

Busting the Pipes, Why Change in Education is Vital for Black Students

Examining the School-to-Prison Pipeline

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Historically, Black men have been portrayed as an evil villain, “super-predator”, and being associated with drugs, violence and gangs (Perry, 2001). The media has spread negative viewpoints of Black criminals, showing a dark and dim image of “monsters” to watch out for and be afraid of. Our society has coupled these images of violence, gangs, and youth of color as one, creating a stereotype and a sense of fear of Black men (Walker, 2007). This systemic racism is subject to everyone within our society, and no one is truly colorblind. Racism exists at every level in American society, and schools have adopted policies to over-punish, and harm, the lives of African American students, out of this fear. Fear that Black children, if not restrained or punished severely, will act out and be more out-of-control than a White child would be. Fear that without harsh punishments, these citizens will “never learn the *correct way* to behave” (Owens, 2017). Black students may feel as if they are lesser than their peers as "we are still living in a society where dark things are devalued and white things are valued" (Billante and Hadad, 2010). Teaching education majors about the school to prison pipeline is the most important project for the future of education in America and equality through the races. These future teachers should go into the world with the belief that all their students have the same ability and potential in the classroom. Through years of Black students receiving lesser education, zero-tolerance policies targeting African Americans, school related arrests, suspension and detention disproportionality, and the disintegration of cultural studies programs, African American students have been undertaught basic foundational skills and have been over punished within school systems. This leads to the higher potential for ending up incarcerated in juvenile detention centers and in some cases, adult prisons. These same students that are lacking their basic foundations don't have the knowledge to build higher academic interests, thus losing the desire to enroll in higher education. Black children are then lacking upward social mobility, and a cap is forced upon the occupation horizon, limiting the jobs they're qualified for. The lack of basic education and the disproportion of White students to Black students enrolled in higher education leads to a disproportion within the working class, and unfortunately, jails. The low-income class and unemployed population are predominantly Black. Crime rates between the unemployed, homeless, and low-income communities are far greater than of middle-class neighborhoods, thus increasing the likelihood of prison for the poor; prison for the Black. The promise of free and equal education is broken for these students, and the vision of the “American Dream” crushed. *The risk of entering into the school-to-prison pipeline is not random. It is a specifically designed system created to oppress Black children from equal education and attainment of the “American Dream”.*

Black Students Receive Lesser Education than their White Peers

Schools were not built for the intent of teaching Black children. When schools were first created in America, Black children were not allowed to attend. When they were allowed to attend, they were forced to use different schools. When they could finally use the same schools, they weren't allowed to use the same bathrooms or water fountains. Black students were "allowed in White schools" in 1954, but widespread acceptance didn't occur until much later (Coon and Travis, 2012). And even when we thought we had finally found an equilibrium in the education system between the races, Black children are still being undertaught and unincluded in most public schools in America.

Public schools in America are funded from the surrounding neighborhoods, resulting in low-income schools filled with low-income teachers and families, majority African American. These schools have fewer resources to offer their students and teachers, and the quality of education in low-income school districts is far below the academic fostering that children of the upper class are fortunate to experience (Redfield and Nance, 20116). Low-income schools have classrooms staffed with underqualified teachers, and in some cases, no regularly assigned teacher is even staffed for a class (O'Brien, 2013). When schools and teachers don't promote and ignite learning in their students, the children are withheld their basic rights of education, and possibility, a future of freedom.

Even within the same schools, children that are seen as underperforming are "given to the less qualified teachers" while teachers with more seniority may be in charge of honors courses and exceptional students (Langberg and Ciolfi, 2016). The quality of teachers is impactful to the instruction and content taught within a classroom, and the possibilities for academic growth moving forward. Black students represent a very small percent of students within honors and advanced classes, while overrepresenting the population of remedial and special education courses (Thompson, 2016). Data collected in 2016 shows Black children receiving 12% of special education services, while White children represent 8.5% (Barshay, 2019). Special education courses are often held in different classrooms and would interfere with the regular school routine the children were used to. The quality of teaching has decreased for these students, and their interest in school starts to diminish, because a lot of the time, Black students are inappropriately placed in these remedial courses and don't need the "extra help". Across 11 states in the South (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia) Black students are 44 percent more likely than their White peers to be recommended into special education courses (Barshay, 2019). When students are incorrectly placed in remedial courses, their interest in academics diminishes and these students are withheld their right of an equal education in America.

