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Ferguson is the Wrong Incident

When Prosecutor Robert McCulloch chose to have Officer Wilson testify before a grand jury he manipulated justice. A grand jury, essentially, is a check on the prosecutor, who generally seeks to bring strong cases to trial. The few cases I have heard of where an accused person testifies before a grand jury actually positions that person in a sympathetic light.

This begs the question, ‘Can a prosecutor influence a no true bill ruling?’ If the prosecutor was not willing to move forward, but felt compelled by social and/ or political forces, can he manipulate a response so as to appear as if he is pursuing justice when in reality is simply leading a grand jury process?

This outcome of no bill of indictment has been handy for law enforcement officers who I prefer to call public safety officials. A positive working relationship between the prosecutor and those public safety personnel is a must, and it can provide a reticence in pursuing the questionable behaviors of public safety personnel on the part of the prosecutor. This also seems to allow passively inhibiting the pursuit of true bills against public safety personnel. Inviting the accused to testify while looking for probable cause could sway a grand jury. This is merely the tip of the iceberg.

That a demographic is disproportionately focused upon by public safety activities and structures is a reflection of our broader government and society. A substantial portion of our general collective perception of young men in the disproportionate demographic is that they are thugs. Does a small number of the so labeled respond with thug-like behavior, thus reinforcing the collective perception born of historic bigotry?

Public safety personnel and those disproportionately in contact with the same need to take it down a notch. Yet they cannot!! So we look to our leaders. But they are busy acting shamefully, violating respect and failing to afford dignity to others in our society. The conundrum persists.

As an academic I am afforded an honored station and should be humbled, consistently working to deserve the privilege. We should push to infuse what we purport to believe. A large part of our social momentum remains true to the values of our Founders. We try to stay true to the positive founding declarations. We need to try harder.

So that necessitates us to look back to the points of contact and beyond. How do public safety personnel and those disproportionately visited with government sanctions get to these points of conflict? Can we unpack the set of causing issues?

First let us focus on a better case for illustrative purposes: the September 26, 2014 shooting by a South Carolina state trooper. The assault was videoed, the victim lived and the trooper was/is/may be prosecuted. The encounter, in broad daylight, was Due to a possible seatbelt violation. Levar Jones had parked his car and was walking away towards the store. He was an unarmed black man complying with the public safety officer’s order when he was shot

multiple times, even while his hands were in the air. Jones collapsed to the ground asking, “Why did you shoot me? I got my license like you asked!” Trooper Sean Groubert was discharged from the SCSP and charged criminally while still being described as “decorated.”

Jones, a person from the disproportionate demographic, survived the attack. People from the disproportionate demographic who are males are 21 times more likely to be shot by a public safety officer. Over fifty percent of Those shot by public safety personnel are disproportionate demographic, ergo the term. Aside from shootings other abuses are faced. Manhandling, lack of respect, and denial of dignity are likely visited upon them at disproportionate rates as well.

Statistics are elusive, for the will to gather such data is at the very least discouraged, which is shameful. Trooper Sean Groubert’s need to exercise dominance over Mr. Jones when he perceived his dominance slipping compelled him to regain control through force.

Is there any resolution to this seemingly intractable problem? Following are some ingredients to a possible solution:

First- Members of the disproportionate demographics must resolve to be beyond this potentially fatal nonsense. Already young men of this demographic receive counsel on how to minimize life disruption when an almost inevitable encounter with a public safety official occurs. Join a congregation, train to be a technician or a professional, get married, make it work, become a family man. This is easy enough for an old white guy to say so here a few ideas put forth members of the disproportionately targeted demographic.

Charles Belk has a good idea. It is rooted in his experience of being officially labeled with an arrest record for suspicion of bank robbery. He was having lunch with friends and associates at a Beverly Hills restaurant at the time the robbery was taking place. He was arrested for six hours. When the bank video showed a clearly different tall black male with a bald head then he was released. He was told that all is the same as it was before. It was not. When Mr. Belk, an Emmy award winning videographer told his tale on social media the fact checkers in his virtual community found his arrest record for bank robbery accessible. They got cranky and invaded, in a legalish way the social media of the Beverly Hills Public Safety, police division and over whelmed them. The Public Safety director (chief) made a number of concessions. Belk’s campaign is expungement of arrest records nationally for people whose due process never went beyond arrest.

Lieutenant Charles Wilson had a good idea. Lt. Wilson is the President of the National Association of Black Law Enforcement Officers. He recently conducted a one day seminar regarding research evidence indicating that Rhode Island public safety does not hire and promote people of diversity at a rate similar to white men. Executives from state, local and college public safety attended to listen and express frustration. A number of veteran diverse public safety officials with mid-level ranks were there from the surrounding states. There was mingling and frank talk. To talk about this issue, offer strategies and identify process ameliorations is a good idea.

Dr. Deborah Plummer, *the author of “[Racing Across the Lines: Changing Race Relations Through Friendships](#).”* Has herself and urges us to cross the racial divide socially. In her

writings she details how having white friends provides the context to increased understanding and respect. We see more inter-racial socializing than ever before but not enough. Plummer's proposition to be fairer and more just though the trust of friendship is sound.

Second- Reframe access to professional training and education. Attach a public service obligation and subsidize the cost. Education is a political tool. De facto denial of access to higher education opportunities is a complex maze of ill preparation, cost, cultural nuance and more. We have to face this blockage. Higher education is poised; we have the capacity available but not the finances to cover the cost.

Third – Police escalation must be a negative value. De-escalation needs be the dominant value. The social control paradigm needs to shift to public safety focus away from catching someone. If our traffic supervision is for revenue and safety let us have a means scale. Being a public safety official is difficult, they need to be charged and resourced to find resolutions. The job is a risk; with less guns and more social opportunity risk is lessened. These are issues of intentionality.

Forth – A few thousand people receive fatal or debilitating gunshot wounds in America every year. We can make the likelihood of anyone pulling a gun on a public safety official less, thus lowering the anticipation of and actual danger levels. The Australia gun experiment serves as an illustration of a country with all sorts of guns becoming a country with limited types and fewer guns. It is responsible to limit guns knowing that well over half of firearms deaths are self-inflicted? If public safety officials were far less likely to encounter firearms while conducting their tasks the real and perceived danger would rightfully diminish.

Fifth – Legalize drugs and tax them generously. This will generate funds for drug treatment and eliminate traffic stops as entre' to the criminal justice system for thousands. Regulation will increase safety.

Targeting disproportionately a particular demographic is morally wrong, un-American, and will spell the undoing of our society. In our founding documents us, 'The People,' are referred to as the third and broadest level of government. The social obligation is to find consensus that will enhance all of our safety, and generate social mores of respect and dignity.

From a history going back to lynching to the video of Rodney King to Ferguson, Staten Island, North Carolina, Cleveland, Baltimore. These are not acceptable costs for the majority to feel safe. The next incident awaits.