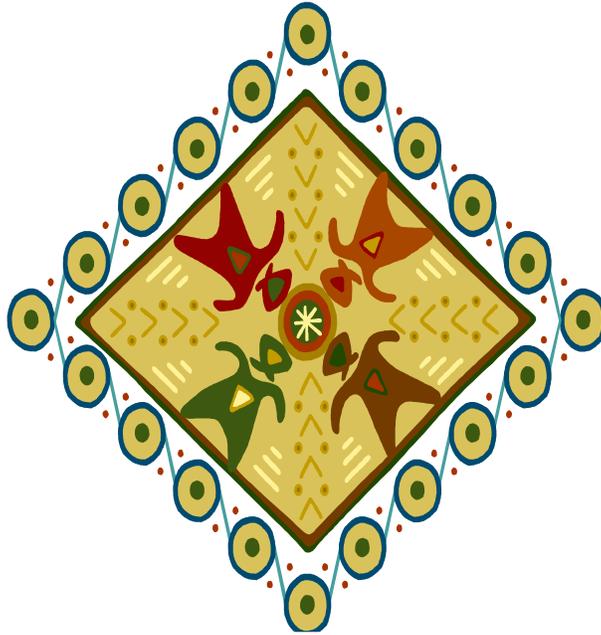


IRVINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

MULTI-CULTURAL FORMAL WRITING CONTEST



A COLLECTION OF WINNING PAPERS

May 2015

Writing Prompt for Grades 3-5

Read the short text, *A Unlikely Friendship* by Sue Carloni.
Write a persuasive essay stating your opinion about the main idea or theme of the story.

Writing Prompt for Grades 6-8

Write an argumentative essay either supporting or opposing Common's views about one's ethnicity as being a "gift" in his interview for Oprah.com in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Selma-to-Montgomery marches.

Writing Prompt for Grades 9-12

Write an argumentative essay either supporting or opposing Cedric L. Alexander's views on improving policing in his opinion article "How to Build a More Sensitive Cop" responding to the most recent rash of police-involved shootings

Saniya Baytops- 1st Place
Grade 3
Ms. Gaston
Chancellor Avenue School

In the story **An Unlikely Friendship**, I think the author's message is to teach others to be kind to each other and not judge people by what they do and how they look. I think the author is telling me that just because some people look different it does not mean that they are not smart or strong. We have to show empathy and be respectful of others. We may be different and still be able to be friends. Being friends is important so we just have to give friendship a try.

There is a change in how the narrator views the other student in the story. She learned a lesson about people and how they deserve to be treated no matter who they are and what they can and cannot do.

From the beginning of the story, the narrator, Natalie, expresses how she feels about Sarah and her handicap. Natalie has a hard time with Sarah's disability. On page 1 the narrator says, "How am I supposed to play with Sarah?" "She can't even walk." In another paragraph, she says, "I walked next to Sarah while she held onto the ball dripping drool all over it." Natalie really did not want to befriend a child who was different from her. She did not like the fact that she was forced to sit next to a student who could not walk, and could not control her drooling. She asked to be moved away and was not pleased with the presence of this new, handicapped classmate. She had to be reminded by her teacher to care about Sarah's feelings.

At the end of the story, they became friends. I know this because Natalie says that she almost missed out on a friendship and Sarah in her journal says she had fun playing kick ball.

I have my own experience with a friend whose name is Yarazet. We are very different. She is Mexican and I am African-American. She eats different food from me. We look different too. Her hair is long, and mine is short. Her skin color is also different from mine. Just because we are different, does not mean that we cannot be friends. Just as in the other story, I made an effort to be tolerant and get used to the differences. We like each other and that is all that matters.

Price Bay Mbock – 2nd Place
Grade 3
Mrs. Trainor
University Elementary School

Don't Judge a Book By Its Cover

Have you ever judged someone by how they look or been judged by how you look? I think everyone has. In the story, An Unlikely Friendship, Natalie judged Sarah who was a new student. Sarah was in a wheelchair. Natalie also didn't like that Sarah had drool coming out of her mouth. She said it was nasty. She also felt bad for Sarah because she couldn't move her legs. After the teacher sat her next to Natalie she asked her teacher if she can move her seat. This was before she got to know Sarah. By the end of the story, Natalie learned that Sarah was a good person and she was funny.

The message of the story, An Unlikely friendship, is to never judge someone by how they look and to treat others the way you want to be treated. You shouldn't say you don't like a person just because of how they look. I believe that no one should be judged by their looks. You should get to know them first. Just like the quote, "don't judge a book by its cover." It means don't judge a person by his or her appearance. People have been judged by their race and what they look like. Before you judge people, you should at least ask things about them, and get to know them first.

One time when I was at school, there was a girl who was blind and she was in my class. The teacher sat her next to me. During gym class we were racing. I expected her to fall or go the wrong way but she didn't. She knew where to go because of the sound our feet made. I was surprised and looked at her wondering if she was going to win. She did win. She came in first place. That's when we started to become friends. Even though she was blind she knew how to get around. She used sound to guide her and much more! I was glad to have a friend like her.

In conclusion, people should not be mean to others because of how they look on the outside. So, don't judge others because they're different. If you see somebody is do not judge them. You never know that person could end up being a great friend.

Genesis Nova – 3rd Place
Grade 3
Ms. Santiago
Berkeley Terrace School

Differences

Everybody is different, but when you work, play, and live with individuals that are different, you can learn to accept them and their differences. You may even gain a new friend. You might know someone with the same difference as them.

The message I took away from the story “An Unlikely Friendship” was to be accepting. The author reminds us that people’s differences should not be what we base whether or not we want to be friends with someone. That person may be helpful and they may be someone you can learn from.

The story reminded me of my friend and I. I have a best friend at church who is from Costa Rica. We both speak the same language, but we have different words for some words. When I attempted to speak to her she would say a word that I understood to mean “later”, so I would walk away. In actuality she meant “now”. I just did not understand. To understand those words we tell each other the meaning of the words; we work with each other. It used to be a problem but we figured it out and decided to be friends. We didn’t stop being friends because of our differences.

Like Natalie I did not let differences stop me from making a friend. In the story Natalie meets Sarah and doesn’t like her because she has special needs. Natalie almost missed Sarah as a friend. Despite her differences, it’s good to be friends with people who are different. One reason to be friends with them is because some of them have lived their entire life with that difference and simply want a friend. Another reason is to make them feel that they are not left out. The last reason is that interacting with those who are different can lead to a learning experience. For Natalie she learned to be tolerant and I learned about culture.

We are not all the same, throughout life we will meet people who are different and may have special needs. Some people with special needs may go through their entire lives with special needs. All around the world there are people and kids with needs. Sarah from the story “An Unlikely Friendship” is like those people who have special needs. They are still people, so we should treat them like you would like to be treated.

Everyone is different. We sometimes do not like others who are different from what we know. We can't think outside the box and work around their differences. I've learned to simply say, “together we can figure it out!”

We leave them out most of the time similar to the way Natalie tried her best to ignore Sarah. But Natalie caught Sarah smiling. People like Sarah have feelings too. Give people a chance; give everyone a chance!

Joyleen Estrada – 1st Place
Grade 4
Ms. Leuth
Chancellor Avenue School

Our Diversity

Often times we meet someone who is different from the way we are. We may look different, wear different clothes, or speak differently. But, our differences don't mean anything. You can actually turn out to be very good friends with someone who is different from you. Maybe even the best! Learn to accept people's diversity and not judge a book by its cover.

In the story, An Unlikely Friendship, at first Natalie felt uncomfortable with Sarah. Sarah was a new girl in class, was in a wheelchair and she drooled. Natalie panicked when she first came in to class because the only empty desk was next to her. She also felt disgusted because as it says in the text, "The first thing I noticed was the drool" and "all I could focus on was the glistening spit." In addition, she didn't think Sarah even belonged in fourth grade because of how she looked and talked. But by the end of the story, Natalie felt empathetic towards Sarah. She looked at her clean shoes and "wondered what it would be like to never walk, never run, never climb a tree or ride a bike." Also, she felt caring when she told Sarah, "We'll win next time!" During the kickball game she didn't even notice her disability anymore. In the text, Natalie stated, "what I saw was a new friend."

That story reminds me of the time I met Sabrina. You see Sabrina was Nigerian and I am from Guatemala. She was in my Pre-K class. She was super small, had short hair, brown eyes. I thought we were never going to be friends. Plus there was something else about Sabrina. She couldn't even grow because of the disability she had. We were just so different. But as it turns out, she was very smart and nice. She taught me how to read! Even after all this time, we are still best friends today. We always talk and laugh when we are together and I always remember the time I met Sabrina. If I hadn't become friends with her I would have missed out on a lot of fun.

Being different can be a good thing. After all, you can turn out to be best friends like Sabrina and I did. We should always try our best to get along and agree with each other. That is why it is important to accept each other's diversity.

Osayamen Amowie – 2nd Place
Grade 4
Ms. Swaby
Berkeley Terrace School

In the short text, *An Unlikely Friendship* by Sue Carloni it discusses how a little girl named Sarah who isn't much like others moves to a new school and a girl named Natalie feels she is forced to play with her. The new girl, Sarah, has some problems and Natalie has to be the one to show her around and play with her, but she doesn't like her because she is different. I know this because it stated, "Sarah not only has special needs, but she has feelings, too. Give it a try. My eyes stung. This isn't fair! I didn't want to be Sarah's friend." This tells me that Natalie underestimated Sarah's ability because of her special needs.

Later in the text Natalie acts mean and wants to change desks to get away from Sarah, but her teacher tells her to give Sarah a try. So, she tried to ignore her. When it was gym time, Natalie looked at Sarah's shoes and they looked brand new. Natalie realized this was because Sarah couldn't walk. This was a turning point for Natalie; she now wanted to help Sarah in gym class. When they were instructed to put Sarah on a team this is when Natalie realized her need to help Sarah.

During gym class, Sarah did pretty well in kickball. She got Matt out, and came in first. Natalie told Sarah they would win next time. This is when Natalie and Sarah became friends. Natalie realized she was wrong about Sarah and her abilities. When they returned to class, Sarah wrote in her journal "My first day of school went well. I had fun playing kickball in gym class. I made a new friend and her name is Natalie.

In my opinion, I think the theme of this story is that you should never underestimate the ability of others based on what you see. Sometimes a person's will to succeed is within. Natalie thought Sarah was different; she can't walk and has no friends. Natalie didn't like her, but as the story progresses Natalie realizes there is more to Sarah than what she sees. There are many people who have gone through a similar experience. They are judged or underestimated by others based on what they look like.

