

The Kercheval Incident

Detroit 1966

The Police Department's Illegal War on Black Power Activists



Unit Plan and Teaching Guide

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The Kercheval Incident StoryMap is derived from Detroit Under Fire: Police Violence, Crime Politics, and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Civil Rights Era, a public history exhibit created by the [Policing and Social Justice HistoryLab](#), an initiative of the University of Michigan Department of History and a component of the U-M Carceral State Project's [Documenting Criminalization, Confinement, and Resistance](#) initiative.

CONTENT ADVISORY

The website and teaching resources for Detroit Under Fire and the Kercheval Incident center upon the history of police violence in Detroit. Many people of color, particularly African-American youth, have been traumatized by the ongoing harassment, violence, and killings of African-Americans by police across the country. Video footage and photographs of these instances have been widely shared on social media and news sites, exacerbating the stress and trauma of these events.

Before using the website and teaching resources, please read the introductory materials and engage your students, colleagues, families, and communities in dialogue around the content. While it is essential that we teach our youth about these issues, sometimes we need to learn deeply ourselves first. In addition, HOW we engage with these issues and materials should be guided by the needs, identities, and concerns of our students, families, and communities of color.

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The Kercheval Incident 1966

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d626e10a71f44968ad7ce4ca0bd85ed8>

In August 1966, Detroit Police Department (DPD) officers arrested three young Black men for "loitering" outside the Kercheval Ave. headquarters of the Afro-American Youth Movement, a Black Power organization at the center of the city's anti-police brutality activism. The confrontation was the latest in an organized and illegal DPD campaign of harassment, criminalization, surveillance, and infiltration of the Afro-American Youth Movement and its parent group, the Adult Community Movement for Equality (ACME-AAYM).

The crackdown sparked four days of unrest and conflict between the DPD, which mobilized with extreme militarization, and Black residents of the East Side neighborhood. The DPD, the city government, and the Wayne County prosecutor labeled this event the "Kercheval Mini-Riot" and used it as a pretext to crush the Afro-American Youth Movement. Over time the event was referred to as the Kercheval Incident.

This unit delves into this event and explores the following questions:

- How did Detroit police use their power in response to Black people's community organizing and resistance to systemic racism?
- How did Black community resistance and police action in Detroit fit into national patterns during this time period?
- To what extent do these events demonstrate equal protection under the law as described in the 14th amendment for Detroit's Black residents? To what extent do they demonstrate the absence of equal protection?
- Extension question: How are these issues playing out today? Are there similar problems still with police brutality and harassment of Black activists?

Instructional Materials Overview

This document provides more detailed ideas for instruction and includes a teacher’s guide for use and implementation of The Kercheval Incident unit slide deck and the accompanying student handout packet (in a separate document).

We encourage you to use, adapt, refine, and modify these materials, or to select and use specific sections, but also to first read through the complete teaching guide to ensure effective and responsible implementation.

These materials can be used for instructional purposes without additional permissions but may not be republished, repackaged, or sold.

General Overview and Teacher Preparation Notes:

- This teacher’s guide accompanies the Kercheval Incident slide deck, as well as the student background and “zooming in” handouts. Through the handouts, students will explore background and national context, and the unfolding of events in Detroit which demonstrate the relationship between Black resistance and police and state oppression. An important decision to make early on is whether or not each student will get their own handout packet or if they will work in groups with group packets.
- **This unit involves online resources, so students will need to access devices and the internet. If this is not possible, the online component can be adjusted to a class wide activity projected on a screen.**
- This unit is most appropriate for high school United States History classes, or for social studies elective courses focused on issues of social justice, Detroit history, African American history, or civil rights.
- The content covered aligns with the following Michigan high school content of expectations for High School United States History and can be integrated into a unit on the 1960’s:
 - 8.2.4 Domestic Conflicts and Tensions – analyze and evaluate the competing perspectives and controversies among Americans generated by U.S. Supreme Court decisions, the Vietnam War, the environmental movement, the movement for Civil Rights (See U.S. History Standards 8.3) and the constitutional crisis generated by the Watergate scandal.
 - 8.3.1 Civil Rights Movement – analyze key events, ideals, documents, and organizations in the struggle for African-American civil rights including: • the impact of World War II and the Cold War. • Responses to Supreme Court decisions and governmental actions. • the Civil Rights Act (1964). • protest movements. • rights. • organizations. • civil actions.
 - 8.3.5 Tensions and Reactions to Poverty and Civil Rights – analyze the causes and consequences of the civil unrest that occurred in American cities, by comparing civil unrest in Detroit with at least one other American city.
- This unit takes students deeper into the issues of racism and police misconduct than is common for most US History courses. With a focus on one key event - the Kercheval Incident - this resource emphasizes depth over breadth.


