

I'm Black. I Hate Police Brutality. I Want to Be a Good Cop.

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Growing up, I saw many of my family members make bad decisions. Some got arrested a bunch of times; some are in a gang. My mom, dad, and grandma smoked marijuana and abused alcohol, and I went into foster care.

I also hung around people who sold drugs and were in a gang, but when I was 15, I decided to straighten up. I separated myself from people who were a bad influence and joined the Police Explorers, a youth program that lets teens work with officers and learn about how they do their jobs.

I joined the Explorers because I was tired of all the crime and violence I'd seen. I decided I wanted to become a cop to make things better. Gangs harm our neighborhoods because they turn little kids into criminals. But I know firsthand that gang members

can change and do good in their communities. As a cop, I could help by offering classes to gang members on how gangs hurt them and their families. I'd tell kids that more people want to help you when you're not a criminal. More doors will open to jobs.

I'd also help the neighborhood I work in by taking weapons and drugs away from anyone who had them illegally. I could lessen violence and tension between police and the community by talking with the residents who live where I'm stationed. I'd also play sports and watch movies with the young kids and the teens. I think when young people know the cops in their neighborhood, there is less chance of them committing crimes.

As a cop, I'd like to stop the lower-level targeting of black and Hispanic kids—especially because it just happened to me. Last week, I was walking down the block in the Bronx when I heard sirens behind me. Two white male officers got out of the car and walked toward me. One of them said, “Have you heard what’s going on in the area?”

Both of the officers were tall, and one was fat. The fat officer was doing all the talking, while the thinner cop stood there with one hand on his gun.

“No,” I answered. I'm thinking that they suspect me of something, so I told him I was not required to answer

his questions and they could take me in; (and that) they were wasting my time.



IMAGE BY YC-ART DEPT

I felt like I was being racially profiled because young white men were walking by and they didn't get stopped. The two officers took me to the 41st precinct—yes, the same precinct where I'm a Police Explorer.

As I walked in, I spotted the sergeant who is in charge of the Police Explorers. I said, "Hi, Sergeant."

"What are you doing here this early?" she asked. The officers looked surprised.

The fat officer said, "Has he gotten into trouble with you?"

The sergeant said, "Never. He's one of ours." Then, to me, she asked, "Did you do something wrong?"

"Ask these officers."

Sounding upset, she demanded, “I want you to tell me why you’re here.”

“He refused to answer our questions and he told us to bring him in because we’re wasting his time,” one cop said.

The sergeant told us to meet with her in two days. “I want to hear both sides,” she said.

At the meeting, I said, “I felt uncomfortable with two cops holding their guns while talking to me. I told them to take me in to avoid a potential incident.”

The fat officer said, “Next time, say you’re a Police Explorer, that you’re with us.”

I looked at both arresting officers in astonishment. “I get a free pass because I know people above you? What would’ve happened if I didn’t?” They all reacted like I’d said something surprising.

Acknowledging Racism

I was thinking how things could have gone differently because of all the disturbing videos I saw this summer of cops shooting black men. It happens so much it seems normal, and this is what scares me.



IMAGE BY YC-ART DEPT

I have built a bond with a lot of officers, and I don't like it when people talk about hating all cops. I say, "They have a dangerous job and they do what they are trained to do."

But this summer, police brutality seems to be everywhere. When I see the videos of black men killed by cops, especially when they don't get punished, I worry about being a cop. The police officer who killed Eric Garner in July 2014 had no right to use deadly force. As much as I like the Police Explorers, I wish they would acknowledge that there is racism in the NYPD.

But I still want to become a cop. Now I think it's even more important to have good cops on the force. If I saw another cop abuse their power, I would tell him to stop. If they didn't, I would go to the higher-ups, all the way up to the police commissioner.

I admit it might be hard to break the code of silence. I've heard officers say they wouldn't report their

partner for fear of retribution from others in the precinct. For example, if you call for backup, the others might take their time, which could cost you your life. But even knowing those dangers, I feel like I would break the code of silence if it was necessary. Bad cops make the people go against the police, so we have to help get them fired.

I still believe that individual cops can make a difference, and I think it helps when they get to know the people in the neighborhood. The cops do have to get over their code of silence and earn back people's trust. If cops don't have a good justification for killing someone then they should be fired and charged with a crime. But people should also stop spitting, yelling, and, especially, shooting at police. It takes both sides to better our communities.