

# Peaceful Ferguson Rallies Erupt in Violence on the Anniversary of Michael Brown's Death

A man was gravely wounded in a gun battle with police in Ferguson, Missouri, on Sunday night after a day of peaceful rallies to mark the fatal shooting of an unarmed black teenager by a white officer one year ago.

Several volleys of gunshots rang out as police in riot gear tried to disperse demonstrators blocking traffic and smashing storefront windows along a street that was a flashpoint of last year's unrest in the St. Louis suburb after Michael Brown, 18, was slain.

Police later said the gunfire began with two groups of agitators apparently shooting at each other. When one gunman ran across a parking lot, four police detectives pulled up in an unmarked vehicle and confronted him.

The suspect opened fire on the police vehicle and was badly wounded in the ensuing foot chase and exchange of gunshots with the four officers, police said.

St. Louis County Police Chief Jon Belmar said the unidentified man, believed to be in his mid-20s, was hospitalized in critical and unstable condition, and was undergoing surgery.

Speaking to reporters at a predawn news conference on Monday, Belmar estimated that more than 40 rounds had been unleashed in what he called "a remarkable amount of gunfire."

"These were criminals, they weren't protesters," he said of the shooters. "There is a small group of people out there that

are intent on making sure that we don't have peace that prevails."

Police initially had reported two people shot Sunday night. But Belmar later said a police officer was struck in the face with a brick hurled by protesters and a member of the local news media was also robbed and assaulted in a nearby parking lot in separate incidents amid Sunday night's turmoil.

Anniversary commemorations for Brown had begun hours earlier with a peaceful march through the St. Louis suburb after a moment of silence for Brown, whose death ignited months of demonstrations and a national debate on race and justice.

The scene changed dramatically after dark with dozens of protesters converging on West Florissant Avenue, which bore the brunt of last summer's rioting, chanting "Shut it down" in the midst of a severe thunderstorm.

A phalanx of helmeted police wearing body armor and carrying shields moved in. Protesters briefly fell away before regrouping to confront the line of officers, who ordered them to disperse.

The protesters, locking arms and edging closer to the police cordon, began throwing water bottles and shouting, "We are ready for war!" Both sides held their ground while clergy members and activists circulated between the two sides appealing for calm.

The face-off was shattered by bursts of gunfire, sending police crouching behind their patrol cars and demonstrators scurrying for cover. Helicopters whirled overhead as additional police armed with assault rifles swarmed the area, some roaring down the street in armored vehicles in the direction of the gunfire.

Merchants, some armed, stood guard outside their businesses early Monday after the disturbances, which unfolded around the

corner from where Brown was gunned down on Aug. 9, 2014, by officer Darren Wilson.

Brown's death—and a grand jury decision to spare Wilson from criminal charges for shooting him—sparked a prolonged wave of demonstrations in Ferguson last year that boiled over into rioting and arson at times and spawned sympathy rallies across the country.

It also sparked greater scrutiny of racial bias within the U.S. criminal justice system, giving rise to the “Black Lives Matter” movement that gained momentum from other high-profile slayings of unarmed minorities by white police in cities such as New York, Baltimore, Los Angeles and Cincinnati.

### **Doves, Then Gunfire**

The unrest that erupted Sunday night was in marked contrast to a day of mostly subdued, peaceful commemorations in Ferguson and elsewhere.

White doves were released after 4 1/2 minutes of silence to represent the roughly 4 1/2 hours that Brown's body lay in the middle of the street after he was shot. A crowd of about 1,000 then embarked on a silent march through Ferguson to honor Brown and others killed in confrontations with police.

Another name was added to that list on Friday when unarmed 19-year-old Christian Taylor, a black college student, was shot dead by a white police officer investigating a burglary at a car dealership in Arlington, Texas.

A federal review of Brown's slaying found that officer Wilson acted lawfully. However, it also determined that Ferguson's predominantly white police department had for years violated the rights of the city's black population.

The Justice Department report found police were singling out African-Americans for arrests and ticketing, in part to raise

revenue for the city. It also found a pattern of excessive force, including the use of attack dogs and electric stun guns, by police against unarmed black citizens.

The city's police chief, city manager and municipal court judge all left their jobs following the report.

The anniversary weekend in Ferguson was also marred by an apparently unrelated drive-by shooting on Sunday afternoon a few blocks away from a church as marchers were approaching, police said. One person was wounded in the foot.

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