

= Blood Ties (Homicide : Life on the Street) =

" Blood Ties " is the three @-@ episode sixth season premiere of the American police drama television series Homicide : Life on the Street . The episodes constitute the 78th , 79th and 80th overall episodes of the series . They originally aired on NBC on October 17 , October 24 and October 31 , 1997 , respectively .

The teleplays were written by Anya Epstein and David Simon , based on a story by Tom Fontana , Julie Martin and James Yoshimura . Directed by Alan Taylor , Nick Gomez and Mark Pellington , " Blood Ties " marked the first appearances of Peter Gerety , Jon Seda and Callie Thorne as regular cast members , replacing outgoing cast members Melissa Leo and Max Perlich . Guest appearances were made by James Earl Jones , Jeffrey Wright , Lynne Thigpen and Mekhi Phifer .

The three episodes were tied together by the story of a murdered Haitian domestic worker employed by wealthy philanthropist Felix Wilson , played by Jones . Protagonists Frank Pembleton and Al Giardello initially refuse to properly investigate the Wilson family out of respect for their success and contributions to the African American community of Baltimore , which leads to tensions and accusations of discrimination within the police department . The storyline serves as a rumination and commentary on racism and classism , even when they come from the best of intentions .

" Blood Ties " included several additional subplots , including murder attempts made against police officers in retaliation for the fatal police shooting of drug dealer Luther Mahoney in the fifth season . The second episode involves a murder at Oriole Park at Camden Yards during a late @-@ season baseball game . In the third episode , police investigate the execution @-@ style slaying of a police informant . According to Nielsen ratings the first episode of " Blood Ties " was viewed by 7 @. @ 94 million households , the second by 6 @. @ 86 million households and the third by 6 @. @ 27 million households . The episodes received generally positive reviews .

= = Plot summary = =

= = = Part one = = =

Pembleton (Andre Braugher) and Bayliss (Kyle Secor) return to the homicide unit after a rotation in robbery , only to find the highest murder clearance rate in five years . A delighted Gee (Yaphet Kotto) credits much of the success to the new detectives Stuart Gharty (Peter Gerety) and , particularly , Laura Ballard (Callie Thorne) . Lewis (Clark Johnson) asks Gee for a different partner , but dodges questions about problems with his old partner Kellerman (Reed Diamond) ; Gee assigns him to Falsone (Jon Seda) , one of the newer detectives , and Kellerman is partnered with Munch (Richard Belzer) . That evening , Gee attends a black @-@ tie dinner honoring his friend Felix Wilson (James Earl Jones) , a wealthy businessman and respected Baltimore philanthropist . In that same hotel , a woman is found beaten to death in the men 's bathroom , and Pembleton and Bayliss are called to investigate . Felix and his wife Regina (Lynne Thigpen) see the body and identify her as Melia Brierre , a Haitian expatriate working as one of their domestic workers . The Wilsons leave after only brief interviews , and Pembleton becomes agitated when Bayliss asks whether Pembleton went easy on them because of his respect for Wilson 's contributions to the African American community .

Meanwhile , a motorcyclist fires shots at the moving car of Lewis and Falsone ; the two narrowly avoid injury and the motorcyclist escapes . Almost immediately afterward , Lewis and Falsone are called to investigate the shooting death of a woman on a nearby street . At the scene they find Stivers (Toni Lewis) , who was speaking to the woman when she was shot ; police later conclude Stivers was the real target . While Munch and Kellerman are leaving the hotel , somebody opens fire on them and shoots Kellerman in the arm . Falsone suggests the shooter is targeting the detectives who were involved in the previous fatal shooting of drug dealer Luther Mahoney . Kellerman becomes angry when Falsone questions the report of Mahoney 's death , which indicates Kellerman shot Mahoney to save Lewis ; Falsone said autopsy reports indicate Mahoney was beaten badly .

