "Men, you better leave your wallets at home. Niggers are going to come in the police station next and rob us." An entry from December, 1979, described an eighteen-year-old black male who was believed to have been involved in the shooting of a police officer but was then released, "due to his lack of mental capacity." Below this, someone had scrawled, "Kill the Fucker."

McCarthy said that police officers resist discussing racism, past or present. "If an officer speaks out, they are ostracized," he said. "They don't want anything negative to be out there. But we're humans—there's gonna be negative. Be honest about it. If you acknowledge it, that's the first step."

Wilson strongly disagreed with McCarthy about this. He granted that, in North County, the overt racism of past decades affected "elders" who lived through that time. "People who

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[59]SCENE: This scene dramatizes one of the difficulties of the police officer's profession. This show-don't-tell approach allows the reader to come to a meaningful understanding of a part of the tough decision-making processes.

[60]OTHER: The colloquialism of 'I ain't going over there' evokes the specific AAVE diction.

experienced that, and were mistreated, have a legitimate claim," he told me. "Other people don't." I asked him if he thought that young people in North County and elsewhere used this legacy as an excuse. "I think so," he replied.

"I am really simple in the way that I look at life," Wilson said. "What happened to my great-grandfather is not happening to me. I can't base my actions off what happened to him." Wilson said that police officers didn't have the luxury of dwelling on the past. "We can't fix in thirty minutes what happened thirty years ago," he said. "We have to fix what's happening now. That's my job as a police officer. I'm not going to delve into people's life-long history and figure out why they're feeling a certain way, in a certain moment." He added, "I'm not a psychologist."

Wilson said that, despite what he'd said about experiencing "culture shock," race hadn't affected the way he did police work: "I never looked at it like 'I'm the only white guy here.' I just looked at it as 'This isn't where I grew up.' " He said, "When a cop shows up, it's, like, 'The cops are here!' There's no 'Oh, shit, the white cops are here!' " He added, "If you live in a high-crime area, with a lot of poverty, there's going to be a large police presence. You're going to piss people off. If police show up, it's because it's something bad, and whoever's involved can't figure out the problem for themselves."

He continued, "Everyone is so quick to jump on race. It's not a race issue." There were two opposing views about policing, he said: "There are people who feel that police have too much power, and they don't like it. There are people who feel police don't have enough power, and they don't like it."

During Wilson's tenure in Jennings, an angry debate arose about how much power the police should have. In January, 2011, a white officer stopped a vehicle with expired license plates. The driver got out, but a black woman who had been riding in the passenger seat drove off. There was a child in the back seat. The officer shot at the car's tires. Though the car didn't crash, the child could have been seriously hurt. (The officer resigned.) Not long afterward, it was discovered that a lieutenant in Jennings had stolen federal funds allocated for drunk-driving checks. In March, 2011, the Jennings City Council voted to shut down the police department and hire St. Louis County to take over. McCarthy secured a job at the local jail, which the town still ran, but most of the other officers were laid off, including Wilson.

"When I left Jennings, I didn't want to work in a white area," Wilson told me. "I liked the black community," he went on. "I had fun there. . . . There's people who will just crack you up." He also liked the fact that there was more work for the police in a town like Jennings—more calls to answer, more people to meet. "I didn't want to just sit around all day," he said.

Wilson, who had recently married a college student named Ashley Brown, didn't have to look far to find a new job. That October, he began policing in neighboring Ferguson, which was slightly more prosperous and about two-thirds black. He was mentored by another field-training officer: Barb Spradling, his future wife. Barb had been working in Ferguson for seven years, as one of three women on a force of roughly fifty officers. "I always thought it was easier to work with guys, because they're not as catty," she said.

The training went smoothly. "I made it easy on her, because all she really had to show me was the city limits and the paperwork," Wilson told me. "I already knew the job." They began confiding in each other, and Wilson revealed that his marriage was foundering. Wilson also

told Barb stories about his mother. Barb was moved, and before long they became a couple. "I was, like, 'Wow, this guy has been through a lot,' " she told me. "And it seemed like he handled it all pretty gracefully."

In July, 2014, Wilson visited the home of Scottie Randolph, a sixty-seven-year-old African-American man, after Randolph reported hearing gunfire. Randolph says that shootings often occur in his neighborhood when "the teen-agers are out of school." The frequency "depends on whether they've got a drug war or a gang war going on." His neighborhood had fallen into disarray because of "the economic meltdown." He added, "A lot of people lost what little they had." Young people who couldn't find work resorted to selling drugs. Randolph told me that he needs the police for protection, but—echoing the Justice Department's findings—feels that they target blacks for fines: "I kind of resent the fact that they're using minorities as a cash cow."

Wilson said that he often handled calls like Randolph's, and that such work was tough, because he could do little to help. I asked him if he agreed with Randolph that the neighborhood's main problem was the absence of jobs. "There's a lack of jobs everywhere," he replied, brusquely. "But there's also lack of initiative to get a job. You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink." He acknowledged that the jobs available in Ferguson often paid poorly, but added, "That's how I started. You've got to start somewhere."

Good values, Wilson insisted, needed to be learned at home. He spoke of a black single mother, in Ferguson, who was physically disabled and blind. She had several teen-age children, who "ran wild," shooting guns, dealing drugs, and breaking into cars.

