[redacted]

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Mass Incarceration

Throughout this project, I seek to educate a younger audience–middle-school students aged ten to fourteen–on the more complex ideas that academics use to describe the run-off effects of America's carceral system. Namely, I introduce the concepts of political socialization, the carceral state, the criminal justice system, and racially disparate police surveillance. It's important to note that my script is tailored for a broad audience, for children who both do or do not possess dual knowledge as a consequence of their lived experiences, race, and class. Thus, I use a few techniques to effectively bridge the gap between my young audience's experiences with and knowledge of the first face of the state (or lack thereof) and research conducted on the lasting effects of interactions with the second to make up for the discrepancies between how children of different cultures are educated about the criminal justice system state.

For my more fortunate viewers, I anchor my concept expositions in familiar or relatable scenarios with the police before challenging their preconceptions of the government by highlighting its second face, lending them the dual knowledge that those in RCS communities already possess. I juxtapose positive interactions with the government that likely align with their parents' with more disciplinary and severe ones that align with marginalized people's experiences. For viewers who have pre-existing familiarity with the carceral state, I hope to disrupt the typical progression of negative political socialization through two means: providing practical information about citizens' rights in encounters with police officers and concluding with empowerment. Informing them of their rights may make interactions with the carceral state

go more smoothly. In the outro, I aim to translate their experiences to knowledge that can aid their development of political opinions toward participation in political processes, rather than discouragement and avoidance.

As an aside, I filmed in environments that corresponded to the subject matter. When covering the second face of the state, I moved to stairwells with fluorescent or dim lighting and graffiti-covered walls. Find the link to the unlisted YouTube video [redacted], and the script and sources referenced below.

[SECTION 1: INTRODUCTORY HOOK]

Imagine this.

You're walking home from school. A police officer stops you. Maybe you didn't do anything wrong. Maybe it's just a "routine check." Maybe it turns into an interrogation. Maybe something more.

Now imagine that moment doesn't just end there.

What if that interaction quietly shapes how you understand your government… for years?

What if it changes whether you vote or whether you trust our political system at all?

Today, I want to talk about a concept called **political socialization**, and more specifically, how interactions with the carceral state–things like policing, tickets, court appearances, or being jailed–can shape whether people participate in our democracy.

And then, I want to shift gears.

Because if these experiences can push people *away* from civic life, then we need to talk about how to bring people back *in*.

[SECTION 2: WHAT IS POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION?]

Political socialization is the process by which people develop their political beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors over time through different lived experiences.

The outcome of this socialization extends beyond deciding between being a liberal or conservative, or between being a Democrat or a Republican.

Throughout this process, people come to a conclusion about whether they are a valued member of their polity, whether the political system is just, and whether politics are even worth participating in.

These encapsulate someone's attitude toward their government, rather than their stances on individual, hot-button social issues.

While you may think of your parents and friends as the primary contributors to the development of your *beliefs*, researchers have found that your *attitude* toward the government is determined by **your direct experiences with it**.

[SECTION 3: WHAT DO INTERACTIONS WITH THE CARCERAL STATE LOOK LIKE?]

Some experiences with the government can be positive, such as receiving a check from the IRS for a tax refund. However, some of them can be negative and involuntary. Many of these negative experiences come from interactions with the criminal justice system, which represents a darker side of the government that researchers have dubbed the "carceral state."

When I say "criminal justice system," I don't just mean prisons. I'm referring to multiple components of this complex system, which include police officers, policing, fines, and surveillance.

Importantly, you do not have to go to jail or prison to experience contact with the carceral state.

Carceral contact can include:

- getting a traffic ticket
- being stopped and searched by police officers
- being questioned by police officers
- appearing in court
- brief jail stays, for even a few days

These kinds of interactions are negative, as these experiences are involuntary and disciplinary in nature.

For example, if a police officer stops one of your parents while they are driving, they could not opt out of that experience.

Unfortunately, some people have more severe interactions with the carceral state on a much more regular basis, and research shows that the effects of these interactions matter politically.

[SECTION 4: RACIAL DISPARITIES W/ CARCERAL CONTACT + THE POLITICALLY DEMOBILIZING EFFECTS OF NEGATIVE POL. SOCIALIZATION AND INCARCERATION]

When we think about law enforcement, we may think of agents who are around to keep us safe. If someone enters your home intent on stealing your television, it would be a good idea to call the police so they can arrive to protect both you and your belongings.

But what if the officers saw you as a threat in need of their surveillance, rather than in need of their protection? For communities of people who are marginalized by their economic class, race, or both, policing can look very different. Instead of being summoned by a phone call, police officers dwell in and proactively surveil the residents of these communities *as though they are the criminals*.

This results in the kind of hostile interactions that contribute to a person's political socialization. As you know, police officers work on behalf of our government, and thus, interactions with officers reflect on it. Hostile, threatening, or demeaning interactions with the police reflect poorly on our government and can alienate people from participating in vital political processes, such as voting.

Think about it like this: if your main interactions with the government are:

- being stopped
- being fined
- being searched
- being punished

Then the government and its political processes don't feel like something you *participate in*.

It feels like something that happens *to you*.

So, people do not always abstain from voting because they legally *can't* vote. Sometimes, it's because they feel disconnected from our government and undervalued by it.

[SECTION 5: WHY THIS MATTERS FOR DEMOCRACY]

Democracy depends on participation, especially through voter turnout.

But if large groups of people are being quietly pushed out of the decision-making process through their experiences, that creates inequality.

Some voices become more prominent while others retract.

And often, the people most affected by policies, especially policing policies, are the ones least likely to feel empowered to change them.

However, understanding the system through your unique experiences with the government shouldn't make you withdraw from it.

It should help you navigate it and, when possible, change it.

[SECTION 6: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS]

First, understand that you have rights.

Even in interactions with police.

For example, if police officers stop you in public and ask you questions, you have the right to remain silent and not identify yourself by name in a majority of states. Furthermore, if a police officer wishes to pat you down and does not suspect that you have a weapon on your person, you can refuse consent.

If you're curious and would like to know more about your rights when interacting with the police, navigate to the American Civil Liberties Union website, where you can read further.

While knowing your rights will not ensure that every interaction with the criminal justice system will go perfectly, having this information in your back pocket can give you a sense of agency and protection.

[SECTION 7: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IS MORE THAN VOTING]

Beyond knowing your rights, know that voting is not the only way to participate politically, especially if you are not yet eighteen.

Yes, voting matters, but there are many ways to be involved, such as discussing issues you care about with your peers, or joining protest marches with your parents or friends.

Participation can start small–what *really* matters is staying engaged.

[SECTION 8: CONCLUSION - WHY YOUR VOICE STILL MATTERS]

Here's what I'm trying to get at: even if the criminal justice system treats some groups of people unfairly, it doesn't mean their voices don't matter.

In fact, it means the opposite.

The people most affected by policies are those who best understand them. Your experiences provide you with valuable political knowledge–and that knowledge can be powerful should you choose to apply it to the political sphere.

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