Past and Present: A Brief Historical Analysis of the Criminal Justice System

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Abstract:

This project demonstrates how unjust our criminal justice system is towards African American males. The paper will briefly review the history of crime and punishment and its relationship to race and racism by focusing on select cases of police brutality, unequal prison sentences, driving while black, and walking while black. The research is framed by questions of Why? How? And Now What? The following questions are central to this thesis project: Why is racism embedded in our criminal justice system? How do African American males experience an unjust criminal injustice system? What possibilities can be made now to promote change?

By reviewing the relevant literature in the area of sociology and ethnic studies, I conclude injustice occurs due to networks of individual and institutional racism and race relationships that have shaped the United States and its criminal justice system. This thesis discusses how race operates within a system of oppression that unequally incarcerated African American men in the United States. This project will assess how society's perception about African Americans have become a domino effect and a scapegoat for white America to persecute African American males. This project develops from my personal concerns as a student leader, who wants to advocate for change and justice.
Introduction

What does a teenage boy whistling at a woman in 1955 have in common with a teenage boy walking on the sidewalk, eating a bag of skittles and wearing a hoodie in 2012?

What does Rodney King being mercilessly beaten by police officers have in common with Oscar Grant, who laid face down, handcuffed, and was shot and killed by an officer?

The opening questions reflect history of injustice that continues today. In 1955, Emmett Till a fourteen year old boy was brutally murdered by Milam Bryant. A group of white men beat Emmett Till to the point his face was not recognizable. They cut his ear off, shot him, and left him by the river as if he was nothing. Even after both killers confessed to the crime justice never prevails: “Milam did the killing. He fired the shot” (Huei, 1956). While hypocrisy was exposed, there was not any justice for Emmett Till. This same hypocrisy continues today. For example, the recent tragedy of a seventeen year old unarmed Trayvon Martin. Trayvon was gunned down on February 26, 2012 by twenty-eight year old George Zimmerman because he looked “suspicious.” The media’s definition of suspicious is a young, black male wearing a hoody in a gated, suburban neighborhood. Although Zimmerman reported this young, suspicious male to the dispatcher. The dispatcher states the following, “we don’t need you to follow him (http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=trayvon+martin+911&oq=tray&aq=6&aqi=g10&aql=0&gs_l=youtube.1,6.0110.1347.6221.0.8862.14.14.5.0.0.0.197.1172.1j8.9.0.).
Both cases indicate how African American males are suspect, whether whistling or wearing hoodies they are victims of being black in America. The injustice system has a negative effect on African Americans social, political, economical, and ideological status in society. Although its main purpose is to maintain social control, there are many instances in the criminal justice system that rely upon race to justify the unfair treatment of African Americans. In this thesis, I will demonstrate how the judicial system oppresses men of color and unequally incarcerates the black community. First I will describe how my positionality informs this research project and the questions I ask. Second I will briefly review the literature by discussing a few historical examples that contextualize today’s justice system. In this review I weave contemporary examples of how African American men experience the justice system. I also discuss how race and racism operate in the criminal justice system. Lastly I will put forth a few possibilities for changing the judicial system and its unequal treatment of African American men.

Positionality: Who am I and why I chose to do this research?

For the past four years, I have been an advocate of social change. Living in the Bay Area, I have been familiar with injustices that African Americans face daily. I try to be an active member for the local community when tragedy or violence strikes. I have witnessed how people fight back and take a stand against corrupt authorities.

I believe racism is deeply rooted in our society. Racism is both unintentionally and intentionally according to Yamato (2004). I have been trained as a Sociology and Ethnic Studies scholar. My training has helped me understand how racism is socially constructed in our society. This position helps me both cope with racism because I understand that I can act to change racism. In part, this position necessitates a type of education for liberation that teaches us how to build coalitions. Freire (1970) states, “critical consciousness is the ability to perceive social,
political, and economic oppression as it occurs in everyday life and take action to transform oppressive elements of society” (10). We cannot simply wake up in the morning and hope and wish away the existence of race or racism, but we can navigate through it and take steps to see change. We can utilize education to transform lives and expand opportunities while ultimately being conscious, understanding, and taking deliberate action against everyday oppression.

