

Blacks in criminal justice assignment

Law



Isaiah Powell Barbra York English Composition 102 Research Essay (Final) 30 November 2007 Guilty By Race “ GET THE FUCK ON THE GROUND NOW! ” As soon as we turned we saw two African-American teenagers several years younger than us, with silver and black guns pointed directly at our heads. I would’ve never thought in a million years I would be a victim of aggravated robbery (becomes aggravated when a weapon is involved). I lived in my neighborhood for almost twelve years and never once felt afraid to walk alone at night. That night, I was walking home from my grandmothers with a friend; it was only a fifteen minute walk.

The street we were walking down was a well lit, rural street, with cars driving through regularly. This area was one of the few places I would’ve thought of being victimized. As we lay on the ground, we were searched for valuables. As I was lying in the middle of the street, one of the guys explained to me, “ IF YOU EVEN MOVE YOUR HEAD AN INCH, I’LL BLOW YOUR BRAINS OUT! ” After the mugger’s comment I felt him place the cold, hard gun to my head. It was the scariest moment in my life; my whole body was trembling with fear. Once the second gunman cleared my friend’s pockets, the two took off running.

The moment they left they fired off several shots. We remained on the ground for five, long minutes. Afterwards we got up, sprinted the remaining distance to my house, and then called the police. I’ve never considered being robbed by an African-American because I don’t associate crime with a color, but after being robbed at gun-point it makes it extremely difficult not to. But instead of blaming an entire race, I sat aside my differences. This is not the case for others. Author Barry Glassner writes, “ when it comes to <https://assignbuster.com/blacks-in-criminal-justice-assignment/>

race, the more obvious the pattern the more obscure it seems,” (Glassner 114).

When we first hear about crimes that are committed, we automatically assume that the assailant is guilty. Yet often in time it’s not the case. As a society we find ourselves fearing things that we shouldn’t. In, *The Culture of Fear*, Glassner makes the argument that African-Americans are among society’s list of imagined fears. He feels that society no longer focuses on “real” fears but rather on “imagined” fears. Society basically spends more time trying to fix things that really doesn’t need to be fixed, and that because we cannot fix the “real” fears we attack the “imaginary” fears.

When society associates African-Americans with crime, we dehumanize the American culture. We shouldn’t blame a race for the mistakes of a handful. The media and politics have made it possible for society to continue associating African-Americans with crime. Through cause and effect it can be seen that associating Africans-Americans with crime has affected all Americans. With the media, politics, and the psychological fears they place in our society, we do the African-American community an injustice by associating them with crime.

As a young African-American I’ve experienced my own accounts of racism. Unfortunately I’m not the only one to fall victim to racism. All over the United States, African-Americans fall prey to racism. In 2006, there were 7, 163 hate crimes reported in the United States; around 4, 000 were racially bias hate crime incidents (Department). The crimes consisted of intimidation, destruction/damage/vandalism, simple assault, and aggravated assault.

Some of the hate crimes documented involved police officers committing acts of discrimination.

People argue that African-Americans account for most of the crime committed in the United States, and that it's accurate to associate them with crime. As a victim, I'm more wary of African-American males. With fears like this we're associating African-Americans to crimes that most have never committed. Glassner mentions that, "black men are about eighteen times more likely to be murdered than is a white woman, that for black men between the ages of fifteen and thirty, violence is the single leading cause of death," (Glassner 112).

Although Glassner wrote his book almost ten years ago, the National Crime Victimization Survey for 2005 has confirmed that these statistics are still accurate. We aid the continuation of discrimination against African-Americans by allowing ourselves to fall prey to media coverage and political statements; they have placed psychological fears in society. Glassner states that our fear of African-American men is, "perpetuated by the excessive attention paid to dangers that a small percentage of African-Americans create for other people," (Glassner 109).

It's only psychologically relevant to associate muggings with African-American males because they are typically the assailants. African-American males are discriminated and stereotyped more than females because their crimes are the ones that get reported. Glassner informs his readers that, "The most egregious omissions occur in the coverage of crime. Many more black men are casualties of crime than are perpetrators, but their

victimization do not attract the media spotlight the way their crimes do,” (Glassner 109). Keep in mind African-American females also fall prey to discrimination, just at lower percentages than males.

According to the 2006 National Crime Victimization Survey, there was a gradual decline in overall violent crime rates (National). Still males experienced higher victimization than females for all types of violent crimes except rape and sexual assaults (Bureau). With the constant expansion of technology, Americans are constantly exposed to news. Through e-mail, internet, television, and newspapers we can easily access information at our own desire. The media has made information easily obtainable in order to influence our society.

By doing this the media provides news as seen through their eyes. Through the use of attention grabbers in titles, we’re compelled to read articles for our own entertainment. With technology the media has made it possible to reach a larger scale of people by using various technology techniques. Glassner writes that, “ Scores of studies document that when it comes to victims of crime, however, the media pay disproportionately more attention to whites and women,” (Glassner 109). The media has a huge influence on what we see in our news and they sometimes do a disservice to communities.