Public school enrollment is heavily skewed between White and Black students in the United States. Enrollment rates on average stand 51% percent of students being White, and only 16% of students being Black according to the American Civil Liberties Union. In schools that are predominantly filled with middle-class, female teachers, and White peers, it can be hard for Black children to see themselves as part of the school community or see the value in their personal learning. Students that don't see themselves within any traits of their teachers, authority figures, their peers, or within the curriculum taught in a classroom may have a harder time understanding the material or forming relationships with other students (Bell, 2014). Children that do not see themselves being valued by their education system, whether through the curriculum or through teacher interactions and relationships, don't see value within their society

and are more likely to commit crimes that land them within a prison system. Lack of attachment to the school community, unfortunately, brings lower grades, and overall lower self-esteem for the child (Winn et al., 2011). These factors are large contributors to drop out rates of high school students and are the first steps into the school-to-prison pipeline.

Economic segregation within states has made the quality of education for Black children significantly worse as well. Many children that come from poverty share similarities with the Beecher Terrace neighborhood followed in the documentary Prison State by Frontline (Childress, 2015). Michelle Alexander describes the neighborhood as being filled with criminals, and each family has experienced jail in some way. She claims, “in these communities, where incarceration has become so normal, the system operates practically from cradle to grave,” and “When you’re born, your parent has likely already spent time behind bars. You’re likely to attend schools that have zero-tolerance policies, where police officers patrol the halls, where disputes with teachers are treated as criminal infractions, where a schoolyard fight results in your first arrest. It sends this message that whether you follow the rules, or you don’t, you’re going to jail.” Children in these neighborhoods feel like officers are “out to catch them at every slip-up,” and have a greater sense of anxiety in their community inside and outside of school (Childress, 2015). Children from low-income families may not have the best life at home; a burden they could bring into the classroom with them. Testimony from Terry Smith outlined in the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy full report, claims “poor students who live in poverty are often under great environmental stress at home and consequently do not receive the support necessary to develop at the same rate as other peers.” Growing up in poverty affects the way your brain develops (Thompson, 2016). Without a stable home life, children are already lacking significantly behind their peers in many physical and developmental assets. This can create major difficulties in the way children are able to learn, their connections to the school and teachers, and their future lives.

Zero Tolerance Policies Over-Punish Black Children Through Suspension and Expulsion

The zero-tolerance system was developed in the 1990s as a response to violence on school campuses and the newfound fear of school shootings (Heitzeg, 2009). Zero-tolerance policies were implemented against weapons, alcohol and drugs on school property. This was meant to discourage the rate of these substances on school grounds and was the only original job for School Resource Officers to enforce (Justice Policy Institute, 2009). Overall, the goal of zero-tolerance policies aimed in the right direction. Schools should not be the place for any of those things, however, administrators and School Resource Officers have twisted the meaning and qualifications to enable zero-tolerance policies covering a different, and entirely separate definition today.

Now, schools run on a tight rope guide to the school rules and strict administrative forces. According to the ABA, “zero-tolerance policies have no distinction between harmful and non-harmful offenses or any mitigating circumstances”, so they may be used to punish children over minor offenses. Some of the reported cases include suspension over “nail clippers, Advil, and mouthwash” (Justice Policy Institute, 2009). Administrators and School Resource Officers have warped zero-tolerance policies to cover suspension for minor, harmless offenses, and do not let the child give his or her explanation of the issue. Students are being regulated and watched over by administrators and School Resource Officers to the point some students would describe school as prison itself (Childress, 2015). Analyzing suspension and expulsion rates alongside

racial backgrounds show zero-tolerance discipline results in Black students suffering significantly harsher punishments within school systems in comparison to their White peers, even for identical infractions (Heitzeg, 2009).

Suspension and expulsion rates for American public schools have increased rapidly in the past decades. The occurrence of one suspension increases the likelihood of more suspensions or even expulsion in the future (Nelson and Lind, 2015). On average, nearly 31% of the students facing multiple suspensions are White children, while 42% of the students with multiple suspensions are Black children (American Civil Liberties Union). This proportion is so blatantly skewed against Black children, considering on average they account for less than 20% of public-school populations, while White children account for the majority in most schools. In 21 states, Black suspension rates are over double that of the Black population rates within public schools (US Department of Education, 2015). Although the rates at which misconduct issues occur remains the same between both races, Black children are severely punished at nearly four times the rate of White children (Stovall, 2016). Severe punishments such as suspension and expulsion over minor misconducts are a result of zero-tolerance policies and the new interpretations taken on by school officials (Nelson and Lind, 2015).

The Advancement Project (2005) outlines incidents subject to zero-tolerance policy:

“A seventeen-year-old junior shot a paper clip with a rubber band at a classmate, missed, and broke the skin of a cafeteria worker. The student was expelled from school.”