More than critical inquiry this research hits close to home. I have friends who have had direct experiences with an unjust system. Specifically, one of my friends is a twenty-two year old African American male who was brutally attacked by six UC Berkeley police officers for peacefully protesting. My last words to him was, “be careful.” Later that night, I received a phone call and was told to watch the news. I quickly learned how the police and the justice system doesn’t differentiate between citizens and criminals and victimize both indiscriminately. As a result, my friend, along with others in my community do not see Police Officers as protectors, but rather as an enemy who continues to frighten and terrorize. Equally important is my activist involvement in the occupy movement. Through direct involvement I have become more aware of injustice in my community. Equally important are the direct conversations with prison inmates at San Quentin I have had. In this respect, my research questions develop from a concern for equality and from a commitment to my community, friends and family.

Herein lies my commitment to this research project. By bringing research closer to home and by studying it as a sociology and ethnic studies scholar I find it central to ask new questions and be aware of social issues. As I will discuss later in my thesis, the justice system continues to promote inequalities that necessitate questions to be asked. Many questions continue to be unresolved. Race and Ethnicity are questions that guide my research position and have inspired me to do research. My training demonstrates how racism is socially constructed and is still
prevalent in America, despite the changes we have made as a country.

**WHY is racism embedded in our criminal justice system?**

America has a history of treating African Americans unjustly. Since the early 1600s, legal injustice has been apart of our society. Slaves were stripped of their humanity coming into America and were seen as property to their white superiors. Slave Codes were created to prevent slave owners from giving slaves any legal right or protection. Rather than the state, punishment for slaves was handled by the slave owner and according to Robert Crutchfield’s (2010) article in *Racial and Ethnic Disparity and Criminal Justice: How Much is Too Much*, “To lock up a slave was to "punish" his master by depriving the latter of labor,” (905). Slave owners had the legal right to corporal punishment when it came to disciplining their slaves.

*Slave Codes and its Limitations:*

In 1865 the Thirteenth Amendment prohibits slavery, however legal statuses of African Americans did not improve because states enacted Black Codes that, like Slave Codes, restricted rights and behaviors of freed slaves and defined former slaves as criminals. This legislation came towards the end of the Civil War to try to control labor, migration, and other activities of slaves who were newly freed. Black Codes gave some rights to African Americans such as legalized marriages, ownership of property, and some limited access to the courts. However, it also limited their rights to testify against whites, serve on juries, vote, and denied their freedom of expression. Even though they were freed from slavery the Black Codes were established to ensure African Americans did not claim social equality. In this context, Slave and Black codes became an informal process whereby white Americans became comfortable with justifying the unequal treatment of African Americans outside of the judicial system.

*Jim Crow Laws: Separate, but Equal:*
Jim Crow laws were enacted through the 1960s and were upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court ordering separate facilities in all aspects of life for African Americans. The term “separate but equal” was used throughout the Jim Crow era, but many of the accommodations provided for African Americans were of lesser quality than those of their white peers. These laws led to social, educational, and economical disadvantages for African Americans. In a country whose goal was to establish justice and equality for all, the meaning varied across racial lines and prohibited slaves from pursuing the true blessings of liberty. In this context, we see how African Americans were treated as second class citizens who had legal rights conferred upon them that did not match the rights of other Americans in the United States.

**HOW do African American males experience an unjust criminal injustice system?**

Due to racial injustice African Americans become economically disadvantaged, while those in power continue to benefit. Many African Americans live in poor residential areas such as ghettos. These areas in inner city communities experience high forms of violence, drugs, and sexual activity. Economically, these communities lack essential resources that can result in positive community turnover. These resources include better access to school systems, recreations, and directional programs. The retention of African American males within the criminal justice system leave families without male supporters and fails to give the children of these fathers a role model. These boys grow up to become men, and many get involved in negative lifestyles continuing the pattern of African American males becoming involved within the criminal justice system. Economical hardships, make living conditions worse in these communities and increase poverty.

