RACE & POLICING

AND HOW WE GET IT WRONG
1: CRIME REPORTING IS STILL CENTERED IN WHITENESS

- We are the most incarcerating nation in the developed world.
- From 1980 to 2015 the incarcerated population increased from 500,000 to 2.2 million.
- U.S law enforcement kill on average 900-1100 people each year.
- And all of this is happening to a disproportionate amount of Americans based on the status of race.
- Knowing the scale of this problem, yet failing to contextualize it is defacto racist.
2: YOU FAIL TO UNDERSTAND THE POLICE

- Police are in an existential crisis. For their own survival they will always advocate and protect themselves over the community.
- Journalism historically has sided with police because they are proximately closer to whiteness.
- Police have positioned themselves as the expert monopoly on crime. They are NOT. They were never built for research, and only represent the front loaded portion of the criminal justice system.
- By failing to understand the police you fail to correctly report and accurately reflect their role and responsibilities to society.
- Our job is to report for the community, not for the police.
3: YOU STEREOTYPE TO FILL IN THE GAPS FOR BAD REPORTING

- We often fall into racial, class, and gender stereotypes to fill in the gaps of poor reporting. We use established, problematic shorthand, in lieu of contextual information.
- This often means problematic or shallow takes are replicated cyclically throughout newsrooms and our industry.
- Covering the criminal justice system is hard. But that doesn’t excuse poor reporting.
4: YOU DON'T FOCUS ON THE END EFFECT

- We often leave stories never focusing on the end of results of poor policing.
- The criminal justice system is bogged down with misdemeanors, and crimes that most Americans would consider non-violent or serious.
- On the flip side, serious crimes, sexual assaults, and thefts have abysmal clearance rates according to the FBI.
- This system is expensive.
- It has terrorized BIPOC communities physically, legally, and socially in ways that effect their day-to-day lives in this country.
- Not contextualizing this information in your reporting is lying by omission, and places the victims of this system as naysayers.

**By not focusing on the end effects, you report an untrue reality in the face of these communities - which drives a wedge further away from them.**
5: WE DON'T REPORT ROOT CAUSES

- Because we overemphasize the police, we often report crime from the perspective of when they encounter it. Not the contributing social or policy factors that led to it.
- This take oversimplifies criminal activity and those interacting with the criminal justice system.
- It also broadly labels violators as "worthless."
6: YOU VALUE CIS WHITE VICTIMS MORE THAN OTHERS

- Danielle C. Slakoff, Henry F. Fradella (Arizona State Univ, 2019) Found that while Black women make up a disproportionate amount of missing persons cases, white women overwhelmingly take up disproportionate amount of media attention.

- (University of Wyoming, 2020) Study showed only 30% of Indigenous homicide victims had newspaper media coverage, as compared to 51% of White homicide victims and found "articles for Indigenous homicide victims were more likely to contain violent language, portray the victim in a negative light, and provide less information as compared to articles about White homicide victims"

- Mass shooting coverage still leads gun crime conversations and policy discussion due to its nature to target white victims, while overshadowing gun violence that effects most Americans or Black & Brown Americans.
Journalism is still white centered in its reporting because it is still overwhelmingly white in demographics. You will struggle to cover communities and lifestyles you are not apart of, and that's why it's imperative for information gathering purposes to diversify ranks. You cannot treat race as an addendum to your regularly-scheduled-programming. It will require structural, editorial, and resources directed change to tackle these topics in the magnitude of which they deserve. That may mean throwing certain structures and philosophies away entirely. Sometimes the easiest solution is the simplest.
EMAIL: ASTEPHENS@THETRACE.ORG
SOCIALS:@ALAINSTEPHENS