

## Breakout Rooms: Contextualizing *The Tradition*

### Group Protocol:

- 2 minutes: Give everyone a chance to introduce themselves, using their name, pronouns, location, and organization.
- 5 minutes: Read and reflect individually. Feel free to turn off your camera and step away if you need to. Start with the Primary Resource, and feel free to skim other resources.
- 10 minutes: Discuss what you learned from the clips, and how it connects to the definitions we reviewed.

### Group Roles:

- Facilitator: Get the conversation in your group moving - make sure all voices are heard and respected.
- Recorder: Take notes on the conversation in your group using [the Jamboard](#).
- Reporter: Share key points from your group conversation with the whole group when we come back together.

### Materials:

Click the link below to access the materials for your group.

[Resource 1 \(Groups 1 & 5\): Sandra Bland](#)

[Resource 2 \(Groups 2 & 6\): Black Masculinity](#)

[Resource 3 \(Groups 3 & 7\): Gun Violence](#)

[Resource 4 \(Groups 4 & 8\): Control of the Music Industry](#)

### Norms:

- 1) Approach this discussion as a learner
- 2) Step Up & Step Back
- 3) For our BIPOC participants: We recognize the stress of these conversations. Take care of yourselves.
- 4) For our White participants: Maintain humility, listen actively, and be vulnerable.
- 6) Expect and accept non-closure

To get in touch with facilitators, click “Ask for Help” in your breakout room.

## Resource 1 (Groups 1 & 5): Sandra Bland

**Primary Resource:** [“I could have been Sandra Bland: Black America's terrifying truth” by Brittney Cooper](#)

**Reflection Questions:** How has your experiences with police been similar or different from the experiences of Black women like Sandra Bland and Brittney Cooper?

**Additional Resources:**

- Maimouna Youssef - [Say My Name](#)
- Article - [Why Black Women Like Breonna Taylor Still Need ‘Say Her Name’ Movement](#)
- HBO Documentary- [Say Her Name: The Life and Death of Sandra Bland](#)

### **I could have been Sandra Bland: Black America's terrifying truth**

A woman pulled over for changing lanes was arrested because she stood up for her rights. Now she's dead.

By Brittney Cooper

JULY 23, 2015, Salon.com

At age sixteen, I went to a high school dance with a white male friend. When we pulled up to the gym, music blaring loudly out the windows, a police officer came over as we got out of the truck, and began shining his flashlight around the cab, questioning what we teenagers were doing there -- at a high school dance. I immediately apprised the officer of the fact that he had no right to conduct a search of my friend’s vehicle without probable cause. Our music had not been loud enough for a noise violation, and we had turned it off, as soon as my friend parked the car.

The officer continued to saunter around the vehicle shining his flashlight, asking us questions, throwing his weight around to let us know he was the one with power. But I had questioned him instinctively. I didn’t think about it, about the consequences, about the ways in which my questions might be perceived as resistance or threat. I saw a police officer improperly enforcing the law, and I was just arrogant and naïve enough to think that the principles we had learned in Civics and American History actually mattered. He was on a power trip, and people on power trips irritate me.

“You seem irritated,” a police officer said to Sandra Bland when he pulled her over two Fridays ago for failure to signal. “I am. I really am,” she told him.

Apparently she had been attempting to explain that she pulled over to get out of the officer’s way, and she didn’t understand why he had stopped her. He demanded that she put out her cigarette, which she is legally allowed to smoke in her own car. When she didn’t, he demanded she get out of the car. She refused, telling him clearly that she didn’t

have to get out of the car if she wasn't under arrest. So then, after opening her door, reaching into her car and grabbing her, he yelled that she was under arrest. He didn't say what the charges were.

Off camera, Sandra narrates for the video, which she knows is recording exactly what is being done to her, that her wrist is being grabbed and twisted, her head being slammed into the ground. When she informs the officer that she has epilepsy, he replies: "Good. Good." And because she refused to go willingly into an unjust arrest for charges that remained unnamed, she was then arrested for resisting arrest.

On three occasions I have given "attitude" to police, asked questions about unfair harassment and citations, and let the officers know that I didn't agree with how they were doing their jobs. I have never threatened an officer or refused an order. But I have vigorously exercised my right to ask questions and to challenge improper shows of force.

