

#BlackLivesMatter

Organizing Against Police Violence Over Time



A lesson created in collaboration of the UC Berkeley History-Social Science Project.

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In 2013, in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's killer, Alicia Garza, an activist based in Oakland, CA, and her friends Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi began discussing their reactions to the acquittal under the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag. This led to the general activist movement Black Lives Matter, which has grown into one of the [largest activist movements in history](#). The numerous murders of unarmed black men and women at the hands of police since 2013, such as Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, Freddie Gray, Alton Sterling, and Philando Castile sparked more protests and organizing. The death of George Floyd in May of 2020 re-ignited Black Lives Matter protests and activist actions around the world.

We hope this lesson will provide an entry point, and important historical context, for discussions with students about the roots of contemporary issues. We know that these conversations, while challenging, are also essential. Consequently, we have included guidance around establishing a climate in your classroom that supports thoughtful reflection.

If students will engage with this lesson online, we encourage teachers to adapt Part 1 to an online setting- either assigned as a journal assignment or completed together in a virtual classroom.

Focus Question: *How have Black organizers responded over time to the continuity of police violence?*

Teaching Thesis: The policing of Black neighborhoods is symptomatic of larger issues of systemic racism and reflect the historically oppressive relationship between law enforcement and the Black community. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense emerged in 1966, in part as a response to racial profiling, over-policing, and excessive force by the police, and created a vision for Black lives called the Ten Point Program. In 2016, after numerous Black people's public deaths at the hands of the police, the Movement for Black Lives created a vision that echoes many of the original visions of the Ten Point Program, including a call to end police brutality, self-determination for Black communities, and government provisions of basic needs (including housing, healthcare, and education).

Lesson Components

Click the link to take you to the appropriate section of the lesson.

[Part 1: Creating a Safe Space for Difficult Conversations about Contemporary Issues](#)

Goal: Establishing common ground (emotional and intellectual) for discussing recent incidents of violence.

Part 2: Establishing Historical Continuity: The Black Panther Party (1960s)

Focus Question: *How do the writings of the Black Panther Party help us better understand the historic context for the relationship between the police and the black community?*

Goal: Identifying a historical perspective to police violence in the black community.

2.1: [The Death of Denzil Dowell \(image/text\)](#)

2.2: [Bobby Seale Remembers Denzil Dowell](#)

2.3: [In Remembrance of Victims of Police Brutality](#) ***Teacher Note: This portion may be traumatic or painful for students and may require additional debriefing and/or support**

2.4: [The Ten Point Program and Vision for Black Lives - Continuity and Change](#)

Part 3: Self-Reflection

Focus Question: *How do you make sense of the Black Lives Matter movement?*

Goal: Articulating a personal perspective on current events.

3.1 [Drafting a Social Media Post - Sharing Student Perspectives](#)

Included Sources

- Adapted from Glenn E. Singleton & Curtis Linton, [Courageous Conversations about Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools](#). 2006. pp.58-65. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- “[Why was Denzil Dowell Killed](#),” *Black Panther Party Newspaper*, 1 April 1967.
- Seale, Bobby. [Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton](#), 1970.
- [The Black Panther Party’s Ten Point Program](#), May 15, 1967.
- [A Vision for Black Lives](#), August 2016.

Additional Sources

- American Police: Throughline, NPR. June 4, 2020.
<https://www.npr.org/2020/06/03/869046127/american-police>
An excellent one-hour podcast covering the history of police in America
- “Black Power in American Memory” A Class Project for AMST 384: Myth and History and American Memory, UNC at Chapel Hill. April 18, 2017.
<http://blackpower.web.unc.edu/2017/04/the-black-panthers-10-point-program/>

Covers the change from the 1967 platform of Black Panther Party to the 1972 platform, which changed language to include healthcare for all and rights for all oppressed people.

Conversations regarding police brutality, #BlackLivesMatter, and the role of police in society can be passionate, divisive, and often deeply personal. It is important to hold space in a classroom for a diversity of student opinions, while understanding that some perspectives can feel hostile and marginalizing. Before introducing a conversation about race, police, and current events, the classroom should have norms regarding honest, challenging, and respectful dialogue. You might consider consulting with colleagues you trust as you prepare to teach this lesson and discuss these powerful issues.

