

People of color have been coerced to distrust their belonging in this nation, with motions that go against what we have pledged to the United States of America. Coloniality, criminalization, and incarceration dismantle the “one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all” (Pledge of Allegiance, 1954). Punitive reformations in these systems have guaranteed that people of color will never attain *true* freedom or lives without restraint.

The “fairytale” of Christopher Columbus “discovering” American lands is nothing but a nightmare for people of color. Out of greed, Columbus wanted all the land he could possibly obtain, and he accomplished it through heinous acts, which is now known as the era of colonization. These heinous acts were rationalized with the “power” they believed was given to them by God. This supremacy allowed Columbus and the rest of the colonizers to believe that they were granted the power to set racial differences between them and the people native to the land (Brown and Barganier, 2018, pp. 34-37). In any land that was “discovered,” they determined people of color were non-believers who could not be converted to Christianity; therefore, they would not be considered humans, but slaves. Through this belief, people of color underwent extreme inhumane treatment across many colonized countries. Throughout this era, they remained property of colonizers and if they tried to advocate against their treatment, they would be treated far worse, facing the consequence of murder. Through the excuse of religion, people of color were excluded from equality and faced many years of oppression.

Along with religious dominance, other inequities were embedded into society through the uprising of racial scientists. These scientists tried to methodically prove that people of color should be governed and treated inhumanely since they were degenerate. Their methods resulted in a racial hierarchy where white people were superior and anyone else became inferior. Now there was the belief that in the name of science, people of color could not coexist with whites, and it became recognized not only by supremacists, but by society. More than that, these testings and findings of racial scientists ensured the idea that people of color were not biologically capable of reaching the intellectual levels as white people (Brown and Barganier, 2018, pp. 71-99). People of color were experimented on as if they were animals, creatures, anything far below humans. These are the drastic measures that white people had to take in order to somehow find validation in their radical beliefs that people of color and whites could not be seen as equals.

Since the beginning of history, people of color have been oppressed by forms of authority that derive from the racial hierarchies. They have been seen as beings that are unable to be civil on their own and thus need guidance or training as it may seem. Even then, when granted some form of freedom through the 13th Amendment, which passed in 1865, white supremacists were still able to confine people of color. This amendment states that “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction” (U.S. Const. amend. XIII). Somehow, this freedom was limited through “vagrancy laws.” These laws enforced the crime of any person of color “who could not prove he or she worked for a white employer” (Hinton, 2018, p. 2). Through these laws, they created a loophole between incarceration and enslavement. This allowed for legal control over *free* people of color, even though they were never truly free, they were coerced into encampment by the disparities in criminal laws.

These factors are important to keep in mind because with late modernization, consisting of urbanization and industrialization in 1890, these ideologies were still being implemented into society. The more modern embedment came throughout the Progressive era. A key point to this era is that reformers still held onto some beliefs that were influenced by racial scientists. Due to the migration of races, interracial relationships emerged which was a problem for reformers. They fundamentally believed that black men were degenerate yet disclosed this notion behind the idea that they were hyper-sexual and predatory towards white women. These events were followed by the creation of the Mann Act. This act was enacted in the year 1910 with the purpose of ending “white slavery,” which in reality was just white men not wanting white women to be in interracial relationships as it was considered immoral (Brown and Barganier, 2018, pp. 119-131). By making this an issue of public safety, the laws of anti-miscegenation were implemented, criminalizing interracial relationships. Once again, laws were used to divide people of color and exert the need for safety, except not *for* them, but *from* them.

There is a national psyche that has carried out through history that revolves around the idea that people of color are to be feared and restrained; nowadays it is done through “colorblind” laws that are

ironically structured around race. In *"The House That Race Built,"* Angela Davis states that: "race provides a silent justification for the technological expansion of law enforcement" (Davis, 1999, p. 275). Law enforcement, under my understanding, was created to provide safety and order for the public, yet from the days it was developed, it seems to have been a system made to keep people of color away from the supremacy whites have reached. The potential root of this is due to the fear of people of color becoming equal to whites and experiencing the life white people have been privileged to live since the "discovery" of the United States. White people have abused the creation of law enforcement and use it as a gateway to continually make people of color inferior and unequal.

