



# POLICY PROPOSAL

## Sociology Topics: Gender, Family, and Punishment

Draft together a policy proposal about an issue relating to bail, racism in child welfare, child support policy, etc. Identify a social movement or political organization that is addressing said issue. First part will be a literature review (address what is already known), research which states, or countries get it right and how it impacts lives.

Tess Styler

Throughout the duration of our nation, known to be full of independence and personal freedom to all, a plague of oppression and systematic racism has found itself in almost every corner of our country. In the most promising of institutions, we see the least promising of outcomes and opportunities for females, members of LGBTQ communities, and most commonly people of color.

How can that be? How can a nation founded on the grounds of establishing a new purpose in what it means to be united, restrict and bound their own citizens to the point of them questioning their own purpose? It's seen all over this country, it's advertised and supported by our political leaders through processes of redlining, food deserts, gentrification, and gerrymandering; all limiting the voice and worth of a disadvantaged citizen. It's in our media and everyday culture through the whitewashing and lack of POC voices and stories, morphing viewers perception on what it truly means to be an American. It's in our cognizance of what a family structure should be and what determines a good parent from bad, due to resources, time, education, money; all factors that are judged on the same level but in no way are judged fairly.

The fundamental freedoms that this country promises to every citizen are stripped and questioned depending on the color of your skin. The fundamental protection of a roof over one's head and food on the table, is at question and is the driving force behind institutions that point blame at the specific situation but not the overarching problem.

We are holding too high of expectations for parents of color when we know that they are both financially and systematically oppressed, and we are punishing them for that.

It has been said time and time again, by political leaders, CPS worker, parents, government workers, that the Foster Care system is a failing solution to what seems like an

unsolvable problem. "...we're searching for a singular model that will meet all of the divergent needs of abused or neglected kid in all of their divergent places" (Beam xvii). Every case and every child is different, with the need of a different lenses to address and dissect each individual case, not one process to lighten the load. We are dealing with cases the same way we deal with problems in our communities, quick to judge and very rarely do those actions get revoked instead are exploited and replicated all over. It comes to no surprise that black children are twice as likely as white children to end up in foster care, even if the treatment and abuse at home is no worse than those found in white households. So why and how are families of color being ripped apart and those children are entering foster care at rates that are disproportional to their presence in the general population? (Casey)

In order to understand the workings of families of color and how to determine a safe home environment from an unsafe, it is essential to take in account the communities and lives that people of color live and live in.

#### Being Black in America.

From the beginning of our nation, the discrimination of black individuals is so engrained in our history, that we still are having a hard time erasing that in its entirety. The days of enslavement, Jim Crowe, Black Codes, to segregation of water fountains, restaurants, and schools, are long gone but nonetheless racial disparities still persist. The average black worker makes 62% of that a white worker, and in 2019, only 49.6% of blacks were found to be employed, and only 31% of those were deemed 'professionally employed' (Gal and Shyanne). Not to forget one of the most alarming of statistics, that 7.4% of the black population are disenfranchised, four times higher than that of a white voter, enabling the voices of black individuals all over the country. In every institution in our country, there are strides being made

to limit the worth of the black self, making their skin color the target for oppression and brutality, so then why are we still holding them to the same expectations set for white individuals?

Removals within foster care should be determined based on the treatment of children and the quality of their life and health within their homes, focusing solely on the abuse and neglect of the child. Not the neighborhood the child is in or the amount of poverty that their family is burdened by, yet those are some of the main factors in determining a removal. It is clear that there is a connection within foster care relating race and money, with black children accounting for 2/5 of the 558,000 kids in the system, similar to the alarming 40% of poor children who are all black. This isn't some coincidence but is evidence from the National Incidence Study for Child Abuse and Neglect, that low-income is a strong risk factor for all forms of maltreatment (Beam 63). Limiting the chances of a better tomorrow for these children because of the economic burdens that their parents endure daily, and most fall on the shoulders of black single mothers.

Black women, who are societally expected to be the rock and primary caretaker in black families, paid the least out of any group and account for 1/3 of our female imprisonment population, are ridiculed and constantly under fire for their actions or lack thereof in providing a 'proper and safe' home for their children. Let us not forget that these families are found in some of the poorest of neighborhoods, with the most limited education and economic growth, and still are being compared and expected to reach standards that ignore these red flags.

