**Minority Relations with the U.S. Justice System**

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One word: Bad.

According to a report from the National Research Council, the American prison system has devastating effects on increasing sections of the nation’s society.[1] Out of the one percent of adults currently incarcerated in the United States, a majority are from disadvantaged backgrounds. In its own words, the report explains that ”in communities of concentrated disadvantage—characterized by high rates of poverty, violent crime, mental illness and drug addiction—the United States embarked on a massive and unique intensification of criminal punishment” from the 1970s to current times. “Although many questions remain unanswered, the greatest significance of the era of high incarceration rates may lie in that simple descriptive fact⁠1.”

Of those counted in the 2010 U.S. Census, 72.4% were white, 12.6% were black or African-American, 16.3% were Hispanic, and the rest of the population were of other minorities.⁠2 Prisoner population is extremely unrepresentative of this - most prisoners had no jobs before incarceration or were under the poverty line, and about 60% of prisoners were black or Hispanic/Latino, despite their making up of 28.9% of the American population.⁠3 According to a study published in the American Journal of Public Health, an adult male in the U.S. has a nine percent lifetime chance of being imprisoned, increasing to nearly thirty percent for blacks and sixteen percent for Hispanics.⁠4

These statistical facts show that the American prison system is largely biased against minority, economically disadvantaged people, as a result of stricter “tough-on-crime” and “broken windows” laws and law enforcement that make it much harder for innocent or nonviolently criminal people to escape the scrutiny and stigma of punishment. Some methods that lead to their arrests are the planting of evidence (in 2011, an ex-NYPD-detective admitted that narcotics squads frequently planted drugs on innocents in order to meet arrest quotas),⁠5 and body searches without probable cause (deemed legal by the Supreme Court in 2012).⁠6 The drug wars and the 9/11 attacks (among other terrorist acts) have led to increased use of racial profiling against blacks, Hispanics, and Middle Easterns.⁠7

Recent events such as the killings of Walter Scott and Michael Brown cast further light on a racist tendency in the police. In a thorough investigation, the Department of Justice found that “Ferguson’s police and municipal court practices both reflect and exacerbate existing racial bias, including racial stereotypes,” in which that “nearly 90% of documented force used by FPD officers was used against African Americans” and “emails circulated by police supervisors and court staff that stereotype racial minorities as criminals, including one email that joked about an abortion by an African-American woman being a means of crime control.”⁠8 The video of Scott's murder, in which the police officer involved can be seen firing multiple, unnecessary shots at a fleeing Scott, and then placing his gun beside Scott's body, as a means of planting false evidence, speaks for itself.[10] Police officers generally go unpunished due to their high position of authority in society, and this general lack of punishment encourages racist police and judges to keep on ‘business as usual’.

Something needs to be done to stop discriminatory practices in law enforcement, and the solution will not be passing reforms. A whole new system will have to be carried out to resolve racism and to actually execute true justice in the criminal justice system at the roots. Such a system would have at least some of the following features: lack of minimum mandatory sentences, lack of federal or state investment or charter of private prisons and jails, lack of excessive bails, lack of racial profiling, lack of searching without probable cause, and finally, an extreme reduction in the superfluous privileges abused by police, or perhaps even the complete riddance of that brutal profession. It is wholly unrealistic to think these can be achieved through systematic reforms however. It would take near a revolution to.

1 "Front Matter ." The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2014.

2 Humes, K., Jones, N., & Ramirez, R. (2011). *Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau.

3 Carson, E. Ann. (2014) *Prisoners In 2013*. Washington, DC: US Dept of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics.

4 Patterson, Evelyn J.(2013) "The Dose–Response of Time Served in Prison on Mortality: New York State, 1989–2003." *American Journal of Public Health*: 523-28. Print.

5 Lee, Trymaine. "Stephen Anderson, Ex NYPD Cop: We Planted Evidence, Framed Innocent People To Reach Quotas." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 13 Oct. 2011. Web. Retrieved May 2, 2015 from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/13/ex-nypd-cop-we-planted-ev\_n\_1009754.html

6 *Florence v. Board Of Chosen Freeholders Of County Of Burlington*. Supreme Court of the United States. 2 Apr. 2012. Print.

7 Racial Profiling. (n.d.). Retrieved April 23, 2015, from https://www.aclu.org/issues/racial-justice/race-and-criminal-justice/racial-profiling?redirect=racial-justice/racial-profiling Racial Profiling | Costs of War. (n.d.). Retrieved April 23, 2015, from http://costsofwar.org/article/racial-profiling#\_ftn2

8 *Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department.* United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. March 4, 2015.