After questioning several of Mahoney 's former associates , drug supplier Wilkie Collins (Robert F. Chew) is pressured into telling Lewis and Falsone the shooter was Mahoney 's nephew , Junior Bunk (Mekhi Phifer) . They arrest Junior Bunk and find the matching gun , a Desert Eagle pistol prompting Bunk to admit he shot at the police to " send a message " from his mother , Georgia Rae Mahoney (Hazelle Goodman) , over the death of her brother , Luther . Georgia is arrested trying to flee in a jet to the Cayman Islands , where she used to handle Luther 's drug money . Meanwhile , following Brierre 's autopsy , Cox (Michelle Forbes) finds somebody had consensual sex with the victim before her death . Pembleton and Bayliss learn from Felix Wilson 's daughter Thea (Ellen Betha) that Brierre had a vicious and abusive ex @-@ boyfriend named Kaja . Pembleton and Gee declare Kaja the primary suspect , despite protests from Ballard that the lead is thin and that they have not properly questioned Felix Wilson . The episode ends with an imprisoned Georgia Rae Mahoney stating Kellerman will hear from her soon .

= = = Part two = = =

Two days after Brierre 's death , the detectives have made little progress on their lead about Kaja , the victim 's abusive ex @-@ boyfriend . Ballard and Gharty suggest they look more closely at Felix Wilson and his son , Hal (Jeffrey Wright) , because Brierre had sex before her death and knew few men socially besides them . Pembleton and Gee , who are both very respectful of Felix Wilson 's contributions to the African American community , dismiss the suggestion ; Gee refuses to even ask the Wilsons to submit a blood and hair sample . The next day 's Baltimore Sun runs a story about the investigation into Kaja , which Pembleton believes was leaked to the press by Gee in order to distance the Wilsons from the crime . Ballard and Gharty question Hal , who denies having sex with Brierre after tough questions from Gharty . After the interview , Gharty tells Ballard that Pembleton and Gee are obstructing the investigation to protect a rich and respected black family .

During their investigation , Pembleton and Bayliss learn Kaja has been in a Haitian prison for four months , eliminating him as a lead . Gee announces the Baltimore Sun is running a story that Kaja has been cleared as a suspect , leaked from the police . Pembleton accuses Ballard and Gharty of leaking the story , while Gharty accuses Pembleton of going easy on Felix Wilson because he is a successful black man . The discussion prompts a heated argument with accusations of racism from both sides . Pembleton agrees to interview Felix Wilson alone because he believes it will clear him . When Pembleton tells Wilson he needs a blood test from him and his son , Wilson admits that he had consensual sex with Brierre the night of the murder , but said he does not kill her . Later , a devastated Pembleton and Gee still insist he should not necessarily be treated as a suspect , much to the disbelief of Ballard and Gharty . The detectives are interrupted by Wilson 's attorney , who says the family will not submit to a blood and hair test without a court order .

Meanwhile , Munch and Kellerman investigate a murder at Oriole Park at Camden Yards during a late @-@ season baseball game , leaving 48 @,@ 000 possible suspects . The Long Island man , presumably a Yankees fan , is found beaten to death on the stairs of the stadium , and the governor of Maryland pressures the police department to solve the murder before the game ends so that millions in tourism dollars and ticket revenues will not be jeopardized . After several fruitless interviews , Munch and Kellerman question Scott Russell (Brian Tarantina) , a New Yorker who attended the game with the victim . Russell admits he killed the victim because he said the Baltimore Orioles were a better team than the Yankees . He agrees to confess to the murder if they let him watch the rest of the game . Back at the police department , Falsone continues questioning detectives about the Luther Mahoney shooting . Stivers expresses concern to Lewis that their covering for Kellerman 's role in the shooting could bring both of them down if Falsone continues his questioning .

= = = Part three = = =

The Baltimore Sun runs a front @-@ page story accusing the homicide unit of fumbling the investigation and protecting the Wilsons based on their race . Under pressure from his superiors ,

Gee demands they solve the murder immediately . Pembleton admits privately to his wife Mary (Ami Brabson) that he let his personal feelings of respect for Felix Wilson get in the way of the investigation ; he agrees to make them a central part of the investigation . After searching the Wilson house , the detectives find love letters written by Hal Wilson to Brierre . Pembleton questions Felix and Hal , who agree to talk only if their statements are not admissible in court . Pembleton confronts the Wilsons with the love letters , which Hal said he never had the courage to give to Brierre . Felix said he would not have had sex with Brierre if he had known , which Hal said he does not believe . Felix demands the truth from Hal , who admits to killing Brierre in a jealous rage upon learning of her affair with his father .

