

The subject matter of my installation revolves around the book *The Wretched of the Earth* by Franz Fanon. Fanon discusses the psychology between the colonizers and the colonized during the Algerian Revolution. This artwork takes this analysis and applies it to the oppressed and the oppressors in the United States.

The diptych includes collage, crayon, and encaustic painting. The left panel follows the evolution of the systematic oppression of people of color in the United States. The right panel starts with the same foundation, but progresses to more personal aspects and opinions.

The process was documented in the form of a film to provide a deeper individual and intimate experience for the viewer.

Grace

# **Racism in America through the lens of Frantz Fanon**

Grace



*Frantz Fanon wrote extensively on the psychology of the colonized and the colonizers in Algeria. This paper uses his framework to gain a better understanding of the motives of the oppressed and the oppressors in the United States. In both countries, the systematic use of mass police repression and triggering violent outbreaks between oppressed individuals is a technique used to enforce the authority and dominance of the privileged.*

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Race is a social construct, invented and enforced by White people to systematically maintain power. Since the 1730s, racial tensions in America have kept continuous violence flowing across the country. The White oppressors in the U.S. place the blame on the oppressed for any casualties that result from cultural pressures. The enslavement and systematic oppression of people of color in the United States is considerably parallel to the European colonization of Africa.

Since the concept of racism was constructed by Europeans, it is the implied responsibility of White Americans to use their privilege against the structure of oppression. The truth is racism is a White problem, and doing nothing to stop it is profiting from the system of oppression, putting oneself on the side of the oppressor.

The following is a glimpse into the inexhaustible history of bigotry in the United States of America, and is meant to purely illustrate the parallels between the colonized and the colonizers in Algeria to the oppressed and oppressors in America.

## **FRANTZ FANON:**

Frantz Fanon, a Black French psychiatrist, born in the French colony of Martinique 1925. He enlisted in the Free French Army where he was transferred to an Algerian hospital in the early 1950s. He spent his time using socio-therapy to connect with the “native” Algerian culture. When the French-Algerian war began in November of 1954, Fanon sympathized with the Front de Libération Nationale (the Algerian nationalist movement) and eventually joined the group. During this time he wrote the book *The Wretched of the Earth*, which was published in 1961. Fanon died from Leukemia later that year. *The Wretched of the Earth* is written about the colonized people of Algeria and the psychology behind their journey of liberation. The psychology he discusses of the colonized and the colonizers motivated through violence and power applies directly to the current racial tensions in America. The United States of America is a country founded on the oppression and enslavement of people of color. Much of Frantz Fanon’s psychological diagnoses are applicable to the ongoing racial tensions in the states.

## **VIOLENCE OF THE OPPRESSED AND OPPRESSORS:**

Fanon, when discussing the violence coming from the oppressed, says, “The colonist keeps the colonized in a state of rage, which he prevents from boiling over.... The muscular tension of the colonized periodically erupts into bloody fighting between tribes, and individuals.”<sup>1</sup> For example, the French colonizers in Algeria had the police force terrorize the colonized and assembled the Sections Administratives Spécialisées for the purpose of “pacifying” the masses, it was a form of psychological warfare that “used the people against the people.”<sup>2</sup> In the United States the continuous White supremacy of the political, economic, and justice systems paired with mass police repression and brutality keep the oppressed in an ongoing state of anger and resentment towards the oppressors. As these tensions rise, every so often, an event takes place that triggers one of two things: the oppressed finally riot out of rage, or the oppressors try to reassert their dominance if they feel it is threatened. The oppressed will then be blamed for any deaths resulting from the riot.

