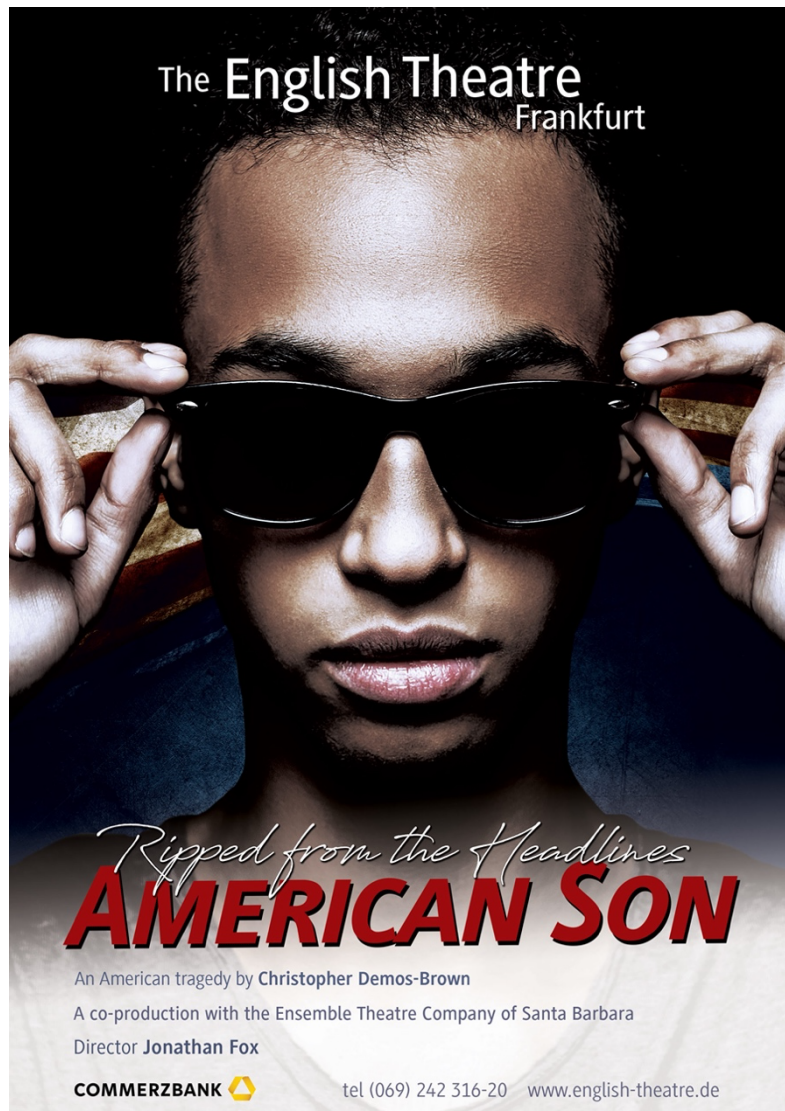


American Son

An American drama, based on the Broadway play (2018) by Christopher Demos-Brown.

6th May 2022– 3rd June 2022



The English Theatre Frankfurt

Teachers' Resource Pack

This teachers' pack includes information as well as tasks and topics to be dealt with in the classroom. The tasks do not necessarily build on each other. Cut and paste as you please, and please consult the official program for additional information.

Background Information to *American Son*

The author - Christopher Demos-Brown



Demos-Brown is a lawyer in Miami, and playwright with over a dozen full-length plays and screenplays to his credit.

Several of his plays have earned multiple regional theater awards over the years but it wasn't until November 4, 2018, that *American Son* debuted as his first Broadway play, opening at the historic Booth Theatre. The play was directed by Kenny Leon, and starred Kerry Washington, Steven Pasquale, Jeremy Jordan and Eugene Lee. His film adaptation of the play, also titled *American Son*, premiered on Netflix in November 2019 as a television drama, and was nominated for a 2020 Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Television Movie.

He was born in Philadelphia, but by the time he was in the fourth grade, he had moved to Miami with his family. He attended Dartmouth College in the mid-1980s, majoring in Russian with a

minor in history, with a potential goal of joining the United States Foreign Service. In 1992, he graduated from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and the University of Geneva.

His interest in the performing arts became serious while he was attending Dartmouth. He acted in several stage productions and directed some short plays. Prior to attending law school, Chris spent two years in Los Angeles pursuing an acting career. When asked about acting during a 2018 interview with *Broadway Buzz*, he said, "I wanted to be an actor in the worst way, and I was an actor in the worst way, unfortunately." He focused his efforts on being a playwright instead.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Demos-Brown

<https://wikibioall.com/christopher-demos-brown-wiki-networth-age/>

The Director – Jonathan Fox

Jonathan Fox is the Executive Artistic Director of the Ensemble Theatre Company of Santa Barbara. Since he assumed the post in 2006, he has directed many productions for the company, including *Ghosts*, *Creditors*, *Buried Child*, *Take Me Out*, *Visiting Mr. Green*, and most recently, *The Liar* and *Crime and Punishment*. He has worked abroad in Germany and Austria, directing *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Old Wicked Songs*, *Crimes of the Heart*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Prior to joining Ensemble, Jonathan helped establish New Jersey's Two River Theater Company, serving as Managing Director from 1994-'99 and Artistic Director from 1996-2006. During his tenure, he directed over a dozen acclaimed productions, including Peter Brook's adaptation of the opera *Carmen*. His production of *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* was profiled in *American Theatre Magazine*, as was his festival of work by Samuel Beckett. His productions have been seen in New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Cologne, Frankfurt and Vienna, and have received critical acclaim from publications including *The New York Times*, *Variety*, and *The LA Times*. He received his MFA from Columbia University and is a recipient of the prestigious Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Fellowship for German studies. He has served as adjunct faculty at UCSB, Monmouth University in New Jersey, University of Utah, and Columbia University.



American Son - Synopsis

On a stormy night in a Miami police station, Kendra Ellis-Connor is waiting for a report on the whereabouts of her son Jamal, who has suddenly disappeared. She asks for help from Officer Paul Larkin, a rookie cop who can't tell her anything about the incident. Due to both protocol and a lack of knowledge of the incident, he tells her that he has to wait for Lieutenant John Stokes, the AM shift liaison officer. Her ex-husband, FBI agent Scott Connor, arrives at the station, demanding to know where Jamal is.

Larkin is able to tell Scott that Jamal and two other Black men were pulled over by the police. The only other thing he can tell her is the fact that Jamal's car had a provocative bumper sticker about violence against cops. This revelation develops into a long argument between Kendra and Scott, where they confront their tumultuous marriage and their experiences raising a biracial son in a privileged community. Kendra repeatedly brings up how Jamal feels depressed and isolated as one of the very few Black men at his school (referring to himself as "the face of the race"), while Scott says that Jamal should have known better than to present himself like "a gangsta."

Larkin returns and says that Jamal was with two other Black men, one of whom has a warrant for misdemeanor drug possession. After this discovery, Kendra and Scott engage in a lengthy, contentious discussion about Jamal growing up in an environment of racial tension, specifically pertaining to Kendra's own experiences as a Black woman and her fears of a possible confrontation between Jamal and police. Scott says that Jamal should not have been hanging out with these men in the first place, prompting Kendra to reveal that Jamal was angry at Scott for leaving them, which is why he placed the bumper sticker on his car. Scott then receives a video from his brother, which shows a recording of the traffic stop Jamal was involved in. In it, a police officer fires at a fleeing suspect as a bystander records it.

The video sends Scott over the edge, physically threatening Larkin to know where his son is. At this time, Lieutenant Stokes arrives and places Scott under arrest after Scott shoves him. After booking Scott, Stokes tells Kendra that three Black males were taken into custody in connection with the traffic stop, unable to tell if one of them was Jamal. After Scott is released after being given a "promise to appear" court order, Kendra reveals that Jamal left the house after an argument with her.

Stokes is able to obtain a full report of the incident: Bell, Rolle, and Jamal were driving around in Liberty City, where Bell stopped to purchase a 'nickel bag' of marijuana. Rodney Banks, a Black police officer, witnessed the exchange and stopped the car. After both Bell and Rolle exited the vehicle to confront Banks, Bell fled after Banks had trained his gun on both men. Jamal at that point had exited the vehicle, trying to position himself with hands on the hood of the car. Banks proceeded to fire three shots at Bell. One of the bullets accidentally hits Jamal in the head, killing him instantly. Kendra and Scott are devastated, and Stokes gives them a moment, and they can only wail in agony. In the final scene, Scott exclaims "I can't breathe! I can't breathe!" either due to his heart murmur or possibly alluding to the killing of Eric Garner.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killing_of_Eric_Garner

The Characters

Kendra Ellis-Connor

Kendra is an Afro-American woman, who works as a professor of psychology. She is between 40 and 50 years old and lives with her son, named Jamal, in Miami. Some years ago, she and her white husband got divorced. She is emotionally very confused, while trying to hide it behind a professional façade. She appears as a strong woman, who fights against racial discrimination. As a mother she acts loving as well as she empathizes very well with Jamal.

Scott Connor

Scott is a white man, in his late 40s to 50s, and Kendra's divorced husband. He's got mostly Irish ancestry and takes pride in his family's tradition of military service. Currently he's working as an FBI

agent. On the one hand he is very sensitive and caring and is a truly loving father. On the other hand, he is rigid in his views, has contained power, and when pushed can explode.

Officer Paul Larkin

Paul is a white police officer in his mid 20s to 30s. He is an intelligent man with high career ambitions, who lacks actual life experiences. His naivety can occasionally appear odd. He is always trying to do the right thing, while doing so, he often says the wrong thing at the wrong time.

Lieutenant John Stokes

John is an African American man, late 40s to 50s. He's been through a tough police officer career so far and appears confident and experienced. John is used to having people listen when he talks. He knows the rules and has no hesitation enforcing them.

