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Seeing Color: America's Judicial System

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In many eyes, it often seems as though being white in America is easy, or a privilege. Being white in America is considered a safety blanket, with an abundance of opportunities beneath it. Yet, how does a physical difference such as skin color manifest itself as privilege? Noticing color is not wrong, hateful, or oppressive. Even children notice color, and we define them as the ultimate innocence. But in fact, skin color is often a trigger. When the world has preconceived notions about people of color, an oppressive system designed to harm people who have never done anything to deserve it erupts, also known as racism.

As an aspiring attorney, this project will examine the racial disparities within the U.S. judicial system. By weaving together, history, laws, and statistics, I create a tapestry of stories that tell of unjust bias towards POC. My research begins in dissecting the historical construct of race, starting with the Transatlantic slave trade, through the Civil War period, the Reconstruction Era, as well as Jim Crow laws. This paper examines a dark history that has infested American ideals and beliefs for almost four centuries, leaving behind a social construct of blacks as inferior. Such an association has arguably led to modern day systemic racism, which many scholars believe to be prominent within our criminal justice system. By researching contemporary jurisdictions involving people of color, examining prison demographics, and looking at Rhode Island case law, this project aims to shed light on racial disparities and how they play out in America's judicial system today.