



# SOURCE SHEET

## THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE AS SEEN IN LATE 2015 MEDIA

### #AssaultAtSpringValleyHigh

Excerpted from: **Robertson, Iyana.** [“Everything You Should Know About the Spring Valley High School Assault.” Vibe. 27 October 2015.](#)

*On Monday, Oct. 26, 2015, a student at Columbia, South Carolina’s Spring Valley High School was asked to leave a classroom after using her phone during a math class. She refused, and was later confronted by Richland County Senior Deputy Ben Fields, who asked her to leave, and then proceeded to... [grab] her by the neck, [slam] her desk to the floor and then [drag] her out of the desk. The footage went viral as the masses began to react on social media.*

Below are select tweets from the days following the assault. You can follow the full Twitter hashtag conversation [here](#).

 **Terrell J. Starr**  
@Russian\_Starr Following

If that girl was white, people would be outraged at that cop. But she's black, which means she "deserved" it.  
#AssaultAtSpringValleyHigh

RETWEETS 214 FAVORITES 196

7:36 PM - 26 Oct 2015

 **britni danielle**  
@BritniDWrites Follow

When exactly did talking back become a crime that warrants being slammed to the ground? #AssaultAtSpringValleyHigh

RETWEETS 20 FAVORITES 15

6:53 PM - 26 Oct 2015

 **deray mckesson**  
@deray Follow

How long will it take for Officer Fields to say that he "feared for his life," which caused him to assault her? #AssaultAtSpringValleyHigh

RETWEETS 1,990 FAVORITES 1,368

6:15 PM - 26 Oct 2015

 **Sam White**  
@samwhiteout Follow

How are students supposed to learn in an environment where they can be battered on any given day? #AssaultAtSpringValleyHigh #QTNA

RETWEETS 214 FAVORITES 230

5:16 PM - 26 Oct 2015

 **Olivia A. Cole**  
@RantingOwl Follow

She. Is. A. Child. #AssaultAtSpringValleyHigh

RETWEETS 133 FAVORITES 91

5:12 PM - 26 Oct 2015

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**Alex** @IWriteAllDay\_ Follow

This is what happens when more money is poured into prison systems & law enforcement & NOT schools or communities  
[#AssaultAtSpringValleyHigh](#)

RETWEETS 171 FAVORITES 144

5:20 PM - 26 Oct 2015

**Danielle** @abradacabla Follow

No way in hell a white kid being disruptive gets treated like that.  
[#AssaultAtSpringValleyHigh](#)

RETWEETS 73 FAVORITES 87

4:49 PM - 26 Oct 2015

**Cher** @cher Follow

Teen girl in classrm thrown around like rag doll. Every1 on TV saying "we can't see what she did b4 video" Who gives a flying Fk !! She's a CHILD

8:08 PM - 26 Oct 2015

24,132 24,944

**Johnny Boy** @JohnTheFame Follow

No 1 would b asking what this young woman did to deserve that type of abuse frm a police officer if she was white  
[#AssaultAtSpringValleyHigh](#)

RETWEETS 187 FAVORITES 161

5:29 PM - 26 Oct 2015

**Samuel Sinyangwe** @samswey Follow

Too many [#onhere](#) look to blame the child, not the officer who brutalized her despite being paid to keep her safe.  
[#AssaultAtSpringValleyHigh](#)

8:31 PM - 26 Oct 2015

127 100

**jamilah** @JamilahLemieux Follow

Teachers=entrusted with the lives of our children and expected to protect them. He failed multiple times. [#AssaultAtSpringValleyHigh](#)

11:31 PM - 26 Oct 2015

371 368

**Broderick Greer** @BroderickGreer Follow

Some folks will watch the [#AssaultAtSpringValleyHigh](#) and say, "We need to listen to both sides."

Those people are white supremacists.

10:48 PM - 26 Oct 2015

554 604

**Tananarive Due** @TananariveDue Follow

Remember when schools used to call children's parents instead of arresting them?  
[#AssaultatSpringValleyHigh](#)  
[#Schooltoprisonpipeline](#)

11:11 PM - 26 Oct 2015

449 544

**Guiding Questions:**

- Which of these tweets resonates with you most? Which one do you disagree with most strongly? Why?
- How does the availability of social media change this conversation?
- What would YOUR tweet say? Create a tweet using 140 characters or less and post it using the hashtag [#AssaultAtSpringValleyHigh](#)

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## Saggy Pants and 'Respectability Politics' in Dadeville, Alabama

***Policing the appearance of marginalized communities is an American tradition. Making it actual law can have life-destroying consequences.***

[Mock, Brentin. "Saggy Pants and 'Respectability Politics' in Dadeville, Alabama." CityLab from The Atlantic. 15 Sept 2015.](#)

(AP/Mel Evans)



Dadeville, Alabama, city council member Frank Goodman has some thoughts on fashion. He's proposed an ordinance that would fine what he calls "[slacking](#)"—allowing one's pants to sag below the waist or [wearing skirts](#) that show one's legs. This puts Dadeville in the company of [several other cities](#) that have [attempted to police](#) saggy jeans and [miniskirts](#). The city of Albany, Georgia could once boast that it [profited](#) from fining saggy pants.

