

# THE Round Table

Winter 2014

"...a path from where we are to where we should be." --Peter Maurin



# Ferguson: Voices from the Movement

# Why This Issue?

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It has been over four months now since Michael Brown was killed by Darren Wilson in the streets of Ferguson. Since August 9th, protests have occurred daily: on West Florissant, at the Ferguson Police Department, in Clayton, in the Shaw neighborhood, and all over St. Louis.

From the onset, it became clear that the thousands who gathered in the streets came out not only to seek justice for Mike Brown but to address the larger systemic issues of racial profiling, police brutality, and the militarization of police forces. People came from near and far to congregate, share their stories, mourn, and listen to others. Though often portrayed only as an unruly mob in the news media, each person within this movement has a story, a particular voice, and a unique perspective on what has happened in Ferguson and how the movement can continue to grow and impart meaningful change in our city and our country.

Mike Brown's shooting was a turning point—an awakening point for many, and a point at which many people's voices who have long been crying out for justice began to be heard. In "An Open Letter from Ferguson Protestors and Allies," written on the 70th day of protests but just as relevant today, the writers share that people of color, and African Americans in particular, are living an "American Horror Story," and that they will no longer accept it. They will no longer let oppression be ignored and overlooked. In this issue, we are trying to open ourselves to that story: "You must come face to face with the horror that we live daily. You must come to know and profess the truth of this story, and be determined to end it."

This issues will bring you many voices. These are the voices that don't get air time on corporate media outlets. They are the voices of those who have been on the streets and have taken part in the organizing. We can learn from these voices what we can't learn from watching TV.

Each person who has written for this issue will share about what Ferguson has meant to them and how it has impacted their work. Ajala discusses the importance of viewing the Mike Brown shooting within its historical framework, citing slave patrols, the KKK, and the War on Drugs as contributing factors to the targeting of Black communities by modern day police forces. Jonathan Pulphus, a SLU student and a member of Tribe X, conveys how as a Black man "every living minute is marked by resistance, struggle, or fight to be". Emily Bland shares about how for her as a white person, she has learned most simply from showing up, listening, and being part of the movement. You will find half a dozen pieces here, each with a unique and important perspective.

In our Roundtable meetings, it became clear that we needed to do an issue on Ferguson, but we did not want to provide analysis, co-opt the movement in any way, or seek to be definitive voices on what has happened in our city over the last four months. There are many voices from the movement—those who have been most affected by racial injustice—who have already been doing that. We wanted to provide another forum to get those voices out. So, read on; open yourself to the American Horror Story. Together, let us be determined to end it. ✚



- Jason Ebinger

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# Ferguson and Mike Brown: A Wider Lens

by Paulna "Ajala" Valbrun

There are many contradictory accounts of what happened the day that Mike Brown was murdered which has caused many people to feel ambivalent towards the whole affair. However, viewing the incident within a historical context clarifies any confusion. Institutionalized racism and police brutality began with slave patrols, which were primarily constructed to suppress slave insurrections, to return runaway slaves to wealthy landowners, and to intimidate slaves.<sup>1</sup> Although slave patrols ended after the abolition of slavery, the idea that Blacks needed to be monitored and have their movement restricted persisted.

The first American police department was established in 1630 in Boston; however, many modern police departments in the South were originally slave patrols. In 1704, the colony of Carolina developed the first slave patrols which were originally unpaid positions, on which all white males were expected to serve. Today's modern police departments have implemented the same racist ideology as slave patrols, an attitude that has eventually become ubiquitous throughout the country.<sup>2</sup>

The confusion expressed by the general public regarding the day that Mike Brown was murdered is understandable because there is such a disparity between witness and police officer accounts. However, the details of what happened are uncanny and offer many parallels to the dysfunctional history in America. For example, Ferguson is 67% Black while only three of Ferguson's 53 officers are Black.<sup>3</sup> Within a historical context this is incredibly problematic, as the issue of Black neighborhoods being patrolled by white police is an ideology that spans back to the institution of slavery.

The duties of slave patrols provided the blueprint for current day racial profiling. Slave patrols conducted unwarranted house searches of Black people's households to ensure they didn't have any weapons or ammunition. Slave patrols also had the right to apprehend any slave that they thought

might be stealing. Another duty of the slave patrol: "[Slave patrols] ordered white adults to ride the roads at night, stopping all slaves they encountered and making them prove that they were engaged in lawful activities. Patrollers required slaves to produce a pass, which stated their owner's name as well as

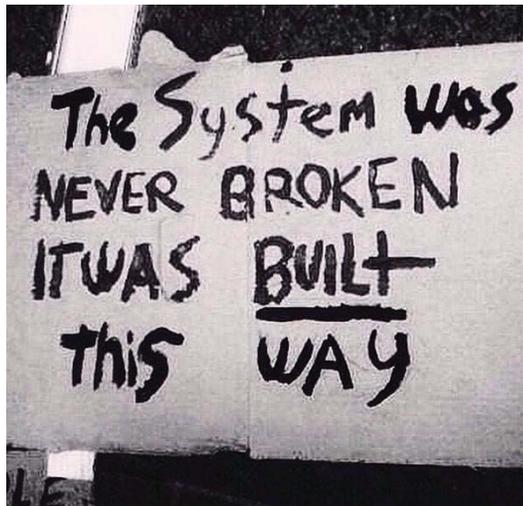
where and when they were allowed to be away from the plantation and for how long."<sup>4</sup>

Under these circumstances, anyone Black was subject to harassment and brutality. The restrictions on the movements or doings of Blacks only increased once U.S. President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation went into effect in 1863. Many Blacks found on the street after 9pm, regardless of if they had a slave pass or not, were arrested by slave patrols.

Slave patrols ended after the Civil War; however this racist mentality manifested in other forms. Now that slavery and slave patrols were outlawed, legal outlets needed to be utilized in order to continue violence and

oppression against Black Americans. Slave patrols evolved into police departments and white vigilante groups such as the KKK. At times the two organizations were interchangeable since many KKK members were also police officers. The KKK's involvement with the police department was so prevalent that Congress had to pass the Ku Klux Klan Act, in 1871. The Act "... prohibited state actors from violating the Civil Rights of all citizens in part because of law enforcement's involvement with the infamous group."<sup>5</sup>

The infiltration of the police department by the KKK was a way to resist the dismantling of slave patrols. It also enabled oppression and violence against Blacks to continue. For example, police officers affiliated with the KKK were sympathetic to lynch mobs and often hesitated to intervene with the murdering of Black people. "Many Southern politicians and officials supported lynch-law, and came to power on a platform of race prejudice."<sup>6</sup>



Source Unknown



**Paulna "Ajala" Valbrun** is a Knox College graduate, new member of the Karen House community, and amazing blogger. ([hood-peasant-valbrun.tumblr.com/](http://hood-peasant-valbrun.tumblr.com/))

When Jim Crow Laws weren't enough, lynching Blacks was a technique used to intimidate and maintain control after the abolition of slavery. Blacks were "lynched for 'crimes' such as registering to vote, arguing with a white man, disrespect to a white woman, shoplifting, drunkenness, elopement, insults and refusing to give evidence," and "being obnoxious, disorderly conduct, indolence, suing white men... vagrancy and unpopularity." Between the years of 1882 and 1951, around 3,437 Black people were lynched.<sup>7</sup>

The idea that Black people need to be monitored and have their movement restricted persists today. The slave patrol mentality pervades through racial profiling, and Stop and Frisk laws in places such as New York City. "An analysis by the New York Civil Liberties Union revealed that innocent New Yorkers have been subjected to police stops and street interrogations more than 5 million times since 2002, and that Black and Latino communities continue to be the overwhelming target of these tactics. Nearly nine out of ten stopped-and-frisked New Yorkers have been completely innocent, according to the NYPD's own reports..."<sup>8</sup>

Another contemporary law that has been used by whites to restrict the movement of Black Americans is the "Stand Your Ground" law. The law became famous after George Zimmerman was acquitted of murdering Trayvon Martin (an unarmed 17-year-old African American) in 2012. The "stand your ground" law states that "...A person may use deadly force in self-defense without the duty to retreat when faced with a reasonable perceived threat."<sup>9</sup> George Zimmerman was on neighborhood watch when he spotted Martin who he claimed looked suspicious. After stating, "These assholes, they always get away," and emphasizing for a second time that Martin was a Black male, Zimmerman decided to chase after Martin.<sup>10</sup> Eventually the situation escalated into him firing a deadly shot at Martin.

