

TAKING STUDENT DEBATES & DISCUSSIONS DIGITAL

Topic Four—Civic Participation: The public responses that are critical of the grand jury decision to not indict Darren Wilson are effective, justified, and/or productive.

“Riots, protests, legal battles: Consequences if Darren Wilson is not indicted for killing Mike Brown.” *Daily Kos*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Feb 2015.

The anger over the shooting death of Mike Brown is real. It's real in Ferguson to those who knew and loved him. It's real in St. Louis to tens of thousands of men and women who've been mistreated by the so-called justice system for decades. It's real to millions of African Americans and concerned citizens all over the country who are sick and tired of young, unarmed black men and women being killed with little to no reciprocal justice.

If Wilson doesn't even face a trial, the response will be a furious anger and righteous indignation. Yes, riots destroy property, harm lives, and cause new arrests. This much is true. What is also true is that when oppressed people try to use the justice system in the murder of a loved one and feel it fails them, the primary outlet for their anger is removed.

Just imagine if you believed a police officer shot and killed your beloved son while he had his hands up and you were told the officer wouldn't even go to trial for this murder. How would you feel? While a legitimate argument exists that riots are counterproductive, that same argument, if Wilson is not indicted, could be made from the point of view of people suffering in Ferguson for trusting the justice system. Why trust the system? Why wait on the system? Why believe in those who run the system, if you feel it fails you and your people time after time when you need it the most?

From the point of view of African Americans well-versed in this country's history, it appears hypocritical for those who love George Washington and Patrick Henry to then say the use of violence in response to an oppressive government is categorically wrong. The point here is not to say that riots are the best optional available, but it is to acknowledge that when people feel their backs are against the wall, it feels like the best option.

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Siegel, Jacob. "Eric Garner protesters have a direct line to city hall." *The Daily Beast*. n.d. Web. 8 Mar 2015.

The demands, which can be found [here](#), begin with Eric Garner and policing but go far further. Some are broad—like asking for an end to the criminalization of young people in the school system—and one, calling for Daniel Panteleo’s immediate firing, goes beyond calling for a special prosecutor, and veers into violating the officer’s right to due process. But none of them are so out of step with sentiments common among many New Yorkers.

Snow fell lightly Wednesday as a League member standing in front of City Hall read the demands. He was flanked by other members of the group and supporters—Russell Simmons, the rapper Common, City Council members and Eric Garner’s son.

Jumaane Williams, a City Council member known for advocating police reform, spoke at the press conference.

"I'll say it twice: This press conference today is not about being anti-police," Williams said and then said again. First, he emphasized the importance of the police and the need for new training and an end to "broken windows" tactics. Then he said the police were no substitute for the lack of other essential services in New York’s black neighborhoods.

The protests were not enough, Williams said, but would go on until the demands were met. "Nothing in this country of good conscience has ever happened without protest," he said.

The snow wasn’t sticking but still drifting down as the event came to an end. Justice League member Cherrell Brown led the group in chanting "I believe that we will win."

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Terkel, Amanda & Reilly, Ryan. "Group rallies in support of Darren Wilson, police officer who shot Michael Brown." The Huffington Post. 17 August 2014. Web. 8 Mar 2015.

The Brown killing has touched a chord with many in the African-American community and beyond that goes further than the shooting. Although a majority of Ferguson residents are black, the power structure there is still white. Ferguson's mayor and police chief are both white, as are six of the city's seven council members. (The seventh is Latino.) And just three members of Ferguson's 53-person police force are black. A 2013 report found a major racial disparity in stops and searches in Ferguson, with black individuals twice as likely to get arrested.

But Bates said he was frustrated that the issue was becoming a "race thing," saying that was besides the point.

"If everyone just stopped with the racism thing, it'd all just go away and everything would go to court and come out with the way the law is supposed to do it. Rioting and everything in the streets doesn't get anything done," he said.

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Harsanyi, David. "Sorry, but the Ferguson grand jury got it right." *The Federalist.com*. 25 Nov 2014. Web. 8 Mar 2015.