“In Ponchatoula Louisiana, a 12-year-old who had been diagnosed with a hyperactive disorder warned the kids in the lunch line not to eat all the potatoes, or “I’m going to get you.” The student, turned in by the lunch monitor, was suspended for two days. He was then referred to police by the principal, and the police charged the boy with making “terroristic threats.” He was incarcerated for two weeks while awaiting trial.”

“In Thurgood Marshall High School, in San Francisco, two groups of students, totaling between three and five, broke into a scuffle. School Resource Officers broke up the fight and escorted the students to the office where they were to be picked up by their parents. When a family member of one of the students confronted some of the students, another small fight ensued, and local police were called in to break up what an SRO termed a riot. Nearly 60 police officers arrived at the scene, some in riot gear, while students were changing classes. Students alleged that the officers brandished their guns, used their batons, and hit, pushed and kicked students. Several students were injured and arrested. Police contend that the students were confrontational.”

These students are not evil, crazy, or harmful. Each broke a rule but was not acting in a heinous or vicious manner. Researchers claim fear is the driving factor in explaining racial injustices as evident within the school-to-prison pipeline. School Resource Officers and administrators are often more “afraid” of Black children, especially Black boys. They have shown to punish these students more severely than White children, out of the fear that without harsh punishments, the child will behave in a much worse way in the future (Lopez, 2018).

Students that were reported having committed minor offenses such as drawing on desks, referencing guns, or having cell phones out in class were suspended or even expelled in some schools. Suspension and expulsion may result from a minor offense as such because of the widely implemented zero-tolerance policies within public schools. By suspending the child, you're hindering their learning experience by keeping them away from the classroom, and expulsion leads to extreme drop-out rates (Lieberman, 2012). Suspension and expulsion over minor offenses are one way that school systems are keeping Black children out of the classroom and limiting their learning. Judges may also be able to order the child to wear an ankle monitor or drop out of school entirely (Childress, 2015). The goal should be refocusing their attention on learning and being engaged in the community, rather than take them away from it.

The Exclusionary Disciplinary Policies Outline in the Oklahoma Advisory Committee's full report states that suspended students are more likely to instead "engage with harmful or unproductive activities, funneling them into the school-to-prison pipeline" (Thompson, 2016). Students that experience suspension or expulsion, even just once, are three times more likely to be in a juvenile jail system within a year (Nelson and Lind, 2015). In the documentary, Prison State, a young girl, Christel Tribble, states "I'm fifteen years old and I'm in here, basically, for skipping school". The documentary follows her story, along with several other young Black children that are incarcerated over minor disciplinary infractions such as truancy. Because of zero-tolerance policies, students such as Christel are not allowed to explain their situation, which can range from homelessness, families experiencing poverty levels where working is more important, taking care of ill family members, the list goes on. Truancy is a school rule regulating attendance to ensure that children are in class and is one of the major reasons for suspension and expulsion and even legal encounters or incarceration for Black students. In Christel's case, she was charged with truancy and disorderly conduct and was incarcerated in a juvenile jail center (Childress, 2015). This kind of experience can be really harmful to children and can have an effect mentally for the rest of their lives. For Christel, she experienced depression and high anxiety from law enforcement encounters and has had a negative view of the police for her entire life. This is commonly the case for Black American children.

In June 2012, investigation in Meridian, Mississippi uncovered a school district and police department that regularly arrest Black youth, without probable cause, because they were "recommended" by the school. This system was used, skipping around due process, and ushering children into juvenile detention facilities and juvenile jails, even when no crime was committed (Childress, 2015). A year later, the State addressed the racial issues that were exposed in Meridian public schools, and concluded these racial issues extend far outside the region of Meridian, Mississippi. It's been shown that American school systems and School Resource Officers are targeting Black youth and urging for incarceration.

School Resource Officers Target and Arrest Black Children More Frequently

The first officer placed within a school permanently was in Flint, Michigan in the mid 1950's. Placing this officer within the school was meant to help proactively reduce crime rates on school property, allowing students to be more focused on their academics and parents to feel safer sending their child to school (Heitzeg, 2009). This system was adopted throughout Florida and led to other states adopting the practice, catching the name: School Resource Officers (SRO). According to the National Crime Victimization Survey, less than 1 percent of schools

across the nation claimed to have an active SRO in the 1970s, about 20 percent in 1997, leading into 40 percent in 2008 and nearly 70 percent of schools in 2013. The majority of public schools today have at least one SRO on their campus daily. New York City public schools alone have a “force of 5,200 School Resource Cops” (Johnson, 2018). This means that NYC public schools have more officers within schools than counselors. State education departments are funding more money into arming public schools and criminalizing our nation’s youth than it is teaching them.

