

American Exceptionalism

From a recent newspaper article about a SoCal controversy over "patriotic" paint jobs on local cop cars:

"A police vehicle with the American flag is the ultimate American expression." So says a "lawyer" (really just a prosecutor, no doubt) who can't believe that some of her Laguna Beach neighbors don't share her enthusiasm for jingoistic police imagery. As another local observed, the bold flag motif is "too aggressive" and "out of step with our artistic, mellow community."

I'd like to ask you guys; how do we all feel about the idea that "the ultimate American expression" is a flag-covered cop car? I mean, it feels a little off, to me. Wouldn't the "ultimate American expression" be something more like a bald eagle soaring over Mt. Rushmore, or a pack of apple-pie-smeared kids at a state fair? Maybe a boat ferrying immigrants past the Statue of Liberty? Or for a less-idealized image, how about acres of shiny new Cadillacs at a suburban mega-dealership, or at least a beach packed with overweight drunks enjoying a fireworks show? Even a deserted restaurant table full of half-eaten cheeseburgers would be a pretty "ultimate" expression of some of the genuine pleasures of American privilege, no? But... Old Glory plastered across a pigmobile? That just feels embarrassing. Cop cars symbolize (and manifest) the worst human instincts: revenge, authoritarianism, and a commitment to the repression of meaningful challenge to the power structure status quo. Cop cars are rolling cages piloted by arrogant state mercenaries, and they are cruelly designed for the maximum discomfort of the human chattel they haul from dungeon to dungeon. Does festooning these publicly-funded shame shuttles with our national symbol really amount to the "ultimate American expression"?

Actually, now that I think about it... that prosecutor lady probably has a point, doesn't she? If only she were making it with a little bit of irony, or a hint of regret.