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## ANOTHER VICTIM: THE CRAFT OF POLICING

***Ronald Greene succumbed to police abuse one year before George Floyd. How they perished was appallingly similar.***



*For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel.* “Let me see ‘em...let me see your [curse] hands...[curse]...” Louisiana State Trooper Dakota DeMoss’ body camera graphically captured what happened (and what was said) during the early morning hours of May 19, 2019 when he and a colleague forcefully extracted the driver of a recklessly-driven vehicle that crashed after a prolonged pursuit. (Click [here](#) for LSP’s video channel, [here](#) for the full bodycam video of the initial encounter and [here](#) for our edited clip of the arrest.)

Ronald Greene, 49 isn’t armed. Neither does he forcefully resist, at least in any conventional sense. But his confused mental state, clumsiness and immense size (shades of [George Floyd](#)) clearly irritate the



officers, and one promptly shoots him with a Taser. That rough handling – and virtually non-stop cursing – continues as troopers drag Mr. Greene from the car and place him on the ground, belly down. That’s when the impaled dart comes into view (left.) An



officer – according to [news reports](#), DeMoss – tells Mr. Greene to “put your hands behind your back, [curse]” but the scared, disoriented man seems unable to comply. Arms outstretched, he whimpers “I’m sorry.” After some blows and a long string of unproductive curses, a trooper delivers another jolt through the Taser (right). Mr.

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Greene continues whimpering and begging for mercy, but troopers ignore his protests and, handcuffs affixed, order him to lay on his stomach.

Unlike what happened to George Floyd, once Mr. Greene was handcuffed he wasn't constantly pressed into the ground. Still, troopers repeatedly warned him to stay on his stomach and occasionally applied force to that effect. Our top image, taken at 5:40 am, about twelve minutes into the encounter, depicts an officer pressing on Mr. Greene as he orders "don't you turn over, lay on your belly, lay on your belly" (click [here](#) for a brief video clip.) But a few moments later another bodycam video (click [here](#)) shows two troopers watching over Mr. Green as he partially sits up.

Many other aspects of this encounter resemble what happened to George Floyd. Troopers handled Mr. Greene very roughly, especially at first. They forcefully extracted him from his car, delivered multiple blows with their fists and jolted him repeatedly with a Taser. Mr. Greene, like Floyd, behaved oddly, mumbling supplications to Lord Jesus in a high-pitched tone of voice. As it turns out, he was also under the influence of a powerful drug: in his case, cocaine. Rough treatment, frail mental and physical health and chemical intoxication comprise the bedrock of the syndrome known as "[excited delirium](#)." A Minneapolis cop thought that it applied to George Floyd. Louisiana's Union Parish Coroner [reportedly identified it](#) as the underlying cause of Mr. Greene's death: "cocaine induced agitated delirium complicated by motor vehicle collision, physical struggle, inflicted head injury, and restraint."



Throughout the first fifteen minutes or so Mr. Greene was conscious and talkative. But as time passed he became unresponsive. This image, taken about 5:46 am, depicts troopers as they begin rendering aid. An ambulance was called. Unlike what happened to Mr. Floyd, troopers closely attended to Mr. Greene after his collapse (click [here](#) for a clip.) Alas, it proved too little, too late.

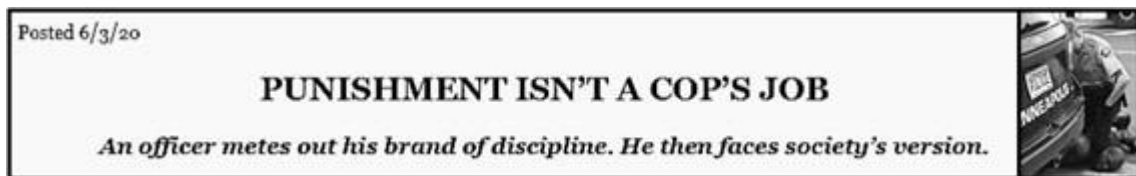
It's not that Mr. Greene shouldn't have been arrested. He was mentally and physically unwell, under the influence of a narcotic, and in no shape to drive. Mr. Greene reportedly ran a stop sign and a traffic light, and during the chase a trooper anxiously radioed that "we got to do something" as Mr. Greene's car was speeding down the "wrong side of the road" and "could kill somebody." Yet watch that video clip of the arrest. Mr. Greene's handling by the two troopers who first encountered him was abominable. Here's what one of these officers (we think, DeMoss) told another trooper by radio as an ambulance rushed Mr. Greene to the hospital (click [here](#) for the clip with audio):

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Well, I think this guy was drunk...and I think he was wet...and I beat the ever-loving ‘fuck out of him, choked him and everything else trying to get him under control...and we finally got him in handcuffs when [someone else] got there, and the sonofabitch was still fighting with me and still wrestling with me...gotta hold him down since he was spittin’ blood everywhere. And all of a sudden he just went limp. Yeah, I thought he was dead. We set him up real quick...he’s on an ambulance enroute to...and I’m haulin’ ass trying to catch up to them.

Tragically, the recipient of that transmission, Trooper Chris Hollingsworth, an 18-year veteran, [reportedly perished in an off-duty auto accident](#) “shortly after learning he was being fired for his role in Greene’s death.”

