

THE IMAGE OF DISCRIMINATION AND POLICE VIOLENCE AGAINST AFRICAN AMERICANS IN MATT TAIBBI'S *I CAN'T BREATHE: A KILLING ON BAY STREET*

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Abstract

The aftermath of Blacks' emancipation has not granted total freedom to the latter. For, other measures are applied to continue maintaining them under the control of the white man. In this paper, for instance, one discovers that Blacks are not only the targets of their civilian white counterparts, but more generally of great institution like the police that torture and gun them in a certain way. The American justice instead of reading the law and condemn the guilty without any regard to the skin color, sides with Whites and rejects all the responsibilities on Blacks. Even under President Obama's administration, Blacks are still victimized and killed by the police just because they are black.

Keywords: Blacks, Whites, Police, Skin color, Victimized, Killed.

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, the national "white supremacy" and American history have been built on the backs of African Americans. They have been victims of the police violence, White civilian's abuses, and humiliation. Among the police misuses of laws in American society, one therefore finds: discrimination and the excessive use of force against Blacks. Discrimination towards African Americans is not just an issue that contradicts the core values of fairness and equality of opportunities in the United States, but also has very real consequences and clearly explains the substantial proportion of the African Americans and the police brutalities. These police brutalities are, indeed, reconstructed by Matt Taibbi in *I Can't Breathe: a Killing on Bay Street*. This novel explores the police excessive use of force against African Americans and other marginalized groups, their discrimination in policing, suppression of protests, and continuing pattern of impunity against the misconduct of the police.

I have chosen to deal with Matt Taibbi's *I Can't Breathe: a Killing on Bay Street* for its themes linked to African Americans' experience of violence and victimization by the police. The purpose of this study is, therefore, to show the intertwining between history and fiction through discrimination, violence, injustice, unfair arrests, and the killings of American citizens whose the majority of the victims are African Americans. What is true is that this newly published novel has not received much critical attention yet. Even internet still leaves little space to it. Aman Nadhiri and Smith Johnson who have first scrutinized the novel argue:

I Can't Breathe: A Killing On Bay Street, is the critique of the institutionalized racism and systematic economic, political and social discrimination with which individuals' communities of color (particularly poor communities) have had to contend in the United States. But beyond that, it implicitly speaks to the treatment of Africa and African Diaspora in many of the western-centered institutions of economic, political and military governance (Nadhiri and Smith: 2017, 11).

By shading light on accurate and basic problems that black characters face in the novel, Aman Nadhiri and Johnson Smith explain how the author has contextualized an oppressed African American family which actually involves in a search for justice in a nation where the systematic denial of substantial rights to Blacks is a mode of life, as the two Reviewers argue:

*The Perpetual Injustice Machine recounts the immediate aftermath of Garner's death, the release of the video, the social and political fallout, the family's search for justice, accountability and information, and the systematic denial of the three through the machination of a city bureaucracy intent on exculpating its officers and its policies (Nadhiri and Smith, *ibid.*, 10).*

Talking of the police violence against African Americans, other researchers shade light on the issue of Blacks who are brutalized, tortured, and sometimes killed. It is in this connection that a report prepared by the Malcolm X "Grassroots Movement" on African Americans' killing issues asserts that "the killing of Blacks by law enforcement", "security guards", and "stand-your-ground vigilantes" has increased from one in every 36 hours in the first part of 2012 to one in every 28 hours by that year's end ¹". This means that police officers in the United States, still use the force and brutalize Blacks they consider as their enemies. For Bonilla, the Police brutality against African Americans is not a today's issue but rather, dates back in the period following the emancipation proclamation when one started talking about racism and discrimination in the United States: "Police brutality and the killing of Black males are not new phenomena, rather they reflect the unabated continuation of racism in America" (Bonilla: 2015, 73). Thus, the question in this paper is the following: Is *I Can't Breathe: A Killing On Bay Street* a re-visitation of the police violence against African Americans in the United States? The answer to this question urges me to show how African Americans are humiliated and victimized by the police, especially the police of New York City in Staten Island. To better conduct this study, I resort then to the new historicism which, according to Prafulla C. Kar, "has distinct affinities with resonance; that is, its concern with literary texts has been to recover as far as possible the historical circumstances of their original production and consumption and to analyze the relationship between these circumstances and our own ²".

Three points are scrutinized in this paper: Black characters' discrimination by the police, the machination of justice, and the image of Blacks' victimization during Obama's administration.

Black characters' discrimination by the police

Before going through the very subject matter of this paper, two distinctive concepts must first be defined in order to bring light on the issue I have to deal with. These concepts are discrimination and the Police violence. Many scholars have defined these concepts. Marger for example thinks that "discrimination, most basically, is behavior aimed at denying members of particular ethnic groups' equal access to societal rewards" (Marger: 2012, 57). As for Walker, the Police violence is "the use of excessive physical force or verbal assault and psychological intimidation" (Walker: 2011, 579). From these concepts, one easily infers that African Americans' experience on the American soil was based on physical and psychological violence. In the novel, one discovers how they are victim of the police violence and discriminatory practices which appear for many of them as a form of oppression and subjugation of the black race.