[African-American History Timeline 1619 - 2021](#)

1619	The first African American indentured servants arrive in the American colonies. Less than a decade later, the first slaves are brought into New Amsterdam (later, New York City). By 1690, every colony has slaves.
1739	The Stono Rebellion, one of the earliest slave revolts, occurs in Stono, South Carolina.
1793	Eli Whitney's (1765 – 1825) cotton gin increases the need for slaves.
1808	Congress bans further importation of slaves.
1820	"Missouri Compromise" is agreed upon. Missouri and all the states South of Missouri, were officially allowed to keep slaves, whereas all states above had to grant the same rights to every new citizen regardless of one's skin color or origin.
1831	In Boston, William Lloyd Garrison (1805 – 1879) begins publication of the anti-slavery newspaper the <i>Liberator</i> and becomes a leading voice in the Abolitionist movement.
1831 – 1861	Approximately 75,000 slaves escape to the North using the Underground Railroad.
1846	Ex-slave Frederick Douglass (1818 – 1895) publishes the anti-slavery <i>North Star</i> newspaper.
1849	Harriet Tubman (c. 1820 – 1913) escapes from slavery and becomes an instrumental leader of the Underground Railroad.
1850	Congress passes another Fugitive Slave Act, which mandates government participation in the capture of escaped slaves.
1857	The <i>Dred Scot v. Sanford</i> case: congress does not have the right to ban slavery in the states; slaves are not citizens.
1860	Abraham Lincoln (1809 – 1865) is elected president, angering the southern states.
1861	The Civil War begins.
1863	Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation proclaims that all slaves in rebellious territories are forever free.

1865	<p>The Civil War ends.</p> <p>Lincoln is assassinated.</p> <p>The 13th Amendment to the Constitution, prohibiting slavery, is ratified. The era of Reconstruction begins.</p>
1866	<p>The “Black Codes” are passed by all white legislators of the former Confederate States. Congress passes the Civil Rights Act, conferring citizenship on African Americans and granting them equal rights to whites.</p> <p>The Ku Klux Klan is formed in Tennessee.</p>
1868	<p>The 14th Amendment is ratified, defining citizenship. This overturns the <i>Dred Scot</i> decision.</p>
1870	<p>The 15th Amendment is ratified, giving African Americans the right to vote.</p>
1877	<p>The era of Reconstruction ends.</p> <p>A deal is made with southern democratic leaders which makes Rutherford B. Hayes (1822 – 1893) president in exchange for the withdrawal of federal troops from the South, and puts an end to efforts to protect the civil rights of African Americans.</p>
1879	<p>Thousands of African Americans migrate out of the South to escape oppression.</p>
1881	<p>Tennessee passes the first of the “Jim Crow” segregation laws, segregating state railroads.</p> <p>Similar laws are passed over the next 15 years throughout the Southern states.</p>
1896	<p><i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> case: racial segregation is ruled constitutional by the Supreme Court. The “Jim Crow” (“separate but equal”) laws begin, barring African Americans from equal access to public facilities.</p>
1954	<p><i>Brown v. Board of Education</i> case: strikes down segregation as unconstitutional.</p>
1955	<p>In Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks (1913 – 2005) is arrested for breaking a city ordinance by refusing to give up her seat on a public bus to a white man. This defiant act gives initial momentum to the Civil Rights Movement.</p>
1957	<p>Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929 – 1968) and others set up the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, a leading engine of the Civil Rights Movement.</p>
1960	<p>Ruby Bridges is the first African-American child to be enrolled in the all-white William Frantz Elementary School in Louisiana. Federal Marshals escort her to the school because of the demonstrating mob outside of the school.</p>
1964	<p>The Civil Rights Act is signed, prohibiting discrimination of all kinds.</p>
1965	<p>The Voting Rights Act is passed, outlawing the practices used in the South to disenfranchise African American voters.</p>
1967	<p>Edward W. Brooke (1919 - 2015) becomes the first African American U.S. Senator since Reconstruction. He serves two terms as a Senator from Massachusetts.</p>
1968	<p>Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.</p>
2008	<p>Barack Obama (1961) becomes the first African American to win the U.S. presidential race.</p>

- 2012 Unarmed African American teen Trayvon Martin gets shot by George Zimmermann, a member of the Sanford community watch, while walking down the street.
- 2013 #BlackLivesMatter movement begins as a result of the shooting.
- 2014 Michael Brown, Ferguson, and Eric Garner, New York City, both unarmed African Americans, get needlessly killed by policemen. Protests led by the BlackLivesMatter organization follow.
- 2016 The Black Lives Matter movement gains renewed attention when San Francisco 49ers players Eric Reid, Eli Harold, and quarterback Colin Kaepernick knelt at the national anthem before the game against the Seattle Seahawks to draw attention to recent acts of police brutality. Dozens of other players in the NFL and beyond followed Kaepernicks actions.
- 2020 46-year-old African-American George Floyd died after being handcuffed and pinned to the ground by kneeling on Floyds neck for more than eight minutes by police officer Derek Chauvin.

The day after Floyd's death, protestors in Minneapolis took to the streets to protest Floyd's killing. Police cars were set on fire and officers released tear gas to disperse crowds. After months of quarantine and isolation during a global pandemic, protests mounted, spreading across the country in the following days and weeks.
- 2021 Chauvin is convicted of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter.

Kamala Harris became the first woman and first woman of color to become vice president of the United States

(cf. <https://www.nps.gov/saga/learn/education/upload/African%20American%20History%20Timeline.pdf> letzter Zugriff: 26.11.2019.
<https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-history-milestones> letzter Zugriff 23.04.22.)

Police Brutality in the USA

The (police) killings of the past few years and the Black Lives Matter movement, which has arisen in response to them, have given all Americans an education in the systematic mistreatment of Black people by police forces across the country. [...]

Where does this brutality come from? And what can we do about it?

Two theories are now dominating public debate. The first sees the problem on the individual level. There are a number of “bad apples” in every police force—authoritarian, racist bullies who take pleasure in pummeling defenseless Black men. We need to take away union protections, increase sanctions, remove them from the force, and prosecute them when appropriate. The second theory sees the problem on the systemic level. There's something inherently oppressive about neighborhoods being ruled by men and women with guns, batons, and mace. In a systemically racist society, the use of force in that way is bound to be unjust. We need to “defund the police” and try softer, more communal models.

Both theories contain some truth. Some cops, like George Floyd's killer, Derek Chauvin, rack up a lot of complaints and infractions. It's also true that over the course of American history, law enforcement has constantly been used to enforce racial hierarchy. Police brutality reflects the legacy of racial

lynchings, and some of the habits of mind that are still embedded in American society and in its police departments.

But the evidence suggests that the bulk of the problem is on a different level, neither individual nor systemic. The problem lies in the organizational cultures of some police forces. In the forces with an us-versus-the-world siege mentality. In the ones with the we-strap-on-the-armor-and-fight culture, the ones who depersonalize the human beings out on the street. All cruelty begins with dehumanization—not seeing the face of the other, not seeing the whole humanity of the other. A cultural regime of dehumanization has been constructed in many police departments. In that fertile ground, racial biases can spread and become entrenched. But the regime can be deconstructed.

Many people go into policing because they are idealistic. A study of NYPD recruits found that one of their most common motivations was the “opportunity to help people in the community.” [...].

Then they enter training, where a core theme is that it’s a threatening world out there. [...] Even when your gun is drawn on someone with his back turned, he can pivot and pull his trigger before you have the chance to fire [...] and the message is: [...] When in doubt, as the saying goes, it is “better to be judged by 12 than carried by six.”

About 70 percent of police officers say they have never fired their gun while on the job, but on average, 71 hours of their training are devoted to firearm skills and 60 hours to self-defense, according to a 2013 Bureau of Justice report, while only 43 hours are spent on community-policing measures, such as cultural-diversity training, human relations, mediation, and conflict management.

[...]

The organizational culture of their departments too often turns them into street warriors, occupying soldiers. [...]

Casey Delehanty, Ryan Welch, Jack Mewhirter, and Jason Wilks have studied the relationship between militarization and public safety. In *The Washington Post*, Mewhirter and Welch wrote about their findings: “When a county goes from receiving no military equipment to \$2,539,767 worth (the largest figure that went to one agency in our data), more than twice as many civilians are likely to die in that county the following year.” Problems are more likely to be seen as acts of war. The person on the other side of the equipment is rendered less visible.

We’re tracing the etiology of dehumanization here, the gradual closing-off of natural sympathy between one person and another. Almost all cops resist this pressure most of the time, and we owe them our respect, honor, and gratitude. Many of us know warm and compassionate police officers, who have rejected the worst parts of their environment—but the cultural pressures are there, nonetheless.

[...] Then there is the constant presence of unacknowledged fear. As Seth Stoughton, a University of South Carolina law professor, wrote in *The Atlantic* in 2014, police officers “shoot because they are afraid. And they are afraid because they are constantly barraged with the message that they should be afraid, that their survival depends on it.” [...]

Even hiring a diverse police force is no panacea. A 2016 Justice Department investigation into the Baltimore Police Department found consistent racially biased policing, in a force where, in 2015, more than 40 percent of the cops were African American. The problem lay not only in the minds of individual police officers, but also in the culture of the departments into which the officers entered.

We all construct reality according to the way we see the world. If the culture around you induces you to see others not as fully human, but as objects, that’s how you’re going to see them. [...]

Three lines of reform have been popping up these days. The first and most famous is “defund the police.” This means different things, many of them quite sensible, to different people. But if it means reducing police spending so there are fewer cops around, it will not happen, and it will not help. [...]

Fewer cops does not mean less brutality. Officers often use force more when they are tired. [...] If you have fewer tired officers working longer shifts with more overtime, you will have more incidents. And, as Matt Yglesias has argued in *Vox*, research clearly shows that the presence of more cops leads to less crime, fewer police stops, a reduced likelihood of abuse when stops do occur, and less incarceration.

