

EPIX ORIGINAL DOCUMENTARY SERIES



AMERICA  
**FERRERA**

AMY  
**POEHLER**

**COMMON**

JESSE  
**WILLIAMS**

NORMAN  
**LEAR**

PETER  
**SARSGAARD**

ROSARIO  
**DAWSON**

ZACH  
**GALIFIANAKIS**

EXECUTIVE PRODUCED BY **NORMAN LEAR, COMMON** AND **SHONDA RHIMES**

# AMERICA DIVIDED

IN A DIVIDED COUNTRY,  
OUR STORIES UNITE US.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

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AMERICA DIVIDED presents an opportunity for us to begin real conversations on one of the most important issues of our time: inequality. The series is comprised of eight human stories of what inequality looks like in people's everyday lives. More than just looking at the way this crisis affects us all, the film also looks at the solutions that can help end inequality and unite us as a country.

AMERICA DIVIDED is an excellent tool for community outreach and education and addresses the following issues:

- Housing Affordability
- Housing Discrimination
- Racism
- Implicit Bias
- Criminal Justice
- Community & Police Relationships
- Education
- School segregation
- Immigration
- Citizenship
- Labor
- Minimum Wage
- Addiction
- Voting Rights
- Education
- Local Policy
- Environmental Justice
- Public Works & Safety
- School-to-Prison Pipeline
- Money in Politics

# A LETTER FROM THE CREATORS AND EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Dear Viewer,

Thank you so much for watching AMERICA DIVIDED. Our team wanted to explore the inequality crisis, expose the damage it inflicts on the most vulnerable Americans, reveal systemic bias, and celebrate real-world heroes fighting for solutions. We were hoping our voices, our investigative journalism, and our platforms could help effect some change.

We've started to accomplish our goals through this docu-series and our talented correspondents who went into the field to do some important reporting about the issues that matter: inequality in education, housing, health, labor, mass incarceration and criminal justice, immigration, and the influence of money on our political system.

Every person who contributed to the series—the creators and producers, the correspondents, the editors, and, of course, the subjects—has a very deep connection with these issues. We're honored to bring these issues, to light, and we're proud to provide these stories as a resource for individual viewers, organizations, educators, and community leaders to use this series as tool for change.

Thank you for your commitment to fighting inequality. We hope the materials included in this guide will help you lead engaging conversations and spark actions that will contribute to building a more united country.

In solidarity,

The Creators: Solly, Rick and Lucian

The Executive Producers: Norman Lear, Common and Shonda Rhimes

## CONVERSATION STARTERS FOR THE SERIES

1. AMERICA DIVIDED is a series about systemic inequality in America. After viewing this episode, why do you think these issues were included?
2. Which moment or subject in the series stood out the most? Why?
3. Why do you think the series is titled AMERICA DIVIDED? Do you agree that America is a divided nation? Why or why not?
4. The tagline for the series is, "In a country divided, our stories unite us." In what way do our stories or personal experiences with inequality unite us? In what ways do they divide us?
5. What commonalities did you find in each of the stories? Differences? How do factors such as race, gender, or class create inequality? Explain.
6. How can we act as individuals or communities to lesson inequality?





## OVERVIEW

AMERICA DIVIDED explores inequality in education, housing, healthcare, labor, criminal justice and the political system. In “Democracy for Sale,” Zach Galifianakis, the comic star of *The Hangover* movies, travels back to his home state to investigate how North Carolina has become a bellwether for how a handful of wealthy individuals has dominated our democracy. North Carolina — perhaps more than any other state in the Union — has been transformed by the new and growing tidal wave of political spending. Galifianakis investigates allegations that the current state government was put in power by moneyed interests and has thus carried out a program that only benefits its backers: cuts to education, healthcare spending, and environmental protection; lowering of taxes for the wealthy and corporations; and, the passage of laws designed to roll back access to the ballot.

