

Ferguson Smolders After Racially Charged Riots Over Slain Teenager

The St. Louis area braced for another day of protests on Tuesday after a grand jury cleared a white police officer in the fatal August shooting of an unarmed black teenager, sparking a night of violent and racially charged rioting.

About a dozen buildings in suburban Ferguson, Missouri, burned overnight and police fired tear gas and flash-bang canisters at protesters, said St. Louis County Police Chief Jon Belmar. Sixty-one people were arrested, police said.

Although no serious injuries were reported, Belmar said the rioting on Monday night and early Tuesday morning was “much worse” than the disturbances that erupted in the immediate aftermath of the shooting of Michael Brown, 18, by police officer Darren Wilson on Aug. 9.

Protests also were staged on Monday night in New York, Chicago, Seattle, Los Angeles, Oakland, California, and Washington, D.C., over a case that has highlighted long-standing racial tensions not just in predominantly black Ferguson but across the United States.

In the city of St. Louis, where windows were broken and traffic was briefly stopped on a major highway overnight, Police Chief Sam Dotson vowed to have a stronger police response on Tuesday night.

“A large presence, very early on, will be a deterrent,” said Dotson, whose jurisdiction does not include Ferguson. “We’ll have resources deployed.”

Schools in Ferguson and its surrounding cities said they planned not to open on Tuesday and city offices in Ferguson were also closed. Protesters planned to demonstrate on Tuesday

outside the courthouse in Clayton, Missouri, where the grand jury sat.

The rioting came despite calls for calm from officials ranging from Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon to President Obama. Activist leaders had spent weeks training protesters in non-violent civil disobedience techniques and police also had been through conflict de-escalation training, although tempers flared after crowds threw bricks at police and set patrol cars on fire following the grand jury's decision.

Officials disclosed that ruling well after sunset and hours after saying it was coming, a set of circumstances that led to protesters taking to the streets well after dark.

St. Louis police reported heavy gunfire late on Monday in the area near where Brown was slain but Belmar said officers did not fire a shot, even after they were pelted with rocks, bottles, batteries and other debris.

Wilson could have faced charges ranging from involuntary manslaughter to first-degree murder and Brown's family said through their lawyers that they were "profoundly disappointed" by the grand jury's finding.

"They want the police to be held accountable, to treat us like Americans, too, so we can get equal justice," Brown family attorney Benjamin Crump said on CNN. "This system always allows police to hurt and kill our children. We've got to change that dynamic."

Brown's family planned to speak to reporters at 11 a.m. CST, Crump said.

Attorneys for Wilson, who was placed on administrative leave and has avoided the spotlight since the shooting, said he was following his training and the law when he shot Brown.

"We recognize that many people will want to second-guess the grand jury's decision," their statement said. "We would encourage anyone who wants to express an opinion do so in a

respectful and peaceful manner.”

Wilson told the grand jury that Brown had tried to grab his gun and he felt his life was in danger when he fired, according to documents released by prosecutors.

“I said, ‘Get back or I’m going to shoot you,’” Wilson said, according to the documents. “He immediately grabs my gun and says, ‘You are too much of a pussy to shoot me.’”

The grand jury of nine whites and three blacks began meeting in late August and heard testimony from 60 witnesses called by the prosecution, including medical examiners who performed three autopsies, one by a private pathologist hired by Brown’s family.

St. Louis County Prosecutor Bob McCulloch declined to say if the jury’s decision was unanimous. At least nine jurors would have needed to agree on indictment.

A separate federal investigation into the shooting continues and U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder emphasized the Justice Department investigators had not reached any conclusions.

McCulloch described a tangled mass of conflicting testimony about what happened in the shooting but said much of it did not square with physical evidence.

Lawyers for Brown’s family say he was trying to surrender when he was shot while Wilson’s supporters say the officer feared for his life and fired in self-defense.

Witnesses disagreed on whether Brown’s hands were up at the time he was shot, McCulloch said, adding that Wilson shot at Brown 12 times. The final shot hit the top of his head.

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