

Institutional Racism Against Black Citizens in America

by Brianna Brianna

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Brianna Bennion

Mrs. Maloney

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Racism is typically defined as discrimination and mistreatment of another human being based on their skin color, race, or ethnicity. The average person may believe that racism has been mostly abolished in America; after all, slavery and segregation are behind us, and racist people are frequently called out and condemned. However, racism extends far beyond this. It still exists in many forms, one of which being institutional racism. Also known as systemic racism, institutional racism tends to go unnoticed. It has been so long embedded in our society that those unaffected tend to pay no attention. Racism, specifically against black people, still lives within many aspects of society, including our education system, healthcare, criminal justice system, and employment statistics. Systemic racism does exist, and will continue to if we, as a society, do not take the time to recognize, understand, and fight it.

One example of institutional racism lies in our education system, and the discrimination begins as early as preschool. According to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, only 18 percent of enrolled preschoolers in the U.S. are black, yet black children make up more than half of the out-of-school suspensions (“Civil Rights Data Collection ‘Data Snapshot: School Discipline’(PDF)” 1). In comparison, 43 percent of preschoolers are white, but make up only a quarter of the suspensions (“Civil Rights Data Collection ‘Data Snapshot: School Discipline’ (PDF)” 1). Outside of preschool, there are still disproportionately high suspension



and expulsion rates for students of color. The department states that “black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than white students” (“Civil Rights Data Collection ‘Data Snapshot: School Discipline’ (PDF)” 1), even when violations are identical. Approximately 5 percent of white students are suspended, as opposed to 16 percent of black students. “Overall, black students represent 16 percent of student enrollment, but represent 27 percent of students referred to law enforcement” (“7 Ways We Know Systemic Racism Is Real”). “Kids who are suspended or expelled from school are more likely to drop out, and those dropouts are more likely to end up with criminal records” (“Black Preschoolers Far More Likely To Be Suspended”). Institutional racism’s negative effect on our black youth and their education paves a path of lesser opportunities down the road. Racism in the education system must be abolished so that people of color are equally able to succeed later in life.


Discrimination against black people exists in the medical world as well. For example, the American Journal of Public Health published findings that revealed that some doctors show “unconscious” racial bias towards their patients (“Unconscious’ Racial Bias Among Doctors Linked To Poor Communication With Patients, Dissatisfaction With Care”). Those who demonstrate this bias tend to “[pay] less attention to [black] patients’ social and emotional needs and [make] these patients feel less involved in decision making related to their health” (“Unconscious’ Racial Bias Among Doctors Linked To Poor Communication With Patients, Dissatisfaction With Care”), among other forms of indirect yet discouraging disrespect. Racial bias strains the relationship on both sides. If a doctor shows a lack of care or respect for their patient, then the patient, in turn, will most likely lose respect for the doctor, as well as trust and a sense of security. In one specific study, about two-thirds of the primary care doctors held racial


bias against their black patients (“Unconscious’ Racial Bias Among Doctors Linked To Poor Communication With Patients, Dissatisfaction With Care”). When patients feel unwelcome in the medical system, they are likely to avoid it—along with the help and attention that it is supposed to provide. Furthermore, black people are less likely to have access to health insurance. Approximately 70 percent of black workers “are employed in blue-collar jobs that typically provide low wages and are less likely than white collar jobs to offer health insurance coverage” (Duckett & Artiga). Thus, the health care options for black Americans are somewhat limited, and even if medical help is available, it is likely to be of unsatisfactory quality.

As for the overall health of black people, they are 9% more likely than white people to report their health status as fair or poor (Mead, Holly et al. 24). Moreover, black people are more likely than any other race to suffer from a chronic condition or disability (Mead, Holly et al. 25). The fact that black Americans’ health, in general, is inferior to that of other racial groups, is likely due in part to their limited and substandard medical assistance. They are also more prone to developing mental illnesses. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, black citizens in America “are 10% more likely to report having serious psychological distress than Non-Hispanic whites” (“Office of Minority Health”). This could largely be in part from the imposing presence of racism in the country. Furthermore, “people of Color have less access to and are less likely to receive needed [mental] care, and the care they ultimately receive is often of poor quality” (Carter 3). In summation, black citizens are at a disadvantage in the medical world, thus depriving them of the basic human need of health and well-being.

