Laundering Militarization: Preparedness, Professionalism, and Police Common Sense

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In 2014, imagery from the germinal protests in Ferguson, Missouri—of unarmed Black civilians facing down officers clad in riot gear, battle-dress uniforms, and heavy weapons—spurred onlookers to compare the St. Louis suburb to Gaza or Iraq. "We rolled lighter than that in an actual warzone," commented a purported army veteran in a widely cited tweet.[1] "Iraq or Missouri?" asked Vox, over photos of Ferguson's "military-style crackdown."[2] A documentary on the Ferguson protests borrowed its subtitle from James Baldwin's famous 1966 essay, "A Report from Occupied Territory."[3] Meanwhile, Palestinian and Black American activists deepened alliances, drawn together through mutual recognition of their subjection to imperial military violence.[4] Critiques of US "police militarization"—the flow of military and "military-style" equipment, training, and technologies to domestic policing—began circulating widely, amplified by later protests against anti-Black police violence in Baltimore, New York, St. Paul, and elsewhere. Similar critiques resurfaced during the summer 2020 protests after the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, when officers nationwide deployed tear gas and flash-bang grenades against protesters. As public backlash to such violence intensified, lawmakers, organizers, and reform groups renewed efforts to "demilitarize" police by restricting transfers of military equipment, arguing that "weapons of war . . . should never be used against the American people."[5]

Such efforts have found little concrete success. Policy reforms under President Barack Obama focused on the most visible avenue through which local police can obtain military equipment: the Department of Defense's 1033 Program, which transfers surplus military goods such as armored personnel carriers (APCs) and night-vision goggles, along with office supplies and workout equipment, to domestic police. In 2015, the Obama administration banned the program from transferring certain controversial military equipment, restrictions that the Trump administration promptly rescinded. Even the former's brief victory epitomized the symbolic nature of demilitarization reforms. For instance, the 1033 Program was prohibited from transferring equipment such as weaponized aircraft that it had never transferred, as well as tracked, but not wheeled, armored vehicles.[6] President Joe Biden's 2022 executive order renewed and expanded Obama's limited restrictions, yet the order has faced criticism for its loopholes and insufficient enforcement mechanisms.[7] Legislative attempts to codify such restrictions have consistently stalled out in Congress. Activist and policy efforts to address other forms of militarization, such as tracking SWAT deployments, have similarly found limited success.[8]

The proximate reasons for these failures to "demilitarize" police are complex, rooted in factors such as the political influence of police unions and white backlash to Black-led movements against police violence. Many critical and abolitionist scholars of the United States have pointed to historical reasons as well. The term *demilitarization*, they argue, wrongly suggests the possibility of disentangling forces whose histories, operations, and treatment of racialized "enemies" have always been enmeshed.

While US policing may have historically strengthened its surveillance and counterinsurgent capacities in relation to imperialist military campaigns—what Aimé Césaire called the "boomerang effect of colonization"[9]—it is nonetheless always already militarized.[10] In other words, *militarization* does not index a novel seepage of "warrior-style policing" into a normative "guardian" orientation, as many reformers and scholars argue.[11] War and police powers have instead always operated conjointly to fortify white supremacy and the state-market nexus.[12] For instance, southern police departments historically emerged from slave patrols and white militias, which worked alongside the federal military to control enslaved people.[13] Northern departments were patterned on the British Peelian model of policing, which relied on counterinsurgent tactics birthed in the British occupation of Ireland, and used such tactics to quell labor organizing.[14] Some southwestern and southern police departments, such as the Texas Rangers, were founded to protect white settlers. The Rangers and allied groups massacred hundreds of Mexicans and Tejanos, alongside Cherokee, Comanche, Apache, and other Native peoples, in service of land dispossession.[15]

Today, many scholars have argued that protecting the racialized, classed status quo remains the core function of US policing.[16] Police have turned "weapons of war" on Black, Brown, and Indigenous organizers for sovereignty and racial justice; Arabs and Muslims, particularly after 9/11; immigrants crossing the US-Mexico border; Black communities targeted by the war on drugs; and protesters against economic inequality.[17] *Police militarization* thus names an inseparability rooted in American racial capitalism,[18] and specifically anti-Black and colonial exploitation. Demilitarization efforts that hinge on the impulse to purify policing of militarism, then, fabricate a nonmilitarized past that never existed.[19] Such efforts can perform other work: they implicitly grant legitimacy to the notion that US police can be substantively reformed, and to racialized imperial military violence, as seen in the quote above that weapons of war should not be used against *American* people. But they can neither restore policing to an imaginary era of benevolent, democratic order maintenance nor bring it into such a future.

These analyses of historical entanglements, however, do not fully explain how "militarization"—by which I mean its common denotation—persists in the present. Another significant but less-well-understood factor militating against demilitarization efforts is the ideological labor of police themselves. In this essay, I locate the failures of demilitarization not only in the genealogies and inheritances of US policing but also in what I call *police common sense*. Drawing on interviews with officers and participant observation at SWAT trainings and academies in Maryland from 2015 to 2018, this essay will ethnographically explore how US police—particularly supervisors and SWAT team members, or "violence experts"[20]—inoculate themselves from demilitarization reforms by posing "good" militarization as a natural, legitimate, and inextricable element of modern police work. I argue that officers resist demilitarization efforts by recasting militarization not as an alien imposition that must be cleansed from police work but as an apolitical technical craft that counterintuitively *reduces* violence and allows officers to fulfill their primary ethical role as stewards of public crises.

Given the history of US police militarization sketched above, Micol Seigel has shown how maintaining the "vanishing horizon" of the civilian/military distinction requires labor. To reinforce

this conceptual boundary, Seigel argues, is to uphold the legitimacy of state power in a liberal democracy.[21] In my fieldwork, I found violence experts taking a different approach to legitimation: they ratified an *indistinction* between civilian and military, rather than laying claim to a fictive nonmilitarism like Seigel's interlocutors. In an unintuitive accordance with the critical literature discussed earlier, violence experts understood police and military as interlinked, and demilitarization as fundamentally impossible. However, they considered militarization to be an apolitical good. They resisted efforts to make policing less militaristic by framing their purported militarism as commonsensical and therefore legitimate—in other words, by translating militarization into police logics. Specifically, they relied on two themes which I explore in this essay: preparedness as moral practice, and police violence as professional technique.

