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Exploratory Paper

This paper outlines three social issues which affect people locally and internationally. The three topics are police body camera usage and community relations, poverty and educational outcomes, and the digital divide. I chose these topics primarily thinking of the African-American community, but soon realized these issues have global implications. I am drawn the systematic exclusion of certain groups of people from the global economy. This can be done through education, economics, and policing. I hope to further educate myself on these issues and learn how I can make contributions to rectify these problems, even if those contributions are small.

1. Police Body Camera Usage and Community Relations

The national spot light was on Fergusson, Missouri on November 24th, 2014: this was the day a grand jury decided not to indict the police officer involved in Michael Brown’s fatal shooting (“Considering Police” 1794). This sparked a national outcry over police use of force; it was further exacerbated by the death of Eric Gardner about a week later due to a police officer’s fatal use of a choke hold ((“Considering Police” 1794).

My first topic is on police use of body cameras to reduce officer misconduct. I found several sources on this topic. The real problem was choosing which sources to use. The first major source of information for this topic was “Study Finds Body Cameras Decrease Police’s Use of Force”. The second source of was “Considering Police Body Cameras” by the Harvard Law Review.

The first article discusses the study “The Effect of Police Body-Worn Cameras on Use of Force and Citizens’ Complaints Against the Police: A Randomized Controlled Trial” (Ziv). It presents the information contained in the study in laymen terms. There was a one year study conducted by Conducted by the University of Cambridge’s Institute of Criminology. It stated there was reduction of use of force by 50 % and complaints against police officers were also reduced by 90% (Ziv). This research makes a case for the use of light-weight body cameras by police officers nationally. The authors believe there are significant societal benefits which outweigh some of the potential pits falls, such as privacy concerns, cost, legal issues (Ziv).

The second source “Considering Police Body Cameras” asks questions similar to Postman or McLuhan. It raises the question if police- worn body cameras are the panacea for the issue concerning police and community relations in ethnic communities by reducing police misconduct (“Considering Police” 1794). It raises issues with the study performed by University of Cambridge’s Institute of Criminology: was the reduction in complaints due to a reduction in police misconduct or a reduction in frivolous claims (“Considering Police” 1795). This article continues to explore some of the unintended consequences of equipping every police officer with a body-camera. This article presents lots of thoughtful questions regarding the widespread adoption of police cameras.

I began this project with the view police officers should wear body cameras, but after reading the second article “Considering Police Body Cameras”, I believe there are some significant questions which should be addressed before these cameras are adopted on a national scale. I do believe there was a significant reduction in police use of force as a direct result of the body-cameras, as stated in the first article. But now, I have come to the conclusion that society may be moving too quickly to solve this problem with technology, before adequately considering both the positive and negative consequences. How are the recordings of the public, sensitive interviews, police officers’ conversations with spouses, and the many non-crime related recordings going to be addressed? Will third party companies have access to this information or other government agencies? Also, there are cases when clear video has been recorded of police interactions with the public, such as the Eric Gardner case, and yet the police officer was not indicted. I believe there needs to be a multifaceted solution to improve police and community relations. The cameras are not the sole answer.

2. Poverty and Educational Outcome

What are the differences between an 18-year-old student attending Harvard and one locked away in prison cell? Has the Pandora’s Box of race, culture, economics, and history been opened: yes, it has. I found two sources which sheds some light on one aspect of this problem. The first source is “Vouchers Help Families Move Far”, and the second is “Long-Term Gains Seen for Kids Who Move Out of Poverty”.

“Vouchers Help Families Move Far” is an article in the New York Times which describes one federal government housing program being applied in Texas. This program gives housing vouchers to poor families in high-poverty neighborhoods and allows them to move to low-poverty neighborhoods (Appelbaum). The article continues to describe the success of one individual family’s use of the voucher program. It also illustrates some of the potential pitfalls of the program; for example, land lords refusal to accept the vouchers, and families choosing to stay in their high-poverty neighborhoods instead of moving to a low-poverty neighborhood (Appelbaum). This particular article is taking a neutral position regarding voucher program and is primarily presenting information to its readers.

The second article, “Long-Term Gains Seen for Kids Who Move Out of Poverty”, is based on research performed by Raj Chetty. This article is describing his research into education outcomes of children who move to low-poverty neighborhoods from high-poverty neighborhoods. The article suggests that children who make this move before the age of 13 have much better educational outcomes and earning power throughout their lives, when compared to those who stay (Heitin). The article summarily breaks down his research into two areas; improved outcome, and second chances. It states better neighborhoods are more lenient of truant behavior and provides social pressure to pursue higher education (Heitin).

