

The Gated Community Mentality and Crime in America

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In the article “The Gated Community Mentality,” published in *The New York Times*, Rich Benjamin highlights the social and racial tensions that continue to shape American society. His article focuses on the mentality of fear, suspicion, and racial stereotyping that can develop in communities where people try to protect themselves from those they see as outsiders. Benjamin uses the idea of gated communities not only as a physical space but also as a symbol of social separation. These communities often represent safety, privilege, and control, but they may also create fear of people who do not appear to belong. Through this argument, Benjamin shows how racial assumptions can influence the way people judge others, especially young Black men in American society (Benjamin, 2012).

Benjamin refers to the case of George Zimmerman and Trayvon Martin to support his argument. Trayvon Martin, a Black teenager, was shot by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer, after Zimmerman claimed that he felt threatened. This incident became a national issue because it raised serious questions about race, fear, self-defense, and the way Black youth are often perceived in public spaces. Benjamin uses this case to explain how the “gated community mentality” can lead people to view certain individuals as suspicious simply because of their race, clothing, or presence in a particular neighborhood. In this sense, the article is not only about one shooting but about a larger social problem in America (Benjamin, 2012).

Benjamin begins his essay by identifying himself as a Black man who understands what it feels like to be in danger, including the experience of being mugged at gunpoint. This personal detail is important because it gives the article emotional depth and credibility. He does not deny that crime exists, nor does he ignore the fear that people may feel when they are concerned about safety. However, he challenges the idea that fear should be directed unfairly toward people based on race. His personal experience allows him to discuss crime and safety in a more complex way. He understands fear, but he also understands the harm caused by racial suspicion.

In contrast, Kevin Drum’s article focuses more broadly on crime rates in America and the possible reasons behind their decline over time. While Benjamin’s article is personal, emotional, and focused on racial fear, Drum’s article is more analytical and evidence-based. Drum discusses the drop in crime rates and examines different explanations that people have offered to explain this change. His approach is less emotional and more focused on statistics, trends, and social causes. Instead of focusing on one case or one community, Drum looks at crime as a national issue shaped by broader historical and environmental factors (Drum, 2016).

The difference between the two articles is mainly found in their tone, purpose, and method of

argument. Benjamin writes from a personal and social perspective. His article is shaped by lived experience, moral concern, and emotional appeal. He wants readers to think about the racial assumptions that influence American life. Drum, on the other hand, writes from a more research-based perspective. He is concerned with explaining why crime has declined and what factors may have contributed to that decline. His writing depends more on facts and figures than on personal experience.

Benjamin's article focuses strongly on the psychology of fear. He suggests that some communities create boundaries not only through walls and gates but also through attitudes. People inside these communities may begin to view outsiders as threats, especially when those outsiders belong to racial or social groups that have been stereotyped as dangerous. This mentality can lead to unfair judgment and even violence. The article therefore raises an important question: when does the desire for safety become a justification for prejudice (Benjamin, 2012)?

Drum's article, by comparison, focuses on crime as a measurable social issue. He examines the decline in crime rates and considers different theories about why this decline occurred. These theories may include policing, social changes, economic conditions, environmental factors, and other influences. His purpose is not to create an emotional reaction but to encourage readers to think critically about data and long-term social trends. In this way, Drum's article is informative and logical, but it may not affect readers emotionally in the same way Benjamin's article does.

Another important difference is the role of the writer's voice. Benjamin's voice is personal and direct. He positions himself inside the issue because his identity and experiences are connected to the topic. This makes the article more powerful because the reader can sense that the issue is not abstract for him. It is part of his lived reality. Drum's voice is more detached and objective. He observes the issue from a distance and uses evidence to support his argument. This approach gives his article credibility, but it may also make the writing feel less emotionally engaging.

Benjamin's essay is unique because it appeals to a wide American audience and forces readers to question their assumptions. It does not simply explain racism in general terms; it connects racial stereotyping to real-life consequences. The article encourages readers to think about how fear can become dangerous when it is mixed with racial bias. It also shows how communities built around security can sometimes produce exclusion and suspicion rather than true safety.

Drum's article is valuable in a different way. It helps readers understand that crime is a complex issue and that simple explanations are often not enough. Many people have their own theories about crime, but Drum encourages a more careful examination of evidence. His article helps readers think beyond emotional reactions and consider the broader factors that influence crime rates. Although it may not be as emotionally powerful as Benjamin's article, it is still important because it provides a factual foundation for understanding crime trends.

Overall, both articles contribute to a larger discussion about crime, fear, and society in America. Benjamin focuses on how racial stereotypes and gated-community thinking can shape people's

perceptions of danger. Drum focuses on the general decline of crime and the possible reasons behind it. Benjamin's article is more emotional, personal, and socially critical, while Drum's article is more factual, analytical, and detached. Together, they show that crime cannot be understood only through statistics or only through personal experience. Both perspectives are necessary for a fuller understanding.

In conclusion, "The Gated Community Mentality" by Rich Benjamin is a strong and thought-provoking article because it connects personal experience with racial and social criticism. It shows how fear, when shaped by stereotypes, can become harmful and unjust. Kevin Drum's article, on the other hand, offers a broader discussion of crime trends and uses facts to explain changes in American society. While Benjamin's writing appeals more to emotion and moral awareness, Drum's writing appeals more to logic and evidence. Both articles are useful, but Benjamin's essay is more powerful because it raises deep questions about race, fear, and the meaning of safety in America.

Works Cited

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