

Kory Barksdale

What's to Fear?

Introduction

I'm a young black male who lives in a country that has a reputation for targeting individuals like myself. With death rates of black people and police officers rising due to recent issues of police brutality and murder, there has become a lack of trust between the two parties. Not only is there a lack of trust, but there is a sense of fear that has come over individuals in the black community that has manifested into a bias towards law enforcement. I've experienced the fear of being pulled over and not knowing how the situation will end. I have to act a certain way when dealing with police officers because that's what I was taught growing up. This is the reality for a lot, if not all, black people. I've definitely had my own biases and perceptions of police officers growing up. Seeing so many cases in the media about young black people getting killed by officers shaped my mind to not trust the police, especially white officers. There's no doubt or question that there are racist cops, but the reality is that this is not the case for all cops and that's something that I feel is important for black people to understand.

I was in the kitchen talking to my dad about some recent issues of police officers killing unarmed black men. Our discussion got so in depth about why officers kill black men, what we should do to stop it, and how this issue is affecting the black community. A couple days after that, I was watching a D.L Hugely stand up special, and he began to talk about how black people fear the police and how we have to teach our children how to behave when around law enforcement. The next day I'm watching my favorite show "Empire" and there's a scene with one of the main characters speaking to the world on a live stream about how she was afraid that

she would lose a family member to a cop's bullet and that's how it feels to be black in this country. She continues to ask, who do we call to protect us?

After these three instances took place, I took it as a sign that I should use my gift as an artist to speak up about the issue and to try to make a change. I took into account my own identity and my own thoughts about police officers, in order to inspire myself to want to learn for myself in order to try to teach others. I had to figure out a way to get to the source of what was going on, and I came to the conclusion that the best way to do this was to involve the community and get their viewpoints on the topic at hand. I knew that photography had the power to tell the truth and that if I combined it with the verbal truths of the people I interviewed, it would be a powerful force of understanding.

For this project, I plan to create a documentary photography series that's accompanied by interview audio, that illustrates the lives of police officers and black citizens in Detroit, in order to debunk any stereotypes or biases each group may have of each other. The individuals that take part in my project will have the opportunity to express their truths and their perspective on the issues. The goal for this project is to ultimately abolish this lack of trust and fear between the black community and police officers. Each group needs to better understand each other in order for them to be a cohesive unit.

Contextual Discussion

The Issues

In order to erase the problem it's important to know what the problem is. Unarmed victims of police killings are more likely to be minorities. In "African Americans and Criminal

Justice: An Encyclopedia”, Bonnie Wu explains how Black people and minorities are the ones who are more likely to experience this brutality and how there is a lack of trust in the police anymore by black people, due to the fact that police are being too aggressive and the fact that law enforcement can be biased and unfair. She provides statistics about how in general African Americans are more than six times as likely as whites to be shot by police, and in large cities they are killed three times more often than whites. The abuse and aggression that she talks about includes misconduct other than physical injury, like false arrest, harassment, and the use of profanity, racial slurs, and verbal insults. This type of assault is meant to not only defeat a person physically, but also mentally and psychologically. In the article she states:

“Although in general, evidence shows that police use of force is an infrequent occurrence, and researchers have found that nonphysical brutality happens more frequently than physical assaults, most evidence points to African Americans and others of Black racial identity as disproportionately the victims of such force. In addition, a consistent number of high-profile use-of-force incidents, especially lethal force, have gained national and international attention supporting the notion that Blacks are overwhelmingly the victims of police brutality.”

This stood out to me in particular because it provides context of how physical abuse is not the main problem. The main problem is that the abuse is bias towards black people. The fact that there are high profile shooting incidents involving the death of black people shows why there is a trust issue between black citizens and officers.

People make choices based on their initial assumptions and perceptions of others. L.A. Fridell’s article “ Racial Aspects of Police Shootings”, discusses implicit bias and the question of whether police officers are racially biased in their use of force. Fridell presents that laboratory research shows individuals, including law enforcement subjects are over-vigilant with racial/ ethnic minorities, especially African Americans, in “shoot , don’t shoot” scenarios. The research

on implicit bias shows that individuals link groups to stereotypes and these stereotypes impact the individuals perception and behavior. The interesting thing about implicit bias is that it doesn't have to come from a hostility towards a group. This type of bias can manifest outside of consciousness, meaning that anybody can be guilty of implicit bias, even those who reject being biased at all.

