

Shianne Wisdom

Prof. Kevin Pinkham

College Writing II

18 April 2021

The Need For Change: Racial Profiling

James Baldwin once said, *“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”* Many people use this quote in reference to a variety of difficulties, but James Baldwin was specifically speaking about racial injustice in America. In agreement with James Baldwin, I feel as though everything can't be solved, but there is no chance for change if the situation at hand isn't spoken about. Racial profiling is defined as someone using either race or ethnicity as a reason to suspect an offense being committed- pointing fingers at someone because of preconceived notions about this person mainly because of race. Even though Martin Luther King Jr., the Civil Rights movement, and a host of other activist groups helped bring about laws that outlawed such discrimination, sadly, it still exists and happens every day! For decades, African Americans have been profiled at their jobs, schools, shopping areas, and much more simply based on the color of their skin. These unjustifiable acts have left many affected mentally, physically, emotionally, and that just scrapes the surface of potential issues. Many African Americans who have been or are racially profiled, have experienced detrimental delays in their development with mental and physical health issues while many have ended in incarceration and even death. America is way more advanced than it was back in the '60s so, in 2021 African

Americans being profiled shouldn't be a problem that we still face. The past must be faced! Racial profiling especially by the police needs to come to an end because it causes mental, physical, and emotional issues, as well as death. Racial profiling should have criminal repercussions.

Being accused of anything, in general, could be pretty traumatizing, imagine being accused, charged, and tried based on the color of your skin. "Depression is the most commonly reported condition across BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color). Additionally, racial trauma can increase the risk of the BIPOC community meeting the criteria for PTSD. Importantly, stress plays a crucial role in how racism affects both physical and mental health." (Howard, C.) Central Park 5 is a huge story that will forever be a part of New York's history. "Five teenage boys were falsely accused of beating and raping a white woman in Central Park back in 1989." (cite) They were profiled, coerced, and framed by the police. I could only imagine the traumatic experience suffered by the 5 innocent victims and their families as a result of this injustice act. Yusef Salaam, one of the falsely accused Central Park 5, now suffers from PTSD after having been released from prison. His disorder is so severe that he doesn't have a television in his home, in an effort to avoid keeping up with current events of the world because it emotionally disturbs him. (Liberatore) Can you imagine being so stressed as a result of racial profiling that you fear suffering emotionally from watching television!?

Another innocent victim of the Central Park 5, Korey Wise, suffered the most out of them all. Since he was sixteen years old, he served his time in an adult prison. Being sixteen years old among thirty and forty-year-olds could harm anyone's mental health.

The actor Jharrell Jerome, who played Korey Wise in Netflix's, "When They See Us", "revealed that he faced mental health issues from portraying the trauma that Wise endured." (Shaw) Jharrell Jerome was an actor that portrayed Korey Wise's real-life trauma. If we were to take a moment to ponder then it's clear to assume the damage that was done to Korey Wise. I'm pretty sure the men of Central Park 5 have faced their shares of mental weariness. Consider six to seven years and for Korey Wise, thirteen years of their lives were taken away while in prison cells resulting from acts of racial profiling by a desperate New York City Police Department rushing to solve a crime. If the police department was punished criminally for what they did, they'd be able to feel for these once innocent children. Other police officers wouldn't be so quick to pin a crime on someone if they were able to witness their fellows being punished. We can see in multiple instances that there are times where fairness and equality are expected, the unjust and unfairness are served instead. Is The United States Of America the "land of the free"? The first amendment gives us the freedom of assembly. But can this be freedom if the assembly is then met with unjust persecution? You can just be in an area that you are allowed to assemble in and still get caught up in a case that has nothing to do with you.

Emmett Till, a young fourteen-year-old was murdered in 1955 for allegedly flirting with a white woman in a store. The store owner and the woman's husband had heard about the alleged incident and went to where Emmett Till was staying that summer. The men proceeded to get Emmett from the house and beat him until he couldn't be identified. In court "the all-white jury deliberated for less than an hour before issuing a verdict of "not guilty," explaining that they believed the state had failed to prove the

identity of the body.” (history.com) The state also did not indict the two men for kidnapping. Sometimes it seems like there is no reason to go to court because justice isn’t served; inequality seems to override justice. Emmett Till’s mom is left without her child while the two men just walked free without punishment. They didn’t get charged for taking this teenager to his place of rest and it’s too often that we see this type of inequity happen. To make matters even worse, author Tim Tyson in 2017 “revealed that Carolyn Bryant (the white woman in the store) recanted her testimony, admitting that Till had never touched, threatened or harassed her. “Nothing that boy did could ever justify what happened to him.” (history.com) Carolyn Bryant should’ve been criminally punished. Years after life is taken it’s okay to now confess something that took his life. I feel that racially profiling people wouldn’t be such an easy act because there are repercussions. People would take responsibility as well as think before they act.

History has been repeating itself for decades with African Americans getting killed at the hands of the police. If we were to stop and think back, African Americans were killed at the hands of slave patrol. Before that, we were being murdered by slave masters. Years before that by the hands of the slave trade. Racial profiling isn’t anything new it’s just repeating itself differently.

