**Racism and Police Brutality**

Today, whether systemic racism exists in law enforcement is no longer debatable. It is evident from the controversial police killings that disproportionally affect Black Americans. Sadly, even after identifying this social evil, cases of police-civilians killings continue to emerge. In most cases, courts dismiss the charges as self-defense, and the perpetrators continue to walk free in society. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was established in 2013 after the acquittal of George Zimmerman, who killed Trayvon Martin in 2012. The Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation (BLMGNF) is a global organization in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom dedicated to eliminating white supremacy and establishing a local power to combat violence against the Black community. In addition, it aims to establish an enabling environment for Black creativity and innovation. While the efforts to combat racism have been outstanding over the years, a growing body of research still indicates serious concerns about police brutality and killings of Black Americans.

**Black Americans Killed by Police**

The case of Trayvon Martin is one of many incidents where African Americans were killed by law enforcement officers across the United States. Martin, a 17-year-old Black American boy, was fatally shot by George Zimmerman on his way from the store. Zimmerman (a patrol officer) called 911 to report a suspicious individual and was instructed not to alight from his SUV or confront the person (Munro, 2022). A few moments later, Zimmerman shot Martin, claiming it was self-defense in a physical confrontation. Zimmerman was not arrested until protests emerged in response to the murder. The incident also ignited national debates on self-defense laws and racial profiling. Zimmerman was charged with second-degree murder but was later acquitted in 2013, triggering the BLM movement.

Eric Garner was another victim of police brutality. The incident involved a New York Police Department (NYPD) officer, Daniel Pantaleo. The officer chock-held Garner on the ground for allegedly selling cigarettes (Lyn, 2022). The 43-year-old Black American man was heard saying, "I can't breathe," in video footage that stormed the internet. Garner later died in the hospital. Like Martin's incident, Garner's murder triggered protests in the streets of New York and other parts of the United States. The court ruled the case a homicide, but Pantaleo was not sentenced. In an out-of-court settlement, the family of Garner received $5.9 million. The NYPD later fired Pantaleo.

An 18-year-old, Michael Brown, was killed by Darren Wilson in the streets of Ferguson, Missouri. According to witnesses, the victim was walking with his friend Johnson when the officer approached them, demanding they walk on the sidewalk (Onion et al., 2014). Wilson and Brown had a physical confrontation, after which the police alighted from his SUV. Wilson ordered the two friends to stop threatening to shoot. Brown, who had surrendered, saying, "don't shoot," was hit by six bullets out of the 12 fired by Wilson (Lyn, 2022). The court failed to indict Wilson, sparking community protests and civil unrest.

In 2020, during the lockdown, the murder of Georg Floyd attracted worldwide attention. The incident involved Minnesota police Derek Chauvin and three other officers who pursued Floyd. Footage of the incident showed Chauvin holding Floyd on the ground with a knee on his neck. Transcripts of the body camera footage indicated that Floyd uttered "I can't breathe" 20 times (Hill et al., n.d.). Floyd was later taken to the hospital, where he died. The court found Chauvin guilty of second-degree murder and sentenced him to 22 years in prison. The three officers were prosecuted in federal court and awaiting sentence for depriving Floyd of civil rights. Floyd's family received $27 million in a settlement.

**Research-Based Evidence of Systemic Racism**

DeAngelis (2021) mapped police killings from 2013 to 2021 to evaluate systemic racism facing the Black American community across the United States. The results indicated that police disproportionately kill African Americans. More than half of the victims are Black Americans. In addition, Black victims, compared to White victims, have a 60% less likelihood of portraying mental conditions, 23% lower odds of having a weapon, and 28% higher odds of running away (DeAngelis, 2021). A similar study analyzed police killings by race across the United States from 1980 to 2019. The study was based on the National Vital Statistics System (NVSS). The results indicate that law enforcement officers disproportionately kill African Americans at a rate of 3.5 times more than White Americans (Global Burden of Diseases, 2021). Moreover, it showed Black victims were more each year, portraying institutions' racial discrimination.

Edwards et al. (2019) analyzed police killings to establish the risk of being killed by an officer in brutal and excessive use of force confrontations across different social groups. The results indicate that Black Americans, American Indians, and Latinos face a higher risk of being killed by police than White Americans. Furthermore, Black American men face the highest risk, such that in every 1,000, one is likely to be killed by the police over the life course.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the issue of systemic racism is deeply rooted in law enforcement agencies in the United States. The pattern of Black American killings has been consistent over the years. The incidents of police killings persist despite the efforts to condemn the social vice. The time for a national reckoning on systemic racism is now to ensure the controversial killings of people like Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, and Georg Floyd never happen again. Police reforms must include a plan to combat systemic racism and foster a culture of fair law enforcement and crisis intervention techniques.

**References**

DeAngelis, R. T. (2021). Systemic racism in police killings: New evidence from the mapping police violence database, 2013–2021. *Race and Justice*, 21533687211047944. https://doi.org/10.1177/21533687211047943

Edwards, F., Lee, H., & Esposito, M. (2019). Risk of being killed by police use of force in the United States by age, race, ethnicity, and sex. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *116*(34), 16793–16798. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1821204116

Global Burden of Diseases. (2021). Fatal police violence by race and state in the USA, 1980–2019: A network meta-regression. *The Lancet*, *398*(10307), 1239–1255.

Hill, E., Tiefenthäler, A., Christiaan, T., Jordan, D., Willis, H., & Robin, S. (n.d.). *How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody.* The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html

Lyn, D. (2022, May 25). *Timeline of Black Americans killed by police: 2014-2022*. World America. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/americas/timeline-of-black-americans-killed-by-police-2014-2022/2596913

Munro, A. (2022, September 20). *The shooting of Trayvon Martin (United States history).* Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/event/shooting-of-Trayvon-Martin

Onion, A., Sullivan, M., & Mullen, M. (2014, August 9). *Michael Brown is killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri.* HISTORY. https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/michael-brown-killed-by-police-ferguson-mo