When Pembleton begins to read Hal his rights , Felix stops him and refuses to let him arrest his son . Later , prosecuting attorney Ed Danvers (?eljko Ivanek) says because the confession is inadmissible , they have no evidence to arrest Hal , and he refuses to issue an arrest warrant against a member of a prominent family without a solid case . The Wilsons decide to move to San Diego , and Felix tells Pembleton he will do everything he can to continue protecting his son . Pembleton and Ballard make a reluctant peace and , although Pembleton remains cold with her , he admits he was wrong about the Wilsons and that Ballard 's instincts about the case were correct . Gee tells Pembleton he too let his personal feelings cloud his judgment , and the two agree they will bring Hal back to Baltimore when they get enough evidence against him .

Meanwhile , Lewis and Falsone investigate the execution @-@ style shootings of Wilkie Collins and his wife , presumably in retaliation for Collins cooperating with police in the investigation and incarceration of Georgia Rae Mahoney , Luther 's sister . They find Collins ' young son Jack (Marc John Jefferies) hiding in a closet at the house , but he is too terrified to answer any of their questions . Falsone takes the Jack to a park , where they bond over their mutual love of cars , and Falsone teaches him how to hotwire a vehicle . More comfortable with the police , Jack tells Falsone that a man identifying himself as Robert on Collins ' answering machine has the same voice as the killer . A disturbed Stivers recognizes the voice as belonging to Detective Robert Castleman (Lance Lewman) . After Jack identifies Castleman in a lineup , Lewis and Falsone confront him with the evidence during questioning , pressuring Castleman to confess to the murder . Castleman said Georgia Rae Mahoney blackmailed him into killing Collins by threatening to reveal Castleman had been on Luther Mahoney 's payroll .

= = Production = =

The story from " Blood Ties " was conceived by executive director Tom Fontana , and supervising producers James Yoshimura and Julie Martin . The first and third episode teleplays were written by producer Anya Epstein , with the second penned by producer David Simon . The three episodes were each directed by Alan Taylor , Nick Gomez and Mark Pellington , respectively . " Blood Ties " originally premiered in October 1997 , about one month later than originally planned , which angered fans of the show . The delay is indicated by the regular @-@ season baseball game prominently featured in the second episode of the arc , despite the fact that the 1997 Baltimore Orioles season ended in September .

" Blood Ties " featured the first appearances of Peter Gerety , Jon Seda and Callie Thorne as regular cast members on Homicide : Life on the Street . Thorne portrayed Laura Ballard , a former Seattle homicide unit detective , marking the character 's first appearance in the series . Gerety and Seda each previously played their respective characters in guest appearances on the show ; Seda 's character Paul Falsone first appeared in the two @-@ part fifth @-@ season finale . Stuart Gharty , Gerety 's character , is described as a transplant from the department 's internal affairs department . Executive producer Tom Fontana said he thought the new cast additions would create drama and tension between the characters : " It 's stimulating to add new people , because you 're not feeling like you 're writing or acting the same scene for the thousandth time , and I think all three of them are very different than any other characters we 've had on the show . "

During her audition for the show , Thorne read the lines from the Pembleton character in a previous episode . She said of her audition , " I said , ' So what do you want me to do ? Do you want me to be

a female Pembleton ? ' And they were like , ' Well we don 't want to say that but that 's sort of the idea . " Thorne said the producers were looking for " a certain type in terms of a strong woman who could keep up with all the men " and that they incorporated elements of Thorne 's own personality into the character , such as the strong amount of trust she has in her instincts . Thorne also said she was treated well by the cast , but upon starting , " I was very aware of the fact that it 's predominantly men , and I have no problem saying that as a small , dark woman I was terrified . I thought I was going to be put through the ringer . " Gerety , when asked about his experience joining the show , said only , " It 's interesting . It 's really interesting . "

The new regular characters replaced outgoing cast members Melissa Leo and Max Perlich , who did not return for the sixth season . In the episode , Leo 's character Kay Howard was said to be working full @-@ time with the department 's fugitive unit ; actress Leo reportedly left the show so she could devote more time to her family . Perlich was allegedly fired from the series , and within the episode his character J. H. Brodie was said to have left police work after a documentary he filmed was aired on PBS and won an Emmy Award . Commentators said the Emmy mention , and a joke by Munch that " they give those things to anybody " , were references to the show 's failure to secure a nomination for Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Drama Series during its first five seasons . Armando Benítez and Scott Erickson , then pitchers with the Baltimore Orioles , make cameo appearances as themselves in the second " Blood Ties " episode .