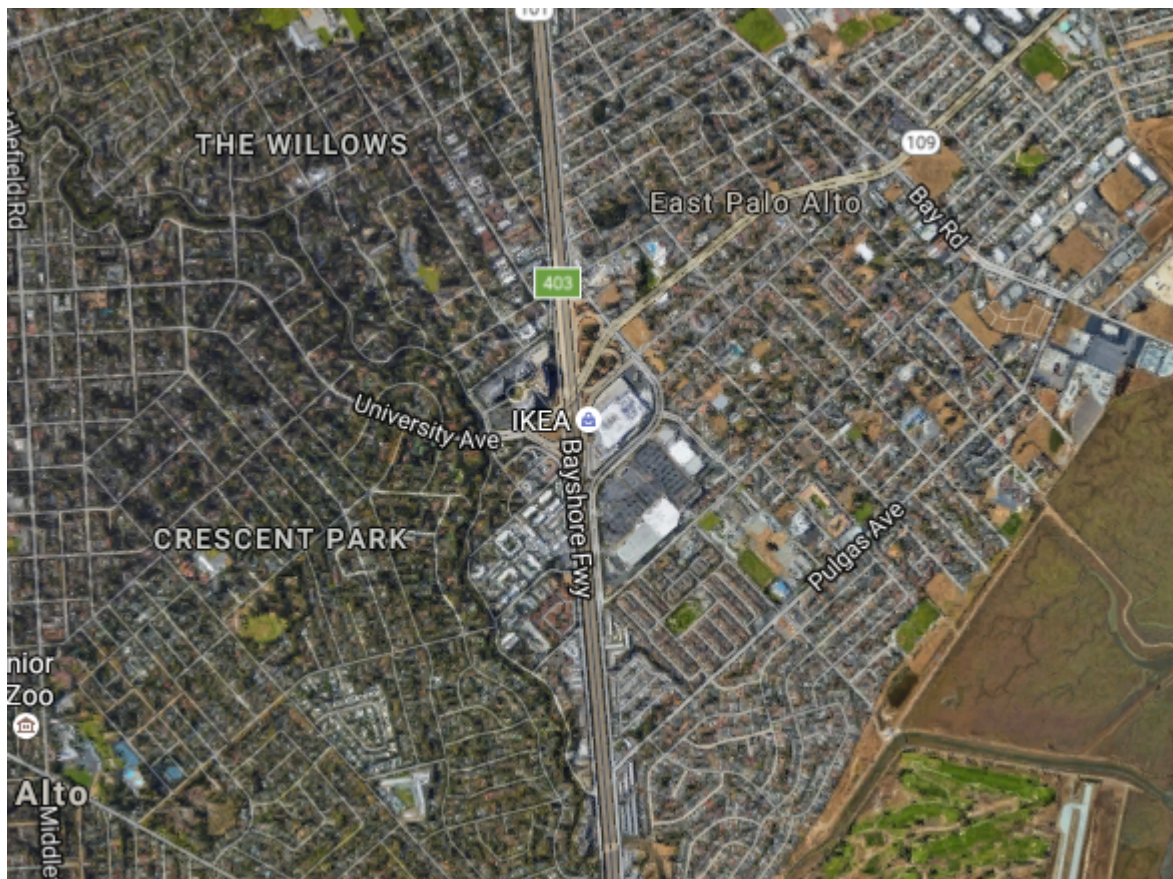
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<sup>1</sup> Fanon, Franz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox, New York, Grove Press, 1963. p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 40

Fanon writes, “At an individual level, violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude... The colonist's world is a hostile world, a world which excludes yet at the same time incites envy. We have seen how the colonized always dream of taking the colonist's place. Not of becoming a colonist, but of replacing him. This hostile, oppressive and aggressive world, bulldozing the colonized masses, represents not only the hell they would like to escape as quickly as possible but a paradise within arm's reach guarded by ferocious watchdogs.”<sup>3</sup> The oppressors utilize the phrase “the American Dream” to convince the oppressed that climbing the economic hierarchy is possible with hard work. However, the system was devised with the intent to oppress people of color and to favor the White public. This leaves the oppressed being blamed or considered lazy for being in the lower class.

Every ghetto in America was designed to keep people institutionalized. Where the projects are set up in the city itself was made to isolate the people from the rest of the community. Freeways and roads are used separate the neighborhoods. The following map is of Palo Alto, California. US interstate 101 cuts off East Palo Alto, which is mainly low-income housing with a mostly Black and Latino demographic, from the suburbs of Palo Alto. Note the lack of trees in East Palo Alto, contributing to higher rates of asthma.

