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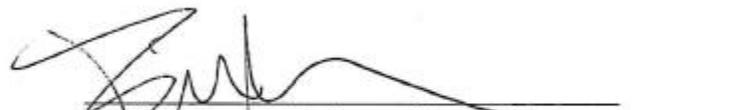
PACIFYING THE VISUAL: POLICE REFORM AND THE PROMISE OF BODY
WORN CAMERAS

BY

IVAN BENITEZ

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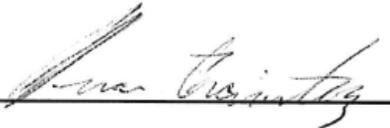

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WORN CAMERAS

BY

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Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Eastern Kentucky University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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DEDICATION

To my nephew and my best friend Maximiliano Bell, who I can always count on to ask me if I have finished my homework. Having you around has made me stay grounded to the family even when I am busy with the books.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank Dr. Travis Linnemann for having the patience to work with me and helping me to develop this thesis. I would also like to thank Dr. Bill McClanahan for being an excellent critique and pointing out areas that I further developed. Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Judah Schept for being a supportive professor and a wonderful committee member.

ABSTRACT

Reform is a political tool, long used to ensure the continuation of specific police practices and the police institution itself. Promising increased transparency and accountability and hence legitimacy, Body Worn Cameras (BWCs) purport to show the facts of police work and critical incidents precisely as they happened. Invoking and relying upon the objective truth of the image, policy makers, academics and some police themselves see BWCs both as a panacea to arrest police misconduct and a way to guard against spurious allegations. However, placing them in the long history of police reform, BWCs are also usefully understood as a form of pacification, one which seeks to reaffirm police legitimacy specifically by mastering the visual field itself. Relying upon a collection of official documents outlining the efficacy and implementation of BWCs, it is argued here that police advocates seek to shield the institution from scrutiny by invoking photographic truth, while less sympathetic reformers likewise overestimate the ability of the visual to reign in the violence inherent to the police project.

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I. Introduction

In 1991, several officers of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) were recorded beating a speeding motorist named Rodney King, leaving him critically wounded and near death. Here, in grainy black and white video, the public could witness firsthand the violence of police directed at poor people of color. King's beating also exacerbated the deep-rooted tensions between hyper-policed black communities and the LAPD, resulting in protests and demands which included the resignation of the much-maligned Chief of the LAPD, Daryl Gates. Even with damning video evidence, the officers involved in King's beating were acquitted of any wrongdoing. The verdict, of course, ignited the 1992 Los Angeles uprising, which lasted five days, left the city with over a billion dollars in damages, cost fifty people their lives, wounded over two thousand and resulted in approximately twelve thousand arrests.

Fast-forward twenty-three years to 2014, and police violence had, of course, not abated. Another high-profile case occurred in Chicago, Illinois in the fall that year, when a white cop named Jason VanDyke shot and killed a seventeen-year old boy named Laquan McDonald. Like the famous King video, the murder of McDonald was also recorded, this time from the dash-cam of a Chicago Police Department cruiser. According to the video and the subsequent investigation, VanDyke fired his weapon, leaving Laquan McDonald lifeless on the pavement within seconds of his arrival. While McDonald was the ninth person killed by the CPD in 2014 (Police accountability tool, 2017), the controversial case again placed visual evidence at the center of questions concerning police violence and accountability.

While Mayor Rahm Emmanuel initially supported the decision to sequester the video, fearing that its release would lead to disorders like those in Ferguson and Baltimore, his office eventually relented and ordered the footage be released to the public. In the resulting trial, VanDyke was found guilty of second-degree murder and sixteen counts of aggravated battery with a firearm and sentenced to seven years in prison. The McDonald family received a settlement of sixteen million dollars, one million for each bullet fired. Even more notably, because of the controversy generated by his office's handling of the case, Emmanuel chose not to seek reelection. When compared to the acquittals in King's case and the subsequent disorder, that the video-taped killing of Laquan McDonald resulted in a rare murder conviction and prison sentence, a sizeable settlement to his survivors and perhaps ended a political administration, it may seem as though progress has been made in the systematic response to police violence. The latter case may also further support the power of the visual in effecting social change. However, upon closer inspection of the King and McDonald cases and of police violence more generally, we should perhaps pause with some caution on the power of police reform and on the efficacy of the visual as a method to arrest police violence and bring about widespread social change. As Travis Linnemann and Corrina Medley (2018) note, state violence is permitted to work in secrecy so that there are no questions asked regarding use of force. Take King's case, where presiding officer Stacey Koon, testified that his actions along with his officers were a "managed and controlled use of force that followed the (LAPD's) policy, and did so to the book" (Mitchell, 1994), regardless of the evidence clearly reflecting

excessive use of force. Indeed, as policy makers from across the nation increasingly point to Body Worn Cameras as a key police reform, we need only review the circumstances of Laquan McDonald's death a bit closer to have increased skepticism regarding the reformist potentials of the visual. For example, VanDyke's lawyer Daniel Q. Herbert stated in an interview that "video, no matter how clear it is, does not ever tell the full story, unless it is a video that captures every single event that is relevant from the relevant perspectives" (Thomas, n.d.). Thus, according to Mirzoeff (2011a), living under a dominant ideology that supports the police power makes it nearly impossible to see the use of violence even when the evidence is crystal clear. By simply changing the point of view in which the visual is captured, the images change from questionable to truthful evidence that ultimately authorizes the public a gaze into police work and how to understand it.

As many have noted (Linnemann, 2017; Kotsko, 2012) the political theater of prosecuting a "bad cop" may actually further entrench police misconduct, as it makes the institution appear more reflexive and accountable to criticism. Even more materially, the settlements paid to survivors of police violence, rarely impacts everyday police budgets and usually leaves the corresponding communities on the hook for the bill. What's more, as Tyler Wall and Travis Linnemann (2014) have shown, the visual is often offered as a window into the facts of the case or "truth" by police and policy makers, usually without any acknowledgement of how police routinely manipulate or withhold videos and destroy evidence. And ultimately, as Linnemann (2017) has noted

elsewhere, the power of the visual, as a product of human culture and understanding, is constrained by the positionality of the viewer. As he writes,

And though it offers means to challenge policing's subjective violence and a diagnostic of its fleeting harms and secret desires, the image must not be exalted as a panacea of social change. As Judith Butler (1993) and Allan Feldman (1994) argued in their confrontations with the fifty-six baton blows suffered by Rodney King, political subjects' embeddedness and complicity in histories of violence and domination often prevents them from seeing even those things that are in plain view. Here we might say that those who could see the savagery of King's beating perhaps did not need to and likewise, those who could not immediately recognize King's suffering, perhaps never would (Linnemann, 2017).

