

Podcast Transcript

(Intro Music)

Dominic: Hello! Welcome to our segment of Podcasts United, Roots of Distrust. I'm Dominic Indelicato...

Jared: ...and I'm Jared Pond. The conflict with police has gained great notoriety recently, but is this really a new problem? We've seen riots in Ferguson and Baltimore. Escalated violence used against officers. Looting, fire, murder. Can we learn from our mistakes and prevent this in the future? To do so we are going to look into the past.

Dominic: As we touch on these subjects we'd like you to keep a few things in mind. Do you feel safe in your community? and how do you place your trust...in the police or in the communities they serve?

Jared: People seem to have a transparent view of the officers in their community, that is they don't seem to trust their intentions. Why is this happening?

Dominic: To find out, we will need look back on the book Outcasts United to see how the distrust between refugees and the city of Clarkston relates to our issue.

Jared: We realize that the faults with policing are mutual. Officers don't always perform as well as they should, but the community is not perfect either. Dom, how do you think our country could solve this?

Dominic: I think the answer is obvious Jared.....donuts.

(DUN-DUN-DUNNN!)

Jared: Funnnnny [sarcastic]

Dominic: So really, we need to touch on some information before we can even get into how to solve trust issues. We have to first look at issues caused by distrust in the police.

Jared: Would you consider Ferguson a good example?

Dominic: Definitely. We've all heard about Ferguson. We know about how Officer Darren Wilson shot Michael Brown, and the confusion that followed. His not guilty verdict sparked so much violence in Ferguson that the National Guard had to be called in to aid the police. But while the riots and backlash that followed the Ferguson Case appeared unique, the country saw an event unfold in a way alarmingly close to the Ferguson unrest over a decade earlier.

Newscaster: [discusses L.A. Riots] (background noise of the helicopter he's riding in)

It's quite a rampage here and it's gone on for a while. It's followed the same pattern that we have seen before. A big fire gets lit, the firefighters become busy, and then the neighboring

stores are quickly drained of every ounce of merchandise. But it's like I mentioned before, you have to sit here and witness little children, women, the shopping bags full and clothes draped over the shoulders and arms as they come pouring out of the storefronts. It uh, it has no bounds. There is no question about that. It has no bounds. And they uh. It doesn't matter what part of the city you go into now. This portion of Los Angeles that has been hit by this is so large that we have crossed all racial boundaries. We are in predominantly Hispanic part of the city right now. Third and El Barado. and they have been taking everything out of every store. Now they are proceeding to set more fires along El Barado street. We have another one that has broken out just in the past ten minutes or so. Presumably this will be followed by other stores being hit by the vandals and looters because they usually jump from one to another. They've just about cleaned out the one we've been watching during the mayor's speech.

Jared: Sound familiar? This is not Ferguson, but you could be fooled. That was audio from the L.A. Riots.

Dominic: Basically, a man named Rodney King was on a high speed car chase with police that ended in LA County. Over 20 officers surrounded him, and four of them proceeded to beat King with their batons over 50 times while the others stayed back and watched.

Jared: That's clearly more than necessary

Dominic: I can't think of any justification for such an over the top attack

Jared: Now, this whole ordeal was captured on camera, and sent straight to the news stations.

Dominic: The four officers responsible for the beating, Sergeant Stacey Koon and officers Laurence Michael Powell, Timothy Wind, and Theodore Briseno, are indicted, but by 1992 they're acquitted.

Jared: This causes a massive outrage in the streets of LA.

Dominic: We're talking looting, burning over one thousand buildings, and even a state of emergency.

Jared: The level of violence was astounding. At one point, a white truck driver was attacked by rioters, being pulled from his truck and beaten.

(dramatic music)

Dominic: More than fifty people are left dead, and another two thousand are injured.

Jared: This is starting to sound like a war zone

Dominic: On top of that, over twelve thousand arrests are made

Jared: I guess Orange really is the new Black

(Jail door closing)

Dominic: Good Netflix references aside, they had to call in the National Guard...

Jared: Over six thousand, five hundred members...

Dominic: Along with eleven hundred marines and six hundred army soldiers

Jared: This is starting to sound awfully familiar

Dominic: The events following the beating of Rodney King appear to be almost identical to the backlash after the shooting of Michael Brown.

Jared: So what does this say about situations like this in the future?

Dominic: Based on the striking similarities we've seen between the LA and Ferguson riots, it's safe to say that history has a nasty habit of repeating itself. Events like this are going to unfold like this every time unless we change the way we see the individuals who were involved

Jared: Individuals like Rodney King or Darren Wilson?