Several times, Wilson recalled, he responded to calls about gunfire in the woman's neighborhood and saw "people running either from or to that house." Wilson would give chase. "It's midnight, and you're running through back yards." If he caught the kids, he checked them for weapons, then questioned them. He recounted a typical exchange: " 'Why you running?' 'Because I'm afraid of getting caught.' 'Well, what are you afraid of getting caught for?' 'I don't know.' 'Well, there's a reason you ran, and there's a reason you don't want to get caught. What's going on?'"[61] Wilson said that he rarely got answers—and that any contraband had already been thrown away. Once, he arrested some of the woman's kids, for damaging property, but usually he let them go. In his telling, there was no reaching the blind woman's kids: "They ran all over the mom. They didn't respect her, so why would they respect me?" He added, "They're so wrapped up in a different culture than—what I'm trying to say is, the right culture, the better one to pick from."

This sounded like racial code language. I pressed him: what did he mean by "a different culture"?[62] Wilson struggled to respond. He said that he meant "pre-gang culture, where you are just running in the streets—not worried about working in the morning, just worried about your immediate gratification." He added, "It is the same younger culture that is everywhere in the inner cities."

[61]DIALOGUE: Halpern includes this fragment of dialogue made-up by Wilson, and it functions as a way of involving the reader in an police-citizen encounter that Wilson considers to be typical.

[62]HOMOD.: This intervention of the homodiegetic narrator both functions as a way of finding out information about Wilson and draws attention to the subjective consciousness that is situated between the reader and the described events, that is, the journalist.

Most of Wilson's calls were routine—traffic stops, house alarms—but some were deeply distressing. At one crime scene, he discovered the mangled bodies of two dead women. A two-year-old, "covered in blood," was crawling between them. I asked him if such incidents made it hard to sleep. "No," he replied. "I've never brought my work home." This was partly a matter of disposition, but Wilson noted that, while he and Barb were on the force, they lived twenty miles outside Ferguson. They needed "that buffer"—a "chance to get out of that element."

Wilson's home life wasn't entirely peaceful, however. In May, 2013, Barb's ex-boyfriend John—the father of her younger son, who was then four—assaulted her, and also attacked Wilson. According to court papers, Barb said that John drank, and had beaten her in the past. (Barb asked me to omit John's surname, to protect her son's identity.) Barb testified in court that John "pulled my hair," "choked me," and "punched me in the face." The Wilsons declined to discuss the incident with me.

Wilson says that he liked working in Ferguson, but after a year or so he discerned problems within the department. One day, he received a call about a woman screaming in the street. When he arrived on the scene, a rookie officer had already forced her onto the ground, arrested her, and handcuffed her. But the woman, the rookie had realized, hadn't deserved this treatment: she was having some kind of anxiety attack. "Now what?" he asked Wilson.

"You don't even know why you arrested somebody?" Wilson said. Then he recalled who the rookie's field-training officer had been. Wilson summed up that officer's approach as "Arrest them and figure it out later."

Wilson blamed the rookie's meagre training for his mistake. "He didn't learn how to talk," Wilson said. There isn't much in the way of a reliable record about Wilson's own mode of communicating, except for a fifteen-second video that shows him arresting a twenty-nine-year-old white man named Michael Arman. That day, in October, 2013, Wilson was visiting Arman's house to deliver a court summons. Arman had several broken-down vehicles parked on his property, in violation of city rules. In his police report, Wilson says that Arman refused to take the summons, and so he arrested him for "failure to comply."

In the video, Wilson approaches the front porch of the house and notices that he is being videotaped. "If you want to take a picture of me one more time, I'm going to lock your ass up," he says, in an almost bored tone.

"Sir, I'm not taking a picture, I'm recording this incident," Arman says. "Do I not have the right—"

"No, you don't," Wilson says, inaccurately. The video ends. The encounter apparently did not escalate, but it is hardly a testament to Wilson's communication skills.[63]

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[63]SCENE: This meaningful sequencing of these two scenes (Wilson's disapproval of the rookie officer's mediocre communication skills and Wilson's own dubious communication skills) forces the reader to seek out the connection between the two scenes, as their juxtaposition insinuates that Wilson is being, to a certain extent, hypocritical. Through this meaningful sequencing Halpern suggests that Wilson is deliberately painting a more virtuous picture of himself.

Arman was fined for his violation. According to NBC News, in 2013 Ferguson filed more than twelve thousand cases charging ordinance violations—everything from loitering to petty larceny. And there were more than eleven thousand cases charging traffic violations.

The Justice Department report on the city of Ferguson notes that police officers were punished when they didn't write enough tickets, and often issued multiple citations for a single stop. Wilson told me that he knew of an officer who had once issued sixteen. "What the hell is the point?" he asked me. He believed that such fines could create a "vicious cycle," in which people could not pay what they owed, then were fined further for missing payments. "That's almost abusive of power," he told me. I asked Wilson if he had issued multiple tickets. He said that he "usually" never wrote more than three.

Three tickets, of course, could have ruinous consequences for a resident who was poor. I met a man from St. Louis named Sean Bailey, who had been stopped by the Ferguson police in 2005. He had parked his mother's car outside a Chinese restaurant, left a friend in the car, and run in to get take-out food. The police issued three violations, charging Bailey a hundred and two dollars for parking in a fire lane, and citing him for failure to register his car and driving without a valid license. Bailey, who was unemployed, couldn't afford to pay, and when he missed deadlines he was charged additional fines. He has since been arrested half a dozen times for having outstanding fines, and has spent three weeks in jail. He says that, cumulatively, he has paid hundreds of dollars, but the city says that he still owes another hundred and fifty-eight. He has little hope of paying the debt, because he and his four-year-old daughter are homeless.

