

## Ferguson protests

Some folks from St. Louis are embarrassed by the spotlight on their community as a place of disgraceful racial unrest. I don't see it that way. I feel like people are finally talking to one another from both sides of the table. What is being said isn't always pleasant or easy to hear, but St. Louis was in racial equality denial until Ferguson became a lightning rod for no longer tolerating the status quo.

Just like there is legalese (ridiculous words attorneys use when they're communicating), there is also a "protest" vocabulary. A few things I've learned:

I didn't know what "kettling" was until this summer. Kettling is when police confine demonstrators to a small area during a protest to assist crowd control.

"Arrestables": those people who have predetermined that they are willing to put themselves in a situation of civil disobedience knowing they are likely to be arrested.

"Non-arrestables": Demonstrators who are not voluntarily putting themselves in a situation or space where arrest is imminent.

"First Amendment": Some Americans don't understand that Freedom of speech and peaceful assembly are Constitutional rights. Really.

"Mic check": Yelled by lead protesters from one section of the march/crowd to have their words repeated throughout a crowd.

Ferguson protests: What we don't need

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Stereotypes: To lump all the protesters under the umbrella of "thugs" is as productive as calling all police officers "racist". I feel compassion for the police officers who must be completely stressed by the constant unrest. I also feel compassion for the protesters whose anger over disparate treatment based on their skin color and socio-economic circumstances cannot be contained anymore.

Denial: Is it really so hard to believe that black people are not treated equally when so many self-righteously call black people stupid worthless lazy non-working domestic terrorists?

Extremists: Extremes and narrow-mindedness are unproductive in government as well as protest environments. Most of the police are honest, devoted officers doing a difficult job. The officers who yell racial slurs and abuse their authority make it very difficult for the entire police department to gain the public trust. The police also lose credibility when they respond to peaceful protesters with excessive shows of force.

Similarly, the protesters who yell obscenities in officer's faces and hurl rocks aren't endearing themselves to the public nor furthering their cause to be treated fairly.

Ferguson Protests: What we need

Rational discourse through the political system is the best avenue for change. Opening minds to another perspective requires effective communication. Rude and disrespectful behavior polarizes people. When someone screams at me or has a heavy-handed response, I quit listening, become defensive and want to get medieval on their ass. Calling people names wasn't cool in elementary school and it's not cool as an adult. Insults and anger are what people who have nothing intelligent to offer resort to. Rude and intimidating tactics escalate tension and work contrary to improving dialogue. Rather than the targets thinking that they are being shown a way in which the world would be improved, they focus on the immediate way in which they are being mistreated.

I wish we could all just love each other.