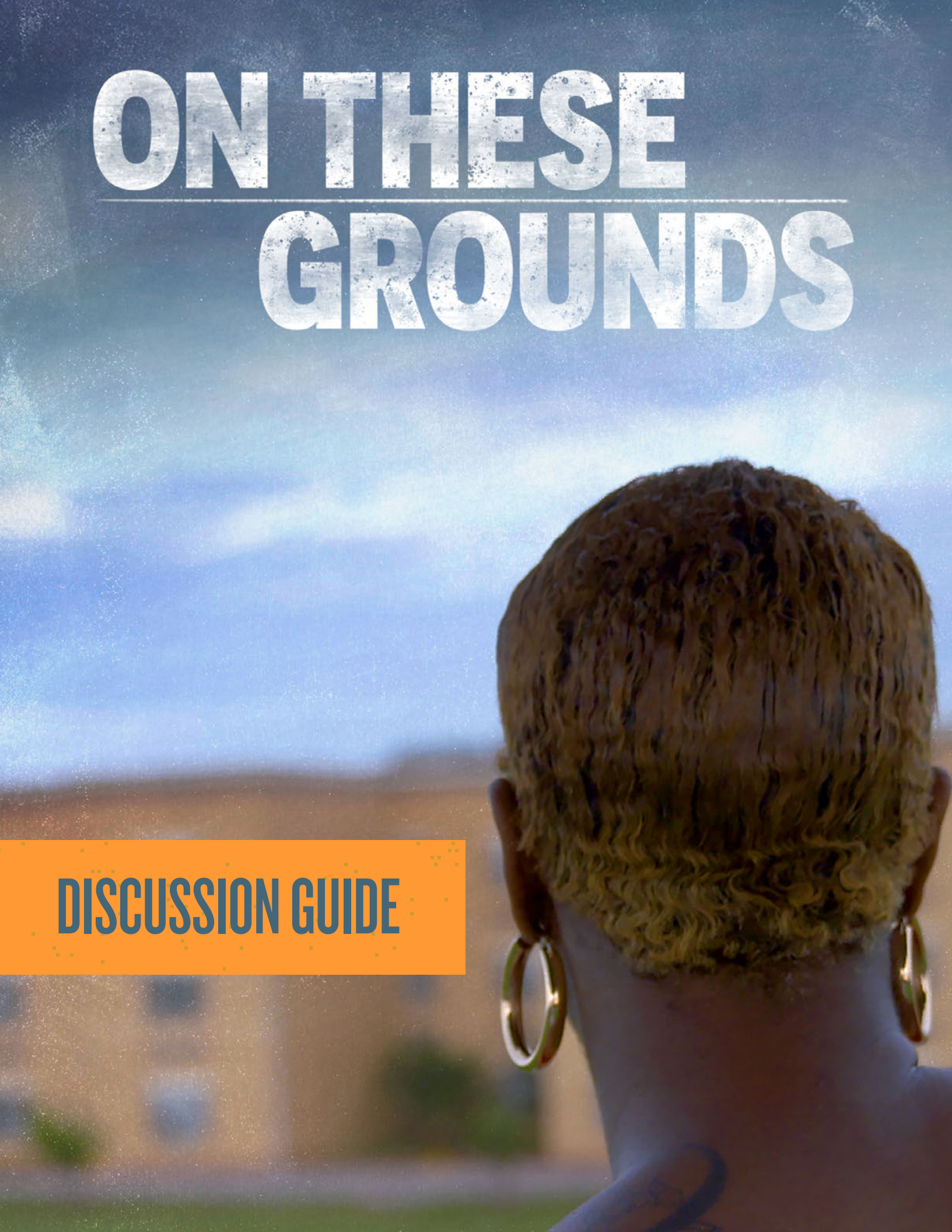
ON THESE GROUNDS



DISCUSSION GUIDE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

3 **WELCOME**
- LETTER FROM VIVIAN ANDERSON
- LETTER FROM THE FILMMAKERS

5 **ABOUT THE FILM**
- SYNOPSIS
- FILM PARTICIPANTS

6 **BACKGROUND**
- POLICING IN SCHOOLS
- SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE
- SAFETY IN SCHOOLS

8 **DISCUSSION**
- CREATING SPACE THROUGH CONVERSATION
- INTENTIONAL LANGUAGE
- DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

12 **TAKE ACTION**
- SUPPORT EVERYBLACKGIRL, INC. TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE HEAL
- LOOK UP DATA IN YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT, ADVOCATE WITH YOUR VOICE, AND VOTE
- HOST A SCREENING
- CONNECT WITH ORGANIZERS
- CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

14 **RESOURCES**

WELCOME

LETTER FROM VIVIAN ANDERSON

I was living in Brooklyn, NY when the video of Shakara's assault at the hands of a Spring Valley High School police officer went viral. As I braced myself to watch, I also came across a news clip of Shakara's classmate, Niya Kenny, who stood up for Shakara in that classroom and was later arrested for it. Why? Because she knew Shakara had no one else, Niya told a reporter.

