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Alexa Boggan  
*Old Dominion University*

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How does suspension affect black people's freedom?

Alexa Boggan

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Jesse Richman

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**Abstract**

The education of our younger generations is imperative for a successful nationwide future. However, children of color are consistently disproportionately affected by low quality education and disproportionate suspensions. Others have proposed that the overwhelming number of black men that are incarcerated are simply due to their own lack of motivation, but without proper resources at a young age students are left at an unfair disadvantage in their adult life. Instead, I propose that exaggerated punishments are the core causes of a substantial amount of black adults being in jail. Education is a vital key to a successful future and all students no matter their racial background or income level should have the same opportunity. This study provides insight for parents stuck in low income neighborhoods. This insight could include where this problem stemmed from, the effects and the possible solutions. Parents that aren't able to change their financial situation to get their school aged children into a good quality school district should be aware of the problem and solutions in order to take action. Groups that promote the advancement of people of color and education such as the NAACP, Historically Black Universities (HBCU) and parents will become better aware of the root of the problem rather than dealing with the consequences of the problem. Questioning the disparity in quality of education in America leaves policy makers with the task of making local, state or national policies that will improve quality and put an end to inequality these innocent adolescents are facing.

Key words: African American, Disproportionately, Education

**Introduction**

Many policies have been put in place such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act by Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965 and the No Child Left Behind Act by George Bush in 2001. (Paul, 2017) These policies were enacted to increase the quality of education to provide a more successful future for our society. However, for some reason, children, especially those of color are disproportionately left behind. Therefore, leading to the question of how does the quality of education affect the freedom of black men? The decreased quality in education leaves students feeling unmotivated when it comes to their education, overly punished when it comes to their behavior and dropout rates that are substantially higher than others. These outcomes later result in the detrimental chances of incarceration in the future.

**Literature Review**

Unsurprisingly, the segregation that stemmed from slavery has had lasting effects on America. Segregation in public schools only ended in 1954 when the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional in the case *Brown vs Board of Education*. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act implemented by President B. Johnson in 1965 to ensure that education was the primary goal of the nation. Years later in 2001 this policy was reformed into the No Child Left Behind Act by President George W. Bush. The purpose of this act was to promote educational achievement to every child in America. Till this day however, African American children are

dismissed, disadvantaged and are dealt more disciplinary actions compared to others. The unfair disciplinary actions implemented by school administrators has led African American students to have less motivation in school, higher suspensions rates in school and increased dropout rates.

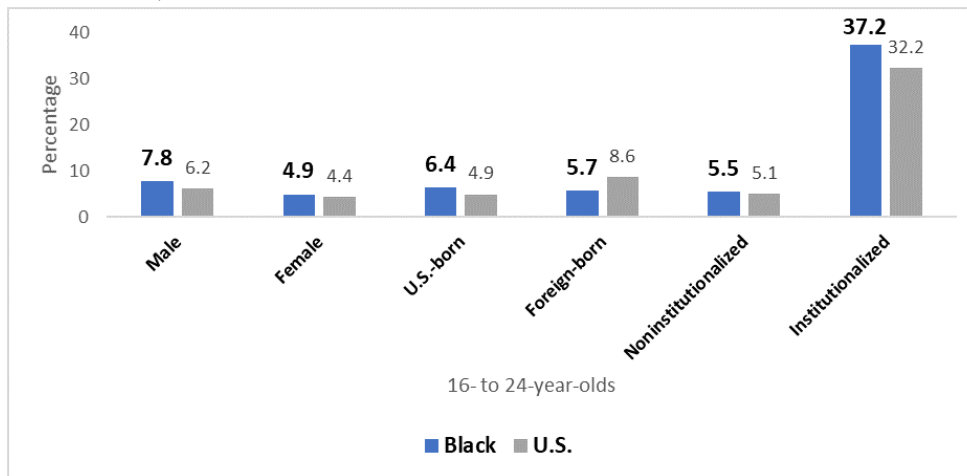
School climate can be described as the way the school community views their school standards such as safety, emotional and economic well being. An encouraging school climate positively correlates with academic achievement. In a study schools that students rated as having a poor social climate also experienced the highest rates of suspensions as well as a high suspension gap. The two of the strongest predictors of academic achievement are educational opportunity and engagement. (Skiba, 2014, 553) When disciplinary removal such as suspension and expulsion are implemented children miss out on both. Not only is it a waste of time for students but also a waste of time for teachers and administrators. 15-to 45 minutes of time is lost for all parties: students, teachers and administrators when the average office referral is written. This proves a student's feelings toward school undoubtedly affects their performance at that school. (Skiba, 2014, 552)

