

INTRODUCTION

Twin Cities PBS's *Paradox* blends in-depth research, candid interviews, and rare archival footage to examine the history of policing in Minneapolis. Based on *Paradox: Echoes of Reform & the Minneapolis Police* by historian Dr. Yohuru Williams, the documentary explores mayoral politics, community activism, union resistance and reform, inviting viewers to reflect on the past and future of public safety.

Paradox's three episodes are:

Ep 1: Early History of the MPD and Reform

Ep 2: Mid-Century Changes and Challenges

Ep 3: 80s, 90s, and Their Echoes

Using this Viewing Guide:

This guide offers facilitators ways to use *Paradox* in community or classroom settings. The film's histories and narratives are complex and thought-provoking, and should be approached with care. At the same time, they provide valuable context for understanding both past and present.

The discussion questions are designed to spark reflection and dialogue. They serve as a starting point, not a quiz or a path to a single interpretation. Instead, they aim to support meaningful conversation that welcomes a range of perspectives and experiences.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The history of policing in America has deep roots, beginning during slavery when Southern patrols were among the earliest forms of law enforcement. After the Civil War, Reconstruction-era tensions and the rise of Jim Crow laws enforced racial segregation.

In the Twin Cities, policing has been shaped by race and identity, as well as labor unions, politics, policy, and reform efforts. Many communities have experienced inequities in public safety, influencing residents' sense of safety and trust in law enforcement. In response, groups such as the Black Patrols and the American Indian Movement Patrol formed community-based safety efforts during the 1960s and 70s.

More recently, increased media coverage of policing practices, including the 2020 killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers, has raised public awareness. This awareness has fueled social justice movements, and has fostered growing demands for transparency, accountability, and reform across law enforcement and the broader criminal justice system.

FACILITATOR TIPS

Review this [Facilitator Guide](#) to help you lead productive and thoughtful conversation. As the facilitator, you know your audience the best! Feel free to choose the topics and questions that align with your audience, purpose and time allotment. Facilitator tips include:

Acknowledge the Landscape

Audiences are navigating a flood of information and misinformation, often polarizing. Public safety can be complex and deeply personal. By naming this context, facilitators can help viewers connect respectfully with *Paradox's* authentic stories—regardless of the day's headlines.

Create a Brave and Accountable Space

- Facilitation goes beyond asking questions. Set expectations for active listening, care, and respect. Emphasize that mistakes are part of the process, and repair is essential.
- You don't need to be the expert. When questions arise, invite the group in: "*What do others think?*"
- Be mindful of implicit bias which includes unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that shape how we understand race, gender, and more. While everyone carries assumptions, we can notice, name, and question them.

Center Emotional Safety

- *Paradox's* stories may surface strong emotions, especially for those with lived experience. Make participation optional and remind the group that stepping away is always okay.
- Disagreement is not disrespect—it can deepen learning. If civility breaks down, step in to redirect the conversation.
- Silence is productive. Allow time for reflection, and rephrase or reframe questions as needed.
- Confidentiality supports openness. When possible, set the expectation that personal stories shared in the room remain there.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: BEFORE WATCHING

Before watching the film, engage viewers with the following pre-reflection questions. Encourage viewers to define, redefine, discuss, and expand upon these concepts and questions.

1. What are you hoping to learn by watching this film?
2. What comes to mind when you think about the terms "public safety" and "policing?"
3. What experiences or perspectives have shaped how you think about history of policing and public safety?
4. How do you think understanding the history of policing and public safety can inform present or future discussions about this topic?
5. How would you define "justice?" How does justice relate to policing and public safety?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: AFTER WATCHING

After watching the film, engage viewers in the following questions. Select questions you feel are most relevant to your group and encourage viewers to expand upon these ideas.

1. After viewing, what is something new that you learned?
2. Is there anything you're thinking about differently? If so, what?
3. How did the film help you better understand different groups' experiences—and your own experiences—with the public safety system?
4. What new reflections do you have about the meaning of “public safety” and “policing?”
5. How has the film helped you better understand some of the current discussions about policing and public safety (e.g., in the news, or on social media)?
6. Thinking about what you learned in the film, what future directions for policing and public safety would you want to see your local government consider?
7. Were there any perspectives absent from the film?
8. What policing practices have evolved over time, and what has remained constant?
9. Intersectionality is the idea that people can face more than one kind of challenge or discrimination at the same time, such as racism, sexism, or class inequality. How can understanding intersectionality help us better understand the experiences and perspectives of different groups?
10. What does accountability mean? How would you define transparency? How are these two ideas connected, and how do they relate to policing, reform, and public safety?
11. What questions do you still have? What's something you'd like to learn more about, or share with others?
12. What is the Minnesota Paradox? What paradoxes did you observe in the film?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR CONTINUED LEARNING

