

# Demonizing the Police Breeds Lawlessness

By Thomas J. Lemmer | 15 September 2021

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The word “*demonize*” is defined as “*to turn into a demon or make demonlike.*”<sup>[1]</sup> No mortal has the power to actually “make” anyone else a demon. What mere mortals can do is to create a perception that someone or some group is, at their very core, “evil” and thereby “demonlike.” There is a long world history of demonization – a very long history. In its most extreme forms, it gives rise to the evils of concentration camps and mass executions. In lesser forms, it cripples the ability of the demonized group to interact with others in society. Once a group has been demonized, the normal protections of the law are removed. The members of a demonized group can be stripped of their civil rights, and relegated to the status of second-class citizens, or worse. But what follows when the police are demonized? The answer is – lawlessness.

## Demonization Versus Legitimacy

During the height of the civil unrest in 2020, “ACAB” (all cops are bast\*\*ds),<sup>[2]</sup> or “all cops are bad,” was a popular rallying cry. The slogan was chanted and spray-painted on police vehicles, buildings, and public monuments in many cities. The slogan advanced an “us versus them” view of policing, with the police in the “them” group. The view declared the police to be illegitimate, which placed “them” outside the community of “us.” When anarchists and others are able to co-opt community attitudes regarding police accountability, there should be great concern across the community.<sup>[3]</sup> By creating a narrative that the police are “them,” the demonization process can seek to convince the community that the police are a threat. If the police are viewed as a community threat, they cannot be trusted, and they must be tightly constrained, if not entirely abolished.<sup>[4]</sup>

Even vocal critics of the police speak of “police legitimacy.” Jonathan Blanks is an ardent police reform advocate. While Blanks seems to lay the burden of maintaining legitimacy on the police alone, he has identified legitimacy as the “most valuable” police department resource.<sup>[5]</sup> In modern times, the police are indispensable to public safety and maintaining a stable community. Therefore, if one is seeking to topple the social contract and structure, attacking police legitimacy is key. Those within the profession are keenly aware that it is essential for the police to be seen within the community as being legitimate. But such is an effort that is also impacted by elected officials, civic leaders, the media, and the community itself. Maintaining a strong police-community relationship is unquestionably a shared responsibility.<sup>[6]</sup>

While many continue to seek the demonization of the police, the nation’s death toll has risen. The weakening of the police-community bond that occurred in 2020 contributed to severe increases in violence, particularly in America’s major urban areas. So far in 2021, the crisis of crime and violence has continued.<sup>[7]</sup> Increasingly the nation is spiraling into lawlessness. Not everywhere, but in far too much of the country, particularly within the nation’s major cities. In Chicago, even before Labor Day 2021, the city had already greatly surpassed the full-year 2019 total of 495 murders. As of 5 September, the Chicago Police Department (CPD) reported the city had 538 murders year-to-date this year. With 538 murders to date, the city’s murder count is up 3.4% from the 520 murders by the same date in 2020, **and** up 55.9% from the 345 murders through 5 September in 2019.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Lawlessness and the Spread of Violence in Chicago

What those living in more peaceful neighborhoods and communities should not forget is, like a cancer, left unaddressed, lawlessness tends to spread to previously unaffected areas. In Chicago for example, like all major urban areas, crime and violence are not evenly distributed geographically across all of the city’s neighborhoods. In examining 9-1/2 years’ worth of murder data for the 77 community areas within Chicago, this introductory point is starkly made. In the Austin community, on the city’s westside, from January 2006 thru June 2015, there were 324 documented

murders. Whereas in the Mount Greenwood community, on the city's southwestern edge, there were no murders – none in the near decade-long period. [9] However, coinciding with the efforts to demonize the police that intensified during 2020, violent crime has become more frequent in the quieter areas of Chicago, including its central business district.

In the once fashionable areas of the city's central downtown and entertainment district, mob-like street assaults, street robberies, and carjackings are a widely-discussed problem. In recent days, the CPD has increased the number of police officers dedicated specifically to address carjackings. [10] Downtown area violence in just the last few weeks has included: the daytime murder of a Chase Bank employee in the lobby of the bank; [11] the shooting of a Chicago Transit Authority bus driver on the block of the city's cultural center; [12] as well as frequent evening and night-time street violence. [13]

The lawlessness, for those not directly victimized or disgusted by it, has even held an air of street entertainment for large groups who frequently roam the city's late-night streets. A video first obtained by *CWB Chicago* highlighted a particularly lawless incident that occurred at about 1:30 a.m. on Saturday, 29 August 2021. Two men were beaten and robbed along the city's famed State Street, *"that great street."* The incident played out in front of numerous spectators and passers-by, and then spilled into the middle of the street blocking traffic. Adding to the lawless feel of the scene, the video also recorded a carnival-like atmosphere of several women taking the opportunity to "twerk" in public – within 10 to 20 feet of the attack. Even as the victims were left motionless in the street, many in the crowd continued to be entertained.

