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## Institutional Racism: Perspectives on the Department of Justice's Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department.

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# Institutional Racism: Perspectives on the Department of Justice's Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department

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## *Abstract*

*On August 9, 2014, Michael Brown, an 18-year old Black man, was fatally shot by Darren Wilson, a white policeman with the Ferguson Police Department. The incident sparked protests and acts of vandalism in Ferguson as well as widespread calls for an investigation into the incident. On September 3, 2014, The Justice Department announced that it would open a broad civil rights investigation that would examine whether the Ferguson police had a history of discrimination or misuse of force beyond the Michael Brown case. On March 4, 2015, Attorney General Eric H. Holder publicly criticized the Ferguson Police Department for "implicit and explicit racial bias" and "routinely violating the constitutional rights of its black residents." In the wake of this public criticism as well as specific events detailed in the 105-page report released by the Department of Justice, I examined qualitative perspectives offered by respondents on The Huffington Post website. Qualitative analysis of the findings revealed the following themes: Theme 1: High Regard for Members of Law Enforcement; Theme 2: Disgust for Police and Government within Ferguson; Theme 3: Disregard for DOJ and its Report on Ferguson; Theme 4: Trust in DOJ Report on Ferguson; Theme 5: Police Corruption Extends beyond Ferguson; Theme 6: No Hope in Systemic Change for Ferguson; and Theme 7: Recommendations for Change in Ferguson. In general, while a few individuals had high regard for members of law enforcement or were skeptical of the Justice Department's Report on Ferguson, the overwhelming majority of respondents believed the report was valid.*

"We have made enormous progress in teaching everyone that racism is bad. Where we seem to have dropped the ball... is in teaching people what racism actually IS" – Jon Stewart (American political satirist, writer, producer, director, television host, actor, media critic, and stand-up comedian).

"Things like racism are institutionalized. You might not know any bigots. You feel like "well I don't hate black people so I'm not a racist," but you benefit from racism. Just by the merit, the color of your skin. The op-

portunities that you have, you're privileged in ways that you might not even realize because you haven't been deprived of certain things. We need to talk about these things in order for them to change" - Dave Chappelle (African American comedian, screenwriter, television and film producer, and actor).

On August 9, 2014, Michael Brown, an 18-year old Black (the terms "Black" and "African American" will be used interchangeably in this manuscript) man, was fatally shot by Darren Wilson, a white policeman with



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the Ferguson Police Department. The incident sparked protests and acts of vandalism in Ferguson as well as widespread calls for an investigation into the incident (Brown, 2014; Workneh, 2015). On September 3, 2014, The Justice Department announced that it would open a broad civil rights investigation that would examine whether the Ferguson police had a history of discrimination or misuse of force beyond the Michael Brown case. On March 4, 2015, Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. publicly criticized the Ferguson Police Department for "implicit and explicit racial bias" and "routinely violating the constitutional rights of its black residents." [Several key events related to Ferguson occurred between September 3, 2014 and March 4, 2015 and these are listed in Appendix A]. Examples of routine violations by police to Black residents of Ferguson included excessive use of force ("Nearly 90% of documented force used by FPD officers was used against African Americans"), canine bites ("In every canine bite incident for which racial information is available, the person bitten was African American"), and municipal court practices that harmed Blacks ("African Americans are 68% less likely than others to have their cases dismissed by the court, and are more likely to have their cases last longer and result in more required court encounters. African Americans are at least 50% more likely to have their cases lead to an arrest warrant, and accounted for 92% of cases in which an arrest warrant was issued by the Ferguson Municipal Court in 2013") as well as racial bias among police and court staff ("Emails circulated by police supervisors and court staff that stereotype racial minorities as criminals, including one email that joked about an abortion by an African-American woman being a means of crime control") (Berman & Lowery, 2015). According to the 2010 Census, the Black population in Ferguson was 67% while the White population was 29%. According to the 2009-2013 American Community Survey, 25% of Ferguson's population lives below the federal poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). All in all, these specific occurrences clearly demonstrate the institutional racism that was commonplace in Ferguson, a community that is poor and mostly Black.

In light of the Department of Justice's report on the Ferguson Police Department, this manuscript will examine the comments provided by bloggers on The Huffington Post. This topic is significant for four reasons. First, given the increasing negative media attention on the excessive force used by members of law enforcement (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011; Chaney & Robertson, 2014; Chaney & Robertson, 2013; Elicker, 2008; Hassell & Archbold, 2010; Jefferis, Butcher, &

Hanely, 2011; Kane & White, 2009; King, 2011; Rafail, Soule, & McCarthy, 2012; Skolnick & Fyfe, 1994), this study examines how individuals generally feel about police, within and outside of Ferguson. Second, since Blacks are substantially more likely to be accosted by police (Armour, 1997; Cush, 2013; Dottolo & Stewart, 2008; Lewis, 2014; Tonry, 2011; Walker, 2011), this study examines whether respondents would identify racism or institutional racism as the impetus behind the Ferguson Police Department's treatment of African Americans. Third, given the lack of trust that many individuals have in the government (Griffin, 2015; Wilkes, 2015), this topic examines whether the public generally believes the Department of Justice's report is valid. Last, since the DOJ is "prepared to disband Ferguson Police over racism" (Huston, 2015), this topic examines recommendations for building a more fair policing system in Ferguson.

## Review of Literature

Racism is "the subordination of any person or group because of skin color or other distinctive physical characteristics. Racism, like sexism, is reflected in both individual and institutional acts, decisions, habits, procedures, and policies that neglect, overlook, exploit, subjugate, or maintain the subordination of the individual or the group" (Appleby, Colon, & Hamilton, 2011, p. 66). In essence, through language (Bonilla-Silva, 2012), people learn to associate the dominant group with positivity and superiority (Callanan, 2012; Conlin & Davie, 2015) and the subjugated group with criminality and inferiority (Behm-Morawitz & Ortiz, 2013; Bryson, 1998; Burrell, 2010; Eberhardt, Davies, Purdie-Vaughns, & Johnson, 2006; Greene & Gabbidon, 2013; Oliver, Jackson, Maddox & Gray, 2004; Moses, & Dangerfield, 2004; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2013; Plant & Peruche, 2005; Seate & Mastro, 2015). Thus, racism becomes a permanent reality in which members of the oppressed group are primarily blamed by members of the dominant group for the ills in society (Bell, 1992; Douglas, 2013; Tonry, 2011; van Doorn, 2015).

On the other hand, institutional racism refers to specific policies and/or procedures of institutions (i.e., law enforcement agencies, government, business, schools, churches, etc.) which consistently result in unequal treatment for particular groups (Better, 2002; Blank, Knowles, & Prewitt, 1970; Feagin, 2010; Feagin & Feagin, 1978; Khanna & Harris, 2015; Lea, 2000; Souhami, 2013). Stated another way, institutional rac-

ism “is the process of making decisions based on skill level, residential location, income, or education, all factors that are considered racially neutral” (Appleby et al., 2011, p. 66). In essence, institutionalized racism is structured into political and social institutions and occurs when institutions, including corporations, governments and universities, discriminate either deliberately or indirectly, against certain groups of people to limit their rights (Better, 2002; Staples, 2011; Troyna & Williams, 2012; Williams, 1985). Race-based discrimination in housing, education, employment, health and public safety are forms of institutional racism. Furthermore, this form of discrimination reflects the cultural assumptions of the dominant group, so that the practices of that group are seen as the norm to which other cultural practices should conform (Andersen & Taylor, 2006; Armour, 1997; Bonilla-Silva, 2009; Feagin & Elias, 2013; Phillips, 2011; Reilly, 2015).

