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APSY2243: Social Oppression and Transformation

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**Major Assignment #3: Adapt a Module Part I**

***Compelling Unit Question:***

Why are Black men disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system today, and how does mass incarceration perpetuate racialized social control in the United States?

***Text Set: (brief summary/justification for inclusion in the set)***

1. Systemic racism explained. Act.tv. YouTube video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrHIQIO_bdQ&t=218s>
   1. The YouTube video “Systemic Racism Explained” explains the prevalence of systemic racism in all areas of life in the United States by presenting the stories of two hypothetical people, Kevin Johnson, a White boy, and Jamal Johnson, a Black boy. The video explains that although the two boys only live a few streets away from one another, they have entirely different experiences academically, economically, and socially on account of race alone. It discusses the intergenerational effects of redlining on one’s circumstances and manifestations of implicit bias and societal prejudices in education and employment. The video also asserts that systemic racism can be seen in disparities in family wealth, incarceration rates, political representation, and education, and explains that this form of racism is extremely difficult to address because it does not just involve one person. The video finally suggests potential solutions for viewers, such as acknowledging implicit biases and the consequences of historical racism and supporting systemic solutions and policies. This video has been included in the text set to provide a foundation of the depth of the issue of institutional racism, as well as its widespread effects in areas of socioeconomic status, education, employment, housing, and criminal justice.
2. Slavery gave America a fear of black people and a taste for violent punishment. Both still define our criminal justice system. Brian Stevenson, *New York Times Magazine*. Article. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/prison-industrial-complex-slavery-racism.html?smid=pl-share>
   1. The article “Slavery Gave America a Fear of Black People and a Taste for Violent Punishment. Both Still Define Our Criminal Justice System” describes the history of mass incarceration in the United States given that the U.S. has the highest rate of incarceration of any nation in the world, asserting that the practice has its historical roots in slavery. Stevenson explains that the racial caste system in the United States began only shortly after the arrival of enslaved Africans in Virginia when the 1664 General Assembly of Maryland decreed that all Black individuals in the province shall work hard labor for life. This enslavement was maintained by the threat of brutal punishment by masters throughout the 1700s, with Black individuals not seen as human beings in every area (education, voting, etc.) except for criminal justice: enslaved Black people were still seen as “capable of committing crimes” as stated by the Supreme Court of Alabama. Stevenson proceeds to discuss the passing of the 13th Amendment in 1865, which ended slavery for everyone but “criminals” at a time when anything that challenged the racial hierarchy could be seen as a crime. The author explains that a large part of the issue of mass incarceration is not only that history fostered a criminalized view of Black people, but also that it cultivated a tolerance of brutality as a response to crime. This is why harsh punishment has continued over the decades, with countless lynchings throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and policies that have disproportionately targeted Black and brown people, such as mandatory minimum sentences and “broken windows” policing. Stevenson describes that the presumption of criminality and harsh punishment of Black people follows these individuals everywhere, such as in schools, and perpetuates racial injustice. This article must be included in the text set to provide a historical background for the issue of institutional violence and racism within the criminal justice system, as well as how it manifests itself in other areas of Black people’s lives.
3. *Visualizing the racial disparities in mass incarceration.* Wendy Sawyer, Prison Policy Initiative. Collection of data charts. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2020/07/27/disparities/>
   1. *Visualizing the Racial Disparities in Mass Incarceration* is a compilation of data on racial disparities in five criminal justice-related areas of policing, juvenile justice, jails and pretrial detention, prisons and sentencing, and reentry. These data demonstrate that Black people are disproportionately stopped on the street by police and are disproportionately likely to be arrested repeatedly, as well as that people of color disproportionately experience the use of force; all of these data also pertain to Black youth, who are more likely than White youth to be arrested and confined. Thereafter, the data show that there are racial disparities in local jail incarceration rates and pretrial detention populations. Some of the charts also address racial disparities and overrepresentation in prison incarceration rates overall, and in extreme sentences to life, the death penalty, and solitary confinement. Lastly, the data show racial and gender disparities in the “prison penalty:” homelessness, unemployment, and poverty after release. This collection of data is important for inclusion within the text set because it shows the racial disparities that exist not only in policing but in all stages of the criminal justice system from arrest to release from prison. The data also provide an objective look at the immense number of people of color, specifically Black men, affected by racism within the criminal justice system.