## QUESTIONS

1. Choosing our leaders at the ballot box is our most fundamental right as American citizens. In what ways do attacks on the right to vote create inequality in our democracy as a whole?
2. Voting is often divided into “us vs. them”: Democrats vs. Republicans; black vs. white, and so on. How did watching a meeting in rural North Carolina of a local NAACP chapter (“a little short on the C,” as Zach put it) allow you to reexamine those divides?
3. Gene Nichol said that “the interest of the bottom quarter of Americans has no impact on the outcome of the legislative process of the United States Congress.” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? If this is true, how might we fix this inequality in our political system?
4. In the story, Carter Wrenn admitted that North Carolina’s legislators passed laws to specifically exclude certain people—including minorities and Democrats—from voting in order to weaken their political power. How does that make you feel? Is this an isolated problem, or part of a broader cultural trend in America?
5. Gerrymandering, the strategic carving of districts, has been around since the founding of our country, and has been utilized by both political parties to remain in power. What can be done to put people, not politicians, in charge of democracy? Would this solve problems of inequality? Why or why not?
6. Rosanell Eaton’s story reminds us that the fight for equal voting rights has been a long struggle and that it’s not over. What have you learned from Eaton, Rev. Barber, and other activists in this story and how have they inspired you? What steps could your community take to effect and catalyze change?

## KEY TERMS

**Democracy:** A form of government in which people choose leaders by voting.

**Gerrymandering:** The dividing of a state, county, etc., into election districts so as to give one political party a majority in many districts while concentrating the voting strength of the other party into as few districts as possible.

**Voting Rights Act:** Legislation aimed to overcome legal barriers at the state and local levels that prevented African Americans from exercising their right to vote under the 15th Amendment. Signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson on August 6, 1965. In 2013, the Supreme Court removed protections from the VRA.

## RESOURCES

- The NAACP Legal Defense Fund: <http://www.naacpldf.org/take-action>
- "A Dream Undone" The New York Times: [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/29/magazine/voting-rights-act-dream-undone.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/29/magazine/voting-rights-act-dream-undone.html?_r=0)
- Inside the Republican creation of the North Carolina voting bill dubbed the 'monster' law" The Washington Post: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/courts\\_law/inside-the-republican-creation-of-the-north-carolina-voting-bill-dubbed-the-monster-law/2016/09/01/79162398-6adf-11e6-8225-fbb8a6fc65bc\\_story.htm](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/courts_law/inside-the-republican-creation-of-the-north-carolina-voting-bill-dubbed-the-monster-law/2016/09/01/79162398-6adf-11e6-8225-fbb8a6fc65bc_story.htm)



## OVERVIEW

AMERICA DIVIDED explores inequality in education, housing, healthcare, labor, criminal justice, and the political system. In “The Class Divide,” actor and activist Jesse Williams examines the schools in Pinellas County, Florida, a school system many call “one of the worst in the nation.” In Pinellas County, residents enjoy some of the highest incomes in the state, but the schools are failing: five of the worst schools in Florida, possibly some of the most challenged in the nation, are located here.

Like many schools in the South after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* decision, Pinellas County Schools worked to desegregate. For many years, the school district—like many others in the country—found success through the use of busing and a “controlled choice” program designed to integrate schools across the district. That stopped in 2008.

What went wrong? A December 2007, Pinellas County School Board vote ended district-wide busing and returned students to neighborhood schools, dividing the north and south sides of the district along race and class lines. This resegregation, compounded by high teacher turnover, misallocation of funds, and exclusionary discipline practices, has left a generation of children underserved.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Sunshine and Andre Walker’s daughter has had five different teachers in a single school year. Other families and students share similar stories. In what ways do teacher turnover, unqualified teachers, and overextended school staff affect student success?
2. Jesse Williams talks about society’s view of education as a personal problem versus a collective one. What do you think he means? In what ways is education personal and in what ways it is a collective concern?
3. In 2007, the Pinellas County School Board voted to end busing, ultimately resegregating the schools across the district. Member Linda Lerner denies that the Pinellas County School Board made a mistake in voting to resegregate county schools. Why do you think this is? How did the end of busing contribute to the schools failing?
4. Discipline data for Pinellas County shows that black students are arrested and even pepper-sprayed in school by police and that “more kids in Florida leave school in handcuffs than any other state.” What connection do you see between police in schools and the school-to-prison pipeline?

5. The argument for removing unruly students often rests on the idea that their removal allows the rest of the students to learn. Is it acceptable to sacrifice some for the benefit of others? What is the long-term impact of removing students from the classroom on individual students and their families?
6. State Attorney Bernie McCabe says there's a "cultural aspect to it that I don't understand" when asked why so many students of color are given criminal charges in school. Elected officials represent the communities they serve. How well are those in positions of authority representing the members of the community in Pinellas County? Do you think implicit bias might be a factor in student discipline practices and juvenile arrests in Pinellas County? Why or why not?
7. Today in Pinellas County schools, black students are still disproportionately more likely to be suspended, arrested, and referred to enforcement when compared to white students. What other strategies beyond those identified in the film do you think would help solve this problem?

