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Ferguson — What Now?

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Ferguson – What Now? (guest post)

This is the final post on Ferguson from Timothy Zick:

Monday night, peaceful vigils and other protected forms of protest were largely overshadowed by acts of violence and destruction. As [headlines attest](#), the Ferguson “protests” have already been displaced in the news cycle by the Ferguson “riots.” The facts are still coming in, but by most accounts police were not the instigators. The commercial and other costs must be laid at the feet of the lawless, who engaged not in legitimate protest or demonstration but in petty and more serious criminal activities. While their frustration may be understandable, their actions were obviously neither wise nor constructive. The violence was not, as some have suggested, inevitable. Whatever their underlying causes or motivations, the riots were a choice.

There will be additional protests and demonstrations in Ferguson and elsewhere. Hopefully they will be vocal, but peaceful, events. The issues are worth demonstrating about. But as I wrote in my [previous post](#), public sympathy will not be with the protesters forever. Last night may have been a tipping point. The media will focus on Ferguson for a bit longer, but the news cycle will inevitably find other conflicts and the press will move on. Many left behind will have expressed their outrage, or have been affected by the actions of those who did so. What will be the legacy of the Ferguson protests (past, present, and future)?

In the wake of last night’s events, hopelessness seems to be pervasive – particularly among many Ferguson residents, who have been witnesses to the conflict from the beginning. The protests and demonstrations have not been empty or meaningless events. They have pricked the public conscience, highlighted grievances, jump-started conversations about social and political issues, and demanded attention from public officials. It would be unfortunate if rioters tarnished or diminished some or all of these important accomplishments. What happens next depends on forces that lie beyond public streets and other public forums. Too often, protesters do not follow action in the streets with concrete social and political activity. Protests and demonstrations are not ends in themselves. They can be catalysts for change, but only if organizations and associations work to channel their outrage and energy. Expressions of outrage from civil rights leaders are fine. But Ferguson desperately needs an organization, preferably a local group, to take the lead. Other elements of the community can also work toward policy changes. Rioters can trade bricks for ballots, residents can work toward rebuilding or strengthening community ties, and officials can follow through on promises made in the heat of the moment – or be [held accountable by higher authorities](#). What’s next for Ferguson is not at all certain. The protests and demonstrations have created an opportunity and suggested an agenda that includes criminal justice reform and protection for civil rights. For the sake of Ferguson itself, let’s hope that peaceful activists seize that opportunity.

Posted by Howard Wasserman on November 26, 2014 at 09:31 AM in [Constitutional thoughts](#), [First Amendment](#), [Howard Wasserman](#), [Law and Politics](#) | [Permalink](#)