By not reporting crimes in certain communities and a lot in others, the media can choose communities to look worse than it’s reported. This misleading information comes at the expense of the public because we’re not aware of problems that occur in other communities because they go unreported. It

was found that African-Americans had highest percentages when it came to falling victim to violent crimes (Bureau). Glassner quotes that, “ Everyone expects black crime victims, the argument goes, so their plight isn’t newsworthy,” (Glassner 113).

With such stereotypes we assume that African-Americans are obviously going to fall prey to being victims because of the places they live. This means that because a majority of people living in poverty are minorities, they live in rundown neighborhoods that tend to have higher crime rates and are more susceptible to falling prey of victimization at much higher rates. Glassner states that in recent studies, African-American men are number one on women’s list of fears (Glassner 113). With the constant negativity seen in African-American communities, leaders of the communities have spoken up against the media for its discrimination.

The media reports that because surveys of crime victims and witnesses show more minorities groups committing disproportionately higher levels of crime, they have the right to make the public aware of growing concerns in communities (Update). This makes African-Americans look more criminal. According to author Larry Siegel, “ Crime rates tend to be higher in District Zone 1, or inner cities and become lower as you move farther out of the cities,” (Siegel). Consider Cincinnati, the communities around downtown like Over the Rhine have the higher crime rates and communities like Blue Ash have lower crime rates.

The reason for higher crime rates in Zone #1 is due to high populations living in smaller communities that cannot accommodate the size of its

residents. This causes higher victimization rates. We assume that African-Americans communities have higher crime rates because it's shown in the news. Glassner says that, " Host of studies indicates that by downplaying the suffering of victims and their families the media do a disservice to minority neighborhoods where those victims live," (Glassner 112). By not reporting the good and only the bad, we're not able to see African-American communities in a positive reflection.

So when these communities actually need help, their pleas sometimes go unheard. In, *The Culture of Fear*, Glassner says, " Underreporting of black victims also has the effect of making white victims appear more ubiquitous than they are, thereby fueling whites' fears of black criminals," (Glassner 113). In retrospect these fears aid in the continuation of African-Americans being associated with crime because of how it's portrayed by the media. The Constitution states that all men are created equal.

You would think that if this was the case, there would be less racial discrimination and tension among communities. When it comes to politics, it governs society as it sees fit. Glassner writes, " Fear mongers project onto black men precisely what slavery, poverty, educational deprivation, and discrimination have ensured that they do not have-great power and influence," (Glassner 121). Politics have given people a chance to discriminate against African-Americans by passing laws in legislation that allow people to cross boundaries. In particular, police officers rights over racial profiling.

Politics feel that higher crime rates in the African-American community are high enough to increase the police presence, yet no documentations or reports by the Federal Justice Department suggest these communities have higher crime rates. However, it was found that African-Americans did fall prey to victimization at almost twice the rate as any other race (Department). Some argue that this is reason enough to increase police patrol, but I believe this is a wake-up call to have programs to influence such communities to come together and stop crime in their neighborhoods.

In 1968, the case of Terry versus Ohio itstates that the, “ Supreme Court ruled that police are allowed to use so-called “ stop-and-frisk” searches, as long as they have reasonable suspicion of crime or weapon possession,” (Key). The Supreme Court did not address the issue of race. It’s said that the stop-and-frisk searches has been criticized as a form of racial profiling. The term racial profiling is when, “ police interact with civilians, often by stopping, searching or questioning them, based on the perception that their race makes them more likely than other people to be engaged in criminal activity,” (Update).

Racial profiling is a controversial issue because police officers are being accused of discriminating against African-Americans when it comes to committing crimes. In New York, more than half of the people subjected to stop-and-frisk are African-Americans. In a recent article, Update of Crime and Race, it was found that, “ According to human rights group Amnesty International, 29 states have passed laws concerning the use of racial profiling,” (Update). It’s apparent that racial profiling is an issue in some

states, but for those states that don't address the issue; African-Americans can still fall prey to this method of criminal profiling.

When it comes to racial profiling, police focus more on appearance and less on suspicious behavior, which would make the most logical sense. Practicing racial profiling isn't particularly accurate because police officers pursue innocent individuals, allowing the "real" criminals to escape. Some critics feel that, "Police tend to conduct the most stops in high-crime areas, but only because African-American communities tend to be more problematic," (Update). A few critics argue that because African-Americans are arrested more often it can sometimes seem as if police officers are using racial profiling in making arrests.

Others argue that the high arrest rate is only because African-Americans are targeted more. Both sides do however agree that police officers monitor African-American communities more than other communities. The racial profiling controversy has caused police departments to be subjected to excessive criticism over how they handle African-Americans. Police supporters say that, "if police are afraid of being accused of racial profiling, they will hold back from stopping people. And if they refrain from conducting stop-and-frisks, police will be far less effective," (Update).