Nevertheless, the visual remains a viable avenue to police reform. In the midst of crisis, police have been quick to offer up this and other reforms to satiate an angry public. Similar to the Rodney King riots, the 1968 Watts riots were also a resistance to the systemic issues in policing that targeted poor African American communities. In response to the ongoing riots, Lyndon B. Johnson formed The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (Kerner Commission), which concluded that "our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal" (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968, pg.1). One recommendation made by the Kerner Commission was to increase federal funding that would lift people out of poverty. It further recommended new police practices that integrate communities and police departments. For example, the city of Los Angeles transitioned from officers patrolling large beats in squad cars onto their experimental "team policing" model which coupled officers to patrol small beats on foot (Abolition Research Group, 2017, pg. 3).

Following the legacy of Kerner, and two months after Michael Brown's death, President Barack Obama issued the Presidential Task Force on 21st Century Policing, which among other things, advocated the use of body worn cameras (BWCs) to combat police misconduct. In addition to this highly placed policy body, recent trends in literature supports the benefits of BWCs, such as reducing police use of force and citizen's complaints (Ariel, Farrar & Sutherland, 2015; Mesa Police Department, 2013; Katz & Kurtenbach, 2014; White, 2014; Ariel, Sutherland, Henstock, Young, Drover, Sykes, Megicks & Henderson, 2016a). Moreover, BWCs can bolster external oversight that simultaneously holds the police and the public accountable for their actions (Farrar & Ariel, 2013). Although BWCs have gained support from some policy makers and academic researchers as a way of curbing police misconduct, it is imperative to note that these devices are not fool proof. Officers can turn BWCs off, destroy and or fabricate evidence and flatly refuse to use them. For example, officer Richard Pinheiro Jr. of Baltimore, Maryland was indicted January 2018 after being recorded on his own BWC planting drug evidence at a crime scene (Fenton, 2018, pg. 1). Once again, BWCs produce such a reliable and objective truth that it can be used to punish officers acting unlawfully. And from a visuality perspective, it may be necessary to have few officers act as scapegoats to demonstrate the reliable accountability that comes from visual evidence. Although BWC visual evidence could result in the same outcome as far as holding an officer accountable, this would give the state control over its visual even when evidence is damning. Likewise, Judah Schept (2016) summarizes Nicholas Mirzoeff's (2011a) work on visuality, using BWCs, which promise transparency and

accountability, gives the state the prerogative to dominate the how the public understands and challenges state power. Thus, the state's power allows for an approved vision of policing to be fabricated even when holding an officer accountable is required. Because the video evidence captured by BWCs are said to reflect the objective truth, proponents then find them feasible for addressing misconduct and spurious allegations. In doing so, police reform and specifically BWCs are simply empty gestures seeking the pacification of the public into accepting state domination in exchange for material changes that promise a boost in transparency and accountability.

Here, BWCs supposedly provide the facts of police work and critical incidents precisely as they happened, and in turn disavow police violence. Invoking and relying upon the objective truth of the image from BWCs, policy makers, academics and some police themselves see the devices both as a panacea to arrest police misconduct and a way to guard against spurious allegations. However, placing them in the long history of police reform, BWCs can be understood as material changes made to encourage the public to again view the police as accountable, and more importantly, indispensable to their security. Arguably, BWCs seek to reaffirm police legitimacy specifically by mastering the visual field itself. Relying upon a collection of official documents outlining the implementation and use of BWCs, it is argued here that police advocates seek to shield the institution from scrutiny by invoking photographic truth, while less sympathetic reformers likewise overestimate the ability of the visual to reign in the violence inherent to the police project.

II. Police reform, pacification and the visual

History of technocratic policing

Police reform in the United States initially began in the mid-19th century, when the police began adopting guns and nightsticks. This is known as the political era because of the suture between politicians and the police (Seaskate, 1998). The 20th century, however, is most recognized as the professional era, which sought to professionalize policing by distancing it from politics. Along with setting hiring standards for officers and administrators to curtail cronyism, police departments directed their attention to technocratic reforms such as motor vehicles, two-way radios, polygraphs, as well as automatic fingerprint identification system that could facilitate police work (Seaskate, 1998). This would later include the use of radars for traffic law enforcement as well as computer assisted dispatching systems, and the official number 911 for the police was officially set by the 1970's (Seaskate, 1998). At the same time, however, technologies were being developed that could facilitate the police efforts to control crowds or riots, such as the taser which delivers a 50,000-volt shock and would later adopt pepper spray as well as an alternative to the use of force (Seaskate, 1998). In adding to the growth of the computerization of United States policing, former President Lyndon B. Johnson, passed the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 which expanded funding for criminal justice institution and provided computers, crime labs, and new training to police departments all over the country.

In dealing with visual evidence, however, dashcams were originally introduced into United States policing by the 1980's. however, because it has been argued that the

perspective does not give sufficient understanding of the incident and is therefore not credible. Perhaps this is why there has been a call for BWCs that ultimately present an objective truth. Although BWCs, first employed in England by the Devon and Cornwall police, are relatively new technology, they are increasingly relevant in the context of the post-Ferguson present. One early independent study by ODS consulting found that adopting BWCs diminished the likelihood of an officer being assaulted, while also reducing spurious allegations (ODS Consulting, 2011). US based BWC studies have also had similar results of decreasing the number of citizen's complaints. For example, Willian Farrar and Barak Ariel (2013) found that officers without BWCs were twice as likely to use force during their shifts, juxtaposed to officers who received BWCs. Another study similarly found that officers in experimental shifts equipped with BWCs were significantly less likely to use force and receive complaints compared to the control group who did not receive BWCs (Ariel, Farrar & Sutherland, 2015).

Conducting their own evaluations, the Phoenix Police Department also found that embracing BWCs boosted police productivity - based on the number of arrests made-and reduced complaints (Choate, Ready & Nuno, 2014). Arizona's Mesa Police Department additionally found that officers with BWCs were less likely to receive complaints compared to officers without them (Mesa Police Department, 2013). Subjecting police and civilians to BWCs not only increases police transparency but has also functioned as a surreptitious mechanism of social control that alters natural behaviors into conforming ones (Fagan, Geller, Davies & West, 2010; Farrar & Ariel, 2013). Command staff officers at the departmental level similarly affirmed trust in

BWCs as a method to reduce the use of force and filed citizen's complaints (Smykla, Crow, Crichlow, and Snyder, 2016). Justin Ready and Jacob Young (2015) interviewed one hundred sworn officers from the Mesa Police Department in Arizona on their perceptions of BWCs and found that officers believed they were useful and facilitated carrying out police practices.