Even if many of your grievances are legitimate, "justice" doesn't exist to soothe your anger. In the end, there wasn't probable cause to file charges against Wilson. And after all the intense coverage and build-up the predictable happened. Even taking a cursory look at the grand jury evidence, the details of Brown's death were far more complex than what we heard when the incident first broke over the summer. Lawyers will, no doubt, analyze every morsel of evidence in the coming days. But if Wilson's testimony is corroborated by forensic evidence, and much of it seems to be, it seems unlikely that any jury would be able to convict him.

For the sake of argument, let's concede that prosecutors punted and allowed Wilson to walk because they were either racist or incompetent or terrified. Let's concede that the grand jury capitulated to the will of the prosecutor. Even if that were all the case, we still don't have an out-of-control cop callously gunning down an innocent, defenseless black man. This does happen in the United States far too often, and all too often there is no indictment. But there is no proof that racism played a role in this shooting. Unless all scientific evidence in the case is debunked, and unless new evidence emerges, it's fair to say that Brown was an aggressor and, at the very least, put himself in a perilous position. So indicting Wilson to soothe the anger of community would not be just. It would be the opposite.

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Root, Wayne. "I stand with police officer Darren Wilson." *The Blaze.com*. 21 Aug 2014. Web. 8 Mar 2015.

Would there be protests if a black officer had shot Michael Brown? Would there be national outrage if a black officer shot a white suspect who was charging at him, after already breaking his eye socket? Would there be rioting in the streets of Ferguson, Missouri if a black male murdered another young black male? Would Attorney General Holder be there?

Who is it that knows for a fact whenever a white police officer shoots a black male that it was based on race or hate? Yet if a black criminal happens to shoot a white person, or another black person, it's not based on race or hate. Who decided that?

It's a fact that race-based hate crime surged in Washington, D.C. last year. Almost all of that surge involved black criminals and white victims. Where is the national outrage? Where are the protests? Where is Obama?

Why has President Obama never been involved in the case of a black male shooting another black male? Or of a black police officer shooting anyone, black or white?

I, for one, stand with Officer Wilson. I will raise money for his defense if needed. I will organize protests against any attempt to prosecute this police officer, either for murder or trumped-up, politicized civil rights charges.

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Sullivan, Eileen. "Supreme Court case could shape Ferguson shooting investigation." *The Huffington Post*. 22 Aug 2014. Web. 8 Mar 2015.

Attorney General Eric Holder said Thursday the episode had opened a national conversation about "the appropriate use of force and the need to ensure fair and equal treatment for everyone who comes into contact with the police."

A grand jury is hearing evidence to determine whether Wilson, 28, who has policed the St. Louis suburbs for six years, should be charged in Brown's death.

Since the 1989 *Graham v. Connor* decision, the courts in most instances have sided with the police.

"Except in the most outrageous cases of police misconduct, juries tend to side with police officers and give them a lot of leeway," said Woody Connette, the attorney who represented the Charlotte, North Carolina, man behind the case, Dethorne Graham.

On Nov. 12, 1984, Graham, 39, felt the onset of an insulin reaction, and asked a friend to drive him to buy orange juice that would increase his blood sugar, Connette said.

According to the Supreme Court, Graham rushed into the store and grabbed the orange juice but saw the checkout line was too long, so he put the juice down and ran back to the car.

Charlotte police officer M.S. Connor thought this was suspicious and followed him. When Connor stopped Graham's friend's car, Graham explained he was having a sugar reaction. But Connor didn't believe him.

As Connor was following up with the store to see whether anything had happened, Graham left the car, ran around it twice, then sat down and passed out for a short time. Other police officers arrived, and Graham was rolled over and handcuffed. The officers lifted Graham from behind and placed him face down on the car.

When Graham asked the officers to check his pocket for something he carried that identified him as a diabetic, one of the officers told him to "shut up" and shoved his face against the hood of the car. Then four officers grabbed Graham and threw him head-first into the police car. Once police confirmed no crime had been committed inside the convenience store, they dropped Graham off at his home and left him lying in the yard, Connette said.

