



## TeachableMoment Classroom Lessons

Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility

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[Home](#) > Freddie Gray and the Protests in Baltimore

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# FREDDIE GRAY AND THE PROTESTS IN BALTIMORE

Submitted by [Marieke van Woerkom](#) [1] on Sun, 05/03/2015 - 08:00

**Area:** Current Issues

**Grade Level:** High School

**Topic:** Diversity

Economy

Race & Racism

U.S. Justice

U.S. Politics & Government

**Tags:** police

violence

nonviolence

**Description:**

Through quotes, photos, and video, students explore responses to Freddie Gray's death while in Baltimore police custody, and the protests that followed.

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## TO THE TEACHER:

Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old Baltimore resident, was arrested by police on April 12, 2015. He suffered a spinal injury while in police custody, and died from his injuries a week later. On May 1, Baltimore's chief prosecutor charged six police officers with crimes including murder and manslaughter in Freddie Gray's arrest and fatal injury. Baltimore State's Attorney Marilyn Mosby charged that police officers lacked probable cause to chase Gray after he had made eye contact with a lieutenant. And she alleged that during the 45 minutes between the time of Gray's arrest and when he emerged from a police van with fatal injuries, all six officers saw that he needed medical help but offered no aid, leaving him handcuffed and shackled in back of the van.

The incident is only the most recent in a line of highly publicized, fatal encounters around the country between Black men and the police. It triggered a wave of protests in Baltimore, which, though mostly nonviolent, has included looting and property damage, including after Gray's funeral on April 27. Rocks and bottles were also thrown at police, some of whom were injured. Many protesters were arrested. The day after Gray's funeral, hundreds of residents came out to

discussion.

In this activity, students explore responses to Freddie Gray's death and the protests that followed, including through quotes, photos, and video.

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## **GATHERING**

Facilitate a conversation with your students asking if they know what's been going on in Baltimore. Ask them if they know the name Freddie Gray. Do they know what happened to him? What has been the response in Baltimore and in other cities around the U.S.? What are their thoughts and feelings about this response?

Elicit and explain that Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old Baltimore resident, was arrested by police on April 12, 2015. He suffered a spinal injury while in police custody, and died from his injuries a week later. On May 1, Baltimore's chief prosecutor charged six police officers with crimes including murder and manslaughter in Freddie Gray's arrest and fatal injury. Baltimore State's Attorney Marilyn Mosby charged that police officers lacked probable cause to chase Gray after he had made eye contact with a lieutenant. And she alleged that during the 45 minutes between the time of Gray's arrest and when he emerged from a police van with fatal injuries, all six officers saw that he needed medical help but offered no aid, leaving him handcuffed and shackled in back of the van.

The incident is only the most recent in a line of highly publicized, fatal encounters around the country between Black men and the police. It triggered a wave of protests in Baltimore, which, though mostly nonviolent, has included looting and property damage, including after Gray's funeral on April 27. Rocks and bottles were also thrown at police, some of whom were injured. Many protesters were arrested. The day after Gray's funeral, hundreds of residents came out to clean up the streets after the riots. The violence in Baltimore touched off a great deal of media coverage and much debate and discussion.

Explain that in today's lesson we'll explore a variety of responses to Freddie Gray's death and the protests that followed.

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## **GALLERY WALK: IMAGES AND QUOTES FROM BALTIMORE**

In preparation for the lesson, print up these images and quotes from the [New York Times](#) [2] (photos by Gabriella Demczuk).

<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/04/28/us/voices-from-baltimore-protests.html?action=click&contentCollection=U.S.&module=RelatedCoverage&region=Marginalia&pgtype=article> [2]

Post them around the room for students to see.

Explain that these pictures were taken on April 28, the day after violence erupted across Baltimore following Freddie Gray's funeral. The people in these images were assembled outside of a CVS drugstore that had been looted the previous evening. They were among the hundreds of people who came out that day to clean up and show support for the community after the violence.

quotes.

- What are your thoughts and feelings about these images/quotes?
  - Which image/quote resonates most with you? Why?
  - What do you notice about the people in the images?
  - What are people saying about the neighborhood/the city?
  - What are people saying about the people in the neighborhood?
  - What are people saying about protection and care?
  - One of the protesters says, “This is my neighborhood. I understand the issues.” What issues do you think she’s talking about?
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## **RESPONSES TO THE PROTESTS IN BALTIMORE**

President Obama, the Mayor of Baltimore, and many other politicians and commentators condemned the violence in Baltimore. Many also noted that most protests had been nonviolent, and that local residents had many legitimate grievances, including unrelenting poverty, high unemployment, and poor housing. Some conservatives blamed these problems on the policies of Democrats, who dominate city politics.

Read out loud or distribute the following quotes. After the quotes, engage students in discussion, using the questions that follow.