For many, the clearest examples of explicit and intentional institutional racism include state and local “Jim Crow” laws which were in effect in the United States from 1865 to 1965. These laws explicitly mandated separation of Black and White individuals in public and private places (e.g., hospitals, schools, neighborhoods, restaurants, entertainment venues, public transportation, drinking fountains, religious organizations) and regulated access to social and vocational opportunities by race (Alexander, 2010; Krieger, 2010; Tischauser, 2012). Furthermore, institutional racism has been found to negatively affect the performance of Black students (Bradbury, 2014; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011), and the experiences of members of the Black professorate at Primarily-White Institutions (PWIs) (Pilkington, 2011). Besides, this form of racism has been found to impede local, state, and national policy that could improve the lives of African Americans (Came & Humphries, 2014; Hurley, Jensen, Weaver, & Dixon, 2015), and has resulted in the wide-sweeping criminalization, disenfranchisement, and imprisonment of millions of Black Americans (Hacker, 2010; Lopez, 2000; Pettus, 2013). While institutional racism is “more subtle, less visible, and less identifiable than individual acts of racism,” (Appleby et al., 2011, p. 66), the policies and procedures created by individuals within institutions greatly diminish the physical, emotional, and mental health, safety, and well-being of the marginalized group (Henkel, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2006; Martin, Mahalik, & Woodland, 2001; McKenzie & Bhui, 2007; Mendez, Hogan, & Culhane, 2014; Meunig & Murphy, 2011; Pieterse, Todd, Neville, & Carter, 2012; Souhami, 2014). As it relates to the current discussion of the Depart-

ment of Justice’s Report on Ferguson, one point must be noted: While any member of a marginalized group can be subject to individual and institutional racism, individuals who are Black and poor are substantially more likely to perceive the police as a threat to their safety, be victims of police violence, and be subject to government that penalizes them due to race (Elicker, 2008; Jeffries, Butcher, & Hanely, 2011; Marger, 2012; Reilly, 2015; Rothenberg, 2010).

## Method

Grounded theory was the foundation of this study (Holsti, 1969; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). This involved examining recurrent themes in comments provided on *The Huffington Post* website. There were two reasons why this website was chosen. First, in 2012, *The Huffington Post* became the first commercially run United States digital media enterprise to win a Pulitzer Prize (Flamm, 2012). Second, in July 2012, *The Huffington Post* was ranked #1 on the 15 Most Popular Political Sites list by *eBizMBA Rank*, which bases its list on each site’s Alexa Global Traffic Rank and U.S. Traffic Rank from both Compete and Quantcast (eBizMBA, 2012).

All 490 comments were provided on March 4, 2015 and March 5, 2015. To maintain the authenticity of the perspectives provided by all contributors, the post names, remarks, and capitalization used in comments was not altered. In keeping with open-coding techniques, no a priori categories were imposed on the narrative data. Instead, themes were identified from the narratives. In order to clearly abstract themes from the written responses, words and phrases were the units of analysis.

Identifying the themes involved several steps. The first step involved reading all comments to identify the most salient themes (e.g., Themes that were aligned with the overarching goals of the study). In cases where comments were not directly related to the goals of the study (i.e., Democrat vs. Republican government, Muslim rights, specific experiences of racism in the South, whether Michael Brown had his hands in the air when he was shot by Darren Wilson, perspectives on former president, George W. Bush, or the emails of presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton), the comment was not included in the thematic coding. Four-hundred four (404) comments were analyzed and 86 comments were not included in the thematic coding and analysis (n = 490).

After the major themes were identified, the second step involved developing working definitions for each of the themes. In some cases, two supporting themes were combined into one. So, since the DOJ Report on Ferguson criticized the racial bias exhibited by members of law enforcement and government within Ferguson, the decision was made to condense these themes into one. In cases where bloggers provided an extended comment that included more than one theme, the comment was separated into multiple themes. For example, if an individual expressed disgust for law enforcement and government in Ferguson, yet provided specific recommendations for change in Ferguson (i.e., the firing and/or imprisonment of police officers and court officials), these comments were counted as the endorsement of two separate themes (e.g., "Disgust for Police and Government Within Ferguson" and "Recommendations for Systemic Change in Ferguson").

The last step involved establishing the reliability of the themes. Themes, definitions, and supporting commentary was provided to an outside coder, and this individual coded all comments based on the themes identified by the author (See Table 1 for Themes, Definitions, and Supporting Commentary). After a 98% reliability was established between me and the outside coder, it was determined that a reliable coding system had been developed. This method greatly minimized the likelihood that the biases of the researcher or the outside coder greatly influenced the outcomes that were presented in this study.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

Grounded theory analysis revealed the following 7 themes: Theme 1: High Regard for Members of Law Enforcement; Theme 2: Disgust for Police and Government within Ferguson; Theme 3: Disregard for DOJ and its Report on Ferguson; Theme 4: Trust in DOJ Report on Ferguson; Theme 5: Police Corruption Extends beyond Ferguson; Theme 6: No Hope in Systemic Change for Ferguson; and Theme 7: Recommendations for Change in Ferguson.

The High Regard for Members of Law Enforcement theme was related to words and/or phrases that indicated the value of law enforcement and the scarcity of police violence. The No Hope in Systemic Change for Ferguson theme was related to words and/or phrases that indicate that the DOJ report will not result in far-reaching change in Ferguson. The Disregard for DOJ and its Report on Ferguson theme was related to

words and/or phrases that indicate the Department of Justice is an outdated entity and its report of Ferguson is questionable. The Disgust for Police and Government within Ferguson theme was related to words and/or phrases that represent a disgust for the Ferguson Police Department and court systems within Ferguson. The Police Corruption Extends beyond Ferguson theme was related to Words and/or phrases that indicated the racism demonstrated by the Ferguson Police Department is done by other police departments in the United States. The Trust in DOJ Report on Ferguson theme was related to words and/or phrases that indicate African Americans are currently and/or have been victims of racist practices for some time and must be protected against corrupt policemen and government. The Recommendations for Change in Ferguson theme was related to words and/or phrases that provide recommendations to change the current structure of law enforcement and government in Ferguson. Due to page constraints, the percent of individuals that endorsed each theme will be provided along with specific qualitative examples to support that theme.