Chicago Alderman Brendan Reilly, whose ward covers a key portion of the city's central business district, has been vocal about downtown looting, robberies, and street violence. [14] Following the State Street incident, he called on the city's mayor to do more to address downtown safety. In a letter to Mayor Lori Lightfoot, dated 30 August 2021, Reilly expressed community concerns about the 28 August street violence caught on surveillance video. He also highlighted several incidents of recent downtown gunfire. He wrote: *"The lawlessness and violence in River North is getting out of hand and is now predictable on a weekly basis. Local residents and tourists are scared to be in these areas after dark and these latest incidents further reinforce that idea."* [15]

Even as a sense of lawlessness has increased downtown and in other areas of the city, the rise in violence in an urban area is always most evident in the areas already suffering with violence. They are the communities that are most in need of a strong police-community relationship, because it is that very relationship that is vital to increased public safety. As such, lawlessness is most prevalent in those communities where the relationship with the police is weakest. Clearly, those who live in such communities are keenly aware of this reality.

### Impact Most Where Already Worst

Over this past Labor Day weekend, there was no relief from the weekend violence that regularly plagues several Chicago communities. Before the weekend was over, at least 65 people had been shot in the city and six murdered. At least eight of the shooting victims were under age 18, including a 12-year-old boy and 15-year-old girl who were just steps from a westside "back to school" event. [16] On the city's southside during the holiday weekend, Mychal Moultry, Jr., a four-year-old boy visiting from Alabama was shot and killed. Mychal was inside a residence when gunfire erupted outside. Two bullets shattered a window and struck the four-year-old in the head. The child's mother, Angela Gregg, commented in a press conference that when she comes to visit Chicago her family *"does not say have fun; they say be safe; be careful."* With the murder of her son, there is yet one more reason for families to caution their loved ones to "be careful" when in Chicago. [17]

Relators operating in urban areas track violence as closely as they track access to quality schools. In July 2020, a Chicago relator, Gary Lucido, compiled the murder rates per 100,000 people in Chicago's 77 community areas for the prior 12 months – July 2019 through June 2020. It bears noting that violence in America jumped dramatically following the 25 May 2020 incident involving George Floyd and Minneapolis police. In the run up to policing after Minneapolis, Lucido determined that the murder rate per 100k people in Chicago's Mount Greenwood community was zero. The

rate in the city's Austin community was 63.5 per 100k.[18] Nationally, the FBI's Uniformed Crime Reporting data nearly thirteen times higher than the national rate.

CBS News reported on the murder rates in the "deadliest" U.S. cities.[20] They found that in 2019, Chicago ranked as the city with the 28<sup>th</sup> highest citywide murder rate, at 18.3 per 100k. Nationally, Peoria, Illinois ranked 15<sup>th</sup>, with a rate of 22.5 per 100k. As such, those fleeing violence in Chicago would be wise to choose carefully where in Peoria they were looking to relocate. Baltimore, which experienced widespread anti-police rioting following the death of Freddy Gray in April of 2015, ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in 2019, with a rate of 58.3 per 100k. The American city with the highest murder rate in 2019 was St. Louis, Missouri, with 64.5 murders per 100k people. It bears noting that St. Louis is the major city closest to Ferguson, Missouri. We cannot forget that Ferguson was the location of the Michael Brown incident in August of 2014. The wave of anti-police rhetoric following that incident served as the foundation for the well-coordinated anti-police movement observed in 2020.

Returning to the point that lawlessness harms already suffering communities most, a review of a second Lucido analysis published in July 2021 is also noteworthy. This timeframe for this second analysis comprised a period when anti-police sentiments were particularly intense. For the period of July 2020 through June 2021, the Austin community had a murder rate of 82.2 per 100k, which was up 29.4% from the year prior, when the rate was 63.5 per 100k. In West Garfield Park, with fewer residents than Austin, the murder rate for the twelve months ending in June 2021 was 225.3 per 100k. This astronomically high rate placed West Garfield Park as the community with the highest murder rate in the city. This community's already alarming murder rate worsened over the two twelve-month periods. For the period ending June 2021, the year-to-year change in the murder rate in West Garfield Park was up 42.8%, from the 157.8 per 100k rate during the twelve months ending in June 2020.

