

Ferguson residents denounce police violence at City Council meeting

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Over 600 people attended a meeting of the Ferguson, St. Louis City Council Tuesday, demanding the prosecution of Darren Wilson, the police officer who killed unarmed 18-year-old Michael Brown on August 9, and expressing opposition to the city's abusive police practices.

The police murder of Brown was followed by mass repression against protests over the killing, which continued for two weeks. The largely working class town was placed under de facto martial law, with hundreds of police, backed by National Guard troops, attacking demonstrators with tear gas and rubber bullets and carrying out large-scale arrests. Civil liberties were suspended as police arrested reporters and imposed a rule requiring residents to keep moving and not stand in one place.

The use of machine gun-mounted armored vehicles and helicopters to support police dressed in military regalia and pointing combat weapons at protesters shocked the country and the world. The events demonstrated the build-up of police state methods to be used against any expression of social opposition.

Tuesday's meeting was the first held by the City Council since the killing of Brown. It took place in the city's Greater Grace Baptist Church. The city's mayor, James Knowles III, announced that the Council would not be answering questions, but would allow residents three minutes each to speak.

The previous day, the City Council announced a series of token measures, including the creation of a citizens review board to oversee the police department. The Council also said court fines would be reduced to 15 percent of the city's overall revenue and added new limitations on how the money can be used. In recent weeks, national newspapers have reported that the city gets a significant share of its revenues from court fees

and has issued warrants totaling three per household.

Residents, some of whom had been tear-gassed and arrested during demonstrations that followed the police murder of Brown, spoke powerfully about the issues raised in the young man's killing.

Brian Like, who was arrested during the protests, presented a series of demands to the City Council. "My first demand is that you drop all the charges of anyone who was arrested," he said. "Anyone who was arrested and thrown in jail had their life taken from them for a brief moment... an hour is too long."

He said he participated in an August 19 demonstration against Brown's killing because "our brothers and sisters, with their picket signs, were facing guns and tear gas canisters," but found himself tackled and arrested by police. He concluded: "Here's the irony of the situation. I spent more time in jail than Darren Wilson... so my last demand is that you do everything in your power to have this man arrested."

Another resident, who gave her name as Shelly, denounced the police crackdown on peaceful demonstrators. Noting that the officers involved in shooting tear gas and rubber bullets had no visible nametags or badge numbers, she said, "It is unreasonable for any officer to do his or her job without a badge. That is gross misconduct."

She added that during the police crackdown, "children faced loose dogs, people were shot at with rubber bullets and tear gassed for hours at a time. This treatment is not even allowed in war overseas."

"You wouldn't have liked it if it were your young son lying out there for four hours," said resident Larry Miller, referring to Brown, whose body was left on the street by police for four-and-a-half hours before being dumped into a police vehicle. "And then they send the army to combat the people who are crying over the

boy.”

He pointed to the broader economic issues involved in the demonstrations. “There are a lot of pockets of poverty in Ferguson... our young folks need jobs.”

Others pointed to the long history of police violence in the city. One resident cited the 2009 arrest and beating of Henry Davis. She said Davis “was locked up in Ferguson and he was beaten, and then [the police] said, ‘Oops, you’re the wrong person... you’re the wrong Henry Davis.’”

She noted that one of the officers involved in Davis’s beating was now a member of the City Council. “You were the police officer who beat him, then charged him with destruction of property for bleeding on your uniform,” she declared, addressing the Council member.

Others raised personal anecdotes of police violence and misconduct. Resident Michael Jackson said police wrongfully accused him of robbery and shot him twice. “Like Mike Brown, I didn’t have anything on me,” he said.

Deborah, a 17-year resident of Ferguson, said that when she had her car stolen last year, police arrived and arrested her and her daughter. “Ferguson police came and locked me up and locked my daughter up, left my grandbaby, four months old, in the bed,” she said.

“When I called the Division of Family Services, they said I should have found someone to look after my granddaughter. How was I supposed to do that when my hands were behind my back?”

On Wednesday, police arrested some two dozen people after a group of demonstrators attempted to shut down a portion of Interstate 70 in Ferguson. The protesters were demanding the arrest of Officer Wilson and the appointment of a special prosecutor to carry out the investigation of Brown’s murder. The current St. Louis County prosecuting attorney, Robert McCulloch, has family connections with police and a history of failing to prosecute police officers.



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