#### ***Theme 1: High Regard for Members of Law Enforcement***

Four individuals (.7% of the total number of respondents) used words and/or phrases that indicated the value of law enforcement, the difficulty of their jobs, and the scarcity of police violence against civilians. A male respondent by the name of Ecyor Nagol reminded everyone that being aggressive is part of the job and a self-defensive tool of law enforcement when he said: "You know what? I guess most police departments are a little aggressive. It somewhat comes with the job to keep them on their toes to avoid getting killed. You wouldn't want a bunch of pansies doing that job would you?" Like Ecyor, Dale Watson (School of Hard Knocks) expressed police have a difficult job: "Police like any job must feel the pressure to make the grade on their job this means showing that you are doing your job. Whether that's building things or passing out tickets. They have a hard job they are damned if you do damned if you don't." A blogger by the name of Jo Huyik reminded everyone that a few repeating cops give the rest a bad name: "Try to remember that most cops are solid people. The majority of these awful incidents are committed by a handful of cops, a few repeat offenders who give the rest a bad name." This perspective was shared by Robert Palmer (University of Illinois Springfield) who

Table 1. Theme, Definition, and Supporting Commentary

Theme	Definition	Supporting Commentary
High Regard for Members of Law Enforcement	Words and/or phrases that indicated the value of law enforcement, the difficulty of their jobs, and the scarcity of police violence against civilians.	“Try to remember that most cops are solid people. The majority of these awful incidents are committed by a handful of cops, a few repeat offenders who give the rest a bad name.”
No Hope in Systemic Change for Ferguson	Words and/or phrases that indicated that the DOJ report will not result in far-reaching change in Ferguson.	“Even after this report - nothing will change.”
Disregard for DOJ and its Report on Ferguson	Words and/or phrases that indicated the Department of Justice is an outdated entity and its report of Ferguson is questionable.	“The DOJ is an obsolete and out of touch government department that is run primarily by the same type whites that rule Ferguson.”
Disgust for Police and Government Within Ferguson	Words and/or phrases that represent a disgust for the Ferguson Police Department and court systems within Ferguson.	“What a sad world we live in when our protectors turn out to be bullies!”
Police Corruption Extends Beyond Ferguson	Words and/or phrases that indicated the racism demonstrated by the Ferguson Police Department is done by other police departments in the United States.	“Where there is smoke there is fire. And it is true far beyond Ferguson. It is true for police departments and state governments everywhere. It is also true in the United States Congress.”
Trust in DOJ Report on Ferguson	Words and/or phrases that indicated African Americans are currently and/or have been victims of racist practices for some time and must be protected against corrupt policemen and government.	“This announcement is going down in the history books. It is an atrocity that a whole city discriminated against the whole African American population. They extorted money from the citizens and locked them into a bogus system to fund the whole city”
Recommendations for Change in Ferguson	Words and/or phrases that offered recommendations to change the current structure of law enforcement and government in Ferguson.	“A lot of law enforcement and local government officials need to go to prison and be held accountable for the laws they broke against protesters.”

believed it unfair to label all policemen in Ferguson as racists: "Wow, ALL Ferguson cops and ALL cops are bigots. Pretty big leap and TOTAL NONSENSE. How many calls for service do police answer every day, and how many end in tragedy?"

### ***Theme 2: No Hope in Systemic Change for Ferguson***

Eleven individuals (2.7% of the total number of respondents) used words and/or phrases that indicated the DOJ report will not result in far-reaching change in Ferguson. Laron Peters commented, "Does ANYTHING in the country work anymore?" Gayle Anderson said, "Even after this report – nothing will change." One respondent who identified himself/herself as Complete Nonsense shared: "Nothing will change. Fact remains that 50% of the budget comes from arresting Blacks. How will they make up the difference?" Kenneth Hare (Porterville College) was not optimistic for change: "So what? Just a bunch of words and nothing and I repeat nothing is gonna happen." Echoing the sentiments expressed by others, George DJgeo Kellon (Harbison Canyon, California) stated: "Here's a fun fact.... NOTHING IS GOING TO HAPPEN TO BETTER IT..."

Like the other bloggers, another respondent did not believe anything would change and that history would merely repeat itself. Michael Shawn Starks (AMDA – Alumni) used the following words to express his viewpoint: "Yeah? And so what's gonna happen to them and what's it gonna change? N-O-T-H-I-N-G. That's what. I'd just rather not know anymore. I want to join all the countless ignorant masses in not knowing and not giving a shit because caring is just too painful. We're all caught in the machinations of a huge runaway monstrosity of hatred and corruption and greed and anger and there's not a damn thing we can do about it. Call me defeatist if you will, but making a little YouTube video or public service announcement to "raise awareness" or telling our representatives we want change DOES. NOT. WORK. We're born, people hate and kill and steal and destroy, we die, rinse, spin, repeat." Like Michael Shawn Starts, Tom Hazen (Burlington High School) has no faith in the justice system: "What 99 percent of all Americans already know, is now in print. Cops are told to fleece people. Give out as many tickets as possible. In the name of the law of course. Sad part is that the judges go along with this scheme. Our system of justice is a black hole. Nothing will come out of this report. There will be talk for a time. Then back to

normal business. Heads of states don't try to correct the problem, they turn a silent ear to the facts. We are becoming a sad country."

Other bloggers were highly skeptical that the police in Ferguson would be fired or imprisoned. This perspective was shared by Ravi Kanwal (Aliso Viejo, California) when he/she shared, "And exactly how many have been or will be fired as a result of this report? Absolutely ZERO police officers who are probably laughing with a snide snort of ... Meh, so what!'" Like Ravi Kanwal, Nick Vanocur (Works at Political Humor Columnist, "From the Desk of NickiLeaks") was highly skeptical that the policemen in Ferguson would be put in jail: "If they don't jail bankers, will they jail cops?"

Some believed that a history of racist-affirming practices gives law enforcement and government in Ferguson no motivation for systemic change. Kevin Suratt (Works at United States Air Force) said this: "I doubt the corruption will change. Whistle blower Christopher Dorner tried to warn the public. Something caused that officer to snap. These courts and police departments are committing treason against the people and the constitution. Traitors for the dollar and self-advancement." Another male believed "hundreds of years of racism and oppression" make wide sweeping change doubtful: "They are hopeful departments will see this and "make changes on their own?" And what motivation do they have to break hundreds of years of racism and oppression? Just another gaming report they will do nothing about at a time when the country desperately needs better policing."

### ***Theme 3: Disregard for DOJ and its Report on Ferguson***

Twenty-one (21) individuals (5.2% of the total number of respondents) used words and/or phrases that indicated the Department of Justice is an outdated entity and its report of Ferguson is questionable. Dave Wakefield questioned that lack of justice in the report: "Millions spent to issue a report ...what about JUSTICE? Eric Holder lap dog of the oligarchs...what about JUSTICE?" For Clint Notestine (Humboldt State University) the DOJ is not conscientiously reporting on other police agencies: "It would be nice if the Justice Department grew a pair and investigated more policy like this." Jon Lucente believed the DOJ's investigation process is too long: "If the DOJ feels there are many other municipalities with this problem, why are they waiting for 40th person to get shot to open investigations?"

