

Racial profiling ethics



Racial profiling is the practice of viewing certain characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion or national origin as indicators of criminal behavior. It is a practice that has been used by law enforcement officials when targeting specific crimes or those suspected of potentially committing crimes (Pollock, 2012). Police Officers utilize their discretion when deciding whether to stop an individual or not; but, when the Officers' beliefs and ideals are immoral or unethical then their judgment may be distorted (Savive, 2012). " Racial profiling is the product of unethical and immoral ideals and beliefs in action" (Savive, 2012). Racial profiling violates both the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States (U. S.) Constitution. The Fourth Amendment states that individuals have the right to be secure in their persons against unreasonable searches without probable cause. The Fourteenth Amendment guarantees equal protection of the law to all its citizens however; those who are subjugated to racial profiling are not being treated to the same justice and searches as their white counterparts (Head, 2012). For instance, in New York City, Police Officers conduct " stop and frisk" of pedestrians (Spitzer, 1999). Stop and frisk occurs when an officer detains an individual and runs his hands over the individual's outer garments to determine whether that person is carrying a concealed weapon. A 1999 study revealed that Blacks were targeted a majority of the time but only 10.5 percent resulted in arrest. Whites however, were targeted the least amount of times but resulted in the greatest percentage of arrest at 12.6 percent (Spitzer, 1999). When New York City Police Officers relied solely on racial profiling, they found weapons less frequently on the racial groups that they profiled. Racial profiling becomes a less effective way of targeting suspected criminals and decreases the overall mission. Racial profiling

actually diverts the Officers' attention from using actual, objective signs of suspicious behavior to effectively assess situations (ACLU, 2010).

Many Americans would agree that racial profiling is wrong and immoral. They would even agree that individuals should not be targeted as suspected criminals simply because of their race. But, many of these same Americans would agree to racial profiling if the focus was on catching suspected terrorist. However, when law enforcement officials concentrate on those of Muslim or Arab heritage they miss a lot of prospective terrorist. Just as focusing solely on African Americans as drug traffickers, law enforcement would fail to focus on the individuals who are transporting and selling drugs (mainly White Americans). When the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City was bombed, law enforcement officials immediately began focusing on Arab Americans when the perpetrator actually ended up being Timothy McVeigh, a young white male who was an Army veteran (CNN, 2001). Law enforcement continues to focus on those of Arab or Muslim decent when tracking terrorist but has not extended their profiles to include young white male veterans. Why not? Another young white American who would not have been caught utilizing racial profiling is John Walker Lindh. Mr. Lindh had joined Al Qaeda, fought with Taliban soldiers, and was captured in Afghanistan along with two other American men by American Soldiers (CNN, 2001). Mr. Lindh nor his two co-conspirators were not and would not have been stopped or detained through racial profiling even though they were members of a terrorist organization. They had even made statements in support of the September (9/11) bombing of the World Trade Centers. A more effective means of profiling would be behavioral profiling. Law

enforcement officials should look for behaviors that do not fit a particular environment. Ronald Burns (2009) alludes to those in security looking for things that do not fit. For example, someone waiting to go through security checks at the airport who is sweating profusely even though it is cold; those who are walking in a manner which may lead you to suspect that they are wearing an explosive belt; or some other bulky item underneath their clothes which interferes with the way they are walking. According to Yuval Bezherano, Vice President of New Age Security Solutions, this behavioral pattern recognition which is modeled after methods used in Israel is much more effective and could be taught (Burns, 2009). This method was used to catch Anne-Marie Murphy, an Irish female who was five months pregnant and carrying explosives in her carryon bag even though she had previously cleared three security checkpoints at London's Heathrow Airport (Burns, 2009). The Security Guards questioned why a woman so far along in her pregnancy would be traveling without a companion and where would she be staying? Anne-Marie provided the name of the Hilton Hotel in Bethlehem which did not exist at that time. Behavioral profiling instead of racial profiling is more effective because terrorist organizations often recruit outside of their race to individuals or groups who are sympathetic to their cause and who can elude racist profiles (Harcourt, 2006). The three White American men captured in Afghanistan working with Al Qaeda serves as an example. One can only imagine the harm these individuals could have caused had the Military not caught them since they were not listed as terrorist. To further their cause, Al Qaeda will collaborate with other nationalities to circumvent the tendencies that the American law enforcement officials have of utilizing racial profiling.

Studies on racial profiling confirm that it is a less effective way of apprehending would be criminals or terrorist; it alienates officers with the very members of the community who could help them (Head, 2012). Racial profiling is a blatant violation of the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments yet it is commonly used by Law Enforcement as a tool for targeting suspected criminals regardless of whether the individuals are actually engaged in criminal activities. Individuals are subjected to unlawful search and seizures based upon their ethnicity, not upon their behaviors. We have seen that those of color are treated differently from their white counterparts. When White America is subjected to the same biases of racial profiling then, we will see an end to this violation of the U. S. Constitution. Law enforcement official would do better and probably be more successful should they adopt behavioral profiling instead of racial profiling as a more reliable means of apprehending would-be criminals and terrorist.

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