If all we expect from police is to handle recalcitrant persons however they wish, our “Selection and Training” section – indeed, our entire website – is superfluous. When it comes to the arrest of George Floyd and Ronald Greene, my non-police neighbors would have done better. Of course, so would most other cops. Officers run into clearly troubled characters such as Mr. Greene as a matter of course. And as a matter of course they apply patience and some good-natured persuasion to avoid needlessly turning to force. When involved in fraught encounters, most cops follow the rules of their intricate and demanding craft. They brush off intrusive thoughts such as anger and frustration because they know that getting emotional can poison their decisions. As we’ve said before, [there’s absolutely nothing new](#) about the trendy concept of “de-escalation”; cops who respect their craft – and we assume they’re in the vast majority – have faithfully practiced its precepts since the times of Robert Peel.



Yet cops *are* human, so exceptions keep popping up. Minneapolis was one. We quickly “diagnosed” ex-cop Chauvin’s actions as an effort to discipline and humiliate. It’s why [our essay](#), posted eleven days after the tragedy, was entitled as shown. What happened to Mr. Greene in Louisiana seems equally appalling. Whatever notions of “craft” the first officers on scene might have had were instantly extinguished by waves of anger.

But the troopers were experienced cops. This wasn’t their first pursuit. They weren’t assaulted or shot at. So why all the rage? In “[Angry Aggression Among Police Officers](#)” (*Police Quarterly*, March 2003) Sean P. Griffin and Thomas J. Bernard surmise that the

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chronic stressors of policing can make officers aggressive, and that they're prone to take it out on the most vulnerable. So who might that be? As Jeannine Bell argues in "[Dead Canaries in the Coal Mines: The Symbolic Assailant Revisited](#)," (34 *Georgia State University Law Review* 513, 2018) citizens who fit a certain Black male stereotype may be at particular risk. She cites the examples of [Tamir Rice, Philando Castile and Alton Sterling](#). And now we can add George Floyd. And Ronald Greene.

We're not arguing that police abuses are inevitable. Officer personalities vary, and at least in this writer's experience, most cops seem to handle the burdens of their craft rather well. Unfortunately, agencies [have failed to correct](#) officers who repeatedly goof up. As we discussed in "[Third, Fourth and Fifth Chances](#)," failure to reign in errant cops can easily lead to disaster. And we have a ready example. On February 8, 2021, nearly two years after his force-rich, expletive-laden confrontation with Mr. Greene, Trooper DeMoss and two LSP colleagues [were booked by their own agency](#) on misdemeanor charges of "simple battery and malfeasance in office" for using excessive force and turning off their body cameras during a 2020 traffic stop.

And just as we "go to press" the craft of policing suffers additional blows:

- Washington State authorities announced the [arrest of three Tacoma police officers](#) on murder and manslaughter charges for needlessly pummeling, choking and Taser-ing Manuel Ellis, a 33-year old Black man, during a seemingly minor encounter on March 3rd. Mr. Ellis complained that he couldn't breathe, and then he died.
- Los Angeles prosecutors [filed perjury charges](#) against a promising L.A. County sheriff's deputy for lying during a preliminary hearing. Deputy Kevin Honea, 33 testified that he found a handgun in the front of a vehicle. Its ready availability helped bind over the car's occupants on robbery charges. In fact, a motel security camera showed that another deputy found the weapon in a box in the car's trunk.

Would Trooper DeMoss be facing charges over a year-old traffic stop had Mr. Greene's death not become a matter of national interest? Would the speedy decision to prosecute the Tacoma officers – we haven't looked into their culpability, but things look bleak – have happened in the absence of Derek Chauvin's trial and conviction? Ditto, Deputy Honea. While his superiors [ascribed his testimony to "sloppiness"](#) and levied a brief suspension, L.A. County's new, progressively-minded D.A., George Gascon, took a far sterner approach.

Examining policing under a microscope is no longer a thing of the "future."

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What's our takeaway? As we pitched in "[More Rules, Less Force?](#)" positive change can't be accomplished by simply making more rules. Instead we must focus on "craft." Police must redouble their efforts to advance the practice of their demanding vocation. In "[Why Do Officers Succeed?](#)" (*Police Chief*, July 2020, p. 26) we suggested that agencies collect examples of good work within their own ranks and use them "to stimulate dialogue about quality policing and the paths to that end."

Officers could be asked to describe recent episodes of fieldwork whose outcomes they found especially gratifying. Examples might range from the seemingly mundane, such as gaining critical information from a hostile resident, to the more noteworthy, say, peacefully and safely taking a dangerous and combative suspect into custody. To learn how these successes came about, officers would be asked to identify the factors they believe helped produce such good results.

Imagine roll-call sessions that focus on craft. And supervisors and senior officers who convey their perspectives about what makes for quality policing to young cops. And should the "uncrafty" take place, promptly step in.

No, that's not dreaming. And while we don't discount formal training, the actual workplace seems to exert the greatest influence on how things actually get done. It's where craftspersons – nurses, physicians, soldiers, plumbers, automobile mechanics and, yes, cops – get "broken in" to their demanding occupations. Naturally, agencies would have to pitch in. Most importantly, they would have to reel in pressures to make "numbers" that, [as we've repeatedly complained](#), can stretch the notion of quality to its breaking point.

Or we can keep driving down this unimaginative, bleak road. It does have an end. It's called "defunding."