The other, more promising reforms involve changing procedures during an encounter and building a community-rooted police force in the first place. [...]

But the big thing is changing the organizational culture of departments. It’s interesting that states with the highest numbers of police shootings per capita are in the West, where the gun ethos is more common: New Mexico, Alaska, Oklahoma, Arizona, Colorado, and Nevada. The states with the lowest rates are in the East: Rhode Island, New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Jersey.

Culture is invisible but all-determining. The police forces that have done well in reducing crime do not train their officers to see themselves as superheroes attacking bad guys. They have a stronger community-service ethos. [...] ¹

There needs to be a change in police training and self-conception, but this alone will not do, since it is fact that one reason for brutal police force is a non-negotiable threat by excessive use of weapons by citizens.

[...]Officers have shot people after mistaking wrenches and badges for guns. Cops have shot people thinking that they’re reaching for a firearm when they’re really pulling up loose-fitting shorts. Police have shot multiple people thinking that a toy gun was a real firearm.

Behind all these incidents lies what seems to be a constant fear that a gun may be present.

According to criminal justice and policing experts, police have good reason to be fearful. The US has a tremendous amount of civilian-owned guns — far more than any other country in the world. Based on recent estimates, there are more firearms in America than there are people. That presents a constant potential threat to police.

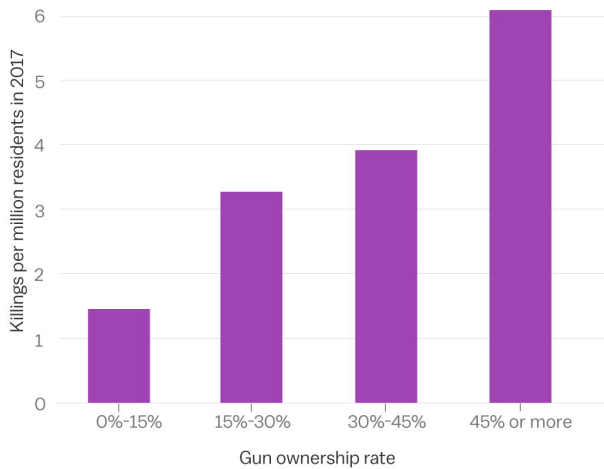
[...]This is one potential reason, experts said, that the US has far more police shootings than other developed nations. A 2015 analysis by the Guardian found that “US police kill more in days than other countries do in years.” Between 1990 and 2014, police in England and Wales shot and killed 55 people. In just the first 24 days of 2015, the US surpassed that toll of fatal police shootings. The differences are not explained by population, since the US is nearly six times as populous as England and Wales, but, based on the Guardian’s count, has hundreds of times the fatal police shootings.

So far, however, there hasn’t been much empirical research on the question of whether more guns in America lead to more police shootings — in large part because the US has long done a poor job tracking killings by cops, making them difficult to study.

[...] (W)eaker gun laws and higher rates of gun ownership do, at the very least, correlate with more killings by police officers (including shootings and other incidents of lethal force). [...]The stronger the gun control laws, the fewer police killings. The higher the gun ownership rates, the more police killings. [...]

¹ Brooks, David: The Culture of Policing is Broken. Found on <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/how-police-brutality-gets-made/613030/>. Last access 24.04.22.)

States with more gun owners have more police killings



Source: John Roman and Vox

Vox

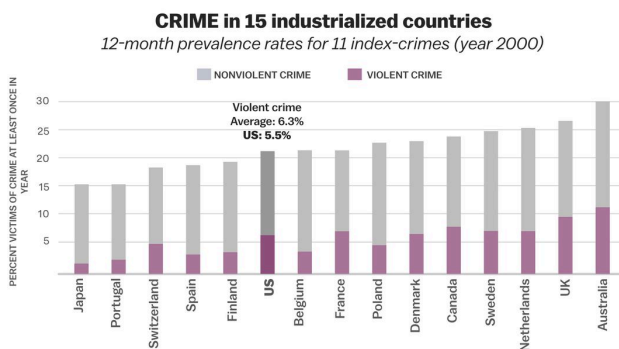
This is a crude analysis, not a peer-reviewed study. [...]

But the findings are echoed by a 2017 study, published in the *American Journal of Public Health*, that found that stronger gun laws are associated with fewer fatal police shootings. [...]

“One of the most reasonable take-homes is that [...] when police are less often in situations in which they might reasonably fear that a gun is going to be pulled, they’re less likely to react with the use of lethal force,” Aaron Kivisto, the study’s lead author, told me.

This would [...] also apply to justified police shootings in which the perpetrator really did pose a deadly threat to cops or others. By mitigating the chances *anyone* has a gun, stricter gun laws may make all sorts of dangerous encounters less likely — and that could, based on Kivisto’s study, save a lot of lives.

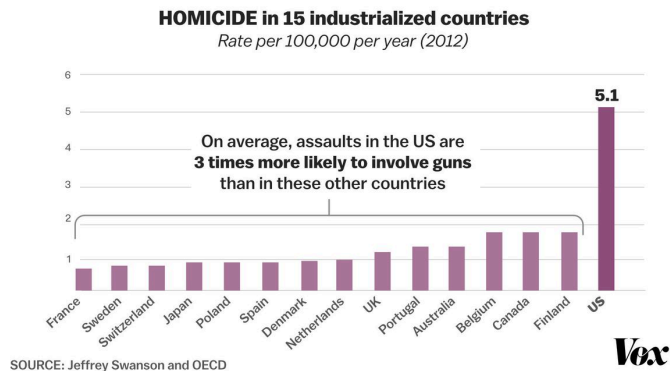
As a breakthrough analysis by UC Berkeley’s Franklin Zimring and Gordon Hawkins in the 1990s found, it’s not even that the US has more crime than other developed countries. This chart, based on data from Jeffrey Swanson at Duke University, shows that the US is not an outlier when it comes to overall crime:



SOURCE: Jeffrey Swanson. International Crime Victims Survey. Gallup Europe.

Vox

Instead, the US appears to have more *lethal* violence — and that’s driven in large part by the prevalence of guns.



“It’s an obvious, common-sense observation,” Tracey Meares, a policing expert at Yale Law School, told me. “In situations where police officers say, ‘I was in fear for my life,’ and later substantiate that with, ‘I thought the person had a gun,’ the reasonableness of someone’s assumption that somebody could possibly have a gun is naturally related to the prevalence of guns in the environment.”

[...]That’s not to say that people in other countries are always unarmed. In some places, like Glasgow, Scotland, they’ve had big problems historically with knife crime. But the reality is non-firearms are simply much less likely to carry a deadly threat. (Indeed, Meares pointed out that UK police are often trained to disarm people armed with knives through communication, their bare hands, and nonlethal weapons — something that is simply much more difficult with guns, given the much higher risks.)

[...]As with the link between guns and gun deaths more broadly, gun ownership rates and gun control laws are not the only contributors to killings by police officers. Other research, for example, has linked police shootings to structural racism, which speaks to the vast racial disparities seen in police use of force. Policies at the department level — which can often encourage escalation instead of deescalation — play an important role as well. And laws that give police wide latitude to use force may be part of the issue too.

But experts and the limited research so far suggest that the abundance of guns and gun laws in America likely play a role. So stricter gun laws could help reduce killings by police officers.²

Black Lives Matter

Black Lives Matter is an activist movement which began as a hashtag (#BlackLivesMatter) after George Zimmermann was acquitted in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed African American teenager killed in Florida in July 2013. The movement became more widely known and popularized after two high-profile deaths in 2014 of African American men (Eric Garner in Staten Island and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri) at the hands of police officers who were ultimately not indicted. Since August 2014, ongoing local and national protests and other actions — often sparked by the deaths of other unarmed African Americans — have brought the movement to the public’s consciousness and conversation. Black Lives Matter, which originated as a hashtag on Twitter and other social media, has since evolved into a “movement”. As of August 2015, more than 1000 Black Lives Matter demonstrations have been held worldwide.



² Lopez, German: Police shootings are also part of America’s gun problem. Found on <https://www.vox.com/2018/4/9/17205256/gun-violence-us-police-shootings>. Last access: 24.04.22.)

BLM is an organized movement advocating for non-violent civil disobedience in protest against incidents of police brutality against African American people. In 2015, four Black Lives activists released "Campaign Zero", which is aimed at promoting policy reforms to end police brutality.

Political slogans used during demonstrations include the eponymous "Black Lives Matter", "Hands up, don't shoot" (a later discredited reference attributed to Michael Brown), "I can't breathe" (referring to Eric Garner), "White silence is violence", "No justice, no peace", and "Is my son next?", among others. But also symbolic gestures are used. Many peaceful protests have been held before. In 2016, American football player Colin Kaepernick and others began "taking a knee" during the American national anthem. That meant they knelt down before their football games. They did it to protest Black people being treated unfairly by police. It was a peaceful way to protest a very important issue. However, Kaepernick and others who "took a knee" faced enormous opposition to this peaceful action, including from Donald Trump. After the killing of George Floyd in May 2020, the BLM movement returned to national headlines and gained further international attention. Taking a knee has become a common sight at demonstrations following his death.

Pre-Watching Activities

Anticipating the storyline – Working with the title

- 1) Teacher Instruction:
Silent Impulse – Write the play's *American Son* title on your board. Let the students freely associate without commenting.
If the students do not know already, after a few comments, tell them that the play's title is *American Son* and ask them about their expectations in terms of storyline.
- 2) Teacher Instruction: The first page of the script contains a quote. Give the students the quote, let them interpret the sentence, and anticipate further.

Race is the child of racism, not the father.

Ta-Nehisi Coates

Group Puzzle – Experiences with Racism³

Ask students to think about the question below. Explain that the class will talk about it in more depth later, but, to start, they might simply do a quick-write that they are welcome to keep private.

