

# Exploring Racism

## Police, Stereotypes, and the Possibility of a Better World

*Manny Reynoso*

### Objective:

To build basic skills (including text and chart reading) while exploring definitions of racism and reflecting on ways to encourage a better relationship between youth and the police.

### Students will be able to:

- Explain two definitions of racism.
- Explore stereotypes of black youth and police.
- Brainstorm ideas on what it would take to rebuild confidence in law enforcement.
- Write down ideas in response to the question “What kind of world do you want to live in?”
- Read and interpret a chart.
- Explain inference and practice using it.

### Materials:

Handout #1 and Handout #2: pp. 16 and 26-27 of the “Talking about Race” issue of *The Change Agent*.

### Step 1:

Give Handout #1 “Two Definitions of Racism” to students and ask them to work through the questions as a class, in pairs, or alone.

### Step 2:

Give students Handout #2 – “Fear of Police” by Reco Davis (p. 16) and “Black People & Institutional Racism” by Lisa Gimbel (pp. 26-27). After reading these articles and doing the activities that accompany the articles, ask students to find stereotypes mentioned in these articles and identify additional stereotypes we hold of police.

### Step 3:

- Watch a youtube video of police officer responding to call and ending up playing basketball with kids: <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUJY82svsog](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUJY82svsog)>.
- Ask students what Reco Davis suggests as a way to build community between the community and police.
- Critically discuss these ideas. Would they help relations between community and police? Why or why not?

### Step 4:

- Ask students to write a response to Reco Davis’s last paragraph. What kind of world does Reco Davis want to live in? Ask students to reference Davis’s ideas while exploring their own ideas about what kind of world they want to live in. Ask them to add specific ideas about how that could be achieved.
- Share writing with class members. Get feedback. Re-write.

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## Handout #1

### Two Definitions of Racism (from p. 12 of “Talking about Race”)

1. “Racism is the systematic, institutionalized mistreatment of one group of people by another based on racial heritage.” *-- Gloria Yamato*

a) Try re-stating this definition in your own words.

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b) List some examples here of institutional racism:

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2. “Racism: the poor treatment of or violence against people because of their race; the belief that some races of people are better than others.” *-- Merriam Webster Dictionary*

a) Try re-stating this definition in your own words.

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b) List some examples here of poor treatment or violence based on race:

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3. Discuss the difference between these two definitions. Which definition do you think is most useful in the United States today? If you were a policy-maker or an activist trying to address racism, how would the different definitions matter? How might they lead you in different directions?

**Handout #2** (3 pages)**Fear of Police***Reco Davis*

Gunshots ringing out in the neighborhood! Another black person is dead!

When I was growing up, I remember nights that I couldn't sleep because of gunshots. One night, I heard gunshots ring out just two houses down from where I lived. I found out later that the gunshots were fired by a black policeman killing another black man, who turned out to be my cousin Tony Harris. He was 25 years old, and he was shot for not wanting to surrender while he was being arrested.

Later that same night, a white policeman killed another black man for not wanting to pull over. He was shot three times, yet it was the first shot in the head that killed him.



I was scared to walk down the street because I thought somebody would pop up out of nowhere and try to shoot me, maybe mistaking me for someone else. When I was growing up, my feeling about the police was that they went around arresting and tasing people, sometimes just for wearing a hoodie, for having sagging pants, or even because of the people that we might hang around with. Really? I don't want to live in a world like that.

I want to live in a world where law enforcement tries to help the community and where police see everyone as a human being. For example, I would like for us all to come together and have a BBQ in the park. The police would see that we are all human and we'd learn to respect one another as human beings, and they would not assume we are criminals just because of the color of our skin, the clothes that we wear, or even who our friends are.

I want to live in a world where we could feel free to wear that hoodie and have no fear. Just to know that we are safe really would set us free.

*Reco Davis is 18 years old. He is a student in the SSD program at Allen Correctional Center in Kinder, LA. He is originally from Abbeville, a small city in Vermilion Parish, LA. One day, he hopes to travel the world, and he wants to start with seeing Mt. Rushmore.*

**Really? I don't want to live in a world like that.**

**Deepen Your Understanding****Killed by police during arrest, by circumstance**  
2012 supplementary homicide report, FBI

■ Black   ■ White   □ Hispanic

**U.S. population****All victims****Not attacking when killed**

Source: <[www.vox.com/2015/4/10/8382457/police-shootings-racism](http://www.vox.com/2015/4/10/8382457/police-shootings-racism)>

**Interpret** the chart above. Write several true statements about what you see.

**Infer** means to judge that something is true based on evidence not on an explicit statement. Circle the best word in italics to complete this sentence: "After reading the text, I can infer that Reco felt *safe unsafe happy* when he was growing up." Now list three details that led you to make that inference.

## Handout #2 (continued)

# Black People & Institutional Racism

### BEFORE YOU READ:

- 1) Think about this vocabulary: institutional, suspend, expel.
- 2) Discuss what we mean by “institutions.” Some institutions are: schools, the media, prisons, the courts, and work. What are some other examples of institutions in the United States?
- 3) Look at the pictures and skim the headings. Every heading says “...while black.” Why?

