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Midterm: Social Action Report

1. Write a paragraph of the mission of the organization. Some questions to consider are: what are the organization's goals? What do they do? (1 paragraph) (8 points)

a. Make sure in this answer that you hyperlink to the agency/organization. (Hidden Water is a local organization that.....)

For my Social Action Report, I chose [Decolonizing Science](#). Decolonizing Science is a grassroots organization, in which a Black scientist uses their expertise in scientific fields to educate both those with and without privilege. Their mission is to combine activism and science, and they do this through a podcast series. Since there are many people who do not have access to scholarly literature, and many – like myself – who struggle with fully understanding concepts just from reading them, I appreciate the way the Decolonizing Science podcast uses everyday language. We often think of only history when we hear the term “decolonize.” Issues with the colonization of science are severely overlooked, and I did realize how much of what I learned about science was told from a white, ableist, wealthy male perspective. For instance, the notion that Black individuals do not feel pain has significantly impacted mortality rates for Black mothers as well as the way Black communities in general are treated negatively in hospitals and doctor's offices. By combining personal anecdotes with overarching scientific knowledge, Decolonizing Science obtains proactive goals, such as educating the public, removing the stigma within Black communities, and evolving medical practices to shift the narrative from colonized ideologies to informed, intersectional, critical ideologies.

2. Pick a 1) review an archived webinar, 2) a live virtual event, 3) listen to a podcast episode (if they have one) or 4) read a resource document or report (any type of written document regarding the organization's research/advocacy, etc) and write a short paragraph summary (1 paragraph) on what it was about (8 points)

I listened to a podcast episode by Decolonizing Science called “[COVID-19 in Prisons: A Conversation with a Wrongfully Convicted Inmate](#)” and I was surprised to learn that inmates were not informed about the pandemic. This episode interviewed a man named Bennu, who has been in prison for 22 years after being convicted of a crime he did not commit. He explained how he noticed inmates around him who appeared healthy one day fall sick and die overnight,

with no explanation from guards or wardens. This opened my eyes to the vulnerability of prison populations and the racialization of the pandemic, in terms of who was/is provided proper medical care and who was/is viewed as disposable groups (e.g. Black prisoners). Bennu also explained how, once inmates started doing their own research and finding out about the pandemic, those in power denied their requests for masks and hand sanitizer, and continued to keep them in the dark about the severity of Covid-19. Bennu founded the Free Alabama Movement in a successful attempt to connect Black inmates with Black communities on the outside. A major takeaway from this episode is that capitalist elites who own prisons do not want to educate or help prisoners; thus, it is vital for inmates to connect with communities outside prisons through these organizations to expose the corruption occurring within the system.

3. Relate what you learned from the webinar, event, podcast, or resource document or report from #2 back to course material. Make 4 separate connections. Make these connections explicit, do not expect me to know what connection you're making. Write answers in four bullet points. (16 points total, 4 points per connection)

a. DO NOT MAKE CONNECTIONS TO THE WEBSITE IN GENERAL. The connections you make should be based on the resource you read/watched/reviewed/listened to from #2.

From what I reviewed for #2, I made several connections to class:

· Connection 1: Critical Race Theory's Interest Convergence

Interest convergence is the notion that progress will only be made if the desires and needs of those in power merge with the powerless. For instance, one example we discussed in class is restaurant owners vs. restaurant workers. If owners realize that workers will be more productive with higher pay, and in turn, more customers will eat at their restaurant (greater profit), then they will raise wages. However, the main objective of capitalists is monopolizing profit, so they will find any means possible to pay workers as little as they can. In terms of Decolonizing Science's conversation with a wrongfully convicted inmate named Bennu about Covid-19, Bennu explained how prisoners' simple requests for masks and hand sanitizer were denied. Bennu was imprisoned in Alabama, but discussed how prisons throughout the nation did not make an economic commitment to prepare for the pandemic. Wealthy billionaires who profit off of the prison system do not want any money coming out of their pocket, and since prisoners are viewed as a disposable population, their interests in having medical supplies did not converge with the interests of elites, who did not want to expend anything financially.

· Connection 2: History Matters/People's History

The idea that history matters is a core theme in restorative justice. Currently, history is told from the perspective of colonists and capitalists in power. Critical criminologists push for the principle of people's history, or history told from the perspective of the oppressed. During the conversation the host of Decolonizing Science had with Bennu, he mentioned he was the founder of the Free Alabama Movement and worked with the National Freedom Movement. This is a way to connect Black communities on the outside with Black inmates inside prisons, as a mechanism of changing the narrative and spreading people's history. Movements like these are beneficial, as they hold prisons accountable for corruption and discrimination and build a nationwide alliance across the United States. Bennu explains how justice for Black inmates is unattainable in the present-day because prisons are rooted in the ideology of white supremacy as a result of the colonization of history and science. This is consequential, as it is not necessarily only white folks purporting this, as there are many Black and Latinx capitalists in positions of power, tokenized by the system to reject people's history. To say that history matters means we must acknowledge that racism in prison is systematic and born from capitalism. As Bennu points out, it cannot be viewed individually as Black vs. White, as most of the guards and wardens within his prison are Black. This is a result of economic disadvantage within a capitalist system that forces the need for job security, even if this means rejecting people's history and, in a sense, turning on your own community.