Other individuals had little respect for the Department of Justice because of their lack of action with other offending law enforcement agencies. This view was expressed by Clif May (The Ohio State University): "The DOJ is a joke. What have they done with the Phoenix or Philadelphia police departments that they found were guilty of the same thing? Nothing, that's what." For Jeremy E. Simpson (Kringle's Helper at Kringle A. Corporation Sole), the Department of Justice is a disaster: "Damning Report"...but nobody goes to prison? How terrifying. The DOJ is an abject failure." Richard Young (University of Phoenix) shared, "Make change on their own"...Give me a F...ing break! The DOJ is an obsolete and out of touch government department that is run primarily by the same type whites that rule Ferguson."

A substantial number of bloggers found it ironic that the Department of Justice found law enforcement and municipalities in Ferguson discriminatory against African Americans yet not charge Darren Wilson for the murder of Michael Brown. Kevin Kelly (Journeyman Electrician at IBEW Local 728) remarked, "All these incriminating findings and no one charged? This attorney general is spineless and is no better than those that came before him!" Althia Waul-Daly said this: "I am really puzzled by the DOJ's decision not to charge Wilson, in light of this report. Wasn't Wilson one of the officers operating under these same policies and practices when he killed Michael Brown?" David Herndon was also confused: "How is it possible that the DOJ found a plethora racially biased practices orchestrated by the Ferguson police and its courts but failed to bring charges against Darren Wilson. There are at least six eyewitnesses with corroborating versions of events that unequivocally proves Darren Wilson is a prevaricating murderer. The same racially biased practices of Ferguson's courts also refused to indict Wilson." The views offered by Kevin Kelly, Althia Waul-Daly, and David Herndon were echoed by Karen Kerr (Brooklyn, New York): "How the DOJ can say on one hand that the Dept. is flagrantly racist and bias in its dealings with blacks, using undue aggressiveness, and then in the same breath, deny that Wilson killed the kid with no intent or bias? CIVIL SUIT here we come. And they can use the DOJ 's own words to back them up! On a different note: The same people who are praising Holder for his 'insight' in finding no charges for Wilson, are calling for his ouster and calling him incompetent and corrupt for his findings about the racist police force. Bigots hate to have their own justice system shine the light on themselves.....Ok for others, but not themselves.

#### ***Theme 4: Disgust for Police and Government within Ferguson***

Fifty-eight individuals (58) (14.4% of the total number of respondents) used words and/or phrases that indicated a disgust for the Ferguson Police Department and court systems within Ferguson. Many respondents used single words to describe their disgust as well as the contempt they believed the law enforcement and municipal governments in Ferguson had for its residents.

A blogger who identified himself/herself as WildEyez Johnson simply said, "Shame. Shame." George J. Zaidan (Christ The King College (C.K.C.) expressed: "ENOUGH! Stop the abuse." Michael Johns referred to law enforcement and government in Ferguson to bullies: "What a sad world we live in when our protectors turn out to be bullies!" James McCoy was also sickened by the actions of law enforcement in Ferguson: "This police department gave all the residents arrested records so they could not vote. Disgraceful." The inability of Ferguson residents to vote because of false reports was supported by Marion Brooks: "We could look at this way...the cops have been targeting this community for some time...records may possibly make it hard for the residents to vote..." Steve Evets, a self-identified White male is sympathetic for the Black residents of Ferguson: "But how many blacks in Ferguson have been disenfranchised or beaten down to the point where they have no hope and see no point in voting. As white people it is hard for us to ever fully appreciate what it is like to be black in America." In addition to the inability to vote, Peter Tracey (Johannesburg, Gauteng) drew attention to the residents of Ferguson who lost their jobs: "In summer 2012, for example, one officer charged a man with violating Ferguson's municipal code by saying his name was "Mike" instead of "Michael." The man told the Justice Department that he lost his job as a federal contractor because of that charge along with several others." All this so that the city of Ferguson could make more money – saddest thing I've ever read; they are going straight to hell no doubt."

According to Rod Coggin: "This agency fulfills the stereotype many Americans have of smaller town police/sheriff departments." Toni Tommasi (Forest Park, Illinois) was scared for the residents of Ferguson: "Frightening that people with such hateful and immature attitudes are running a city." Cynthia M. Clemmons Lee (Columbus, Ohio) referred to Ferguson as a "cesspool." Rashonda Robinson compared law enforcement and government in Ferguson to plantation overseers: "In-



stead of attempting hand controls or seeking assistance from a state trooper who was also present, the correctional officer deployed the [Taser] because the woman was “not doing as she was told.” My God, they don’t sound like police; they sound like plantation overseers.”

Others believed Ferguson’s law enforcement and government created a racist “culture” that was inherently unjust to African Americans. Randy P. Green (University of Washington) remarked: “They sewed a culture of bigotry, hatred and corruption.....” Ted White believed the Ferguson Police Department operated under the same racist practices of police departments in the Deep South: “It seems the Ferguson PD is using the playbook of the Deep South police departments from the Civil Rights era and they are proud of it.” Brian Amberg compared living in Ferguson to “a Kafka novel.”<sup>1</sup> Deborah Hillary compared law enforcement in Ferguson to the gun-toting west: “Someone needs to tell Ferguson Police this is not the Wild, Wild West!”

Former residents of Ferguson were not surprised by the DOJ report. Katie Beyers (Kansas City, Missouri) shared this: “As a St. Louis native, I am so NOT surprised at what this investigation found. White St. Louis cops who work in North St. Louis only do so because they are not good enough to work elsewhere in the Metro, and I know a LOT of these bad guys because they grew up around me, and are racist as the day is long. Glad to see some sunshine disinfecting some really nasty people in law enforcement.” In support of Katie’s comment, Fanny Fae recalled how deeply ingrained racism is in Ferguson: “This isn’t just how it is in one city in Missouri. This is absolutely endemic in the entire consciousness of that state. I was born in, spent my childhood in and moved away from that place where racism and prejudice is ingrained into the very culture. In school, little children KNOW every classmate whose daddy, grandpa, brothers, uncles, etc. are in the KKK and it isn’t just common folk, it’s in law enforcement and the courts, and the halls of government and on and on. If anyone is under the illusion that somehow the Civil Rights Movement and time has made it all better, I think the events in Ferguson and the DOJ findings have pretty much underscored that the racism and prejudice as policy is deeply ingrained still. You won’t fix this overnight...”

Fundamentally, Christine Hill (Works at Self-Employed) summed up the disgust shared by many bloggers for law enforcement and government in Ferguson as well as her naiveté in believing the events in Ferguson were a distant memory. She provided the following extended comment: “Take the time to read the full report. It

is absolutely appalling and goes FAR beyond the police department, who apparently act as enforcers for equally correct town leaders and courts. I am dumbfounded at the brazenness of the corruption in Ferguson, and I feel stupid and naive forever believing that routine practices like those the DOJ’s report describes were a thing of the past in the U.S. It isn’t just the police. The corruption starts at the top in Ferguson, with city leaders increasing the revenue projections every year and leaning on the cops to write more tickets so they can assess more fines in what amounts to a scheme of shakedowns. The courts participate in the shakedowns as well as the cops, and their schemes seem likely to attract cops who already are corrupt as a safe haven for further corrupt behavior. Their town is corrupt from top to bottom, and the corruption is vastly disproportionate in its impact on black citizens (no surprise there). The biggest thugs in Ferguson apparently are town leaders, judges, court employees and police officers.”