Several factors make it clear that the "Stand Your Ground" law was implemented in a way that reinforced the idea that whites, specifically white vigilantes, have the right to police Black people. Zimmerman was on neighborhood watch in his mostly white suburban neighborhood when he murdered Martin. He also had a history of calling 9-1-1 to report Black males who he described as "suspicious" looking, but were never found to be doing anything illegal or harmful. When he wasn't calling the police to report innocent Black males, he reported issues as mundane as a male driving without headlights, a pothole, or a stray dog. In fact Zimmerman was obsessed with calling 9-1-1, he called the cops around 46 times between January and February of 2011.<sup>11</sup>

The acquittal of Zimmerman compared to the case of Marissa Alexander also clarifies how "Stand Your Ground" laws are used. The same law that helped acquit Zimmer-

man—a white man who murdered an unarmed Black male—could not acquit a battered Black female.<sup>12</sup> She was arrested, charged with aggravated assault, convicted and sentenced to 20 years. After winning an appeal, she recently accepted a plea deal for time served (1,030 days), an additional 65 days in jail, and two years of probation while serving house detention and wearing a surveillance monitor.<sup>13</sup>

The murder of Mike Brown should not surprise anyone once the history of police and white vigilantes and their treatment of Black Americans is examined. The idea that Blacks need to be monitored and have their movement restricted was manifested again on the day that Mike Brown was murdered by Darren Wilson. According to Wilson, he felt that he had the right to use deadly force because his life was in danger. Witnesses state that an unarmed Brown died with his hands in the air revealing that he had no weapon with the hopes that Wilson would stop shooting.<sup>14</sup>

The parallels of Brown's death to the history of Black men dying at the hands of white vigilantes or police officers are uncanny. Similar to slave patrols, Wilson was a white male, from a predominantly white police department, patrolling a Black neighborhood. As many slave patrols and KKK members, Wilson claimed that he had to use lethal force against an unarmed Black male because he felt threatened. Similar to Trayvon Martin and many lynching victims, the criminal history of Brown was closely examined by the media. The argument presented by racist apologists was that Brown wasn't an innocent victim because he was accused of stealing Cigarillos. It is an argument reminiscent of the arguments presented by lynching mobs who justified their brutality of Black men because they were accused of "drunkenness, elopement, insults and refusing to give evidence, vagrancy, unpopularity," and like Mike Brown, shoplifting. †

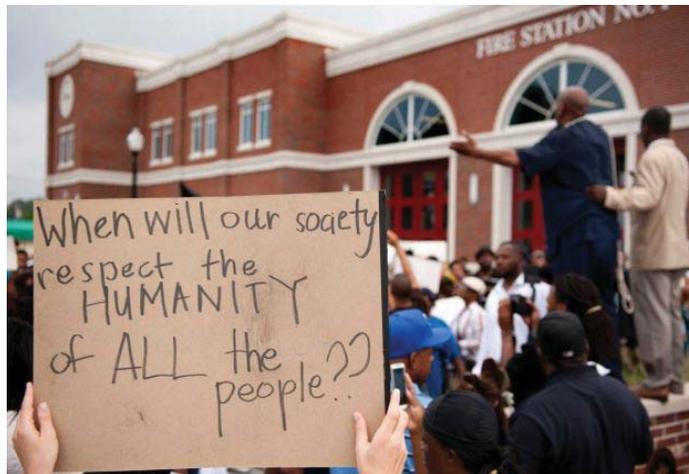


Photo Credit: Unknown

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# Ferguson: Making a Choice

by Emily Bland

*my ceiling fan reminds me of the helicopters and I can't sleep at night*

*I wonder if maybe they're monitoring my Twitter feed or email and they'll eventually put my name on a list marked forever because of Ferguson*

*marked forever because of Ferguson*

*Mike Brown's body facedown on the news marked forever*

*the screams of the people as the shots ring out and the gas makes its way towards us but there's nowhere to run the pain sears my face and i'm choking*

*choking back tears this shit hurts in all the ways a person can be hurt*

I wrote these words in the early morning hours of August 19th, ten days after Michael Brown was murdered by the state, and mere hours before Kajieme Powell was killed by trigger-happy cops in North City. I had just finished a "shift" out on the streets of Ferguson with my friends, Evan and Jelani of the Organization for Black Struggle (OBS); we walked the streets that night with bottles of antacid and water, wet bandanas, earplugs, and some band-aids. We were there to accompany protestors and provide relief if the outside agitators - the police - escalated the situation once more. The National Guard was on the scene and I remember thinking "Dear God, the Guard has live rounds. What am I doing here?"

One thing I do know is that when I heard about Mike Brown, my first reaction was a terrible sense of "Not again..." A few days before, John Crawford had been gunned down in an Ohio Walmart. Before that was Eric Garner. There was Renisha McBride. Jordan Davis. Trayvon Martin. Cary Ball Jr. And now Mike Brown. I felt angry, I felt sad, and this was followed with a sense of disbelief, but also a sense of "Of course... this IS St. Louis; it was only a matter of time." These thoughts were followed very quickly by a text sent to a friend of mine who is involved with OBS saying "What can I do? How can I support OBS? Tell me where to go when you know."

As all of this was happening, I was in the middle of a beginning of the year orientation for a group of volunteers that

I supervise, all of whom are called to embody what we call the Vincentian charism: the spirit and example left to us by Saints Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac. One of the focuses of this charism is the idea of systemic change: identification of the root causes of injustice and the creation of strategies—including advocacy—to change those structures which keep people oppressed.

Here I was: a volunteer coordinator, a social justice educator, a Vincentian... and I was suddenly faced with a real-life opportunity to help create systemic change. This was (and still is) an opportunity to accompany folks as they moved a moment into a movement, with the hope that that movement would lead us all to what Martin Luther King, Jr. (and later, bell hooks) called beloved community. I was (and still am) faced with the opportunity to co-create a more fully realized Kingdom every single day. Going into the streets of Ferguson in those early days just seemed like a natural fulfillment of the charism I have chosen to live.

I could use the rest of this space to talk about these big, grand theories that I have about capitalism and race and patriarchy. I could talk about my fervent belief in the concept of collective liberation and the fact that Christ was a political agitator who was assassinated by the state. But I am still wrestling with a question I posed earlier: What was I doing in Ferguson that night the National Guard came out, and the nights before and after? What am I doing now? If I am being honest... I still kind of don't know exactly what I am doing. Most days, I just take notes at meetings and show up to protests when and where I can. I listen a lot. I try not to talk too much (this is something that's really difficult for me). I give some people rides, and I try to be affirming and loving and supportive of everyone in the movement. I share a lot of things on Facebook. I got arrested at a Walmart. Occasionally, I argue with my dad about whether or not I am a domestic terrorist.

One thing I am sure of is that I am making a choice. Every day, I wake up, and I make the choice to dismantle white supremacy in the ways that I am able. Each day, those choices look a little different. But the choice is the same: choosing to affirm that Black Lives Matter. Choosing the Freedom Side. Is that the side you are on?

I hope so.

We need you. ✚



**Emily Bland** co-directs a local volunteer program for young adults who wish to form intentional community and is the co-chair of the Justice Institute's Anti Racism Collective. She likes to bake and as a general rule, does not trust people who can sit still while listening to James Brown.

# Resistance is Justice

by Philip Crawford

I never thought something as heinous as the murder of Mike Brown could happen in my own backyard. I thought this way perhaps because I had attempted to create a false sense of reality. I thought police violence could happen on a micro level with hotspot policing and the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department's policy of "pedestrian checks". I thought this kind of thing was something I would accept. It could happen in California or New York because it does happen in California and New York. Black people around this country are subject to police violence daily. It is indeed something we unfortunately have to expect.

Around the time I was ten years old my older brother, Melvin, bought his first car, a maroon Buick LeSabre. This was not only exciting for him but exciting as well for myself and my sister, Melanie, because now we would no longer have to rely on our father, who used the school bus he drove for a living as our family vehicle. Finally we could control what station played on the radio and roll down our windows when the Saint Louis heat became more than we could bear. It brought freedom that we had never known. One day while going to my aunt's house in the College Hill neighborhood we were pulled over by a St. Louis City police officer near the intersection of Penrose and West Florissant. Melaine, in the front passenger seat, looked directly at me to ensure my seat belt was on and immediately noticed that it was. As time passed my brother had his license out and my sister called our dad. While both of them were preoccupied the officer appeared at the window. This was the first glimpse I had at him. He was

old and white. He focused his attention on me. "Why aren't you buckled in son?" He asked. I was dumbfounded. It was obvious that I was buckled in.

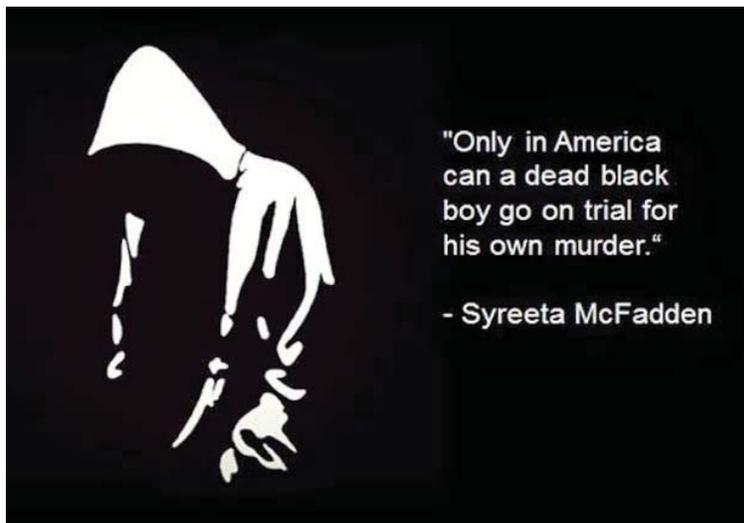
How could he ignore this? He could easily see the strap across my chest as my sister had. Grabbing the strap and extending it so he would have to acknowledge my wearing of it was the only thing I could do in response. I had committed no wrongdoing, yet by his question I was in the wrong. I could

not focus on what was happening around me anymore. I thought solely about his question.

I did not notice his accusation about my brother not stopping at a nonexistent stop sign, the barking German Shepherd in the officer's car, or that our father had arrived and had gotten the officer to leave. I had not accepted this when I ten; why would I accept it at nineteen?

Soon after this incident I learned that this officer did this on a regular basis to my brother. I knew something was wrong

here but I could not identify what. This confused me and even to some point angered me that no one would explain why it was happening. Richard Wright in his 1945 novel Black Boy writes about a similar occurrence happening around the same age after a conversation with his mother about the racial makeup of their family stating: "I was angry... I knew there was something my mother was holding back. She was not concealing facts, but feelings, attitudes, convictions, which she did not want me to know; and she became angry when I prodded her. All right, I would find out someday. Just wait. All right, I was colored. It



"Only in America  
can a dead black  
boy go on trial for  
his own murder."

