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Gee, Officer Krupke: An Actor's Casebook

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GEE, OFFICER KRUPKE:
AN ACTOR'S CASEBOOK

by

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ABSTRACT

In 2016, I was cast as Officer Krupke in a production of *West Side Story* at Orlando Shakespeare Theater in Partnership with UCF. Even though Krupke can be thought of as a minor character in the play, bringing him to life required a great deal of research and imagination. In order to ground myself in the reality of the role, I researched the effects of implicit bias in modern policing, applied that research to Uta Hagen's Nine Questions, and brought that knowledge into the rehearsal hall and onto the stage. I examined how my character's interactions with Lieutenant Schrank influenced his actions and attitudes toward both street gangs in the play and reflected on how my research and these performances changed my point of view and helped me recognize my own biases. This thesis reflects that process and will serve as a tool available to any actor seeking to create his or her own interpretation of Officer Krupke.

For my parents who never lost faith in me.

I love you, Mom. I miss you, Dad.

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I owe a great debt to a great many people for their support as I wrote this thesis. My professors from both Southwest Minnesota State University and from the University of Central Florida and especially my thesis committee have shown me great patience and support throughout this process. My dear friends and classmates Kody, Maddie, Blaine, Mike, and MJ from UCF are among the most talented and challenging artists that I have ever worked with. My growth over these last few years is largely due to my interactions with them. I would also like to thank Jim Helsinger at Orlando Shakespeare Theater in Partnership with UCF for casting me in *West Side Story* and the entire cast and crew of that production: especially Mark Ferrara and Duncan Bahr whose backstage, spur-of-the-moment, in-character arguments helped deepen my performance night to night. Finally, without my parents, my brothers, my sisters-in-law, my best friends, my nephews, and my niece, I would be nowhere. Thank you for holding me accountable for this stuff.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

West Side Story by Arthur Laurents, Leonard Bernstein, Jerome Robbins, and Stephen Sondheim is a play that hinges on the tensions between two gangs in New York City. The Jets, a gang made up of young white men, and The Sharks, a gang of young Puerto Rican men who are new to the city, clash in an increasingly violent conflict that eventually leaves three young men dead and a neighborhood traumatized, but united. The adults in the neighborhood are largely absent in the play save for the chaperone of a dance, a kindly neighborhood shop-keep, and two police officers: Lieutenant Schrank and, most importantly for this paper, Officer Krupke. For a modern actor, one of the great challenges of bringing Krupke to life is reconciling his intentions to preserve order with the results of his actions. Schrank and Krupke exacerbate the tensions between The Sharks and The Jets at every turn despite their best efforts. It was important to me to find a reason why these well-meaning officers could fail to see what was happening so badly and in implicit bias I found a seed from which I could grow my performance of Krupke.

Implicit bias is a hot-button topic in contemporary America. Anthony G. Greenwald and Linda Hamilton Krieger define implicit biases as

“...discriminatory biases based on implicit attitudes or implicit stereotypes.

Implicit biases are especially intriguing, and also especially problematic, because they can produce behavior that diverges from a person’s avowed or endorsed beliefs or principles.” (Greenwald and Krieger, 951)

Most people don’t believe that they act out of prejudice towards others, but their implicit biases can, and often do, lead those same people to take actions that perpetuate the prejudices that they claim not to hold. These biases can range from assumptions about gender roles to something as

innocuous as assuming a soccer player has a great deal of physical stamina. Where implicit biases can have a terrible impact is when they are held by officers of the law.

In the last several years, police shootings of unarmed African American men have led to protests and riots across the country. Unrest has sprung up in response to police shootings in Ferguson, Missouri, the suburbs of St. Paul, Minnesota, Cleveland, Ohio, and too many more cities to name here. In Chapter Two, this thesis will give an overview of implicit bias by focusing specifically on the events surrounding the death of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida because, even though Martin was not killed by a police officer, the actions taken by neighborhood watch captain George Zimmerman are especially indicative of implicit bias in action. After that, there will be a thorough analysis of how these aspects of implicit bias can be applied to Officer Krupke's character in *West Side Story*.

When preparing a character, research and analysis are only the first step. In Chapter Three, this thesis will show my process in bringing Krupke to life. Beginning with preparation before the start of rehearsals using Uta Hagen's Nine Questions—Who am I? What time is it? Where am I? What surrounds me? What are the given circumstances? What is my relationship? What do I want? What is in my way? And What do I do to get what I want?—and leading into a narrative of the rehearsal process and the performances of *West Side Story* at Orlando Shakespeare Theatre in Partnership with UCF. Following this, there will be a chapter reflecting on the process as a whole.

Officer Krupke is a relatively minor player in *West Side Story*, but his presence has become increasingly relevant to our society today in the years since the play premiered in 1957 (IBDB). As implicit bias among officers of the law becomes a greater issue in America,

Krupke's failure to not only stop the conflict between The Jets and The Sharks but to understand that conflict stands out as a prescient story arc nestled inside an American classic.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH

Defining implicit bias requires an examination of how those biases form and an examination of those biases in action. This chapter will briefly examine the differences between acting on explicit and implicit impulses, between explicit and implicit attitudes, and how stereotypes play into both. This research will then be applied to Officer Krupke's actions in *West Side Story*—serving as a tool to help the actor find a psychological foothold from which to flesh out Krupke as a three-dimensional character instead of a simple caricature of an officer of the law.

Implicit Bias

To understand implicit bias and how it relates to Officer Krupke in *West Side Story*, one must first understand what it is and how its effects manifest in those who wish to enforce the law. Cynthia Lee, Charles Kennedy Poe Research Professor of Law at The George Washington University Law School, describes implicit bias in America as existing in the shadow of explicit racism. According to Lee:

“To match the egalitarian race norms that are prevalent in today's society, most Americans will try to avoid appearing racist in situations when it would be obvious to others that are acting in a racially biased manner. When the racial nature of the situation is salient or obvious, individuals are reminded that their actions could be seen as racist, and they are more likely to try to act in accordance

with egalitarian principles. If, however, there is some ambiguity about whether their actions would appear to others to be biased, they are more likely to respond in biased ways.” (Lee, 118)

To clarify her point, Lee refers to the Florida State Attorney’s Office initial decision not to bring charges against George Zimmerman in the case of the shooting of 17-year-old, African American Trayvon Martin, a decision that led to large protests accusing Zimmerman and the State Attorney’s Office of racial profiling and biased decision making. Zimmerman was eventually charged and acquitted of second degree murder, but initially the chief of police in Sanford, Florida where the shooting happened decided there were “...no grounds to disprove his (Zimmerman’s) story of the events” (CNN.com). That choice to initially withhold charges demonstrates Lee’s point about biased action being taken when there is ambiguity about whether that choice would be considered explicitly racist because eventually it was determined that enough evidence existed to bring Zimmerman to trial, but that evidence was not considered until there was an outcry.