These themes compose a key aspect of *police common sense*, or a semisystematized practical approach to the tensions of embodying both state authority and a deliberately constructed sense of vulnerability. I borrow here from Antonio Gramsci's formulation of common sense as an accretion of pragmatic received wisdoms.[22] As Stuart Hall and Alan O'Shea argue, the "virtue [of common sense] is that it is obvious. Its watchword is, 'Of course!' It seems to be outside time."[23] While Gramsci, Hall, and O'Shea were concerned with the formation of popular common sense and its germs of both political passivity and radical potential, here I consider a specifically police common sense, which diverges somewhat from these scholars' formulations. Popular and police common sense share certain incoherences, which I explore elsewhere; both are products of their historical conjunctures; both make social worlds appear as timeless givens. However, while popular common sense includes the critical impulses toward justice that Gramsci terms "good sense," police common sense is more status quoist, containing few or no seeds of challenge to existing orders. It moralizes and naturalizes certain forms of violence, and presents seemingly unquestionable rationales for police powers. Examining police common sense illuminates an underexplored facet of the failures of demilitarization reforms: how police thinking can render certain reforms impossible or even unimaginable.

Police common sense is an inherently ethnographic concept, in that it is traceable only through close attention to the ideological labor—the daily work of framing, legitimating, and rendering commonsensical[24]—required to sustain militarization. Analyzing this labor requires taking officers as interlocutors: trailing after SWAT teams as they rehearse house raids, touring equipment inventories with police supervisors, and listening to officers articulate what police militarization means to them. My immersion in their professional lives has allowed me to track not only their political, ethical, and material engagements with militarization but specifically the shared ideological quotient within these engagements that often endures across individual differences of race, gender, and professional experience. This quotient is police common sense, the collective register of naturalized worlds and seemingly timeless knowledge.

As I discovered during fieldwork, the very *obviousness* of police common sense engenders a form of evangelism: exposure to its wisdom is expected to cultivate accordance with its logics, even for those outside the discursive circuits of policing. Yet the assumed ease of this cultivation is racially uneven. My whiteness and femininity not only afforded me a presumption of innocence, which undoubtedly shaped my interlocutors' willingness to invite me into their worlds,[25] but also meant being

hailed by some as a potential ally. Occasionally, this took the form of casual racist commentary to an audience imagined to be receptive. More often, interlocutors implied that my "objective" research—where objectivity was prefigured as the domain of whiteness[26]—would naturally conscript me into police common sense. Some of my interlocutors even clearly hoped that I would translate their narratives to a skeptical public.[27] As whiteness and US policing are signs stuck enduringly together,[28] so is embodied whiteness *always already recruited* to police modes of thought. I read these impulses as another instantiation of the ideological labor of police common sense—an effort to demonstrate to the assumed-sympathetic researcher (and hence to a wider audience) the inherent legitimacy of police reason.

In this essay, I deconstruct police common sense by first tracing the ideology of preparedness, a deeply racialized idea that renders readiness for emergency simply pragmatic. I argue that police understand "reasonable" militarization as a colorblind tool in service of the moral and practical necessity of preparedness. This understanding produces officers as domestic guardians of American civilization while obscuring the more ordinary, racialized ends of preparedness in practice. I then turn to professionalism and the technicization of police violence, interrogating the police argument that more skilled, militarized forms of force produce more safety. I argue that police, particularly the violence experts on SWAT teams, see demilitarization efforts as making police work more violent and less professional, and preventing them from performing their jobs. This understanding neatly elides the police role as enforcers of racial capitalism, framing policing instead as a matter of technical concern. I argue that together, the logics of what I call militarization-as-preparedness and militarization-as-professionalism function to insulate police from reform efforts by framing militarization as legitimate and commonsensical. I conclude that many demilitarization reform efforts operate in tandem with these logics to sanctify "good" militarization, thereby inadvertently lending power to the notion of police as the "thin blue line" between extreme violence and innocent (white) society.

Militarization-as-Preparedness

In 2018, I was sitting in the unassuming office of Persistent Surveillance Systems (PSS) with Stewart, one of the company's personnel. PSS's founder, Ross McNutt, is an Air Force Academy graduate and inventor of Angel Fire, military technology developed for the US war in Iraq that could surveil an entire city from plane-mounted cameras. McNutt later commercialized his technology under the auspices of PSS and began shopping around for customers in police departments.[29] PSS's presence in Baltimore was controversial by the time Stewart and I spoke, not least since it was initially deployed by the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) in secret in 2016, without the knowledge of the public or even the mayor and city council.[30] The privately funded Baltimore "spy plane" had flown overhead at four thousand to ten thousand feet, taking wide-angle composite photos of the city—specifically, East and West Baltimore, its majority-Black areas—every second. Combined with on-the-ground surveillance such as CCTV camera networks, PSS's military-derived technology could warrantlessly cull the movements of homicide suspects from terabytes of mass surveillance data, rendering people mappable and, if tracked back to the scene of a crime, potentially arrestable. By 2018, McNutt was

attempting to sell Baltimore on the return of the spy plane. McNutt promised to capture from above the data that BPD would need to solve future homicides, which had spiked from around 200 to around 350 per year after BPD's killing of Freddie Gray.[31] PSS would produce what it argued were minor violations of privacy in exchange for the security of helping to solve Baltimore's homicide crisis. It would help police be prepared to manage the persistent threat of killers walking free.

Stewart opened a map of a city, which resembled Google Earth's satellite view with pedestrians visible as smudges, and showed me in the software how analysts could create colored tracks by following moving objects with their mouse pointers. On the map were dozens of overlapping circles representing CCTV camera coverage. Stewart explained that PSS also wanted to integrate ShotSpotter, which promises to use machine learning to delineate the sound of gunshots and automatically notify police, and automated license plate readers, which scan passing cars and run plates through criminal databases. They wanted to integrate these technological forms, he said, because they believed in technological solutions for social problems, such as catching Iraqis who planted IEDs to bomb US soldiers. Baltimore was thus a natural fit for PSS, its low homicide case closure rate seemingly begging for technologies that could make an apparent problem population more trackable without requiring warrants and routing through the slow machinery of the courts.

For Stewart, for BPD, and for the politicians and Baltimore residents who eventually came to support the ultimately doomed "spy plane" program,[32] this military mass surveillance technology was simply a common-sense modality of readiness for both ongoing and future crises. Its abrogation of poor Black Baltimoreans' privacy could be mitigated by storing data for only forty-five days, or by not tracking individuals over multiple days (neither of which turned out to be entirely true). But ultimately, some sacrifice of privacy was considered not only practically necessary but a moral imperative in a city of spiking interpersonal violence. The framing of "what better option is there?" permeated debates over the program. Most immediately, it promised to help BPD hunt and catch murderers. In the long term, it would also lower Baltimore's homicide rate by deterring crime; as importantly, it could be used for a potentially infinite array of unknown future threats, from a terror attack to reckless drivers. It would equip BPD to become more prepared to "do its job" in a crisis-generating city.