· Connection 3: Power Over

The third connection Decolonizing Science makes to course material is power over, as opposed to power with. During the pandemic, Bennu explained how inmates in his prison in Alabama had no access to the Internet or the outside world. Although there were over 98,000 Covid-19 cases in prisons, and people would seemingly drop dead overnight, this was a tactic to display power over inmates, by removing their informed sources of education and keeping them in the dark. There is power in numbers against corruption, and prisons kept inmates blind so they would not rebel. Bennu explained how inmates have no access to proper nutrition, and exist in an environment that is not conducive to healthy meals or mental health resources. He even discussed how there are rats in the kitchens and around food, and prisons have no proper sanitation guidelines. As a result, prisoners are a vulnerable population more susceptible to contracting illness. Despite this, Bennu explained how prisoners do not have access to Covid-19 testing or healthcare, and those who work in prisons are not required to be tested routinely either. When connecting this with the concept of power over, we must ask why prisoners are released without being tested. The racialization of mass incarceration results in high rates of Black and Latinx populations being imprisoned. Black people who are released will most likely go home to Black families or friends or, if they do not have social networks, back to Black communities. It is an effective way to introduce Covid-19 into Black communities and exert power over them. If we were to discuss "extreme" theories, which are really not all that extreme, many believe this is

a governmental tactic of controlling overpopulation by eliminating members of minority populations.

· Connection 4: Sociology of Attention

Sociology of attention is the concept that humans cannot multitask efficiently; that is, we can only focus on one thing at a time. During my undergraduate career, I studied psychology, and we watched the gorilla/basketball video. I was shocked that nobody, including myself, noticed the huge gorilla dancing in the middle of the screen, because we could only pay attention to the players. People only tend to pay attention to what we personally have to do for survival (e.g. job, family, individual stressors). Hiding prisoners away makes them invisible, as it does not appear to affect us directly. Media is socially constructed. By removing the racial component of the prison system, our attention is removed from the high rates of Black people in prison for petty crimes. In *Decolonizing Science*, the host discusses how Black men comprise 6.5% of the U.S. population, yet make up 40% of the prison population (03:30-03:38). The media takes our attention from these problematic statistics by vilifying Black communities. They do this by turning our attention to the idea that they are inherently “lazy” and are “mooching off the system.” This completely disregards the fact that the prison system is a violent institution which upholds structural factors such as poverty, racism, and sexism. Bennu goes on to discuss how, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the attention of those who wished to support inmates was shifted to nonprofits and churches, in a successful attempt to encourage civilians to donate to these organizations, instead of directly to prisoners. Unfortunately, most of the funds went to capitalist elites to further maintain power structures in prison systems. Organizations like the Free Alabama Movement, which was founded by Bennu, were removed from mainstream media discussions. To really help prisoners, people on the outside have to make direct contact with them, and social media has helped tremendously with this.

4. Indicate what you thought about the webinar/podcast/resource document. Tell me what you liked, what you think could be improved, and provide some suggestions on how they could have improved it. Your suggestions could be based on the content itself, delivery or presentation. (1 paragraph) (5 points)

I thoroughly enjoyed the podcast episode for *Decolonizing Science*. I really liked how it kept my attention, and instead of just one person lecturing for an hour, there was a conversational aspect to it. My favorite part of the podcast was the first-hand narrative from Bennu, a current inmate in a prison in Alabama. Bennu talked about his own personal experiences in the prison system, and how he has been locked up for 22 years after being wrongfully convicted. This offered an entirely different dynamic from other podcasts, which may discuss corruption and discrimination in the criminal justice system, without granting a subjective perspective. I would like to listen to more episodes of *Decolonizing Science*, and as I skimmed through some of the other episodes, I

noticed that the key theme was a conversation with a new individual, whether they be a professional or everyday citizen, every time. There is no particular issue that I found should be improved, and I appreciate how Decolonizing Science gives Black individuals the opportunity to share their expertise and first-hand experiences navigating a racist, capitalistic system.

