

School-to-Prison Pipeline

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The intersection between one's path in life and the educational experience they are allocated is dependent on the race of the child and their class level. The school-to-prison pipeline is "a disturbing national trend wherein children are funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems" ("School-to-Prison Pipeline"). In America, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are hindered and even forced into a pathway leading to incarceration due to failing public schools, zero-tolerance policies, and policing school hallways.

In American society, we profit at the expense of others' misfortunes. We also allow "priorities to incarcerate compete against priorities to educate" (Gass and Laughter, 2015). One of the leading events that allow the school-to-prison pipeline to thrive is failing public schools. The main reason inner-city public schools are failing is the money available to the districts in which they are located. According to The Atlantic: "The discrepancies occur largely because public school districts in Connecticut, and in much of America, are run by local cities and towns and are funded by local property taxes" (Semuels, 2016). They bring up a fascinating point. Poorer neighborhoods have lower home values and do not accumulate as much money as affluent neighborhoods. Due to money going to schools, schools are not able to afford updated textbooks, have fewer guidance counselors, and have way more students in classes than suburban schools.

While these items might be deemed as nonessential, they are actually very heavily needed by public schools universally. Having fewer guidance counselors, tutors, and other adults in the education system are big injustices for children who have no real choice of where they live and their economic situation. These 'in-school support systems' are supposed to be put in place so that students can have an outlet and be helped if they need anything. By feeling like they have nowhere to turn, they could turn to other support systems such as gangs depending on their

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family situation. Not having all these resources available for schools is just enforcing the education and resource gap between suburban and inner-city kids. In *Reconstructing the Nation's Worst Schools*, "Poverty, ethnic diversity, and recent trends in immigration are often cited as explanations for the failure of inner-city schools" (Walberg, 1989). Since these schools are surrounded by poverty and ethnic diversity, intersectionality is critical to schooling and education.

Pew Research Center states that in 2010, the research found that approximately 19 percent of students graduating from urban school districts attend college compared to 70 percent of students graduating from suburban school districts (Bassetti, 2018). This educational gap influences inner-city kids to feel they have failed and cannot go anywhere or "get out" of their inner-city neighborhood. Thus some turn to trouble as a way to sustain a manageable life. Inner-city kids are surrounded by poverty and "adults with low levels of educational attainment and limited professional prospects" (Schneider, 2017). This impacts how the children who grow up in inner-city neighborhoods interact at school and "envision their future."

Along with failing public schools, there is another issue just as pressing: zero-tolerance policies. Zero-tolerance, "in its conception implies one-way communication or domination: One powerful group, or alliance of dominant social and political actors, sets the stage for "appropriate" ways of seeing, feeling, being, thinking, acting, and relating in public - spaces, namely public schools" (Robbins, 2005, p. 2). Students can be suspended or expelled for minor infractions such as skipping the lunch line, talking back to a teacher, or even bringing medications like aspirin to school. While some of these might be seen as more rebellious, they still do not call for expulsion or suspension. If we were to be honest with ourselves, we would see that these rules are unnecessary for younger children. The Zero Tolerance policies also

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disproportionately affect students of color. It is theorized that students of color are written up more because of teachers' cultural incompetence or racial stereotypes. The lack of sensitivity training they may receive is not enough to even break the racial stereotypes that are ingrained in their heads. According to *The Right to Be Literate: Literacy, Education, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline* "the practices of teachers who unknowingly (or knowingly) participate in the discourse of deficiency also contribute to students of color being denied" (Winn, 2011). This also contributes to the issue of self-acclaimed color-blind Americans and the effect of educational deformities in public schools.

To be expelled or suspended simply because of darker skin color is simply unjust. Due to being targeted at a higher rate, students of color come to peace with dropping out of school. Thus again, leading them to gang violence or other types of crime. The supposed purpose of the Zero Tolerance policy is to mirror the broken windows theory. The goal is to stop petty crimes before the offender turns to much harsher and deviant crimes. However, while they are trying to "prevent" these harsh crimes so their students do not become hardened criminals, they are ensuring that the school-to-prison pipeline continues and thrives.