I have had the police threaten to billyclub me, write unfair tickets, and otherwise make public spaces less safe, rather than more safe, for me to inhabit, all out of a clear lust for power. On the wrong day, I could have been Sandra Bland. And if a police officer pulled me over for a bullshit-ass reason, I absolutely would have given him the business on the side of the highway. By this, I don't mean I would have made threats. I mean I would have asked questions.

All Sandra Bland did was ask questions. Now she is dead. Supposedly after hanging herself in a jail cell. Just a few hours before her sister was coming to bail her out. None of that makes sense. What does make sense are the words of her mother, Geneva Reed-Veal. She said,

"Once I put this baby in the ground, I'm ready. This means war."

The American public is comfortable with Black mothers who are charitable in their grief, Black mothers who declare that this isn't "a race issue, but a right and wrong issue," mothers who forgive, mothers who become silent, stoic, and elegant. But it is time that Black mothers who keep burying children because of poor policing begin to fight back.

Nothing about this officer's actions were legal. It is the evidence of Sandra Bland's irritation that caused this officer to escalate. He firmly expected to be able to harass a citizen going about her business and have her be okay with it. He expected that she wouldn't question him. He wanted her submission. Her deference. Her fear.

White power. Black submission. It's the oldest trick in the white supremacist handbook. The officer might think he wanted Sandra Bland's respect. But what he really wanted was her fear. And the fact is: He is entitled to neither. She did not owe him either her respect or her fear. When his white maleness and his badge didn't elicit the first, he used the power of that badge to compel the second.

Now Sandra Bland is dead. She isn't dead because of suicide. No matter what they say, justice, reason, fairness and good damn sense compel us to believe differently. She is dead because she wouldn't go quietly. She is dead because she asked questions. Dead because she knew her rights. Dead because she demanded to be treated with dignity. Dead because she wouldn't submit. Dead because she wouldn't shut up.

Black people, of every station, live everyday just one police encounter from the grave. Looking back over my encounters with police, it's truly a wonder that I'm still in the land of the living.

Am I supposed to be grateful for that? Are we supposed to be grateful each and every time the police don't kill us?

There is a way that white people in particular treat Black people, as though we should be grateful to them -- grateful for jobs in their institutions, grateful to live in their neighborhoods, grateful that they aren't as racist as their parents and grandparents, grateful that they pay us any attention, grateful that they acknowledge our humanity (on the rare occasions when they do), grateful that they don't use their formidable power to take our lives.

When we refuse gratitude, they enact every violence -- they take our jobs, our homes, refuse us respect, and kill us. And then they demand that we be gracious in the face of it.

Black gratitude is the prerequisite for white folks to treat us like human beings. But in my faith tradition, we define grace as "unmerited favor," as undeserved, unearned. And it is God's grace toward us that compels our gratitude toward God. Not so in a culture of white Supremacy. In a culture of White Supremacy, White people get to be God without grace. Black people must give all the grace and act grateful for opportunities to do so. If we stumble on the wrong day with the wrong white person, we pay for it with our lives.

Now here's what I know. White people don't like to be lumped in with each other. They don't like racial generalizations. But in Sandra I see myself, and every interaction I've ever had with the police, both good and bad. Black communities are weeping and mourning with her mother, friends, and four sisters, because we know that at any time, she could be any of us. Black people don't have the luxury of refusing identification and commonality.

This is why some Black people are asking themselves, "Why didn't she just put out the cigarette, shut up and get through it?" Because she loved herself. Because she was on her way to fulfill her dream. Because she knew she was somebody and that she didn't deserve to be mistreated. Because the demand for dignity always asserts itself at the height of an assault. Because the choice never should have been between her life or her dignity. Neither her life nor her dignity should be a casualty of an encounter with police. But there is what-should-be and what-is. Sandra Bland should be starting the second week of her job at Prairie View A & M University. Instead her mother is preparing to put

her “baby in the ground.”

White people resist seeing themselves in the face of the oppressor. That mirror reflection is almost too much to bear. I get it. So then they resent the person that holds up the mirror. But let me just say as directly as I can: White people must begin to see themselves in the faces of the mostly white police officers who keep committing these atrocities against Black and Brown people. This will not stop until you recognize that you are them. These officers are your brothers and sisters and aunts and cousins, and sons and daughters and nieces and nephews, and friends, and church members. You are them. And they are you.