In their article, Implicit Bias: Scientific Foundations, Anthony G. Greenwald and Linda Hamilton Krieger further examine implicit bias by tracking its origins in implicit attitudes and implicit stereotypes. Greenwald and Krieger describe an attitude as “...the tendency to like or dislike, or to act favorably or unfavorably toward, someone or something” (Greenwald and Krieger, 948). By that definition, expressing an explicit attitude would be a conscious choice while expressing an implicit attitude would involve showing favor or disfavor to something instinctually or for specious reasons. For example, if two separate people were going to a movie theater at the same time on the same night, one might choose to buy a ticket to a movie because

that person's favorite actor is the star and the other person may buy a ticket because the poster advertising that movie looks good to them. The first person in this scenario is demonstrating the expression of an explicit attitude and the second an expression of an implicit attitude. Implicit attitudes are often instinctual and can seem arbitrary while explicit attitudes are often just as arbitrary but have been considered and accepted by the person or people holding them.

Implicit bias comes into play when implicit attitudes are combined with implicit stereotypes. Greenwald and Krieger define a social stereotype as "...a mental association between a social group or category and a trait" (Greenwald and Krieger, 1994). They make clear that stereotypes do not necessarily reflect a statistical reality. Stereotypes are assumptions that apply a trait from a small sample size to an entire population. By this definition, a statement that "all people with prescription eyeglasses have imperfect natural vision" is not a stereotype because it is nearly 100% accurate. However, a statement that "all people who wear prescription eyeglasses are intelligent" is a stereotype because, while it is certainly true that some people who need corrective eyewear are intelligent, glasses are not a measure of intellect. The person making the second statement may have met several intelligent people who wore glasses and that stereotype took hold, leading to their assumption that everyone who wears glasses is smart. That assumption, when combined with implicit attitudes about smart people, creates implicit bias. In this example, the bias is relatively benign—people with glasses are smart—but an implicit bias along gender or racial lines can be terribly negative.

We can use the events surrounding Trayvon Martin's death at the hands of George Zimmerman to show the negative effects of implicit bias. George Zimmerman shot Trayvon Martin on February 26, 2012 as Martin was returning to his father's home after buying candy at a

local convenience store. Zimmerman was a neighborhood watch captain. He called the police, “...referring to Trayvon Martin as ‘suspicious’” (Dahl). Zimmerman was instructed not to confront Martin, but he ignored those instructions and in the ensuing struggle, shot and killed Martin. Why did Zimmerman consider Martin to be “suspicious?” Zimmerman and Martin had not met before, so Zimmerman could not have been motivated by a prior interaction between the two of them. Martin did not seek out a confrontation with Zimmerman. We know this because Zimmerman called the police before the confrontation to describe Martin. With this information, we can only assume that Zimmerman believed Martin was suspicious because of implicit bias. Zimmerman assumed, thanks to his implicit stereotypes, that someone who looked like Martin was a threat to the neighborhood he was watching. Whether the Zimmerman was holding a stereotype against teenagers or African Americans is a subject beyond the scope of this paper, but we can surmise that a stereotype was held. This stereotype was then connected to attitude—acting “favorably or unfavorably toward someone or something” (Greenwald and Krieger, 948)—when Zimmerman decided to both call the police and ignore their instructions. The argument can be made that calling the police was an expression of Zimmerman’s explicit attitude. It was a conscious choice based on his experience as a member of a neighborhood watch when a “suspicious” person is seen in the neighborhood. Ignoring police instructions by personally confronting Martin can be seen to be an expression of implicit attitude. He was instructed not to confront him, but he still confronted him. This is an implicit stereotype feeding an implicit attitude—implicit bias in action.

Manifestations of Implicit Bias in Officer Krupke

When examining implicit bias in the context of performing as Officer Krupke in *West Side Story*, it is important to look at how implicit bias can influence a police officer's actions.

“...police officers learn to respond to people, places and situations based on their experiences, including how they were trained and taught in the police academy, by field training officers, supervisors and others. In fact, these influences, among others, may and often do include racially prejudiced attitudes. It is therefore important to acknowledge that behaviors based on police experience suffer from the same misinformation and prejudices as the behavior of other citizens.” (Alpert et al, 413-414)

What this tells us is that, to examine Officer Krupke's implicit bias, one must look to his actions and how they stem from his personal history and his interactions with the people who hold influence over him. Since Krupke is a fictional character and only exists as a piece of art, there is only so much of his life that can be examined. One part of his life that is available to examine that was mentioned by Alpert and his co-authors, though, is Krupke's relationship and interaction with his supervisor, Lieutenant Schrank.

When Krupke and Schrank first appear on stage, they break up a fight between The Jets and The Sharks and are described in the stage directions as follows:

“It is stopped by a police whistle louder and louder and the arrival of a big, goon-like cop—Krupke—and a plainclothesman: Schrank. Schrank is strong, always in command; he has a charming, pleasant manner which he often employs to cover his venom and his fear” (Laurents et al, 1)

Schrank is the dominant figure in the stage directions. As dialogue begins, he is much more verbal than Krupke. Krupke's first lines are barked commands and refutations of the young gang members' sarcastic quips, but Schrank takes a different tactic. He plays along with The Jets. What is telling is that even though Schrank treats The Jets with a relative amount of respect, his initial interactions with The Sharks are dripping with racism. While The Jets are a gang that has been in this neighborhood for some time getting in fights with various opposing gangs as detailed in the lead up to the song "When You're a Jet," Schrank immediately blames The Sharks for any violence in the neighborhood. He says "Boy, what you Puerto Ricans have done to this neighborhood." before telling Bernardo, the leader of The Sharks, to "get your trash outta here" (Laurents et al, 2-3). When Schrank and Krupke exit, it is with these lines:

SCHRANK: Say goodbye to the nice boys, Krupke.