What is your earliest experience dealing with race and/or racism?

Explain to students that everyone has a racial identity. Sometimes white racial identity is seen as the “default” and people mistakenly think only minorities (Black people, Latino/Hispanic, people of arabic or turkish ascend, Asian or PoCs in general) have a race.

It is important to emphasize that all people have experiences with race, whether they are overt, hidden, unconscious or implied. People might experience those encounters directly, witness them happening to others, or have opportunities, or privileges, as a result of their racial identity.

After the students have written or thought about their experiences regarding race and racial injustice, show them the following 5 minute clip:

<https://www.nytimes.com/video/players/offsite/index.html?videoId=100000003670178>

In this short documentary, young Black men explain the particular challenges they face growing up in America.

After watching the video, give the students a little time to think about the differences and similarities they noticed between the experiences they’ve made and the struggles the Afro-American men had and have to deal with.

Main Part of the lesson:

Divide the three **First Encounters With Racism** stories equally among the students. Have students who are all reading the same story sit together, then give each group 10-15 minutes to read their story silently.

After reading their stories silently, the students then are supposed to answer the questions below their story. They should do this together with the group and have a small discussion.

Then, representatives from each of the story groups will report back to the whole class by describing what they read, and sharing their reflections on the questions below. While students are listening to other groups share, they can continue to write down words, phrases and feelings that resonate.

After each group reports on the stories they read, engage the whole class in a group discussion by asking:

- After reading and hearing about the stories, what stands out for you?
- What were your thoughts and feelings while reading your story or hearing others talk about the stories they read?
- What are some common themes?
- What did you learn that you didn’t know before?
- Did anything challenge what you know or thought you knew?
- What is the difference between interpersonal racism (individual acts of bias, meanness or exclusion) and institutional racism (policies and practices that are supported by power and authority and that benefit some and disadvantage others) in these stories?

Going further:

Ask the students to write their own story about race and racism. They might use the writing they did at the beginning of class about their first encounters with race or racism, or they might write about some other time in their lives when race or racism played a part.

³ Found on <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/27/learning/lesson-plans/first-encounters-with-race-and-racism-teaching-ideas-for-classroom-conversations.html>. Last Access: 25.04.22.



Only volunteers share their result.

Riley Lockett, 16, Youth Radio

Oakland, Calif.

Black

Followed by a Police Officer

About two months ago, I was walking to the BART station from school, sipping on soda and listening to a podcast when I noticed a blue uniform following me like a shadow. It was a white police officer. He scanned me as if he were the Terminator, trying to see if I posed a threat. I had never been stopped by a cop before. But I wasn't scared or even nervous. I was prepared.

My mother was always gearing me up for something: a good education, future job security and, most of all, institutionalized racism. Every time we passed a police car, she would drill my sister and me on what to do if and when a police officer stops us. We would begrudgingly repeat what our superior said: "Maintain eye contact, stand straight, speak when spoken to, no sudden movements."

As children, we never understood why she grilled us like that. Then, when I was 12, Trayvon Martin was killed. Even though it wasn't a cop who killed him, I started to comprehend what she was preparing us for. Although we live in a quiet suburb of Oakland, we are in a city where a police officer is usually seen as more of a threat than a friend. As a young Black man, I know an officer of the law can shoot me no matter where I am — and maybe especially in the middle of Orinda, the mostly white city where I was being stopped for the first time.

So, as the cop was questioning me, I decided to practice what my mom preached.

"Is there a problem, officer?" I asked in my most articulate, mature, but nonviolent voice.

"No. What's your name?"

"Riley Lockett."

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"Where do you go to school?"

"Orinda Academy, just up the hill. But I live in Oakland."

"Do you have ID?"

"Yes, here you go."

I felt like I was performing a one-man show I've been rehearsing my whole life. He eyed my ID, then looked through me while handing it back. He turned on his radio and mumbled some breaker-breaker nonsense into it, and in a few seconds he got a few squawks back.

"You're free to go," he said to me in a tone that made it sound like his mind was on something else.

I felt bold enough to ask, "What was the problem, officer?"

"Oh, some guy robbed a convenience store a couple streets over," he told me. "He fled in this direction, and you matched the description."

I've never had to face the color of my skin in anything but a mirror. So as far as police interactions go, I'd say my first one went pretty well. I know there will be plenty more as I get older.

Having to spend my childhood rehearsing for the day a police officer would pull me over may sound scary. And I'm aware it's not something parents of all races feel the need to teach their kids. But the day it actually happened, I was grateful, at least, that my mom made sure I was ready.

- **Briefly sum up what happened to Riley and his response.**
- **What is your personal reaction to this story?**
- **Explain how Riley was prepared for his encounter with the police officer.**
- **Find reasons why Riley says that in his community, a police officer is usually seen more of a threat than a friend.**
- **Think about and discuss the impact his needing to "prepare" has on him.**



Maya James, 19, Youth Radio

Traverse City, Mich.

Mixed Race (Black/White)

A Lesson from Kindergarten

Shortly after enrolling in kindergarten, one of my classmates threw the N-word at me in a small scuffle. I cannot remember what the little boy was so upset about — it was probably something elementary school students usually get upset about. Maybe I was hogging the markers; maybe I cut in line, or vice versa.

It was the first time I had ever heard that word. I didn't know how to react. I had many questions. Should I be upset? Could I call the white student the N-word, too? Who invented this word? Do adults use the word?

Before that moment, I had no idea what race was or what class meant. Now I had to grow up.

My teachers tried to intervene — yanking the little boy's arm and demanding he look in my eyes and "see the pain she feels!" They forced him to stay in and write apology letters during recess in their words, not his. "I should have thought before saying Black people are bad," says one note I've kept all these years, "To me, you are a good friend."

But the letters didn't stop the name-calling or the rock throwing at recess, at the bus stop or after school.

Back then I had a lot of loud temper tantrums. I was not a picnic for my parents. I cried a lot, I was irritable. That's when my father — who grew up in Longview, Tex., at the height of Jim Crow politics — started talking to me about race. After my teachers told him about the incident, he had no choice; he had to teach his 5-year-old daughter the tragic story of African genocide and white supremacy that was the American slave trade.

My dad's struggle and the struggle of his parents were now rubbing off on me at such a young age. No longer a little girl in the suburbs, but a descendant of people considered cattle. No reparations.

I remember thinking: This is unfair! What did I do to be born Black?

Traverse City, Mich., is 94 percent white. So it's no wonder I felt alone growing up as a half-Black, half-white little kid.

I am biracial, but in the United States, more often than not, I am always going to be labeled a person of color. I constantly have to choose between one side of my culture and the other — always seeking a greater identity. I feel like a puzzle piece that got lost, always trying to find some way to fit.

- **Briefly sum up, what happened to Maya and her response.**
- **What is your personal reaction to this story?**
- **Explain why Maya's father started talking to her about race and racism when she was 5 years old.**
- **Find reasons why Maya feels she has to choose one race over the other.**
- **Discuss why this affected Maya differently as a biracial person than it might have affected someone who is one race or with a different racial identity.**



Marianne Nacanaynay, 15, Youth Radio

Mountlake Terrace, Wash.

Filipina

A Slur Directed at Me

The first time someone directed a racial slur toward me I was at a pizza place in Everett, a town in western Washington State. One of my friends who works with me on our high school newspaper wanted to get lunch early, and the place was already crowded with a line stretching around the block. I was waiting outside of the restaurant and chatting on the phone when out of the corner of my eye, I saw two dudes walking by. They were young looking — teenagers or 20-somethings — with light skin and blond/brown hair. As they passed me, I heard them laugh and say, “(expletive) chink.” It took me a few moments to process what I had just heard. I was taken aback, but not exactly surprised. After all, there I was, a Filipina reporter covering a Trump rally.

Washington State tends to be super liberal. We had the first elected married gay mayor of a major American city. We’ve legalized recreational marijuana. Until recently, Republicans I knew here were mostly “in the closet” in the sense they didn’t talk much about their opinions in public. But I’ve learned that doesn’t mean racism doesn’t exist in Washington — it’s just typically a less overt brand of racism.

Growing up, I lived in Auburn, a suburb south of Seattle, and there weren’t a lot of other kids who looked like me. Back then, it didn’t bother me, because I didn’t think too much about race. My family raised me with phrases like “People are people,” and “It’s who you are inside that counts.”

I remember the time I had a white classmate come over to my house for dinner. We served adobo, which is chicken or pork that’s been marinated in soy sauce or vinegar then fried, and ube, a dessert made of purple yam. The girl politely tried everything but mostly pushed the food around the plate. When I asked her about it later, she said the flavors weren’t familiar to her.

Then in sixth grade we moved to Mountlake Terrace, a suburb about 20 minutes north of Seattle with a noticeable Asian population. Being around more Asian friends, I found myself reflecting differently on my interactions with white peers.

I brought a plate of the same adobo to a party, and people loved it. Having people like my culture made me feel more comfortable with it, too.

So, after years of slowly opening myself up to having pride about my race and culture, hearing two boys call me a chink in the middle of a pizza place was a snap back to reality. On the one hand, it was so over-the-top, it was almost comical. I mean, it’s not even the right racial slur, since I’m not Chinese.

Sometimes I think back on that incident, like when I hear about other people being called a racial slur, or when I hear about people harassing others at Trump rallies. And I remember how I felt vulnerable. It’s a reminder that there are some places where I am still considered the “other.”

- **Sum up in your own words what happened to Marianne and what her response was.**
- **What is your personal reaction to this story?**
- **Explain why Marianne wasn’t initially surprised when she heard the slur directed at her.**
- **Explain what Marianne means when she says Washington has a “less overt” brand of racism.**
- **Outline the changes in Marianne’s thinking about her interactions with white peers after she moved to a town with more Asian-American people.**

Reading Comprehension – Black Lives Matter

Black Lives Matter (BLM), international social movement, formed in the United States in 2013, dedicated to fighting racism and anti-Black violence, especially in the form of police brutality. The name *Black Lives Matter* signals condemnation of the unjust killings of Black people by police (Black people are far more likely to be killed by police in the United States than white people) and the demand that society values the lives and humanity of Black people as much as it values the lives and humanity of white people.