One question to ask however, is why if most of the literature has pointed that BWCs produce transparency and accountability, is there still skepticism in trusting the cameras to work effectively and efficiently? Of the most visible critics of the technology, the ACLU worried that a full-scale implementation of BWCs could surreptitiously surveil and invade the public's privacy (Stanley, 2013). The Las Vegas Police Protective Association also suggested that forcing officers to wear BWCs could change their current work conditions and negatively impact officer safety (Schoenmann, 2012). New York City's largest police union, the Police Benevolent Association, suggested that hiring more officers made more fiscal and practical sense than rolling out BWC and paying for their upkeep (Celona, 2013).

It is perhaps possible that the inconsistency in literature regarding BWCs and their abilities to improve police departments has created skepticism for a wholesale adoption. For example, two contradicting studies found that if BWCs are used inappropriately they could exacerbate already existing issues. Officers given recording discretion increased their use of force (Ariel, Henstock, Sutherland, et al., 2016b). Secondly, officers with BWCs had a higher likelihood of being assaulted (Ariel, Henstock, Sutherland, et al., 2016c). The UK Home Office further recognized potential

health concerns caused by BWCs, such as being shocked by the wiring as well as neck or head injuries caused by the weight of the device (Goodall, 2007). Lastly, some officers (Jennings, Friddell & Lynch, 2014), and officers with less experience (Smykla, Crow, Crichlow & Snyder, 2016), doubted that BWCs could make any positive significant changes to their work conditions. Perhaps more officers perceiving BWCs as ineffective to police practices could undermine the devices and possibly delay their adoption process. Given the position of BWCs in the current calls for police reform and the history of police reform itself, it is prudent to consider how BWCs may operate as a form of pacification, defusing criticism and shielding the institution of policing from meaningful change.

As John Uhr (2001) notes (see also Goldsmith, 2005), accountability for powerholders, such as the police, must be present within democratic governments to maintain popular consent or public's trust. However, there are several reasons why the public may lose faith in the police, such as civilian perceptions of the police maintaining the status quo (Choongh, 1997), or oppressing underrepresented groups (Goldsmith, 2003). This is also reflective upon the fact that public perceptions of the police operating under impunity has resulted in demands for increasing external oversight (Goldsmith, 1991). As Robert Reiner (2000) notes (see also Goldsmith, 2005), the public often mistrusts the police since they are often under suspicion and perceive anyone as a potential threat. Likewise, Tom Tyler and Yuen Huo (2002) note that small negative police encounters significantly impact how individuals perceive the effectiveness of the courts and the police institution.

In response to the dwindling levels of public trust, the police institution must decide whether material changes are necessary to bolster police legitimacy. Seeking to re-brand the police institution as trustworthy, reformers have relied on boosting accountability as a means to demonstrate responsiveness to misconduct. Increasing accountability can also work to omit the preexisting negative public perceptions of the police to begin building positive perceptions.

Goldsmith (2005) notes that the willingness of the police to act fairly and transparently creates performance expectations for the police that will gain public support. In utilizing third-party interventions, police agencies reaffirm a culture embracing police competency and accountability. Here, using BWCs is thought to create the external oversight that will force officers to act by the books. As noted by Goldsmith and others (Levi, 1998; Goldsmith, 2001; Weitzer, 2002), it is important that higher ranked officials embrace a culture of accountability. And in this case, larger police agencies like the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and the New York Police Department's (NYPD) decision to implement BWCs is arguably an attempt to boosting accountability.

Drawing on the work of Margaret Levi (1998), Goldsmith (2005) notes that the material changes made must align with the interest of the policed public. Here we can see how the use of BWCs, which are said to provide accountability and present the institution as responsive to police violence, have led to a boost in public trust. In addition, using third parties to affirm a power balance between the police and civilians has also elevated levels of public trust in the police. As Ronald Weitzer (2002) notes,

when the LAPD introduced an independent federal monitor to oversee police reform, this resulted in an increase in public trust. This could arguably explain why BWCs, which are presented as an objective oversight to the police, have been used to target public trust and repair the ties between the police and communities.

Non-government organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) also play a significant role in producing public trust in the police. For instance, their ability to inform civilians of their rights to monitor the performance of police agencies (Goldman, 2015) intimately involves them in assuring that policies and procedures are obeyed. As it will be discussed later, non-state organizations efforts to endorse BWCs for their ability to provide accountability, although perhaps unintentionally, work to reaffirm the police institution. This would explain why the ACLU (ACLU, 2016) and the NAACP (NAACP Criminal Justice Department, 2016) have made policy models and recommendations that facilitate their adoption process by deeming them as a potential tool to curtail police misconduct and boost police legitimacy.

From a more critical perspective, however, we can understand how police reform promises perfection (Correia & Wall, 2018). In other words, police reform that provides material changes seeks to separate the police institution from its inherent use of violence (Correia & Wall, 2018). Instead, individual officers are punished for their misconduct and the institution appears responsive. This in turn preserves the police institution which is essential to the maintenance of capitalist order and the accumulation

of private property (Correia & Wall, 2018). One issue with police reform however, is that along with its goal of reaching the police institution to perfection, it also expands the police power through federal grants that promote more officers, training, and equipment (Correia & Wall, 2018). Thus, the introduction of BWCs can then be understood as part of another reform era attempting to distance police from violence by implementing material changes and promising improvements. However, using BWCs to improve the police project should be understood as police reform seeking to professionalize the police institution by reshaping state power and “making police violence more efficient and more ‘civilized’” (Correia & Wall, 2018, pg. 122).

Pacification

Mark Neocleous (2000) notes the police institution’s crucial role in preserving the capitalist system by disavowing its inherent problems and fabricating the general social order of wage labor and private property. This arguably makes police reform crucial to preserving the institution that securitizes capitalist order. If this is the case, then the police obtaining the public’s trust is vital to capitalist expansion as it creates a greater sense of police legitimacy. One dilemma faced, however, is whether the state wants to use force to maintain dominance or more civilized approach that does not require brute force. In his history of pacification, Neocleous (2011) articulates the origins of counterinsurgency pacification projects which trace back to the late sixteenth century, when King Phillip II of Spain responded to the concerns of his subjects regarding the empire’s conquest. Future colonialist expansions were now termed projects of pacification that intended to reorient colonization as a peaceful way of

disciplining unruly subjects under Spanish rule (Neocleous, 2014). Here, the goal of pacification was to develop a strategy consisting of collaborative work between colonialists and influential indigenous figures who would aid in learning local cultures and terrain. Subsequently building rapport, colonialists could win the “hearts and minds” of indigenous people without relying so heavily on violence. This was facilitated by targeting children and indoctrinating them early on as a means of ideological pacification. Hence, meeting the material needs of indigenous populations was one technique used to pacify territories and maintain a dominant order.