As this implies, preparedness, broadly, is oriented around a permanent anticipation of crisis. It mandates constant readiness to handle certain forms of danger: specifically, "those threats that allow [the security state] to produce a militarized counterformation."[33] In other words, preparedness is concerned less with the slow violence of poverty or climate change and more with "events" like homicides, mass shootings, and terror attacks.[34] It orients itself around that which threatens to *rupture normalcy*, howsoever constructed. It imagines imminent social breakdown and readies its practitioners to act in the breach. As I saw in my fieldwork, preparedness operates on a particular imaginary of likelihood. In this imaginary, present realities (Baltimore's homicide rate) and unlikely potential futures (terror attacks) are folded together into a logic where what matters is less the calibration of possibilities and more the construction of a police force prepared to defend and restore order through violence against an infinite array of potential threats: the "thin blue line" between civilization and chaos.

The racialization of such purported threats has been exhaustively cataloged by scholars and activists.[35] Preparedness here means a readiness to fight the poor foreign Brown and Black man to

preserve innocent American whiteness, an ideology that far transcends policing. It also means at times obscuring racialization under the banner of colorblindness: if the dangers for which one must prepare are potentially anywhere, they can theoretically emanate from any body. For my officer interlocutors, preparedness spoke to their role as enforcers of a colorblind order, guardians of the law, and overseers of any social problem that may involve force.[36] Stuart Schrader argues that "Police enumerates its concerns as they arise, with their enumeration always ending with an ellipsis."[37] Preparedness amplifies some of those concerns as potential crises while maintaining the open-ended ellipsis. It situates police as the front line of homeland defense against emergent threats. It braids the practical and the ethical in an approach to crisis anticipation that helps justify the presence and power of police; it is, in other words, a legitimizing discourse. Preparedness also imagines itself as commonsensical. For instance, if police are expected to be the frontline response to homicides, mass shootings, or terrorism, preparing for that protective performance is simply a matter of realpolitik. Like with the "spy plane," officers ask, what is the alternative? This is police common sense. The question is calibrating the right level of preparedness, not whether preparedness is necessary at all.

This approach partly hinges on a conception of militarization as *defensive*, not offensive. For many of my interlocutors, it first and foremost helped them be ready to protect innocent potential victims. This argument emerged from a belief that the prime calling of police work is reactive rather than proactive. This is not to say that officers do not value proactiveness, but rather that for many, their ultimate social value rests in crisis response. A crisis may be as massive as the 9/11 attacks or as circumscribed as a single homicide. What matters is that it figures them as responding to social rupture and unrest rather than fomenting it themselves; they therefore contested critics' framings of militarization as assaultive rather than protective. This view necessarily depends on an ideology of policing itself as a form of defense—even within its most offensive projects.

Officers' arguments that militarization is a commonsensical form of preparedness often used the practical language of work to effect that link. Colin, a young county police officer, put it simply: "Why do [police] need tanks? . . . Why do they need military rifles? . . . Why do they need gas masks and night vision and all these big scary things that they need? The answer is, because you asked us to do a job. And if you want us to do that job, you're going to need to give us the tools to do it." This job, he explained, requires police to "be ready for *every eventuality*, every possibility, things that we can't even imagine." Militarization, in other words, is a mere prerequisite for a project whose potential purview is functionally endless. If police are called on in the course of their labor to be first responders to nearly any form of violence, militarization offers the instruments needed to be ready to fulfill that duty without compromising their personal safety. It is, simply, a job requirement.

One might subsequently question whether every (or any) eventuality actually eventuates. A common rejoinder to police narratives of threat is that officers are exceedingly unlikely to ever face "things that we can't even imagine" in the line of duty. For instance, every year in the US there are about six to twelve mass shootings, as popularly understood, relative to approximately eighteen thousand police departments.[38] Many of my officer interlocutors agreed with the improbability of confronting the specter of mass violence, yet they nonetheless spoke in the future subjunctive of what *could* be, relying on an imagination of the future in which the very concept of likelihood is irrelevant.

This imaginary is perhaps best captured in the police aphorism I heard repeated by Colin and many others: "It's better to have it and not need it than to need it and not have it." For instance, some of my interlocutors yearned for drones at their departments, reasoning that in the case of a hostage situation or an attack on a public event in a quiet town, they would profoundly regret their inability to conduct remote mobile surveillance. This formulation forecloses critique of what police have, or of what constitutes need, by figuring nearly boundless accumulation as the natural and preferred opposite of desperate lack. My point here is not to argue in favor of a middle ground between these two polar possibilities, or to argue on the terrain of empirical likelihood, but to highlight how the debate is often framed to minimize or exclude likelihood altogether. The concept becomes immaterial, at best a brief gesture prefacing the *real* concern.

For example, Allen, a county police lieutenant, explained that his agency sends officers to trainings in New Mexico on suicide bombers and IEDs. When I asked how they apply that training, he responded that suicide bombing is "a situation that is not *common* here, but it's really not far-fetched when you think of it. And [if you encounter it], you don't wanna be like, 'they never taught me that.'" Likelihood here is subsumed by the mere existence of possibility, by the fact that Allen and his colleagues could envision a suicide bombing as a potentiality, even if it had not yet occurred. Officers sometimes referenced recent events elsewhere to tighten this argument. During one SWAT training I attended at a shooting range, team leaders set up a scenario patterned on the 2016 mass shooting at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando. Cardboard-backed, human-shaped paper targets lay scattered on the ground or leaning against barrels, while a loudspeaker blared sirens into the rising dusk. SWAT officers had to jump from a van and shoot the "bad guy" amid this scene of chaos without killing innocent people. As Kyle, a team leader, told me, *This scenario may be unlikely, but that's what the Orlando cops thought.*[39] If it happened to police somewhere, in other words, police common sense dictated that it could happen here.

Many of my interlocutors emphasized this point by using the second-person mode of address—based on the implicit innocence and vulnerability of the addressee, in this case me as a white woman, as a stand-in for a broader innocent civilian populace. They married this address with the alleged natural consequences of not getting the equipment, technologies, or discretion they required. For example, Colin, the young county police officer, explained why departments need APCs as rescue vehicles, an argument echoed by many officers. *Say you've been shot by a gunman in a house*, he said, *and you're lying bleeding in the front yard. Because the threat is active, we could not rescue you on foot. But since an APC is bulletproof, we could drive it between you and the house in order to pick you up and get you medical attention.* "So you can either bleed out or I can have this armored vehicle to come and rescue you," Colin concluded, starkly.

Such rhetorical gestures serve to emphasize the stakes of allowing police to determine their own needs. They play into powerful commonplace images—often amplified in police-friendly television shows and on sympathetic social media accounts—of police running toward gunfire while civilians run away. Such self-sacrificing hero-guardians, in this framework, should not be left without the protection that militarization provides. Dan, a city community policing officer, argued of APCs that "I know the public doesn't like it, but they're not the ones on the other side of the gun barrel."

Heroism and militarization-as-preparedness are thus woven together in a mutually reinforcing cloak of protection against critique: How can you presume to "demilitarize" us when our work requires standing between a gunman and you, the innocent (white) civilian? This framing elides the usually Black civilians on the other side of gun barrels held by police while emphasizing officers' vulnerability and endowing them with unquestionable authority as protectors of innocents. As Josh, a veteran training officer, told a class of new recruits in their first week of training, *You're the light in the darkness. You're the thin blue line between chaos and order. You patrol on Christmas and say "not on my watch."* It is within this ethical-practical imaginary that militarization works. Militarization provides the armor, literal and metaphorical, for the thin blue line.