### **A. President Obama**

In a press conference on April 28, President Obama said:

“.... there’s no excuse for the kind of violence that we saw yesterday. It is counterproductive. When individuals get crowbars and start prying open doors to loot, they’re not protesting, they’re not making a statement — they’re stealing. When they burn down a building, they’re committing arson. And they’re destroying and undermining businesses and opportunities in their own communities that rob jobs and opportunity from people in that area.

.... That is not a protest. That is not a statement. It’s people — a handful of people taking advantage of a situation for their own purposes, and they need to be treated as criminals.....

[W]hat we also know is that if you have impoverished communities that have been stripped away of opportunity, where children are born into abject poverty.... In communities where there are no fathers who can provide guidance to young men; communities where there’s no investment, and manufacturing has been stripped away; and drugs have flooded the community, and the drug industry ends up being the primary employer for a whole lot of folks — in those environments, if we think that we’re just going to send the police to do the dirty work of containing the problems that arise there without as a nation and as a society saying what can we do to change those communities, to help lift up those communities and give those kids opportunity, then we’re not going to solve this problem.

<http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2015/04/28/president-obamas-comments-on-baltimore-violence-video->

Ask students:

- Who does President Obama focus on in this quote?
  - o How does he describe those who looted and set buildings on fire?
  - o Why does he say these actions are “not a protest”?
- What does President Obama say about the problems in Baltimore?
- What does he say about the police in this situation?
- What does he say about the role of government?
- What does he say about the role of society in general?
- What do you think President Obama thinks the solution is?

**B. Republican Presidential candidate Senator Ted Cruz (on April 28):**

Today 85,000 Baltimore city children will not be going to school. Buildings have been set ablaze, stores have been looted, the police in the streets have been seriously injured, and strict curfews have been imposed.

No man, woman, or child should fear for his or her safety in America—not in their schools, not in their neighborhoods, not in their cities—but today families are scared.

Our government must perform its central functions and purposes: to preserve the peace, protect the people, and serve justice. The government exists to ensure our domestic security—whether it’s from a city riot, or the threat of a terrorist attack on our homeland. We have to restore that trust and prove to the people we can make America safe again.

Every case deserves justice, and the facts surrounding Freddie Gray’s death should be thoroughly and impartially investigated. But rioting and mayhem are not the answer.

While we continue to pray for a peaceful conclusion to the events in Baltimore—and pray for the families of those injured—I hope we all remember that our nation’s law enforcement consists of thousands of heroic officers who deeply respect the dignity of each person they serve to protect. Targeting law enforcement for violence is wrong, and it cannot be allowed to persist.

Likewise, the small number of those who have wreaked destruction upon Baltimore over the past few days are not emblematic of the thousands of honest, hard-working families who are proud to call the city home.

There is, and has always been, far more to celebrate in America than to worry about. Don’t lose sight of that fundamental truth.

We will always face challenges and, together, we must rise to address them with strength and confidence in the future of our nation.

<https://www.facebook.com/tedcruzpage/posts/10153254334827464> [4]

Ask students:

- Who does Senator Cruz focus on in this quote?

- What does Senator Cruz say about the problems in Baltimore?
- What does he say about the police in this situation?
- What does he say about the role of government?
- What does he say about the role of society in general?
- What do you think Senator Cruz thinks the solution is?

### **C. New York Times columnist Charles Blow**

The black community in America has been betrayed by Democrats and Republicans alike — it has been betrayed by America itself. Therefore, it can be hard to accept at face value any promises made or policies articulated. History demonstrates that too many forked tongues have delivered too many betrayed covenants....

It is this disenchantment, as well as the steady beat of black bodies falling, the constant murmur of black pain and the incessant sting of black subjugation that contributed to the conflagration of rage this week in Baltimore.

You could easily argue that that rage was misdirected, that most of the harm done was to the social fabric and the civil and economic interests in the very neighborhoods that most lack them. You would be right.

But misdirected rage is not necessarily illegitimate rage...

It has been my experience that people who feel no investment in systems of power — no belief that they have access to that power and that that power will treat them fairly — are the ones most likely to attack those systems with whatever power they think they have.

The time that any population will silently endure suffering is term-limited and the end of that term is unpredictable, often set by a moment of trauma that pushes a simmering discontent over into civil disobedience.

And, in those moments, America feigns shock and disbelief. Where did this anger come from? How can we quickly restore calm? How do we instantly start to heal?

That is because America likes to hide its sins. That is because it wants its disaffected, dispossessed and disenfranchised to use the door under the steps. That is because America sees its underclass as some sort of infinity sponge: capable of quietly absorbing disadvantage, neglect and oppression forever for the greater good of superficial calm and illusory order. And expected to do so.

No one of good conscience and sound judgment desires violence or would ever advocate for it. As the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. put it, "The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy."

Ask students:

- What does Blow say about how the black community in America feels about its politicians?
- How is this related to what happened in Baltimore this past week?
- What do you think Blow means by 'misdirected rage is not necessarily illegitimate rage'? What are your thoughts about that?

