

Ferguson Killing Illuminates How Sociopaths in Power Act

People without conscience pay big to whitewash white cop who kills

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Global Research, December 10, 2014

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

The same night the manipulated Ferguson grand jury delivered the unjustifiable non-indictment sought by a prosecutor nursing his own childhood hurts, the lawyers for homicidal cop Darren Wilson issued a [dishonest statement](#) in Wilson's name, concluding with this falsehood:

'Moving forward, any commentary on this matter will be done in the appropriate venue and not through the media.'

At the same time the Wilson team was making up this statement, they were also [running an auction](#) with TV networks to get the most money for Wilson's first "exclusive" interview. NBC dropped out of the bidding when the price rose into the "[high six figures](#)." Less than 24 hours and close to a [million dollars](#) after his lawyers said he would not comment "through the media," this unindicted killer was at ABC News getting a [toadying interview](#) from George Stephanopoulos. The full [edited version](#) runs about 46 minutes of mostly fawning deceit and truthlessness.

This is the way our world works these days, when you have commercial television determined to get ratings for any popular fraudulence, when you have mercenary "journalists" ready to follow any unbelievable script their bosses buy, and especially when you have lawyers who are determined to get paid by any means available. The Ferguson story is a perfect storm of corrupt practices, none of them admitted, much less reported accurately. From the outside, it looks like ABC paid big bucks to affirm the corrupt practices of a Missouri prosecutor playing to race hatred, even if that meant the network was setting up its own employee as an after-the-fact accessory to state-sanctioned manslaughter.

Looked at honestly from the inside, these institutions would likely appear even more horrifying to a morally aware observer, but to their inmates they may well seem normal. Corruption like this tends to be situational, not pervasive. The participants spend most of their time acting like "solid citizens," creating a context that always leaves room for the required corrupt exception, the necessary evil, the false choice among self-limited "bad" options, the self-serving situation in which "we had no choice." That is always a lie. There is always another choice.

Currently such behavior is called "sociopathic." In the past, the clinical level of this condition has gone under such descriptive terms as "guiltlessness," "psychopathic inferiority," and "moral imbecility." In recent decades, the United States appears to have been increasingly controlled by the moral imbeciles among us, including at least the three most recent presidents (but that's for another piece).

No one coerced Americans to choose to enslave other human beings

Ferguson was a corrupt paradigm of a corrupt nation long before a homicidal cop executed an unarmed black teenager. Polling appears to show that a majority of Americans is reasonably pleased with the turn of events there so far. Among white people, a much greater majority is pleased. In other words, when Americans get played by the mainstream media on stories like Ferguson, most of them seem to like it (if they actually notice). ABC News knows this about its American audience, ABC News (like all other network news) has always known this. ABC News pandered to power and popular delusion with similar corrupt reporting on the Viet-Nam War (which, when I suggested a different choice, got me fired).

Common to the performance of all these personal and institutional corruptions is a behavior that appears sociopathic, in the sense that the performers show little sign of having an active conscience. It is the absence of conscience that defines the sociopath, as discussed by Martha Stout in her book, "[The Sociopath Next Door](#)" (2005, Broadway Books). As Stout observed people's reactions to September 11, 2001, including irrational enthusiasms for war, torture, suspension of civil liberties, a terrified search for homeland "security," she found herself asking: "Will the shameless minority really inherit the earth?" Without naming the president at the time, or members of his administration, [she began](#) her book this way:

"Imagine – if you can – not having a conscience, none at all, no feelings of guilt or remorse no matter what you do, no limiting sense of concern for the well-being of strangers, friends, or even family members. Imagine no struggles with shame, not a single one in your whole life, no matter what kind of selfish, lazy, harmful, or immoral action you had taken. And pretend that the concept of responsibility is unknown to you, except as a burden others seem to accept without question, like gullible fools.

Now add to this strange fantasy the ability to conceal from other people that your psychological makeup is radically different from theirs. Since everyone simply assumes that conscience is universal among human beings, hiding the fact that you are conscience-free is nearly effortless. You are not held back from any of your desires by guilt or shame, and you are never confronted by others for your cold-bloodedness. The ice water in your veins is so bizarre, so completely outside of their personal experience, that they seldom even guess at your condition."

