Police Brutality and Racism

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Police brutality entails the excessive or unjustified illegal use of force against citizens by law enforcers and can comprise torture, assault, battery, intimidation, mistreatments, mayhem, verbal abuse, and murder. Racially biased police brutality has become outrageous, with many innocent African Americans and other minority groups experiencing violence and, in some cases losing their lives in the hands of police officers meant to maintain law and order and guarantee public safety. Of the many Americans that have experienced police brutality, most of them are black Americans. Most experts have identified anti-black racism as the primary factor that promotes this violence against African Americans and other ethnic groups. White people are privileged as they get to enjoy fair and humane treatment from law enforcers, which black communities are fighting so hard to accomplish. Generally, although racism is considered the major cause of police brutality against people of color and other ethnic groups, other social constructions like classism perpetuate inequality and drive police officers to use force against these vulnerable groups.

Racial discrimination and prejudice is the leading force motivating law enforcers to support inequalities and violence against people of color and other ethnic groups in the United States. **Stereotyping** is among the racism factors that affect society’s perception of people of color and other minority groups. It entails an over-generalized and exaggerated belief about a specific group of people that affects every individual belonging to the group. Stereotypes of black people evolved from the time of African servitude during the colonial period and are extensively linked to the persistent **discrimination** and racism faced by people of color living in America. For example, America is a society that associates black people with criminality and violence, leading police officers to terrorize and harass black people instead of protecting the community and keeping them safe (Carbado and Rock 2016). Officers, like most Americans, have an implicit predisposition relating black people to crime which justifies their use of deadly and aggressive force towards black people. Innocent black individuals are more likely to be wrongfully convicted of crimes like murder, drug scandals, and sexual assault than innocent white people, which illustrates **discrimination** and racial prejudice. This criminalization of black people, which is not new in America, has created inequitable life opportunities for African Americans and triggers the negative attitude that American legal authorities, including police, have towards black people. Therefore, race plays a significant role in dictating how police officers perceive and treat African Americans and other individuals from minority groups.

Again it is notable that most white Americans view black people as a threat to society even in the absence of any threatening, angry or aggressive facial content. Young African American men are stereotyped as threatening, which can result in severe consequences upon interacting with law enforcers. For instance, the fatal shootings of vulnerable black men without weapons by American police officers have become common occurrences that have grabbed people's attention worldwide. As a result, activists and campaigns such as Black Lives Matter have become vocal about police brutality based on racial discrimination portraying the urgency needed to address this issue. An example is the killing of George Floyd, which demonstrates the impact of racism on police brutality. Floyd was an innocent African American who was murdered by a Minneapolis white police officer who handcuffed him, lying his face down, and knelt on his neck for more than eight minutes (Cappelli 2020). Distressingly, three other officers assisted in restraining Floyd because they suspected he was using a counterfeit bill. They never even invested in determining whether he was indeed guilty or not, meaning that they just assumed that he was guilty because he was a black man.

This act portrays racial **discrimination** and explains why white police officers are quick to harass and even kill innocent black men. Floyds’ case is one among many. The worrying thing is that the justice system is not effective enough to protect the black community and other minority groups from false stereotypes. Unfortunately, white men can walk freely across the streets without worrying about the police stopping to oppress them, something that black people cannot afford to do. Portraying black men as potential threats to the community even without concrete evidence demonstrates the bias of associating danger with black people, which exposes them to police brutality and violence. Overall, it is clear that African Americans are disadvantaged within the American law enforcement system, which leads to significant inconsistencies even among those who are entirely innocent.

In addition to racism, another social construction that enhances police violence among people of color and other minority groups is classism which refers to prejudice based on social class and **status**. Social class entails classifying people according to their wealth, education, income, and work, while status refers to the position an individual holds in a society. It is improbable for police officers to invade people residing in well up neighborhoods where wealthy and influential people live (Pillay 2020). This behavior exhibits **racial formation**, a sociology analytical tool developed by Howard Winant and Michael Omi that views race as a socially created identity where the significance of racial classifications depend on political, social and economic factors (Omi and Howard 2020). The law enforcement system allows the wealthy and influential people to enjoy certain privileges that poor black people are denied. It is more of objectivation where this behavior is a reality and part of the system which most police officers adapt to and cannot even trace the first racist law enforcers that began this tradition. Based on those who benefit, it is likely that the poor and underprivileged had nothing to do with determining how the system will operate; instead, it began with influential individuals who had the power to control police officers in the past.

Furthermore, Police officers understand that they are simply working-class citizens with little power in the overall scheme of things. They usually indirectly or directly report to powerful people like politicians and elected officials who can become trouble for them, similar to rich people. Hence as a result of this fear, most law enforcers avoid messing up with wealthy and influential people who can interfere with their career reducing the possibility of equal law enforcement in the neighborhoods. Since the American system limits police officers from interfering with the upper-class society, this aspect increases their contact with the poor and the working class who have limited influence and can do little to protect themselves from unjust police **oppression**. Some ways law enforcers oppress poor black people include harassing pedestrians and stopping them for no reason, false arrests, drawing their weapons, and shooting innocent civilians. Research shows that police violence mainly takes place in predominantly poor black urban neighborhoods (Pillay 2020). They enforce the laws on marginalized groups and the less fortunate with confidence as the poor lack the power and influence of the rich and influential individuals. The United States has a serious issue with police brutality and violence, which mainly affects African Americans and other vulnerable groups residing far from the top socioeconomic system.

Although police brutality towards people of color and minority groups has been an issue affecting the United States for long, there are possible solutions to help reduce inequalities and ensure equal and just treatment of all Americans. One strategy that would help mitigate racial-driven police brutality is peer intervention which involves forming programs that train officers to stop their colleagues from getting involved in unjustified violence. For instance, if the three officers in the case of Georgy Floyd intervened instead of helping the officer who killed him, Floyd would probably be still alive today. Therefore, the various police departments should adopt peer intervention programs that will help prevent unnecessary violence, reducing racial discrimination in American society. An example of such a program is the Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement (ABLE) project established through a partnership between Sheppard Mullin, an international law firm, and several members of Georgetown (Staub 2018). This project aims to prepare police officers to effectively intercede to stop harm and form a law enforcement culture that advocates for peer intervention.

Another effective solution would be for the American justice system to hold police officers who commit violence against black people accountable for their acts publicly. Most officers who are guilty of abusing their power to racially discriminate against African Americans walk away, freely justifying and portraying their actions as self-defense. An organization proposing for the American Justice system to step up and punish officers guilty of committing racial discrimination against African Americans is Earthjustice. It is a non-profit law organization focused on protecting people's interests (Goodman and Connelly 2018). With such solutions, it is possible to fight anti-black police violence, which will wipe racism off the system, promoting equality and fair treatment of all people regardless of race or social status. Therefore, it is possible to fight racial discrimination and discourage police officers and the public from discriminating against people of color. People need to understand that there is nothing special about being white. All people have the same capabilities, and hence defining them by the color of their skin or their place in society is wrong.

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