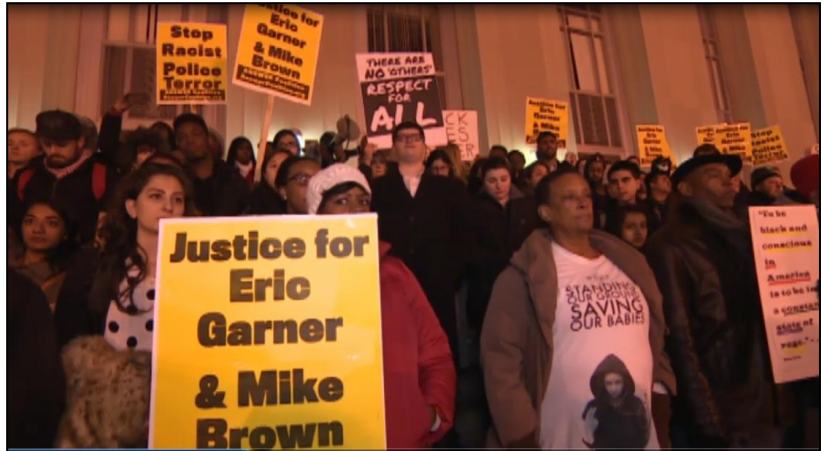


*News in Review – February 2015 – Teacher Resource Guide*  
**ANGER AND AUTHORITY IN THE UNITED STATES**

**Note to Teachers**

The classroom must promote a safe place for students to discuss sensitive issues such as violence and death. Prepare students for the topics that will be discussed. Allow for individual reflective time in addition to small group activities where students can safely process their thoughts and emotions.



**MINDS ON**

After two high-profile black deaths at the hands of police, and the decision by two grand juries to not charge the officers involved, Ismaaiyl Brinsley made the lethal choice to drive from Baltimore to New York to gun down two police officers. Earlier in the day he posted on social media, “I’m Putting Wings On Pigs Today.” After killing the two officers in their cruiser, Brinsley fled to a nearby subway station and turned the gun on himself. Prominent black civil rights activists and supporters of the police immediately condemned Brinsley’s actions.

What effect do you think Brinsley’s actions had on the debate surrounding racial divide in the U.S.?

**SETTING THE STAGE**

When the people of the United States elected their first black president in 2008, pundits declared the emergence of a “post-racial America” — one where racial divides would be bridged and all races would live in harmony. Six years later the idea was reduced to a utopian ideal as racial tension and violence rocked the U.S.

**Fatal encounters with police**

Tensions had been high since the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of 17-

year-old Trayvon Martin in the summer of 2013. Martin, an unarmed black youth, was walking home when an altercation with Zimmerman led to his death. The acquittal sparked outrage and nationwide protests ensued. Things remained relatively calm until the summer of 2014 when three fatal encounters — all involving black men dying at the hands of police — brought renewed cries for justice.

**Eric Garner**

The first incident occurred in July when police in Staten Island, NY, stopped Eric Garner. Officers suspected he was selling illegal cigarettes. Garner protested and said he was tired of being harassed by police. When he didn’t comply with the directions of the police, one of the officers used a chokehold (which is against the NYPD’s use of force rules) to subdue Garner. While he was on the ground, Garner said, “I can’t breathe” eleven times before dying of a heart attack. A bystander recorded the entire ordeal on his smartphone.

**Michael Brown**

A month later, Michael Brown and a friend were walking down the middle of the road in Ferguson, Missouri. A police officer told the two friends to get off the road and walk on the sidewalk. An altercation followed and Brown was shot at least six times (twice in the head). Some witnesses say Brown raised his hands in surrender prior to being shot.

## Tamir Rice

Both deaths drew outrage. Brown’s killing inspired particularly vocal and, at times, violent protests. Authorities vowed to investigate and mete out justice where warranted. Grand juries convened in New York and Missouri as civil rights activists across the U.S. waited. Then, the third high-profile death made national attention. Twelve-year-old Tamir Rice was pointing a toy gun at people in a park in Cleveland, Ohio. Concerned citizens called 911 and told police the gun probably wasn’t real but they didn’t like seeing the boy brandishing even a fake weapon in their park. Officers arrived and, within seconds, they shot and killed Tamir Rice. The three deaths combined to make some members of the black community wonder if the police had declared open season on African Americans.