Over those twelve months, there were various levels of demonization of policing in Chicago. Protests, vocal criticism, tepid support from key elected officials, a drumbeat of negative media coverage, and expanded and critical monitoring by a host of entities. Through all of that, the violence in the city has thus far remained at levels far above where they were in 2019. In addition to murders being up 55.9% from 2019, shooting incidents were up 9.4% from 2020, and up 65.8% from 2019. As of 5 September, thus far this year, there have been 2,415 shootings, 207 more than at the same point in 2020, and 959 more than 2019.[21] Such is not to say that seeking always to improve policing is not a worthy objective. It is to say, demonization of the police harms public safety.

### What Drives the Narrative?

The *Wall Street Journal* has reported that the spike in violence during 2020 occurred disproportionately in the poorest, Black and Hispanic neighborhoods of America's urban areas that had a long history of violence.[22] Such was the case in Chicago, New York, St. Louis, Philadelphia, Minneapolis and many other cities across America. We also know that violence levels in these communities are at their lowest when: (a) the police-community relationship is the strongest, and (b) the police are proactively focused on addressing the unlawful activities of the criminal gangs, and other drivers of violence, in the areas where violence is most pronounced.[23]

This reality also provides an additional foothold for those seeking to demonize the police, as police responses are drawn first and foremost to address violence. The increased proximity to violence poses both physical and mission-related risks for police officers. If crime and violence are disproportionately present (which we know they are), are not the responses from the police inevitably going to be disproportional as well? The answer, of course, is "yes." Creating false narratives around this reality has helped to create suspicion about the police within the community that is useful in the demonization process.

The explosion of violence that followed the Floyd incident occurred in tandem with a dramatic rise in anti-police rhetoric. The rhetoric went far beyond the calls for justice relative to a single officer or department. Those demands were utilized by extremists to foster a much wider demonization effort relative to the entire policing profession. Then U.S. Attorney General William Barr also concluded that the protests had been "*hijacked by violent radical elements.*"[24] Not only did the movements to "abolish" or "defund the police" fail to enhance public safety, they did not find their greatest support among those living with pervasive community violence. The Rasmussen polling firm

released survey findings in June 2021 that reflected on the 2020 anti-police protests. More than twice as many of those surveyed indicated the protests “hurt public safety,” rather than helped.<sup>[25]</sup>

The community is right to expect **both** constitutional policing that is respectful of civil liberties **and** public safety. Support for efforts seeking to cripple the ability of the police to respond to crime and violence tend to build first from a combination of activists, anarchists, radicals, political operatives, opportunists, the naïve, and well-protected profiteers seeking to curry favor with the spirit of the age. In an analysis of the Antifa movement and its Marxist ideology, Soeren Kern identified law enforcement as a specific target of the group’s activities. He reported on a common Antifa tactic: “employ extreme violence and destruction of public and private property to goad the police into a reaction, which then ‘proves’ Antifa’s claim that the government is ‘fascist.’”<sup>[26]</sup> He further noted: “Antifa radicals increasingly are using incendiary events such as the death of George Floyd in Minnesota as springboards to achieve their broader aims.”<sup>[27]</sup> With each enflamed police-related tragic incident, the needs and desires for the community to reach consensus with its police on the way forward are further subverted to the detriment of the community.

### How Can Incendiary Incidents Be Assured?

Given that incendiary incidents are essential to enflaming anti-police sentiments within the larger community, how can those seeking to demonize the police ensure there will be such incidents. Such is easily orchestrated if the reality of the policing mission is pushed against an unattainable standard. We have seen the emergence of this approach, even as most observers have not yet drawn the connection. In the article “Tragedy-Free Policing, or Else: The Need for Critical Thinking,” published in the June 2021 issue of the *FOP Journal*, awareness on this emerging standard was raised. In that article the following insight was provided:

*What is “tragedy-free policing?” It is a worldview that the police must proceed without taking any actions that could cause harm, without using force, and without ever making a mistake. Using a baseball analogy, the standard seeks “no runs, no hits, no errors.” From this view, no one ever runs from the police, and if they do run, the police should not pursue after them, as even in foot pursuits some “harm” may occur. Second, no one should be forced to comply with any police order, seeking voluntary compliance is the only acceptable approach for the police. Third, all police actions must be error-free, without exception.*<sup>[28]</sup>

Such is an unattainable standard. As was described in the original article, policing is inherently wrapped in the perpetual vulnerability of tragedy. The very mission of policing has us sending our police officers into circumstances that are already tragic or at grave risk of quickly turning tragic. When tragedy has already occurred, we direct the police to respond to the aftermath. But fundamentally, policing is about public safety, and the community expectations are that the police will seek to prevent crime – particularly tragedy. We direct our police officers to respond to calls and observed circumstances, with the expressed purpose to address the potential or reality of tragedy. When tragedy is unfolding, the police are expected to take action to intervene.