- What does Blow say about how long people are willing to suffer in silence? What do you think about that statement?
- How does he say America tends to respond when anger finally erupts from that suffering? Why?
- What are your thoughts and feelings about Dr. King's quote?

#### D. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Introduce another King quote for students to consider, excerpted from a speech King gave at Grosse Pointe High School in Michigan on March 14, 1968 (less than a month before his death).

But it is not enough for me to stand before you tonight and condemn riots. It would be morally irresponsible for me to do that without, at the same time, condemning the contingent, intolerable conditions that exist in our society. These conditions are the things that cause individuals to feel that they have no other alternative than to engage in violent rebellions to get attention. And I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard.

And what is it America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last twelve or fifteen years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice and humanity.

Ask students to discuss:

- How does King's quote relate to Blow's argument?
- How do you feel about the fact that King's quote is still so relevant today, fifty years after the end of the civil rights movement?

### **COMMENTARY FROM BALTIMORE RESIDENTS**

Show the following clip:

<http://www.aol.com/video/want-to-know-whats-really-going-on-in-baltimore-listen-to-the-residents/518797335/>  
[5]

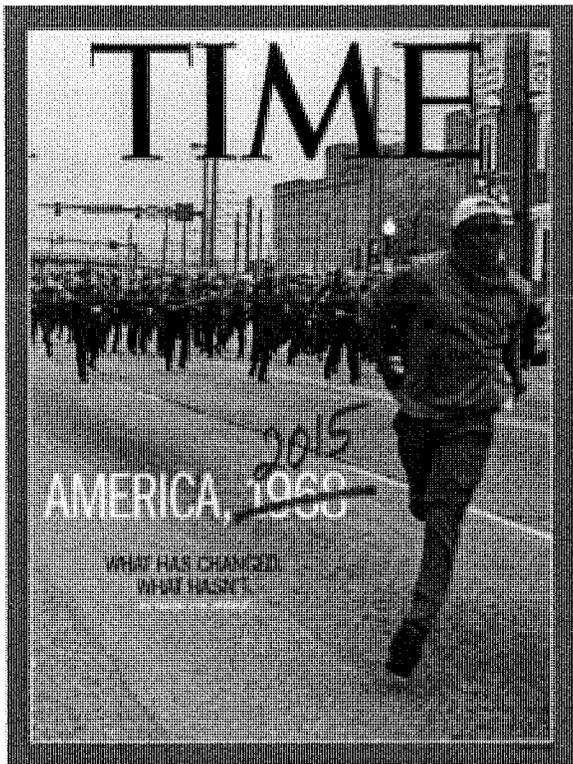
Then ask students:

- What are your thoughts and feelings about what you just heard and saw?
- What voices connected most with you? Why?
- What is the resident in the clip saying about the CVS that was destroyed? What about the small minority-owned businesses?
- What are people saying about the anger and frustration in Baltimore? What are they saying

- One resident is upset at the kind of attention Baltimore has received. She asks a reporter: "When we were out here protesting peacefully last week, where were you? Why does it take this for America to hear our cry?" What does this resident say about the media and what people like to focus on?
  - What does the white resident say about white people starting to figure things out when this has been a problem for a very long time? How do you feel about this?
  - Towards the end of the clip, residents talk about some of the reasons why young people went into the street. They also talk about why they are out in the street cleaning up. What are your thoughts and feelings about that?
  - How does that relate to the activist Charles Blow quotes, who says: "I don't have to condone it to understand it"?
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### Closing

Ask students to share one thought about the following:



Time Magazine photograph by Devin Allen

**Source URL: [http://www.morningsidecenter.org/teachable-moment/lessons/freddie-gray-and-protests-baltimore?utm\\_source=SEL/TM%20News%205-4-15&utm\\_campaign=SEL/TM%20Newsletter%204-17-15&utm\\_medium=email](http://www.morningsidecenter.org/teachable-moment/lessons/freddie-gray-and-protests-baltimore?utm_source=SEL/TM%20News%205-4-15&utm_campaign=SEL/TM%20Newsletter%204-17-15&utm_medium=email)**

**Links:**

[1] <http://www.morningsidecenter.org/users/marieke-van-woerkom>

[2] [http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/04/28/us/voices-from-baltimore-protests.html?](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/04/28/us/voices-from-baltimore-protests.html?action=click&contentCollection=U.S.&module=RelatedCoverage&region=Marginalia&pgtype=article)

[action=click&contentCollection=U.S.&module=RelatedCoverage&region=Marginalia&pgtype=article](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/04/28/us/voices-from-baltimore-protests.html?action=click&contentCollection=U.S.&module=RelatedCoverage&region=Marginalia&pgtype=article)

[3] <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2015/04/28/president-obamas-comments-on-baltimore-violence-video-transcript/>

[4] <https://www.facebook.com/tedcruzpage/posts/10153254334827464>

[5] <http://www.aol.com/video/want-to-know-whats-really-going-on-in-baltimore-listen-to-the-residents/518797335/>