- Syreeta McFadden

Source Unknown



**Philip Crawford** is a college sophomore at Roosevelt University in Chicago, IL with a love for justice and good food.



"Children are made to fear those who in idea are made to protect them, but in practice destroy their lives." Children are a common site at the protests in Ferguson. Photo: Unknown

justice that can be realized is that another Mike Brown, another Kajieme Powell, another Vonderrit Myers will not be murdered by those who are there to protect them. ✦

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was fine. I did not know enough to be afraid or to anticipate in a concrete manner. True, I had heard that colored people were killed and beaten, but so far it seemed so remote. There was, of course, a vague uneasiness about it all, but I would be able to handle it when I came to it."<sup>1</sup>

The horrendous fact of the matter is that the only thing that has changed from Wright's childhood to mine is the use of the word colored. This realization is a truth that all black people must suffer through in this country. Parents of black children, just as mine had done, attempt to allow their children to hold on to fleeting innocence for as long as possible. This innocence cannot last long. In the 2012 "Report on the Extrajudicial Killings of 120 Black People" from the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, 11% of the 120 victims were under the age of 18.<sup>2</sup> This is utterly indefensible. Children are made to fear those who, in theory, are made to protect them, but in practice destroy their lives. If freedom is what Assata Shakur said it was—"the right to grow, the right to blossom"<sup>3</sup>—then these black children were denied their freedom.

This is why resistance is paramount. Since the lives of children, the most innocent among us, are seen as threats then all of us black people, who have lost much of our innocence facing the world, must be seen as threats. Ferguson opened the eyes of countless people, both white and black. The death of Michael Brown forced me to sit with the discomfort of blackness as a threat and destroyed any lingering faith I had in the systems of power. I did not know Mike Brown but I know the streets where he walked and that was enough to make me realize that neither I, nor the countless beautiful black people that I know, are at all safe from the same fate. It forced me to identify with the history of black people that I love so deeply in western society and draw the distinct parallels between us. Resistance in Ferguson seeks justice just as Dred Scott and the Shelley family did. Justice for Mike Brown is not only an indictment or an arrest of Darren Wilson. The fullest form of



Original Artwork: Damon Davis, Heartacheandpaint.com

# Karen House Statement Following the Death of Mike Brown

8/12/14

*To our fellow white friends and supporters, and to our fellow Catholic Workers,*

It is time. 18 year-old Michael Brown is dead (as is Eric Garner, John Crawford, Trayvon Martin, and too many others...) He is another victim of an out-of control system that systematically targets people of color. At Karen House, we don't have a guest or neighbor who doesn't have their own story of police humiliation, harassment or violence – including Anna Brown, a former guest who died in a St. Louis jail in 2012.

We realize that as a mostly white community, it is our responsibility to speak to other white folks about race, racism, and what is happening in Ferguson. Our community has been learning more and more about how racism operates to separate and limit all of us. We are encouraging ourselves, and other white folks we love, to look at our fear and conditioning about race, to listen better, and to act as allies to people of color.

It is time for us white people to step back, and to step forward. It is time to listen:

Listen to the African American mothers who rightfully fear sending their sons to the store, to school, and to grandma's house. (Don't walk too fast. Don't walk too slow. Keep your hands out. Pull your pants up. Don't look guilty.)

Listen to the rage of the black man, who has been vilified, stereotyped, targeted and jailed by a white-controlled establishment since before America was even a country. (Slavery, Jim Crow, and now Mass Incarceration are a litany of terror and control, leaving deep and open wounds. Listen.)

Listen to more than the riot porn on the network news. Connect with those most affected by violence, and learn about their stories. (Check out ColorLines, St. Louis-based Organization for Black Struggle, and Black Girl Dangerous; each has insightful analysis on the Mike Brown and Ferguson)

It's time for white folks to get better educated. "We white people don't understand the anger re: Ferguson because our kids aren't murdered with impunity by the state." (@Auragasmic) It is time to step forward, to learn about and take responsibility for our white privilege.

It is time for us to talk with other white people who also feel fear and confusion: "Why can't they be peaceful? Why are they so angry? Why so conspiratorial?" A few responses from some people of color to start us off:

"What is an appropriate expression of anger when the

cops keep on killing our kids?!" (@ProfessorCrunk)

"We can't deride the actions of those who are expected to respect property when their very lives are devalued. We can't expect them to maintain civility when their very existence has been the target of incivility from others." (Christi Griffin)

"If Black folks are 'civil' & polite in petitioning authorities, THEY ARE IGNORED. If they lash out, they are demonized. Typical." (@lkscollective)

It is time for us to talk to other white people about race, and about our experience of being white: what it has cost us, what it has excused us from, and where it can lead us. It is time to temporarily set aside our defensiveness and guilt ("I didn't own slaves! I have a black friend! I'm colorblind!"). It is time to share our shame, regret, and sorrow that whiteness, in this country, has meant slave-ownership, exploitation, genocide and oppression; it is time to move forward, committed to ending this reality.

It is time for all of us white folks to step forward. It is time for us to start showing up, following the lead of people of color – beyond the safety of Facebook. To challenge the violent systems that create the conditions of poverty, police brutality and oppression.

It is time for us white folks to acknowledge the hypocrisy of opposing war abroad while we've shrugged off the war on people of color in our own cities and neighborhoods; right now, the U.S. incarcerates a larger percentage of its black population than South Africa did at the height of Apartheid. (The New Jim Crow, 6)

Fellow white folks, it is time to step back, and to step forward. All we can do is our best: learning, leaving our comfort zones, acting, asking forgiveness from each other, failing, and starting again. "Indeed, a 'riot is the language of the unheard,' (MLK) but we collectively must work to provide microphones for the dispossessed." (@Negrointellect)

Please join us! It's time. It's about time.

In hope and solidarity,  
*The Karen House Community*



# We Are the Ones We've Been Waiting For

by Julia Ho

The day that Mike Brown was killed, I was in Mexico City with my sister. Through social media, I heard the news that an 18-year old Black man had been executed in broad daylight, and that thousands of people had risen up to protest his murder. My flight home wasn't scheduled until Tuesday, so for the first three days I glued myself to Facebook as I tried to understand the situation at home. During those three days, I not only saw vivid images of the brutality that my friends (and many people who would later become my new family) were facing at the hands of the police, but I also saw the media's vilification of the protesters through portrayals of isolated acts of looting and violent rebellion. Instead of projecting the grief and righteous anger of the community onto the police, mainstream media quickly did their work to dehumanize protesters by painting them as violent thugs. Now, more than *100 days later*, we are still fighting that narrative.

Since Mike Mike's death, I have seen what started as an uprising transform into a powerful, concerted, and organized movement against police brutality and state violence. I have seen and been a part of dozens of actions, late-night discussions, panels, art projects, meetings, arguments, disruptions, and celebrations. I can name tangible results that have come out of the collective efforts of the people—significant steps toward

the creation of a civilian review board in the city, bench warrant amnesty, increased training for officers, federal intervention from the Department of Justice, the implementation of body cameras, the birth of several youth-led organizations. Each of these wins, no matter how small, helps me remember why I am a part of this movement and realize my own power.

Although these wins make me hopeful, I am equally driven by the losses that have led to this moment. Each and every day, I am reminded of how incredibly violent and dangerous America is for Black and Brown people. Some days, this reminder comes through blatant expressions of racism, in the image of a young white woman screaming at a group of young, Black men and women that "We [white people] are the ones who gave y'all all the fucking freedoms y'all have."

Some days, this reminder comes through forms of violent rebellion, in the image of a group of young Black men who arm themselves against the police and refuse to obey a curfew because "they [the police] are killing us anyway." Some days, this reminder comes by simply walking through North City and County and seeing the remains of beautiful homes and histories that have been torn apart by decades of intentional neglect. Some days, this reminder comes through the strength of my friends, many of whom have lost their jobs and homes



"If you aren't being actively anti-racist, then you are supporting a racist, violent system." Photo: Jim Young



**Julia Ho** is an organizer with MORE who spends most of her time scheming to end capitalism or thinking about food.

because they have dedicated their lives to the struggle.

On top of all of this, I am reminded that police brutality is a matter of *life* and *death* for Black folks, in a way that it isn't and never will be for me. As a 22 year old Taiwanese-American college graduate, I can no longer be complicit or complacent in a society that values my life more than the lives of Black men and women who are killed every 28 hours by law enforcement. While I was a student at Washington University, I was acutely aware of how my life was valued more than Black life by the ways that my friends, professors, and advisors warned me of the "dangers" of venturing North of Delmar, suggesting that these dangers would cease to matter as long as they did not affect me.

As a non-Black Person of Color (POC), and particularly as an Asian American raised in an affluent household, I am aware of the ways that I have benefited from anti-Blackness through a "model minority" myth that affords me the benefit of the doubt in nearly any type of situation. Even within organizer and activists circles, I notice the ways that my racial identity gives me the flexibility to work easily in many settings.

And while I have to understand these realities to make myself an effective organizer, I also have to challenge them daily to keep myself grounded in the types of communities that I *want* to live in. I have to lift up and reclaim my history as an Asian American, recognizing that Asian American identity was initially formed in solidarity with the Black Power movement. I have to actively challenge anti-Blackness in the communities I am a part of, and I have a responsibility to understand the ways that the white power structure will constantly work to divide us across lines of race, class, and gender. Most importantly, I have to understand that solidarity is first and foremost an *action* and not just a convenient concept that I can use for my own gain.

