

Police fire tear gas at protests in St. Louis suburb over police killing of unarmed teen

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An expanded force of police fired tear gas canisters, flashbang grenades and rubber bullets Monday night at crowds protesting on a main thoroughfare of the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson, Missouri against the police killing of an unarmed teenager.

Earlier Monday, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) announced that it was initiating its own investigation of the killing.

Eighteen-year-old Michael Brown was shot multiple times and killed by a police officer Saturday afternoon in what eyewitnesses describe as a wanton and unprovoked homicide. Hundreds of residents of the largely African-American working class neighborhood poured into the streets after the shooting and were quickly confronted by a large contingent of police.

A protest was held Sunday morning outside police headquarters. That evening, following a vigil commemorating the slain youth, there were reports of scattered looting and damage to local stores. Thirty-two residents were arrested.

Anger over the wanton killing of Brown has been compounded by statements from police officials claiming that Brown attacked the police officer, whose name has not been released, and tried to grab his gun.

Some 300 police were deployed Monday night against continuing protests. Residents reported that police had their rifles drawn and were ordering people to stop filming, vacate the streets and go inside their homes. By 9:30 PM, police were reportedly firing teargas canisters and rubber bullets indiscriminately and threatening residents and journalists with arrest.

That morning, protesters had gathered again outside the Ferguson police department and issued four demands: that the officer who killed Brown be identified, that he be fired from his position and charged with murder, that the police department's

protocol handbook be released to the public, and that the police department hire more African-Americans.

St. Louis County Police Chief Jon Belmar has emphasized the department's readiness to crack down on crowds. Further protests are scheduled Tuesday at the police department and the county prosecutor's office.

Michael Brown's death is the latest in a series of police killings across the United States. He was shot while walking through the Canfield Green apartments and his corpse was left lying on the street for several hours.

The police have confirmed that Brown was unarmed when he was shot multiple times in the head and chest at a distance of 35 feet. Eyewitness accounts have emphasized Brown's hands were raised to indicate he was unarmed when he was shot.

Ferguson is a suburb northwest of the US city that Columbia University historian Kenneth T. Jackson described as “a premier example of urban abandonment.”

Having been already devastated by deindustrialization, the recent recession years have dealt additional blows to working people. Employment in the region has lagged behind the national average in the years since the 2008 crash. The Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis states that 90,000 jobs have left the metro area since 2008.

As in the rest of the country, job growth has been located in low-wage health care work, retail, building management, and maintenance services.

The Ferguson-Florissant school district is currently facing an acute budget crisis. District superintendent Rob Chabot told one local media outlet, “We’ve eliminated textbook purchases, pre-school transportation, staff through attrition. We reduced the

summer school programs, teacher tuition reimbursement, after-school activities, athletics, fine-arts programs.”

One school in the area was closed in 2013 due to budget cuts. Additional schools are expected to be shuttered if a property tax hike referendum does not pass this year.

The local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) held an informational meeting in nearby St. Louis Monday evening, calling for calm. The NAACP had earlier appealed to the FBI to launch a federal investigation. An investigation was opened on Monday, according to police chief Belmar.

There were reports that Democratic Party operative and media pundit Al Sharpton would travel to Ferguson on Tuesday.

Forces such as the NAACP and Sharpton seek to direct the anger of workers and youth over police atrocities such as the shooting of Brown and the recent police killing of Eric Garner in New York City along political channels that pose no threat to the political establishment and the capitalist system. They do so chiefly by promoting racial politics and concealing the more fundamental class divisions in society, and seeking to boost illusions in the Democratic Party and the Obama administration.



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