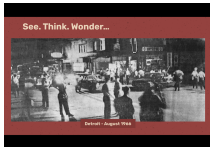
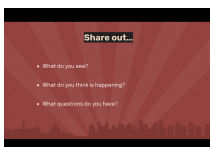

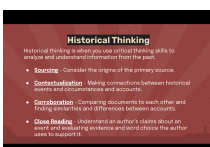
- We strongly encourage emphasizing small group and pairs work so that students have the opportunity to process and think through these challenging issues with their peers. There is an associated final project that can be implemented as a performance assessment for this unit.
- Students will need the printed handouts, a notebook or composition book, or an online tool such as Google Docs, where they will record their thinking and responses to questions and tasks.
- In the sections below, you will find the teacher directions and suggestions for each corresponding slide and handout, as well as guidance on tackling challenging issues in the classroom in an appendix.


Please be sure to review Appendix A of the teacher guide on preparing yourself and your learning community for tackling this complex and challenging, but incredibly important topic.



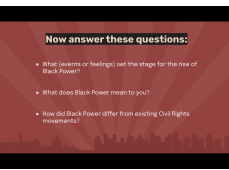

Suggested Pacing is listed below. The Sessions are in the context of a typical 50-55 minute class period.

Session 1	Unit Introduction	Slides 1-8	Handout p.2
	National Context: Black Power	Slides 9-15	Handout p.3-6
Session 2	National Context: COINTELPRO	Slides 16-23	Handout p.7-8
	Leading Up to the Kercheval Incident	Slides 24-26	
	Detroit's Anti-Loitering Law	Slides 27-30	Handout p.9-10
Session 3	Leading Up to the Kercheval Incident	Slides 31-32	
	The Kercheval Incident Timeline	Slides 33-36	
	How did the Kercheval Incident begin?	Slides 37-44	Handout p.11-14
	The Kercheval Incident Timeline Cont.	Slides 45-47	
Session 4	Who was Alvin Harrison?	Slides 48-53	Handout p.15-19
Session 5	Wrap Up	Slide 54	
	Final Project Introduction	Slide 55	Final Project Handout
	Unit Credit	Slide 66	

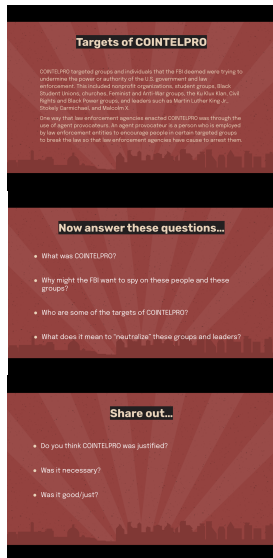
To begin the unit, open up the slide deck on your screen or smart board. Students will work through content on the slides, in linked videos, and through several readings on handouts. The Teacher Moves section below will guide you through the activities and help you facilitate all of the learning activities and transitions.

Student Directions	Teacher Moves
Unit Introduction (20 min)	
	<p>[Slide 1] Introduce to students the unit focus: The Kercheval Incident in Detroit, 1966.</p> <p>You might explain to students that this was an incident which took place on Kercheval Avenue in Detroit during some of the most tense years in the city between Black Detroiters and the Detroit Police Department. The Incident was the culmination of tensions between a Black Power organization and the DPD after years of surveillance and harassment by the city and anti-police brutality organizing by community activists. It was also a precursor to even more inflamed tensions in years to come.</p>
	<p>[Slide 2] To begin, engage students with a See Think Wonder activity to preview the topic.</p> <p>While projecting the image on the slide, ask students to study the image (also included in their handout packet) and have them engage in the See Think Wonder protocol on page 2 of the student packet (access the hyperlink for more information on this protocol, or find it using your browser and the search terms “Project Zero See Think Wonder”).</p> <p>The photo is low quality/blurry, it is also one of the only photos of the event in the archives. This might be something you point out to your students and ask them why they think that it is.</p>
	<p>[Slide 3] Take some time to have students share their observations, thoughts, and questions, asking them to clarify and differentiate between what they see, think, and wonder. Explain that they will learn more about what is happening in this photo further on in the lesson.</p>
	<p>[Slide 4] Explain to students that the photo was taken on the second night of an event known as “The Kercheval Incident”. Have a student read the introductory summary out loud to the class.</p>
	<p>[Slide 5] If your students are not familiar with historical thinking, explain to them that some activities in this unit will ask them to think and read like historians. If time allows, use resources from the Stanford History Education Group, such as their table on historical reading, to introduce these ideas (https://sheg.stanford.edu/history-lessons/historical-thinking-chart).</p>