The Wilson murder is a " red ball " , a police case involving an innocent victim , widely known suspects or a combination of the two . Red ball cases tend to draw attention from the media , the public and high @-@ ranking police brass , and often result in additional detectives being added to the case . Fontana thought these elements of the red ball case would help produce a strong season premiere and tension among the veteran characters who resent the meddling of the new detectives . Julie Martin , one of the show 's writers and supervising producers , said " Blood Ties " marked a deliberate change in the series , focusing on darker story lines that are " a little messier and unresolved " and more interpersonal relationships : " The show 's been on for six seasons , and it absolutely has to change . We can 't keep doing the same show . " Media outlets noted that " Blood Ties " included more action @-@ oriented elements such as car chases and a chase sequence involving helicopters at an airport . Fontana denied allegations of tampering from NBC executives and said any such changes would have come from him : " I don 't want us to have a style every week that we feel we have to conform to I want people not to know what to expect when they tune in every week . We 're not formulaic . "

The New York Yankees baseball team refused to give Homicide : Life on the Street permission to use the Yankees logo in the episode , which Fontana said angered the writers and inspired them to portray Yankees fans in a particularly negative light . Fontana , a New York native himself , was later apologetic about this portrayal and said , " I kept telling the guys they were being a little harsh on the Yankees " . The names " Stringfield " and " Doherty " can be seen under Ballard 's case list on the white board . The names were purposely inserted as an inside joke to Homicide fans as a reference to online rumors that cast member Melissa Leo was to be replaced by actors Shannon Doherty or Sherry Stringfield . The false rumors were actually leaked by Tom Fontana himself to keep fans guessing .

" Blood Ties " and the rest of the sixth season episodes were included in the six @-@ DVD box @-@ set Homicide : Life on the Street : The Complete Season 6 , which was released by A & E Home Video on January 25 , 2005 for \$ 99 @.@ 95 .

= = Themes = =

In portraying black members of the police department ignoring legitimate evidence to protect a prominent member of Baltimore 's African American community , " Blood Ties " touches simultaneously on themes of police misconduct and racism , however inadvertent , from the characters of Pembleton and Gee . Because the episode involves discrimination among black characters , " Blood Ties " has been described as an example of " reverse racism " , even though the majority of Baltimore 's population is black . The episode also includes elements of classism ,

since Pembleton and Gee treat Felix Wilson differently than they would another black suspect based on his financial success and charitable contributions to the city and African American community .

Most of these themes are most overtly addressed during a climatic argument between Pembleton , Ballard and Gharty in the " Blood Ties " arc 's second episode . When Ballard and Gharty suggest questioning Felix and Hal Wilson because the murder victim had sex the night she was killed , Pembleton accuses them of reverting to old stereotypes about black male sexuality , namely " that black men can 't control themselves when it comes to blue shoes and tight pants " . When Gharty describes Baltimore as a black @-@ run town that protects its own , Pembleton points out similar practices were carried out in Baltimore history by the Italian Americans and Irish Americans when they primarily controlled the city ; in particular , Pembleton says , " How many favors have been called in in the name of the Knights of Columbus or the St. Michael 's Society , huh ? "

Roger Wilkins , a history professor at George Mason University who studies race in the United States , said " Blood Ties " provided " insightful , wonderful explorations on the complexities of many levels of race . " He also said the show " really does understand how we 're all caught in this culture , and we 're all struggling with it . And we all bring to this jagged enterprise the limited understanding of where we came from and who we are . Being fully alive requires us to struggle with these realities . That 's what the show does . " In his journal article about the portrayal of African American men in *Homicide : Life on the Street* , documentary historian Thomas A. Mearns said the presentation of light @-@ skinned black villains like Luther Mahoney and dark @-@ skinned actors like the one played by James Earl Jones in " Blood Ties " , " dispels the notion that black skin color is uniform or determinative with regard to character " . Some media outlets described the Watson subplot as a racial spin on the 1996 murder of six @-@ year @-@ old child beauty pageant queen JonBenét Ramsey , although Tom Fontana said any similarities were not intended .

