

Blur and cross the thin blue line

By [Tammerie Day](#)

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“We call the police the thin blue line. Let it not be a line that divides us.” –  
Eric L. Adams, NY police officer and [nytimes.com](#) guest columnist

Eric Adams describes his experience as an African American citizen and father as well as a police officer in blue uniform in this guest column; what can only be a painful intersection every day has become searing this week.

It reminds me of a conversation I had thirteen years ago with a fellow seminarian who was a former police officer. She was as intrigued with my background as a Baptist turned pacifist Mennonite as I was with her story, cop turned minister. Our conversation went from curious to passionate when we engaged the question of guns and violence. She spoke about her training to meet what she faced, and only escalate as needed to contain a situation. “What would you do,” she asked, “if you responded to a domestic disturbance, and walked into a house and found a man waving a knife at his wife?”

“Well,” I said, without having completely thought it through, “I wouldn’t want to walk into the house alone. I’d want 25 of my neighbors with me. I’d want us to put overwhelming numbers of people who care about both of them in the room. We’d need to be physically willing to put ourselves in the middle of the fight, and help each of them move away and cool down.” Her eyebrows went up. Mine did, too, as I contemplated being close to the knife, or whatever other weapons might be in the house.

“But there’s not 25 people. There’s one of me. Maybe two if my partner is there. Maybe four if we call for backup,” she shot back.

And therein lies the problem.

We as a society have created chasms of inequality and estrangement that benefit some of us at great cost to others. And those of us with privilege don’t care to know

those oppressed, because we don't want a claim laid on us: to listen, to care, to help, to be at risk in the way experienced by the one we paint Other.

And we draw a thin blue line between us, to keep us apart, to protect our Things, our Property, while the Lives on the line and the Lives on the other side of the line matter less and less.

For things to change, we will have to do three things.

1. Lessen the pressure on either side of the line. Shift economic resources from the advantaged side to the disadvantaged side. Significantly.
2. Add civilians from both sides of the line TO the line. Blur it with shades of other colors than blue.
3. Reach across and through the line.

Sound impossible? Not really. What needs to be impossible is living through another week like last week.

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