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FIQWS 10108 Composition

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Fall 2018

*Black and Blue: People and Police Officers in America*

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 what we expect them to do. The show *Seven Seconds*, a TV mini-series by Netflix in 2018 is about a 15-year-old black boy cyclist, who died in a hit-and-run accident caused by a white police officer who was behind the wheel of the vehicle. The police officers Peter Jablonski, Mike Diangelo, Manny Wilcox, and Felix Osorio, left Brenton Butler to die and fled the scene of the crime. They thought because of his skin color, and the clothes that he was wearing that made him look like a gangster/thug, no one would notice if he would be "missing." Wrong. Brenton Butler 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 support my belief that police brutality affects the justice system and the lives of many families and society. I will provide evidence, research, as well as my knowledge and stories from other families where injustice occurred. Additionally, many have proposed various solutions to eliminate the prejudice against minorities that has been created. Others have claimed that the cases raised in recent years have not suddenly risen but rather now have received merely more coverage. However, some argue that it is not a war between the police and blacks, but in reality, the police are just performing their duties. I believe that police brutality shows how the justice system is weak and unfair, it damages and scars the lives of many. Even though there are people who disagree with my beliefs and have their claims that support their opinion, I will be showing evidence for both.

“I can’t breathe.”(Garner, Eric). Those were the last words of Eric Garner, a 43-year-old black father murdered on the streets of New York in 2014. He was standing in front of a Bodega selling loose cigarettes, then police officers approach him and start being aggressive with him. Then things escalated, and Eric Garner was put in a chokehold for about 15-19 seconds, while the NYPD white officers were arresting him, he died on that concrete sidewalk. This is nothing new because there are so many videos and stories about police brutality and it 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). According to The Washington Post, “Of the people killed by police in 2014 and 2015, 51% were white, 28.1% were black, 19.3% were Latino, and 1.7% were Asian. The remainder came from other ethnic backgrounds.” and “In 2014 and 2015, white people made up about 62% of the U.S. population and are underrepresented in this group. Meanwhile, blacks made up 17.9% of the country and are dramatically overrepresented.” (Strother, Logan). Meaning that African Americans are more likely to be killed by police officers rather than white people and 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 seem to lash out because of the injustice that society is oppressing them with, and that pushes 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, a black independent woman, who randomly got assigned to the case, though at first she didn't care and thought she landed an easy case, she just wanted to do her job and close the case. However, when she starts getting more informed and even visits Brenton Butler at the hospital, she gets her head in the game and demands justice for him and his family. KJ wants to prosecute the hit-and-run as a hate crime, in addition to negligent homicide because she has evidence that the police officers that were involved left Brenton Butler, a young black boy, bleeding to death in the snow and tried to cover it up. The longer the case drags on without a resolution, the tenser the situation becomes, the Butler family needs justice, and the police officers who committed the crime and tried to cover it up need to face the consequences. When they went on trial, the accused officers hired one of the toughest lawyers known by many, Sam Hennessy. She made sure that they weren't going to jail and did everything to make Brenton Butler look like a gangster from the projects while making the officers Jablonski, Diangelo, Wilcox and Osorio look innocent. KJ put up a good fight but it seemed like every evidence and recordings that placed the officers at the scene would disappear or be messed with which in the court it couldn't be used. She made the jury see that Brenton Butler was just a kid who was riding a bike home after a typical day at school and that he

didn't deserve what happened to him. 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. The officer who hit Brenton, Jablonski was sentenced to 364 days of jail time. Not even a full year. The rest of the cops are living their lives outside of bars. Although the cops all got off easy, all of them will be haunted for the rest of their lives. This show is a brutal look at the politics of an American city, and the public has responded in positive ways, there are many articles and blogs about their opinion of the show. Meaning that this show has opened their eyes on the systematic racism that people of color face throughout the criminal justice system, and there are also others who think that the show is looking at the bad parts of the justice system. It also highlights what happens when a culture of corruption infects the police department and that no matter if it's viewing the wrong side of the system, this still happens in real life.

The stereotypes of black people that are continuing are one of the many driving forces that generate these fixed mindsets of racial profiling, the use of race or ethnicity as grounds for suspecting someone of having committed an offense, 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 narcotics officers 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. However, this is what people need to see and open up their eyes to about the injustices against people of color and how the much power the government and the justice system has, but it's not fair when it comes to cases like this.

On 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 duties and when the harsh force towards suspects could be utilized. More often people are quick to criticize police officers when shootings occur and demonize them as killers or murderers. According to *The Washington Post*, "Studies finds police officers arrested 1,100 times per year, or 3 per day, nationwide."

(Jackman, Tom). The numbers are high, and this makes it look suspicious on the arrests. People may argue that it's not the officers' fault, it's the people who are getting themselves into trouble and they should get punished for it. 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, neither Eric Garner, a man in handcuffs, crying for help to breathe, nor Michael Brown, an unarmed teenager who yelled, "don't shoot" but got shot at least six times by a white police officer never seemed like harmful or dangerous situations. In the show *Seven Seconds*, we can see that Brenton was judged so quickly by his looks or how he dressed which is similar to both Garner and Brown and that made police officers quick to violence or to cover up their mistakes and hide behind the law and their badge. 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. This wasn't shown by police officers in both cases and in the show, Brenton was left bleeding in the snow next to a road for hours and the police officers didn't even bother to call an

ambulance anonymously or do their job, which is to report the accident and make sure that Brenton got a chance to survive.

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 of police brutality and unequal treatment that they receive because of the way they talk, dress or look, 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 because I used to believe police officers were meant to help, protect, and to bring justice to people and families. However, because of the gap, this created a domino effect that hinders the mindset of black people that fear of becoming 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 about police brutality and not enough news on police appreciation. Some videos praise police officers for their heroic acts or their simple acts of kindness, but the horrifying videos seem to change people's perspective. 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, 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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