Officers can be seen as a necessity when considering major events, like school shootings, but are a vast overkill in most schools and don’t serve the correct purpose. These officers can even make students feel less safe or targeted by law enforcement within school (Lieberman, 2012). Analysis of School Resource Officers’ effectiveness on school grounds, which was intended to be reducing the crime rates on school campuses, was shown to rather be increasing the rates of “crimes” (Kaba, 2016). Students were being arrested at rates much higher than previous years, and punishments began to evolve into being referred to juvenile detention centers rather than the “old slap on the wrist”.

Today, School Resource Officers are often the ones in charge of punishments. The punishments are often harsher and more brutal than what a teacher or administrator would have previously assigned. Students may be arrested and face legal action for breaking a rule they would normally be given a suspension or even just reprimanded for, and this occurrence is still rising (Bryan, 2017). In some cases, arguments could result in assault charges and time spent behind bars (Childress, 2015). A report from the Justice Policy Institute states “when schools have law enforcement on site, students are more likely to be arrested by police instead of discipline being handled by school officials”. This leads to more kids being funneled into the juvenile justice system, which is “both expensive and associated with a handful of negative impacts on youth.” (Kaba, 2016). By punishing children with extensive legal measures, the rate of repeat offenders increases as well as the rate of high school dropouts (Lopez, 2012). Being incarcerated once increases the likelihood of returning to prison significantly (Childress, 2015). So, when School Resource Officers suspend and expel students, they could be dismantling their future lives outside of education.

Sometimes situations get out of hand within schools, and students break rules to the point of legal interaction. However, the American Civil Liberties Union reports Black students alone represent on average 31% of school related arrests. Statistically, each race should be represented equally within the suspension and expulsion rates, relative to their respective population percentage, as it’s been proven for decades that the color of your skin does not make you any more or less violent of a person. Discrimination is still present within school systems, and Black children are still the target. Black youth are 2 times more likely than their White peers to be arrested or referred to juvenile/adult court (Panel on Justice, 2001). They are also “3 times more likely to suffer out-of-home residential placement” (Spohn and Delone, 2007). Black children are being targeted and made into evil criminals displayed on media outlets, creating a racist stereotype that society has accepted as “normal” for Black people. This stereotype is systemically engrained in society and American thought. Analysis of this systemic racism can explain why Black students are targeted and arrested at higher rates than their White peers (Stovall, 2016).

One testimony provided The Advancement Project (2005) states:

Two 10-year-old boys from Arlington, Virginia were suspended for three days for putting soapy water in a teacher's drink. At the teacher's urging, police charged the boys with a felony that carried a maximum sentence of 20 years. The children were formally processed through the juvenile justice system before the case was dismissed months later.

These boys did not have evil intent, they're simply ignorant and young. Children make mistakes, and in this case, that mistake made at 10 years old could have cost their lives. A felony conviction in America is a death sentence inside or outside of jail. A majority of jobs, especially the elite and prestige, will never hire a convict. Convicted felons are also extremely more likely to be homeless and live in poverty (Lieberman, 2012). The Sentencing Project reports that nearly 1/3 of American Black men have felony convictions and experience these issues. If the court would have followed through with sentencing the two young boys, as the teacher had recommended, they could have been "just another statistic" and had their futures completely ruined over a simple, childish mistake. Teachers and school officials need to rewrite their "code" for Black children and understand the discrimination they are promoting within schools.

Cradle-to-Jailhouse Theory

The cradle-to-jailhouse theory argues that Black youth are being targeting and detained over minor – kidlike – infractions. Black children are often perceived as older and more dangerous than their White peers (Thompson, 2016). Evidence in this fear-based theory can be seen when analyzing punishment reports from preschools across the nation. Preschool children range 2-5 years old, and are completely harmless, however dozens of preschool children are suspended and expelled from their schools every year in America (Johnson, 2018).

Two testimonies provided The Advancement Project (2005):

"A 5-year-old boy in Queens NY was arrested, handcuffed and taken to a psychiatric hospital for having a tantrum and knocking papers off the principal's desk."

"In St Petersburg Florida, a 5-year-old girl was handcuffed, arrested and taken into custody for having a tantrum and disrupting a classroom."