For example, when I first moved to America from Canada I was shy and didn't make many friends at my new school. I didn't think they would like me. Other kids possibly felt that I was different because I was from another country. It was not until I won an essay contest and made the honor roll that I felt like I fit in at my new school. This was my turning point when other students saw that I was more than a little shy girl, but I was a person that they can be friends with and I had a voice.

In conclusion, just as Sarah found it hard in the beginning to make new friends so did Natalie, but eventually Natalie learned that if you just get to know someone you never know what you can learn from them and you never know how it will make them feel.

Shanon Kennedy – 3rd Place
Grade 4
Ms. Foluke
Madison Avenue School

How Can I Live, Work and Play With Others When We Have Differences?

When people are different you should not judge them. It is rude and it could lead to you excluding them. When you exclude people it means that you are bullying them. I think that Sue Carloni, the author of *An Unlikely Friendship*, is trying to say that being different is not so bad. Avoiding others who happen to be a bit different can make them feel very sad. Judging someone by their appearance does not tell you much about their personality, and you could overlook someone very nice.

In the story, *An Unlikely Friendship*, Natalie underestimated Sarah because she was different. She thought of Sarah in a negative way and did not give her a chance. Before Miss Brown encouraged Natalie to get to know Sarah, she refused to be friendly to her. She was embarrassed of what others might think of her. But, when Sarah played well in the kickball game Natalie was impressed. She was glad that she had changed her mind and got to know Sarah better.

I can relate to Natalie and Sarah's friendship a lot. My grandmother has special needs too. She cannot hear very well, carry bags, bend down, or do ordinary things for herself. My whole family helps her because we all know that she depends on us. My mom cooks for her and buys her goods. I vacuum her floor and brush her dog. I feel good inside when I help my grandmother; a lot like Natalie felt at the end of the story.

In all, there is a lesson that we can all learn from *An Unlikely Friendship*. It does not matter what physical features someone has. As long as they are good on the inside, they are worth getting to know. You might actually make a new friend.

Esther Arhewoh – 1st Place
Grade 5
Berkeley Terrace School
Ms. Lewis

Have you ever wondered how you could live, work and play with others when they are different from you? In an, Unlikely Friendship, by Sue Carloni which was a great short text by the way, Natalie makes a new friend, a friend that she almost missed out on. The author shows that we shouldn't be quick to judge a person when we first meet them by the way they look, or talk or if they have a disability. Instead, we should have tolerance and give them a chance to be our friend. Also, we should have patience so they will be able to show who they are on the inside.

In the text, An Unlikely Friendship by Sue Carloni, Natalie's class has a new student, Sarah who was in a wheelchair and she also drooled. Sarah had to sit next to Natalie and Natalie did not like that at all. For example, in the story it states, "As Miss Brown, Sarah's aide, pushed the wheelchair toward me, I panicked. Why was the only empty desk next to me? I shrank in my seat". I can relate to how Natalie felt. When, I am outside in the car, walking, or on the bus and I see a person that has a disability I suddenly feel sad. I imagine myself in their shoes, not being able to walk, or see.

In, "An Unlikely Friendship", Natalie didn't judge Sarah on the way she talked but on the way she looked. When Natalie first saw Sarah and she saw the drool and her in the wheelchair, Natalie formed a wall that instantly made her not want to be Sarah's friend. When Natalie had to play ball with Sarah, she thought, "How am I supposed to play with Sarah?" Natalie wanted to change her seat, Mrs. Wagner, her teacher didn't agree, and because of that Natalie decided that she didn't care about Sarah's feelings. Natalie didn't want to be Sarah's friend because she was in a wheelchair. All Natalie thought was she is in a wheelchair, I can't be her friend, and she kept on judging Sarah on how she looked and her disability. I feel guilty because I judge people on the way they look, or talk, or dress when I first meet them sometimes. Not waiting to see their actions, and not thinking about the way I talk. I have an accent, and people tend to believe the way I sound when I talk or the way I pronounce words sounds funny. This story reminded me that it's important to be tolerant and kind.

In the middle of the story, Natalie had to play with Sarah and Sarah had to be on Natalie's team. Natalie didn't want to be with Sarah. She didn't want to be Sarah's friend when Natalie and the class were playing. Sarah had to be on Natalie's team, even though the team didn't win Natalie started not to care. By the end, Natalie stopped looking at Sarah's differences. Instead, she put her differences away and made a new friend with the girl who couldn't walk and drooled.

When I first came to America, I had to live, work and play with a lot of people that are different from me. I had an accent that made people not understand me, I talked too fast or I couldn't understand what they said. On my first day when I needed to use the bathroom and I said, "Can I go pee?" instead of saying "Can I go use the bathroom?" I had to meet new friends that were way different from me and I had to adapt to their living. I had to set my differences aside and actually try to be their friend. Another personal experience that I had was with my grandma. When she came from Africa to America for surgery, I had to adapt to her, because of her surgery. I had to help her do a lot of things. I had to help make some meals because she wasn't able to hold anything or do too many actions that will cause her stress. Even though I was the one now getting all the stress, I put my differences away and helped her.

Have you ever wondered how you could live, and play with others when we have differences? If you haven't you have to start thinking about it now. We shouldn't behave the way Natalie acted when she saw Sarah. The way Natalie acted in the end is better. You never know, once or twice in your life, you may be in Sarah's shoes. You don't want people to treat you bad and not talk to you because you have a disability. We should be able to put our differences aside for people that are different and try to give them a chance to be a friend.

In conclusion, in the short text, *An Unlikely Friendship* by Sue Carloni, the author was trying to convey that we shouldn't be quick to judge a person when we first meet them by the way they look, talk or if they have a disability. We should have tolerance and give them a chance to be a friend and have patience so that we can see them for who they are.

Tyler Pendergrass-Ewell – 2nd Place
Grade 5
Ms. McCreary
Thurgood Marshall School

Unique People Shouldn't Be Invisible

Have you ever ignored someone because they were different or weren't like you? In the story, An Unlikely Friendship, Natalie saw Sarah differently because she wasn't like her. So she tried to ignore her but her teacher partnered her up with Sarah. Throughout the day, Natalie got use to Sarah and they became the best of friends. In my opinion, the theme or main idea is give people a chance to be themselves. Therefore, you should respect others with differences and learn who they are without judgment.

The theme or main idea of the text is to give people a chance to be themselves. In the beginning, Natalie didn't want to be friends with Sarah. All Natalie saw was that Sarah drooled a lot. But by the end of the day they were tighter than the tightest knot in the world. The text states, "My eyes stung. This wasn't fair! I didn't want to be Sarah's friend." This shows that Natalie wanted nothing to do with Sarah because she was different than her. However, by the end of the story Natalie discovered there was more to Sarah than her drool. The text states, "What I saw was a new friend, a friend I had almost missed out on." Accordingly, if you give people a chance to show themselves, you can discover different things about them and you can make a new friend.

The author's message, in this story, is to accept people the way they are. The author states, "Sarah threw her head back, laughing, and drool went flying. Then I laughed, too". As a result of Natalie interacting with Sarah during kickball, she began to accept who Sarah was as a person, not a disability. Natalie's focus was Sarah not being like her and wouldn't give her a chance. During the day she realized that Sarah couldn't do the things she could, but she took pleasure in what she could.

I believe that it is important for people to be friends and interact with others with differences. I have this belief because people who are differences don't always have someone to hang out with. This reminds me of a time when I met a girl named Ginger. She didn't speak clearly so it was hard to understand her. Since she didn't speak, I didn't think I could talk to her and be friends. After a month of watching her, I went to talk to Ginger. She broke down in tears. I helped her calm down by giving her advice. I told her, if she is feeling upset, do something that made her happy. I also told her she could give herself a bear hug or a cannon ball and breathe in through her nose and out through her mouth like she was in yoga class. She felt much better

doing those exercises and I was happy to get to know her a little better. Eventually, even though we had some differences, we still became friends.

In conclusion, you shouldn't ignore people who are different. The story shows this by giving us the situation with Natalie and Sarah. Sarah's differences stopped Natalie from wanting to be her friend at first. Then Natalie discovered that they could still be friends even if Sarah wasn't like her. To sum it up, we should be friendly, respect people, and give them a chance to get to know who they are.

Vegonia Jean-Baptiste – 3rd Place
Grade 5
Mr. Rientis
University Elementary School

In the story, “An Unlikely Friendship,” by Sue Carloni, the main character, Natalie, is chosen by the aide to be Sarah’s friend. Sarah is handicapped and in a wheelchair. She also uses a red bandana to drool on.

In the beginning of the story, Natalie does not want to sit near Sarah or become friends with her because Sarah is totally different from the other kids. After spending some time with Sarah, and playing kickball with her, Natalie realizes that even though Sarah is different from her, she can still participate in the same activities. Natalie accepts Sarah’s differences and finds that Sarah is a good person to have as a friend.

In this story, the author is telling us not to judge by appearances. Get to know a person with differences and you can benefit from their friendship. Think about the old saying, “Don’t judge a book by its cover.”

I had a similar situation as Natalie. It was when I was in dance class. There was a boy with a speech disability. He could only say very few words and it was hard to understand him. I was uncomfortable, and so were the other kids. They said hi, but then walked away, laughed, and then ignored him. I did not want to follow the others because the little boy would feel badly. I talked to him as if he was my friend. I was originally going to judge him when he first walked in, but I am glad I didn’t. He turned out to be “cool” and nice. I convinced the other kids to try to talk to him, and one by one, they came over to talk to him. By the end of class, all of us were laughing and joking together. I feel like I made a difference as well as a new friend.

As you can see, I agree with the theme of the story, “An Unlikely Friendship.” People should not be judged because of their differences and appearances. Whether physically or mentally challenged, or different cultures, or religions, we are all the same inside with the same feelings and desires. We should accept all differences as we are all brothers and sisters.

Janasia Conover -1st Place
Grade 6
Ms. Emami
Union Avenue Middle School

Agreeing With Common

Do you agree with Common that being African American is a gift? I do agree with him. He says many things about how good it feels to be African American. He says that being African American allowed him to know and learn who he is as a Black man. In his interview with Oprah Winfrey, he said being Black was a gift to America. It is in loving others that you know who you are. He affirms that being African American allows him to be a better person. I agree that a person's appreciation for their heritage will make them be successful and a better person.

