

“Bizarre Dissonances in Baltimore”: Class and Race in the Color-blind Discourses of Police Violence

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Mainstream reporting on the death of Freddie Gray at the hands of Baltimore police in 2015, like much contemporary public discourse in the era of color-blind racism, often considered the issue of race only indirectly—in this case, through the discursive substitution of issues of class. By focusing on journalistic representations of the police officers, the protestors, and Gray himself, as well as other symbols of race and class in the reporting, this study unravels the discursive strategies which mask or make sensible the racialized practices of policing and government. Class and race are posed in opposition to one another in these discourses in ways that obscure how these categories are co-constituted and interrelated. Particularly key to this analysis is the police union’s claim to the discursive territory of class and labor in cases like these, where a broader application of class critiques would better help the public understand the structural interlinkage between class and race in American society and criminal justice.

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On April 19, 2015, Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old black man from West Baltimore died as a result of spinal cord injuries he suffered while being arrested and transported by the Baltimore Police Department (Graham 2015). The following day, six police officers involved in his arrest and transportation, three of them black and three white, were suspended from duty with pay (Laughlin & Swain 2015). After Gray's funeral the following week, protests in West Baltimore were being characterized by the press as "riots, arson and looting" (Gorta 2015, para. 1). President Barack Obama "denounced the rioters as 'criminals and thugs'" (Stolberg 2015, para. 14). On May 1, Maryland's state attorney Marilyn Mosby ruled Gray's death a homicide, saying her office would pursue charges against the six police officers involved (Barajas 2015).

More than a year later, after three of the officers were already acquitted, the cases against the remaining three were dropped by the state attorney's office (Sung & Shoichet 2016). Two of those three officers, William Porter and Alicia White, were young African Americans who lived in or grew up in the same West Baltimore neighborhood as Gray. A number of factors in this particular case—the ambiguity produced by a lack of video evidence of police culpability for Gray's death, the involvement of the black officers in Gray's transportation, and the civic unrest that preceded the officers' trials—makes the press's response to issues of race surrounding Gray's death, the protests, and the officers' trials, both complicated and compelling. Though no straightforward charges of overt racism were being voiced by institutional sources, the racialized nature of hyperpolicing and police brutality surely influenced the police officers' actions, the protestors' response, and the prosecutor's investigation.

In this essay, I examine how journalists shape the discursive construction of race in reporting on the protests in West Baltimore and the police officers' trials. Focusing on the sourcing practices and textual representations of mainstream journalism, this study shows how reporters and critics "draw interpretative frameworks from their society's cultural repertoire, serving simultaneously as the producers, distributors and re/producers of public discourse," with an aim at connecting this particular discourse of race with discourses of academic and political practices (Herzog, Sharon, & Leykin 2008, 1093; Van Dijk 2000). Just as Hall et al. (1978), in their seminal study, exposed the discursive construction of criminality in the British press and the role of political and criminal justice institutions in shaping that construction, and using it as justification for policy decisions and policing practices, here I conceptualize discourse, like Foucault (1980), as co-constitutive with the practice of power.

In order to better contextualize an overriding finding that will shape my analysis—namely that class, as a discursive construct, is used to negate or obscure issues of race—I will frame my focused critical discourse analysis with an examination of key historical moments in which the discourses of race and class have been set at odds with one another in the domains of social science, criminology, and journalism. This theoretically informed historical context will allow me to use the "specific textual features" of the reporting I study to "invoke 'extra-textual' cultural relations of ideology and power" (Hartley & Montgomery 1985, 233). The reporting, like much contemporary public discourse in the era of color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2015), often deals with the issue of race only indirectly. Therefore, by focusing on the journalistic representation, in particular, of the two younger black officers, the protestors in West Baltimore, and Gray himself, as well as other symbols of race and class in the reporting, I hope to unravel the discursive

strategies which mask or make sensible the racialized practices of policing and government. Class and race, I find, are posed in opposition to one another in these discourses in ways that obscure how these categories are co-constituted and interrelated. Particularly key to this analysis is the police union's claim to the discursive territory of class and labor in cases like these, where a broader application of class critiques would better help the public understand the structural interlinkage between class and race in American society and criminal justice.