### ***Theme 5: Police Corruption Extends Beyond Ferguson***

Eighty-three (83) individuals (21% of the total number of respondents) used words and/or phrases that indicated the racism demonstrated by the Ferguson Police Department is done by other police departments in the United States. Annie Anderson said: “Officer Friendly retired decades ago.” Several bloggers mentioned that the actions of law enforcement in Ferguson mirrors that in other cities in America. This view was articulated by Thomas Westman when he said: “Just like any other American police district and municipal court.” Lydia Lindsey thought: “But this isn’t the only city like this in America!” Michael Gerard commented: “I can only imagine what LAPD and NYPD e-mails look like.” Like other bloggers, Alice Ferrell (The Ohio State University) shared: “Raise your hand you are black and surprised by the DOJ report. This goes on in EVERY police department in EVERY state.” Similarly, Carolyn d’Almeida (Mizzou) commented, “It’s not just Ferguson. Its police department in New York, Chicago, LA, all every municipality large and small.” Likewise, Edward F. Dease (Property Claims Adjuster at Pilot Catastrophe Services, Inc.) added: “Ferguson is just the tip of the iceberg. There are thousands of small fiefdoms across America where the powerful prey on the weak to keep their excuse for a city afloat.” Also, Mike Anastas mentioned: “This is not a surprise and I’ll bet you’ll find this to be the same in all US Police

Departments.” Moreover, Ken Bauer (Owner at Bauer Painting) declared: “Police departments throughout this country have become terrorist organizations. They have murdered more Americans than any country we have invaded under Bush or Obama. Yesterday I read a story where an officer was shot and killed in Georgia. I certainly did not rejoice in this news but neither was I saddened.”

Others supported the view that the findings in Ferguson are “typical” of most police departments in the nation. Xtfr Merton said: “I remember when police pledged “To Serve and Protect.” Now, it’s clear the police view us and treat us like the enemy. We see almost daily new examples of untrained, unprofessional, cowardly cops whose first recourse is to reach for their handguns and kill citizens. It’s a disgrace.” Similarly, Jim Buchanan (Reverse Engineer at Indentured Servitude, Inc.) believed: “These jokers aren’t rare or special in any way. I think they are average cops, as the daily news keeps showing us. Cops kill and mayors excuse. They tear down society, then they bitch that their results suck. Conservative cops are no more accountable for their actions than conservative anything else.”

Several bloggers compared police departments that operate like Ferguson to historical racist organizations. Leighton Hansel (Gurnee, Illinois) said: “It would appear that in the rural south, white sheets have been replaced by blue uniforms in areas where there are large numbers of blacks and whites control political structure, police and courts.” Instead of eluding to “white sheets” Jo Huvik specifically mentioned the KKK: “It appears that elements of the KKK have infiltrated some police departments. Have to wonder how deep this goes.”

Some bloggers mentioned specific instances of excessive force by police in places beyond Ferguson. Pedro Pedro wrote: “The problem with the police force is not just isolated to Ferguson - in my area two recent cases stand out -

CASE 1: Man shot dead for listening to his music too loud in his own home - [http:// www.tcpalm.com/news/more-details-released-in-fatal-standoff-in -fort](http://www.tcpalm.com/news/more-details-released-in-fatal-standoff-in-fort).

CASE 2: Man in coma 2 days after confrontation with deputies <http://www.wpbfl.com/news/tavares-docher-man-in-coma-2-days-after-confrontation-with-deputies/25957296> and the Police stated that it was all SOP Standard Operating Procedure to use excessive force and get away with it in the great state of Florida ... It not just in Ferguson.” Deborah Hillary mentioned another case in

Hartford Connecticut, “Here is an editorial written just a month ago in the Hartford Courant (Conn.). There are lots of problems with PDs in the State of CT, as there are everywhere as we all know. But in this case of excessive force, civil rights violations, etc. (the writer is a civil rights lawyer who has 8 or 9 cases alone against the same PD), the PD DID police itself and issued an arrest warrant for one of their own! Then the Hartford State Prosecutor refused to prosecute the officer! (The first 2 or 3 paragraphs of the editorial are about other CT corruption issues, but then you’ll see the lack of prosecution of police who the POLICE determine are criminal! <http://www.courant.com/opinion/op-ed/hc-op-spinella-connecticut-needs-effective-prosectors-0215-20150213-story.html>”

### ***Theme 6: Trust in DOJ Report on Ferguson***

One hundred three (103) individuals (25% of the total number of respondents) used words and/or phrases that indicated African Americans are currently and/or have been victims of racist practices for some time and must be protected against corrupt policemen and government. Jill Spring Forrest (Tahoma High School) used the single word “Finally!” to express how she felt about the report. David Zomber wrote: “Goddamning.” Similarly, Susan Pane said, “Business as usual.” Also, Connie Quarles (L.A.C.C.) remarked: “No surprise here, same old, same old.” According to Keith Grant: “It didn’t take an investigation to tell us what seemed apparent.” Using a hint of sarcasm, LaVette Sanders (Illinois State University) shared: “Shocked I say. Shocked! NOT!!” Echoing the comment provided by LaVette, Heather Smith (Hollywood, Florida) said: Surprise surprise.....NOT! I understand Ferguson PD was dissolved a few years ago for the same problem.”

Sadly, the events in Ferguson made many wonder what time in history we found ourselves and compared these events to modern-day slavery. Anusha Amen-Ra (Bauman College) expressed: “Wow. Someone needs to tell Ferguson Police it’s not 1920’s. They reserved their dogs exclusively for AA?” John Philip Shenale sarcastically wondered what century it was: “Ahhh, what century is it? Just checking!!!” In addition, Leal Lee said: “Is this the 21<sup>st</sup> century or the second century? Nonsense.” Patricia Vargas Schreiber (Mount Vernon High School, New York) shared, “What the hell era are we living in? I just watched Selma today, then I read this article. Is this really 2015? Shameful.”

Some respondents used the word “slavery” to de-

scribe the DOJ Report on Ferguson. For example, Larry Glinzman-Murphy expressed, "Modern day slavery in America." For Rob Perry (Boston, Massachusetts), "These tactics are nothing more than Slavery 2.0!" In support of Larry and Rob's views, Cynthia M. Clemmons Lee (Columbus, Ohio) provided this perspective: "This report put the whole country on notice. Slavery is alive and well across this country. This was an institution that was going on for years even though the people begged for help. Now we see just how important the power of loud protests has."

