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The Greater Injustice: Police Brutality vs. Black-on-Black Crime

The art of protesting is as old as the sentiment of disagreement itself. It has manifested in several historically significant movements, such as Moses' protest against the pharaoh in the Bible, the Boston Tea Party of our nation's early stages, women's suffrage, and antiwar protests of the 1960's and 70's. Protesting is a right given to us by God, further enforced in our Constitution by the First Amendment, which reads "The congress shall make no law... abridging... the right of people to peaceably assemble..." This art allows for democracy to stand, providing the people a vehicle for voicing their opinions. Without this art, the idea of true democracy would dissipate. However, people use this art to a fault, protesting statistically inferior matters. Black-on-black crime, based on data, is much more frequent of an issue than police brutality, yet it is not protested as often. Why is this so?

The issue of police brutality, which essentially is the event in which a civilian is shot wrongfully by an officer, has recently become a large one that has been protested by a number of groups. The shooting of Trayvon Martin in 2012 seemed to bring this issue to the surface. In fact, it was during this time that the well-known Black Lives Matter group formed. This young man, seventeen at the time, traversed the late night streets of Sanford, Florida allegedly to go to the convenience store to purchase skittles and tea. A neighborhood watch member ended up killing

him, and the story went viral within hours. Many different protesting techniques took place, such as social media posts with his picture, people wearing hoodies in his honor, and, most notably, the hashtag “#BlackLivesMatter.” Since then, the protest of police forces has been one that has resonated with many across the nation. According to the *International Business Times*, as of September 25, there have been 708 documented deaths in police shootings, 173 of which have resulted in the deaths of African-Americans. The African Americans killed represents just under 25% of those killed this year by police. This statistic was similar in 2015, as there were 990 killed, 258 of which were African American. Williams says that “the latest stats hint that police shootings are on the rise compared to previous years.” These numbers have also angered many of the African American community, and to an extent, rightfully so. Any life taken should be lamented over. However, since they focus so strictly on this issue, they tend to overlook the, numerically, much larger issue of black-on-black crime.

Black on black crime is a real issue. According to phrases.org.uk, the term originated in a piece from *The Chicago Daily Defender* in 1968, stating that these sort of crimes in which an African American kills another of his race, are cancelled out in a white officer’s mind. By writing this statement, the author meant that since there is no white party in the equation, the crime is not as important, and thus, does not require the same amount of care. This would explain the many cases during that time in which police officers would reportedly show up in a hurry if the victim was white, yet take their time if the victim was black. Many believe that this term is only a myth. In fact, Urban Dictionary defines it as “a racist statistic invented by the FBI and ghetto leaders like Al Sharpton.” On the contrary, this issue is truly disturbing. When one looks at statistics hailing from urban cities such as Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit, and many others, it is hard not to empathize with African Americans who live in that area. Over Independence Day

weekend of 2016, only three days, more than 60 were shot in Chicago, IL, according to CBS News Chicago. The Chicago Tribune reports that as of September 7th, 500 homicides took place this year. Along with that, nearly all of them were African American males killed by other African American males. According to statistics reported by the Chicago Police Department, found by way of Intellectual Takeout, 75% of those murdered in Chicago are African American, and 71% of those who are behind the gun are of the same race. These numbers are disturbing, but notice how I said “reported” when discussing each of the statistics. An unfortunate reality is that, in order to hide the utter evil that is occurring, departments are delaying to report or are not reporting the full statistics of these incidences. Since crime rates and statistics that are reported reflect the effectiveness of the department, it is not uncommon for these agencies to report favorable numbers. According to Police Mag, “misreporting statistics about crime is not a new phenomenon.” Mint Press News reports that on February 17 of this year, six officers filed a lawsuit against their own Arizona State University Police Department for encouraging them to create favorable statistics to make ASU look safer. This is what police departments are doing to statistics involving all crimes in general, and seeing that some highly populated African American areas have even more crime happening, this practice is bound to happen in order to make the areas look favorable. This being said, the horrifying numbers that are reported may not fully encapsulate the magnitude of the issue at stake. Yet this issue is not as media-covered or protested as the issue of police brutality. Is there a reason for this?