## KEY TERMS

**School-to-Prison Pipeline:** Policies that encourage police presence at schools, harsh tactics including physical restraint, and automatic punishments that result in suspensions and out-of-class time that often result in criminal charges and the arrest of minors.

**Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas:** A landmark United States Supreme Court case in which the Court declared state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students to be unconstitutional.

## RESOURCES

- Advancement Project: <http://advancementproject.org/america-divided>
- Code of Conduct: A Guide to Responsive Discipline: <http://www.tolerance.org/code-of-conduct>
- Flagler County: A Case of Suspension Abolition: <http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-53-summer-2016/feature/flagler-county-case-suspension-abolition>
- *Failure Factories*, the 2015 *Tampa Bay Times*: <http://www.tampabay.com/projects/2015/investigations/pinellas-failure-factories/5-schools-segregation/>
- U.S. Department of Education School Climate and Discipline: Know the Data: <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/data.html>
- The Schott Foundation for Public Education: <http://schottfoundation.org/>
- Dignity in Schools: <http://www.dignityinschools.org/>



## OVERVIEW

As the fate of nearly 11 million undocumented immigrants has become the political football of the 2016 campaign, actress America Ferrera heads to Texas, the state with the longest border, which is home to 1.65 million people living without papers. Ferrera, whose parents and siblings are immigrants from Honduras, understands the challenges faced by new arrivals to the U.S. fleeing from Central America. In “Out of Reach,” she documents the special difficulties for Central American refugees in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, where U.S. Border Patrol checkpoints inside the country, many miles from the border, keep undocumented people hemmed-in and further distance them from the American Dream.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When crossing the checkpoint, correspondent America Ferrera asks, “Is this the border with Mexico?” A border patrol agent then cites the Immigration & Nationality Act, which authorizes border patrol agents to conduct immigration inspections in the interior of the United States within 100 air miles of the border. Did this information surprise you? Why or why not? How does this increased militarization of U.S. borders affect American citizens?
2. After having witnessed the hardships of undocumented people along the border, America Ferrera rhetorically asks, “Do the undocumented have any human rights?” How would you answer this question?
3. After viewing this story, what role do you think racism plays in the immigration story of the United States?
4. One undocumented mother states: “We are in the shadows as undocumented parents.” What do you think she means by this statement? How can we empower undocumented people?
5. How does current immigration policy affect the lives of U.S. citizens, especially citizens from mixed status families? In what ways do these policies contribute to a divided America?
6. Immigration policies affect much more than the lives of immigrants. How do you think other areas such as education, healthcare, and jobs are affected by our current immigration policies? What effects do these policies have on the lives of undocumented people in regards to education, health, and jobs?

## **KEY TERMS**

**Legal Immigrant:** An Immigrant is any person who is residing in the United States as a legally recognized and lawfully recorded permanent resident.

**Undocumented Immigrant:** A term used to refer to individuals present in the U.S. without proper authorization.

## **RESOURCES**

For immigration assistance in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas: <http://lupenet.org/>

For legal assistance throughout Texas, Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid: <http://www.trla.org/>

For a national network of immigrant allies, United We Dream: <http://unitedwedream.org/>



## OVERVIEW

Amy Poehler ventures into the world of the invisible women who help keep California's economy afloat: domestic workers. What she finds is a human story far more complex than the simple exploitation of poor women by the super-rich. While domestic workers organize for a living wage, some of their employers are also struggling—squeezed out of the middle class in an increasingly unequal economy in which everyone works harder than they used to.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

