**Racial Discrimination in Law Enforcement**

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In the United States’ criminal justice system, law enforcement is the first step of the three level pyramid of the criminal justice system. Generally, the role of law enforcement is to maintain peace and order within society by removing and correcting potentially violent threats to this said peace and order. Law enforcement is perhaps the most crucial aspect of the justice system since law enforcement officers such as police gather supposed criminals to be upholded in a court of law. However, as with all institutions, law enforcement is susceptible to myopia and vice. Corruption in law enforcement takes the form of racial profiling, police brutality, and (insert another example). A critical issue lies within public doubts of the stability of its own law enforcement, especially accusations of law enforcement displaying racial discrimination in executing justice. Even though the U.S. criminal justice system operates on the grounds of secular and egalitarian policies, racial discrimination is indeed evident in the U.S. criminal justice system’s law enforcement. As of recent, the U.S. media has brought to light incidents of white police officers utilizing deadly force against African American suspects, and the public have displayed mix reactions. Although public doubts of our law enforcement are justified, there are achievable methods to stop discrimination that is inherent in the system.

Because law enforcement is a delicate and significant matter in upholding peace and domestic safety, there are of course specific laws and amendments exclusively pertaining to law enforcement. A premier example can be found in the Fourth Amendment of the Bill of Rights, which protects citizens against unwarranted searches and seizures:

*The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized*⁠1*.*

At face value, the amendment states this fact only; as with all laws of the Constitution, the Fourth Amendment gives a solid but ambiguous statement that is open to interpretation and manipulation as society sees fit. Something important to note is that the amendment states that law enforcement may conduct searches and seizures for which they have justifiable cause and reason. However, a “justifiable cause and reason” for conducting such a search is unclear as well; what counts as a justification is totally up to the discretion of police officers and court rule.

A controversial policy tied to Fourth Amendment rights is stop and frisk -- a policy that involves arbitrarily halting a suspicious person at random and conducting a quick examination of the person. In essence, stop and frisk contradicts Fourth Amendment rights but it is completely legal and common practice, especially in urban environments. Stop and frisk is meant for preemptive measures, but strangely enough, those who are black appear to be targeted more often than other races. According to a 2014 NYPD report on stop and frisk incidents, about 55% of those who were halted by cops were innocent and/or were black. The years preceding 2014 have stop and frisk rates of blacks above the 50% mark. Those who were stopped and frisked and of white or Latino ethnicity remained below the 50% threshold for the 2014 report and preceding years’ reports⁠2. The data shows a certain bias amongst law enforcers when choosing appropriate subjects to target, which is that of relying on the color of a person’s skin first and foremost and then leaving other physical characteristics as secondary.

There are several reasons as to why African Americans are the most frequently involved racial groups in law enforcement activity. For one, there is a high population of African Americans and other racial minorities living at or below the poverty line due to socioeconomic inequality prevalent in the U.S⁠3. Those living at or below the poverty line also tend to live in clusters in the same area -- where amenities in the neighborhood are subpar. In these neighborhoods, violent crime tends to be part of recurring events, as opposed to affluent and upscale areas that typically enjoy little to no crime. This leads to law enforcement focusing most of their funds and efforts in these neighborhoods and also incarcerating many of its inhabitants. In turn, this results in minorities being the dominant demographic in prisons. Of course, a large group of people with a defining characteristic -- that is in this case, skin color -- is subject to generalization and stereotyping and then applied to others outside of the group who coincidentally share the same characteristic. These generalizations and stereotypes made then trickle down to the public and media, continuing and perpetuating them.

Although it is evident that racial discrimination is present in our law enforcement, it does not need to be a perpetual stain on U.S. law enforcement. There are several paths that can be taken to rectify flaws within our own law enforcement and society to eliminate racial bias in the system. The most important step that can be taken is to inform the youth demographic of racism and its detrimental nature and refraining from instilling racist values in our youth. Racism can become inherent at a young age, as children are exposed to different ideals and absorb them readily. Racist beliefs can be expressed and exposed to a child at home, through peers, at school, or in the media. These beliefs are often expressed subtly and then manifest in the child later in their lifetime. Therefore, a good starting point to correcting racial bias in law enforcement is within society itself, as it is an influential platform that unfortunately lacks in egalitarian attitudes. Another step to be taken is to strengthen anti-discrimination policy and implement stricter criteria to hiring acceptable law enforcement. Tighter background checks, including mental background checks, and stricter policies with the use of firearms decrease incidents in which a police officer may use lethal force against a suspect. An interesting public proposal that has been introduced recently is to attach surveillance cameras on police officers to monitor their activity during work hours and investigations. Though this proposal may seem impractically ludicrous at first, the startling lack of evidence and disagreement between witnesses in several police-killing trials supports such a proposal as advantageous.

Although the system of law enforcement has improved significantly, racial discrimination is a very real and difficult issue that must be tackled in order for law enforcement to work most efficiently.

1 U.S. Const., amend. IV.

2 "Stop-and-Frisk Data | New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) - American Civil Liberties Union of New York State." Stop-and-Frisk Data | New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) - American Civil Liberties Union of New York State. Accessed May 9, 2015. http://www.nyclu.org/content/stop-and-frisk-data.

3 "Ethnic and Racial Minorities & Socioeconomic Status." Http://www.apa.org. Accessed May 9, 2015. http://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/factsheet-erm.aspx.