Devastatingly, increased referrals lead to increased suspensions. It has been proven that African American students are disproportionately suspended at rates higher than their peers of different races. A study done by the U.S Department of Education Office for Civil Rights confirms that African American students, girls and boys, are suspended at three and six times the rate of their white counterparts. Achievement and behavior is also affected by disciplinary actions. When students are suspended for over a three day period reading achievement growth decreases. While suspension is used to decrease disruptive behavior in the future, it actually does the opposite. Bad behavior has been seen to increase after suspension, “acting as a reinforcer rather than a punisher.” (Skiba, 2014, 554)

According to the School Discipline Support Initiative the Zero Tolerance policy is a term coined during the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 in response to the war on drugs implemented by Reagan in 1986. At the time this term meant that students that committed serious offenses such as bringing firearms to school, selling drugs, and engaging in gang related activity would be expelled. However, over the years this policy has begun to include other minor offenses such as talking back to school administrators, bringing prescribed drugs to schools without a doctor note and even not wearing school uniform all call for expulsion. The Zero Tolerance policy has only helped increase the number of black students that are disproportionately affected by exclusionary punishments.

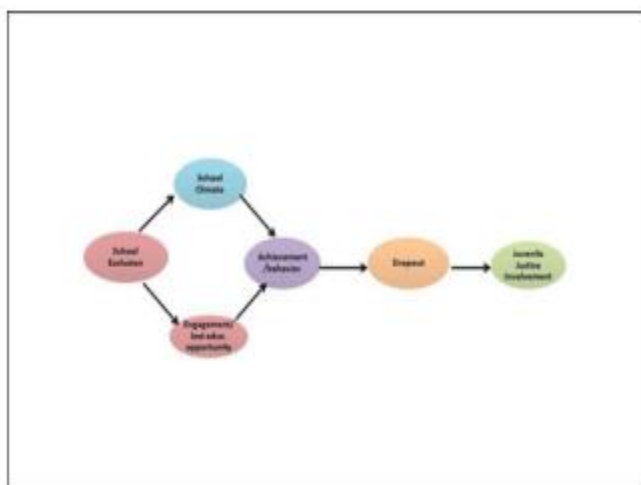
Lost motivation paired with excessive disciplinary actions would certainly make a student want to be anywhere else but school, therefore increasing dropout rates. Throughout the years dropout rates have decreased nationwide from 9.7% in 2006 to 5.3% in 2018. However, black students' dropout rates are still disproportionately higher than others. Black students dropout rates stood at

6.4% while white students were at a low 4.2%. Figure 1. Shows nearly 8 out of 100 black males dropped out of school, about 6 out of 100 U.S.-born black students dropped out of school and 37 and 100 black students in correctional or health care facilities. (National School Board Association)



**Figure 1.** National School Board Association

The many policies implemented throughout the years have not been the saving grace they were predicted to be. The lack of attention given to the school system combined with the lack of attention and concern to the black community has been detrimental for the black youth. Immoderate disciplinary actions such as referrals, detentions, suspensions and expulsions do not result in the reform school administration thinks it will. Instead these harsh punishments lead to negative short-term outcomes such as lack of motivation in school, increased disciplinary actions and increased drop-out rates. Figure 2 shows these negative short-term outcomes have the potential to later turn to negative outcomes such as incarceration.



**Figure 2.** (Skiba, 2014, 552)

## Hypotheses

While instances of lack of motivation, school punishments and dropping out might not seem that substantial, it plays a huge role in one's life. School disciplinary actions can be characterized as turning-points. A turning-point can be described as an event in a person's life that disconnects their past from their present. When a person of youth is deemed as unacceptable to be around solely based on their behavior it may be difficult to redeem themselves in their eyes and could lead to incarceration. The term school-to-prison pipeline has been defined by authors and organizations such as the NAACP as the growing pattern of tracking students out of educational institutions, primarily via "Zero Tolerance" policies and directly or indirectly into the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems.

In the year 2017 African Americans represented only 12% of the U.S population, however they represented 33% of the sentenced prison population. This statistic is alarming considering the U.S population is 64% white but only counts for 30% of the prison population. (Pew Research Center) Despite having the lowest population in the U.S black people make up a majority of the prison population. The current prison system holds about 1.6 million inmates, inmates can be defined as someone staying in jail for over a year. Only about 16% of inmates have a highschool diploma. With that being explained, more than a fifth of young black males who dropped out of highschool, at 22.9% are incarcerated.(Eley, 2009) These statistics lead to the question, "What are the root causes of incarceration of young black males?"

**Hypothesis 1:** I hypothesize that increased suspensions ultimately leads to black men being incarcerated at a higher rate.

