



# Mass Incarceration and Microaggressions: America's Modern Day Slavery

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## Abstract

The Black population has historically been disregarded, abused, and overlooked. Its past and present are still marred by white supremacy which displays itself in various ways. This includes but is not limited to racism in the justice system, law enforcement, sports, home-buying, educational institutions, etc. Some members of the Black population have been successful at navigating this reality while others struggle to persevere. Further, individuals of any race can and do engage in criminal behavior, but people of color are incarcerated at disproportionate rates. Facing the stress of an unjust world on a daily basis can manifest physically emotionally, and mentally. This paper analyzes the effects of mass incarceration and microaggressions on Black Americans.

Keywords: microaggressions, incarceration, Black Americans, racism

## INTRODUCTION

The foundation of the U.S. was built on racism, oppression, genocide, and white supremacy. During America's infancy, Native Americans were forced either into enslavement or death by Spanish conquistadors (Smithsonian, 2022). West Africans were bought and sold to countries along the Caribbean and in the Americas. They went on to construct and cultivate the land that would become the United States (Smithsonian, 2022). After more than 300 years of slavery and slave revolts, African descendants never received reparations after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed. In fact, some slave owners were compensated for the inconvenience of losing their chattel, while former slaves were not even aware that the Emancipation Proclamation existed (Craemer, 2021). African descendants were forced to navigate a country where their culture, language, and humanity had been torn from them by means of rapes, beatings, and other forms of mistreatment years after they were freed (King, 2014). They

eventually found jobs that underpaid and built Black only areas with their own homes and businesses that were vandalized by White individuals (Wilkins et al., 2013). Due to segregation, they were not allowed to share schools or hospitals with their White peers (Massey & Tannen, 2018). Violence, murder, and unfair laws at Black individuals' expense has continued for decades after slavery. From Jim Crow lynchings to the Black Power movement to Black Lives Matter, Black individuals have persevered. This does not mean it has been easy. What it means is that white supremacy and racism have morphed with the times but have always been present with the reinforcement of Black inferiority at the forefront.

Due to the racist makeup of society, being born Black in America comes with certain difficulties and expectations as soon as the baby breaches the birth canal. These same difficulties and expectations do not apply to White individuals, at least not for racially related reasons. From birth, the life expectancy of a Black child is years shorter than that of his/her non-Black counterparts (NIH, 2022). Parents who are aware of the obstacles their child will face, try to prepare them for what it is like to be Black in America. This may look like teaching five-year-olds not to resist arrest if they are arrested when they are older because the police will kill them or instilling the idea that they have to work twice as hard to get half as far as White individuals. The awareness of racism and inferior treatment is undeniable and palpably present early on in the lives of Black individuals.

It is not always obvious how the stressors of being African American affect people physically, but there are statistics to consider. Black women suffer from more

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aggressive breast cancer and have lower survival rates than other races (Whitehead & Hearn, 2015). Black individuals are more likely to suffer from diabetes, asthma, cancer, osteoporosis, and experience higher levels of blood pressure (Morgan, 2008; Barajas et al., 2019). Researchers have wondered if the Black community's position in society is the link. At times, Black Americans' diets, which can be high in fat, sugar, and salt are blamed. Parts of this diet originate from slavery where enslaved Africans were given the worst parts of the animal to eat (Grant, 2006). Other options included salty pieces of meat and an abundance of starches leading to diets high in fat and low in nutrition resulting in physical ailments (Vance, 2018). Starches were common because they gave the illusion of being more filling than they were and gave the enslaved people energy (Vance, 2018). They were forced to find ways to add flavor in order to consume things that were not meant for consumption. This is likely why there is the belief that Black soul food is flavorful or over seasoned, and food cooked by White people is unseasoned or bland. Regardless, even the diet during slavery has persisted for generations, which still could affect Black individuals' health today.

Residual Effects of Slavery (RES) are described as "the ways in which the racist treatment of African Americans, during and after slavery, has impacted multiple generations" (Wilkins et al., 2013, p. 15). Due to RES, Black individuals experience low self-esteem, paranoia, and anxiety sometimes just at the expectation of racism (Clark et al., 1999; Do et al., 2019). When this happens multi-generationally, it can be labeled as Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) because of the persistent psychological effects on Black individuals that are not present in White lives (Wilkins et al., 2013). What is unfortunate is the fact that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in response to sexual or violent trauma is accepted generally, but PTSS is not accepted even though it is the result of the same occurrences. The difference is that PTSS only applies to descendants of slaves. These are just some hardships that affect the Black population in different ways than other races. Black individuals are more affected by racism and slavery than previously considered.

