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THE GHOST OF JIM CROW
FALSE LABELS = EXCESSIVE SENTENCES

by

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Jim Crow killed George Floyd. Only five months earlier, in January 2020, it was reported that as many as twenty Metro Division Los Angeles Police Officers (LAPD) were falsely labeling African American citizens as gang members (King, 2020). Jim Crow allowed the LAPD to impose a life-long negative label to these young men, labels that typically end in eternal prison sentences. These allowances and the pervasive attitudes that go with them stem from the Jim Crow era, and convict leasing, where white men of authority labeled African American men and women to subjugate them; the practice continues today (Gates, 2020).

And just a few months before it was discovered that the LAPD was branding young men of color, the Los Angeles Times reported that Metro officers stopped African American drivers five times more than white drivers (King, 2020). This

racialized pattern of policing has been reported in Minneapolis, New York City (Bass, 2020), Florida, and many other major cities across this land of the free (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016). And as if the power of the pen was not bad enough, studies of these same cities also reveal a pattern of excessive force by police against African Americans, particularly African American men (and now Latinos). These facts have culminated in the grim statistics that note police violence is the sixth leading cause of death of African American men. To boot, one-in-three African American youth are also predicted to be placed in control of the criminal justice system.

As the second half of 2020 begins, and the details of George Floyd's death emerge, along with others in this pattern of extra-judicial killings, it is important to remember the many, many men, women, and children crammed in the nation's overcrowded prisons. No, this long-held pattern of false labeling, and bias doesn't end in the streets of America's criminal justice system. The streets are where the excessive force ends and excessive sentences begin. The streets is the beginning of the story. We are labeled gang bangers, threats, "super predators" and finally incorrigible. Many of us are then disproportionately sentenced to extreme sanctions such as life without the possibility of parole or the death penalty. From Jim Crow to present, from false labels to excessive sentences, this is our reality. If we're going to truly analyze this historical pattern of Jim Crow, then we must look at the entire context because, when it comes to the ghost of Jim Crow, context matters.

Call to action: 1. Create a hashtag; 2. Contact your lawmakers

Sources:

Bass, Karen (2020, June 2), Fox 11 News, New York Police Officers biased

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Gates, Henry, Jr., PBS (2020, June 2), "Reconstruction"