This is a lifetime struggle. It took hundreds of years of white supremacy and colonization for us to get to this point—it's definitely going to take longer than 100 days to fix it. But if there's anything I have learned in the last 4 months, it is that nothing scares the power structure more than seeing us come together and *scheme* and *organize* and *disrupt* in order to take our power back.

To those of you who are still on the fence: If you aren't being actively anti-racist, then you are supporting a racist,



"...I am aware of the ways that I have benefited from anti-Blackness through a "model minority" myth that affords me the benefit of the doubt in nearly any type of situation."

Photo Credit- Unknown

violent system. Not everyone has to be out on the front lines. If everyone was out on the front lines, then there would be no one to staff the jail support hotline, or knit warm clothes for protesters, or give rides to people, or buy supplies for safe spaces, or create art, or prepare food, or make calls, or do any number of things that you don't see featured in the news. Find your role in the movement, and don't let the amount of credit you receive affect the work that you do—just *do the damn work*. If you see a hole, find a way to fill it. Most importantly, know that you are not alone and that others are here to support you. In the words of Asian American Detroit-based activist Grace Lee Boggs: We are the ones we've been waiting for.



# Educate, Empower, and Organize: A Voice of Resilience

by Jonathan Pulphus

The resistance, this struggle for freedom, is my life. I am not required to march, pick up a picket sign, and lead chants to be involved. Each day is struggle for improving the quality of black life; my every living minute is marked by resistance, struggle, or fight to be.

It is as important to me as is exercise is to health. The war did not start the 9th of August; though, brother Michael Brown's slaughtering is a catalyst in this particular moment of the struggle for freedom. As a member of the youth organization Tribe X, whose mission is to educate, empower, and organize around issues through building strong alliances, I understand that the resistance to oppression is not bounded by West Florissant, Riverview or the Shaw neighborhood.

These are simply terrains. 400 years of marginalization, abuse, slavery, martyrdom, courage, and resilience have created the conditions for terrains where we are increasingly, openly, treated as insignificant, utilitarian, less than. The way Michael Brown was policed on this terrain is typical of the way blacks are often treated by authority figures in this struggle for freedom. Thus, whether I choose to participate in direct action or not, I have a responsibility in improving the quality of black life, of asserting our humanity.

I want people to know that the youth need more support in keeping this movement for justice going. There are established

organizations that do great work, but they do not assist in building the capacity of young fighters for justice. Resources should go directly to the youth who are on the ground to support and sustain our creativity, expertise, and ability, and



Artist rendition: Cassandra Roberts gassed, helped by strangers in Ferguson.

Credit: Original by Robert Cohen

to enable us to reach the masses who are in need of education, empowerment and organization most: the grassroots. When we planned and executed actions, such as the Saint Louis University "Occupy SLU" and the St. Louis Central West End Loop "Die-In" as awareness building mechanisms, resource, energy, and time were at a premium. The work done in these spaces was worth every bit of effort because these locations are spaces of prestige, regard, and privilege that need to be held accountable to the community. When social issues arise, business can not go on as usual and larger underlying problems

of the St. Louis community can not be left unaddressed. Youth organizations like Tribe X and Freedom Fighters seek to ensure that pro-action occurs to galvanize when reaction is needed. Support youth led movements. Donate time and resources directly to them where they are most needed.

On a personal note about the movement, I noted in engagements with this struggle how my sisters continue to be at the forefront but, with few exceptions, are the last to be interviewed (particularly in mainstream media), on a panel, or are not acknowledged as leaders. On the ground this is not typically an issue. However, wherever it occurs, it is my



**Jonathan Pulphus** is a full time student, organizer, advocate, comrade, ally, friend, partner, cousin, brother, and son who is on twitter at @pulphusj

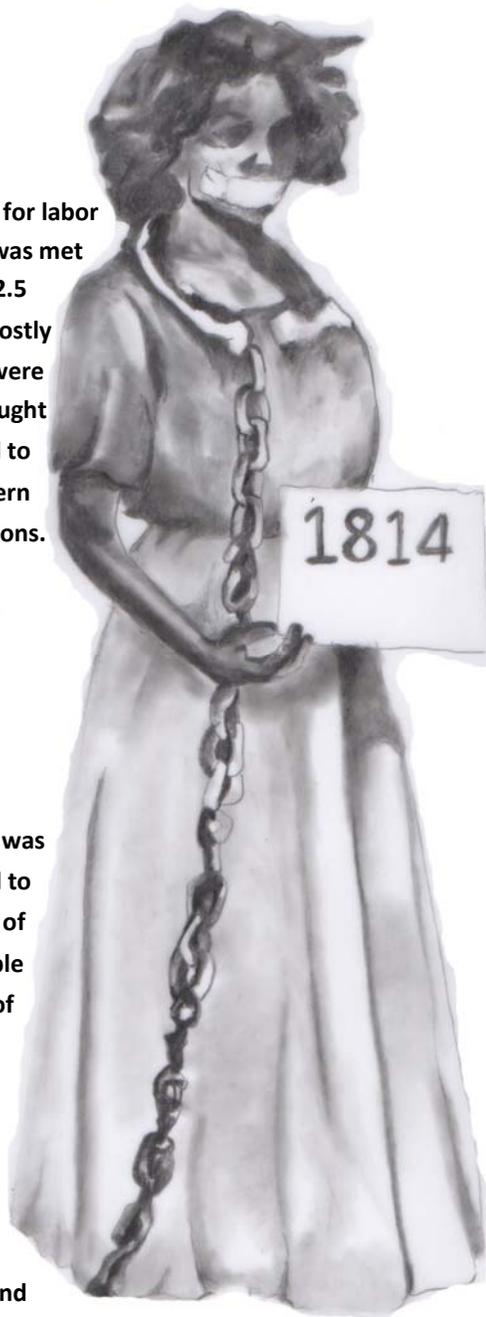
## Reckoning with History: Systemic Racism

Mike Brown and Ferguson shine a light on the systemic racism and devaluing of black lives from slavery's origins to today in the US. The story begins with 250 years of African American enslavement, followed by 90 years of Jim Crow with white terror and apartheid-style laws...

### SLAVERY

Increasing demand for labor on US plantations was met through slavery. 12.5 million people, mostly from West Africa, were kidnapped and brought against their will to mostly Southern plantations.

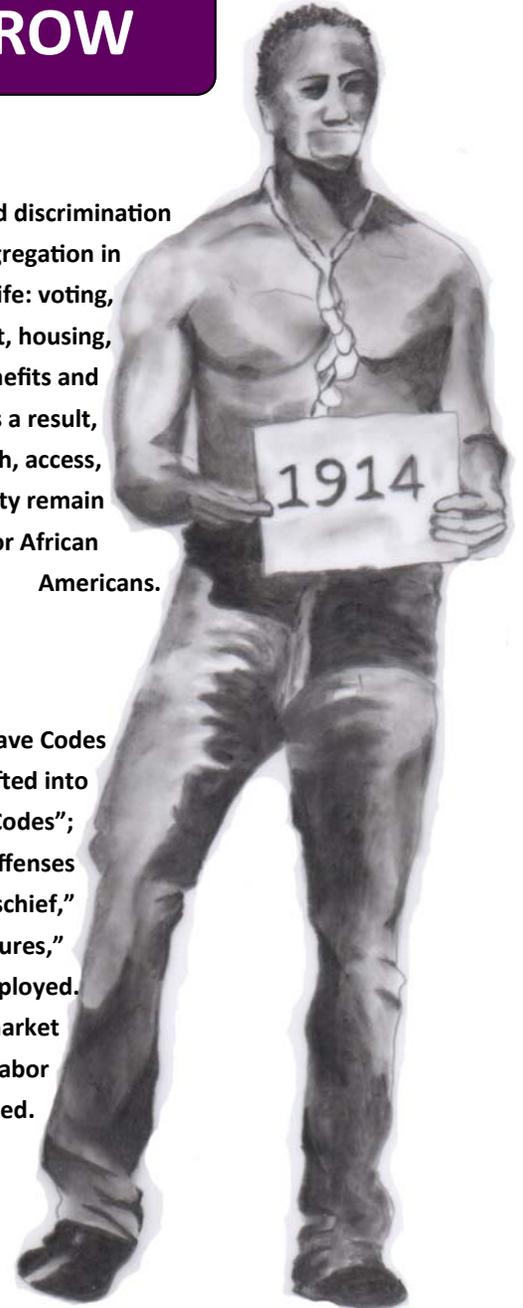
The idea of race was propagated to rationalize slavery of black-skinned people and genocide of American Indians. The elite planter class provided special privileges to poor whites to further the idea of white superiority and prevent solidarity between poor whites and blacks.



### JIM CROW

Legalized discrimination authorized segregation in every aspect of life: voting, employment, housing, state benefits and education. As a result, wealth, health, access, and opportunity remain unequal today for African Americans.