In fact, the narration around the police killings of Blacks is not exceptional, for people on different sides of the issue suggest that “bad apples”, also called “racist white cops” are to be blamed for an undeniable problem. The portrayal of Pedro Serrano in *I Can't Breathe: A Killing On Bay Street* is a good illustration of black children's subjection, segregation and discriminatory practices of the New York Police. The novel really depicts how some of the New York boroughs are not accessible to a category of African Americans. The passage below illustrates how Pedro and his friends, respectively nicknamed Freckle-Faced Ivan, Little Man Ivan, and Karate Pete are segregated:

But there were some sections of the North Bronx neighborhood where you weren't welcome if you weren't white. Pedro knew from very early on, for instance that he and his friends weren't allowed on some stretches of 187th Street, in Bronx's Little Italy. [...] "I remember turning a corner on my bicycle and a whole group of white coming out of nowhere, chasing me back in the other direction", he says. "You got good at running when you grew up around there" (ICB: AKBS, p. 23).

In this passage, Bronx is an illustration of the “places off limits” to Blacks, I mean a city where Blacks are not judged by the content of their knowledge, but by the color of their skin. Pedro and his friends victimized here are just the sample or representatives of all Blacks rejected in the United States. Matt Taibbi portrays this racist situation to show that despite the declaration of Blacks' emancipation in this part of the world, African Americans are still subjected to inhuman treatments for the simple reason that they are black. The police action in the novel reinforces doubt in Blacks to enjoy the full fruition of democracy in the United States. In remaining in the State of New York City, the author goes on showing this segregation in Staten Island through these lines:

By the mid-2010s, even after the election of a black man to the Oval Office, the country was almost completely segregated. [...] America, in other words, is a lot like Staten Island: white neighborhoods and black neighborhoods often separated by a physical border like the Madison-Dixon line (ICB: AKBS, pp. 276-277).

Barack Obama's two mandates at the White House has not really solved the problem of segregation in the United States. For, this passage shows how people of the same nation are separated by the Madison-Dixon line which symbolizes a barrier enacted by political leaders for their interests. Blacks and Whites do not commonly share the same living facilities from the 1960s to Obama's terms of office. This discrimination represents a huge touchstone that should be reviewed and altered. The novel reads that Pedro Serrano and his friends are victim of abuses which show their weakness before their oppressors:

Football would go bouncing down the sidewalk, every time", he recalls. Then, the cops, mostly all white, would start rifling through the kids' pockets in search of drugs or guns or whatever, feeling them attitude the whole way swearing at them calling them animals and other names. [...] "Then they'd slap you on the back of the head and be like, shut the fuck up, you little spic", he says. "They didn't even try to hide the fact they were racist" (ICB: AKBS, p. 24).

The words “animal” and “spic” exclusively used to qualify Blacks are indicative for their nothingness in the white man's world. Undoubtedly, Whites qualify Blacks as “animals” to show

the lack of Blacks' identity in the United States. From these words, the author demonstrates how Blacks who are involved in a daily struggle for an equalitarian America, are reduced to mere objects to remind them of their inferior position in this democratic nation. This means that Blacks still have a long way to do, a long march to complete in their struggle for equality, acceptance and integration as full American citizens.

However, the people who are often victimized, discriminated and arrested every time for no reason are Blacks and Hispanic. They are considered as crime doers and dangerous people in American society. African Americans are the first category of people to receive discriminatory treatments because of their skin color. In other words, discrimination equals hatred that someone has for his kinsmen. That is why in most cases, white police officers often brutalize Blacks. For instance, on Saturday afternoon, July 12, 2014, Jeff Thomas, a forty-year African American is arrested by the New York City Police in Staten Island's park for his false teeth. The police version of the story states that they have found Thomas with an open container of alcohol near him and that he categorically refuses to provide his Identity Card. But Orta's video showing Eric Garner's arrest and last moments of his life shows clearly three police officers striking the man with a nightstick because he has false dentures that those policemen think of being crack.

The passage below is illustrative:

Thomas was pondering a chess move and playing with his dentures when suddenly he looked up and saw that he was surrounded by police. "Open your mouth", they said. Police questioned him about what was in his mouth, apparently thinking he had drugs stashed in there and was trying to swallow contraband. Thomas explained: I just have false teeth. Police knocked him off his chair and tossed him to the ground. [...] He had two cops, a Hispanic man named Geovani Sanchez and a female officer described in court papers as a Jane Doe, on the top of him. They were pushing Thomas face downward into the sidewalk. A third officer, tall and red faced with a close-cropped head, stood behind Thomas and pulled out his cell phone and started filming (ICB: AKBS, p. 96).

Throughout this illustration, one understands how Thomas, a black character in the novel, is beaten by the police just because of his false teeth that they think of being crack. Thanks to Orta's video, Thomas lodges a complaint against the police which, unfortunately does not lead because of the other fake version provided by this institution, stating that Thomas had drugs in his pockets. The use of excessive force particularly against unarmed civilians, raises issues of racial discrimination, and takes place in a permissive legal environment that enables excessive force and prevents accountability. Finally, according to some surveys led by brilliant Departments and Associations of law and Civil Rights, major facts on discrimination most often strike African Americans and Hispanic people. In 2014, National Research Council, in a Report of the Sentencing Project to the United Nations Human Rights Committee regarding Racial Disparities in the United States Criminal Justice System, for instance, explains:

Once arrested, people of color are also likely to be charged more harshly than whites; once charged, they are more likely to be convicted; and once convicted, they are more likely to face stiff sentences – all after accounting for relevant legal differences such as crime severity and criminal history (National Research Council: 2014, 93-4).

