

In an attempt to better understand and predict where we might be heading as a culture, I researched and wrote a series of newspaper articles as I imagined they might look in the near future. Grounded in evidence, I attempted to create plausible projections. Connecting all of the topics is the observation that everyday the vast majority of Americans ignore problems both overseas and around them locally. There is a growing apathy among people when it comes to facing the world's problems. There is a perception that the individual cannot make a difference, and that there is no reason to bother. The truth is, however, it is only through the individual that change can be incited. Although you may not witness the effects of your actions, they do hold significance.

I manifested this apathetic sentiment visually by creating an animation about a boy's commute to school. Along his commute he passes by a series of smear campaigns, a giant prison, the homeless, a peaceful protest being met by military weaponry, until he finally arrives at school. The child has grown up in this environment and is routinely exposed to it, he is numb and perceives it all as nothing else other than ordinary. It is this lack of awareness and lack of motivation that everyday Americans possess, we will continue to simply kick the can down the road until it is too late.

Max C.

**NOTE:**

*The following are a series of articles for a fictional newspaper published in 2025. The facts and statistics are all concrete, however, some are projections based on already existing trends. The predictions about the future made in the articles all assume that no progress is made on current issues we face today in the next decade. The final paper will be printed and formatted with the addition of visuals.*

## **Beasts Of No Nation 10 Year Anniversary: Has Anything Changed?**

It has been ten years since the release of *Beasts Of No Nation* on Netflix. Directed and written by Cary Joji Fukunaga, *Beasts of No Nation* tells the story of a young boy whose innocence is lost to a raging civil war in an unnamed African country. The young boy, Agu, portrayed by Abraham Attah, flees his village after witnessing his father and brother being executed by invading government forces. Alone in the bush, Agu meets a faction of the rebel group, the NDF. It is at this point that Agu is introduced to the Commandment, played by Idris Elbra, who takes Agu under his wing and teaches him to be a soldier. Through the rest of the film, Agu is exposed to and takes part in drug use, brutal killings, and rape.

The power of this film lays in its ability to make the viewer empathize with a child whose life and background varies drastically from that of a typical westerner. Fukunaga leaves a lot of information undisclosed from the film including the name of the country the story takes place in. The simplicity of the piece does not negate the realism of the story, rather it shifts the focus from a retelling of a historical event to offer a unique perspective of a child. This allows us to relate on a more personal level to the story. It is disturbing when Agu is separated from his mother, when his father and brother are murdered, when he is forced to execute a seemingly innocent man, when he is raped, when he struggles with a drug addiction, when his best friend is shot; ultimately, he is robbed of his childhood. While the majority of people would not condone the cruelties that transpire in the film, everyday people tend to ignore injustices that occur across the globe. Reading, for example, newspaper articles about the atrocities that occur overseas are often overshadowed by the complex political, social, and cultural circumstances that surround them. There is an overload of information about global issues that are projected at us by the internet, television, radio, flyers, advertisements, and other forms of mass communication that are all part of an attempt to bring about awareness. Due to this over saturation, it becomes impossible to vessel an interest in all of these issues. Unlike advertisements and articles, *Beasts Of No Nation* offers the viewer an emotional connection to the issue of the use of child soldiers.

In the past ten years, however, not much has changed. Today, Americans are still bombarded with advertisements and headlines, but the messages do not stimulate the empathy that is necessary when seeking to change the world. Empathy provides an emotional connection that in turn can lead to a genuine want to help that is pure and free of ulterior motives. A simple notion, it is, however, immensely difficult to develop a deep desire to make change. It is immensely important for one to acknowledge that they are not going to simply transform a country immediately, it is a slow process that often does not yield any dramatic outcomes. This is not to suggest that the individual can not make change, rather, that the individual can not expect instant gratification for attempting to make good in the world. When the individuals intentions are rooted in empathy the more effective and profound the help becomes.