The media is a powerful tool in today’s society. The use of audio and video permeates today’s news outlets, as it shows exactly what is going on – or at least what they need to show to enforce their message. Many of today’s news networks are skewed to one side or another. This bias sometimes causes there to be misrepresentation in what is broadcasted, often to a fault. For

example, in the early stages of the Trayvon Martin case, many outlets regularly attested that George Zimmerman, the neighborhood watch officer, was white. In reality, he was of Hispanic descent. The reason that the media did this was in order to establish the misconception that it was an issue of a white racist man who sought out this African American man, therefore creating a narrative that sparked even more outrage than the crime itself. In many cases similar to this, skewed news outlets will give a certain rhetoric that incites hatred, outrage, and thus, improperly gathered opinions on the matter. This hatred then leads to generalizations that are largely untrue. A viral example that particularly hits home is the YouTube video that portrays a young man at a protest who is protesting the officer who shot Keith Lamont Scott, but shows love to the officers who are doing their job by protecting the protesters from any harm. The act of giving hugs to these officers shows that he makes his decisions on a case by case basis, which is highly commendable. However, those around him do not seem to have the same sentiment. They spew hateful words at him, yelling obscenities and calling him derogatory names because of his act, along with generalizing the entire police force and incriminating those innocent officers simply because they wear a badge. Simply put, this hatred is inspired by what the media chooses to report and what it chooses not to, and in turn, causes more people to protest the more reported issue at the time.

The mass media cannot be the only scapegoat, though. In these times, social media plays just as much a part in the reporting and distribution of news as news outlets do. In an age where there is Facebook mass streaming, updates can be sent out seconds after something happens through Twitter, and there are cameras everywhere due to the prevalence of smartphones, it is nearly impossible to miss out on what is happening around us. What makes this even more effective is the fact that we, as millennials, are on our phones just about 24 hours, seven days a

week. News outlets have caught on to this fact, and it is common for them to have accounts on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and many other social media platforms. Even further, family members, friends, and loved ones who have accounts post about their plight on their pages. When others see this, they will share it to others on their friend lists, and so on until it has gone viral. In fact, according to Black Lives Matter, the movement was made famous by the hashtag that spread right after Trayvon Martin's death in 2012. Unfortunately, with this ability to post speedily and the want to be the first to post something, comes the consequence of misreporting information. When news is passed by word of mouth, or in this case, fingers, sometimes certain facts are misconstrued with certain bias, which, again, causes for misinterpretation and improperly formed opinions. Thus, when thousands of people are retweeting this type of tweet, the misconception is presented to other impressionable minds, which causes for mass misconception. The combination of both types of media sometimes causes outrage among various groups.

With these powerful tools, one would think that everyone would be trying to slow down and eventually get rid of every issue in our nation. However, this is not the case. Many of our local news stations will report on crimes in our communities, but those headlines never make world news. The larger media outlets choosing not to report these stories is heartbreaking, and as a consequence, these events go nationally unnoticed. Yet when there is a story like Trayvon Martin's that would get higher ratings, they dwell on the story for weeks, sometimes going too far. This is also another reason that we cannot fully blame the media. The ratings come from the people, meaning that the stories that are reported cater to those watching. This lack of reporting the black on black crime statistics somewhat reflects our apathy as a nation to such an issue. This is why when there are numbers reported reflecting this issue, there is no outrage or protest. This

has happened so much in the communities around us that we have become desensitized to it. The violence that goes on around us and the frequency with which it happens has infiltrated our lives and has become normal, which is not good in the slightest. In December of 2012, my family was riding to New York to celebrate my sisters' birthday. In the Philadelphia area, we came to a stoplight, and a pedestrian was walking across the street. As he got closer to the sidewalk, a car sped around the corner and hit the man. Even worse, he did not stop, but sped off, trying to get away. My father was infuriated, and chased the car for a few blocks, trying to stop the driver or make out his tags. Eventually he ran a red light and got away. The most astounding fact is that my father was the only one who seemed to care. Everyone else around seemed to see it happen, and drive away with no concern. In such a community, people are so used to things like that happening that they did not have any urgency to do anything, which is heartbreaking. The reason that this issue is not being protested as much as others is that there is minimal care for it. It has happened so much that people are desensitized to it, and do not have the inspiration to protest it.