Spanish conquistador Captain Bernardo de Vargas Machuca published counterinsurgency manuals after completing many pacification campaigns. These warfare manuals emphasized the significance of learning and operating under similar fighting strategies of indigenous populations to facilitate the pacification process. His work subsequently inspired French and US tactics in Vietnam and was later incorporated into counterinsurgency tactics throughout the twentieth century. For example, in 1962 the Kennedy administration implemented a counterinsurgency program in Southeast Asia that emphasized “security and development” to cease communism from further spreading. This was arguably the same time when the United States began adopting counterinsurgency pacification strategies to direct at its domestic populations. (Rigakos & Ozcan, 2014; Seigel, 2018). Ultimately, Neocleous (2000) notes that pacification is a process where unruly populations accept an ideological domination from an oppressive state without calling for violence. However, the state at times displays its potential to dominate by force to remind newly subjects that the

peaceful way is the superior choice. It is here that the police power is used as a political tool to fabricate social order (Neocleous, 2000) and providing the public with a sense of security for the agenda of colonial enterprise such as capital accumulation.

Thus, pacification projects are inherently destructive and productive, seeking the destruction of any existing order and the implementation of a new one with the use of soft approaches against subjects refusing to yield. Regardless of failed attempts in Vietnam, however, counterinsurgency projects have meshed into police practices subsequently used throughout the war on drugs (Williams, 2011). For example, the DEA recruited soldiers returning from Vietnam to fulfill tasks that required similar skills used in Vietnam. This includes transitioning helicopter pilots from dropping napalm bombs in Vietnam, to spraying herbicides throughout Mexican drug fields as a part of Nixon's "war on drugs" (Linnemann, 2016; Frydl, 2013). While the marijuana fields were an immediate cash crop for the poor people of the Sierra Madre region, preventing them from further flourishing ceased any opportunities for abrupt peasant revolutions that resisted state domination (Frydl, 2013). Wall and Linnemann (2014) use this concept of pacification regarding the "war on cameras" as a response to dominate the aesthetic visual of police power. For these two, anyone recording the police poses a challenge to the state's right to control its own image and is thereby deemed a threat (Wall & Linnemann, 2014). Following Wall and Linnemann's theoretical framework, we can say that BWCs can be seen as a technology of police reform, promising to make police transparent and accountable. More specifically, we can see how the image provided by BWCs can undermine perspectives outside of

officers involved in critical incidents and seeks to disavow state violence by creating a limited narrative of how to understand police work. However, in the context of the history of police reform, and the doubts raised by Wall and Linnemann regarding efficacy of the image to arrest police violence, we might even more skeptically view BWCs not only as another example in a long line of police reforms, but also as a pacification method that relies upon the notion of visual truth. Even more critically then, we might argue that BWCs are not only a form of pacification that employs the visual, but also by creating a specific, approved vision of policing, a method pacify the visual field.

Visuality

As Susan Sontag (1977) notes, the images we register are subject to interpretation based upon the viewers ideology. In this case, where the police are fundamental to maintaining capitalist order (Neocleous, 2000), it could ultimately leave BWC visual evidence to perceive the officer's perspective as the truthful. As other scholars have also noted (see also Barthes, 1978; Sekula, 1986; Sontag, 1977), the camera also functions to dehumanize the powerless, however, only through the work of ideology. As Judith Butler articulates on the framing of war, the images provided to the public are actively interpreted based on how we understand who we are fighting against (Butler, 2009). And while the state is allegedly securing capitalist order through the police power, this leaves BWC evidence with limited interpretations and deems anyone in sight of an officer as a potential threat to security.

And ultimately, as Philip Jones and Claire Wardle (2010) note, photographs are only interpreted in the way in which the dominant ideology allows. This could make it difficult to challenge the states perspective captured from an officers BWC with it existing within a capitalist society that affirms the police power. This could arguably categorize BWC visual evidence along with legal images, which according to Katherine Biber (2007) “purport to tell the truth” (2007, pg. 5). And while the link between photography and criminology exist within the realms of pseudo sciences like phrenology and physiognomy (Sekula, 1986), we should remain cautious that BWC visual evidence could instead solidify the disadvantaged as a criminalized other. Visuality then, regarding BWCs, can be seen as understanding the state’s role in boosting its legitimacy by demonstrating its role in fighting crime to maintain order. Likewise, as Mirzeoff (2011a) notes, by naturalizing its power, the state determines what is (un)seeable to the public. Schept (2016) further articulates Mirzeoff’s argument that visibility is comprised of classification, separation, and aestheticization, in which the state creates a hegemonic “common sense” of how we understand its history. Thus BWC visual evidence could likely work in a way that disavows the states use of violence that preserves the police institution and even greater, capitalist order (Mirzeoff, 2011b; Neocleous, 2000), or in the words of Schept (2016, pg. 3), “the quotidian violence underwriting authority is made illegible and unseeable” through the very technology designed for increased transparency.

III. Methods

A non-probability sampling method, or a purposive theoretical method was used to gather data for this study. This method was utilized as it was necessary to have a sample with similar characteristics. I draw data from eight national organizations and attendant policy documents focusing on police reform, specifically addressing BWCs and their potential for increasing transparency and accountability, and hence legitimacy, as the best method to reign in police violence. In doing an analysis, any information that pertained to “body-worn camera, transparency, accountability, and police perspective”, was extracted from the following documents:

- President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing. (2015). Final report of the President’s task force on 21st century policing. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.
- Miller, L., & Toliver, J. & Police Executive Research Forum. (2014). Implementing a body-worn camera program: Recommendations and lessons learned. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.
- NYPD completes rollout of body-worn cameras to all officers on patrol (New York City Police Department, 2019). Retrieved from <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/news/pr0306/nypd-completes-rollout-body-worn-cameras-all-officers-patrol#/0>
- Mather, K. (2018, March 20). LAPD to reverse policy and make body camera, patrol car videos public. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-lapd-video-release-20180320-story.html>
- NAACP Criminal Justice Department. (2016). Pathways to Police Reform Community Mobilization Toolkit. Retrieved from <https://www.naacp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Toolkit.pdf>

- ACLU. (2016). Police body-worn cameras: how to do it right in Massachusetts. Retrieved from <https://www.aclum.org/sites/default/files/wpcontent/uploads/2016/07/BWC-ACLUM-Position-6-23-16.pdf>
- Laney, T., & Bonsu, J. (n.d.). Agenda to keep us safe. Retrieved from <https://agendatobuildblackfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/BYP100-Agenda-to-Keep-Us-Safe-AKTUS.pdf>
- Campaign Zero (n.d.). Body Cams/ Film the Police. Retrieved from <https://www.joincampaignzero.org/film-the-police>

Once identified, I read each document thoroughly several times, noting key suggestions related to the use of BWCs as I read. Following the initial read, I open-coded the material paying attention to the language stakeholders used to advocate for the use of BWC. From this I developed the following themes: transparency, accountability, and photographic truth. Below is an analysis of the themes, demonstrating how police reform and BWCs as a technology of truth, overlap and undergird policing's aim of pacification.