KRUPKE: Goodbye, boys.

While these lines and exchanges seem small, they give great insight into Krupke and Schrank's relationship. As Schrank contradicts Krupke's aggression with his generally laid-back, joking approach to The Jets, we see that he is in charge in spirit as well as in rank because by the time they exit, Krupke has started to play along with Schrank. He is taking a certain amount of Schrank's tone into his own. It can be inferred that he also takes Schrank's explicitly expressed attitude toward The Sharks as his own as well. We see Krupke embody Alpert, Macdonald, and Dunham's words in real time as he embraces the behaviors of a higher-ranking officer.

Later in the play, we see Krupke attempt to use Schrank's tactics on his own when he confronts Baby John and A-Rab after the rumble that resulted in two deaths at the end of Act One. Initially he attempts physical threats that one might expect from an officer described as

“goon-like,” but he soon attempts a softer technique that falls more in line with the attitude displayed earlier by Schrank. Krupke says, “I’ll make a little deal. I know you was rumbling under the highway—“ (Laurents et al, 93). It’s only one line and he’s immediately interrupted and frustrated by the young men with whom he is trying to communicate, but it speaks volumes. Schrank, and by extension Krupke, have shown that they blame The Sharks and other Puerto Ricans for the violence in their neighborhood and view The Jets as a reasonable yet trouble-making group. Krupke offering to make a deal with two Jets implies that he is willing to let them go in return for an excuse to punish those that he truly sees as responsible for the night’s carnage.

Officer Krupke develops his implicit stereotypes and attitudes about The Jets and The Sharks quickly in *West Side Story*, but they are key to understanding his actions and how implicit bias affects them. This understanding can then translate to the scenes in which Krupke does not speak. He is at the dance at the gym, but only speaks up to make sure both The Jets and Sharks listen to Gladhand. He is always in view of the audience, though, but the stage directions and choreography of the scene rarely mention him. It is up to the actor to decide how he behaves in that scene. With the stereotypes and attitudes that have been previously examined, we can apply Lee’s writing on actions taken through implicit bias to Krupke’s behavior in the dance-at-the-gym scene. As Lee wrote, “If...there is some ambiguity about whether their actions would appear to others to be biased, they are more likely to respond in biased ways” (Lee, 118). In Krupke’s case, that means watching The Sharks in the gym more closely and with more implied malice than he shows toward The Jets because he is negatively biased toward The Sharks and doesn’t believe that bias to be racist.

Examining Officer Krupke's implicit bias is an important step toward bringing the character to life on stage, but it is hardly the only step. This examination will play a major factor in crafting the answers to Uta Hagen's Nine Questions which serve to develop the rest of the character before entering rehearsals.

CHAPTER 3: PROCESS

Since there were only twenty rehearsals between the initial company orientation on August 16th until the first preview on the 7th of September, and much of that time was spent working dance numbers in which I did not participate, I have chosen to provide the work I did to create my character before the start of rehearsals in the form of my responses to Uta Hagen's Nine Questions and to synthesize my rehearsal and performance journals into narratives to relay my experiences in Orlando Shakespeare Theater's *West Side Story* more efficiently. *West Side Story* was performed 35 times with one performance cancelled due to inclement and dangerous weather. The production was well received with Matt J. Palm of the *Orlando Sentinel* calling it a "stellar production of the enduring classic." (Palm)

Uta Hagen's Nine Questions

In her book, Respect for Acting, actor and teacher Uta Hagen detailed a simple process to help an actor prepare for a role. That process involved the actor as their character answering a series of questions to explore the given circumstances—according to Hagen, "past, present, future, and events" (Hagen, 82)—and background of that character. The questions are as follows: "Who am I? What time is it? Where am I? What surrounds me? What are the given circumstances? What is my relationship? What do I want? What is in my way? What do I do to get what I want?" (Hagen, 82). Some of these questions can be answered about the play as a whole, some must be answered to address specific scenes and, at times, specific lines. It is very important to be specific in these answers because specific understanding of a character's background and desires leads to more specific actions on stage, which are, in turn, more interesting for the audience to watch. When a character such as Krupke does not appear on stage

or in a script often, it becomes important for the actor to use their imagination to fill in the gaps. In the following section, I will explore my answers to all nine of Hagen's questions as Officer Krupke.

WHO AM I

My name is Eugene Krupke. I'm 34 years old. I'm an officer in the New York Police Department. I take my orders from Lieutenant Schrank. He's a good guy. He doesn't take any guff from anybody. Neither do I. I have no problem busting heads and I'm good at it. That's probably why Schrank likes having me around. Sometimes a nightstick can say more than all the talk in the world. I grew up on the West Side. My parents came over from Poland. They converted to the Polish National Catholic Church after they came over. They felt a lot more comfortable with a priest who spoke Polish and the other Catholic church didn't have many of those. It was a nice church. The old ladies in the congregation would bring in *krowki* and *kolacz* to eat after Mass and they made *mazurek* at Easter. I didn't graduate high school, but I learned enough. I bummed around, raising hell for a while. I was even in a street gang! But my dad was pretty tough on me. he straightened me out good. He didn't make me go back to school, but he made damn sure I got a job and earned my keep. When I got a little older, I joined the Army. I got to be an MP. I was pretty good at it, so after I got back from the war I joined the NYPD. Now my beat is the same neighborhood where I grew up. It feels pretty good. That's why I'm tough on these kids. I know what a good beating can do for a kid. Turned me from a hooligan into a cop. Not bad, if I do say so myself. I bet I could have been a sergeant or

something by now if I wanted, but I like being on the beat. I'm not fancy. I see something that needs taking care of and I take care of it. That's what I'm good at. That's what I like. No messing around. That's the Polish in me. Some people may not think I'm not all that bright, but I get the job done. I'm married and I have a couple kids at home. Two boys, 10 and 12 years old. I make sure they're on the straight and narrow, too. My youngest told me he wants to be a cop. My oldest...I don't know what he's gonna be, but it won't be a hooligan if I have anything to say about it.

WHAT TIME IS IT?

It is August 12, 1954. Starting on a Thursday afternoon and progressing through the next few days. It's hot. The dog days of summer. You can see the heat radiating off the pavement. It's that time of year when the street smells like sweat and street vendors. Tempers are high and I gotta keep a closer watch on everyone.