Thinking about this from a black person's perspective, even if there isn't an explicit bias against white officers there may be an implicit one. We see unarmed black people being killed by police officers so we assume that any police officer we come into contact with has the potential to kill us. With this bias, comes a range of defense mechanisms. Now we see a lot of people making videos of their encounters with police officers in order to have proof of what may happen. There have also been riots fueled by the anger people have towards police officers. However, not all mechanisms are manifested through anger or negative intent. People participate in marches and protest in hopes that things will get better and that there will be justice for those who have been killed by police officers. One of the biggest campaigns to launch after the death of Trayvon Martin was the Black Lives Matter movement. This movement began as a call to action in response to state-sanctioned violence and anti-black racism. Even though there is an overarching issue that fuels the bias black people have towards police officers, we can choose to either react or respond. What we choose, decides whether or not we are helping to solve the problem or perpetuating it.

Police and the People

With this project I've been able to get a sense of how police view the people and how the citizens view the police by interviewing each group. I've come across some perspectives that

have surprised me and some that have not been so surprising. On the topic of citizens fearing police officers, Lieutenant Mark Young stated in all occupations there are some great people and some bad people. He admits that there are some cops that don't do what they're sworn in to do and there are some citizens that fear the police but there are also some officers that fear the people their policing. However, he feels that people need the police and the police need the people.

When I interviewed Mallory Humes, she admitted to feeling fear when dealing with the police. She states that if a cop was to ask her how she feels when she sees them, she would respond that she feels as if she doesn't have a relationship, that she doesn't feel protected, she feels biased, there's no justice, and she feels fear. This answer really was one that I really hoped to receive when doing this project because it proves that this fear does exist in citizens. The relationship between citizens and officers is clearly not where it should be.

The police should be able to understand and relate to the people they are policing. John Shjarback's article "Minority representation in policing and racial profiling: A test of representative bureaucracy vs community context", reveals that increasing minority representation in law enforcement has long been viewed as a primary means to improve police-citizen relations. The relationship between officers and black citizens has had a bad history in the U.S.. Due to a series of civil unrest in minority communities the Kerner Commission Report recommended to hire more minority officers so that the police departments could resemble the communities that they serve. The logic behind this idea was that with black officers, the communities would accept them and change the dynamic between officers and citizens. Although this has been a strategy used in many cities, it's proven that it isn't completely effective.

Detroit's History

The 1967 Detroit riots were among the most violent and destructive riots in U.S history. What was the cause of these riots? The race relations between the Detroit Police department and Black residents living in Detroit were at an all time low. The department had only about 50 black officers at the time and it was viewed as a white army. Racial profiling and police brutality were normal accusations made by the black residents.

It's interesting to see how the Detroit of the past compares to the Detroit of the present. According to an article by George Hunter, of the Detroit news, in 2015 majority of Detroit's police officers have been recorded to be African American. Sixty-one percent of the 2,306 member force is black in a city that is 83 percent African American. This has helped improve race relations in the city of Detroit since the 1960s. This aspect of police demographics was something that was clear to me as I aimed to interview different officers in Detroit. I noticed that a lot of officers are black, even the ones who are higher in the ranks like the Chief of Police.

Photography for Change

Photographs are a visual aid to the truth and can be used to shape and influence peoples understanding of other people's perspectives. The power photography has to bring about change has been duly noted for decades and through documentary photography people have the ability to encourage understanding of lives and perspectives of people who may live on the other side of the world. The concept to include my community into my project was heavily influenced by photographer Tonika Johnson's "Folded Map" project. Tonika noticed a divide in living conditions on the North and South side of Chicago and decided to use photography to bring

residents with reflecting addresses together so that they can understand how each other live and the separations in their city. I thought this was a very original and effective way to use photography as a means of social change.



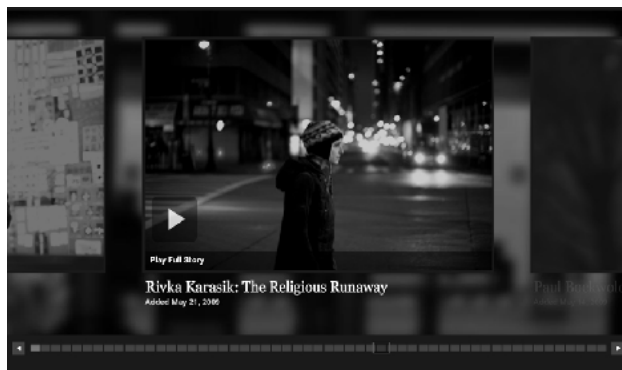
(Images from “Folded Map”Project”)



Another project that I found interesting was the “One in 8 million” project (Figure 1 & 2) done by The New York Times. This project introduced 54 ordinary people through the use of photography and interview. “Ordinary people telling extraordinary stories of passions and problems, relationships and routines, vacations and obsessions” as the Times described it. This

project is fairly similar to mine because it brings sound and visuals together to tell a story. I'm extremely intrigued by the variations of stories told and the variety of people that are included in this project. The photography really speaks to who the person is but when the sound of their voice is added, it creates another element of realness and understanding. This is what I really want to capture in my project as I continue to interview and photograph my subjects.