Those in power, however, continue to benefit from locking up African Americans. The more involved within the system, the less the chances of African Americans holding positive
socioeconomic statuses such as higher positions in businesses. Those in charge feel no effect in the continuous lock up of African Americans and based on their ideologies, they feel as if they are doing their job well benefiting from the injustice within the criminal justice system.

**Racism:**

Racism in this instance is used as a tool of power. The purpose of our criminal justice system is to strike fear into the population in order to maintain control. Racism is an essential weapon in the control process. Racial justice is to convince whites of all social levels that Blacks and other minorities are inclined to do crime. Thus we must be treated unfairly for the good of the majority. When most whites hear the words racial profiling and DWB, they believe it may be overdone but there is a valid reason for it.

Socially, unfair treatment in the criminal justice system negatively impact African Americans in society. Superior political power in the legal system places these social disparities upon African Americans. Some of these instances happen before placed in the system and after. These negative social factors include racial profiling, discriminatory sentencing, disfranchisement, and difficulties with employment opportunities. All these factors play a role in how African Americans are socially harmed through the criminal justice system. Racial profiling is a controversial practice that refers to law enforcement personnel as a key factor in deciding whether to engage in enforcement (e.g. make a traffic stop or arrest) based on the principle of an individual’s race or ethnicity. The truth is that the United States criminal justice system often discriminates against black people at multiple levels. One level is discriminatory sentencing, which forces judges to hand out arbitrary sentencing based on racialized disparities (Perry, 2008, 3). Disfranchisement on the other hand, Quigley (2010) explains is the revocation of the right of suffrage (the right to vote) of a person or group of people, or rendering a person's vote less
effective, or ineffective.

**Racial Profiling:**

Racial profiling is an act police partake in most commonly found among African Americans. According to Nadra Nittle (2010) in her article *What is Racial Profiling*, racial profiling is a form of discrimination by which law enforcement uses a person's race or cultural background as the primary reason to suspect that the individual has broken the law. African Americans are most likely to get pulled over by the police more than any other race. The assumption that African Americans have a higher tendency to cause criminal behavior makes them prime targets for police officers.

Racial profiling is not a new phenomenon. Before the civil rights movement ended legal segregation, governments, employers and cops knew they could humiliate and brutalize Blacks with impunity. The term “DWB” otherwise known as “Driving While Black” is a term used to describe why Blacks are pulled over due to skin color. Many would argue that racial profiling is not the practice of state police, however African Americans are 47% more likely to receive a traffic citation and are 50% more likely to have their car searched when compared to white drivers, (Crutchfield, 2010, page 921). It is why most African Americans see cops as a not-so-friendly force in communities. The gap between white and Black perceptions of cops is based on real hard evidence-of being treated as second-class citizens, which echoes back to the historical legacy of slave codes. The problem is not merely one of racist cops, but of a policing system that encourages and promotes racial profiling and unequal treatment by individuals. African Americans are also 23% more likely to experience or have experienced police brutality against them (Quigley, 2010). One famous example of police brutality took place on March 2, 1991 in Los Angeles, California. On this day Rodney King was severely beaten by four Los
Angeles police officers. King was hit numerous times by metal batons, he was kicked, and stomped on by these officers while handcuffed. Once this case made it to trial, there was an all white jury. Even with the videotaping of the incident, the jury’s verdict was “not guilty.” It was because of the “not guilty” verdict which lead to riots in the streets of Los Angeles filled with angry and outraged Black citizens.

As the opening question in this thesis suggests, Rodney Kings case is parallel to a more recent incident of police brutality which, led to the killing of one Bay Area native. Oscar Grant a young Black male, 22, was unarmed and faced down at a Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) platform when Johannes Mehserle a white police officer, 28 shot Grant in the back. Oscar Grant died the next day at Highland Hospital in Oakland, California.

In both cases, the two Black men did not receive fair justice. Four LAPD officers were later tried in a state court for the beating; three were acquitted and the jury failed to reach a verdict for the fourth. On the other hand, Grant’s killer Mehserle was found guilty of involuntary manslaughter and not guilty of second degree murder and voluntary manslaughter. In King’s case police brutality left him badly bruised and battered. Grant’s incident led him to death and all there is to account for a lost life is involuntary manslaughter serving only a year in jail. If these instances are considered justified, imagine if the roles were reversed and the victims were white, there would have been much more uproar on the situation. This further supports the idea that racial injustice is all throughout our justice system and negatively affects African Americans. Justice for them is rarely served.

