



After writing a few posts on murderous cops and their victims, I find my conscience nagging me to express some of my more challenging thoughts on this subject. I'll try.

Much ink has been spilled over whether Tyre Nichols' murder was different from George Floyd's because of their killers' skin tone. With Mr. Floyd, the easily digested consensus was that a "black" man was, naturally, offed by a racist "white" cop, but that oversimplified narrative never sat well with me. For instance, did Derek Chauvin really need a particular color of neck beneath his knee to continue kneeling on it as a display of his authority? I never believed so, and now that Tyre's badge-brandishing murderers are "black", folks are scrambling to insist that the killer's color doesn't matter when that killer is a cop, because all shades of pig are equally likely to inflict lethally psychotic violence... so long as the victim is "black". Such a concession at least begins to correct what I see as the flawed post-Floyd analysis of police brutality, but this new truth-du-jour — that the VICTIM'S skin is the crucial factor because all policing is inherently racist — still seems to miss the mark.

Try this thought experiment: Imagine that all visible markers for discrimination have suddenly disappeared. Suppose that all brown skin, all oriental phenotypes, are just gone. Even dark hair and dark eyes, too. Now also imagine that police continue to exist in the same proportions and with the same training and mentality as they exist today. Do we suppose that the nature of coppism magically disappears in this scenario as well, and that police brutality ceases to be? That seems unlikely; instead, I'd ~~bet~~ ^{bet our grinning} blue goons would carry on ~~with the~~ ^{with the} beating and murdering of ~~all~~ ^{all} those of us who aren't part of their tribe, just as viciously as ~~they~~ ^{they've} always ~~done~~ ^{done} simply inventing some new markers to determine who they can target for the worst of it. You see, fundamentally, I suspect the problem almost certainly isn't racism per-se, but something more like TRIBALISM; and no, I am not oblivious to the fact that, all things being equal, cops are more likely to kill a "black" person than a "white" one ~~because they (correctly) assume that~~ ^{because they (correctly) assume that} their excuses for it will be more readily accepted. Yes, this fact is sickening evidence of a pervasive historical racism that must be resolved, but does it always demonstrate individual racial animosity in cops who kill "black" people today? Not necessarily, and

after many years of witnessing the largely unbridled violence of cops in prisons, I'd argue that pigs will abuse non-pigs indiscriminately, with no racial prejudice or preference, whenever they believe they can get away with it. I realize this idea strongly contradicts the conventional wisdom, so let me try to explain.

To the best of my knowledge, roughly 40% of California's prison population is "black" and 60% is everything else, a far higher percentage than California's non-caged "black" population. (I base these numbers on my own observations and old statistics; if anyone has more accurate data, please let me know!) Obviously, "black" people are terribly overrepresented in prison, which clearly suggests some serious systemic "racial" problems. However, after many years inside every security level from minimum to maximum across 14 different prison yards, I've known of countless inmates abused by guards... and guess what? Very few of those incidents have involved "black" prisoners. In fact, I have never personally seen a "black" man beaten up in prison (not counting the violence guards use to break up fights), though I've directly witnessed dozens of "white" and Hispanic prisoners unjustifiably manhandled over the years. To be clear, I am NOT suggesting black folks aren't ~~beaten~~ necessarily beaten in prison, frequently and badly. Of course they suffer the batons too, and I've heard some horrific stories for sure. Isn't it just a bit odd, though, that it hasn't yet happened in front of me despite the outsized "black" representation in these cages? My point is that while street cop violence against "black" people is radically disproportionate to their population, violence by prison cops apparently is not, and if anything, ~~Police~~ violence against "black" people in prison seems to happen disproportionately less often, which is good! I'm no advocate for the equalization of abuse, and I say all of this to ask you: Doesn't this anomaly seem to reveal something really unexpected about the relationship between "race" and police brutality?

Assuming my impressions reflect reality, what could explain the egalitarian ethos of presumably racist cops in a place where violence is completely normalized? Once again, I nominate tribalism. If we think of "whiteness" not as a property of one's skin but as a social condition of opportunity and status, then we may recognize that the color of bodies is but a historical heuristic for treatment by power, and inside prisons, there's no need for skin-based assumptions about who should be treated as valuable. The "good guys", those respectable citizens who count, are starkly distinguished from the

"bad guys", the disposable, interchangeable criminals, by their clothing as well as the fact that the former go home each day while the latter never leave the premises and sleep in cages. In the prison environment, cops can immediately identify their tribesmen, so the way they act toward EVERYONE else — which is badly — reveals a lot about their basic psychology ... or psychopathy, as it were.

During a recent conversation about my time in these dungeons, a friend reminded me that the prison experience is, of course, skewed. No question about that, and it's true that most observations from here are not generalizable, but in this one respect I think prisons may have something valuable to teach us about broader societal conditions, if only we are willing to think honestly about the simple facts. Cops on the inside are probably no different from cops on the outside, and if they act more violently (they do), it is just because they do their copping in a place where violence is more expected, more accepted, and more protected than in real life. More to the point, since prison pigs aren't burdened with applying ~~an insulating~~ ^{an insulating} presumption of "whiteness" to any of their potential victims, regardless of skin color, the way that real world police generally must do before they unleash the fists and sticks and dogs and guns, perhaps we are able to discern a truer, more unvarnished version of genuine cop-think. The ugly fact is, behind the bars and razor wire, prisoners really are racially equal from the punishers' perspective: "criminals" of every hue are nothing more than "worthless niggers" to those who view the world through their blue-tinted wrap-around sunglasses. Should we assume the ones on the other side of the wall really see things so much differently?

From where I sit, if the lens of racism serves to focus more attention on the problems of coppism, excellent, but let's be wary of reducing deep-seated police pathology to a mere prejudice problem, which can lead us to settle for impotent reforms that aim for "equality" and injury reduction instead of at the ultimate elimination of a universal menace.

You can write me directly!
(But please still leave a comment anyway. ☺)

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* If you leave a comment, I will reply!
But please expect it to take a few weeks with the long mail delays. Sorry!