Graham ended up with a broken foot, cuts on his wrists, a bruised forehead and an injured shoulder.

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Minor, Kelsey. "Black, male, mad as hell." *The Huffington Post*. 29 Nov 2014. Web. 8 Mar 2015.

If my memory serves me correctly it was Michael Brown, Sr.; the man who lost his son, the young 18-year-old who lay dead in the middle of a street for more than four hours, who called for peace and non-violence no matter the outcome. So why didn't we all respect his wishes? As I have watched both Michael Brown, Sr. and Lesley McSpadden over the course of these months nothing has been clearer to me that they are people of grace and so much dignity. So again I ask why the rest of America couldn't demonstrate that?

I'm mad as hell at the media coverage of the aftermath of the Grand Jury decision reading. I know that somewhere in the St. Louis area there was peaceful and non-violent protest happening. However, we didn't see that because it wasn't sexy enough. I'm mad as hell because as the President of the United States was speaking on every single channel playing his remarks we saw pictures of Ferguson, Missouri burning to the ground. These pictures were playing in a box right next to the first African-American President of the United States. The President, a man who represents progress in this country after its torrid history with race had to be heard while the country was reminded of what salvages people of color can be. I'm mad, as hell because no one but a small group of people realizes that race relations is serious problem in America. We as a country must address this issue and start to have real and honest conversations about how to tackle this extremely sensitive issue and move forward.

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Reininga, Ben. "Ferguson protests day II: What you need to know."
Refinery29. 25 Nov 2014. Web. 8 Mar 2015

Crowds began to gather in the streets of Ferguson in the hours before the announcement was made. Missouri Governor Jay Nixon activated the National Guard, and as rumors grew that Wilson would not be indicted, tension mounted. Protesters stayed out throughout the night.

According to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, there were more than 61 arrests in Ferguson Monday, and at least 10 businesses were destroyed by fires. Reports of tear gas deployed by police started to surface by 9:15 p.m. local time, shortly after the announcement. National Guard troops arrived on the scene at about 1 a.m. Local news and social media showed images of broken windows, burglaries and looting.

The St. Louis County Police posted on Facebook that the destruction resulting from Monday night's protests was "much worse" than anything they saw in August, when Brown was killed. Several protesters were treated and released from a local hospital, but there are no reported serious injuries or deaths.

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"Gunshots, looting after grand jury in Ferguson case does not indict officer in Michael Brown shooting." Fox News.Com. 25 Nov 2014. Web. 8 Mar 2015.

President Obama addressed the nation less than an hour after the decision was announced, pleading with protesters to remain peaceful.

"I join Michael's parents to ask anyone who protests this decision to do so peacefully," Obama said. "Let me repeat Michael's father's words: 'Hurting others and destroying property is not the answer. I do not want my son's death to be in vain.'"

But soon after McCulloch's statement, a crowd gathered in Ferguson and erupted in anger, throwing debris at police and knocking down a barricade after McCulloch's announcement. Several gunshots were heard on the streets.