BLM activists have held large and influential protests in cities across the United States as well as internationally. There are local BLM Organizations, that are affiliated with the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation, a nonprofit civil rights organization that is active in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

BLM was cofounded in 2013 as an online movement (using the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on social media) by three Black community organizers—Patrisse Khan-Cullors,

Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi. They formed BLM after George Zimmerman, a man of German and Peruvian descent, was acquitted on charges stemming from his fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager, in Florida, February 2012. Zimmerman, a neighborhood-watch volunteer, had seen Martin walking in his neighborhood and called the police because he thought Martin looked “suspicious.” Although Zimmerman was told not to do anything, he followed Martin, got into an argument with him, and shot and killed him. When law enforcement arrived, Zimmerman claimed that he had been assaulted by Martin and fired in self-defense.

Zimmerman remained free for weeks, but, as the shooting gained national attention, demonstrations demanding his prosecution were held in cities across the United States, he was finally charged with second-degree murder and arrested in April 2012. At his trial more than a year later, Zimmerman claimed that he had acted in self-defense. His acquittal in July 2013 was widely perceived as a miscarriage of justice and led to further nationwide protests.

In May 2020 George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, was pronounced dead after Derek Chauvin, a white Minneapolis police officer, knelt on Floyd’s neck for more than nine minutes, despite Floyd’s repeated protests that he could not breathe. Wide circulation of a bystander’s video of Floyd’s last minutes triggered massive demonstrations in cities throughout the United States and across the globe.

The Black Lives Matter movement has many goals. BLM activists seek to draw attention to the many ways in which Black people are treated unfairly in society and the ways in which institutions, laws, and policies help to perpetuate that unfairness. The movement has fought racism through such means as political action, letter-writing campaigns, and nonviolent protests. Its efforts have included calls for better training for police and greater accountability for police misconduct.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-Lives-Matter/Subsequent-protests-George-Floyd-Ahmaud-Arbery-and-Breonna-Taylor>

1) Is this statement true or false? Tick the right boxes.

True False

- ☐ The Black Lives Matter Movement was formed in 2013.
- ☐ BLM stands for “Beautiful Ladies Matter”.
- ☐ They demand that white people are less valued than Black people.
- ☐ The active organizations take place in the US, Canada and the United Kingdom.
- ☐ The movement was cofounded by three Black community organizers.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2) Match the names with the right descriptions.

Patrisse Khan-Cullors

a white Minneapolis police officer

George Zimmerman

an unarmed Black teenager

Trayvon Martin

community organizer

George Floyd

a man of German and Peruvian descent

Derek Chauvin

an unarmed Black man

3) Put the events in the right order (1-5).

- ___ George Zimmerman was acquitted.
- ___ George Zimmerman was arrested as second-degree murder.
- ___ The unarmed teenager, Trayvon Martin, was killed
- ___ The unarmed George Floyd was killed.
- ___ The international movement “Black Lives Matter” was formed.

4) Answer the questions.

What is the main goal of the Black Lives Matter Organization?

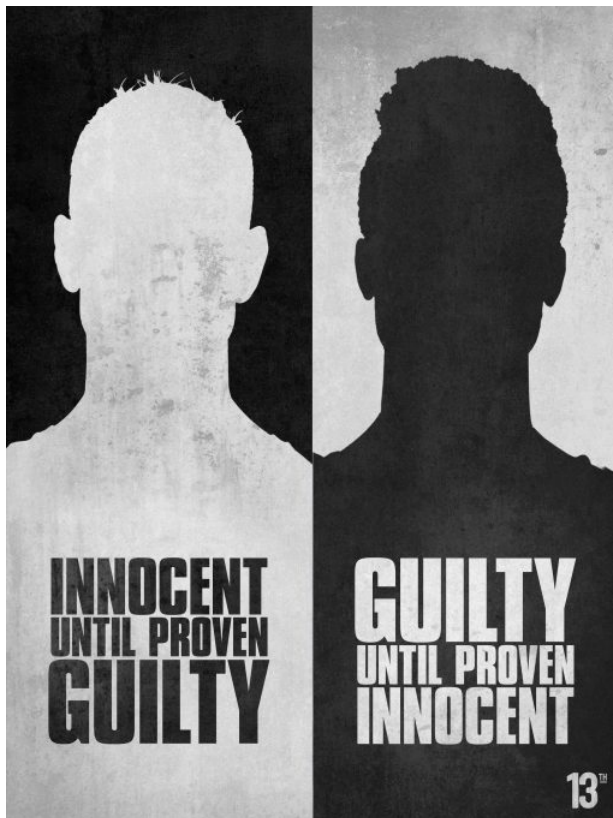
What caused the founding of the organization?

What measures does the BLM movement take?

Gallery Walk - African American Life in the US today - Police Brutality and modern segregation

With a partner, describe the pictures and try to find out what they have in common. Share any background knowledge you might have.





In class: Choose the picture you find most interesting/you have questions about/... and tell the group why you chose it. Share your background knowledge.

The raised fist is a powerful symbol, which is often used in protests against police brutality as you can also see in one of the pictures. Find out what it is a symbol of and why the protesters in this picture use it?



Think/Pair/Share - Ten rules of Survival

“The talk” is something every Black parent in the United States of America has to face at some point when raising their children. There is even an official video, recorded to help parents start and guide them through that conversation.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wqJ-psD9vJw>

Watch the clip.

In class: What did you feel while watching? Why?
What is the clip about?

Watch the clip a second time: Which rules did you understand?

Think – Pair Share:

Explain why you think it is necessary to talk to young Black Americans about how to behave in front of police officers.

Read the rules below.

Think-Pair-Share: Choose a rule and explain, why this behavior might be necessary.

10 Rules of Survival if Stopped by the Police

1. Be polite and respectful when stopped by the police. Keep your mouth closed.
2. Remember that your goal is to get home safely. If you feel that your rights have been violated, you and your parents have the right to file a formal complaint with your local police jurisdiction.
3. Don't, under any circumstance, get into an argument with the police.
4. Always remember that anything you say or do can be used against you in court.
5. Keep your hands in plain sight and make sure the police can see your hands at all times.
6. Avoid physical contact with the police. No sudden movements, and keep hands out of your pockets.
7. Do not run, even if you are afraid of the police.
8. Even if you believe that you are innocent, do not resist arrest.
9. Don't make any statements about the incident until you are able to meet with a lawyer or public defender.
10. Stay calm and remain in control. Watch your words, body language and emotions.

Group Work - Police Brutality in the USA

Young Black males in recent years were at a 21 times greater risk of being shot dead by police than their white counterparts.⁴ The following is a selection of publicly known victims of police violence in the USA.

Get into groups of 5-6 people and divide up the cases. Read your person's story and look up words you do not know if necessary.

Present your case to the other students in your group. Then discuss what they have in common and try to find reasons why the police might have acted in this way.

Date and place	Victim's name	What happened
17 July 2014 New York City	Eric Garner	Garner (43), who had a police record of 30 arrests for assault and theft, was approached by police officers who suspected him of selling untaxed cigarettes. Garner protested his innocence and knocked away the hand of Officer Daniel Pantaleo, who was trying to handcuff him. Pantaleo then grabbed Garner in a choke hold around his neck and brought him to the ground. Aided by more police officers, he then pushed Garner's face into the pavement in an attempt to subdue him. Garner was reported to say, "I can't breathe" eleven times, and then fell silent. He did not receive any medical help. Later, he was taken to hospital and died there. The autopsy declared his death to be a result of compression to his neck and chest, but also listed that Garner had been suffering from asthma, a heart disease and obesity.

---X---

---X---

---X---

Date and place	Victim's name	What happened
9 August 2014 Ferguson, MO	Michael Brown	CCTV footage showed Brown (18) and a friend robbing a shop and shoving its owner. As the two young men walked away from the shop Police Officer Darren Wilson blocked their way with his patrol car. A short struggle followed with both Brown and Wilson fighting for Wilson's handgun through the window of the police car. Brown then ran away and Wilson gave chase. When Brown stopped and turned towards Wilson, the police officer felt threatened and fired a total of eight bullets into Brown, presumably killing him with the last one. This incident led to widespread rioting in Ferguson. In an investigation by the US department of Justice Wilson was cleared of any civil rights violation.

---X---

---X---

---X---

Date and place	Victim's name	What happened
20 October 2014 Chicago, IL	Laquan McDonald	McDonald (17) was reported to be walking around with a knife and breaking into cars. When a first police patrol confronted him McDonald slashed one tyre of the police car and further damaged the police car with his knife. McDonald, who was high on PCP, then left the car park and wandered around aimlessly in the adjoining street, still holding on to his knife. More police arrived. One of them was Officer Jason van Dyke. Although none of the other eight police officers present perceived McDonald as a threat at that moment, van Dyke opened fire about six seconds after leaving his car. McDonald fell to the ground after the first shot, but van Dyke kept firing and emptied the rest of his magazine into McDonald. He fired a total of 16 shots. On 16 December 2015 van Dyke was indicted for first-degree murder.

⁴ <https://www.propublica.org/article/deadly-force-in-black-and-white>

Date and place	Victim's name	What happened
22 November 2014 Cleveland, OH	Tamir Rice	In a 9-1-1 call police were alerted to a Black male pointing a gun at people in a park. The caller added that probably the gun was not real and that the person in question seemed to be a juvenile. However, these pieces of information were not passed on to the two police officers dealing with the case. Officers Timothy Loehmann and Frank Garmback arrived at the park and saw Rice (12) reaching for what looked like a real gun. Loehmann opened fire while his car was still moving and hit Rice with one shot. The boy died the following day. His gun turned out to be an airsoft replica. Although the police officers were acquitted, the City of Cleveland finally agreed to pay \$6m in compensation to Rice's family.