It’s a hard truth. It’s a truth that will infuriate each and every white person that floats through life on the cloud of individuality, fooling themselves into thinking that the assumptions, presumptions and privileges of growing up white in a white supremacist society somehow missed them, while touching an alarmingly large number of people who look just like them.

Today is not the day for such fantasies. Sandra Bland is dead for -- I don’t know -- failing to signal properly, failing to stop smoking a cigarette, failing to fear the police. She’s dead for some reason. Or more likely she’s dead for no reason at all.

But she’s dead. And somebody is to blame. And it isn’t her.

Who do we blame? How do we make it stop? How shall we now live?

Like Sandra, I have questions.

## Resource 2 (Groups 2 & 6): Black Masculinity

**Primary Resource:** As a group, discuss this excerpt [from an interview by Jericho Brown](#) on Black Masculinity. Below write down a brief summary of what you discussed as a group.

**Reflection Questions:** How does intersectionality play a role in Jericho Brown's identity? How does it connect to double consciousness and privilege?

**Additional Resources:**

- Video - [bell hooks and Kevin Powell Black Masculinity, Threat or Threatened](#)
- Interview - [Q & A: Jericho Brown](#)
- Book - We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity by bell hooks

**Many of your poems lend an often ignored delicacy and fragility to black men. Why have you chosen to present black masculinity in this way?**

I think media, social media, and television give us the wrong ideas over and over again about who we really are. I come from a family where generation after generation, we, for the sake of beauty, tended our houses, our land, our lawns, our flower beds. There were gardens in the backyard where you grew greens, beans, tomatoes, and potatoes, but in the front yard, you had a flower bed for no reason other than the fact that it was beautiful. Those are the kinds of things we don't know or see about each other, particularly when we think about black men.

That's who my dad was. He was also a lot of awful, but I have to remember that he taught me that. I can share that feeling with him now because I have a yard; I didn't understand it before. I remember turning the corner to our house when I was a kid, entering the driveway, and hearing him say, "Ooh that's pretty." [There was a sense of] pride because the yard looked nice. I got to see something in him that isn't what people automatically think about him when they simply think of his image.

This is why I'm interested in this thing called masculinity. I'm interested in the fact that it could exist, but in our minds, in our perceptions, we keep leaving stuff out of it. People have to fall in love. People have to take care of their kids. I want to make sure men know it's possible for them to have feelings and that those feelings are okay to have. I think our world would have us believe they're not okay to have.

**Your poems are often about difficult and highly politicized parts of your experience as a black, gay, Southern man, but they are simultaneously celebratory and joyful. How do you find that meeting place between terror and joy in your work?**

Well, it's just my life, isn't it? I'm from Louisiana, which is where you learn to party if you really want to. I am gay and we do have a good time, and I am black and don't nobody

sing and dance like us. At the same time, having all of those identities in a single body means bombardment from people you share identities with.

[The terror and joy] are both there, but I think they're both there for everybody. I just get the opportunity to see it. W.E.B. Du Bois talked about this when he talked about double consciousness; I get to look outside of myself and see myself having those experiences at one time. Other people are having those same experiences, but they don't understand that's how we live our lives.

The trouble white folks are having in this country in particular is not being able to see that things are happening as they are happening. Then, when some result appears, white people experience a surprise and shock that black folks don't have. Some of us in this country are under the impression that we are being protected, and some others of us understand that protection was never there. And so that's what I'm talking about. That's what I'm interested in. That's what I want to tell the truth about, the way privilege hurts even the people who are supposedly privileged. We're experiencing the world on fronts where the same thing happening to two people can be seen in two very different, and, for both of them, very dangerous ways.

## Resource 3 (Groups 3 & 7): Gun Violence

**Primary Resource:** [“The world is listening to Parkland teens. Some Philly kids wonder: Why not us?”](#) by Kristen A. Graham

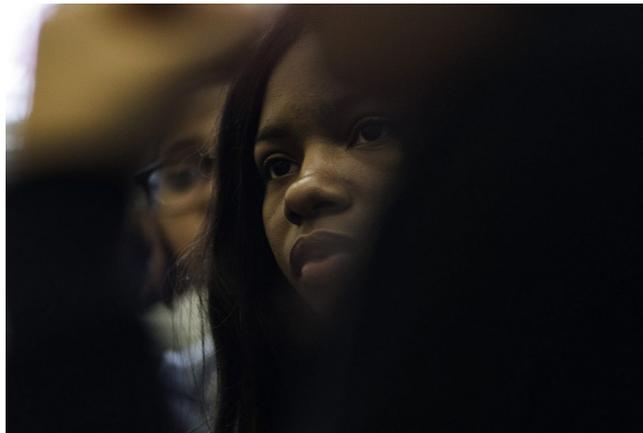
**Reflection Questions:** How does race play a role in the media coverage of gun violence in Black and White communities? How does race and/or racism impact our definitions of safety in both communities?