Black Americans undergo stressors that other groups do not. It is common knowledge that stress can cause headaches or fatigue, but it is important to note other physical and mental manifestations. These include issues with sleeping patterns, feelings of dread, high blood pressure, heartburn, weight gain/loss, and worsening of existing conditions (APA, 2018). Obesity, cardiovascular disease, and breast cancer are important to mention considering these conditions are identified at higher rates or are more aggressive in Black Americans than of other racial groups (Clark, 2001; Morgan, 2008). This could be due to Black individuals' unfair positioning in society and not due to genetics. Stress manifests physically and mentally and while anyone can experience it at one point or another it is vital to locate the source in Black Americans.

### **American Police Force and the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment**

With the foundation of America being white supremacy, there is no wonder that it is still embedded in today's society. The origin of policing is not excluded from this. Originally called slave patrol, policing was put in place to control and evoke fear in enslaved people (NAACP, 2022). Its goal was to discourage revolts and disobedience. This way, slave owners could maintain ownership of their slaves and control their behavior. Slave patrolmen were allowed to use excessive force to enter homes that were believed to be

hiding runaway slaves. The beginnings of modern-day police brutality are evident but it was not until the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment that Slave Patrol officers were not needed (NAACP, 2022).

The general public is still under the impression that the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment condemns slavery however, this is false as it revealed under certain circumstances slavery is still considered acceptable. The 13<sup>th</sup> amendment states, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction" (NAACP, 2022). Put simply, slavery is allowed when someone has been convicted of a crime, and once tied into America's relationship with racism it becomes apparent why Black individuals are overrepresented in the prison system; slavery is still legal and the racist remnants of slave patrols are active.

### **Criminal Justice System**

Although the criminal justice system houses only 5% of the world's population, the U.S accounts for 25% of prisoners with Black men being 6.6 times more likely to be imprisoned than White men or Latinos (Kaeble & Cowhig, 2018). This says that America's problems are not only domestic but international. According to Kaeble and Cowhig (2018), in 2016, there were 2,162,400 adults in American prisons with a substantial amount belonging to minority groups.

Controversial and discriminatory are often used to describe the criminal justice system. As stated, Black individuals are sent to prison at disproportionate rates; composing 13% of the population but 38.4% of the prison population (Bureau of Prisons, 2020). This contrasts with White individuals making up 61.5% of the population but 57.6% of the prison population. This reveals that Black individuals are overrepresented in prison while there is a slight underrepresentation of White individuals. Ideally, if a group makes up 13% of a population, then about 13% would be incarcerated, suggesting that racial groups are pulled over, arrested, and convicted at proportionate rates.

With Black individuals making up more of the prison population than they should, there is the belief that they engage in criminal behavior more than other races. This is not only untrue but is an example of the association of; White with innocence and Black with negativity or criminality. Racial profiling must also be considered, this is the targeting of individuals for suspicion of a crime based on their race, ethnicity, religion, or nationality (Hayle et al., 2016). Taking into account this term, one has to consider that there are other factors to Black imprisonment other than the affinity for criminality.

The experience of blackness in America can already be difficult enough without having a criminal record, yet it is nearly insurmountable when an individual has a felony. Illegal searches and police brutality are more justified when someone has a record. Certain jobs are off-limits, and unemployment rates are higher (NAACP, 2022) even after the sentence has been served. The actual time spent in prison can also produce effects and suffering through harsher prison sentences because of race can also weigh on an individual mentally. It is important to note that it is not to say White individuals do not experience stress when in prison, but to recognize their race did not cause them to be arrested and sentenced harshly. Black inmates can endure the same PTSD or depression as other races, but their racial background plays a role whereas White inmates' mental

health issues may be due to other factors like being innocent, feelings of entitlement, or fear. This is similar to the difference between depression in men and men's depression. One focuses on how men express their depression and the other is depression that is unique to men because they are males. Highlighting how these obstacles affect Black individuals physically, emotionally, and mentally when considering ways to provide adequate counseling services.