*Discriminatory Sentencing:*

African Americans also experience racial differences in the criminal justice system through discriminatory sentencing. It only seems fair that criminals convicted of similar crime
in similar circumstances should in fact have similar sentencing. Discriminatory sentencing is the notion that biases in race, gender, age etc. has an effect on decisions in sentencing. Racial discriminatory sentencing looks at minorities being given harsher sentencing for crimes than whites.

Unfortunately for African American men, race often plays an essential role in the decision making process of sentencing. “The U.S. Sentencing Commission reported in March 2010 that in the federal system black offenders receive sentences that are 10% longer than white offenders for the same crimes,” (Quigley 2010). For example, a white suspect charged with theft may receive a misdemeanor whereas a Black suspect will be charged for robbery for the same situation and receive a felony and serve a longer sentence. As stated in the Justice Works! organizational analysis of *Racism in the Criminal Justice System as Experienced by African Americans*: “A 1991 study revealed that federal prosecutors routinely charged more black men than white men with offenses that called for mandatory sentences. It was also found that prosecutors were less inclined to offer plea bargains to black defendants. As a result, the study showed that blacks received sentences that were 49 percent longer than those of whites convicted of similar offenses, (17).” Racial discrimination in the criminal justice system is seen here as being contextual rather than systematic.

The most famous case dealing with the issue of discriminatory sentencing took place in March of 1931 and is known as the Scottsboro Boys’ Trials. In Alabama, there were nine black men riding on a freight train through Jackson County accused of raping two young white women, Victoria Price and Ruby Bates. The boys were then arrested and taken to Scottsboro to await their trial. In early April of 1931, the first set of trials took place. With an all-white jury and hostile judge, the court appointed defendant put up inadequate defense, failed to question
witnesses of the case, and paid little attention to the key evidence of the prosecution. The jury claimed guilty verdicts and sentenced the boys’ to death with a split decision on whether the youngest of the boys’ should also be sent to death or life of imprisonment.

After the unfair results of the first trial, The International Labor Defense (ILD) and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) intervened with the case to battle for legal defense and the hearts of African Americans for the duration of the trial. TheILD appealed the case before the Alabama Supreme Court and the convictions were upheld. In November of 1932 the U.S. Supreme Court overrode the Alabama decisions and granted new trials to all defendants. Under protection of the Fourteenth Amendment, African Americans’ were given the right to adequate counsel.

With overwhelming evidence of innocence, testimony in the defense of the Scottsboro boys’ from Ruby Bates herself and even medical examinations refuting the rape charges the jury still ruled a guilty verdict and recommended the death penalty. In 1933, two of the boys’ were convicted of rape and sentenced to the death penalty for a third time by an all-white jury. Five stayed in prison waiting for new trials and two were removed from juvenile court and later convicted.

The U.S. Supreme Court reviewed the third convictions and the courts overturned the guilty verdict ordering new trials. In compromise to end the long ordeal of the trial, five defendants were convicted and four were freed all on the basis of the same evidence. Even though a little outdated, the case of the Scottsboro Boys’ is a prime example of poor legal representation, rushed trials, and racial injustice within the legal system. It also shows how some of the same issues that made that case a legal tragedy are still relevant in today’s system. This case redefined the power of white supremacy in the criminal justice system not just in Alabama,
but also throughout our nation.

Another instance of discriminatory sentencing was in the case of Tyrone Brown. Brown was an African American male who was sentenced to ten years on probation for being involved with a armed robbery of $2 in which no one was hurt. While on probation, Brown tested positive one time for marijuana and was sentenced by Judge Keith Dean in Dallas, Texas to life in prison. In many people's perspective robbery of $2 and an incident where no one was hurt would be seen as petty theft. Tested only one time for marijuana is definitely not enough to be sentenced for life in prison. The only answer for an outcome like this is discriminatory sentencing and how race plays a major role in how many African Americans are given harsher punishments for their crimes.