Below are a few ideas to create a safe classroom environment for these conversations.

1. Help students create norms for the conversation. Teachers may want to start with the “Four Agreements of Courageous Conversations”.¹
 - a. Stay engaged
 - b. Experience discomfort
 - c. Speak your truth
 - d. Expect and accept non-closure
2. Lead students through an icebreaker. One icebreaker could include reading a list of statements, and asking students to stand if the statement is true for them. Teachers could start with general statements and move to more serious statements. If time allows, teachers might hold discussion circles after each question. **Note:** In an online context a zoom poll could be used to gather anonymous responses.

Sample Statements:

- a. *Stand if you had a fun experience this summer.*
 - b. *Stand if you have ever felt mistreated because of how you look.*
 - c. *Stand if you have a family member who is a police officer?*
 - d. *Stand if you or someone you know has been mistreated by the police?*
3. Allow students to express their own opinions in a free-write before beginning the lesson.

Possible Writing Prompts:

- a. *What is your personal reaction to the #BlackLivesMatter movement?*
- b. *How would you characterize your perception of the police? Do you have friends or family who are in law enforcement? Have you had positive or negative experiences with the police in the past?*
- c. *Does talking about race make you feel uncomfortable? Why or why not?*
- d. *How might you or others experience fatigue from being confronted with racism?*

¹ Adapted from Glenn E. Singleton & Curtis Linton, *Courageous Conversations about Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*. 2006. pp.58-65. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Part 2.1 The Death of Denzil Dowell

Directions: Use the provided newspaper article (left) to complete the box titled "information about the source" (right) and discuss the focus question.

Background: The Black Panther Party for Self Defense was established by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland, California in 1966.

The BLACK PANTHER

VOLUME 1 APRIL 25, 1967

P.O. BOX 8641 OAK, CALIF. EMERYVILLE BRANCH

BLACK COMMUNITY NEWS SERVICE

NUMBER 1

PUBLISHED BY THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY FOR SELF DEFENSE

APRIL FIRST 3:50 a.m.

WHY WAS DENZIL DOWELL KILLED

"I BELIEVE THE POLICE MURDERED MY SON" SAYS THE MOTHER OF DENZIL DOWELL.

Brothers and Sisters of the Richmond community, here is the view of the family's side of the death of Denzil Dowell as compiled by the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, concerned citizens, and the Dowell family. As you know, April 1st, 1967, Denzil Dowell (age 22), was shot and killed by an "officer of the Martinez Sheriff's Department", so read the newspaper.

But there are too many unanswered questions that have been raised by the Dowell family and other neighbors in the North Richmond community. Questions that don't meet the satisfaction of the killing of Denzil. The Richmond Police, the Martinez Sheriff's Department, and the Richmond Independent would have us black people believe some thing contrary to Mrs. Dowell's accusation. That is, her son was "unjustifiably" murdered by a racist cop.

There are too many questionable facts supporting the Dowell family's point of view.

These questionable facts are as follows:

1. Denzil Dowell was unarmed so how can six bullet holes and shot gun blasts be considered "justifiable homicide"? (Cont Page 2)

WE BLACK PEOPLE ARE MEETING SATURDAY 1:30 AT 1717 SECOND STREET LET US SUPPORT THE DOWELL FAMILY EVERY BLACK BROTHER AND SISTER MUST UNITE FOR REAL POLITICAL ACTION



Information about source

Article Title:

Newspaper Title:

Publisher:

Volume:

Date:

Location:

Focus Question: *What does this article from the BPP tell you about the historic relationship between the Black community and the police?*

Part 2.2: Seale Remembers Dowell

Directions: Read the following account of the killing of Denzil Dowell. As you read, choose one color to highlight words describing the police. Use another color to highlight actions taken by the Black Panthers in response to the police. Use a third color to highlight the response of the family and community to the Black Panthers actions.

Source: Bobby Seale's memoir *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton*, published in 1970.