This is not a generalization, however. There has been some outcry over this issue, especially within the communities in which this is happening. Jemele Hill, an African American anchor for ESPN, hosted a town hall discussion on athletes, guns, violence, and law enforcement at the South Side YMCA of Chicago, Illinois on August 25th of this year. Created by Kevin Merida, editor-in-chief of ESPN's "The Undeclared," This event was televised as an ESPN special and featured athletes who hail from Chicago, including the Chicago Bulls' Dwyane Wade, the Milwaukee Bucks' Jabari Parker, and the US National Track and Field Team's Kristi Castlin. The reason this roster was so powerful is embodied by Merida's quote saying that "Sports is...the universal connector. It crosses all ideological and political lines. I think athletes are becoming more and more aware of this influence and that they have the power to change."

Athletes have become spokespeople for many of the issues prevalent today, and the outcry against this issue in particular was a step in the right direction. However, what is utterly disturbing about this is that less than 24 hours later, Dwyane Wade's sister was killed due to gun violence in that same city. This incident made news, unfortunately, because the victim was tied to a celebrity, and it was a day after such a meaningful event. Even still, there were not protests, but mention was made on social media about the tragedy of the event. This is an unfortunate circumstance that seemed to overcast the power of the town hall.

Other initiatives have been taken as well. A project conducted by several professors around the Chicago area studied some local organizations that sought to make a difference in the community. These professors studied three separate intervention programs. The first and second was a singular program named "Becoming a Man," which was conducted by the non-profit Youth Guidance, studied on two separate occasions, 2009-10 and 2013-15. This program was an after school initiative that helped teach values, such as discussing problems rather than using physical force. The third program was conducted in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center. This intervention included implementation of a token economy for good behavior within the facility, increased staff education requirements, and a daily program similar to Becoming a Man. The basis of the project was to monitor decision making of the youth in the area based on crime and graduation statistics, and it was extremely successful. During the time period of the first two studies, total arrests were reduced by 28-35% and violent crime arrests were reduced by 45-50%. During the first study, in which the professors had follow up information, graduation rates increased 12-19%. The program run by the Cook County JTDC yielded improvement as well, reducing readmission rates to the center by 21%. These results are

striking because they prove the fact that if something is done to prevent these atrocities from happening, they could be immensely effective.

Black-on-black crime will not only be stopped through the protesting, though. It can be prevented during the growing stages of life. A sad truth is that in African American homes, many times, a father is not present. This absence of a father figure in the home leaves a hole in a young man's heart, as he seeks a role model who is not there. Even President Barack Obama, who went through a single-parent upbringing, has said that despite the love and care of his mother and grandparents, "that doesn't mean that [he] didn't feel his father's presence." According to The Root, in Cory Ellis' report "Growing up without Father: The Effect on African American Boys," "father-absence was the strongest indicator of delinquency, even more so than low socioeconomic status or peer pressure." The truth is, fathers provide the strength necessary in a home. A mother can raise a child on her own up to a certain point. When he becomes of age, and is stronger than his mother, if he has not already developed a certain respect for her, his strength could be used to overpower her, and her discipline becomes virtually useless. When a father is in the home, he provides the strength necessary to discipline his child, and not always physically. A certain tone of voice could incite correction in a young man, as it has with me. A father's love, care, and presence in a household can work wonders when raising a child. As time has moved on, numbers have shown an increase in rates of fathers being present. This is good for our future, as it provides promise of more safety for generations to come.

The issue of violence within the African American community has been a large one for years, yet has not been properly covered or protested. While some statistics have shown a decrease in such activity, there is still a long way to go before we can call it eradicated. Police brutality has been a largely covered issue, but does not yield the same numbers that black on

black crime does. What gives? The apathy towards what is happening in our communities is what holds us back from protesting the issue. An issue of such magnitude should be spoken out against and eradicated by the African American community itself.

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