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Black and Blue

Isn't our police force supposed to serve and protect us? In my eyes and others, it seems as though a lot of them have been taking advantage of their power and American citizens. Police brutality is affecting the justice system and the lives of many families and society. For whatever reason, our police seem to be doing things backward from every other police system in the world. The show "Seven Seconds," that was created by Netflix is about a 15-year-old black boy cyclist, who died in a hit-and-run accident that was caused by a white police officer who was behind the wheel of the vehicle. They left him to die and left the scene of the crime. They thought that just because of the way he looked he wouldn't matter to anyone if he would be "missing." Wrong. He is one out the many who were killed by police officers and were left there to die. There are many other stories like this one, that supports my thesis. I will provide evidence, research, as well as my knowledge and stories from other families, where injustice made. Additionally, many have proposed various solutions to eliminate the prejudice it has created. Some argue that it is not a war between the police and blacks but in reality, the police are just performing their duties. Others have claimed that the cases raised in recent years have not suddenly risen but rather now have received merely more coverage.

"I can't breathe." Those were the last words of Eric Garner, a 43-year-old black father that was murdered in the streets of New York while being arrested by a white police officer. This is nothing new and only comes to prove that racism is very much alive and prominent in the United States, a country that is supposed to represent freedom and equality. In 2016, "40% of deaths of unarmed people at the hands of police were of black men, though they

only make up 6% of the U.S. population,” (Abdul-Jabbar 1). In comparison, white people who constitute more than 50 percent of the population, one can conclude there is an immense gap that suggests and identifies the real victims of these ongoing crimes. The duty of a police officer is to serve and protect; however, they have instilled fear into the lives of American minorities. Scholars are attempting to find the root of the use of excessive police force and its effects on the mental health and behavior of a person of color. The method of the police force in the 20th and 21st century has been used as a form of systematic racism that has oppressed the African American community psychologically and behaviorally.

Many argue that the black population has been a target for police violence that dates back to more than just recent years. Police brutality is one of many forms of police misconduct which has involved extreme violence against African Americans for over a century. Some say, “Historical evidence of public harming of Black bodies by police dates back at least to the era of slavery when police disciplined Blacks and recaptured those who escaped enslavement” (Alang 1). Police have inherited social stratification towards people of color because the country was founded and constructed to enforce slavery, lynching, and other dehumanizing acts towards Blacks. For more than 200 years black people have been enslaved by the rules of whites resulting, in strong feelings of hatred and tension between police officers that enforce or allow those rules and the black community. Additionally, in the 21st century “young Black males are profiled as criminals, deviant, [and] unapproachable... this profile often is a determinant to how they are treated by police.” (Moore 5). Young black males lash out because of injustice, yet they fail to execute their thoughts correctly because society is oppressing them towards a path of a stereotypical criminal or ‘thug.’

In the show “Seven Seconds,” we can see how the death of Brenton Butler makes Jersey City explode with racial tension. This crime drama explores the aftermath of the accident, which includes an attempted cover-up by the police department and an unpredictable trial. The assistant prosecutor KJ was assigned to the case wants to prosecute the hit-and-run as a

hate crime, in addition to negligent homicide. The longer the case drags on without a resolution, the tenser the situation becomes which is supposed to happen because this family needs justice and the police officers who committed the crime and tried to cover it up need to face the consequences. Unfortunately, at the end of the trial, it didn't end the way the public and the family wanted it. It was unfair, but it was a reality. This show is a brutal look at the politics of an American city, and the public has responded in positive ways, meaning that this show has opened their eyes on the systematic racism that people of color face throughout the criminal justice system. It also highlights what happens when a culture of corruption infects the police department.

The stereotypes that are continuing is one of the many driving forces that generate these fixed mindsets of racial profiling by the police force. Police officers have created racial biases to discriminate and distinguish criminals as black creating a rise in profiling in today's society. In the show "Seven Seconds," we can see all of those things being played out. The police officers of narcotics would stop every person of color, dig in their pockets throw out their food and drinks, cursing them out and it was hard to watch. But this is what people need to see to open up their eyes about the injustice that is being made against people of color and others.

In the other hand, others believe that the police are merely doing their job and the situation is often misinterpreted because people are not well informed on the extent of the police force and when it could be utilized. More often people are quick to criticize police officers when shootings occur and denominate them as killers or murderers. In reality, "the law does not require police officers to invariably utilize the absolute minimum force necessary in a given situation, because how could one instantaneously judge what "minimum" is in every conceivable circumstance?" (Miller 2). Sometimes officers follow their immediate survival instincts and one does not know how he/she will react in a certain environment or situation. However, Eric Garner, a man in handcuffs, crying for help to

breathe, or Michael Brown, an unarmed teenager who yelled “don’t shoot” but got shot at least six times by a white police officer both never seemed like a harmful or dangerous situation. The justice system defines force in two different ways, “Necessary force is the amount of force required to control a given situation, to preserve the life and maintain the safety of police officers or vulnerable civilians at the scene. Excessive force is any use of force beyond that required for safety and control” (Miller 2). The most difficult part for a court is to determine where to draw the line between necessary or excessive force and frequently the court sides with the fellow officer. NBC news reported the verdict of the Michael Brown case, “A grand jury chose... not to indict Darren Wilson, the white police officer who shot and killed unarmed black teen Michael Brown on the street in Ferguson, Missouri, in August” (Connor). Many police officers, like that of Michael Brown’s killer, end up not being indicted or suffering even the smallest of consequences after his/her actions. This decision triggered riots and protest that was heard all across the nation for the injustice caused not just for the family of Michael Brown but for that of a whole community of people of color. Excessive force or not, a police officer’s duty is to carry out the law not to judge or prosecute a potential criminal.

Policing in the United States has brought up an issue of not only corruption in the justice system but also problems affecting how the African American community react to the ongoing murders. Everyday people of color are witnesses or victims to police brutality and the unequal treatment, that goes to show the police brutality affects the justice system and the lives of families and society. I did not expect for there to be such a significant gap between the police killings of black and whites, therefore, creating a domino effect that hinders the mindset of black people that fear to become another statistic. I wonder if the media is partially at fault for creating mass divisions between people of color and police officers by reporting more news of police brutality and not enough news on police appreciation and praise for their heroic acts performed every day. However, with the help of the media, we can

see things from a closer point of view. I believe the show “Seven Seconds,” opened up our eyes into seeing somewhat what it's like to be a colored person in America, where racism and injustice still exists. Ultimately, the police brutality in America has to lead to one of the most severe and systematic human rights violations in existence and society must continue to change to defeat it.

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