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Senior Project Research Topic: Missing Black Children in the US

Problem: Lack of Media Coverage

Missing is defined as an absence or loss, 170,899 black children were reported missing in 2016. In the United States, a child under the age of 18 is considered missing if their parent or guardian does not know where they are. According to a study called “The Forgotten Victims of Missing White Woman Syndrome: An Examination of Legal Measures That Contribute to the Lack of Search and Recovery of Missing Black Girls and Women” by William & Mary Journal of Race, Gender and Social Justice, there are “approximately 90,000 people missing in the US at any given time. Of those missing 33,338 of them were juveniles.” The study went on to say that according to the National Crime Information Center “ Although a majority of these cases end up being resolved... specifically, the cases of Black Americans go unresolved.” In most states, a person must be missing for 48 hours before law enforcement can begin taking action to find them. A large part of locating these missing persons relies on a combination of investigation, evaluating evidence, media coverage and getting the public involved in the search. However, there is an extreme underrepresentation of missing Black children in the media compared to the attention given to missing White children. This is due to the fact that Black children are often regarded as “runaways” because they may have left home on their own and authorities believe they will probably return soon. As a result, Black children get little to no screen time and police offer less help to parents fighting to get their child’s story heard.

Children that go missing are also at risk of being human trafficked for sex, forced labor, and debt bondage. According to the Human Rights Commission “Sex trafficking disproportionately affects women and children and involves forced participation in commercial sex acts. Forced labor and debt bondage involve forcing an individual to work to pay back a debt.” When referring to Black or African-American children the victims can be boys and girls under the age of 18, from low-income families, with a history of homelessness, poverty, neglect, abuse, and children in the foster care system. One example of this is Rachele, a 14-year-old black girl who went missing from

a sleepover at a friend's house. Rachelle was attending a sleepover on October 30th, 2018 with a group of her friends, the girls had fallen asleep watching movies and when everyone had woken up, she was gone. Rachelle had a history of running away before when she would have problems with her parents at home. She usually would be with a friend at the arcade and or hanging out somewhere else in town. The police believe that she ran away again and are delaying assistance as a result. Although she has been missing for over a year the local news station only speaks about her case once a month.

Another example of this is Jason, a 16-year-old black boy who went missing on June 10th, 2019. He was on his way to summer school but never walked into the building. Jason was living in foster care because he was physically abused by his biological mother and his father is in prison. Although he's been missing for 6 months, the local police believe he left town to stay with a friend out-of-state. His foster parents have filed a missing person's report but the police haven't told them any new information. They've handed out missing posters but no one has seen or heard from him. The largest news station in town only shows his picture with a description once every night around 10 pm.

The top priorities for everyone involved are to have Jason, Rachelle and other missing black children like them found alive and returned home safely. Their personal challenges after reuniting with their families would include receiving therapy or counseling to process trauma and trying to resume their normal lives. One possible solution to this issue is to campaign to large networks and streaming services outside the news stations like BET, VH1, Netflix, YouTube, and Hulu encouraging them to take a more active position rather than broadcasting simple moments of silence. This would include gaining more media coverage with donations and partnering with organizations already working towards the cause. Getting the information to viewers through an ad-like commercial would put their stories out to a larger audience who may not be watching the news or subscribing to cable. The goal of this solution would be to put the viewers on high-alert and disable the "bystander effect" letting them know it is not someone else's responsibility to help a person in distress. Ultimately, it would make the faces of these missing Black children memorable to the viewer so they would be more likely to be aware of their surroundings and always report something suspicious

because it may be a contributing factor to finding a missing child or saving someone's life.

Bibliography

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