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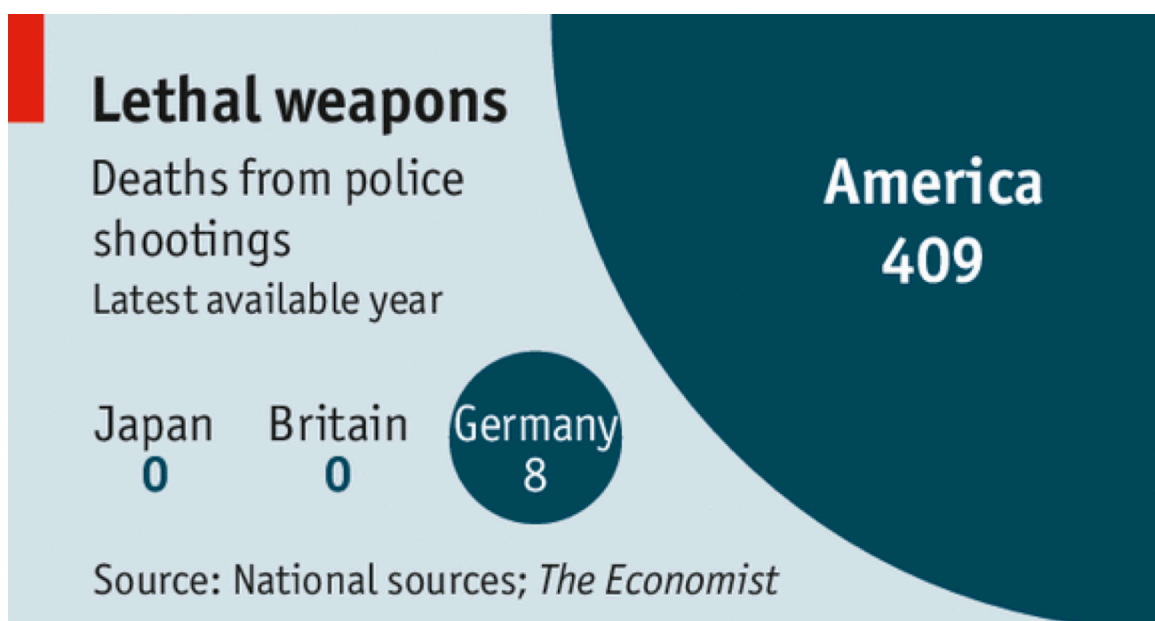
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Overkill: Police in a Missouri suburb demonstrate how not to quell a riot.” [The Economist.com](#). 23 Aug 2014. Web. 8 Mar 2014.

Rioting seldom makes life better for anyone, and the damage can last for years. Looters often make shopkeepers flee permanently to safer towns. Those who remain face less competition and therefore raise prices, making life even harder for residents. Newark and Detroit have never fully recovered from the riots of 1967.

Smug television broadcasts in Russia and China have wildly exaggerated the sickness of which Ferguson is a symptom. But it is real enough. The police in and around Ferguson have shot and killed twice as many people in the past two weeks (Mr Brown plus one other) as the police in Japan, a nation of 127m, have shot and killed in the past six years. Nationwide, America’s police kill roughly one person a day (see chart).

This is not because they are trigger-happy but because they are nervous. The citizens they encounter have perhaps 300m guns between them, so a cop never knows whether the hand in a suspect’s pocket is gripping a Glock. This will not change soon. Even mild gun-control laws tend to fail. And many Americans will look at the havoc in Ferguson and conclude that it’s time to buy a gun, just in case.



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Sulahry, Junaid. "Nation civil rights groups disappointed by Ferguson grand jury decision, call for significant reforms." Muslimadvocates.org. 24 Nov 2014. Web. 8 March 2015.

National civil and human rights organizations and community leaders expressed disappointment at today's announcement by the St. Louis County grand jury not to indict Officer Darren Wilson for the wrongful shooting death of Michael Brown. This decision is a failure by St. Louis County in securing justice for Michael Brown and his family.

The act of injustice seen in the killing of unarmed African American teenager Michael Brown and the collapse of the justice system have struck our community to its core. Brown's slaying and the resulting mistreatment of protestors in Ferguson, MO has brought to light the larger issue of police brutality and the need for critical police reforms, including de-militarization; community-based policing; mandatory racial bias and sensitivity training for all law enforcement personnel; and full accountability in Ferguson and nationwide. It also underscores the structural factors that have led to white political dominance in the city of Ferguson, contributing to racial inequalities in socio-economic access for African-Americans, which pre-date the shooting of Michael Brown.

We have mourned the repeated loss of innocent lives of citizens of color at the hands of racism and the senseless use of deadly force and the militarization of law enforcement across the nation. Sadly, the same injustices, the same violence and threat to the civil rights of Americans shown in black and white images, in our history books and documentaries as being a thing of the past is sadly still alive and well.

