

Ferguson After Ferguson

by Khaliah Booker

How many people can say they saw a whole city *angry*?

The Ferguson Uprising was not just a random moment. It was a culmination. For many people, Ferguson exists as a moment in time: August 2014, tear gas, protest lines, national media, and the name Mike Brown. But twelve years later, I find myself less interested in revisiting the moment itself and more interested in asking a different question.

What tangibly changes after something as revolutionary as the Ferguson Uprising? What does Ferguson look like after the cameras left?

I grew up in North County. I attended McCluer High School. And I remember one day sitting in the library and flipping through old school yearbooks, completely shocked. Page after page, decade after decade, I saw a school that was almost entirely white. I remember looking up and asking the librarian, "Is this real?"

At the time, my school was over 90% percent Black. I couldn't understand it.

How did this Ferguson become *my* Ferguson?

That question led me toward researching the municipalities, suburbanization, and the history of St. Louis County. In grad school, it led me toward [Colin Gordon's work](#) and toward understanding how communities like Ferguson were built, and specifically who they were built for, and how demographic change transformed them over time. Learning terms like the [white spatial imaginary with George Lipsitz](#). *My* Ferguson was a result of migration and policy.

And that history matters because Ferguson did not begin in 2014. But neither did it end there.

In the years since the uprising, much has changed. The Department of Justice entered into a [consent decree](#) with the city which has since been defunded by Ferguson. New leadership emerged. Ferguson elected its first and second Black mayor. Political participation increased. Residents became more engaged in local government. Questions about development, public safety, economic growth, and city services became central conversations.

Yet when I look at Ferguson today, what surprises me most is not the political changes.

It is the distrust. The distrust is everywhere. Distrust of elected officials. Distrust of the media. Distrust of institutions. And distrust of one another.

Sometimes it feels like we don't even trust ourselves. We don't trust that people will tell our stories correctly. We don't trust that our experiences will be remembered. We don't trust that we will be unforgotten. And perhaps most surprisingly, we don't always trust that things will get better.

I see this when I look at local political conversations online. I see it in and around City Council. I see it in the constant scrutiny of public officials. I see it in the tension that emerges whenever difficult questions are raised. The energy may be different than it was in 2014, but the wounds are still present.

What surprises me is that we don't have many places to talk about those wounds.

We all know what happened.

We know where we were.

We know what we did.

We know what was said about us.

But we still don't often talk about our loss or our anger. We definitely don't often talk about what it meant to become the center of the nation's attention and then watch that attention move elsewhere.

The story of Ferguson is often told through anniversaries, documentaries, speeches, nonprofit strategic plans, and academic research. Yet I am not even sure we have fully developed a language for talking to one another about what happened here and what it continues to mean.

Maybe that is why I've come up with the idea that maybe Ferguson is the "middle child" of the movement.

Everyone knows Ferguson matters. Everyone knows Ferguson changed something.

Yet Ferguson often feels known but unspoken.

Inhabited but not present.

I hate to say it, but Mike Brown's name is not always spoken alongside Trayvon Martin, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor in the way it should be. Ferguson is remembered, but not always centered.

And I wonder if that has shaped us as a community.

Maybe we learned to become self-reliant and avoidant.

Maybe we learned to avoid certain conversations in order to preserve some mythic peace.

Maybe we became so accustomed to carrying the weight of the story that we stopped asking how the story was affecting us.

Twelve years later, I don't think the most important question is whether Ferguson changed.

Of course it changed. The more interesting question is what remains?

For me, what remains is a community still wrestling with trust, memory, and meaning. A community that knows exactly what happened but is still figuring out how to talk about it. And a community that, twelve years later, is still asking what comes after Ferguson.