

Black People's Grand Jury Indicts Cop for First Degree Murder of Michael Brown

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A Black People's Grand Jury in St. Louis, Missouri, this weekend delivered a "true bill of indictment" for first degree murder against former Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson in the death of Black teenager Michael Brown. Black people "can and must take matters into our own hands," said Omali Yeshitela, one of four prosecutors that presented evidence, not only of Wilson's personal guilt, but the institutional culpability of the entire regional criminal justice system in the murder and subsequent whitewash of the crime.

"Darren Wilson is a killer, and he's out there, but he's not out there by himself," said Yeshitela. "He was doing what U.S. police have done historically and traditionally to African people in this country." It wasn't Wilson's decision to leave Brown's uncovered body on the asphalt roadway for nearly four and a half hours in 100 degree heat – a collective insult and threat to the victim's community that harkens back to the ritual public displays of mutilated and burned Black corpses in the time of lynch law. Wilson was later rewarded for his crime "with almost one million dollars" in contributions "by white people."

The 12 jurors, all of them from greater St. Louis, spent January 3rd and 4th reviewing some of the same evidence presented by county prosecutor Bob McCulloch to the mostly white grand jury that failed to indict Wilson, in November. McCulloch's mission was to obfuscate the facts and confuse the jurors; to free the cop and convict the victim – as attested to by one of his own jurors, who maintains, in a suit asking permission to speak publicly, that McCulloch made the "insinuation that Brown, not Wilson, was the wrongdoer."

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The Black People's Grand Jury also heard testimony from local residents with personal knowledge of police behavior in the region, including Black former police officers – a method of truth-seeking grounded in the logic that the most "expert" witnesses on institutional racism are its victims, who have experienced the phenomenon in all its dimensions.

At root, the Black People's Grand Jury is an exercise in self-determination, a collective response to a collective assault on a people that have been criminalized by the Mass Black Incarceration State. "We cannot trust our children, the future of our community, in the hands of this establishment that has proven to us over and over again its disregard for black life," said Yeshitela, whose International People's Democratic Uhuru Movement teamed with local Black organizations to convene the proceedings.

Most importantly, the Black People's Grand Jury model is easily replicable throughout the U.S., just as the Mass Black Incarceration State operates in near-uniform fashion in every

precinct of the country. North, South, East and West, whether the Black population is relatively large or small, the State's mission is to contain, control, terrorize and criminalize Black people, and to incarcerate them in enormous numbers. The St. Louis model, and longer-form variations on the theme, such as Black People's Boards of Inquiry, can go far towards exposing and deconstructing the police/prison regime that over the past two generations has killed innumerable Michael Browns and spawned a gulag so huge and so disproportionately Black that one out of every eight prison inmates on the planet is an African American.

"Resistance to the Black Mass Incarceration State, in all its manifestations, must be rooted in the struggle for self-determination."

The Mass Black Incarceration State, erected in response to the Black Liberation Movement of the Sixties, is the driving force and organizing principle of the U.S. criminal justice system. (Ironically, its predatory mechanisms have caused more white Americans to be imprisoned, as well – collateral damage inflicted by structures designed to ensnare masses of Blacks.) It is an inherently militarized system of counterinsurgency that begins with hyper-surveillance of Black communities and ultimately warps every aspect of Black internal and external social relations. Inevitably, the white supremacist, profoundly anti-democratic and ultimately lawless nature of the U.S. police-prison mission has facilitated the rise of the national security state and the general degradation of bourgeois liberties for all Americans – a strong basis for building multi-racial alliances.

However, African American resistance to the Black Mass Incarceration State, in all its manifestations, must be rooted in the struggle for self-determination – freedom on our own terms, which is inseparable from demands for justice.

Black People's Grand Juries can be part of the process of building local self-determinationist institutions of resistance to the ruling order, particularly in bolstering demands for genuine community control of police. For these reasons, the model can help prevent Black people's righteous anger and energies from being dissipated by diversions concocted by the matrix of elected officials, their appointees and commissions, along with the Black misleaders and accommodationists who act as agents of the Democratic Party and the rich.

The steady drumbeat of protest must be accompanied by institution-building projects aimed at dismantling the Mass Black Incarceration State – the transformational task of the current movement.

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