

Social Action Paper

Nyack College

Foundations of Social Justice

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Critical Analysis and Social Action Paper

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## Social Action Paper

### **Abstract:**

Racism is a cruel, dark and ugly reality that has been in place for decades and continuous as of today. Racism and classism within the criminal justice system has proven to be interconnected based on the number of unjustified killings and murders of African American men, women, children and other marginalized groups of people. The abuse of power by police officers is unacceptable and a form of systematic oppression, which is why there needs to be changes made within the police departments in the United States. Police officers have a duty to protect and serve no matter what the geographical location is, yet statistics will show how policing is different depending on the socio-economic status and class of the individual. Economic inequality is an example of how the criminal justice system perpetuates race relations today, if this remains unchanged, civil unrest is likely to continue. Black people have been quiet and over looked for far too long and have had enough. The Black Lives Matter movement is a movement for social change for African Americas whom are arrested, charged and killed at a disproportionate rate than White men. I will highlight the systemic breakdown of African Americans and poor communities affected by the mass unemployment, social neglect, economic and the intense police surveillance and brutality in black and brown communities.

### **Statement of Purpose:**

I believe the myths of meritocracy is what creates the problem of racism and classism. We are taught to believe that those who are financially successful as well as those who have access to excellent educational institutions are fully deserving of that privilege, while those who are not must have acted badly at some point and, therefore, deserve their poverty. Such a generalization is unfair and harmful because it obscures systemic factors that contribute to poverty and wealth to rectify injustice. The issues of racism, privilege and oppression is currently

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dividing our nation. African Americans are fighting the fight against act of depopulation by the government, the police and privileged white people. We are battling this corona virus, trying to stay alive. Police brutality and the unemployment rate is prevalent. There is a divide within our country, it is the us versus them, the rich versus the poor. Our president has created the divide with his rhetoric regarding race which has created a trajectory of encouraging this behavior by Trump supporters.

There is persistent racism in America as it relates to class and the criminal justice system which is at an all- time high. African Americans and other marginalized groups of people are impacted and targeted due to the issue of systemic racism. Systemic racism and or institutional racism is a form of oppression that is embedded as a normal practice within society or an organization. The murders conducted by police officers against unarmed black men, women and children has become the norm and nothing is being done about it. Modern-day lynching and acts of genocide are being performed in communities of color. Our husbands, fathers and children are being killed at the hands of the police and families are left broken and without justice. It is incomprehensible that in the year 2020 we still have not made any progress towards equality, liberty and justice for all which are the words echoed in America's Pledge of Allegiance. Sadly, I am not surprised, but I am hopeful that real change is finally coming due to the unfortunate and tragic death of George Floyd.

Police officers will finally begin to be held accountable and charged for the crimes they themselves commit against civilians of color. This will hopefully serve as a deterrent for other officers from taking the law into their own hands. Much like the birth of Jim Crow White people are uncomfortable, fearful and outraged when African Americans obtain a slight step towards social and economic equality or any political power. This brings about the existential question,

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why is the world so cruel? and why Black people are not seen as equals? The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment states slaves were 3/5 of a person. Racism, violence and oppression continues to hinder black and brown people. I am angered and simply frustrated at the injustices and privileged behavior rendered by those police officers who abuse their power. African American men are arrested, detained and incarcerated at disproportionate rates in comparison to white men. They are often kept in jail because they cannot afford bail despite their innocence and are often recidivist due to the lack of economic growth and stigma associated with being incarcerated. A criminal record can reduce the likelihood of a callback or job offer by nearly 50 percent. The negative impact of a criminal record is twice as large for African American applicants. The United States has the highest rate of incarceration in the world, with over 2,200,000 individuals in jails and prisons. From 1970 to 2000, the U.S. prison population increased by 500%. African American men are rearrested 72.7% of the time within 3 years of their release from prison. African Americans have a higher incarceration rate than any other racial group in the United States; nearly 1,000,000 African Americans are in jail or prison. Moreover, 60% of African American men who drop out of school are incarcerated by the age of 30 years old (Thomas, M 2020).

