

# Whose Streets? (2017)

Rated R. Running time: 1 hour 30 min.

Our content ratings (1-10): Violence 3; Language 5; Sex/Nudity 1.

Our star rating (1-5): 5

*He has pity on the weak and the needy,  
and saves the lives of the needy.  
From oppression and violence he redeems their life;  
and precious is their blood in his sight.*

*Psalms 72:13-14*

Directors and activists Sabaah Foleyan and Damon Davis's powerful documentary about Ferguson present a convincing case as to why the black citizens of Ferguson reacted as they did following the shooting of unarmed Michael Brown in 2014. Their film is linked to the other documentary about violent oppression reviewed in this issue, *City of Ghosts*, in that a major portion of both films is made up of footage shot on their mobile phones by eyewitnesses who can be called citizen journalists. Added to this are clips from all of the major TV and cable networks, still photos, and even YouTube videos. This "Ain't your daddy's civil rights movement" one leader says, and is he ever right!

The film is divided into five segments, each introduced by a memorable quote from an African American leader. The first is the shortest and most incisive, Dr. King's observation, "A riot is the language of the unheard." (The four others quoted are Frantz Fanon, Sojourner Truth, Langston Hughes, and Maya Angelou.) The film immediately shows that those protesting Michael Brown's killing were "the unheard." When blacks (and a sprinkling of whites) gather at the spot where Brown's body

had laid untended for over 4 hours, the police show up armed with automatic rifles. Many of them hold on tight leashes attack dogs that seem eager to do what they were trained for. Didn't any police officer think what police dogs mean to the African Americans, or were the demonstrations in Birmingham and Selma too long ago? A woman named Ashley comments that the cops showed "a constant lack of humanity" by not looking her and her fellow demonstrators in the eye.

The police chief and the Mayor of Ferguson prove completely inept at dealing with the angry blacks, and later Attorney General Eric Holder will release a report indicting the Ferguson police department for its racism—there is a shot later in the film of a large bedsheet stretched out in front of the police HQ emblazoned with "racism lives here."

One of the interesting individuals whom we see throughout the film is nursing student is Brittany Farrell, a single parent raising her daughter Kendra to think for herself. The mother puts her career on hold so she can become fully engaged in the demonstrations. If she is even half as passionate at nursing as in demonstrating, she will make a terrific nurse!

Still another personality is David Whitt, the father of two young children who lived on the street where Brown was shot. As his t-shirt proclaims, he belongs to Copwatch, a national organization that is dedicated to documenting police brutality so as to call them to task. We first see him saying goodbye to his children as leaves home with a backpack filled with video equipment. He will be present throughout the film making candid comments about the scenes. I am not sure, but I think it is he makes a statement similar to one that a citizen journalist makes in *City of Ghosts*—the camera is his powerful weapon.

Along with the US Attorney General and President Obama, other national figures come to Ferguson to lend their support. At an October rally the president of the NAACP declared, "We have a

nation that is over-incarcerated and under educated!”

Despite the attempts of the leaders to keep the demonstrations nonviolent, some grew so angry, especially when Officer Darren Wilson’s defense that Brown “looked like a demon” as he ran toward him was accepted by the grand jury, that they set a police car and buildings on fire. The always present looters also took advantage of the situation.

Perhaps the film’s most poignant moment takes place as we hear the prosecutor announce the decision and we see a medium shot of Michael Brown’s mother. Her face is contorted in grief and disbelief. A man immediately hugs her. On the back of his jacket is emblazoned, “I AM MICHAEL BROWN.”

Near the end of the film there is a scene of a gathering commemorating the one year anniversary of the police killer’s non-indictment. We at last hear the crowd chanting the words that give the film its name, “Whose streets? Our streets!” The female leader says, “This movement was born in love, and love always wins. We do this not because we hate the police, but because we love each other.”

As if this were not powerful enough, the film concludes with a black screen on which are printed the words of the Declaration of Independence up to and including the line about the Government “it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it.” Let’s hope that as soon as this leaves the art house circuit it will be available on Netflix or Amazon. It provides a great explanation of why the Black Lives Matter movement is so important today.

*This review with a set of discussion questions will be in the September issue of Visual Parables.*