

Ferguson: Tragedies of a Broken System

BY DEJON BUNN-CONSTANT

The recent shooting of Michael Brown is a tragedy in multiple senses. First, there are two parents without a child, friends without a comrade and a country with one less human being. But the tragedy is also found in the issue of inequality and discrimination in the country. This young man's death is, unfortunately, only one example of a countrywide issue that has a much uglier, more systematic, more complex, racist backstory.

The rampancy of police brutality and racial profiling against blacks, especially young black men in this country, is nothing new. But the killing of Michael Brown demonstrates an issue of overall social and political inequality in Ferguson, which in itself represents a larger issue of inequality in America.

For one, there are 53 members of the police department in Ferguson and 3 are black. The other 50 members, a whopping 94 percent of the department, including the chief of police, are white. Would this be a big deal if Ferguson was virtually an all white town? No, in fact it would be pretty expected. However, the population of Ferguson in 2010 was measured to be roughly 67 percent black and 29 percent white. There is obviously a problematic disparity between the population of Ferguson and the representation of race in their police department, but this is just part of a bigger picture. 86 percent of the drivers stopped in Ferguson last year were black, and 93 percent of the people arrested last year in Ferguson were black. This would not necessarily be a huge racial discrepancy if it were not for the fact that this is an alarmingly consistent pattern across the entire nation.

Far too many blacks are wrongfully pulled over or stopped and frisked by police, when the police have no reasonable suspicion. The myth of "Driving While Black" is no myth at all; it is a painful reality that nearly every black person will face in their lifetime. Not only is our society's racist conditioning that blacks are more likely to commit a crime to blame, but misrepresentation in police departments themselves are also more damaging than they may seem.

In the same way it is important



PHOTO BY JAMELLE BOUIE / FLICKR

Police in riot gear at Ferguson protests

for everyone to have an inspiration or idol to identify with, it is important for every race to be equally represented in all three branches of our government. However, the judicial branch is arguably struggling more severely than its two sibling branches to achieve equality and work against racism.

Representation is important, not only because it gives everyone a sense of equal acknowledgment and appreciation in the grand scheme of society, but it is literally the only fair way to have each race be heard. We cannot have an equal, fair society where one voice, one part of the story, is heard louder than the others.

How are young black teens supposed to feel important in a society that repeatedly tells them their lives are expendable if a police officer feels threatened by the fact that they are simply walking down the street? How are they supposed to feel safe when racial profiling is so pernicious? How are they supposed to feel included and heard when there is such a disproportionate amounts of blacks in police departments and other judicial and federal positions across America? How is Dorian Johnson supposed to feel knowing that he lost his friend because officer Darren Wilson was still too

uncomfortable, even with Michael Brown in a surrendering position, to stop and treat the victim with human decency?

The biggest problem is not just crooked policies. Along with the racism that is instilled in human nature — misrepresentation, racial profiling, lack of compassion and sense of humanity, and many other factors also play a role. This also

includes the fact that far too many people are mis-educated about their rights and unknowingly let police officers take illegal advantage of them. Ultimately, officers will continue to claim the lives of those like Michael Brown and Eric Garner unless we take action as a nation, and speak out against clear cut evidence that inequality is a much bigger problem than many care to believe.

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