**The Ferguson Syllabus**

**Sociological Research Puts Ferguson in Context**

By [Nicki Lisa Cole](http://sociology.about.com/bio/Nicki-Lisa-Cole-126089.htm) (August, 2014)

<http://sociology.about.com/od/Current-Events-in-Sociological-Context/fl/The-Ferguson-Syllabus.htm>

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Protestors in Ferguson, MO raise their hands and chant 'Hands up, don't shoot.'.  Scott Olson/Getty Images

On the heels of the [open letter signed by over 1,400 sociologists](http://sociology.about.com/od/Current-Events-in-Sociological-Context/fl/Sociologists-Take-Historic-Stand-on-Racism-and-Police-Brutality.htm) after the police killing of unarmed black teen Michael Brown, the newly formed group [Sociologists for Justice](http://sociologistsforjustice.wordpress.com/) has released a list of published research that informs the arguments put forth in the statement. The following articles and books will help interested readers understand the social and historical context surrounding the events in Ferguson, Missouri, and allow readers to see how these events fit within larger patterns of [racial profiling](http://racerelations.about.com/od/thelegalsystem/g/racialprofiling.htm), [systemic racism](http://sociology.about.com/od/S_Index/fl/Systemic-Racism.htm), and [police brutality](http://racerelations.about.com/od/thelegalsystem/a/Latinos-On-The-Receiving-End-Of-Racial-Profiling-And-Police-Brutality.htm).