Common says he is God's child and that being God's child means he can love, forgive, have grace, and tolerance. This means that being God's child allows him to escape the past. The film, *Selma*, was all about the past and how African Americans were not treated well. As a child of God, Common says he is not stuck in the past. He says you can escape your past. You have to forgive those who have done wrong to you and you also have to have tolerance to love those people that see things differently from you. You also give them grace. Grace is overlooking the bad stuff that people have and thinking well of them. You do this because you want that too.

Common asserts that freedom allows you to embrace yourself. You can love yourself. It is a mindset that allows you to be who you are wherever you are. It helps you go places you have never been before. You are not held back by past hatreds or prejudices. In this country we have a great deal of freedom, but you are only as free as your mind lets you be. If you decide you cannot do something because of the people involved, you are not free. If you decide you cannot do something because you have never done it before, you are not free. Freedom is a mindset and it truly sets you free. Other countries do not have our freedom. In China, they have a one-child policy and if you go against the policy you have consequences. In Saudi Arabia, women have to cover up and have to be accompanied by a male relative. We should love and enjoy our freedom in this country. Having a mindset of freedom makes us do what a free people do.

Common says that Black Americans are a gift to America. Being as we came over on slave ships, many of us would disagree with that statement. But, if you look closely you will agree. Because of what has happened to us, America has to be on the lookout for all acts of prejudice and race hatred. We can be part of that also. We can be the guardians of racial prejudice and care about those others that have come after us so that the same treatment is not given to them. This is the gift that we give America. We remind America that they got it wrong, but that wrongs can be turned around so that we are a better America. Because we are African American and come with a different culture, we can honor and respect other people with a different culture.

In conclusion, Common said that being God's child, free, and African American have all contributed to making him successful, fulfilled, and a blessing to America. I agree with him. As God's child I can forgive. As a free person I can have that mindset that allows me to be anything I want. As an African American or any kind of American, I am a gift to America.

Amiri Lott – 2nd Place
Grade 6
Ms. Martin
University Middle School

If you are not proud of where you come from or how you look how you will live your life? Feeling like that no one cares if you exist? That you are a mistake? Or, that you do not fit in must be a horrible feeling. I agree with Common's statements because there are so many people in America from other places with different cultures, assorted races and many religions. I am a girl in America who knows how all three of those differences feel, in a good way.

When I look in the mirror, I see a proud Muslim girl that is glad to wear her Hijab, every day. I feel protected and beautiful. I stand out in a crowd, but for a good reason. I am proud of my Islamic religion and enjoy holiday and traditions that we practice. In our religion, we have to pray five times a day! Learning to speak Arabic gives me another level of pride. It will allow me to expand my culture even further when I grow up.

Waking up in the morning, I remind myself that my future depends on how I am disciplined. The women in my family show me how I should carry myself. It is an important part of my culture and it is taught to me so that I can defend myself against making bad choices and regretful mistakes. My brother, though he acts like he doesn't care, is taught to protect me as part of our culture and religion. I have to make sure I do not give him a reason to be disappointed.

Personally, when I can express being black and free, I feel as if the fight of my ancestors was not in vain. Being a prideful African American, to me, means being proud of your history and where you come from as well as where you are headed. From slavery, to Dr. King, to President Obama or Harriet Tubman, Queen Latifah, or my mom. Being a prideful American means this a place that many cultures and races can come to and feel welcomed, whether they are from China, Russia, Africa or Haiti.

I am glad to be the religion that I am and to be African American. Like my mom tells me to "Never let someone pick on you because of your religion. Just keep your head high and be impressed with yourself, because in the end all you need is yourself. Like Common, I carry myself in an aroma of self-respect. I'm not intimidated by any other culture. It's easy to appreciate their differences because I appreciate my own.

Ayrden Patilla – 3rd Place
Grade 6
Ms. Emami
Union Avenue Middle School

“Freedom allows you to be yourself wherever you are”. A singer, songwriter, and rapper named Common made this statement. Common said this on the Oprah Winfrey Show. What I think the quote that Common gave meant was that freedom allows every Black and White person or any race to be who they are and never stop just because someone is telling you to. I agree with Common when he says, “Freedom allows you to be yourself wherever you are.”

Common continues to say that “In embracing that I’m also able to embrace others” about being a child of God. He says that being a Child of God gives him the ability to love and forgive other people. It also allows him be tolerant and show grace. When he doesn’t get a job because of his ethnicity, he can forgive that person or situation because by being God’s child he knows that God is involved and there will be something else for him. Being God’s child allows him to be free. This makes me want to be God’s child as well.

Furthermore, Common believes being free is what has made him whole. He says, “Freedom is a mindset.” That means that he is not controlled by anger and hatred. In my life I have the freedom to pursue my dreams. I don’t know what my dreams are yet but when I find out what they are I will bet you that I will go after them. I am who I am because I am free. I will become what I need to become because I am free to do so.

In addition to that, Common says that Black people are a gift to America. However, many people would disagree with this. With the recent demonstrations in Baltimore and Ferguson, we know that Africa Americans do not feel appreciated by America. But Common is correct. We are a gift to America, even as we demonstrate. We remind America that all Americans have equal rights before the law.

In conclusion, Common says that being God’s child, free, and Black have all contributed to making him successful, fulfilled, and a blessing to America. I can say that not everything is going to come easy, but when you start appreciating what we as Black people have in America and the blessing that we can be to America, we more fully appreciate who we are. And as a free person I can believe that Black people will help people in America not destroy people in America. I am a blessing to America.

Jonathan Wilson-1st Place
Grade 7
Mr. Lawrence
University Middle School

Accepting Who I Am

I confidently believe that embracing ones' culture can be a significant time or part of someone's life. Particularly, I know that my culture and others are very important to us and others. I see my culture as a power line that no one can break or destroy. I also see my culture or heritage, that of being Trinidadian, as a source of energy and power. I see it as a source of energy and power because when I'm down or not feeling myself, I always remember where I came from, and that makes life much better.

I had some free time, so I started to analyze quotes from a rapper named Common. Common stated many strong quotes about his culture, life, and just being his self. For example, he stated that "freedom is a mind state, allows you to be yourself where ever you are." When I read and analyzed that quote I came to an understanding that no matter what people may think about you or even do to you, you should still love and honor yourself for who you are, not for what people want you to be.

When I say my heritage is a significant part for someone's life, I mean that no matter how life has been treating you, you still have to stay strong and positive. I say that because my heritage is a symbol of not just peace and happiness but hope and satisfying confidence that may be around you or just in the air for you to follow. Another quote I read from Common was when he stated, "I admire the aspects that god gave me." From reading that, I know he's strong and has strength even when something goes bad because he understands that we all make mistakes but we have to move on and do better.

One of Common's points from his interview that I highly agree with is when he states, "you all have the qualities to love and forget." To me, I think Common has an appreciation for life; he is willing to embrace those he feels may have wronged him in the past. People might put you down so many times in life, but you have to get up and be a man and understand that life has challenges. You have to set goals for yourself to follow, not for you to turn your back on. Take life as a message; follow the message into the end of time. Be positive and enjoy life and be the best you can be because every day isn't promised, and every day is a blessing.

Common has a very unique mind when it comes to enjoying life and being thankful. For example, he states his, "love to continue to get better and except what's right and what's not right." That means that no matter how many challenges you may have, you still have to except those challenges, in a positive way. He also means that many things may go wrong but the only thing that puts him back on his feet is the love he has, the motivation and the dedication he has. Just knowing that freedom is a mind state, it makes life a goal, a goal for you to keep striving for the best, and a goal for you to be and think positive in any and every way.

When I listen to Common's quotes, I think of the good times in life, from Trinidad to America. When I listen to Common, I think of the good and positive times I had and can have in the future. When I think of life, I think of me seeing my heritage becoming a better place, a better community, and a better environment, just like Common stated about him growing up in the south side of Chicago. Being able to grown up in an unprotected city, a city with no future image, just negativity, a treacherous city that shows you the less percentage of life, and shows you the unsatisfactory people that may be in his city. It is truly a blessing for someone like Common to escape that mind state of feeling impuissant to know evolving into the person his community counts on, and a community that has nothing but love and care for him.

Being able to love and understand my heritage is something that everyone should be able to do with their own. Just knowing where you come from and how you announce yourself is a blessing because then people will take you as a leader not a follower, just like Common. One thing Common and I share is that we both know what it is like growing up in a unprotected community not knowing which street to walk on, not knowing what people to talk to, and not knowing if I can go out on my own porch. But, just being able to say I made it a long way by only thinking positive, I came all this way from doing the right thing and knowing that I'm never turning back. That should be everyone's key fact. I'm a nice, young stalwart kid that has nothing but the positive characteristics for life. I have nothing but change and hope in my heart. I've been able to love and forgive. I was brought into this world with a positive attitude and I don't want to leave it with a negative one, not today, not tomorrow, not next week, not even next year, I'll still be here because I'm strong, I'm positive thinking that a change will come, and I won't stop until a change really comes.

Think positive, think positive, and positive things will come to you. From saying that, I can say that's what Common it trying to explain, is that being positive can lead you in a way everybody wants to be. Common wants to explain that having your heritage as the symbol of a goal in life can lead you to great places. In honor of my culture, my family, and myself I see life in a whole different perspective. I'm so thankful for where I come from and who I am that I now try hard to be the best I can be. In conclusion, this is what I think about what Common was trying to say. I will remain the young and strong young man I am today, I will remain being positive, I will remain being positive, and I will always remain confident about my culture and myself.

Ines Kenfack – 2nd Place
Grade 7
Mr. Knight
Union Avenue Middle School

Accept Who You Are

You should always take pride in whatever race you are. When you are in a different culture, you inherit many wonderful traits from your ancestors. In that way, your ethnicity is a gift to everyone. It makes the world a richer, more interesting place, and that's why you should always be proud of who you are. When you do that, you bring out the true you. In a recent interview with Oprah, the rapper/movie star, Common stated: "And that freedom of the mind is really important because then you get to learn who you are, and you get to embrace who you are. And love who you are. And be who you are wherever you are." And that's how I feel about my culture and race. No matter where I am, I feel comfortable with being me, which is how it should be. As Common says, "Freedom is a mindset." I couldn't agree more.

I mean, just think, not everyone gets to experience your culture or ethnicity. Some people in the world would love to be you, even if you don't think that's entirely true. Some people live bland lives, and they would love to eat something different than what they have to eat every day. Because even though hamburgers and hot dogs are great, who wants to eat that all the time? I know I sure don't. That's why it's good to be different. Different is unique. Different is wonderful.

