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Based on: US Bishops Article

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(The Birthday of Breonna Taylor)

The Value of Human Life

Written in hopes that there is a future in which we can all “breathe”

In an interview that took place on September 27, 1966, Dr. Martin Luther King stated that “a riot is the language of the unheard, and what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the economic plight of the negro has worsened over the last few years”. As I look at the history of unjust treatment of the Black community in America, it is evident that our voices have long gone unheard. That for centuries, whether or not we spoke against the system that oppressed us, seemed to do little to make a difference. Because of this, some have taken matters into their own hands, by looting, burning down stores, and posting up graffiti. In desperate attempts to make their voices heard, some members of the Black community have turned to violence. What has made “the plight of the negro” worsen to the point where America appears to be waging a war against its own people? What does the Catholic Church believe about the killing of George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter Movement, and the recent protests?

Although the events that sparked nationwide protests are instances of police brutality, the fight against racism has actually been an ongoing fight for the black community. From the year 1526, when Africans were brought to the Americas as slaves, to present day in 2020, they have been faced with systemic oppression, prejudice, and criminalization from Caucasian and ethnic communities in America. One may even view recent protests as a rebellion, instead of a riot.

These protests are carried out to call attention to the discrimination and dangers of black citizens in America. The protests are targeted at those who view racism as a ‘black people problem’ and resort to doing nothing at all. Despite the belief that issues faced by marginalized groups do not affect the majority, continuous acts of racism call to question our morals as a society, as well as our definition of human rights. The ability to carry out tasks such as shopping,

working, walking, and even sleeping are to be considered a human right and should not be factors that play into an individual's death. For a black American however, carrying out basic everyday tasks could cost them their lives. They could die selling CDs like Alton Sterling, playing with a toy gun like Tamir Rice, sleeping like Breonna Taylor, and over a twenty dollars like George Floyd. Many black Americans, such as the ones previously mentioned, lose their lives in the hands of officials who should be protecting them, the police. Instances in which police officers are found to have used excessive force are not rare and have resulted in the coined term "police brutality".

Police brutality is a product of racial prejudices that are constantly circulated throughout mainstream media. On occasion, black people are referenced to as "gang members" and "monkeys". These terms are used to criminalize and dehumanize the black community as a whole. Through the use of racist and grotesque diction, the racial acts against the black community have often been excused or justified. Some people go as far as viewing the unjust deaths of the black community as the gradual eradication of an unneeded race in America.

An article posted by the Catholic News Agency addresses "the fight to eradicate racism [as] a pro-life issue" (Catholic News Agency). Unfortunately many government officials fail to recognize this and dismiss the viewpoint in which the lives of black individuals matter. Furthermore, they call for laws banning abortion and turn around to call for the killing of American citizens in the same breath. They fail to realize that being pro-life means that they believe that the value of human life in any state or form is immeasurable. This pro-life ideology should include the lives of Black Americans who are at risk everyday, however that is not the case. As a result, Black Americans continue to face a system of oppression and have to watch as members of their communities are killed in this system of hatred that breeds widespread prejudice.

Despite all of this, many people refuse to believe that racism is a prevalent issue in America. The article that was posted by the Catholic News Agency contrastingly stated that "racism is not a thing of the past or simply a throwaway political issue to be bandied about when convenient. It is a real and present danger that must be met head on" (Catholic News Agency). In attempts to face the present danger head on, petitions to defund the police and increase the mandatory period of training from 18 weeks to 2-4 years have been created. In addition to this, funding for the Black Lives Matter Movement has dominated all social media platforms as many Americans

and individuals worldwide work towards a future in which black Americans are truly equal to their white counterparts.

Despite the earnest efforts by millions to contact government officials, sign petitions, and donate to victims and organizations in order to help further the efforts of the Black Lives Matter Movement, some are choosing to remain 'neutral'. These individuals continue to ignore issues that they believe do not directly affect them. They have chosen to ignore that the term "ALL Lives Matter" is an untrue statement until black lives matter as well. It will continue to be an untrue statement until virtue signaling on social platforms cease to exist, until difficult discussions on race are held amongst family members, and until changes have been made in our communities. If we all work towards a future that is less suffocating for the marginalized groups in society and allows them to breathe, we have succeeded in upholding basic human rights for every individual.