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by Joan Lipkin*



With a few exceptions, the media coverage of the situation in Ferguson has been disappointing. Most reporting has been focused on actions in response to the shooting of Mike Brown and/or the reaction to the lack of an indictment that would lead to a trial for Officer Darren Wilson. It has missed the bigger stories that underlie this tragedy.

How and why do we have an essentially white police force and government in an area that is essentially black? How are areas like Ferguson, (one of over 80 municipalities in St Louis), financed by ticketing of traffic violations and court fees that target a poor minority community? What is the number of men of color that have been shot who were unarmed by white police officers over the past ten years in St Louis and throughout the US? How many of these cases go to trial? Why are body cameras not required in every jurisdiction to demonstrate what really goes on when the cost of a camera is probably less than a firearm?

The general lack of attention to these significant details has made for shoddy reporting

which doesn't convey the why of people's despair, only the way it has been enacted. The why is the story of systematic racism, both in St Louis and elsewhere.

And because I think that news is also about positive action, I think the media should be covering more of that as well. Clergy of all denominations and races and ethnicities have been on the ground almost every day and recently, several have offered their houses of worship as designated 24/7 safe spaces. Despite wearing orange vests labelled clergy, many have been arrested and in a few instances, they have been dragged.

The story of positive young leadership that is emerging is also under reported. A lot of young people of different races have grown up seeing their parents comply with a system that clearly does not serve them. In a terrible economy, with the use of social media to help them organize and do their own accounts on the ground, they have little to lose by speaking out and they are doing so increasingly both in St Louis and elsewhere.

There are other stories of positivity that indicate the commitment and resilience of the human spirit. For weeks, coalitions of activists and protesters have been meeting to try to determine how to keep peace and to negotiate w the police. When Mike Brown was shot and the schools in Ferguson were closed, A food fund was quickly organized to ensure that children who normally got meals at school would be fed and many people, including artists, volunteered at the public library which was open to work with the children and make art projects with them. When many buildings were boarded up in South St Louis after the vandalism spread to that area of the city, artists appeared on the scene and painted messages of hope and beauty. This, too, is news.

The media often both misses the bigger underlying stories and the smaller stories that convey the soul of a community.

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