

# Vigilantes on the Freeway

By Rick Esenberg

Esenberg is president and general counsel of the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty and an adjunct professor of law at Marquette University Law School.

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Friday afternoon protestors blocked I-43 in a protest related to the shooting of Dontre Hamilton. I don't know whether charges are appropriate in the Hamilton case. You can only know this if you have spent the time necessary to review the evidence – much of which is not yet public. You cannot infer the need for charges based on whether or not the police officer "should have" patted him down, how many times he was shot or that he has no history of (he was indisputably behaving violently here) or how you feel about other cases of police-involved deaths.

The numbers do not come close to establishing that there is anything like an epidemic of police violence against African Americans (or, for that matter, anyone else) But even if you believe that there is, that belief tells you precisely nothing about what happened here.

On the other hand, you cannot infer that charges should not have been issued because Hamilton suffered from mental illness or because the shooter was a police officer. You can be a staunch supporter of the police and believe that they do a wonderful job. You can believe that certain past cases – such as those involving Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin – have been abused by racial demagogues. But that won't tell anything about the facts of this case,

So I don't know what should be done and neither does almost everyone who has expressed an opinion on the matter,

But I do know this.

Whether or not charges should be issued does not depend on who can pitch the biggest fit or is willing to block traffic. We don't charge people with crimes because the crowd demands it. The history of vigilantes storming the barricades and demanding someone's head on a pike has not been edifying. What we didn't want for Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, we shouldn't want for Christopher Manney in Milwaukee.

There is nothing admirable about blocking traffic on the freeway over something that you feel rather than know. It is, at best, an assertion that your sentiments are more important than anyone else. It is to say that they are worth causing accidents, obstructing emergency vehicles and provoking violent confrontations.

I appreciate that those those who chose to do this regard themselves as selfless crusaders for justice. But their moral self-congratulation is itself a sign that they've got it wrong. What they did is nothing but a misguided act of self-absorption and utter disregard for everyone else.