

Ashley Tapia

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Instructors: David Crohn & Janelle Poe

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

Isn't our police force supposed to serve and protect us? In our eyes, it is as though many of them have taken advantage of their power and American citizens. For whatever reason, our police aren't doing 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, who died in a hit-and-run accident caused by a white police officer who was behind the wheel of the vehicle. The 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 he had on, he was a gangster, no one would notice he would be "missing." Wrong. Brenton is one out the many who were killed by officers and were left to die. Other similar stories support my belief, police brutality affects the justice system and the lives of families and society. There is evidence, research, as well as stories from other families where injustice occurred. Additionally, many have proposed solutions to eliminate the prejudice against minorities that are created. Others have claimed the cases raised in recent years have not suddenly risen but instead have received more coverage. Some argue it's not a war between the police and blacks, in reality, the police are performing their duties. I believe police brutality shows injustice in the system and scar the lives of many and I have clear evidence which supports my claims.

"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 cigarettes; then officers approached him aggressively. Things escalated, and Eric Garner was put in a chokehold for about 15-19 seconds, while the NYPD officers were arresting him, he died on that concrete sidewalk. This is nothing new, there are many videos and stories about

police brutality, and it comes to prove racism is much alive and prominent in the United States, a country that should 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 2014-2015, 51% were white, 28.1% were black, 19.3% were Latino, and 1.7% were Asian...” and “In 2014-2015, 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). Data shows African Americans are more likely to be killed by officers rather than whites, they’re the real victims of these ongoing crimes. The duty of an officer is to serve and protect; however, they have instilled fear into the lives of American minorities. 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 the black population is a target for police violence that dates back to more than 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 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 society is oppressing them with, and that pushes them towards the stereotypical criminal or “thug.”

In the show *Seven Seconds*, we can see how the death of Brenton makes Jersey City explode with racial tension. It shows us the outcome of the accident, which includes an attempted cover-up by the police department and an unpredictable trial. Assistant prosecutor, KJ, who got assigned the case, thought she landed an easy one. However, when she obtained more information and visited Brenton at the hospital, she wanted to bring justice for him and his family. KJ prosecuted the hit-and-run as a hate crime, and negligent homicide because she had evidence against the officers involved who left Brenton, bleeding to death in the snow. The Butler family needs justice, and the officers who tried to cover it up need to face the consequences. On trial, the accused officers hired Sam Hennessy; her goal was to make the officers look innocent, keep them out of jail and make Brenton look like a gangster from the projects. KJ put up a good fight yet every evidence and recordings couldn't be used since they either disappeared or were tampered with therefore she couldn't present it to the court. She made the jury see Brenton as a kid who had goals and dreams in life but his life was cut short, and he deserves justice. Unfortunately, at the end of the trial, the officer who hit Brenton, Jablonski was sentenced to 364 days of jail time. Not even a full year. The rest of the cops lived outside of bars. It was unfair, but it's the reality. This show is a brutal look at the politics of an American city, and the public has responded in positive ways, this show has opened their eyes on the systematic racism that people of color face throughout the criminal justice system, and others who think the show is looking at the bad parts of the system. It highlights what happens when a culture of corruption infects the police department and no matter if it's viewing the wrong side of the system, this still happens in real life.

The stereotypes of black people are continuing as 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 the police are 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 the arrests questionable. People may argue 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. 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 officer never seemed like harmful or dangerous situations. In the show Seven Seconds, we can see Brenton was judged quickly by his looks or how he dressed which is similar to both Garner and Brown. This made officers quick to use violence and/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 officers, end up not being indicted or suffering the smallest of consequences after their actions. This decision triggered riots and protests that were heard all across the nation for the injustice caused not just for the family of Michael Brown but a whole community of people of color. Excessive force or not, a police officer must carry out the law not to judge or prosecute a potential criminal. This wasn't shown by police officers in both cases and 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 or do their job, which is to report the accident and make sure Brenton got a chance to survive. This goes to show how police brutality and stereotypes affect the justice system and the lives of families and society.

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 because of the way they talk, dress or look. 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 who 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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