By scrutinizing this passage, one infers that African Americans represent a huge threat and receive more prison terms than white Americans. For, one must also note that the same survey

shows that Blacks in the United States receive sentences that are nineteen percent higher than those of white men convicted for the same crimes. The law that should be legally applied to every American citizen regardless of the skin color, unfortunately promotes discrimination in the way that it is used between the conflicting races in the United States. This discrimination in law matters even pushes many Blacks to see America not as a democratic nation, but a racial one, with all forms of terror and threats to the minorities.

In fact, Matt Taibbi's *I Can't Breathe: A Killing on Bay Street* introduces us with a wide and huge theory known as "Zero Tolerance" or "Broken Windows" policy. It also examines policies that contribute to the police bigotry. This theory is introduced for the first time in 1982 by the social scientists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling who suggest that crime flourishes in environments of lax law enforcement. It is further popularized in the 1990s by the New York City Police Commissioner William Bratton and Mayor Rudy Giuliani whose policies are influenced by the theory. "Broken Windows" theory is, in its essence, a criminological policing which states that visible signs of crime, anti-social behavior, and civil disorder create an urban environment that encourages further crime and disorder, including serious crimes. The theory suggests that policing methods that target minor crimes such as; vandalism, public drinking, and fare evasion help to create an atmosphere of order and lawfulness, preventing more serious crimes. In an interview with Nick Gillespie on his TV show entitled "Reason" while speaking of "Misogyny, the Left vs Free speech, and the killing of Eric Garner", Matt Taibbi, for the first time, defines the concept of "Broken Windows" as follows: "*Broken Windows' policy strategy which this thing, that idea that was created here in New York City which is basically focused on minor crime, you go out with people who jump turnstile, who ride bicycles wrong [...] around the street, it is seen as a crime*"³. Unfortunately, instead of reacting to crime and enforcing the law, the New York City Police Department shifts to assail mostly African Americans to maintain a so-called public order, as the narrator explains what George Kelling thought about the concept "zero tolerance":

But the idea that spread around the country was not exactly what Kelling envisioned. [...]. "Zero Tolerance implies the police have no discretion", he says. "But the program really depends upon the police exercising good discretion". Kelling believed a key to good policing depended upon police knowing when to throw the book at people and when to negotiate problems away quietly. Moreover, "Zero tolerance" implied police were arresting everyone everywhere by the book, without making their own judgment calls, which was certainly not the case (ICB: AKBS, pp. 63-64).

Through this passage, one observes that Kelling's "Broken Windows" theory is first created to help police officers fight against unfair acts in American society. But Kelling, desperately sees that his theory is sarcastically turned out by the New York City Police officers who misuse the theory. Officers' racially biased use of discretion either intentional or unintentional, is one of the causes of racial disparities in police contact that are not explained by differences in crime rates. Designed to target minor violations with the rational of circumventing serious crimes, these policies place people of color under greater scrutiny. Indeed, one of the most tremendous aspects of the "Broken Windows" policing is "fear" that the New York City Police instill in most African Americans' minds. For, Blacks are still considered as aggressive people and a menace for white American citizens. Such a negative view of Whites over their black counterparts urges the first to use force upon the second to implement their supremacy over them, because, for many

white characters in the novel, being black is a crime, as stated as follows: *New Yorkers who are afraid of crime are already victims. Many New Yorkers are scared of black people. Therefore, being black is a crime* (ICB: AKBS, p. 59).

The atmosphere reconstructed by the author is too shocking to see that some of American citizens are rejected and considered as a menace for white citizens, because they are black. The sentence “black is a crime” symbolizes this hatred of Whites for Blacks and the risks the latter run in a racist nation. Commissioner William Bratton plays a crucial role in implementing the misguided and destructive “Broken Windows” policing when he is in charge of the City’s transit police in 1990 and during his first tenure as a police commissioner under Mayor Rudy Giuliani, from 1994 to 1996. Under his commissionership, Lawyers’ offices and Police post-offices start getting stuffed with African Americans accused sometimes of breaking laws or selling drugs in neighborhoods:

The only people who had a problem with Broken Windows seemed to be ones living in the target neighborhoods. People in black and Hispanic neighborhoods of New York and other cities began showing up in Lawyers’ offices with horror stories of being knocked down, strip-searched on the street, and busted repeatedly for nonsense charges like obstructing government administrations, loitering or obstructing pedestrian traffic (ICB: AKBS, pp. 64-65).

What should be noted here is that Blacks are victim of the white man’s fear to see them free and equal to the right of citizenship in a nation that has viewed them as beasts, or foreigners. This fear is what pushes Whites, from slavery to the present time to reinforce their racist machinery against Blacks in the only purpose of maintaining them down:

The fear of Black men by White society goes back to the earliest days of slavery in the early 1600s in this country. Along with this fear was the imposition of criminal sanctions upon Black slaves. Southern states created slave codes to control the behavior and movement of slaves and created a separate and more severe set of crimes and punishments for slaves (Bell: 2008, 36).

