

Inequality of Police Brutality By Jazmin Rivera

George Floyd (46) was suffocated, after saying he couldn't breathe repeatedly, for allegedly trying to use a counterfeit \$20 bill; Breonna Taylor (26) was asleep as the plain-clothed police were trying to execute a drug case; she got shot by the police eight times even though she was unarmed; Atatiana Jefferson (28) was shot in her own home after her neighbor called the police because her door was open. These heartbreaking shootings took place at the hands of police officers, and this list is just a drop in the bucket.

This year, in the midst of fighting the COVID pandemic, our attention shifted to an ongoing epidemic—one that has been raging, unchecked, for years: The epidemic of police brutality. Police brutality is a huge problem in the USA; people of color are getting treated differently and even killed because people make assumptions and/or are threatened by their skin color. It is unfair and, recently, people have been taking a stand—asking lawmakers to reevaluate the laws that unfairly target minorities. Though these protests have brought attention to the issue—the issue is systemic; it will take the ongoing cooperation of people, police, and lawmakers to create substantive change.

Despite the fact that we have many good cops, they are working in a broken system. These good cops are working with fellow cops who have practiced the same kind of racial profiling that has plagued our country for generations—and, due to lack of body cameras, have gone unpunished. Furthermore, a whole host of officers lack the background and training necessary to thoughtfully navigate these delicate interactions. While ending systemic racism in our justice system is a long-term effort, there are some steps we can take immediately in order to combat the issue: body cameras and more police training.

Right now, police training lasts from 10 weeks² to 36 weeks². Some police only have to train for 28 days to join the force². During this short period of time, they are educated on a variety of things: From police procedure, to state laws, to driving skills—with their time divided among so many different topics, there is not nearly enough time spent on working to neutralize the implicit racial biases that run rampant throughout our law enforcement system. Thus, spending more time training our officers is one of the first steps that we need to take toward combating the police brutality that has become all too common these days.

Though extended training times will certainly be beneficial, simply having it will not be a cure-all for our issues. We need to conscientiously implement the time, so it helps officers understand the power they hold and the role racial bias plays in how they use that power. With the extra training time, officers would have an opportunity to be trained to safely deescalate situations and understand the role that race plays in policing. While this will not eradicate the racism present in the system, it will help our officers understand its insidious presence.

Furthermore, body cameras are another great option to help keep both officers and citizens protected. They are a safe and easy-to-use way to ensure honesty on all fronts. Body cameras are an essential part of policing because they help to keep officers honest, and they help

to provide a clear, unadulterated version of the events that transpired. Without body cameras, we are forced to rely on testimonies and interviews—helpful tools, surely, but they pale in comparison to having a visual of a situation.

These steps have already proven to work—in our own country and abroad. For instance, when San Diego created a law to require the use of body cameras, police complaints fell by 40.5%⁴; the use of “personal body” force by officers was reduced by 46.5%⁴, and the use of pepper spray dropped by 30.5%⁴. In Finland, they train police for 2.5 years; they don’t even learn about force training until 4 months in. Studies have shown that these trainings are effective: 90%⁵ of people trust the police in Finland, while about 48%⁵ of people in the US trusted their police force in 2020.

If police officers receive more training—and we require that all police officers on duty wear body cams—then we can stem the tide of police brutality. To be clear: these steps are not solutions; they are merely a starting point for more substantive changes. We’re not asking for more; we’re asking for the bare minimum. We need to be protected, not scared. We want to be understood, and we need a solution.

Sources:

¹<https://www.wbtv.com/>

²<https://www.insider.com/>

³<https://www.wired.com/>

⁴<https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-body-cameras-20150318-story.html>

⁵<https://www.pewresearch.org/>