



THE SCOPE

JULY EDITION
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF NEIL PATIL

EDITOR'S NOTE

In the face of the most challenging global climate our generation has ever seen, we feel this issue is more poignant than ever. At The Scope Magazine, we believe it is our responsibility to give a platform for this change and to make advocacy more accessible for all. With this goal in mind, we hope that these articles will inspire you to make change and be an advocate for the fights that are important to you. Lastly, Michael Bendok, Yash Wadwekar, and I unequivocally stand in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement and all other organizations around the nation fighting for positive change. This article being released on July 4th is no coincidence, because we firmly believe the most patriotic thing you can do for your nation, is better it.

-Neil



THE AMERICAN SPIRIT

AUDREY KAMENA

It is both simple and impossible to picture America. Immediately, images of stars and stripes are conjured up, of the red-white-and-blue, of the physical shape and features of the country. But America is more than its geography or symbols. America is more than a country. To be an American is not a certificate or a language or a look. To be American is a way of life.

To find what it means to be an American, let's look at one of the most American institutions still in establishment: the Boy Scouts, now known as Scouts BSA since admitting girls into the program. One of the foundational principles of Scouting is community service. Scouts demonstrate commitment to their nation from helping their neighbors to the famously challenging Eagle Project, the final step in scouting that requires a lengthy project meant to have long-term benefits for a community (BSA). Giving back to the community through food drives and clean-ups is one of the fundamental qualities of a scout and an American. Volunteering our time, energy, and money to the communities that give to us is the hallmark of a good citizen. To be American is to be ensured inalienable rights and a beautiful country, and it is our duty to ensure that those benefits are guaranteed

for our progeny.

However, community service is nothing if there is no community to serve. What defines America at its core is its democracy. Though one of the youngest countries, it has quickly risen to be one of the most successful in history. This meteoric success can be attributed to that democracy which enables our people to be represented. Such representation is not guaranteed, and it is the greatest duty of an American to take part in voting and elections. This means turning up to the polls, but the true work begins long before November. In an age of misinformation, it is our job to sift through the infinite amount of news coming our way and find the truth. It is also our duty to accept viewpoints not the same as our own, for it is only through compromise that any proper solutions may flourish. It was only through compromise that both our esteemed Constitution and the Bill of Rights came to fruition. And it is only through compromise that our country will continue to provide both rights and protection for our people.

Though we must acknowledge and accept our differences, so too must we revel in our likeness. In the preamble to the Constitution, it is stated that one purpose of the document is "in order to achieve a more perfect Union" (National

Archives). As the media and a deep-rooted passion for always being correct have pushed us farther apart, we must realize that it is more important to be able to listen than to talk. The partisanship that divides us is far from what the Founding Fathers envisioned (Pruitt). In fact, many of the first Americans were adamantly opposed to political parties, as Georgian England had been torn apart by fighting factions. We see a similar issue in modern America: politicians ripping into one another on national television, news articles heavily slanted towards one side, and even slander on social media. As Americans, it is our duty to see to it that we take pride in what we share, from our undying ambition to the love for our admittedly flawed country.

At times, it may seem that being an American is more work than it's worth. However, we must keep in mind the fruits of our labor: our freedoms, our rights, and our privileges that make our way of life the best one of all.

TEEN PREGNANCY AND ITS CULTURAL BACKGROUND

ISABELLA GRECO

According to the Washington Post on January 18, 2020, there are more than 750,000 teen pregnancies every year. The article furthered that three out of every ten girls will get pregnant before the age of twenty. It is clear that there is a problem in our society. However, this issue can be examined through multiple lenses. The issue can be examined by looking at the cultural trends of Hispanic, African American, and white teens; also, we can examine the strides being made to help these vulnerable young women.

In the world of teen pregnancy statistics, Hispanic women top the charts. According to the Pew Research Center, the teen pregnancy rate among Hispanic women is 26%, followed by African American women at 22%, and 11% of white women. Hispanic women clearly have the highest rate, and there are a lot of possible reasons why. In the Latino community, religion plays a major role and that most often includes having a large family. For many Latinas, this means having children at a very young age. In fact, more than 15% of Hispanic women get married and begin their families before the age of nineteen. While many Hispanic teen pregnancies are an outcome of their religious beliefs, the saddening reality is not all teen pregnancies are the product of love and religion. Rape is rampant in the Latino culture. According to the Pew Research Center, more than 22.1% of all Latinas are victims of sexual assault and are twice as likely as other women to be raped. This statistic can most be attributed to the age-old Spanish term: *machismo*. In the Latino culture, machismo, or toxic masculinity, is very common. Beginning in the ages of colonization, Spanish colonizers were known as being the most brutal to the native populations. Rape was common in these times especially to Native American women. Today, the trend of machismo continues. However, with the success of movements like the #MeToo movement, more and more women are speaking up against toxic masculinity. Hopefully in the years to come, machismo will finally be a thing of the past, and no more young Latinas will become a statistic.

Second in the teen pregnancy statistics are African American women. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2019, there were about 54,000 births from teenage African American women. While the issues of rape persist in these communities, another prevalent issue for many teenage African American expectant mothers is poverty. The CDC also mentions that more than 20% of African Americans are below the poverty line- more than any other race. There are many problems that come from this especially from the teen pregnancy standpoint. These teens are unable to afford things like birth control, Plan-B, or abortions. The average birth control costs around \$50 per month, Plan-B costs around \$50, and an abortion ranges from \$350 to \$950 depending on how far along the mother is. While contraceptives have been made available to teens in many of these communities, condoms are not 100% effective when it comes to preventing pregnancies and STDs. However, this misconception can also come from a lack of sexual education in these communities. According to The Balance, impoverished school districts receive far less health education and other schools in the country. This lack of education combined with the inability to afford birth control or abortion creates many factors in the teen pregnancy rate in these communities. Since the poverty rate is much higher in these African American communities as well, it's not hard to see why African American women hold the second highest teen pregnancy rate.

The third highest teen pregnancy rate are white women. According to the Pew Research Center, teen pregnancy rates for white women sit at 11%- half of the African American women rate. There are actually many factors that lead to this. According to Research in Nursing in Health, median net worth of white households is \$143,600- second only behind Asian households. This income allows for these families to raise their children in a good neighborhood and go to a good school. These schools will generally have better sexual education programs than that of impoverished neighborhoods. This income also allows for the availability of birth control and other contraceptives. However, with this wealth, there comes different challenges for white teenage girls. According to the CDC, privileged children face the pressures of attending the most prestigious universities, getting a high paying job, and making an income for their families. The concept of teen pregnancy goes against all of these values for these families. Teen mothers usually do not pursue a higher education; in fact, many of them dropout of high school to care for the child and escape the harassment from classmates for being a teen mother. The shame that these families might feel is enough for any teenage daughter to avoid getting pregnant. However, if these girls do become pregnant, they are also available to more options than Latinas and African American women. With all of the added pressures and availability of options, it's clear to see why the rate of teen pregnancy for white women is much lower.

Finally, the things that America is doing to combat these teen pregnancy rates must also be recognized. As mentioned earlier, there have been huge strides to provide contraceptives, like condoms, to teens. However, there have been many achievements in other sectors. According to The Balance, Title X is a federal grant program that allows for low to no cost options for birth control. This greatly benefits those in poverty-stricken communities. Programs like this have had great results. The Balance furthers that teen pregnancy rates among Hispanic and African American have decreased by 40% since 2006. This year was also the year that programs like Title X started to be strictly implemented across the country. Also, sexual education classes are being worked into many curriculums. According to the Pew Research Center, more than one billion dollars have been allocated towards sexual education classes across the country. Implementing classes like sexual education all over the country allows for teens to learn about all contraceptives no matter the income and help to decrease teen pregnancy rates. It's clear that things like culture and ideology are hard to fix; however, programs like Title X and sexual education classes have clearly been the most effective in decreasing pregnancy rates for everyone.

In the end, it's not hard to see that the issue of teen pregnancy can be viewed from many different lenses. Looking at a cultural standpoint, we can evaluate teen pregnancy by the cultural trends of Hispanic, African American, and white teens. We also must recognize the strides being made in our society to combat these teen pregnancy rates. It's clear that teen pregnancy has many angles. Whether from a cultural, social, or religious standpoint, teen pregnancy is a very complex issue with many layers to it.