One clearly understands that the fear that pushes white Americans to reinforce measures of oppression against Blacks is “fear itself”. The author uses “bondage time” to show how and when the hatred of Whites for Blacks in the United States started. In fact, white Americans created codes that could help them better control the movement and behavior of Blacks, because they knew that the latter were capable of social achievements. They believed that if Blacks were totally free of all movements, they were capable to turn guns against their oppressors, and conduct the destiny of the American nation. This fear to see former black slaves lead the country is the source of crime perpetrated against Blacks in the United States. In the novel, Ray Kelly who plays the role of the Blacks’ oppressor enlightens Senator Eric Adams that the purpose of “Broken Windows” is basically to set fear within African American communities in order to prevent them from roaming up and getting down street unwillingly:

A black state senator named Eric Adams would later testify that Ray Kelly, the City’s commissioner throughout the Bloomberg years, had told him openly that the goal was to change the psyche of young black and Latino men by instill [ing] fear in them that every time that they left their homes they could be targeted by police (ICB: AKBS, p. 65).

“Broken Windows” is a form of oppression, an “anti-gang” policy like “the Ku Klux Klan”, made to threaten African Americans who dare stand up for their rights in American society. The purpose of this policy is not perhaps to secure the American society against the enemies of freedom and democracy, but to terrorize black Americans in order to prevent them from enjoying the full fruition of the American democracy. The following utterance really attests how Blacks’ rights to stand in public places are restricted: *“On the top of all of this came Broken Windows and Stop-and-Frisk, which had made going from anywhere to anywhere problematic, through standing in place was just as bad”* (ICB: AKBS, p. 110). Here, one understands that Blacks are subjected to evil considerations most often if they stand in a very bad posture, for instance in a street corner. This policy which is for many black characters, a system that should regulate and control their behavior in American society, prevents peace and good cohesion among American citizens. The question of racial prejudice is what the author develops in his fiction. He wants just to inform the whole world that from slavery period to the present time, the question of race relation is still an obstacle for peace in American society. Matt Taibbi’s *I Can’t Breathe: A Killing On Bay Street* entirely depicts “Broken Windows” policy as being a discriminatory policy against African Americans simply because, the New York City Police Officers brutalize more Blacks than Whites, and oppression that African Americans suffer under the share cropping system is too tragic. The paradox of “Broken Windows” policing is that it relies upon enhanced contact with people to be effective. No longer just sitting in cars driving in circles, no longer even just pacing sidewalks, police go up stairwells and crisscross hallways, stopping people indoors. Thus, what comes next constitutes the bitter part in which justice represents an illusion for Blacks. For, they are not considered as full American citizens because their rights are trampled in court.

The machination of justice

To better understand this section made of unjust killings of Blacks, a few real testimonies of some African Americans beaten, tortured, and sometimes eye-witnesses of murders of some of their kinsmen by the New York City Police are illustrative. Then, among the prominent figures portrayed in the novel, one may basically quote: Eric Garner and Michael Brown. In fact, justice in most cases of these men is partisan of injustice to the extent that complaints lodged against their killers are not taken into account for the simple reason that the victims are Blacks. Indeed, one of the most outstanding figures victim of injustice in the legal system is, of course, the protagonist Eric Garner whose death in the hands of the New York City Police Officer, Daniel Pantaleo looks dramatic. This means that justice in the United States is still a burning issue which tears African Americans’ citizenship. For, the latter represent a great number of those Americans who see their Civil Rights being trampled over by the justice court. Michael Brown’s arrest and assassination on summer August 9, 2014 is illustration of Whites’ wrong view over Blacks in the United States, as stated below:

Ferguson was “controversial” in a way the Garner case was not. There was not video of the shooting in Ferguson so the case devolved into a battle of. Ferguson police quickly released footage of Brown captured by a security camera in a convenience store shortly before his death. The footage appeared to show him stealing cigars and pushing a store employee into a merchandise rack. [...] Wilson responded by firing two shots at Brown from seat of his car. He hit him on the thumb with one shot and missed him with the other. Brown took off and ran east about 160 feet. Wilson pursued on foot. [...] Wilson fired a total of twelve times at Brown, twice from his car and

ten times from the street, hitting him on the top of the head, the eye, the chin, the neck, the thumb, his right breast, and three places on his arm (ICB: AKBS, pp. 140-141).

All the strategies made to discredit the black race do not only come from ordinary citizens or mere individuals, but from American institutions like the police, and the court of justice to quote only two. The causes of Browns' death such as robbing cigars in a store and grabbing the officer's gun are pure inventions of the white murderer to justify his crime. Then, as a White man, Wilson cannot be qualified as a murderer in such an extent that in the United States, "killing a nigger didn't qualify as a murder, you could only accuse somebody of a murder if they killed a human being" (Lester: 1994, 111). The white man's view of Blacks in Lester's novel goes along with that of Matt Taibbi in *I Can't Breathe: A Killing On Bay Street* when he describes Brown as "no angel", that is to say, not fully considered as a human being, and in the press magazine where he is caricatured as a physically imposing monster that attacked Wilson, who at his turn does not have no alternative but to shoot him dead. What is true is that Brown is arrested and killed for jaywalking. His assassination quickly gives rise to demonstrations. In effect, the search to draw attention to persistent racial disparities in policing, especially the disproportionate use of force against African Americans urges the latter to involve in different forms of demonstrations to claim equal justice for all races in the United States.