	<p>The four practices listed on the slide are the four with which students will be engaging in during this lesson. Have 1-4 students take turns reading each practice and its definition.</p>
	<p>[Slide 6] It is now time to frame the guiding questions for the unit. Have students take turns reading the questions out loud. Check for students’ understanding of the phrase “Black Resistance”. You might ask students what they think this means. If helpful, you can share the following definition of Black resistance: <i>The Association for the Study of African American Life and History of African Americans says:</i> <i>“African Americans have resisted historic and ongoing oppression, in all forms, especially the racial terrorism of lynching, racial programs, and police killings since our arrival upon these shores. Black people have had to consistently push the United States to live up to its ideals of freedom, liberty, and justice for all.”</i></p> <p>Clarify and explain other terms, such as oppression, as needed.</p> <p>*You can choose to have students stop and jot their initial answers to these questions before the unit begins.</p>
	<p>[Slide 7] Now, you will take a moment to review the 14th Amendment’s equal protection clause. Have students take turns reading the left column (The 14th Amendment says...) and then the right column (This means...). Ask students if they understand the premise of this clause and provide any necessary clarification.</p>
	<p>[Slide 8] Explain to students that throughout the lesson, they will keep the 14th Amendment and the idea of “Equal protection under the law” in mind as they learn about the Kercheval Incident. Read the question out loud.</p>
<p>National Context:</p>	
<p>Black Power (30 min)</p>	
	<p>[Slide 9] Here, you will guide students in taking a “step back” to understand the national patterns in which the Kercheval Incident is contextualized. Explain to students that before diving deeper into the Kercheval Incident, they will explore the national context of Black resistance and state oppression in the 1960’s. This will allow them to see how a particular incident in Detroit fits into national patterns of resistance and state interference.</p> <p>If helpful, explain that the word “state” in this context means government, and that oppression means systematic, unfair treatment that limits the freedoms and opportunities of a particular group... so state oppression is when the government targets, attacks, and treats unfairly a particular group of people.</p>
	<p>[Slide 10] This slide introduces the lesson and activity about the Black Power movement. Explain to students that Black resistance building up to the time of the Kercheval Incident often took the form of Black Power organizations.</p>

	<p>Pass out, or have students go to, the Black Power Quote Comparison handout on page 3 of the student packet.</p>
	<p>[Slide 11] Bring students’ attention to the questions on this slide, and also on their handout, and encourage them to keep these questions in mind as they view the following video.</p> <p>You might read the questions out loud.</p>
	<p>[Slide 12] Play the Black Power in 2 minutes or So video to introduce students to the idea and development of Black Power.</p> <p>https://youtu.be/OE6oS_3H5IM</p>
	<p>[Slide 13] Have students respond to the provided questions in their handouts. This can be carried out by having students record their written answers, discussing their ideas in pairs or groups, or by a combination of the two (e.g. students Stop and Jot ideas and then share in a Turn and Talk).</p> <p>If time permits, have students share ideas and record students’ responses to “What does Black power mean to you?” somewhere visible. This can be on a Jamboard, a whiteboard, sticky notes on a wall or poster, etc..</p>
	<p>[Slide 14] Display this slide as you introduce the next activity to students. You can keep this projected while students complete their activity. Highlight the tensions that existed within the Civil Rights movement about Black Power, as stated in the video.</p> <p>Explain to students that they will be comparing and contrasting different views about Black Power expressed in quotes and primary sources from prominent Civil Rights and Black Power leaders at the time.</p> <p>Inform students they will be using primary sources curated by undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Michigan. They found these sources in the archives of the UM Bentley Historical Library. Curated means that somebody researched the issue, found the artifacts, and made choices about what to include and how to present it.</p> <p>Along with professors, these student researchers have learned about the local history, analyzed primary resources, and put all of that information together in a “story” design for us to learn from. This project was published in 2021, so it is pretty recent information.</p> <p>You might also share with students the website, so they can see the product of these college students’ work.</p> <p>https://policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire/page/home</p> <p>https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d626e10a71f44968ad7ce4ca0bd85ed8</p> <p>Have students work their way through the excerpts and prompts in the handout, pages 3-6, if possible in their pairs or groups, checking in to monitor understanding of the task and texts as they work.</p>