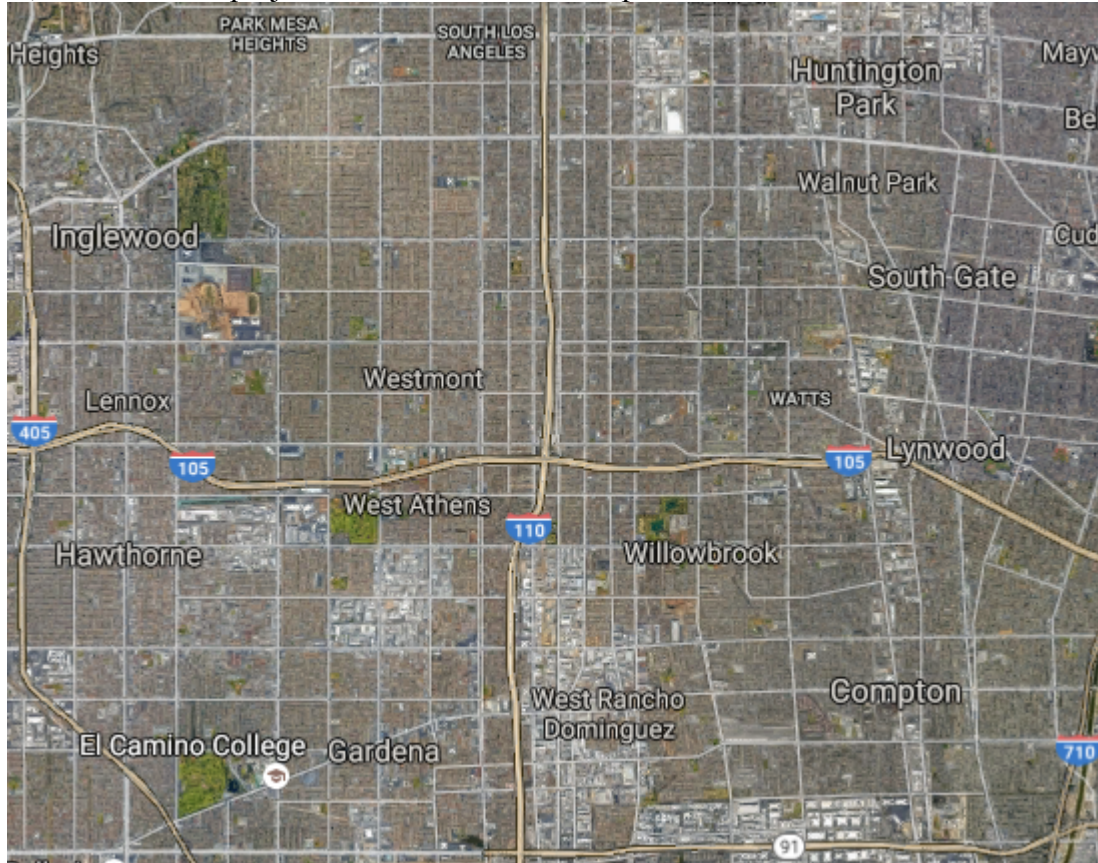


In South Central Los Angeles the different housing projects are sectioned off using highways or freeways. Cities in America were designed for segregation, as well as to separate

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 16, p. 51.

the oppressed from communities of oppressed individuals to prevent rebellion. Inglewood, Compton, and the Watts projects are all intended to deepen this division.



The oppressors take advantage of the unavoidable hostility that the oppressed have for one another individually. As so eloquently explained by the 1991 classic film, *Boyz N the Hood*, “Why is it that there is a gun shop on almost every corner in this community? I’ll tell you why. For the same reason that there is a liquor store on almost every corner in the Black community. Why? They want us to kill ourselves.”<sup>4</sup>

Often the oppressed will organize. The head of the rebellious groups tend to distance themselves from the movement, as Fanon writes, “The leaders distrust the rural masses.”<sup>5</sup> This is similar to what often happens in gang activity. Many gangs started as block protection. Soon after forming, they were manipulated by the cartels to run drugs into the inner city. When minimum sentences for drugs were announced, gangs started using children, who would not get tried as adults. As more and more gangs utilized kids, the preteens and teens started to get tried as adults. These young adults and minors get killed consistently. However, it is a rarity for a gang leader to get arrested or eliminated. Gangs have evolved to being merely the illusion of protection from authorities, so the leaders are not high priority for the law. Gangs are keeping the ghettos from organizing, so the oppressors do not interfere. The leaders of the Panthers Party connected with the public and put themselves on the same level as the members. As the group gained power and the White oppressors felt threatened by the oppressed, they used the justice

