

Most White People in America Are Completely Oblivious

I suppose there is no longer much point in debating the facts surrounding the shooting of Michael Brown. First, because Officer Darren Wilson has been cleared by a grand jury, and even the collective brilliance of a thousand bloggers pointing out the glaring inconsistencies in his version of events that August day won't result in a different outcome. And second, because Wilson's guilt or innocence was always somewhat secondary to the larger issue: namely, the issue of this gigantic national inkblot staring us in the face, and what we see when we look at it—and more to the point, why?



Because it is a kind of racial Rorschach (is it not?) into which each of these cases—not just Brown but all the others, from Trayvon Martin to Sean Bell to Patrick Dorismond to Aswan Watson and beyond—inevitably and without fail morph. That we see such different things when we look upon them must mean something. That so much of white America cannot see the shapes made out so clearly by most of black America cannot be a mere coincidence, nor is it likely an inherent defect in our vision. Rather, it is a socially-constructed astigmatism that blinds so many to the way in which black folks often experience law enforcement.

Not to overdo the medical metaphors, but as with those other cases noted above, so too in this one did a disturbing number of whites manifest something of a repetitive motion disorder—a reflex nearly as automatic as the one that leads so many police (or wanna-be police) to fire their weapons at black men in the first place. It is a reflex to rationalize the event, defend the shooter, trash the dead with blatantly racist rhetoric and imagery, **and then deny** that the incident or one's own response to it had **anything to do with race**.

Reflex: To deny that there was anything racial about sending around those phony pictures **claimed to be of Mike Brown** posing with a gun, or the one **passed off as Darren Wilson** in a hospital bed with his orbital socket blown out.

Reflex: To deny that there was anything racial about how quickly **those pictures were believed to be genuine** by so many who distributed them on social media, even when they weren't, and how difficult it is for some to discern the difference between one black man and another.

Reflex: To deny that there was anything racial about how rapidly many bought the story that Wilson had

been attacked and bloodied, even as video showed him calmly standing at the scene of the shooting without injury, and even as the [preliminary report on the incident](#) made no mention of any injuries to Officer Wilson, and even as Wilson apparently [has a history](#) of power-tripping belligerence towards those with whom he interacts, and a propensity to distort the details of those encounters as well.

Reflex: To deny that there was anything racial about Cardinals fans [taunting peaceful protesters](#) who gathered outside a playoff game to raise the issue of Brown's death, by calling them crackheads or telling them that it was only because of whites that blacks have any freedoms at all, or that they should "get jobs" or "pull up their pants," or go back to Africa.

Reflex: To deny that there was anything racial about sending money to Darren Wilson's defense fund and then [explaining one's donation](#) by saying [what a service the officer had performed](#) by removing a "savage" like Brown from the community, or by referring to Wilson's actions as "animal control."