Police as well as reformers do sometimes critique the supposed excesses of militarization-as-preparedness. For instance, Robert, a retired SWAT officer, told me that "SWAT today is so ridiculously militaristic. We weren't anything like that." He complained that the 1033 Program has given officers "armored vehicles and all this other crazy crap." Similarly, Eric, a current city major, called militarization "immensely dangerous," absurd, and out of hand, arguing that if officers dress "like Nazis," it changes how they think of themselves. The force of such blistering arguments, however, was always paired with justifications for militarization-as-preparedness in certain cases. Robert suggested that "all this other crazy crap" may be acceptable along the US-Mexico border to help officers surveil and arrest violent drug dealers and human traffickers—relying on a racialized trope of the border as a space of exceptional violence against police. Eric argued that militarization supplies equipment for tasks that are *not what we do 99 percent of the time. That 1 percent, we do need those APCs, maybe full-auto [versus semi-automatic] rifles, for example in active shooter scenarios. But not the rest of the time.* In other words, militarization-as-preparedness can be excessive and unrealistic when it is unwarranted. Such critiques explicitly preserve the possibility that it *can* be warranted in certain situations. The terrain of debate is therefore the right amount, geography, and justification for militarization.

Reformer discourse often functions similarly, even where it questions the argument that militarized interventions are "not what police do 99 percent of the time." For instance, the ACLU report "War Comes Home: The Excessive Militarization of American Policing" identifies the divergence between SWAT's supposed crisis mandate—it was originally designed to handle rare hostage and barricade situations—and its routine use in the foundationally anti-Black and anti-poor war on drugs.[40] For the ACLU, SWAT is *meant* to serve as a form of preparation for rare crises, but instead it regularly violates that mandate toward more ordinary racialized ends. However, the ACLU report is also replete with references to "excessively" militarized policing. This framing situates "hyper-aggressive tools and tactics" that disproportionately harm Black and Brown people as *outside* the normative purview of police work, rather than as extensions of its ordinary labor.[41] To eliminate such "aggression," policing must therefore be purified of its "excessive" militarism and left with only what is necessary to prepare to combat rare crises.

This argument relies on the assertion that it is in fact possible to purify policing, to fashion it into an instrument of guardianship if only it could be properly calibrated. Making "excess" the master term effectively rescues "reasonable," commonsensical militarization-as-preparedness. It directs our

focus to technicalities: to what extent the spy plane program could actually track individuals across multiple days versus its promised short-term surveillance, or whether police need tracked APCs versus those that run on wheels. The critique of "excess" leaves unquestioned the premises of militarization-as-preparedness: that police ultimately should and do function as defenders against extreme violence and protectors of innocent (white) society.

Militarization-as-preparedness therefore works to shore up the moral legitimacy of policing. Preparedness does the political work of depoliticizing "militarization" by framing it as a common-sense moral and practical necessity in a job that requires the hero-guardian to set aside likelihood to ready himself for the next Orlando. I aim less to adjudicate this framing on empirical or normative grounds than to argue that it helps explain how police common sense attempts to foreclose certain debates. Preparedness transforms the contested arena of "militarization" into a sanitized, common-sense debate over how much is too much—leaving untouched the violence at its heart.

Militarization-as-Professionalism

The idea that militarization does in fact make police more violent is both intuitive—if militarization is the social organization of the production of violence[42]—and foundational to public critique, particularly since 2014. The violence experts with whom I worked, however, begged to differ. For many, military surveillance technologies like night-vision goggles, military-style uniforms, military tactics of clearing rooms and securing suspects, and their own existence were a good thing for everyone. Highly trained SWAT team members and supervisors argued that more professional, more technically skilled, and better-equipped forms of force actually preserve public and officer safety. In other words, militarization for them commonsensically *produced* rather than undermined security. Nick, a county training supervisor, summarized this approach as "violence on the front end saves lives on the back end." Many of my SWAT interlocutors, who regarded themselves as ultimate professionals, therefore understood demilitarization efforts as making policing more violent and less professional, and as interrupting its trajectory of constant improvement.

This argument was founded on a shared notion of professionalism as apolitical expertise, which resonates with Pierre Bourdieu's critique of "profession" as a "folk concept" that dangerously proffers an "appearance of neutrality."[43] For my interlocutors, professionalism meant, neutrally, ever-improving work performance: constantly seeking better training, upholding bureaucratic norms, and obtaining the tools necessary to conduct their work as experts. This denotation was studiedly apolitical in the sense that critical political questions such as what those jobs were, or who defined improvement or expertise, rested outside the frame. As Elif Babül argues, professionalism conveys universality and technicality, making it the perfect tool for "the politics of the apolitical."[44]

To make the case for apolitical militarization-as-professionalism, my SWAT interlocutors often pointed to the dangers of poorly trained officers. For instance, on one balmy July evening, Kyle, the SWAT team leader, was replacing paper targets at a shooting range during a break from target practice. *These guys are pretty good*, he said, showing me how team members' shots had torn the cardboard backing through its center. *But if you could see patrol officers shooting, you would be scared to see how some of them shoot. You would ask why they're police officers.* Because the team trained regularly, their marksmanship was

superior to that of patrol officers, who were required to complete their recertifications only once annually. As importantly, regular range training was understood to restrain fear and impulsiveness. Knowing how to shoot well was meant to make officers less likely to fire unnecessarily or to shoot innocent people. For these officers, then, a SWAT professional in battle-dress uniform wielding a semiautomatic rifle—the very picture of the "heavy-handed storm trooper"[44]—was paradoxically less violent and dangerous than badly prepared patrol officers. As Bob, a former police chief and current training administrator, explained succinctly, "On the receiving end, it's heavier, but it's usually safer." In other words, worse police violence stemmed not from militarized training or SWAT units but from the *lack* of both.

Similarly, professional deployment of equipment was understood as key to preserving public safety. Steve, a county major and SWAT supervisor, explained that well-educated commanders combined with the proper military-type tools could obviate needless violence. For instance, a camera-equipped drone in the right hands could fly up to the window of a barricaded person to make visible whatever is happening inside. This would allow officers to avoid circling the perimeter themselves, putting their own safety and the barricaded person's at risk. Steve emphasized that he would not use this technology to spy on ordinary people; even though technically no policies forbade it, professionalism dictated proper deployment. Similarly, when his agency handles search warrants or barricades, he said that the protection offered by their APC allows them to avoid escalation: "He [the suspect] starts shooting at us, and we don't need to shoot him, and we keep everybody safe." Yet he recognized that deploying such equipment in the wrong context could foment public backlash, like in Ferguson in 2014. He believed that highly trained, formally educated supervisors such as himself could avoid the temptations and excitement of hypermasculine militarism,[45] and instead discern how to appropriately use what he considered necessary equipment. Part of this professionalism obtained through education entailed colorblindness. Professionalism meant objectivity, and objectivity precluded racism, understood here primarily as personal animus. Professionals deployed military equipment on the basis of their apolitical expertise: a true professional would never assess a crowd's threat on the basis of race. The point here for Steve, as well as for other similarly educated commanders who presented the same argument, was to challenge equipment-focused demilitarization efforts, shifting blame for "militarized" violence away from equipment accumulation and onto a lack of education. The common-sense solution, then, was not less equipment but more professionalism.

