

Protesters condemn exoneration of cop who killed Michael Brown

WSWS reporting teams
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In interviews with WSWS reporters, workers and youth in a number of cities expressed anger over the grand jury exoneration of the police officer who murdered Michael Brown.

In **New York City**, thousands of protesters assembled for a second night in Manhattan's Union Square and carried signs that condemned the failure to indict Daren Wilson. They chanted, "Hands up, don't shoot" and "No justice, no peace."

One group of several hundred marched to Times Square where they chanted, "Send the racist cop to jail," knocked over police barricades, and blocked traffic for fifteen minutes. Police helicopters followed the march while other police followed on motorcycles.

Those who protested were mostly young people, including many students from local universities.

"It is crazy. I see videos of this stuff on Facebook all the time and they are pretty gruesome," said Luis, a high school student, speaking about police brutality. "Police take out batons or guns after the person gave up."

"Some people are saying we are going to have martial law and I sort of agree. People should protest peacefully but the way the police are reacting is way out of hand. The police are acting like people have AK-47s or M4s. In August, I saw police pulling guns on completely peaceful protests."

Oscar Rivera, a senior at the New School, said, "Every level of government messed up and I just hope everything wasn't in vain. People need to mobilize and fight for a change. These issues have a long history. We were founded on certain people being unequal, with slavery and exploitation. Now police oppression is institutionalized in a way that it was not before."

Jasmine, a student from New York University, told us, "I wasn't surprised at the verdict at all. There is an epidemic of police violence, and it's not just in the United States. It happens in Venezuela and in Mexico with the murder of the student teachers. The police feel that they have authority and that they can use it however they want. The Ferguson police brought in weapons of war against peaceful demonstrators. It's nothing but intimidation. I think they are drunk with power."

In **Detroit**, Darryl Clay, a law student, told the WSWS, "I feel that with the decision last night they are saying it is legal to execute black people."

"It was evident Michael Brown did not have a weapon," he continued. "All of a sudden he is mowed down. It is happening across the country. It is just lucky we have cell phones to capture these incidents."

Andre, a railroad worker, said, "I came down today in support of Michael Brown. I was not surprised by the grand jury decision. These

police shootings have been happening for a long time.

"I feel that it is fundamentally about class. However, the news media is trying to present it as black against white. The media is really fueling that perception. Obama is basically a puppet. He does what he is told."

"The decision was wrong," said Sandy, a retired Detroit Public Schools worker. "You shoot a person six times and it's self-explanatory that the cop should be indicted. I remember what it was like being chased by the cops in the 1970s because I was a teenager with a big Afro. It's happening all over."

A car designer said, "This is happening all over. In New York, the police killed Eric Garner; he had no weapons and he told them he couldn't breathe. But they choked him to death. What if that was your son, brother or father?"

Marsalis, a student at Oakland Community College, said, "This is very wrong. They left his body outside on the ground for four hours. The police are enforcing the law unevenly. They are repressing people."

"This is about inequality. It seems like black youth are being targeted. I read that a black youth is killed by the police every 28 hours. But this is not just about race. It is the ruling class against the working class. American democracy does not exist."

In **Ann Arbor, Michigan**, a crowd of 400 to 500 people assembled on the central campus of the University of Michigan. It was one of the largest demonstrations at the university since the run-up to the Iraq war in 2003. The rally was followed by a march to the city hall building, where a vigil was held for Aura Rosser, a woman shot dead by police in Ann Arbor two weeks ago.

"The Ferguson grand jury decision adds insult to injury," said William Royster, a senior in engineering from Kalamazoo. "We know the status of the black community. The grand jury decision shows that the problem is systemic; if there ever was a case that we had them against the wall, it was this one. People go to trial for stealing cookies. In this case, we had a man who was shot six times. It should have gone to trial."

William said protests were understandable but not enough. "There are no consequences, nothing truly inconvenient to the system comes from demonstrating. We can riot, we can march, but we are aware that this won't change things."

Asia, a senior majoring in neuroscience, said she was disgusted, "but not surprised" by the grand jury decision or police response. "It's happened before and it is happening again. It took so long for them to announce a ruling, as if they were dragging it out, getting people's hopes up and trying to present it as a legitimate process."

In **Portland, Oregon**, Christian, 25, joined a demonstration at

Portland State University. “Before this happened in Ferguson, I didn’t want armed police on campus,” he said. “Now I really don’t want it. It would be a step toward militarizing the university.”

“It’s unfair that Wilson was set free without charges. It seemed like it wasn’t even an issue of if they would charge him but what they would tell people when they didn’t.”

Riley, 21, also at the Portland State demonstration, said, “It’s pretty upsetting that he’s not paying. He should be in jail.”