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<sup>4</sup>Fishburne, Laurence, performer. *Boyz N the Hood*. Columbia Pictures, 1991.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 72

system along with mass police repression (and the introduction of free base into primarily Black and Latino neighborhoods) to suppress the Panthers.

### **REBELLION:**

Organized rebellion of slavery dates back to 1739, when the The Stono Rebellion took place in South Carolina, leaving roughly 40 White people deceased. After the rebellion, the state of South Carolina ordered around 50 slaves to be executed. That shows mass repression to terrorize the oppressed and keep them in a constant state of fear to prevent further uprising.

The Springfield Race Riot of 1908 began when a White woman, Mabel Hallam, accused a Black man, George Richardson, of rape (which later proved to be an empty claim, as confessed by Hallam two weeks after the riot had occurred). “The charge of rape, however, in Springfield, as elsewhere, was often the excuse for wholesale violence, the justification for punishing an entire race for individual crimes and misbehavior, real and imagined”.<sup>6</sup> As Richardson awaited trial along with another young Black man (for a separate alleged crime) a mob of angry White civilians began to form outside the courthouse seeing the two men as a threat to White authority. Often an individual's crimes are used to target the whole race of people: collective punishment.

As word spread about the charge against Richardson, unrest began to grow among Black and White residents. First, a mass of White men went through the Levee in Springfield, destroying Black businesses and homes. Later the mob moved through the Badlands, which was Springfield's primarily Black neighborhood, and torched the whole area. The Black townspeople defended themselves. Gunfights broke out; causing the death of four White men. Black casualties also occurred but went unrecorded. “Without local protection or militia relief, Blacks were chased through the streets -- beaten, injured, and forced to leave behind unprotected property and valuables.”<sup>7</sup> Two men, Scott Burton and William Donigan, had been lynched by the time the riot was over. Reports about Burton's lynching: “The mob had stripped him of his clothes and mutilated his body, shooting it, gashing it with knives, and trying unsuccessfully to set the body on fire.”<sup>8</sup> The Springfield Race Riot of 1908 is one of six of the worst race riots that occurred before World War II. It is only one example of the violence that was used to preserve White supremacy in America.

In Tulsa, Oklahoma, a Black man was arrested after riding an elevator with a White woman (all other details on the incident vary from person to person) and a race war broke out. The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 consisted of 24 hours of White rioters wreaking havoc and violence on Black citizens. This resulted in the death of what is believed to be 300 people.

In late August of 1965, 14 year-old Chicago resident, Emmett Till, was visiting relatives in Money, Missouri. Till went to the market to buy bubblegum. While there, he allegedly whistled at a White woman. Four days later the owner of the market, Roy Bryant, and his brother-in-law J.W. Milam, went to where Emmett Till resided, demanding to see him. Bryant and Milam kidnapped the teen, then tortured and murdered him. Three days later his body was recovered, brutally mutilated, in the Tallahatchie river. On September 23rd, 1965, the all White jury found Bryant and Milam not guilty. Till's mother requested her son's body to be sent to Chicago, where she held an open casket funeral. Emmett Till's death occurred roughly ten years

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<sup>6</sup> Merritt, Carole. *Something so Horrible: The Springfield Race Riot of 1908*. PDF ed., Springfield, IL, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

after his father, Louis Till, a soldier who had served in WWII, was executed by the U.S. military for allegedly raping an Italian woman.

The Watts Riots were six days of rioting after a Black man was arrested for drunk driving and was greeted by police brutality in the Watts housing projects in Los Angeles, California, 1965. The aftermath left 34 people dead.

This pattern of riots occurring in various cities all over the U.S. kept continuing throughout the 20th century. When the racial tensions would hit a flashpoint a riot would burst out leaving property damage, death, and endless social impacts such as mass incarceration, broken homes, and economic devastation.