**Hypothesis 2:** I also hypothesize that black students will be suspended at a higher rate.

**Hypothesis 3:** Because black students are suspended at a higher rate, they will also be arrested at a higher rate.

## Research Design

I propose a statistical analysis as a research design method. Young men including all races will be the unit of analysis. All races will be included so it would be clear that black men are being disproportionately affected. Respondents will be chosen in the sixth grade, with parents permission and will be monitored until adulthood age 26. The study at hand will take place between the years of 1996 to 2022. This spatial domain was chosen so people of all ages of 18 to 26 could be evaluated by their suspension rates in school and incarceration time in their adulthood. The temporal domain would be nationwide. Implementing the study nationwide will give data from low-income and high-income neighborhoods so the differences and similarities can be noted. The independent variable will be defined as suspension rates while the dependent

variable will be defined as the incarceration rates of black men. Because white students have and do not face the same discrimination that black students do, this group will be used as a control. As the sample size is monitored throughout the years disciplinary actions the child faces will be noted. Monitoring for juvenile detention centers will begin at the beginning of the study and monitoring for adult incarceration will begin when the subjects turn 18 to avoid any ethical issues.

### Measurement

Variable data to determine a relationship between suspension and future criminal activity was extracted from an NLS investigator study. This study followed 6,748 individuals ranging from ages 12-16 in 1997 to the year 2020. This study not only recorded suspension rates and criminal activity but also recorded data for control variables such as gender and sex. 23 years is a long time to conduct a survey and consistent participation could be considered a limitation, but 80% of the original sample was retained. Using computer program SPSS to analyze data, the variables will be analyzed independently as well as the relationship between them. To analyze the interactions between the variables a multiple regression model will be used. Graphs will also be used to gain a better understanding of the relationships that take place between the variables.

### Data

**Figure 3.**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	.320	.006		.000
	totalsuspensions	.006	.000	.260	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: pol418arrestedby17

A linear regression model was run to test the relationship between suspensions in primary school and future arrest activity, without controlling for race and gender. Based upon first glance there is a statistically significant relationship between adolescents being suspended and future arrest activity. This is clear because the standard error is .000 which is much smaller than the coefficient. The P value is much less than the .05 at .001 and the t statistics is large at 23.220, making this relationship significant. To test the control variables a multiple regression model was used.

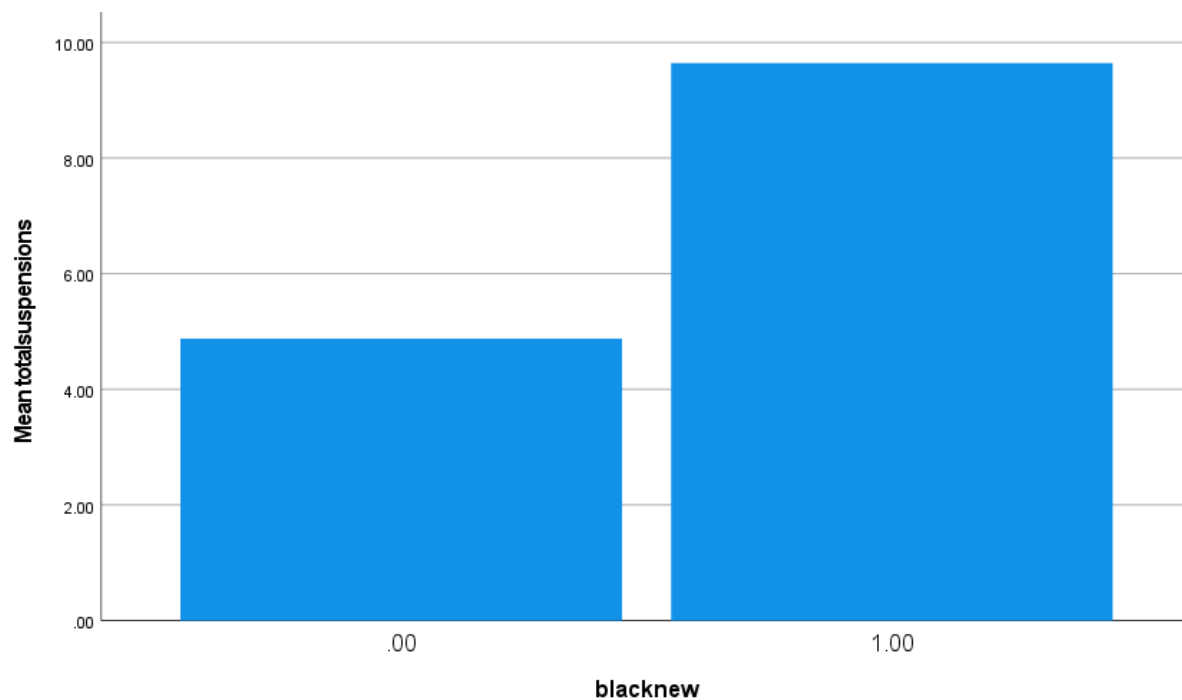
**Figure 4.**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	4.876	.252		<.001
	blacknew	4.769	.494	.101	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: totalsuspensions

When tested if black people were more likely to face suspension, a significant relationship was discovered. Coefficient B tells us that black people get five more suspensions than races that are not black. It is clear in **Figure 6** that that is almost double the rate that none black students face.

