

St. Louis police stock up on riot gear ahead of grand jury decision on Brown killing

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Police in the St. Louis, Missouri area are stocking up on riot gear in preparation for renewed protests next month in the event that a grand jury fails to indict Darren Wilson, the Ferguson, Missouri police officer who shot and killed unarmed teenager Michael Brown on August 9.

The *Guardian* newspaper reported this week that police in St. Louis County spent \$172,669 since August on tear gas, rubber bullets and other riot equipment.

The killing of Michael Brown sparked mass protests in Ferguson and the surrounding area. Police responded to the largely peaceful protests with brutal repression that amounted to a declaration of martial law, including the imposition of curfews and the calling in of National Guard troops. The grand jury is expected to come to a decision within the next two weeks.

According to the *Guardian*, Ferguson police have spent nearly \$25,000 on 650 crowd-dispersing grenades. Some of these grenades release tear gas, while others create smoke. Another variety, the “hornets nest” CS sting grenades, launches a payload of small rubber projectiles and a powdered chemical agent.

The product description warns, “This round should only be used by individuals properly trained in the use of chemical munitions,” and warns, “injury or death may occur.”

The police department also spent some \$18,000 on 1,500 “beanbag rounds” and on 6,000 pepper balls. Beanbag rounds are billed as less lethal projectiles designed to bludgeon and stun the victim. Pepper balls are another less lethal projectile, something like a paintball, that release chemical irritants on impact. The claim that these are “nonlethal projectiles” is misleading, as such rounds can and do cause death, and are particularly dangerous if they strike a victim in the

head.

Ferguson police spent \$77,500 on other items, including helmets, shin guards, riot shields, batons, and 2,000 sets of plastic handcuffs.

The *Guardian* reported that Missouri state highway patrol Captain Tim Hull admitted that his force has recently made similar purchases, but he would not reveal the details. Likewise, St. Louis police Chief Sam Dotson told the Associated Press that he purchased \$325,000 in “civil disobedience equipment,” though he did not give specific details about what was bought.

These purchases show that the ruling class, far from intending to tone down its military-style response to mass demonstrations, has instead committed to a broader and even more authoritarian reaction to future expressions of social opposition.

At the same time as the police prepare for physical violence against demonstrators, elements of the state with insider knowledge of the grand jury proceedings have carried out an ongoing campaign to vilify Michael Brown and exonerate his killer through a series of controlled leaks to the press of grand jury testimony.

The press, including the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post*, has uncritically reprinted these one-sided leaks from the grand jury testimony, while presenting information in a way that would lead the public to believe Wilson’s story.

The latest in this shameful spectacle was an article published last week in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, entitled “Source: Darren Wilson says Michael Brown kept charging at him,” which it claimed to be “the most detailed account of Wilson’s version of the Aug. 9 event to be made public.”

In a companion piece, the *Post-Dispatch* claimed that the autopsy of Michael Brown supported the claim of Wilson that Michael Brown had reached for the

officer's gun. *Post-Dispatch* writers quoted forensic pathologist Dr. Judy Melinek as saying that Michael Brown's autopsy "supports the fact that this guy is reaching for the gun, if he has gunpowder particulate material in the wound."

The same article quoted her as saying, "If he has his hand near the gun when it goes off, he's going for the officer's gun."

Melinek, who is an assistant clinical professor of pathology at the University of California, subsequently told the *Washington Post* that her words were taken out of context.

She denied telling *Post-Dispatch* reporters that a gunshot wound on Brown's hand definitively showed that he was reaching for Wilson's gun during a struggle while the officer was in a police SUV and Brown was standing at the driver's window.

"Bullet trajectory analysis is complex, and you cannot interpret autopsy reports in a vacuum," Melinek wrote in an e-mail to the *Washington Post*. "You need the scene data and the witness statements. When a forensic expert says something 'appears to be' or is 'consistent with' the findings, that doesn't mean it is the only explanation. It means it is one possible explanation."

On her blog, Dr. Melinek describes the *Post-Dispatch* quotes as "*inaccurate and misleading*."

"I read the report, and spent half an hour on the phone with the reporter explaining Michael Brown's autopsy report line-by-line, and I told her not to quote me - but that I would send her quotes she could use in an e-mail. The next morning, I found snippets of phrases from our conversation taken out of context in her article in the *Post-Dispatch*," she writes.

The blog post specifically refutes the claim that Melinek said, "he's going for the gun," which quote the *Post-Dispatch* apparently fabricated out of whole cloth. *Post-Dispatch* editor Gilbert Bailon told the *Washington Post* that his paper stands by its article.



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