### **THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY:**

In the midst of all this, in 1966 a Black nationalist group started to form in Oakland, California, calling themselves the “Black Panther Party”. This occurred promptly after the assassination of Malcolm X whose teachings they embraced.

*The only way to police the ghetto is to be oppressive. None of the Police Commissioner's men, even with the best will in the world, have any way of understanding the lives led by the people they swagger about in groups of twos and threes controlling. Their pressure is an insult, and it would be, even if they spent their entire day feeding gumdrops to children. They represent the force of the white world, and that world's real intentions are, simply, for that world's criminal profit and ease, to keep the black man corralled up here, in his place.<sup>9</sup>*

The above quote is from James Baldwin, referenced by the late Huey P. Newton, a co-founder of the Panthers, in his book *Revolutionary Suicide*. The Black Panthers made a point of policing the police, who consistently used excessive force against Black citizens. The Panthers utilized open-carry laws to patrol the streets holding shotguns as protection from the authorities. Newton discussed recruiting people all over the Bay Area, “[we had to] show them that we were not afraid of weapons and not afraid of death. The way we finally won the brothers over was by patrolling the police.”<sup>10</sup>

*At first the patrols were a total success. Frightened and confused, the police did not know how to respond, because they had never encountered patrols like this before. They were familiar with the community-alert patrols in other cities, but never before had guns been an integral part of any patrol program. With weapons in our hands, we were no longer their subjects but their equals.<sup>11</sup>*

As the Panthers gathered a following, patrols increased and the police became more and more aggressive and paranoid. Altercations consistently occurred between Panthers and the authorities. The 17 year-old treasurer of the Black Panthers, Bobby Hutton, after surrendering all weapons and being stripped of his clothes was shot more than 12 times by Oakland police on April 6th, 1968. Shortly after that, Robert Kennedy, who was one of the few politicians who sympathized with the Panthers, was assassinated. In December of 1989, a Chicago FBI raid

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<sup>9</sup> Newton, Huey P. *Revolutionary Suicide*. Deluxe ed., Penguin Group, 1973. p. 120.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 121.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 127



resulted in the murder of Panthers Fred Hampton and Mark Clark. Later agents admitted that the bureau was guilty of a plot to “kill” the Panthers. The remaining leaders and members were arrested or died in various circumstances. The group was officially disbanded in 1982. Soon after this crack spread through Black neighborhoods causing even more destabilization.

### **THE CRACK EPIDEMIC AND WAR ON DRUGS:**

The “War on Drugs” was started by Richard Nixon in 1971 which encouraged no-knock warrants and minimum sentences. In a recently published interview Nixon’s aide, John Ehrlichman, discussed the true motives of the “War on Drugs”: "You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin. And then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities," Ehrlichman said. "We could arrest their leaders. raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did."<sup>12</sup> This was a war on poverty, Black people, and pacifists.

In 1979, the Nicaraguan Revolution began. When Ronald Reagan became president in 1982, the U.S. started to fund The Contras (the republican group advocating for the counter revolution) in Nicaragua. The CIA smuggled arms and allegedly smuggled cocaine to finance the Contras. This was a more consistent stream of cocaine trafficking to the U.S. than ever before, it was moved quickly to the low income areas of the major cities. After the iconic discovery of how to turn coke into crack rock in 1984, a far more affordable alternative to the traditional powder cocaine, murder and other crime increased drastically in the projects of practically every major city in the states. This was the beginning of what became known as the “crack epidemic”. “Between 1984 and 1994, the homicide rate for Black males aged 14-17 more than doubled and homicide rates for Black males aged 18-24 increased almost as much... By the year 2000, homicide rates had fallen back below their initial levels of the early 1980s for almost all age groups.”<sup>13</sup> The rise in crime in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods was used by the government to justify the mass police repression that was being used. “The fraction of Black children in foster care more than doubled, fetal death rates and weapons arrests of Blacks rose more than 25 percent, and Black low birth weight babies increased nearly 10 percent. Among Whites, there is little evidence of parallel adverse shocks.”<sup>14</sup> The phrase “Black on Black” crime was coined in the 1980s as the FBI used it to blame the rise of felonies on the residents of the projects.