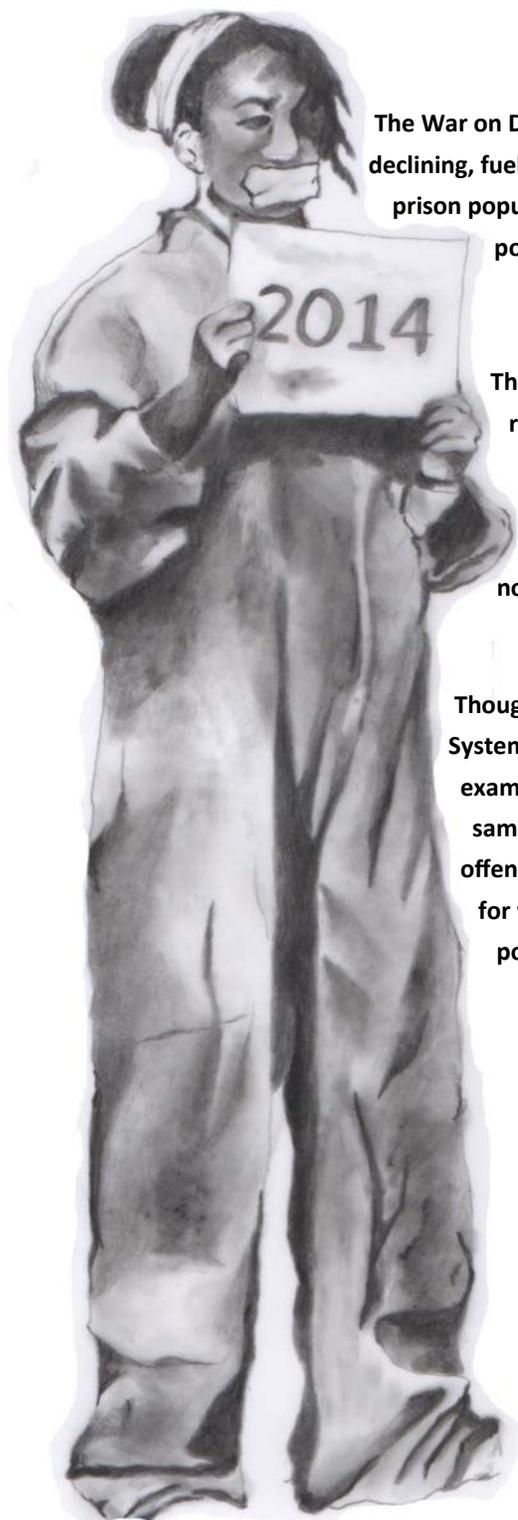
In the South, Slave Codes were simply shifted into "Black Codes"; arrestable offenses included "mischief," "insulting gestures," and not being employed. A massive new market for imprisoned labor was thus created.



White terrorism reigned, in the form of mob violence, bombings, and lynchings (which often included leaving bodies hanging for days or weeks). Ironically, this violence coincided with white propaganda and belief that African Americans, especially men, were inherently dangerous.

...Mass Incarceration, created in the post Jim Crow years, is the most recent system of control, disproportionately targeting African Americans and other people of color compared to whites. We are called—as people of faith, as people believing in love and the dignity of every person—to abolish and transform these racist systems and the values that undergird them.

## MASS INCARCERATION



The War on Drugs, announced when both illegal drug use and crime rates were declining, fuels Mass Incarceration. It has resulted in an 790% increase in the US prison population<sup>1</sup>; the US currently incarcerates more of it's black population than South Africa did at the height of apartheid.

This system has a profound lack of accountability, especially in relation to people of color. Racial profiling and police brutality are problems across the country. In St. Louis city, blacks are arrested 18 times more often than whites for marijuana possession.<sup>2</sup> Prosecutors have vast discretion to over-charge some offenses or not charge others.

Though supposedly race-neutral, the “Criminal Justice” System targets people of color at every level. For example, African Americans use and sell drugs at the same rates as whites do, but are arrested for drug offenses at rates two to 11 times higher than the rate for whites.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, with 13% of the US population, they make up 40% of prison population.

### Sources and Further Reading

Images based on the October Ferguson solidarity action by students at the University of Pennsylvania.

All facts from The New Jim Crow (Michelle Alexander), except:

1. thinkprogress.org

2. ACLU :“The War on Marijuana in Black and White”

3. Human Rights Watch: “US: Drug Arrests Skewed by Race”

### Also Check Out

mxgm.org, stopmassincarceration.net, sentencingproject.org

“The Case for Reparations” - Ta-Nehisi Coates



Protesters paused in front of Reinert Hall at Saint Louis University. Late at night on Sunday October 12 hundreds gathered at the University's clock tower to begin what became known as Occupy SLU. Photo Source: Unknown

responsibility to take ownership in curtailing the suppression of black women by crediting their involvement. I remember listening to people describe what the movement was about as a “black male issue” because Michael Brown is a black male. This resistance is one that continues to desensitize the public to the contributions from our sisters, mothers, cousins, aunties, and many more women who are soldiers. My mother was the first to let me know about the shooting. She issued a call to action and was one of the few adults consistently standing between black youth and armored vehicles early on. A black woman saved me from being run over by advancing police after I was pepper sprayed and teargassed the first ominous Sunday night. Black women are advisers for many organizations. One of the first reporters to interview Leslie McSpadden on the ground was a black woman. The Freedom Fighters are an organization of black women. At the front of every chant, march, or action black women are present and withstand threatening forces, chemical tactics and baton beatings. There needs to be intentional allocation of resources, time, and investment in hearing their stories, highlighting their tactics, and learning from their experiences.

On a positive note, in the past 101 days Tribe X has been fortunate to connect with like-minded people in the struggle. In the Shaw neighborhood, the parents of VonDerrit Myers, Jr. invited Tribe X to a vigil for their son. Here, we met with

students from Palestine through the Right to Education Campaign (R2E) in the West Bank through organizer and writer for Ebony Magazine, Kristian Bailey. Personally, I have met media journalists and organizers as a Tribe X representative on platforms such as the “Ferguson Panel” that was hosted by Washington University’s LaTanya Buck, director for the Center for Diversity and Inclusion. These are powerful bonds that have been forged.

I am fired up in love for justice. My fellow Tribe X members stand with me, as our allies do. This is strengthened due to the way in which police have responded to peaceful protesting: firing on law abiding citizens and doing their own share of violence and property damage, as they deny many of our first amendment rights. We also realize that centuries old struggle for freedom involves meeting new challenges. While problems of white privilege, white supremacy, and resulting inequities are old problems, they manifest themselves in new ways every day. I remember a lady, who I would later learn by the name of Cassandra Roberts, that knelt in surrender to National Guard’s armored vehicles launching tear gas canisters above her as I poured milk in her face to ease the burning pain, and I think we have not come that far. Yet.



# Two Open Letters from Ferguson Activists and Allies

## 10.17.14: We are Living an American Horror Story

*Ed. Note: The original letters published online along with the signers of these letters can be found linked here: <http://tiny.cc/jekdqx>*

We are living an American Horror Story.

The unlawful slaughter of black bodies by the hands of power has continued day after day, year after year, century after century, life by precious life, since before the first chain was slipped around black wrists.

Black youth, brimming with untapped potential, but seen as worthless and unimportant. Black activists, stalwart in pursuit of liberation, but perceived as perpetual threats to order and comfort. Black men, truly and earnestly clinging to our dignity, written off as the ravenous, insatiable black savage. Black women, always unflinchingly running toward our freedom, dismissed as bitter and angry after long denial and suffering.

Not one group of us has been spared from the bullet or the beating, too many armed only with our Blackness, left to live this American Horror Story. The story has come alive once again in Ferguson. Ours were the bodies, the strange fruit that swung from the poplar trees. Ours were the bodies, the motionless forms stretched out in the street for 4.5 hours. Ours were the bodies, left to be seen to rot as warnings against being too uppity, too confident, too bold, too free. Ours were the bodies, served up as notice to remain humbly and quietly in our place, never to awaken America's fear of Blackness.

It was Emmett's body in Mississippi. Little Aiyana's body in Michigan. Amadou's body in New York City. Travon in a Sanford gated community. Jordan in a Florida gas station. Jonathan's body on a North Carolina road. Renisha's body on a Detroit front porch. John in an Ohio Walmart. Ezell on a Los Angeles sidewalk. Eric's body on a New York corner. Mike's body on a Ferguson street. It was names and bodies that we will never know in cities and towns across this land.

In every main street and dark corner of this nation, Black people are unsafe to breathe, walk, speak, lead, move, grow, learn and be without the distinct possibility that our blackness will be seen as enough weapon to justify the taking of our lives. Our education doesn't save us, for Mike was on his way

to college. Our respectability doesn't spare us, for men and women were lynched in three-piece suits and Sunday dresses. Our innocence doesn't protect us, for little Aiyana was only seven years old when the officer's bullet struck her down.

We are living an American Horror Story.

From every corner of life we have assembled, time and time again, to demand we turn the page. Time and again we were met with militarized forces that unlawfully tamped down on peaceful action and peaceful people. That we must keep emphasizing the civil nature of our disobedience and highly organized struggle is but another moment in the myth of the so-called Black savage our country seems determined to pin on us.

We are despised for our struggle for freedom, despite learning it from those patriots at the Boston Harbor who cried "give me liberty, or give me death" and those Black freedom fighters whose likeness and admonitions are now emblazoned in our Nation's Capital.

In Ferguson, police met our protesting of police brutality with the disgusting irony of greater brutality, the likes of which Americans had never seen on our own soil. In this American town, officers tapped their batons, pointed guns in our faces, kneed our women's heads, threw our pregnant mothers to the ground, jailed our peaceful clergy and academics, and tear gassed our children.

We are living an American Horror Story.

But it is significantly past time for the story to end. Never to be told again. The onus to close this book falls directly on our leadership. Our elected leaders bear direct responsibility to ensure the safety of every one of its citizens at the hands of its agents, and to capture justice for every life taken. In this, the land of the free, you are responsible for securing and preserving that freedom for all of your citizens, irrespective of—or perhaps, especially because of—our skin.

In a story in which we have been overwhelmingly targeted, unduly struck down by threat of our blackness, we require explicit attention, protection and value. We require freedom, and will hold everyone accountable to preserving our inalienable right. We will no longer live this American Horror Story.

Nonviolent direct action is a necessary, vital, and wholly American tool in forcing meaningful, permanent,

transformative action from our leaders and fellow citizens. Today, the 70th day of this nightmare, some may wonder why we have yet to stop—stop chanting, stop marching, stop occupying. But we have not yet found peace because we do not yet know justice. Therefore we, together with our allies, will continue to occupy the streets and the American consciousness until the book is closed.