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Date and place	Victim's name	What happened
2 December 2015 San Francisco, CA	Mario Woods	Woods (26), a suspect in a stabbing incident earlier that day, was stopped by several police officers. Woods had his back against a wall and was surrounded by a ring of police officers. When efforts to make him drop his knife failed (including the use of bean bags and pepper spray) and Woods tried to walk away, the police officers opened fire. Witnesses described the scene as "barrage-style" firing. As the autopsy revealed, Woods was hit by 21 shots. He also had drugs in his bloodstream, including THC.

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Date and place	Victim's name	What happened
25 May 2020 Minneapolis, Minnesota	George Floyd	Floyd (46), bought cigarettes at a grocery store. A store employee believed Floyd had paid with a counterfeit bill, confronted Floyd, who was already back in his car. Floyd refused to return the cigarettes, which is why the police was called. When the police arrived, officer Lane drew his gun and ordered Floyd to put his hands on the steering wheel; Floyd did as he was told. Following a brief struggle, Lane pulled Floyd from the car and handcuffed him. The Officers Kueng and Lane told Floyd he was under arrest and walked him to their police car across the street. ^[4] Floyd fell to the ground next to the car; the officers picked him up and placed him against the car's door. Floyd told the officers that he was not resisting, but that he was claustrophobic and did not want to sit in the car. Floyd told the officers he could not breathe while they tried to force him into the car. Floyd, still handcuffed, fell to the pavement where he lay on his chest with his cheek to the ground, officer Chauvin kneeling on his neck. ^[1] Floyd repeated at least 16 times that he could not breathe and begged for his life until he finally died after 8 minutes and 46 seconds of being pinned to the ground. Chauvin was fired the day after the incident. He was charged with second-degree-murder and second-degree manslaughter.

Sources:

- Garner: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Eric_Garner
- Brown: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shooting_of_Michael_Brown
- McDonald: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shooting_of_Laquan_McDonald
- Rice: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shooting_of_Tamir_Rice
- Woods: <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/02/11/us/san-francisco-police-shooting-mario-woods-autopsy/>
- Floyd: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killing_of_George_Floyd

Find more cases here:

<http://www.buzzfeed.com/nicholasquah/heres-a-timeline-of-unarmed-black-men-killed-by-police-over#.xgx3bM08Q>

Listening task: Violence, shootings and the police in the US

on [BBC 4: More or Less: Behind the Stats](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p041ldjz), July 15, 2016, ~10 min. Download from [www.englisch-bw.de](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p041ldjz).
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p041ldjz>

I. True or false? (1 credit each)	true	false
1. Data on victims of fatal police shootings are easily available and reliable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The FBI have collected the data, so there can be an informed discussion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. There is uneven reporting on victims shot by the police because collecting data is voluntary.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

II. Complete this sentence. (2 credits)

Investigative journalist *Kimberly Kindy*, counted

III. Tick the one correct answer. (1 credit)

Kindy found out that	a	<input type="checkbox"/>	half of the victims were Black, half from other minorities.
	b	<input type="checkbox"/>	overall, African-Americans are more often involved in crime.
	c	<input type="checkbox"/>	the numbers are evidence of racism.

IV. True or false? (1 credit each)

	true	false
1. According to an economist, <i>Roland Fryer</i> , people of color experience more police violence.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. <i>Fryer</i> also argues that they are more likely to be fatally shot by the police.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Homicides in general have been decreasing in the last two decades.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

V. Complete the sentence. (3 credits)

Especially after a gunman shot five police officers in Dallas on July 7, 2016, there is a wide-spread perception in the public and within law-enforcement that

Proper names:

1. *Kimberly Kindy*, investigative journalist at "The Washington Post"
2. *Roland G. Fryer Jr.*, African-American economist at Harvard University
3. *Seth W. Stoughton*, law professor at the University of Southern Carol

Analyzing a picture - London artist comments on the death of George Floyd

- 1) The picture below is by the London artist Banksy. It is the first of two pictures he posted on social media. Look at the picture and describe it to your partner.



<https://www.designboom.com/art/banksy-anti-racism-george-floyd-black-lives-matter-06-06-2020/>

- 2) Share in class: Analyze and interpret the picture. Elaborate on context and possible reactions.
- 3) The picture above was the first of two pictures posted online commenting on the death of George Floyd. It was a part of the second picture (below) posted by Banksy. Talk to your partner again. Describe what else you can see.
- 4) Share: Discuss whether seeing the whole picture changes your interpretation. Can you think of a reason why Banksy might have posted those pictures separately?
- 5) Comment on Banksy's picture. What do you personally think about it?



<https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/black-lives-matter-banksy-setzt-amerikanische-flagge-in-brand-16803707.html>

- 6) Banksy not only posted his pictures, he also commented verbally on the situation in the USA.

Read his statement and sum it up in your own words.

“At first I thought I should just shut up and listen to Black people about this issue. But why would I do that? It’s not their problem, it’s mine.

People of colour are being failed by the system. The white system. Like a broken pipe flooding the apartment of the people living downstairs. The faulty system is making their life a misery, but it’s not their job to fix it. They can’t, no one will let them in the apartment upstairs.

This is a white problem. And if white people don’t fix it, someone will have to come upstairs and kick the door in.”

- 7) Comment on Banksy’s approach. Do you agree? Do you disagree? Why? Which ways do you think there are to fix the system?

While Watching Activities

Mentimeter – What is the play about?

Teacher Instruction: You can either let the students gather their input analogously on sheets of paper and pin them to the board or use Mentimeter for a word cloud or, the free alternative that does not need a log-in, via *Kartenabfrage* on Oncoo .

Let them freely discuss the results a little and then give them the comprehension test. After the test, give time for additional comprehension questions.

Finally, return to your question from the beginning. Do the students still agree with their choices?

Comprehension Quiz

- 1. Name the current relationship status between Kendra, Scott, and Jamal.**
 - a) They are separated and Jamal lives with Kendra.
 - b) Although they argue sometimes, Kendra and Scott still live together with Jamal in Miami, Florida
 - c) Scott left many years ago and was never really there for Jamal. He wants to rejoin his son's life though.

- 2. Why does officer Larkin refuse to give Kendra information about her son's whereabouts, but in contrast tells Scott all he knows?**
 - a) Larkin believes Scott to be his superior.
 - b) He bends the rules for the white male colleague he can look up to.
 - c) Because Larkin realizes that Jamal's parents have a right to know.

- 3. From Kendra's point of view: Why does officer Larkin ask about Jamal's criminal record in such detail?**
 - a) Because he is prejudiced against African-Americans
 - b) Because Kendra hints at past infringements
 - c) Because Jamal is a known member of a local gang

- 4. Scott uses slang and Kendra reacts aggressively. Choose the most fitting answer why.**
 - a) She thinks it is unprofessional to use incorrect language and doing so makes him seem stupid
 - b) She is angry because she tries so much harder to educate her son properly than her ex-husband.
 - c) She does not want her son to pick up this kind of language because she fears he might be discriminated against because of it.

- 5. Why is Scott worried about his son exploring his identity as a Black person? Choose the most fitting answer.**
 - a) Scott wants his son to be more like him.
 - b) Scott thinks that all Black people who act "Black" are asocial and criminals.
 - c) Scott is worried, Jamal might be discriminated against if he started identifying with Afro-American culture.

- 6. Who else besides Jamal was in the car when stopped by the police?**
 - a) Two white boys he barely knew from his prep school.
 - b) His only Black friend Al, together with his cousin.
 - c) Two Black kids neither Kendra nor Scott know personally.

- 7. Choose the right message portrayed on Jamal's sticker.**
 - a) Black Lives Matter
 - b) Shoot Cops
 - c) Stay Blazed

- 8. Why does Kendra say: "Jamal feels like he's "the face of the race"?"**
 - a) He feels like a forced representative for all Black people, because at school he often is the only Black student in class.

- b) He sees himself as “the face of the race” because he has better grades and scores than all of the other Black students at his school.
- c) Jamal feels that having one white and ne black parent makes him responsible for forging a connection between white and Black students.

9. Why does Scott think that Jamal is walking through his world and not Kendra’s?

- a) Because he thinks that due to his privileged upbringing, Jamal does not know discrimination. In consequence, for Scott discrimination is a result of a certain behavior more than a result of skin color.
- b) Because he thinks that his son is much more leveled and intelligent than his mother. Therefore, Jamal will know how to defend himself and convince others of his talents.
- c) Because Jamal has a much deeper connection to his father. He admires him and looks up to him.

10. Why is Jamal angry at Scott?

- a) Jamal is angry at Scott for shattering his dreams to be a professional baseball player by telling him how he is missing the needed talent and athleticism.
- b) Scott forbids Jamal to continue playing the guitar and pursuing a career in the music industry.
- c) Jamal is full of anger for Scott because he thinks his father let the family down by leaving both his mum and himself.

11. What is the content of Scott’s brother’s text message?




- a) A video of their man-crush Dwayne Wade dunking a basketball
- b) A bystander’s video of a police control and the resulting conflict between an armed police officer and a Black person
- c) A picture of the provocative sticker on Jamal’s car

12. Lieutenant Stokes behaves disrespectfully towards the Connors, because...

- a) He had to get up and come in early
- b) He thinks Larkin could have dealt with the situation himself
- c) He judges the Connors for not teaching their son about the risks of being a Black person and the proper behavior when confronted with police

13. How did Jamal get killed?

- a) The officer believes him to have a weapon and shoots in self-defense.
- b) One of Jamal’s friends aims a weapon at the officer and shoots Jamal by accident.
- c) When Jamal slips, one of his friends tries to run away and the officer, being overwhelmed by the situation, shoots Jamal in the head by accident.

d) 10-113 correct answers	5-9 correct answers	0-4 correct answers
 Congratulations! You understood a lot!	 Quite good already! Talk to your classmates again about the play, you might tap into new levels of understanding!	 Don’t give up! Talk to your classmates about the parts of the play that are still a bit fuzzy to you.