## Grand juries elect not to charge

Three days after Rice’s killing, the grand jury deliberating on the Michael Brown case decided not

to proceed with charges against the officer involved in the shooting. Protests followed, and even some rioting in Ferguson, with racial tension rising to levels that hadn’t been seen in years. However, it was the grand jury in New York’s decision to not prosecute the officer involved in Garner’s death that really set people off. The smartphone video was clear: the officer used a chokehold to subdue Garner. However, after hearing the prosecutor’s case, the grand jury determined that the officer had not broken the law. Nationwide protests brought global attention to the issue and, as 2014 came to a close, the racial divide in the U.S. was seen to be as wide and tense as during the civil rights era.

## Searching for explanations

With the “post-racial America” ideal in tatters, pundits scrambled for explanations. Their fundamental dilemma, and according to many the brutal reality, was that black lives seemed to be of little value in conflicts with the police.

---

## To consider

1. a) Why did the deaths of three black men at the hands of police inspire protests across the U.S.?  
b) Why did the decisions of two grand juries further inflame the situation?
2. Why was the idea of a “post-racial America” seen as naïve and utopian by the end of 2014? Do you agree?

## Further inquiry

1. NBA stars LeBron James and Kobe Bryant (along with a slew of other NBA and NFL players) decided to wear a t-shirt reading “I Can’t Breathe” during the pre-game warm up after the grand jury decided not to indict the officer involved in the death of Eric Garner. Do you think this kind of protest is effective? Do you think the actions of celebrity athletes like James and Bryant could really bolster the cause of the protest movement?
2. CNN host and legal analyst, Sunny Hostin was shocked that there was no indictment in the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. Hostin, a former prosecutor said in an essay, “If a prosecutor wants to indict a case, the case gets indicted. The prosecutors in both Brown and Garner were not seeking indictments. Period.” (Essence, February 2015) Do you agree with Hostin’s characterization? Do you think a prosecutor would present his/her case in the hopes of not getting an indictment?

## VIDEO REVIEW

### Pre-viewing

When a wave of black deaths at the hands of police hit the news, Chicago’s Trinity United Church of Christ decided something needed to be done. After a series of local discussions and the development of broad-based partnerships, the community started teaching young people the Ten Rules of Survival if Stopped by Police (see the video version at <https://vimeo.com/116706870>).

### Ten Rules of Survival if Stopped by Police

1. Be polite and respectful — and don’t say anything that might escalate the situation.
2. Even if you feel you have been treated unfairly (or even illegally), keep quiet and pay attention. If warranted, you can work with your parents to file a formal complaint when you get home.
3. Never engage in an argument with the police.
4. Remember: your words can be used against you in court.
5. Keep your hands in plain sight.
6. Do not make physical contact with the police.
7. Do not run — even if you are afraid.
8. Do not resist arrest — even if you are innocent.
9. Do not say anything until you meet with a lawyer.
10. Stay calm and keep your emotions in check.

Source: Dare to be King Project, [daretobeking.net](http://daretobeking.net).

### Questions

1. Why would the community at Trinity United think they needed to make this set of rules?

---

---

2. What impression do these rules give you about the police? In other words, how do the rules characterize the police?

---

---

3. Are these rules necessary? Do black youth need to fear the police so much that they need to be taught rules just so they can get home alive?

---

## While viewing

1. What grand jury decision inspired violence in Ferguson, Missouri?

---

2. What does U.S. President Barack Obama mean when he says, “The problem is not just a Ferguson problem — it’s an American problem”?

3. What flaw in the prosecutor’s case did Brown’s lawyer Benjamin Crump think led to the acquittal of Darren Wilson?

---

---

4. Why did the death of Eric Garner inspire protests in New York, Boston and Chicago?

---

---

5. Does it seem outside the realm of common sense that the policeman would not be charged in the death of Eric Garner? Why or why not?

---

---

6. What was the protest chant of Garner’s supporters?

---

7. What was the response of the police officers’ union to Garner’s death?

---

---

8. What is Titusville’s “Unity in the Community Night”?

---

---

9. Who were Harry and Harriet Moore?

---

---

10. Why did some African-Americans dare to dream that the racial divide might finally be over?

---

---

11. What are the youth of Titusville being taught to help them avoid dangerous encounters with the police?

---

---

12. a) What did Ismaaiyl Brinsley do to draw even more attention to racial tensions in the U.S.?