Several bloggers were not surprised by the DOJ Report in light of the racism that is prevalent in America. Mari Vazquez-Fernandez (Holy Names Academy) was not surprised by the DOJ's report: "Racism alive and well in the U.S.! Any surprise?!" Also, Kathy Kokitis (Indiana University) opined: "Racism is alive and well all over the United States. That is one thing that has not changed." The "nothing has changed" narrative was furthered by Gary Bernard Hall (Los Angeles, California) when he said: "This shows that nothing has changed since 1815 despite the year is now, 2015 'NOTHING HAS CHANGED'!!" In addition to these perspectives, Adrienne McCue (President/Executive Director at AJW Foundation) remarked: "Sorry, but not surprised. From the start of 1776-2015, should be on the American history books as bias, when it comes to justice on many civil rights issues. History continues to show this." As it relates to the current discussion, Brianna Amore (Solo Entrepreneur at Amoré Design Werks) provided an extended lesson on institutional racism: "This is EXACTLY the institutional racism that exists within America that was so roundly poo-pooed by all the racist crackers on Fox and other "news" organizations. Black people have been treated as extra-legal tax revenue since the days of civil rights, and most crime statistics are grossly overinflated as a result. So in the end, white people get to claim "well look at the crime stats involving black people" while completely ignoring the fact that the system of injustice exists against black people. Maybe now people will start paying attention to the way the system is designed to keep black people in poverty and on welfare."

### ***Theme 7: Recommendations for Change in Ferguson***

One-hundred twenty-four (124) individuals (31% of the total number of respondents) provided recommendations to change the current structure of law

enforcement and government in Ferguson. In general, these recommendations included increasing the number of Black voters and elected officials in Ferguson, as well as firing and imprisonment, bringing class action law suits, and disbanding the entire police force and government in Ferguson.

In regards to voting, Keith M. Davis shared this view: "This is not limited to one police department or city. We do not live in a post racial society. We therefore, must continue the fight our fathers and grandfathers started long ago. We must vote in every election to rid ourselves of this scourge." Robert Covert mentioned: "It is time for the overwhelming majority of black voters to get these politicians, and judges (if they are elected) removed through the ballot. They have the power and they need to exercise it." The need to vote was also advanced by Annette Priestly (University of Baltimore): "MLK said "RIOT IS THE LANGUAGE OF THE UNHEARD" Nobody was listening to the people of Ferguson. Now good people of Ferguson you have to vote to stamp out this non-sense. The good people of Selma voted Bull Connor out after their franchise was protected."

Others believed a Black Police Chief or all-Black police department is the only way for African Americans in Ferguson to be treated fairly. Eugene Barrow (Montgomery, Alabama) said: "Just fire all the white officers and create an all-black police department. Problem solved." Lewis Cisle (Belfast, Maine) remarked, "Fire all of them and install a black chief of police to do the rehiring." Russell Davis (College of Southern Nevada) mentioned, "What they really need is a black mayor and a black police chief."

Several bloggers believed law suits would change the current racial climate in Ferguson. Franklin Gove (Trading watch supervisor at Dailyoptions.org) said, "One word...class action." Similarly, Thai Angst (Mind your own business) shared, "Malcolm X couldn't go before the UN, but a massive civil rights lawsuit on his birthday would be a nice consolation prize." In a vein similar to the need for law suits, Aurelie-Anne Gilly (The American University of Paris) shared this perspective: "Name and shame those departments and officers who are bigots. At least people will then know who they are and there will be basis for civil suits." Ed Botsko (Ambridge Area High School) also supported the idea of civil suits: "Perhaps a civil suit that will cost Ferguson all that illicit fine money they've been extorting from the population... I hear busloads of lawyers are heading to Ferguson as we write/read this."

Fining and imprisoning police and governmental

officials in Ferguson was a recommendation offered by several bloggers. Frank Taylor said, "If there is a legitimate justice system there will be serious criminal charges and eventually prison sentences handed down!" Conversely, other individuals saw imprisonment of Ferguson law enforcement and officials as the only viable option. James Lawrence (Point Park University) cautioned: "Other cities won't change their behavior until they see folk going to jail." Daniel Krell expressed: "And it's not just the police; the town officials have to have known this was going on, and likely encouraged (demanded) it of the police force. They should all be fired and charged." In addition, Nelson Page (Lincoln High School) commented: "RACISM in Ferguson runs deep. This level of RACISM cannot be fixed. The only solution as I see it is to FIRE everyone, Judges, Prosecutors, Chief of Police, Police Officers, Jailers and Clerks. They are all complicit in this injustice." Deborah Hillary also believed: "Everyone and anyone involved in these civil rights violations should be fired, and their pensions should be revoked. And then reparations to those wronged who ever set foot in Ferguson should be made. Then and only then do I think that the healing can begin." David Herndon pointed out the value of Ferguson police and government officials losing their jobs: "The only way to fix the problem in Ferguson is to fire the entire police force and the county prosecutors. This will definitely send a strong message to other communities who are engaged in the same discriminatory practices."

For many, the imprisonment of all guilty parties was a viable resolution. Mitchell Martin believed, "The protesters were righteous in their protest. And this nation was founded on the right to protest, specifically against abuses like these, and yet they get stuck with an arrest record and other scars. What about the damages done to them, and the rights that were taken from them, and the injuries placed on them, and the arrests that are on their records? A lot of law enforcement and local government officials need to go to prison and be held accountable for the laws they broke against protesters. Real justice has to be equal..."

The overwhelming majority of respondents believed the police department and government in Ferguson should be disbanded. Stephen Janson (University of Wisconsin Milwaukee) wondered, "So why is this police department not disbanded?" Others declared the town of Ferguson needs to start over. Andrew Lyall remarked, "Close it down and start again. Send in the National Guard to keep order and then dismantle the whole Ferguson police department. Start a new one

with careful vetting of applicants." John Simpson (The Catholic University of America) opined, "What a disgrace! The entire department needs to be shut down." Susan Haselmann believed the entities in Ferguson are a cancer that needs to be purged: "All the public officials have to go. You can't cure a cancer if you don't get all of it. I'd like to see the State Trooper....Johnson, I think his name was.....become the mayor." Ralph Novy (Marquette University) used the word "dismantling" to describe what should happen to Ferguson: "Yeah, it appears that the whole Ferguson police department needs a thorough "cleaning," if not dismantling. But let's not forget about the courts!" Shane Shepherd believed Ferguson should also be dismantled: "They need to do what they did in Jennings, MO disband it and rebuild it again. It's no coincidence that some of those officers ended up being rehired in Ferguson to continue their abuses."

Ted White opined: "Nothing new there and we didn't need a DOJ investigation to know that. The Federal Government needs to go into Ferguson and clean house and the hiring process for officers need to be one that weeds out racist people regardless of race." Furthermore, Peter INova (Burbank, California) expressed himself in this way, "It is for damning moments like this that "throwing out the baby and the bath water" was cobbled together as a concept. Don't incrementally fix it. Time for baby and bath water to go. Start over."

