COM-803 Hermeneutics and Communications

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Omega Graduate School

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Professor

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Assignment

**Assignment #3 – Essay on a case study**

**1. Write a 5-page paper on a specific event or phenomenon (e.g., a historical event, a**

**cultural practice, a legal decision), and interpret it from a hermeneutic perspective.**

**This would involve understanding the event within its context and recognizing the role**

**of your prejudices in shaping your interpretation.**

**The student should direct developmental readings from Assignment #2 on the**

**the hermeneutic issue for this assignment.**

**2. Paper Outline**

**a. Begin with an introductory paragraph with a succinct thesis statement.**

**b. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought.**

**c. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.**

**d. Use at least eleven scholarly research sources (two books and the**

**remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).**

**Systemic Racism and Trauma- Perception of Policing in African American Communities**

Systemic racism and trauma are deeply interconnected and often perpetuate one another. Systemic racism refers to the various policies, practices, and structures within a society that create and maintain racial inequalities and disparities. Trauma, on the other hand, refers to the psychological and emotional effects of experiencing or witnessing events that are deeply distressing or harmful. The perception of the police within the African American community is complex and can vary among individuals. Historical and systemic factors, such as the tragic death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore in 2015, shape African Americans' law enforcement experiences and perspectives.

There is a distinction between systematic racism in African American communities and the trauma it causes. The former often manifests as a sense of threat from police presence, while the latter stems from continuous exposure to racial discrimination, violence, and inequality. Systematic racism takes a severe toll on the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of marginalized groups. American policing has never had a stellar reputation with minorities. It can be said that any minority in history has been abused, belittled, taken advantage of, and more. The callousness has caused hostility in the black community toward American policing **(**Franklin & Hein, 2021)**.**

On April 12, 2015, Baltimore City Police Officers arrested Freddie Gray for allegedly possessing an illegal switchblade. During the arrest, Gray suffered a severe spinal cord injury while in police custody. He was not properly secured in the police van and was not provided with medical attention despite visibly needing it. Gray was transported to a hospital and fell into a coma. He died a week later on April 19, 2015. Gray's death and the circumstances surrounding it ignited outrage and protests in Baltimore and across the country. Demonstrators called for justice and demanded accountability for the officers involved in his arrest and the subsequent events that led to his death. The protests in Baltimore turned violent at times, with clashes between protesters and police, and the city was put under curfew.

The case of Freddie Gray highlighted the more significant issue of police misconduct and brutality, particularly against African American communities. It became a focal point in the ongoing national conversation about racial inequality and the relationship between law enforcement and minority communities.

In the aftermath of Gray's death, six police officers involved in his arrest were charged with various crimes, including manslaughter and second-degree murder. Ultimately, the trials resulted in acquittals, dropped charges, and convictions. Police officers who serve the public in a free society must be able to uphold every aspect of their profession to promote public safety and maintain the rule of law. Doing so requires a sense of ethics and the ability to use moral reasoning to navigate the ambiguous job complexities of law enforcement and the life-and-death circumstances police may encounter at a moment’s notice (Dempsey et al., 2023).

The death of Freddie Gray had a profound impact on the movement for police reform and the fight against systemic racism. It catalyzed further discussions and actions aimed at addressing issues of racial profiling, excessive use of force, and the need for accountability within law enforcement agencies. Although police killings and physical violence are primarily associated with police brutality, it is essential to note that police brutality also includes emotional and sexual violence, verbal assaults, psychological intimidation, and other forms of police misconduct. Racism negatively impacts Black people's psychological, emotional, social, spiritual, financial, and physical well-being (Holmes IV, 2020)

Having the opportunity to work in Baltimore during the riots and aftermath of the Freddie Gray death opened my eyes to two worlds. The focus was on completing the mission of restoring law and order to the community. When the team arrives on a scene of this magnitude, the training overrides any empathy, and the mindset is that everyone is wrong or a criminal. After the civil unrest was over and to this day, I often reflect to try to understand how those in the community were feeling. The trauma of police brutality is a serious issue that can have long-lasting effects on individuals, families, and communities. Victims of police brutality may experience physical injuries, psychological trauma, and emotional distress. The trauma of police brutality can manifest in various ways, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and feelings of fear, anger, and helplessness. It can erode trust in law enforcement, exacerbate existing social inequalities, and contribute to a sense of injustice and powerlessness. Although police killings and physical violence are primarily associated with police brutality, it is essential to note that police brutality also includes emotional and sexual violence, verbal assaults, psychological intimidation, and other forms of police misconduct. Racism negatively impacts Black people's psychological, emotional, social, spiritual, financial and physical well-being (Holmes IV, 2020)

The effects of systemic racism and trauma are intertwined and can create a cycle of disadvantage. For example, individuals who experience racial discrimination and trauma may face barriers to accessing quality education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. These limited resources and opportunities then contribute to further disparities and perpetuate the cycle of systemic racism. Moreover, the intergenerational transmission of trauma is a significant aspect to consider. Historical traumas have long-lasting effects on communities of color. The trauma experienced by previous generations can be passed down through family and community dynamics, impacting the mental health and well-being of subsequent generations.

Several initiatives have been implemented, including community policing, cultural competency and diversity training, community advisory boards, and police-community relationship-building events, to build positive relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve. Here in Maryland, I have been part of a Knock and Talk Community initiative where we go out into the communities with parole and probation agents and social workers to provide resources for the clients who have been incarcerated and are currently supervised by parole and probation. These initiatives foster trust, improve communication, and promote collaboration between law enforcement agencies and community members. Additionally, providing support and resources for healing and recovery is crucial. This support can involve culturally competent mental health services, community-based programs, and trauma-informed care. Creating safe spaces and platforms for individuals and communities to share their experiences, process their trauma, and advocate for change is essential.

Ultimately, addressing systemic racism and trauma requires a collective effort from individuals, communities, institutions, and policymakers. It involves recognizing the deep-rooted nature of these issues and committing to systemic change that promotes justice, equality, and healing for all individuals, regardless of their racial or ethnic background. These initiatives, among others, aim to bridge the gap between law enforcement and the communities they serve by promoting trust, understanding, and collaboration. By fostering positive relationships, law enforcement agencies can work more effectively to address community concerns, prevent crime, and maintain public safety.

# References

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