

How not to act in solidarity with Ferguson

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August 19, 2014

What's the best way for white Americans to act in solidarity with black Americans protesting the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson?

I don't claim any fresh insights on this question. [Jane Woods has some good ones.](#)

Here's something I do know: one extraordinarily *bad* way to stand with Ferguson is to show up there, strive to ratchet up tensions with police, tangle with local black leaders about tactics, and insist that the problem at hand is everything everywhere rather than this thing here.

[That appears to be the mode of solidarity](#) chosen by Revolutionary Communist activist Greg "Joey" Johnson:

In [another video](#), Johnson leads a chant against "the whole damn system." Take that! In Ferguson, of course, the outrage is a little more specific: the cops killed Michael Brown and then responded to overwhelmingly peaceful protests with oppressive restrictions and absurd firepower. If you want to be in solidarity with people, protest what they're protesting. And defer to local leaders, don't fight with them! They might not be full-time revolutionary agitators, but they probably know a thing or two about Ferguson, its people, and their needs.

According to Chris King of *St. Louis American*, [Johnson was responsible for at least some of the molotov cocktails](#) last night. Yes, [some black protesters threw them, too](#). As Christena Cleveland reminds us, [the image of God exists even in the minority of protesters who haven't stayed 100 percent peaceful.](#)

Maybe you'd stress instead than an outraged, scared, tear-gassed kid throwing a burning bottle *at a massive armored vehicle* is by definition an awful criminal who's looking for whatever trouble he finds. Fine.

But let's at least agree not to be distracted. The authorities in Ferguson keep trying to redirect the conversation. There were looters! Brown stole cigars! We confiscated [two handguns](#) (legal in Missouri) and [one whole molotov cocktail!](#) (Best response: "[YAY! YOU FINALLY FOUND ONE!](#)")

Looting, stealing, fighting back: not good things. Also not the point. As Al Jazeera America puts it, [stay with the story](#): Michael Brown, a young black man, was killed by a cop. He was unarmed. More than a week later, protests—largely peaceful protests—continue, and police continue to act as though they don't value these protesters' rights or well-being much more than they valued Brown's.

But their lives do matter; their bodies do have worth. ([That'll preach this Sunday.](#)) If you believe this, then doing what Joey Johnson did—showing up to agitate, escalate, tell local leaders what's up, and generally exploit the situation—is a singularly crummy way to help out. But sitting back and wringing our hands about calm and cooler heads and blame-to-go-around isn't a whole lot better. Solidarity may be complex, but it has to at least include refusing to distract or be distracted from the injustices that got Ferguson's people out in the streets in the first place.