Both of these articles informed me of a government program I didn’t know existed. They make a case for reverse-gentrification by taking families with children out of low income, high crime, low aspirations, and depressive neighborhoods. I cannot help but feel that there is some real truth behind this research, but there are many problems which must be addressed before this program can be expanded to larger areas. For instance, I can see communities attempting to keep these families out of their neighborhoods, and budgetary problems related to the increased cost of funding these programs. How are these issues going to be addressed? I do believe that there is a mutual benefit which can be gained from moving lower-income families to areas of less poverty. It can improve race and ethnic relationship. It can also add to the overall American economy as the skilled work force is expanded. The home voucher program appears promising but it needs much further exploration.

3. The Digital Divide

This scene can be seen routinely through the streets of New York City: children and teenagers walking around with their iPhones® and iPads®. But, do these children realize they have access to a compendium of human knowledge with these internet connected devices? I would surmise they are unaware of it due to these devices natural inclusion in their daily lives. However, there is another scene as well: children and teenagers without these devices, personal computers, or internet access. These two scenes illustrate the digital divide – that is, the gap between people and/or countries which have unfettered access to internet technologies and those who do not (Vidyasagar).

I found two sources providing information on the digital divide: the first source is an article by D. Vidyasagar called “Digital Divide and Digital Dividend in the Age of Information Technology”, and the second source is an article by Robyn Broadbent and Theo Papadopoulos titled "Bridging the Digital Divide – an Australian Story".

In the first article, D. Vidyasagar makes the argument that digital divide is important problem facing society today, and as such needs to be addressed. He states “There is increasing evidence regarding the role of IT in improving access to information in improving health, education and, therefore, economy across the globe. This is the Digital Dividend” (Vidyasagar). He continues to outline how this divide is related to economic output with the sharing of ideas. The byproduct of these new ideas, created in the developing world, would also benefit the first-world nations (Vidyasagar). His main idea can be seen in the following quote: “It is hoped that like the water flowing from the mountains and the light from the sun, the knowledge will also flow freely through the portals of IT.” (Vidyasagar)

The second article "Bridging the Digital Divide – an Australian Story" outlines a project to bridge the digital divide in the inner-city of Melbourne, Australia. The study highlights how economically-challenged, non-English speaking people with disabilities can prosper when connected to the internet for the first time. It further elaborates how a certain degree of education is required to utilize internet access and reap the benefits this access provides. The article stresses the importance of internet access as a community and health tool. It states, people can create and maintain strong bonds with family and friends as they move away from the community. Technology creates significant health benefits as people can perform health related research and become better informed about their own and familial health.

What would happen if there were no digital gap? I’m not referring to some utopian idea. I’m simply hypothesizing; what if every human on earth had access to the internet? What type of ideas -- economic, industrial, intellectual, social, and artistic – would be created? I believe significant resources should be allocated for the closing of this gap for the betterment of all people and economies.

4. Conclusion

When I began this research, I was primarily focused on the digital divide within the United States; however, I have learned its importance reaches far beyond the American boarders. It connects a small famer to a retail store on Fifth Ave (Vidyasagar). It also allows the free flow of ideas across different cultures and ideologies. The great advantage of the Roman Empire was the cross pollination of ideas. I can only imagine what occurs when the entire globe is connected and finally fertilized.

The digital divide has many economic and financial repercussions, such as who is responsible for the cost of internet access in these marginalized, local communities. I did not notice any dissenting view regarding the divide, and all of the analysis appears to be consistent: the divide exists and it is mutually beneficial to close it. However, it has come apparent to me that further research needs to be performed on how to close the divide in a economically responsible manner.

The use of police body cameras is a fertile ground for further research. It is a socially, politically, and culturally active issue, and receives a tremendous amount of funding. This is--in my view--the easiest topic to pursue further. I cannot make any argument against further investigation into this topic, as there are social and economic implications which leave room for further research. With that being said, it no longer interests me to continue this research.

As I performed the research for this paper I changed several of my initial ideas. I was originally most fascinated by the digital divide, but I now believe there is significant room for exploring the economics of the federal housing voucher programs. I believe Postman’s and McLuhan influence has already made its mark on me. The housing voucher program appears to be a beneficial program, but I see the possibilities of unintended consequences which impacts multiple communities. I also believe this is the most difficult of the three topics to pursue; as there is significantly less research regarding this issue, and it is not on the political radar. But there is a bigger problem of homelessness and connecting disenfranchised Americans to the larger global community—that is, a problem that is causing America to lose its competitive advantage in the global arena. I believe the planting of the proverbial seed—lower-income families—into communities with stronger educational and economic base will result in an American intellectual and economic resurgence.

Works Cited

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