Like previously mentioned, every case is different, and every case and process of removal differs depending on the specific agent assigned and the state the case is in. But still, in every state, we see an alarming disparity with the number of children being removed and the time spent outside the home.

Strides have been made to limit this disparity, in hopes of accurately dealing with unfit homes and when it is deemed necessary for a child to be removed. In Nassau County, New York, a new tactic emerged in hopes of reducing the number of black children being placed in out-of-home situations, called, Blind Removal Meetings. Similar to normal procedures, a case worker is sent into a home to determine the risks and rewards of a child staying in said home, but instead of making the decision right then, they are sent back to a committee to present their findings. The catch: they leave out the demographics and neighborhood, two factors that often sway the decision (Pryce). From there, they look at solely the treatment, history and family structure and strength to determine what happens next. These findings recorded and followed over five years by Jessica Pryce, director of the Florida Institute for Child Welfare at FSU, found that “the rate of black children being removed dropped from 55.5% to 29%”, a change worthy of implementing this process in every state (Pryce). Now this doesn’t account for the number of children who find themselves placed back into the system, but it does give insight that race, and location of the family doesn’t need to be disclosed in determining their stability.

It takes more than just one county to have a successful outcome to enact change, it demands leaders and members of society to realize that this is not a situational problem but an institutional one. This isn’t a solution that can solve all aspects of this problem overnight, it only helps those families yet to be affected by the harsh reality of foster care. It doesn’t account for the possible thousands of wrongfully removed children that are stuck in this cycle of new homes and therapy, or the kids whose entire youth was spent waiting to age-out of the system.

Far too many children are separated from their families with little explanation as to why, leaving them with little to no support to create healthier homes and relationships, and are being blamed for their inability to change their situations.

The findings from the Blind Removal Meetings should be enough evidence alone that there is more to be done within our nation and our ongoing battle with racism. People of color should not have to worry of their family structure being questioned and taken from them because of the color of their skin. Their parenting should not be up for question or compared to that of white families when looking at their income or poverty level when it is known that they are unable to compete economically [with whites]. Child Welfare is just one institution of many that exploits the black individual, making them the perfect poster child without ever truly wanting to help them.

It is hard to think of a world without racism, as crooked and sad as that sounds and as much as people deny that reality, it is one that will remain true. “Racism has found its way into every crevice of society”, within our criminal justice system, healthcare access, education institutions, and in our foster care system (Pryce). Instead of thinking that racism will one day be eradicated and out of the conscious of our minds, we should have a new mindset of canceling the impacts of it [racism], not through our own personal bias and stereotypes but blind procedures and healthier thinking.

“If you live in a poor neighborhood; you better be a perfect parent”, a statement that sums up the issue at hand while also showing that there’s no true solution (Pryce video). Poverty will still cripple communities and families of color, poverty will still be ignored when individuals question high crime rates and removals in these families, and poverty will be the defining trait that classifies them as unfit parents.

## CITATIONS

Beam, Cris. *To the End of June: the Intimate Life of American Foster Care*. Mariner Books, 2014.

Pryce, Jessica. *To Transform Child Welfare, Take Race Out of the Equation*. *Ted Talks*, TED, May 2018, [www.ted.com/talks/jessica\\_pryce\\_to\\_transform\\_child\\_welfare\\_take\\_race\\_out\\_of\\_the\\_equation/footnotes?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/jessica_pryce_to_transform_child_welfare_take_race_out_of_the_equation/footnotes?language=en).

Pryce, Jessica. "What Are Blind Removal Meetings? – Dr. Jessica Pryce." *Dr Jessica Pryce*, [jessicaprycephd.com/what-are-blind-removal-meetings/](http://jessicaprycephd.com/what-are-blind-removal-meetings/).

Riley, Naomi Schaefer. "Is Foster Care Racist?" *Quillette*, Quillette Magazine, 26 June 2020, [quillette.com/2020/06/26/is-foster-care-racist/](http://quillette.com/2020/06/26/is-foster-care-racist/).

Shyanne Gal, Andy Kiersz. "26 Simple Charts to Show Friends and Family Who Aren't Convinced Racism Is Still a Problem in America." *Business Insider*, Business Insider, 8 July 2020, [www.businessinsider.com/us-systemic-racism-in-charts-graphs-data-2020-6](http://www.businessinsider.com/us-systemic-racism-in-charts-graphs-data-2020-6).