

Background

For Geoffrey Canada the situation in this country is quite clear: "Either we address the murder and mayhem in our country or we simply won't be able to continue to have the kind of democratic society we as Americans cherish." He believes that not only do we need to act now, but we need to act differently, we need to come up with innovative solutions to what has become a "national crisis." In chapter 23 of *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun*, Canada outlines five proposals which he believes the government should adopt now. Many others as well have offered solutions to the problem of crime, some successful, some failures, and some controversial.

Topic

Write an essay in which you examine **one** of the five proposals discussed by Canada, and offer your opinion as to whether this proposal is feasible and whether it could be effective. Your examination should specifically explain the proposal and how those in favor of it see it as helping to solve the problem of violence. Also, you will need to explain carefully why you think the proposal is feasible or unfeasible, as well as why you think it could be effective or why it might be ineffective.

Essay A

The government tries to lower crime and violence in our nation's minority communities by the passage of the thirty-two billion dollar Crime Bill, which proposed increasing the police force and building more prisons. Nevertheless, did this increase help our communities decrease crime? Did such a simplistic solution become the key answer to our nation's problems of violence? Sadly, the answer is no, and Geoffrey Canada stresses that it should be clear that simply passing tougher laws and adding more police on the beat will not deter violence or crime (Canada, 131).

Do not get me wrong, Geoffrey Canada is "a believer in community policing," but many of these police officers come from middle-class families and have trouble understanding situations involving poor communities. Here is one example. One day, Geoffrey's mother had sent his brother Daniel to the store with ten dollars. Daniel was nine at the time. Daniel, coming back with a scared look on his face, had been robbed of the ten dollars. The time was 1959, and in that time, ten dollars for Geoffrey's poor family was a great deal of money. So his mother called the police. The police took their time to arrive. When Geoffrey's mom explained what had happened, the two police officers looked at them as a "naïve family." "This contact with the police shook my confidence in the world. It was nothing they did, it was what they didn't do. They didn't take us seriously. They came because they had to come. I looked at the two white officers and realized that while their mouths were saying one thing, their manner and attitude were saying another. We can't believe you called us for just ten dollars" (14). The problem

here is not that the police are not doing their work, but that they do not understand what it is like to live in a poor community.

Canada argues that if we add more of the same middle-class officers this "war on crime" will not result in its purpose of justification. Many of these police officers have no knowledge of how to deal with the problems that evolve in poor communities. If we are going to hire more police, we should hire officers that come from the communities in which they work (130).

Geoffrey Canada stresses that it is clear to see how the prison system has failed to confront the problems of violence and crime. The Rockefeller Drug Laws (established in the early seventies by the governor of New York, Nelson A. Rockefeller) are laws that gave one long mandatory sentences if caught with a proportionate amount of narcotics. Due to this law, a great number of drug dealers were arrested and given long prison sentences. Hence more arrests, less prison space. In their report *Imprisoned Generation: Young Men under Criminal Justice Custody in New York State*, researchers Robert Gangi and Jim Murphy note, "In 1983, for example, 1,567 people were sent to the State's prisons for the sale or possession of drugs. By 1989 that had risen to 9,762, an increase of over 600%. As New York State doubled the number of State prisons between 1980 (thirty-four) and 1993 (sixty-eight), the costs of prison construction and incarceration skyrocketed. In 1980 New York State was spending 243 million dollars on its prison system; in 1993 it was spending 1.2 billion" (Canada, 131).

It is a waste of money to lose to such a law that won't work. Most of this money is needed for

schools and other services such as fixing roads. But the community demanded safer streets for our children. In my opinion, it is sad to see how money is highly needed for one thing and is being spent for something that doesn't seem to work.

Why do we have such an increase in imprisonment of drug sellers? Canada argues that it is partially because many of these "drug dealers" cannot find a job due to a criminal record. Keep in mind that the majority of these "drug dealers" come from poor communities. These increases are due to lower opportunities for criminals to find jobs.

In conclusion, the increase in the number of police officers the building of more prisons cannot work if such arguments like Canada's are not addressed by the government. I know that Canada speaks about the majority of poor communities because in my neighborhood, many people sell drugs for money and most of them hate the police due to their carelessness towards the people living in our community. This is why I highly agree with Canada's arguments against the Crime Bill, in that it needs adjustments in order for it to work and that it would be a great amount of money to waste for something that doesn't work.

Essay B

Our government has proposed many solutions to the problems of violence and corruption. The ironic thing about it is that they always seem to come up with the same ideas: increased prison sentences and more police. For some reason our society feels that more police will eliminate crime. I do believe that to have a well-run society we need police, but to fight the war on crime and to prevent the record number of kids dying from increasing even more, there has to be other strategies.