	<p>[Slide 15] Bring students’ attention back to the whole group. Engage students in a discussion about the two primary sources. You might highlight the difference in understanding between more moderate Civil Rights groups and more radical organizations regarding what Black Power means and what it accomplishes.</p>
<p>COINTELPRO (25 min)</p>	
	<p>[Advance to Slide 16]</p> <p>Now, you will transition students into an introductory lesson on COINTELPRO, the federal government’s Counter Intelligence Program targeting civil rights and racial justice organizations and activists. Explain to students how the Civil Rights Movement and the rise of Black Power were met with incredible resistance by many people in power, including those with government agencies at their disposal. One of the most powerful instances of state oppression in response to Black organizing and resistance was led by J. Edgar Hoover, the Director of the FBI at the time.</p>
	<p>[Advance to Slide 17]</p> <p>Bring students’ attention to the questions on page 8 of their handout packet and encourage them to keep these questions in mind or to take notes as they view the following video.</p> <p>You might read the questions out loud.</p>
	<p>[Advance to Slide 18]</p> <p>Here, you are going to show students an educational video from Tik Tok. You can explain to students that valuable historical knowledge can come from many different sources, including “non-expert” people. While it is important to be critical of information found on social media, these platforms are an important tool for making knowledge accessible to all people. The woman in the video that they will watch is a Black Tik Tok creator who uses her platform to share clips that educate the public on historical and current social issues about race and racism.</p> <p>Play the Tik Tok clip to introduce students to the basics of COINTELPRO.</p> <p>https://www.tiktok.com/@theoriginalsilverfoxx/video/7040664603130645806?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7189442406255773227</p>
	<p>Review and select from Option A or B to continue building student background knowledge.</p> <p>OPTION A (whole class using slides)</p> <p>[Advance to Slide 19]</p> <p>Share “J. Edgar Hoover’s Purpose” on the screen. Explain to students that the language might be confusing, but this is a direct quote from J. Edgar Hoover’s writings. Have one or two students read the excerpt out loud. Check for any questions about words or ideas and explain to students that they will receive more clarifying information.</p>



[Advance to Slide 20]

Have 1-3 students take turns reading off the goals of COINTELPRO. Check in with students to see if they have any clarifying questions.

[Advance to Slide 21]

Have 1-2 students read the excerpt about the targets of COINTELPRO out loud. Check in with students to see if they have any clarifying questions.

[Advance to Slide 22]

Have students respond to the questions. This can be carried out by having students record their written answers, discussing their ideas in pairs or groups, or by a combination of the two (e.g. students Stop and Jot ideas and then share in a Turn and Talk).

[Advance to Slide 23]

Wrap up this activity by bringing students' attention back together and engaging them in a large group discussion. You can use the handout questions listed on slide 22. If you would like to engage with more complex questions, you might use the ones listed on this slide: Was COINTELPRO was justified? Was it necessary? Was it just/good?



OPTION B: (small groups or pairs using handout pages 7-8)

[Stay on Slide 18]

Bring students' attention to the COINTELPRO handout. Have students read through the purpose, goals, and additional information, if possible, in their pairs or groups, before responding to the questions. This can be carried out by having students record their written answers, discussing their ideas in pairs or groups, or by a combination of the two (e.g. students Stop and Jot ideas and then share in a Turn and Talk).

[Advance to Slide 23]

Wrap up this activity by bringing students' attention back together and engaging them in a large group discussion. You might ask students whether they think COINTELPRO was justified. Was it necessary? Was it just/good?

First Look at Timeline: "Leading Up to the Kercheval Incident" (3-5 min)

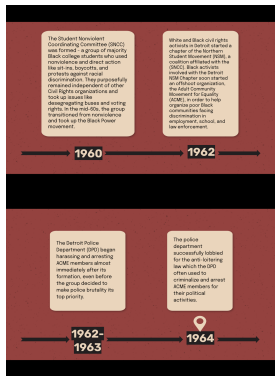


[Advance to Slide 24]

Tell students that they are now going to shift focus from national events and zoom in on events in Detroit. Ask them to keep Black Power and COINTELPRO in mind as national events and trends and think about how they showed up in Detroit.

Explain to students that they will now be entering a timeline of events - the story leading up to and of how the Kercheval Incident unfolded. Let them know that they will be following the story line and pausing at certain points to zoom in along the way.

Frame this first portion of the timeline as a chance to hear about the events and circumstances that set the stage for the Kercheval Incident.