Does this mean that either Wilson or Stephanopoulos is a sociopath? No, but there's no way of being certain, short of the clinical evaluation neither will probably ever have. The point is not to label them, but to observe how some of their behavior is both commonplace and consistent with sociopathology. Stout says one in 25 Americans is a sociopath, that they come with all degrees of intelligence, lucidity, ambition, and other human qualities, and that they hide well in plain sight.

Wilson expresses no remorse, no second thoughts, no empathy

Under his present circumstances, with other possible investigations pending, there is no reason to expect Darren Wilson to display the full range of human emotion on national television. But even just a little apparently real emotion would have helped persuade us of his fundamental mental health and basic humanity. For Darren Wilson to go on national television as he did and express no emotion about anything, is more than passing strange and reinforces the notion that this appearance was all about staging a performance

designed to avoid accountability.

Asked again and again in different ways to express any pity or sorrow or understanding of how others might feel, Wilson came up empty. After 45 minutes of dead-voiced repetition, Wilson had achieved no further illumination of the Ferguson story or his own central role in it. Wilson ended up expressing the same, numb perspective/cover story that he's expressed for months:

"I just did my job. I did what I was paid to do and that was my job. I followed my training, the training took over, the training led me to what happened, I maintained the integrity of this investigation, that's it." (Blackout, as the interview tape ends.)

I just did my job. When you "just do your job" and you end up killing an unarmed person with a [12-shot fusillade](#), doesn't that suggest something is wrong somewhere? It's an obvious question, but Stephanopoulos didn't ask it, nor did he ask any follow-up, clarifying questions about what Wilson thought his job actually was. Stephanopoulos never asked any version of the simplest possible question: isn't it your duty, first, to do no harm.

Stephanopoulos asked a tepid question about other, non-specific people accusing Wilson of racism, which Wilson impassively denied: "They are wrong. You can't perform the duties of a police officer and have racism in you. I help people, that's my job." The interviewer might then have asked something like: if your job is to help people, how did you do your job with Michael Brown? Stephanopoulos went a different route, changing the subject to the racial nature of the neighborhood (he called it an "anti-police neighborhood"). This gave Wilson the opportunity to call it a "high crime area" and talk stereotypically – as well as counterfactually – about drugs, guns, burglaries and assaults, neatly reinforcing his context for being afraid in broad daylight.

The shooting took place on a dead end street

When Wilson first came upon Michael Brown and Dorian Johnson, Wilson was on his way out of a cul de sac. He was not on a heavily-traveled public roadway, but on [Canfield Drive](#), one of the quiet streets more like driveways in the midst of a housing complex. (Canfield Drive matters so little to the city's traffic circulation that, after the killing, police [shut the roadway down](#), inconveniencing almost no one but the people who lived there.) Wilson was leaving a residential neighborhood, on his way to get lunch. And it was Saturday, around noon.

By his own testimony, Wilson did not know the young men in the street. He had no idea when he first saw them that they might be connected to any theft of cigarillos. All he knew, though he didn't put it this way, was that he saw two young black men walking toward him down the middle of the road, presenting a cause for caution, but not even blocking traffic. Wilson drove slowly up to them and stopped abreast of Johnson.

This is the beginning of the first beat of the three-beat event, and it is both the least discussed and most provocative beat in the event. This is the beat that, played differently, leaves everyone still alive and relatively well (the cigarillo theft would have remained an issue). All that needed to happen at this moment was for Wilson to keep driving and leave those kids behind on a residential street where they were doing no harm and getting close to home. Worst case, they were kind of jaywalking down the middle of a street where people were supposed to be driving slowly anyway. They were doing no harm.

I just did my job. Has anyone asked Wilson: was it your job to go after jaywalkers on a little-travelled residential roadway when they present no threat and are causing little if any harm? Stephanopoulos didn't ask that, he didn't even seem to understand that there was a question to ask. Wilson doesn't seem to have asked himself that question, either, then or later. And he hasn't been asked what his training dictated as the best thing for him to do [after he stopped](#) beside Johnson and learned that Johnson and Brown were "almost to our destination." In other words, he knew with reasonable certainty that they would be off the almost empty street very soon. He could have gone on to lunch, confident that he had done all that was necessary for public safety under the circumstance. Instead, what he did next set off the calamitous sequence of events. First Wilson called for back-up. Then Wilson backed up.