Geoffrey Canada, a well-respected youth counselor, opened up a recreational center in the inner city of New York. What was so different about this recreational center was that it opened right after school for the kids and stayed open through the late hours of the night. The center gave the kids somewhere to be and something to do, instead of being out on the street corners.

Canada is also author of a book called *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun*, a remarkable book about Canada's history growing up as a ghetto child, his

theories about what will happen to our society if we don't do all we can to stop the increase in violence and the strategies he proposes. Canada's proposals include creating a peace officer corps, reducing the demand for drugs, reducing the amount of violence on television and movies, and regulating the possession of handguns.

I as well as Canada know that the children are our future and they are the ones affected the most by violence. Canada points out that "a child dies from gunshot wounds every two hours." When Canada was a young boy, he was almost killed by a gun, when he encountered a "rifle . . . aimed right for my head." His experience as well as that of others are what made him think of strategies to prevent any more occurrences.

Regulating or banning the possession of handguns is his best proposal of all. There are at least 6 million guns circulating in the U.S. alone and every year 2 million more are being produced. The only intent of the gun manufacturers is making a profit. If we stop selling handguns, true, they will be out of business, but I am sure they can think of more productive ways to make a living.

Unfortunately, the reality is gun manufacturers and gun organizations play an important role in our society. They spend thousands of dollars, even millions, to keep the production of and demand for guns steady. So banning guns would be extremely complicated. However, I suggest that the production of handguns be reduced to two thousand guns every five years. Canada also suggests that every person with a gun should have a license and insurance and that there should also be ammunition identification.

These are all good strategies and of course they won't be effective right away, but the real problem is getting the government to participate. They see that most of the children that are being killed are black and brown and are less prone to amount to anything. All I have to say to that is regardless of their color, they are still little children and a bullet does not see any color. If you think the mayhem in America will somehow skip your household, you are sadly mistaken.

Essay C

Many people today try to come up with innovative solutions to try to reduce violence. Geoffrey Canada, in *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun*,

outlines five proposals which he believes the government should adopt now. The one proposal that I think is the most important is his idea of reducing the number and regulating the possession of handguns.

Canada states that while it takes passing a written examination and a driving examination, as well as possession of insurance to be able to drive a car, anyone can buy a gun without passing any test or having any type of insurance in case someone is hurt with the gun. He thinks that all handgun sales should be banned in this country. He also believes that the Second Amendment was intended for a militia, not for individual citizens.

His first idea to regulate and reduce the number of handguns is licensing. Everyone who wants a gun should have to pass both a written and a field test. The cost for the test will have to be paid by those who make, sell, and buy guns. The result that he expects is that we will have only trained gun owners who know when and how to use a gun, and not inexperienced punks that are unpredictable.

Second, he says that gun-makers and dealers should be required to register every handgun they make so the guns can be traced when used in crimes. Also, the manufacturers and dealers should be held liable for damages caused by the gun they made or sold. He expects that this will pressure manufacturers and dealers to sell guns only to reputable citizens. The citizens would also have to get an insurance policy for liability and theft on their guns. This will reinforce the fact that a gun is more a liability to them than it is a protector.

His third idea was to have ammunition identification. This means that every bullet would be coded so that it could be easily traced to whomever bought the ammunition in case it was used in a crime.

His last idea is to buy back guns that are in the hands of children. He says that it might take five or ten years to get children to eventually turn in their guns but it is better than giving them to other kids and extending the life cycle of these guns. With all these ideas he believes that we would definitely have a safer community.

I personally don't believe that any of these ideas will work and I also think that all gun sales should not be banned. The only one that I agree

with is the one about licensing. Everyone who wants a gun should be trained how to use it and when to use it. But I think that gun control is prohibited by the Second Amendment. The Supreme Court in *U.S. v. Miller* (1939) stated: "The Militia comprised all males physically capable of acting in concert for the common defense . . . and that when called for service, these men were expected to appear bearing arms supplied by themselves and of the kind in common use at the time." This means that the Constitution gives Congress no authority to enact gun control legislation and also allows Congress to *require* gun ownership. In 1982 a U.S. Senate Subcommittee said, "In the Militia Act of 1792, the Second Congress defined 'militia of the United States' to include almost every free adult male in the United States. These persons were obligated by law to possess a firearm and a minimum supply of ammunition and military equipment." This means that any law-abiding citizen is allowed to own a gun and that Congress can require gun ownership.

Canada also depicts guns as only used by drug dealers and criminals. But he doesn't talk about how guns can deter crime. Many people think that gun owners slaughter each other in traffic disputes and others shoot bystanders in unsuccessful attempts to prevent a crime. I think citizens who carry firearms legally are more law-abiding than the general public. In Florida, according to the Florida Department of State, about 400,000 people carry licenses and not even 0.02 percent have been revoked because of crimes committed with guns.

Although Canada is right to say that kids shouldn't have guns and that they are responsible for many deaths among youths, he shouldn't stereotype the use of guns.