Now some would argue that African Americans being racially profiled is a played-out narrative or even a tactic used in an effort to distract attention away from the potential crime that was committed. Some may even unconsciously argue that there are so many of these stories that’ll find their way onto social media, the news, and the next movie that society desensitizes these life events. During the pandemic, we’ve witnessed many black lives that were lost due to racism and racial profiling. George Floyd,

Breonna Taylor, and the Black Lives Matter Movement have seemed to become trendy hashtags, resulting in people almost becoming immune to hearing the message as it seemed to become the daily norm. America tends to casually re-run a tragedy and air it on television which is a negative additive. The more you shove anything in someone's face they begin to lose feelings towards that particular matter or event. Re-runs of the countless injustices have potentially further devalued the deaths of the countless Black men and women who have been murdered before and sadly those who will be murdered. Repeatedly hearing and watching each murder has likely created numbness and desensitization, like “what is experienced when repeatedly watching any other image of violence” (Mrug et al., 2015; Stafford, 2015) The constant re-runs and hashtags might be the potential cause of America not understanding the true effects of prejudices. We just see a story on the news and go on with our lives.

Being racially profiled affects a person's mental health. Society might not be able to see and/or understand the extremities of this act because our mediums are plagued with a different story every day. Moments like seeing a white woman grasping onto her purse as soon as a black person comes around can cause adverse effects beyond the moment itself. The memory continues to play in our minds despite it seeming like a norm. If we keep accepting racial profiling or justifying the fear of another group, then we aren't advancing. What does equality look like for an African American? Or America free of racial injustice? Where should we begin to bring on change? The first step to change anything is acknowledgment and awareness. We should start within ourselves. To spread change, we can begin to call out anyone that makes racial remarks so it

begins to be an uncomfortable state. We aren't carrying out Martin Luther King's dream and many others. *"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."* Let's face what has and continues to happen, which is racial profiling which to defeat, we must all strive to better understand the cause in order to make a positive change.

Works Cited

“The Effects of Racial Trauma on Mental Health: Deaths Captured on TV and Media.”
NAMI,

[www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Identity-and-Cultural-Dimensions/Black-African-American/](http://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Identity-and-Cultural-Dimensions/Black-African-American/The-Effects-of-Racial-Trauma-on-Mental-Health-Deaths-Captured-on-TV-and-Media)
[The-Effects-of-Racial-Trauma-on-Mental-Health-Deaths-Captured-on-TV-and-Media](http://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Identity-and-Cultural-Dimensions/Black-African-American/The-Effects-of-Racial-Trauma-on-Mental-Health-Deaths-Captured-on-TV-and-Media).

Hadjer, KHALFOUN. “Racial Profiling: The Case of the Arizona Senate Bill 1070.”

Emmett Till Is Murdered.

www.history.com/this-day-in-history/the-death-of-emmett-till.

[Http://Dspace.univ-Guelma.dz:8080/Xmlui/Bitstream/Handle/123456789/2486/M821.174.Pdf?Sequence=1&IsAllowed=y](http://Dspace.univ-Guelma.dz:8080/Xmlui/Bitstream/Handle/123456789/2486/M821.174.Pdf?Sequence=1&IsAllowed=y), 2018,
dspace.univ-guelma.dz:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/2486/M821.174.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

Harris, David A. “Racial Profiling: Past, Present, and Future?” *American Bar Association*, 2020,

www.americanbar.org/groups/criminal_justice/publications/criminal-justice-magazine/2020/winter/racial-profiling-past-present-and-future/.

Lawrence, Caroline. *Masking Up: A COVID-19 Face-off between Anti-Mask Laws and Mandatory Mask Orders for Black Americans*, 2020,

poseidon01.ssrn.com/delivery.php?ID=969069125111073030016066103122109124096013037044021004025108067026064115018008117072011019010100011037017024073097089022109116024072012082004016106121080095122024028064037045093108074004106024087122116066010105072092112076029115123116001084115026089095&EXT=pdf&INDEX=TRUE.

Liberatore, Wendy. “One of Central Park 5 Speaks of Trauma, Forgiving Trump in Saratoga Springs.” *Times Union*, Times Union, 3 Dec. 2019,

www.timesunion.com/news/article/One-of-Central-Park-5-speaks-of-trauma-forgiving-14879269.php.

O'Connor, Eileen. "Psychology Responds to Racial Profiling." *Monitor on Psychology*, American Psychological Association, 2001, www.apa.org/monitor/may01/raceprofile.

Risse, Mathias, and Richard Zeckhauser. "Racial Profiling." *Faculty Research Working Papers Series*, Sept. 2003.

Terrell, Jazzie M. "Black Lives Matter Activist Rhetoric and Online Participation on Twitter." *Rhetoric, Composition, and the Teaching of English*, University of Arizona Department of English, University of Arizona, 2020, www.researchgate.net/profile/Jazzie-Terrell-2/publication/347014111_Black_Lives_Matter_Activist_Rhetoric_and_Online_Participation_on_Twitter/links/5fd78b6145851553a0b795cd/Black-Lives-Matter-Activist-Rhetoric-and-Online-Participation-on-Twitter.pdf.