The Advancement Project outlines two preschool children who share their case of being arrested and incarcerated over "tantrum's", something every young child will experience. These cases are not unique and are just a glimpse into a nationwide problem in American schools, of all ages. Black children are seen as dangerous and uncontrollable, even when they're not doing anything out-of-the-ordinary for a child.

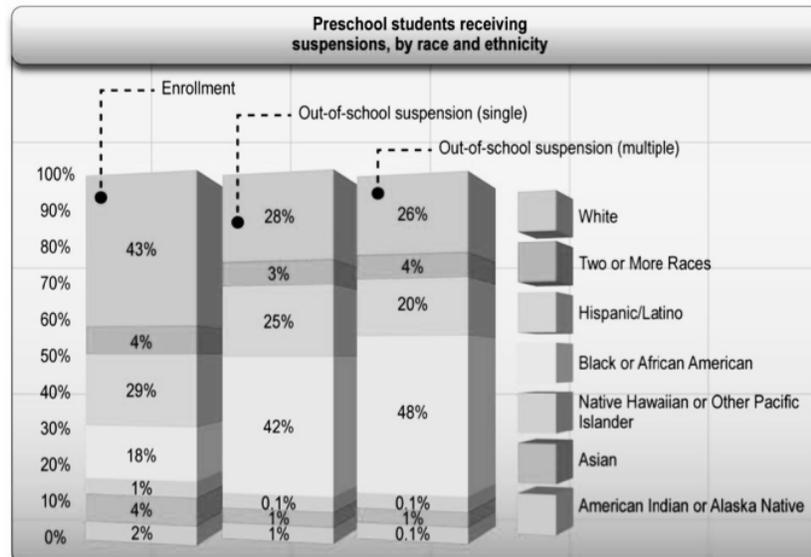


Figure 1 US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Data Snapshot (School Discipline)

The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights Data Snapshot (School Discipline) report from 2015 outlines different aspects of the school-to-prison pipeline and Black youth. They claim Black preschool children may be targeted at rates higher than other ages, and that resulting data has proven “discipline begins in the earliest years of schooling”, targeting youth specifically. The cycle begins young and continues through each grade of the K-12 system, detaining and derailing the futures of Black children.

Within the preschools represented in the study, roughly comparable to 99.6% of public preschools in America, 6% claimed to have suspended at least one child within the previous year. While Black children represent roughly 18% of preschool enrollment, they account for approximately 42% of one-time suspensions and 48% of multiple out-of-school suspensions (Figure 1). So, although less than 10% of preschools in America claimed to have suspended a child, just under half of those children suspended were Black, despite their enrollment rate. Researchers claim that school systems are funneling out children younger and younger every year, causing an influx in the juvenile justice system, and ultimately robbing Black cradles (Lopez, 2018).

Black Students are More Likely to Dropout

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in the 2016-2017 school year, the dropout rate for Black students ranged about 6.4 to 8 percent, and White students roughly 2.3 to 4.3 percent. An infographic from safequalityschools.org states “one suspension in 9th grade can double the chance of dropping out before high school graduation”. Because more Black students are being suspended and expelled in schools, the rate of Black students that dropout has remained steadily higher when compared to their White peers (Figure 2).

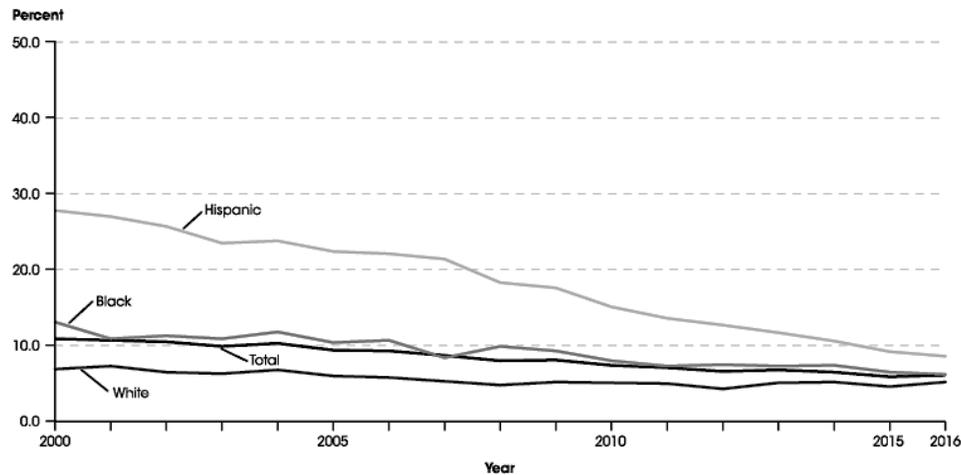


Figure 2 U.S Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, October 2000 through 2016

There are also several other factors that may lead a student to dropout, such as poverty, learning disabilities, feelings of academic abandonment, struggling families, discipline issues and lack of connection, all of which are statistically higher in Black students. For decades, Black students have had a higher percentage of dropout rates in public education (Figure 2). A large portion of children that dropout of school will become incarcerated. This figure is roughly four times higher for Black students than White students (Smith, 2009). Children that end up within a juvenile system once have a high probability of spending the remainder of their life in and out of prison systems periodically (Redfield and Nance, 2016). Evidence of this theory can be seen in analysis of prison racial breakdown and repeat offenders.

