

RACE, ECONOMIC JUSTICE, AND FERGUSON: SOME REFLECTIONS



Ralph McCloud, Executive Director of the USCCB's Catholic Campaign for Human Development, will be the guest speaker at the Office for Catholic Social Justice Ministry's 46th Annual Dinner and Awards event on Tuesday evening, October 21st, at the Aqua Turf Club in Plantsville.

*The reflections here are excerpted from a conversation between *Millennial*, an online journal, and Mr. McCloud following the killing of Michael Brown and the ensuing protests in Ferguson, Missouri.*

A full transcript of the interview can be found [here](#)

OCSJM is grateful to the [Millennial Journal](#) for allowing this reprint.

On racial bias . . .

Racism continues to be a major problem in the country. Unjust stops, arrests, the use of militia-type tactics on citizens and discriminatory sentencing policies have led to a growing distrust among African Americans and other people of color toward police and the judicial "system." There is a feeling that we will not be treated fairly and because of that, there is growing polarization, mutual disrespect and alienation on all sides... until it erupts unfortunately in a tragedy. You know there's a problem when police view neighborhoods as war zones and kids feel like they're under occupation.

On systemic and structural racism . . .

Why is it the norm when dealing with people of color and alleged "criminals" to utilize violence? Why do we consider certain types of communities disposable? It's a fact that racism shapes American attitudes and policies around criminal justice. It is systemic and structural, but on many levels and by many systems... We spend a great deal of time and energy applauding the gains we've made, but we ignore how far we still have to go. This isn't just a law enforcement issue; it's also about health care, education, economic opportunity, political participation. There are systems and structures in the United States keeping people from living up to their God-given dignity. Violence has never been solution to our problems.

On economic injustice . . .

In Ferguson, I see folk denied access and opportunity. Violence is the reaction of a society that refuses to address the growing divide between those who have and those who are disposable, what Pope Francis calls the throw-away culture. People of color are more likely to be denied access to those things they need to reach their goals, what

you might call the American dream. Historically, when people are denied opportunity, frustration and anger reach a boiling point. People want to exist in a peaceful society, where they can raise families, contribute, educate their children, and be safe. When these goals are out of reach for lifetimes and generations, despair sets in.

What can be done . . . ?

This tragedy should make us rethink the evil that rampant inequality is inflicting on our communities, the use of violence to enforce it, and the “roping off” of opportunity to growing parts of our society. Whether its people of color, immigrants from the wrong country, or a growing group of people below the poverty line, we have to ask whether it’s appropriate to police the margins with violence and punishment. This type of punishment starts with impoverished communities and poor education, continues with lack of economic opportunity, and ends up in a prison and immigrant detention cell.

A preferential option must be shown to those communities where high poverty exists. Intensive efforts must be made to stimulate economic development, to educate tomorrow’s work force, to give families a sense of ownership and pride in their communities. Will we treat people, as Pope Francis has asked us to, as artisans of their own destiny or will they be objects of punishment and exclusion?