If there was a decline in policing in African-American communities, some fear that this could lead to even higher crime victimization. Yet African-Americans already account for a majority of homicides in the United States (Department). African-Americans don't want to worry about being harassed by police officers because they fit a vague description of being black. In

recent studies, it was found that traffic stops was another area where racial profiling came into play. A report in 2007 conducted by the Justice Department found, “ racial disparities among drivers whose cars had been searched during traffic stops,” (Update).

The report found that African-Americans only accounted for 17% of motorists on highways, yet 70% of drivers pulled over by police were African-Americans (National). It was also found that African-Americans motorist pulled over were most subjected to searches, and that they were twice as likely as whites to be arrested (Update). In settling a lawsuit in 1993 over alleged racial profiling by police, Maryland agreed to collect data on traffic stops. The data revealed that African-American motorist are pulled over by police in numbers vastly disproportionate to their presence on the state’s highways (Key).

In Maryland’s follow-up in 2007 it showed that, “ Drivers pulled over were pulled at comparable rates when it comes to race, but still found differences in the ways whites, blacks and hispanics were treated during these stops,” (Update). By focusing on African-American communities, police officers do an injustice to society by not providing equal protection and politics still allow these procedures of racial discrimination to continue. They do this by not having harsher punishments for police departments that allow its’ officers to continue the practice of racial profiling. Glassner writes, “ Police inattention is one of several actors that journalist accurately cit to account for why white crime victims receive more media attention that black victims,” (Glassner 112). Former officer Larry Reynolds is a 49 year old, African-American, who was a former police officer in Cincinnati for over ten years. In 2006 he was <https://assignbuster.com/blacks-in-criminal-justice-assignment/>

removed from the force because of a pending investigation involving racial discrimination. Reynolds is currently a Criminal Justice major at the University of Cincinnati. In order for Reynolds to retain his former position on the police force he must receive his bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice because it's now required to become a police officer.

Reynolds feels he was fired because he spoke out against several of his co-workers who were targeting African-Americans when it came to crime. According to findings, it's harder for African-American officers to speak out against fellow officers who discriminate against African-American when it comes to crime because they fear losing their job. Glassner wrote that, "Since 1941, twenty black police officers in New York had been shot by white colleagues. During that time not a single white officer had been shot by a black cop," (Glassner 114).

The term, Code of Silence, is when a person opts to withhold vital information either voluntarily or involuntarily. In the police force this practice is put into place in order to protect fellow officers and police departments from being viewed in a negative light. African-Americans account for less than 20% of officers in the United States (Department). With society associating African-Americans with crime we have given our officers a reason to discriminate. The built up tension between African-Americans and police officers have cause problems with both parties, and example of was the 2001 Cincinnati Riots.

The Riots were a result of an African-American teenager being shot and killed by a white police officer. In response to the many African-Americans

being killed by white police officers this killing was the final straw. Cincinnati was placed on a 9pm curfew and strict restrictions were put into place. The police officer who killed the teenager was tried by Cincinnati judges and was cleared of all charges. The city paid 4.5 million in damages and court fees, but never admitted any wrongful doings.

Cincinnati is a result of extreme tension between police officers and the African-American community that got extremely out of hand and resulted in riots. However, the Cincinnati Riots has showed society that there's a problem and that it needs to be corrected. As a society we are quick to blame others and when it comes to crime we blame African-Americans. It has become accepted associating African-Americans with crime because it has become the social norm. Through the use of media and political methods they have ensured society continues to associate African-Americans with crime.

Glassner talks about Tupac for a brief conversation and mentions, " he lived in a society that still didn't view him as human, that projected its worst fears onto him," (Glassner 128). It's important that society at least acknowledges the racial discrimination that is occurring in our society. If not, incidents such as the Cincinnati Riot could result in cities throughout the United States falling victim to costly damages and increases in deaths. Society is making an effort to correct this issue by protesting and making laws harsher as well as making news less about race and more about gender.

Glassner claims that, " to suggest that all Americans have a realistic chance of being a victim of homicide is to heighten already elevated anxieties

among people who face little risk," (Glassner 111). It's apparent crime is higher in low income communities, but you cannot assume African-Americans are to blame. Society places blame on African-Americans because it's easier to do so when the majority sees it that way. In order to prevent future riots we must come together and pave a way for society to tackle crime by not associating it with a color.

African-Americans should not be considered guilty because of their race.

Works Cited Glassner, Barry. *The Culture of Fear*. New York: Basic, 1999. "Key Events in the Controversy Over Racial Profiling." *Issues & Controversies On File* 25 May 2007. *Issues & Controversies @ FACTS. com*. Facts On File News Services. 16 Nov. 2007. Siegel, Larry. *Criminology: The Core*. Wadsworth Publishing, 2007. "Update: Crime and Race." *Issues & Controversies On File* 25 May 2007. *Issues & Controversies @ FACTS. com*. Facts On File News Services. 16 Nov. 2007 <http://www.2facts.com>.