Apart from Eric Garner and Michael Brown, the novel also hosts other African Americans who are victim of the Police machination of justice. For instance, James Powell (ICB: AKBS, p. 157), Laquan MacDonald (ICB: AKBS, p. 238), Carnell Russ (ICB: AKBS, p. 195), and Sayon (ICB: AKBS, p. 159) are all killed by the Police. Orta who earlier filmed and turned viral Garner's video is himself victimized and pursued by the New York City Police Officers. He attempts to lodge complaints against the police, but the officer receives no justice charges. Annan Ibrahim, another black character whose leg is pieced in three parts by the same police of New York City, lodges a complaint against these officers, which unfortunately remains disconnected. In their article entitled "Racism and police brutality in America", Chaney and Robertson explicitly show how White officers who have committed atrocities to Blacks, receive fewer convictions than Blacks:

Through an extensive search of the National Police Misconduct Statistics and Reporting Project (NPMSSRP) data between April 2009 and June 2010 the authors found that only 33% of misconduct cases went through to convictions and that the average incarceration, post-conviction, for officers was only 14 months compared to 49 for the general public (Chaney and Robertson: 2013, 480).

These findings suggest clearly that the police are not being held to the same standard of accountability as the general public. It also shows that retribution is lacking to blame the misconducted white police men. In other words, white people responsible for Blacks' assassination are not summoned to the court as criminals, but as pacifist people defending themselves against their aggressors.

In short, it is prominent to note that the relations between the police and African Americans continue to take a toll in American society. This conflict observed between the two races has caused the deaths of millions of African Americans, which many years later, are viewed as the price Blacks have paid for their freedom in this part of the world. Thus, long-running racial discrepancies in the way that force is applied to African Americans, however, have significantly

eroded trust between law enforcement and the public they serve. This unfortunate state of affairs is unlikely to improve until fundamental changes in public policy and policing are undertaken. For African Americans and other minorities who have experienced the impact of police brutality, debates on racism and police abuses on African Americans may produce overwhelming feelings of resentment or ridicule. Justice for African Americans still remains a great breakthrough to pursue, because the police brutality as a form of racism is rooted in the foundation of the United States. What urges, in fact, the police to use violence against Blacks is the “fear” to be equal to people who have served them as servants in America, people they think, can turn guns against them for a revenge of their kinsmen assassinated by Whites. All these forms of their victimization are scrutinized in the section below.

The image of Blacks’ victimization during Obama’s administration

For a worldwide view, the New York City is a place of economic profits as it is populated by rich people, middle classes, and poor men. These three different categories of residents populating the city are certainly the cause of burning issues such as: racial discrimination, crimes, and destructive policies of victimization to mention only these. African Americans most represent this misfortune and feel powerless because of some discriminatory practices they endure during their lifetime in most of poor boroughs of New York City. The statistician Erika Harrell in a Special Report of Bureau of Justice Statistics in relation with the United States Department of Justice, provides us with a slight understanding of how Blacks are more vulnerable to violent crimes than Whites as far as the State’s new policies of managing with inhabitants are concerned: *“In 2005 black males were somewhat more vulnerable to violent crimes than Whites. Blacks age 24 and under had higher rates of violent victimization than blacks are 25 or older”* (Harrell: 2007, 2). According to statistics provided by Erika Harrell, it is important to glance at the violent victimization rate African Americans go through.

In fact, most of Blacks arrested in streets, as the novel reads it, are not always obstreperous people as the police often describe them. For the police, Blacks carry up all the world’s misfortune and are dangerous for the society. Barack Hussein Obama as the first black president in the United States has not made much effort to solve this question of race relation in it. For, the assassinations of Michael Brown and Eric Garner in 2014 echo president Obama’s weakness before the white injustice. Even though after these murders, he declared that: *“In too many parts of this country, a deep distrust exists between law enforcement and community of color”* he said. But *“there’s never an excuse for violence,”* he added” (ICB: AKBS, p. 153), this had not been enough for the black community which expected concrete actions for peace and equal chances for every American citizen. When President Obama added that *“When anybody is not being treated equally under the law, that is a problem”*. *“And it’s my job as president to help solve it”* (ICB: AKBS, p. 155), he challenged the white wrong view over Blacks. The sentence *“And it’s my job as president to help solve it”* echoes Obama’s involvement in the struggle for equality of races in the American nation. This means that Obama has not simply been president of the United States, but also a fighter for equality. For, most of his speeches were based on racial reconciliation. When scrutinizing Matt Taibbi’s above sentences, one should know that president Obama’s words are not sufficient to calm down uprisings throughout the country. That is why new forms of the police policy such as “Broken windows” and “Stop-and-Frisk” are reinforced to reprimand and arrest any American citizen tending to break laws established to keep peace in the United States.

Unlike the “Broken Windows” policing which is just centered in New York City, “Stop-and-Frisk” or “Stop-Question-and-Frisk” policy is, in fact, nationwide. The novel introduces the reader with another police policy tending to arrest any American citizen breaking laws: *“The newspapers called the program ‘Stop, Question, and Frisk’. [...] which was that the police would put you up against a wall and empty your pockets every time they saw you”* (ICB: AKBS, p. 24). The “Stop-Question-and-Frisk” policy or “Stop-and-Frisk” is a practice of temporarily detaining, questioning, and at times searching civilians and suspects on the street for weapons and other contraband. A stop-and-frisk refers to a brief non-intrusive police stop of a suspect. The Fourth Amendment of the United States’ Constitution requires that before stopping the suspect, the police must have a reasonable suspicion that a crime has been, is being, or is about to be committed by the latter:

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized (U.S Constitution: 1988, 11).