**Figure 6.**



**Figure7.**

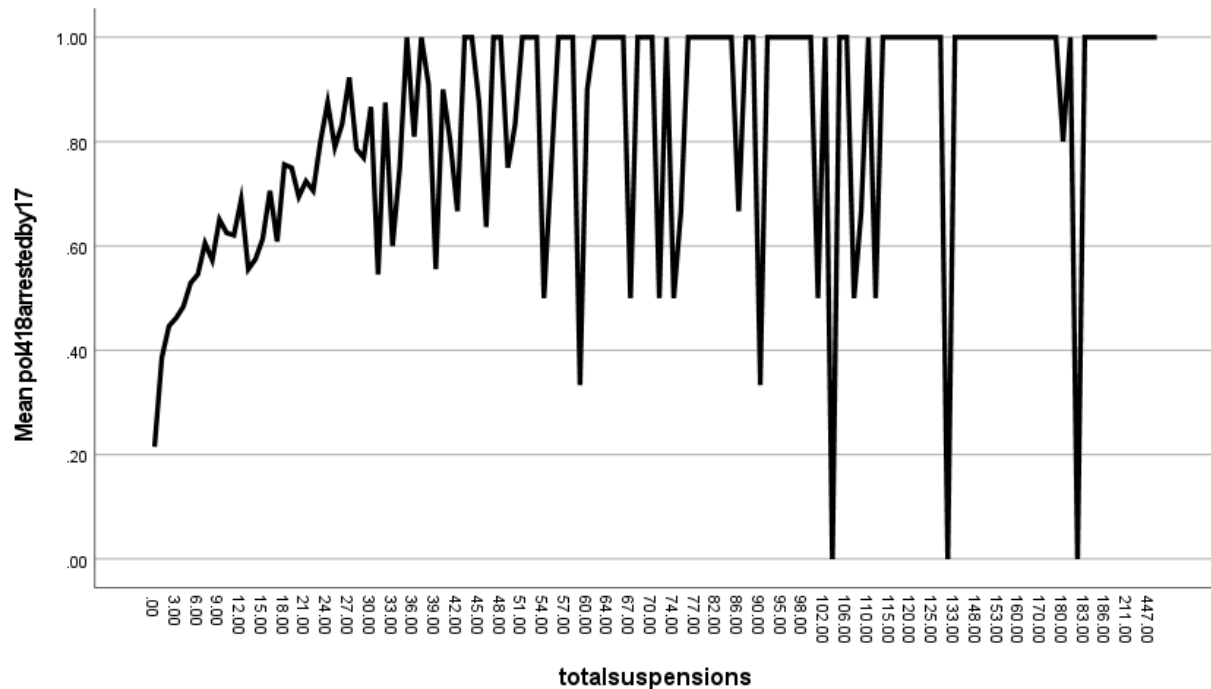
Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	.623	.017		<.001
	blacknew	.063	.012	.059	<.001
	KEY!SEX (SYMBOL) 1997	-.210	.011	-.219	<.001
	totalsuspensions	.006	.000	.273	<.001
	blacksuspensions	-.002	.001	-.067	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: pol418arrestedby17



When tested the interaction between black people and total suspensions there was a surprising result. Based on the coefficient and the negative t statistic it is clear that black students were least likely to go to be arrested than other races despite their suspension rates.

**Figure 7.**



## Results

Ultimately there is a clear relationship between the total amount of suspensions and the chances of a future arrest. Figure shows that if a person were to get suspended three days they have a little over a 20% chance of being arrested in the future. By the time a person is suspended for more than 36 days the chances of getting arrested in the future are almost at 100%.

## Conclusion

Attaining an education can be categorized as an aspect of the “American Dream.” All native born Americans should have an authentic shot at the American dream. However, African Americans’ “American Dream” comes to a likely end the moment they start the U.S K-12 school system. When entered into the system these kids are dealt excessive and exaggerated punishments such as suspensions and expulsions, leading to lack of academic achievement, therefore increasing dropout rates. Because black students are not arrested at a higher rate does not mean they are not subject to the school to prison pipeline. Instead it shows their ongoing resilience to not succumb to a system that is meant to see them fail. Every student deserves an equal chance of education

and a successful future. Hopefully, the policies that are in place are heavily reconstructed to promote education and success in all races.

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