THE NFL & RACE

JACOB SINGER

Without a doubt, the American experience is highly variant on the basis of differing backgrounds, socio-economic standpoints, fields of profession and other bases of category. However, through these several factors, one major impacting component remains consistent: representation. Through the demographics of race, sexuality, religion, sex and more, how one is represented through various governing bodies as high as the federal government and ranging all the way to corporate members on the board of a company or industrial brand, those in positions of power possess the ability to use their past experiences to relate to those they relate to, for better or for worse. Take for example, the past few years of the National Football League. Prior to the 2016 NFL Season, then San Francisco 49ers Quarterback Colin Kaepernick restarted a seemingly drowned out practice in protesting during the National Anthem on the basis of systemic racism and police brutality in the United States of America. Initially, Kaepernick drew heavy backlash from NFL Managers, Owners, and several Governors, Members of Congress, and even the President of the United States for his protests. Despite Kaepernick having unwavering support from his fellow players, by September of 2017, Kaepernick was unemployed. At this same time, north of 200 NFL Players in total took part in kneeling for the national anthem, and the remaining players participated in other forms of protest, usually being them interlocking arms with one another in solidarity. Later in September, President Trump spoke to supporters in a rally in Alabama, where he infamously said “wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners, when someone disrespects our flag to say, 'get that son of a bitch off the field right now. Out. He's fired. He's fired!'” This sparked an intense cultural spar, between supporters and adversaries of the protests, and all the whilst Colin Kaepernick remained unemployed for his action, and former teammate, Defensive Back Eric Reid, found himself jobless for the same reason. Following this, President Trump organized a conference call with each of the big 4 sports commissioners, Roger Goodell of the NFL, Adam Silver of the NBA, Rob Manfred of the MLB and Gary Bettman of the NHL, to pressure them into putting repercussions into motion to those who protest during the national anthem, and each of the four commissioners followed suit. By 2018, protesting during the national anthem was relatively quiet, and didn't make noise again until the social unrest being experienced in the status-quo. Currently, a slew of athletes, with names as prominent as LeBron James, Michael Jordan and Russell Wilson, have spoken up in solidarity with Colin Kaepernick and the anthem protests in wake of the recent incidents of police brutality on Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks and others. With the clear overwhelming support that athletes have towards Kaepernick, a clear pattern was noticed: despite roughly 70% of the NFL Players being African American, ZERO, yes zero, of the 32 NFL Team Owners are themselves African American. This leads to a clear understanding, being that the silencing voice of those in power can easily stomp directly on the throats of voices of the marginalized, while the oppressing forces continue to profit in the billions on the labor of those they oppress, as exhibited in the releases of Colin Kaepernick and Eric Reid, despite the wishes of them and their teammates. Enter: The Rooney Rule. Alike to the situation with the owners, there is gross representation within Head Coaches, as only 4, or 12.5%, of NFL Head Coaches are African American. Thus, the NFL decided to implement a system in which teams get financial or draft compensation for hiring and interviewing front office members of color, from management to coaching positions. On May 19, 2020, the NFL and the board of governors voted to ratify the Rooney Rule, expanding the incentives to this cause. Already, the results of this rule are taking place. Kansas City Chiefs Offensive Coordinator Eric Bieniemy, a black man, has been fielding calls with multiple NFL Teams about a potential Head Coaching role, as he has been noted to be the best Coordinator not to be a Head Coach in years past. Los Angeles Chargers Head Coach Anthony Lynn, also a black man, has publicly expressed his intent to work out and potentially sign Colin Kaepernick, a possibility that hasn't been ventured in several years. Overall, through the enhancement of the Rooney Rule it has been made abundantly clear that without representation in any field of management or governing body, the needs of those in whom they govern would never be met. In returning to the premise of the American experience, just one example of the struggles and encounters of NFL Players for the cause of representation shows how much effect such management alterations has on individuals. This theme reigns true for all Americans, whether it be impacting them from the federal government on the basis of representational politics and diversity in congress, from an employer as we see in the NFL, and in any other private or public sector endeavors people encounter.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN AMERICAN?

SARA FARAJ

From the very beginning of our educational experiences, we are told that being an American means living the American Dream. In kindergarten, we learn the Pledge of Allegiance, reciting it every single day until the twelfth grade. In primary school, we sing the Star Spangled Banner to express our patriotism. In intermediate school, we get our first glimpse at American history. We learn of a history rooted in discovery, adventure, and liberty from oppression. We learn how America's founders fought for their rights of expression and independence from tyranny. In middle and high school, we learn this history in depth, acknowledging new concepts like colonialism, genocide, and slavery, but quickly brushing them aside as "necessity." One thing is for sure, we are always taught that being an American means being on the right side of history. Little do we know that America has been an oppressor as much as the one oppressed. The reality is that being an American isn't as simple as our hyper-romanticised history books make it seem. Despite what history might tell you, inequality is pervasive.

For low-income Americans, the reality is less access to high-quality housing or healthcare. It means being unable to afford the same opportunities as others. It means having less of a voice inside politics. Recent estimates from Feeding America say that 41 million Americans face hunger, and the US

Census Bureau explains that at least 28 million Americans are uninsured. When millions of families cannot afford to put food on the table or purchase life-saving medication, the American Dream isn't as pervasive as it seems. Being a low income American means barriers and unique struggles at every turn.

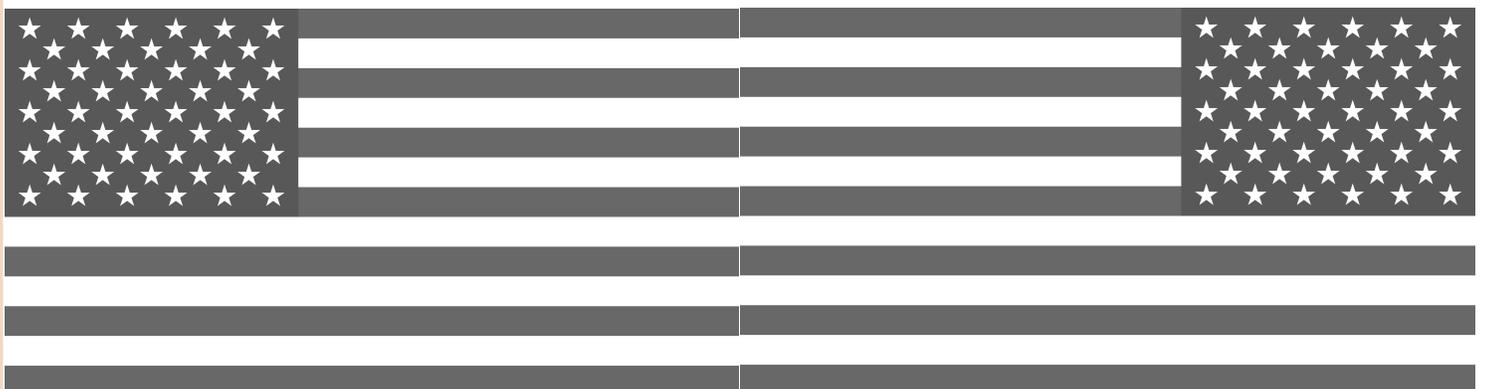
For Black Americans, the reality is police violence and racial profiling in every aspect of life. It means not being able to walk into a store without eyes on your every move. It means fearing for your life every time you are pulled over at a traffic stop. It means being subject to violence by officers more interested in power than protection. It means being told you are less capable for no reason other than the color of your skin. The Washington Post tells us that over 1,200 Black Americans have been shot since January of 2015. These are mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons who have had their lives ripped from them simply for the color of their skin. Being a Black person in America means facing racism and violence every single day.

For members of the LGBTQ+ community in America, the reality is facing bigotry and gender discrimination. It means being told that you don't deserve the same rights in our country as everyone else. It means being denied a job or access to medical care on the simple basis of your identity. It means constantly being an afterthought in government affairs. The Human

Rights Campaign tells us that already this year, 15 transgender womxn have been murdered. With hundreds of members of the LGBTQ+ community being the subject of egregious hate crimes every single year, it is clear that bigotry runs rampant. Being part of this community means living in fear of your own identity.