Though Ferguson police officers routinely arrested people for "failure to comply," Wilson's arrest of Arman was unusual in one respect: Arman is white. The Justice Department report concludes that Ferguson's officers disproportionately charged black citizens with such violations. Wilson insists that he didn't perceive this bias. But the inequity was extreme: between 2011 and 2013, the Justice Department reported, ninety-four per cent of the people arrested in Ferguson for "failure to comply" were black. The Justice Department also reported that the Ferguson police routinely performed "pedestrian checks," in which residents were stopped on the street, often without proper legal justification.

In police records, I found four well-documented instances in which Wilson was involved in "ped checks."[64] On February 27, 2014, he stopped a twenty-three-year-old black man named Aaron Simmons, outside a minimart. In the police report, Wilson remarks that the minimart was known as a place where drugs were sold. He also mentions that it was cold outside, and that while patrolling he had seen Simmons four times "in this area." Wilson reports that, for his own safety, he told Simmons to remove his hands from his pockets. Simmons objected: it was freezing, and his pockets were empty. Wilson forcibly removed Simmons's "hands from his pants, during which Simmons actively resisted my control." Wilson then requested Simmons to place his hands against the police car, so that he could be searched for weapons. When Simmons refused, Wilson arrested him for failure to comply. The report does not say that Simmons possessed anything illegal. During the arrest process, Wilson notes, he and Simmons had several physical confrontations, including one, at the police station, in which "Simmons was pushed against the wall."

[64]HOMOD.: A second-order narrative in which Halpern investigates the stories behind Wilson's ('ped check') statistics.

I showed the four reports to Erin Murphy, an N.Y.U. law professor who studies Fourth Amendment issues. Murphy said that, in the case of Simmons, there was no legitimate reason for detaining him. The other ped checks were less dramatic, but also reflected "questionable constitutional behavior." These reports, she noted, painted "a familiar picture of contemporary law enforcement." Police officers, she added, are not entirely to blame—often, they are trying to "enforce vague standards for detaining people that they don't really understand." (Wilson conceded that the failure-to-comply ordinance was exploited as an "easy way to arrest someone." True violations, he said, involved more resistance than "you telling someone to come here, and them saying, 'No, screw you.' " But when I asked him to explain the ordinance further, he said, "I'd have to read it again.")

The Justice Department found other examples of systemic racial bias in Ferguson. From 2012 to 2014, the Ferguson police issued four or more tickets to blacks on seventy-three occasions, and to whites only twice. Black drivers were more than twice as likely as others to be searched during vehicle stops, even though they were found to possess contraband twenty-six per cent less often. Some charges, like "manner of walking in roadway," were brought against blacks almost exclusively.

Wilson told me that Ferguson's force had a few bigoted members, but he denied that racism was institutional. The Justice Department's numbers were "skewed," he said. "You can make those numbers fit whatever agenda you want."

Within the city government, however, there appears to have been a disturbing level of cynicism about race and crime. In 2011, an e-mail circulated by police supervisors and court staff joked that a black woman who had an abortion was practicing good crime control. While Justice Department officials were investigating Ferguson, city officials repeatedly told them that the arrest statistics simply reflected the fact that black residents lacked "personal responsibility." Indeed, before August 9, 2014—the day of Brown's death—there seems to have been almost no sense that the city needed to change. When I asked Wilson if he felt that Ferguson might boil over, he said, "There's always going to be a little bit simmering in a high-crime, poverty area. In that area, police usually aren't coming over to have dinner."

Mark Byrne, who has been a councilman in Ferguson since 2010, told me that there were things he had missed: "I didn't know, on August 9th, that we only had four African-American police officers on a force of fifty-three." In 2014, the city spent four times as much money on police uniforms as it did on police training. Byrne said, "I could have done a better job."

Just before noon on August 9, 2014, Darren Wilson was heading for a lunch date with Barb when his radio announced that there was a "stealing in progress" at the nearby Ferguson Market and Liquor.[65] The dispatcher offered a description of the two suspects. Wilson radioed back: "Do you guys need me?" The dispatcher replied that the suspects had "disappeared."[66]

Wilson, who had just assisted a mother whose infant was having difficulty breathing, decided that if the robbery trail was cold he would continue on to lunch. Moments later, he

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[65]SCENE: This paragraph (which begins the narrative of the events leading up to Brown's death) is preceded by paragraphs that discuss possibilities of systemic racism and the Ferguson police. Through this meaningful sequencing Halpern primes the reader with expectations for the upcoming paragraphs on the encounter between Brown and Wilson; that is, expectations of systemic police racism.

[66]SCENE: This scene recounts the events of leading up to the encounter between Brown and Wilson from Wilson's perspective.

encountered Michael Brown and his friend Dorian Johnson, walking down the middle of Canfield Drive.

Brown was at a precarious juncture in his life. When he was twelve, his parents had split up. At first, he had lived with his mother, Lesley McSpadden, but by the age of sixteen he had moved in with his father, Michael Brown, Sr. “He wasn’t doing so good over there,” Brown, Sr., told me. “She was working—wasn’t nobody there to kind of help him out—so he came back my way, and he was staying back and forth with me and my mother.” Last summer, Brown was living with his maternal grandmother.