For example, I am African, and I love my ethnicity. I feel like I'm different from everybody else and that's good. Our way of dressing is different (like our beautiful kabbas and boubous), our food is different, and our language is different. Not only that, but even our leaders are different. For example, Nelson Mandela was a truly great person. Everybody loved him. But what's most important about him is that he loved himself and believed in his own ethnicity, so much so that he even went to jail for most of his life to defend his rights, and it didn't even bother him. Just as long as he got to stay true to his ethnicity and culture, it was worth the wait. And that's why I love my culture. We have such brave leaders. They make me proud to be African.

That said, being a minority isn't always such a great thing. You might be from an ethnicity that many people dislike or treat unfairly. Even worse, your ethnicity might be one in which other countries don't want to trade with you. This can be a big problem. But as long as you stay true to yourself and show that you are trustworthy and honest, that problem can be solved. It might take some work, but it can be solved. Believe in yourself. Anything is possible.

In conclusion, your ethnicity is a gift, just as Common says. So cherish it. You only get one.

Ashanti Hall -3rd Place
Grade 7
Ms. Parson
University Middle School

Many people do not know their culture. Some people are not even allowed to express their culture. Maybe some people do not even claim their culture because of the history behind their culture. But, culture is a part of you and you cannot change that. You must show your culture without any shame or fear of anyone else. Tell everyone about your culture and how you feel about it. Express your culture and be proud to be apart of that it.

In Common's interview, he states how you should be proud of your ancestry. You should be proud of your culture no matter what others believe. I believe that your culture is apart of you; therefore, you should embrace everything that makes it special. Common states that he loves his culture and the color of his skin. "I got to learn who I am as a Black man in America and to be able to embrace that." Common knows where he came from and what he is. He is not afraid to be who he was born to be. I describe my culture as being free. In my Native American culture, an individual can choose any religion, the foods they eat, and they are free to learn any language they like.

People may oppose and say that your culture has nothing to do with individuality. They say you should be yourself and everyone is unique. Culture, however, is a feature that everyone can share. People whose culture is represented badly would not claim their culture. Muslims, such as extremist Muslims, are representing all Muslims in a bad way. I am not Muslim myself but other people believe that Muslims are dangerous by their appearance also because of ISIS. ISIS is a terroristic form of the Muslim religion. Most Muslims would be ashamed of them. Extremist Muslims are having people from different places think badly about all Muslims. Black people can say the same thing. The bad behavior of a small group causes everyone else to think all Black people are murderers, welfare dependent, or uneducated. It is important to remember that culture is celebrated individually and expressed in different ways.

Even though they say individuality has nothing to do with culture, it does. People are constantly judged by their culture. If you try to get a job, the person interviewing you may judge you by your culture, features, or race. They forget that we look the same on the inside but have different colors and features on the outside. It is an important expression of your culture and should be appreciated. If you are black, white, biracial, or any other race, then you have the right to express your race as in any form you please and to show your peers you are not ashamed. Sometimes I ask myself if people realize that all humans are a part of the same race.

Many people do not know how much it means to be apart of a culture. There is pride, joy, and happiness in standing by your cultures side when your culture needs it most. Be proud of your culture. Appreciate where you come from. Understand that your culture is the reason why you have the characteristics that you have now. Embrace the good and bad in your culture. Show and express that your culture is apart of you. Without it, who would you be?

Indirah Clark – 1st Place
Grade 8
Ms. Furr
Union Avenue Middle School

Embrace Yourself

Has anyone ever told you that they hate you because of your skin? Has this ever made you think that you are not as beautiful as you really are? If you have answered yes to either one of these questions, just know that you are a unique and utterly amazing individual. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and in my eyes, I see someone of ethnic exquisiteness and your ethnicity should be seen as a gift and not a curse. Oscar-winning hip-hop star Common did an interview for Oprah.com. In his interview, he had an amazing outlook on culture and ethnicities. Common stated, “I got to learn who I am as a black man in America, as a black person in America and to be able to embrace that,” he says. He also states, “With embracing that, I’m also able to love others and not feel uncomfortable in any situation because I know and recognize and value my blackness. I look at it as a gift and a blessing and it makes me honor and respect everybody else’s tradition, culture and nationality.” This quote provoked me to think that everyone should embrace himself or herself. I am made up of a mosaic of ethnicities that include African-American. I believe that being black and any other ethnicity should be looked at as a gift and be embraced. I personally believe this because it will help you embrace yourself and will support you on your journey of learning your background information and where you come from. Also, we need to educate ourselves on race vs. ethnicity. How do you feel about this “hot topic?”

First of all, by seeing your ethnicity as a gift it can help you embrace yourself. Once you feel that you are God’s gift, you will learn that you are worth much more than what you think, it also, helps you embrace others’ views and beliefs. For example, as I stated earlier, hip-hop artist and actor Common said in an interview for Oprah.com, “I got to learn who I am as a black man in America, as a black person in America and be able to embrace that. With embracing that, I’m also able to love others and not feel uncomfortable in any situation because I know and recognize and value my blackness. I look at it as a gift and a blessing and it makes me honor and respect everybody else’s tradition, culture and nationality.” He is giving a perfect example of how embracing your ethnic background can help you embrace yourself. I know that I am one who respects everyone else and their cultures. But not only that, I embrace myself in every way I can. I treat others as I would like to be treated. This mindset has helped me value other people as well as myself.

Secondly, having your ethnic background seen as a gift can assist you in knowing your ancestors and how your family has come to be. For example, a woman had embraced her British heritage and decided to find out more and her name is Lin Hyde. She traced her father's family line to one of the best known men in British India. Her father's family lived during the years of the British Raj. She had been able to trace the line back to 1700 and is still going. She says, "The most fascinating relative I've found so far is my third great-uncle, Sir Dighton Macnaghten Probyn, who had an incredible link to royalty." Sir Dighton had a very close relationship with the Queen and she helped him when he had seizures. He was also photographed by Queen Alexandra and she also left flowers and a handwritten note once he died in 1924. This reminds me of a time a few months ago when my grandmother found out a little bit more about our history. My great grandmother had a box of old photos from when she was a little girl. We looked through all the photos and noticed that our family that is living in the present look a lot like how my great grandmother and her family looked way back in the early 1900s. I take pride in being a multiethnic person in America and so does Common. He stated in his interview, "The beautiful aspects of being black...being a black person in America, a child of Africa who's given to America now, growing up to understand what being black is. It's a sense of pride in that." This shows that if you grasp the importance of your ethnicity, you may find out a lot more about your history. These findings are priceless!

Lastly, we need to educate ourselves on race vs. ethnicity. It can help us try not to overstep that boundary of becoming racist towards everyone else's cultures and traditions. For example, the actress Zoe Saldana has replaced the award-winning R&B singer Mary J. Blige as Nina Simone in the Nina Simone biopic. People are outraged that she is playing Nina Simone because Zoe is also mixed with a Latin heritage. Saldana has yet to speak out about it but I have a feeling why she hasn't. She knows herself truly and does not care what others think. If this is what she thinks of herself, and I'm sure it is, I wholeheartedly agree. If anyone were to ever try to tell me that I couldn't do what I wanted to do, I would just turn my head and move forward with what I have to do. I don't have time for people trying to thwart me from loving myself and being free. Common stated, "Freedom is a mindset and that freedom of the mind is really important because then you get to learn who you are, and you get to embrace who you are. And love who you are. And be who you are wherever you are." This is why we need to discuss race vs. ethnicity. It is time to remove the stereotypes and set each other free!

All in all, your ethnicity should be looked at as something that you should be proud of no matter what anyone else says. I feel this way because it will help you embrace yourself and assist you in knowing your background and culture. It also brings up heated debates like race VS. ethnicity about which we need to educate ourselves. A woman named Mandy Hale once said, "Stop apologizing for who you are. You earned your scars. You earned your defeats. You

triumphed over your enemies. OWN IT!” I think that many people can carry this quote with them and own who they are. I go forth and “OWN IT!” It is my gift and I will illuminate in the earth by making a positive impact because I am growing and learning daily about who I am.

Mike Petros – 2nd Place

Grade 8

Ms. Furr

Union Middle School

Embracing Your Culture

I am Eritrean. Eritrea is in Africa. When filling out applications, and I come across the ethnicity section, there is no “African” box to check, there is just “African-American.” I choose to check “Other.” I want it to be known where I am from because I love my ethnicity. Common stated in his interview on Huffington Post “I look at (being black) as a gift and a blessing and it makes me honor and respect everybody else's tradition, culture and nationality.” Embracing your culture will also allow you to except yourself. And sometimes embracing your culture is all you can do because many people will never look at you the same way you look at yourself. Common’s views on blackness need to be heard by everyone because I couldn’t agree more.

To start off, embracing your culture is a step towards self-acceptance. Your culture has everything to do with you as an individual. It helps separate you from others, defines you, and ultimately enriches your life. Culture is what divides one society from the next. For example, I am Eritrean and therefore I have many other living habits than many other people such as, I have to speak in another language called Tigrinya at home. My mother cooks me meals called injera that I have to eat. It is mandatory that I have to wear a certain kind of outfit to church. If I were to not embrace this culture, I would be neglecting my lifestyle. I would not be accepting myself for who I am. As Common said in his interview “In embracing that, I’m also able to embrace others, and not feel uncomfortable in any other situation because I know and recognize and value my blackness.”

Furthermore, we must stay strong in the black community because our “blackness” is viewed negatively by some people. Being black is beautiful, but a lot of people fail to see that. The following report is from the recent protest in Baltimore. “On 12 April, 2015 25-year-old African American Freddie Gray was taken into custody by the Baltimore Police Department for possession of a switchblade. Whilst being transported, Gray had experienced what was described by officers as a "medical emergency"; within an hour of his arrest, Gray had fallen into a coma and had been taken to a trauma center, where it was determined that he had suffered from a spinal injury. According to his family, Gray's spine was 80% severed at his neck, he had three fractured vertebrae, and his larynx was injured. The events that led to the injuries are unclear. Despite extensive surgery in an attempt to save his life, Gray died on 19 April. Pending an investigation, six Baltimore police officers were temporarily suspended with pay.” No matter

how nice you are, how smart you are, how talented you are, or how well intentioned you are you will ONLY be an “African American” (to most people). Now in my heart and high hopes I wish that label, “African American” was associated with the history, talent, strength and potential all “African Americans” hold. In this world that label means you are poor, uneducated, violent, substandard, etc., BUT being black is pulchritudinous, actually it’s more than that, it’s a blessing! African Americans are some of the brightest people on this planet! We have the richest mindsets in this country and nobody can take that from us. As Common said, “I know I am free.”

