

The Miami Herald

A call for peace in Ferguson

By Frederica S. Wilson 11/23/2014 2:00 PM

Having grown up in the 1960s, I have experienced the horrific consequences of violent protests and riots, as well as the positive outcomes brought about by peaceful, nonviolent means. There are no winners when a protest turns violent. The police, the cities, and most importantly the citizens all lose. Protestors are brutally slaughtered, arrested and left to deal with criminal records that follow them for the rest of their lives.

I deeply understand the feelings of unrest that can accompany gross injustice. I admire Sybrina Fulton, the mother of slain teenager Trayvon Martin, who bravely called for peace after the disappointing verdict in her son's case. I am asking that regardless of the outcome, that those working on the ground continue to organize and convene peacefully. I am asking for peace and calm in Ferguson, Missouri because there is no victory in violent protest.

I also ask that those of us who lived through difficult times of social change in our country take the time to teach the younger generation how to affect change through peaceful means. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was our example. Through his leadership, we were able to accomplish some of the greatest social advances in this country's history. Regardless of which way the Darren Wilson grand jury decides, we must carry out Dr. King's message of peace and nonviolence.

I personally witnessed the riots that devastated Liberty City in 1980. The violence resulted in senseless deaths, injuries, thousands of arrests, and over \$100 million in damages to the community. Thirty-four years later, Liberty City is still struggling to recover.

Historically, the community is the most negatively affected by violent protests. During the Los Angeles riots in 1992, at least 53 people were reported killed, approximately 2,000 were injured and there was more than \$1 billion in property damage. As a result of the 1967 Detroit riots, 43 people were reportedly killed, approximately 7,000 people were arrested and more than 2,000 buildings were destroyed.

I expose children on a daily basis to techniques on how to resolve conflict without resorting to violence through the 5000 Role Models of Excellence Project that I founded 22 years ago. This program teaches boys how to interact with law enforcement and has paid huge dividends in the salvation of human life.

We must break this tragic pattern of predictability. We cannot afford a repeat of the past.