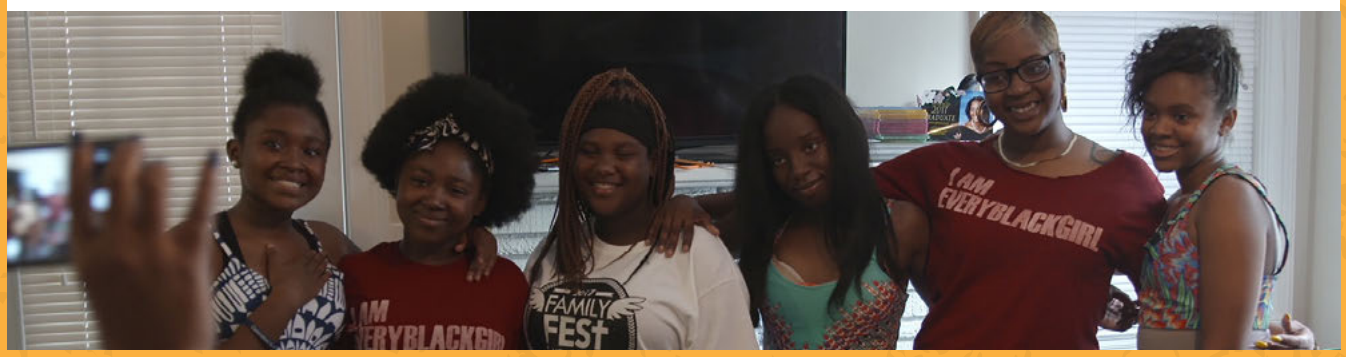
I just wanted to hug both of them. This was the world adults had created. Black girls still felt like nobody else will stand for them, that they have to stand for each other. No child should ever have to say that they have no one else to support them but another child. Niya and Shakara didn't have to walk this walk alone — no young person should.

I uprooted my life, moved to South Carolina and in 2016 founded EveryBlackGirl, Inc., a national campaign and program that centers and supports Black girls. What happened to Niya and Shakara was not an anomaly; it's the expected result of decades upon decades of racism and misogyny that has harmed Black girls in this country. School, a place from which a Black girl was historically excluded, is a microcosm of what's happening in our world.

Thank you for watching *On These Grounds*, and for being willing to spend 101 minutes of your time to truly see Black girls.

As you review this guide and join community conversations, I encourage you to release your own knowing and be open to looking at the biases you may have. We all have them. But being willing to let them go, to truly witness the harm that's happening to our Black girls, is how we can collectively cultivate the courage to take action and ensure this doesn't happen again.

Vivian Anderson
Founder, EveryBlackGirl, Inc.



