

# Protests continue over decision not to charge cop who killed Eric Garner

Our reporters  
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Anger and protests continued in New York City and in other US cities for a third day yesterday, following this week's announcement that the police officer who killed 43-year-old Eric Garner in Staten Island in July would face no charges.

Demonstrations took place at various locations around New York City on Friday. Hundreds marched through the streets and staged "die-ins" at shopping centers and transportation terminals. Protests were smaller than on Thursday, when thousands participated and over 200 were arrested in Times Square.

In the Boston area, a mainly young crowd numbering in the hundreds marched from Medford, through Somerville and Cambridge into Boston. The protesters, including students from Harvard, Tufts, and Lesley universities, stopped and lay down in the street at several main intersections, including Harvard and Central Squares.

Other protests were held Friday in Chicago, Illinois; Cleveland, Ohio; Miami, Florida; Washington, D.C. and other cities.

Naomi Salib, a medical worker demonstrating at Columbus Circle in New York City, told the WSWS, "It is all just BS. I see this is the same as Ferguson," referring to the decision not to indict the cop who killed unarmed Michael Brown. "They say, let's put it through more government officials. Nothing happens and more kids get killed."

"It's not just a black issue, it's a civil rights issue," Jordan Jones said. "We have imperialist troops all over the map; that means we have to have paramilitary here.

"The media keeps you confused and distracted," Jones added. "Now things are coming to light. We have two parties that are two sides of the same coin. Obama is the biggest disappointment. All the politicians are worthless."

Corey Lima, an artist, referred to the highly-manipulated process by which a grand jury decided not to file charges against Daniel Pantaleo, the cop who killed Garner. "I know the history of the grand jury. It was supposed to protect citizens, but today it just protects the system."

It emerged on Friday that 29-year-old Pantaleo, who choked Garner to death as he was arresting him for selling untaxed cigarettes, had been previously sued over three separate incidents of violating the constitutional rights of suspects.

The suits include at least two in the federal courts over the past two years. One involved illegal drug charges, and two others misdemeanor marijuana possession. All of the cases were dismissed. In the first one the city settled the lawsuit for an undisclosed amount. The suits allege false arrest and also humiliating and unlawful strip searches.

This same Pantaleo was granted two hours to give the Staten Island grand jury his testimony, asserting that he wished Garner no harm and was only doing his job. Pantaleo and other cops then stood around for minutes, with no attempt to provide resuscitation or any aid, while Garner lay on the ground motionless.

Ramsey Orta, the man who filmed the strangling of Garner, told the *New York Daily News* on Thursday that he thought the entire grand jury process (directed by a prosecutor who is close to the police and composed of many police officers) was rigged. His own testimony only lasted 10 minutes. "I think they already had their minds made up," Orta said.

Orta said that most of the questions asked of him pertained not to the incident itself, but rather to Garner and Orta's own criminal background. One juror repeatedly asked him questions like, "What was Eric doing there? Why was Eric there? Nothing pertaining to

the cop choking him,” Orta told the *Daily News*.

Meanwhile, funeral services for 28-year-old Akai Gurley will be held in Brooklyn on Saturday. Gurley was shot and killed on November 20 by rookie police officer Peter Liang, who was conducting a “vertical patrol” in the Pink Houses, a city housing project in the East New York neighborhood. The cop came upon Gurley and his girlfriend in a darkened stairwell.

New York Police Commissioner Bill Bratton later acknowledged that Gurley was innocent of any crime, and claimed it had been a case of accidental discharge of the officer’s weapon. There have since been reports that Liang and his partner waited more than six minutes before reporting the incident to their superiors. During this time Liang texted a police union representative instead of seeking medical aid for Gurley.

The services for Gurley will take place the Brown Memorial Baptist Church in the Fort Greene section of Brooklyn. Gurley’s family has called for a mass turnout at the funeral.

The killing of Gurley is part of an ongoing and escalating police attack on workers and youth in the poorest communities of the city. In response to public outrage, Brooklyn District Attorney Kenneth Thompson announced that he would present the shooting of Gurley to a grand jury—just as was done for the killer of Eric Garner.

The political establishment in New York and elsewhere, including the White House, is working to diffuse public anger over police violence that has erupted during the four months since the killing of Michael Brown in August.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, elected last year partly on the basis of his criticism of the Bloomberg administration’s “stop-and-frisk” policy, told a news conference, in language similar to that employed by Obama, that Eric Garner’s death “was a terrible tragedy that no family should have to endure.”

Significantly, de Blasio did not explicitly criticize the grand jury decision. He went on to refer to his proposal for police retraining and a pilot program for the use of body cameras by the police. These are simply palliatives. Even graphic video evidence of Pantaleo’s role in Garner’s death was not enough to secure an indictment for any crime on his part, even manslaughter or reckless endangerment.

Various local Democratic politicians, including City

Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and Public Advocate Letitia James, called for a Department of Justice investigation, and Attorney General Eric Holder announced that a DOJ civil rights probe would take place. Legal observers have pointed out that it is generally more difficult to bring federal civil rights charges than to hand down an indictment on criminal charges in the local jurisdiction.

The efforts of de Blasio and other Democrats to balance between empty gestures to public anger on the one hand, and complete support for the police on the other, have the support of media-anointed black political leaders like Al Sharpton. Sharpton was scheduled to speak at Gurley’s funeral but apparently will not, reportedly because of opposition among at least some members of the family.



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