The military use of children continues to thrive in the modern world despite international efforts to thwart the recruiting of children. During World War I, 250,000 boys younger than eighteen enrolled in the British military<sup>1</sup>. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child in 1989 declared an international law declaring it illegal for children under fifteen to take

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<sup>1</sup> "Military Use of Children." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 02 May 2016.

part in combat and banned children under eighteen from being recruited<sup>2</sup>. Individuals in between fifteen and eighteen, however, were allowed to voluntarily join the army<sup>3</sup>. In February of 2002 The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict was enacted to discourage the military involvement of those under the age of eighteen. While it remains legal for children under eighteen to take part in combat out of their own volition, the treaty states that "State Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of eighteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities."<sup>4</sup> In other words, governments must do all in their power to prevent children under eighteen from taking part in armed conflicts.

How effective have these international laws been? Unfortunately despite the many treaties signed, countries continue to arm children under eighteen. The West shares the blame for allowing these injustices to occur. While the United States supports policies opposing child militarization, historically it has not always done its part in preventing countries from arming children.

During President Obama's presidency, the United States continued to support the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Somalia, and South Sudan militarily; all nations infamous for using child soldiers.<sup>5</sup> The Child Soldiers Prevention Act states that the United States may hold back from dispatching troops to assist countries until they have ceased their recruitment of soldiers under eighteen.<sup>6</sup> Obama overlooked this policy in the name of "national interest" and offered these countries a combined \$161 million dollars worth of armed support.<sup>7</sup>

Today the United States continues to offer millions of dollars, and in the past ten years, the Child Soldiers Prevention Act is still yet to be invoked to prevent major money from going to nations such as these. It is through stories such as *Beasts Of No Nation*, even if fictitious, that we are better able to empathize with the thousands of children whose lives are disregarded by nations as casualties of war. We cannot stand for an epidemic like the military use of children in the name of the greater good or else we will continue overlooking global injustices.

### **Why American Prisons Continue To Overflow**

Today, the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world and has held this title since 2002. According to a report delivered by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 15 years ago, other countries averaged 100 prisoners per 100,000 population.<sup>8</sup> The United States, however,

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<sup>2</sup> "Military Use of Children." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 02 May 2016.

<sup>3</sup> "Military Use of Children." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 02 May 2016.

<sup>4</sup> "Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 02 May 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Becker, Jo. "Dispatches: Obama Still Arms Governments Using Child Soldiers." Human Rights Watch. N.p., 01 Oct. 2015. Web. 02 May 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Becker, Jo. "Dispatches: Obama Still Arms Governments Using Child Soldiers." Human Rights Watch. N.p., 01 Oct. 2015. Web. 02 May 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Becker, Jo. "Dispatches: Obama Still Arms Governments Using Child Soldiers." Human Rights Watch. N.p., 01 Oct. 2015. Web. 02 May 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Tsai, Tyjen, and Paola Scommegna. "U.S. Has World's Highest Incarceration Rate." U.S. Has World's Highest Incarceration Rate. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 May 2016.

averaged 500 prisoners per 100,000 residents.<sup>9</sup> In 2010, federal and state prisons incarcerated a combined 1.6 million inmates. Since then the numbers have steadily increased, despite the dip that the prisoner population took between 2013 to 2016.<sup>10</sup> Today, in 2025, the United States' facilities detain 2.1 million convicts. According to American Legislative Exchange, in 2014, American taxpayers paid a sum total of approximately \$31,286 to fund keeping each individual inmate locked up.<sup>11</sup> Does internment lead to a safer society and what is the cost of imprisoning those deemed to be offenders? In 2016 New York state spent nearly \$60,000 yearly to imprison a single inmate while only approximately \$18,500 was spent per year on a single elementary student.<sup>12</sup>