Several individuals provided specific recommendations for change. One male (Kenneth Smith) suggested that police wear cameras: "All cops need cameras on duty. All municipal buildings need to have recording devices to preserve everything they say. There is just too much corruption from the bottom up." The need for police cameras was echoed by Vinny Lee: "Stop breaking the law...no police are needed, the police disappear... :D. Also, instill cameras in all police to make sure violations are caught on video and in black and white for all to see...Golden rule, treat others like you want to be treated! Love everyone, and start by loving yourself, no matter what!"

Others believed changes in the police system must be aligned with societal change for African Americans in Ferguson. Corinne Bernstein Gilarsky (The Wharton School) said, "Police tend to mirror greater societal issues....the police can't be fixed in a vacuum.... changes have to be made in conjunction with changes in education, job training, drug addiction assistance, and employment opportunities."

## Discussion

This study provided an informative qualitative tapestry of how bloggers on The Huffington Post felt about the Department of Justice's Report on Ferguson. In addition, this study examined how individuals generally feel about police, within and outside of Ferguson, whether respondents would identify racism or institutional racism as the impetus behind the Ferguson Police Department's treatment of African Americans as well as recommendations for change in Ferguson. The seven major themes that have been identified in this study and have been qualitatively supported by a wide array of bloggers merit an in-depth scholarly discussion.

As one of the three major components of the United States Criminal Justice System (e.g., law enforcement, courts, and corrections), it was not surprising that some bloggers highly valued law enforcement. It is possible that these individuals are part of the law enforcement system (i.e., policemen or family of policemen) and feel compelled to protect this institution. Another possibility may be that they nor anyone that they know (e.g., family, friends, and acquaintances) have ever been personally victimized by police. So, for these persons to accept law enforcement as anything other than a necessary and benevolent pillar of stability in an increasingly chaotic society is extremely difficult. However, the specific incidents of excessive force used by police in Ferguson resulted in negative feelings within many bloggers for this segment of the nation's criminal justice system. For these individuals, the exceedingly detailed examples cited in the Department of Justice's Report on Ferguson demonstrated that the police and government entities in this city engaged in a pattern of racist practices that unfairly targeted African Americans. On the other hand, those that questioned the DOJ Report or believed the report had little merit may also have had unfavorable views of President Obama and his administration. In other words, the DOJ's findings are suspect because they come from the auspices of a presidential administration whose views do not align well with those of some bloggers.

It is important to note that the overwhelming majority of bloggers trusted the DOJ's Report on Ferguson, and there may be three reasons for this. For one, these bloggers may have confidence that the federal government would conduct a more thorough and transparent investigation of police and governmental misconduct than a local or regional entity. In addition, although we live in what many believe to be a post-racial society (Bass, 2014; Gonzalez-Sobrinio & Hughey, 2015), the findings of this report caused several bloggers

to wonder about the point in time in which we find ourselves (e.g., "Is this the 21<sup>st</sup> century or the second century? Nonsense."). Sadly, although we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the DOJ's Report on Ferguson harkens a dismal time in the nation's history, namely slavery and the Jim Crow era, when African Americans were open targets of disdain. Also, given the increasing level of media coverage on alleged and/or substantiated incidents of police misconduct (Behm-Morawitz & Ortiz, 2013; Hassell & Archbold, 2010; Jefferis et al., 2011; Kane & White, 2009; King, 2011; Oliver, et al., 2004; Skolnick & Fyfe, 1994), these bloggers may have been motivated to highly trust and value the DOJ's findings. Finally, many individuals may regard law enforcement as a historically-viable way to advance individual and institutional racism. Moreover, it is important to note that many established a clear link between the DOJ's Report on Ferguson and systemic racism in the nation.

In support of the findings of numerous studies (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011; Chaney & Robertson, 2013; Elicker, 2008), the majority of individuals who provided comments on this weblog were extremely confident that police corruption extended beyond Ferguson. Since several of these bloggers provided personal accounts or media-specific examples of police brutality, this suggests that these individuals perceive the corruption in Ferguson as a widespread problem. Stated another way, the findings in the DOJ Report strongly suggests that an increasing number of Americans are not comforted by police and do not unequivocally trust that they will "Serve and Protect" members of the general populace, especially African Americans. In regards the lack of comfort many individuals feel toward police, Annie Anderson's five words are particularly insightful: "Officer Friendly retired decades ago." All in all, the majority of respondents believed the findings in Ferguson are "just like any other American police district and municipal court" in America.

Even though the Department of Justice announced they are "prepared to disband Ferguson Police over racism" (Huston, 2015), a substantial number of bloggers did not feel that the Ferguson Report would cause extensive change in Ferguson. There are three possible reasons to explain their feelings. For one, many may perceive the lack of change in law enforcement agencies in other areas of the country as a strong indicator that things would not permanently change in Ferguson. Second, some may perceive the DOJ's Report on Ferguson as a "cowardly" way to broadly acknowledge the existence of racism without legally penalizing individuals who are personally culpable. Related to this, several

respondents saw a disconnect between the criticism of an institution (i.e., Ferguson Police Department) yet its acquittal of Darren Wilson, an individual police officer that operated under the same racist paradigm as the agency through which he was employed. Finally, individuals who have observed the lack of legal accountability of police and law enforcement agencies over many decades may have accepted that racism is so engrained in the nation's way of operating that there is no hope for change. For these men and women, the many privileges of being White provide little or no incentive for Whites to create a more equitable society for Blacks. Essentially, for these bloggers, there is no hope for change because law enforcement ensures that Whites maintain their historically-elevated position in society.

While the findings of the DOJ Report on Ferguson provide strong evidence that America is not in a post-racial society (Howard & Flennaugh, 2011; Lee, 2013), the majority of respondents provided specific recommendations to change the current law enforcement and government in Ferguson. In particular, bloggers that recommended the Black residents of Ferguson vote for "the right people" or elect Black officials may have an exceptional level of trust in the government and a law force and government that was more representative of the marginalized members of that community would advance meaningful change. Even though the DOJ's Report on Ferguson has been publicly documented as "damming" (Huffington Post, 2015) and "scathing" (Berman & Lowery, 2015), a substantial number of individuals believed specific action should be taken against those that "sewed a culture of bigotry, hatred and corruption" in Ferguson. In particular, many thought class action law suits should be made and those who engaged in racist practices be fined and imprisoned. Essentially, these individuals may have reasoned that fining and imprisoning these officers is "poetic justice" for the Blacks who experienced these same forms of treatment when they were targets of law enforcement and government in Ferguson.

Of particular note, although Justice Department officials said they believe that Ferguson has the ability to fix its problems, many respondents believed that a "throwing out the baby and the bath water" approach is the only way to effect wide sweeping change. The "racial-biased" emails sent by current Ferguson officials over the past several years are documentation of the covert animus that many Whites have for Blacks. Furthermore, this view may be linked to the belief that individual and institutional racism is so deeply ingrained that individuals with positions of power have little or no

motivation to change. Sadly, a steady, financial revenue may be a strong motivation to maintain the status quo. Since the city, police and court officials have "worked in concert to maximize revenue at every stage of the enforcement process" for several years, many wonder how or if the city would financially survive if the current law enforcement and government were eradicated. While some might believe this is a glib assessment of human's ability to affect positive change, others find it realistic, especially in light of the historical "implicit and explicit racial bias" and "routine violation of the constitutional rights" of Black residents of Ferguson.