In a 2008 speech made by then Senator Barack Obama, he said we are wise to redirect our attention from the individuals who designed the system and occupied key positions in it to the system itself. W.E.B Dubois said “To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships. The system is not designed for poor people, instead poor people are characterized by the lies about poverty stating that poverty is a character flaw, that minorities receive the bulk of government entitlements, and that poverty is uniquely urban. (Caliendo, S. M. (2014). *Inequality in America: Race, Poverty, and Fulfilling Democracy’s Promise*. Westview Press.).

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Classism plays a huge part in the wealth gap between minorities and white people. Housing, Education, Income and Wealth are all interconnected. Classism is defined a social hierarchy which makes mobility difficult due to opportunity, resources, race, wealth, and education. The reality of class differences for me is the rich and the poor. The “middle class” labels for individuals much like myself prove that it has no meaning because there is a huge gap between rich and poor. Middle class people in my opinion are straddling the fence as we are trying to stay above water and between being homeless due living pay check to pay check, and are termed “the working poor”. I believe the system is designed to keep poor people marginalized which places the poor and middle-class people at a disadvantage and unable to move forward. All too often, it is the poor people that are working jobs that are in positions to assist the wealthy or upper-class individuals to become wealthier. They benefit and profit off the hard work and labor we put into the companies and we are not compensated for it. For example, in building of jails, the convicts are performing free labor while the investors, jails and state profit from it.

There is a disparity and economic inequality between the two classes. I don't think people choose to be poor, I think given the opportunity and resources to education and trainings then people would be more inclined to work and will have a shot at upward mobility. If only one group of people or person is willing to help the next I believe the world would be different and build a sense of comradery and togetherness, which would bring about change. Minorities are often doing the jobs no one wants to do, we are usually the essential workers and are not getting paid our worth. I think people are stagnate and there isn't any upward mobility because of our lack of knowledge and money. It is not because we are lazy that we do not grow. We are not born into generational wealth, we are unable to get loans to buy property and create opportunities of wealth for younger generations. I am afraid for my four male Black children of whom my

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husband and I speak to daily about what they should do if they are stopped by police or questioned by a privileged white person while out walking while being black. My nine- year old son ran in fear when seeing a group of police officers in vehicles drive through a park. He was obviously traumatized because he cried to my husband asking what was happening. It is unfortunate that civilians and people of color are fearful for their lives by officers who have a sworn duty to protect and serve because they are abusing their power and taking matters into their own hands.

The impact of racism on mental health has created a distrust in the police and in our justice system. Feelings of worry, powerlessness, panic and trauma from both the present and triggering past instances and generational trauma and increase risk of depression and anxiety. This cannot continue it is time for folks to be held accountable and to dismantle white supremacy. African Americans and minorities are demanding the need for social change now than ever before because of the death of George Floyd and so many other African Americans killed by police. The information has proven clear based on the number of African Americans killed day after day, year after year with no justice and the use of excessive force was clearly committed. George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbury, Rashaud Brooks, Eric Garner, sadly the list goes on and on.

### **Literature Review:**

In reading *The New Jim Crow*, the author gives an overview of how Black people were enslaved the birth of Jim Crow and modern-day slavery. She highlights the injustices Black people has endured for decades. There are so many relevant quotes that I could sight, one quote relevant to the issue of racism in the criminal justice system is the chapter on the color of justice, subtitle *The Occupation, Policing the Enemy* when she refers to the Court turning a blind eye to

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race discrimination in the criminal justice system. “Racial bias is most acute at the point of entry into the systems for two reasons: discretion and authorization. Stating, although prosecutors, as a group have the greatest power in the criminal justice system, the police have the greatest discretion” This is the problem, this authority and power if you will, rendered to individuals who may be racist use their power to oppress the minority. Another quote, “When black youth find it difficult or impossible to live up to these standards, or when they fail, stumble and make mistakes, as all humans do, shame and blame is heaped upon them”. This reminded me of the “letter to my son”, written by Ta-Nehisi Coates in the textbook by Blumenfeld, which was profound being a mother of four Black boys. He warns his son of the injustices in the world against Black boys and men and how he was fearful for his son and had been for himself. That that his everyday choices and mistakes will be magnified by society and police, like wearing a hoodie or listening to loud music like Michael Brown was and who had been killed by police and the killers would go free.

