

From Prof Gadfly's homework pile

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police July 7, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police 

Assignment:

Watch **Bethlehem** and **Allentown** Police recruiting videos and write a short reflection paper for Professor Gadfly

As Peter Crownfield commented earlier, I also thought I knew which police dept had a more progressive outlook and would want to pitch community connections over militaristic sensationalism. I also thought I would see more diversity among the officers in Bethlehem. Wrong on both counts.

After viewing both of these recruiting videos: bravo Allentown. Even if this is simply marketing and pr (and I don't know, I don't live there or experience interactions with Allentown police), the APD recruiting video is at least delivering the message about the kind of department they aspire to be: diverse, inclusive, friendly (with smiling faces), with a department emphasis on building relationships, and anxious to communicate with all people in their community. The video seems to say they are an asset-based rather than deficit (or control) focused department. Is this true? Or perhaps that approach will be realized as they add new officers who may apply *because of* this constructive approach to policing? If the training is as positive and community-connected as their marketing, this is one up and coming department. Change takes time, but what a step, what a way to communicate to the existing force that this is what we EXPECT all of us to be.

And what does Bethlehem's video tell us? Policing is about drama, about control, about domination. Yes, there are a few images of friendlier aspects of policing, but I am sad (and appalled) that Bethlehem couldn't come up with a more positive, inclusive video. Do we want recruits who are all about SWAT teams? Walking in phalanxes through crowds? How many smiles do we even see in this video? The tense, dramatic music: do

we want to encourage that kind of feeling about policing among recruits (surely it is part of the job, but is that what we want to focus on?)?

There are two Black officers seen in two photos within the video, but shouldn't those statements, "We are the Bethlehem Police Department" include a Black officer, at this moment in our history? Not just for optics, but for the commitment it would show: Black Lives Matter here. Also, seriously: no Spanish heard or seen (although there was at least one officer who may be Latino in "We are" section)? Unlike Allentown's video there are no Spanish subtitles for any potential Latinx recruits to see they are genuinely welcomed to apply, or for other recruits or current officers to see that Latinx people –from fellow officers to constituents—are valued by the BPD. There is nothing that says to the Latinx community in general, "We see you, and want to communicate with you?"

Sadly, I feel an urgency about our local leaders tackling changes in Bethlehem policing after watching this video, and fear that it may actually represent the way officers are trained, as well as recruited. The video has reinforced my concern that in Bethlehem attitudes conveyed to new and experienced officers by the recruiting video, and perhaps also by trainers, and department leaders may (almost certainly do?) negatively impact everyday interactions with folks in our community. The recruiting message depicted in the video stirred me from a vague, semi-comfortable complacency about our little town of Bethlehem, to serious concern.

Certainly recruiting videos are not policy; they are not necessarily representative of how a department works. But these kinds of videos **are** the public face of a department, and reveal a lot about what its leaders and city leaders believe policing is all about, and what they publicly commit the department to do with (and to?) our communities. Does stereotyping and deficits-based thinking rule the city's policing (however unconsciously)? Do the BPD trainings and the department leadership model active antiracism and strive to counter ethnic bias? Who will chart a new assets-based and antiracist approach to policing (from public actions and statements, to what goes on within the walls of the department)? How can "we the people" of this city influence, push for, and assist with these changes?

Meanwhile, city officials: at least take down the current video. Please.

Respectfully submitted
Student 1

Prof Gadfly notes that the Bethlehem video seems to have been taken down.