

Hayden Outlaw

PHIL 3560

Preliminary Project Report

For my potential project, I am considering doing a report on NOPD activity using publicly available data published by the city of New Orleans. There are various metrics and demographic datasets available for general use, and I have a few different possible options based on the various combinations of these resources that I could use; my current plan is to use the electronic police reports for each year, which include all reports filed by NOPD officers for all incidents, as well as all of the calls for service logs and use of force incidents, and complaints filed against the police force. My goal is to try to look for and bring attention to disparate treatment of different demographics by police officers in New Orleans in both a clear and accessible way. At least for now, since I couldn't find others with a similar statistical or computer science inclination for their project, I will be working on it by myself for now, but am open to that changing.

I was inspired by the discussion we had in class on Tuesday February 14, and the respective reading from Iris Marion Young – specifically Young's characterization of oppression as something that can exist without the awareness of the participants of a society or even the oppressed group, as well as her characterization of oppression as a multifaceted phenomenon. While disparate outright violence from police officers is more obvious to tease out, her exploration of "marginalization" specifically led me to be curious about not just over-response of police forces in New Orleans, but under-response towards requests from specific groups as well. Are there certain groups that the NOPD considers less important on average when considering response time and location? Are these the same groups that are also subject to more obvious police over-response and brutality when it occurs? Would it be possible to break down NOPD's treatment of different demographics into different measures in a similar way as Young did?

I do claim that this act of analysis is in and of itself a good or ethical act. To reference Young's writing again, oppression in a society could exist implicitly, or without a direct oppressing social group in opposition. However, due to the direct correlation of systemic oppression with the suffering and restriction of livelihood of others, I believe that any act in combatting it is therefore an ethical good. Because of the tacit or mercurial nature of modern

systemic oppression in a liberal society, the first step is both to identify it and to spread awareness of it, as it could be a product of ignorance as much or more as a product of malice. As well, as noted by Rawls in “Justice as Fairness”, any meaningful attempts at justice in a society must apply to all groups or parties equally and indiscriminately. Administrations of justice that benefit one party based on personal or situational traits over another, even if from an administrative perspective, undermine the entire societal justice of concept as an institution. Therefore, attempting to work towards rectifying these inequalities in the interest of preserving the integrity and equality of justice, independent of the morality of any specific participating party in a society, is an inherently moral act.

I also personally stand to benefit from this project directly – I am not native to New Orleans, and as a Tulane student I am often able to reap the cultural and societal benefits from living in this city without needing to help alleviate, or even acknowledge, the various inequalities and dysfunctions that directly affect those around me. I will not make any normative claims whatsoever; I acknowledge my position both as an amateur and transplant, and my only goal is to bring awareness to disparate enactment and enforcement of laws in New Orleans.

With that being said, I will not measure the immediate success of project by the discovery or claim of any injustice. I believe that a thorough, nuanced, and mindful complete examination in as much as the timeframe for this project will allow should be my goal. I not only think that this is the most feasible option, but I also do not want to introduce bias into the statistics in any way that I can, even if it is bias against the opposing or oppressing group. There could genuinely not be enough data to make a claim from this project, or there could be confounding variables that are not directly observable. However, a meaningful contribution towards systemic accountability for the city of New Orleans, by translating obscure or difficult statistical concepts into a more accessible and published way for the members of the society would be a service itself. I also believe that this mindset will prevent the project from expanding beyond the scope of completion for this course – it is possible that it could spiral in complexity in such a way that finishing by the end of the year is no longer feasible, but I hope that both this simplicity and focus will mitigate that risk. It’s also possible that the data I need might not be publicly available, or there might not be enough samples of data with certain attributes to make a claim. While there are some public datasets, and New Orleans has gotten better about data transparency than it has been in years past, it is entirely feasible that there is simply not enough or that are

confounding variables that I simply can't see. If that happens, it's possible that I will have to rope in other data sources as proxies, but this will weaken the observational strength of this report.