Among Black students that do not dropout, many will find difficulties in their future from their discipline records in their K-12 careers. Discipline and criminal records can create problems when applying for college or jobs, buying a home, or getting loans (Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups, 2017). These citizens are likely to have resentment towards police and the law and could feel like “life is out to get them”.

Court Cases Regarding the School-to-Prison Pipeline

During a court hearing with Senator Al Franken, testimony from Judge Heske can be heard claiming that courts “do not want to punish children”. He states that children are “neurologically wired to do stupid things” and that strict punishment upon their minor offenses could derail their future. Out of all the cases that come before Judge Heske, about 1/3 of them are “school related, low-risk misdemeanors”. He argues that these cases undergo a “least restrictive means assessment” and if the child passes, punishment is often handed down to the parents. Some reasons for consideration listed: mental health concerns, special needs, age, nature of act, and “did the parents take corrective action”. He claims that prison and juvenile detention is far too “adult” for children whose “developmental focus should be cognitive structuring” within a school system and that often, these cases are thrown out and never see “the light of day in a courtroom” for one of the above-mentioned reasons. Judge Heske argues that schools need to be more restrictive in the cases that are sent to courtrooms, and start distributing punishments on site, and from teachers. Although the testimony of this particular Judge seems fair and reasonable, that only the serious offenses receive legal punishment, he claims it wastes a third of

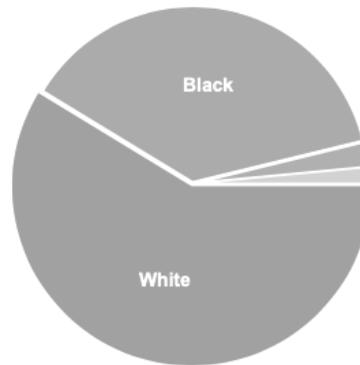
the court's time on minor cases instead of keeping real criminals off the streets. Judge Heske is also not the "norm" in his thinking and verdicts, as we can see in the rising rates of younger children within prison systems, most judges must be in opposition with his ideals and in favor of the incarceration of America's youth.

For instance, in the case *Fuller v. Decatur Public School Board of Education District 61*, students were expelled for a period of two years because of a zero-tolerance policy the school has put in place. The group was denied their constitutional rights and believed the punishment to be racially motivated. No guns, knives, weapons, or drugs were involved within the fight; thus, the students argued the zero-tolerance policy was not even warranted for use. Ultimately, the court ruled that the students did not provide sufficient evidence that the case was racially motivated, despite having proved at trial Black students account for 47% of the school district's population yet hold 82% of suspensions and expulsions that year. The judge ruled the school district was not in the wrong, and the students remained expelled (Smith, 2009).

Prison Statistics and Consequences

The rise of prison populations in the United States has dramatically escalated a "tenfold increase since 1970" (Stein, 1997). Prisons are overflowing with citizens who've committed nonviolent minor crimes and are serving lengthy prison sentences (Criminal Justice Facts, 2019). This costs the federal government, and ultimately the money from free men's pockets, hundreds of thousands of dollars, per prisoner, per year, times the over 2 million people that are currently incarcerated in America.

This increase of prisoners is severely skewed toward the Black population. In America, Black men face the rate of 1 in 9 aged 18-25 for being at risk of incarceration in his lifetime, while the rate for White men 18-25 stands at 1 in 100 (Heitzeg, 2009). The rate of actual crimes committed by each race remains generally around the same, while the rates of incarceration, or risk of incarceration, are several times higher because of the color of their skin. For Black children in American K-12 schools, their chance of being incarcerated is roughly four times greater than a White student, and once prosecuted, Black youth are nine times more likely than White youth to receive an adult prison sentence rather than juvenile detention or juvenile jail (Smith, 2009).