IV. Analysis

The analysis revealed several key themes used to argue for BWCs. The first is transparency, which means that the police institution will operate under less secrecy and allow the public access to information regarding practices and procedures and involving them in police affairs. One example is creating time for public hearings on suggestions for policy improvements. The second is accountability, which was anything that pertained to officers or civilians being responsible and liable to discipline for their actions. Last is the image as truth, which included anything that discussed BWCs visual evidence as an objective truth that could resolve complaints or misconduct. This also included anything that deemed the perspective of state equipped BWCs as superior to outside perspectives. It is argued from a theoretical perspective that police reform such as BWCs are part of a pacification project seeking to create a mystification over a dysfunctional police institution and promising to increase transparency and accountability as a way of boosting professionalism.

Transparency

Under the Department of Justice, the office of Community Oriented Policing Services (C.O.P.S) is responsible for distributing and monitoring funds to determine the best policing practices relying heavily on community trust to facilitate the daily tasks of the police. In the third chapter of *Implementing a body worn camera program: recommendations and lessons learned* (Miller, et al., 2014) C.O.P.S makes recommendations that were developed from speaking to several police chiefs and

officers regarding their experience with BWCs. It is also noted that while results in different locations may vary, there are still general recommendations that could improve citizen and police interactions. One suggestion is to make officers equipped with BWCs easily identifiable. This allows for the public to set self-expectations on how to behave around officers that are recording. It is further suggested that officers being equipped with BWCs should be prioritized for those who most often spend time with the public. In addition, C.O.P.S suggests that the times and places that BWCs could be used by the police should be made public, allowing civilians to know when they are subject to the camera. This reflects concern for invading the public's privacy. As stated in the report:

Policies should clearly state which personnel are assigned or permitted to wear body-worn cameras and under which circumstances. (Miller, et al., 2014, pg. 38).

By limiting the extensive use of BWCs to specific police practices, the public is assured that surveillance is not an underlying objective. This also allows the public to be self-policed, as they would now know why they would be subjected to the camera. The police projects material changes made to boost transparency should then be understood as trying to convince the public to trust and be compliant with the police and that BWCs are a feasible way to reigning in police misconduct. Aspiring the public to accept their domination and state controlment by agreeing to set police practices, however, can interpreted as pacification that also aims at disavowing police violence.

The LAPD's Board of Police Commissioners are responsible for making sure that civilian voices are heard. In a formal hearing to discuss BWC policy, the Board

unanimously decided that the former policy prohibiting the publicizing of dash-cam and BWC recordings was obsolete and required changes. In hopes of setting a new precedent for police practices and an effort influence other police departments, the new policy requires recordings of “critical incidents” to be made public within forty-five days. According to the Los Angeles Times (Mather, 2018), the Commission’s Vice President Matt Johnson, felt that the use of BWCs could build public trust by providing evidence necessary for investigating incidents involving an officer. The visual evidence, which is ostensibly an objective truth, could then be used to resolve differences between an officer and a civilian. As Johnson states,

I think this will go a long way in helping build trust through a significant increase in transparency. (Mather, 2018, pg. 4).

Commission vice president Matt Johnson’s comment during the meeting regarding BWC policies reflects his unconditional support and trust in BWCs as a repairing mechanism for the havoc in the police institution. For example, “I think this will go a long way” (Mather, 2018, pg. 4), reflects how police reform instead calcifies the police institution’s existence. Further, “helping build trust” reflects BWCs potential to regaining community trust that will facilitate continuing the police project. And “through a significant increase in transparency”, the public can once again trust the police and allow them to witness the “truth” when skepticism rises.

We can see here how the diminishing levels of community trust are again heavily considered and failure to address the issue could lead to greater institutional challenges. This attempt at regaining public trust should be interpreted as no other than

a pacification project seeking to win the hearts and minds of the public so that they may accept being controlled and dominated by the same institution they were once skeptical of. As Correia and Wall note (2018), police reform, and in this case BWCs, pacify the public into accepting state domination by creating material changes to the police institution that may distance itself from violence and appear more professionalized.

Police Commissioner James O'Neill acting as head of the NYPD endorsed the New York Appellate Court's decision to make BWC and dash-cam recordings public. This can be seen as an attempt to boost community trust that facilitates police practices by stating that information will be openly provided. This decision met resistance from New York's largest police union, the Police Benevolent Association, who firmly believed that implementing BWCs too quickly could be problematic. Commissioner O'Neill responded by saying,

This ruling is an important step forward for transparency and affirms what the NYPD believes. (Sisak, 2019, pg. 2).

Police commissioners have continuously preserved the police institution by presenting BWCs as a feasible way to boost transparency. It further creates an opportunity for the public to spectate the supposed truth of the police project and the hardships faced by the police. This is an opportunity for the police institution to allow the public to gain an understanding of police tasks that produce safety and security. In doing so, the public becomes sympathetic for police officers and fail to consider that violence is a long existing systemic issue. It should now be understood that BWC reform theoretically pacifies the public and polices them through consent.

Public trust has long been crucial in developing police legitimacy and is more important when maintaining a long-term trust that will diminish the likelihood of needing future reform. Perhaps this led former President Barack Obama to issue the President's Task Force on 21st century policing which provides recommendations seeking to improve the current state of police practices. One recommendation made by the President's Task force on 21st Century policing is the need to transform the police culture into one that embraces public support. This recommendation provides an opportunity for the police institution "to build trust and legitimacy" in neighborhoods apathetic to police practices. As stated in recommendation 1.3 of the report,

Law enforcement agencies should establish a culture of transparency and accountability in order to build public trust and legitimacy. (President's Task Force on 21st century policing, 2015, pg. 12).

