

Why We Commemorate August 9th and the Ferguson Uprising

August 9, 2015

As those committed to social justice in St. Louis prepare to mark the August 9th killing of unarmed teen Michael Brown Jr. by Officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, we know that many in the region would like us to just go away. Enough already, they say. Why commemorate something so sad and wrong, anyway? Let's just move on. But we're at the beginning, not the end of this struggle. It's not time to move on, and this day calls for reflection. We want to remember Brown's life as well as commemorate the uprising of resistance against police misconduct generally, and the killing of Black people in particular. We will remember and grieve with the Brown family. Families of countless people who have been killed by police violence grieve alone every day. This August 9th, we will remember Michael Brown and all lives lost to police violence. We have not forgotten Kajieme Powell or Vonderitt Meyers or countless others. We will honor those in the Ferguson community who said no more to police violence and took action to stop it. Their courage and perseverance has inspired millions around the world. And we will celebrate the activism of the St. Louis Region demanding long overdue and much needed change in how Black people are treated and perceived by police, the courts and the St. Louis community as a whole. We will celebrate as we plan and prepare to keep up the struggle. We know we face a long and difficult struggle. But we will not give up because we know that change will not come by itself, and we can no longer endure the status quo. To live, we must make the change that we seek. Finally, we will commemorate the day to remind the St. Louis Region and the world that the movement for Black Lives is dynamic, creative and ready for action. We will not go back to a time when a Black person killed by law enforcement was only a headline, without scrutiny or accountability. We understand the system will not stop killing us unless we make it. We will see this struggle through, for we have nothing to lose but our chains, and everything to gain. We seek a world where we don't have to say Black Lives Matter. We call on all people who want to see a peaceful and just world to join the movement for change. Don't stand on the sidelines observing the struggle for Black Lives. Our community can only heal if we work together. The fight to end racism and the legacy of slavery is far from over. To end police abuse, economic inequity and racist laws is not a win for Black people, it's a win for all of us. We are a better nation because of slavery's end and the Civil Rights movement's relative success. We are a better, safer and more prosperous nation when all people receive fair and just treatment at the hands of government and fellow citizens. In commemorating Michael Brown's death, we are redoubling our efforts to secure a world in which black lives really do matter. Now is the opportunity to be part of the change, on the right side of history. Michael McPhearson is Executive Director of Veterans For Peace, based in St. Louis, MO, and co-chair of the Don't Shoot Coalition. Don't Shoot formed in the direct aftermath of the killing of Michael Brown Jr. in Ferguson.