Moreover, people may rebut that there is no need to be classified under a certain ethnicity. They will say that we are all equal in America so there is no need to “label” each other. I would tell them that America is still a racist country. African-Americans are still not as privileged as white people in this land. Studies show that police are more likely to pull over and frisk blacks or Latinos than whites. In New York City, 80% of the stops made were blacks and Latinos, and 85% of those people were frisked, compared to a mere 8% of white people stopped. In 2009, African-Americans were 21% more likely than whites to receive mandatory minimum sentences and 20% more likely to be sentenced to prison than white drug defendants. When Common says “I got to learn who I am as a black man in America, as a black person in America and to be able to embrace that.” He means that he got to know how it feels to grow up as an unprivileged black man and living in injustice. When we don’t classify each other into different ethnicities no-one will know the struggle that we went through or everything we prospered from. “The beautiful aspects of being black... a child of Africa who is given to America and now growing up to understand what being black is, it’s a sense of pride in that.” We feel pride in this because we know that we struggled to get to where we are right now. As the amazing Frederick Douglass said “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.” We have fought to be in this position and are showing our ancestors why they didn’t lose their lives in vain. If there is one thing you take from Common’s interview, let it be when he said “The beautiful aspects of being black.” This one statement tells us that being black is prideful, and no cop can steal that from you!

In conclusion, I strongly agree with Common’s views on embracing your culture. To repeat, it is a step towards self-acceptance. Also, embracing your culture shows who you are. Although this is a cruel and unfair world, we as African Americans have the ability to make ourselves free. “Freedom is a mindset...Freedom allows you to be yourself wherever you are.” When you embrace your culture you will feel at peace with yourself and be “free.” As said by the wonderful author M.F. Moonzajer, “My culture is my identity and personality. It gives me spiritual, intellectual and emotional distinction from others, and I am proud of it!”

Stephanie Black – 3rd Place
Grade 8
Ms. Hofler-Mattaur
University Middle School

Were Common's views about one's ethnicity being a "gift" actually true? Well, from my perspective, I believe it is. My skin color is something I am proud of. Just as Common said, "We should embrace our ethnicity". I value my blackness and others should, as well.

Being black is nothing to be ashamed of; as a people we have persevered many hardships. We must reinforce self-respect within our community; continue striving for knowledge about who, what, and where we come from to fully appreciate our contributions to this country. This in turn will promote greater self-esteem amongst our people, specifically our young people.

As African-Americans, we continually fight against stereotypes, many are not positive. To mainstream America we often have to disprove the negative images of being a thug, criminal, loud, uneducated to name a few. We have done many things that still are instrumental today, the traffic light being a simple yet very important contribution.

As Common said in his interview, "I got to learn who I am as a black man in America and to be able to embrace it that." Although there is a small percentage of African Americans in America, we as a people, should stand together as one embracing our ethnicity proudly. Everyone should accept the differences in their ethnicity. No matter what race, gender, or religion, we all belong to the human race and must be appreciative of the differences while fully accepting the similarities.

Our blackness is a gift, I am proud everyday of who I am; because I accept myself as I am I am able to fully experience life and strive for greatness. While we still have a long way to go we certainly are not where we used to be, I am confident that the slave bought to this country in shackles would beam with pride to see that all their suffering and work was not in vain, they have a legacy in foreign land that many of their offspring call home. So, screaming at the top of my lungs - I am black, I am America, and I am proud.

Debbie Pierre - 1st Place
Grade 9
Mr. Endwaris
Irvington High School

Supporting Mr. Alexander's Methods

Maybe one of the biggest national debates that has faced the twenty-first century is ironically centered on the police who are sworn to protect us. These situational conflicts surrounding the police department not only sparked protests and riots but it shed light on an unanswered problem slowly destroying our nation...how to improve the police department methods. Instead, we all should be asking, "How can we build a more sensitive cop?" Cedric L. Alexander's views on the matter at hand can solve all the issues. We can stop the endless hatred involving police by recruiting more ethnic groups, providing more training to understand the cultures within communities and building a better relationship between police officers and the communities!

Our communities can become more peaceful if the police department recruits more ethnic groups. In Mr. Alexander's article 'How to Build a More Sensitive Cop?' he stated, "Police departments need to work much harder to build a work force that is diverse, in that words broadest definition." And "a police department demographic should closely represent that of the community it serves." Alexander stated that a police department needs to recruit more people of ethnic backgrounds to match the community so the people can feel more at ease. For example, if a community is filled with African-Americans it only makes sense to send an African- American cop to handle the situation because the cop can relate with the people who would consider him/her as equals. The connection between Alexander's statement and my example is that to make a community feel more at ease and safe the police department should try to recruit people who already are a part of the culture/ communities in their neighborhood. This is one way to improve the police department.

Another way we can stop the endless rage within the communities because of the police department method is continuous training. In Alexander's article, he asserted the need for more training in specific areas of culture sensitivity. He explained that police officers should be rigorously trained in different cultures to better understand their communities. For example, an Arabian man approaches a police officer and continuously offers him food but the cop refuses. The police officer could be offending the man by not taking his offer. The connection between Mr. Alexander's statements and my examples is that police departments should train their officers on different cultural backgrounds to better understand the people because there are different ways to encounter someone. This is another way to stop the violence within the communities!

The final way we can ensure safety within the communities is by building a better relationship between police officers and the people. In Alexander's article he states that there is also a need to "Build police department community relationships that will foster the development of trust and true collaboration." For example, the police department can hold banquets, job fairs, and/or a midnight run and meet the community members and explain the procedures and methods they use to ensure safety. This will help the community better understand police department procedures and methods after seeing them under a different lens which portrays a less violent but friendlier demeanor. This is the yet another way to make the communities a safer place!

I agree with Cedric L. Alexander's viewpoints. To build a more safe community and sensitive police officers, we need to recruit more ethnic groups to the work force, continuous training to better understand the communities members, and build a better relationship between the police department and the people. These are the ways we can improve the debates/wars in our nation and world.

Naomi Masslieno – 2nd Place
Grade 9
Mrs. Anderson
Irvington High School

Building a More Sensitive Cop

After reading Cedric L. Alexander's views on police sensitivity, I realized there were several beliefs expressed that I both agreed and disagreed with. On the surface, his views seemed citizen favorable. They also appeared unrealistic from a cop's perspective. Unfortunately, we live in a time where communities aren't as friendly as they used to be. Today's interactions are done on computer networks and rarely with face-to-face communication. While this is no fault of the police themselves, they're still asked to protect and embrace these modern day hostile communities. This is why I believe many of Cedric L. Alexander's opinions are great in theory alone.

For instance, Mr. Alexander suggested policing could be improved with sensitivity training. This sounds great when you consider the model citizen, but the criminals that the cops are policing, are anything but sensitive. Once again, it becomes a matter of cause and effect. The cops are unfairly asked to decipher a good citizen from a bad citizen in a matter of seconds. This can cost them their lives and that kind of daily pressure can take a toll on anyone's attitude. I think there should be citizen sensitivity training to promote empathy for the good cops who are put in this dangerous position as well.

One opinion of Cedric's that I agreed with was regarding recruitment methods. I do feel a person's knowledge of the environment that they're assigned to protect should play a major role in the hiring process. You basically have to know where you are and by whom you are surrounded. It's human nature! People get along better with people with whom they can relate. Therefore, a cop with ample knowledge of his or her patrolling neighborhood will be more likely to embrace and be embraced than one with little to no knowledge of the environment in which he/she works.

As for police brutality and things of that nature, it boils down to individuals and circumstances. For example, police are given power over the typical citizen, and power affects individuals differently. Power is either properly used or maliciously abused. Therefore, when certain individuals are met with potentially hostile circumstances, the mix can be a recipe for disaster. There is no definitive answer to this issue. I can only suggest enhanced surveillance to ease the issue by making it easier to decipher the power users from the power abusers.

In closing, I was both intrigued and impressed with Cedric L. Alexander's views on improving policing. He has some ideas that are far-fetched, but most are achievable with hard work. Hopefully, police and citizens can find some common ground and co-exist peacefully together as intended in a civilized society. This change like any other major change will take collaboration and commitment of entire communities, clergy, and government.

Allizea Kennedy – 3rd Place
Grade 9
Mr. Kurtzer
Irvington High School

So many mishaps have happened in the world and lately more have been occurring, especially in the police field. I'm not just talking about the police themselves, but the innocent citizens they encounter. Most of these encounters don't end well. The killings of Michael Brown in Ferguson and Eric Garner in Staten Island are perfect examples. Yes they did something wrong, but the excessive force used only exacerbated the situation. So what do I think?

Personally, I think Alexander's suggestions for improving police-community relations are one hundred percent accurate. Mr. Alexander touches on numerous ways to reform policing starting with enhanced recruitment methods. He states that "Police departments need to work much harder to build a workforce that is diverse, in that words broadest definition." Meaning no favoritism, no discrimination, but police need to learn how to treat everyone equally and fairly. They also need to have police officers that complement the community as a whole.

Another reason why I agree with Alexander's methods is because he says nothing but the truth. He is earnest and direct in his criticism, and offers several innovative solutions. He discusses, and I'm paraphrasing here, about how unfair the government is in this era. He also suggests the police force be representative of the communities they serve. If you ask me, this is an idea whose time has come.

Finally, I agree with Mr. Alexander's views because they are realistic. They aren't impulsive or violent. This creates a friendlier atmosphere for people to participate in to get involved. These movements consist of Communities creating neighborhood advisory committees that provide direct feedback to police officials. With the communities trying to change something in an orderly fashion, this might just get them the change they so desperately need.

All in all, Alexander sees the need to get police and residents to communicate and come together with each other. I like all of his strategies on "how to build a more sensitive cop" because they all are respectful and peaceful. None of them condones excessive force, which is the proper way to handle potentially volatile situations. I know there's a point when waiting doesn't seem like the answer. I know people want what they want when they want it, but change comes gradually. How would you build a more sensitive cop?