For immigrants in America, the reality is being treated like you don't belong. It means coming to America for the chance at a better life only to be treated as "less than" American. It means being regarded as less intelligent simply for the way you talk. It means being told "go back to your country" even when America *is* your country. It means living under a government that actively works to remove opportunities for others to escape violence and oppression. Being an immigrant in America means being treated like an outsider.

So as much as we'd like to wish that being an American meant living the American Dream, we're just not there yet. While America likes to boast our economic and military prowess, we continue to lack the social progress for any semblance of perfection to reign true. But by recognizing these inequalities and working together to create a brighter future for our country, we may someday live in a reality where being an American means being an equal no matter who you are. We may someday live in an America that is *actually* on the right side of history.



HISTORY & HONG KONG

MARK JEWISON

In the middle of the modern representation of Revolutionary American politics shown in the smash-hit Broadway musical *Hamilton*, the creator and star, Lin-Manuel Miranda, is able to slip in a question politicians still ask today: what is our country's role in defending democracy worldwide? Two founding fathers -- Hamilton and Jefferson -- take different positions and rap out the issue. For entertainment value, Jefferson is clearly shown as logically unsound and nowhere near as quick-witted as everyone's favorite Secretary of the Treasury. Hamilton convinces the room how dangerous it is to support the revolutionaries in France. But the question lingers. Last year, it butted its head for months as pro-democracy protestors took to the streets in Hong Kong, resisting the oppressive regime of Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

Hong Kong's fight for independence goes further back than their transfer of sovereignty from the United Kingdom to China in 1997, but the 'one country, two systems' model that China adopted put a roadblock in the process. Since then, domestic groups have attempted to get democratization onto the mainstream platform. In 2014, new restrictions on Hong Kong sparked months of protests known as the Umbrella Movement. Today, this movement is not a part of our history, but rather an ongoing fight in the special administrative region.

So what is our role? According to President Trump, not much. Faced last November with a veto-proof vote, President Trump signed the Hong

Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act. The act required the US government to sanction Chinese and Hong Kong officials responsible for human rights violations as well as mandating the State Department to regularly review the question of independence. The act was a step in the right direction -- but nowhere close enough to the bounds that need to be leapt for Hong Kong to be rightfully free.

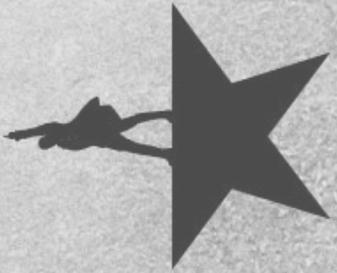
Promoting democracy worldwide is -- or should be -- a key value in our country. We have failed to enforce this value. In May of this year, President Trump announced his intention to strip away the special privileges we had granted Hong Kong and stop recognizing the two as separate. This draconian measure to push back against Beijing only weakens the people living in the administrative region. In Trump's trade war, democracy has become a casualty.

Our role in supporting Hong Kong's autonomy isn't just moral -- it's practical. Becoming a democratic nation is no easy task, but a strong nation's support can make all the difference. Just like *Hamilton's* ensemble described in "Guns and Ships," the American Revolution wouldn't have been possible without the support of the French government. We owe every democratic movement facing authoritarianism the same support we were given during our revolution. A Center for Justice and Accountability Report found that emerging democracies modeling their governments after our own were significantly more likely to stabilize than those who didn't. Moreover, they concluded that a backbone

built from international support was crucial for helping them stay afloat as they mold their democracy.

Hong Kong's democracy isn't something that can be attained overnight. But turning our back on a struggling movement and allowing them to fall further into the hands of autocracy to boost our economy is immoral. As a country, and as people, we must support the people in Hong Kong risking everything for a better future. The values of our country are being tested in our response, and so far we are failing. Our debt to those who helped us must be repaid by helping others. As for the senators and representatives at Capitol Hill, I urge them to listen to military commander, Secretary of the Treasury, and founding father Alexander Hamilton: "those who stand for nothing fall for everything."

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MAIL-IN BALLOTS ARE THE WAY TO GO

ELYSA KAN

As the United States continues to battle the Corona virus pandemic, the American people have adapted their lifestyles. Whether it's hosting Zoom work calls or learning to cook at home, we've seen changes inside and outside of our homes. But one change nobody could have foreseen is that voting in America has now become a public health issue. Like it or not, our congressional and presidential elections will continue to happen in November. And with the Corona virus continuing to ravage our nation, traditional in-person voting will not be feasible in this election.

Even before the Corona virus, the U.S. election system was inaccessible to people with disabilities. The Government Accountability Office found that during the 2016 election, at least 60 percent of polling places were inaccessible to disabled voters, and that number has been unchanged for the past several election cycles. Now, with the added threat of the Corona virus, those with disabilities and pre-existing medical conditions are more at risk than ever before. The level of inaccessibility in American democracy is something that our Congress and President cannot continue to allow. The only way to protect our democracy is to protect our voters. But how do we do that in our next election?

A vote by mail option provides voters with as much time as they need to vote in advance of an election. Additionally, it gives them the opportunity to do so from the comfort of their home. Those who need additional time to process information have the time to view the ballot, and those with physical disabilities no longer have to navigate transportation and inaccessible polling places. For people with compromised immune systems, vote by mail means not having to risk getting sick, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Institutionalizing a vote-by-mail process in our elections guarantees that all Americans have a chance to be heard - not just those who are able to stand in five hour long lines to cast a ballot. But ever since this option was proposed months ago, we've seen opposition to it on the basis of partisan voting skews. However, when we look to the numbers, voting by mail doesn't provide any clear partisan advantage. As states have expanded their use of mailed ballots over the last decade — including five states that conduct all-mail elections by default — both parties have enjoyed a small but equal increase in turnout. That's corroborated by a 2020 study from Stanford University, where political scientists looked at county-level implementation of vote by mail in California, Utah and Washington from 1996-2018. They found no statistically significant partisan difference between counties that had transitioned to voting fully by mail and those that had not, along with a slight increase in voter turnout.

If America utilizes mail-in ballots, partisan skew will not occur. The exact opposite is true - it increases accessibility for all American voters. When we ask ourselves what it means to be an American, it is critical that we remember that America does not exist without our democracy. To protect our democracy is at its core what it means to be an American. Mail-in ballots protect the fundamental idea of American democracy - a democracy by the people and for the people. Only by ensuring that our elections are accessible for all do we achieve that goal.



WHY AMERICA NEEDS A PUBLIC OPTION

ISAAC KAN

In every email I've opened since March, the opening line has been "I hope you're well." And while I appreciate the sentiment, I've found myself wondering: if that regard holds weight in light of the Corona virus pandemic, what is hoping going to do? If we want America to be well, we can't just hope. We have to act.

As America continues to suffer from the worst pandemic in a century, our country is collapsing. The U.S. jobs report released in June shows that 30 million Americans have lost their jobs because of the Corona virus pandemic. As our nation continues to suffer from the worst pandemic in a century, Americans are losing their livelihoods and their lives at an unprecedented rate. But what we've failed to consider is that lost jobs have also cost Americans their insurance coverage. Job loss in the Corona virus pandemic carries with it two things: loss of income and loss of health insurance for those covered by their employer. In the next two months, 35 million people will lose job-based insurance because of the pandemic on top of the 28 million who were uninsured before. However, a public option healthcare system will allow Americans to retain affordable coverage even while in between jobs.

First off, what is a public option? It's essentially a government-provided

healthcare plan available for people (and companies) to buy in healthcare exchanges. The Association of Health Care Journalists tells us two months ago that with a public option system providing Medicare, people who've lost their jobs don't have to worry about losing their insurance. With the projection that the Corona virus pandemic will linger until 2024, the impacts of a public option aren't just in the short term, but the long term as well. Americans are suffering immense hardship during this pandemic, and when 36 million people are unemployed and uninsured while dealing with a global pandemic, change is necessary. Healthcare may seem trivial, but for millions of Americans, it is monumental.