Perhaps one of the most prominent examples of institutional racism lies within the criminal justice system. When discussing racism in this area, it is very difficult to avoid the major issue of racial profiling. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, “ ‘Racial Profiling’ refers to the discriminatory practice by law enforcement officials of targeting individuals for suspicion of crime based on the individual's race, ethnicity, religion or national origin” (“Racial Profiling: Definition”). It is not only illegal, but ineffective, as “it alienates communities from law enforcement, hinders community policing efforts, and causes law enforcement to lose credibility and trust among the people they are sworn to protect and serve” (“Racial Profiling”). Federal statistics note that “a black driver is about 31 percent more likely to be pulled over than a white driver, or about 23 percent more likely than a Hispanic driver” (Ingraham). According to these statistics, black people were almost twice as likely as white people to not be given a reason for why they were stopped (Ingraham). Furthermore, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, stopped black drivers are more than twice as likely to be searched than stopped white drivers (Ingraham). These statistics show that a significant amount of law enforcement officers and other figures of authority are racially biased, whether they are aware of it or not.

Another example of systemic racism in the criminal justice system is a practice by the New York City Police Department known as stop-and-frisk. This occurs when a police officer finds a person suspicious and searches them for any hidden weapons. However, stop-and-frisk is hardly effective. According to reports by the NYPD themselves, “nearly nine out of 10 stopped-and-frisked New Yorkers have been completely innocent” (*Stop-and-Frisk Data*). It is important to note that the overwhelming majority of those stopped through the years have been

minorities, and, since 2003, more than 50 percent of those stopped have been black (*Stop-and-Frisk Data*). This blatant racism breaks down trust between police officers and communities, causing a loss of respect for the law and therefore a potential increase in crime.  2

Some find stop-and-frisk to be a useful practice. While it may reduce crimes slightly, the percentage of those stopped being innocent shows stop-and-frisk is not worthwhile. In addition, one of the main goals of stop-and-frisk is to take guns off the streets, yet guns are found in only a measly 0.2 percent of stops (*Stop and Frisk Facts*). Furthermore, “while violent crimes fell 29 percent in New York City from 2001 to 2010, other large cities experienced larger violent crime declines without relying on stop and frisk abuses: 59 percent in Los Angeles, 56 percent in New Orleans, 49 percent in Dallas, and 37 percent in Baltimore” (*Stop and Frisk Facts*). There are other methods of protecting cities that do not require harshly accusing millions innocent  3 civilians, and singling out Black people and other minorities as more likely to be criminals. One such practice is focused deterrence. “Instead of harassing innocent bystanders in an effort to score easy arrests” (Forman & Stutz), authorities “generally target a specific type or group of offenders, such as youth gang members or repeat violent offenders” (“Focused Deterrence Strategies”). While stop-and-frisk tends to lower citizens’ respect and trust for police officers, focused deterrence can have an opposite effect. When authorities target and arrest the actual criminals, officers garner esteem and legitimacy, and communities become safer. Furthermore, if the captured offenders are given help turning their lives around—whether through drug rehabilitation, job training, or education—they are more likely to not only change their criminal ways, but also become a positive influence in their communities. In conclusion, it is evident that it is possible to fight crime in more effective and less prejudiced ways.

Another instance of institutional racism is shown by the fact that black people are significantly more likely to be unemployed than white people. Firstly, “for most of the past 50 years, the overall black unemployment rate has remained twice as high as the white unemployment rate” (Ross). In regards to unemployed citizens with no high school diploma, 6.9 percent are white, and 16.6 percent are black; therefore, at this same level of education, black people are more than twice as likely as white people to be unemployed (Wilson). Additionally, young black high-school graduates (age 17-20) are at an unemployment rate of 28.4 percent, which is higher than the peak unemployment rate for young white graduates (during the recovery of the relatively recent Great Recession) (Gould & Cooke). As for young black college graduates (age 24-29), close to one-tenth are unemployed, which, once again, exceeds the peak percentage of unemployed white college graduates during the recovery. (Gould & Cooke) Correspondingly, “Many studies have found that workers unable to find steady employment during their first years in the labor market often pay long-term costs [that] . . . can permanently alter the trajectory of a worker's lifetime earnings” (Ross). Once again, black people have a more difficult path than white people, which is paved for them from a young age. Even at the same level of education, black people struggle considerably more than white people when it comes to finding a job. This disparity further shows the undeniable discrimination against black people in the country.

In summation, the existence of institutional racism against black people is clear and indisputable. It has existed in our society for generations, and therefore it cannot be vanquished overnight. Regardless, if we, as citizens, work together, we can overcome this problem and bridge the gaps between races. Truly, the first step is to accept that there is an issue in our

country. Oftentimes, those more privileged will turn a blind eye and pretend that nothing is wrong as long as they are not affected. However, people like this are the reason why institutional racism continues to thrive. Once we are able to recognize and understand the racism that has been woven into our society, we can begin to unravel it together.

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GENERAL COMMENTS

190/200

Instructor

Excellent effort. Try to vary sources within paragraphs. Be sure in text citations match works cited page exactly. Note comments throughout the paper and on the rubric.

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Comment 1

Excellent use of statistics

PAGE 3

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Comment 2

Good point



Comment 3

Excellent rebuttal

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