WHERE AM I?

I'm in New York City. In America. I'm on my beat on the Upper West Side. It's a hot summer. Drunks keep pissing outside at night and then the sun heats it up so the smell just hangs there. You figure you'll get used to the smell eventually, but as soon as you put it out of your mind a breeze kicks up and blows it into your face again. There are always some trouble-makers around but lately it feels like it's been worse than usual. More fights breaking out between street gangs. It didn't used to be so bad, but I think these Puerto Ricans are just more violent. You'd think the heat wouldn't be so bad for them, but their tempers seem even worse than the American kids to me. Still and all, this neighborhood is my favorite place in the world. There's nowhere else I'd rather be.

WHAT SURROUNDS ME?

Act One, Scene One: I'm surrounded by both Jets and Sharks on the playground on my beat. There's a basketball court and a jungle gym. I can smell rotting garbage from the cans in the alley behind the deli about half a block away. It's wafting over thanks to a hot summer breeze. I don't like it. The damn hooligans are breathing heavy because they've been fighting. My nightstick is in my right hand, my whistle is in my left. Schrank is with me, taking the lead on putting these kids in their places. I'm wearing my uniform. My undershirt is wet from the sweat, but I don't want these kids to know how much I'm perspiring. If they spot a single ounce of weakness from me, that's it. It won't matter how many heads I crack, they'll never listen to me again.

Act One, Scene Three: I'm at the gym to keep the peace at this dance. Gladhand is nearby, sweating and fretting over all the kids at the dance. The gym has a kind of terraced entrance. People gotta walk in the door and then go down stairs to get to the gym floor. I don't mind it. I've got a bird's eye view of the whole dance floor. Both Jets and Sharks are here with their girlfriends. They're all dressed as nice as these hooligans and their little chippies can manage. I spot a flask and take it for myself. It's full of cheap hooch. I don't mind it, though. It's helping me tolerate Gladhand, that's for sure. A few of the kids are dancing too close for my tastes, but I'm here to stop fights. Gladhand can stop everything else for all I care. There's a band and a record player so that Gladhand can play his little get-to-know-you games. He's an idiot.

Act Two, Scene Two: I'm in a back alley with loose boards, garbage cans, and empty milk crates lying around. The only other people surrounding me are Baby John and A-Rab. The pavement looks wet in the moonlight. I don't want to think about the stink in this alley. I just want to get these kids to come to the station. Two people are dead and I know those Puerto Ricans are responsible. If I can get these boys to talk, we can really start cracking down on these Sharks and life will get back to normal in this neighborhood.

Act Two, Scene Six: I'm surrounded again by all The Jets, all The Sharks, their girlfriends, Schrank, Doc, Gladhand, and Tony's body. There's a gun. I hold onto my nightstick, but it's useless. It's all useless. My sidearm feels heavy against my hip. I have my cuffs. I use them to take Chino away. There is an atmosphere of tragedy and regret. All this could have been stopped but I didn't know how to stop it.

WHAT ARE THE GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES?

Ever since these Puerto Ricans have started showing up on my beat, things have gotten out of hand. The Jets and The Sharks are fighting more and more, and the bosses want me and Schrank to clean it up. Including the Army, I been a cop close to 15 years now and this is the worst I've seen on my beat. The Jets have gotten into some fights with other gangs before, but Schrank doesn't like how these PRs carry themselves and I tend to agree with him. They aren't like I was when I was a troublemaking kid. I understand The Jets, though. I was a lot like them as a kid. Boys will be boys after all, and these are, at heart, some good Polish boys for the most part. I mean, some of them aren't Polish but that's not the point. I'm getting distracted. These Sharks? I don't like them. Schrank

needs me to bust up fights and bust heads when needed. I'm ready for that. There's big trouble brewing. I can tell. And I'll beat that trouble out of anyone who needs it.

After all is said and done, though...once Riff, Bernardo, and Tony have all died...I don't know if what I'm doing is actually helping. I see Maria, weeping horribly over Tony and I get it. They aren't different. She looks like my mother at my dad's funeral. I gotta make a change. Busting heads failed. I don't want to fail again.

WHAT IS MY RELATIONSHIP?

Schrank: He's my superior officer and I look up to him. He isn't that much older than me, but he's in plainclothes and I'm wearing a uniform and I get why. The guy is smart and he really commands a room. I'm proud to work with him. We get along great. He always knows what he's talking about and if anyone can whip these PRs into shape, he can.

The Jets: They're hooligans and troublemakers, but I can relate to them, you know? I wasn't the best-behaved kid, but my dad knocked that out of me and now I'm a cop. Who knows what some tough love can do for them? Emphasis on tough.

The Sharks: I don't trust them and I don't like them. They're much more aggressive than your average Jet. I see the way their girls dress and the way they dance and it's too much. They need to show some modesty. Act like Americans. We gotta deal with them, since they're here and they don't seem to be going anywhere, but I don't have to like it.

Gladhand: He's a wimp. He wants to be all lovey-dovey with these Sharks. He thinks a school dance can clean up the neighborhood better than a nightstick. What a waste of a man.

The NYPD: Being an officer is the greatest thing that ever happened to me. Better than getting married. Better than having kids. I have a purpose. I keep my streets nice and clean. It's more than a job to me. Working this beat is a calling.

The Upper West Side: I've lived here my whole life and I don't ever want to leave. It's in my blood. I'll take down anyone who messes up my beat.

WHAT DO I WANT?

Act One, Scene One: I want to enforce my authority and bring both gangs to heel.

Act One, Scene Three: I want to prevent the gangs from causing trouble at the dance

Act Two, Scene Two: I want to secure information from Baby John and A-Rab

Act Two, Scene Six: I want to prevent more bloodshed by Chino

WHAT IS IN MY WAY?

Act One, Scene One: The Jets and The Sharks show disrespect and arrogance toward me, their flippant tone diffusing my threats

Act One, Scene Three: There is so much happening at the dance, it's hard to maintain order. Gladhand's efforts at playing games with the gangs only makes things worse, but he's an adult, so I need the kids to play along with him.

Act Two, Scene Two: Baby John and A-Rab's distrust of authority figures stands in my way

Act two, Scene Six: I show up too late

WHAT DO I DO TO GET WHAT I WANT?

