

24.191S15 LAUNCH QUESTION #4

PUNISHMENT AND DETERRENCE

In his article in *The Atlantic*, “The Banality of Richard Cohen and Racist Profiling,” Ta-Nehisi Coates begins by quoting an argument for racial profiling given by Richard Cohen:

“In New York City, blacks make up a quarter of the population, yet they represent 78 percent of all shooting suspects—almost all of them young men. We know them from the nightly news. Those statistics represent the justification for New York City’s controversial stop-and-frisk program, which amounts to racial profiling writ large. After all, if young black males are your shooters, then it ought to be young black males whom the police stop and frisk.”

Coates thinks this argument fails to justify a policy of racial profiling. Are you convinced by Cohen’s argument that we should use race statistics to more effectively prevent crime? Or do you agree with Coates that any such policy will be racist and unjust? Or do you think we should adopt some intermediate position between the two authors’ views? (Remember: we’re not looking for you to give one particular answer rather than another. Instead, we just want you to discuss your opinions in a way that is honest but also open to the possibility that others might reasonably disagree. This is especially important to remember when discussing a sensitive issue such as race.)

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “The Banality of Richard Cohen and Racist Profiling.” *The Atlantic*, July 17, 2013. © The Atlantic Monthly Group. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <http://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

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