Professionalism, finally, also signified proper paramilitary tactics when facing emergencies. During one SWAT training, Kyle, the team leader, told his teammates that on the scene of certain crises, their authority necessarily exceeded even that of patrol commanders. *Remember that you know what you're doing and patrol, even higher-level officers, don't*, he said. *You have to resist any pressure by patrol command to put people where they're not needed*, for instance if commanders insisted that the SWAT officer should breach a door with patrol officers rather than waiting for SWAT teammates. In other words, the tactical training and skill set of SWAT officers should preempt the otherwise rigid chain of command, because they know the correct techniques for preserving everyone's safety. *You must think that we think SWAT guys are better than everyone else*, Kyle told me afterward, *but we really do have more training*. For instance, he said, one of his teammates was recently involved in a car chase where patrol officers

surrounded their prey in a semicircle. Had the driver fired, they all would have fired back and hit each other. SWAT officers by contrast know to avoid crossing lines of fire. To be less professional, less of a tactical expert, is to be more dangerous.

The logics at play in all these cases would appear to verge on Orwellian doublethink: more violence—in the form of SWAT units and tactics, military equipment, and racialized mass surveillance—somehow produces less. Militarization-as-professionalism, though, frames the violence not as *more* but as *better*: not excess, but refinement of what already exists. This framing is possible only under the commonsense assumption that police work naturally, inevitably entails a certain amount and type of force, and that professionalization means improving and minimizing that force. The directionality, scope, and stakes of that violence are left largely unquestioned. For militarization-as-professionalism, if the use of force will always be necessary, it is simply best for the experts to do it, and for them to have the most powerful tools possible at their disposal.

At the core of militarization-as-professionalism is the conception of police work, and specifically police violence, as a kind of specialized craft.[46] This conception amplifies a key policing practice, on which the institution's legitimacy partially hinges: the practice of rendering police violence as a technical concern. Here the anthropology of development offers useful insight. James Ferguson conceptualizes development programs as an "anti-politics machine," in that they depoliticize deeply political fields such as infrastructure and poverty by constructing them as objects of *technical* intervention.[47] Building on Ferguson, Tania Murray Li argues that development schemes "render technical" their field of intervention by problematizing a domain to be fixed and producing it as an intelligible field, for whose problems development experts can provide answers.[48] Such schemes tend to shun questions of, say, how poverty is inflicted through generational dispossession, in favor of intervening in the "capacities" of impoverished people. Experts' assertion of expertise "depends on their capacity to diagnose problems in ways that match the kinds of solutions that fall within their repertoire."[49]

Similarly, militarization-as-professionalism "insistently repos[es] political questions" about police violence as intelligible technical problems,[50] which only experts can solve. Banished from the frame are questions of who benefits and who suffers from state violence and surveillance; the right questions are about the proper tactics and correct equipment. Militarization-as-professionalism diagnoses the problem of police violence as one requiring *police solutions*: more training, technology, gear, expertise. The accidental killings of Breonna Taylor, Aiyana Stanley-Jones, and other predominantly Black people in police raids are dismissed as anomalous, for indeed, even experts make mistakes. Similarly, every Parkland and Uvalde—instances of officers failing to stop a school shooter—is framed as a lack of training or personal cowardice, while the police response to the 2023 Nashville attack was "a textbook operation," an instance of police professionals performing their work as trained.[51] The point here is not to dismiss the profoundly American reality of regular mass shootings but to examine how police common sense depoliticizes and forecloses certain analyses. Police common sense translates violence from a method of enforcing white supremacy and maintaining class dominance into an apolitical means toward the righteous end of law enforcement. Militarization becomes not the unblinking eye overhead in Black Baltimore or masked agents of the state kicking

down your door but merely a tool required for well-trained and -educated professionals to perform their jobs.

This is Ferguson's "anti-politics machine," Li's rendering technical. Militarization-as-professionalism *launders* police violence. It frames militarization as beneficial for everyone's safety and as a fundamental aspect of the technical praxis of police work. It is no surprise, then, that my SWAT interlocutors experienced demilitarization efforts as forcing police to regress. For many of them, the history of US policing is that of a halting march toward enlightenment, toward becoming more judicious, accountable, and safe. Demilitarization seemed to turn that trajectory on its head. If SWAT could not serve warrants, for instance, departments might have to rely on less-trained and more-impulsive patrol officers, placing civilians and cops alike at risk. If police were not allowed to possess APCs, more casualties might pile up during police raids, including possibly the victimized "you." Demilitarization reforms for these SWAT officers contradicted the mantle of authority which their expertise allowed them to claim, and ripped from their hands the tools they needed to perform their professional duty to protect and serve.

Conclusion

For many of my interlocutors, police militarization has been unduly politicized. If the public understood that militarization simply helps them be prepared for crises, do their jobs as professionals, and keep everyone safer, they told me, perhaps we would not criticize it so much. After an interview with Colin, the young county police officer, he handed me a sheet of his notes with the line, "Public expects police to provide safety and security, but does not want to give them the tools to accomplish the goal." I thanked him for the interview and he remarked, *We want to get our view out there.* To Colin, as to many of my officer interlocutors, this view was obvious, requiring the sympathetic (white) researcher only to see sense. As I discussed in the introduction, these officers assumed that my immersion in their work would naturally produce an alignment with their thought. What such immersion did enable was not alignment but an intimate analysis of police common sense, and how it structured their resistance to demilitarization.

Police common sense separates what it admits as unreasonable, extreme militarization from that which is simply "a natural progression in the evolution" of policing, and demands that the latter be cordoned off as an apolitical good.[52] "Reasonable" militarization is thereby transmuted from a logic of occupation in service of racial capitalism, to the joint logics of preparedness and professionalism. These logics deploy consequentialism in order to counter demands to demilitarize: What does it matter if we *look* military, with our APCs rolling through your streets, if we are saving you from bleeding out? In a city with one of the country's highest homicide rates, what choice do we have other than using military-derived mass surveillance to manage the crisis? What is the alternative to militarization, if we must be ready to professionally manage every eventuality, things we cannot even imagine?