Class and race in discourses of social science and criminal justice

A number of recent studies by scholars of race in America have shown, sometimes indirectly, how racialized social science and criminal justice practices have been perpetuated alongside specific discursive constructions of race and class. As shown by Khalil Gibran Muhammad in his book *The Condemnation of Blackness* (2011), social science, public policy, and racial ideologies have been knit together into a “strategy of communication” (Porter, 1995, viii) to construct black criminality and to deny black Americans the full rights of citizenship in a liberal democratic society. Muhammad found that the dominant white sociologists of the early 20th century determined the divergent representations of poor white immigrants and African-Americans in academic and public policy discourse, employing the metrics and discourses of class to extend social welfare benefits to whites but not blacks, essentially ignoring and perpetuating the structural effects of endemic racism. Likewise, Geoff K. Ward, in his book *The Black Child-Savers* (2012), has shown how the “rehabilitative ideal” of juvenile justice policies, starting in the Jim Crow era, neglected black youth through racial degradation, white supremacist ideology, and the practices of the courts. In part, Ward's work represents a revision of previous histories (e.g. Platt, 1969), which explored the contradictions of juvenile justice in terms of the ideological commitments of elite white Progressives and thereby ignored the racial disparities inherent in the reform movements. Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve, in her book *Crook County* (2016), reveals, among other things, how rhetorical practices in criminal courts serve to mask racialized outcomes in the functionalist language of a bureaucracy. In contextualizing the use of the word “mope,” for instance, to describe people regarded as impediments to the smooth functioning of the courts, Van Cleve elucidates how class-based or work-based language can mask race-based practices in the criminal justice system. These and other works hint at how social science and public and criminal justice policy both serve to facilitate and are facilitated by discourses that dismiss the contradictions of racial disparities in a liberal democracy, through the rhetorical substitution of issues of social class.

Among more standard work in criminal justice scholarship, race and class have long been conflated, to a large extent because of a lack of critical approaches to measures and methodology, but also because of ideological prerogatives (Muhammad, 2011). In attempting to “prove” racism with such measures, quantitative social scientists often disregard race as a factor all-together, or at least relegate it as a control variable, focusing on secondary causes for crime statistics, such as low marriage rates, education, and poverty, which are understood, by some, as broad class markers. The strict quantitative approach of most criminal justice scholarship (e.g. DeLisi, 2011) may only reinforce the discursive ignorance of structural racism by providing the empirical, statistical evidence for “disproving” that race is an important factor, or by robbing race of its effects by emphasizing proxies, like education, marriage rates, and income, that can be labeled class markers by those motivated to minimize the effect of racial bias.

The discursive problem of whiteness

Yet, on the other side of the conversation, many critical penologists and activists have interpreted the history of policing and mass incarceration “almost exclusively as a means of securing white domination,” according to Cedric Johnson (2016, para. 31). History shows, for these critics, that “modern policing originated and evolved as a means of protecting the interests of capital more broadly, whether that meant recovering the troublesome human ‘property’ of the Southern landlord class, or crushing worker rebellion in mines,” making the racialized practice of current policing incidental to its role in facilitating the smooth functioning of a capitalist society (Johnson 2016, para. 31). Though Johnson, and others who agree with him (e.g. Palmer, 2016), acknowledge that race has played an outsized role in policing, and they introduce empirical evidence that class is also an important factor in disproportionate violence and surveillance, the either-or approach they take—substituting capitalism for racism as the root cause of the policing crisis—elides the cultural construction of both race and class in the United States.

Recent popular cultural histories of whiteness, such as *White Trash* by Nancy Isenberg (2016), along with older texts like David Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991) have interrogated how whiteness in America has been constructed throughout history not only in terms of race, but also in terms of class. Whiteness has subsumed “working class” as a category, so that discursively, working class does not function merely as a social class indicator or an indicator of economic conditions, but also as a racial category. In excluding African-Americans and other people of color from this social construction of class, popular cultural discourse, in particular, has pitted issues of class and race against one another. We have seen this in particular in the infighting among liberal pundits in the wake of the 2016 presidential election, in which so-called “identity issues,” i.e. race and gender, are represented as incompatible or even antipathetic with “economic issues,” i.e. class (Traister 2016). The discursive blending of class and race then, particularly in the American context, makes it important to understand how, in specific narratives, one or the other dominates at the expense of a broader understanding of how both function.