Al-Nazir Blackman – 1st Place
Grade 10
Ms. Caddle
Irvington High School

Cedric L. Alexander's piece on improving police policies and training includes various ways to improve American police departments and every cop it houses. Many of Mr. Alexander's proposals and ideas correlate to mine. The enhanced training of police officers in cultural sensitivity and critical thinking are imperative to an officer's performance on duty. Along with training in cultural diversity, police departments should also recruit a more culturally diverse demographic to equal the population they are serving. Police departments should also strive to build a strong positive relationship with its community, this relationship must include trust in one another, this way the jobs of police officers and citizens become easier and scenarios never have to reach violent circumstances. Cedric L. Alexander's piece clearly outlines how to re-configure and better the mindsets and actions of every police officer worldwide.

Many urban cities have a community of people that does not reflect the race of its local police force. This kind of cultural friction cannot be overlooked. In the article Cedric L. Alexander gives a solution to this problem. Alexander suggests, "Training in specific areas of cultural sensitivity will help the cop of a different race better understand the neighborhood they are serving". Most police departments claim to have tried to re-configure their cognate population but they have apparently failed on multiple attempts. I agree with Alexander's side of the spectrum when he states, "Police departments need to work much harder to build a workforce that is diverse... This is no excuse and can't be tolerated." The mirroring of police and community demographics will decrease the chances of altercations and violence occurring. Police officers serving their own ethnicity help the department make and foster positive relations with their community, which in turn keeps their duty easier as well.

One of the most important aspects of a police department's job is to build a positive relationship with its community through town meetings, local events, community forums and committees. Too many times police officers are wearing their "poker face", showing no emotions and being equivalent to a robot. This type of behavior will not elicit positive responses from the community. In order for communities and police departments to collaborate, officers need to be more transparent in their approach. Alexander voices these concerns in "How to Build a More Sensitive Cop" as, "a trusting collaborative relationship with the community requires police department transparency. Communities want to know that their concerns are being heard and addressed." Police officers who are more amicable and down to earth will improve community relations nationwide. The improved relations between the police department and the community they serve will lead to decreased pressure on the police department and an increase in cop morale. The happier a cop is the more culturally sensitive he/she is willing to be.

Cultural sensitivity and critical thinking are crucial to a police officer's performance. Cultural sensitivity can help keep a docile situation from turning hostile. While critical thinking can keep lives from being taken, the recent events that have taken place with law enforcement have shown the world that police have not been trained in cultural sensitivity and critical thinking thoroughly. Police officers need to know how to interact with other ethnicities without

resorting to violence. Police need to be able to use situational force and not deadly force to resolve confrontations. In “How to Build a More Sensitive Cop”, Alexander pinpoints the need for improvement, he states, “Superiors should continually evaluate their officer’s command of these skills. If an officer consistently shows to be lacking in these areas, commanders should seriously consider firing that officer.” Alexander is absolutely right, an officer who is not sensitive to different cultures should be deemed as inefficient as an officer who can’t shoot a pistol. This is how important these skills are in the modern day era.

Police and officers can learn a lot from this article. It serves as a guideline on how to build a more efficient police officer. Alexander proposes ways to improve the performances of police departments and officers worldwide. Alexander believes that police officers need more training in cultural sensitivity and critical thinking. He also believes that police department’s populations should reflect the population they are serving. Police officers have to strive to create a positive, collaborative relationship with their community. If police officials take heed to Alexander’s guideline, I promise that there will be a decrease in cases of police brutality.

Maria Idrovo -2nd Place
Grade 10
Ms. Caddle
Irvington High School

How to Build a More Sensitive Cop

In Cedric L. Alexander's article "How to Build a more Sensitive Cop", he makes some excellent points of which I agree. Communities must build better work forces that are diverse, train officers in cultural sensitivity and critical thinking, and build a trust between the police and community.

When building a diverse workforce, the main strength is finding people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, that way a different perspective by a plethora of people can improve decision making on various problems. A diverse force can also satisfy community members with different backgrounds because they will have a cultural connection. In the article he states, "criminal justice leaders say 'We are doing our best to recruit diverse officers, but we have not been successful'. If they can't create a diverse force, then they can create a relationship with organizations that can. Building a diverse workforce can develop the decisions the officers make to benefit both them and the community they are policing.

If officers get trained in cultural sensitivity, then they will be able to understand each person's unique background. It would make it easier to understand how a problem is viewed through various perspectives. Training in critical thinking can help develop a decision that benefits both the officer and the person he or she is interacting with. Without critical thinking, severe problems may be caused for the officer. Officers need to plan out what they will do and make sure they are not basing decisions on race. Alexander says "This skill can mean the difference between life and death for an officer or the person with whom he or she is interacting". Officers trained in cultural sensitivity and critical thinking can create a better understanding through superior planning before any judgment or action can occur.

The police and the community need to build a trust. As stated in the article, "Communities want to know that their concerns are being heard and addressed". With trust, there will be a bond between the police and the community and each will understand the other. If there is no trust, then sooner or later the general public is going to take matters into their own hands. They may turn on the police because people will believe that if the police will not listen then, why even bother calling them? Alexander states, "The more time together, the better each understands the other". With a trust between the police and community, a healthier relationship can be created and community concerns will be heard.

Without a diverse workforce, trained officers in cultural sensitivity and critical thinking, and a trust between the police and the community, many problems may occur. A variety of people will assume the officers are doing whatever they want. This is why an abundance of people are protesting when poor decisions are made. If all of Alexander's ideas were applied, then there may not be feuding over the judgments that are made because they would be thought out more clearly.

Luis A. Corbalan Jr. – 3rd Place
Grade 10
Ms. Anderson
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Building A More Sensitive Cop

In the article, “How to Build a More Sensitive Cop,” the author Cedric L. Alexander, expressed the claim that, “We are doing our best to recruit diverse officers, but we have not been successful.” (Alexander, 2014) he claims that without the diversity in the police force, the public can come to the assumption that the police officers will not understand the people they protect. Now if they start implementing officers from different ethnic groups into the academies, the police force might still have a chance to change the whole trust and security situation. Building a more sensitive cop is not as hard as it may seem, the police departments across the country just need to develop a better recruiting system that will promote diversity in the police department. The police officers are not being taught to think the way they should. If they learn the way of being more sensitive to the races, there can be peace and tranquility between the police force and the community.

Firstly, because of the slew of constant rioting in Baltimore, Maryland a baseball game between the Chicago White Sox and the Baltimore Orioles has been cancelled. Even the sports teams are being affected by the results of the officers killing these young men. How can we stop this? That is the big question here. Yet another young man was killed while in police custody in Baltimore, and the black community has been rioting ever since and they have yet to stop the disturbance. Their decision to riot is just because police brutality is unjust. The rioting may portray the African-American community as a violent and hostile group, but in actuality, they are coming together to stop police brutality. Police departments need more officers on the force that understand the black mind and heart. The true nature of the black community is not hostile or violent, but it is a group of people who love each other despite the fact that there are a select few who seem to go in the opposite direction. The police, in these cases, shouldn't have used deadly force; it was uncalled for. Instead, they went for the kill shot rather than firing warning shots to stop the young black African-American males. Shooting multiple bullets to kill a man in the back wasn't necessary.

Moreover, for those select few people who actually agree with the verdict that was given, it is important to refer to the article in order to show the decisions are wrong. Mr. Alexander claims that, “You cannot be an effective or ethical officer if, you cannot think critically -- that is, being able to gather and process information to guide decision-making that directly affects behavior. This skill can mean the difference between life and death for the officer or the person with whom he or she is interacting.” (Alexander, 2014) The people who agree might say that the officers are taught to go for the shot to kill and not to maim the suspect. That's not true because with that idea in mind, it is giving the officers the mindset of killing before taking down the suspect. It is never shown or heard of that an officer is found killing a white man; instead, you continually hear about the black men being put six feet under by the police force. Also, it is sad to say that many innocent people are going to continuously be murdered before the officers are

taught to understand the cultures of the diverse communities that they serve. If they can be taught all over again how to assess any potential situation, the murders may be reduced and all can be mended.

Lastly, there are ongoing debates on the grand jury's decisions of the cases of Eric Garner and Michael Brown. Though these prosecutions have happened in a year or two ago, the results of, and the cases themselves are still being talked about today. The grand jury decided not to indict the officers involved in the cases of Michael Brown, of Ferguson, Missouri and that of Eric Garner, of Staten Island, New York. The verdicts are not justifiable. Across the nation, police departments should follow the core value that justice is for all. The people should not be taken advantage of.

In conclusion, Like Mr. Alexander, I also suggest that all of our officers should be retrained so that they learn more about cultural diversity. They can better predict how to act in the field of work. I believe that the cultural sensitivity training may help the community to trust the police officers and it's not too late to retrain the police officers. Just ask yourself this question, can you really continue to live in a society where the people meant to keep you from harm's way are the people putting you in harm's way?

Kirstein Fontaine - 1st Place
Grade 11
Mrs. Martin
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“How to Build a More Sensitive Cop”

“According to Breaking News – Choke hold by cop killed New York man, medical examiner,” this was stated by a CNN reporter. We can all recall the Eric Garner case reported by CNN. The explicit video, which showed Garner gasping for breath, as he uttered his last words to police officers, "I can't breathe! I can't breathe!" It sparked a huge controversy among its viewers along with many similar incidents. Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri is another similar incident. Both incidents had violent protests due to the grand jury's decision not to indict the police officers involved. In today's society, the news is mainly about civilians dying under police custody. We can agree that in order to stop similar events from recurring; policing needs to be changed. As Cedric L. Alexander stated, we need more sensitive police officers. In order for this to happen, we must enhance recruitment methods, provide initial and continual training in specific areas of cultural sensitivity, and build police department-community relationships.

To begin with, recruitment methods for hiring police officers need to be enhanced. In the article, Cedric L. Alexander states, “Police forces should take in those who are interested in making policing a career, and increasing salaries across ranks may encourage more people to do this.” In order to improve policing, we need to recruit those interested in policing. After all, we do not just want anyone to enter the police force. We do not want to open up the doors for psychopaths, sociopaths, and lunatics. Hiring random people like these can put the community at risk. These types of people lack conscience, and are unable to feel any empathy for human beings. Additionally, they rarely feel guilt regarding any of their behaviors, no matter how much they hurt others. We should make sure officers, who are recruited, are joining the force to serve the community. Furthermore, we should hinder officers from joining for own personal selfish reasons. Also, increasing the salaries across ranks will encourage those passionate about the field to be recruited. Many people are overlooking policing, as a career, because they may feel that it is not enough money for putting their lives on the line every day. With increased salaries this problem can be alleviated and open more opportunities will exist.

