

# *The Ferguson Fuss, Fatigue and Failure: Faith's Response*

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The unofficial consensus of Ferguson, Missouri citizens is the protest and violence will continue until Police Officer Darren Wilson, the 6 year veteran of the Ferguson, Missouri police department is arrested. Officer Wilson shot and killed Michael Brown, an 18 year old Black youth of Ferguson, Missouri for allegedly “bum rushing” him despite the discharging of bullets.

Many people do not understand what all the fuss is about. Many feel all the fuss the protesters, the media and others are making over one incident, tragic as it is, is a disproportionate response. By now they are undoubtedly fatigued over the Michael Brown shooting. While they do not believe this is much to do about nothing, they believe the excessive protest is over the top and incomprehensible.

What many people are scratching their heads about is a protesting community of Blacks, Caucasians, Latinos, Protestants, Catholics, Muslims and social justice activists that is accompanied by violence, looting, shooting, and Molotov cocktails. They do not believe the justice called for by angry protestors warrants this kind of retaliatory reaction.

A case for an over the top reaction can possibly be made when you add context to the text of another young Black youth shot and killed by a white police officer. It matters in

places like Ferguson, MO when there are 5,384 police stops with 686 of them whites while 4,632 are Blacks. It matters when of 611 police searches, 47 are white and 562 were black. It matters when there is one black on city council, no black school board members, a white mayor and 3 black police officers out of 564. An over the top reaction becomes understandable if not acceptable.

A case could possible by made when one cannot trust, for evidence-based reasons, a city and county judicial system that treat Black Americans different than non-blacks as in the case of Ferguson, Missouri. It becomes understandable if not acceptable.

Before one makes the very rush to judgment about how wrong the protesters are in their reactions and unrelenting demands, one might do some homework. Google the many studies that reveal evidence pointing to the criminalization of black youth, or research the statistics on how difficult it is for a black ex-offender to remain free from a criminal justice system that seems more designed to assure their return than to sustain their restoration as family and community assets.

Having said this about excessive reactions, they may be understandable but they are never acceptable.

As unpopular as this may sound, we cannot protest in the name of justice and not allow the process that leads to justice have its day in court. Just as violence begets violence, injustice begets injustice. No matter what degree the historical deficit disorder of injustice may allegedly exist in any given community, it must be trumped by a more excellent way.

The way forward is always the way of justice. As much as race matters, excessive force matters, historical evidence matters, facts and evidence-centered justice must always matter more.

What about when all the evidence and facts are in and the end process spits out an unjust verdict? This is indeed the sentiment of countless Black and Hispanic Americans across this nation. They point to studies that reveal injustice in the judicial processes that continue leading to unjust outcomes.

One reaction is to take justice in our own hands by collectively becoming community prosecuting attorneys, street jurors and judges. We can try and convict people in the court of public opinion based on the same deficit disorder of facts and evidence with which we charge the official judicial system. This is an example of injustice begetting injustice driven by the wrong angels of human nature. What are called for are measured responses, not emotion-driven reactions.

One response would be Officer Wilson turning himself in, kind of like Governor Perry of Texas. Having been found guilty of excessive force, for example, the misuse of his authority as governor, Governor Perry turned himself to authorities while vehemently protesting his innocence along the way. The Brown family and thousands of others feel

Michael Brown as innocent as Governor Perry feels in a context of political, partisan injustice.

There is, however, one big difference between Governor Perry turning himself in and Officer Wilson turning himself in. A grand jury found enough evidence to indict Governor Perry. What could happen, as unlikely as it may be, would be Officer Darren Wilson turning himself in to authorities before the grand jury reached its findings. As innocent as he may feel he is, he could allow the justice system which we would assume he has complete faith in, to eventually exonerate him on the basis of evidence and the facts of the case. I don't know if turning himself in is even permissible. If it is and however unlikely this might be, it would be a noble response to tragic realities that are being compounded daily.

Think about it. While Officer Wilson remains free, police officers are risking their lives daily. Innocent protesters are getting killed and hurt daily. School children are being kept out of school daily. Racial divisions within the community are being deepening. Businesses are dying while others are dead. Unemployment is worsening because businesses are losing money.

A second response to the over the top reactions come from the St Louis County Prosecuting Attorney, Bob McCulloch. He is asked by some and demanded by others to recuse himself in the Michael Brown case in the name of peace and order, if not justice. His father, mother, brother, uncle and cousin all worked for the St Louis' police department. Attorney McCulloch was 12 years old when his father was killed by a Black suspect. While there is nothing criminal about having family members deeply rooted in police work; and while he has every legal right not to recuse himself, the practical consideration to do so would not be out of order. For the sake of restoring order and peace leaders sometimes step down from positions of power. They step down not because they are guilty of anything, but so other things, for example justice, can have a chance to be stepped up.

A third response called for is that of the majority of the citizens. Black citizens who feel every right to be outraged could recuse themselves from the vitriolic anger that is interpreted by some law enforcement officers as fueling their militant reactions. This is a good time to reclaim the response of civil rights marchers of the sixties in the midst of dogs, water hoses, guns, knives and police batons.

Dr. Martin Luther's King's path of non-violence direct action requires and demands that peace-minded protesters step up their behavior in the name of love and a "just" peace. Black and White citizens must meet physical militancy with the spiritual militancy of nonviolent love. We, however, must not remain silent in the face of outside agitators.

Outside agitators have added insult to death and severe injuries by their immoral outrage. We must separate those that have the audacity to take advantage of parental sorrow to vent their misguided rage in the name of justice. As ironic as it might seem, peace-loving and justice-centered citizens must turn outside agitators in to police or

other law enforcement officers as threats to their community and their cry for true justice.

A fourth response must be faith based organizing of Black and White leaders from diverse communities of faith accompanied by intense collaboration with other community stakeholders: Faith-based organizations, elected and appointed government officials, social justice agencies, non-profit organizations, business leaders and concerned citizens must reach a certain declaration and determination about the direction of their communities. If Jews, Hamas and terrorists can agree to mediation to discuss their deep, historical differences, we certainly can.

The way forward is to stop scratching our heads and rushing to premature judgment over the outrage of others. We must find ways to connect, reconnect or strengthen communication connections between the most visible anti-violent initiatives and the less visible. We must match over the top violent reactions to pain, disappointment and hopelessness with over the top responses consistent with the values of freedom, justice and democracy.