Even in facing this terror, we have not met those who mean us harm with the same. Even in the face of this terror, we will continue to force the readers and writers of this, a most American of horror stories, to face the blackness that they fear, the blackness they have spent this entire story trying to erase, trying to soften, trying to co-opt, trying to escape. We will no longer allow you to escape this story and pretend that the epidemic of black lives dying by white hands is merely a

figment of an active Black imagination. You must come face to face with the horror that we live daily. You must come to know and profess the truth of this story, and be determined to end it.

We are not concerned if this inconveniences you. Dead children are more than an inconvenience.

We are not concerned if this disturbs your comfort. Freedom outweighs that privilege.

We are not concerned if this upsets order. Your calm is built on our terror.

We are not concerned if this disrupts normalcy. We will disrupt life until we can live.

This is an American Horror Story. Together, we are writing the final chapter. ✚

## 11.24.14: The Grand Jury Decision

In Ferguson, a wound bleeds. For 108 days, we have been in a state of prolonged and protracted grief. In that time, we have found community with one another, bonding together as family around the simple notion that our love for our community compels us to fight for our community. We have had no choice but to cling together in hope, faith, love, and indomitable determination to capture that ever-escaping reality of justice. After 108 days, that bleeding wound has been reopened, salt poured in, insult added to the deepest of injury.

On August 9th, we found ourselves pushed into unknown territory, learning day by day, minute by minute, to lead and support a movement bigger than ourselves, the most important of our lifetime. We were indeed unprepared to begin with, and even in our maturation through these 108 days, we find ourselves re-injured, continually heartbroken, and robbed of even the remote possibility of judicial resolution. A life has been violently taken before it could barely begin. In this moment, we know, beyond any doubt, that no one will be held accountable within the confines of a system to which we were taught to pledge allegiance. The very hands with which we pledged that allegiance were not enough to save Mike in surrender. Once again, in our community, in our country, that pledge has returned to us void.

For 108 days, we have continuously been admonished that we should “let the system work,” and wait to see what the results are. The results are in. And we still don’t have justice. This fight for the dignity of our people, for the importance of our lives, for the protection of our children, is one that did not begin Michael’s murder and will not end with this announcement.

The ‘system’ you have told us to rely on has kept us on the margins of society. This system has housed us in her worst homes, educated our children in her worst schools, locked up our men at disproportionate rates and shamed our women for receiving the support they need to be our mothers. This system you have admonished us to believe in has consistently,

unfailingly, and unabashedly let us down and kicked us out, time and time again.

This same system in which you’ve told us to trust --this same system meant to serve and protect citizens-- has once again killed two more of our unarmed brothers: Walking up a staircase and shot down in cold blood, we fight for Akai Gurrey; playing with a toy after police had been warned that he held a BB gun and not a real gun at only twelve years old, we fight for Tamir Rice.

So you will likely ask yourself, now that the announcement has been made, why we will still take to the streets? Why we will still raise our voices to protect our community? Why will still cry tears of heartbreak and sing songs of determination? We will continue to struggle because without struggle, there is no progress. We will continue to disrupt life, because without disruption we fear for our lives. We will continue because Assata reminds us daily that “it is our duty to fight for freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love and support one another. We have nothing to lose but our chains.”

Those chains have bound us—all of us—up for too long. And do not be mistaken- if one of us is bound, we all are. We are, altogether, bound up in a system that continues to treat some people better than others. A system that preserves some and disregards others. A system that protects the rights of some and does not guard the rights of all. And until this system is dismantled, until the status quo that deems us less valuable than others is no longer acceptable or profitable, we will struggle. We will fight. We will protest. Grief, even in its most righteous state, cannot last forever. No community can sustain itself this way. So we still continue to stand for progress, and stand alongside anyone who will make a personal investment in ending our grief and will take a personal stake in achieving justice. We march on with purpose.

The work continues.

This is not a moment but a movement.

The movement lives. ✚

# Second Chances for Whites, Punishment for Blacks: Experiences of Institutionalized Racism

by Paulna "Ajala" Valbrun

People often ask me, why did you leave NYC to live in St. Louis? Well, I felt inclined to stay here due to the activism in Ferguson. My experiences as a child and college student forced me to recognize institutionalized racism. An early understanding of black oppression made me feel hopeless and defeated. I didn't feel empowered against institutionalized racism until I began protesting in Ferguson.

My experiences as a child in a predominantly white neighborhood taught me that the legal system punishes you for being black and rewards you for being white. I learned this through witnessing the stark contrast in how the legal system treated my white friends as opposed to my black friends. For example, one of my white friends had been caught stealing clothes from a luxury, retail store in our local mall. The mall security warned him that if he was caught stealing again that he would be reprimanded. After being caught for the third time, the store offered him their form of a plea bargain. If he agreed to take a rehabilitation class, then they would not press charges. They were vehemently against pressing charges and creating a criminal record for a young man.

The way he was treated was startling in juxtaposition to how one of my black friends was treated after she was caught stealing. She was immediately thrown into juvenile after she

was caught stealing tampons and bread from a grocery store. Unlike my white friend, there were no warnings given to her. No one cared about creating a criminal record for her and she was never offered the opportunity to take a rehabilitation class. Nobody even bothered to question why a young lady felt the need to steal tampons and bread.

Instead of questioning this situation, the justice system heartlessly threw my black friend into jail. As her friend, I can tell you that she resorted to stealing because she was hungry, and being neglected by her parents. Meanwhile my white friend was given several chances to stop stealing clothes from a luxury retail store. Even when he continued to commit theft, he was merely forced to take a class.

That's what a system that functions on institutionalized racism does. It allots compassion and second chances to white Americans while punishing and imprisoning black Americans. This scenario is one of the many examples of how I began understanding the criminalization of

black people, as a child.

When I decided to research police brutality in NYC as a college student, my understanding of institutionalized racism increased. I commenced my research by reaching out to the October 22nd Coalition, which advocates against police brutality. I was introduced and welcomed to the October 22nd



Ferguson, August 2014. Photo: Unknown



**Paulna "Ajala" Valbrun** was a Counselor at Henry Street Settlement in New York City before moving into the St. Louis Catholic Worker.

Coalition in NYC by Kathie Cheng. One of my most memorable interviews from the October 22nd Coalition was of Nicholas Heyward whose son was killed by NYPD when he was 13 years old. I was surprised that the cop that murdered his son still worked for the NYPD.

After interviewing several other victims of police brutality and family members of victims, I began to feel overwhelmed. Most of the people I interviewed were black. The victims of police brutality documented in the book *Stolen Lives*, produced by the October 22nd Coalition, were overwhelmingly black.

As a child, I had already gained an understanding of institutionalized racism and the fact that blackness was criminalized in this country. However, it was my research in New York City that completed my feeling of powerlessness against institutionalized racism. It made me realize that this dysfunctional ideology was reinforced and protected by police brutality.

The NYPD officer who killed Nicholas Heyward Jr. had

never been arrested for killing a child, in fact he's still employed by the NYPD. No one had spoken out against the contrast in how my black friend was treated by the legal system as opposed to my white friend. All of these things made me feel hopeless and defeated. It wasn't until I had the courage to protest in Ferguson that I began to feel empowered and hopeful against institutionalized racism.

I've decided to stay in St. Louis because the activism against racism has allowed me to feel empowered. I've never witnessed people coming together to speak out against white privilege and institutionalized racism within our legal system. Besides protesting, activists have created various workshops to discuss what role white privilege plays in their everyday lives and how to dismantle institutionalized racism in the St. Louis area. All of this is progress, and allows me to remain hopeful about the dismantling of institutionalized racism in Ferguson and the St. Louis area. ✦

# The Resistance: A Fight For Justice

by Diamond Latchison

In Ferguson October, I became involved because I wanted people from across the world coming into Ferguson to see what we as protestors go through on a day-to-day basis. I wanted them to see what the day-in-the life of a protestor is like, and to see our narrative through our walk of life instead of by way of the media portraying it in a negative light. That was important because what the media sees and what we see are totally different. The media outlets (not all but most) make us out to be the bad guys while we're running from tear gas and rubber bullets and pellets. How are we so terrible when the ones that are doing wrong are the ones that are supposed to 'protect and serve' us?

Some people do come out to protest without pure intentions and agitate, but they are a dime a dozen, and we deal with those people before situations go any further to the point where people get hurt. I wanted it to be shown how protestors

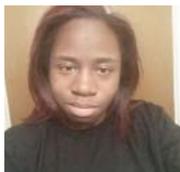
were really treated at the hands of police and wanted it to be shown that WE are PEACEFUL protestors! Whatever happened the first two nights after Mike Brown was shot are irrelevant. We've been at it for 100+ days and that hasn't happened since then. All we've done is peacefully protest, put plans in place, and try to exercise our First Amendment rights. That is all. Nothing more than that.

All in all, my hopes are that people saw a different view than what they've see on TV. I hope the people that didn't believe had their perceptions changed. Hopefully, for them to actually have their feet planted on the ground with other protestors who have been out since August, they were able to see a bit of what has been going on since then. I hope that they take what they saw and learned, and that they bring it to their own communities and continue to spread seeds for this movement to grow and flourish.

This is not just a Ferguson issue, not just a St. Louis issue;



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**Diamond Latchison** is one of the members of Freedom Fighters, an organization that wants to help rebuild and empower Black youth & Black communities.

this is an international issue and should be treated as such because this could happen in anybody's community. Michael Brown was just the straw that broke the camel's back not only for the people of Ferguson, but for the entire country.

