

Ferguson and most of our cities are short in community capital: here is how to rebuild it.

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Everyone seems to know that the problem in Ferguson relates to a white police force in a predominantly black community. Whether the community leaders were blind to the problem, or aware of it but unable to find African American people qualified, is argued from both sides.

Howard University students take powerful #DONTSHOOT photo in protest of #MikeBrown killing <http://t.co/FhHr3S60iu> pic.twitter.com/rxh3qT03j0 — Global Grind News (@GlobalGrindNews) August 14, 2014 At issue here is what some are calling community capital. In our free market system capital is being expanded beyond Marx's limited view of financial capital to include just about everything worthwhile. Education, training and experience give one personal capital; friends and networks give one social capital; and now, participation in a diverse community gives one community capital. This is a pretty neat way of describing what can happen when our human adaptations are centered on building communities rather than on accumulating money; on diversity rather than survival. So how can we promote such an orientation so that we have no more Fergusons?

Well, the problem is much bigger than Ferguson. Our whole nation is short on community capital. Our prison population is item number one; it reflects the lack of community capital that permeates our country and in 40 participating states costs close to a billion dollars annually per state. Drug offenses are the main reason for most incarceration, and our drug economy is a main occupation for many who see no future in our legal free market economy. Our significant income disparity also reflects reduced community capital. Altogether our penal system and drug wars cost close to a hundred billion dollars every year, but that financial capital is likely far less than the value of the human, social, and community capital that is wasted in the process.

In searching for alternatives we tend to laugh at the U.S. Army's "Be All You Can Be" ads, but the military has a valid record of bringing people from poverty into the middle class. Many have argued for expanding its role by establishing a program of a year of government service for all young people, and we agree. Eighteen year olds who are searching for work often fail and are among the highest groups of unemployed, and are also at highest risk for drug abuse and prison.

#DONTSHOOT #MikeBrown pic.twitter.com/V19BzjPdIE — Karma Bieber (@karmabieber_) August 14, 2014 Young people would have some military training, as well as options for volunteer military, UN Peacekeeping Forces, as well as Peace Corps. Some of them could be appropriately paired with Police Officers in their hometowns to help avoid situations of racial disparity like we see in Ferguson and elsewhere. And they could also be used to help rebuild our crumbling infrastructure.

Young people could work in Nursing homes, day care facilities, and as teachers aids. Included in these jobs would be training in child development, nutrition, parenting, and education.

This kind of a program would not be cheap in terms of money, but we agree with the effort to replace our measuring stick of GDP with something better that measures the value of individual, social, and community capital instead of just the dollars. Giving something back to our country would be a good place to start.