
“Looking Back at Ferguson” Video Transcript

DeNeen Brown

Reporter, *The Washington Post*

Despite all of the reporting that was done on what happened with the officer, what happened with Michael Brown, I still believe that people on both sides of the issue are kind of locked in their positions.

Wesley Lowery

Reporter, *The Washington Post*

It takes months of reporting and months of information finally becoming made public before any reasonable person could really draw a conclusion anyway. That's what we didn't see in this case. Michael Brown's killed August 9th. By August 10th, 11th, everyone knows exactly what they think about what happened in this case, even though most of the vital information didn't become public for months.

Kenya Vaughn

Reporter, *The St. Louis American*

The thing that was most striking about Ferguson—and I think that was the contributing factor to the core of the unrest—is there was no information disseminated. So you kind of had to decide based on nothing, based on the fact that you knew an unarmed black man was dead and that a police officer had shot him, had fatally wounded him. So you decide because there was no information disseminated, you decide, OK, was he a thug that warranted death or was he a target? And so you kind of went from there. I think that people did that a lot because there was nothing else to go from, and it shows the importance of information and sharing the information and getting the facts, because if you don't have the facts, you just make things up to support—or make assumptions, not just completely make things up—but you make assumptions based on what you feel personally happened.

Koran Addo

Reporter, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

A lot of people took exception to describing, for us describing Mike Brown as being unarmed. And their argument was that by saying he was unarmed, that we were trying to paint him as a sympathetic figure. Well no, I mean, he was unarmed, that's a fact, and besides it being a fact, it's relevant. It's relevant to the issue. Mike Brown being unarmed was part of the reason why we saw the response that we did from the community. If you have something that's a fact and something that's relevant to the story, and you see a bias in it, I would say that would be your bias, not my bias.

Gabriela Akrap

Student, Kirkwood High School, Kirkwood, Mo.

With my family, a lot of them were on the police officer's side because we have a lot of cops in the family and stuff, so they were leaning more towards the policeman, even if they didn't know what the facts were. It was just kind of like, “Oh, well he's older, he's a cop, an authority figure, so he must be right.”

Yamiche Alcindor

Reporter, *USA Today* (2011–2015)

What Ferguson did was really put on display people's personal experiences. And that, I think, was how you perceived the story. So if you had never heard of racial profiling, had never experienced it, then you couldn't imagine why someone would either run from the cops or why you would have a negative experience. But if you were from a neighborhood, like, maybe Baltimore or maybe Ferguson where you had had these experiences with police officers, then you instantly thought, "Oh, this police officer was wrong. This was an unjustified shooting." And it seems like the reality was kind of somewhere in the middle.

Krissah Thompson

Reporter, *The Washington Post*

When it comes to the Justice Department report, you could glom on to any aspect that fit your worldview. You could go with the part that showed that the police department in Ferguson had some racialized practices, or you could go with the part that found that Michael Brown probably did not have his hands up when the officer approached him and the officer could have indeed felt threatened. I think what people tend to do is go with whichever aspect fits their worldview, and you'd hope they would read all of the story and understand that it's not just black or white, but that there's gray there.

Craig Cheetham

Investigative Reporter, KMOV-TV (1999–2015)

Ferguson challenged a lot of us to try to check our biases and to pursue the truth. And I'll tell you, I think a lot of us failed that test. I really do. I think a lot of us picked sides early on and after we picked those sides we didn't move. "Well, I've been here with the protesters for so long I can't really start telling the police side of the story. How do I go back and cover the protesters again? They're just going to start yelling at me, and they'll shut me out." And they would. So that was the balance that a lot of journalists were playing. My take on it is: You don't ever pick a side. If somebody's not going to like you as much as somebody else, because that other person did pick a side at the beginning, that's okay. In the long run, as you work through this thing, you're going to be on the right road. You will. But that became a huge challenge in Ferguson. It really was. I don't think I've covered any story where that became a bigger problem for journalists than "pick a side." It was a huge problem. It really was a big deal. It affected the way we did our jobs; it affected the way stories were presented to the public; it affected the public perception of what was happening.

David Carson

Photojournalist, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

I feel really fortunate in my coverage of Ferguson. I was able to tell the story from both the side of the protesters and from a few nights of being embedded with the police and telling it from their side of the story. There's not many journalists that got to tell the story accurately from both sides there. I had a range of interactions with the police from being teargassed, had rubber bullets shot at me, being threatened with arrest, threatened with guns from the side of the police. And I also had a similar sort of thing of being threatened and pushed around and assaulted by people who were at the protest.

Krissah Thompson

Reporter, *The Washington Post*

You hope that some of this reporting begins to create bridges of understanding that weren't already there, but often people just do feed back into what they already know, what their own experience has been, and aren't often willing

to step outside of that to understand what's happening on the other side. But you do find spaces where that does begin to happen and I would call that progress.

Wesley Lowery

Reporter, *The Washington Post*

What so many people want across every ideological spectrum, no matter what they want to believe to be true, what they want is for it to be easy. Either Mike Brown was a thug who attacked a police officer who deserved to die and therefore Ferguson PD did not and has never done anything wrong, or Darren Wilson and Ferguson PD are a bunch of racists who racially profiled Michael Brown and the whole thing should be shut down. Reality always exists in the middle of those two things. It's not an either/or.

Student Notes