

## Can civil disobedience be justified? - the fight for racial equality

With the recent acts of objection aiming to confront existing racial inequities, it has become apparent that civil disobedience is taking over our society. Between late May and August this year, protests associated with the Black Lives Matter movement have flooded the United States. The “news tends to delegitimize the demands of activists by focusing their coverage on the spectacle and violence of protests” (Yoganathan, Nimalan) when they should be concentrating on the purpose. Racial discrimination towards African Americans has come in many forms throughout history, including slavery, convict leasing, Jim Crow oppression & segregation, mass incarceration, and War on Drugs. It is fair to say that this discrimination has not been resolved; rather, it has been enshrined into a continuous cycle that comes in waves. Currently, we are experiencing a massive wave, and civil disobedience in the form of protesting is crucial to stand up against inequity.

We must ask ourselves, what defines civil disobedience? Its denotation is the refusal to obey a government's laws, demands, or orders, often in nonviolent resistance (Civil disobedience); however, Martin Luther King Jr., a renowned advocate for civil disobedience, once stated, “an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is, in reality, expressing the highest respect for the law” (MLK). In other words, demonstrating civil disobedience against unjust laws is essential for bettering our society by promoting a healthy democracy. Furthermore, it plays a vital role in protecting civilians' rights and freedom. Therefore, one could view civil disobedience as a means of effectuating governmental, social and political change, rather than a hostile act like the biased media illustrates.

Police brutality is a major violation of civil rights which people are protesting against, hoping that it will be dismantled and reformed. Countless unarmed Black lives have been taken from our world unjustly due to police brutality. The recent murder of George Floyd was the breaking point; his death added fuel to the Black Lives Matter movement by sparking protests across the world. Officer Derek Chauvin forcefully pressed his knee into Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. This reinvigorated a crucial talk about the correlation between police brutality and racism. Studies show that Black men are 2.5 times more likely to be killed by the police than White men, and are two times more likely to be unarmed when fatally shot by police than White men. Additionally, white officers dispatched to Black neighbourhoods fire their guns five times as often as black officers in the same neighbourhoods (Peeples, Lynee). Therefore, it can be concluded that police violence is rooted in anti-black racism ingrained within the whole system.

The fact that the officer overtly perpetrated the murder of George Floyd, and it is somehow justified because of White privilege and supremacy, shows how corrupted the police system is. Nevertheless, this systemic racism also persists in the criminal justice system, and people are

protesting to bring attention to this. There is an abundance of instances where African Americans have been falsely accused and convicted of a crime, imprisoned and killed because of racial disparities in the criminal justice system. Mass incarceration is one of the many examples of how Black individuals are being mistreated in our society. The system has deliberately targeted them and painted an inaccurate picture that deceptively links them with criminality. Statistics show that although Black people account for only 13.4% of the U.S. population, they are 7 times more likely to be convicted of murder, 3.5 times more likely to be convicted of sexual assault, and 12 times more likely to be convicted of a drug crime than White people (Lopez, German et. al). Furthermore, they receive harsher sentences and punishments compared to White individuals. Breonna Taylor was a Black woman who was fatally shot in her home by the police during a drug investigation. Currently, after more than six months, the white male officers involved have not been rightfully charged. This injustice in the criminal justice system is rooted in a history of oppression and discriminatory behaviour.

Society favours and celebrates whiteness, leaving Black minorities riding against the current of freedom. Too many African Americans have died, suffered and faced inequality at the hands of societal prejudices. This treatment has left people with no choice but to carry out civil disobedience in the means of protests so that their voices can be heard and effectual change can be made.