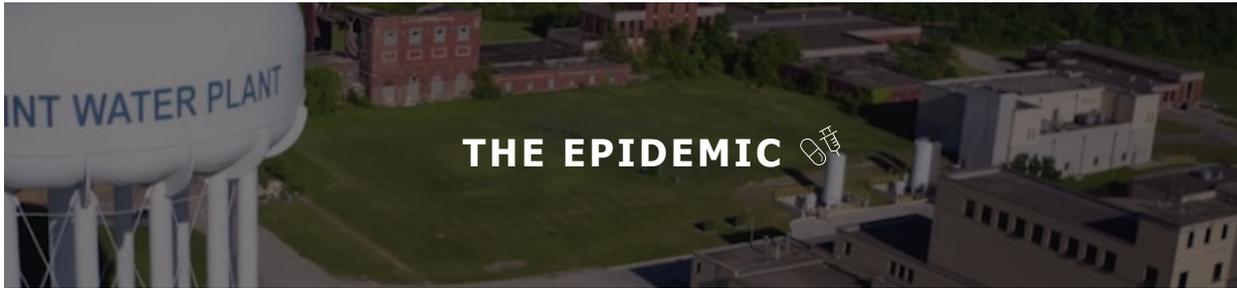
1. In the opening scene, why is it such a surprise that Amy Poehler thanks the women who take care of our children? What does this about the way domestic work is perceived in our society?
2. Throughout the film, we hear many stories of home service and care. Did you connect with this experience? In what ways?
3. What value do you think domestic work and care work have in our society? Are they equivalent to work done outside the home? Why or why not?
4. Amy Poehler asks: "Why can't we make it so that the a woman working and the woman that she hires can both have a living wage?" How would you respond to this question? What changes would our society need to make in order to make this possible?
5. How have the stories in this episode—of both the injustice facing domestic workers and their leadership in the movement for change—impacted you?

## KEY TERMS

**Domestic Worker:** A person who works within an employer's household. Domestic workers perform a variety of household services for an individual or a family, from providing care for children and elderly dependents to housekeeping, including cleaning and household maintenance.

## RESOURCES

- Home Economics: The Invisible and Unregulated World of Domestic Work: <http://www.domesticworkers.org/sites/default/files/HomeEconomicsEnglish.pdf>
- Invisible Women: The Real History of Domestic Workers in America: <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/02/timeline-domestic-workers-invisible-history-america>
- Hand In Hand Domestic Employers Network: <http://domesticemployers.org/>



## OVERVIEW

In the 21st century, we have seen the withering of middle-class life in America. Manufacturing, which once held out the promise of a middle class life for those with a high school education, has shed five million jobs since 2000. Now, as Americans grapple with growing inequality, something startling is happening to working class white America: an epidemic of suicide and drug- and alcohol-related deaths across the Heartland. Since 1999, this epidemic has resulted in nearly half a million early deaths—a figure comparable to all the lives lost to AIDS in the United States. In “The Epidemic,” Peter Sarsgaard —whose own family has battled drug addiction—travels to Dayton, Ohio, to investigate how the city, once the very definition of industrial innovation and middle class America, has become a symbol of our age of inequality.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This story highlights the negative impact addiction has on communities. What actions is the Dayton community taking in order to address the opiate epidemic? Are they necessary? Are they effective? Why or why not?
2. The current opioid crisis in white, lower middle class communities is often compared to the crack epidemic that destroyed black communities in the 1980s. Is this an accurate comparison? In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different?
3. The attorney in the story references “Big Pharma” and the billions it makes in profit due to both selling drugs that cause addiction and selling drugs that treat addiction. Discuss the role of pharmaceutical companies in the opioid crisis. Should companies be held accountable for aiding addiction and should those same companies be allowed to profit from creating drugs that help end addiction? Why or why not?
4. Addiction is a disease, but there are many roadblocks that prevent those suffering from seeking and receiving treatment. What are those obstacles and how might we help to remove those barriers for those who need help?

## KEY TERMS

**Addiction:** A medical condition characterized by compulsive engagement in rewarding stimuli, despite adverse consequences.

**Opioid:** Substances that act on opioid receptors to produce morphine-like effects; most often used medically to relieve pain.