This recommendation implies that the current police culture lacks transparency, and that BWCs could rectify the issue. Boosting transparency and accountability -often a part of police reform- through BWCs instead pacifies the public by creating the idea of a professionalized police force that can provide facts of critical incidents that help understand police actions. If the public can witness the truth for themselves and learn to sympathize for individual officers acting in good faith, even if violently, then reformists hope that such material changes are enough to defuse institutional challenges that diminish police legitimacy.

The ACLU's goal is to preserve individual rights and liberties for all people, yet they most often favor police reform that affirms an institution that has historically

oppressed minorities. The ACLU states in their policy model (ACLU, 2016) that it is crucial to include a public hearing process for reform policies that will address community issues. As stated in the document,

body-worn camera policies should be shaped and approved through a public process, allowing community stakeholders to address local concerns (ACLU, 2016, pg. 1).

Here we can see how the ACLU is similarly complicit in securing the police institution's existence. Rather than further challenging the policer power, the ACLU informs the public that their voices can create social change and to once again place their trust in the police. Once again, the public is involved in standardizing policies and procedures for BWCs that are meant to reign in police violence in exchange for submitting to state domination. Such recommendations made should then theoretically be understood as pacification projects that surreptitiously seek creating docile bodies and eliminating the state needing violence to obtain control. However, the ACLU is not alone in articulating recommendations that have sought to professionalize BWCs to obtain public trust.

Even more critical groups such as BYP 100, which is composed of African American youth seeking empowerment and freedom from state oppression, have similar approaches to standardizing BWCs as state organizations have had. In *Agenda to keep us safe* (Laney & Bonsu, n.d.), BYP 100 makes general policy recommendations seeking to eliminate African Americans from being targeted by state institutions like prisons and the police. Moreover, BYP 100 is critical of how the police are increasingly militarized and how the police power has controlled minorities. As a result of the

ongoing police fatal shootings, poor communities have become more apathetic to police practices. This intensified the demands for reform to bolster the dwindling levels of police legitimacy. For example, followed by the killing of Michael Brown was a petition to the White House for the Mike Brown Law that would require officers at all jurisdictional levels to be equipped with BWCs to increase transparency (Laney & Bonsu, n.d.). And although there is some benefit to surveilling the police, BYP 100 notes the caveat of BWCs possibly invading the public's privacy. Perhaps this inspired BYP 100's recommendation which would require limiting BWCs for officers who are easily identifiable and inferring to the public that their use is strictly for police practices and not a surreptitious act of surveillance. As stated in the report,

Limit cameras to uniformed officers and marked vehicles, so people know what to expect. Officers who cannot be clearly identified as law enforcement should not have cameras. (Laney & Bonsu, n.d., pg. 14).

While BYP 100 is critical of institutions like the police that have historically oppressed Black youth, their recommendations in securing the police project should not be overlooked as a pacification project. Rather than seeking the abolition of the police institution, BYP 100 finds that the immediate material changes made to the police are an appropriate response to the pre-existing issue of police violence. More specifically, this seeks to turn Black youth into docile bodies that accept being policed by the state and defuse police criticism and conversations discussing inherent flaws to the police project.

Associates of the Black Lives Matter Movement and other activist groups have mobilized and demanded an end to systemic oppression of African Americans through Campaign Zero. Under this campaign there are ten proposals made that could arguably reign in police violence, although not eliminate it. One recommendation that focuses on needing to film the police demands that police officers should wear BWCs and be prohibited from preventing civilians from recording them. Campaign Zero also recommends that there be an external storage for camera recordings that will ensure the public that the police cannot tamper with collected evidence. As the group recommends,

body and dash cam footage to be stored externally and ensure district attorneys and civilian oversight structures have access to the footage. (Campaign Zero, n.d., pg. 2).

However, implementing BWC policies that demand externally storing data fails to address quotidian police violence. Such recommendations may be presented as a great solution at face value, yet their material changes still preserve the police institution and fail to criticize how violence has long been a part of the police project. Thus, critical groups like Campaign Zero as well as others who endorse BWCs may not be done so nefariously. Their actions from a larger and theoretical perspective, however, unintentionally reaffirm the police project that secures state domination.

Lastly, in the “Pathways to police reform community mobilization kit” (2016), the NAACP articulates the importance of building a climate of trust between the public and the police by implementing reform that boosts transparency and accountability. This in turn preserves an institution that has long countered their goal of reaching equality for all people. Given the preexisting tensions between poor communities and

the police, the NAACP recommends that the community should participate in addressing issues regarding police misconduct and ensure that they are invested in disciplining officers. This creates a façade of police values that affirm public transparency allowing the public to participate in disciplining “bad cops.” As stated in the report,

An independent civilian review board is necessary to ensure that the community is engaged in addressing police misconduct (NAACP Criminal Justice Department, 2016, pg. 11).

Including the community in the disciplinary process for police misconduct affirms their role in deterring future altercations creating an empowerment feeling. This may satisfy the public’s urges to be provided with a professionalized police institution, however, it also pacifies them by promising that material changes like BWCs can improve the police project by distancing it from the use of violence. By further increasing oversight the public is left with less reasons to question the police institution and instead accept it as a natural part of life. Arguably, transparency is one logic used by state and non-state organizations to articulate the benefits of BWCs and their ability in providing the truth, which are instead a project of pacification that bring the public to come to terms with state domination.

Accountability

Although transparency has worked to build community trust, it is more effective when partnered with the logic of accountability. If the larger society feels that the police operate under impunity, then it would make sense as to why BWCs are accepted by the public as a means of hindering police violence. Officers held accountable and

disciplined however great it may sound, still limits critical challenges relating to BWCs and their limited ability to curtail misconduct rather than eradicating it. Increasing accountability through BWCs is arguably another logic used to pacify the public by promising “bad cops” will be disciplined, rather than furthering discussions relating to the systemic violence existent in the police project.

The killing of Michael Brown as well as many others intensified the preexisting tensions between communities and the police. This has resulted in reduced levels of police legitimacy that could arguably hinder police tasks. The President’s Task Force notes that the previous wrongs by the police have a damning effect on building community trust. Thus, accountability that stems from the truth fabricated by the BWC is ostensibly a feasible way that the slightest response to the inherent issues of the police project, shielding itself from further scrutiny. As stated in recommendation 1.2 of the report,

Law enforcement agencies should acknowledge the role of policing in past and present injustice and discrimination and how it is a hurdle to the promotion of community trust (President’s task force on 21st century policing, 2015, pg. 12).

This report suggests that the admissions of past wrongs functions as a reminder of the lack of accountability that police officers have had and that this approach is the beginning to winning the ‘hearts and minds’ of skeptical community members. However, the recognition of injustice along with the failure to provide significant changes creates a meaningless indication and should instead be interpreted as a method

towards achieving an ideological pacification instead of addressing systemic issues in the police institution.

