
Racism As The Main Factor In Police Brutality

Can the use of excessive force on African Americans by police officers be justified by their motto "to protect and to serve" ? According to Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Frank Edwards, Hedwig Lee, and Michael Esposito found that about 1 in 1,000 African American men and boys in America can expect to be killed at the hands of police. Men and women between the age of 20 and 35 are at risk of death at the hands of police. Experiencing and witnessing unwarranted arrests, harassment, and deaths that go unpunished can inflict permanent damage both emotionally and psychologically. Police brutality is a human rights violation that classifies a civil rights violation because officers exercise excessive force against a civilian. Police brutality against African Americans is a major human rights violation that affects many individuals across the United States.

Racism towards African Americans in law enforcement causes innocent lives to be taken. Amadou Diallo, an unarmed and innocent twenty three-year-old immigrant from Guinea was killed by New York City police officers on February 4, 1999. The officers mistook Amadou for a rape suspect from one year earlier. He was shot forty one times and killed with nineteen bullets. The Supreme Court moved the trial from the Bronx New York to Albany New York because officers shared their concern that in the Bronx, it would be impossible to find twelve impartial jurors. All four officers went from being charged with second degree murder to reckless endangerment within its two day trial. "Diallo's parents filed a \$61,000,000 lawsuit against NY city and in March 2004, they accepted a \$3,000,000 settlement" (Nelson). There are many families that have gone through such a painful experience and do not receive compensation for emotional and physical distress. Amadou was wrongfully identified and it cost him his life. The officers that made this mistake did not have to pay for their wrong doings.

Rodney King was on a high speed with L.A.P.D. on March 3, 1991. When the chase ended, according to Bibliography, King was removed from his car and brutally beaten. George Holliday witnessed the act and caught it on camera. The four L.A.P.D. officers that were involved in this crime were each charged with assault with a deadly weapon as well as excessive use of force by a police officer. The three month trial sparked the Los Angeles riots. Their trial was originally supposed to take place in Los Angeles, but defense attorneys argued that a fair trial in Los Angeles would be impossible because of the amount of publicity the case has gotten. The trial was then moved to Simi Valley where the jury was composed of ten caucasian and two minority citizens. The four officers were found not guilty in court. King was then awarded \$3.8 million for the physical injuries he sustained. Amadou Diallo and Rodney King both had their trials moved because of the fear of an impartial jury. The trials took place in a predominantly caucasian neighborhood which also makes the jury impartial. Both cases received compensation for police misconduct that instilled trauma not only in these two men, but also in the African American communities. The fear African American communities are experiencing in relation to police officers can cause mental health issues.

African Americans are experiencing stressors related to the fear of becoming a victim to a police encounter. By experiencing and witnessing unwarranted arrests, harassment, and deaths that go unpunished, these communities fear for their life. According to Sirry Alang, a health researcher with the American Journal of Public health, when one is faced with a threat, the body

will produce signals that turn on your fight or flight instincts that are necessary for survival in the short term. When the threat becomes repetitive, in the case of police brutality, the survival process causes wear and tear on the body's organs. According to PBS African Americans face a rate of 96 out of 100,000 deaths by police while Caucasians face a rate of 64 out of 100,000 deaths by police. Having such a high statistic number is going to cause a bit of paranoia. These communities are affected emotionally because they are constantly losing loved ones at the hands of those who are supposed to protect you. Cassandra Chaney and Ray Robertsons conducted a study that examined findings provided by the National Police Misconduct Statistics and Reporting Project (NPMSRP), and found "fatalities at the hands of police are higher than they are for the general public". This can cause individuals to be fearful of law enforcement.

Self defense is protected by the second amendment and is being taken away from the African American community. In 1976 Terrence Johnson, a fifteen year old African American, was originally arrested by two white police officers in Prince George's County for taking coins from a laundromat. The suburb has a long history of police brutality. Johnson claimed that he was severely beaten by one of the policemen and killed the officer in self defense. The state tried Johnson for first-degree murder and requested that he be charged as an adult. "His bond was set at \$1,050,000, an amount that had never been placed in the county's history" (Turner, Seltzer). If he was convicted as an adult, he would receive two life prison terms and in order to have the possibility of parole he needs to serve at least thirty five years. If he was tried as a juvenile, he would be free by the age of twenty one. Terrence was a victim of police brutality and retaliated in self defense. When it comes to encounters with authorities, self defense is never really talked about. There is a thin line between self defense and threatening the safety of an officer. Officers are trained to identify if the situation they are in is going to require excessive force. An instance where an officer may need to use excessive force is if a criminal is trying to escape or they have a weapon on them. Race should never be a reason for an officer to feel endangered. Matthew Bernard is a caucasian 18 year old male who was charged with killing his mother, sister, and nephew. According to ABC news, "the sheriff's office issued a BOLO for him saying he was armed and 'very' dangerous" (Tyree). When a police officer found him, he had his gun drawn. Matthew was running from the woods naked and strangled a bystander as the officers hit him with a baton. This man is resisting arrest, putting innocent lives in danger and was not tackled or shot. Terrence Johnson shot the officers beating him down for taking money from a laundromat. Matthew Bernard is a triple homicide suspect that was treated as a minor threat. The officer had probable cause to tackle or shoot this man and chose to do neither.