## RESOURCES

- East End Community Services: <http://www.east-end.org/>
- Families of Addicts: <http://www.foafamilies.org/>
- Montgomery County Drug-Free Coalition: <http://www.mcdrugfree.org/>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: <http://www.samhsa.gov/recovery>
- WestCare Foundation: National Leaders in Addiction/Recovery Services: <https://www.westcare.com/>
- Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA): <http://www.cadca.org/comprehensive-addiction-and-recovery-act-cara>



## OVERVIEW

Norman Lear explores the housing divide in New York City, where he is confronted by one of the nation's starkest images of inequality: a record number of homeless people living in the shadows of luxury skyscrapers filled with apartments purposely being kept empty. The creator of "All in the Family," "Good Times" and "The Jeffersons" speaks with tenants, realtors, homeless people, housing activists, landlords and city officials — investigating the Big Apple's affordability crisis, hedge fund speculation on residential housing, and a legacy of racist discrimination that still persists today.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Twenty-three thousand children are homeless in New York City through no fault of their own. Throughout our nation, there are homeless families in nearly every community. Are there actions we can take as a nation to ensure that every child has a decent, healthy, and safe place to live?
2. The "American Dream" rests on the idea of the possibility of upward mobility—the idea that if you work hard and play by the rules, you and your children will be able to realize a better and more prosperous future than the previous generation. Increasingly, the American Dream is out of reach for many. What kinds of changes are needed to restore hope and ensure that more opportunity exists for low and moderate income families to achieve the Dream?
3. Gentrification can revitalize a community, but it often leads to the displacement of that community's current residents, whether due to construction or those individuals being priced out of their homes. What policies or strategies would you suggest that both revitalize a community and improve its resources, but simultaneously allow its current residents to stay and enjoy their renewed community?
4. In the film, Norman Lear asks whether skin color is still destiny. Are the life chances and opportunities available to Americans still dictated by race or national origin? What do you think?
5. In one of the clips from Norman Lear's series *The Jeffersons*, the punchline to a joke is "one colored family is a novelty and two is a ghetto." Lear and Nikole Hannah-Jones then talk about this commonly held idea that when black families move into a neighborhood, property values go down. Share a time when stereotypes and false perceptions have affected a community to which you belong.

6. In America, where you live matters—whether it’s the schools you can attend or the resources that are available. Think about where you grew up and where you currently reside. What opportunities did you have or what opportunities did you lack because of the neighborhood in which you lived? What can we do to ensure that every family has an opportunity to live in a decent neighborhood of its choosing?
7. Nikole Hannah-Jones states that we have fair housing laws, but we don’t have fair housing. And Fred Freiberg argues that adequate resources have never been devoted to vigorously enforce the 48-year-old Fair Housing Act. Both of these experts say that the reason for this has to do with Americans’ lack of political will. What can we do when, as citizens, we find many of our leaders lack the resolve to tackle an intractable problem or address a major need in our society?

## RESOURCES

- “House Rules” This American Life: <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/512/house-rules>
- “The Case for Reparations” The Atlantic Magazine: <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>
- “Why Segregation is Bad for Everyone” The Atlantic City Lab: <http://www.citylab.com/work/2013/05/why-segregation-bad-everyone/5476/>
- National Fair Housing Alliance: <http://www.nationalfairhousing.org/>
- A Matter of Place: <http://www.fairhousingjustice.org/resources/film/>



## OVERVIEW

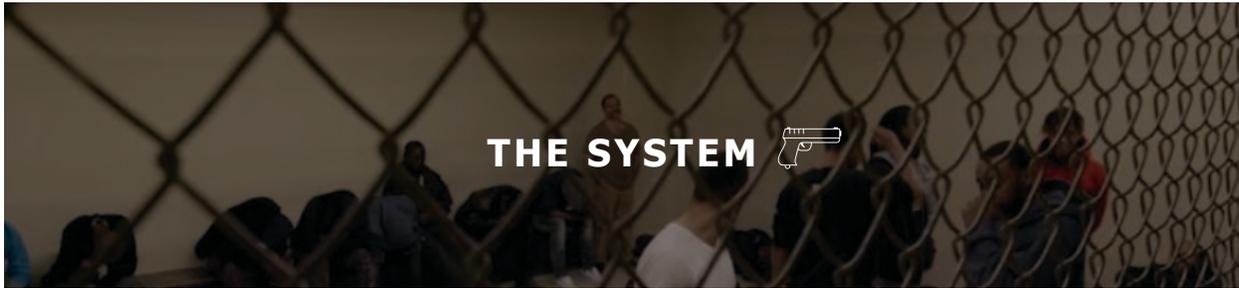
While most people are aware of the basic contours of Flint’s water crisis, *AMERICA DIVIDED* goes deeper. Correspondent Rosario Dawson investigates how a government could poison its own citizens, what hidden forces may have been at work, and how specific policies unique to Michigan led not only to the crisis in Flint, but also damaged other poor, largely African American communities around the state.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Flint’s water crisis occurred because of changes implemented by the state in order to save money. Those changes resulted in a failure to ensure the quality and safety of residents’ drinking water. Is safe drinking water a public service that should be protected regardless of budgetary concerns? What other services might fall under this protection?
2. Rosario Dawson is shocked when she learns that the disaster in Flint is a direct result of decisions made by one state appointed “emergency manager.” What do you think about a law that allows a single appointed person to overrule local elected officials? Does that make sense in a democracy? Why or why not?
3. Although the situation in Flint is particularly egregious, the disaster there helped focus attention on the potential for lead contamination in water in cities across America. Do you know how testing is conducted in your city? Does your home have lead plumbing or a lead service line? What could community be doing to protect you from lead?
4. Lead is an extremely potent neurotoxin that is especially damaging to young children. Exposure to even low levels of lead can cause IQ loss, learning disabilities, and behavioral problems. Given that Michigan is directly responsible for polluting Flint’s drinking water, what do you think the state’s responsibility should be in terms of addressing the multi-faceted problems it created?