Also, the relationship between the police department and communities that will foster the development of trust and true collaboration. As a community, it is satisfying to know that you can trust the police department. We, the community, feel that they were here to protect and serve us. This is the reason we should develop a relationship amongst the police department and the community. Alexander states, “Developing trust also means increasing the amount of time the police department and community — both in the form of groups and individuals on the street -- spend together. The more time together, the better each understands the other.” Communities want their voice to be heard and their issues to be addressed. Developing trust will allow many to be comfortable around the police, because they know that the police department is addressing their concerns. There would be no need for angry protests or the riots of Baltimore. There is compelling evidence that strong relationships contribute to a long, healthy, and happy life.

Finally, cultural sensitivity training should be taught. This will allow them to create a healthy workplace by valuing diversity and respecting differences. Diversity is readily apparent in America's workforce and throughout the general population. Cultural sensitivity can get rid of stereotypes, prejudice, biases, discrimination, harassment, and racism. "Cultural sensitivity training requires an understanding of the history of the community and its members, but it also requires officers' personal reflections, so they are aware of their biases and allegiances and how these may influence their decision-making abilities and behavior." - Cedric L. Alexander. Cultural Sensitivity training is relevant to the community, because many communities are diverse. This training will enforce police officers on how to conduct themselves in such circumstances. Making those involved not feel racially profiled, discriminated, and judged. By understanding the history of the community, they can learn how to effectively communicate with all types of people. Many police officers bring their personal pain and heartache to the battlefield, which they could take it out on the people they encounter. This is very dangerous, because doing so can cause you to view something irrationally. Cultural sensitivity ensures that one's decision-making is not a part of one's personal life.

Many believe that there is no problem with policing in America. If so, why are police officers being scrutinized for their wrongful actions? Even though many officers do abide by the law, others seem to steer clear from it. The South Carolina shooting is a perfect example of that. Police reports show that Slager said he used his taser. The officer later said, "Shots fired and the subject is down. The police officer claimed that the suspect took his Taser," according to reports. The video that was taken by a bystander contradicted what he reported to the police department. All of this information was reported by CNN, at the time. This shows that some police officers lie to cover up their actions and sometimes get away with it. Some police officers are ill willed or full of malicious behavior. This also pushes the need for body cameras, which many believe it is not necessary. Had the bystander not taken the video of the officer killing Walter Scott, the officer, would have gotten away with murder. The body camera provides evidence of what the police officer was doing at the time. This will prevent police officers from getting away with breaking the law.

In conclusion, there have been generations of stereotyping between the police and the community. It is time for us to stop repeating history and make a change or else the matter is only going to get worse. This can be done if we build a more sensitive cop by enhancing recruitment methods, providing initial and continual training in specific areas of cultural sensitivity, and building police department-community relationships. If we build more sensitive police officer, we can gain back the trust lost among the police and the community. We can create a safe environment for everyone. If we do not build a more sensitive cop, it will cause us to continue in a down spiral. Furthermore, more angry protests will be formed and could lead to huge riots like they did in Ferguson. Many people will not rely on the police but take justice into their own hands. Many police officers could end up like New York Police Department officers Liu and Ramos, which is dead. All that is needed to prevent this from happening is a simple change.

Brian Banatte – 2nd Place
Grade 11
Mrs. Takkellapati
Irvington High School

The problem with a sensitive cop

A man just has his car stolen. An officer apprehends the thief, but a mistake is made. The officer is attacked, but is unwilling to retaliate. The officer makes no attempt to draw his weapon, and instead begins to reason with the thief. The thief then draws a weapon and fires; man down. This is one of the many examples of how dangerous having a sensitive officer can be. The lives of officers, as well as the citizens they protect would be in major danger.

Cedric L. Alexander is the director of public safety at the DeKalb County Police Department in Georgia. Surprisingly, this is the same man that would have the hounds of justice (officers) neutered. Mr. Alexander would have his readers believe that law enforcement officers have failed at their jobs. He goes as far as to scrutinize the diversity of police departments. This is ultimately a race issue, as it pertains to and is eventually brought about by the recent police shootings of black men. The racial implications of recent attacks are no reason to attack diversity. “A police department demographic should closely represent that of the community it serves.” Race is such a recurring theme throughout, that it begs to be asked “how biased is this man?” As an African American, Mr. Alexander must have some form of racial bias toward the recent “attacks.”

With racial bias in mind, what if the recruits were not diverse enough to become part of a certain department? What if a Caucasian man was deemed unworthy to become an officer in a predominately black area? Mr. Alexander seeks to redeem himself with this line, “of course, a desirable recruit is one who feels called to serve.” This line is contradictory to his earlier statement on diversity, and community reflection. These criteria for being diverse would only end in lawsuits, as it is illegal to hire personnel based off of race. “The laws enforced by EEOC prohibit an employer or other covered entity from using neutral employment policies and practices that have a disproportionately negative effect on applicants or employees of a particular race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), or national origin.”
<http://www1.eeoc.gov/laws/practices/index.cfm?renderforprint=1>.

Cedric L. Alexander goes on to say, “if a department’s recruiting methods aren’t resulting in a diverse force, they should form relationships with local and national private sector organizations.” Mr. Alexander’s solution is to advocate outsourcing law enforcement jobs. Mr. Alexander would rather take jobs away from those who seek them, and instead place them in the hands of private organizations. This is not only morally wrong, but can be extremely dangerous. Private law enforcement and armies bring about disastrous consequences. This was seen in the Iraq war when private sector troops were hired, and innocent people died. “Black Water Worldwide security guard to life in prison and three others to 30-year terms for killing 14 unarmed civilians in a Baghdad traffic circle in 2007, an incident that fomented deep resentments about the accountability of American security forces during one of the bloodiest periods of the Iraq war.” <http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/crime/four-blackwater-guards-sentenced-in->

iraq-shootings-of-31-unarmed-civilians/2015/04/13/55b777e0-dee4-11e4-be40-566e2653afe5_story.html

Cedric L. Alexander also argues that “Training in cultural sensitivity and critical thinking are crucial to an officer's performance.” I can applaud his concern for the critical thinking aspect of the quote. This skill is a necessity in law enforcement. The sensitivity training is another matter. Police budgets just cannot handle that kind of strain of additional and unneeded training. The city of Eureka can be an example of constrained budgets. “After several years of the city pulling from reserves to meet budget constraints, and relying on vacancies at the Eureka Police Department to balance the budget, the city’s police force may be facing a hefty cut, according to a memo EPD Chief Andrew Mills sent to all department personnel on Wednesday.” (<http://www.times-standard.com/general-news/20150429/police-chief-proposes-staff-cuts-to-meet-city-budget-constraints>.) Law enforcement officers deal with dangerous criminals, day in and day out; a culture unto themselves and the only way to handle these people is by force. Lawbreakers, criminals and offenders are to be put away, not coddled.

Many cite the deaths of Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice and even Treyvon Martin as examples of police brutality. The opposition mentions these as race related hate crimes. Many perceive these incidents as an officer's SHOW of force, as EXCESSIVE force. Yet no one cites the events preceding the shootings. For instance, let us examine Freddie Gray. The 25-year-old’s criminal history started in July 2007 with an arrest for “possession of a controlled dangerous substance with intent to distribute,” and “unlawful possession of a controlled dangerous substance.” A month later, he was charged with three separate counts of drug possession, a count of violating probation, and making a “false statement to a peace officer.” <http://dailycaller.com/2015/04/28/freddie-gray-had-a-long-criminal-record/>.

I can only be an advocate for justice, as my moral character dictates it. A sensitive officer would compromise the quality of work officers perform. Regardless of race or diversity, America’s and Mr. Alexander’s concern should be on justice and decriminalization. It should not be focused on neutering the police force.

Jaciana Pierre – 3rd place
Grade 11
Mrs. Martin
Irvington High School

Prompt

Imagine a child lying dead in a casket, mother wailing, and family and friends mourning in tears and pain. You would wonder what or who contributed to his demise? Would the first guess be a cop, who are the people sworn to protect us, are the ones filling our graves! Cedric Alexander states that this occurs, because “most cops are not minority and often do not have much connection to the community in which they work.” He also talks about how to create a more sensitive cop. Through steps of diversity, training systems, and community interaction we can build a more sensitive cop.

The first step to creating a more sensitive cop would be diversity among the police force which Cedric Alexander has said, “A police department demographic should closely represent that of community service” he is saying that the police force should look like the community you cannot have an all-white police force in an all-black community. Some say they are trying but in reality are making unacceptable excuses, he states that “he often hears from criminal justice leaders who say that they are doing their “best to recruit diverse officers.” Nevertheless, these leaders have not been successful. This is no excuse and cannot be tolerated.” Often dealing with police brutality the situation always starts with the same dilemma. White cop shoots a person whether child or adult that is identified as a person of minority. Often time this is the common situation because there is no diversity among police forces. In some states there is a very low percent of color in the police force others there are none at all. By changing this we can significantly decrease some problems that come up surrounding the white cop shoots minority situation.

After dealing with the situation of more diversity, in the police force, you would usually go on to training a cop to be culturally sensitive and a critical thinker. As Cedric Alexander said, “They are crucial to an officer's performance. You cannot be an effective or ethical officer if you cannot think critically—that is, being able to gather and process information to guide decision-making that directly affects behavior.” To make this a reality cops would have to have an understanding of the history of the community and its members, but it also requires officers' personal reflections, so they are aware of their biases and allegiances and how these may influence their decision-making abilities and behavior.” To make sure training is effective and stays that way. “Superiors should continually evaluate their officers' command of these skills, much as they would the use of firearms, defensive tactics and knowledge of relevant laws and regulations, and continued refresher training should be provided when needed. If an officer consistently shows to be lacking in these areas, commanders should seriously consider firing that officer.”

The final yet most important piece to creating a sensitive cop Cedric Alexander says is “a trusting, collaborative relationship with the community requires police department transparency.” police have to be open and willing to understand these people in the communities.” Communities want to know that their concerns are being heard and addressed.” Using what Mr. Cedric Alexander says and putting it into action cops must be aware and heed these concerns when interacting with the community. Cedric Alexander also mentions, “Developing trust also means increasing the amount of time the police department and community — both in the form of groups and individuals on the street -- spend together.” This will help to build a better relationship amongst them.