Act One, Scene One: “Knock it off! Settle Down!” -I bully both gangs

“Impossible!” -I warn Riff, Big Deal, and A-Rab

“Goodbye boys.” -I threaten The Jets, but nicely. Like Schrank

Act One, Scene Three: I survey and intimidate both gangs, but pay special attention to The Sharks. I threaten both gangs when they are hesitant to participate in Gladhand’s dance game.

Act Two, Scene Two: “Hey you two!” -I call out to Baby John and A-Rab

“Yeah, you.” -I ensure that they heard me

“I’ll crack the top of your skulls...” – I intimidate them

“You wanna get hauled...” -I threaten them

“I’ll make a little deal...” I reason with them

“OK, wise apples...” -I bully them

Act Two, Scene Six: I do nothing. I can only stand impotent in the face of failure

Rehearsal

Rehearsals for *West Side Story* began with a meet and greet session to introduce the cast and crew to each other and to the staff of the theater. With thirty primary cast members, I made it a point to seek out and introduce myself to this production’s Lieutenant Schrank, Duncan Bahr

since I would be spending the majority of my time on and off stage with him. We got along well and would be instrumental in helping each other develop our characters.

Because the rehearsal period was so hectic, we did not have an initial read-through of the script with the full cast. Instead, the singers and dancers split off to work with the musical director and choreographer. Later in the week, I met with the director, Jim Helsinger, for an individual rehearsal in which we discussed Officer Krupke's character and given circumstances. We discussed Krupke's youth and where he grew up, why he became a cop, and what he wanted for his neighborhood. We agreed that he was probably a troublemaker as a kid. While Krupke may threaten the Jets, he's just trying to be stern the only way he knows how. He wants to help them. He wants to make sure they don't ever go too far because he recognizes himself in them. He was a poor Polish kid, himself once, after all. So while he threatens the Jets with his nightstick, he never really means to harm them. He always gives them a chance to shape up. The problem for him comes with the Sharks. Even though the Sharks have a lot in common with the Jets to an outside observer, Krupke doesn't trust them in the same way he trusts the Jets. With the Jets, Krupke has common ground. They eat the same stuff on the holidays. They speak the same language literally and figuratively. The Sharks are an unknown quantity that, frankly, Krupke doesn't want to know. Their accents are strange to his ear and he doesn't care what the government says about Puerto Rico being a U.S. Territory, in Krupke's eyes they're nothing but foreigners.

In my conversation with Helsinger, I brought up some of the concepts from my research on implicit bias and he seemed very excited by them. He told me a story about his father-in-law who was a cop in Philadelphia. He said that his father-in-law was the kind of cop who would

treat a Black man in a winter coat on a hot day as a threat and would search him for a weapon with or without probable cause. With that in mind, we agreed that Krupke should take a much more aggressive stance toward the Sharks. Unfortunately, Krupke has very few scenes with the Sharks and almost no written dialogue with them. Helsinger and I discussed different tactics we could use to show Krupke's antipathy toward the Sharks in the opening scene and during the dance at the gym.

We then turned to Krupke's scene after the rumble when he confronts A-Rab and Baby John. The key to my characterization of Krupke comes when, after the young Jets have instinctively taken an irreverent and flippant tone during their conversation, the officer says "I'll make a little deal. I know you was rumbling under the highway—" (citation) before being cut off. Helsinger asked me what deal I was willing to grant the boys. My belief is that Krupke was going to let them go with a warning. He assumed that whichever Jet had killed Bernardo had done so in self-defense. In my mind, Krupke blamed the Sharks for escalating the violence in the neighborhood from a few fistfights into combat with deadly weapons and he wanted the young Jets to give him a reason to arrest the lot of the Puerto Ricans. When Baby John and A-Rab cut Krupke off and reject his kindness before he can even offer it, it gave me a reason to go back to aggressive, stern tactics. Krupke threatens the boys physically, and they sneak behind him and trip him up.

Once we got into running larger portions of the show with the full cast, I continued to play with Krupke's biases and prejudices. While blocking the dance at the gym in act one, Helsinger gave me the freedom to scan the crowd of Sharks and Jets and choose the people I would chastise. So while I as Krupke saw Riff clutching his date's buttocks in the middle of the

dance floor, it was the sight of Teresita and Francisca arguing about who would dance with Indio that triggered a threatening gesture. And while I did threaten one of the Jets when he made a joke at Gladhand's expense, my gaze and my threat quickly moved over to the Sharks. Unfortunately, when we moved onto the set, much of this changed since I was blocked to stand above the dancing crowd instead of on the same level with them.

This change in blocking did come with a new opportunity to show Krupke's bias. Now, instead of reacting to the Shark rank and file, Bernardo had to walk right past me. This allowed me to improvise a threat to him each time he entered and gave me a character that I could focus on as a potential source of trouble. I wanted to make sure that any Shark who looked at me would know that I was watching their leader and that I was in no mood to tolerate their aggressive behavior. This scene also required me to leave the gym before the dance was over. The justification we came up with involved my distaste for Gladhand's optimism that these disparate groups could coexist if they simply danced together. Since Gladhand's planned "Get to know you" dance failed, I reasoned that Krupke would take great pride in saying "I told you so." It gave me a reason to leave the stage early that was in character and allowed me to foist Krupke's bias on another adult character.

The final scene of the play was something that Helsinger allowed me to discover on my own. With all my talk of Krupke's implicit bias, I wasn't sure what to do in the face of Maria's grief. During our designer run, I found the end to his story. As Schrank and Krupke enter the stage, they see Maria wielding Chino's gun. Watching her weep over the body of her lover, to me, finally triggers Krupke's empathy. He sees her as a person. Someone no different than him

and someone he let down. As we connected the full story of the play together, I found myself wiping my eyes every time I put my handcuffs on Chino to lead him away.

Performance

As previews and performances began, the last note I received from Jim Helsing was to remember the physicality and we had developed to make Krupke an imposing physical presence. If the audience doesn't read his presence as intimidating, they won't understand why none of the young characters trust him. The song that the Jets sing about him is funny, but he cannot come across as a joke to the audience. This was an important final note for me to receive because one of my biggest flaws as an actor is my tendency to play up humorous situations on stage. Especially once I'm in front of an audience.