A public option could also save hospitals which have been overburdened by the Covid-19 pandemic \$350 billion annually, nearly 15% of all health care spending. Government medicare systems have simplified financing systems, making it far easier for hospitals to process paperwork, streamline treatment, and decrease administrative costs. Hospital workers have pledged their lives to serve the American people in the Corona virus pandemic- it's time that our government aids them in their struggle.

When almost 70% of all Americans support a public option, it's clear that such it is

categorically in the interest of the American people.

For the thousands of Americans killed by the Covid-19 pandemic, for the millions who can't afford insurance - it is imperative that we work to create change for them. All Americans deserve a chance. Only a change in our policy can ensure that health isn't just for some Americans, but all.

WHY THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE IS UNDEMOCRATIC

AKAASH BABU

The 2016 election saw a lot of outrage at the seemingly undemocratic result of the electoral college, with many questioning the democracy of a system that rendered such an undemocratic result. But many don't realize **that the Electoral College was designed to be undemocratic.**

Alexander Hamilton (in Federalist Paper no. 68) explains how the Electoral College originally worked: electors from each state, designed to be the smartest and most politically involved of the state's government, would be chosen to convene at a location in each state and all cast their votes for one candidate. Then, each state's electors would gather at a national convention to cast their votes, with each state casting all their votes for one candidate and the individual who won the most votes becoming president.

This system wasn't meant to foster a healthy democracy involving the people. In fact, it was explicitly designed un-democratically; a way by which the members of each state's political and social establishment, and not the people, would control the country. Hamilton justifies this in Federalist Paper no. 68 by claiming a popular election would be susceptible to influence from foreign interest and fast-talking populists. By entrusting the job to a dedicated set of informed men, the presidency would be one for intelligent, capable individuals, not just for capable orators.

Obviously, the system we use today is a much more democratic one, with the modern American electoral system attributable to the Founding Fathers giving the responsibility of choosing their electors to the states. Using this power, the states converted to using a popular election to pick whom their electors would vote for. This bending of the inherently undemocratic electoral college to suit the ideals of democracy is akin to hammering a square peg into a circular hole; it just doesn't work. Although the Electoral College might seem democratic, because its foundations are still designed around being a convention of the political elite and not a democracy, it has many glaring issues that make it extremely undemocratic.

Perhaps its most glaring "undemocracy" is the advantage it gives to smaller states. In its inception, this advantage was supposed to be a concession to the lesser populated of the original 13 states, as every state is guaranteed 3 electors no matter their population, meaning that the power of smaller states in the electoral college is disproportionately large. For example, Wyoming has 577,737 people and 3 electoral votes, meaning around 190,000 people per electoral vote, while California has 39.56 million people and 55 electoral votes, meaning around 740,000 people per electoral vote. This is still a major argument in favor of the electoral college today; it supposedly ensures that smaller states aren't trampled over by bigger states and that rural America isn't trampled over by the urban elite.

But the borders of a state aren't designed to divide rural America from the urban states. Instead, we have many small states with predominantly rural makeups (such as Wyoming), many with predominantly urban makeups (such as Rhode Island or Delaware), and many others with a more mixed makeup (such as Nevada). On top of this, many rural Americans live in larger states, such as Texas and California. In the case of the latter, millions of rural Californians have their votes overpowered by the liberal coasts, completely going against this purported "feature" of the electoral college. This fact that the state borders aren't based on dividing these rural areas from urban areas, or marginalized areas from privileged areas indicates that the advantages given by the Electoral College don't go towards helping any socioeconomic group of Americans. Instead, they simply go towards helping small states, who have a myriad of people living in their borders. As a result, **instead of helping a particular group, the Electoral College instead gives an undemocratic advantage to a random selection of the populace.** After all, what else do Wyoming and Delaware have in common other than being small states?

Let's take a deeper look at California. Contrary to popular belief, California has millions of Republican voters and used to be a predominantly Republican state up until the late 1990s (but that's a whole different rabbit hole.) In 2016, the state had 4 and a half million Republican voters in the presidential election. But thanks to the winner-take-all system that the electoral college uses, because there were more Democratic voters in the presidential election it gave all of its 55 electoral college votes to Hillary Clinton. This is the second major issue with the electoral college: its winner-take-all system that awards ALL a state's electoral votes to the candidate that wins a plurality of the votes means that large sections of the American population don't get their voices heard due to their location and the other voters near their location.

In California, this fault of the electoral college meant that the 4 and a half million Trump votes in 2016 didn't actually count towards anything of importance. That's more Trump votes than in the states of Alaska, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, West Virginia, Nebraska, Utah, Kansas, and Arkansas **combined**. But while the Republican voters in California had their votes wasted, the Republican voters of these small states had their voices heard. Often, these voters shared socioeconomic statuses, yet by sheer virtue of where they live in relation to a centuries-old line of demarcation, some got their voices heard and some didn't.

This winner takes all system and the advantage that the electoral college gives to smaller states mean that a candidate who wins the smaller states by close margins wins against one that wins larger states by overwhelming margins, even if they lose the popular vote. This isn't democracy. Instead, it's the arbitrary overpowering of certain groups of people. By having certain voters of a state overpower others and by having certain states overpower others, the electoral college violates every basic democratic ideal.



DEFEAT THE MODEL MINORITY MYTH

CYNTHIA CHOCKALINGAM

Soon following the death of George Floyd, I saw many of my peers mobilizing themselves for the first time. Usually, this consisted of posting something on Snapchat and Instagram on what you should do if you are white. While I'm not white, I found much of it applicable to me, but I was also left wondering: what specifically is the Asian-American community's role in this movement and fight? After a while, I stumbled upon the Model Minority Myth, something I soon realized I've lived with forever. The University of Texas at Austin explains that most Asian-Americans are placed into this category called "model minorities" essentially meaning they are perfect, successful, and what every minority should aim to be. The cultural expectations include being naturally "smart," wealthy, hard-working, submissive and obedient, uncomplaining, and self-reliant. They live the "American Dream."

First, understand this is an extremely broad generalization and creates such a narrow stereotype for a large group of people. Yale Insights from the Yale School of Management corroborates Asian students are typecast as math geniuses, and these students should only grow up to be law-abiding doctors, lawyers, and engineers. What do these have in common for the most part? They are high-paying but do not allow higher, leadership positions that would typically gain the attention of main-stream media. In fact, Ascend in a report titled "The Illusion of Asian Success: Scant Progress for Minorities in Cracking the Glass Ceiling from 2007-2015," quantified and reported Asian-Americans professionals, compared to any other race, were more likely to be hired as individual contributors, but they are also less likely to be promoted into the roles in management. While this is extremely problematic, you may be thinking well this is all true right? It's not. The Practice from Harvard Law explains Asian-Americans have the largest income gap of any racial group. In NYC, Asians experience the highest poverty rate than any other immigrant demographic, but the richest 10th percentile earn more than any other racial demographic. In 2018, the Pew Research Center explained why: there are simply a lot of different groups that create the Asian demographic. When this group includes Indians, Chinese,

Koreans, Cambodians, Vietnamese, Pakistanis, and much more, it's too difficult to put them all into one group, which is why we shouldn't. The Model Minority Myth makes an impact on two main groups: Asians and non-Asian minorities.

The most obvious effect of the Model Minority Myth is on Asian students. Over-burdened with expectations to succeed in school, these students experience extreme anxiety. As Shanni Liang told NBC News, "Usually the model minority [label] does cause a lot of anxiety in a lot of the second-generation children... We do get a lot of callers that have their first mental health breakdown in college." Vivian Biwei Huang at UCLA explains these students often hide their personal problems and struggles compared to other demographics because they do not want to stray from this "good" stereotype where Asians and Asian-Americans are "perfect." Tyrone

Howard in "Why race and culture matter in schools" furthers that either trying to confirm or disconfirm this stereotype can negatively affect test performance.