---

---

b) What did Eric Garner’s mother, Gwen Carr, say in response to Brinsley’s actions?

---

---

c) How did Rafael Ramos’s teenage son react to his father’s murder?

---

---

### Post-viewing

In the documentary, Pastor Glenn B. Dames issues the following warning to black youth, “Sometimes you have to go the extra step to be extra careful just so you can stay alive. The onus is on us. It’s disheartening, but that’s where we are in 2014.” Essentially he is asking the youth to work to de-escalate the situation when confronted by law enforcement.

Is it fair to put this expectation on young people who find themselves in potentially volatile situations with police? Shouldn’t the police be the ones to master the art of de-escalation in situations of conflict? What do you think?

---

---

---

---

---

## BLACK LIVES MATTER

### Minds on

Racial division between the white and black community in the U.S. stretches back hundreds of years. Many people refer to the laws of segregation (often referred to as the Jim Crow laws) enacted after the Civil War as evidence of the wide gap between the human rights of black and white citizens of the U.S. Those laws effectively stayed on the books from the late 1870s to the early 1960s. Some go back even farther and claim that the psyche of division was formed when the original white settlers embraced black slavery (dating back as far as the early 1600s) as a way to build the agricultural economy of the U.S. Ultimately the people of the U.S. have struggled to find a way to heal the rift between its black community and white community.

1. Why do you think it so difficult for people to overcome their differences and live in harmony?
  2. Do similar racial divisions exist in Canada?
- 

### The Black Lives Matter movement

After George Zimmerman was acquitted in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin in 2014, three African-American women founded a movement called Black Lives Matter. Working on a number of social media platforms, Black Lives Matter strives to be the voice of disenfranchised African-Americans. Their premise: U.S. society needs to be constantly reminded to not dehumanize and degrade the black community and that a black life matters as much as any other life.

Take a look at the statistics below with this question in mind: Do white lives matter more than black lives?

What the numbers say:

- A Bloomberg poll indicates that 53 per cent of U.S. respondents think race relations have gotten worse since President Barack Obama took office.<sup>1</sup>
- Between 2004 and 2010, white Americans lost one per cent of their wealth while black Americans lost 23 per cent of their wealth.<sup>1</sup>
- Between 2007 and 2013, the poverty rate among white Americans rose from nine to 9.6 per cent while the poverty rate among black Americans rose from 25 to 27.2 per cent.<sup>1</sup> Put another way, there are currently approximately 21 million white Americans living in poverty (out of a total of 223 million) versus 12 million black Americans living in poverty (out of a total of 45 million).
- In 2014, the unemployment was 5.3 per cent for white Americans and 11.4 per cent for black Americans.<sup>1</sup>
- While the general population grew by 44 per cent between 1970 and 2007, the U.S. prison population grew by 700 per cent. Currently, the incarceration rate for whites is one in every 106 males over 18, while the incarceration rate for the black population is 1 in every 15.<sup>2</sup>

- During the U.S. real estate crisis (2006-2012), black homeowners were 70 per cent more likely to lose their houses than whites.<sup>1</sup>
- On average, white males live five years longer than black males (76 vs. 71 years) while white females live almost four years longer than black females (80 vs. 74 years).<sup>3</sup>
- While a National Review report indicates that police are just as likely to kill whites and Latinos (both were grouped together in the study) as black people<sup>4</sup>, a study by journalists at

ProPublica suggests that black individuals between the ages of 15 and 19 are 21 times more likely to be shot dead by police.<sup>5</sup>

Sources:

1. Maclean's, December 29, 2014.
2. American Civil Liberties Union, June 17, 2011
3. Business Insider, August 21, 2014.
4. National Review, December 31, 2014.
5. ProPublica, October 10, 2014.

### Activity 1

- a) Use the statistics above to complete this chart comparing information dealing with the U.S. white population and the U.S. black population.

Talking point	White	Black
Wealth lost – 2004-2010		
Poverty rate – 2007		
Poverty rate – 2013		
Unemployment rate – 2014		
Incarceration rate		
Life expectancy – Male		
Life expectancy - Female		

- b) Write a one paragraph summary of the conclusions you were able to draw from the chart.

Guiding question: What do you think? Do white lives seem to matter more than black lives?

### Activity 2

Use the statistics to write the story of racial disparity in the U.S. Your story should be 200-250 words long.