Method: Finding discourses of race and class in color-blind journalism

Guiding the analysis that follows is the methodological adaptation of Bonilla-Silva’s (2002) concept of color-blind racism to the study of journalism by Hemant Shah and Mai Yamagami (2015). Bonilla-Silva’s work pushes back against arguments for class as a root cause of difference, suggesting that class is used, discursively, in our era of color-blind racism, as a proxy for race. The discursive use of class makes the threshold even higher to identify and describe structural racism in both vernacular and academic discourse. Studying the textual tactics used in in-depth interviews to discuss racial disparities without directly mentioning race, Bonilla-Silva (2002) reveals the textual characteristics of color-blind racism. Shah and Yamagami (2015) adapt this theoretical and methodological approach to analyze the “racism and racist discourse [that] has become subtle and perhaps more difficult to detect” in news media (197). As overt racist rhetoric has become less socially acceptable, the discursive constructions that prop up structural racism have changed. The de facto deracination of discourses in journalism may also contribute to the public’s ability to both embrace universal rights and accept racialized violence, as Lee (2016) suggests of political rhetoric.

Critical discourse analysis, as described by Fairclough (1995), allows scholars to link texts, the discursive practices within those texts, and the sociocultural practices in the society that produce those texts. The critical discourse analysis that follows examines mainstream journalism coverage surrounding the Freddie Gray case, as a corpus of texts, in order to better describe the discursive practices of color-blind racism—which in turn are linked with the sociocultural practices that make hyper-policing and hyper-surveillance based on race sensible in the same cultural context. Freddie Gray’s death, the protests in West Baltimore, and the trials of the six police officers constitute what Carvalho (2008) calls a “critical discourse moment” in the much broader discourse of race in America in that the contradictory representations of race and class become apparent in the midst of the conflict over justice.

Following Hall’s articulation of race as not merely a “subcategory” of analysis but as a discursive mechanism through which “the whole social formation...is racialized” (quoted in Grossberg, 2007), this study focuses on the permutations of that mechanism and how it is often hidden by the discursive mechanism of class. Historians have uncovered how discourses of race have propped up specific economic policies, synonymizing certain class-based identities with whiteness or with racist ideologies; these studies argue that discourses flow from race-based and class-based power struggles rather than the other way around (e.g. Roediger, 1991; Kendi, 2016). Though it is beyond the scope of this essay to elaborate the complex structural realities of the events under discussion, it is important to keep in mind that the discourses analyzed here both reflect and reinforce “the whole social formation” Hall described as the object of cultural studies. In preparation for this analysis, I read local and national newspaper, magazine and web articles from the initial reporting of Gray’s death on April 19, 2015, through the acquittal of the officers on all charges in the summer of 2016. This sample included stories from national media such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic* and *The New Yorker*, and local media such as *The Baltimore Sun* and the website of WBALTV. These outlets were chosen for their extensive reporting on the story as it unfolded. The local media reported more prominently on the activities and statements of the police union than national media. Magazine stories dealt more fully with issues of race than newspaper reports.

Though avowedly partisan outlets were avoided for the main portion of analysis, stories from conservative outlets were analyzed in order to understand how discourses of race and class are used more overtly to support current policing practices and to diminish the objections of the protestors. Understanding these discursive tactics allowed me to better untangle the subtler discursive practices in the mainstream reporting.

In analyzing this broad range of texts, I was guided by the following questions:

1. How are the discourses of race and class deployed in relation to one another in the reporting on the protests and trials after Freddie Gray’s death?
2. How do these discourses shape the representation of individual people, groups, and places in the reporting?

In addition to these empirical concerns, I embrace, in this essay, Stuart Hall’s (1985) call for “generating new discourses...capable of intervening as a historical force”—which can disrupt, not just describe, the cultural practices under study (96). In this spirit, I hope to question the

discursive construction of an antipathy between political and cultural constituencies that define themselves by class and race in the United States.