Hence police common sense contains a claim to legitimacy in a liberal democracy. Mark Neocleous has traced how liberalism reframed the police concept as apolitical, coding police as a "*technique of liberal security*," a nonpartisan force for equal protection under the rule of law.[53] US police, reformers, and the public now widely understand police legitimacy to stem from how closely they hew

to this ideal: the more they perform professionalism and procedural justice, or fair treatment, the more they garner public trust and consent.[54] Police common sense is an expression of this reframing. It positions police as professional, prepared guardians of public order and hence legitimate enforcers of liberal security, rather than an occupying force. Thus, police common sense swathes itself in *apolitics*.

Such an apolitics always performs political work.[55] It allows policing to bound the imagination, to circumscribe the possibilities of change, by denying the political claims embedded in demilitarization efforts. It naturalizes and moralizes the violence of a SWAT team bursting into a Black family's home by framing the team's militarism as a technical tool toward the apolitical end of liberal security. Police common sense thereby attempts to foreclose political demands. It renders ending federal equipment acquisition programs, much less curtailing SWAT operations, nearly unimaginable. Even my most critical officer interlocutors repeated the common-sense wisdom that police need certain military equipment, tactics, and training to do their jobs as expert protectors of society. My primary point in this essay has been not to contest this argument on empirical grounds, as others have done,[56] but to demonstrate how it obscures the core functions of policing. Police common sense attempts to extract these functions from the realm of critical thought under the guise of practicality and neutrality.

Police common sense is therefore profoundly seductive and hegemonic, although by no means has it effected complete closure. Abolitionist critiques of policing now circulate more widely in public discourse; some organizations, such as members of the Demilitarize Our Communities Coalition, have organized around ending the 1033 Program rather than merely limiting it. Other campaigns like Stop Urban Shield in Oakland and Stop Cop City in Atlanta have worked locally to shut down "militarized" police training. Such efforts tend not to see reform as an end in itself and are often wary of expanding police legitimacy by making them appear reformable. Rather, these efforts aim for immediate harm reduction toward the ultimate end of police attenuation or abolition. Police efforts to draw a veil of moral and professional authority over certain debates thus should not be considered all-powerful.[57]

Many demilitarization reform efforts, however, do fall in line with police common sense. They often carve out space for "reasonable" militarization, sanctioning militarization for the "right reasons." These reforms implicitly accept the premise that some militarization is necessary, for it prepares police to serve as society's thin blue line. Other reforms demand police accountability and transparency about how departments use military equipment or deploy SWAT teams, often via reporting requirements, institutional oversight, and assurances that equipment will be used properly. These reforms assume that police can be professional guardians who carefully calibrate appropriate uses of force. Despite being well intentioned and potentially harm-reducing, these efforts represent a minimalist approach to the violence indexed by *militarization*. They demonstrate how policing, and police reformism, force engagement with police violence onto the shallowest shoals. This is not to argue that such efforts are meaningless or to cast blame on reformers, some of whom struggle valiantly against institutions that stonewall demands for information. Rather, I am arguing that reformist demilitarization efforts can ultimately reinforce police legitimacy when they imagine that police can be restored to a nonmilitary (less violent, occupying, destructive) past or brought into such a future.

Many of my interlocutors protested reform proposals like limiting the 1033 Program, but their commonsense vision of their role nonetheless aligns with that of reformism itself. A focus on limiting and accounting for police levels of militarization can implicitly sanction the notion that police *should* be professional and prepared stewards of crisis. The debate, then, is simply about whether certain forms of militarization accomplish or hinder that goal. The issue, as Tamara Nopper and Mariame Kaba remind us, becomes the excess and spectacular rather than what Saidiya Hartman calls "the terror of the mundane and quotidian" that is normalized anti-Blackness,[58] the plane quietly tracking the movements of poor Black people from above. The concern becomes the American people newly subjected to "weapons of war," rather than the Americans and non-Americans routinely terrorized by US state violence. And the impetus forever remains the preservation of a white supremacist order that defends the justice of the thin blue line.

Notes

1. Paul Szoldra, "This Is the Terrifying Result of the Militarization of Police," *Business Insider*, August 12, 2014, https://www.businessinsider.com/police-militarization-ferguson-2014-8.
2. German Lopez, "Iraq or Missouri?," Vox, August 18, 2014, https://www.vox.com/michael-brown-shooting-ferguson-mo/2014/8/18/6031679/ferguson-missouri-mo-protests-michael-brown-police-military.
3. James Baldwin, "A Report from Occupied Territory," *Nation*, 1966; Orlando De Guzman, *Ferguson: A Report from Occupied Territory* (Fusion Media, 2015).
4. Nadine Naber, "'The U.S. and Israel Make the Connections for Us': Anti-Imperialism and Black-Palestinian Solidarity," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 3.2 (2017): 15–30.
5. Rand Paul, Brian Schatz, and Chris Van Hollen, "Sens. Paul, Schatz, and Van Hollen Reintroduce the Stop Militarizing Law Enforcement Act," 2020, https://www.paul.senate.gov/news/sens-paul-schatz-and-van-hollen-reintroduce-stop-militarizing-law-enforcement-act.
6. After President Obama's executive order, law enforcement agencies returned 126 out of 1,300 military vehicles they then held, while another 400 were newly distributed. See Trevor Burrus, "Stopping Police Militarization," 2022, https://www.cato.org/cato-handbook-policymakers/cato-handbook-policymakers-9th-edition-2022/stopping-police-militarization; Law Enforcement Support Office, "1033 Program FAQs," https://www.dla.mil/Disposition-Services/Offers/Law-Enforcement/Program-FAQs/.
7. Stephen Semler, "Biden's Clamp-down on Military Gear to Local Police Has Giant Loophole," *Responsible Statecraft*, January 27, 2022, https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2022/01/27/bidens-clamp-down-on-military-gear-to-local-police-has-giant-loophole/.
8. Milton C. Regan, "Citizens, Suspects, and Enemies: Examining Police Militarization," *Texas National Security Review* 4.1 (2020): 97–130; see also Kara Dansky, "War Comes Home: The Excessive Militarization of American Policing," American Civil Liberties Union, June 2014, https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/jus14-warcomeshome-text-rel1.pdf; Radley Balko, *Rise of the Warrior Cop: The Militarization of America's Police Forces* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2013).

9. Nasser Abourahme, "Of Monsters and Boomerangs: Colonial Returns in the Late Liberal City," *City* 22.1 (2018): 106–15; Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000); Christopher Coyne and Abigail Hall, *Tyranny Comes Home: The Domestic Fate of U.S. Militarism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018); Derek Denman, "The Logistics of Police Power: Armored Vehicles, Colonial Boomerangs, and Strategies of Circulation," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38.6 (2020): 1138–56; Julian Go, "The Imperial Origins of American Policing: Militarization and Imperial Feedback in the Early 20th Century," *American Journal of Sociology* 125.5 (2020): 1193–254; Alfred McCoy, *Policing America's Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009); Stuart Schrader, *Badges without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019); cf. Stuart Schrader, "More Than Cosmetic Changes: The Challenges of Experiments with Police Demilitarization in the 1960s and 1970s," *Journal of Urban History* 46.5 (2020): 1002–25.