4. A dozen high-profile fatal encounters that have galvanized protests nationwide. Nicole Dungca, Jenn Abelson, Mark Berman, and John Sullivan, *The Washington Post*. Article. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/a-dozen-high-profile-fatal-encounters-that-have-galvanized-protests-nationwide/2020/06/08/4fdbfc9c-a72f-11ea-b473-04905b1af82b_story.html>
   1. *The Washington Post*’s article “A Dozen High-Profile Fatal Encounters that have Galvanized Protests Nationwide” provides information on the high-profile deaths of twelve Black Americans at the hands of police since 2014. It discusses the murders of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Laquan McDonald, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, Samuel DuBose, Freddie Gray, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. The article explains the events leading up to each incident as well as the consequences on the police officers involved in each incident. Although this article obviously does not list every instance of police brutality since 2014, it seeks to highlight the twelve cases of murder by police that have been the central focus of protests and movements for police reform. This article is necessary for inclusion in the text set because it emphasizes the importance of knowing and saying the names of these individuals who were murdered, as well as increases readers’ knowledge on these cases and how every single one of them could have been resolved less violently and the deaths have been prevented.
5. Exonerated ‘Central Park Five’ Survivor Dr. Yusef Salaam on Black Trauma | NowThis. NowThis News. YouTube video (watch from 0:28-3:28). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgYPqqHNPG4>
   1. This YouTube video presents an influential discussion of Black trauma by Dr. Yusef Salaam, one of the Black men who was wrongfully convicted as a teenager of the 1989 rape of a White female jogger in Central Park. The video clip commences with Dr. Salaam’s statement that he is “trying to fight for freedom, justice, and equality” by viewing his negative experiences in prison as ones that helped him grow. He explains that Black trauma and criminalization began when Black individuals were brought to the United States from Africa as chattel slaves, and that historically, Black men and women have always been viewed “in the worst way first… because of the way that we have been socialized.” Salaam expounds the case of the Central Park Five and the judgments of guilt throughout the media cast on him and the other four involved in this case even before they were convicted of the crime. He concludes by explaining the impacts of detention, incarceration, and the criminalization of Black people; it turns them into “second-class citizens” unable to participate in structural processes such as voting and housing projects. This video clip is imperative for inclusion within the text set because it shows the real-life, personal ramifications that the criminalization of Black men can have on individuals’ lives even when they have not been convicted of a crime. This video demonstrates that although racism in the criminal justice system is a systemic, institutional issue, it profoundly affects individuals such as Dr. Salaam and perpetuates the cycle of Black incarceration, harsh punishment, institutional violence, and trauma.
6. So you want to talk about helpful rebuttals for frustrating conversations. @soyouwanttotalkabout. Instagram post. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CNxdGAgH3j-/>
   1. This Instagram post consists of various rebuttals that one can make to racist statements by others, specifically those pertaining to criminal justice issues. Firstly, the post explains what one can say to someone who attempts to justify the murder of an individual by a police officer, explaining the role that law enforcement officers are supposed to have within our society. Next, the post addresses responses to someone who believes the murders of Black individuals by police officers are oftentimes “mistakes” or accidents, as well as rebuttals to someone who might say that had a person of color not resisted arrest, they would not have been killed. The Instagram post also addresses more general issues of racism in the United States beyond the criminal justice system; it explains that the country was built on a foundation of oppression, the importance of speaking out against hatred and violence, talking about racism, and focusing on language’s role in injustice. This Instagram post is imperative for inclusion within the text set because it provides concrete rebuttals and statements that one can make to family members and friends as strategies to be actively anti-racist. It also was posted on an Instagram page that addresses various forms of oppression and injustice in the United States today that is accessible to students for them to explore and learn more about the issue and ways to fight oppression daily and work against the perpetuation of oppression.