This is the exact ground on which the police are the most vulnerable to taking actions that can quickly serve the interests of those seeking to demonize them. The police response must not only be just, and without any error or miscalculation, the response must also be nearly universally perceived as such. That is quite a challenge. As we all know, perceptions are greatly influenced by perspective, and they are vulnerable to manipulation. Providing the clarity that fosters police legitimacy is a community-wide responsibility. As such, it is essential that elected officials and civic leaders vocally reject efforts that weaken the police-community relationship. It is essential that they visibly demonstrate support for the police, as they fulfill their public safety mission. This is particularly essential when the police are thrust into the center tragic events.

### The Police are Not Evil

Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot made telling remarks following the 7 August 2021 murder of Chicago Police Officer Ella French, and the life-altering wounding of her partner Carlos Yanez, Jr. At a press conference the following morning, Mayor Lightfoot’s remarks included the following statement:

*“Of course, we have to continue the journey to achieve constitutional, accountable policing. That cannot be in debate at this point. But let me also reiterate, what I have said before, and what I know to be true. **The police are not our enemies** (emphasis added). They’re human. Just as we are. Flawed. Just as we are. But also risking their lives everyday for our safety and security. That reality became very real last night in an emergency room, amongst tears and fears from the finest and the most courageous people I know.”<sup>[29]</sup>*

The mayor’s remarks were appropriate to the moment. Yet the remarks also highlight that the impact of demonization on the police in Chicago was discernible by the mayor. There is no need to assemble the Chicago news media and spread the word that the police are not the enemy, unless the mayor was concerned that this view was held by at least some in the city.

To say that Ella French and Carlos Yanez, Jr. are not evil should be self-evident. They answered the call to serve the people of Chicago. They willingly served in the communities of Chicago that are suffering from the highest levels of violence. Officer Yanez was considering moving his young family into the very neighborhood in which he and Officer French were attacked.<sup>[30]</sup> Just weeks before her own murder, Officer French helped render aid to a one-month-old infant struck by gunfire, and she provided comfort to the infant’s mother, while they were sped to a trauma center. That child lived.<sup>[31]</sup>

Ella French and Carlos Yanez, Jr. performed their duties exactly how they were asked. They are not evil. They risked their lives, and they dedicated themselves to a profession sworn to confront evil. Officer French’s life was taken in this effort. Having suffered catastrophic injuries, the life of Officer Yanez has been changed forever. Thank God his life was spared. Officers French and Yanez are not the enemy, and neither are those officers with whom they share a uniform.

### The Way Forward

The way forward must be a proactive one. In this effort, it is essential for us not to be deceived by those who are seeking perpetual division for their own ideological and political purposes. When the police are one with the community, the community is safer, freer, more stable, and better positioned to help foster the improved wellbeing of the entire community. Those seeking and participating in police reform efforts must not lose sight of this reality. The community must reject the efforts to demonize the police. Police accountability efforts must distinguish between unintended or unavoidable tragedy, and true misconduct. As a community, we need our elected officials and civic leaders to foster unifying approaches that advance constitutional policing, reduce violence, address chronic crime conditions, improve public safety, protect victims, foster wellness, and enhance community support for the police.

Given that lawlessness follows when the police are demonized, the question the community should start asking is: *Who benefits from lawlessness?*

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<sup>[4]</sup> Thomas Lemmer, “The Importance of ‘Us,’ The Failure of Being Cast as ‘Them,’” *FOP Journal*, Feb 2021. Accessed 6 Apr 2021, <https://secure1776.us/our-media/articles/the-importance-of-us/>.

<sup>[5]</sup> Jonathan Blanks, “The Legitimacy Crisis in American Policing,” *The Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity*, 11 Jun 2020. Accessed 2 Apr 2021, <https://freopp.org/the-legitimacy-crisis-in-american-policing-24168d7a1cc0>.



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