While often pushed under the rug, the currently more important impact that is imperative to note is the Model Minority Myth puts other non-Asian, marginalized groups at a further disadvantage. Claiming these minorities work harder, which is why they don't suffer, causes the struggles of others to appear to be falsified. A prime example is outlined by Fortune Magazine in June of 2018. They claim Andrew Sullivan, a blogger and political columnist, said Asians were able to turn around false, negative stereotypes by maintaining "solid two-parent family structures" and placing a large emphasis on education and hard work. Therefore, he is implying that other racial minorities do not place importance in these areas, which is why they face their hardships. I think at this point, it is unnecessary to explain why this is simply false, but let's also just say you somehow don't buy this, NPR in April of 2017 elucidates the hardships Asian-Americans and African-Americans face simply cannot be compared. While Asians face the hardships of entering and gaining citizenship in the US, they also don't face the dehumanization, segregation, and police-brutality that

African-Americans have been enduring for years.

To my fellow Asian-Americans, this is our role in helping defeat systemic racism: defeat the Model Minority Myth. This helps us and everyone else. We will no longer have to bear the burden of having to succeed in all aspects of education and professionalism, but everyone else deserves this too. If your parents try to make the claim they came here with very little money, but worked hard to succeed, so others should be able to too, explain that we all do not have the same systems and institutions supporting us. The system and stereotypes around us let us do this. If you want to give a quick history lesson: African-Americans still face discrimination that dates before the civil war. They fought this civil war and continued the fight after that when Asian immigration sky-rocketed decades later, we did not enter this country with the same level of predetermined discrimination. For those who don't fall into this Asian-American category, keep in mind not all your peers of color face the same hardships. It's not appropriate to use an us vs them mentality because there are more than two groups present here. The struggles of all minority demographics can't be grouped into one. Your Asian-American peers don't stereo-typically do better than your African-American peers because they are "more hard-working." It's because your African-American counterparts didn't have the frameworks created for them to succeed, even at a young age while they were still in primary school. We might all look different, but we should be in this together.

THE WAR ON DRUGS

PIERCE FLOREY

In June of 1971, Richard Nixon declared that, “America's public enemy number one in the United States is drug abuse. In order to fight and defeat this enemy, it is necessary to wage a new, all-out offensive.” This declaration marked the beginning of the nationwide, anti-narcotic campaign known as the War on Drugs. Over the past five decades, the War on Drugs has come to encompass a myriad of policies, both domestically and internationally oriented, supposedly designed to prevent drugs from reaching the United States. However, instead of reducing drug consumption, the War on Drugs has done nothing but further entrench racism within America’s criminal justice system. Continuing along the same path that the United States has when it comes to drug policy represents both a massive policy failure and an antithesis to justice. Accordingly, America ought to end its War on Drugs and focus on the actual health and well being of its citizens instead.

First, long before the phrase “War on Drugs” entered the common lexicon, racist stereotypes surrounding narcotics were both prevalent and influential. For instance, beliefs surrounding Latinx youth and cannabis usage directly influenced the passage of the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937. These stereotypes almost certainly influenced the placement of cannabis within Schedule I (along with heroin and LSD) under the Controlled Substances Act of 1970. In essence, the racism that characterized America’s earliest anti-narcotic crusade was never addressed before the War on Drugs. Tragically, the problem worsened to a horrifying extent. The Anti Drug-Abuse Act of 1986, proudly signed by Ronald Reagan, brought about one of the most unjust policies in contemporary history. The cornerstone of the bill was a mandatory minimum sentence of five years for the possession of just five grams of crack cocaine. However, despite being different forms of the same drug, it took 500 grams of powder cocaine to receive the same sentence. The US Sentencing Commission finds that, “The odds of a typical Black drug offender being sentenced to imprisonment are about 20

percent higher than the odds of a typical White offender, while the odds of a Hispanic drug offender are about 40 percent higher. “ Put simply, the criminal justice system is disproportionately handing down both frequent and longer sentences to people of color.

Additionally, the War on Drugs has ingrained itself in the American psyche. Unfortunately, policymakers who are either naive or are looking to appear “tough on crime” have used the brutal campaign as a cheap bid for political capital. In addition to incarceration, governmental structures from local to federal continued this offensive through implementing harsher state drug laws and by militarizing even the smallest police forces. Ever since Nixon’s declaration and Reagan’s policies, the United States has lied to itself that drug abuse can be solved with harsh sentences or police officers using armored vehicles and assault rifles. For all of the unspeakable, and often irreparable damage the War on Drugs has done, it has perpetually failed to do what it was intended to: curb drug abuse.

The CDC reports that in 2018, 67,000 Americans died by overdose. The opioid crisis still continues to destroy communities throughout the United States, yet policymakers still insist drug abuse is a criminal issue. Their reticence on ending the War on Drugs and pivoting to solutions based on public health research and community resources will continue to cost lives. Instead of declaring “war” on drugs, and by extent on drug-users, the US must start treating drug usage as a public health issue. Until we do so on a national level, then thousands of people will continue to die by overdose and our epidemic of mass incarceration will grow to an even greater magnitude. As with so many policies, there needs to be either serious reform or total overhaul. With this in mind, the War on Drugs is the right place to start.

EQUALITY AT THE BALLOT BOX

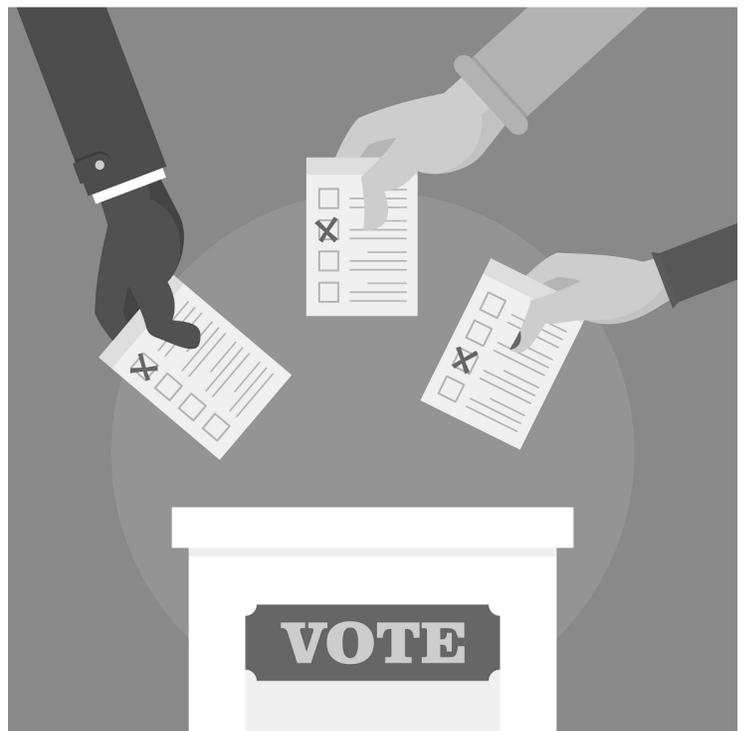
MICHAEL BENDOK

As politicians and legislators, United States representatives are obliged to use their speeches and votes to represent all of their constituents. But when discriminatory voting policies bar certain demographics from reaching the ballot box, every speech they give and vote they take is absent of the voice and vote of a disenfranchised constituency. For instance, when our country was tainted by Jim Crow laws in the 19th and 20th centuries that prohibited African Americans from accessing the ballot box, their rights were limited as racist politicians were elected who did not represent them. Correspondingly, African Americans were left out of opportunities presented by benevolent policies.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed to counteract policies hinged upon Jim Crow ideologies, such as poll taxes and tests, that made it nearly impossible for black and Latinx voters to access the ballot box. Because in 2013, the supreme court case *Shelby County versus Holder* struck down the portion of the Voting Rights Act that gave the federal government authority to prevent discriminatory voting laws, bringing the racism and segregation characterized by the Jim Crow era back to the ballot box. Since that ruling, 37 states have passed laws to suppress minority voter participation by forcing voters to show an ID when they vote under the guise of protecting election security. But when an ACLU study found that between 2000 and 2013, there were only 31 credible allegations of voter impersonation – the only type of fraud that photo IDs could prevent – during a period of time in which over 1 billion ballots were cast, is this really about election security? Absolutely not. It's about suppressing minority voices with impunity: The Brennan Center for justice quantifies that 18% of LatinX, 19% of Native Americans, and 25 percent of African-Americans don't have photo IDs, compared to 3% of whites. Just one example includes North Dakota, where thousands of native Americans on reservations, who do not have home addresses, were barred from voting.

