

Despite the fact that I spent the weekend in St. Louis, I was figuratively as far away from the happenings in Ferguson as one could get. A long-time friend was visiting and she treated me to a ridiculously indulgent spa day at the Four Seasons in downtown St. Louis. I would be hard-pressed to have been at a venue more divergent from what has been going on in my community than the extremely posh spa with beautiful views of the Arch.

We drove through Ferguson Saturday on our way downtown to get a sense of what's happening just miles from where I live. The rain deterred many protesters on W. Florissant Ave. that morning. There were only two dozen or so folks congregating under the gas station canopy in front of the now infamous vandalized, burned-out QuikTrip. We drove in silent disbelief past the McDonald's where Huff Po reporter Ryan Reilly and Washington Post reporter Wesley Lowery were arrested last week. It didn't look like a war zone or a scene of chaos, but Ferguson in the day doesn't look like Ferguson at night. They are two different worlds. By day, concerned residents clean up debris from the night before. By night, a mostly foreign element is taking advantage of a broken, grieving community by inciting violence that unfortunately diminishes the message of the protesters.

You read stories about the Revolution Club from Chicago and the New Black Panther Party who are trying to co-opt the spotlight that should be shining in one place—upon the death of young black man. Nothing else matters. It doesn't matter if the Ferguson Police Officer Darren Wilson lives in a predominately white neighborhood anymore than it matters if Michael Brown was headed to vocational college. Everyone agrees the looting and rioting must stop, but we can't let the vile actions of a few stop the real message from emerging.

I devoured as much news as I could cram into the hour before we arrived at the spa and told myself that I'd be doing myself a disservice if I didn't unplug from the events in Ferguson for a few hours. It always feels decadent to get a massage, but it felt especially so this time. Given what is going on, perverse, even. My friend swung for a birthday package for both of us so we walked around the spa as birthday impostors with silly matching Birthday Girl robes. I tried to keep my mind silent and my conversation polite. I told wealthy lounging couples in the relaxation area we were celebrating Madonna's birthday, not our own. The Material Girl turned 56 Saturday. Who knew? I couldn't quiet my head. Note to self before next massage:

must learn meditation. Because relaxation.

By the time I was getting a pedicure, I couldn't help myself and asked the nail aesthetician if anyone had been talking about the events in Ferguson. She said, "Not really. It's a little awkward with staff at the front of the house versus the back of the house." I assume she meant the white staff versus the black staff, but I didn't probe much further. The spa staff was diverse. The clientele was not. The tech already knew I was a deviant by my choice of green nail polish. Still, it made me sad, and I hope it wasn't true.

I want to talk about Ferguson. We should be talking about Ferguson in every part of St. Louis. Protests are happening in our city, to our people, to all of us. It's happening here because it has to happen. We all have a stake in equality, justice, peace and decency regardless of our politics, skin color, gender or socio-economic status.

So, let's talk about Ferguson.