(Figure 1 & 2)



Methodology

I knew this wasn't going to be an easy process because I don't know any police officers personally. I didn't know if I should choose random citizens off the street to interview or people I know. I was skeptical about whether or not people would be interested in taking part in this

project and didn't really know how people were going to react to the questions I asked. The first person I decided to interview was my dad because he was the one who inspired me to take on this project. From there I needed to interview an officer but I didn't know how to get into contact with one. Luckily my father is a barber and knows many different types of people; and one of those people is a Detroit police officer. I was able to get in contact with this officer and interview him. He informed the president of the Lieutenant and Sergeants Association about my project and I immediately went to interview him. After getting my first two officers, I decided to go back to interviewing citizens. I used Facebook to put out a call for citizens and officers in Detroit who were interested in being apart of my project. I didn't get many officers but I heard from a couple citizens who I was able to contact.

When thinking about the type of people I wanted to include in my project, I wanted to choose people who I knew were doing something positive with their lives and went against stereotypes. The people that I chose were successful in the cooperate world as well as in their families. In order to get more cops, I visited the Detroit police website and found a list of officers' emails. I sent out a mass email to all of the officers on the list and I received a response from two officers. They gave me their phone numbers but unfortunately when I tried to call I couldn't get an answer. I tried emailing them back but I still didn't get an answer. So from there I went back to social media to try to get more officers to participate. People were tagging officers they knew in my post and I was able to get into contact with one and got a successful interview out of it. For my last officer interview, I went to my local precinct and asked the officers if they would be interested in being apart of my project. One of the officers on duty agreed and I was able to interview and photograph him.

Throughout this project so far, I've asked citizens to describe who they are and what they do. There are a lot of stereotypes about black people and by allowing these people to address their realities, this debunks the first layer of biases and stereotypes. Then I continue to ask them how they feel about law enforcement. This is where things become interesting because everyone has a different experience. This is also where I'm able to get an idea of what I should ask police officers. As I continue to build my list of questions, the more I'm able to extract ideas and perspectives from people I interview. As a result I'm able to get a better understanding of who they are and this is where the photography kicks in. The photos I create are a testament to the realities of the person I'm photographing. They serve as a visual aid to tell a story about the person and what they do. Whether this person is a musician, a barber, a mother, a father, or a police officer who is highly involved in the community, the photos will allow viewers to see this.

Creative Work

As stated before, I want the photography to speak to who the person is and what they do. The images are a visual aid to the subject's reality and should serve the purpose of debunking different stereotypes in the world or each group may have of the subjects.

Lt. Mark Young:

These photos speak to how involved Lt. Young is with the community and how accomplished he is as a black police officer. In the photos one of the consistent aspects that I wanted to highlight were the many awards and photos on the office walls. These are a testament to Lt. Young's contribution to the city of Detroit as president of the Lieutenants and Sergeants Association. The stereotype that officers aren't involved with their community or are just out to put people in jail is clearly debunked through these images.



(Lt. Mark Young)

Kory Barksdale Sr.

Black people are lazy. This is a stereotype that has been passed down for generations. When you look at the these photos of Kory Sr., do you see a lazy black man or do you see a hard working, energetic entrepreneur. Kory is the owner of his own corporate band, a master barber, has released 5 albums that have all made it to the radio, and he just happens to be my father.





(Kory Barksdale Sr.)

Darryl Humes

Black men aren't in their children's lives. Well, Darryl is definitely a devoted black father and is very dedicated in building a legacy for his son and the generations after. These photos speak to a man who is a father and an entrepreneur in the clothing industry.



(Darryl Humes Jr.)

These are just a few of my subjects but the idea behind my creative making is to use photography as a way of telling a story and debunking stereotypes. Each image has a deeper meaning behind it and a specific role in being apart of this photo series.

Conclusion

In doing this project I've learned a lot about the people in my community, the issues that are amongst society, and how to use my art as way to shape controversial discussion. My own perceptions have changed throughout this project. Before I had a fear of police officers and really didn't want to come into contact with them. After sitting down and talking to some and learning how they operate and what their goals are as officers made me more comfortable and understanding. This is what I want for the citizens that see this project. I want their perceptions of officers to change as well. I've gained knowledge about what it is that the people fear and why they lack trust. I've come to realize that not all black people fear the police and some are quite understanding of how police officers feel in different situations.

This project has definitely inspired me to continue working on it post graduation. I feel like this topic is very relevant today and it can be useful in changing the narrative. I want to expand the demographics of people and officers that I interview and photograph. This will make it more relatable to a wider range of people. I feel like there are a lot of people who aren't aware of these types of issues going on or are just trying to ignore them altogether. I feel this project will create conversation and inspire people to want to make a difference.

Portfolio of Project found at:

<https://korybarksdale-kapture.squarespace.com/whats-to-fear>