10. Markus Kienscherf, "Beyond Militarization and Repression: Liberal Social Control as Pacification," *Critical Sociology* 42.7-8 (2014)**:** 1179–94; Mark Neocleous, *War Power, Police Power* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014); Micol Seigel, "Always Already Military: Police, Public Safety, and State Violence," *American Quarterly* 71.2 (2019): 519–39; Nikhil Pal Singh, *Race and America's Long War* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).

11. Eliav Lieblich and Adam Shinar, "The Case against Police Militarization," *Michigan Journal of Race and Law* 23.1–2 (2018): 105–53; Seth Stoughton, "Law Enforcement's 'Warrior' Problem," *Harvard Law Review Forum* 128 (2015): 225–34. For further discussion of these debates in police studies, see Garth den Heyer, "Mayberry Revisited: A Review of the Influence of Police Paramilitary Units on Policing," *Policing and Society* 24.3 (2014): 346–61; Tony Jefferson, "Pondering Paramilitarism: A Question of Standpoints?," *British Journal of Criminology* 33.3 (1993): 374–81; Victor Kappeler and Peter Kraska, "Normalising Police Militarisation, Living in Denial," *Policing and Society* 25.3 (2015): 268–75; P. A. J. Waddington, "The Case against Paramilitary Policing Considered," *British Journal of Criminology* 33.3 (1993): 353–73.

12. Neocleous, *War Power, Police Power*; Micol Seigel, *Violence Work: State Power and the Limits of Police* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

13. Even some efforts to disarm or prevent militarization have historically emerged themselves from a deep history of anti-Blackness. The 1878 Posse Comitatus Act (PCA), for example, originally prohibited the army from enforcing domestic laws. Particularly since Ferguson in 2014, the act has been hailed as a bulwark against police militarization, which critics have claimed violates the intent of the act. Some argue for strengthening its provisions to encourage less violent policing. Yet as Fanna Gamal has shown, the PCA from its founding reinforced what she calls the racial politics of protection, withdrawing federal military protection of Black rights in the South and effectively ending Reconstruction. This reversed tenuous Black political gains, allowed lynchings to climb, and ensured continued white hegemony. Even earlier than the PCA, the federal government used the principle of posse comitatus—which allowed officers to draft civilians into temporary posses for "law enforcement purposes"—to compel civilians to help enforce the Fugitive Slave Act. Thus the PCA, that acclaimed check against militarization, itself emblematizes the white supremacy at the core

of policing. See Gamal, "The Racial Politics of Protection: A Critical Race Examination of Police Militarization," *California Law Review* 104.4 (2016): 979–1008; see also Gautham Rao, "The Federal 'Posse Comitatus' Doctrine: Slavery, Compulsion, and Statecraft in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," *Law and History Review* 26.1 (2008): 1–56.

14. Randall Williams, "A State of Permanent Exception: The Birth of Modern Policing in Colonial Capitalism," *Interventions* 5.3 (2003): 322–44.

15. Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Karl Jacoby, *Shadows at Dawn: A Borderlands Massacre and the Violence of History* (New York: Penguin, 2008); Monica Muñoz Martinez, "Recuperating Histories of Violence in the Americas: Vernacular History-Making on the US-Mexico Border," *American Quarterly* 66.3 (2014): 661–89.

16. Amna Akbar, "An Abolitionist Horizon for Police (Reform)," *California Law Review* 108.6 (2020): 1781–846; Paul Butler, *Chokehold: Policing Black Men* (New York: New Press, 2017); David Correia and Tyler Wall, *Police: A Field Guide* (New York: Verso, 2018); Angela Davis, *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture* (New York: Seven Stories, 2005); Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Abolition Geography: Essays towards Liberation* (New York: Verso, 2022); Mariame Kaba and Andrea Ritchie, *No More Police: A Case for Abolition* (New York: New Press, 2022); Derecka Purnell, *Becoming Abolitionists: Police, Protests, and the Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Astra House, 2021); Dylan Rodríguez, "Abolition as Praxis of Human Being: A Foreword," *Harvard Law Review* 132.6 (2019): 1575–612.

17. Emmanuel Hiram Arnaud, "The Dismantling of Dissent: Militarization and the Right to Peaceably Assemble," *Cornell Law Review* 101.3 (2016): 777–812; Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Joy James, "Erasing the Spectacle of Racialized State Violence," in *Resisting State Violence: Radicalism, Gender, and Race in U.S. Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Natsu Taylor Saito, "Why Xenophobia?," *Berkeley La Raza Law Journal* 31 (2021): 1–24.

18. "Racial capitalism" refers to capitalism's dependence on racialized and racializing processes of slavery and colonialism, and on the forms of disposable, exploitable labor enabled by racism. See Zachary Levenson and Marcel Paret, "The Three Dialectics of Racial Capitalism: From South Africa to the U.S. and Back Again," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* (2022): 1–19; Khwezi Mabasa, "Racial Capitalism: Marxism and Decolonial Politics," in *Marxism and Decolonization in the 21st Century: Living Theories and True Ideas*, ed. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Morgan Ndlovu (London: Routledge, 2022), 228–47; Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

19. Mark Neocleous, *The Fabrication of Social Order: A Critical Theory of Police Power* (London: Pluto, 2000); Seigel, "Always Already Military."

20. I build here on Seigel's use of the term "violence workers" to reference those who channel state-condoned violence. See Seigel, *Violence Work*; see also Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference: Notes on Racism and Geography," *Professional Geographer* 54.1 (2002): 15–24; Martha Huggins, Mika Haritos-Fatouros, and Philip Zimbardo, *Violence Workers: Police Torturers and Murderers Reconstruct Brazilian Atrocities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

21. Seigel, "Always Already Military."

22. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971); see also Elizabeth McNulty, "Generating Common Sense Knowledge among Police Officers," *Symbolic Interaction* 17.3 (1994): 281–94, for a different use of "police common sense." For further discussion, see Kate Crehan, "Gramsci's Concept of Common Sense: A Useful Concept for Anthropologists?," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 16.2 (2011): 273–87; and Tania Murray Li, "Politics, Interrupted," *Anthropological Theory* 19.1 (2019): 29–53.

23. Stuart Hall and Alan O'Shea, "Common-Sense Neoliberalism," *Soundings: A Journal of Politics and Culture*, no. 55 (2013): 9.

24. For an analysis of how police translate common sense into policy, see Stuart Schrader, "To Protect and Serve Themselves: Police in US Politics since the 1960s," *Public Culture* 31.3 (2019): 601–23.