In addition to condoning the Court's decision on making police recordings public, the NYPD decided to make the largest deployment of BWCs in history and equipped all their officers with a device (New York City Police Department, 2019). Perhaps this precedent was set to influence other departments to follow their example of increasing police accountability. Consider Commissioner O'Neill's statement on BWCs and their benefits to building communication between the police and the public.

Body-worn cameras enhance the safety and accountability of the dedicated men and women of the NYPD while improving their ability to ensure public safety. (New York City Police Department, 2019, pg. 1).

While still providing accountability, BWCs visual evidence is said improve public safety, or as Neocleous (2000) states, the fabrication of social order. By simply providing visual evidence, BWCs are presented as a feasible way of eliminating state violence and, hence boosting professionalism. In exchange, the public is expected to trust the evidence provided and once again disavow state violence and submit to state control. Thus, by providing a visual evidence that promises accountability, the public is one step closer to pacification.

In addition, an increasing number of police departments that have experimented with BWCs have arguably built towards a consensus that they are a practical solution to the inherent pitfalls of the police projects. Routinizing the use of BWCs would now leave few reasons as to why an officer could justify his or her failure to active the

device. However, due to human error, one recommendation C.O.P.S. makes is to require officers to articulate why they failed to activate the BWCs (Miller, et al., 2014).

As stated in the report,

Officers who wear body-cameras should be required to articulate on camera or in writing their reasoning if they fail to record an activity that is required by department policy to be recorded (Miller, et al., 2014, pg.39).

Creating a safety net for police departments and officers who fail to activate the devices is arguably another method used to continue the pacification process. Here the police institution is given the benefit of the doubt of still being able to justify police actions when failing to provide the truth. This should be considered as an empty gesture made to convince the public that enforcing discipline will remind officers to follow BWC policies in return for the public's trust. Through such gestures however, the police institution wins the hearts and minds of an untrusting public and in return continues the police project. The ACLU also makes recommendations for best practices, such as limiting an officer's discretion on the use of BWCs to obtain the highest levels of accountability (ACLU, 2016). Having to record under certain circumstances again ensures the ability to provide an objective truth for incidents involving officers. Such changes could be used to reflect race-neutral practices and undermine the inherent systemic issues of the police project. As stated in their document,

Body cameras don't advance accountability if police can turn them off any time they want. Officers should record when responding to a call for service or any investigative encounter. That includes stops, frisks, searches, arrests, consensual interviews and searches, enforcement actions of all kinds, and any encounter that becomes hostile or violent (Police body-worn cameras, 2016, pg. 2).

Here we can see how the ACLU is once again complicit in further calcifying the police institution by embracing BWC policies that may boost accountability. Rather than discussing critical challenges such as state violence used through a variety of practices, choosing to always record demonstrates to the public the willingness of holding officers accountable. This instead pacifies the public by creating a more professionalized police institution that no longer acts with impunity and is hence trustworthy. Thus, the public goes back to being policed and discontinue their critical institutional challenges. Campaign Zero further recommends developing and introducing a disciplinary matrix seeking to penalize officers who fail to record civilian interactions. this practice in theory should deter officers from failing to use their BWCs when ordered to. This could ensure that officers or police departments who find it problematic in following procedures will be reprimanded and enforce using the BWCs. As stated on their site,

include a disciplinary matrix clearly defining consequences for officers who fail to adhere to the agency's body camera policy (Campaign Zero, n.d., pg. 3).

We can see how Campaign Zero's efforts unintentionally preserve the police project by setting standards that will allegedly hold officers accountable for their wrongdoings. And that using BWCs will prevent misconduct from spreading. However, this fails to consider how it still seeks preserving an institution that has historically oppressed minorities that Campaign Zero is standing up for. Arguably, choosing to preserve the police institution is no different to pacifying victims of state violence. The NAACP further notes the necessity of having accountability to build community trust.

Police officers acquitted in the past for police misconduct has left skepticism in the public that the police operate under impunity. And that using BWCs can be used to reign in police violence by ensuring swift prosecutions shortly after critical incidents. Thus the NAACP affirms that boosting accountability professionalizes the institution and finds the material changes sufficient. Thus, accountability is used to boost police legitimacy which in turn preserves and shields the institution from political scrutiny. As stated in the report,

In addition to ensuring that officers who kill without justification are successfully prosecuted, reforms need to hold officers and police departments accountable for their misconduct short of using deadly force (Pathways to police reform, 2016, pg. 5).

Under the auspices of accountability, BWCs are presented as a promising tool to combat police violence and create opportunities to discipline officers as well. The issue however is that police violence will likely to continue regardless of boosting police accountability and should instead be interpreted as a pacification project seeking docile bodies that accept their control by the state through the police power. We can see then how accountability is simply another logic used by state and non-state organizations to articulate BWCs abilities in providing the truth that can be used to correct misconduct. Their ability however in producing the truth and holding officers accountable should be viewed as a way which the police institution places responsibility on officers for their actions and fails to address its own systemic issues. As a result the increasing accountability with BWCs does discipline some bad officers but it also dominates the

police visual that makes the institution seem professionalized and worth keeping around if material changes are made.

Image as truth

While BWCs can now be understood as reform efforts to boost transparency and accountability, and ultimately arrest police misconduct, we can interpret BWCs visual evidence as the states effort to dominate and pacify its visuality and limiting how the public perceives state violence. This grants the state the prerogative to undermine any outside existing images of state violence that could defame the police institution. As Correia and Wall (2018) have noted, arguably reforms true purpose is to give the public a new and re-formed way of understanding police legitimacy, and what better way than the perspective of officers involved in critical incidents.

This in turn naturalizes state power by deeming the officer's point of view as truthful and any outside perspectives illegitimate and hence making police violence unseeable (Mirzoeff, 2011a). Thus by dominating its visual, the police institution further calcifies its existence by distinguishing itself from its inherent use of violence and presents itself as a civil and indispensable institution. The office of C.O.P.S suggests that police officers should be prohibited from using their own recording devices and be limited only to BWCs provided by police departments. This approach embraces the objectivity of the truth provided by the state by diminishing any possibility for officers to fabricate any visual evidence of their own. The state in this case shields itself from its own working members to distance itself from political scrutiny. As stated in the report,

Agencies should not permit personnel to use privately-owned body-worn cameras while on duty. (Miller, et al., 2014, pg. 38).