This Amendment is clear when it states the respect and dignity of any American citizen. If the police reasonably think that the suspect is armed and dangerous, they should frisk him, meaning that the police will give a quick pat-down of the suspect’s outer clothing. Unfortunately, Blacks experience every day’s pat-down simply because they represent a threat towards Whites. To show this intertwining between fiction and reality, Edwar Estrada provides a prominent aim of this policy:

The goal was to stop as many citizens as possible for minor crimes (i.e. loitering, public drinking, etc.), with hope that they would be caught committing more serious crimes (i.e. possession of a deadly weapon, possession of illegal substance, etc.) while being frisked (Estrada: 2016, 346).

Unfortunately, most of the victims of these arrests are black Americans who, according to many white characters in the novel, are dangerous for the security of millions of white Americans. Dealing with the New York City as the epicenter of “Stop-and-frisk” in the United States, this program, known in the 1990s, reaches its paroxysm in the 2000s as a policy dedicated to stop Blacks and Hispanics. *Racial Inequality in New York City from 1965 to 2015 and Beyond* is a book of history by Benjamin P. Browser and Chelli Devadutt which highlights the evil image of Blacks through three different New York City’s White Mayors under which Blacks go through the “Stop-and-Frisk” policy. In chapter four of this book, they clearly paint Rudy Giuliani as the Great White hope, that is to say, Giuliani is greatly influenced by the whole white community in which he experiences the reinforcement of a deep discomfort against people of color and issues of race. Under his mayorship, Blacks through the “Stop-and-frisk” policy are constantly arrested, put in jails, and sometimes killed:

During his term, he did whatever he could to marginalize people of color. Within two weeks of taking office in 1993. [...] As time wore on, he reined in welfare, cut funding to public hospitals, and limited civil employment opportunities for Blacks. Giuliani promoted a strict law-and-order policy that expanded the practice of stop-and-frisk within communities of color. Arrests soared seventeen percent under Giuliani, mostly affecting Blacks and Latinos (Browser and Chelli: 2019, 18).

Rudy Giuliani echoes a dark horse for the black community. For, his promotion of “stop-and-frisk” policy mostly towards people of color, rises a great rate of arrests. Matt Taibbi directly introduces us with the billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg whose great wealth and financial power are not required to pander to the city’s White elite donor class, but to encourage the use of “Stop-Question-and-frisk” program during his term of office which affects more Blacks than Whites. Although New York City is best known for its use of “Stop-and-Frisk” policy, police departments across the country use the same tactic. However, these other police departments do not have the high volume of stops and frisks the New York City has. The problem with the New York City’s “Stop-and-Frisk” policy is best illustrated in statistics. The novel, for example, provides a tremendous significant and shocking number of arrests during Bloomberg’s mayorship in the 2000s:

In 2002, before the deal, the NYPD had stopped 97,296 people. In 2003, that number jumped to 160,851. By 2004, it was 313,523. Then, by 2007, the city was stopping almost half a million people every year. In each of these years, blacks and Latinos made up, well over 80 percent of the stops, despite being less than 50 percent of the population (ICB: AKBS, p. 77).

This passage is an illustration of Blacks and Latinos as the most excluded people in American society. It appears quite clear that Blacks and Latinos are those minorities victimized by white Americans who think of themselves as superior to the other races. For them, Latinos and most especially Blacks, are second zone citizens, and as such cannot be treated equally to Whites. Their arrests are due undoubtedly to this inferior position they occupy in American society. Taibbi denounces these racial inequalities through arrests only being perpetrated in nonwhite neighborhoods as follows:

In year one of their settlement the city doubled the number of stops, and their own data showed the same clear evidence of racial profiling. Within four years, the city had quintupled the number, and all evidence suggested that a Bloomberg-led city would continue to order more and more stops in nonwhite neighborhoods (ICB: AKBS, p. 77).

Here once more, the reader discovers how much Blacks are brutalized and how much the Bloomberg’s mayorship does not facilitate African Americans’ lives in New York City, mostly in poor boroughs where gangsterism and hooliganism hit the spotlights. In a 2011 Report released by the United States Census Bureau under Michael Bloomberg’s mayorship shows how arrests of Blacks and Latinos increase, as stated as follows:

In 2011, the NYPD made 685,724 stops, a 14 percent increase from 2010 and a more than 600 percent increase since Mayor Michael Bloomberg took office in 2002. Of those 685,724 stops, 574,483 (86.6 percent) were of African Americans and Latinos, who make up 54.1 percent of New York City’s population ⁴.

Obviously, these figures reflect the New York Police Department’s presence in “high crime” areas, which are mostly populated by African Americans and Latinos. In fact, to increase stops and numbers, the New York Police Department has created a special police unit called “Street Crime Unit”. The author describes this police unit as “a roving gang of plainclothes ass-kickers who roamed all over the city and targeted pimps, rapists, stickup kids, muggers” (ICB: AKBS, p.