### *Limitations of the Current Study*

The limitations of this study must be noted. For one, as I have noted in several published works (Author Citation, 2013, 2012), extracting "data" from a public website makes it impossible to determine the demographic characteristics of the participants. In particular, a public website makes it impossible to determine the gender, age, sex, marital status, education, occupation, and sexual orientation of the individuals are commenting. Another possible limitation is that even though other forms of data collection such as interviews, surveys, and focus groups allow individuals to provide false information, the anonymity of a public website could considerably increase this risk. In other words, people may be more likely to falsify information or embellish their experiences. Added to this, since The Huffington Post is a liberal political weblog, it may invariably attract individuals with similar views to read and post comments than a weblog with a more conservative orientation (i.e., Instapundit, Hot Air, and Redstate) (Kettle, 2015). Moreover, as many of the respondents identified themselves as students or faculty from colleges and universities in the nation, it is possible that a less-educated demographic of bloggers may have yielded different results. Further, as the study provides a single snapshot of the views of these individuals at a particular point in time, another limitation is that the study does not determine whether the views of these individuals have changed or remained the same over time. Lastly, the views provided by these individuals may reflect personal (positive or negative) biases regarding the police, President Obama and his administration.

Given these limitations, there are several advantages to examining the comments provided on a political weblog. For one, the anonymity of a public website

makes it possible for individuals to more openly share their views, feelings, and experiences and could therefore decrease the risk of social desirability. More clearly, the anonymity of a public website could facilitate a greater level of honesty, especially among individuals who would not ordinarily share their views publicly. Furthermore, as individuals shared their Facebook information, this made it possible to “Friend” request individuals for further discussion and/or debate. In addition, that individuals are allowed to share their perspectives in “real time” as well as their agreement or disagreement with the perspectives of others can further increase the validity of the findings presented herein. In several instances, bloggers educated others by providing links for specific terms (e.g., John Metcalf shared a link on “structural violence,” <http://www.structuralviolence.org/structural-violence/>) or examples of police violence in different geographic regions (e.g., <http://www.wpbf.com/news/tavares-docher-man-in-coma-2-days-after-confrontation-with-deputies/25957296>). Clearly, while social desirability is an inherent risk of any form of data collection, I believe the anonymity of a public weblog allows for a higher degree of honesty and self-disclosure than may be afforded in an interview, survey, or focus group. This represents a major strength of the current study.

### ***Directions for Future Research***

There are three ways that future scholarship can build upon the findings presented in this study. For one, scholars can examine what if any systemic changes have occurred within the Ferguson Police Department and Ferguson government over time. Future work in this area would highlight the longitudinal changes that have occurred within these entities, but more important, whether those changes have positively influenced the racial climate for Blacks in Ferguson. In addition, and related to the first point, scholars can qualitatively examine whether Ferguson residents and members of the general public have more positive, negative, or neutral attitudes about police. Future work in this area would draw attention to the relationship between law enforcement’s interactions with Blacks and how police are generally perceived by individuals within this community. Finally, scholars can use mixed-methodologies to examine whether an increasing number of non-Blacks will not only have faith in the DOJ Report, but acknowledge the racism experienced by many African Americans. Future work in this area would reveal the

specific factors that make non-Whites more or less likely to acknowledge racism as well as the historical distrust that many Blacks have for members of law enforcement.

### **Conclusion**

At the onset of this manuscript I provided two comments from well-known White and Black comedians. Jon Stewart, who is White, recognized that while it is common knowledge that “racism is bad,” society has done a less than adequate job of “teaching people what racism actually IS.” However, as evidenced by the Department of Justice’s Report on Ferguson, many people are highly aware of the many ways a racist law enforcement and government agency operates. On the other hand, Dave Chappelle, who is Black (and like several of the respondents on this political weblog such as Brianna Amore) acknowledged the institutional nature of racism and how it privileges some individuals while depriving others. As the City of Ferguson seeks to heal the many wounds inflicted by members of its law enforcement and government, it is my hope that racism, whether individual or institutional, be permanently eradicated.

Appendix A. Key Events Related to Ferguson that Occurred Between September 3, 2014 and March 4, 2015

Date	Key Event
September 3, 2014	Missouri Governor Jay Nixon lifts the state of emergency in Ferguson, citing a calming of tensions.
September 4, 2014	Citing the "deep mistrust" between the local residents and law enforcement officials, the Justice Department launched a broad investigation into the practices of the Ferguson police department. In announcing the probe, Holder says he and his department had heard numerous concerns from people in the St. Louis suburb about police practices, a history of mistrust and a lack of diversity on the police force.
September 9, 2014	Residents turn out in force for the first Ferguson City Council meeting since the Brown shooting, expressing anger at elected leaders and the police department.
September 16, 2014	Officer Darren Wilson testifies before a grand jury, which is reviewing evidence in Brown's death to determine whether Wilson should face criminal charges.
October 10, 2014	"Ferguson October," a four-day peaceful protest with planned civil disobedience, begins while police investigate the shooting deaths of Brown and a second black teenager in the area, Vonderrit Myers Jr.
October 13, 2014	Police arrest clergy and activist academic Cornel West as the "Ferguson October" movement culminates on "Moral Monday." Activists led hundreds of protesters in a march from a church to the police station in the most organized demonstrations carried out by protesters yet.
November 11, 2014	Nixon says he will activate the National Guard to respond to any unrest that erupts after the grand jury delivers its decision. "Violence will not be tolerated," he said.



November 13, 2014	Brown's mother and father, Lesley McSpadden and Michael Brown, Sr., traveled to Geneva, Switzerland, to testify before the United Nations Committee Against Torture as part of a delegation of human rights advocates organized by the New York- and Atlanta-based U.S. Human Rights Network.
November 20, 2014	Advocacy group STL Forward released a Youtube video featuring Michael Brown, Sr. In it, he urged people that regardless of the grand jury decision, violence is not the answer.
November 21, 2014	Attorney General Eric Holder urged law enforcement authorities Friday to minimize the potential for confrontations during possible demonstrations.
November 24, 2014	A St. Louis County grand jury declined to indict officer Darren Wilson for firing six shots in the confrontation that killed Michael Brown, said Benjamin Crump, an attorney for the family.
December 13, 2014	Protests occur nationwide and thousands march in Washington.
December 28, 2014	Officer Tim Zoll, a spokesman for the Ferguson Police Department, is suspended after he refers to Brown's memorial as "a pile of trash."
January 18, 2015	Nine members of the Congressional Black Caucus visit Ferguson to attend a special church service honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and to stand in solidarity with community members pushing for police reform.
February 10, 2015	Protesters rally on the six-month anniversary of Michael Brown's death. Seven are ultimately arrested.
March 4, 2015	A scathing report from the Justice Department finds that the practices and protocols of Ferguson's criminal justice system repeatedly violate the rights of African-American residents.

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