To ensure that the hard work that went into crafting my character didn't fly out the window, I had to make sure I took the time to breathe into my character. To do this, I found a spot out of the audience view and away from the other cast members where I could pace back and forth, take deep breaths to expand my ribcage and push my torso forward as though Krupke was a boulder, rolling inexorably toward the trouble makers on his beat. Fortunately, the dressing rooms for the actors playing the adults in the show was on the opposite side of the stage from those of the actors playing the gang members. This practice helped me to focus, find my voice, and remind me of my character's history and frustrations with the young people in his neighborhood. It was especially important that I did this during performances because it helped me refrain from listening too hard to what was happening on stage. The emotionally resonant performances throughout the production and especially the performances of Carly Evans and

Karli Dinardo as Maria and Anita were so moving to me that I had to find a way to tune them out to retain Krupke's status and demeanor.

Even with those exercises, I found that I was losing some of my intensity and directness after the first week or so of performances. Part of that can be attributed to the repetition of an eight to nine show week. Mark Ferrara and Duncan Bahr, who played Doc and Schrank respectively, noticed a similar drop in their performances, too. We began to improvise debates in character about what should be done about the increasing violence in the neighborhood of the show. Ferrara as Doc argued that the Sharks and the Jets had more in common than they thought and that they just needed to get past their surface differences to get along. Bahr as Schrank and I as Krupke took the opposite view. We argued that the Jets could go too far sometimes, but they were just kids while the Sharks were inherently more violent and dangerous. Logically, our arguments didn't hold as much weight as Doc's. Schrank and Krupke relied on anecdotal evidence, emotional appeals, and using each other's opinions as proof of our own beliefs. We put the practices of implicit bias that have been observed in police officers as detailed in chapter two into effect in our improvised debates on a near nightly basis. We found that our debates helped keep our performances fresh and in the moment since we were reestablishing our characters' perspectives so often.

During the run of *West Side Story* I continued to find new ways to act on Krupke's antipathy and distrust toward the Puerto Rican characters. During a fight call in the second week of performances, Maxel Garcia, who played a Shark named Luis, pointed out that for all Krupke's posturing and threatening, his was the only character that Krupke actually manhandles during the show. We decided to play with that dynamic. I had been blocked to run on stage and

pull Maxel away from the Jet with whom he was fighting. Without changing the fight choreography which would have been unprofessional at best and dangerous at worst, we adjusted the aftermath of the moment. Maxel played up the pain my character had caused his by clutching his shoulder and spitting in my direction as he exited the stage. With every move he made, I began to stare him down with a challenge in my eyes. We carried that relationship over to the dance at the gym. At one point in the scene, my job as Krupke was to keep the Jets and Sharks from making fun of Gladhand. In keeping with the work I had done with my character, I took a stern tone with the Jets, but saved my most aggressive actions and looks for the Sharks and particularly for Maxel's Luis. On some nights, if I heard him whispering in Spanish I would bark "English!" at him. When that happened during a student matinee, I heard shocked gasps from the crowd. It felt great to elicit that kind of reaction and I firmly believe that it led to an interesting back and forth between students and teachers during the talk-back after that performance in which a teacher argued that the type of racism on display in *West Side Story* no longer existed in America. The students disagreed vehemently.

The final change that arose in my performance centered around Krupke's implicit bias was subtle. I don't think anyone noticed it. It came in the final scene. After Tony had been murdered and Maria had dropped the gun to the ground, members of the Sharks and Jets came together to form a kind of honor guard to carry Tony's lifeless body off stage. To get to Tony's body, one of the Sharks, Toro played by Ellis Endsly, had to walk right past the gun. During a performance about three weeks into the run, I caught myself reaching toward my holstered sidearm when Ellis got close to the weapon on the ground. That simple gesture was, to me, a sad comment on just how deeply Krupke's prejudice runs. Because while seeing the grief-stricken Maria always served to shatter Krupke's preconceptions, his beliefs and prejudices run deep. No

one simply flips a switch and eliminates all bias and prejudice from their mind and heart. The simple act of reaching for my gun because a Puerto Rican character was in proximity to a weapon spoke very deeply to me because while I was in character as Krupke, it still came from me. It was a physical manifestation of my own internalized bias given shape by this character. That's the power of a great character in a great show and the thrill of playing him. Even though Krupke wasn't on stage much, he still forced me to commit to the act of creating him night after night and in that act of creation, I still learned truths about myself. Ugly truths, to be sure, but truths that will allow me to better myself.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

Officer Krupke is a relatively minor character in *West Side Story*. He only appears in a few scenes and doesn't say much when he's on stage. However, that does not mean that his presence in the play can be ignored or that the actor playing him can afford to forgo research into the background and psychology of the character. By incorporating concepts about implicit bias and finding a psychological reality for Krupke, I was able to give the actors playing Sharks and Jets more to react to in character and aid the audience in seeing and understanding why the youth refused to trust the adults around them. My work as an actor on this production also taught me about myself.

In researching implicit bias and applying that information to Officer Krupke, I learned harsh truths about myself. I noticed more and more moments like the ones Cynthia Lee described where I was asking myself if what I was doing would be seen as racist or sexist or discriminatory in some way or whether the situation was ambiguous enough to yield to my own ingrained biases. Since playing Krupke, I've made conscious efforts to recognize these moments when they come and force myself to act contrary to those discriminatory biases. My hope is that, through this constant work of self-reflection, my implicit biases will more accurately reflect the explicit, non-discriminatory beliefs I hold. I have failed on more than one occasion, but my successes in this endeavor have outnumbered those failures. Of this, I am proud.

I am also proud of the work that the company at Orlando Shakespeare Theatre did on *West Side Story*. As an actor, the feeling of an audience that is invested in play unfolding before them is palpable and indescribable and I felt that investment during every performance. Even when the cast was physically and emotionally exhausted at the end of a performance week, there

were tears and thunderous applause to be seen and heard from the crowd. The proudest moment for me came when my father watched our production. He said to me, “Sometimes I have to pretend to enjoy your plays, but I don’t have to this time. That was wonderful.” The compliment was slightly backhanded as most compliments from Minnesotans are, but I wouldn’t trade it for anything. It came from the heart and he meant every word of it. Officer Krupke and OST’s production of *West Side Story* gave me that moment and I’ll cherish it for the rest of my life.