The United States has not always housed such a large portion of its' population in prisons. A hundred years ago, in 1925, less then 200,000 men and women served time.<sup>13</sup> In fact it was not until 1973 that the incarceration rate began to steadily rise.<sup>14</sup> President Richard Nixon declared the War on Drugs in 1971, labeling drugs as "public enemy number one." This new campaign against substance abuse did not stem from a growing fear of the use of harmful drug use in the United States. The Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs under President Richard Nixon, John Ehrlichman admitted after being confronted by Dan Baum about the history of the War on Drugs admitted that "The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did."<sup>15</sup> The War on Drugs stemmed from a campaign team that were seeking to secure Richard Nixon's presidency by criminalizing drugs in order to in turn criminalize "the antiwar left and black people", the two groups that opposed Nixon that were most likely to oppose his policies. At the time Nixon's preached that his rhetoric condemning drug use was rooted in an attempt to combat the rising use of heroin, marijuana, and other recreational drugs. As it turns out, however, the demonization of drug use was simply a front to persecute the far left and communities of color. The truth is the majority of inmates who have had chunks of their lives destroyed by the American criminal justice system are not all threats to society, rather they are victims of the tradition of mass incarceration that was started by the Nixon administration.

Although the criminalization of recreational drugs is rooted in an intricate campaign strategy that was utilized to help further the political agenda of President Nixon, the American government had already firmly declared itself opposed to drugs and was set out to win the "war" that Nixon had started. During the presidencies of Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Bill Clinton,

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<sup>9</sup> Tsai, Tyjen, and Paola Scommegna. "U.S. Has World's Highest Incarceration Rate." U.S. Has World's Highest Incarceration Rate. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 May 2016.

<sup>10</sup> "Incarceration | The Sentencing Project." The Sentencing Project. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 May 2016

<sup>11</sup> Person. "Prison Overcrowding Threatens Public Safety and State Budgets." - American Legislative Exchange Council. N.p., 08 Apr. 2014. Web. 02 May 2016.

<sup>12</sup> "Education vs Prison Costs." CNNMoney. Cable News Network, 2016. Web. 02 May 2016.

<sup>13</sup> "The History of Mass Incarceration in the US...in One Chart." Daily Kos. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 May 2016.

<sup>14</sup> "The History of Mass Incarceration in the US...in One Chart." Daily Kos. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 May 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Baum, Dan. "Legalize It All." Harpers Magazine. N.p., Apr. 2016. Web. 02 May 2016.

and George W. Bush, incarceration rises continued to rapidly rise as more and more youth were caught in possession of recreational drugs<sup>16</sup>.

The tradition of targeting African American communities that was orchestrated by President Richard Nixon and his campaign team in fighting the War on Drugs continues to be practiced. According to a study done in 2012 by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, one in three African American males can expect to go to prison in their lifetime. Comparatively, while one in fifteen of the male African American community is incarcerated, only 1 out of 106 white males face jail time.<sup>17</sup> These statistics still hold true even thirteen years later. They are a testament to the systemic racism that still flourishes in this country. What is in part so worrisome is that not everyone part of the system, although many are, are not themselves prejudiced, but continue to partake in an inherently structure. It is not a coincidence or a black cultural problem that so many young African American males face time. There is something terribly wrong with the United States justice system there is not only clear bias towards white Americans but also a noticeable systemic discrimination towards African Americans.

While the War on Drugs was conceived 56 years ago why is it still such a big issue in 2025? Who benefits from the mass incarceration of young men? Perhaps the push to further criminalize drugs is another means for our government to demonize and oppress communities of color. What we know for sure is that there is money to be made be housing a large population of convicts. Prisoners offer local jails income paid for by the state.<sup>18</sup> The more prisoners the more it costs prisons the more it costs the state to support which all leads to citizens paying higher taxes. Inmates also provide free source of manual labor that can be justified as making the most of the 39 billion taxpayer dollars.<sup>19</sup> The truth is, the overcrowding in prisons is continually fueled by the large profit that is made off of convicts. The Corrections Corporation(CCA), the largest corporation that controls more then 65 private facilities.<sup>20</sup> In 2012 the company made a profit of \$1.64 billion in revenue in which state governments supplied \$883.1 million of that profit<sup>21</sup>. The larger the prison population, the larger the profit; it is in the the interest of companies such as the CCA for the United States justice system to sentence thousands of young men each year. This problem can only be solved by lowering the sentences for drug related crimes, but is also more importantly about the decriminalization of colored communities.