### Prison Industrial Complex

The prison industrial complex has been a topic of contention for years as for-profit prisons, private prisons, and corporations are able to enter contracts with them, and the government forces prisoners to create products for them for nearly nothing (Nellis, 2021). Corporations may have inmates assist with making clothing, food, or toy products. For instance, Walmart or McDonald's may work with and/or bribe politicians to support for-profit prisons. In politics, the word lobbying is preferred to as bribing (Nellis, 2021), it is important to mention that lobbying is considered legal while bribing is not however, payment and influence are crucial factors within both terms. The influential corporations are allowed to pay inmates less than a dollar a day while making billions (Nellis, 2021). If slave labor is defined as labor that is forced and/or inadequately rewarded then this is in fact slave labor. Further, politicians receive contributions or legal kickbacks for assisting with this, what complicates this is the fact that private prison companies unite with lawmakers and interest groups to advocate for privatization through the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) (Gotsch & Vashti, 2018). This mimics free labor during slavery, and the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment legalizes it. This amendment does not target people of color in its rhetoric, but because of America's connection to racism, they are still victims of injustice due to race. So, this leads to Black Americans still being enslaved more than 150 years after slavery. Knowing this, falling victim to it and having to live in a country that actively perpetuates it can weigh on Black individuals as a collective even if the symptoms present the same way in other groups of people. The only symptom that may be unique to people of color are the feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, or worthlessness that surface solely due to race and the obstacles that come with it.

### Time Served

Prison can cause rapid declines in physical health (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2013). This is due to the fact that although meals are served regularly, they are lacking in nutrition and quantity. Smoking, poor ventilation, sanitation, infestations, lack of family visits, airborne diseases, and other illnesses like HIV and hepatitis only add to this harsh environment (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2013). Prisons can be likened to the ships that brought Africans to the Americas during the Middle Passage. Enslaved Africans were chained to the ship in crowded rooms where they could not sit or stand comfortably (Liverpool, 2022). Germs and horrific smells circulated in these quarters where there was no access to bathrooms to bathe, use the toilet, and take care of menstrual needs (Vance, 2018). The voyage could take months at a time resulting in emaciated captives. It is important to recognize how the conditions of American prisons are not much different.

Aside from malnutrition and illness, physical health is jeopardized in another way. Some inmates are targeted in

the same ways that enslaved people were. Both male and female prisoners report physical assaults at the hands of their peers and guards (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2013). This may be beatings or sexual violations. When beatings and rapes of Black inmates at the hands of the people in charge are taken into account, especially if the violators are White, the conditions of slavery must come to mind. While on the slave ships, women and children were separated from the men like in prison (Liverpool, 2022). Sometimes women were able to have limited access to the deck for mobility and fresh air. Unfortunately, that came with a cost. The crew would sexually assault their female captives (Grant, 2006; Liverpool, 2022). Outside of the injuries obtained from forced penetration, prisoners can be injured while fighting off their abuser. This could lead to head injuries, cuts, bruising, and in some cases, death. The terms 'slaves' and 'inmates' can be used interchangeably in these cases. These displays of brutality are nearly identical even though they are hundreds of years apart.

Further, in addition to the physical assaults that will almost guarantee the need for a medical professional and counselor, overcrowding and isolation are the main stressors (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2013). These can actually lead to suicide and psychiatric commitment based on research that has been conducted since the 1980s (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2013). This makes sense considering that while humans enjoy personal time, they are also social beings. Clearly, the struggle to find the right balance leads to poor mental health for some inmates. The obvious difference here is that enslaved Africans did not have any access to healthcare services while prisoners have access to some type of medical facilities. This may be the most distinct variation between prison and slavery.

Further, juvenile courts are not above inflicting injustice either. Long before adulthood, youth of color are subjected to biases in the criminal justice system. According to Dragomir and Tadros (2020), while youth of color only comprise 34% of the population, they are 62% of adolescents charged in the juvenile justice system. This is reminiscent of the statistics for Black adults who are incarcerated. It is evident that Black Americans are arrested at higher rates as well as convicted at higher rates, even as teenagers, leading to lifelong mental and physical health issues. If unchecked, these same issues can lead to further incarceration in the near future.

