

Police crackdown on hundreds protesting acquittal of killer cop in St. Louis

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Protests erupted in St. Louis, Missouri on Friday after a police officer was acquitted of first degree murder and armed criminal action in the killing of 24-year-old Anthony Lamar Smith. The St. Louis Police officer, Jason Stockley, fatally shot Smith in December 2011 after a three-mile police chase. The officer fired seven bullets at point-blank range into Smith, an African-American, while the victim was seated in his car.

Not only was the police execution caught on a cell phone video, recordings also showed Stockley going into his police car to get a gun, which he then planted in the car of the dead victim. Even more damning, the police car dashcam recorded Stockley saying to his partner in advance of the shooting, “We’re killing this motherfucker, don’t you know.”

The verdict handed down by Missouri Circuit Court Judge Timothy Wilson, a cruel mockery of justice, drew a crowd of nearly 500 protesters Friday afternoon. Protests continued into the evening.

Videos and photos of the scene show hundreds of police officers dressed in riot gear and armed with military-grade weaponry, standing off against the protesters. In one video, a group of officers violently pull an unarmed young man off of his bicycle. His body is then swallowed up by a crowd of policemen. When his bike emerges from the huddle, an officer launches it into the crowd in an attempt to hit other protesters.

As of this writing, the police had arrested 13 people. The St. Louis Police Department tweeted just after 6:30 pm that the protests were “no longer considered peaceful” and claimed that demonstrators were ignoring commands to leave the streets, making them subject to arrest. Police also tweeted that rocks and water bottles had been thrown at officers throughout the day and “officers showed great restraint.” That “restraint” included the use of mace against the

overwhelmingly peaceful demonstrators.

State and local authorities had anticipated angry protests over the expected exoneration of the killer cop. Officials spent the past week preparing to impose a virtual lockdown on the city. Governor Eric Greitens, a Republican, activated the state’s National Guard on Thursday, while the Democratic mayor, Lyda Krewson, reinforced the police and warned the populace that disturbances would not be tolerated. Businesses in the downtown area shut down and many high schools and middle schools were closed.

Despite the blatant character of the murder, no charges were filed by the state against the assailant, Officer Stockley, for nearly five years. The Obama administration, for its part, helped set the stage for the ultimate whitewash by refusing to file federal civil rights charges against the cop. Meanwhile, the city agreed to a settlement with the Smith family in 2013, paying out \$900,000.

When new incriminating evidence emerged, the state felt obliged to file criminal charges against Stockley in the spring of 2016. The accused cop waived his right to a jury trial, opting instead for a ruling from Judge Wilson.

St. Louis is only a 20-minute drive from the suburb of Ferguson, Missouri, where large protests erupted over the police murder of 18-year-old Michael Brown in August of 2014. Then-Governor Jay Nixon, a Democrat, called out the National Guard to supplement local riot police, who used military weapons, including machine-gun mounted armored vehicles, to attack the demonstrators and threaten reporters and photographers. Obama dispatched his attorney general, Eric Holder, to contain and dissipate the protests, in large part by defining the issue of police violence entirely in racial rather than class terms.

In the end, a grand jury refused to indict the police killer of Michael Brown and Holder declined to file federal charges against the officer.

With these events in mind, some protesters in St. Louis on Friday wore masks to protect themselves from tear gas and held up a banner reading, “Welcome back National Guard, signed unarmed citizens.”

Stockley’s acquittal comes as no surprise. He is only the latest in a long list of killer cops who have been given immunity by the state to terrorize the poor and working class. Not a single police officer was held responsible under the Obama administration for crimes such as the shooting of Michael Brown, the fatal choking of Eric Garner in New York and the death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore. (On Tuesday, the Justice Department announced that it would not pursue federal charges in Gray’s 2015 killing). Police killings in the US continued to rise, reaching more than 1,000 a year.

The Trump administration, in openly sanctioning police violence and spewing “law-and-order” demagoguery, is pursuing in a more naked manner the pro-police policy of Obama and the Democrats.

The details of the killing of Anthony Smith underscore the fraudulent character, from a legal standpoint, of Judge Wilson’s exoneration of Stockley. The incident began as a police stop for an alleged drug sale, a charge that was never proven. Forty seconds after Stockley told his partner that he planned to kill Smith, the officer fired the first of the seven shots into Smith’s body. An FBI firearms analyst testified at the trial that one shot was discharged from six inches away. In his testimony at the trial, Stockley said he had no recollection of making the incriminating statement that was recorded on the police dashcam.

In his verdict, Judge Wilson defended Stockley’s testimony with the absurdity that “People say all kinds of things in the heat of the moment or while in stressful situations.”

The trial revealed that Stockley was carrying, in addition to his police issue pistol, his personal AK-47 gun, a violation of St. Louis Police Department policy.

Evidence presented at the trial showed that Smith’s DNA was not found on the gun he was supposedly carrying when he was killed, while Stockley’s DNA was found on the weapon. Against this and other evidence pointing to Stockley having planted the gun to give himself an alibi, Wilson wrote in his verdict that

based on his nearly 30 years on the bench, “an urban heroin dealer not in possession of a firearm would be an anomaly.” This claim is made without any proof that the victim was a heroin dealer.

One can only imagine how differently the judge’s verdict would read if the roles were reversed, and the victim, a 24-year-old worker, were the shooter, and the cop the victim!

The epidemic of police murders is a symptom of a deeply dysfunctional society in which the ruling class operates with increasing violence both at home and abroad. The political system is incapable of addressing any of the grievances of the vast majority of the population and compelled to resort ever more openly to state repression.



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