

# “Where Capitalism and Racism Intersect”: Defending The Ferguson Revolts

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*“I think that we’ve got to see that a riot is the language of the unheard. And, what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the economic plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years.”- Martin Luther King Jr., Interview with Mike Wallace, September 27, 1966*

“Now, let’s get to what the white press has been calling riots. In the first place don’t get confused with the words they use like ‘anti-white,’ ‘hate,’ ‘militant’ and all that nonsense like ‘radical’ and ‘riots.’ What’s happening is rebellions not riots[.]”- Stokley Carmichael, “Black Power” speech, July 28, 1966

Many people are telling the people of Ferguson that they should not riot, that it is only hurting their community and they should instead engage in peaceful protests. However, this is deeply problematic as it ignores a number of issues.

People’s main concern regarding the riots in Ferguson come from a concern about private property. One could say that people are more concerned about the theft and destruction of private property than human life, but this needs to be made much more clear. People are more worried about the smashing and theft of inanimate objects than they are about human life. But it isn’t specifically human life, it’s black human life that many of these people could care less about.

On a deeper level, this is where capitalism and racism intersect. One of capitalism’s main tenets is the dominance of private property and how it must be protected. We can see that this has been transcribed in law, such as with the Stand Your Ground laws. Yet, also within the larger society there is a lack of caring for black life. In any situation, the media and general public regularly engage in victim blaming and look for anything, anything at all to assassinate the character of those who died at the hand of the police. This can be seen even today, when the media brings up Akai Gurley’s criminal record when discussing his death at the hands of a police officer. These two ideas have come together in Ferguson, creating a situation where people are more concerned about private property destruction than they are about the death of Michael Brown.

Many argue that the people of Ferguson are destroying their own community. Yet this is false. To quote [Tyler Reinhard](#): “we don’t own neighborhoods. Black businesses exist, it’s true. But the emancipation of impoverished communities is not measured in corner-store revenue. It’s not measured in minimum-wage jobs. And no, it’s especially not measured in how many black people are allowed to become police officers.” The neighborhoods like

Ferguson were not created by black people, they were created due to [racist housing policies](#) that black people had no control over. It should also be noted that Ferguson is 60% black, but has an [almost entirely white police force](#) and that [the city government and school board](#) are also almost completely white. So while they may live there, the black residents of Ferguson have little representation in the local community and are essentially living under a group of people that isn't responsive to their concerns.

With regards to the riots themselves, the larger society is asking why don't the protesters remain peaceful. The answer is two-part: peace has been tried and we are going to be condemned no matter what.

Society asks why aren't the protesters peaceful, however we have to ask this: Why would you think that people would remain peaceful in the face of constant violence? Why would a people remain peaceful when their young people are being killed on an seemingly weekly basis by the very people who are supposed to protect them?

Black people have tried peace before. We were peaceful in the 1960s when we were peacefully protesting for our civil rights and were met with racist mobs, firehoses, and dogs, we had crosses burnt on our lawns, lynchings, and a bomb put in a church. During all of that time we remained peaceful even as society enacted massive violence and repression against us. Yet, violence against the black community continues today, the only difference is that it isn't so blatant. Martin Luther King Jr. was nonviolent and died at the hands of an assassin, a violent act. Look at the Occupy protests, which were entirely nonviolent, the protesters were still met with violence, most notably in the form of [a pre-dawn raid](#) on Zuccotti Park. So even when protesters are nonviolent, they can still be met with violence.

The situation is currently such where if a black person is killed by the police, people immediately come out and find anyway in which they can besmirch or blame the victim, such as with the aforementioned example involving Akai Gurley. So they are already looking for ways to take the blame off of the authorities from day one. The situation changes, though, when oppressed people fight back. Not only is the violence denounced, but then it is used as an excuse to use massive amounts of violence against the oppressed, as we saw by the militarized police that have been used in Ferguson.

When people lash out against one incident, one may be inclined to call that violence, but when violence against your community has been going on for decades and people lash out, that's no longer violence on the part of the oppressed, that's called resistance.

When the question is raised of why aren't there peaceful protests, it is also extremely hypocritical. Many have spoken out in person and on social media condemning the riots, but at the same time they are silent on the constant police brutality that the black community deals with and they are silent on the economic violence done against black communities, pushing them into ghettos where not only is there economic poverty but also a poverty of expectations. On a larger scale, they are also silent when other groups riot, such as when white people [rioted over pumpkins](#). It is extremely hypocritical to speak out against rioters, but not have a thing to say about police brutality or to ignore others who riot.

At the heart of this is how society condones state violence, but condemns violence by individuals. This mindset is a serious problem as it only gives more power to the state and consistently puts state forces in the right, with the victims of state violence being forced to

prove their innocence, a situation made all the harder due to people already assuming that the victim is in the wrong.

Many have pushed for peace, but peace and safety are not something the black people in America receive, whether we are just looking for help after a car accident, as was the case with Renisha McBride, or we are carrying a toy gun around, as was the case with John Crawford.

This is not the time to ask for peace. This is the time to say “No justice, no peace.”

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