Now is the time to act. A coalition of 14 national civil and human rights organizations and leaders issued a Unified Statement of Action to Promote Reform and Stop Police Abuse on August 18th, which cited clear and necessary recommendations and reforms. We will continue to work together to ensure that all of our recommendations and reforms are adopted and justice is brought in Ferguson. Notably, six additional groups, including the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, and more than 520 independent signatories, have joined the open letter which was sent to the White House and the Department of Justice (DOJ).

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**Balko, Radley. "After Ferguson, how should police respond to protests?"
Indystar.com. 18 Aug 2014. Web. 8 March 2015.**

Here we have a community that doesn't see itself reflected in the police force. Ferguson is 67 percent black, while its police force is more than 90 percent white. It's a community with long-simmering racial tension between police and the people they serve. It has now been well-reported that blacks are significantly over-represented when it comes to stop-and-frisks, traffic stops and arrests in Ferguson, even though the town's white residents are more likely to be caught with contraband like drugs or illegal weapons.

We then have an incident that represents all of these problems in a concentrated form — an unarmed black man was killed by a (reportedly) white police officer who had stopped him as he was walking home. The police, under pressure, released the officer's name Friday, along with an incident report that raised many questions. But they have not released Brown's autopsy report. All of this only adds to perception of a Ferguson Police Department that is detached, unaccountable, opaque and unconcerned with how it is perceived by the community it serves. If a town's citizens are reminded over and over again that the law has no respect for them, we shouldn't be surprised if they begin to lose respect for the law. This isn't an excuse for the looting and rioting. But it does add context.

The police in Ferguson are almost a textbook example of how not to react to protest. "When you start by rolling out the SWAT team, and you then position a sniper on top of an APC with his gun pointed at the protesters, what kind of message are you sending? Did they really expect the sniper would need to start shooting people? It was just a show of force," Geron says. He adds that it's particularly important for police leaders to prepare their officers when the protests are aimed at police, and to stress the importance of separating themselves from criticism directed at the agency, or at policing in general.

"It's a crucial conversation that you need to have with your commanders and your officers," he says. "You have to tell them that it isn't personal 'They're going to be critical of us. They may yell at us. But that's OK. That's their right. And our job is to protect their rights.'"

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“Grand jury does not charge Ferguson officer in Michael Brown shooting.” NDTV.com. 25 Nov 2014. Web. 8 March 2015.

The [Wilson] decision set off a new wave of anger among hundreds who gathered outside the Ferguson Police Department. Police in riot gear stood in a line as demonstrators chanted and threw signs and other objects toward them as the news spread. One woman said: "The system failed us again."

Brown's family issued a statement expressing sadness but calling for peaceful protest and a campaign for body cameras on police officers nationwide.

"We are profoundly disappointed that the killer of our child will not face the consequence of his actions," the statement said. "While we understand that many others share our pain, we ask that you channel your frustration in ways that will make a positive change. We need to work together to fix the system that allowed this to happen."

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Sowell, Thomas. "The steep cost of the Ferguson riots." Townhall.com. 2 Dec 2014. Web. 8 March 2015.

The riots, looting and setting things on fire that some in the media are treating as reactions to the grand jury's decision not to indict the policeman, actually began long before the grand jury had begun its investigation, much less announced any decision.

Why some people insist on believing whatever they want to believe is a question that is hard to answer. But a more important question is: What are the consequences to be expected from an orgy of anarchy that started in Ferguson, Missouri and has spread around the country?

The first victims of the mob rampages in Ferguson have been people who had nothing to do with Michael Brown or the police. These include people -- many of them black or members of other minorities -- who have seen the businesses they worked to build destroyed, perhaps never to be revived.

But these are only the first victims. If the history of other communities ravaged by riots in years past is any indication, there are blacks yet unborn who will be paying the price of these riots for years to come.

Sometimes it is a particular neighborhood that never recovers, and sometimes it is a whole city. Detroit is a classic example. It had the worst riot of the 1960s, with 43 deaths -- 33 of them black people. Businesses left Detroit, taking with them jobs and taxes that were very much needed to keep the city viable. Middle class people -- both black and white -- also fled.