



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on August 12, 2014

St. Louis Shooting Sparks Riots, Accusations, Outside Intervention

Riots in Ferguson, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis, [began Sunday](#) following a vigil for Michael Brown, who was shot and killed by a police officer on Saturday afternoon. The riots continued on Monday.

Almost from the beginning, estimates of the number of people involved in the riots, the damage inflicted on businesses, and testimonies from eyewitnesses of the shooting varied greatly and conflicted with police reports. A minimum of 12 businesses were heavily damaged and looted, and at least one, QuikTrip, a gas and convenience store, was burned to the ground. Numbers of those involved in the riot varied between two hundred and several thousand, many from out of town. Business owners in the area, some of them armed, prepared to defend themselves as the riots escalated.



According to Dorian Johnson, he and a friend, Michael Brown, an 18-year-old who had graduated from high school earlier this year and was prepared to start classes at a local technical college on Monday, were walking down the middle of a street in Ferguson, a town of 21,000 about 10 miles northwest of downtown St. Louis, when a police cruiser pulled up alongside them and an officer told them to walk on the sidewalk. Eyewitness Piaget Crenshaw said that Johnson, Brown, and the officer “got into a verbal confrontation and the officer attempted to put Brown in the police car. When Brown began to flee, his hands in the air, the officer got out of the car and started shooting at Brown.”

Another eyewitness at the scene told the press that the officer was in his car when he started shooting at the boys. Johnson said that he and Brown started running when they heard the first shot. The officer “shot again and once my friend felt that shot, he turned around and put his hands in the air. He started to get down and the officer still approached with his weapon drawn and fired several more shots.”

St. Louis County police chief, Jon Belmar, held a news conference on Sunday morning, saying that a man had been shot and killed after he assaulted a police officer and the two had struggled over the officer’s gun inside his patrol car. At least one shot was fired from inside the car, said Belmar. A slightly different version came from a report on the incident by the *Wall Street Journal*:

Authorities said the shooting occurred around noon Saturday, when a Ferguson police officer encountered two men in the street. When the officer tried to exit his vehicle, Chief Belmar said one of the two pushed the officer back into the cruiser. The suspect allegedly assaulted the officer in the car and the two struggled over his gun. At least one shot was fired inside the vehicle. A few moments later, Chief Belmar said, the officer allegedly fired multiple shots outside the vehicle that



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killed the suspect, about 35 feet from the cruiser.

When asked just how many shots were fired in the incident, Belmar responded, “more than just a couple, but I don’t think it was many more than that.” Johnson said that four shots were fired while Brown’s mother, Lesley McSpadden, says she was told by authorities that Brown was shot eight times.

This caused many to jump to conclusions. Brown’s stepfather, Louis Head, was photographed holding a sign that read “Ferguson police just executed my unarmed son!!!” Esther Haywood, president of the NAACP in St. Louis County said, “We are hurt to hear that yet another teenaged boy has been slaughtered by law enforcement.”

Brown’s parents have hired Benjamin Crump, the Florida attorney who represented Trayvon Martin’s family after the shooting in 2012. Crump has taken on a number of similar pro-bono (free) cases, including that of Martin Lee Anderson, a black teenager who died after a beating in 2006 by white guards in a Florida youth detention center, the family of Genie McMeans, a black driver who died after being shot by a white state trooper, and Ronald Weekley, a skateboarder who was beaten by police in Venice, California. For Crump, the police officer in this latest shooting (whose name, rank, or race has not yet been released) is guilty of murder because Brown “was executed in broad daylight.”

Brown’s mother said she didn’t understand why the police didn’t try to use a club or a Taser to restrain her son rather than shooting him, claiming that “my son turned 18 and graduated from high school and he don’t bother nobody.” He was just a “gentle kid,” according to Aisha Sultan Asultan, writing for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

Connections have been made between Saturday’s incident, which occurred on August 9, and the Watts riots in California that were sparked almost exactly 50 years earlier, from August 11 to 17, 1965, which resulted in 34 deaths and more than \$40 million in property damage.

Antonio French, a city councilman in St. Louis, expounded on the racist implications of the incident even though the details concerning the officer involved haven’t been released: “Ferguson has a white government and a white mayor, but a large black population. This situation has brought out whatever rifts were between the minority community and the Ferguson government.”

It has also brought out of the woodwork the ubiquitous Al Sharpton, who said he was planning to visit Ferguson at the request of Brown’s parents.

As of this writing the riots have ceased, but behind the scenes the investigation of the incident is just getting started. The FBI has become involved, but only as an interested observer, according to some sources. They will be interested in learning whether Brown’s civil rights were violated, while U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder added, “Aggressively pursuing investigations such as this is critical to preserving trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve.”

The stage appears to be set for a repeat of the Zimmerman/Martin incident that roiled Florida and exacerbated race relations nationally for months until a jury ruled Zimmerman innocent of all charges in 2013.

Photo of protester and police car in front of burned-out QT gas station in Ferguson August 11: AP Images

A graduate of Cornell University and a former investment advisor, Bob is a regular contributor to The New American magazine and blogs frequently at www.LightFromTheRight.com, primarily on economics and politics.



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