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<sup>16</sup> Kerby, Sophia. "The Top 10 Most Startling Facts About People of Color and Criminal Justice in the United States." Center for American Progress. N.p., 13 Mar. 2012. Web. 02 May 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Kerby, Sophia. "The Top 10 Most Startling Facts About People of Color and Criminal Justice in the United States." Center for American Progress. N.p., 13 Mar. 2012. Web. 02 May 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Grim, Ryan. "Mississippi Jails Are Losing Inmates, And Local Officials Are 'Devastated' By The Loss Of Revenue." Huffington Post. N.p., 14 Apr. 2016. Web. 2 May 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Godard, Thierry. "The Economics of the American Prison System." The Economics of the American Prison System. N.p., 23 Mar. 2016. Web. 02 May 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Godard, Thierry. "The Economics of the American Prison System." The Economics of the American Prison System. N.p., 23 Mar. 2016. Web. 02 May 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Godard, Thierry. "The Economics of the American Prison System." The Economics of the American Prison System. N.p., 23 Mar. 2016. Web. 02 May 2016.

## Tuberculosis Evolving: Can We Keep Up?

In 1996, tuberculosis, the 5000 year old disease killed three million people around the world<sup>22</sup>. While a third of the world's population carry the disease, only 10 percent of that one third will develop into active tuberculosis<sup>23</sup>. Factors that contribute to this activation include "stress, poor nutrition, diabetes, or HIV infection."<sup>24</sup> The disease developed when the individuals lungs are attacked by mycobacterium tuberculosis that enters and infects the lungs.<sup>25</sup> The symptoms of the disease include a decline in stamina, coughing mucus or blood, loss of weight, the development of a fever, and a lack of appetite.<sup>26</sup> Although the disease is largely treatable, mycobacterium tuberculosis because of its ability to travel through the air.<sup>27</sup>

Russian prisons are immensely overcrowded and cramped.<sup>28</sup> This provides a perfect setting for tuberculosis like any disease, to spread.<sup>29</sup> Unlike normal tuberculosis, the tuberculosis that the majority of Russian inmates are diagnosed with multi drug resistant tuberculosis.<sup>30</sup> The first dose of treatment often kills off the majority of bacteria, however, some of the bacteria has evolved to resist the antibiotics. At this point these resistant bacteria will multiply until they have formed a new resistant body of bacteria that can not be treated by the standard antibiotics used to treat tuberculosis.<sup>31</sup>

While the tuberculosis continues to evolve through the process of natural selection in which only the bacteria genetically fit enough survive antibiotics, for the majority, humans rely on scientists ability to synthesize antibiotics to treat diseases. Are we, in fact, weakening the gene pool of the human race by not allowing natural selection to take place? To a certain degree we are. The main concern, however, is less about the strength of the human race, and more about our ability to develop antibiotics faster than diseases such as tuberculosis that can evolve. Today we see multiple forms of antibiotic resistant bacteria including Staphylococcus aureus (golden staph) and Neisseria gonorrhoeae (causes gonorrhoeae) which have developed a resistance to the previously effective benzyl penicillin.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "History of Tuberculosis." News-Medical.net. N.p., 11 Dec. 2009. Web. 02 May 2016.

<sup>23</sup> "Threat of Tuberculosis." PBS. PBS, n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2016.

<sup>24</sup> "History of Tuberculosis." News-Medical.net. N.p., 11 Dec. 2009. Web. 02 May 2016.

<sup>25</sup> "Tuberculosis: MedlinePlus." U.S National Library of Medicine. U.S. National Library of Medicine, n.d. Web. 02 May 2016.

<sup>26</sup> "Tuberculosis: MedlinePlus." U.S National Library of Medicine. U.S. National Library of Medicine, n.d. Web. 02 May 2016.

<sup>27</sup> "Threat of Tuberculosis." PBS. PBS, n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2016.

<sup>28</sup> "Threat of Tuberculosis." PBS. PBS, n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2016.

<sup>29</sup> "Threat of Tuberculosis." PBS. PBS, n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2016.

<sup>30</sup> "Threat of Tuberculosis." PBS. PBS, n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2016.

<sup>31</sup> "Threat of Tuberculosis." PBS. PBS, n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2016.

<sup>32</sup> "Antibiotic Resistant Bacteria." - Better Health Channel. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 May 2016.

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