APPENDIX A: ADDENDUM TO CHAPTER 2

To expand on my examination of implicit bias, in this addendum I will examine various characters from film, pop-culture, and theatre to observe manifestations of those characters' biases in action. While this thesis was focused on how bias affected Krupke's actions in *West Side Story*, different characters manifest bias in different ways and that bias is reflected in the actions of those characters differently. In order to examine these characters' implicit biases, I will be referring to Greewald and Krieger's definitions of implicit attitudes and social stereotypes as described in chapter two.

It is important to note that not all bias is racial in nature. For example, in *The Poseidon Adventure*, Ernest Borgnine plays Detective Lieutenant Mike Rogo. Rogo and his wife Linda are passengers on a cruise ship called The Poseidon. They are shown to be brash, loud characters whose bickering is played for comic relief initially. Rogo is overprotective of his wife and overbearing toward others. As the film progresses, it is revealed that Rogo and Linda met when he arrested her six times for prostitution. Despite Rogo's protestations that he doesn't care about her past, he gets belligerent whenever he feels someone may be looking too closely at Linda. When the ship capsizes, and Linda must change out of her formal gown in front of people, Rogo furiously demands modesty. Before giving her his shirt so that she doesn't have to strip in front of the entire ship, Rogo says to Linda "Next time you put something on like I told you to put on" (Irwin, et al). This line shows that Rogo, despite his earlier protestations, is still uncomfortable with the idea that other men may see his wife as a sexual object or may have known her in her previous profession. Rogo holds certain ideas about sex workers. He is aware of the social stereotypes about sex workers and the attitudes he carries towards those stereotypes are negative. While he tells Linda privately that her past does not matter to him, his public discomfort as expressed in his defensive anger shows that he still carries an implicit discomfort and bias

against her previous life. His deep affection for Linda is matched by his private shame at her former life. This seeming contradiction is central to Rogo's character and to understanding implicit bias. Consciously, he would never insult his wife for the work she used to do, but unconsciously, her past is always scratching at him behind his eyes.

In *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, a legendary miniseries from DC Comics, a character confronting his implicit bias is shown late in the series. In this miniseries, at one point an electro-magnetic pulse has knocked out every electronic device in and around the fictional Gotham City. In a series of flashbacks with narration from unnamed characters, the reader is shown the events of the destructive night through the framing device of a retrospective news report. One of those characters is an elderly priest. The priest tells the story of how frustrated he had been before the disaster at a young "punk" who was playing a radio loudly in public and, according to the priest, "...seemed to be keeping pace with me deliberately, taking the joy from my evening walk" (Miller, et al 175). The priest saw the young man through the filters of his biases. He judged him according to stereotypes of people who dress a certain way and listen to loud, aggressive music. His distaste for how the "punk" presented himself publicly influenced his negative attitude toward the younger man. It is only after disaster struck the city and a riot broke out that the priest confronted his biases. The people who were the most violent were all wearing suits. They were young and middle-aged professionals. But the young man who the priest had judged so harshly protected him from harm and assisted passing out medical supplies after the violence had passed. The priest is ashamed at the way he judged the "punk." He recognizes his bias. We never see the character again, so it is unclear how his experience during the disaster in Gotham affected him in the long run, but we are given an excellent example in a few short pages of a character expressing his bias and confronting that bias.

Looking to the world of musical theatre, Javert in *Les Miserables* presents a fascinating example of a character allowing his bias to rule his actions to the point that he does not know how to exist after his deeply held biases have been confronted and debunked. The events in *Les Miserables* occur over the course of 20 years. During this time Javert doggedly pursues Jean Valjean. Eventually, Javert is captured by student revolutionaries who give Valjean the right to do with Javert as he sees fit. Valjean releases him and Javert returns the favor when he has one last opportunity to catch Valjean at the cost of the last remaining student's life. This action breaks Javert. Javert's perspective on life was shaped by his upbringing as the child of a convict in a women's prison. He states that personal change is impossible; saying "Once a thief, forever a thief" and "Men like you can never change" (Schonberg, et al) repeatedly. In the song "Stars," he compares himself to the unwavering heavens and looks to his rigid application of the law as a calling from God. Javert does not believe it is possible for a convict like Valjean to behave in any way but as a drain on society and a source of sin. When he is presented with incontrovertible evidence that Valjean is merciful and is capable of acting with compassion and care he does not know how to handle this information. For his entire life, Javert has held fast to his attitudes towards those who have been convicted of crimes. He treats anyone that he suspects of guilt as totally and irredeemably guilty. His bias is deeply ingrained into his every action as an officer of the law. This is shown over and over again—not only in his interactions with Valjean, but in his scenes with the students and with Fantine. When Fantine, who has turned to sex work after being fired from a factory job, defends herself from the unwanted advance of a wealthy man, Javert immediately takes the man's side and is prepared to jail Fantine despite her pleas for mercy. In his eyes, she is nothing but a prostitute and must therefore be guilty of anything of which she is accused. When Javert gets word of the students' plans to start a revolution, he is determined to

stop them no matter what their reasons for fighting their current government. To Javert, anyone who seeks to disrupt society is a bane on that society and must be punished. When he is finally shown how wrong he has been to act on his biases over the years he does not know what to do. Javert has only known a world in which he is ruled by his biases. Without them, he is lost. This is why Javert throws himself into the Seine. He cannot comprehend a world that does not adhere to the rigid biases he has structured his life around.

Comparing these characters to Krupke in *West Side Story* creates a picture of bias on a spectrum. While we see more of the social structure around Krupke and how his biases are fed by those in power and alongside him than we see of any of the three previous examples, parallels between Krupke and these characters emerge when they are examined side by side. Both Krupke and Javert use their bias to justify their actions. Javert's attitudes toward convicts and those he perceives as criminals fuels his rigid adherence to his interpretation of the law while Krupke's distrust and bigotry toward the Sharks fuel his disproportionately harsh reactions to their behavior over his reactions to anything done by the Jets. Rogo actively tries to fight his bias towards his wife's past while that same bias results in his tendency to lash out at anyone he views as holding his same point of view of her. With Krupke, in the last scene he sees the Sharks and Jets unite over Tony's body, but in rehearsal and performance I still couldn't help but reach for my gun when Toro got near the gun on the ground. The bias is still there for Krupke, even though he knows now how wrong he has been to hold on to it. Finally, the priest gives insight into Krupke's feelings as he hauls Chino away in handcuffs at the very end of the play. The priest sees how wrong he was about the young man with the radio and deeply regrets his judgment of the boy. The priest in *The Dark Knight Returns* feels deep shame at how he judged the young

man just as Krupke feels shame and impotence as he takes Chino away—too late to protect his beat from more death and heartbreak.