## RESOURCES

- The ACLU of Michigan’s Full-Length Documentary on Flint
- “At least 33 US cities used water testing ‘cheats’ over lead concerns” *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jun/02/lead-water-testing-cheats-chicago-boston-philadelphia>



## OVERVIEW

Common returns to his hometown of Chicago –a city on fire in the aftermath of the brutal police killing of teenager Laquan McDonald. With thousands of people in the streets, Chicago has become the epicenter of national debates around police violence, racism, and accountability. Working with community activists and whistleblowers, Common discovers a decades-long pattern of police corruption and sophisticated cover-ups that stretch all the way to the mayor’s office. But he also finds reason for hope. An energized movement in the streets mounts unprecedented pressure for reform. It’s clear that the system is broken: is it finally time for a change?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. There is no doubt that the criminal justice system is disproportionately affecting communities of color. Have you witnessed or experienced unfair treatment by police in your community? What do you think lies at the heart of this unbalanced treatment?
2. Superintendent Garry McCarthy explained to Common that the police aren’t racist, but instead simply the face of a system that is continually battling with a racist past. How do you interpret this understanding? Is McCarthy using the system as a scapegoat for biased officers, or do we have a truly broken system rooted in injustice?
3. In Chicago, community members admitted distrusting the police on account of continual and perpetual harassment. What could be done differently to help rebuild this trust and create safer, more equal communities?
4. The Southside of Chicago might as well be an entirely different world from Downtown Chicago. What sort of discrepancies exist in your community and how do these differences affect your experience with the criminal justice system?
5. The #BlackLivesMatter movement has taken over the airwaves in response to unjust shootings across the country, similar to that of Laquan McDonald. What does the phrase #BlackLivesMatter mean to you and do you think it has made a difference in how we approach and discuss criminal justice?

## KEY TERMS

**Criminal Justice System:** The system of law enforcement that is directly involved in apprehending, prosecuting, defending, sentencing, and punishing those who are suspected or convicted of criminal offenses.

**Implicit Bias:** The attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.

## RESOURCES

- The White House: Criminal Justice Reform: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/criminal-justice-reform>
- Cut50: <http://www.cut50.org/>
- The Sentencing Project: <http://www.sentencingproject.org/>
- The Invisible Institute, Citizen Police Data Project: <https://cpdb.co/data/Ldqkab/citizens-police-data-project>

## CONTENT & RESOURCES PROVIDED BY

Ashley Hanke, Deputy Director, Fair Housing Justice Center

Chelsea Fuller, Senior Communications Associate for Youth Criminalization, Advancement Project

Curt Guyette, Investigative Report, ACLU of Michigan

Emily Surico, MPH, Health, Crime, and Safety Prevention Initiatives, East End Community Services

Erik Opsal, Deputy Communications Director, Brennan Center for Justice

Fred Freiberg, Executive Director, Fair Housing Justice Center

Sara Wicht, independent consultant, Teaching Tolerance

Shanti Abedin, Director of Inclusive Communities

Tania Chavez, M.B.A., M.A., Special Projects & Outreach Coordinator, LUPE

Lisa Rice, Executive Vice President

Pamela Bond, Director of Communications

Gregory Parrish, Vice President of Resource Development and External Affairs

Created By:

