

SD Protests on Ferguson - City News Service Story

SAN DIEGO (CNS) - At least two demonstrations were planned Tuesday night in San Diego in response to a Missouri grand jury's decision not to charge a white police officer for the shooting death of an unarmed 18-year-old black man.

The first demonstration is scheduled from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. in front of the Edward J. Schwartz Federal Building at 880 Front St. in downtown San Diego, according to a Facebook page used to organize the event.

The site is run by a group that calls itself the Uhuru Solidarity Movement. The group posted prior to the grand jury's decision being handed down Monday night that it would stage a protest after the decision was read, regardless of whether Officer Darren Wilson was indicted in the Aug. 9 death of Michael Brown.

A half-hour after the downtown demonstration is scheduled to begin, another demonstration is set to begin at the City Heights/Weingart Library and Performance Annex at 3795 Fairmount Ave.

Also organized on Facebook, the 6 p.m. City Heights demonstration was called by the group United Against Police Terror - San Diego.

A peaceful demonstration was also held Tuesday at San Diego State University.

Despite a call from the Brown family for supporters to keep things civil, several violent protests that included fires and looting broke out across the country on Monday night. But there were no such incidents in San Diego County, according to local authorities.

For more than three months, the officer-involved shooting death of Michael Brown has shined a national spotlight on the small Missouri town of Ferguson outside of St. Louis, and the issue of racism.

Brown was fatally shot on a residential street in broad daylight on Aug. 9 while allegedly trying to evade arrest by Wilson. At the time, Wilson, an eight-year veteran of the Ferguson Police Department, was responding to a robbery call in the area and had stopped Brown and another young man for questioning.

Several witnesses came forward, claiming that Brown was shot in the back but a subsequent autopsy report showed he was not, prosecuting attorney Robert McCulloch said during a news conference. The grand jury concluded that there was no probable cause to believe that Wilson committed a crime.

Don Dripps, a professor at the University of San Diego School of Law, told City News Service that an investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice could bring far more change to Ferguson than the prosecution of one police officer.

Such an investigation could result in a "consent decree" that would place the police department under a federal monitor, tighten use-of-force restrictions and require reporting of interactions between officers and the public. The restrictions would be imposed if a pattern of civil rights violations was found, he said.

Police departments in Detroit, New Orleans and Pittsburgh are operating under consent decrees, he said.

Dripps said it was "extraordinary" for McCulloch to go through a grand jury and even more so to make the testimony and exhibits public.

"It didn't prevent violence in the community -- it happened," Dripps said. "If that was the goal, it didn't work."

Justin Brooks, the director of the California Innocence Project at the California Western School of Law in San Diego, said that based on similar cases in the past, he isn't sure if positive change will come from Brown's death.

"I don't see enough change that's occurred because people are polarized in their positions," Brooks said. He said some people believe police have no racial bias, while others are so angered by it that they set fires.

He called the grand jury decision an "extraordinary result" because it's rare that prosecutors are unable to obtain an indictment.

Brooks, who works to free wrongfully imprisoned inmates, criticized the decision to go through the secretive grand jury process. In a more public proceeding, the evidence would come out piece-by-piece, he said.

"The general public would have a greater acceptance of it," Brooks said.

He said he hopes the episode leads to greater training for police officers.