

Police arrest Ferguson protesters ahead of ruling in Michael Brown case

Andre Damon
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Police arrested at least five people late Wednesday evening at a demonstration outside a Ferguson, Missouri police station. The arrests are an escalation of the police crackdown on protesters ahead of an expected grand jury ruling in the coming days on whether or not to indict Darren Wilson, the police officer who killed unarmed teenager Michael Brown in August.

The arrests, conducted by police in riot gear, were the first in about a week. One of those arrested was streaming the protest live on the Internet, and he appears to have been deliberately targeted by police. Three of the five people arrested were from Missouri, one was from Wisconsin, and another was from Illinois.

The arrests came as news outlets continued to report that a decision in the case could come as early as Friday, with a possible public announcement on Sunday. On Thursday reporters said they received a test email from the St. Louis County prosecutor's office, which some interpreted as indicating that the announcement was imminent. Police will begin working 12-hour shifts beginning Saturday, also likely in preparation for the grand jury announcement.

These preparations come as a leading official for the St. Louis Police Officers' Association said he does not expect the grand jury to bring charges against Wilson. "It's fair to say that neither he nor his defense team expect an indictment," said Jeff Roorda, the organization's business manager, based on meetings he had with Wilson.

In preparation for the ruling, Ferguson-Florissant School District, encompassing 23 schools, announced that it would either close early or remain closed on the day of the decision.

Missouri Governor Jay Nixon, speaking at a Kansas

City school on Thursday, was met with a silent protest by students, who stood at the back of the auditorium where he was speaking with their hands up, a symbol of the Ferguson demonstrations.

Earlier this week, Nixon made the unprecedented decision to preemptively declare a state of emergency and activate the National Guard in the St. Louis area in response to the mere possibility of protests. The move indicated that the military/police response to renewed protests is likely to be even more violent and aggressive than what happened in August, when police attacked peaceful protesters and reporters with tear gas and rubber bullets.

In recent days, the media has intensified its campaign for an exoneration of Wilson. In perhaps the most explicit defense of the killer cop to date in a major newspaper, the *Washington Post* published an opinion piece Thursday, entitled "Officer Darren Wilson and the Rule of Law" by University of Utah Law professor Paul G. Cassell, which explicitly calls for the exoneration of Wilson.

Cassell argues that the "pressure" to indict Wilson comes not from the overwhelming evidence that he killed an unarmed young man in cold blood, but rather from "mob justice" and the threat of rioting if he is not charged. He concludes, "A grand jury decision not to charge Wilson would be a courageous step."

He argues, "If no charges are filed, the country would have an opportunity for an important civics lesson on the presumption of innocence, the need to avoid a rush to judgment, and possibly (depending on the evidence) the fact that a police officer did not use excessive force but was simply defending himself in the course of trying [sic] apprehend a violent robber."

Given that the author is a law professor, his argument is knowingly fraudulent. Individuals are presumed

innocent even after they are indicted. The purpose of a grand jury is to determine whether there is sufficient cause to bring an individual to trial. Probable cause is defined by one commonly used law dictionary as “a reasonable amount of suspicion, supported by circumstances sufficiently strong to justify a prudent and cautious person’s belief that certain facts are probably true.”

The independent testimony of a half-dozen witnesses claiming that Michael Brown posed no danger to Wilson when he was shot clearly fits any sane person's definition of a “reasonable amount of suspicion.”

In fact, an extraordinarily drawn out grand jury proceeding is being used by the St. Louis county prosecutor to give the appearance of an impartial trial, while in fact stage-managing the entire procedure to defend Wilson and attempt to persuade the public of his innocence.

The grand jury proceeding is secret and non-adversarial, meaning that the prosecutor has complete control of how evidence is presented.

In Wilson’s case, the prosecutor has not even recommended that any charges be brought against the killer, and recent media reports indicate that when the grand jury proceedings are finally made public, they will include testimony from witnesses whose names are not revealed.

The media campaign to exonerate Wilson is not based on the merits of the evidence. Rather, it is part of a deliberate drive, organized at the highest levels of the government, to use the Michael Brown shooting to set a new precedent, both for the legal impunity of police officers who kill citizens, and for the suppression of popular opposition to social inequality and the increasingly dictatorial forms of rule being employed in the United States.



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