Although some may argue police officers are just doing their job, the strategies used during arrests are sometimes collateral. When police officers use excessive force against a minority, the media only shows the violent scenes. They don't show the encounter leading up to the arrest. The citizen may have been resisting the arrest and the officer has to follow protocol. There may have been times where an officer believes they must use excessive force to complete an arrest because they felt unsafe. It is unfair to state all police officers use brutal force based on an individual's ethnicity. This does not excuse some officers' behaviors. Officers are trained professionals and should be able to identify at what point in time they need to be aggressive.

This is an issue that is going to take a long time to overcome because it is a grey area. The police force has rules and regulations to try and limit the amount of police brutality cases they receive, but you can't control everybody's actions. Some officers believe they are doing their job and are doing whatever means necessary to protect themselves and the citizens around

them. This is going to take a few years but we have already made progress. A very helpful solution is protesting and spreading awareness to police brutality cases. Body Cameras are now required for all officers. Witnesses are at the scene and can depict what actually happened by capturing the incident on camera.

Protesting is granted to all Americans by the first amendment. To end police brutality we all need to force policy makers to face their subconscious racism by protesting. Frank Leon Roberts, an activist and writer, explains The Black Lives Matter movement as an activist movement founded in 2013 when Trayvon Martin, an unarmed African-American teenager, was killed in Florida in July 2013. It originated as a hashtag on all social media platforms and informed the public about all police brutality victims. By participating in such a movement you are adding to the voice of those who lost theirs so their story can be heard and they will always be remembered. Black Lives Matter is a human rights movement rather than a civil rights movement. By protesting all police brutality encounters you are letting officers know that their actions do not go unseen. By protesting you are demanding that the court take this matter for what it is, a murder, and persecute accordingly. Protesting does not always guarantee a positive outcome. You are putting pressure on elected officials to take action, but some may not care enough to take action. The amount of publicity a case gets causes an uproar in communities but that does not mean justice will be served. The Rodney King beating sparked the Los Angeles riot which included looting, fires, and lives lost. The four officers were found not guilty and it caused citizens to fight back. The people wanted justice which is understandable considering the case was caught on video and broadcasted on KTLA. This is not protesting, this was a violent riot that came from a good place but ended up causing more damage to the community. Nothing can change the fact that these families were impacted by police misconduct, but by telling their story we are making sure that their legacy still lives on. These victims have made a huge impact and can educate people on the reality of police brutality.

An action put in place to limit the number of police brutality cases is officers being required to wear a body camera. The North Carolina Conference of District Attorneys state, "Unlike dashboard cameras, these cameras record virtually all officer contact with other individuals in the field, whether on foot or in a vehicle—in both audio and video" (Macari). By using body cameras, police officers should be less likely to commit a questionable act because they know that their actions are being recorded and the footage can now be used against them. These cameras have the potential to make officers think twice about their behavior because they know if the situation ends poorly, then tape is now concrete evidence that can and will be used against them in court. Now all citizens have a reliable witness to use in a court case. Body cameras can be seen as an intrusion of privacy for both the citizen and the police officer. Since the officers are required to wear the camera, their privacy is being invaded. Citizens also may not want to be recorded, but it is a requirement set in place for the protection of both the officer and the citizen. If a citizen is resisting arrest or is a potential threat to the officer and the officer acts accordingly, these cameras have footage to present in court that shows exactly what happened. Same goes for a citizen that feels they are being mistreated. They can take the officer to court and use the footage as evidence. These cameras are put in place to protect all parties.

Police officers have to put aside their prejudiced views towards African Americans and put the law above their stigmatism. The only way to truly stop racism in police brutality is to eliminate all racism within law enforcement. Officers can not fear African Americans and take extra precautions based on their skin color. A traffic stop needs to just be a traffic stop. There is no

need for somebody to lose their life for running a stop sign. According to the American Psychological Association, "New Orleans police are being trained to step in when they see their colleagues about to overreact in heated situations, tell them to take a break and urge them not to do something they will regret" (Novotney). The goal of this training is to provide officers with tools to help prevent overreactions or potential misconduct by officers. They implemented using discrete codes that encourage a coworker to calm down and to stop what they're doing or let them know another officer is going to take over. Law enforcement needs to be trained on how to put the law before their own tempers. This is taught during their training. There needs to be regular checkups on these officers. Police officers tend to have PTSD from previous arrests and can cause them to act out of character. That's why seeing a therapist regularly can help level their mind. When law enforcement is on duty, there is nobody watching their every move so by having a colleague with them, there is somebody there to step in if the officer is losing their temper. You can't control everybody's actions and police officers are human. Everyone has their own beliefs but as an officer your job is to put the law above all. If you can not do that, then you should not be a police officer. Subconscious racism exists in all fields of law enforcement, but can not be acted on. Officers must face penalty if caught in a racist act or they will do it again.

Being educated on all human rights violations is extremely important so you know what is happening in the world. Just because it is not affecting you directly, that shouldn't make it any less important to you. As an ally your voice needs to be heard along with those who have been fighting for their freedom. The more people protesting, the louder our voices are heard and government officials will be forced to take action and make a difference in the community. Officers have instilled fear in the African American community when they are supposed to be the ones you call when you're in danger.