The actions and the constant presence of the protestors in Ferguson have been IMMENSELY important because they show not only the people in our communities, but the whole world that we're not going away. We're gonna make people uncomfortable until we feel comfortable - until then, nobody can be. Protestors being out on the streets constantly shows resilience and strength. This could have been all over a few weeks after Michael Brown's murder but a community came together, mostly full of young people, and said, "Enough is enough." We said we're not taking any more of the police brutality, mistreatment, and killings of young black men. We will no longer be silent or silenced to the oppression that constantly hits us because of a stereotype, or because of the color of our skin. Black lives matter. All of these emotions and thoughts took us to the streets, and have continued these last three months, proving our resilience and strength. Even with being hit with all the rubber bullets and pellets, tear gas, and everything in between, having people from third world countries coaching us on how to use gas masks when those fumes are being thrown at us, people have still maintained a presence and will continue to do so no matter what the outcome.

Being a black person - that's influence enough to be in the movement, because at the end of the day, that could have been any of us out there taking the place of Michael Brown. Not only myself being black, I'm a woman and queer - so that's triple the amount of oppression I have to fight. Just because I'm a woman doesn't exclude me from being shot down in the streets and faced with police brutality. I'm not only fighting for the color of my skin but for my gender and sexuality. When I'm out there on the ground, that's what I'm thinking. I'm certain that's what everybody who has been on the ground has thought to themselves as well. And that's what I've come to learn in the last three months of this movement. I've had to fight for all that I am, not just part of me. I've had to be brave and face my father (who didn't know of my sexuality) before I could honestly and truly talk about freedom. How do you fight for the freedom of others when you're not fighting for freedom of self? Fighting to preserve your blackness is not all every person of color fights for, so I felt like it was my duty to put all aspects of myself into the movement and not just a small part. There are rights to be fought for black people, rights to be fought for women, and rights to be fought for queer people. All of my individual qualities link to this movement just like everybody else's and I won't stop fighting until those battles are won. We won't stop until our battles are won. ✚



"Being a black person - that's influence enough to be in the movement, because at the end of the day, that could have been any of us out there taking the place of Michael Brown." Photo: Justin Sullivan



# From the Mailbag

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Dear Round Table,

Again, I am writing to request you take me off your mailing list and stop sending me the Round Table.

Since you have changed from being Catholic Workers to be catholic Workers, I no longer feel like one of your fellow travelers.

For decades the Round Table has heartened me with its distinct voice, reporting the unrelenting expression by its communities of Catholic Christianity: diverse, accommodating, ingenious, committed, compassionate, bold.

Now these same qualities seem to me (from reading the Round Table) supported a kind of Unitarianism – with which I am familiar through friends here in Cincinnati.

I am left behind by your relinquishment of your Catholic Christian identity. So, stop sending me the Round Table, but keep doing good!

Gratefully and Regretfully,  
I remain yours truly in Christ,  
Tom D.

From the Editors:

Dear Tom, Thanks for your letter. We are all on different paths through life, here at Karen House some of our paths have separated from that of the official Catholic Church. Some of us too have been left behind because of a variety of justice issues in the Church: primarily women’s roles and the rights of LGBTQ members. Much of the spirit and values that you appreciated in the past are still present today, just in a different form. Some of us hope that one day our paths will realign with the Church in both charity and justice issues, until then we hold strong and work to create a loving and just community around us. We hate to lose anyone, particularly someone who shares our vision of good work and community.

Dear St. Louis Catholic Worker,

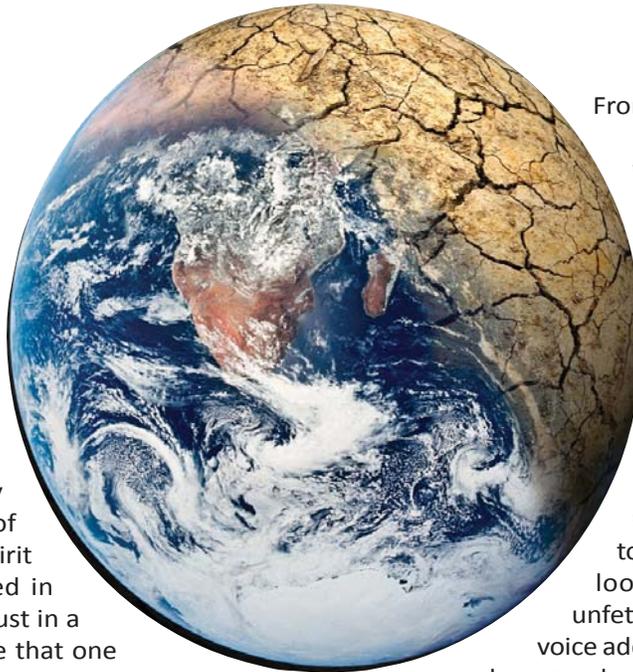
A friend has been giving me your fine newsletter for several years, but I was extremely disappointed to see your issue on climate change. The lead article should have clearly presented the reasons why carbon in the atmosphere is such a problem.

The two ‘social activists’ presented the old Marxist line that environmentalism must be linked to the overthrow of capitalism, or it is not worth supporting. This also was distressing to read. We have 30 years to save the planet. The old hostilities, “us vs. them” framework have to be discarded. We don’t have time to keep trying to impose political ideologies on each other.

I disagree with your editor that climate change is ‘depressing.’ It is the most vital issue of our time. The problem of carbon in the atmosphere must be the central unifying issue for all of us.

I think you ought to try again.

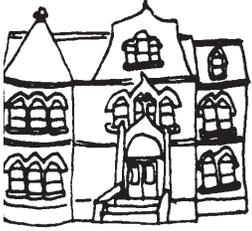
-Barbara J



From the Editors:

Dear Barbara, thank you for your letter. Climate change is indeed an enormous issue facing us. It is a large issue that can be addressed well from many different angles. It takes many voices to be heard and everyone is moved in a different way. The Round Table authors chose one way to express the issue, and we thank you for expressing your view of climate change as well. We do believe that it’s hard to talk about climate change without looking at one of it’s root causes: unfettered global capitalism. With your voice added, we hope that more people will be moved.





# From Karen House

## Voices of Karen House Guests

During the October Weekend of Resistance, Karen House hosted over a dozen activists from across the country. These were folks who traveled to St. Louis to participate in the myriad of marches, panel discussions, and actions hosted by The St. Louis Don't Shoot Coalition and other groups. Our guests were our primary hostesses, preparing beds and rooms, cooking extra food, and having important conversation. We asked a few to them to reflect on their experiences and what the resistance in Ferguson has meant to them.

As the events unfolded, I welcomed a group of young black women from New York. I was more than happy to have them and was outdone by their energy. It was funny because one of the guests stated that they were coming to be white. When they arrived the first time, they introduced themselves as "BLACK" (which was the name of the group) and I said "And you're here to go out immediately and join in the protest for Vonderhilt Meyers and Mike Brown. They told me to about how they were arrested, how they were pepper sprayed, and the different things that the police were shouting at them. All of the ladies in the house went above and beyond to make sure that their stay was a great stay. I would like to extend many thanks to the group BLACK and for their support in the Mike Brown case. When they were set to leave, they presented myself and my children with a couple of gifts as well as the other kids in the house. It was awesome to have them here, and I would host them anytime. -Shauntel

I enjoyed meeting the people from New York. I thought they were very nice group of people. I like talking to different people and I didn't mind doing whatever I could to make them feel comfortable while they were here. Hopefully they'll come back again and visit Karen House and see what progress has been made. -Shirley

We have no unity in this country, and I believe everyone should stick together and stand up for what they believe. First Amendments should be exercised—we have the right and the freedom of speech, but apparently we're not getting it. My take on the situation is we just need God, love, unity and peace for the entire nation. I enjoy the people that came in from New York. Another lady that came in from Idaho—I thank her even though I'm not into protests myself. I thank you all for standing

up for us as a black community. We are all God's children. I thank you. -Tracy

We are all one race: the human race. Kids don't know the difference —racism is taught. Hanging out is a crime—but only for us. I don't believe in the violence and the looting that's been happening. I'm glad about the protests. The young generation is saying "No more, we don't deserve this! We aren't going to take it." They want the quality of life for everyone—not just for some. - Sha-



Visiting activists and

I feel that the racism never stops. Change is good; I feel like I supported the people to come here to protest. If we get people from other states to come here and help us protest, then we have people to support it other than ourselves. We can't do it alone. People wonder why things are happening, you just want to say, "Look around you, do you see what's going on or don't you?" When will the police stop shooting Black people that are our husbands, friends, sons, and daughters when they put their hands up to surrender? It's clear that civil rights is still a human fight! -Shelby

I am very glad that people came all the way from other states just to get involved. That's called unity. We are all one. Even though I cannot go down there, there are other voices that can play a part in my absence. I believe in equality; God created us all equal, to God, we are all one – no difference. The more we continue to have racism, we can never be one. When I was growing up, I didn't know what was white or black. When I came to the United States it took me so many years to adjust to it. Under God's roof, we are all one. People should forget about what their parents said and change it around. They should try to make change and treat people equally. - Vicky





# Catholic Worker Thought & Action

*White Privilege and Solidarity*

by Annjie Schiefelbein

*This article is written for my fellow white people, who as the power holders, have the most to learn about racism.*

On August 10th of this year, the day after Mike Brown was killed, I stood in Ferguson and felt a fundamental shift within me. I stood next to a woman my age, a mother of an African American son. I stood next to her in front of a line of police officers while she wept and screamed. She screamed for the life of her son; she screamed for her nephew, killed last year. She screamed for her own pain, her children's pain, her people's pain. I am embarrassed to say that, before that day, I would have had a different response—one filtered greatly through my experience of white privilege. I would have stood next to her, I would have protested and resisted with her, but deep down I would have been thinking something along the lines of, "Oh, sweetie. I am so sorry for your pain but no one is going to listen to you if you scream like that." I probably would have even been embarrassed for her because she was making such a spectacle. Instead, that day, I saw her. I really saw her. And I wondered how I would keep going, living in a country I knew didn't want me, and worse, wanted my son dead. And so I screamed with her.