Class and modern color-blind racism in conservative journalism

A brief exploration of the work of media pundits publishing in mainstream conservative outlets like *The National Review* and *The Wall Street Journal* offers an illustrative entry point into how the discourses of race and class are brought into tension with one another in the more mainstream-to-liberal journalism, which will be the focus of this essay. Rather than embodying an extreme, non-normative treatment of race and class—such as might be found in more ideologically provocative outlets like *Breitbart*—these conservative pundits only exemplify and amplify the standard forms of the journalistic construction of these issues. The American conservative media sphere, which has notably been fractured in the era of Donald Trump and Steve Bannon, has been shown to represent racial disparity as the result of “socio-cultural flaws,” rendering black survivors of natural disasters as unworthy victims (Shah, 2009) —often framing those representations in proxy terms of social class in the coded color-blind language of “post-racial” America (Bonilla-Silva, 2015) that may register as dog-whistle racialized messaging with certain audiences but avoids overt charges of racism in mainstream discourse (Haney-López, 2014). More scholarly work has explored an older conception of color-blind racism, known as “modern racism,” in the media (Shah & Yamagami 2015). Modern racism has been explored in the media context, where coded racial stereotypes, in terms of criminality and poverty, predominate coverage of black Americans (Entmann, 1990, 1992; Lule, 1995; Parisi, 1998). Shah and Yamagami’s (2015) work has extended this research—which seemed to have stalled for two decades prior—to examine specifically how conservative media construct racism as an individual psychological failing, often a failing of people of color in public life, and to explain away any disparities as a result of socioeconomic class.

In the conservative media’s coverage of the Freddie Gray case and the protests that followed his funeral, a discourse of color-blind racism pervaded the representation of black public figures, protestors, and other community members. In an article in *The Wall Street Journal* from April 2015, Daniel Henninger blames the “civil unrest” after Gray’s funeral on Al Sharpton’s chant “No justice, No peace,” which he calls an “implicit threat” (para. 3). Sharpton, in Henninger’s article, is a demagogue and the protest over police violence is represented not as valid, worthy civil intervention, but as “emotions unloosed and enlarged by social media” (para. 9). Sharpton’s treatment by the conservative press historically has exemplified how racism is psychologized and, ironically, attributed to black public figures, while the materiality of racial injustice is ignored (e.g. Wallsten, 2010). The protestors in the black community of West Baltimore are not portrayed as citizens with legitimate complaints about policing but as “unworthy victims” in Shah’s (2009, 1) terms, because their acts are portrayed as “emotional” (i.e. irrational). Furthermore, Henninger, in representing the protestors as a malleable group under the control of Sharpton, attributes to them the “stupidity, immorality, dependency, irresponsibility, and propensity toward violence” found by Shah (2009) in his exploration of conservative media’s discursive construction of the black community’s “sociocultural flaws” (9). Toward the end of his article, Henninger dismisses the racial aspects of the protestors’ complaints and blames their unrest on unemployment and a stagnant GDP, using class markers as a proxy for legitimate dialogue about racial disparities in policing. He writes: “That’s [the economy is] the real powder keg, not the police” (para. 18).

In the *National Review*, Jay Nordlinger (2015) represented the protestors similarly, writing: “They’ve been told they are victims — victims of a society rigged against them. A racist society. They’ve been told they aren’t free in life, but shackled” (para. 2). Nordlinger denies the protestors legitimacy, writing “they are among the luckiest people in the whole world: to have been born American” (para. 4). As in Henninger’s article, the protestors are unworthy, their victimhood is self-imposed and not material but only “mental and spiritual” (i.e. irrational). The protestors actions are simply “lawbreaking.” “There is no excuse” for the protests. The violence of the protests is a manifestation of “contemporary liberalism,” which is “sick at its core” (paras. 7-8). The dismissal of the realities of racial disparities—to call a poor young black man from West Baltimore, who is at a heightened risk of police violence “among the luckiest people in the whole world”—demonstrates the discursive maneuvers of color-blind racism, particularly in terms of using the proxy of class to delegitimize racial issues.