### Reintegration

According to Morenoff & Harding (2014), being released from prison and reintegrating into the community is less likely to be successful because mass incarceration challenges the structure and social organization of said community. This is another obvious and dangerous correlation to slavery. So not only does mass incarceration target Black individuals like slavery did, but it also disrupts the family structure in similar ways. During slavery, married couples were separated never to be reunited. People were bought and sold never to see their parents or siblings again, it was not always known where someone ended up or if they were even alive. As far as prison is concerned, getting convicted of crimes not only physically separates people from their families but also affects voting rights and career options. Former slaves also struggled with these obstacles once they became aware of their freedom. Unfortunately, finding their place in society and securing living quarters and jobs were major tasks then and still now.

In order to make reintegration a smoother process, more effective counseling services are crucial. This can help combat “Post-Incarceration Syndrome” which is similar to PTSD and involves former inmates continuing to suffer the mental effects of prison (Quandt & Jones, 2021). Mental health professionals may help alleviate some of the residual effects of incarceration.

### Microaggressions

When having effective conversations about race, it is imperative to discuss microaggressions. They are defined as intentional or unintentional slights that send a negative message to individuals based solely on a marginalized group (Tadros & Owens, 2021). This can look like non-Black individuals being surprised that Black individuals earn their money through legal means, assumptions about academic inferiority, stereotypical misrepresentations, and negative expectations overall (Woods-Jaeger et al., 2022). Since racism is sometimes believed to only occur on large scales like slavery or mass incarceration, microaggressions are overlooked and disregarded when detailing the unjust Black American experience. People of color regularly experience microaggressions due to their culture or race since they do not fit the standard of whiteness. This can start during childhood. In fact, studies indicate that Black children experience school-based microaggressions that influence them academically, socially, and behaviorally. Children who suffer from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) or traumatic events like neglect, bullying, or witnessing community violence could be more deeply affected by this (Woods-Jaeger et al., 2022).

### Racial Battle Fatigue

If microaggressions are present from school age and on, this can lead to racial battle fatigue by adulthood. Racial battle fatigue is the accumulation of racial microaggressions which can lead to the manifestation of negative health (Tadros & Owens, 2021). Black individuals may seek professional assistance to minimize this struggle. This may look like scheduling doctor’s appointments or time with a therapist. Talking about race issues during a therapy session could lead to not just being able to define microaggressions but pinpoint why they are problematic. Counseling can offer validation to Black individuals who feel disrespected but are not exactly sure how to put their feelings into words. Unfortunately, even some counselors are not immune to falling victim to using microaggressions themselves. Therapists outside of marginalized groups may not realize their own biases, which is why counseling can be beneficial, but it is not guaranteed to be successful. Counselors participating in training and actively being aware of cultural differences are essential in tackling this issue (Tadros & Owens, 2021). What may also be helpful is counselors learning in diverse classrooms at the Bachelors, Masters, and Doctorate levels (Tadros & Owens, 2021). Another way to show support for underserved communities is by highlighting the areas where services are needed. Ignoring these issues in therapy only further perpetuates white supremacy through microaggressions, reinforces white fragility, and disregards marginalized groups’ unique issues.

### Educational Institutions and the Workplace

In adulthood, there have been reported cases of microaggressions on college campuses. There is support to suggest that reducing microaggressions can increase

camaraderie and comfort on campus, which can result in a positive change in academics and social skills (Liu et al., 2019). This is not limited to students but also Black staff. Black professors recall their White counterparts going through an easier hiring process where their merits were sufficient (Liu et al., 2019). Microaggressions can begin identity issues and cause individuals to question their value in the workplace and life (Liu et al., 2019). In schools filled with scholars where everyone should be well-educated, there is still much more progress to be made at the institutional and interpersonal levels.

Microaggressions also exist in other kinds of workplaces. According to Young et al. (2015), managers and employers may actively try to be unbiased in the workplace but still have unconscious negative feelings towards people of color. This can lead to tension between the individuals who experience the microaggressions and the ones who do not experience them and are not aware that something negative occurred (Young et al., 2015). In the workplace, people of color might start to be overly considerate of White individuals’ feelings, allow white counterparts to speak over them, or just accommodate White individuals in general. This may cause people of color to forfeit their own psychological and emotional welfare (Holoien & Shelton, 2012). The issue needs to be addressed, but there may be pushback from people who do not understand the problematic essence of their subtle behavior or speech. This delicate nature makes it hard to discuss these issues and can make the marginalized group feel unheard or gaslit. It can lead to other psychological issues, depression, and anger, especially with inmates who have already been treated unjustly at the macro level.

