

# **IN HIS OWN HOME**

## **Study Guide**

by director Malini Johar Schueller

### **Introduction**

*In His Own Home* tells the story of the shooting of a Kofi Adu Brempong at the University of Florida in the spring of 2010, in order to make his story known. Few media sources outside of Gainesville, Florida picked up this story. Understanding how this tragedy occurred can potentially lessen police violence on campuses and in the public.

The film asks us to think about the role of race, mental illness, and the militarization of campus and city police forces in contemporary U.S. culture. These are issues with great topical importance, made highly visible from 2014-present, with police killings of unarmed black men and children in Missouri, Ohio, New York City, etc. and large scale grassroots protests. The questions below are designed to ask students to think about these profound and topical issues as they are raised by the case of Kofi Adu Brempong and *In His Own Home* and also to consider them in relation to the long history of movements toward racial justice in the U.S.

This guide includes discussion questions, activities and ideas for essay questions all of which are intended to promote critical thinking and understanding about questions of racial prejudice, the role of the police, militarization, and grassroots organizing. In addition, the guide also includes detailed questions about the film intended to help students become more astute analysts.

### **Objectives**

The teacher's guide will help students to:

- See this film as an example of the endemic intersection of racism and police militarization in our communities
- Recognize the importance of grassroots organizing and citizen involvement in bringing about justice and change
- Use the example of student and community protests to demand police accountability in their own communities
- Be effective and critical viewers of news media

## **Using IN HIS OWN HOME in Classroom and Discussion Groups**

Before screening the documentary each person should write a short response to one of the topics below using his/her own experiences, past readings, as well as classroom instruction.

After screening the documentary people should break into small groups and discuss how the film changed or affected their thinking about the topic they had written about before seeing the film. Groups can use the post-screening questions to inform their discussion.

After discussion each group can report to the class or group on the major points they discovered while screening the film.

### **RACE**

#### **Pre-Screening:**

- Are there stereotypes of Black men present in society? If so, what are they? If not, what were some of the stereotypes of the past?
- Does racial profiling exist in your community or in the U.S. at large?

#### **Post-Screening:**

- The film introduces the racism in the Gainesville Police force as an important context for the shooting and provides a discussion of an incident in which white off-duty police officers threw eggs at residents in an African American neighborhood. You are told in the film that the officer who shot Kofi was part of this group of Gainesville Police officers. Given Keith Smith's testimony after the shooting do you think his shooting was racially motivated or did he make a quick self-defense decision? Compare this to other cases you have heard about.
- Did the police officers in the film have stereotypes of African American men? If so, what might these have been?
- Nkwanda Jha suggests that African Americans and whites have different views of the police. Do you think she is correct?

## MILITARIZATION

### Pre-Screening:

- What are your views about police in the community and campuses having high-tech weaponry?
- What are your views about city and campus police having SWAT teams?
- Do you think of college campuses as part of the militarization of America? Discuss different aspects of the campus including ROTC, marching bands, military recruiters, campus security.
- Is our society becoming more militarized? If so, why?

### Post-Screening:

- Paul Ortiz asserts that police officers ought not to have automatic weapons and armored vehicles that we see in the police force recruitment film and on display at the homecoming parade. Why do local police forces and university police forces have such powerful weaponry? Do you think these weapons are necessary?
- What events have fostered this high level of fire power? Paul Ortiz mentions 9/11.
- How did the use of the SWAT-like team affect what happened to Kofi?
- The movie shows University of Florida's homecoming parade to be militarized. Examine the parade closely and see if it promotes militarization.
- Professor Paul Ortiz asserts that police officers ought not to have automatic weapons and armored vehicles that we see in the police force recruitment film and on display at the homecoming parade. Why do local police forces and university police forces have such powerful weaponry? What events have fostered this high level of fire power?
- What do you think of the police recruitment video shown in the film? What messages does it convey to potential police officers?

## MENTAL ILLNESS

### Pre-Screening:

- What should the role of the police be in relation to people with mental illness? How has your community addressed the question of police interactions with people who have mental illness?

### Post-Screening:

- The film shows that Kofi was having problems with mental illness. What kind of help did Kofi receive and what were the problems with this help? What can be done to improve assistance to people with mental health issues?

## POLICING

### Pre-Screening:

- Do you think police often injure people fatally because they have to defend themselves? Write about an example from your community.
- What roles should the police play on campuses and communities?