The discourses produced by conservative journalism essentially erase the question of racism from discussions of racial unrest and the hyper-policing of young men of color. As shown in other contexts, such as the Jewish settlement of Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the denial of race as a legitimate category for political and journalistic discourse can coincide with periods of heightened racial unrest and conflict (Herzog, Sharon, & Leykin, 2008). The conservative media sphere seems particularly adept at denying race as a legitimate topic. Media critics have even charged conservative outlets like *Fox News* with deliberately cultivating a constituency and audience around class resentments, specifically as a counter to discussions of structural racism (Sherman, 2016). Though the examples above represent the avowedly conservative media position on race in terms of the civic reaction to police brutality, an analysis of the discursive nature of conservative media can guide an interrogation of how these representations of race and class migrate into mainstream journalism in more subtle forms.

The police union and class

Since at least the post-World War II period—when police unions emerged and “cops established a strong foothold in the trade union movement”—up until the present, in which those unions represent the most strident opponents of reform, police union spokespeople have been “staunch voices of reaction” (Palmer, 2016, para. 27). In the case of the 1992 NYPD riot, for example, the police union was the dominant institutional voice of class issues in the discourses produced in news media, with little regard to how economic issues—among them the breakdown of industrial unions during the 20th century—may have produced the spike in violent crimes that began to taper off around the same time (Tomasky, 1993). Unionism has long stoked racial antipathies among white workers, in the form of xenophobic exclusion and the tactical establishment of a white working class consciousness (Heideman, 2016). The same has been true of police unions throughout history. Workers’ parties and unions, even in the Deep South, also have a strong tradition of black leadership and egalitarianism (Kelley, 1990); yet discourses pitting white working class interests against the “identity politics” of race persist to this day, particularly in the aftermath of the 2016 election.

In the reporting on the Freddie Gray case, the police union remains the dominant voice shaping the discourse of class. When class issues are invoked directly—in terms of income, benefits, job security, and onerous financial risks associated with work (e.g. Donovan 2016; Rector 2016a; Rector 2016b)—they are invoked almost exclusively by representatives of the police union, the

lawyers of the police (who are paid by the police union) and occasionally former police officers who were charged in cases of police violence. No other institutional voice pushes back against the discourse shaped by the police union, and journalists rarely question or contextualize the police union's statements in any contradictory fashion, as will be shown in the analysis below. In regard to the civil unrest after Gray's funeral, class issues—in the form of poverty, lead poisoning, and a lack of social welfare programs (e.g. Cox, Hendrix, & Hermann 2016)—are occasionally invoked primarily by community organizations within West Baltimore, but only occasionally by other residents. In both cases, journalists still by-and-large rely on easily accessible official sources, just as Hall et al. (1978) found nearly 40 years prior. We don't hear very often in mainstream reporting from non-official sources. This institutional bias shapes how both race and class are represented, as will be shown below.

Constructing the black officer in contrast to Gray and the “rioters”

Particularly in the reporting on the trials of the police officers charged in Gray's death, class is often used discursively as a proxy for race. The two younger black officers lived in the same neighborhood as Gray, and while their race is rarely if ever mentioned in the text of the reports about their cases—though photographs often accompanied these reports—, they are often written about as members of the same community as Gray. Though the class-based race proxy of the neighborhood is used to link Gray and the two officers, the dominant discourse of class—particularly the labor of police work as defined by the union—allows the black police officer to be constructed as a benevolent, desirable member of the community. The black men targeted by those police, as well as the “rioters” in West Baltimore after Gray's funeral, do not fit to remain part of that population. In Shah's (2009) terms, the black police officer imperiled by the investigation into Gray's death is constructed as a worthy victim in the color-blind journalism, while Gray and the protestors who feel victimized by the police are constructed as unworthy victims.

At the heart of the representation of different individuals, and groups as worthy and unworthy, in the reporting is the discursive fusing of police work and class in the reporting on the officers' trials. Though reports concerning the federal investigation of the Baltimore Police Department ran during this time (Zapotosky & Lowery, 2016), detailing statistics about racialized hyper-policing, the police union and defenders were still largely able to define police work in the abstract and to tie it inextricably to a vision of working class life as upstanding, moral, and productive. Police are “aboveboard”; they get to work “every day ‘on time, ready to go’” (Rector & Fenton, 2016, para. 20); they don't become police officers to “swing a big stick” but to “help people” (Bui, Weiner, & Juvenal 2015, para. 8); they follow the rules and, most importantly, do not make a lot of money. They rely on the support of their families. The union and defenders shape what police work means, what type of person fulfills the role, what the hardships of the policing class are and, in this case, particularly the financial jeopardy that these “working class” people are facing as they are charged in Gray's death.