The fact that black parents must counsel their black children on how to be respectful to the police and what they should do if they are approached. Writing this letter to his 15-year-old son who had already witnessed and heard of all the tragic deaths of Black men at the hands of the police was devastating. The death of Eric Garner being choked to death because he was selling cigarettes, that John Crawford was shot down for browsing in a department store, the killing of 12-year old Tamir Rice by police. It is troublesome that Black people must live in this kind of fear, to not be protected by the law. That the “law” now has an excuse for stopping and frisking simply because they are police. By the age of 18, Black males are at a 30% risk of arrest compared to 22% for White males, and by the age of 23, Black males are at a 49% risk of arrest, whereas White males are at a 38% risk of arrest (Barnes, Jorgenson, Beaver, Boutwell, &

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Wright, 2014). According to the article, what is the average police time in the U.S. The article highlights what happens when 911 is called and the police response depending on the urgency of the call. I thought this information was relevant to reveal the response time, what happens when police are called and who gets priority. The average response time for a 911 call is 10 minutes. The urgency of these calls varies based on the type of emergency. Most police departments have a response schedule that ranks different types of emergencies from high to low. Top priority always goes to callers who need assistance due to a life-threatening emergency. (Julie Fritz June 3, 2020)

### **Theoretical Framework:**

The theoretical framework that applies to the social issue of racism and classism is the Conflict theory. The Conflict Theory helps explain how power structures and power disparities impact people's lives. Power is unequally divided in every society and all societies perpetuate various forms of oppression and injustice through structural inequality from the wealth gap to racial discrimination. Conflict theory sees social life as a competition, and focuses on the distribution of resources, power, and inequality. All conflict falls into two categories: internal and external. Internal conflict is when a character struggles with their own opposing desires or beliefs. It happens within them, and it drives their development as a character. External conflict sets a character against something or someone beyond their control. My understanding of this social injustice of racism and classism stems from the effects of slavery and the continuous oppression of Black people, particularly Black men. This form of oppression is consistent and has become embedded in the fabric of American society to the point where its not looked upon as being unjust.

### **Social Action Plan:**

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The murder of George Floyd was the tipping point and moment of reckoning calling for social change. African Americans are no longer willing to sit down and accept the acts of racism committed by police officers. It is time to dismantle acts of white supremacy and acknowledge that Black Lives Matter. Racism, bigotry, prejudice and classism are the worldviews and psychological mindsets of Americans' daily lives, but racism also refers to the ways that institutions, culture, and social systems reflect the historic oppression of persons of color in America and perpetuate inequality as a result. (Caliento 2014)

Social change is what's needed and required in police departments across the United States. This issue of systemic racism is prevalent through the United States, lets start by saying their names and then discuss what they all have in common. On a Micro or individual level, the goal is to change the attitudes, beliefs, emotions and behaviors that are prejudicial and taught with explicit and implicit biases. Police officers need to accept and acknowledge the differences and diversity of the communities they serve.

On a Mezzo level police officers should start by getting to know the individuals in the communities, sitting with them learning from them interacting with them on a personal and professional level to bring forth awareness to the department and their colleagues. Officers should get to know the lived experiences of individuals apart from their ethnic background and culture. Officers of a higher ranking must confront disparate treatment in our justice system no matter how insignificant or harmless it may appear. For example, if there are complaints of a, officer of any misconduct it should not be dismissed. The community should demand the use of body cameras be worn and turned on by all police officers in every community. The community should also challenge "consent" searches without probable cause, this process is all too familiar to me in that I live in the East New York section of Brooklyn and the profiling that occurs is frequent. Police officers will patrol a neighborhood and observe young black boys and men hanging out stop and begin

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asking them questions. This tactic often results in disproportionately searching black people, their cars even their homes. Officers that may be on any type of disciplinary should be mandated to attend trainings without pay.

On a Macro level, the policies will need to be change, for example banning the choke hold creating a law which was recently passed. Holding police officers accountable in the unlawful abuse of power and murders of unarmed African Americans. They should be terminated, loose their pensions and not be permitted to have paid leave or desk jobs. Members of the community must demand change in how our communities are policed through legal and legislative advocacy. Mandated trainings will need to be required and enforced for officers involved in racial practices whether explicit racism or implicit bias such as stop and frisk policies and other stops built on racial profiling. Lastly, on the Macro level policies should be enforced to defund the precincts with the most biased and racial incidents that end in these senseless murders. This will serve as a warning to other officers and hopefully deter them from committing these crimes.

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