By prohibiting officers from using their own devices, the state ensures that only its desired visuality is portrayed and that officers alone do not dictate what is considered an acceptable image of police work. Take the argument made by VanDyke's Lawyer, Daniel Herbert, who stated that no perspective is relevant regardless of how close it may be, because it fails to capture the perspectives of the officer involved. This in turn affirms the states prerogative in dominating its visual that is used to distance the police institution from violence. And although the recommendations made by the NAACP are not intentionally set to bolster the police project, they perfectly instill the public with pacification by promising that the material changes made will combat police violence. thus, police reform advocating for BWCs is used to create an argument that promises distancing violence from police work. It also re-forms how the public understands police power (Correia & Wall, 2018) and how we should interpret it. For example, Commissioner O'Neill believes that it is beneficial to police and civilians alike for departments to release visual evidence captured on BWCs. Providing the truth to the public enables their ability to see firsthand the dangers the police face while maintaining peace and order, turning cops into heroes for their willingness to risk their lives for our safety.

Not only is the public entitled to this information, but this footage overwhelmingly shows just how brave, skilled and dedicated our cops are every single day in service of the people of New York City" (Sisak, 2019, pg. 2).

This narrative surreptitiously spreads police ideology by making the public sympathize for the hard work done by the police to maintain peace. It also mystifies the realities of police violence by focusing on the heroic officers and not the few bad cops. Commissioner O’Neill, who is presenting BWC visual evidence as representative of true police work, is arguably the only way that he along with the public could interpret it, given that we exist upon a hegemonic “common sense” that narrows the understanding of police work (Mirzoeff, 2011b). With the public now having a new understanding of the police, it is likely that could more easily be subject to state domination without using violence. The narrative used in the Task Force on 21st Century Policing relating to BWC visual evidence arguably reflects similar attempts to present the states visual as an objective truth. As stated in the report,

By documenting encounters between police and the public, BWCs can also be used to investigate and resolve complaints about officer-involved incidents (President’s Task Force on 21st century policing, 2015, pg. 31).

Rather than stating that any visual evidence can be used to resolve civilian complaints, the report suggests that BWCs specifically have the power to do so. By dominating and choosing how to present its visuality, the state can now distance police power from misconduct by using an approved image of policing to resolve critical incidents. Another issue however, as the report states, the goal from BWCs is simply to resolve complaints. Thus, the very same material changes that promised eliminating police misconduct by boosting transparency and accountability fail to address the deep-rooted issues of state violence. As we can see, state organizations recommendations

deliberately shield the police institution by advocating for police reform that will reign in police violence by increasing accountability. However, they should simply be taken as empty gestures that are made to pacify the public masses and subject them to state control.

Non-state organizations similarly narrate BWCs visual evidence as being truthful and a feasible solution to police violence. Perhaps the NAACP supports using visual evidence because it has been used in the past to hold officers accountable. Doing so creates the opportunity for the public to disbelief that the police operate with impunity and are trustworthy. This would then make sense why the public would believe BWCs could reign in police misconduct directed towards people of color. As stated in the report,

Video footage of police shootings has illustrated graphically the complaints communities have been raising for years. Action on complaints of misconduct should not require video proof. However, body worn cameras and dashcams can be useful tools in ensuring transparency in law enforcement (NAACP Criminal Justice Department, 2016, pg. 8).

The NAACP states that because visual evidence has at times demonstrated the realities of police work in disadvantaged areas, it can now be used more efficiently through BWCs to hold officers accountable. As Mirzoeff (2011b) notes, visibility is the reproduction of state power, and by holding few officers accountable, the police project is secured while the material changes made are working accordingly. More importantly, because we are bounded within a dominant ideology (Jones & Wardle, 2010) that limits how we understand police reform, it could be difficult for the public to critique the

police project as trying to reach perfection. It is now made easier for the police institution to dominate its visuality through BWCs when non-state organizations like the NAACP choose to endorse reform, however, with the hopes of curtailing state violence. Campaign Zero similarly believes that because incidents pertaining to police violence have been exposed through BWCs, there is hope that they can be used to hold officers accountable. As stated in their site,

While they are not a cure-all, body cameras and cell phone video have illuminated cases of police violence and have shown to be important tools for holding officers accountable (Campaign Zero, n.d., pg. 1).

Here, I argue that although the efforts made by Campaign Zero to hold officers accountable is not intended to reaffirm police power, their narratives could be used by the state to demonstrate that even critical groups endorse the material changes made to the police. However, this further entrenches the police institution as it provides the state with the prerogative of controlling its visuality, can easily distance itself from violence, and deems what is an approved image of police work. Thus, a critical group that resists Black oppression advocating for police reform instead facilitates the pacification of the powerless.

V. Conclusion

While the focus here are the problems of police reform, the deeper analysis relies on BWCs and their ability to function as a project of pacification. The material changes made such as BWCs, are said to bolster police transparency and accountability by providing what is said to be truthful visual evidence of critical incidents. However this should be interpreted as a political tactic used to professionalize the police institution by presenting itself as responsive to misconduct. While violence is inherent to the police project, it seems more logical to the institution to treat few officers as scapegoats if it means further entrenching itself. Just as indigenous populations were subjected to Spanish Law through nonlethal approaches, their ideological domination diminished the need to use force and produced compliant, docile bodies. Thus while state violence has not abated, this creates demands for material changes to be made that further professionalize the police but modernize it as well. And in the age of technology, BWCs are the newest approach to police reform that are presented to the public as panacea to police misconduct by providing truthful evidence that holds officers accountable. However, officers held accountable should be taken as an empty gesture, as it fails to consider the police projects inherent use of violence that secures the capitalist enterprise and never really does eradicate police misconduct.

Thus, state and non-state organizations efforts in endorsing BWCs for potentially arresting misconduct should be interpreted as the state achieving pacification through its visual. For example, a wholesale adoption of BWCs would imply that there

is trust in them to actually provide accountability. In doing so, the public is giving credibility to the visual received by the state during critical incidents. That alone should indicate that once again, state power creates a hegemonic “common sense” (Mirzoeff, 2011b) that authorizes its approved image of police work. Instead, as Mirzoeff (2011a) notes, the state naturalizes its power by deeming its point of view as the only legitimate source of facts. In dominating its visual, the police institution masks its use of force by showing the public the brave and risky work conditions that officers face when providing security. By advocating for police reform and specifically the use of BWCs which provide accountability, state and non-state organizations facilitate the pacification process by influencing the public into disavowing state violence in exchange for material changes. However, recall from the Laquan McDonald case that it often does not matter whether officers are held accountable or not if the violence will continue even after the legal settlements for victims’ families. What comes with reform then are simply empty gestures made from the police institution promise accountability through visual evidence in exchange for submission to state domination.

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