= = Reception = =

The first episode of " Blood Ties " received an 8 @. @ 1 Nielsen rating , which constituted 7 @. @ 94 million households at the time . The episode outperformed *Homicide* 's time @-@ slot competitor , CBS 's *Nash Bridges* , by about 588 @, @ 000 households , although ABC 's *20 / 20* beat both shows with 11 @. @ 37 million households . The second and third episodes of " Blood Ties " , however , finished behind both shows each week . The second episode received a 7 @. @ 0 rating , which constituted 6 @. @ 86 million households , compared to 7 @. @ 94 million for *Nash Bridges* and 11 @. @ 37 million for *20 / 20* . The third episode received a 6 @. @ 4 rating , which constituted 6 @. @ 27 million views , compared to 7 @. @ 94 million for *Nash Bridges* and 10 @. @ 98 million for *20 / 20* .

" Blood Ties " received generally positive reviews . Baltimore Sun television critic David Zurawik described it as " one of the most serious , frank and compelling discussions of race in any medium " since an episode of *NYPD Blue* from 1995 , in which actor Dennis Franz used the word " nigger " . Mike Duffy of the Detroit Free Press described " Blood Ties " as " explosive (and) riveting " , and wrote , " The smart , darkly humorous writing on *Homicide* is as strong as ever . So are the performances of a superb ensemble of actors . " R.D. Heldenfels of the Akron Beacon Journal praised the episodes and called them " a complicated rumination on race and class " . David Bianculli of the New York Daily News said the episode had an unpredictability that helped maintain the show 's vitality , and said of the first two episodes , " Except for one moment in tonight 's opener , I was on the edge of my seat for the entire two hours ; at that moment , a surprise shooting shocked me right onto my feet . " Newsday writer Verne Gay described " Blood Ties " as " brilliant drama " and " a superb piece of work (that) appears to be a novel variation on reverse discrimination " . Regarding the first of the three episodes , Dallas Morning News writer Ed Bark said Seda and Thorne had " solid first impressions " and that the episode arc " has all the makings of another killer story line " . Virginia Rohan of The Record of Bergen County , New Jersey , called the episode " gripping " and " another strong start for a terrific series " .

Tony Norman of the Pittsburgh Post @-@ Gazette praised the episode , which he said " has wandered into the heart of Dostoyevsky territory with its storylines " . He particularly praised the

episode for going outside its normal conventions by portraying lead characters like Pembleton and Gee as being so reluctant to do the right thing . Alan Pergament of The Buffalo News gave the episode four out of five stars ; he particularly praised the performances of Thorne and Gerety , and said the show did an impressive job of introducing the new cast members . Michael Storey of Arkansas Democrat @-@ Gazette said " Blood Ties " lived up to the high standards he said the show had set for itself . Ron Miller of Fort Worth Star @-@ Telegram praised " Blood Ties " , although he said he does not always enjoy Homicide : Life on the Street . He said the episode " starts fast and gets better and more intense by the minute " , and described the climactic argument in the second episode as " the most turbulent internal dispute we 've ever seen among the detectives " . Rocky Mountain News writer Dusty Saunders praised the main story @-@ line and said the subplots were well juxtaposed into the episode . He also said " Blood Ties " could serve as a good introduction to the series for new viewers . Alan Sepinwall , television critic for The Star @-@ Ledger , criticized the addition of " silly " action @-@ oriented scenes the traditionally more intelligent show , but praised " Blood Ties " and the addition of the new cast members . Sepinwall particularly praised the acting of Andre Braugher : " Pitted against a powerhouse like James Earl Jones , he not only holds his own , but at times is so dramatically forceful that the former voice of Darth Vader sounds intimidated . " Not all reviews of " Blood Ties " were positive . Joanne Ostrow of The Denver Post said the series benefited from the new characters , but that the episode " asks viewers to believe rather too strongly in the inherent racism of certain characters we 've come to know as heroes in seasons past " . Ostrow also thought Pembleton 's clashes with the new detectives was predictable .