

# Police influence on society

Society



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## Police Influence on Society

There always has been conflict between law enforcement and ethnic and social class groups. Some argue police will arrest an African American, Hipic, or Asian before they will arrest a Caucasian; there is also a belief police will arrest a person coming from a lesser socioeconomic class before he or she will arrest a person from a more affluent place in society. Unfortunately, though the criminal justice system denies these allegations, history tells a quite different story.

## History of Policing

Prior to the 1970s, law enforcement officers were mostly Caucasian males, five foot 10 inches or above. Although this requirement no longer exists today, in the 70s it meant Hipics and Asians could never look forward to a career in law enforcement; and though African Americans could meet height requirements, other discrimination practices kept them from advancing to a higher rank. In 1964, The Civil Rights Act abolished occupation discrimination; (Walker, 2011) however; though minorities could become police officers, other obstacles like harassment, lesser assignments, and the inability to make formal complaints to those higher in the department because these senior administrators made the regulations.

This meant that African American, Hipic, Latino, and Asian officers were given menial tasks like clerical work, jailor duty, dispatch, and the processing during intake of new offenders. Also, minority officers rarely performed patrol duties, which was a requirement for promotion, minorities found it significantly harder to gain the higher ranks their Caucasian male

counterparts could (Walker, 2011). Fortunately, things have changed significantly, and the role of police officer for minorities have become a valid, important aspect of today's policing. For instance, minority employment as police officers has increased dramatically. African American and Hispanics are now a majority in some police departments.

Furthermore, in some cities, African American, and Hispanic officers are the majority of police officers. The positive effect within the community is the diversity in officers, gives different cultures and ethnicities police officers they can relate to more comfortably, which, in turn, strengthens the police/community bond. Some agencies offer incentive pay to bilingual officers if the majority of a certain area where only Spanish is spoken by the majority of the community. Though there are still some agencies believed to continue discrimination against different ethnic groups, but this is not believed to be true for the largest percentage of agencies.

### Arrest and Imprisonment

Although law enforcement itself has evolved, there are those who believe some things do not change; the treatment of individuals from different ethnic groups and social classes comprising this opinion. One category focusing on racial disparity transpires when a substantial variance in the proportion of an ethnic group signified in the overall populace and the proportion of the identical ethnic group highlighted at any other instance is determined in the justice process. For instance, 12% of the U. S. population is African American, and also account for approximately 40% of arrests, " 50% of the prison population, and 50 percent of the inmates on death row" (Racial Disparities, 2012). An additional type of racial disparity is brought to light when a <https://assignbuster.com/police-influence-on-society/>

considerably larger proportion of a racial/minority group than Caucasians, are familiar in an area of the criminal justice system.

For example, more than nine percent of the total population of adult males either incarcerated, or on probation/parole are African American, as opposed to the two percent of adult Caucasian males (Racial Disparities, 2012). Furthermore, African Americans are arrested four times as often on drug charges than Caucasian, though the ratio for drug use between the two are almost identical.

### Theory on Existence

Racial disparities in the criminal justice are placed in three categories:

“ differential involvement, individual racism, and institutional racism” (Racial Disparities, 2012, p. 1) African-Americans and Hispanics are differentially involved in criminality. Their criminal behavior is because these groups are afflicted by a significantly higher rate of poverty and unemployment. Some disparities are because of the prejudice of officers, the prosecution, defense attorneys, judges, probation/parole officers, and parole board members as individuals (Racial Disparities, 2012).

Prejudicial beliefs and discriminatory behavior are characteristics of individual racism that leads to criminal justice authorities against minority groups and individuals. Finally, a portion of the disparities can be credited to institutional racism, which occurs because of statutes, classifications, and facility practices contributing to inequality against racial minorities. Social Class

Typically, lower income areas are known for higher criminal activity and lower police presence; the “broken window” theory, which suggests disorganization and decomposing neighborhoods are breeding grounds for criminal behavior, are thought to be a lesser concern for police. However, in “higher class,” more affluent neighborhoods, police officers are thought to show greater presence, have faster response time, and are less likely to arrest or ticket a person from a higher level of socioeconomics. From a political standpoint, though most police officers do not differentiate between social classes; however, police agencies and public officials who oversee policing agencies, do.

It is common knowledge that public officials attempt to gain and retain the support of affluent members of the community, some of this is accomplished by protecting the personal property and family of the affluent. Though this propagates positive relationships for police and the affluent, and has throughout history, it does not solidify relationships between police and the less fortunate. Police in early America were hand-picked by the affluent, and some are of the opinion this has not changed. Relationships between lower income neighborhoods and police are often strained because citizens in these areas are less likely to speak with a police officer out of fear of becoming identified as a “snitch,” and most are not willing to risk their safety, or that of their families’ to attempt to report or witness a crime.

## Conclusion

Just as individual relationships are, at best, difficult to manage, the relationship between the criminal justice system and a diverse society is no less difficult. Racial, cultural, gender, religious, and sexual orientation have

always been, and most likely always will be a significant area of controversy and intolerance in American society today. Though steps have been taken to reduce prejudice and discrimination against those of difference ethnicities and socioeconomic groups, the fact that the system has been forced into making laws to do this, is disturbing at the very least.