In 1986, Reagan announced that crack was the issue of the year and imposed a minimum sentence of five years for five grams of crack cocaine. Despite this, there was no minimum sentence that was set for powder cocaine, even though coke and crack have the same chemical formula. Powder cocaine is mainly known as a drug used by White Americans, a clear double standard. Crack was rushed to impoverished neighborhoods and was notorious for being used by Black Americans. The minimum sentence started to raise the incarceration rates- targeting Black and Latino Americans. This continued and by 2010, drug offenders in federal prison had

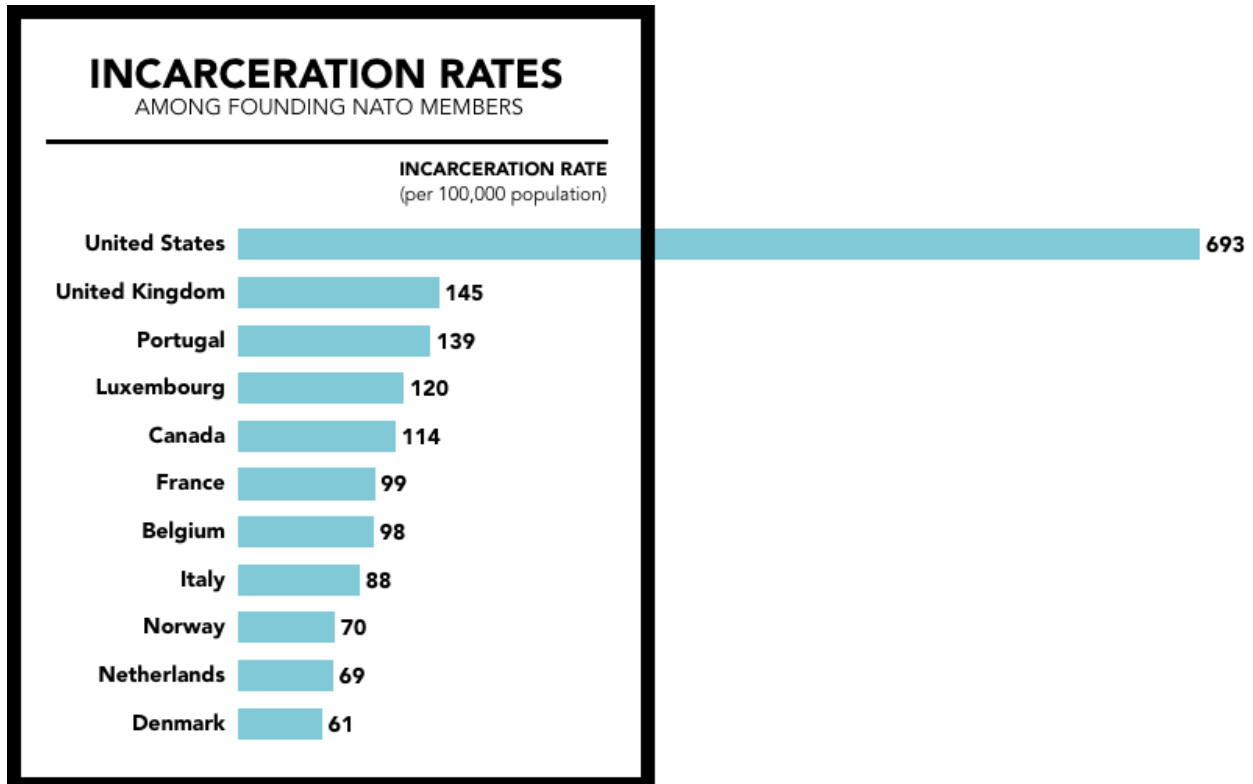
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<sup>12</sup>LoBianco, Tom. "Report: Aide Says Nixon's War on Drugs Targeted Blacks, Hippies." *CNN*, Cable News Network. Turner Broadcasting System, 24 Mar. 2016, [www.cnn.com/2016/03/23/politics/john-ehrllichman-richard-nixon-drug-war-blacks-hippie/](http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/23/politics/john-ehrllichman-richard-nixon-drug-war-blacks-hippie/). Accessed 4 Dec. 2016.

