BLUE & BLACK:
STORIES OF
POLICING AND
VIOLENCE

BY RACHEL MARIE-CRANE WILLIAMS
Brutality, harassment and antagonism between police and people of color, members of the LGBTQ community, people who are poor, immigrants and activists have always been an ugly part of the history of the United States.

As readers hopefully develop a critical consciousness about the roots of police violence, it is our hope that they are galvanized to take action to transform these injustices.

For many of the young people who we work with, the police symbolize fear rather than protection. The experience of being consistently harassed by law enforcement is deeply felt and can engender a great deal of anger. Much of that anger however is unexpressed and it is almost never analyzed or contextualized historically. Thus young people are sometimes left feeling powerless in the face of aggressive policing in their communities. The police are our most readily accessible symbol of the state’s power over our daily existence. Their role in our society, in our communities, and in our lives deserves to be examined and discussed.

We hope that this comic contributes to catalyzing these discussions and we invite you to share it with everyone who you think would be receptive to its message and also with those who might find the information more challenging. This comic is part of a larger project titled “Policing, Violence, and Resistance.” Our goal in the project is to answer the following question: how do we as adults engage young people around the history of policing in the United States and the manifestations of police violence?

You can find a set of resources including this comic online at http://policeviolence.wordpress.com/.

In Peace and In Solidarity,

Mariame Kaba
Founder and Director, Project NIA
Police violence is irrational, after all, police are sanctioned to use legitimate force by the state to protect the public and themselves when confronted by danger.
One explanation for police violence is stereotypes based on the cultural, social, and emotional bias of police.

Often stereotypes are made up of exaggerated mythologies and perceived threats. Likewise citizens may harbor and react to stereotypes about police.
The fears of citizens are well grounded; especially if they are people of color or poor. Research has shown that police are more likely to use excessive force in neighborhoods with high concentrations of people of color and/or people who are poor.

For over a century “dangerous classes”, immigrants, people of color, those who transgress gender and heterosexual norms, and the poor have been defined and oppressed by those in power to maintain the status quo. Crime control has been one mechanism used to maintain the social hierarchy.
While this is important to consider when we think about the uses of police by the state, it is more likely that in cases of police brutality individual police or small groups of police personally feel “threatened” in some way by the victim.

The spectrum of police violence includes a range of actions, policies, reactions, and ideology.
Stop and Frisk

Walking While Black

Last week I was walking home from school...

It happens pretty often.

Hey... you... son - I want to talk to you!

Of course I stopped. I learned, when I turned from a boy into a teenager, that I could never take my status for granted. I might be feared or seen as a possible troublemaker or worse, a predatory criminal because I am a Black male.

Yes sir.

Where are you coming from? What is in your pocket?

I almost always the same - from school sir - it's just a pen and my MP3 player.

He patted me down, and got my wallet.
HE FOUND NOTHING AND OFFERED ME THE USUAL EXCUSE.
SORRY TO STOP YOU BUT YOU MATCH THE DESCRIPTION OF A ROBBERY SUSPECT, A YOUNG BLACK MALE.

IF YOU ARE STOPPED BY THE POLICE - BE CAREFUL ABOUT YOUR WORDS, MOVEMENTS & BODY LANGUAGE. DO NOT ARGUE; BE POLITE. MAKE SURE YOUR HANDS ARE VISIBLE AT ALL TIMES. DO NOT RUN OR TRY TO PHYSICALLY RESIST THEM. IF YOU ARE ARRESTED, ASK FOR A LAWYER.

JUST ANOTHER DAY OF WALKING WHILE BLACK.
20 MINUTES LATER, AFTER A HUMILIATING SERIES OF SOBRIETY TESTS, ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD...

I am going to go easy on you and just give you a ticket for reckless driving... Next time you are in this neighborhood be sure to watch your speed and drive more carefully. You... girls have a nice afternoon... and don’t drink and drive!

Homework: Big Goebbels! Some donuts!

PLEASE MAXI... JUST BE COOL. HE IS AN IDIOT WITH A GUN.

SO ARE YOU TWO LESBIANS? WELL, HER—DON’T WORRY. I LIKE GIRLS TOO! WELL MISS... YOU WERE DRIVING ERRATICALLY. HAVE YOU BEEN DRINKING?

DONT GET BELLIGERENT! Step slowly out of the car... I want to make sure you can actually pass a sobriety test.

GET OUT OF THE CAR! DON’T MAKE THIS DIFFICULT!!! I will haul you both down to the station where you can meet some real men!!!

IS THAT REALLY NECESSARY?! I already told you I am perfectly sober!!
Many immigrant women who are victims of intimate partner violence may not report abuse to authorities because they fear deportation, fear police, or their language skills may be a barrier, and they are isolated from their friends and families.

*Special thanks to Ana Merino and Ben Mackey for their Spanish translation skills.*
Things you can do to prevent police violence

What can you do about Police Violence?

Remember that most police hope to avoid escalating conflict and violence.

If you are stopped by the police, be polite and cooperative. Make a note of their name, badge number and license plate if possible.

If you see conflict that involves the police don’t be afraid to stop and observe, this is not illegal.

Remember, it is perfectly legal to document the incident by taking videos or photographs.

Join your community’s police review board, cop watch organization, or start a grassroots organization that reviews the actions of local police.

Organize peaceful protests against police violence.

Vote for politicians who believe in the watchful oversight of the police.

Speak Out!