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## The Infringement of Rightful Justice

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Alaina Fleming

### The Infringement of Rightful Justice

Katherine Boo's book *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* depicts the aspects of life unique to those inhabiting the Mumbai slum of Annawadi. Her journalistic story portrays the lives of numerous slum dwellers as well as the injustices these ostracized individuals routinely encounter. Abdul Husain was a victim of the unfair criminal justice system in Annawadi. Due to his age, minority status, and corruption within the slum, Abdul had no power or opportunity to escape the abuse and oppression inflicted upon him. Unfortunately, this corruption is not prominent only in India. Kalief Browder, a young, African American male, was also victimized by a prejudiced and intransigent system. He was incarcerated for suspicion of stealing a backpack and never received a conviction or trial until the end of his three-year imprisonment. Abdul Husain's and Kalief Browder's experiences within corrupt justice systems that display no concern for the lives of the convicted negatively impacted their characters and eradicated their psychological well-being.

Abdul's experience with the justice system degraded his self-worth as his humanity and intrinsic value were continually disregarded. Annawadi's police officers were not hesitant to inflict emotional, psychological, and physical abuse upon Abdul. After turning himself in, the officers fiercely and relentlessly whipped the boy, and his "screaming, then his sobbing, rang out onto the road" (Boo 105). The punishment that Abdul endured was so brutal and excruciating that he could no longer retain his pain internally. Upon witnessing the disturbing effects of their immoral acts, the police officers did not cease beating Abdul. They ignored his humanity in pursuit of delivering violent and unethical punishment for a crime Abdul did not commit.

The extent of the corruption in Annawadi's justice system did not remain confined to the officers who beat imprisoned individuals and forced others to give them financial stipulations. This corruption also affected the jails in India. Abdul suffered through horrendous conditions when he was imprisoned at the Dongri correction center. Incarcerated children were situated in a facility with shuttered windows and air plagued by "breath and body smells" (Boo 124). Newspapers even proclaimed that "Dongri Home is [a] Living Hell" (Boo 124), one in which the prisoners' basic human rights were neglected. Correctional facilities were meant to be settings in which children could comprehend the consequences of their actions and learn how to change their lives for the better. Instead, the conditions of this building emphasized that both innocent and guilty children were not deemed significant enough to receive adequate care or to live in healthy conditions. The justice system and its respective authority figures rarely considered the emotional or physical well-being of the Annawadians. Those in control of the system did not acknowledge the detrimental effects that the lack of care would create or the ruthless community that was influenced by their indifference.

Similarly, the time Kalief Browder was confined by the criminal justice system was characterized by injustice, degradation, and the denial of his inalienable rights. Just as Muslims were arrested more frequently than any other racial or ethnic group in Annawadi, African Americans were, and still are, disproportionately incarcerated in the United States. The overcriminalization of African American men, women, and children makes them the recipients of police brutality and various implementations of injustice. In 2014, approximately 95 percent of the incarcerated youth in New York City were African American or Latino, and Kalief Browder, being the former, experienced the ramifications of a racist criminal justice system

(O'Donohue). He was imprisoned on suspicion of committing a crime, but the trial that eventually proved his innocence did not occur until after he suffered years of physical and psychological abuse. While in jail, he was repeatedly beaten by the guards and offered no protection when threatened or harmed by other inmates (Holley). Video evidence from Rikers Island displayed the lack of concern that these officers expressed for Kalief's life; the guards also placed him in solitary confinement for more than 800 days of his three-year sentence (Johnson 147). They subjected him to extensive solitude and disregarded the negative effects that prolonged isolation can have on an individual's mental health. Both Kalief and Abdul were denied the right to be treated as human beings. Their irrefutable humanity was neglected by the numerous components of a supposedly just system that proclaimed them guilty until proven innocent.

Abdul's imprisonment had detrimental and irreversible effects on his psychological well-being that permanently altered his character. He was mercilessly abused by police officers while detained in the station's unofficial holding cell, and these seemingly endless occurrences of "being terrorized by living people seemed to have diminished his fear of death" (Boo 124). He discovered more solace in the idea of death because he did not have to face his fear of humans' callous intentions. After his release from the Dongri center, he "had tried to forget what had happened to him in the police cell" (Boo 167). Even though his experiences had inevitably become part of his identity, Abdul desperately sought to eradicate the memory of his abuse and mistreatment. Those thoughts were too painful and vivid to retain in his consciousness, but when he learned about his friend Kalu's death, "something sealed inside him had split open" (Boo 167). Unbearable tragedies, such as the death of a friend, intensified his inner turmoil. The time

he spent being neglected and cruelly treated by the justice system had gained control of his character and his life.

The unjust treatment and abuse that Kalief endured while imprisoned permanently damaged his mental health and ultimately caused him to end his own life. Throughout the entirety of his incarceration, he was treated in unceasingly inhumane manners, and no one made the effort to recognize the value of his life. Kalief was inadvertently taught by authority figures within the justice system that his life did not mean enough to receive a timely trial or to convince the guards to fulfill their occupational purposes. His worth was further disregarded when the officers confined him to a cell and left him alone with his suicidal thoughts (Holley). While on Rikers Island, Kalief had symptoms of depression and attempted to end his life on multiple occasions. His captivity had deleterious effects on his mental health, and even after his release, Kalief was haunted by traumatizing memories he desperately attempted to suppress (Johnson 148). Before his incarceration, “[he] never had any mental illnesses. [...] He had stressful times prior to going to jail, but not like during jail. That was the worst experience that [he] ever went through” (Holley). The horror that Kalief encountered in prison could not be expunged from his consciousness, and two years after his release, he committed suicide. His depression, PTSD, and suicidal tendencies were direct results of the “racialization of suspicion” (Scuro 1) that has ruined countless lives in America.

Kalief and Abdul were both unfortunate victims of apathetic criminal justice systems. Their lives were destroyed by the unethical components of the systems that are responsible for protecting the world. Their lives, struggles, and the mistreatment they unjustly experienced

reveal the undeniable destruction that corruption has on all individuals and the necessity for immediate change.

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