

Police Brutality: The Reality of a Flawed System

By Elias Ramirez

With so much news focusing on relationships and events occurring between law enforcement officers and minorities, our class addressed the various issues involved in the conflict. Elias voices his response to these issues by focusing on what he discovered about the "other side" of the debate in the essay "The Cop Mind" by David Brooks. Elias's comments speak to his coming awareness of what law enforcement officers face every day that they are on the job.

---English Professor Steve Sansom

Decades from now, the year 2016 will be defined by two things: an eventful presidential election and the collective activism against police brutality brought forth by the internet. While it is easy to see raw cellphone footage of a cop using deadly force, associate it with age-old stigmas about cops, and call the entire system racist and totalitarian, writer David Brooks gives his audience a more informed perspective on our law enforcement. In "*The Cop Mind*," Brooks presents an overlooked perspective held by police officers in light of recent events. This unique point of view in tandem with my own experiences gives me a more positive view on police, both as individual officers and as a system.

Brooks attempts to show readers the dimensions of police officers' roles that aren't caught on raw cellphone footage, which include the unpleasant facets of society that take a physical and mental toll on these individuals. He explains how a large portion of an officer's job is dealing with society's unpleasant side; cops spend most of their time dealing with the most belligerent of people, be it drunks, addicts, or perpetrators of domestic violence disputes. He states that many of the situations they are faced with daily are not for the faint of heart whether it is dealing with death, murder, fatal car crashes and the disfigurement that they entail, or the grief that ensues from any of these sources. In adapting to such a strenuous and stressful

lifestyle, they distance themselves from the pain by separating themselves from others and consequently they grow cold and cynical.

Cops simply view the world differently; they become accustomed to seeing only the threats, hazards, and all of society's negativity. The unfortunate reality for these police officers, though, is that this point of view becomes unshakeable after years on the job. Eventually, intense emotional stress affects them mentally and physically. Brooks found that police officers' life expectancy is lower than that of other public servants. They disproportionately develop back disorders and heart disease compared to the rest of the population, they suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and they even have a suicide rate of about three times that of public sector jobs in other areas.

Brooks further asserts that even though citizens typically view cops as invulnerable and authoritative figures due to being trained and armed, cops believe the contrary. Police are typically called into unfamiliar terrain surrounded by bystanders in unknown territory, where their training in hyper-vigilance puts them on a roller coaster of emotions. In these situations, stressful and unpredictable events require spur-of-the-moment action and decision-making powered by adrenaline. The difficulty of these circumstances, according to Brooks, impairs their decision-making as they must consider others' safety while trying to preserve their own. High pressure situations like these offer no clear protocol, which suggests that the very nature of the semantics of law enforcement needs to be questioned rather than the individual cop.

In my experience, interactions with the police have typically been amicable, but there was a time when I felt being a minority led to unwarranted suspicion and aggression from an officer. When I was fourteen, I dressed like a typical male my age: baggy t-shirt and baggy pants; so, when my older cousin invited me to the mall with him, that was what I was wearing. While at

the mall, I simply thought I was waiting for him to exit a clothing store, but unbeknownst to me, he was shop-lifting in the dressing room, and later was apprehended upon leaving the store. Because of my connection to him, I was treated as an accomplice and taken to the "back room." My cousin, whose skin is several shades lighter and a lot better dressed than I was, confessed and returned the items, but I was still treated unfairly. As I reached into my pocket to get my ID as requested, I was slammed into a wall by an HPD officer: "Don't reach into your pocket in front of me." I was being treated worse than the person who perpetrated the crime because I was of darker skin color and because I could easily be profiled as a "Hispanic criminal."

My response to the article and to police brutality, especially regarding the treatment of minorities like myself, is that the system is definitely not perfect. Rather, it is a flawed system made to manage a flawed world. The article urges its readers to consider the individual before believing all cops to be corrupt, but it is the system that empowers the few "bad apples." Every occupation has its good and bad employees; law enforcement just happens to equip its "bad apples" with weaponry. Therefore, job scrutiny should be high because there are times when we as citizens are essentially at the mercy of an officer's whims. Unfortunately, law enforcement officers' prejudice towards minorities is another coping mechanism whose purpose is to uncomplicate a complicated job. They know that dangerous situations can happen at any moment and that there is nothing anyone can do to prevent them. So to establish some control, law enforcement officers profile certain races as having a higher propensity for crime and consider them as one unit so as to efficiently suspect of one kind of person rather than many. The article even affirms that police officers' treatment of people of color is still flawed, even though white officers believe blacks are not treated unequally. Unfortunately, many black officers disagree.

David Brooks uses statistics and studies to show the audience the difficult scope of life and daily struggle for police officers. While real instances of police brutality in highly publicized cases, such as Eric Garner's death, are wrong, it shouldn't reflect on the entire occupation or dismiss the level of difficulty that their job entails. While I agree, for the most part, I still believe that the police system, built to enforce laws sometimes supported by fleeting agendas, instills the need to be suspicious of minorities, and one corrupt officer is too many. There is no clear-cut manual detailing every situation in which an officer might brandish a service weapon-- in that confusion and adrenaline, a cop can act as a judge, jury, and executioner. Therefore, while I have newfound respect for their demanding jobs, I still support a peaceful activism towards the injustice of brutality occurring when officers who incorrectly gauge a situation end up taking a life unnecessarily.

Works Cited

Brooks, David. "The Cop Mind." *The Writing Arc*. Eds. Steve Sansom, Brian Kyser, Bruce Martin, and Robert Miller. Southlake, TX: Fountainhead Press, 2015. 199-200. Print.