My presentation highlights the critical importance of acknowledging the reality of Black teenagers’ experiences with the police. Public conversations about urban police practices tend to exclude the perspectives and experiences of young Black people, the citizens most affected by those practices. The aim of our project is to access that critical knowledge and ensure it is represented in the public discourse. Rather than examining high-profile incidents of police abuse, we focus on the routine encounters between police and Black youth that take place countless times every day in cities across the nation—interactions that shape how kids see police and how police see kids.

Three findings stand out, above all, from our work:

- The ubiquity of police presence in the lives of Black youth. Every student who we interviewed lives with the ever-present possibility of being stopped, searched, and treated as a criminal. These negative encounters make many students feel “less than a person,” and cause them to curtail their own freedom at a critical phase in their development in efforts to avoid being stopped by the police.

- The depth of alienation between young Black people and the police. The overwhelming majority of Black high school students express great distrust of the police, so much that they do not feel comfortable seeking police assistance, even when someone close to them is the victim of a violent crime.

- The primacy of accountability. Unchecked police power—lack of accountability—emerged as the single greatest barrier to building a relationship of trust with police.

Drawing on these findings, we propose a set of policies that, taken together, have the potential to improve police accountability and yield more equitable and constructive relationships between Black communities and police.