I have learned so much since then, as I think we all have. I'd like to share some thoughts with other white people on what I've learned about the process of acting as a "white ally," supporting the resistance to the open wound of racism, born in and carried by all of us. This is in no way an exhaustive list, nor is it my own original thinking—these are ideas shared from many wise people (Resources are listed on the back page). My hope is to share those thoughts that have been most helpful to me as I have moved and struggled through these days.

The most important thing I've learned is how racist I really am, and WOW, am I racist! The nice thing about this realization is knowing that it is not my fault. It is devastating to learn how purposefully racism has been built into this nation of ours. It can feel totally disheartening, except that I also know that I am not racist because I am a bad person. I am racist because lots and lots of people throughout history have counted on racism and white supremacy to keep people separated and to keep white privilege in place—from

slavery, through Jim Crow, the War on Drugs, and now mass incarceration. White people are so used to it that we breathe it in and out without noticing—like carbon monoxide, odorless but no less toxic. And the great thing about realizing how racist I am is that I can't do anything about it unless I notice it first. The expanding self-awareness then continues, if I keep tending to it.

A week after Mike Brown died, I was watching some kids walk by my house. Jenny and I have lived down the street from Karen House for about seven years; we joke that I am the nosy neighbor. But that day, I realized I wasn't actually being nosy, I was patrolling. I was making sure that those kids were not going to break into my car, my yard, etc. Not only was I making sure they wouldn't do anything, I was watching them because deep down, I was pretty sure they would do something harmful to me or my house. It was a personally devastating realization for me to realize that I view groups of kids (probably walking home from school) as suspects because of their skin color. My own sadness doesn't stop the fact that it was the truth.

So, what to do with this realization? First step, forgive myself. This was handed to me and put into my psyche (through early socialization, white-washed textbooks, news media, etc.), and I and all white people have it to some degree—the equating of black skin to criminal behavior. Eradicating it is only possible when we see it in the light of day.

This expanding self awareness has also helped me to learn about intersectionality.

That is a fancy way to say that in the US many different oppressions operate to give privilege to certain identity groups over others (racism, sexism, classism, ageism are all examples.) As a white person (in the dominant group) I want to continue working to be in solidarity with people of color (who are in the targeted group). I've learned that I can do this best when I am in touch with my own identities that are targeted by sexism, heterosexism, and obesityism. I know the pain of being targeted within those oppressions (feeling isolated, ashamed, not wanted, ridiculed, generally not accepted, and having to fight for rights automatically granted to the dominant group), and dealing with those wounds makes me a much better ally for people who are targeted by racism.

Another helpful thing I've realized: This is NOT about



Photo Credit: Unknown



**Annjie Schiefelbein** can be found these days making homemade bird food and trying to keep her three dogs away from her birds.

me (a particularly hard one for a youngest child!) I've been challenged (both in person and in readings) to notice when I am centering myself and if I'm counting on non-white folks to either make me feel better about my racism or give me props for not being racist. To read this idea in cold words like that, I would respond, "No WAY do I do that!" But again, when I started noticing, I was actually doing it a lot. For me it looked like making sure that my co-workers who are African American know that I live on the North side of St. Louis (props to the white girl!). Or checking in with an African American colleague I don't know well about an interaction I had with a patient to see if I was being racist or not. I am responsible for my own education and growth, and white folks need to help each other in this education. It is NOT up to brown and black folks to educate us any more than it is up to women to explain sexism to men. Another place this came up for me was realizing that some of my Facebook postings (relating to the issue of Ferguson and racism) had more to do with me and my feelings than with the experiences of people directly targeted. I have close people with whom to process my feelings and thoughts about racism, and this is essential. But as part of a dominant group, it's also essential for me to realize that my feelings and experience are not in the crosshairs of racism; I am not the center of the struggle or universe (sad though that might be for me).

It has been vital for me to deepen my learning that I get to have my thoughts, opinions and feelings about racism, Ferguson, or any other related subject (as a white person in the US, my opinions are highly esteemed). I do NOT, however, get to dictate (or even have a strong opinion about) how targeted people should engage in their struggle. Never, ever. I don't know what it feels like to be targeted (literally) day after day because of racism, so I don't get to judge or decry people's reactions.

This goes hand in hand with another important lesson that has been burned into my heart: no group is a monolith and no person represents any group. Just because we have been led to believe that one African American should and does represent every other African American (does the term "credit to their race" sound familiar?) No one has ever called me a credit to Caucasians, nor have they told that my destructive behavior was ruining it for whites everywhere.

And while we're at it, let's reject the narrative that any life matters less than any other life. Mike Brown's death is tragic whether or not he was an ideal person. How many of us are without sin? Do our failures, dysfunctional behaviors, or poor choices mean that our lives matter less? Mike Brown's life does not matter more because he was college bound, nor does it matter less because he may have shoplifted.

So put those concepts together and we have this: Do I think property destruction is the way I want to resist the gross injustice of Mike Brown's murder? No, nor do most of the African Americans I know. But I am not about to denounce the destruction of a cop car (or even a building) when it is being talked about more than the fact that a black person is killed by police or security guards every 28 hours.

So where do I get to have an opinion and speak my truth? One of the answers is—I get to speak it to my own people, the white people. Before, I wanted it to be sufficient that I was going to resistance marches, protests, and living (somewhat) with people of color. My life was my example, right? Well, as it turns out...no. You know (if you are white) that terrible feeling in your chest when you hear another white person say something either blatantly or mildly racist? That "Should I say something? What to say?" moment? The thing we are asking ourselves in that moment is not actually "Should I say something."

If we looked a little deeper and centered ourselves in that moment, what we are really experiencing is, "I'm so scared! Saying something will separate me from this group. People may get mad, I may get laughed at. Is this worth it?" We need more and more practice at recognizing our fear and responding with a resounding "YES, it is worth it!"

But that's just the beginning. We need to be willing, as a Witnessing Whiteness facilitator encouraged us, to "Get our people!" We need to try to respond both to covert and overt racism. We need to not only challenge personal racism, but bring up issues of systemic racism with other white people. Talk about white privilege with co-workers. Talk about racial profiling at the dinner table. Is it uncomfortable? Wow, is it ever! Is it necessary? If we take the call to racial solidarity seriously, it is some of the most important work we can do.

These are just a few of the lessons that have been vital to my continuing drive to notice, challenge, and transform my own racism. There are so many others, please see the many good resources available in this issue, on our website (we have a great list of racism and white privilege articles), and all over the web. There are other equally important lessons to be learned about: recognizing the layers of our own white privilege, dealing with our guilt and shame, examining our organizations, churches and groups for racism, and many more.

Racial solidarity and ally work is not a linear process; there is no finish line or merit badge. It is a constant process of discovery, progress, regress, and starting again. It is daily, and it is vital. I wish that we all continue to have moments of transformation and growth, like the one I had on August 10th. We have to keep taking off our blinders—even though the light hurts our eyes—and scream together. ✦



Photo Credit: Jenny Truax

# The Round Table

Karen Catholic Worker House

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*The Round Table* is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Subscriptions are free. Please write to *The Round Table*, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO. 63106. Donations are gladly accepted to help us continue our work. People working on this issue include: James Meinert, Timmy Cosentino, Jenny Truax, Teka Childress, Theo Kayser, Jason Ebinger, Ellen Rehg, and Paulna Valbrun. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

## **Christmas Liturgy**

NEW TIME: 10pm at Karen House!

We hope you will join us for a prayerful Christmas liturgy this year! We welcome new folks and those that have joined us for years!

## **Ferguson Round Table Discussion**

Hear more from these authors and discuss this important issue with others!

## **Sunday, January 4th 6:30pm**

Friends Meeting House (1001 Park Ave.)

## **Finance Update**

Thank you so much for your responses to our October appeal letter! We received an amazing response. We've also made it possible to make regular, automatic donations to Karen House. Click the "Support" button on our website for more info.

## **Anti-Racism Work**

We are continuing to offer regular Racism 101 and 202 workshops. Please visit our website for articles, group reflections, and other resources on Ferguson, white privilege and structural racism.

## **Further Learning**

### Articles

- *Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* - Peggy McIntosh
- *The Making of Ferguson* - Paul Rothstein

### Books

- *Witnessing Whiteness* (Shelly Tochluk)
- *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* (Joy DeGruy)
- *Mapping Decline* (Colin Gordon)

### Videos

- *White Like Me: Tim Wise on White Privilege*
- *Slavery by Another Name* (PBS special and book by Douglas Blackmon)

### Take Action

- [thisisthemovement.org](http://thisisthemovement.org) - a great daily digest of Ferguson-related info!
- [fergusonaction.com](http://fergusonaction.com) - hub of actions and updates

### **Karen House Needs**

Laundry and Dish Soap  
Canned: tomatoes, tuna, ravioli



## **We welcome your donations and participation in this work!**

As Catholic Workers, our hospitality to the homeless is part of an integrated lifestyle of simplicity, service, and resistance to oppression, all of which is inherently political. For this reason, we are not a tax exempt organization. Furthermore, we seek to create an alternative culture where giving is celebrated and human needs are met directly through close, personal human relationships. Thus, all of our funding comes from individuals like you who share yourself and your funds so that this work can go on.