Background: Denzil Dowell, age 22, was shot and killed on April 1, 1967 by a police officer in Richmond, California. According to the police report, Dowell was a suspect in an attempted robbery and fled the scene. The Black Panther Party questioned the circumstances regarding Dowell's death, and published his story on the front page of the first Black Panther Party newspaper on April 25, 1967. In his memoir, Black Panther co-founder Bobby Seale recalled the circumstances surrounding the death.

The Black Panther Party was called to Richmond by the Dowell family . . . because Denzil Dowell had been killed in Richmond by a Contra Costa deputy sheriff.

We went out there that day and saw the Dowell family. They began to explain all the details about how certain people had said they heard ten shots, and the papers and the local media there were saying that only two or three shots were fired. And how the coroner's office had originally told them he was shot nine or ten times, but the police department said he was only shot once or twice. How the pigs had lied about Denzil Dowell, the brother, telling about how he was trying to burglarize some place.

His brothers, Carl Dowell and George Dowell, explained how the pigs knew Denzil by name, because they had arrested him a number of times. The pigs had made threats that they were going to get Denzil. It was just a cold-blooded killing of a black man. Some pigs were trigger-happy and wanted to shoot somebody, shoot a "nigger."

They explained all this to us. Then the family took us over to the site where they killed brother Denzil Dowell, and showed us just where the bullets hit certain walls and the direction they came from, and how the pigs lied and said that he ran and jumped a fence. The blood was twenty yards away from the fence. They must have dragged his body over to the other side, and then over another fence. The blood was in two different places.

We were investigating, and a lot of black people in the black community there came out. They had noticed us Panthers, with our guns and everything. I guess there were ten or twelve of us who went out there together and went through the whole process of investigation, of looking over what had happened, and listening to the information that people were giving that contradicted all the crap that the pigs and the newspapers had run down. And the people were looking. . . . All of a sudden, some sister hollers out, "Uh oh . . . here come the cops."

When the sister hollered, Huey jacked a round off into the chamber of his eighteen-inch shotgun with a loud click and clack. When he did that, I unhitched the strap that held the hammer down on my .45 and it clacked too. People started moving back Then the pigs came down and Huey stepped to the curb. I followed Huey and stepped to the curb, a few feet down from him. The pigs were surprised all of a sudden. They looked and noticed who was ready and standing tall for them. The pigs kept driving, drove right on off- in fact they speeded

Part 2.2: Seale Remembers Dowell

on up and drove on away. Then the people moved on back, and some of them jumped around across the street, figuring there was going to be a shoot-out, but we just stood tall, ready to defend ourselves. We were educating the people that we would die here for them. This was the position we always took with brother Huey P. Newton.

We told the people there that we were going to have a rally that coming Saturday, on the corner of Third and Chesley, right down the street. We said we'd run down and educate them about the fact that we'd have to start using guns to defend ourselves, because the racist pig cops were coming to our community and murdering our brothers and sisters. Brother Denzil Dowell was killed, and we'd found information about two, three other brothers who'd been shot up back in December, in North Richmond there. The brothers had been shot in the armpits, which clearly showed they had their arms over their heads. Two brothers were killed in December and around April 1 Denzil Dowell was gunned down by those pigs. Huey told them we were going to have a rally concerning this, to tell the people it was necessary for us to arm ourselves for self-defense.

What words does Bobby Seale use to describe the police?	What actions were taken by the Black Panthers in response to the police violence?	How did the family and community respond?	How do you respond to the events described by Bobby Seale?

1. Who might have embraced the Black Panther Party in the 1960s and 1970s? Why?
2. Who might have feared or not supported the formation of the Black Panther Party? Why?
3. What does Bobby Seale's account of the death of Denzil Dowell tell you about the historic relationship between the police and Black community in the United States?

Note: Students, this remembrance may be difficult or traumatic. As you read about the lives of each of the individuals below, we ask that you do so in solemn remembrance, with the knowledge that each person is beloved and missed by family and friends. Please let your teacher know if it is too painful, and we encourage teachers to give space for all students to process, grieve and/or opt-out. Students may want to remember someone they know who was harmed via police violence.

Directions: Choose two or three of the people below, and use the links or other articles online to learn about their lives.



Trayvon Martin, 17, student who loved video games and wanted to be a pilot.