In order to stop this progression from getting any worse than it already is, the society as a whole must work to reform school's tolerance policies. Instead of going directly to expulsion and suspension, there are other solutions. These include having the child try to right their wrongs or discuss why what they did was wrong so they can become aware and take ownership of their actions and what they could have done better. Allowing the student to talk about it or engage in making things right teaches them positive ways to deal with a situation the next time they feel like acting out or engaging in another infraction. Too often, society just jumps the gun and does

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not allow much room to grow, get a punishment. That is no way to teach all students what is right and what is wrong.

A third reason as to why this system continues to flourish in American society is the increased presence of police in the school hallways. Urban Wire presents that “students attending high schools that have substantial shares of Black or Hispanic students attend schools with a police officer at higher rates than students attending schools with few black and Hispanic students” (Lindsay, 2018). It implicitly expresses that students of color are in need of more police presence because “throughout U.S. history, African Americans have been portrayed as dangerous and violent” (Robbins, 2005). The simple fact that kids of color need to be subjected to being criminalized in the school setting is absurd. Video footage has also proved that the police presence is not helping but rather hurting students of color. There have been videos where cops have literally pulled kids out of their chairs and slammed them on the floor.

As well as being a danger to students, the rates in which they are criminalizing them are going up as well: “The misbehavior triggering most tickets is not new to public schools. What is new is that Texas students are increasingly receiving misdemeanor tickets for minor misbehavior, and being drawn into adult municipal or justice of the peace” (Fowler, 2011). These charges can lead to fines, community service, and even a criminal record. Being criminalized in a place where one is allowed to make mistakes to a certain extent is ridiculous.

The school-to-prison pipeline can be labeled as a modern-day form of systematic racism. One of the most disheartening aspects of this system are the statistics. According to the ABA Coalition on Racial and Ethnic Justice, Black children make up only 18% of students in the United States; however, they account for 46% of individuals suspended more than one in school settings. From the beginning of these children's lives, as young as pre-k, they are placed into a

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box and labeled as problematic kids, which can forever impact their school life. One of the more critical factors in reinforcing this system is the stereotypes being placed on African American parents. Stereotypes are often made about Black and brown parents as they are labeled as "bad" or individuals who do not seem to care about their child's education. Although not everyone will have the proper home support or setting for better education, casting stereotypes can hinder Black individuals in the school. Some teachers might create biases against them if they were ever to create trouble in the classroom.

Although even when the children's home life is not the best, especially if they live in less economically efficient neighborhoods, school officials tend to blame the "at-risk" kids' behavior only on the home. However, teachers or law enforcement need to realize how much school can impact juvenile behavior by being responded to when they make bad decisions. A 2005 study showed that "in-school arrests have been on a stagnant rise and a majority of these cases reported are for nonviolent offences" (Buzelli). These arrests are far more commonly made on Black and Hispanic students as compared to White students who behave the same but do not get the same punishment. Grasping the disproportionality in the way behaviors get punished is essential in assessing why this pipeline is so common. These minority groups are being criminalized constantly in school police monitoring at a young age. Policies should be made about limiting these arrests and the use of restraint being used.

It is equally important to look at the studies on the relationships between race, behavior, and suspension. Reports have shown that although more Black students were punished at a higher percentage rate than any other race, the reasons behind the punishment were subjective compared to White individuals. For example, a White student may get punished for provable offenses such as smoking or vandalism; however, a Black student may get expelled for the

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amount of respect they show, which is very subjective. This shows how biases can play a role in deciding a child's future as they might feel disadvantaged; even if their behaviors are not risky, they are being criminalized.

School personnel with negative attitudes toward ethnic minorities view these students as less intelligent and incapable of obtaining promising futures. Therefore, it is prominent that these kinds of authorities are impacting the confidence or support needed to be instilled into students in order for them to graduate. With all of this in mind, we as a society must continue to disband the social structures currently implemented in our schools to diminish the school-to-prison pipeline outcomes.

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