74). Stops in New York City begin with a form called “Unified Form 250” but known by New York Police Department officers as a “250”. This form is a “Stop, Question, and Frisk Report Worksheet” that officers are required to fill out every time they make a stop. Matt Taibbi argues that in cities such as New York, cops on the beat have experienced pressure from their superiors to make a minimum number of stops per month and prove as much by filling out a UF-250 form for each one on line with something called the CompStat system. Thus, the more filled the UF-250 form is with high numbers, the more police officers are rewarded by their high-ranking chiefs. In the novel, the author gives four reasons allowing the Street Crime Unit to arrest most especially: *“Inappropriate attire, furtive movement, Actions indicative of engaging in violent crimes, suspicious bulge”* (ICB: AKBS, p. 28).

In scrutinizing these reasons, one may retain that they significantly mean that “Inappropriate attire” is when someone badly dresses himself (low baggy pants, cap down, etc.), “Furtive movement” is indeed, the fact of belonging to a gang and messing up everywhere. “Actions indicative of engaging in violent crimes” almost joins the second reason’s explanation, it is merely when gang members’ acts are basically visible and attract the police attention. Finally, “Suspicious bulge” describes someone who walks down in streets and suspected to have a shape of fully pockets or his hands in his pockets. Another problem with New York City’s “Stop-and-Frisk” policy is that Unified Form 250 gives officers too much discretion in determining when it is appropriate to make a stop or frisk and not hold them accountable once they make such stops or frisks. The most compelling example is the use of the term “furtive movement”. According to the 250-form, an officer has reasonable suspicion to stop or frisk someone who exhibits “furtive movement”.

However, the form does not define “furtive movement” instead. Officers individually determine what they believe to be “furtive movement”. This lack of clarity gives officers the right not only to define “furtive movement”, but also to change their definition based on the circumstances. That is to say that this term does not mean the same thing in all neighborhoods. Officers can adjust their definition to justify illegal stops and frisks. But the 250-form requires officers only to describe a “Suspicious Bulge / Object” and to clarify when they make a stop or frisk based on other reasonable suspicion of criminal activity.

Moreover, Matt Taibbi is not the only novelist to provide reasons urging police officers to toss people in streets. For, Edwar Estrada, too, provides us with a large and clear list of ten circumstances where an officer has reasonable suspicion on an armed suspect who has committed or is about to commit a crime. According to the form, Edwar Estrada comments that someone is suspected of a crime when he is:

(1) carrying objects in plain view used in the commission if crime, (2) fits description of suspect wanted by the police, (3) exhibits actions that are indicative of casing a victim or location, (4) exhibits actions that are indicative of acting as a lookout, (5) has a suspicious bulge or object, (6) exhibits actions indicative of engaging in a drug transaction, (7) exhibits furtive movement, (8) exhibits action indicative of engaging in a violent crime, (9) is wearing clothes or disguises commonly used in the commission of a crime, or (10) is engaged in other criminal activity (Estrada: 2016, 349).

Through this passage, officers use this list of circumstances to determine which individuals to arrest. They can arrest suspected people in the street, in public and private apartment buildings. During these arrests, officers are supposed to question suspects basing only on their reasonable suspicion to determine if a crime has been or is about to be committed. Additionally, during a stop, the police officer may have reasonable suspicion that the suspect is armed or dangerous, and these situations give police officers the right to frisk the suspect to ensure the officer's safety.

However, between 2003 and 2013, always under Bloomberg's terms of office, the New York City's "Stop-Question-and-frisk" program Database releases tremendous information concerning the police misuses of lethal arrests of African Americans. The misuses characteristics of police are given through the use of force tending to stop and arrest Blacks: "hands, force to wall, handcuffs, draw weapon, push to the ground, point a weapon, pepper spray or strike with a baton ⁵". The database contains detailed information on the characteristics of each stop (precinct, cross streets, time of day, inside / outside, high / low crime area) which show how African Americans are targeted to illegal practices. Data suggest that the vast majority of street stops by the police in New York at the height of stop-and-frisk are not particularly helpful in fighting crime. For, few lead to arrests or uncovered weapons. But researchers have found that a small subset of stops are specific suspicions by officers and not general sweeps or racial profiling do. That is to say, instead of arresting individuals legally whose victims are Blacks and Hispanics, New York Police officers merely stop innocent people they seemingly find suspicious. "Force to wall" and "push to the ground" are, of course, misuse practices that Eric Garner has been victim of before his assassination.

From the outset of *I Can't Breathe: A Killing On Bay Street*, Ibrahim Annan is portrayed as an African American who is handcuffed and beaten with a nightstick, breaking his leg into three pieces. These forms of atrocities are associated with other forms of the police violence in Bronx borough through Pedro Serrano who confesses wrongdoings to the targeted people in the American society:

He says, I'm in a van. You wouldn't believe what's happening. We're jumping out and tossing people at random. No rhyme, or reason. We just go into their pockets. We're looking for drugs, weapons, and arrests. He's like, 'We're strip-searching people on the street!' "And I'm like, 'Listen, man, what are you talking about?" "He says, "I'm telling you, I've seen a guy's penis, I've seen his ass, you can't believe what's going on here"' (ICB: AKBS, p. 26).