Brown had struggled academically, and had switched schools several times. He was six feet five and weighed nearly three hundred pounds, and, because of his size, people often thought he was older than he was. Brown, Sr., recalls worrying that his son’s physical stature might make him a target for the police. “We had a conversation about just following orders,” he said. “After you thought that you were being disrespected, get a name and a badge number, so your parent can reach out to the police department and file a complaint.” Most important was a simple directive: “Obey.”

Brown had just graduated from Normandy High School, where he had participated in an alternative-education program. He was planning to study heating and cooling at a technical school, but hadn’t yet started. Now summer was ending, and he had decisions to make.

Each spring, Duane Foster, a music teacher at Normandy, who knew Brown in passing, tells his seniors, “Since you’ve been a child, you have known every year, from August to June, that you’re going to go to school. . . . For the first time in your life, you won’t have anything set in stone. And that should make you scared.”

For many of the students at Normandy, Foster said, attending college is not a possibility. At home, these students are often told that, once school ends, they must earn their keep. Some of these young people have very few options, he said, then asked, “How do I compete with somebody struggling with poverty? How do I come into a classroom and say that you don’t need to be selling drugs or participating in gang-like activity?”

Foster grew up near Ferguson, in Velda Village Hills. When his family moved there, in 1969, it was among the first black families in town. By the mid-seventies, the neighborhood was almost entirely black. Back then, there were jobs and two-parent families, and this created stability. “We had General Motors, Chrysler, and Ford,” he told me. “So many factories.” Those jobs are now gone, as are many fathers, he says.

According to a recent analysis by the Times of American communities with at least ten thousand black residents, the city with the largest proportion of black men who are “missing”—in jail or prematurely dead—is Ferguson. Foster said, “There’s no real design for a middle class, or even a lower-middle class, in this area.”

Michael Brown’s father played an active role in his life, but this isn’t always the case for Normandy students. A third of Foster’s students have a father in jail. Many of them believe, rightly or wrongly, that their father is innocent, and this inevitably shapes how young people in Ferguson view the police. This context, Foster says, helps provide a clearer picture of where Brown came from, and who his peers were.

The image of Brown that many people have was shaped by the surveillance video from Ferguson Market and Liquor. In that footage, we see Brown take several packages of cigarillos, then head toward the door. A clerk tries to stop him, but Brown easily shoves him aside. Store employees later told federal investigators that Brown looked "crazy," used profane language, and asked the clerk, menacingly, "What are you gonna do about it?"

Dorian Johnson told me that, before entering the market, he and Brown "never talked about stealing things." Johnson claimed that they were instead immersed in a discussion "about the Bible and God—how you're supposed to be as a human going through life." After Brown stole the cigarillos and they left the store, they resumed this conversation. Johnson also claimed that he didn't even acknowledge that the theft had taken place, because he didn't want to rub Brown "the wrong way." He told me, "I was being a real good friend and staying with him, even though I know he committed a crime," and added, "It wasn't like he robbed the store—like he held it at gunpoint or anything—so I didn't think the guy was really gonna call the police."

The most thorough account of what happened next comes from the Justice Department's report on the incident, which is eighty-six pages long.[67]

Wilson was heading west on Canfield Drive, his window open, in his department-issued Chevrolet Tahoe. He spotted Brown and Johnson, and called out to them to use the sidewalk. According to Wilson, Brown replied, "Fuck what you have to say." (Johnson denies that Brown said this, and claims that Wilson told them, "Get the fuck on the sidewalk.")[68] Wilson surmised that Brown and Johnson were the robbery suspects, based on the descriptions offered on the radio and the cigarillos in Brown's hands. After calling for backup, Wilson parked his vehicle at an angle, barricading the roadway.

According to Kevin Ahlbrand, the president of the Missouri Fraternal Order of Police, parking a police car in this manner is a common maneuver—a car in the street offers a cop protection in the event of a gunfight.[69]

Jonathan Fenderson, who is a professor of African-American studies at Washington University, in St. Louis, told me that young black men are inclined to see the police as an "occupying force." Intentionally or not, Wilson's decision to blockade the street sent a message: You will defer to the power that I exhibit, or I am going to force you back into place.

After stopping his car, Wilson tried to open his door, but Brown blocked his way. It is impossible to know what Brown and Wilson then said to each other—or why the situation escalated so quickly. I asked Wilson repeatedly to discuss this moment with me, but he declined, noting that Brown's parents are pursuing a civil lawsuit, and that he didn't need details "in print that they're going to try and spin."[70]

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[67]OTHER: The implication of this is omitted. With this ellipsis, Halpern incites the reader to make the final mental leap themselves: *Eighty-six* pages that describe a single incident? This functions as a way of stimulating reader engagement with the text.
[68]SCENE: In this scene, Halpern decides to present the competing descriptions of what happened in a single paragraph.
[69]SCENE: Halpern pauses the passage of narrated time and dissects and explains what happens with the aid of experts.
[70]SCENE: Halpern acknowledges the limitations of his own research and what can in general be known about the Brown-Wilson encounter.

According to Wilson and several witnesses deemed credible by the Justice Department, Brown reached into the Tahoe's open window, grabbed Wilson, and punched him. This narrative, the report says, is supported by bruising on Wilson's jaw and samples of Brown's DNA found on Wilson's collar, shirt, and pants. It's not known why Brown did this, and many have speculated that Wilson provoked Brown somehow.

At this point, Wilson told investigators, his training kicked in and he reviewed his options.[71] He did not carry a Taser, so the weapons at his disposal were mace, a retractable baton, and his gun. The only one readily accessible, Wilson said, was the gun. When he unholstered it, he told investigators, Brown reached for it. He told the grand jury that Brown said to him, "You are too much of a pussy to shoot me." In the ensuing struggle, Wilson shot Brown in the hand. This sequence of events has factual support. Brown's DNA was detected on the inside of the driver's-side door, and soot from the gun's muzzle was found in Brown's wound, indicating that his hand was within inches of the weapon when it fired. It was the first time that Wilson had used his gun in the line of duty.

Wilson told the grand jury that Brown, upon being shot, had "the most intense, aggressive face," and looked "like a demon." Brown retreated, running east. Wilson chased him. Brown ran at least a hundred and eighty feet down Canfield Drive—his blood was found in the roadway—and then headed back toward Wilson. According to the Justice Department, eyewitnesses claiming that Brown raised his hands in surrender proved unreliable. (One of these witnesses, Dorian Johnson, continues to insist that Brown's hands were raised.) Witnesses deemed credible offered varying accounts of Brown's movement—"charging," "slow motion," "running"—but concurred that he was approaching Wilson. According to Wilson, he repeatedly ordered Brown to stop and get on the ground. Brown, who was unarmed, kept moving. At one point, Wilson told investigators, Brown put his right hand into his waistband, as if reaching for a weapon.

Sometime after the chase began, Wilson shot ten bullets at Brown. A few missed him, but he was hit in the chest, the forehead, and the arm. Autopsy reports indicate that, contrary to initial media reports, no bullets hit Brown in the back. It is possible that Wilson fired some of the errant bullets before Brown turned around, and the Justice Department report says that "the autopsy results alone do not indicate the direction Brown was facing when he received two wounds to his right arm." Yet the report repeatedly underscores that eyewitness accounts describing Brown being shot from behind were unreliable.

Academics have studied whether cops exhibit racial bias when deciding whether to pull the trigger. Joshua Correll, at the University of Colorado Boulder, has done more than twenty studies on this topic. In 2000, Correll created a video game in which participants view images of armed and unarmed men—some black, some white.[72] Participants must make rapid decisions about whether to shoot. Initially, Correll tested civilians—college students, mainly—and found that they were quicker to shoot black suspects than white suspects. They also were more likely to shoot unarmed suspects when those suspects were black. When Correll had police officers do the test, the results were more ambiguous. Officers, like civilians, were significantly quicker to shoot black suspects than white suspects; but cops

[71]SCENE: This passage echoes the earlier paragraphs on the questionable relationship between Wilson's training vis-à-vis his professional conduct.
[72]SCENE: Halpern once again pauses the passage of narrated time and dissects and explains the concept of racial bias and how that could have possibly influenced the situation.

showed no bias when shooting unarmed suspects by mistake. Correll believes that this is a result of the training that cops receive.

Wilson told the grand jury that when Brown was hit by the bullets he “looked like he was almost bulking up to run through the shots, like it was making him mad that I’m shooting at him.” This testimony has inspired much debate. In November, Melissa Harris-Perry, the commentator on MSNBC, noted that Wilson’s use of language—much like his use of the word “demon”—was dehumanizing, and conformed to the “myth of the black brute incapable of pain himself bent on inflicting pain on others.” She added, “Americans long have had difficulty in understanding, acknowledging, and having empathy for the pain of black men.”

Brown collapsed after being shot. At 12:05 p.m., an ambulance—carrying the infant Wilson had assisted—came across the scene, and a paramedic pronounced Brown dead. The body remained on the hot asphalt for four hours. Hundreds of angry residents gathered, some shouting, “Let’s kill the police!” Ferguson officials say that this volatility slowed down the processing of Brown’s body, but the delay struck many onlookers as deeply insulting. As one local told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, “You’ll never make anyone black believe that a white kid would have laid in the street for four hours.”[73]

Sabrina Webb, one of Brown’s cousins, lived on Canfield Drive, across from the scene of the shooting. She was at work when the shooting occurred. Her roommate called to report that someone had just been shot dead. Webb rushed home.[74] She couldn’t get down Canfield Drive in her car, so she parked on a nearby street and ran the rest of the way. She pushed through onlookers and discovered that the victim was her cousin. Brown was three years younger than she was, and they had seen each other the previous week. “We were just happy,” she says. “Like normal kids.” Now his dead body was lying on the street. “That’s going to always stay on my mind,” she told me. “Always. It’s nothing you can get rid of.”

At the Ferguson police station, Barb Wilson wondered why her husband hadn’t showed up for lunch.[75] Then, she told me, “he just walked in and was, like, ‘I just killed somebody.’ ” Barb noticed that Wilson’s “face was flushed and red—it didn’t look right.” She decided that he needed space and, not knowing what else to do, took care of some paperwork. Wilson went to the hospital with his superiors, and debriefed them while he was examined for injuries. He returned to the station, and he and Barb headed home.

“Neither one of us knew what the reaction was going to be the next day,” Wilson said. “You know, a typical police shooting is: you get about a week to a week and a half off, you see a shrink, you go through your Internal Affairs interviews. And then you come back.” Barb told me, “I didn’t think it would be a big weight on his shoulders. This is kind of what we signed up for.”

Later that night, however, they turned on the television and watched live coverage of unrest in Ferguson. Barb recalled, “We stayed up all night watching, like, ‘Oh, my God—what’s going on? What are they doing?’ ”

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[73]FIG. LANG.: Halpern analyses two distinct images: Wilson’s ‘demon’ description and the ‘black corpse lying on the asphalt.’

[74]SCENE: Shift in perspective: Halpern switches to the character of Webb, instead of Wilson or Brown.

[75]SCENE: Another shift in perspective; Halpern switches to Barb.

Barb's younger son, who was then six, asked why there were images on television of Ferguson burning. Wilson told me, "I said, 'Well, I had to shoot somebody.' And he goes, 'Well, why did you shoot him? Was he a bad guy?' I said, 'Yeah, he was a bad guy.' "

Soon after the shooting, Wilson called Mike McCarthy and gave him an account of what had happened. "I never questioned it," McCarthy told me. Around the same time, he was involved in a shootout with an armed suspect, and he knew that such experiences were chaotic. McCarthy, who was moonlighting as a policeman in a North County town, answered a call about a domestic disturbance. He showed me a video of the incident.

When McCarthy arrived on the scene, a black man in his twenties opened fire on him and another officer. The other cop was hit. The shooter sped off in his car. McCarthy got back into his car, letting out a strange, adrenaline-filled whoop. "After I got shot at, I had one thing on my mind, and that was getting that son of a bitch," McCarthy told me. He pursued the shooter. "Then it hit me—'I have to go back.' " He returned to his colleague. Fortunately, the officer was unhurt; the bullet had been stopped by the Taser on his utility belt.

McCarthy's story made clear that even a seasoned veteran could forget protocol while under duress. [76]He said of Wilson's troubles, "It just tore me up, because here you had a young kid who was doing nothing more than his job—and was doing a job that I encouraged him and taught him how to do." McCarthy sympathized with some of the underlying rage that fuelled the protests—and the riots—but he was adamant that the shooting had nothing to do with race.

A few days after the shooting, the Wilsons, worried that their address was about to be leaked online, fled to the house of a relative: "We ran through the house, grabbed all our guns, and put some bags together." Wilson contemplated leaving St. Louis for good, then reconsidered. He told me, "At least here I'd know where I'm welcome and not welcome."

On August 9th, as events unfolded in Ferguson, Rasheen Aldridge was working at an Alamo rental-car office at the St. Louis Airport. From the parking lot, he had a clear view of Interstate 70. "I saw, like, forty police cars heading toward Ferguson," he recalled. On the Internet, he found an image of Brown's body in the street.[77]

Aldridge, who was twenty at the time, had grown up in the impoverished Fifth Ward of St. Louis, but he was a homebody and spent little time on the streets. In kindergarten, Aldridge had entered the county's desegregation program, and attended school in an affluent suburb. Many of his friends were white and Jewish. His childhood was quite different from Michael Brown's, and perhaps for this reason he was drawn to Ferguson. On August 11th, he drove there with a friend.

Aldridge talked with residents, gathering firsthand accounts of what had happened. A few days later, he returned and watched, horrified, as looters ransacked a store. He and several others formed a raggedy line of defense. Some looters walked away, Aldridge says; others didn't. "Some called us house niggers," he said, his voice cracking.

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[76]SCENE: McCarthy's anecdote has as function to exemplify the chaotic circumstances during escalating police-citizen encounters.
[77]SCENE: Another shift in perspective; Halpern switches to Rasheen Aldridge.

In subsequent weeks, Aldridge returned often to Ferguson, participating in protests that he hoped would peacefully bring change. Initially, he gave the police the benefit of the doubt. Then officers started firing tear gas into the crowds and, occasionally, calling protesters "niggers."

Aldridge heard the media reports that Brown's hands had been raised and that Wilson had shot him in the back. It was Dorian Johnson who had first made these allegations, and they helped inspire the now famous rallying cry "Hands Up, Don't Shoot." Although Johnson's story proved to be at odds with the Justice Department's findings, the narrative had taken hold—and, for many Americans, it has endured. In part, this is because Johnson's story was eminently plausible. Within the past year alone, the media has highlighted many examples of police brutality in which the facts strongly resemble the type of story that Johnson told—from the fatal choking of Eric Garner, on Staten Island, to the fatal shootings of Walter Scott, in North Charleston, South Carolina, and Samuel Dubose, in Cincinnati.[78]

Aldridge told me that, based on what he had heard and read, he believed that Brown was in "surrender mode" when Wilson shot him. When we spoke, he admitted that he had not yet read the Justice Department's report on the shooting. It was hard not to notice a parallel: both Aldridge and Wilson had turned to the report that buttressed their own world view. It was as if the two Justice Department reports had come to present opposing realities.[79]

Legitimate questions linger about the shooting. If Brown was unprovoked, why did he reach into the police car and punch Wilson in the face? Why did Wilson fire ten shots? A young activist in Ferguson, Clifton Kinnie, said, "The story doesn't make sense. Black youth don't fight police—we run."[80]

Kinnie recounted a story of walking toward a park, with his younger brother. A police officer pulled up in his car and told them to get on the ground. Kinnie complied and told his brother to do the same. The officer was apparently searching for some suspects. Kinnie still recalls how aggressive the officer was, "coming at us as if we were grown men." This was in 2005, when Kinnie was eight years old.

Kinnie's cynical view of the police was bolstered by the Justice Department's conclusions about the city of Ferguson. If the police generally acted in a racist and abusive manner, why give Wilson the benefit of the doubt?

In May, I posed this question to Brittany Ferrell and Alexis Templeton—a charismatic black couple who are two of the most visible activists in Ferguson. Templeton said that the two Justice Department reports "pretty much contradict one another," adding, "You have to say, Damn, if the Ferguson Police Department is racist, and Wilson works in the Ferguson Police Department, that means he might be racist, too." She said, "They need to open up and relook

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[78]OTHER: Halpern introduces a metanarrative, as he discusses a narrative about the narrative of police brutality. He builds a narrative of how the narrative of police brutality is interpreted by many American citizens, such as Aldridge. In this case the veracity of the details of the smaller, individual cases (such as whether Brown's hands where raised or not) does not affect the larger, overarching explanation or pattern behind those cases. Halpern suggests that, for many Americans, the strong resemblance between the cases of Garner, Scott, Brown, and Dubose is more important than the question whether Wilson shot Brown in the back or not.
[79]OTHER: The previously identified metanarrative is continued in this paragraph, with the addition of the parallel between Wilson and Aldridge concerning their reasoning.
[80]OTHER: These four paragraphs echo the paradox identified in the beginning of Halpern's piece. They elaborate on the absurdity of the self-contradictory findings of the two reports.

at this case." Ferrell said, "The system is going to do whatever it has to do to protect itself. And if that means protecting Darren Wilson, the officer who represents that system, they're going to do that."

One afternoon this spring, Ferrell and Templeton joined a protest in Ferguson. At the time, people were marching in Baltimore over the death of Freddie Gray, and the mood in Ferguson was tense. About a hundred protesters gathered outside a church, then proceeded onto the street. They chanted, "Indict! Convict! Send that killer cop to jail! The whole damn system is guilty as hell!"

The plan was to shut down the intersection of West Florissant and Chambers Road for four minutes, in symbolic homage to the four hours that Brown's body lay in the street. When the protesters reached the intersection, they marched in front of oncoming cars. Horns honked, and an irate motorist yelled, "Get out of the street so people can get to work!" One car drove onto the elevated median and made a reckless U-turn. Another driver tried to force his way through the protesters, at considerable speed, and nearly hit one of them.

The police never showed up. Several squad cars remained parked just down the street, in an empty lot. Some locals told me that the Ferguson police often decided not to engage these days. Weeks later, one white resident told me, bitterly, that the cops had their "hands tied" and couldn't police "the way they should." On one occasion, he said, he called the police about a possible break-in at a neighbor's house, and an officer advised him to arm himself. Mike McCarthy also lamented the situation: "I don't think the cops in Ferguson can do a whole lot of policing these days." The Justice Department's exposé may have had a constraining effect, but it's also true that the city's leadership is in flux. A week after the report came out, the police chief, the city manager, and the municipal judge all resigned. (The city recently named Andre Anderson, who is black, its interim police chief. His first goal, he announced, was "simply to build trust.")

Late in the evening on April 28th, violence broke out in Ferguson, and a store was looted. That night, I met up with McCarthy, in Jennings. On his police scanner, there were multiple reports of gunshots. "They are getting ready to switch over to Code 2000," McCarthy told me.

The problems in Ferguson, McCarthy told me, were rooted in a vast historical legacy of injustice: "No matter what we do, we cannot right our wrongs to the African-American community." But police had to do their job—and he, for one, couldn't see himself leaving North County. "I don't think I'd be effective," he said. "It's not what I know."

I asked him if, by the same logic, a man with the background of Darren Wilson would be inherently less effective in North County. McCarthy bristled. "Watch what you're using for the definition of 'effective,' " he said. "I can do my job down there, but you're not getting the maximum use of my resources." What would be lost? The ability to communicate easily, he replied.

I reminded him that he considered communication to be the most important skill in law enforcement. Wasn't Wilson's confrontation with Brown, on some level, about

communication? Would an encounter with Brown really have played out in the same manner for McCarthy?[81]

He insisted that he would have acted just as Wilson had. I then asked him to consider the initial moment of contact, when Wilson and Brown were still talking. “It might not have escalated to that point,” McCarthy conceded, uneasily. Later, he added, “There is likelihood that it could’ve avoided that confrontation—the escalation of that confrontation.” But he felt that such speculation was pointless.

Reverend Starsky Wilson is the co-chair of the Ferguson Commission, whose members have been asked by Missouri’s governor, Jay Nixon, to study what factors might have contributed to the rioting. In Reverend Wilson’s view, the moment when Darren Wilson first spoke with Michael Brown was enormously consequential. “It frames the engagement and it sets a tone for the relationship,” he told me. But this moment couldn’t be isolated from all the mistakes that came before it. In places like Ferguson, police officers needed to spend more time in the schools, getting to know disadvantaged students, and they had to treat more residents as allies. He urged me to consider what might have happened if Wilson had known Brown, or Brown’s grandmother, and was able to say, “Does Miss Jenny know you’re out here?” Such a question, Reverend Wilson said, has a more potent moral authority. One afternoon this spring, I accompanied Darren and Barb Wilson to a park near their house, where they watched Barb’s younger son practice baseball. Darren wore shades and a baseball cap, and we stayed in the Wilsons’ S.U.V.

Wilson says that, after the grand jury cleared him, he wanted to rejoin Ferguson’s police force. But he was told that his presence would put other officers at risk. “They put that on me,” Wilson said. He worked for two weeks at a boot store, stocking inventory, but quit when reporters started calling the store. “No matter what I do, they try to get a story off of it,” he told me.

After the shooting, Barb was reluctant to return to the streets of Ferguson, for fear of being identified as Wilson’s wife. The department recently offered her a job as a dispatcher—with a substantial pay cut. Barb decided to retire early. In the car, she turned to Darren and said, “I just want that lottery ticket we bought in Piedmont to be a winner.”

I asked Wilson what he would do if the Ferguson police force offered him his job back. He seemed startled. “I would—um—”

“I would not allow him,” Barb said.

“I would want to do it for a day,” Darren said, finally, to show people that he was not “defeated.”[82]

In our many discussions, Wilson rarely spoke of Michael Brown. Twice, I asked him if he had reflected on what kind of person Brown was. The first time I asked, it was early May, and Brown’s parents had just filed their civil lawsuit against him. “You do realize that his parents

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[81]HOMOD.: This intervention of the homodiegetic narrator both functions as a way of finding out information about McCarthy’s thoughts on the situation and draws attention to the subjective consciousness that is situated between the reader and the described events, that is, the journalist.
[82]DIALOGUE: This dialogue explores the dynamic between Barb and Darren (Halpern refers to him as Darren, not Wilson, in this fragment).

are suing me?" he said. "So I have to think about him." He went on, "Do I think about who he was as a person? Not really, because it doesn't matter at this point. Do I think he had the best upbringing? No. Not at all." His tone was striking, given Wilson's own turbulent childhood.

Six weeks later, Wilson told me that he had never really had a chance to contemplate who Brown was, because he had been preoccupied by the maelstrom that followed the shooting. I asked him if he thought Brown was truly a "bad guy," or just a kid who had got himself into a bad situation. "I only knew him for those forty-five seconds in which he was trying to kill me, so I don't know," Wilson said.

Barb also said that she rarely thought about Brown. But she thought about a woman named Stephanie Edwards, whom she knew well. Edwards was the mother of Louis Head, Brown's stepfather. Before becoming a cop, Barb had worked with Edwards at a grocery store. Barb says that they talked every day for roughly ten years, learning minute details of each other's lives, but they didn't keep in touch when Barb became a cop.[83]

After the shooting, Edwards joined the protests, appearing at a rally wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with Brown's face.[84] "We are tired of police brutality," she told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. "I came out for justice." Barb wonders what would happen if she and Edwards crossed paths again. Barb assumes that much of the world assumes that she is a racist, but clings to the idea that Edwards knows better: "I know that she knows, in her heart, that I am not like that." (Edwards could not be reached for comment.)

One recent afternoon, I met with Sabrina Webb, Michael Brown's cousin, on Canfield Drive, at the spot where Brown was killed. A makeshift memorial was in place: a pile of wilted flowers and sun-scorched Teddy bears. She recalled that, when she left her apartment the day after the shooting, "you could still see brain matter on the street." She moved out soon afterward.

Webb was still angry that Wilson had offered condolences only after the grand jury gave its decision. Wilson was interviewed by George Stephanopoulos, of ABC, and he said of Brown's parents, "I'm sorry that their son lost his life. It wasn't the intention of that day. It's what occurred that day, and there's nothing you can say that's going to make a parent feel better." Wilson also reaffirmed, "I did my job that day." I asked Webb how she felt about Wilson. "Anger and hatred," she said. "There's no forgiveness."

Michael Brown, Sr., also feels "resentment" toward Wilson, and feels that nothing, not even Wilson's going to jail, can rectify what happened. When we spoke of the day of the shooting, I asked him what he believed had happened at Ferguson Market and Liquor. "That's just out of character," he said. He also insisted that the video didn't "show all the facts," though he wouldn't elaborate. His son, he said, "was an average kid that did teen-age things and had fun and tried to live his life." Brown, Sr., said that two images of his son never leave his consciousness. One is from the last time he saw him smiling. It was on August 1st, the day that Brown graduated. They went out to eat. "He had on a nice tie," Brown, Sr., recalled, quietly. The other memory is of his son lying on the ground, dead.

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[83]OTHER: Literary technique: ellipsis: The implication of this is omitted. With this ellipsis, Halpern incites the reader to make the final mental leap themselves: *Why* didn't Barb and Edwards stay in touch when Barb became a cop?

[84]OTHER: This echoes the preceding ellipsis, and hints at the answer to the question the ellipsis elicits.

Since the shooting, gun sales in Ferguson have spiked, and there is little sense of reconciliation. The sixteen members of the Ferguson Commission have been charged with proposing policy reforms. Rasheen Aldridge, the activist, who is a member of the commission, told me that last August he believed that Wilson deserved the death penalty. Since then, his views have softened: "I can't hold hatred in me for too long." He still can't decide what kind of punishment Wilson deserves. "I want to be, like, 'He needs to go to jail.' But then there's also that other side of me that understands everything. He is probably in prison, in a way."

At one point, I asked Wilson if he missed walking outside and going to restaurants. He told me that he still ate out, but only at certain places. "We try to go somewhere—how do I say this correctly?—with like-minded individuals," he said. "You know. Where it's not a mixing pot."

Wilson has received several thousand letters from supporters, and he has written thank-you notes to almost all of his correspondents. Many of the letters are from police officers. Some are from kids. One card reads, "Thanks for protecting us!" Wilson proudly showed me a drawer, in his living room, which contained dozens of police-department patches from cops expressing their support. None of those cops, however, had offered him a job.[85] ♦

[85]FIG. LANG.: This detail (which is, in a way, also an ellipsis) represents something else beyond the literal meaning of the fact that Wilson hasn't been offered a job yet. It represents a certain societal pattern, namely the toxicity police officers acquire after allegations of police brutality and associations with systemic racism.