[Read More](#)



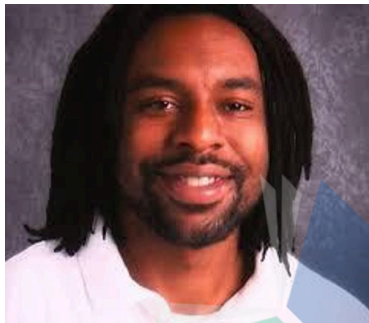
Sandra Bland, 28, activist with a degree in agriculture who worked with children.

[Read More](#)



Eric Garner, 43, husband, father, and grandfather, known as a “neighborhood peacemaker”.

[Read More](#)



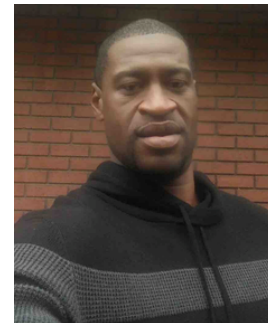
Philando Castile, 32, father and beloved school lunchroom worker known as “Mr. Phil”.

[Read More](#)



Breonna Taylor, 26, EMT worker who loved singing and playing games with her family.

[Read More](#)



George Floyd, 46, father, security worker, and community mentor known as a “gentle giant”.

[Read More](#)

Reading Questions:

1. After reading and remembering:
 - a. What did you learn about the lives these individuals lived?
 - b. What did you learn about how and when they died?
2. What emotions do you feel reading about these deaths?
3. Remembering what you learned about Denzil Dowell, what do you notice about policing in the Black community over time?
4. How would you want to honor the lives of one or more of the people you read about? Or the experiences of someone you may know who experienced harm at the hands of the police?

Part 2.4: The Ten Point Program and Vision for Black Lives

Directions: Read the Ten Point Program, published by the Black Panther Party in 1967, and the Vision for Black Lives, published by the Movement for Black Lives in 2016. Underline any similarities between the two plans and answer the questions on the following page.

Background: The Black Panther Party released the [Ten Point Program](#) on May 15, 1967. It was later amended in 1972. The program had two sections: the first was a list of what the Black Panthers wanted and the second was a list of what the Black Panther Party believed.

In 2016, a coalition brought together through #BlackLivesMatter called for six demands to achieve racial justice. In 2020, the [Movement for Black Lives](#) revised and expanded each of the six original demands.

BPP Ten Point Program (1967)	Vision for Black Lives (2016)
1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our black community. 2. We want full employment for our people. 3. We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our black community. 4. We want decent housing, fit for the shelter of human beings. 5. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present day society. 6. We want all black men to be exempt from military service. 7. We want an immediate end to <u>police brutality</u> and <u>murder</u> of black people. 8. We want freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county, and city prisons and jails. 9. We want freedom for all black and oppressed people now held in U.S. federal, state, county, city and military prisons and jails. We want all black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their black communities as defined by the Constitution of the United States. 10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace.	1. End the War on Black People: We demand an end to the criminalization, incarceration, and killing of our people. We call for not just individual accountability of officers after a murder, but entire police departments. 2. Reparations: We demand reparations for past and continuing harms. 3. Invest-Divest: We demand investments in the education, health and safety of Black people, instead of investments in the criminalizing, caging, and harming of Black people. 4. Economic Justice: We demand economic justice for all and a reconstruction of the economy to ensure Black communities have collective ownership, not merely access. 5. Community Control: We demand a world where those most impacted in our communities control the laws, institutions, and policies that are meant to serve us while recognizing that the rights and histories of our Indigenous family must also be respected. 6. Political Power: We demand independent Black political power and Black self-determination in all areas of society.

Continuity and Change Organizer

1. What general continuities do you see between the BPP Ten Point Program and the Vision for Black Lives?
2. What general changes do you see between the BPP Ten Point Program and the Vision for Black Lives?
3. How could these two platforms help us create the elements of a more just world? How could they help heal harm that has been caused?
4. What would be required for these policies to be fully implemented? Think about what might be required on a personal, local, and/or national level.

Directions: Read the questions below and reflect on your personal experiences with police, power, and injustice.