Problems may arise, but someone’s death should not be one of them. Officers should have more than handcuffs in their utility belt. They should have cultural sensitivity and critical thinking. After all, as Alexander states, “This skill can mean the difference between life and death for an officer or the person with whom he or she is interacting.” This is very crucial, because what if in creating a more sensitive cop he or she cannot make the life decisions. The results can mean someone may lose their life. When a cop is faced with things he or she has never experienced, they (like all people) often times cannot think in a way that is sensitive. Unexpectedly that person may act upon a whim and can cause the life of a cop or themselves or someone else.

Lastly, though situations (such as those may arise) there will be a solution. Cedric Alexander’s steps to creating a more sensitive cop can be very effective if carried out in the right way. We cannot protect humanity from everything, but we can solve problems one solution at a time. Taking theses lay out into consideration will not only benefit communities it will benefit the cops, as well. This occurs, because we do not know people we will not trust their judgment whether they are law enforcement. But in creating this more sensitive cop we can better solve certain predicaments that are arising regarding police brutality. This can result in a more trusting and unified community, which will result in a more peaceful town.

Breman Bookhart – 1st Place
Grade 12
Irvington High School
Mrs. Sutton

“A More Sensitive Cop”

Men will have, “no natural affection.” This phrase from the Bible, book of 2nd Timothy accurately explains the events that occur in the world at an unprecedented rate. Interestingly, the most notable examples of this lack of affection have been shown through law enforcement officials. In many individuals’ opinions, these peace keepers have done anything but maintain peace and order in our communities. Cedric L. Alexander wrote an article that expresses his views on how police officers can obtain the ability to maintain peace in our societies. In the article, “How to Build a More Sensitive Cop,” Alexander presents some interesting ideas as to what society and police officers need to do in order to coexist better. The points made by Alexander are pivotal in promoting peace, because they involve not only the police themselves, but the community as well.

For starters, a great point by Alexander involves racism to a certain extent. Alexander says, “A police department demographic should closely represent that of the community it serves.” To put into blatant terms, this point means that a police department’s law officials should, for the most part be of the same ethnic background of the vast majority of the population. This is very beneficial because it creates respect. For the most part, many African Americans, Haitians, Caucasians, and so forth show more respect for an officer of their own nationality than an officer who is not. While this should not be the case, the harsh reality is that it is and more than likely will not change. Thus, rather than trying to win every battle, society should attempt to compromise in order to create more peace in the world.

In addition, history class should gain importance to the police department. Every state, city, and township is different than the next one. Thus, “training in specific areas of cultural sensitivity,” will greatly help the police department, because the officers will have a better understanding of an environment. For example, let us say a particular block has a particular tradition once a year at a specific time in the night. Perhaps this tradition seems like a block party to an officer who is unfamiliar with the customs of the city he is in. This may be considered a disturbance by this officer. However, the entire block is involved, because a young man from the block gave his life in war and saved millions. The officer would know this if he or she did more research on the area they are covering.

Moreover, the community needs to be involved. That is not to say that the community should become the new law enforcers of the world we live in. Rather, it simply means that the community needs to know what is going on in the area they live in. “Communities want to know that their concerns are being heard and addressed.” That statement could not be any truer! In order for society to truly accept and appreciate the work done by the police, society has to feel that the police are thinking of them in the decisions the police make. By so doing, the

accusations of police brutality will decrease, because the community will have a better understanding of the role of law enforcement officials in our society.

Sadly, there are those who believe a more sensitive cop is not the solution to the problems facing society today. Some believe that having a less diverse society is relatively the same as returning back to a society in which diversity is frowned upon. Admittedly, this argument has a sound basis. However, when looked at through a lens, it can be seen that this is not the case. Diversity itself is not being frowned upon. The fact that cops are not sensitive and aware of their communities is the real issue. Thus, having law enforcement officials who are of the same ethnic background of the citizens they serve and protect is beneficial, because this will serve as a better protection for the people in the community. Also, it will increase the likelihood that the community will be more receptive of the law enforcement officials.

Clearly, having a more understanding police department is crucial to increasing positive relations between the law enforcers and the communities they serve. It is vital that the police learn about the community they serve and show sensitivity to its customs. An officer should show respect and it is easier for them to do so when they can relate to a specific ethnic group. However, it is most important to have the community involved in different things. The people must know that their voices are being heard, and that decisions made reflect such voices. By following these steps, society can become one step closer to Universal Peace within our communities. This, in turn will promote peace throughout the world.

Anniyah Snelling – 2nd Place
Ms. Phillips
English 12
Irvington High School

Recently in Baltimore, Maryland, another young black man was injured or killed during his interaction with the local police force. His story is not the first of its kind. It seems that there is an issue of excessive police force against minorities, especially black males. Many have voiced their opinions on these incidents and how to fix them. Cedric L. Alexander is not only a director of public safety in a Georgia police department, but he is the president of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives. He wrote an article called “How to Build a More Sensitive Cop” which discusses his take on the issue of police brutality. In this article, some very solid and valid points were raised that made me agree with Mr. Alexander’s views on how to improve policing.

To begin, Alexander expresses his wish to increase cultural diversity and sensitivity in the police force. This would mean police officers would have to know their local community’s social history and current inhabitants. They would also have to understand their own personal biases and general world views to better serve the public. The officer would have to be evaluated continuously on these social perspectives as if they were law regulations, defensive tactics, or firearm usage. As Alexander continues to say in “How to Build a More Sensitive Cop,” “If an officer consistently shows to be lacking in these areas, commanders should seriously consider firing that officer.” Police departments should fire officers who cannot relate to the people they protect and serve because it causes tensions that cannot easily, if at all be diffused. In addition, the fired officer should be flagged by all other law enforcement agencies as culturally insensitive and not fit for active service. It may seem harsh, but cultural sensitivity is too important to overlook in any officer. Alexander would agree, “This skill can mean the difference between life and death for an officer or the person with whom he or she is interacting (“How to Build a More Sensitive Cop”, paragraph 7, lines 24-25).”

Everyone does not agree with Alexander’s views. In the Chicago Tribune article, “Baltimore riots remind us of why we need police” it is said in line 1 that “Some people protest police brutality in ways that only remind us of why we need police.” Those who believe this statement find fault in the protesters’ behavior, not the police’s. In rebuttal, the police would not be needed to contain a crowd if they were more trustworthy. Austin Weekly News put out an article called, “Cops versus community?” in which former Chicago Police Commander Jon Burge was found guilty in 2010 of torturing criminal suspects over a 20-year period. The crime committed “still lingers, causing many residents to mistrust any law enforcement (paragraph 12, lines 101-104).” When you have police who do not feel “called to serve (“How to Build a More Sensitive Cop”, paragraph 6, line 19)” the people will not feel safe or comfortable and will not peacefully comply with them.

In conclusion, Cedric L. Alexander wrote an article titled “How to Build a More Sensitive Cop.” In this article, he states that more culturally sensitive officers of the law would be able to improve their relationships with those they protect and serve. These officers will be able to perform their expected tasks to the best of their ability with minimal hostility from the

general public. Failure to employ enough of these officers is part of the reason why there are so many issues between the police and the public in today's social climate. I agree with Mr. Alexander's reasoning. Those who argue with his main point say that the people get out of line and their behavior has nothing to do with the police. In rebuttal, the police have yet to earn the trust of any minority and so they will inevitably face resistance. Mr. Alexander's idea makes sense because better officers, who are morally outstanding and understanding of those around them will receive more cooperation from civilians. This mutual understanding leads to better officer-civilian relationships. When everyone is on good terms, they do not usually cause trouble for each other. This makes a more peaceful society, which I believe was Mr. Alexander's goal all along.

Genai Arscott – 3rd Place
English 12 Honors
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Mrs. Sutton

“How to Build a More Sensitive Cop”

After reading Cedric L. Alexander's opinion article on "How to Build a More Sensitive Cop" published on CNN.com, I definitely agree with his views on how to build a more sensitive cop. A cop's job is to help and protect the people and the community, and not to shoot innocent victims, because of their appearance or even if the person disobeys the law, but is harmless. Today in society there have been many recent police shootings and it seems like the cops who are shooting are not being punished for their acts. Therefore, Cedric L. Alexander's opinions on how to build a more sensitive cop are very important in my eyes.

To begin with, because of the increased deaths and injuries caused recently by police brutality, officers need techniques on how to become more sensitive. In the recent deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson and Eric Garner in Staten Island, police officers were the cause of their deaths and they have not been charged for their actions. To put a stop to such ruthlessness from the police department, Cedric Alexander suggested that "police departments need to work much harder to build a workforce that is diverse, in that word's broadest definition. And a police department should closely represent that of the community it serves." This means that a black cop does not have to serve a black community or a white cop serves a white community. The cop should be able to serve the community they grew up in whether they are black and grew up in a white community or white and grew up in a black community. It also shows that the cop would be familiar with the community, so the cop would know the citizens living there, and would know the best actions to take. Therefore, the police department can be diverse and can serve their own community.

Furthermore, Cedric Alexander said that “officers need training in cultural sensitivity and critical thinking,” because it is beneficial to their performance. It will help cops to think before acting, which can make a difference between life and death. In the text it states, "you cannot be an effective or ethical officer if you cannot think critically- that is being able to gather and process information to guide decision-making that directly affects behavior...Cultural sensitivity training requires an understanding of the history of the community and its members; but it also requires officers personal reflections, so they are aware of their biases and allegiances and how these may influence their decision-making abilities and behavior." This means that a cop should think before just grabbing weapons when handling a case. Also, with cultural sensitivity, cops will be able to have a deeper understanding of how the people in the community are, the percentage of crime rate, and what types of crime occur in the community. It also means that if a cop knew a person from that community that they serve, and that person committed a crime, the officer would use his or her thinking skills first to arrest the person instead of shooting; and they would arrest the criminal as if they did not know him or her, because that would mean the cop is doing his or her job the correct way.

Additionally, some people agree on officers not being punished in the death of Eric Garner and Mike Brown, because the cops are only doing their jobs. A person should not resist arrest or flee the cops, because it will most likely lead to an injury or even worst death. However a life should not be taken, especially if the person is harmless. Instead of shooting in the most vulnerable areas of the body, cops should shoot the person in the leg or even in the hand, so that they have a greater chance of living.

In summation, lately a lot of lives have been taken, because of the careless officers taking actions with weapons and even the choke hold. Cops need to be less cruel, especially if the criminal is harmless. Therefore, cops definitely need the right training to become sensitive police officers so they can handle tasks the right way.