[Advance to Slide 25]

Have students take turns reading the points on the timeline. This slide begins with some background on how these Black Power and activist organizations came to be, both nationally and in Detroit.

[Advance to Slide 26]

This slide begins to show how the DPD was treating Black activists and how they used their political power to legalize their behavior. Have 1-2 students take turns reading each point on the timeline.

After reading “1964”, let students know you will now be “zooming in” to learn more about the anti-loitering law the DPD lobbied for.

(Zooming In) Detroit’s Anti-Loitering Law (25 min)



[Advance to Slide 27]

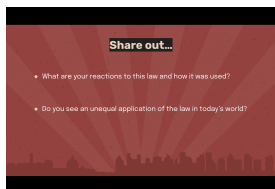
Now, you will transition students to the “zooming in” on the Anti-Loitering Law enacted in 1964 in Detroit. Have students find their **Detroit’s Anti-Loitering Law** handout, pages 9-10 of the handout packet. You can highlight for students that they will be scanning for patterns in the government’s response to Black community organizing in Detroit. They will read about a law that the DPD used to target Black activists and leaders.

Use the slide to share this introductory text with the students. Have students take turns reading portions of the passage out loud. Check that students understand the language used in this passage.

- **Lobbying** is an attempt to influence politicians and public officials on an issue.
- **Investigative arrests** happen when a police officer detains someone based on “reasonable suspicion” when they do not have enough evidence to make an arrest.
- **Discretionary policing** is enforcing the law selectively based on an individual police officers’ judgment.

[Advance to Slide 28]

You can engage students in a discussion about their initial reactions to this and its use. These questions are not written in the handout but are included for optional use in discussion. This law is important in understanding the ways in which state discrimination and violence were written into or protected by the law. You might ask students to reflect on how this unequal application of the law is manifested today.



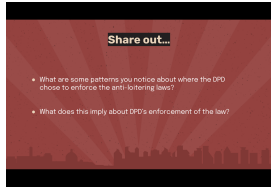
[Advance to Slide 29]

For this activity, students are going to use the “Map of Racially Targeted Enforcement of the Anti-Loitering Law” in Detroit to search for patterns that reveal with whom police officers decided to enforce this law.

Explain to the students that this Map is an interactive curated collection of maps, text, data, and historical documents.

This is also the time to walk through online access and make sure the students can find and work with the map. As needed, model for them how to move through the map.





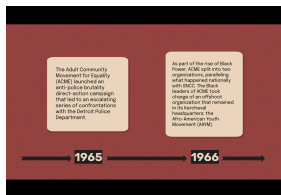
Explain that they will not necessarily explore every point on the map, but will be prompted to focus on certain areas by the handout.

Have students turn to their handout to read the introductory section and use the guiding questions to explore the map, if possible in their pairs or groups. Check in and monitor their understanding as they work.

[Advance to Slide 30]

Close this section out by having students share some of their ideas from the activity. The handout questions are very specific and more factual, so you might engage students in a higher-demand discussion. This slide includes questions which are not on the handout but are included for optional use in discussion.

(Zooming out) Timeline leading up to Kercheval Incident (1-2 min)



[Advance to Slide 31]

Now you will transition students back to the timeline of events leading up to the Kercheval Incident.

This slide details the work of ACME and their split into ACME and the Afro-American Youth Movement (ACME-AAYM). Have 1-2 students take turns reading the points on the timeline.

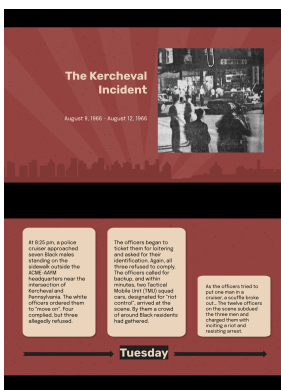


[Advance to Slide 32]

This slide is the last point on the timeline before the Kercheval Incident begins. Have a student read this point on the timeline.

Remind students that Stokely Carmichael was the leader of the Black Power movement that they learned about in the Black Power background activity. You might ask students to reflect on how this call for Black Power might have empowered people to feel like they could resist the police and government.

The Kercheval Incident Timeline (3-4 min)



[Advance to Slide 33]

At this point in the timeline, explain to students that they will now be focusing on the four days that made up the Kercheval Incident spanning Tuesday August 9, 1966 to Friday August 12, 1966. Explain to students that the information on this timeline contains the “undisputed” or agreed upon chain of events.

[Advance to Slide 34]

This slide details the beginning moments of the Kercheval Incident on Tuesday. Have 1-3 students take turns reading the different points on the timeline.