<sup>13</sup>Fryer, Roland G., Jr., et al. *Measuring Crack Cocaine and Its Impact*. Apr. 2006, [www.scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/fhlm\\_crack\\_cocaine\\_0.pdf](http://www.scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/fhlm_crack_cocaine_0.pdf). Accessed 13 Nov. 2016.

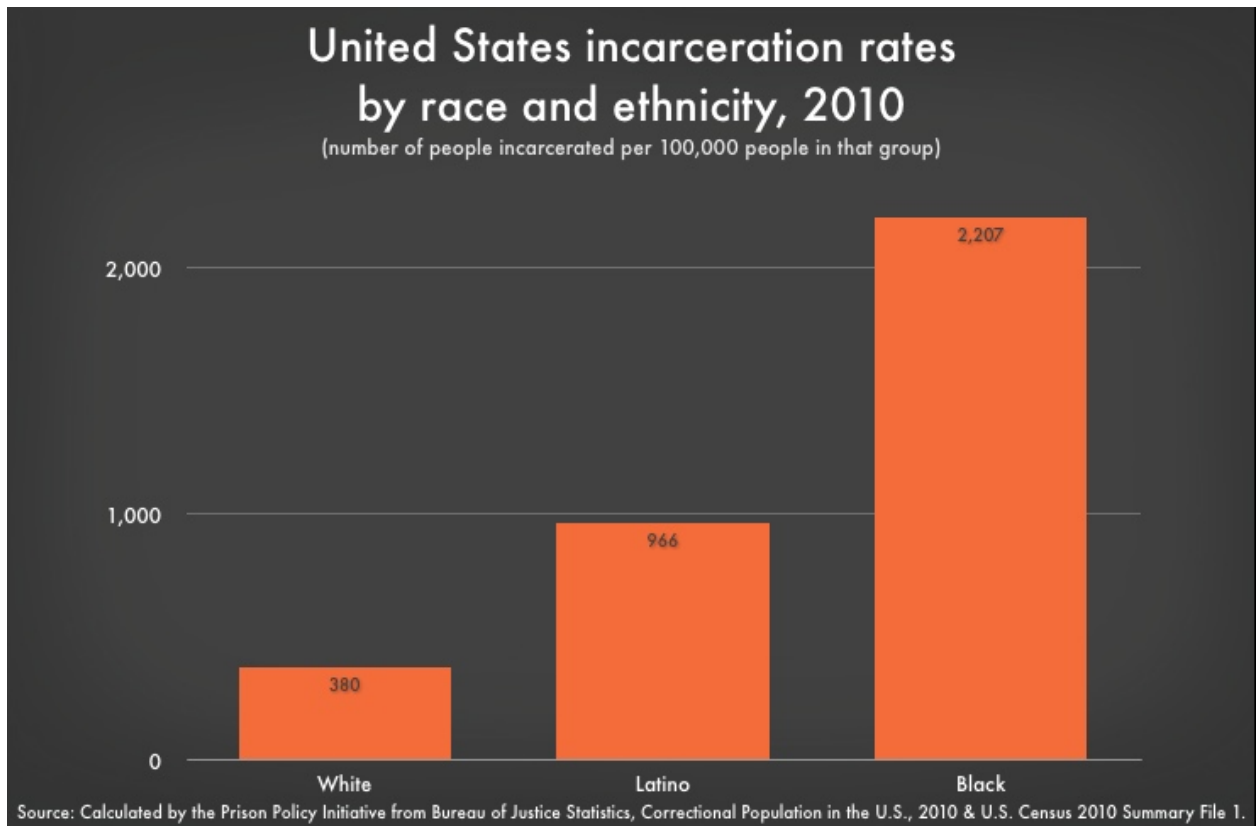
<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

increased to 500,000 per year, up from 41,000 in 1985.<sup>15</sup> The United States still incarcerate more people than any other country and police continue to target people of color more than White people. The charts below show statistics that clearly demonstrate this.



Source: <http://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2016.html>

<sup>15</sup> Alexander, Michelle (2010). *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press. p. 60.



