

Combating Racial Injustice Breakout Group Notes

April 27th, 2019

- What stood out the most about the presentations?
 - Lack of information about Virginia
 - The issues with money bails
 - The power of prosecutors and the importance of knowing who the prosecutor is and what they stand for
 - Long jail terms for very minor issues
 - 95% of cases ending in plea bargains
 - The discrepancy between crime rates and incarceration rates
 - The definition of violent crime
 - Robbery being considered “violent” just because of the threat of bodily harm
 - The understanding of investigatory stops versus traffic stops
- What are you feeling after the presentation?
 - Depressed because of the topic
 - Motivated and encouraged
 - The 7% decline since 2009 of incarceration rates
 - Actions due to this data
- What is the impact of drug courts, they are thought of a great resource to reduce recidivism, but what is the impact?
 - Question from a participant
 - Opinions:
 - The process is extremely monitored, and the treatment does not seem to be state of the art
 - Is it well enough funded?
 - Many of the treatment outcomes are mixed
 - Surprised as to the fact that drug courts have not increased in popularity
- Why aren't drugs legal?
 - Question from participant
 - Alcohol is legal, tobacco is legal
 - The “people from the top” are making the money from it being not illegal
 - Decriminalization would decrease rates, because you cut out the middle man
- “Political rights do not mean anything if you do not have socioeconomic rights”
 - You have the right to free trial but not really based on your socioeconomic standard
- Reflections on the “Best Practices” for combatting these issues
 - Policies the presentation mentioned:
 - Revise policies and laws with disparate racial impact
 - Address implicit racial bias among criminal justice professions
 - Reallocate resources to create a fair playing field

- Revise policies that exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities and redirect public spending toward crime prevention and drug treatment
 - Treatment of the youth is not the same as treating adults
 - The “ridiculousness” of really long sentences, there’s no chance for reform or rehabilitation
 - Having the data, and making the data public increases education on the topic and increases visibility
 - DOR has caused police departs to collect traffic stops data to increase accountability, awareness for traffic stops, meet monthly to discuss data
 - Montgomery County Sheriffs Dept.
 - Blacksburg PD
 - Christiansburg PD
 - The change in the label of “Police Officers” to “Peace Officers”
 - This will change the perceptions from the “us versus them” mentality
 - Increase trusts and understanding police
 - We still think America is the greatest salvation of the world, when the reality of this is not true, in the form of crime
 - Not blocking accessibility to public assistance
 - Food stamps
 - Housing
 - Jobs
- What can we do in our local community to make a change? What are some initiatives we can take?
 - Mandatory preschool for children to necessities
 - Food
 - Access to books
 - Love
 - Social needs
 - Work to lowering Virginia Sentences and get rid of the death penalty
 - Organize an initiative around bail
 - Access to education
 - Empowering the Virginia Voter

Small Group Discussions and Ideas for Change

- Actions we can take:
 - Better funding for the court system, locally and state
 - “Justice delayed is justice denied”
 - Taking the issue of sentencing inequality to our public schools
 - Though education and awareness programs
 - Recognizing the mass media/social media market profiling
 - Government regulation
 - Learning about what race dialog and the importance of simply starting the conversation
 - Connecting the public officials and experts in the field with the public

- Having meaningful but respectful conversations
- Remove the ban on receiving assistance for ex-felons
 - Food stamps
 - Housing