Working with the text – The police system and its challenges

The police system was criticized for brutality and racism massively in the last couple of years.

Collect what you know about the police system in the USA.
Think of changes that could be made to make a difference and create a safer society and collect them on your card.⁵

In consequence of police killings, the BLM movement, and increasing public attention, changes have been made in the police of which some are reflected and commented on in “American Son”.

Read the excerpt below. Take notes on what the excerpt tells us about changes already made in order to reduce racism and brutality in the police system. Which ones have you mentioned already, can you find additional ones?

Analyze the effectiveness of these changes based on the text. Discuss the core source of police brutality according to the play and find possible changes that might make a difference after all.

STOKES I will tell you this... The car had a bumper sticker on it that raises some concerns.

KENDRA I'm aware of that.

[...]

STOKES A Black boy in a car with a bumper sticker like that...? He's asking for trouble.

KENDRA And what does that tell you?

STOKES It tells me the world is not the same for people who look like you and me.

KENDRA Jesus Christ.

STOKES Yeah. That's what it tells me. It also tells me that the people who patrol the streets with legal authority to use deadly force are not robots. They help their kids brush their teeth at night. Read 'em Dr. Seuss and pray they'll get to do it the next night. They do it for the pride and not for the money. It tells me that when they see some nihilistic, agitatin' young thug, their pride may get the best of 'em.

KENDRA Who the hell do you think you are? Calling my son a thug. Running cover for some crackerass cop.

STOKES The cop is Black. The one who made the stop? He's Black as you and me. (Beat).
Lemme tell you something lady. I parachuted outta planes. I fought house-to-house in Fallujah. The most scared I've ever been in my life.... ever... is when I made my first traffic stop on a ghetto street. And you know why? Because there are hip hop songs and bumper stickers and mobs shutting down the interstate saying the cops are the enemy so it's OK to question 'em. It's OK to challenge 'em. If they pull you over, it's OK to bust out with an attitude. Act like gangsters and have... “swagger.” You step up to a cop, that makes you hard. Well, all that bullshit gets cops killed.

KENDRA I don't know who you're talking about, but that's not my son. My son was taught to be respectful and assert his rights.

⁵ Possible answers: Demilitarization of police, more training in de-escalation and communication, less police, more police, more diverse police officers, longer training of officers, community work as precondition for police work, stricter gun laws for society in general...

STOKES When I pull you over? You got no grounds to “assert your rights.” Know what you have the right to do? Shut up and do what I say.

KENDRA I-- I-- I can’t believe what I’m hearing. You serve us. Not the other way around.

STOKES What if your car matches one from an Amber alert? What if you fit the BOLO for someone who’s just shot up a school? When you get stopped you got no idea what it might be. Some hard-acting fool just gets in the way.

KENDRA Maybe if you’d grown up in The Pork ‘n Beans like me, you’d understand that Black boys don’t act gangster to be hard, they do it to hide their fear.

STOKES I grew up in Overtown lady, so ain’t nobody gotta tell me why they do like they do.

Oh, but hold up-- Y’all’s family’s living the American Dream, ain’t ya? Your son got no reason to be afraid, right?

KENDRA Oh-- is that what I should be doing? Teaching him to be scared? Be a good boy and keep his mouth shut?

STOKES Damn right. Make sure he understands that for us? There ain’t no “American Dream.”

KENDRA Well... I guess I just wasn’t raised to be bitter Uncle Tom like you.

STOKES Lady, you got a nerve...

KENDRA You damned right I do.

[...]

STOKES One thing I know for sure about this incident already. Just like almost every other one of ‘em: If the young brothers woulda just shut their mouths and done what they were told, none of us would be here tonight. That’s what I suggest you do-- sit tight and shut up. (he turns to go) Oh. And sistah... Next time you call a Black man a Tom? It’d play a whole lot better if that Black man didn’t just drag your White husband out the room in handcuffs.

Stokes exits.

Post-Watching Activities

Reading Comprehension - Let's get to the root of racial injustice by Megan Ming Francis

Megan Ming Francis is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Washington where she specializes in the study of American politics, race, and the development of constitutional law. She is particularly interested in the construction of rights and citizenship, Black political activism, and the post-civil war South. In her talk at a Ted conference in 2016 she takes a closer look at the roots of racial injustice and possible solutions.

Read the text below. Look up words you do not know, mark important passages and take notes on the side of the text.

Fixes that do not address the root causes⁶ of an issue are not really fixes at all. [...]The present crisis surrounding race in the US suffers from a lack of attention to the root causes. Better attention to the root causes will help us to figure out how to move past where we are right now in terms of the current racial climate in the United States.

So why does the killing of unarmed Blacks continue to happen? I think it continues to happen because we have the wrong diagnosis and the wrong cure. And what I mean by this is we tend to think the problem of racial violence is isolated to a few stubborn racists [...] and we tend to think the cure to the injustices in the United States should always revolve around⁷ education. [...] I will challenge both of these ideas and suggest a new way to understand the problem as well as the solution.

First, part of the reason the killing of unarmed Blacks continues to happen at an alarming rate is because we have not properly addressed our long history of racial tear in this country which has treated Blackness as a proxy⁸ for criminality. As a substitute for criminality. Instead, when confronted with kind of these jarring racial injustices, what we like to do is to point to the bad racist apples. We like to individualize the problem and situate it away from us. [...] But the problem of contemporary racial violence is not that we have a few kind of racist bad apples. The problem is that the whole tree, the whole apple tree is infected. The problem is that the presumption⁹ of dangerousness is tightly bound to race for so many in this country. For police officers, to justify the use of deadly force, they have to reasonably believe that their lives are in danger. And in all of the high-profile killings of Blacks the past year, officers attest to feeling under threat.

But what does that mean in the context of unarmed citizens? It means that Black skin triggers a heightened sense of threat – a life-threatening sense of threat – that then influences the officer's decision to use deadly force. According to the most recent statistics, 33 per cent of Blacks that have been killed by the police were unarmed. But it is not just police that pop up this myth of Black danger. This myth gets reinforced and takes on a truth-like quality through everyday interaction. When a Black man passes and a woman clutches her purse or when a group of Black friends walk by a car and hear the jarring sound of someone who has just pushed the automatic locks because they are afraid. And I have friends on both sides of this: Black men with great jobs who just want to be viewed as a person and not as a threat after a long day of work and I have really great white and Asian woman friends who clutch their purse and walk quickly if they see a Black man on a dimly-lit street and then feel ashamed in the need to over-explain their actions to me. [...] In talking about the current racial crisis we tend to focus all of our attention on police and overlook our own complicity¹⁰ in creating an environment in which Black lives are not treated as equal.

To be clear, in thinking about solutions to the racial violence, I am in favor of body cameras, I am in favor of a non-militarized police force, I am in favor of stricter laws that make police officers more accountable when they stop and frisk people on the street. But I am not convinced that we would need something like body cameras if we did not live in a society that treated Blacks as dangerous and suspicious first and as citizens second.

⁶ Hauptursache

⁷ Sich drehen um

⁸ Stellvertreter

⁹ Annahme

¹⁰ Mitschuld

It is not just a few bad racist apples in a police department [...], It is all of us who in big ways through our actions and in small ways by our silences support this lie, because that is what it is, that somehow Black folks are just more dangerous than the rest of us.

So, not only do I believe that we have misdiagnosed the problem, I also think we have the wrong cure to it. We keep offering up education as a solution to all racial injustices in the United States [...]. But [...] education is not a cure-all for all of America's racial sins. And yet, education is still how most Americans understand their responsibility to fixing contemporary¹¹ racial injustices. Our measure of how far we have come in the area of race relations is most often calculated in how integrated our schools are, how many innovative education experiments are currently going on, and how many federal¹² dollars are committed towards education. But the contemporary problem surrounding the killing of unarmed Blacks is not a problem that boils down to providing greater educational opportunities to Blacks. This is a misdiagnosis. A book is not going to stop a bullet barreling through a gun [...] and longer classroom times are not going to save Freddy Grey¹³ from being illegally stopped and then manhandled by the police in Baltimore.

This is what I know for sure: That in order to combat continuing racial injustices today, we must expand our vision and our responsibility to what Civil Rights actually means. We must include the battle against racist violence in our understanding of Civil Rights. Instead of education, what if we placed freedom from racist violence at the crux¹⁴ of what it means to be free and equal in the United States. Doing so does not mean that we necessarily dislodge education, but it means that if racism and white supremacy¹⁵ are a rock fortress, that we assemble a greater arsenal of weapons to break the damn thing down.

I know this is not an easy task, but I know that it can be done. So [...] I have spent the last ten years focused on a surprising finding: that before the Civil Rights group, the NAACP¹⁶, focused on its historic campaign against segregated education, the NAACP spent the first two decades of the 20th century focused on fighting escalating levels of racial violence that Blacks endured as a result of the actions from police, politicians and private white citizens in the south and in the north. In order to wage this big campaign against racial violence, the NAACP organized mass demonstrations in the streets. They lobbied Congress to pass an anti-lynching bill, they litigated¹⁷ and won a landmark decision in front of the Supreme Court. And they petitioned three different presidents to make a statement against lynching. It was this massive, extraordinary, in-your-face campaign that forced America to confront lynchings and mob violence against African Americans. It asked America how strong its commitment was to protecting Black lives. As a result of this work in the early 20th century, the rates of lynching and mob violence dramatically decreased. I tell the story about the NAACP's historic campaign against racial violence, because I believe our past history can light a way out of the present darkness. If we listen to what this history tells us, then we must struggle through this current moment. We must confront the ways that our actions and our institutions lead to a differential treatment of Blacks, even if done unintentionally.

