

The main idea behind the research that influenced this painting is gun violence in the United States. Considering that I am both a teenager and African American, it is likely that I may fall victim to a school shooting or excessive force from a police officer. In addition to referencing personal experience, I looked into statistics relating to America's gun homicide rate, especially in comparison to other developed countries. The frequency of violence perpetrated with a firearm in this country is among the highest in the world. As a result, the media is saturated with examples of mass shootings and police brutality. This desensitizes us to the problem at hand, even though it is blatantly prevalent in our lives. As grim as this may seem, it is part of our reality, largely in part due to the country we reside in.

The materials used for this painting consist of acrylic paint and an assortment of various brushes of different sizes. The use of paint as a medium is mainly a result of it being a tool that I am proficient in handling, as well as one that I have always wanted to use more often. Paint also allows me to create imagery in full color without sacrificing the elaborate detail I am used to creating in drawings.

This installation seeks to sensitize the viewer to the issues of this country, as well as motivate them to take a critical look at how society functions around them. I hope viewers will reflect upon how their position in society affects the level of safety they experience in day-to-day life.

True G.
Georgia

This is America

True G.



Unfortunately, I have slightly more connection to gun violence and police brutality than most other people I have met. The earliest example of me being subjected to this that I can remember was at a time when I was living with my family in our first Georgia home. At the time, I, my mother, my sister, and my sister's biological father lived in an apartment complex near to a few other neighborhoods of similar structure. The complex we lived in wasn't meeting any High living standards, but I would not have considered it a bad area. The apartments across the fence, however, did not seem to exude quality living or even safety. Frequently at night I would hear what I have first thought were fireworks, but my mother informed me later that these were the sounds of gunshots. There were times where I would hear them ring out multiple times a night, for multiple nights in a row until I became accustomed to it and the sounds became background noise as I fell asleep each night. I never realized it at that age, but looking back, I realize that it is likely that I was falling asleep to the sound of people trying to kill each other. The exposure to these experiences spiked extremely high in intensity one day when I was maybe six or seven. My day was interrupted by a knock on the door while I was playing in the living room. Being a naturally curious child, I followed my mother and my father to the door. When they opened it we were faced with a shocking scene. A young man stood before us, covered in blood and begging for help. He Had been shot and a nearby apartment complex had spent the time since the incident walking around door to door asking for assistance. Evidently, we were the only people who he encountered that agreed to help him. At that age, I was not old enough to understand the full weight of the situation, but I was still shocked at the image of the dying man in the doorframe. After hearing about the instances of gun violence and police officers murdering people in the last few years I can't help but sometimes I imagine myself in a similar situation as the man who came to my apartment.

Being the age and ethnicity that I am, in the country I'm in, there are two categories of gun violence that are most likely to have me involved in them: mass shootings on a school campus and excessive force from a police officer. Though I do not go to school with a strong premonition that I will be shot and killed, the idea remains in the back of my mind throughout the day. Going about my school day, I can't help but notice the lack of any sort of precaution to prevent a shooting from happening. As far as I'm concerned, a student should feel secure in an environment in order to learn in it. In addition to this, I can think of two instances where there was a threat or potential for violence at the campus that resulted in changing schedules or having the police involved. One of these occasions was invoked by a student having a picture of themselves holding a gun on social media. This created a nervous tension on campus for more than a week. On the opposite side of these problems are dangerous I potentially face outside of school, namely becoming a victim of police brutality. Being black has always been part of my identity, and I am aware that discrimination against people of color is especially prevalent in the history of the United States. Despite this, I never realized that there were going to be situations in my life in which I would possibly feel nervous being in the vicinity of a person due to their particular occupation. Even though I've lived a portion of my life with the conscious knowledge that my skin color painted a target on my back, I have only for the last few years felt that the

negative impacts of that could directly apply to me. In the United States, there's a disproportionate amount of blacks shot by police in relation to whites. This only becomes more and more evident every year in news stories.