Even once sentenced behind bars, black's life and safety is not a certainty. Take Troy Kell for example, in 1986 he was sentenced to life in prison by the state of Nevada for the killing of James Kelly. Kell was transferred to the Utah state prison as part of an exchange program. In the year 1996 Kell attacked and killed his Black inmate Lonnie Blackmon after stabbing him several times. Prior to the incident, Kell was a white supremacist and was involved with many altercations with African Americans.

**Injustice in the Prison System:**

As seen in the previous example of Kell, once sentenced to life African American men still deal with unequal prison life. For example, If security was aware of the involvement Kell had as a white supremacist, they should have taken extra precautions in Kell's placement within the prison. Also, stabbing of another in a jail system causes loud commotion, so there should have been a response team on standby as soon as the stabbing occurred. The incident was caught on tape by the prison, meaning that someone had to have been monitoring what was
going on. This incident makes us question the quality of security in our prisons and how African Americans are being treated within a prison confinement.

**Disenfranchisement:**

Felony disenfranchisement denies those incarcerated the ability to exercise their right of suffrage. For example, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that in the *Richardson v. Ramírez* case California's law for felon disfranchisement was in fact constitutionally permissible, (471 U.S. 222 (1985)). In 48 of the 50 states, there are felony disfranchisement laws keeping people with felony convictions from voting. Depending on the state, some voting rights are permanently taken away or can be restored after sentencing, parole, and probation are completed. This greatly affects the African American community in that 1.4 million Blacks are disfranchised because of felony convictions. Keeping a large number of African Americans locked up takes away their freedom to exercise their opinion through voting and negatively impacts opportunities to make changes in their local communities, cities, and ultimately their state. Felony disfranchisement is an obstacle made worse by racial disparities in the criminal justice system, resulting in many Black voices unable to be heard.

**Prison Life and Employment:**

Even when African Americans are able to get through the system, they still suffer hardships finding employment opportunities. There is already adversity when trying to find a job with the status of the economy today, imagine how much harder it must be being an African American with a criminal record. "17% of white job applicants with criminal records received callbacks from employers while only 5% of black job applicants with criminal records received callbacks," (Quigley 2010). Once out of the system, adaptations back into mainstream society present African Americans with more complications. *The Mark of a Criminal Record*, by Devah
Pager discusses the issue that "... even whites with criminal records received more favorable treatment than blacks without criminal records (958)." Therefore employers, already reluctant to hire blacks, appear even more wary of African Americans with proven criminal involvement. Decision-makers hold negative ideological perceptions that most minorities commit most crimes. African Americans are already stereotypically categorized as being violent and aggressive. This idea held throughout society keeps a vicious cycle of the self-fulfilling prophecy throughout society: More minority arrests and convictions perpetuate the belief that minorities commit more crimes, which in turn leads to more racial profiling and minority arrests.

Despite what the facts say and what the statistics show many still believe the criminal justice system is not racist. In a book titled *Myth of a Racist Criminal Justice System*, author William Wilbanks explains his arguments against racism in the system. He states: "First, I believe that there is racial prejudice and discrimination within the criminal justice system, in that there are individuals, both white and black, who make decisions, at least in part, on the basis of race. I do not believe that the system is characterized by racial prejudice of discrimination against blacks; that is, prejudice and discrimination are not 'systematic'," (6).

Wilbanks (2006) suggest that for the criminal justice system to be considered racist the system as a whole would participate in racial injustices and that is not the case. Rather, racism within the system is an individualistic trait found amongst certain people. He also believes that the system is colorblind and most decisions are not based on discrimination. In fact, Wilbanks says, "It appears, however, that there is an equal tendency for other individual decision makers to favor blacks over whites," (6). This so that white are not seen as being prejudice or discriminatory. Wilbanks continues throughout his book giving more examples against racism in the criminal justice system.
In contrast, Samuel Walker argued ways in which the system is racist. Walker’s book, *The Color of Justice*, explores instances within the system that contains racism. For example, he believes, “The criminal justice system is neither completely free of racial bias nor systematically biased,” (5). Walker continues on with his claim providing readers with solid evidence of discrimination existing in many stages of the criminal justice process, including the police use of deadly force and the application of the death penalty. Walker uses studies and research to support his position and explanations. In summary of his book, Walker deliberates his beliefs that the “Majority of scholars would agree that there is a substantial body of evidence proving that racial bias inheres in certain practices and policies of both the criminal justice and juvenile justice systems, however there should be zero tolerance for it in the administration of justice,” (20).

