Yet another young black man is dead at the hands of America’s law enforcement. We may not yet know all of the details, but video footage shows that Freddie Gray was breathing and screaming when he went into a Baltimore Police van. He was unconscious and had a severed spinal cord when he came out.

Gray’s death and the lack of answers from police have lead to searing unrest in Baltimore and heated debates online and in the 24-7 television news cycle. There’s a lot of anger going around. Unfortunately, too much is directed at black people. “You’re being treated poorly by police?” reads one Facebook meme going around last week, complete with an image of Willy Wonka’s smirking face leaning into his hand as if in contemplation. “Have you tried not breaking the law to see if that helps?”

In the months since Michael Brown’s death at the hands of Ferguson, Missouri, police officer Darren Wilson, people seeking to investigate a potential pattern of police violence have found the numbers difficult to track. The FBI says that 461 people died of justifiable homicide by police officers in 2013, the latest reporting year, The New York Times says. But other reliable monitors say the figure is more like 1,100 deaths each year.

Fatal Encounters, a journalist-run data aggregator, says that since 2013, African-Americans accounted for about 30 percent of police homicides in which the victims’ race is identified — far greater than their share of the population, the Times reported.

Racial tension has continued to boil since Brown’s demise, as questionable deaths by police continue to crop up. Around the same time as the Brown incident, a cellphone video documenting the death of Eric Garner — killed by chokehold as Staten Island police officers arrested him for selling single cigarettes — flew around the Internet. Then, last November, came video of 12-year-old Tamir Rice getting shot and killed by Cleveland police officers for wielding a BB gun at a park. In April, cellphone video showed Walter Scott fleeing after North Charleston, South Carolina, police officer Michael Thomas Slager pulled him over for a broken tail light — a video that ends in Scott collapsing to his death in a storm of shots from behind.

After all that, it’s little wonder that Gray’s death has sparked riots.

In the wake of the killings, protests have rung out across the nation. As in most good protests, there’s some disturbing of the peace. Occasionally, as in Baltimore, justifiably angry protests devolve into violence.

Public reaction to the protests is mixed, especially on social media. Facebook is no grand forum, but it is, at least, honest.
Some Facebook commenters remind followers of how gay marriage wouldn’t be before the Supreme Court if not for the people who asked hard, angry questions along the way. Many others, losing sight of the long arc of history, trash protesters in Baltimore for losing their cool.

Why the vitriol for the protesters throwing stones and no recognition for the centuries of lynching and oppression and racism that led up to it?

Martin Luther King won respect long after his violent death for instilling in all of us an appreciation of peaceful forms of protest. But King did not denounce riotous behavior without also laying waste to the conditions that brought them about.

"It is not enough for me to stand before you tonight and condemn riots," King said in his speech, The Other America. "It would be morally irresponsible for me to do that without, at the same time, condemning the contingent, intolerable conditions that exist in our society. These conditions are the things that cause individuals to feel that they have no other alternative than to engage in violent rebellions to get attention. And I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard."

I do not condone violence, but I understand the anger and desperation behind it. And I understand the role White America — of which I’m a member — plays. Despite all of their calls for peace in the Facebook feed, I find it hard to believe most white Americans are willing to abandon their privilege and challenge the status quo.

Instead of dwindling in the years since the civil rights era, the racial wealth gap has tripled since 1984, a Brandeis University study shows. The Great Recession hit black families harder than white families — their wealth fell by 31 percent between 2007 and 2010, compared to 11 percent for white families.

A study released by Urban Institute, a nonpartisan think tank for social and economic research, found mortgage denial rates in 2012 were higher for black applicants with bad credit than for white applicants with bad credit.

U.S. Department of Education data for 2012 shows black students are more likely to attend poorly funded schools. Bureau of Justice Statistics data for 2011 show white Americans use more drugs than black Americans, but black people are arrested more than three times as often for drug possession.

Many people face discrimination; it’s tragic in every instance. But black people have it worse and let’s concentrate on that. We can reserve some anger for rioters throwing stones. But let’s be sure the real devil at hand — the enduring racism that brings those stone-throwers to the brink of desperation — gets its due.

Amanda Drane can be contacted at adrane@valleyadvocate.com.
Robert Joseph Underwood • 2 days ago

I wonder how many of the rioters are registered to vote and what they have done to unseat the incumbents who hired the cops. The answer is in general they did nothing to prevent the problem.

Even “minority” politicians and “community leaders” are part of the Democratic Machine which runs many cities. That machine hires the cops. While they may take to the air waves and make speeches, they will do nothing to touch the civil service system that has treated abusive and corrupt cops well. Police Unions also support crooked and abusive cops. Police Unions even supported Richard Nixon, the first president who had to resign for being such a crook.

The Civil rights era did not result in political action. Many cities have a 40% or less rate of voter registration, and a lower rate of voter turnout. This is related to the drop out rate. We also have kids that merely show up in school but do not apply themselves to it. So they are educationally equipped to throw rocks, nor remove an incumbent from office, nor to protect American jobs.

So whose fault is that? The tax payer who pays $10,000 per pupil per year? Or the person who simply does not take advantage of the opportunity that his forefathers risked their lives to provide him?

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