Dominic: Yes. The media has a way of twisting and exaggerating things quickly. If people can attempt to change their perspective from what they immediately see or hear, situations can be resolved quickly, or even prevented before they happen.

Jared: While we have made some progress in the past, we still find this issue in our news time after time.

Dominic: Something needs to be done about this repeating issue, not only in Ferguson, but across the country. Our own President addresses this dilemma, as shown in this short audio clip.

President Obama:

We need to recognize that this is not just an issue for Ferguson. This is an issue for America. We have made enormous progress in race relations over the course of the past several decades. I have witnessed that in my own life and to deny that progress I think is to deny America's capacity for change. But what is also true is that there are still problems and communities of color are not just making these problems up.

Jared: If there is one thing to take from that, it's that this is a national issue. There have been confrontations in Baltimore, Cincinnati, Atlanta...and Detroit. There were riots in East St. Louis back in the 60's and I lacked to mention the Watts Riot which was about as violent and destructive as those involving Rodney King. There was the debate about the stranglehold used on Eric Garner which led to his death in New York City. The list really does just goes on and on. The further we look back, the easier it is to see how history has repeated itself.

Dominic: I think the problem is that we, as a country, just don't seem to learn from our mistakes. We treat everything like it hasn't happened before, but it has. Should the death of one American cause the destruction of a municipality? Of course not, but nothing stops this from happening. The police try, but their efforts irritate the crowds even further.

Jared: The relationship between these riots is clear. There is a blatant distrust in the enforcement of law. This may be due to socioeconomic conditions of the community such as poverty or it could be due to recent events. Some just feel like the police aren't there when they need them or they fear the police.

Dominic: The point is that once this trust is questioned, it's hard to earn it back. This works in both directions. Trust in the police and trust by the police in the individuals they protect. If you think about it, when an officer pulls you over they are making a judgement call. You tell them your story and they decide whether to let you off with a warning, to ticket you, or, if need be, investigate further. The community's relationship with officers has a massive impact on this decision. It's likely that an officer in North St. Louis County for example would be more skeptical than an officer patrolling a smaller closely knit town in central Missouri.

Jared: Speaking of closely knit towns...this town right outside of Atlanta, Clarkston, has seen its own stress on relations. The novel *Outcasts United* focuses on the struggles caused by and influenced on an influx of refugees settled there.

Dominic: Despite the fact that these refugees have escaped the purging of their home countries, they are not well greeted by the American society.

Jared: With the lack of diversity training, police were continuously writing traffic violations against the refugees. Clarkston drew 30% of its revenue from tickets. Guess what it should've been making? 9%!

Dominic: Ouch! I don't think I have room to complain. I do notice that these stats are strikingly similar to an article by the New York Times called "A Chilling Portrait of Ferguson." African-Americans — who made up 67 percent of Ferguson's population — accounted for 85 percent of vehicle stops, 90 percent of citations and 93 percent of all arrests. African-Americans were more than twice as likely as white drivers to be searched during vehicle stops, and were significantly more likely to be ticketed for speeding.

Jared: No wonder these people don't trust the police. They feel like they are being singled out whether they are African Americans or refugees. They feel mistreated and misrepresented. Basically, the police in these communities do not reflect the diversity of the communities they serve.

Dominic: The fact is that the police officers in Clarkston did not understand the refugees or why they acted the way they did. Similarly, the refugees did not understand the laws or customs of the United States.

Jared: Refugees were viewed as a constant problem because they were completely unaware of basic etiquette when it came to the police. According to St. John, the author of *Outcasts United*, “some, when pulled over, gesticulated and cried out, and even reached out to touch the officers” (40). We all know touching an officer is not something you want to do.

Dominic: But... this misinterpretation can be viewed like this. Warren St. John mentions the story of how a group of refugees that were speaking excitedly into a phone had a run in with a Clarkston officer.

Jared: They were talking to a relative that they hadn't seen in a decade. Imagine that. Giving the family member you haven't seen in so long the directions they need to reunite with you half of a world away.

Dominic: Then the recent arrival pulls up and parks in a fire lane.

Jared: The police officer had been eying the group and at the sight of this violation approaches the man to ticket him. In the refugee's excitement and confusion, he hugs the officer thinking that the officer loves him.

Dominic: Of course, the officer is shocked and wants to charge him with assault.

Jared: That's a bit drastic.

Dominic: It's all a matter of perspective...

Jared: Well, let's take another perspective then. This is a clip from the video *So Violent A Nation*.

Flores-Velasquez: Okay, an example is a police officer working in an Asian community where you have recent arrivals, where the experience of those Asian refugees is one of extreme fear of police officers, so that when a police officer coming down the street comes across an Asian refugee, perhaps the first reaction of that Asian refugee is going to be to turnaround and run away. Well...

