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(You Can't Beat) The System

(You Can't Beat) The System is a card game that was developed in a response to the police brutality in Ferguson. I wanted to create a simple game that people of all races could play and realize that something is wrong with our police system. I also wanted to create a game that could be seen as a civil rights effort. After presenting my Ignite Talk I do think I achieved my first goal though not the way I planned it.

Growing up my family was a big Uno family which exposed me to card games. They are easy to setup and if they target for the casual player anyone should be able to pick it up. I was exposed to gambling by my Grandfather who taught me the basics of Poker, and my most eventful lessons on card games came from playing Spades at a College Summer Camp at the Historic Black College, Morehouse. The social impact of Spades and Uno made me comfortable with putting my big goal into the hands of a card game.

When picking a topic I thought all of the choices could work for what I wanted to accomplish but I was hoping for either integrity or honesty. I could go with a game that shows the integrity of police officers or a game that calls into question how honest our judicial system is and the power of white privilege. A game about empathy also could have been interesting, placing the players into the shoes of a minority and the trials and tribulations they face in society. Reflecting back the other choices might have evoked more revelatory discussion, especially empathy. We decided on integrity upon which Janet asked each of us to give our own definition

of integrity. To me integrity is to display good qualities and virtues and remain true to them. I also believe that in our society this behavior is not always rewarded. Life is a popularity contest, relatively speaking of course. Skill in a field is generally a given for success however it is the little things that make a difference. Sometimes that means doing someone a favor even if it is not what's right. Other times it means conforming to what others are doing rather than doing what's right.

This game is heavily inspired by the series Gotham though it could also be similar to CSI or Cold Case. In Gotham there is a commissioner who assigns cases to her detectives. In the first episode Jim Gordon, an honest detective on his first job, arrives on the scene of the crime with Harvey Bullock, his corrupt partner. The case is the murder of the billionaires, Robert and Martha Wayne, during a robbery in an alley. Bullock wants nothing to do with the case and tries to run away while Gordon starts talking to the witness immediately taking the case. It is this dynamic I wanted to showcase, detectives choosing to take cases due to their moral compass and overall aspirations. Bullock realized a case of this magnitude would be under high scrutiny and could make them look really bad the longer it drags out, and worse if they can't find the killer (who could be anybody). Avoiding the case would be best for his career and ambitions. Gordon ignored all of these factors and took the case because it was the right thing to do. Occasionally wildcards come into play, such as when two officers from the Major Crimes Unit offered to take the case off of their hands. Ultimately, Bullock and Gordon kept the case. As the show went on two major things occurred. One, it became clear that the police force was corrupt and everything was based on self-interest and two, Gordon's focus on integrity got him demoted to a security guard for an insane asylum.

I went with a simple design for the game, based off of a standard 52 card deck. There are two suits. Case Cards and Wild Cards, there are a total of 13 cards for each suit. The core game mechanic is reacting to these cards. Each suit is separated into a separate deck. The case deck is supposed to represent the commissioner who assigns cases to his/her detectives whereas the wildcard deck are random things that affect the player's case or career. Both decks usually affect the player's stats which are integrity, political power, and money.

I wanted to showcase the strengths and weaknesses of each decision. Integrity is the one thing no one can take away from you so I wanted there to be situations via wildcards where your information is revealed. If you have positive integrity no one can fault you for it because there is nothing bad to say. If you had negative integrity people will push you down (you'll lose political power) because it makes them look bad to be around a person known to the public to lack positive moral values (scapegoat). An increase of political power leads to an ascension through the ranks. In this game an increase of political power results in promotions (accumulated for every 25 political power) which allow you to take on an additional case and in turn an additional wildcard. This is a major advantage throughout the game. The next statistic is money and its main benefit is there are wildcards that can swap it for integrity (via donations) or a political power (via bribes).

The original way the game worked is that you drew 3 case cards and a wildcard. The case cards took x amount of turns to complete or let drop and either decision would affect your stats. The only way to win was to get to 100 points in any one category. My first feedback came from Janelle who told me I should move my game to twine. I thought this would be too far from what I was initially trying to achieve. However, I believe looking deeper into the game it was because there really wasn't much multiplayer interaction. It was a single player card game done at the

same time as others. This was all on display during the first game testing. The game was very clunky, long, and disorganized. I got some feedback from Kyle that the required turns for completing a case or a wildcard event were too long. Also Adam told me that the points were too hard to manage and that I would benefit from a game board of some sort. I would have a second playtest with my Sister in Missouri just a short while away from Ferguson where I received feedback that the points system was broken.

I made numerous adjustments to the game I reduced it to one case card at a time (unless you have been promoted) and 1 wild card per turn per case, made sure points are added once a case is taken rather than after it has been completed, and I balanced the points more. My third test was the best. During this test I picked how I would react if I was focused on integrity while my frat brother focused on political power. He crushed me. Immediately, I wondered if that was a flaw but then I had a revelatory moment. The game occurred similarly to in real life. I then made the adjustment to have players draw 3 cards in the beginning. The player with the highest total picks among the three stats which one they would need to max out in order to win. The second highest point total picks their criteria and the third is left with the remaining stat. This limits the game to three players but showcases the dynamic I wanted to point out. In a typical round the player who has a political power focus will come in 1st followed by the player with a money focus and lastly the player with the integrity focus. It really stays true to the figure of speech "Nice Guys Finish Last!"

After making these discoveries and realizing that the games lack of balance creates a learning lesson for the player I have realized the game I've developed does support my original goal and teaches a lesson on integrity that I really am glad I can share.