It is undemocratic and immoral to suppress the votes of the 21 million Americans who are disproportionately minorities living in poverty just because they cannot afford to travel up to 200 miles round trip and pay up to \$250 for a photo ID. And due to the purging of voter rolls in several swing states, including Arizona, Wisconsin and Ohio, some Americans *still* can't vote with the ID they've had to fight to obtain. As the Arizona Republic explains, Since 2016, the voter registrations of nearly 258,000 Arizonans were removed from voting rolls so when they go to vote in 6 months, they will be unable to do so. Beyond the immorality of voter suppression, the laws literally alter our elections. Wisconsin's voter-ID law reduced turnout in 2016 by 300,000 votes and President Trump won the state by just 23,000 votes. But there is hope for our democracy.

In Wisconsin 2 months ago, thousands of voters showed up to the polls during a global pandemic. If people are risking their lives to make democracy happen, our representatives should make it easier for them to do so. It is time that we look past the red and blue of our parties because the fabric of our nation is 'unity' under the red white and blue of our flag. The right to vote is a fundamental aspect of being an American, and in the wake of recent protests for equality, the ballot box is a catalyst for change. We must save the future of our democracy by destroying undemocratic barriers to the ballot box.



THE DIVISIVE COLOR LINE

MICHAEL BENDOK

In 1903, W.E.B Du Bois preemptively remarked “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line: the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men” (DuBois 197). The term refers to racial segregation ingrained into societal standards and codified through discriminatory laws which are still evident a century later. White individuals above the color line have access to privileges and institutions which individuals of African descent are denied access to. Justified through the principle of “separate but equal,” the color line created unequal societal and economic playing fields in which skin color dictates access to privilege. This inequity is evident to this day.

The abhorrent legacy of the color line is codified in discriminatory stop and frisk policies. The specific term stop-and-frisk was coined in New York when the first law passed in 1964 allowing police to stop, interrogate and frisk any person whom they believed to be involved in criminal activity and in possession of a weapon. Fifty-four years later, former mayor of New York City Michael Bloomberg has come under fire for making this dehumanizing policy a lynch-pin of his mayoral run. Since Bloomberg assumed office as mayor in 2002, “more than 80% of stop and frisks in the city of New York have been of African Americans or Latinos” (“Stop-and-Frisk Data”). This reality is disheartening because the city has a Latino and African American population of 52.6% (“Race and Ethnicity in New York”). The efficacy of police force operations should be contingent upon the use of probable cause on the basis of crime, not the basis of race. When the color of an individual’s skin becomes the target of discriminatory policing, the fabric of law enforcement’s moral code becomes pierced with gaping holes. Guns should be treated as reactive measures charged with deterrence and pointed at criminals for their crimes, not proactive

weapons aimed at civilians on the basis of their skin color.

While Bloomberg’s justification for this policy is contingent upon the claim that nobody is hurt during these encounters, he fails to see the enormous corrosion of trust between police officers and the communities in which they operate. To understand the ramifications of the color line, Bloomberg must be taken at his word when analyzing the justifications for stop and frisk. For his administration, the purpose of stopping individuals on the streets of New York on the basis of the least auspicious reasonable suspicion rather than justifiable probable cause is to prevent crime, keep communities safe, and keep citizens content. Analyzing this ambition through the lens of the color line’s implications allows a clear view of Bloomberg’s failures. Those under the color line are disproportionately targeted for crimes that are assumed to carry a jail sentence. Thus, the entire system is tilted so minorities fall into the prison systems while whites continue to have access to economic opportunity without their adherence to the law put to question. Even though 9 out of 10 stopped-and-frisked New Yorkers have been completely innocent, minorities are still four times as likely to be marginalized by the policy than their white counterparts (“New NYPD Data Shows Racial Disparities”). While an analysis of the color line implies more economic opportunities are provided to whites due to this policy’s outcomes, the NYCLU statistics mitigate this impact. However, every individual targeted by the problematic policy is affected by a more pervasive issue. Civilians living in neighborhoods with high stop-and-frisk rates experience high rates of “nervousness, feelings of worthlessness and emotional distress, as well as anxiety and symptoms of PTSD” (“Aggressive Policing and the Mental Health”). The amount of melanin in a person’s skin should never be an

indicator of their mental well-being. Bloomberg’s policy physically and emotionally suppressed those under the color line for over a decade.

Only when Bloomberg took the national stage on a progressive pedestal was his policy challenged and denounced. This reaction is important because in the democratic party, minorities are agents of change as they comprise the majority of the voter base. Bloomberg only apologized for his actions when those he affected had the power to dictate his position of power. Intrinsicly, the democratic party challenges the color line because those under the divide decide the political fate of those above it. Essentially, to be champions of progressive policies, politicians must bridge the color line to heal the wounds of the divide it has created. As champions of change, we must bridge the color line so that it does not tear our nation apart.

MENTAL ILLNESS: THE ISSUE OF SERIOUSNESS

REID PINCKARD

"I disliked myself so intensely. It was just a mindset. I did not know how to love myself. I did not know how to love anybody." This is a mild description of Anne Hathaway's battle with depression. It shows how depression ravages your mental health. What is worse is the overwhelming feeling of any mental illness is not easily overcome, and for the past few decades mental illness has become more prevalent. What makes this worse is the simple fact that most people regard mental illness as a figment of someone's imagination. Mental illness is anything but imaginary. We need to help the population to understand what mental illness is and why it demands attention.

Over the past few decades, the surge in interest in mental health has the older and younger generations alike wondering what exactly mental illness is and how it came about. Not knowing the signs and catalysts for mental illness is what makes individuals regard it as an imagined issue. We need to notice how exactly mental illness roots itself in the brain. "Mental illness is a structural and functional abnormality. They are likely to have multiple causes, including genetic, biological, and environmental factors. They are very complex to understand (Weir)." Kirsten Weir, a freelance writer a part of the science initiative, notices that there are many ways to contract a mental illness. One of the best examples she gives is that of an abused child. They have gone through tons of trauma that causes their brain to take on that constant physical, mental, or emotional harassment which morphs their cognitive processes to think negatively about their own life. This visualization of mental illness can develop mental illness as a norm. This sounds counterproductive, but once mental illness is recognized as a norm people will then take it seriously. Without seriousness being attributed to the issue of mental illness it will continue to throw itself on top of generation after generation.

Outside of Weir's explanation, there are more in-depth scientific descriptions that give an image as to how mental illness functions in cognitive processes. Doctor Tim Cantopher, "argues there is a part of the brain called the limbic system that acts like a thermostat, controlling various functions of the body, including mood, and restoring equilibrium after the normal ups and downs of life (Cantopher)." He goes on saying, "The limbic system is a circuit of nerves, transmitting signals to each other via two chemicals, serotonin and noradrenaline, of which people with depression have a deficit. According to this description, depressive illness is predominantly a mental illness (Cantopher)." Dr. Cantopher gives a clear biological description as to why mental illness is real and how it interacts with our brain. Beyond this description we can nail down what the physical signs of mental illness is, and correctly educate people on how to spot it and find help. This scientific description also offers a concrete explanation that proves the portion of the population that does not believe in mental illness wrong. As I stated before, it is vital that we make mental illness known because without that we can not actively change how people handle mental illness.

One of the side effects of not taking mental illness seriously is that it has made itself too prevalent in today's society. It has a snowball effect. Older generations disregard mental illness therefore they tell the generations after them that it is not ok to accept that you may have a mental illness. "Our society is

in the throes of a virtual epidemic of depression (Schwartz)." It is hard to ignore the fact that depression is on the rise along with every other mental illness attached to it. "More than twenty percent of the American population will experience at least one episode of what we refer to as clinical depression (Schwartz)." This number is also on the rise. This virtual epidemic continuously spreads, and it is because of the irrelevance of the issue. Mental illness carries this negative connotation stemming from the use of insane asylums to put "mentally insane" people in. When we carry this connotation over to modern day mental delusions, we resort to ignoring the issue rather than taking it head on. This is what throws us in the inescapable maze of a mental illness epidemic.