Moyers: Immediately becoming a suspect.

Flores-Velasquez: Right, immediately becoming a suspect, when actually, he or she didn't commit any crime, but the experience in their native country is one of extreme fear of police.

Dominic: What can we take from this? Police do not need to reinforce the fear that these refugees feel against them. Police need to be informed so they can act justly and earn the trust of these new immigrants.

Jared: While we are on the subject of *Outcasts United*, let's talk about Chime.

Dominic: Chike Chime was a refugee nonetheless, but he did not let this stop him from becoming a successful businessman. Since he was surprisingly more wealthy than the rest of the refugees, he was able to afford a nice vehicle.

Jared: Officer Jordan had never seen a refugee driving in such style. His first suspicion was that it was stolen. This racial profiling led Jordan to pull Chime over.

(police sirens)

Dominic: For reasons that were unclear and unprovoked Jordan bashed Chime in the head with his flashlight and sprayed him in the face with mace. He threw him in the back of his squad car carelessly as Chime whimpered from pain. Jordan added in his own crude remarks afterward.

Jared: No one wants to hear, “I hope it burns your eyes out” or “It’s you-it’s Africans ...I have nothing but problems from you guys.”

Dominic: This event mirrors images of the abuse on Rodney King. He is beaten ceaselessly by a police officer. Do we ever learn?

Jared: How does this misunderstanding relate to riots you might ask?

Dominic: Well, misunderstandings usually lead to conflict and conflict leads to more misunderstandings. People frame misconceptions and they lose faith that police are performing their duties well.

Jared: So once this builds up, you can get a riot. It just takes the match to light the flame. No pun intended Ferguson.

Dominic: Michael Brown...Rodney King. They are all matches.

Jared: The truth is...if you don’t fix the social problems that are causing disputes between the police and the community, then the problem is just going to repeat itself.

(eerie music, gunshots, police cars passing)

Flores-Velasquez: First we have to eliminate that fear and that mistrust that exists between the community and the police, and especially that fear and mistrust that exist in communities of color, where much of this violence is taking place.

Jared: What is the real cause of this distrust? If this problem...these riots just seem to repeat themselves, then how is our country supposed to prevent them in the future?

Dominic: Can we say that police are justified by their actions? or Are police forces basing their judgements completely off of racial bias?

Jared: The issue is how could we solve this problem of distrust when it is not always clear who is to blame. Sure. Everyone has their opinion, and based off of isolated incidents they are often correct. But we are talking about the big picture here. How may our country fix trust between police and communities throughout the country? There is no way for everyone to trust the police, we realize that, but what can be done to help?

Dominic: I think we can take a bit from Outcasts United. The new police chief, an African himself, helps to bridge the gap between the people and his police force. For Clarkston, this is the first time that the refugees have been represented by a position of authority.

Jared: It's important to notice the amount of changes he makes to the system because he takes the initiative to identify the problem. This chief, Tony Scipio, interviews citizens before he begins his active duty.

Dominic: He doesn't take his position lightly. He holds his officers to a high degree of courtesy, professionalism, and respect. He offers open ride alongs, diversity training, and strict supervision. He essentially roots out the officers that aren't right for the job. The ones causing all the problems.

Jared: What can we learn from this? Diversity training helps to explain the reactions of various ethnicities so that police do not overreact. Also, good supervision does two things: it tells the community that police are held liable for their actions and it opens communication up between police and the community.

Dominic: The problem with trust between police and the community is that people simply do not have all of the information. Twice a year, the Decatur Police Department's Community Services Unit hosts an event at a Cracker Barrel that allows people in the community to become more comfortable with cops by talking about issues or problems in neighborhoods or just getting to know the police force a little better.

Jared: This method has a surprising effect on the community. People receive a very personal experience with officers and see them as fellow human beings. Opening a dialogue between the community and the police can lead to better crime prevention because citizens tell police directly what they want changed. The more information the police have, the more likely police are to prevent crime in the future.

Dominic: This dialogue not only acts as a method of suggestion and cooperation, but it checks the actions of the police too. Mrs. Velazquez from So Violent A Nation helps elaborate.

Flores-Velasquez: We need to have civilian oversight of police actions when we have abuse or mistreatment of citizens.

Moyers: Doesn't that inhibit the police? Doesn't it make the police fear the citizens who fear them, and increase the distance between them?

Flores-Velasquez: Police officers, and I've had police officers tell me, "I don't fear a police review board because I have nothing to hide -- I'm a good cop." The good cops aren't going to fear this kind of civilian oversight.