5. Based on what you read about the organization and the resource you reviewed, how does this institute/organization frame the issue of restorative and/or transformative justice? If it is not explicitly framed, how does this organization and resource you reviewed embody RJ and/or TJ principles? (1 paragraph) (5 points)

Decolonizing Science aims to break down the punitive measures of the current criminal justice system and work toward incorporating techniques of transformative and restorative justice. One major transformative justice principle that Decolonizing Science encompasses is accountability. The specific episode I listened to regarding Covid-19 in prisons holds the prison system and those in power who run prisons accountable for the 98,000 Covid-19 cases among inmates during the first wave of the pandemic, many of which ended in preventable deaths. As a result, organizations like the Free Alabama Movement and the National Freedom Movement have grown to 2.5 million members, both inside and outside prisons. Decolonizing Science hopes to give a platform to these movements so they may continue to grow successfully.

Decolonizing Science frames restorative justice in a positive light, as well, by focusing on repairing the damage that has been done, both individually and systematically, to Black communities. In recent decades, the decolonization of history has been a major focus. Decolonizing science often goes overlooked, but like history, we must hold those in power responsible for repairing communities who have been torn apart and stripped of proper resources for centuries. Black communities are segregated today with the existence of ghettos. As a result, they have unequal access to education and employment opportunities. This economic strain leads to the need for fast money, often through illegal means, and results in higher rates of Black individuals being thrown in prison. As Bennu said, no justice can ever be granted to Black people in prison because it is the result of centuries of systematic racism. Decolonizing Science aims to uphold the restorative justice principle of repairing damage by giving a platform to those whose narratives are cut out of the dominant perspective.

6. Based on what you read about the organization and the resource you reviewed, did they frame the issues of interpersonal, state violence, harm, etc. in line with the critical criminology approach we've discussed in class (e.g., power over, crimes of the powerful, global elite, etc)? If yes, how? If not, how do you know? (1 paragraph) (5 points)

Decolonizing Science holds the values of the critical criminology school. First, it frames the issue of state violence and harm in line with the critical criminology approach of power over. Prisons have failed inmates during the pandemic, but within a capitalist society, money talks and the small percentage of those in power can abuse thousands of inmates with no repercussions. During the pandemic, there was no social distancing. Bennu explains how there were approximately eight people all sleeping within six feet of each other in cells due to overcrowding. Capitalist elites further enacted power over inmates by their failure to address the drug epidemic inside prisons, which Bennu believes to be worse than the Covid-19 pandemic. Addiction spreads Covid-19 because prisoners addicted to, say, heroin will go through any means to obtain the drug. Those in power know this, but fail to provide resources to help prisoners detox and stay sober. As a result, prisoners were forced to sell necessary items, such as the few masks prisons did distribute, for drugs. This is a vicious cycle used to keep prisoners a vulnerable population that those in charge can keep power over and exploit.

Secondly, Decolonizing Science frames the issues of state violence and harm with the critical criminology approach of crimes of the powerful. Bennu was being tried for a gunshot that killed his alleged victim, despite being wrongfully accused. He only learned of the charges the day he went to trial, as Bennu understood he was being tried for lesser charges. This is problematic, as it prevents individuals, especially individuals of color, from being informed and properly defending themselves. This is a racialized way that those in power can illegally imprison innocent communities. When taking into account that Black defendants from low-income neighborhoods cannot afford proper defense, these crimes of the powerful are further exacerbated. This is problematic, as it results in innocent people being sent to prison for petty crimes, and has even led to extreme cases where innocent people have been on death row. The wealthy elite know this, but do not want to change a system that benefits them. The powerful profit from overcrowding in prisons. More prisoners means more free labor which, in turn, means greater profit. Prisoners make items like clothing and toys for only a few cents an hour, and elites then sell these items at extremely inflated prices. Bennu explains how they were even expected to make hand sanitizer during the pandemic, yet were unable to keep any for themselves, further spreading Covid-19. These crimes are not viewed as crimes within a capitalistic system that values goods and services over quality of life.

7. Reflect on this assignment. Some questions to consider: Did you like learning about what this organization is doing? This assignment is also meant to show you that there are tons of think tanks, institutes, non-profit, activist, and academic organizations that are out there. Does it give you any desire to search for additional organizations for your own career interests? What was the most difficult part of this assignment and why? Do you have any suggestions on how I can improve this assignment in the future? Any other comments? (1 paragraph) (8 points)

I am glad that I chose Decolonizing Science. I enjoy learning about its mission in confronting abuse faced by Black individuals in the medical fields, whether they be patients, doctors, or researchers. For my future career, I am interested in working with survivors of intimate partner violence, specifically those who have faced sexual violence. I understand that the racial component of intimate partner violence cannot be ignored, but I have had trouble finding mainstream podcasts and resources specifically dedicated to injustices toward Black communities in both mental and physical health spaces. Although Decolonizing Science is not specifically dedicated toward intimate partner violence and sexual violence, it does focus on systematic disadvantages (e.g. economic disparities) which produce strain and result in higher rates of victimization within Black communities. This has definitely given me the desire to seek out additional resources and incorporate them into my own career interests.