### Introduction

Do you ever ask yourself, “Is this really racism? Or is it just a personal problem?” Sadly, statistics show us that racism is part of the way that many institutions work. Institutional racism is in schools, policing, prisons, and jobs. It then impacts our basic human rights to housing, water, and food. It affects *all* people of color, but this article focuses mainly on black people. Institutional racism is the American way of life. Not sure you agree? Keep reading! As you read, remember that 16% of people in the U.S. are black.



### 1. Being in Preschool While Black

Black children are punished much more than white children. For example, 50% of children suspended in preschool are black, even though only 18% of children in preschool are black.

**Sources:** 1. NPR; 2. Dept. of Education; 3. <www.slate.com>; 4-5. <www.usnews.com/news/blogs/at-the-edge/2015/05/06/institutional-racism-is-our-way-of-life> 6. <www.motherjones.com>.



### 2. Being in School While Black

Forty percent of children expelled from elementary, middle school, and high school are black. Unfair punishment gets more serious, too. The schools refer students to the police! Sixty-five percent of children referred to the police are Black or Latino, according to the Department of Education.

### 3. Doing a Science Project While Black

Research shows 75% of all people in the U.S. have racial bias. They automatically connect black people with “dangerous or aggressive” behavior. For example, Kiera Wilmot (picture below) is a 16-year old girl who lives in Florida. She was arrested at school when the top came off of her chemistry experiment and smoke came out. No people or things were hurt, but the police arrested her and took her away in handcuffs. She was suspended from school for 10 days and charged with two felonies.





#### 4. Driving While Black

Blacks and whites break traffic laws equally. They are not arrested equally, though. For example, on the New Jersey Turnpike, 15% of drivers are black, but 40% of people stopped for breaking traffic laws are black. It's worse, though. Seventy-three percent of people arrested on the New Jersey Turnpike are black.

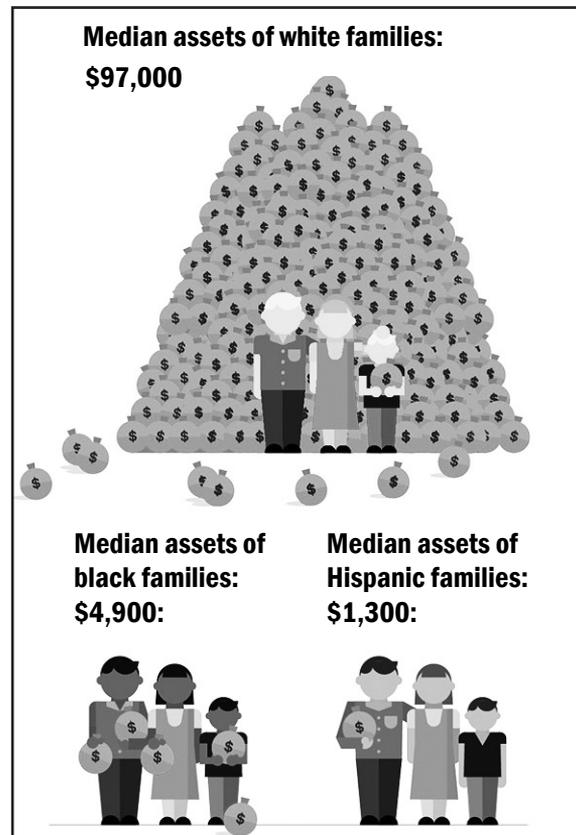
#### 5. Getting a Call-Back While Black

Black people who graduated from college have difficulty finding jobs twice as often as white people. Why? One reason is that people with black-sounding names have to send out almost twice as many applications as people with white-sounding names, just to get a response to their resume. After finally getting an interview, black people are called back to talk with the company again only 14% of the time. White people are invited back 34% of the time. Remember how the schools and police work together? When a person has a criminal record, it's even harder to get a job, especially if a person is black.



#### 6. Trying to Survive While Black

Is this just a personal problem? No. The average black or Latino family has less cars, property, and money than the average white family. Without the assets white families have, many black families have to rely on landlords, banks, and credit card companies. These institutions also work against black people and people of color. It is difficult to escape institutional racism. The cycle continues.



**AFTER YOU READ:** What argument is the writer making? Which statistics are especially interesting? Why? Do some research to find facts that further support the author's claims or disprove her claims. In the Introduction, the author says that institutional racism impacts basic human rights. Use the text to explain how that could be true.

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**Additional Resources:**

Many more articles in the "Talking about Race," issue of *The Change Agent* as well as "extras" on our website. See especially p. 19, "Boy Blue" by Jelal Huyler. Also, find audio versions of *Change Agent* articles on the website.

*Black and White Styles in Conflict* by Thomas Kochman

*Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* by Beverly Daniel Tatum, PH.D

*Race in the Schoolyard* by Amanda E. Lewis

*White Teacher/Diverse Classrooms* Edited by Julie Landsman and Chance W. Lewis

*Reflecting Diversity* by MacMillan/McGraw-Hill School Division Staff

*A White Teacher Talks about Race* by Julie Landsman

*Uprooting Racism* by Paul Kivel

*Young, Gifted, and Black* by Theresa Perry, Claude Steele and Asa Hilliard III

*Race Matters* by Cornel West



*This image is from the youtube video of Jelal Huyler reciting "Boy Blue," which was featured in the film "Cracking the Codes," <[crackingthecodes.org](http://crackingthecodes.org)>.*