"To Serve and Protect" should mean: first, don't make things worse

According to Wilson on ABC News, he had seen the cigarillos and had connected that with the fragmentary radio report he said he'd heard earlier. "It all sort of clicked then," Wilson told Stephanopoulos, who just listened. Stephanopoulos did not ask Wilson why he told St. Louis County detectives a different story on August 10 (with Wilson's lawyer present). Then, less than 24 hours after the event, Wilson made no mention of anything "clicking" about the theft report. "Prior to backing up I did call out on the radio" for another car, Wilson [told the detectives](#). He didn't say why he called for backup and they did not ask. (Did they do their job?)

Wilson's supervisor has said Wilson had no knowledge of the cigarillo theft when he encountered Johnson and Brown.

I just did my job. I did what I was paid to do... I followed my training.... This suggests that Wilson was trained to turn a near non-event into a deadly confrontation, since that's what he did step by step. There's no reason to believe that, at that point, Wilson had any basis to think that he was dealing with anything more than two recalcitrant teenage jaywalkers who would soon reach their destination on a little traveled street. He had already decided not to go to lunch, the most peaceable choice. He had already called for backup, which he says he expected within a minute (backup apparently arrived in [about 60 seconds](#)). He could have just stayed where he was and kept the two young men under observation as they slowly walked away. Or he could have slowly followed them at a discreet distance.

We don't know why he chose not to take a less provocative course of action. And we don't know what had already been said. And we don't know how racially charged the words had been. We don't know why Wilson decided to back up and ratchet up the confrontation. All we know is that he did back up, and that he did so very aggressively. And he did so in a hurry. What was Wilson's hurry? Stephanopoulos didn't ask. Stephanopoulos even got the timeframe wrong.

In the one minute it took backup to arrive on the scene, Wilson pursued and killed Brown. Wilson first backed his police cruiser up to Brown and Johnson, swinging it close to them and across their path. The cruiser was close enough that when Wilson tried to open his door, it either hit Brown or Brown pushed it shut. This is the beginning of the second beat of the event, although most accounts treat it as the first beat of a two-beat event. The elements of this second beat are familiar as reported: backing up, blocking the way, pushing the door, grappling at the window, Wilson firing two shots, Brown wounded and running away. Precisely how these things happened is uncertain. There are several conflicting accounts

and no single, complete and credible account. Wilson, in his [grand jury testimony](#) (p.211) has Brown holding cigarillos in the hand with which he's hitting Wilson. That seems unlikely on one hand, but on the other, it would help explain why Wilson had no serious injuries, nothing cut or bleeding. "Hulk Hogan" holding cigarillos doesn't do that much damage apparently. All accounts seem to agree that this beat ended with Michael Brown running away, leaving Wilson in his cruiser with eleven bullets remaining in his .40 mm handgun.

Again, Wilson chose to escalate rather than wait patiently and safely

I just did my job... I followed my training, the training took over, the training led me to what happened.... If this is literally true, it suggests that Wilson went into some sort of fugue state in which rational thought was no longer an option. And if this is true from another perspective, it raises the further question of why anyone would get the sort of training that turns you into an automaton when you need to be alert, flexible, and careful. Stephanopoulos did not raise these questions, he didn't ask any questions about how Wilson's "training" led him to pursue and kill a wounded unarmed man. He didn't come close to asking why Wilson chose to execute Michael Brown even though Wilson had the near-certain knowledge that backup was only about half a minute away.

Wilson's version of events relies for its justification on others believing he was in reasonable fear for his own life – even though Wilson himself says he was in an unreasoning state. For his justification to be believable, Wilson has to be a head case. Time after time, his behavior consistent with uncontrolled rage, Wilson chose to make the situation more and more dangerous. Wilson wants us to believe that, even though he had already been afraid for his own survival, he felt the need to put himself at risk once again in chasing Brown. Yet he refuses to take any responsibility for the death that resulted from his hot pursuit of a "dangerous" jaywalker.