APPENDIX B: ADDENDUM TO CHAPTER 3

As part of my defense, my committee recommended I go back into my Uta Hagen questions and work to bring out more of Krupke's point of view. Specifically, they wanted to see his opinions of the Puerto Rican Sharks represented more clearly. To that end, I've written this addendum to Chapter 3.

WHO AM I

I don't trust these PRs. They come on my streets with their greasy hair and act like they own the place. Say what you will about the punks in the Jets, but they're at least from here. These spics run in here and start throwing their fists around like they don't need to know the lay of the damn land. What have they ever done to belong here? Nothing. Their girls run around acting like whores. They're rotten. All of them. And I'll crack every head I can get at to make sure they don't wreck my neighborhood.

WHAT SURROUNDS ME

Act One, Scene Three: I gotta keep a special lookout on the PRs. If anyone's gonna start something, I know for fact it's gonna be them. All these Sharks are huddled around, talking in Spanish. I bet they're saying trash about me and Gladhand. I usually wouldn't mind someone making fun of that milksop, but I gotta make sure his dance goes well tonight so anything they say about him reflects on me and I won't have these little pricks question my authority in any language.

Act Two, Scene Six: The first thing I see is that gun. Bernardo's sister is holding it and then she throws it on the ground and all I can think is that if one of these PRs picks up the damn thing, it'll be a bloodbath. I see that Shark, Toro, get near the thing and I reach for

my sidearm, but he doesn't pick it up. There are tears in his eyes. He picks up Tony's body with Sharks and Jets together and I'm stunned. They're kids. They're all just kids. I should have done more to stop this.

WHAT ARE THE GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES

I always get a bit of a short fuse around this time of year. I hate sweating and it's real muggy out. My uniform is thick and I sweat a lot this time of year. All the worst smells of the city can get on my nerves and when little bastards like these PRs stir up trouble, I don't exactly react with patience. Not that they deserve it. I mean, I ain't exactly a patient man anyway, but in the summer? Forget about it. The more of my time you take up with nonsense, the less time you'll have to wait for my nightstick to come out. Schrank knows I get like this and keeps me in check most of the time, but he won't always be around. The punks in this neighborhood better recognize that.

WHAT IS MY RELATIONSHIP

The Sharks: I don't want to mince words here. I fucking hate these PRs. They're aggressive, violent, and if I have to hear them say "buenas dias" to me one more time with those shit eating grins of theirs, I might just kill one of them. They don't belong here.

LIST OF REFERENCES

Allen, Irwin, et al. *The Poseidon Adventure*. Twentieth Century-Fox Film, 1972.

- In my Addendum to Chapter 2, I looked at Detective Rogo's implicit bias toward his wife and compared that to the bias that drives much of Krupke's actions.

Alpert, Geoffrey P., et al. "Police Suspicion And Discretionary Decision Making During Citizen Stops*." *Criminology*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2005, pp. 407–434., doi:10.1111/j.0011-1348.2005.00012.x.

- This paper was key to my understanding of some of the ways Krupke's bias could have developed. The focus on law enforcement and how bias can be passed from superiors to lower ranked officers changed my focus and led me to more closely examine Krupke's relationship with Schrank

Dahl, Julia. "Trayvon Martin Shooting: A Timeline of Events." *CBS News*, CBS Interactive, 12 July 2013, www.cbsnews.com/news/trayvon-martin-shooting-a-timeline-of-events/.

- Because I wrote so much about the killing of Trayvon Martin, I felt it was important to pull up information from a few different sources. This was one of them.

Greenwald, Anthony G., and Linda Hamilton Krieger. "Implicit Bias: Scientific Foundations." *California Law Review*, vol. 94, no. 4, 2006, p. 945., doi:10.2307/20439056.

- This paper showed me how implicit biases are formed and provided several useful definitions.

Hagen, Uta, et al. *Respect for Acting*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2009.

- I find Hagen’s Nine Questions to be incredibly useful in preparing a character.

The detail they require forces me to explore each character I play in more detail than I ever would have when I was starting out as an actor and has led to some of my favorite performances, including my performance as Officer Krupke.

“IBDB.com.” *IBDB: Internet Broadway Database*, www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/west-side-story-2639.

- I needed information on *West Side Story*’s original premiere date.

Laurents, Arthur, et al. *West Side Story*. Music Theatre International, 1956.

- The original source material that inspired this thesis.

Lee, Cynthia. “Making Race Salient: Trayvon Martin and Implicit Bias in a Not Yet Post-Racial Society.” *North Carolina Law Review*, vol. 91, 13 May 2013, pp. 101–157.

- This source explained the difference between acting on explicit versus implicit biases very well and led me to use the events around Trayvon Martin’s killing to find a potent, powerful, real-world example of the disastrous effects that can be led to when implicit bias remains unchecked.

Miller, Frank, et al. *Batman: the Dark Knight Returns*. DC Comics, 1986.

- In my Addendum to Chapter 2, I compared the bias of an unnamed priest character to the Krupke’s biases and how they both responded to their biases being confronted.

Palm, Matthew J. “Review: Orlando Shakes' Superb 'West Side Story' Is Timely, Touching and Tear-Filled.” *OrlandoSentinel.com*, 24 Sept. 2016, www.orlandosentinel.com/entertainment/arts-and-theater/os-mjp-west-side-story-orlando-review-20160924-column.html.

- I wanted to use a quote from this review to give context to the audience reaction to OST's *West Side Story*.

Schonberg, Claude-Michel, et al. *Les Miserables*. Wise., 1985.

- In my Addendum to Chapter 2, I compared the dogged officer Javert to Krupke. Both lawmen allowed their biases to fuel their actions and both struggled to let them go.

“Trayvon Martin Shooting Fast Facts.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 7 May 2018,

www.cnn.com/2013/06/05/us/trayvon-martin-shooting-fast-facts/index.html.

- Because I wrote so much about the killing of Trayvon Martin, I felt it was important to pull up information from a few different sources. This was one of them.