The abrasive relationship between the police and the minority communities has been a major -- and explosive -- source of grievance, tension and disorder. The blame must be shared by the total society. The 1968 “Kerner Report”

Here we go again! The death of Michael Brown and the subsequent developments in the case represent one more American tragedy. The sheer predictability of the events in question, the familiarity of the racial dynamics, and the evidence that this case has touched a nerve around the question of race and justice represent an emergency alarm that the nation ignores at its peril. Nor can we be satisfied with one more short-term rhetorical management approach.

Rodney King, Amadou Diallo, Timothy Tomas, Sean Bell, Trayvon Martin, the American landscape is littered with the cases of black men whose suffering or demise at the hand of the criminal justice system establishment have triggered important, but limited conversations and reforms related to race and justice. These conversations, while important, are of limited value without structural reform of the criminal justice system stacked against people of color and the poor. The structural problems spawning economic inequalities, with racial wealth and income and employment opportunities gaps, also have to be addressed as part of any thoroughgoing effort to address this enduring problem of race and justice in America.

Still, with persistent pressure from communities of color and various groups across the nation there have been important changes and improvements in the criminal justice system. Such changes include the implementation of community policing in California, following the Rodney King case, adjustment to practices of racial profiling in New York and beyond, enabling the Department of Justice to address police misconduct under the Crime Control Act of 1994, a result of the Amadou Diallo case, and federal and state sentencing reforms scaling back excessive penalties applied disproportionately to people of color. These reforms are clear indications that change is possible, but such change, however necessary, has neither been sufficient nor readily forthcoming. Where important reforms to policing have been recommended implementation has often been slow and limited as was the case with the Christopher Commission’s recommendations after the Rodney King case, for example.

Even with recent reforms, evidence persists that the criminal justice system disproportionately ensnares people of color. For example, THE SENTENCING PROJECT notes that “one of every three African American men, and one of every six Hispanic men, can expect to go to prison in his lifetime if current trends continue.” Such statistics continue to fuel the widespread perceptions of unfairness which undermine confidence in the American system of justice and fuel broad mistrust of the police.
Ongoing lack of faith in the system of justice is a sure way to ensure its demise and the degrading of safety.

Notions of a color blind society and a system of justice that does not judge on the basis of color ring hollow in the face of clear evidence of different applications of justice for blacks and whites and for the wealthy and the poor. Still, even as Ferguson reminds us of the enduring flaws in the system of justice it also demonstrates in stark terms that people will not remain passive in the face of injustice and racism. It is through active responses and organized effort that we have made any steps toward achieving anything close to racial justice in the United States. The Race and Pedagogy Institute remains focused on the task of educating all learners to act to end racism. We are committed to this assignment of achieving racial justice and we join with others and invite your continued active partnership in the effort.

The death of Michael Brown August 9, 2014 was a tragedy. This killing and the subsequent developments in the case is cause for alarm and deep soul searching across the nation. Race and Pedagogy Institute notes with deep sadness, first the killing of unarmed teenager Michael Brown on August 9, 2014 and then the decision of the grand jury not to indict Officer Darren Wilson for this act. While we respect the grand jury we are outraged at the manipulation of the process by St. Louis County Prosecutor Robert McCulloch to bring about this predictable result of no indictment. Prosecutor McCulloch acted in the name of justice, but the scales were clearly tipped in favor of Officer Wilson. Prosecutor McCulloch who faced calls to recuse himself on account of his documented bias in favor of police officers as well as his personal history that cast doubt on his ability to be fair in this case, not only refused to recuse himself, but by his action in the proceedings he forever cast doubt on the fairness of the process.

In order for us to continue in good faith to encourage respect for the decisions made by our courts, we must insist that they and our entire criminal justice system work in concert to ensure equal justice under law for all.

African Americans continue to believe that the criminal justice system was not designed to serve and protect them. Sadly, this perspective finds its basis in the historical practice of the unequal dispensing of justice across the nation. Such findings were reported by the Kerner Commission in 1968 and they are supported by the several reports by the Sentencing Project and studies like The New Jim Crow and Slavery By Another Name. Of course, the developments in Ferguson since August 9, 2014 with the shooting and subsequent treatment of Michael Brown and those who call for justice in his name, only serve to confirm the continued existence of this problem.

The killing of young black men by law enforcement officers must stop. It is an outrage to note the number of young black men killed by police in the last four months of 2014 alone. Since the killing of Mike Brown Jr., Tamir Rice, Tanisha Anderson, Akai Gurley, Ezell Ford, and Omar Abrego have been added to this macabre list; young black men
killed by the police. We are in agreement with other agencies including the Yale Black Law Students Association, that "both state and federal laws on use of force by police officials almost assures continued, legally-sanctioned slaughter." We therefore support the call for a review of state and local procedures for subduing alleged assailants and that force equivalent to the threat should be employed against unarmed suspects. We also affirm the priority of the safety of police officers. Additionally, we must reduce justifiable homicide by raising the justification standard above that of police "feeling threatened."

We strongly believe that justice is the basis upon which a society must seek peace and equality. We must denounce the tainted method applied in the Michael Brown case as it ensures that we will never get to the truth. In so doing, we stand with the National Bar Association, the ACLU of Missouri, the Yale Black Law Students Association, and other organizations voicing similar concerns. Racism has no place in our legal system and we have a duty to ensure that it is eliminated from every facet of our system and our society.

Tacoma has its own history of challenging race relations and strained relationships between law enforcement and the community. We therefore recommend that like the rest of the nation Tacoma should take note of the lessons from Ferguson. Tacoma’s criminal justice establishment including the bench, the District Attorneys’ Office, and the police should take note that representation matters. Therefore, a criminal justice establishment that does not look anything like the community it serves is asking for trouble, no matter how dedicated and professional its employees.

Based on documented best practices elsewhere we recommend that the Tacoma Police Department be guided by the following:

1. Reward Officers for Connecting with the Community
   - Promote senior officers who treat all communities with respect, including communities of color.
   - Officers’ job evaluations should be tied to their success in community engagement.
   - Patrol officers should be given more regular beats and directed to spend more time on foot, rather than in squad cars.
   - Assign officers for longer periods to specific geographic areas with the expectation that they get to know and become known by residents.
   - Departments should be engaged with businesses, nonprofits, churches, a wide variety of community organizations, and they come to be seen as a partner in crime reduction.

2. Hire for Diversity
   - Make it a top priority to hire and promote the highest-quality people that represent that diversity of the community, across the board including more women, Asians, Latinos, and African Americans.
   - Also hire for diversity in life experiences, being connected to neighborhoods, growing up either in Tacoma or cities like Tacoma.
• While it can be helpful for officers to have had military experience, it is also important to hire people who can show empathy with victims of crime, who are not afraid to smile, to get out of the police car and interact in a positive way with people, who can demonstrate emotional intelligence, who are good listeners, who have patience, who don’t feel that it takes away from their authority to demonstrate kindness.

3. Partner with Activists and Community Groups
  • Work closely with groups across the city to connect with a network of street-smart youth mentors to identify teenagers most at risk of joining gangs or engaging in gun violence.
  • Design opportunities to connect with job training, counseling, and financial support to young people who agree to abandon a life of crime.
  • Work with community organizers to ensure fair treatment of all.

4. Limit the use of guns
  • Undertake new training programs and acquire non-lethal weaponry, including Tasers and pepper spray, designed to minimize the use of deadly force.
  • Participate in the nationwide Violence Reduction Network which supports efforts to promote procedural justice for Police Departments, including focusing on the problem of unconscious bias in police interactions with the public. The Network is sponsored by the United States Department of Justice.