A young man who preferred not to be identified told the WWSW that he had earlier studied to be a police officer, and that many officers are hired directly out of the military. “Of course they have military equipment; they *are* the military, that’s what they want,” he said, adding that many suffer from the trauma of combat overseas and have not been reacclimatized to civilian life.

Four to five hundred demonstrators gathered in **Minneapolis, Minnesota** on Tuesday to voice their opposition to the grand jury decision. While demonstrators gathered at the University of Minnesota in the midafternoon, a larger group met in front of a police station on the corner of Minnehaha Avenue and Lake Street. Police responded to the demonstrations by cordoning off surface streets in the surrounding area. One woman was injured as a car drove through a group of protesters who had gathered in the intersection.

In the aftermath of the Brown decision, the Minneapolis Police Department warned demonstrators that they were prepared to crack down. While hypocritically announcing that the police would intervene “to keep demonstrators and the general public safe,” Police Chief Janee Harteau also said the department would maintain “a safe and secure city while respecting private property.”

A group of students from South High School told the WWSW that students at their school had staged a walkout and had received wide support from teachers and fellow students.

“We were going to hold a sit-in for four hours to symbolize the time Michael Brown’s body was in the street,” said Brigie, who explained that students then agreed to join the afternoon’s scheduled demonstration.

“We walked out to unite the youth and to be peaceful, and to come together for democratic rights. We want to be in solidarity with the people of Ferguson,” Brigie added.

Jacob, another South High student, said they were demonstrating in Minneapolis because “injustice somewhere affects the rights of people everywhere.”

Another student said, “It has become legal in this country for police to kill.”

Tyler, a custodian, said Darren Wilson was “an agent of the state.” The police and the state, he said, “have a symbiotic relationship, and that’s why they protected him. While race was probably an element, the main thing is that poor people are being oppressed equally.”

A food truck driver named Van said the police killing in Ferguson was “a brick in the wall,” implying these types of killings take place on a regular basis.

Two to three hundred people, including many students from the University of Wisconsin, rallied in **Madison**, the capital of Wisconsin, which saw major protests against attacks on workers’ rights in 2011.

Protesters chanted, “Hands up, don’t shoot” and “Black lives matter.” Signs read “Jobs not jails,” “Surplus tanks, no thanks,” and “Stop the racist killer cops.”

One student speaker said, “The Democrats have not done anything for us, both the Democrats and the Republicans.”

Claire, an unemployed young woman, told the WWSW, “I came to

be part of an important moment in history. It is affecting lots of people. There is a general sentiment of injustice.”

Harry Richardson is a mail clerk at the University of Wisconsin. “Three years ago the state took away our right to a contract. The killing of Michael Brown and the grand jury decision are a gross injustice. It gives the lie to any meaningful change since Obama. Domestically things are not improved and foreign policy is a copy of the Bush administration. Speaking of militarization of the police, the police in Madison got a tank.”

Roughly 200 people in **Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania** attended a rally Tuesday evening at the University of Pittsburgh. Students and youth made up the majority of those in attendance, joined by a smaller number of workers and professionals. After an hour and a half of rallying, protesters briefly blocked a traffic intersection before police intervened.

Melanie told the WWSW, “My thoughts are that the system is really broken. It is designed to do exactly what it’s been doing. It’s actually successful at oppressing the people and creating a lot of cynicism. We have to change the whole society and start all over again. It is totally impenetrable now. They’ve even passed laws making it impossible to sue law enforcement.”

Joey said, “Whenever someone is killed like this, there is always some hate behind it. People are being killed, they’re being put down and being put into slums—here and all over the world. America always talks about adverse issues around the world when in fact it is creating those conditions.

“We have to organize politically, get the word out, and disturb the system. For example, the media is talking about all of the looters in Ferguson. Well, the system isn’t working for them, so they’re going to break it. They’re being killed there and it’s being ignored by the media. Not by us, though.”

In **Washington, DC**, on Monday, hundreds gathered in front of the White House to protest the decision not to charge Wilson. On Tuesday, over a thousand protesters marched in the downtown area.

Reporters from the WWSW spoke to Devon, a young writer with family in St. Louis. “There is a culture of segregation in my city that I’m not sure some people understand. When I was ten or eleven years old cops broke into my house attempting to find incriminating evidence on my older brother. When my mom asked [the officers] why they were in our house, they lied to her, saying they had been chasing a suspect who had ran into our house.”

Devon expressed anger over the Obama administration’s sanctioning of Wilson’s exoneration. “It’s not a white and black thing,” he added.

Muhammad, an unemployed worker, also expressed his disgust with the Obama administration. “Why’d he have to send more troops to Iraq?” he asked. “I’ve got friends that have to fight in that war.”

Nearby, in **Baltimore**, hundreds of protesting students at Morgan State University blocked traffic at a number of intersections. Students at the Maryland College of Art drew murals declaring “R.I.P. Michael Brown” on the street.



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