1. “[Stealing a Bag of Potato Chips and Other Crimes of Resistance](http://www.broomcenter.ucsb.edu/files/publications/pdf/rios1.pdf),” by Victor M. Rios.
In this readable essay, Dr. Rios draws on extensive ethnographic research in a neighborhood in the San Francisco Bay Area to show how Black and Latino youth turn to crime as a form of resistance against a racist society after they have been rejected and marginalized by social institutions. He also defines the “youth control complex,” composed of police, educators, social workers, and others, which constantly monitors Black and Latino youth, and frames them as criminals before they even are. Rios concludes that acting out and committing minor crimes “served as a resource for feeling empowered and for gaining redress for the humiliation, stigma, and punishment they encountered even when they were being ‘good.’” Dr. Rios’s research shows how racism and a punitive approach to youth collude to reproduce widespread social problems.
2. “[The Hyper-criminalization of Black and Latino Male Youth in the Era of Mass Incarceration](https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B8eBQGZrG7BFdnhWRzNNNl9ZOHM/edit),” by Victor M. Rios.
Drawing from the same research conducted in the San Francisco Bay Area, in this article Dr. Rios illustrates how the “youth control complex” extends into schools and families to “hyper-criminalize” Black and Latino youth from a young age. Rios found that once kids had been labeled “[deviant](http://sociology.about.com/od/Disciplines/a/Sociology-Of-Deviance-Crime.htm)” after having contact with the criminal justice system (most for non-violent offenses), they “experience the full force of direct and indirect punishment and criminalization traditionally aimed at violent offenders.” At the same time, institutions that are meant to nurture youth, like schools, families, and community centers, have been folded into the practice of surveillance and criminalization, often acting at behest of police and probation officers. Rios concludes darkly, “in the era of mass incarceration, a ‘youth control complex’ created by a network of racialized criminalization and punishment deployed from various institutions of control and socialization has formed to manage, control, and incapacitate Black and Latino youth.”
3. “[Want to Help Marginalized Students in Schools? Stop ‘Stop and Frisk’ and Other Punitive Practices, Too](http://thesocietypages.org/sociologylens/2013/11/07/want-to-help-marginalized-students-improve-in-schools-stop-stop-and-frisk-and-other-punitive-practices-too/),” by Markus Gerke.
In this readable essay published by The Society Pages, an online repository of accessible social science writing, sociologist Markus Gerke explains the connections between systemic racism, racial profiling and hyper-criminalization of Black and Latino youth, and the underrepresentation of Black and Latino men in colleges and universities. Drawing on the research of Victor Rios, Gerke writes, “the experience of being labelled (and treated as) a criminal despite attempts to keep their distance from gangs and not be involved in criminal activities, led some of these boys to lose any faith and respect left for authorities and ‘the system’: What is the point of resisting the temptation and the pressure of peers involved in gangs, if you are always assumed to be guilty regardless?” He connects this phenomenon to the racist police practice of “Stop N Frisk” which was ruled unconstitutional by the state of New York for overwhelmingly targeting Black and Latino boys, ninety percent of whom were never arrested for anything.
4. “[Differential Police Response to Black Battered Women](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J012v12n02_04?journalCode=wwcj20%23.U_vTRrxdVxA),” by Amanda L. Robinson and Meghan S. Chandek.
In this journal article Drs. Robinson and Chandek report results from a study they conducted using police records from a medium-sized Midwestern police department. In the study they examined whether race of domestic violence victim is a factor in whether the perpetrator is arrested by police, and if there are any other factors that influence arrest decision when a victim is black. They found that some black women received lower quantity and quality of law than other victims, and quite troublingly, that police were less likely to arrest the perpetrator when black women victims were mothers, while arrest rates more than doubled for other victims when children were present. The researchers were also disturbed to find that this happened, despite the fact that children were present at the scene more frequently when black women were victimized. This study points to significant implications for the safety and security of black women and their children who suffer domestic violence.
5. [*Pulled Over: How Police Stops Define Race and Citizenship*](http://books.google.com/books/about/Pulled_Over.html?id=TlHmAgAAQBAJ), by Charles Epp, Steven Maynard-Moody, and Donald Haider-Markel.
Nationwide, racial minorities are pulled over at double the rate of whites. This book examines the ways in which racial profiling in police stops has been encouraged and institutionalized by police departments, and the implications of these practices. The researchers found that African Americans, often pulled over for “driving while black,” have been taught by these experiences to see little legitimacy in the practice or in police generally, which leads to low levels of trust in the police, and decreased reliance on them for help when it is needed. They argue, “with a growing push in recent years to use local police in immigration efforts, Hispanics stand poised to share African Americans’ long experience of investigative stops.” The authors conclude by offering recommendations for practical reforms to policing so that it can both protect the rights of citizens and curb crime.
6. “[The Continuing Significance of Race: An Analysis Across Two Levels of Policing](https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B8eBQGZrG7BFYVZ2Zlpzb1IxWVU/edit),” by Patricia Y. Warren.
In this journal article Dr. Patricia Warren examines survey responses from the North Carolina Highway Traffic Study and finds that non-white respondents had come to have a distrust in both highway patrol and city police through vicarious experiences of racial profiling (hearing about it from others), and that they applied their distrust to both forces equally, despite the fact that practices differed across them. This suggests that negative experiences with police within a community cultivate a general air of distrust of police in general.
7. “[State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review](http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/2014-implicit-bias.pdf),” by the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity.
This report published by the Kirwin Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity relies on thirty years of research from neurology and social and cognitive psychology to show that unconscious biases exert a strong influence on how we see and treat others. This research is important to consider today, because it illustrates that racism exists even among those who are not outwardly or vocally racist, or who believe vehemently that they are not racist.
8. [*Oppositional Consciousness: The Subjective Roots of Social Protest*](http://books.google.com/books?id=BJG_CuyDSFMC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Oppositional+Consciousness:+The+Subjective+Roots+of+Social+Protest&hl=en&sa=X&ei=ktf7U5avJOnp8AGbxoDQCQ&ved=0CB0Q6AEwAA%23v=onepage&q=Oppositional%2520Consciousness%253A%2520The%2520Subjective%2520Roots%2520of%2520Social%2520Protest&f=false), edited by Jane J. Mansbridge and Aldon Morris.
This book of essays by a variety of researchers focuses on the factors that lead people to engage in protest and fight for social change, and to develop an “oppositional consciousness”, “an empowering mental state that prepares members of an oppressed group to undermine, reform, or overthrow a dominant system.” The essays examine different cases of resistance and protest, from race-focused causes, to disabled folks, sexual harassment, labor rights, and AIDS activists. The collection of research “sheds new light on the intricate mechanisms that drive the important social movements of our time.”