The United States has a startlingly high rate of gun-related violence on a yearly basis. In fact, the frequency of gun homicides is among the highest in the world. This becomes even more alarming when the countries compared to others of similar Status in relation to how developed they are. America's gun ownership rates and gun homicide rates are multiple times higher than other developed countries. The consistency of the violence is increasingly worrying when one notices that the U.S. doesn't seem to react to its "accidents" in the same way that other parts of the world do. There seems to be a habit of acknowledging the fact that blatant issues exist, but this is juxtaposed with little implementation of preventative measures (there is a post by The Onion That is written as 'No Way to Prevent This' says only nation where this regularly happens). This is not the case with other parts of the world, as is evident in multiple examples of them reacting appropriately to high-intensity violence. The United States does have legislation regarding the types of restrictions that apply to owning firearms, but they clearly are not sufficient enough to effectively combat the gun-related homicide rate. One country that has displayed an effective and responsible reaction to tragedy is Australia. In 1996, a 28 year old man entered a cafe in Port Arthur, Tasmania. The individual (named Martin Bryant) received and ate lunch before taking a semi-automatic rifle from his bag and proceeding to begin a massacre. By the time he was done, he had killed 35 people and wounded 23 others. In the span of less than 2 days, he claimed the position of Australia's worst mass murderer. Bryant was later assessed to have a far below average IQ, and was diagnosed as having a form of autism known as Asperger's Syndrome. The occurrence of this event was all it took to drive Australia's government to action. In less than 2 weeks following the incident, they enacted changes in their gun laws in cooperation with the numerous territories and states in order to regulate firearms. In addition to this, a temporary buyback program was put in place, and it resulted in a round 650,000 assault weapons being removed from public circulation. Along with this, the national agreement on firearms required those with licenses to demonstrate a genuine need for a specific type of gun as well as take a safety course. There have been no fatal mass shootings in Australia since 1996. Another example of a developed Nation with well enforced Methods of keeping gun homicide low is Japan. With one of the lowest rates of gun violence in the world, the country has the potential to set an example for the United States in terms of legislation. Japan's firearm and sword possession control law allow for the only guns permitted for use to be shotguns, air guns, guns being used in competitions, and guns with a specific industrial or research purpose. On top of this, licensees must attend a day-long class, take a written exam, and pass a shooting range test with a mark of 95% or greater. Criminal records are checked along with mental health and drug testing. After 3 years the license expires, and the aforementioned processes must be repeated in order to renew it. This all results in the country facing little to no gun violence. In 2014 alone, there were 33,599 gun related deaths in America. In that same year, Japan had six.

Most people in America will have some sort of connection with gun violence, even if it is indirect. This is mainly due to informative media such as news channels or papers. In the event that there is a significant case of murder, media outlets will broadcast information to a large sum of American households. This makes it nearly impossible to avoid coming across the results. A sizable portion of the violence reported in the media tend to be mass shootings or police brutality, the second of which affects more specific groups of people. Police brutality is generally defined as a situation where an officer utilizes an excessive amount of force against a citizen in order to subdue them or deescalate a situation that did not warrant the extremity of the force. Excluding the blatant violence and aggression, significant issues regarding police brutality are the facts behind who is most often subjected to it. People of color or people living with a low income status tend to have negative interactions with police. Poor neighborhoods on average have the higher rate of crime than other, better off areas. This leads to larger police presence in these locations, along with the officers expectations that they will be frequently encountering criminals. Crime, while not morally justifiable under most circumstances, is often one of the few options low income individuals choose is a method to support themselves. People of color born into poverty or financial instability are faced with a reality in which they are potential targets due to societal expectations for them to accurately fit into a set of simple stereotypes. Individuals of black descent make up 13% of the U.S. population. Parallel to this information is the percentage of people that are black in relation to the total amount of people killed by police annually. Blacks make up 26% of all people killed by police in 2015, 24% in 2016, and 23% in 2017. For the first half of 2018 they make up 20% of all the murders by police officer. These numbers mean that we are killed on average at around twice our rate in the general population, creating a disproportionate amount of police brutality victims in communities of color.

Conclusively, America has a lot to learn in terms of treating its citizens fairly and allowing them to lead safe, productive lives. The country is due for a reassessment on how it functions on a daily basis in order to improve. This can be done if people in power are held responsible for helping fix and mitigate problems that they benefit from.

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