### Post-Screening:

- How do the police officers explain why they shot Kofi? You might want to consider how Officer Smith (@ 6:00) and Captain Jeff Holcomb (4:20) explain the reason for Kofi's shooting. Are you convinced by their accounts?
- What was the timing of events? What might the timing of police actions indicate about their tactics?
- Adu Brempong walked with a cane as a result of polio and the only "weapon" he had was a light aluminum table leg, incapable of causing any significant injury, and yet the officers found Kofi a threat. How can we understand the threat the police felt?
- Jaclyn states that Kofi didn't come out because in Ghana when police come to your house you are sure to be attacked. Do you think there are people in the U.S. who fear that as well?

## **GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING**

Pre-Screening:

- In addition to voting do you think there is a role for grassroots organizing and protest to achieve social justice? Write about an example about grassroots organizing that did/did not work in your community.

Post-Screening:

- What role did grassroots organizing play in bringing visibility and action to Adu Brempong's cause? Which groups were involved? What did they do? What impact did they have?
- Activists in Gainesville are demanding a civilian police review board. How might a civilian review board help to stop police violence? Does your community or university have a civilian police\_review board?

## **JUSTICE**

Pre-Screening:

- What do you think is adequate justice for victims of police violence?

Post-Screening:

- The case was ultimately resolved with a settlement between the University of Florida and Adu- Brempong's family. Do you think justice was served in this case? Explain the reasons for your answer.

## Analytical Essay Questions

The following questions are intended to enhance students' analytical and critical thinking skills and their abilities to be careful viewers.

1. How do you interpret the two police officers' comments that Kofi's smile scared them? Why do you think they were scared of his smile?
2. In the film, the police action and shooting of Kofi Adu Brempong is framed by a conversation between a mother and her child. In what ways does the whispering of the mother and child during the shooting affect your viewing of the film?
3. What is the significance of the graffiti wall at the end of the film? What do you think the graffiti artists hoped to achieve by creating that graffiti?
4. How does the police recruitment video shown in the film compare to the home video of the actual attack on Kofi Adu Brempong?
5. *In His Own Home* interviews one of Adu Brempong's students, colleagues, and neighbors. The film also includes footage from speeches made by Adu Brempong's family. What do we learn from them about Kofi as a person and as a teacher? How might Adu Brempong's physical condition and attitude towards students and colleagues be important?
6. How does the film undercut the police narrative of the incident?
7. Comment on the juxtaposition of the University of Florida homecoming parade with the protest marches for Kofi Adu Brempong.

## Research Essay Questions

The following questions are designed to link this film to important moments in US history through research.

1. Compare the marching of the protesters to the march on Selma. Are there any similarities? What does Selma teach us about marches today?
- 2.. How do you compare civil rights struggles with the Justice for Kofi? Use any one examples in the civil rights struggles with justice for Kofi.
3. What might Dr Martin Luther King Jr. have thought about this incident and why? Use any one speech of Dr King to support your answer.
4. Compare the use of the CIRT team in this incident to the use of SWAT teams at an earlier moment (the 1960s, post Hurricane Katrina) or with similar uses today.
5. On March 1 2010, Kofi Adu Brempong, a Ghanaian citizen completing his doctorate at the University of Florida, was suffering from the delusion that people from Ghana were coming to kill him. The chair of his department called the University counseling service and the University Police Force in effort to get him help. However, instead of bringing help, the University Police came to his home, broke down his door, and shot him. How is it that his nightmare came true? What are specific factors about Adu Brempong's situation that led to this tragic outcome? What are the larger social and historical issues that contributed to it?

### Short List of Resources

Michelle Alexander. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. 2012.

Radley Balko *Overkill: The Rise of Paramilitary Police Raids in America*. Cato Institute, 2006  
[http://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/balko\\_whitepaper\\_2006.pdf](http://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/balko_whitepaper_2006.pdf)

Dan Bauman. "Campus Police Acquire Military Weapons" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Sept 21, 2014

Tom Engelhardt. "Militarization of America" *Alternet*, December 9, 2013.

David H Ikard *Blinded by the Whites: Why Race Still Matters in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America*, 2013.

Peter B. Kraska. Ed. *Militarizing the American Criminal Justice System: The Changing Roles of the Armed Forces and the Police*, 2011.

Omi Michael and Howard Winant, "Racism Today: Continuity and Change in the Post Civil Rights United States"

Kelley Robin D. G. "The U.S. vs Trayvon Martin" *Counterpunch*, July 15, 2013.

Kelley D. G. "Why We Won't Wait Resisting the War Against the Black and Brown Underclass" *Counterpunch*, Nov. 25, 2014.

Schueller, Malini Johar "Policing the University: The Terror of Campus Security" *Counterpunch*, August 12, 2011

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