After looking at both sources...

- These documents agree that...
- They disagree about?
- Which document do you think is most reliable? Why?
- How do you think the Kercheval incident began? Based on your reading of these two accounts?

Bring students' attention back to the whole group and ask them to share out their answers for each document to check for understanding.

[Advance to Slide 44]

Students will now turn back to their pairs/small groups to work on “corroboration” questions. Before beginning, remind students that a **reliable source** is one that provides a thorough, well-reasoned theory, argument, or discussion based on strong evidence

Engage students in a large group discussion of some or all questions. Highlight the question of which source students think is a more reliable account and encourage them to share their reasoning. It is important for students to understand the various perspectives which shape our understanding of what is “true” in history. It is important to also point out how a person’s position of power or their identities (race, gender, etc.) influences whether or not their perspective is seen as “true”.

(Zoom out) The Kercheval Incident Timeline Cont. (5 min)

[Advance to Slide 45]

Explain to students that you will be “zooming out” again to see how the rest of the Kercheval Incident unfolded.

This slide details the events and mass arrests of the second day. Have 1-2 students take turns reading the points on the timeline.

[Advance to Slide 46]

This slide details the actions of community members and continued arrests on the third day. Have 1-2 students take turns reading the points on the timeline.

[Advance to Slide 47]

This slide details the fourth and final day of what is officially called the Kercheval Incident or the Kercheval Mini-Riot. Have 1-2 students take turns reading the points on the timeline.

Prepare the students to transition into another “zooming in” activity.

(Zoom in) Who was Alvin Harrison? Activity (45 min)

[Advance to Slide 48]

Now, you will guide students to “zoom in” to Alvin Harrison, one of the main players in the Kercheval Incident and ACME-AAYM. This is the time to make sure students have their **Who was Alvin Harrison?** Handout, pages 15-19 of the packet. The students will receive limited information about Alvin Harrison as they first read an excerpt from his speech. Following, they will receive more information about Alvin Harrison as a potential FBI/DPD informant and be asked to rethink their analysis of his speech.

[Advance to Slide 49]

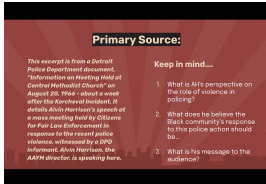
On the screen, share the introduction of “Who was Alvin Harrison?”. Have a student read the description out loud.



Explain to students that they will be reading excerpts from a primary source transcription of Alvin Harrison’s speech following the Kercheval Incident.

[Advance to Slide 50]

Project the context description for the primary source excerpts. Have a student read the blurb out loud.

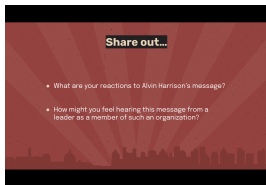


Have students work in their pairs/small groups to read through the highlighted excerpts from the primary source included in their handouts and work together to answer the subsequent questions.

You also might have a student/students read the speech out loud.

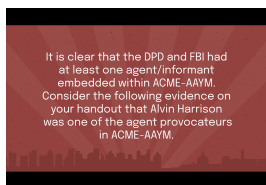
[Advance to Slide 51]

Bring students’ attention back together to discuss their reactions to Alvin Harrison’s strong message. These questions are different from the questions on the handout. You can use slide 50 to reference the questions from the handout. If you would like to engage students in high-demand discussion, you can use the prompts on this slide.



[Advance to Slide 52]

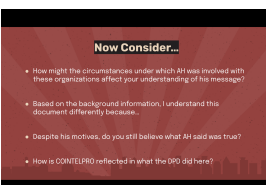
Now explain to students that they are going to receive some more information about Alvin Harrison. Read the context on the slide out loud to students: “It is clear that the DPD and FBI had at least one agent/informant embedded within ACME-AAYM. Consider the following evidence on your handout that Alvin Harrison was one of the agent provocateurs (a person who induces others to be violent or commit an illegal act in order to incriminate them or discredit a cause.)



Have students work in their pairs/small groups to read through the background information about Alvin Harrison as an informant and answer the “Now Consider” prompts.

[Advance to Slide 53]

Bring students’ attention back together to discuss their reactions to this new information about Alvin Harrison and his role in both DPD and ACME-AAYM. Have students share out their answers to the “Now Consider” questions.



Emphasize to students that the most important thing happening here, whether or not Alvin Harrison was a spy, was that DPD and the FBI infiltrated and plotted to sabotage these activist organizations.