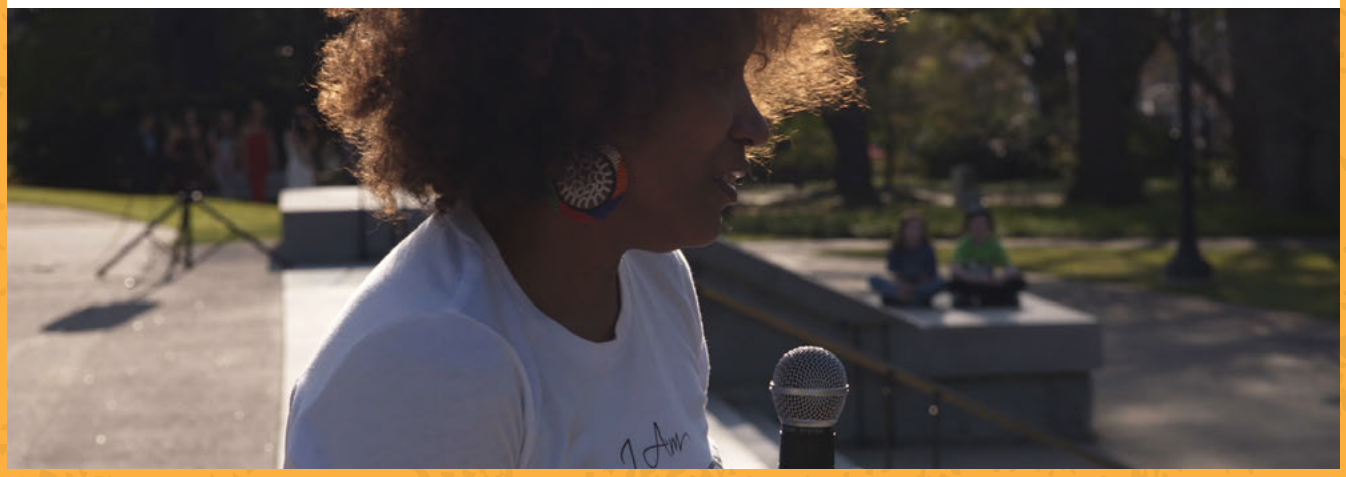
LETTER FROM THE FILMMAKERS

Thank you for watching *On These Grounds* and participating in a national conversation about what's happening in our schools. Although our history of structural racism is deeply entrenched, the time for change is now.

We made *On These Grounds* because Shakara and Niya in South Carolina, Brianna in San Diego, and so many other courageous Black children have refused to be pushed out of classrooms and labeled as criminals by the very people responsible for their education and safety. We made the film because caring adults like Vivian Anderson and so many other organizers, activists, and community members refused to accept the harm and oppression of our youth. And, we made the film because too many white perpetrators and bystanders in America still prefer to bury the past and blame children, even when they can see injustice with their own eyes.

We hope *On These Grounds* shows that we must get the criminal justice system out of the education system. Bias remains the driving force behind policies rooted in intersectional issues of race, gender, class, and disability. We hope the film can be a tool in the passionate work already being done for police-free schools and restorative healing practices. We hope it can provide a new perspective to some viewers and reflect a true lived experience for others. We hope each of you will discover your own way to connect what happened at Spring Valley High School to the new world we want to build together.

Garrett Zevgetis, *Director*
Ariana Garfinkel, *Producer*
Jeff Consiglio, *Producer*
Chico Colvard, *Producer*
On These Grounds



ABOUT THE FILM

SYNOPSIS

A video goes viral, showing a white police officer in South Carolina pull a Black teenager from her school desk and throw her across the floor. Healer-Activist Vivian Anderson uproots her life in New York City to move to South Carolina to support the girl and dismantle the system behind the assault, including facing the police officer. Adding context, geographer Janae Davis treks the surrounding swamps and encounters the homes of formerly enslaved people of African descent, connecting the past to the present. Against the backdrop of a racial reckoning and its deep historical roots, one incident illuminates how Black girls, with the support of organizers, are creating a more just and equitable future for themselves and our entire education system.

TOTAL RUNTIME: 101 minutes

RATING: The film is not yet rated, and we suggest the film is suitable for audiences 13 years and older. However, we recommend viewing the film in advance of planning a screening to determine the fit for your audience.

FILM PARTICIPANTS

Filmmakers

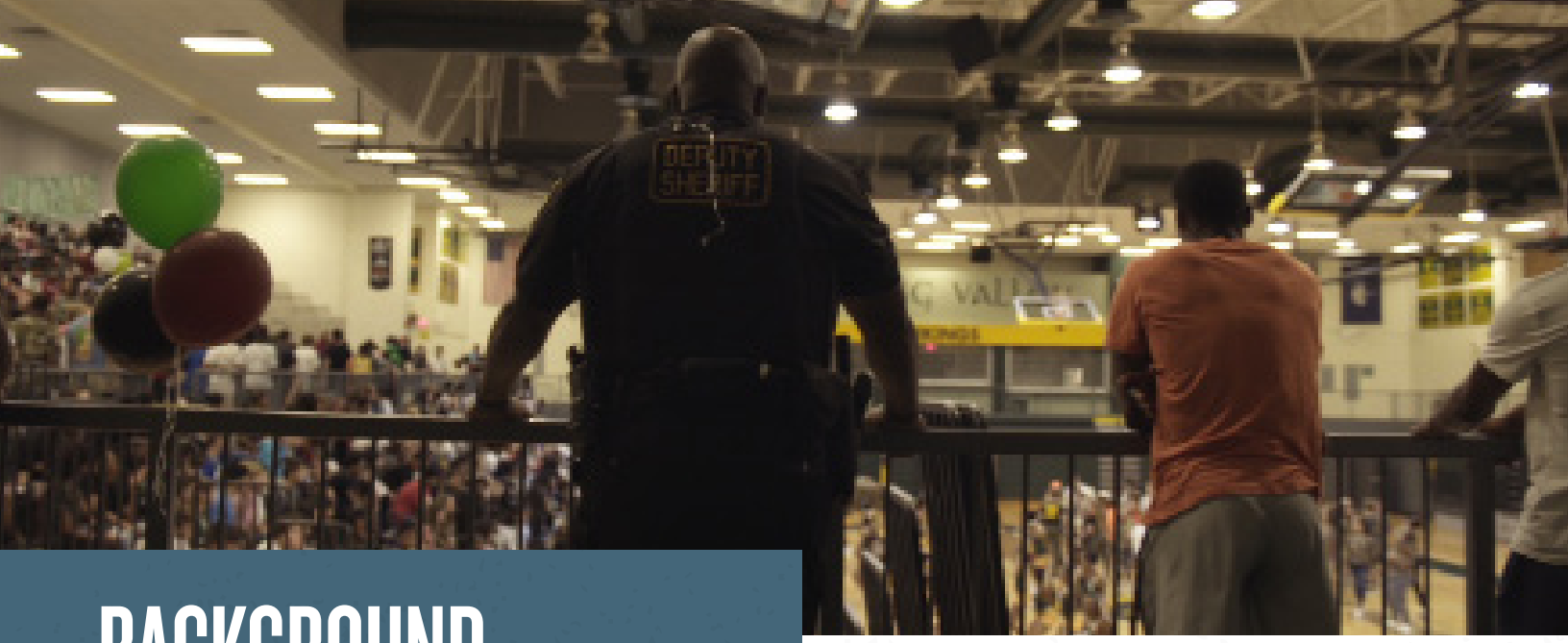
- Directed by Garrett Zevgetis
- Produced by Ariana Garfinkel, Jeff Consiglio, Chico Colvard
- Edited by Jeff Consiglio
- Co-Editor Chrystie Martinez Gouz
- Original Music by Chanda Dancy