	Race	# of Inmates	% of Inmates
■	Asian	2,672	1.5%
■	Black	66,176	37.5%
■	Native American	4,129	2.3%
■	White	103,594	58.7%

Figure 3 Federal Bureau of Prisons Inmate Breakdown (Race)

An infographic available on the Federal Bureau of Prisons website (Figure 3) shows the inmate race breakdown with four racial categories. The statistics are updated on a monthly basis, being last updated November 16, 2019. The percentage of Black citizens that are incarcerated is quite alarming. According to the United States Census Bureau's 2018 report, 76.5% of the American adult population self-identifies as White, and 13.4% identify as Black. Based on the graph of current inmates in America, the percent of Black inmates is 37.5%, with White inmates accounting 58.7%. This ratio is clearly skewed towards the Black population in America, indicating discrimination in law enforcement.

A graph from the Prison Policy Initiative and the Bureau of Justice Statistics, Correctional Population in the U.S. Census 2010 Summary File 1 demonstrates the rates of incarceration based on three racial categories: White, Latino, Black. The data set was tested by the "number of people at risk of incarceration per 100,000 people in that group", similar to the size of hundreds of cities in America. The results in this particular study show less than 400 White per 100,000 occupants would be incarcerated, while over 2,200 Black are predicted, a near 500% comparison between the two races (Figure 4). This is quite alarming when comparing the statistic to a typical American city and understanding the number of individuals that would have their future stripped from them. It is even more alarming when analyzing children and prisons. Approximately 75% of juveniles in adult prisons fail to complete tenth grade and about 33% do not even have a fourth-grade reading level (Smith, 2009). To be literate is a basic human right, and Black students are being denied that.

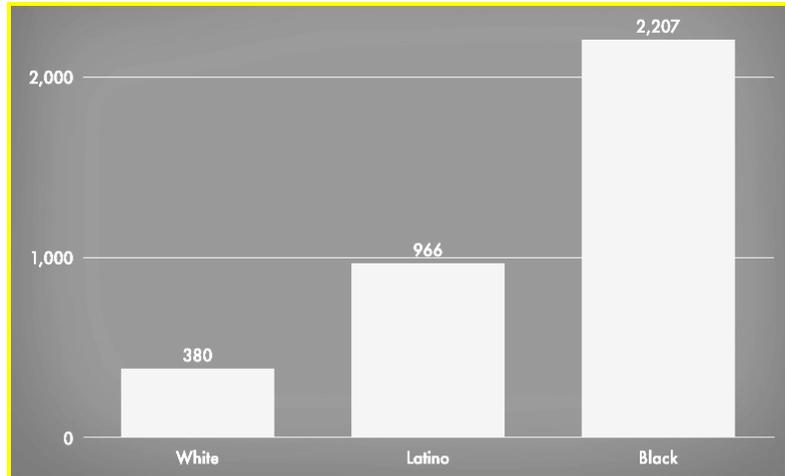


Figure 4 Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Correctional Population in the U.S. Census 2010 Summary File 1*

This can be really harmful within the “free” society as well. For instance, 69% of all incarcerated adults never finish high school (Smith, 2009). This statistic means that nearly three-quarters of incarcerated individuals will have trouble finding a job, applying for loans, and renting an apartment or home once the individual is released from jail. This is a major reason in repeat offenders and reentering into the prison systems. A large portion of the currently incarcerated individuals will be released into the world without a high school diploma, limiting the life they are able to experience, and the help they are able to receive. These individuals are released back into society without a dime in their pocket, and “do what they know best”, most commonly returning to jail within a year (Childress, 2015). These issues coupled with felony convictions or misdemeanors could be the end for someone in America.

Recommendations for Teaching Education Majors

American teachers are most often white and female. Teaching education majors is the absolute key to busting this pipeline and changing the future for all students. It’s not enough to just say we’re “colorblind” anymore. Real action should be taken within the classrooms to help stop this epidemic. It’s important for teachers to understand racial differences, and cultural backgrounds that may change the behavior of their students. Teachers must become diversity responsive and adapt their curriculum to fit each and all of their students. Because some of the highest rates of discipline disproportionality are found in schools with low minority populations, it’s extremely important for education majors to be experienced with the proper facts about other races than their own (Heitzeg, 2009).

A diversity responsive teacher is one who acts in ways that no child feels excluded for their identities. They work in ways that encourage an inviting classroom environment where cultural diversity is approved within. These teachers show kindness towards all their students and avoid using harmful language or stereotypes that could affect their students, families, or friends. One example of a diversity responsive teacher would be someone who teaches the curriculum in the context of culture. This can be seen in a few different ways such as: using inclusive language techniques and code switching, Code switching involves students being able to use the language

they are more comfortable with, rather than the “proper English” that is taught within schools. Research has claimed that “proper English” was invented and seen as the “better” way of speaking, which also puts bias on children that speak in ways that differ. The use of code switching within classrooms has been beneficial for students within different racial groups (Hill, 2011). Inclusive language techniques can also make students feel more accepted within a classroom, by their teacher and peers.