We have recognized the issue of older generations calling mental illnesses nonexistent, but one of the biggest issues we have is the overuse of mental illnesses as a "joke." It is the culture we are currently being raised in. Young adults throw the term depressed around like it has no weight and when they are anything but depressed. "The word 'depressed' is flung around flippantly by people who are just upset about something or having a bad day (McAdams)." This belittles the experiences and seriousness of individuals with a mental illness. It is this idea of a circle of depression. We overuse the term, lowering the seriousness of the situation, then we can not actively take on the issue of mental illness. It has become prevalent in a world full of "meme culture." This culture thrives off comedy to make everyone feel better, and at the center of it is jokes about depression or anxiety because that tends to be how people cope, but this is detrimental to the issue at hand. If we initially treat mental illness as a joke, we will continue to not take it seriously. We must redefine the earnestness of mental illness so that we can take on the issue in a healthy way.

At the end of the day, mental illness has now become a central part of society and is beginning to raise red flags. It is ideal that individuals notice that mental illness is real, and people struggle with it as if it were a disease like the flu. By providing examples of how mental illness is developed from exterior situations and then develops on a biological scale, we can actively understand why mental illness even happens and that it is real. It is clear we have a virtual epidemic of depression going on and "meme culture" is not helping that, but that is why we must redefine the seriousness of the situation. Anne Hathaway's struggle with depression and how she "disliked herself so intensely," and how she "did not know how to love anybody," can simply be helped by taking our first step of taking mental illnesses seriously.

A TRULY UNIVERSAL PURSUIT

RUSHIL ROY

When it comes to gun control, U.S. House Representative Steve King certainly has some *unique* views. After being questioned on his position against legislative firearm regulation by Senate Judiciary Committee Advisor Johnie Hammond, King contended that unrestricted gun ownership is safe, replying, "You women don't understand — guns are for men what jewelry is for women". Impressively, this response managed to prove itself as sexist as it was empirically false, because as the Center for Disease Control and Prevention explained, it's definitely not jewelry that's responsible for nearly 40,000 deaths a year in America. Increasingly, the issue of gun violence has become one of the most predominantly polarizing issues to divide Americans, with many opposing gun control on the basis of a perceived abridgment of constitutional rights. Despite this prominent opposition, it is necessary to recognize that legislative action is necessary, with policy advising universal background checks for prospective gun buyers proving fundamental in preventing gun violence, thus ensuring the safety of millions of unknowingly vulnerable Americans in the process.

In all possible considerations of new gun legislation, historical precedence best illustrates the urgent need for implementation of universal background checks (UBCs). In Connecticut, the state legislature passed policy identical to what many have called for on a federal level, mandating that guns may not be sold to those with previous criminal offenses or records of mental health issues— almost instantly, the results spoke for themselves. The passage of the legislation saw a state-wide gun homicide rate decrease of nearly 40%. Unfortunately, Missouri's approach to the issue embodies the antithesis of Connecticut's efforts, resulting in tragedy. Following Missouri's 2007 repeal of their state-level background check law, a reform which many believed would serve to grant more freedom to American retailers by allowing them to sell firearms to whomever they wished just like any other commodity, the state instead saw a 25% increased homicide rate. This issue stems from how legislative loopholes in non-universal background check policy, or background check laws which do not mandate verifying a purchaser's criminal and mental health record at all retailers, are abused by criminals to obtain a firearm. In order to circumnavigate existing non-universal background check measures, a variety of "alternative retailers" can legally sell firearms without so much as verifying the identity of a purchaser. This is often done through a medium like a gun show, gun auction, or online retailer, which leads to the counter-intuitive situation where an individual can be denied the right to purchase a firearm from an established gun retailer but obtain the same gun from a local auction without so much as a second glance.

Beyond curbing the shocking rise in gun violence on a domestic level, another crucial benefit of universal background checks comes from an international perspective, in how the system prevents acts of terror. Problematically, legislative inaction on the issue of firearm regulation has directly fueled terrorist acts both at home and abroad. In 2017, Derek Hawkins of the *Washington Post* published a groundbreaking report, uncovering a translated version of the ISIS propaganda magazine *Rumiyah*, which specifically advocated for the abuse of current non-universal background check loopholes in order to carry out terrorist initiatives. The propaganda piece, published under the title "Just Terror Tactics", instructed its regular audience of ISIS members, leaders, and recruits alike, that "The acquisition of firearms

can be very simple. In most U.S. states, anything from a single-shot shotgun all the way up to a semi-automatic AR-15 rifle can be purchased at showrooms or through online sales — by way of private dealers — with no background checks, and without requiring either an ID or a gun license". The article went on to advocate for the use of American firearms as the most viable method for acts of terror, such as taking hostages and carrying out mass shootings, further citing the 2016 attack on the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, which left 49 dead, as evidence of their plan's supposed efficacy. Worryingly, it seems the legislative passiveness which has characterized the U.S.'s approach to gun reform has been recognized by those who wish to cause harm and terrorize American citizens. Many who oppose universal background check measures, such as Devlin Barrett of *The Chicago Tribune*, argue that background checks would fail to efficiently prevent crime because of how the "background-check database ... [is] missing records of millions of cases". However, while this may currently be true, *PBS* explains that the reason for this comes from the fact that the FBI's terrorist watch list, which indexes all individuals whom federal law enforcement has determined have been involved in terrorist activity, is currently not used in standard background check procedures. This is the reason why Omar Mateen, the perpetrator of the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, the same tragedy which ISIS cited as evidence of the U.S.'s lax gun restrictions, was legally allowed to purchase a firearm during the ten months he spent on the FBI's terrorist watch list. While this should not fuel an advocacy against the very imposition of universal background check legislation, it should spur reform in how those background checks are conducted. Just because a system does not operate with a 100% success rate, is by no means a reason to forgo with the system in its entirety. When looking at the issue from a practical perspective, it becomes evident that in curbing crime, whether on a domestic or international scale, universal background checks are an essential step in order to protect all. Over the past two decades, as gun violence has continued to unfold as an epidemic across the American societal landscape, it has become clear that action must be taken. Unfortunately, the federal government's inaction which has defined the past twenty years of *attempted* firearm reform, has left millions of American people vulnerable to becoming victims of lax gun policy and preventable loopholes. U.S. citizens are forced to play a waiting game with Congress for the mere hope of progressive gun control ever being signed into law. As gun violence in America continues to consistently top every other developed nation in the world, by a factor of nearly 400%, it is clear that we as a nation are missing something. This is the effect of governmental complacency. This is the effect of a decades-long waiting game. This is the effect of complete and devastating inaction. A federal policy of universal background checks for firearm purchases is a fundamental solution in helping curb the violence and tragedy which has pervaded the presence of guns in the United States. America as a nation can no longer shield its eyes to pretend it doesn't see the catastrophe unfolding affront. It is now time to open our eyes to the problem, recognize the solution, and take action to ensure that the solution becomes a reality.

