

Benedict College
School of Education, Health and Human Services
Social Work Department

SSCJ 439 99- Specific Topic: BLK LIVES

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Social Justice Essay

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Social Justice

My name is Octavia Williamson. I am a junior at Benedict College majoring in Social Work. I have five siblings, three younger brothers and two older sisters. At the moment, I have a job in a home healthcare agency, working with people who are mentally challenged. I love my job so much and have a great passion for it. In addition I have a passion for social justice which comes from a personal experience.

One night I was having a movie night with my siblings. It was around 10 pm; when I asked my younger brother, who was sixteen and just gotten his driver license, to go to the store. He called me when he got to the store and when he left. Then I received a phone call which was odd. He called me and said the police stopped him. I could hear the fear in his voice and his crying for help. I went outside and started walking up to my brother, and the police told me to get back. Then I saw five more officers' cars coming down the street. They searched my car which he was driving and didn't find anything.

My mother proceeded to come outside. She introduced herself before evening coming close to the officer. I was confused. After my mother gave the officer all my brother's information, the officer said my brother turned in too quickly, but in my opinion I know what I know. It was just another case "Driving while Black." I will never forget the fear on my brother's face and will never understand why seven policemen were there only for one black teenage boy.

Angela Davis, professor at UCLA and activist, once said, "I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept." There are many social justice issues that we Americans deal with on a daily basis, but the one I feel most passionate towards is racial inequality. The United States has a troubled history of racism, dating back to the United

States' colonization and founding by white landowners who enslaved millions of people from Africa and their descendants. Though the Civil War ended the practice of legal slavery in the United States, racial disparities, racist attitudes, and systemic problems persist to this day. In just one striking example of inequality, a 2019 report by the New York Times discovered that the average white American has seven times the wealth of the average black American. The effects of racial inequality ripple throughout society, impacting education, representation, healthcare, and law enforcement. For example, Black Americans are disproportionately arrested, charged, and sentenced to jail time.

Additionally, another troubling statistic is that police are 3.5 times more likely to kill black Americans than white Americans, according to the American Psychological Association(2019). The rise of the Black Lives Matter movement has brought many instances to light, increasing public awareness of racial injustice and racially motivated violence by officers and authority figures. Through demonstrations and activism in the United States and across the world, the movement has helped shift public sentiment in favor of systemic reform of law enforcement. Sutton (2020) published an article about his views on racial inequality that we see today and in which he stated that, "George Floyd should be alive today. Instead, he drew his last breath after one police officer knelt on his neck for nine minutes and another taunted "don't do drugs, kids" to the gathered crowd. With George Floyd most recently, Breonna Taylor earlier this year, and countless others before them, perceived drug possession and drug use served as a justification by law enforcement to dehumanize, strip dignity from, and ultimately kill people of color" (p.1).

Furthermore, there are a few laws that help African Americans to be treated fairly no matter their racial background, but unfortunately they do not hold as great of an impact for the many issues in racial equality. For instance, the Crown Act, which stands for Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural hair, was created in 2019 by DOVE and the Crown Coalition to ensure protection against discrimination based on race based hairstyles by extending statutory protection to hair texture, and protective styles such as braids, locs, and knots in the workplace and public schools. This is a great start but not all American states have agreed to pass this yet, and it does not that help in any other racial equality issues other than discrimination against natural hair. I have been very passionate about this topic since 2012 when the national incident of Trayvon Martin's death occurred. Martin was a seventeen year old African American boy when he was racially profiled, stalked, and killed for just walking alone with a hoodie on top of his head.

To compare, there have been many collective efforts that have sparked up change and policy change such as petitions of those inmates who have been wrongfully profiled and charged with a crime that may or may not have committed based on the color of their skin. Also, there have been many protests and lootings because of the many victims of racial inequality today. The Black Lives Matter movement was founded a year after the passing of Trayvon Martin, who was the spark of the beginning of the organization. The Black Lives Movement was preceded by the Civil Rights Movement, which was created in hopes that African Americans would be respectfully treated fairly as any other race. Moreover, teaching humans that we are all equal regardless of our different racial backgrounds should be taught in school because racism still exists so therefore, we should start at an early age and provide information to students that racial

inequality is real and will not be tolerated any longer. The actions I have personally started in order to be part of the solution is by signing petitions to get Breonna Taylor's killers arrested, by voting, and by participating in peaceful protests against racial inequality.

In conclusion, racial inequality is something we as humans have been dealing with for over four hundred years. I am very passionate about this topic because as an African American woman, I have been racially profiled and judged and so have my family members and ancestors. It is heart wrenching to know that this may still be the world into which I will bring my children and that they may also experience the same injustices I have experienced. The issues in 2020 have made me more aware that there are some really dangerous and hateful people in the world who will decide that some people's lives do not matter as much as theirs just because of what others look like. One recommendation I would provide for anyone who is looking to help build a solution to this social injustice is to do research on the people for whom you vote to let in office and to never stop letting your voice be heard.

REFERENCES

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