

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND ME

personal essay
Micah Shannon | 12

It's the late 2000s; I'm in my old backyard in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I'm out with some neighborhood kids and my dad is giving me a tomato we grew in our garden to eat, when we hear a gunshot down the street. The sound is almost deafening. My dad yells for us to get on the ground. A man was shot no more than a block away. This is nowhere near the first time

and we hear gunfire next door. The police shot our neighbor's pitbull.

It's 2016, Athens this time, and my dad tells me that the president of our homeowner's association called the police because a Black kid in our neighborhood was playing basketball with his friends. This is not the first police call like this, and it will not be the last.

"I wonder why we've banned tear gas in war, but not for domestic use."

I've heard gunshots, but it's the time I remember most vividly.

It's the late 2000s, and our house gets burglarized. When the police come, they hand us a card, and tell us they'll call if they get any leads. They don't, but they do tell us to get a dog to deter future burglars.

It's the early 2000s, still Minneapolis. It's late at night and the couple next door are having an argument. The police are called,

It's sometime around 2015, and I'm sitting in my church basement. A guy named John Lash is telling us how he shot and killed someone decades ago, how restorative justice saved him, and how he's dedicated so much of his life to stopping other people from falling into the same pit he did.

It's sometime in 2017, and I'm driving home from some school activity with my mom,

a criminologist who teaches her discipline to people in prison. She mentions that she has to send money to her "friend on death row" so he can pay for toothpaste. I can't believe that they make you pay for that on death row.

It's 2019, and my mom asks if I still use my "Magic: The Gathering" cards. I don't. She asks if I would mind giving them to her friend who just spent upwards of thirty years in prison, and wants to use them as a way to make social connections. I don't mind.

It's 2018, and I'm sitting in the CCHS library with my friend Maggie. We're reading Dostoyevsky's "Crime and Punishment" instead of "Catcher in the Rye" because we complained about it enough to Mrs. Guidry. I'm on chapter two, where the main character Raskolnikov talks with a man named Marmeladov, a bureaucrat who's drunk his life away, thrown his family into poverty and forced his daughter into prostitution out of economic necessity. He's a self-pitying mess, but at the end of his rant he says:

And [God] will judge and will forgive all, the good and the evil,

the wise and the meek.... And when He has done with all of them, then He will summon us. 'You too come forth,' He will say, 'Come forth ye drunkards, come forth ye weak ones, come forth, ye children of shame!' And we shall all come forth, without shame and shall stand before him. And He will say unto us, 'Ye are swine, made in the Image of the Beast and with his mark; but come ye also!' (30)

I read that, and I try not to cry.



digital graphic
Monique Thomas | 9

**EYE OF
THE HOPE**

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND ME (CONTINUED)

It's sometime in 2017 when I see a video of Daniel Shaver dying online. He is crying and begging for his life, but is shot five times because his hand slipped. I think to myself that there's no way anyone can excuse this level of police brutality.

It's 2020, I'm writing this essay, and I learn that the police officer who killed Daniel Shaver was found not guilty, and that the jury never even saw his death on video. After the events of this year, the people killed by police, the protests and the reaction to those protests, I am no longer surprised.

It's June of 2020 and I hear helicopters outside my window. I later learned from my parents that the Athens Clarke County police department used tear gas on a small group of protesters Downtown. I wonder why we've banned tear gas in war, but not for domestic use.

It's 2020, and my mom says that many criminologists don't

even use the word "criminal" because it inaccurately implies the existence of a type of people who do crime, and type of people who do not. I agree, and wonder why we are quick to call Trayvon Martin or Jacob Blake criminals but not my white friends who smoke a lot of weed but get good grades.

I've spent my whole life unable to avoid the broken reality of our criminal justice system. It's easy, if it doesn't hurt you, to ignore it or even believe in it. I've lived with a criminologist mother, met murderers, experienced crime, seen punishment, and I just can't believe this system works anymore. I've seen it destroy people, I've seen who it helps and who it doesn't and I just can't stomach that picture anymore. I believe that justice must be restorative, that the purpose of the court and the police is to prevent violence and rebuild communities, not perpetuate pain and destroy people. ○

MATCHBOX

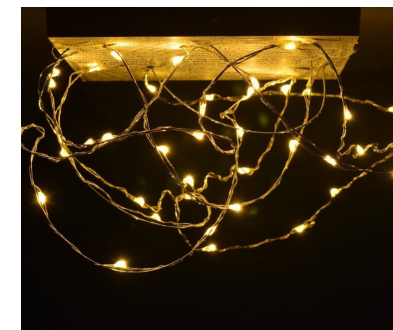
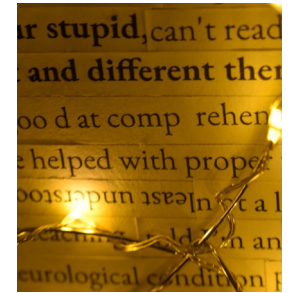
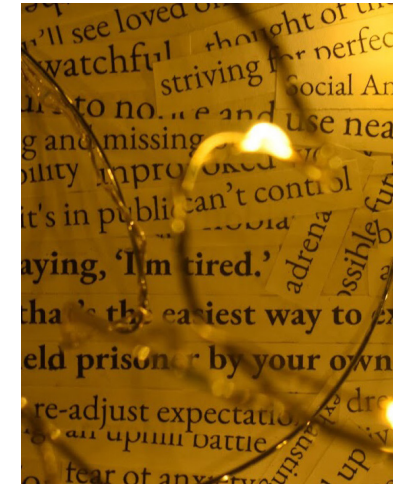


photo compilation
Samantha Brodrick | 12