1. How have you been affected by state violence and/or the Black Lives Matter movement?
2. What elements of the BPP and/or MBL proposals do you think would be most effective in creating a just world?
3. How might you advocate for something that would help achieve an aspect of these visions for change?
4. Write a sample social media post (twitter, instagram, Facebook, etc) that expresses your views on how we might move forward in creating a more just world.



Directions: Use the provided newspaper (left) to complete the box titled “information about source” (right) and discuss the focus question.

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There are too many questionable facts supporting the Dowell family's point of view.

These questionable facts are as follows:

1. Denzil Dowell was unarmed so how can six bullet holes and shot gun blasts be considered "justifiable homicide"? (Cont. Page 2)

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Information about source

Article Title: "Why was Denzil Dowell Killed"

Newspaper Title: *The Black Panther*

Publisher: The Black Panther Party for Self Defense

Volume: 1

Date: April 25, 1967

Location: Oakland, California

Focus Question: What does this article from the BPP tell you about the historic relationship between the Black community and the police?

Answer: This article is the first article published by the BPP, indicating that police brutality was a central focus, and that the relationship between the police and the Black community has been historically contentious.

Teacher Note: In looking at this source, it is powerful to note that this article was the lead story in the first issue of the Black Panther Party Newspaper. We have chosen the Black Panther Party and the killing of Denzil Dowell as a case study for exploring the historic relationship between the police and the black community. Examples ranging from slave patrols to the LA Rebellion following the police assault of Rodney King could also be used.

What words does Bobby Seale use to describe the police?	What actions were taken by the Black Panthers in response to the police?	How did the family and community respond?	How do you respond to the events described by Bobby Seale?
-pigs -racist -cold-blooded -trigger-happy -lying -murdering	-The Black Panthers came and investigated Dowell's death -carried weapons and were willing to fight/die in a shootout with the police -had a rally to educate black community on self-defense	-relieved -validated -supported -listened to	-responses will vary

1. Who might have embraced the Black Panther Party in the 1960s and 1970s? Why?

Many members of the Black community, although not all, might have embraced the Black Panther Party because it represented a chance for self-defense against police brutality. Other communities who also felt harassment from the police might also support the Party.

2. Who might have feared or not supported the formation of the Black Panther Party? Why?

Police officers, government officials, and white citizens may have opposed the Black Panther Party out of fear that it was a paramilitary group.

3. What does Bobby Seale's account of the death of Denzil Dowell tell you about the historic relationship between the police and Black community in the United States?

Bobby Seale's account of the death of Denzil Dowell reveals the historic mistrust and antagonism between the police and the Black community in the United States.

Reading Questions:

1. After reading and remembering:

a. What did you learn about the lives they lived?

Answers will vary, but encourage students to learn more about each individual's life, rather than simply focusing on their death.

b. What did you learn about how and when they died?

Answers will vary- this may be painful or traumatic for students. Students might need to opt out of this portion of the lesson.

2. What emotions do you feel reading about these deaths?

Answers will vary- see question 1b.

3. Remembering what you learned about Denzil Dowell, what do you notice about policing and the Black community over time?

Answers will vary, but students might point out that the Black community has organized against police brutality in one form or another over many years.

4. How would you want to honor the lives of one or more of the people you read about? Or the experiences of someone you may know who experienced harm at the hands of the police?

Answers will vary. You might discuss how different cultures honor those who have passed away or how leaders in the community have been honored in the past.

Note to teachers: *Answers will vary for the following questions. You can encourage students to share as much or as little as they feel comfortable for question 1. For questions 2-4, students should reflect on one or two platform policies of either the Black Panther Party or the Movement for Black Lives that they think might be effective in creating a just world, and then create a sample social media post presenting their perspective. If they don't identify with anything from either party platform, students could create their own platform that they believe might create a just world.*

Directions: Read the questions below and reflect on your personal experiences with police, power, and injustice.

1. How have you been affected by state violence and/or the Black Lives Matter movement?
2. What elements of the BPP and/or M4BL proposals do you think would be most effective in creating a just world?
3. How could these two platforms help us create the elements of a more just world? How could they help heal harm that has been caused?
4. Write a sample social media post (twitter, instagram, Facebook, etc) that expresses your views on how we might move forward in creating a more just world.