Ask students why they think the police used these kinds of tactics and discuss their ideas.

After some discussion, explain to students that they were engaging in the historical practice of sourcing, identifying the author’s position on the historical event, evaluating the speaker’s purpose, and evaluating the source’s trustworthiness by considering genre, audience, and purpose. Return to the historical thinking chart if helpful and review sourcing.

Wrap Up, Final Project and Unit Credit (25 min)

APPENDIX A

Developing classroom spaces and cultures that allow for the safe exploration of challenging issues

Among the many important roles that educators play, part of our responsibility is to support and empower students to learn and think critically about important social issues, including those that have the potential to generate controversy. As a part of this responsibility, educators need to provide students with modeling and instruction so that they can learn how to participate in constructive dialogue around these issues, even when it might make them uncomfortable.

Police brutality and violence is one such issue that merits exploration in our classrooms. There is a long and well-documented history of police violence towards people of color in this nation, yet many people – especially White people – have not learned about this history, and some deny it even when given the opportunity to learn about it. Many people in our country grow up learning that police officers serve and protect their communities, so it is difficult for them to understand and accept that there is a demonstrable historical pattern of police violence and brutality towards Black people and other people of color that goes back to the very founding of American police forces. So this issue can generate a great deal of emotion. Many people are righteously angered by incidents of police violence, while others feel defensive and see the outcry for justice as anti-police (as evidenced by the development of Blue Lives Matter in reaction to Black Lives Matter). The issue is complex however, and deserves thoughtful examination. The guidelines below should be read and considered carefully before delving into this issue in order to create dialogue that is thoughtful and productive, even if it is also uncomfortable.

Don't re-traumatize black youth and other youth of color

Part of our responsibility as educators is to deal with these challenging issues, but also to do so in a way that does not re-traumatize Black youth and other youth of color who have experienced police abuse and/or been exposed to widespread video of Black people being abused and/or murdered by the police. Each classroom is different, and the demographics of different classrooms should inform how this material is taught. ALL young people need to learn about this aspect of American history and contemporary society, but the pathways to this learning can and should be adapted to fit each context. Students in an all-White classroom in a rural school district will have different needs than a racially mixed classroom in a middle class ring suburb outside a large city, and a classroom with all African-American students, or all Latinx students, in an urban area will have different needs as well.

For more information and resources about how to affirm Black lives and teach about injustice without inducing trauma, explore the resources made available by Teaching Tolerance:

<https://www.tolerance.org/the-moment/may-8-2020-affirming-black-lives-without-inducing-trauma>

The additional recommendations below are adapted from work carried out in connection with the chorale performance of Seven Last Words of the Unarmed. Associated resources can be found at:

<https://sevenlastwords.org/educational-resources/>

Prepare yourself:

First know thyself! When preparing to take on an issue in the classroom, you need to consider your own knowledge, biases, and views around the issue. Do you understand the historical and political context of the issue? Are you aware of different perspectives on the issue, and have you had the opportunity to listen to the voices of those most impacted by this issue? Are your views supported by evidence, or just what you have sort of always thought? Do you have strong views? Will you be able to listen well to students who might not agree with you? Will they feel they can speak up? If you do have strong feelings, how will you work with students who feel differently?

Think about these questions ahead of time so that you are not caught off guard if a student says something with which you deeply disagree. At times, these might just be differences of opinion, but students might also hold and voice misguided ideas you feel compelled to challenge. There will be times when you may need to stop and manage offensive speech that might harm other students, whereas other times you may want to push a students' thinking without shutting them down. Know your own triggers and have a plan so that you are able to stay calm and be a facilitator of learning!

Prepare yourself academically and cognitively. Learn as much as you can about the topic from a range of sources. Explore divergent perspectives and consider the evidence base for different positions. At the same time, don't feel like you have to be the all-knowing expert! It is acceptable and even helpful to say to your students something like, "That's a great question... I don't know the answer, but I'm going to write it down and we'll see if we can't address it later." There may also be instances in which students know more than you, or have had personal experiences that give them insight into an issue with which you are less familiar. How will you handle this? Are you open to being a learner?

Prepare for and with your students:

Know your students! What issues set them off? What views are circulating in the classroom? Which students have anger issues, or tend to say things without first thinking? Which students start clowning around when things make them uncomfortable? How can you proactively prepare yourself and them for the topic and the discussion? How do YOU respond to these students? Do you try to shut them down, remove them, or engage in power struggles? Are there more productive and proactive solutions?