People of color have never been seen as equal through the eyes of the white state, nor have they been seen as a population in need for public safety since they have been portrayed as the danger. News, televised or paper, have all taken a toll on moral panic because they have brought people to believe that crime will always be behind the face of a person of color. People who consume misrepresentation of crime through the media, often picture a person of color next to a crime. In "Understanding Mass Incarceration: A People's Guide to the Key Civil Rights Struggle of Our Time, New Press," by Kilgore, it is stated that: "stereotypes of black men as violent criminals are reflected in what people recall from news reports. This kind of mismemory has many implications...such as greater fear or distrust of others" (Kilgore, 2015, p.41). This is why society has ingrained a negative stereotype on people of color. In essence, people of color are seen as crime itself, rather than a person who has committed a crime.

There is a misrepresentation when it comes to race, crime, and incarceration. Especially when it comes to drug-related offenses, the excessive emphasis on the incarceration of people of color creates a gap between the same offenses committed by white people. Laws such as the famous "three-strikes-law" and "Rockefeller drug laws," targeted people of color for excessive sentencing and incarceration. Given that these laws paved ways to cut down on the big drug industry, it has not done so equally. It is hard to believe that laws like these were created for the purpose of getting drugs off the streets. If that was the truth, if the purpose of these laws were to create a safer society, why is it that people of color are the only ones who are majorly sentenced? In "An Unjust Burden: The Disparate Treatment of Black Americans in the Criminal Justice System," we are told that "for everyone white male aged 21 to 44 incarcerated under the Rockefeller Laws, 40 black males of similar age were incarcerated for the same offense" (Hinton, 2019, p. 5). If we all abide by the law, and if it applied equally to all, how can some be free for the same reason others spend up to their whole lives incarcerated?

In order to understand this system of punishment, I would like to surface the employment and housing barriers that have allowed for the rooted division between whites and people of color to exceed. Despite the efforts for equality through policies such as DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion), people of color are still being denied employment. A study done by BLS Reports stated that, "people who are white made up the majority of the labor force (76 percent) in 2023. Those who are black or African American and Asian constituted an additional 13 percent and 7 percent, respectively" (2024, p. 5). Even though these studies are from three years ago, these measures still affect people of color today. For reasons as such, it seems we have yet to cease the ideologies of white people being more capable and intellectual than people of color. It is a deep-rooted belief in degeneracy that has created a false reality for those who believe in white supremacy. As you may imagine, not having a job guarantees the fact that you will not be living as comfortably as those who have a stable income. There is a struggle for the bare necessities, such as food, clothing, bills, etc. With no income, how do you live a suitable life? When you are isolated, in the brinks of homelessness, would you choose a dangerous, yet fast way to make income? For a vast majority, the answer is yes.

As we can see throughout these fragments of history, people of color have been outcasted from receiving the minimum of human rights. In early years it was because they were "heathens;" further on, it was due to the fact that they were "scientifically proven" to be degenerates; and eventually moral panic was introduced as a modern approach to granting racism and exclusion in society. Even though today, we do not see these methods of exclusion as apparent as it was back then, that does not mean they do not exist. It simply means that as we evolved, so did these ideologies except, in more discreet and "legal" ways. See, when it comes to thinking about equality, public safety, and people of color, I think of incarceration. I think of laws that were created behind the face of racism to oppress these people in ways that society would find

“rational” and never once doubt it was inhumane. All of which have guaranteed them to not feel equal to their white neighbor, to feel as if they are not granted safety in public whenever a police officer is around, in fact they may ask themselves whether they are posing as a threat simply by being a person of color. It is clear that the legacy of distrust that people of color have when it comes to equality and public safety has not only been warranted, but constructed throughout years of persistent coloniality, criminalization, and incarceration.

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