Through Serrano's confession, one understands that Blacks' and Latino's victimization is not only due to their illegal selling of drugs, but more of the hatred of Whites who do not want to see the latter enjoy freedom and full citizenship. African Americans have never known peace in America because some of them are stopped in their own apartment buildings and asked to show identification, often many times a day. The phrase "I've seen a guy's penis" attests of the climax of the police brutalities to Blacks. These brutalities do not only physically harm them, but humiliate and reduce them to nothingness. In the white man's world, Blacks feel themselves experiencing an endless war of their acceptance not only as full citizens of the United States, but as human beings. For, they are deprived of all the dignity a human being is supposed to enjoy. Just as speaking of strip-searching Blacks for no reason, in 1999, one of the White Street Crime

Unit officers provides The New York Times information about how they proceeded in their mission of arresting people: *"We frisk 20, may be 30 people a day. Are they all by the book? Of course not; it's safer and easier to just toss people"* (ICB: AKBS, p. 75). These arrests which mostly target Blacks show the latter are the core of the American history. That is to say, from slavery to the present time, Blacks have always been victims of Whites' hatred and injustice, and that these social facts have been conceptual tools which have helped many novelists and historians to shape the history of the United States.

In their long struggle for integration, Blacks have known a great deal of Civil Rights fighters whose one of them is, Al Sharpton in the twenty-first century and founder of the National Action Network (NAN) that warmly supports Bill de Blasio since this one has got good initiatives to alter the New York City's political system. Matt Taibbi explicitly hosts Bill de Blasio as the man on the spotlights in these terms: *"When de Blasio ran for the mayor in 2013, he promised to be the only candidate to end the Stop-and-Frisk era that targets minorities"* (ICB: AKBS, p. 133). Unfortunately, these promises during his mayorship remain unrealized. For, De Blasio has appointed Bill Bratton, the godfather of "Stop-and-Frisk" policy as his police commissioner, known in Bloomberg's mayorship of being roughly rude with people of color. From his first term of office, Bill de Blasio pledges to roll back "Stop-and-Frisk", and to end what he calls the "tale of two cities". For, in the white communities or neighborhoods, violence is not as higher as in the black ones, and Bill Bratton roughly uses his Street Crime Unit to brutalize peaceful African Americans and Hispanics as targeted minorities. Now reappointed, Bill Bratton and Mayor Bill de Blasio remain committed to this philosophy of order-keeping policing, with Bratton touting its racial disparities result from targeting minorities with higher violent crime rates. These minority communities consist most often of Blacks and Latinos, dealing with drugs or other illegal stuffs. Mayor Bill de Blasio vows that his administration is not going to break the law, but to initiate a crackdown on gun crimes in order to establish efforts, and address disparities in enforcement about the "Stop-and-Frisk" policy targeted mostly in the black community. In The New York Times review, Goldstein in 2014 while highlighting Bill de Blasio's second term of office writes: *"The New York City Police Department stated it would no longer make arrests for possession of small amounts of marijuana but would instead treat these cases as non-criminal offenses subject to a fine rather than jail time"* (Goldstein: 2014, 505).

In fact, when scrutinizing these lines from the New York Police Department, it obviously pictures a wrong hidden image of de Blasio's running term who, of course, tends to mystify his policy of victimization. For, everybody knows that a possession of marijuana as a misdemeanor drives to be either fined with a great wad of cash or jailed. "Stop-Question-and-Frisk" is, anyway, a string of police practices whose objectives are to control black Americans whether they commit a crime or not. These practices of "Stop-Question-and-Frisk" are the reconstruction of the American history because like the novelist, Benjamin Brower and Chelli Devadutt in their book entitled *Racial Inequality in New York City from 1965 to 2015 and Beyond*, write:

On March 9, 2013, an even occurred in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, that served as a tragic example of what can happen when the Stop and Frisk policy is applied within communities of color. On that, two plainclothes police officers patrolling the streets judged that 15-year-old Kimani Gray had to be carrying a gun. They stopped the young man to question him, and ended up shooting Gray eleven times. He had no weapon. No criminal charges were brought against the officers (Brower

and Chelli, *ibid.*, 35).

This passage shows the unfair “Stop-and-Frisk” police system tending intentionally to pat down the young black man Kimani Gray they accuse of possessing a weapon. What is shocking here is the fact this event happens during Bill de Blasio’s beginning term, whose policy at his first mayorship claims to end up this political system of Blacks’ victimization, but de Blasio’s sermon remains unachieved. These forms of victimization the author argues, are just put into practice in the black communities rather than in the white ones. The aim of these atrocities is certainly to maintain Blacks in an external fear to prevent them initiate any movement that can demand their full integration and equality to Whites in American society.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this paper, I confess that from all victimized American citizens, African Americans are those minorities who pay for the crimes committed in the United States. It has been largely developed that even if they have no link with the crime committed, they are summoned to the court, beaten or sometimes killed. The cause of this fury the author argues, is that they are black and inferior citizens in the United States. Stop-and-Frisk is a modern expression of a historic bias against African Americans. Over times, African Americans have been carefully watched, held under suspicion, and perceived as dangerous people who must be controlled every single movement of the day. Therefore, this New York City’s policy of victimization has disproportionately impacted young men of color. Prosecutorial policies, such as plea bargain guidelines that disadvantage Blacks’ and Latinos’ compounds sentence laws that dictate harsher punishments for crimes. People of color are disproportionately arrested. Racial profiling and excessive stops have become part of the New York City Police Department culture and have too often been rewarded rather than disciplined. Finally, justice as being one of the issues generally praised by every human being in society, is the institution Blacks rely on to claim their innocence for the crimes attributed to them. Unfortunately, this institution, too, does not play its role as it is not independent in the making of decisions. It sides with Whites to sentence Blacks who sometimes, have committed no crime.

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