Talk with your students about emotions, and respect emotions when they arise, especially in these kinds of activities. If a student gets upset when talking about these issues, that is very understandable and potentially productive. If students are outraged or saddened by this issue, let them know it's ok to feel that way, but work with them on how to manage and express the emotion. Acknowledge discomfort and validate it, and find positive ways to help move past it without delegitimizing it. At times, humor may be appropriate to lessen tension, but be careful and never use it to humiliate a student or trivialize their feelings. Asking everyone to pause and take a few deep breaths (inhaling, holding their breath, and then letting it out) can help a great deal.

Prepare your classroom culture:

Establish a safe classroom climate BEFORE engaging with controversial issues. Students need to build trust with each other and their teacher in order to fully engage with these topics. HOW to do this is beyond the scope of this guide, but seek out help from master teachers or other instructional leaders in your building. Consult high quality online resources such as Teaching Tolerance and tap into the many available (and often free) professional learning materials. Start with one of these resources if you need ideas:
<http://www.tolerance.org/module/critical-practices-anti-bias-education-classroom-culture>
<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/fostering-civil-discourse-how-do-we-talk-about-issues-matter>

Briefly preview the issue you are going to explore. In the case of police violence, let students know this is coming up, and provide opportunities for them to raise questions, concerns, and fears beforehand. Ideally, give them a way to do this anonymously.

Establish group and discussion norms at the beginning of the school year, preferably in the first 2-3 weeks. In particular, help students collaboratively develop norms for the following:

- o how to disagree respectfully.
- o how to listen productively.
- o how to deal with interruptions and how not to interrupt.
- o how to ask thoughtful questions.
- o how to participate in a discussion, including how to manage equitable talk time.
- o how to choose and use appropriate language in different contexts.
- o how to care for their fellow students and have empathy.

Work with students to respect and value multiple perspectives, but help students learn to discern when a “perspective” becomes hurtful or offensive. This is not an easy process, and different people have different standards... but this is why we need to talk about them! In this process, establish clear boundaries for classroom language. We want students to speak their minds, but we do not want them using racist, sexist, homophobic, or other offensive language that will make other students feel unsafe or uncomfortable. Be prepared to take on the idea that there are two valid sides to every issue. While we want to understand differing perspectives, we don't want to validate racist narratives as an “just a different opinion.”

Teach students to focus on ideas and not on individuals when there is disagreement! Some views can be deeply tied to important identities carried by students, so helping them see that we can question ideas without calling their identity into question is important.

Prepare for interactive learning and dialogue:

Clarify and make visible the purpose for any discussion, especially when they delve into controversial issues. What do you hope the outcome of the discussion will be? Do students think this topic matters? If not... why should they? Why do you? What's the point of talking about it?

Have discussion protocols or routines in place, and practice them ahead of time with less sensitive subjects. Classroom "discussions" often aren't really discussions; many times they involve the teacher asking questions and the same four or five students answering them while everyone else sits back and tunes out. Disrupt this dynamic by starting small! Use a Stop and Jot routine with an interesting prompt to give students time to think and informally jot down some ideas before asking them to talk about them. Then have students Turn and Talk with one or two other students, sharing what they wrote and responding to each other. Keep these moments short (30 to 60 seconds), and perhaps even use a timer. Then have students form larger groups of 4 to six and share again, and only then bring the class together. Using this kind of approach gives every student time to talk in safer spaces and also gives them time to "practice" before speaking in front of the whole class.

Explicitly teach students the discourse of dialogue. For example, teach them how to express disagreement by providing sentence stems and having them use them in discussion (e.g. I think that what she is interesting, but I have a different idea... I'm glad you shared that thought, but I disagree because...)

Prepare for implementation around a specific topic:

Communicate with administration and families ahead of time if you have concerns about a particular topic. As needed have support staff either on hand or alerted to an upcoming topic that might trigger students dealing with trauma, anger, etc.

Attend to necessary knowledge. Is there content or vocabulary that students really need BEFORE they engage with this topic? Do they have it? If not, how will you build it? What historical background do students need to understand events in context?

Locate the issue in an academic discipline and tie it to real world experts, organizations, or events. Let them know that other people deeply care about this issue and are actively studying it and trying to solve it.

Locate the issue in your curriculum. How does it connect to other problems you have studied? If it doesn't, why is it worth exploring now?

Find out what your students already know and/or think about the topic. This can help you clarify any misconceptions they might have and also head off potential problems.

With this groundwork laid, you are ready to get moving into the learning activities. Ultimately, this kind of preparation work will produce deeper learning and richer conversations!