Jared: It is the responsibility of both sides to maintain the trust. Bad cops don't belong in the police force and if they are causing the problems, then citizens and police chiefs need to ensure that they don't stick around.

Dominic: Well. I can see what should be done, but what have we been doing wrong. Sure. There are bad cops, but there are so many more cops that do their jobs well. There is something deeper that we aren't seeing here. Let's take another look at So Violent A Nation.

Rashidi: Collectively we have historically dealt with problems after the fact. I think we need to start in the early prevention stage if we are really going to take control of the situation that not only exists in Dallas, but in the whole country.

Moyers: Why do you think crime has gotten out of hand?

Rashidi: Crime has always been out of hand in America. This country was based and built on the premise of violence, and we shouldn't be surprised that the violence is continually being perpetuated to this day.

Jared: Our country's system is heavily set upon punishment of crime as opposed to preventing crime. We give off this message....if you do wrong, we're going to lock you up for a long time. This method has not been working.

Dominic: What do people see when they see a cop? They see the men and women who keep the criminals off of the streets...or at least that's what we'd like them to see.

Jared: But...when the criminals aren't on the streets...they go to prisons where they don't really learn from their mistakes. They don't benefit society in there. All they do is drain money from the national budget. And as crime rises, so does the number of prisons.

Dominic: Sure. We want to feel safe, but that doesn't mean we lock away everyone who does wrong. Criminals need to be reintegrated into society as productive members eventually. Now I don't want to get into that because that is a whole other argument, but it is an important factor into how we view the police.

Jared: If our society wants to remove the violence from coming to fruition, then it is our responsibility to take preventative action. This would predominantly take part in the education of the children at home which would be reinforced at school.

Dominic: And when it comes to the poor neighborhoods where the trust has declined, they need to be shown that people do care about them, that they don't have to resort to violence out of frustration or necessity.

Jared: Trust can only be repaired if we resolve the social problems that plague our country.

Dominic: We realize that solving trust is not simple. What is a community? Well, it's a group of individuals all with their own opinions.

Jared: It is not possible to get everyone to trust the police. That is a pipe dream. But for those of you who want this...those of you who want to make your community better...listen, research, and communicate.

Dominic: We are telling you that violence, these riots, are a direct result of ignorance. Set in ways that continue through time. Why does trust with the police decline? It's because people don't take action to make it better.

Jared: We get caught up in the media. We look at these events and say, "The world is really going downhill." That doesn't have to be us. The world is what we make of it.

Dominic: Don't get caught up with the news. Treat officers with respect and you will receive the same. If you live in an ethnically diverse community, encourage diversity training.

Jared: If you feel wronged by an officer, report the occurrence to his department.

Dominic: If crime increases in your neighborhood, let your concerns be known.

Jared: Communication is key to improving relations and positive relations with police are pivotal to reducing violence.

Dominic: We can solve this if we work together. We can find....The Roots of Distrust.

(Same music as in the intro)

(New peppy music plays in the background)

Mark: Hello there I'm Mark Hampton. Thank you for listening to our edition of Podcasts United. Tune in to hear more from our associates. Next up is food culture. We'd like to give a special thanks to Warren St. John. His novel inspired these works and the topics we have discussed. Be sure to read Outcasts United in your spare time. If you would like to see a list of our sources, you can see them in the transcript of this episode. Signing off...

(Lamp clicking off)

Police/Community Relation Citations/Sources Page

Sources for Background & Examples

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Newscast about LA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gCHS7CsjsE>

Obama responds to events in Ferguson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIBZqxnFQsw>

Audio Clips

Graham's Intro

Graham Stanfill, 2015. *SoundCloud*. Web. 10 Nov. 2015.

<<https://soundcloud.com/cathexisedm/podcasts-united/s-rHtY6>>.

Comedic Effect

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bW7Op86ox9g>

Intense Music

Graham Stanfill, 2015. *SoundCloud*. Web. 12 Nov. 2015.

<<https://soundcloud.com/cathexisedm/tracks>>.

Gunshots Audio Sources:

Bashing & Rioting

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPrfjd3vl2s>

Erie Music

<http://freesound.org/people/ERH/sounds/33987/>

Gunshot

<https://freesound.org/people/Kleeb/sounds/180960/>

Police Sirens

<https://freesound.org/people/goose278/sounds/165166/>

Police Siren

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8lNY3NO30c>

Jail Cell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBITGyJynfA>

Outro Music

Crywolf & Ianborg. "Stay." Okami Records, 2014. MP3

Lamp Clicking

Roommate's Lamp.