**Discussion:**

Based on the findings of racial injustice in the criminal justice system, African Americans are consistently mistreated throughout the system. African American injustice has been apart of our history since the slave era. Years later, African Americans are still being oppressed in a more modern form of chains. The injustice experienced in the criminal justice system has an everlasting effect on the African American people and their future progression in society. Crime sees no color so our criminal justice system should be a representative of that. Protesting, Facebook, and Twitter has been a useful tool for the black community to express and voice issues of racial injustice. However, white and black crime continues to exist. On the other hand, issues of racial injustice have brought many people from different social locations: people from different ethnicities, sexual orientation, and social backgrounds.

After reviewing, researching, and reflecting on the issue, it seems as if this is a never
ending cycle for African Americans. The first step in the cycle is the negative ideological perceptions that many hold against the race, especially in the criminal justice system. These beliefs and negative ideas is what leads to negative social factors of more Black racial profiling and arrest. The more arrest, the more the chance of African Americans receiving harsher sentencing for crimes committed. This leads to the overrepresentation of African Americans within the system. Becoming apart of the system, African Americans lose the political rights they once had and opportunities such as voting are taken away. If given the chance, those let out of the system face economical factors that leaves them unemployed and unable to adjust back into society. This cycle, that stems from a single belief, grows as an African American progresses through the system. The ideological, political, economic, and social factors are all intertwined within the process of the system where each factor plays a role in how the next one is determined almost as if a domino effect. This is crucial in explaining the statistics of African Americans in the criminal justice system.

Exploring the issue of racism in the criminal justice system really hit home for me. I am a citizen living in a country that highly enforces its criminal justice system. My interest in this subject was beginning my research on exploring how this system works. I wanted to understand how race informs laws in the criminal justice system, what the goal of laws are, and what the punishments are for violating some of these laws. It is important to know and understand how this system works in a country that I am living in. Second, I am a minority and the majority of people involved in the criminal justice system are minorities of this country. It is important for me, as a minority, to do research and find information on why there is not fair representation of all racial groups. These disproportionate findings in the earlier stage of the criminal justice system are important in that they set the stage as an individual continues throughout the system.
"Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world."

-Harriet Tubman

Conclusion

WHAT possibilities can be made now to promote change?

Based on my discussion and preliminary findings I realize there are many solutions for change, but I offer the following three suggestions for changing how the criminal justice system oppresses men of color: self-empowerment, awareness, and coalition.

The following three options that I have listed above have a unique connection to bring social change for oppressed African Americans. I believe self-empowerment starts with the individual because in order to change the structure of society they must become aware and educate themselves on oppressive issues. When the individual becomes conscious they build strength and courage to eliminate further injustice. To become empowered, it is imperative that you know your history, once you know and understand your history you will begin to know exactly who you are. In this moment you start to connect to the past and in this process you are capable of forgiving those who have violated, oppressed, and destroyed your ancestors heritage. I highlight the self-empowerment of African American males because the judicial system has targeted this group for many years, but it goes beyond a racist issue. Because injustice is a issue around privilege, social class, and dominance. Self-empowerment can help others to empower themselves as well by broadening awareness into their local communities and those in power as well that can help bridge the gap. People from different social locations and standpoints can join together to ignite change rather your gay, white, nonwhite, religious, or nonreligious person to
find strategies and become a voice for the voiceless. In the context of my thesis the judicial system is not just targeting African Americans males and it is not just their concern, but a concern for society as a whole. Furthermore, if we have more individuals aware of these issues and coming together to address these issues it can transform the social inequalities that will lead to engaging in dialogue. Because each individual are oppressed in different shapes and forms and with coalition it helps to resist further injustice.