Incarceration is stressful whether you are the prisoner or related to the prisoner, and the effects of stress can manifest physiologically. There is research that reveals a correlation between children with incarcerated parents and physical conditions. Based on self-reports, there are higher rates of suicide attempts and delinquent behavior including substance abuse in children of inmates (Hiolski et al., 2019). An increase in cardiovascular conditions exacerbated by lack of access to healthcare is also linked to the children of incarcerated individuals (Hiolski et al., 2019). This ties into the possibility that some health conditions of Black Americans may be tied to injustices or social position and not biology or personal decisions.

In one study with over 100,000 participants, it was shown that 2% of children with incarcerated parents, most of them were children of color who also had economic hardship (Stoliker and Galli, 2019). Even though these children had not themselves been institutionalized, their families were still directly affected, and the children were individually and personally affected by the unjust prison system. This is not to say that all people of color who are incarcerated are innocent of their crimes however, it is to say it is possible that they have been unlawfully arrested or sentenced more harshly due to race which affects them and their loved ones negatively. This can influence the way incarcerated individuals’ children see police officers and the criminal justice system. Not only is there mistrust but potentially built-up anger, aggression, and feelings of inadequacy that could lead to criminal behavior and health issues.

If these are the effects on the children, it’s important to examine how the inmates are affected. Prisoners on average have higher rates of mental health issues than the general population (Stoliker and Galli, 2019). Depression is very common among inmates. In older aged prisoners, anxiety disorders, personality disorders, schizophrenia, and substance abuse are more common than in younger aged

prisoners (Stoliker and Galli, 2019) and can be due to spending decades institutionalized. Other contributors to mention are lack of mental stimulation and drug abuse. It has been established that prison is a stressor, and stressors lead to anxiety, depressive mood, or the pains of imprisonment which involve confinement, isolation, and danger of the prison environment (Sykes, 2007; Sugie, 2017). The odds of diabetes, hypertension, heart problems, asthma, arthritis, kidney problems, stroke, hepatitis, and STIs are also more significant in inmates (Binswanger et al., 2009; Notwotny et al., 2016, as cited in Tadros et al., 2022.) This is reminiscent of some of the higher rates of diseases found in Black individuals even if they do not have a criminal record. It is clear incarceration and the Black American experience induce similar symptoms of stress at one point in time or another. Once combined, the effects are exacerbated or almost guaranteed to manifest if not already present. Experiencing microaggressions throughout the lifespan not only does nothing to alleviate this but will in fact worsen the experience.

### Clinical Implications

With this in mind, strides can be made so the future does not resemble the past. Changes like forcing the different races of people to relocate to a country where their race is dominant or throwing all individuals who are blatantly or subtly racist in prison are far-fetched and unrealistic. What is more attainable is fostering environments filled with diversity in culture and ethnicity. This can happen in various ways.

Teaching an unbiased history of America needs to be the beginning. This means acknowledging America's unsavory past in its entirety. It also involves not hiding, altering, or leaving out any information by calling enslaved Africans "workers" as has been done in grammar school textbooks (Deutsch, 2015). The rhetoric used in literature and media plays a major role in shaping developing minds and there are subtle ways this is evident. When considering the adjectives of black and white, it is not often that black is used positively or white negatively i.e black representing death and danger and white representing purity and innocence. The association of black with bad and white with good does not stay within the confines of books but becomes social when people verbalize and act according to these connections.

This is important to note because racism is learned, not innate. Realistically speaking, sensitivity training, race-related counseling or classroom-based lessons may not be effective with adults who learned racism decades ago and who actively incorporate it into their daily lives. Some of them may be able to adjust or fix their way of thinking, while others will continue to choose to be racist because it has been deeply ingrained in them for so long. This is why working with children is more effective. They have not learned as much; their minds are plastic, and they do not yet hold positions of power. These suggestions need to be incorporated early on in the lives of Americans before they can act out on negative perceptions or bigotry. Ideally, they would not form at all, or at the very least they would be rectified before these individuals become politicians, public service employees, educators, doctors, etc.