Today people across the United States are taking the streets and are demanding to be seen, not as dangerous but as people whose lives have value and deserve protection. Some of these groups are associated directly, and some indirectly, with the Black Lives Matter movement. Without the efforts of these groups, so many of these killings of unarmed Blacks would have been swapped under the rug, and we would have lost attention long ago. But so many of these activists have denied¹⁸ the comforts of silence and they are being active around this issue. Their message and my message to you today is that we must pay closer attention to the way that Black people are treated. The stories of police brutality and killings of unarmed Blacks is not a story about Black people. It is a story about all of us, about racial progress and the stubborn durability of American racism. It is about if we will stop making the mistakes of our past and confront our own complicity in this great American lie that somehow some people are

¹¹ gegenwärtig

¹² staatlich

¹³ On April 12, 2015, Freddie Carlos Gray Jr., a 25-year-old Black man, was arrested by the Baltimore Police Department and subsequently charged for possessing a knife. While being transported in a police van, Gray fell into a coma and died on April 19, 2015; his death was ascribed to injuries to his spinal cord.

¹⁴ Kernpunkt, Knackpunkt

¹⁵ Überlegenheit

¹⁶ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

¹⁷ Einen Prozess anstrengen

¹⁸ ablehnen

more dangerous than others. And finally, it is about if we have the courage to take a collective stand¹⁹ against racial injustice today.

This year nearly half of my students in my race and politics upper division course participated in a walkout in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. Halfway through my lecture I could hear the swelling crowd of students, teachers and community members in the Quad of the University of Washington. [...] My books and my silence will not save these students, but their activism, their courage in challenging the status quo, and this movement just might.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aCn72iXO9s>

	true	false	Actual content
Fixes that only treat symptoms usually work.		X	<i>Fixes need to address the root causes of a problem.</i>
Megan Ming Francis challenges the idea of individual racist people being the main problem.			
Only three percent of Black people killed by the police were unarmed themselves.			
Black skin is seen as a threat in society.			
Body cameras, a non-militarized police force, and stricter laws are the solution to the problem.			
Education does not have any part in solving the problem.			
Black Lives Matter protested against racial injustices and brutality against African Americans in times of the Civil Rights Movement.			

Ming uses the analogy of the apple tree.

when confronted with kind of these jarring racial injustices, what we like to do is to point to the bad racist apples. We like to individualize the problem and situate it away from us. [...] But the problem of contemporary racial violence is not that we have a few kind of racist bad apples. The problem is that the whole tree, the whole apple tree is infected.

Explain her statement in your own words. Apply her statement to the play you have just seen.

If you read the speech again, you will find more figures of speech. Highlight them, choose one and explain its meaning and effect on the text and on you.

Sum up Ming's central message and compare them to Banksy's statement. Give your own point of view of the matter.

¹⁹ Kollektiv Stellung beziehen

Mediation Task – Problems of USA's police system and training

- 1) Read the article from *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* below. Take notes on content of the single paragraphs in English. Do not try to translate word by word but to capture the essence in short notes.
- 2) It's one year after Jamal's death and Scott cannot come to terms with his fate. He cannot stand being part of a broken police system anymore and therefore wants to quit his job. He is asked to justify his decision in a letter to his superior.
Write the letter of resignation from Scott's point of view. Use the information given in the play as well as the article.

US-Ausbilderin: „Die Polizeiausbildung in den USA ist die schlechteste der Welt“

Erstellt: 03.07.2020, Von: Sebastian Moll

<https://www.fr.de/politik/us-ausbilderin-polizeiausbildung-schlechteste-welt-13819802.html> (Stand: 22.04.2002)

Maria Haberfeld spricht im FR-Interview über Gründe für Rassismus und das Fehlen einheitlicher Standards und erklärt, warum sie eine Kürzung der Finanzmittel vehement ablehnt.

In den USA gibt es keine einheitlichen Standards für die Ausbildung, Ausrüstung und Auswahl der Kandidaten. Es ist laut Haberfeld dringend nötig, die Ausbildung der Polizei komplett zu reformieren. Polizisten in den USA müssen unter anderem mehr auf verbale Deeskalation geschult werden.

[...]

Das größte Problem der amerikanischen Polizei ist ihre dezentrale Organisation. Wir haben in den USA 18 000 bis 20 000 unabhängige Polizeiabteilungen. Das macht eine Regulierung beinahe unmöglich. Es gibt keine einheitlichen Standards für die Ausbildung, für die Ausrüstung, für die Auswahl der Kandidaten. Das gibt es sonst nirgends auf der Welt.

[...]

Aber [was] löst das Problem des Rassismus?

Ich denke, dass der Rassismus mit der mangelnden Ausbildung der amerikanischen Polizei zu tun hat. Leute, die weniger Bildung haben, sind weniger tolerant. Viele Kandidaten in den USA müssen nicht einmal einen Highschoolabschluss²⁰ haben, um Polizist zu werden. Dann bekommen sie zehn Wochen Ausbildung, werden auf die Straße geschickt und können über Menschenleben entscheiden. Das kann nicht gutgehen.

Ausbildung der Polizei in den USA muss von Grund auf reformiert werden!

Wir haben in den vergangenen Jahren hier in New York für aktive Polizisten Sensitivitätstraining eingeführt, aber so etwas müsste eigentlich schon Teil der Grundausbildung sein. Deswegen greifen auch alle die gut gemeinten Reformvorschläge nicht. Wir müssen die Ausbildung von Grund auf reformieren.

Wie ist die Polizeiausbildung in New York?

Hier dauert die Grundausbildung sechs Monate. Aber im Vergleich zu vielen europäischen Ländern ist das ein Witz. In den meisten Ländern dort dauert die Ausbildung vier Jahre. Polizeiarbeit ist unheimlich kompliziert, sowohl von der theoretischen Seite als auch von der praktischen Seite her, und man trägt als Polizist eine extrem große Verantwortung. In New York müssen die Beamten mindestens zwei Jahre das College besucht haben, aber das ist meiner Meinung nach noch immer zu wenig. In anderen Teilen des Landes haben die Beamten oft nicht einmal einen Schulabschluss.

Polizei in den USA wird zu wenig auf Kommunikation und Deeskalation geschult!

²⁰ Final stage of secondary education – diploma after approximately 12 years of school

Die Polizei in den USA scheint grundsätzlich aggressiv und konfrontativ aufzutreten, nicht nur gegenüber Minderheiten. Woran liegt das?

Die Polizei in den USA wird von der Öffentlichkeit nicht respektiert. Die Beamten finden sich oft in Situationen wieder, in denen sie sich überwältigt und übermannt fühlen. Wenn Sie dann noch die ungenügende Ausbildung dazu nehmen, haben Sie ein Problem.

[...]In den USA ist der Weg von verbaler zu physischer Gewalt in der Polizeitaktik gewöhnlich sehr kurz, die Polizisten dürfen schnell eskalieren. Sie müssen unter bestimmten Umständen auch nicht alle notwendigen Zwischenschritte tun. Aber sie fühlen sich auch oft unter Belagerung.

Die meisten Polizisten werden zu wenig in Kommunikation ausgebildet. Der Anteil der Polizeiausbildung, der auf Kommunikation verwendet wird, liegt unter einem Prozent. Deswegen kann ich mich nur wiederholen. Mittelkürzungen sind nicht die Antwort. Wir müssen mehr Geld in die Ausbildung stecken. Das ist der Weg.

Die Polizei wird stark dafür kritisiert, militärisch aufzutreten und damit die Menschen einzuschüchtern. Sehen Sie das auch so?

Ja, das ist sicher ein Problem. Es gibt aber andererseits auch kein westliches Land, in dem es so viel Gewalt gibt und so viele Menschen über Schusswaffen verfügen. Wenn die Polizei sich mit automatischen Schusswaffen auseinandersetzen muss, dann muss sie vorbereitet sein. Die Polizei ist militarisiert, weil oft die Straßen militarisiert sind. Es ist ein Teufelskreis.

Answers Quiz

Name the current relationship status between Kendra, Scott, and Jamal.

They are separated and Jamal lives with Kendra.

Why does officer Larkin refuse to give Kendra information about her son's whereabouts, but in contrast tells Scott all he knows?

Larkin believes Scott to be his superior.

From Kendra's point of view: Why does officer Larkin ask about Jamal's criminal record in such detail?

Because he is prejudiced against African-Americans

Scott uses slang and Kendra reacts aggressively. Choose the most fitting answer why.

She does not want her son to pick up this kind of language because she fears he might be discriminated against because of it.

Why is Scott worried about his son exploring his identity as a Black person? Choose the most fitting answer.

Scott is worried, Jamal might be discriminated against if he starts identifying with Afro-American culture.

Who else besides Jamal was in the car when stopped by the police?

Two Black kids neither Kendra nor Scott know personally.

Choose the right message portrayed on Jamal's sticker.

Shoot Cops

Why does Kendra say: "Jamal feels like he's 'the face of the race'"?

He feels like a forced representative for all Black people, because at school he often is the only Black student in class.

Why does Scott think that Jamal is walking through his world and not Kendra's?

Because he thinks that due to his privileged upbringing, Jamal does not know discrimination. In consequence, for Scott discrimination is a result of a certain behavior more than a result of skin color.

Why is Jamal angry at Scott?

Jamal is full of anger for Scott because he thinks his father let the family down by leaving both his mum and himself.

What is the content of Scott's brother's text message?

A bystander's video of a police control and the resulting conflict between an armed police officer and a Black person

Lieutenant Stokes behaves disrespectfully towards the Connors, because...

He judges the Connors for not teaching their son about the risks of being a Black person and the proper behavior when confronted with police

How did Jamal get killed?

When Jamal slips, one of his friends tries to run away and the officer, being overwhelmed by the situation, shoots Jamal in the head by accident.