"I just did my job. I did what I was paid to do and that was my job. I followed my training, the training took over, the training led me to what happened, I maintained the integrity of this investigation, that's it."

I maintained the integrity of this investigation, that's it. That's a strange, mid-sentence shift of focus from the events on Canfield Drive to the aftermath of those events. "This investigation" is all about Wilson's use of deadly force. "This investigation" was a secret process relating to public events. "This investigation," from the start, was all about vindication of the killer, starting with police leaks to demonize the victim. Time and again Stephanopoulos asked Wilson why he told the grand jury Michael Brown was a "demon." Time and again Wilson's non-answer was some variation on Brown's seeming to have "such high level of intensity." Neither Wilson nor Stephanopoulos came close to talking about another reality: that it was necessary for Brown to be a "demon" if Wilson was to evade indictment.

The short [interview clip](#) that ABC News chose to run on its Sunday show November 30 highlighted the lazy, soft questioning Stephanopoulos used throughout the interview, instead of asking direct questions like "what happened?" or "what did you think?" Even the Sunday host's intro to the clip played into the Wilson cover story: "Darren Wilson told George, in their exclusive interview, that what happened on that night in August was the result of his training." It wasn't "that night," it was noontime, but night is scarier and offers more support to Wilson's claim to fear. Stephanopoulos proceeded like this:

STEPHANOPOULOS: You describe, I guess, the fear you were thinking. You thought he was coming after you.

WILSON: Yes.

STEPHANOPOULOS: On the street. But is any part of you angry?

WILSON: No.

STEPHANOPOULOS: No anger?

WILSON: No. There was no time for anger. Like I said, training took over. It was survival mode.

Asking questions that can be answered with a monosyllable is an excellent technique to allow an interviewee to avoid saying anything harmful to his self-interest. It's a technique that is unlikely to produce any interesting answers, but allows the interviewee to stick to the script that your network has just bought for close to a million dollars.

The rest of the ABC News Sunday clip illustrates another way Stephanopoulos pandered to his guest. Notice how, when Wilson answers with two sentences, still completely on script, Stephanopoulos immediately intervenes, avoiding the risk of Wilson's going off script and saying too much:

STEPHANOPOULOS: Because some of the witnesses have said they thought you were out of control, that somehow you had snapped.

WILSON: That would be incorrect. There was never — the only emotion I'd ever felt was fear and then it was survival and training.

STEPHANOPOULOS: And the training kicked in?

WILSON: The training took over. It didn't just kick in, it took over.

STEPHANOPOULOS: And in your training, there was no option in those moments when you were faced with Michael Brown but to shoot?

WILSON: Correct.

"Clean conscience," no second thoughts, no remorse...

Later, Stephanopoulos helped Wilson out some more with a non-question: "It does really seem like even from the moment this all went down in those 90 [sic] seconds that, um, you are, you, you have a very clean conscience." Wilson's whole response was a non-verbal "uh-huh."

Stephanopoulos went on: "And so there, there's this way, and you would imagine that when you go back in that time and you think, what happened there, what, what could I have done? Uh, it, it, something would grab hold of you and say wait a second, maybe, maybe this could have been different, maybe it could have worked out a different way. Nothing?"

Nothing it was. Wilson's full response was: "The reason I have this clean conscience is because I know I did my job right."

A minute later, Stephanopoulos commented on Wilson's impersonal language: "It sounds like you don't think you were responsible." And all Wilson said was: "I did my job that day."

Eventually Stephanopoulos asked directly: "Do you feel any remorse?"

Wilson doesn't say he feels remorse, he doesn't say what he feels, he says:

"Everyone feels remorse when a life's lost. I had told you before, I never wanted to take anybody's life. You know, that's not the good part of the job, that's the bad part of the job. So, yes, there's remorse."

The day after the ABC News interview, Wilson's lawyer [Neil Bruntrager](#) told CNN about his client, "His remorse and his sadness about what happened is there, and it's real." Even in a courtroom, what a lawyer says for his client is not evidence. And what Wilson has said for a fee on his own behalf offers little support for any conclusion that he feels remorse, or that he understands how he might have avoided killing Michael Brown, or that he has a conscience.

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