Further, there are cities and neighborhoods in America where the only interaction a group of people has with another group is by watching the news, TV, and movies. TV shows that only depict Black characters as aggressive or criminal perpetuate the idea of black being synonymous with bad. Protagonists or heroes wearing lighter colors or white and antagonists or villains wearing black should be

adjusted but is still very common. In 2005, pictures of Hurricane Katrina survivors flooded the internet and news channels. White victims were said to have "found food" while Black ones were called looters (Shalby, 2019). Images like these fill the mind with stereotypes, exaggerations, and unrealistic views and expectations. Regular in-person interactions with people of different backgrounds can combat falling victim to stereotypes. These interactions may occur in diverse neighborhoods, grocery stores, group therapy, work, church, etc., and can be effective with a different range of ages. This humanizes marginalized groups and reduces the likelihood of being seen as different and therefore inferior which leads to racial profiling, police brutality, and by extension the mass incarceration of Black individuals.

Another way to combat microaggressions, race, and the problematic issue of mass incarceration is to simply talk about them. It is beyond time that the taboo associated with these topics be removed. All it has done is allow the groups of power i.e White individuals to maintain said power and comfort. No positivity comes from this and more importantly not for Black individuals (Williams, 2020). Discussing microaggressions consists of questioning the actions or statements of White peers. Asking them why they thought a Black woman's hair was not soft or why they assumed a Black child did not have both parents in their life are some scenarios that have come up and will continue to resurface. As stated by Sue et al. (2019) acceptance, silence, and inaction has been ineffective response to microaggressions. Addressing "White tears" and guilt and preventing them from distracting from the real issue at hand is also critically important. Historically speaking, "White tears", specifically from White women, have been distractions when White individuals are confronted with uncomfortable racial conversations. Maintaining the privileged group's comfort is not the solution it is the problem. In order for change to occur, people and society must change. Sue et al. (2019) asserted that society must make the invisible and make it visible, educate the perpetrator, and seek external support.

It is crucial to educate and let White individuals know that microaggressions, mass incarceration, and racism can be difficult to understand from their position of privilege. It is their lens created from white supremacy that prevents them from seeing the problem, and it is precisely that reason, that has created the problem. The world they live in is exactly why they do not see or experience microaggressions, but this does not mean they do not exist (Sue et al., 2008). Additionally, the support of White allies would help other White individuals in understanding that microaggressions and racism are not just perceptions (Banks, 2014, p. 314). The key to awareness is a different lens and to better help them understand, one can use an example such as; germs and microaggressions are similar, both are microscopic yet dangerous.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

If subtle racist remarks and behavior can be seen as microaggressions, then the mass incarceration of Black individuals must be categorized as a macroaggression because it is not discreet and happens on a broad scale. Mass incarceration in America does not have the privilege of being subtle, but it is still hard to dismantle. This is likely because of the racist foundation that the US was built upon and the violently racist origins of the police force. Undoing centuries of oppression, genocide, and systemic racism

overnight will not and cannot happen. America would have to be completely restructured from the bottom up in order to correct its malevolent past. Since this is nearly impossible, racism persists.

Microaggressions can occur towards marginalized groups without the offender knowing. Sometimes the victims themselves may not be able to express why they feel the way they feel, but they know they are left feeling disrespected or belittled (Sue et al, 2008). The subtlety of microaggressions makes them lethal because they are hard to identify and therefore not always easy to address. With time, people from all groups will gain an understanding of how problematic certain words, phrasing, or behavior can be. From micro to macro, all forms of discrimination affect people of color, but the connection between mass incarceration and microaggressions remains the fact that they physically and mentally affect Black individuals on a daily basis.

Focusing more on the mental health of inmates could improve the atmosphere within the prisons. It could reduce the aggressive or violent natures of some of the inmates, which will reduce prison fights and assaults. Ultimately, taking mental health seriously can help former inmates reintegrate in society. Unfortunately, upon release, Black parolees not only have to face the stigma and obstacles that come from having a record but also the same microaggressions and racist policies that were present from their birth. It follows that before the erasure of these issues happens, Black individuals should be offered counseling services while their White counterparts are required to engage in the aforementioned solutions of accurate history classes, educational courses, and integrating with different races. If the United States truly plans to earn the label of a just nation, there is a lot of work that needs to be done in order to abolish microaggressions, the justice system, the extorting nature of the prison industrial complex, and the racist essence of the country. All of this will result in better overall health for Black individuals, lead to fair sentencing, and improve the treatment of this marginalized group in general.

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