Role playing while reading books is another way teachers are able to teach in the context of culture. By reading books that are inclusive of different races, and allowing students to role play the narrative, they’re being inclusive of different cultures and learning about differences. There are also several online resources to help aid in role playing, as well as programs that can read books within the context of culture aloud to the class. Teachers are teaching to speak about differences and students are able to acknowledge them within each other. This can spark class conversation over racial differences and can lead to discussion about inequalities through the races.

One aspect I’ve personally grown to love is incorporating mentor texts on social issues with the regular curriculum. These books can show students that they are valid and seen within literature. It also can show students that someone just like them can succeed in life and be anything they want to be. Mentor texts on social issues can include a vast array of genres, and there are dozens of books on every identity. Some children’s books that are beneficial for opening up discussion on racial issues include:

- *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Pena illustrated by Christian Robinson
- *I Am Enough* by Grace Byers
- *The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson
- *The Skin I’m In: A First Look at Racism* by Pat Thomas
- *Full, Full, Full of Love* by Trish Cooke illustrated by Paul Howard
- *Mixed Me!* by Taye Diggs illustrated by Shane W. Evans

Reading books alone are not enough to end the decades of stigma against African American students. Explaining racial differences and acknowledging them early on in an elementary classroom are the keys to helping children grow up with a different understanding of the issues (Husband, 2018). It is also important for teachers to be able to use culturally appropriate language and avoid stereotypes within their discussions. Even though racial discussions may seem scary or awkward to have with students, it’s very important they understand the real facts and aren’t “sugar coated” the information.

A diversity responsive teacher is also one who combines different representations of material throughout their curriculum. The use of culturally mediated instruction and intervention of differential views can optimize the experience for all students within a classroom. A diversity responsive teacher is someone who supports multicultural viewpoints and allow for inclusion of all. When students notice themselves not being validated in society, they question their importance and value. It’s important for students to be able to see themselves in successful and influential role models within the curriculum (Bell, 2014).

It’s also really important for teachers to start taking further action themselves in the classroom. The less situations that end up in front of SRO, the less children will be forced to face a legal authority over miniscule issues such as having a cell phone out in class (Justice Policy Institute, 2009). Children make mistakes, and no child should have to face such high authority

over simple mistakes, especially because of the color of their skin. Teachers are often so overwhelmed with the idea of scoring high test scores on national exams, that any disruption and thus wasted classroom time, could be detrimental, resulting in many minor conflicts ending up in front of law enforcement officers instead. Students that speak out of turn or cause class disruption are sent in the halls or reported to the office for law enforcement intervention. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People states, “In the last decade, the punitive and overzealous tools and approaches of the modern criminal justice system have seeped into our schools, serving to remove children from mainstream educational environments and funnel them onto a one-way path toward prison.... The School-to-Prison Pipeline is one of the most urgent challenges in education today.” It’s vital for teachers to intervene as much as they can and keep control within the classroom, rather than a law enforcement officer. By better preparing teachers for these interventions, the rate of students sent out of the classroom should decrease, and the rate of children feeling included in the school community increase.

Personal Plan for Keeping Up with Future Events

As much as anyone can hope, the issue isn’t going to just blow over or be fixed overnight. There is no cut dry solution to this epidemic, and slow progress from classroom to classroom is expected before any national outcomes become evident. I believe that this will be a struggle into my own teaching career. I plan on using a mixture of the recommendations for teachers I applied above to help teach my students as well as seeking out new information to further adapt. I also plan on keeping up with current news stories and articles about the topic in the future.

Before being exposed to these concepts within a classroom, I had never thought of many different things we were taught over the course. I shared my knowledge with my friends and family almost weekly of the different things I had learned over the week, and I really enjoyed diving deeper into the concept of race. This paper was really interesting to put together and to see how badly the United States really did make school more of a sorting facility rather than an education sanctuary promised to all American children. I think this is a really important issue that needs to be understood even better than I do now. There was so much more I would uncover with every topic searched, and I plan on continuing this paper further in the future as well. I plan to keep diving deeper into these topics and making my future classroom aware of the discrimination throughout history and even currently, because even if it’s hard or awkward to talk about, it still needs to be talked about to make any change, and change is completely necessary.

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