ABOLISH THE POLICE

JULIETTE REYES

Abolish the Police. It started as a hashtag, a hashtag thrown around by activists observing the protests. Then it became a rallying call, a chant fiercely shouted across lines of protestors under the fire of rubber bullets and smogs of tear gas. While the term, Abolish the Police, maybe new, the sentiment is not. If anything, the concept of radical police reform dates back to 2015, when the initial black lives matter protests began. However, the recent murder of George Floyd united activists and allies alike to start having conversations questioning the role of policing in American Society. And with social media outlets such as Black Twitter, Facebook live streams depicting police brutality, and constant anti-racist Instagram posts— one has to beg the question. Are the police genuinely innocent? Are the institutions sworn to serve and protect us truly beyond proper scrutiny and reform? Nevertheless, while many would argue that law enforcement are the backbone of American Democracy, a centerfold of our culture, we must also remember one thing; That this nation was born out of belligerent and violent protests at times, and everything we cherish today from workers' protections to fundamental civil freedoms was a result of placing doubt on once untouchable institutions and groups of people. The police are no different, especially when you consider the fact that the police we know today, is not the police the media, government, and education systems glorify. But let's go back to where this shift from law and order to containing the masses began. In 1968, Richard Nixon was a republican president with two things on his mind; the rising inflation rate and emerging anti-war leftist sentiment. Nixon was at odds both at home and abroad, and with an economy unfavorable to employment rates and mass wealth inequality, he soon found his party's hold to power in danger. However, Nixon and his staff found that if it was one thing Americans were starting to fear, it was drugs. The Michigan University Law School explains in their journal, how "The war metaphor came about in the wake of World War II when leaders sought to rally public support to solve social problems. The 'war on crime' was coined by President Johnson in 1966, whereas the 'war on drugs' began during the Nixon administration. Nixon called drugs 'public enemy number one,' equating them with 'foreign troops on our shores.'" With a new public enemy for the American people to hate, silently behind the scenes both Nixon and later, President Reagan would go onto enact massive reforms to police departments from federal, state, to local scale. Even Presidents George H.W Bush and Clinton had a hand in what was soon to follow. From having the Marines train police officers to create the first-ever SWAT Teams, granting police access to military information and weaponry, increasing patrols in communities of color, and expanding police funding to nearly \$800 million—The American Police Force changed in the matter of a decade or two, if not a couple of years. Additionally, the University of Virginia's Miller Center finds, how in 1970 (two years after the War on Drugs was first declared), Nixon created the Interagency Committee on Intelligence. The agency was ordered to "coordinate operations against domestic targets, namely anti-war leftists and suspected communists." With all these reforms, one would suspect that crime rates would have gone down drastically along with drug usage. Yet, as the National Institutes of Health, explains, "War on Drugs policing has failed in its stated goal of reducing domestic street-level drug activity: the cost of drugs on the street remains low, and drugs remain widely available. Evaluations of specific tactics, such as raids on crack houses and crackdowns, suggest that their effects on drug availability are minimal, decay rapidly, and may displace drug activity to other areas and increase drug-related violence". So then it begs the question, why? If politicians and government officials continuously tell us that the more resources police officers have than that will lessen the crime rate, then why isn't that the case. A 22-year-old interview with Harper's Magazine may just provide the answer. In the interview, former Nixon Domestic Policy Chief, John Ehrlichman, revealed the real intent behind the ever so famous "War on Drugs" and the policies that came with it. According to Ehrlichman, "The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin. And then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities, we could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course, we did." This is the reason why we see protestors being shot at with tear gas in the streets. It's the reason why black martyrs such as George Floyd and Breonna Taylor are in graveyards rather than with their families. It's not because of a couple of bad apples; it's because the whole forest is rotten—and has been rotten since 1968. And while many could argue this isn't an issue today in the US, recent reports would beg to differ. "Between 2002 and the third quarter of 2014, 5 million New Yorkers were stopped and frisked; in any given year during this period between 82% and 90% of people stopped had committed no offense and just 9–12% of people stopped were Non-Hispanic White. Stop, and frisks can be highly geographically concentrated: in a single 8-block area of a predominately Black and Latino neighborhood (home to just 14,000 people), the police conducted 52,000 stops and frisks over a four-year period; 94% of people stopped had committed no offense." (New York Civil Liberties Union, ND) And sadly, this issue is deeply an American one. Lisa Schirch, a researcher in Conflict Resolution Analysis, clarifies in her handbook, "Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning," the difference between human security actors (such as law enforcement and social workers) and national security actors. In her handbook, she identifies that under a Human Security Paradigm, law enforcement, government officials, and local communities are designed to work together to minimize harmful factors and protect the well-being of ALL individuals.

Whereas, on the other hand, a National Security paradigm focuses on securing territorial, economic, and political

interests with budgets geared towards " offensive military capacity."

Sound familiar?

In the United States, "79 percent of paramilitary police activity is now devoted to serving warrants, one of the more routine types of police deployment." With every passing year, Police departments are dedicating their funds towards acquiring helicopters, camouflage, battering rams, and other forms of military equipment. Whether conservatives and skeptics want to admit it or not, the police force in America is militarized. It is not an institution that stands for protecting democracy and enforcing the law as it once was intended to. Instead, policing in America has been taught with the steadfast belief that officers have unlimited power and to use force first and ask questions later. The American Bar Association, one of the nations most reliable institutions goes onto argue how; "In these neighborhoods [black and brown communities], heavily armed paramilitary teams of 20 or more officers break down doors, stun residents with flash-bang grenades, and point assault weapons at children. They are not trying to take down an active shooter or neutralize a terrorist threat. They are simply serving warrants and searching for drugs." As police brutality becomes more normalized with every passing presidential administration, definitive action needs to be taken. The National Institutes of Health warns of the consequences associated with our broken police system, explaining how, "By increasing the frequency of aggressive police/civilian interactions, stop and frisks increase the chances that violence will occur. This chance may be exacerbated if, consonant with the militarization of police departments, police officers have come to see civilians less as civilians they are charged to protect and more as the enemy." Moreover, when officers regularly treat civilians as enemies, **civilians are less likely to comply** with their orders, which may, in turn, **further amplify violence.** As the fourth of July approaches, a celebration of patriotism and what it means to be American, we as a country need to question if our police system is genuinely inline with our nation's values. We need to understand that Abolish the Police isn't a calling to descend into anarchy, but rather a wake-up call to fix a deeply broken system. I can't promise all of the details. Still, a great start would be for police officers to be better trained in de-escalation scenarios, more well-read on racial & LGBTQ+ discrimination in our country, and more willing to communicate with their communities. If we are to rebuild a system founded on peacebuilding and conflict resolution, we'll have a long way to go. But abolishing the police *as we know it* will be the first step.

THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

CHARLIE GU

Being an American means you can't:

Listen to loud music -

Jordan Davis

Go jogging -

Ahmaud Arbery

Return home from 7/11 -

Trayvon Martin

Seek help with your car -

Renisha McBride

Celebrate New Year's -

Oscar Grant

Reside in your own home -

Breonna Taylor

Being an American means:

99% of the time, your murderer won't be held accountable.

You're three times as likely to be killed by police than your peers.

In 8 of the largest cities in your country, your friends and loved ones will be killed at a higher rate than the US murder rate.

I know it's cliché to start an article about America with the document that serves as the reason we can even call ourselves the "United States of America", but truth be told, there's few other texts that better represent the ideals that have guided and will continue to guide our growth as a nation.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

You've heard this famous quote an innumerable number of times, and for good reason, it's beautiful, it's eloquent, it makes for really nice contextualization in your APUSH DBQ. But what if I told you there

was more to the document that breathed life into our democracy than Thomas Jefferson's proverbial opening line?

"That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to [alter it]."

Here, Jefferson and the Founding Fathers championed the idea of the "social contract," an Enlightenment idea articulating that the government has an obligation to tend to society's welfare; if it is to fail that obligation, such a government should exist no longer. If you asked any random person on the street if they think that our government has failed its duty to the American people, or "[become] destructive," as Jefferson might put it, I'd bet a lot of them would answer yes.

In recent weeks, this answer is becoming increasingly justified. With the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, an African American male jogging in his Georgia neighborhood, and George Floyd, who was killed by police officer Derek Chauvin kneeling on his neck, outrage has erupted across social media and on the streets of American cities. Many compared the kneeling officer in Floyd's killing to the kneeling of Colin Kaepernick, the former NFL quarterback who kneeled during the national anthem. For his stand against injustice, Kaepernick paid the price of being outcast by the team he once called home. Despite the actions he took and the future he sacrificed, injustice in our country has persisted, most notably with Floyd's murder. The protests have been accented with vivid moments—snapshots in history, if you will. Whether it be looters gratuitously smashing the windows

of businesses, leaving shards of glass in their midst, or small business owners staring at their shattered storefronts, seeing decades of hard work reduced to dust, or police officers resorting to excessive violence to quell the disarray, it's easy for Americans to see the protests in an overwhelmingly negative light. It's the side of the protests that the media doesn't show that reflect the truly unifying nature of this country: a group of protesters locking arms to protect an isolated cop or protesters in New Jersey joining together to dance to the "Cupid Shuffle." If there's anything these protests have shown, it's that division has always been deeply woven into the fabric of American society.

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