25. For further discussion of researcher positionality in "studying up," see Christina Aushana, "Inescapable Scripts: Role-Playing Feminist (Re)Visions and Rehearsing Racialized State Violence in Police Training Scenarios," *Women and Performance* 30.3 (2020): 284–306; Nick Clare, "Militantly 'Studying Up'? (Ab)Using Whiteness for Oppositional Research," *Area* 49.3 (2017): 377–83; Sanjukta Mukherjee, "Troubling Positionality: Politics of 'Studying Up' in Transnational Contexts," *Focus: Feminist Research and Knowledge Production in Geography* 69.2 (2017): 291–98.

26. Frank Rudy Cooper, "Cop Fragility and Blue Lives Matter," *University of Illinois Law Review*, no. 2 (2020): 621–62.

27. Jessica Katzenstein, "Introduction: Policing and Labor," *Exertions*, 2020, https://saw.americananthro.org/pub/introduction-policing-and-labor/release/1?readingCollection=be9c3444. I discuss this further in an in-progress essay on police scenario trainings.

28. Nikhil Pal Singh, "The Whiteness of Police," *American Quarterly* 66.4 (2014): 1091–99; see Sara Ahmed, "The Affective Politics of Fear," in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 62–81.

29. Monte Reel, "Secret Cameras Record Baltimore's Every Move from Above," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 2016, https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2016-baltimore-secret-surveillance/.

30. Reel.

31. McNutt and his political allies also attempted to rebrand the program, eventually dubbed "Community Support Program" and "Aerial Investigation Research Program," as an instrument to deter or catch police misconduct by providing "unbiased information as to police activities." See Brandon Soderberg and Raven Rakia, "Baltimore's 'Eye in the Sky' Plane Is Back with a New Pitch: Surveil the Police," *The Appeal*, 2018, https://theappeal.org/baltimores-eye-in-the-sky-plane-is-back-with-a-new-pitch-surveil-the-police/. See also Benjamin Snyder, "'Big Brother's Bigger Brother': The Visual Politics of (Counter) Surveillance in Baltimore," *Sociological Forum* 35.4 (2020): 1315–36.

32. After a six-month trial in 2020, the program's contract was canceled in 2021. A federal lawsuit against BPD concluded with an order to expunge all records, and a ruling that the program was unconstitutional and could not be implemented again by the city.

33. Joseph Masco, *The Theater of Operations: National Security Affect from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 27; see also Stephen Collier, "Enacting Catastrophe: Preparedness, Insurance, Budgetary Rationalization," *Economy and Society* 37.2 (2008): 224–50; Brian Massumi, *Ontopower: War, Powers, and the State of Perception* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Janet Roitman, *Anti-Crisis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013). For discussions of preparedness beyond state violence, see Malay Firoz, "Adapt or Die: Resilience Discourse and the Shifting Contours of Humanitarian Morality," *Co-herencia* 19.36 (2022): 95–129; and Johannes Kaminski, "The Neo-Frontier in Contemporary Preparedness Novels," *Journal of American Studies* (2020): 1–29.

34. Chloe Ahmann, "'It's Exhausting to Create an Event Out of Nothing': Slow Violence and the Manipulation of Time," *Cultural Anthropology* 33.1 (2018): 142–71; Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

35. Sara Ahmed, "The Affective Politics of Fear," in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 62–81; Junaid Rana, "The Racial Infrastructure of the Terror-Industrial Complex," *Social Text* 34.4 (2016): 111–38; Pnina Werbner, "Folk Devils and Racist Imaginaries in a Global Prism: Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism in the Twenty-First Century," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36.3 (2013): 450–67.

36. See Egon Bittner, *Aspects of Police Work* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990).

37. Schrader, *Badges without Borders*, 16.

38. Mark Follman, Gavin Aronsen, and Deanna Pan, "US Mass Shootings, 1982–2022: Data From Mother Jones' Investigation," *Mother Jones*, 2022, https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/mass-shootings-mother-jones-full-data/. This data set defines mass shootings as killings of four or more people in a public place, motivated by indiscriminate mass murder versus armed robbery, gang violence, or domestic violence in a home. These shootings represent a fraction of mass killings in the US. See Follman, "What Exactly Is a Mass Shooting?," *Mother Jones*, August 24, 2012, https://www.motherjones.com/crime-justice/2012/08/what-is-a-mass-shooting/; "Mass Killing Database: Revealing Trends, Details and Anguish of Every US Event since 2006," *USA Today*, August 18, 2022, https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/graphics/2022/08/18/mass-killings-database-us-events-since-2006/9705311002/.

39. I use italics to signify unrecorded dialogue reconstructed from detailed field notes.

40. ACLU, "War Comes Home."

41. ACLU, 2; see Tamara Nopper and Mariame Kaba, "Itemizing Atrocity," *Jacobin*, August 2014, https://jacobinmag.com/2014/08/itemizing-atrocity/.

42. Michael Geyer, "The Militarization of Europe, 1914–1945," in *The Militarization of the Western World*, ed. John Gillis (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 65–102; see Catherine Lutz, "Making War at Home in the United States: Militarization and the Current Crisis," *American Anthropologist* 104.3 (2002): 723–35.

43. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), 242–43.

44. Elif Babül, *Bureaucratic Intimacies: Translating Human Rights in Turkey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 83.

44. Cowper, "Myth of the 'Military Model,'" 243.

45. Peter Kraska, "Enjoying Militarism: Political/Personal Dilemmas in Studying U.S. Police Paramilitary Units," *Justice Quarterly* 13.3 (1996): 405–29.

46. See note 11 for literature that debates police professionalism.

47. James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

48. Tania Murray Li, *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

49. Li, 7.

50. Ferguson, *Anti-Politics Machine*, 270.

51. Ryan Young, "'A Sense of Pride' Swells across US Police Ranks as Officers Hail the Quick, Heroic Nashville School Massacre Response," *CNN*, March 31, 2023, https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/31/us/police-response-nashville-school-shooting/index.html.

52. Den Heyer, "Mayberry Revisited," 347; cf. Kappeler and Kraska, "Normalising Police Militarisation, Living in Denial."

53. Neocleous, *Fabrication of Social Order*, 43; see also Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

54. For further discussion of police legitimacy theory, see Monica Bell, "Police Reform and the Dismantling of Legal Estrangement," *Yale Law Journal* 126 (2017): 2054–150.

55. Babül, *Bureaucratic Intimacies*.

56. See, e.g., Jonathan Mummolo, "Militarization Fails to Enhance Police Safety or Reduce Crime But May Harm Police Reputation," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 115.37 (2018): 9181–86.

57. For discussions of how expertise attempts to effect closure in other contexts, see Babül, *Bureaucratic Intimacies*; Jennifer Greenburg, *At War with Women: Military Humanitarianism and Imperial Feminism in an Era of Permanent War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2023); and Li, "Politics, Interrupted."

58. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4; Nopper and Kaba, "Itemizing Atrocity."