Key Participants

- Shakara
- Niya Kenny
- Vivian Anderson, Founder of EveryBlackGirl, Inc.
- Ben Fields

Additional Participants

- Geoffrey Alpert, Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of South Carolina
- Brianna Bell
- Shauna Bell, Teacher
- Aneatra Brown Spann, Shakara's GED Teacher, Workforce Instructor
- Chris Crolley, Coastal Expeditions Tour
- Janae Davis, Geographer
- Carrie Dennison Elliott, Educator
- Robin DiAngelo, Author, *White Fragility*
- Dr. Bobby Donaldson, Professor of History, University of South Carolina
- Max Eden, Manhattan Institute
- Aeiramique Glass Blake, Director, Generation Justice
- Josh Gupta-Kagan, Professor of Law, University of South Carolina
- Susan Finley & Marc Bartley, Co-Owners, Spud Inc. Gym
- Catherine Lhamon, Chair, US Commission on Civil Rights
- Leon Lott, Sheriff, Richland County
- Judy Kidd, Classroom Teachers of NC
- Shawn McDaniels, Master Sergeant, Richland County School Resource Officers
- Bree Newsome, Activist
- Amanda Ripley, Journalist



BACKGROUND

POLICING IN SCHOOLS

The origins of police presence in schools dates back to the 1940s, and in 1953, the first School Resource Officers (SROs) were permanently assigned to Flint, MI schools with the intention of improving the relationship between the young people of Flint and the city's police[1] This led to a domino effect across the country, and by the mid-1970s, school districts in 40 states had some form of policing within their schools.

The increased prevalence of policing in schools also dovetailed with a rise in "tough on crime" values and policies, which were often aimed at young people of color. The Safe Streets Act of 1968, for example, offered millions of dollars in grants to law enforcement to create programming targeting youth, leading to the establishment of school gang databases and youth crime prevention programs that inevitably increased the criminalization of Black and brown youth. The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act that followed in 1974 allowed law enforcement to label children as young as nine as "pre-delinquents" and work with schools to monitor their behavior. Such policies were bolstered by the War on Drugs of the 1980s, philosophies like "broken windows policing" and the D.A.R.E. program, all of which legitimized pathways to criminalize Black and Brown youth.[2]

In 2018, after decades of expanding policing in schools, about 58% of schools reported having a police presence.[3] And the reality is that this approach to school safety has disrupted young people's growth and equitable access to education. Today, policing in schools is often tied to protecting students from school shootings, but the presence of armed police officers does not protect students from injury, and is instead associated with a higher rate of injury for students.[4] Crucially, police officers based in schools lead to worse educational outcomes for students. In Texas, police presence in schools has been found to lower graduation rates, and in New York, an increase in police presence in the neighborhoods of Black youth led to a drop in their test scores.

IN 2018, AFTER DECADES OF EXPANDING POLICING IN SCHOOLS, 58% OF SCHOOLS REPORTED HAVING A POLICE PRESENCE.