**Additional Resources:**

- Article - [Race And Policing: Treat Black Men And Boys Like Victims, Too](#)
- Article - [A Lack Of Police Presence Isn't Chicago's Problem, Structural Racism And Trauma Are](#)
- Article - [White mass shooters receive sympathetic media treatment](#)
- Video - [Why Did the Police Shoot Jacob Blake? Trevor Noah](#)

### **The world is listening to Parkland teens. Some Philly kids wonder: Why not us?**

by [Kristen A. Graham](#), Posted: March 11, 2018, Philadelphia Inquirer



RAYMOND W. HOLMAN JR. / FOR THE INQUIRER

Milan Sullivan is horrified that 17 people died in a [mass shooting](#) at a Parkland, Fla., high school. And she does not disagree with the teenage survivors who have stood up since the massacre, demanding action on gun violence.

But she's not leaving class next week for the National School Walkout, and she won't board a bus for Washington for the [March for Our Lives](#) on March 24. Sullivan, a junior at Mastery Charter School-Shoemaker, is all for activism, but she is like a lot of her classmates: hesitating a little over this particular movement.

For some students, it's because they feel too removed from things that go on in suburban high schools in far-away places, or they feel numb to gun violence. Others wonder: Where

was the attention during the protests over issues pressing our community, whether it be Black Lives Matter or the murder of a friend or relative?

"[Politicians are going out of their way](#) to help these kids," Tatiana Amaya said of the Parkland activist students. "And there's just a disconnect — when something happens in the white community, the black community is expected to support them, but people don't stand up for the black community. The focus isn't 'What can we do to make black and brown kids feel safe in school?'"

Amaya, Sullivan, and the other members of Raised Woke, a Mastery-Shoemaker club focused on social justice and youth engagement, wonder where the outrage is when people in predominantly black neighborhoods get shot.

[They're not alone](#). From Florida to Chicago, [some people](#) in [marginalized communities](#) have been asking the [same question](#) in the wake of the Parkland massacre.

"When something happens in the black community, we don't get a lot of support," Sullivan, 17, said.

It is interesting to note the difference in support for the kids in FL versus the kids in Black Lives Matter. I say that with full admiration for the kids in FL, to survive such a trauma and fight for everyone to be safer. But that's also what was happening in Ferguson and beyond  
— roxane gay (@rgay) [February 21, 2018](#)



RAYMOND W. HOLMAN, JR. / FOR THE INQUIRER

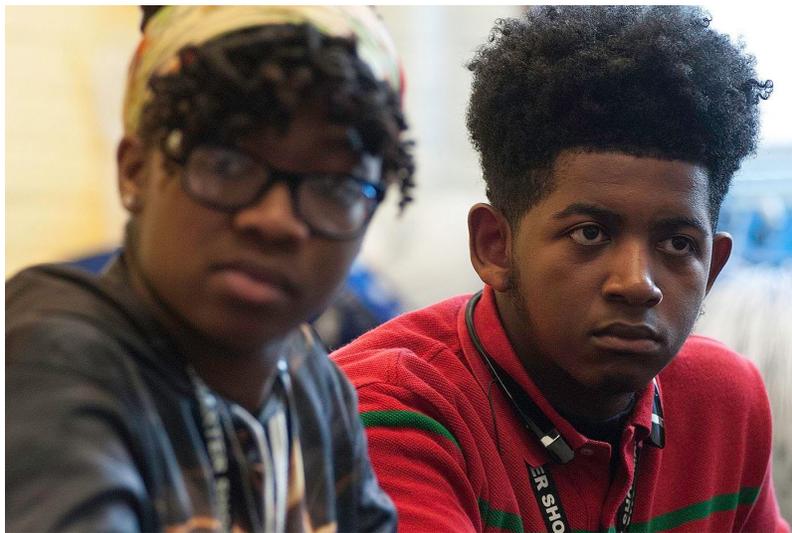
Kaiyah Taylor (left) talks about how shootings in the inner city are different from the school shootings in Parkland, Fla.

Or, as Kaiyah Taylor put it: "We have a lot of dying in our community, and no one is paying attention."

(Her brother's friend was recently gunned down on her block, Taylor said, and there was no media coverage, no story about what the victim was like, no uprising to demand answers.)

No one disputes that the mass slaughter in a matter of minutes by a teen toting an assault weapon rekindles what has been a bitterly fought and politically divisive national debate in the last two decades. But for this group of Mastery-Shoemaker students, a collection of dynamic, bright high school juniors, the issue is complicated, and a lot of it is about race. What would have happened if the mass shooting happened in Philadelphia, not suburban Parkland? the students asked during a recent wide-ranging conversation. Would the outrage have been as sharp? As national? They couldn't imagine any [celebrities coming to survivors' aid with cash and acclaim](#).

"We do care," said Ahmad Abdullah, 17, "but we have to take care of ourselves."



RAYMOND W. HOLMAN, JR. / FOR THE INQUIRER  
Amaya Toby and Ahmad Abdullah-Tucker, students at Mastery Charter-Shoemaker, talk about reactions to gun violence in Parkland, Fla. and their own community.

Why do black shooters tend to be portrayed as thugs and white shooters quickly labeled as mentally ill? the teens wanted to know.

And frankly, there's also an element of desensitization, said Nathaniel Brown.

"We're numb when it comes to gun violence," said Brown. "We see it every day. Honestly, you can only cry but so much."

Around the Mastery-Shoemaker conference room where the students gathered, everyone nodded. Then the talk turned to President Trump's call to arm teachers as a way to ward off school shooters. Kyra Lewis is OK with arming "certain people — like security guards, or the deans."

But most students shared Perla Espinal's view.

"School is a safe place — we don't want guns in school," said Espinal, 16.

"That's promoting gun violence," said Amaya. "It shouldn't be that you have to have guns to feel safe."

The students are planning some action. Raised Woke is organizing Mastery-Shoemaker participation in the National School Walkout on April 20, the 19th anniversary of the Columbine school shootings.

"It's not like we don't care," said Amaya. "We need to urge our politicians to be accountable."

"This is not a time for us to be petty," Lewis said. "It's 'I see you, now can you see us?' " Darin Toliver, a social worker and member of the Mayor's Commission on African American Males, understands the teens' complicated feelings.

"It's like the opioid crisis vs. the crack dilemma," Toliver said. "Today, we're talking about safe injection sites, but when blacks were being infected by the crack epidemic, no one seemed to care."

But this is a "pivotal moment in our history," said Toliver. "The individuals who were slaughtered on Valentine's Day, it was more than just white kids in a suburban high school being killed. It transcends color lines. It's a climactic period where enough is enough."

The [Philadelphia Student Union](#), a citywide youth organizing group, is also using the movement to amplify its voice. Some of its members will participate in the national walkout Wednesday, converging on the Philadelphia School District's North Broad Street headquarters and then marching to City Hall.

Rather than focusing on a ban of assault weapons or other, less-germane-to-them issues, the group has come up with its own, Philadelphia-centered list of demands. Among them is [divestment from school police officers](#), more mental and emotional health services, more guidance counselors and social workers, and "gun control that does not result in targeted policing of black and brown bodies."

## Resource 4 (Groups 4 & 8): Control of the Music Industry

**Primary Resource:** Watch these two clips:

- [A History of White People Stealing Black Music](#) (from Little Richard TV movie, 2000)
- [Louder Than A Riot trailer](#)

**Reflection Questions:** How does anti-Blackness and exploitation of the Black community manifest itself within the music industry?

**Additional Resources:**

- Movie: [Ma Rainey's Black Bottom](#)
- Article: [The 'whitewashing' of Black music: A dark chapter in rock history](#)
- Article: [For centuries, black music, forged in bondage, has been the sound of complete artistic freedom. No wonder everybody is always stealing it.](#) 1619 Project
- Podcast: [Louder than a Riot from NPR Music](#)