- *Jim Crow of the North* charts the progression of racist policies and practices from the advent of restrictive covenants after the turn of the last century to their final elimination in the late 1960s.
- *PBS Frontline: Policing the Police* investigates police use of force and accountability through case studies and investigative journalism.
- MNOPEDIA provides Minnesota-focused historical content, including entries about the American Indian Movement Patrol and Race and Policing in the Twin Cities.
- “Policing Politics” (2021), by Michael J. Lansing, is an overview of policing history in Minneapolis.
- “Understanding the History of Policing in American and Police Violence Against Black Communities” (2022) by Rev. Dr. Susan K. Smith, outlines of the history of policing, its relationship to the maintenance of slavery and then Jim Crow, and continuing problems between police and Black communities.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Historical Recovery with Primary and Secondary Sources

Participate in a historical recovery by examining primary and secondary sources. Select Option 1 to review one source, or Option 2 to compare different sources. Answer the following questions.

Option 1: This article, "Roughly Handled" from *The Afro-American Advance* newspaper, is featured in Episode 1 of *Paradox*.

1. What stands out to you?
2. Who are newspapers intended for and what is their primary purpose?
3. What was the purpose of publication of this article?
4. Which aspects of the language stand out to you?
5. Are you in any way surprised by what you read?
6. What questions does this article raise for you?
7. What emotions does this article evoke for you, and why do you think that is?
8. What limitations does a newspaper article have as a source of information?

ROUGHLY HANDLED.

Patrolman Thomas Britt Chokes Mrs. Ophelia Rice, a Respected Colored Lady, and Also Severely Injures Her Back.

As the result of an altercation Friday evening with Mrs. Ophelia Rice and family, at their residence, Lake street between Aldrich and Bryant avenues, Patrolman Thomas Britt, of the fifth precinct police station, is to be made the defendant in a suit for damages. He will be charged with assault and battery upon Mrs. Rice. Mrs. Rice is said to have been so badly injured by the patrolman that she has since been confined to her bed and has required medical attendance. The neighbors sympathize with Mrs. Rice. At least two witnesses are ready to swear that the officer used undue force in attempting to arrest her.

Mrs. Rice, her daughter, Maude, and a young woman by the name of Mabel Whittaker attended a reception on Clinton avenue Friday night. They had nearly reached home when Mrs. Rice discovered that one of her gloves was missing. The girls went back to look for it. On their way back the girls picked up an armful of boards in front of a new residence. Patrolman Britt demanded what they were doing with the boards. Unknown to the officer, the girls received permission from the owner of the house to help themselves to kindling wood. So they replied that it was none of Britt's business. He ordered them to drop the wood, and although they continued to talk back, they did so. They allege that he swore at them and followed them home. There Mrs. Rice took a hand in the dispute and asked Britt if the city paid him to swear at young girls. He ordered her to go in the house and mind her own business. When she refused to do so,

according to her story, he grabbed her by the throat, threw her down and struck her. The girls ran screaming to the residence of Thomas Houston, near at hand, and informed him that a policeman was killing their mother.

Britt finally arrested the three on a charge of disorderly conduct. The case was promptly dismissed on motion of Assistant City Attorney Dickinson yesterday. Mrs. Rice is confined to her bed under care of Dr. Crosby. She has sought the counsel of Lawyer W. R. Morris, and a civil damage suit will be brought against the officer.

The Afro-American advance.,
Collection: Afro-American
advance (Minneapolis, Minn.; St.
Paul, Minn.) 1899-1900
Minnesota Historical Society 345
Kellogg Blvd. W. St. Paul, MN
55102 - This material may be
protected by copyright law (U.S.
Code Title 17)

Option 2: Explore the following digital collections listed below to find sources such as newspaper articles, images, maps, or documents. Utilize the search function to look for sources based on keywords, concepts, cities or states, and time periods that you would like to learn more about after watching *Paradox*. (Example search: *American Indian Movement Patrol in Minnesota, Minneapolis Police 19xx, Police Union in Minneapolis, Ophelia Rice*, etc.)

- [Newspaper Hub | Minnesota Historical Society](#) is a digital collection of newspapers from Minnesota.
- [Digital Collections | Hennepin County Library](#) is a digital collection of newspapers, photographs, and documents relating to Hennepin County.
- [Digital Collections | The Library of Congress](#) is a digital collection from the Library of Congress that holds newspapers, articles, documents, photographs, maps, videos, and recordings.

Once you've reviewed multiple sources, answer the following questions.

1. What stands out to you?
2. Who created these sources (image, news article, etc.), and what was their purpose?
3. How does the format or medium of these sources impact their message?
4. Are you in any way surprised by what you observe?
5. What questions do these sources raise for you?
6. How might the context in which these sources were created shape their content?
7. Can you identify any biases in these sources, how do they affect how you view the information?
8. How do these sources compare to others you've seen on the same topic?
9. What emotions do these sources evoke for you, and why do you think that is?
10. How might different people interpret these sources in various ways?