In constructing the officers as worthy victims, the reporting uses voices of support from the police unions to highlight the difficulties of police work, its upstanding nature, and the financial precariousness introduced by the prosecution. The union-supplied attorneys of William Porter, according to *The Washington Post*, “painted a portrait of an officer who cared about the residents in the neighborhood where he patrolled and grew up. Porter, 26, has never fired his gun and has

no major blemishes on his record” (Bui, Weiner, & Juvenal, 2015, para. 7). Even the rare instances when institutional voices from within the community comment on the officers, the same representation—of a member of the community valued because of their police work—shapes the discourse. A community association leader told *The Baltimore Sun*, Alicia White “was the darling of the community. . . . She always took her time working the community, the elderly and the kids, especially the kids. . . . We want her back” (Donovan 2016, paras. 25-26). Throughout the local reporting, in particular, the police union introduced the issue of bail paid by the officers after they were indicted. Though the union itself did not front the bail payments, each of the six officers managed to borrow the thousands of dollars necessary from family and friends. The union used this to both represent the officers as upstanding, family-oriented individuals, as well as beleaguered members of the working class with little regard to how excessive bail disproportionately affects the hyper-policed populations of young men of color in places like West Baltimore: “Supporters of the officers, meanwhile, said the bails set for the officers,” reported *The Baltimore Sun*, “were exorbitantly high for working people with strong ties to the community who were not flight risks” (Rector, 2016b, para. 12). In addition to the financial toll of bail, the risk of the officers losing their pensions is repeated again and again in the reporting. The rights to these benefits are connected with the discursive construction of the police as working class, in a way that the people they police are not. Most people in West Baltimore have no access to pensions or protection against usurious bondsmen, and the police union express no concern over the precariousness of the members of the communities they police.

After the acquittal of all six officers, five young men were convicted for their involvement in the protests in West Baltimore after Gray’s funeral. The national reporting on these convictions, while limited, serves to construct these young men of color as unworthy victims of a particularly harsh criminal justice system, in which the destruction of property can be punished more severely than the destruction of a black body. “All are black, none older than 25, and each is likely to serve years in federal prison,” *The Washington Post* reported on these convictions (Cox, Hendrix, & Hermann, 2016, para. 3). Even as the reporters of this story contextualize the conviction by writing, “the juxtaposition of their cases with those of the officers has only fueled a pervasive sense of inequity in Baltimore’s most beleaguered neighborhoods” (para. 4). They qualify this by stating that “no one defends the rioters’ destructive acts” (para. 4). In effect, though it may stoke resentment and civil unrest, the reporting and the outcomes of the trials affirms that those destructive acts are less defensible than the killing of Freddie Gray. Like the “mopes” who judges and attorneys dismiss as unworthy of consideration in the Chicago courtrooms observed by Van Cleve (2016), these young men are defined as unworthy of the consideration others—such as the police—are afforded. Even among these mainstream outlets, the protestors were constructed as irrational and violent, a key way in which a society committed to rational liberalism legitimizes the political and economic neglect of communities—particularly communities of color—according to Shah (2009).

Prior to the convictions of the protestors and the acquittals of the officers, Jelani Cobb (2015), writing for *The New Yorker*, captures the disposability of millions of young black men in terms of policing practice and public discourse, citing a recent study that found “that some one and a half million black men had effectively disappeared from their communities” (para. 5). Cobb contrasts this with the prosecutorial and policing zeal with which the courts and police protect property writing:

But to people already infuriated by the self-protecting reflexes of bureaucracy, this was an additional insult—not because businesses don't warrant police protection but because they could scarcely imagine the police demeaning their own communities as worthy of protecting that way (para. 7).

Cobb observes the sociocultural practices of a simultaneous neglect and hyper-policing that produces a complicated cognitive dissonance surrounding the public policy regarding communities like the one in West Baltimore. The discursive practices of journalists reflect and reproduce this confusing rationalization of unjust policies.

Yet even in reports detailing Freddie Gray's life, such as a *Washington Post* series that would go on to win a prestigious Polk Award in journalism, the discourses of class serve to define Gray and his family by the "socio-cultural flaws," which Shah (2009) describes as essential to the legitimization of neglect. The presentation of the markers of poverty as the defining qualities of Gray's life rob him of his humanity and often represent the racialized nature of the institutional neglect which made his lead poisoning possible as a mere incidental to poverty. A story in the *Washington Post* series reads,

Before Freddie Gray was injured in police custody last month, before he died and this city was plunged into rioting, his life was defined by failures in the classroom, run-ins with the law and an inability to focus on anything for very long. Many of those problems began when he was a child and living in this house, according to a 2008 lead poisoning lawsuit. . . . Still, the relationship between poverty and lead poisoning remains difficult to parse. Was it the lead poisoning that resigned Gray and his family to a life on the margins? Or would they have ended up there anyway (McCoy 2015, paras. 5-27)?

Though the reporter admits in the same article that lead poisoning disproportionately affects African Americans, particularly in Baltimore, the racialized aspect of the problem is not dealt with any further. The question of whether lead poisoning produces poverty or the other way around seems of little relevance. Instead, if the reporter confronted the issue of race, he could have asked why poor children of color have been neglected by the institutions that should help protect them from lead poisoning. The discursive rendering of poverty as a socio-cultural flaw, whether deliberate or not, forecloses on any discussion of race. The neglect, the violence, and the policing are all decoupled from race in the color-blind discourses produced and reproduced by journalists.

In much of the reporting, class and police work are deployed as signifiers of acceptability. Porter deserves a lower bail because he's a working person and not a flight risk. If he were poorer, and out of work, would he deserve a higher bail? Do the five young men who destroyed property deserve the same consideration as a person accused of contributing to someone's death? Do those like Freddie Gray, who suffered the effects of lead poisoning, not deserve the same consideration because they are not working? What makes a community member worth protecting and qualified to remain in the population? The only individual people who qualify as such in the reporting are the police officers and occasionally members of community organizations. This results, at least in part, from the journalistic reliance on institutional sources, such as the police

union, to shape these narratives. Journalistic routines, determined by the political economy of the journalism business, make it particularly hard for journalists—who rarely ever live in these communities—to understand the communities in a complex, deep way, outside of the institutional constructions of class and race, in this case. But ignoring race altogether produces color-blind discourses that legitimize the neglect of communities of color, by focusing on poverty and class as sociocultural flaws.

Camden Yards and the CVS: A critical discourse moment

The discursive positioning of race and class as antipathetic is particularly important in the reporting on the protests after Gray’s funeral, especially as those protests neared Camden Yards, the baseball stadium in Baltimore. A dissonance arises from these stories: in what the authorities protect—Camden Yards and the tourism district—and what they neglect—the neighborhood CVS, and other businesses and property in West Philadelphia, not to mention black lives. Both class and race certainly determine the priority of policing in this instance. The commercialized leisure of the middle class—the predominantly white middle class—supersedes any other concerns. We can’t extract white privilege from class privilege, or the other way around, as the color-blind discourses prominent here attempt to do by default. Cobb (2015), later in his *New Yorker* article, evokes the dissonances produced by a neoliberal society in which innocent black men are killed by police and swarms of consumers head to the ballpark:

Those disparate realities produced bizarre dissonances in Baltimore. On Pratt Street, a scalper tried to sell game tickets to the protestors marching toward the stadium. For a brief moment, it was possible to purchase both a Baltimore Orioles and a “Black Lives Matter” T-shirt on a single corner. On Howard Street, which runs alongside Camden Yards, cheers from the stadium competed with angry chants from the streets. The public-address system in the rail station that connects the stadium to downtown announced, “Due to a large number of protestors in the area, the system is experiencing significant delays. We apologize for any inconvenience” (para. 8).

Likewise, a *Baltimore Sun* reporter observed the protests as a distraction for the crowd at Camden Yards, writing, “As the Red Sox took batting practice, fans in the center-field rooftop deck seemed more focused on the protestors” (Encina, 2015, para. 5). Despite the distractions, the game was not delayed.

The juxtapositions here are striking. It’s almost as if the interests of the middle classes are being performed, in an almost grotesque way. They’re safely inside the ballpark and the enactment of civic frustration, to say the least, outside of the park, has become a performance for their viewing pleasure. The middle classes are simultaneously consuming baseball and consuming the public reaction to injustice outside the ballpark. “We apologize for any inconvenience,” the public-address system in the train station announces.

Interestingly, the protests were seen, in some reports, as the impetus for broader discussions about both race and class in the city itself. A West Baltimore community activist was quoted in a *Washington Post* story, saying, “There’s never been more conversation about the underlying issues of poverty and race. The death of Freddie Gray gave us more exposure than we ever had for what we have been fighting for” (Cox, Hendrix, & Hermann, 2016, para. 8). Yet, the

destruction of property in West Baltimore, and the response to the threat to property at Camden Yards, affirmed the priority of policing, the racial and class-based structure that determines each police action. These may seem naturalized. But what is it that makes the police protect Camden Yards and not the neighborhood CVS? We cannot explain either only by invoking race or only by invoking class.

In regards to police brutality, David Simon, a former journalist at *The Baltimore Sun* and creator of *The Wire*, an acclaimed cable television program about the drug trade in Baltimore, told an interviewer,

The guys who would really kick your ass without thinking twice were black officers. If I had to guess and put a name on it, I'd say that at some point, the drug war was as much a function of class and social control as it was of racism. The two agendas are inextricably linked, and where one picks up and the other ends is hard to say. But when you have African-American officers beating the dog-piss out of people they're supposed to be policing, and there isn't a white guy in the equation on a street level, it's pretty remarkable (Keller, 2015).

Though this might represent a more complex view of race and class than the standard oppositional view, the idea that if a white person is not physically present in an instance of police brutality—that somehow the issue of race “ends” and the issue of class “begins”—is indicative of an understanding of the two issues as exclusive of each other somehow. At least, Simon acknowledges that they are “inextricably linked.” Similarly, just because there may have been people of color on the other side of the police lines, going to Camden Yards to enjoy a leisurely afternoon of baseball does not make it any less about race. Likewise, just because the CVS was in a black neighborhood does not make the policing decision have any less to do with the fact that Camden Yards is much more valuable economically than a drug store in a poor neighborhood. The tension between the discourses of race and class exists not only in the representation of individuals, but also in the representation of spaces.

Conclusion

During the 2016 presidential election, the largest police union in the United States endorsed Donald Trump (Kamisar, 2016). After the Philadelphia police union endorsed Trump a few days later, police officers of color in the city voiced concern over their union's support of a candidate they considered a bigot (Jones, 2016). Perhaps these endorsements should not have come as a surprise. Not only have police unions monopolized and weaponized the discourses of class in cases of police violence in opposition to an open confrontation with the racism at the heart of the system, they have also had major influence with conservative state governments in pushing to block progressive polices that might improve policing in big cities (Clift, 2014). The domination of unions in shaping the discourses of class in narratives of police violence may actually be crippling the ability of those in urban governments to reform police conduct and procedures, to institute civilian review boards, and to make sure police charged with brutality and homicide will see impartial judges that are not influenced by those state governments resisting the sweeping changes needed.

Journalists can, however, resist the easy institutional discourses presented by the unions. The constituencies of class must not always be presented in opposition to those of race. Color-blind language need not obscure the material realities of injustice. Imagining united constituencies is not impossible. Journalists and scholars can rethink how their own practices perpetuate an either-or narrative of cause inherited from the social sciences and public policy. Though Du Bois' (1903) concept of "double-consciousness" arose out of a disconnect between how white and black Americans experience their country, insisting on a single category of injustice will only alienate either side. Perhaps the academic and journalistic discourses elaborating a dual-consciousness in which both class and race are fully acknowledged can do more than describe the discursive and sociocultural practices which make injustice sensible; perhaps they can intervene.

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