#### **THE RODNEY KING RIOTS:**

As The Crack Epidemic settled down, tensions in the cities were running high from recent increased police brutality. On the evening of March 3, 1991, in Los Angeles, Rodney King was pulled over after a “high speed chase” with local authorities. When he got out of the car police officers accused him of “resisting arrest” and started to beat him with batons as well as use tasers. The brutal assault on King was captured on video showing excessive force was used. The LAPD officers accused King of being under the influence of PCP, but when he was tested for it the results were negative. Four LAPD officers were charged with using excessive force and were tried with a jury made up of nine White people, one man who was biracial, one Latino resident, and one Filipino resident. The jury acquitted the four officers, once the verdicts were announced- the city erupted with riotous behavior resulting in 55 casualties.

#### **THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION:**

On November 9th of 2016, Donald Trump got elected to be the 45th president of the United States. Much of the nation was shocked by the results. However, it should not have come as a surprise. America has made it evident for centuries that our government and justice system is run by White supremacists.

There is a lot of fear surrounding president-elect Trump and having a Republican Congress and Supreme Court. The next four to eight years will likely be similar to the Reagan administration. The election of Trump was parallel to Reagan’s. Reagan was not taken as a serious candidate, as he had been an actor, not a politician. Both succeeded a democratic president. The Reagan administration set up policies that still contribute to oppression today, and we should expect no less from Trump. He is setting up a cabinet of exceptionally conservative

politicians and white supremacists, such as Steve Bannon, Reince Priebus, and Jeff Sessions. These men are the ones who will be running our country. Trump's stance on environmental policy will likely erase any progress made to prevent climate change and increase environmental racism. "Trump promised on the campaign trail to rip up the Paris Agreement on climate change, which aims to limit global warming to "well below" 2°C above pre-industrial temperatures. He wants to kill America's Clean Power Plan, which would regulate emissions from power plants."<sup>16</sup> In 2012 Trump tweeted about his opinions on climate change:



17

The ghettos of America will be exposed to the most toxic waste and pollution. This oppression will cause health complications and keep the oppressed in a destabilized environment. The next four years of continued White supremacy will only add fuel to the anger of the oppressed, and cause more violence.

## CONCLUSION:

This is a brief overview of the oppression people of color face. America's history of racism has formed the society of today. Every issue is complex and has been simplified here because of the enormity of the United States' divide. The ghettos also face lack of healthcare and education; and many are still suffering from the AIDS epidemic that swept the inner cities in the 1980s. Every complication that contributes to the system of oppression was created by White people, the myths of "black on black crime" and "the American Dream" are constantly used to blame the oppressed for the inequality they face. With the next four years continuing the reign of a White-washed government it becomes increasingly more important for White people to take a stance against systematic repression. Many oppressors are unaware that they are the oppressors. They believe racism fell with the Jim Crow laws; they believe that because we do not call it "apartheid", that our political system is not founded in segregation. However, "The colonial subject is a man penned in; apartheid is but one method of compartmentalizing the colonial world."<sup>18</sup> Racism takes place in White homes behind closed doors. Racism is a White problem.

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<sup>16</sup>J., M. S. L. "Environmental Policy under Donald Trump." *The Economist Explains*, The Economist Newspaper Limited, 15 Nov. 2016, [www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2016/11/economist-explains-8](http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2016/11/economist-explains-8). Accessed 4 Dec. 2016.

<sup>17</sup>Trump, Donald J. "The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make the U.S. manufacturing non-competitive." *Twitter*, 6 Nov. 2012, 11:15 a.m., [www.twitter.com/realDonaldTrump?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor](https://www.twitter.com/realDonaldTrump?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor).

<sup>18</sup>Fanon, Franz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox, New York, Grove Press, 1963. p.15.

Black Americans have faced oppression since America was founded, Black Americans have been fighting this oppression since America was founded.

If these issues continue to go unaddressed the divide will deepen and the likelihood of a race war increase. Fanon came to the conclusion that the European and Western model for a society is not a valid solution. We must devise a new, unbiased system that empowers all Americans and offers equal opportunities and protection to all.

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