*Self-Empowerment:*

African Americans have to help themselves before anyone else can help them. For example, the black community must do more than just protest when it is a crime of black and white issues. To begin to resolve this issue the African American people need to begin with themselves by reducing problems in their control and provide opportunities for each other. They cannot expect change to happen within their own people unless they become the change they want to see. In no way do I encourage killing of any human being, but the practice of killing people in your own race, such as Black on Black crime, only sets the Black community back. Instead, coming together and providing opportunities for each other will help uplift African Americans as a race. Fixing the ghettos of many Black neighborhoods, providing more resources, and helping to employ each other will bring empowerment to the African American community. Resolving key problems in the Black race will be the spark that ignites change in the criminal justice system. There are no marches or protest done for black on black crime. This creates a lack of diverse solidarity amongst the black community. In addition, African Americans must stop internalizing their oppression by reinforcing societal negative stereotypes. It is very important for African Americans to become aware of the mainstream media’s continual dismissal of African Americans intellects, beauty, and strength. By recognizing their beautiful
qualities it helps to empower and help them to realize “blackness” does not mean less than, but they possess both inner and outer beauty.

Awareness:

The next step towards racial equality in the criminal justice system is making our policymakers aware and informed of the mistreatment of African Americans in the system. They have the power to become advocates toward reform through sponsoring legislation that resolves the issue of racial injustice in the criminal justice system. Legally, our policymakers have the ability to make a difference in communities, society, and ultimately at a national level. Once brought to the attention of the nation and made aware to those with authority, the racial injustice within our system will begin to diminish. Policymakers need to become more informed and involved with the issue of racial injustice in the criminal justice system and seek out solutions to eliminate them. Continuing to bring the attention of many to this issue will challenge society to make changes at a national level.

On the other hand, we also must become aware. This would gain us the opportunity to be the voice for the voiceless. We need to educate ourselves and not expect the News, Twitter, and Facebook to help us become aware of historical injustice. But, we must go into the communities where people are being oppressed. This will help us to engage in open dialogues to eradicate oppressive systems. In order to achieve this, we have to stop being in denial about the past, if not we will continue to internalize our oppression and keep dominant systems in the forefront. We need to challenge the status quo, build global bridges, listen and ask questions. It is important to take Sociology and Ethnic Studies courses that discuss racial issues and realize when it affects one person, it affects all of us. We must create political and social movements and not give up until we see change. This all can be done if we work together in solidarity.
Coalition, Alliance and Activism

I see coalition as a form of resistance because people from different social locations can come together to build their own community within the dominant community and dismantle oppressive systems tied to racism, police brutality, driving and walking while black, and harsher criminal sentences geared towards African American males. I say this because even though people come from different social locations and have different standpoints, these different groups of people can come together as a whole to pursue their common goal of succeeding through a racist society. Through coalition building oppressed students can start with struggles and discrimination, take matters into their own hands, and build a strong foundation for the future generation. I see coalition as a form of resistance because it gives people from different social locations a chance to come together and fight against political and social issues around racism and whiteness within the dominant community. It gives a voice to the voiceless, while helping to dismantle oppressive systems tied to the "White Racial Frame." "Standing Beside my Sister Facing the Enemy," Mari Matsuda describes coalition as, "individuals from different social positions coming together to work toward a common goal" (Matsuda 1990: 732). Although people come from different social locations and have different standpoints, these different groups of people can come together as a whole to pursue their common goal of succeeding through a racist society and beyond it. However, many may not have the same goals or interests, yet, they all want their demands met. Many, who have expressed their frustration about Trayvon death, may be voicing their opinions for a different cause. For example, some may want to get justice for Trayvon, while others want to dismantle the "White Racial Frame." With coalition, oppressed groups can share and listen to each other's experiences and realize to "move beyond race alone:" (Matsuda 1990; 734). Racism alone is not the only factor for
Oppressive systems: multiple identities, privilege, whiteness, and class. The purpose of coalition is to become aware that there is a problem, organize, and create a plan of action. First the problem must be deeply analyzed. A collective movement can lead to a fixture in the problem.

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