Goodman's fellow city council member Stephanie Kelley was concerned that the ordinance would have a discriminatory impact on boys. So she proposed applying it to girls as well. As Kelley [told](#) *The Daily Beast*, "When you got on short shorts or a short skirt, leaving nothing to the imagination... it's like you're advertising."

Though this particular ordinance was apparently [inspired by God](#), there's also a history of racializing and criminalizing "slacking." As NPR CodeSwitch reporter Gene Demby wrote in his [investigation of that history](#) last year, "Sagging ... has been [an] oddly long-lived source of agita."

It can't explicitly be said that Dadeville's ordinance is racist, or that it targets young people of color, the demographic most often associated with sagging pants ([Slim Jesus](#) notwithstanding). After all, the ordinance was proposed and endorsed by the only [two African Americans](#) on the city council.

But the history that informs such a strong reaction to saggy pants has to do with the pesky issue of "respectability politics"—which is also an essential ingredient of "[black-on-black crime](#)" alarmism. Harvard professor Randall Kennedy

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wrote about the [role of respectability politics](#) in American history, protest, and politics in the cover story of this month's *Harper's* magazine. In defense of dressing respectably as one way of deterring racism, Kennedy wrote that, "proponents [of respectability politics] advocate taking care in presenting oneself publicly and desire strongly to avoid

saying or doing anything that will reflect badly on blacks, reinforce negative racial stereotypes, or needlessly alienate potential allies," and that "any marginalized group should be attentive to how it is perceived."



Joe Smith - Mayor

It should be noted that age and religion also have influenced the Dadeville ordinance. Goodman is 66 years old, and [told](#) *The Daily Beast* that before proposing it he had this talk with himself:

*What would God do? Did God go around doing this? I prayed about this. I know that God would not go around with pants down. ... He would show me this saggy pant—it's one of the things He did not do. It is not in His orders to do that to gain eternal life.*



(City of Dadeville)

Stephanie Kelley - District 1  
Mickey Tarpley - District 2  
Jimmy Frank Goodman Sr. - District 3  
Billy Monroe - District 4  
Randy Foster - District 5

As a 66-year-old black man in Alabama, Goodman must also understand his state's long history of racial discrimination. Kennedy argues in his *Harper's* piece that it's specifically because of Jim Crow racism in Alabama that civil rights protestors of the 1960s needed to dress properly in their demonstrations. Writes Kennedy:

*We know intuitively that our appearance affects the treatment we receive. Image does not wholly dictate response, but often it makes a difference. This proposition is so obvious as to be banal.*

*The argument is that prudent conduct and sensitivity to how we appear to others improve our chances for success in environments peppered with dangerous prejudices. It is unfortunate that safety might require such self-consciousness, and it is imperative to reform society such that self-defense of this sort is no longer needed. In the interim, however, blacks should do what they can to protect themselves against the burdens of a derogatory racial reputation that has been centuries in the making.*

In other words, keep fighting racism and sexism, but just keep your pants pulled up or your skirts long while you do it—even if that means reinforcing the very bigotry that you're fighting. It's a worldview to which Kennedy is entitled, but

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it becomes something more consequential when it becomes a pretext for criminal policy. And that's the part that the pro-respectability politics crowd misses: The impact of anti-"slacking" laws on criminal justice reforms.

It's been well established that ordinances of this kind violate constitutionally protected expressions of free speech. The ACLU has often had to [intervene](#) when cities pass these ordinances to show how they become pretexts for illegal police searches and other unnecessary interactions with the criminal justice system.

Today it might be a \$50 fine for wearing a too-short skirt, but an unpaid fine could lead to an arrest warrant, which could lead to jail time, which ends up affecting [everything](#) from a person's [employability](#) to their ability to [serve on a jury](#). In that context, Dadeville's ordinance, and Kennedy's argument, come off as tone deaf to the very [loud, bipartisan](#) conversation currently held about [mass incarceration](#) and its devastating effects on [black communities](#).

### Guiding Questions:

- The article presents a proposed ordinance that appears neutral, but has a discriminatory application and impact. What other situations also seem racially neutral on the surface, but are far more complicated on further examination?
- How would this ordinance connect to incarceration more broadly?
- How does what we wear reflect who we are and how we see ourselves? Is there a particular way you dress or a specific item you wear that connects to who you are? Are there any justifiable limits on how a person dresses?

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