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Blacks Outraged by Ferguson Grand Jury Decision

By George E. Curry
NNPA Editor-in-Chief

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Long after the St. Louis County Prosecutor Robert M. McCulloch announced Officer Darren Wilson will not be prosecuted in connection with the killing of unarmed Ferguson, Mo. teenager Michael Brown and burning tempers and flames had subsided, African American leaders were still expressing their disappointment in a criminal justice system that failed Brown.

“It has been fairly obvious from the beginning that the predominate belief in Ferguson and St. Louis was that Darren Wilson, the killer of Michael Brown, was not going to be indicted by a Bob McCullough grand jury,” Jesse Jackson said in a statement. “In a rambling statement of the grand jury’s process and conclusion - which did little to inform - Bob McCullough acted in the capacity of a defense attorney who misused the grand jury process ‘as a trial’ without professional legal cross-examination.”

Jackson continued, “The issue is not the unfortunate and unwise violent protests that followed. The issue is the lack of federal uplift for the community even now. The issue is the lack of federal enforcement of civil rights laws. The issue is that Ferguson’s police and fire departments do not represent the people, are in violation of the law, yet it continues to receive federal funds. Ferguson’s police department, fire department and contracts issued are all subsidized by the federal government - including the equipment that was used to put down the protests - yet the federal government is still not enforcing its own civil rights laws.”

In a Huffington Post blog, Al Sharpton said: “If a grand jury is hearing evidence tantamount to what they would hear in a jury trial, then what is the point of a grand jury? In Ferguson, there are witnesses who say Brown had his hands up when he was shot. That should be enough probable cause to go to trial to then determine if Officer Wilson is guilty or not. It is at trial that he can then defend himself and his attorneys can present their own witnesses and their own defense.”

Sharpton added, “Whether it is the death of Michael Brown, Eric Garner or the many others who die at the hands of police all across this country, it’s important to remember that we never get to hear their side of the story. The victims don’t have the ability to cross-examine or refute theories. They don’t have the ability to hide out somewhere for months while a grand jury deliberates. And they don’t have the ability to defend themselves as some may attempt to assassinate their character either in a courtroom or in the court of public opinion. They are dead, silenced forever.”

National Urban League President Mac H. Morial said, “We respect the grand jury’s decision in the course of due process of our legal system. We will, however, continue to fight for justice and accountability in the death of Michael Brown. As such, we first and foremost urge the Department of Justice to continue a full and thorough investigation to determine whether federal civil rights charges should be filed against Officer Wilson, as well as to carry out federal reviews of police misconduct and implement key recommendations for police reform. The excessive use of force by law enforcement in our communities is unacceptable, and we know that we cannot prevent future similar tragedies unless and until there is systemic change across the nation in the area of police reform.”

Charles Steele, Jr., president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), said, “The grand jury’s decision not to indict Officer Darren Wilson is not an end but just another painful step in the long journey to justice, a journey that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., our founding president, and others walked with confidence and determination.”

“Just as SCLC did not give up until the buses were desegregated in Montgomery, Ala. Under Dr. King’s leadership, we will not give quit until justice is the norm in America instead of the exception in the deaths of our unarmed Black men and women.”

Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr., president of the National Newspaper Publishers Association, a federation of approximately 200 Black Newspapers, said: “(The) announcement that the grand jury decided not to indict Ferguson, Mo. Police Officer Darren Wilson who killed unarmed 18 year-old Michael Brown in August 2014 is yet another systematic and tragic slap in the face of equal justice in the United States - We are the ‘Voice of the black community’ and the NNPA will not be silent or rest until there is justice in the Michael Brown case and other cases of racially-motivated police killings and violence in our communities across the nation.”

The NAACP announced that will initiate a 7-day, 120-mile march from Ferguson, Mo. to Jefferson City, the state capital, on Saturday, Nov. 29.

“The death of Michael Brown and actions by the Ferguson Police Department is a distressing symptom of the untested and overaggressive policing culture that has become commonplace in communities of color all across the country, said NAACP President Cornell William Brooks.

“Our ‘Journey to Justice: Ferguson to Jefferson City’ march is the first of many demonstrations to show both the country and the world that the NAACP and our allies will not stand down until systemic change, accountability and justice in cases of police misconduct are served for Michael Brown and the countless other men and women who lost their lives to such police misconduct.”

Melanie L. Campbell, President and CEO of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, said, “(The) decision by the grand jury in Ferguson, Mo. to not indict officer Darren Wilson in the shooting and killing of Michael Brown who was unarmed is a travesty of justice. Further, we believe the St. Louis County Prosecutor Attorney Robert McCulloch’s gross mishandling of this case is inexcusable. We join the civil rights and social justice community in a call for an end to racial profiling of our young Black men and women who are losing their lives across the country at alarming rates at the hands of police officers who are sworn to protect and serve.”



President Barack Obama and Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr. meet with Philadelphia Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey and Laurie Robinson, professor of criminology, law and society at George Mason University, and a former assistant attorney general, who will be co-chairing a Presidential task force on how communities and law enforcement can work together to build trust to strengthen neighborhoods across the country, in the Oval Office, Dec. 1, 2014. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

Publicity, tourists expected for historic march

By Rick Harmon
MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) - State and local officials believe the 50th anniversary of the Selma-to-Montgomery march, which celebrates an event that ushered in a new day for civil rights, could well usher in a new day for Alabama tourism.

Lee Sentell, director of the Alabama Department of Tourism and Travel, sees a perfect storm approaching that will rain torrents of publicity on the March 2015 event - publicity he believes may permanently elevate Alabama’s civil rights tourism.

Sentell said the 50th anniversary of such a historic event would attract huge numbers of tourists from throughout the country and beyond on its own, but that next year a number of factors will multiply those numbers.

The Oprah Winfrey/Brad Pitt-produced film “Selma,” which is about the historic march, is scheduled to open in late December in Los Angeles and New York so that it is eligible for the 2014 Oscars, and will open across the country on Jan. 9.

“It’s almost impossible to imagine a more spectacular promotion of the event,” Sentell said.

Dawn Hathcock, vice president of the Montgomery Area Chamber of Commerce’s Convention & Visitor Bureau, agrees and gives part of the credit to the Alabama Tourism Department. That department also includes the Alabama Film Office, which helped convince Winfrey, who shot much of the film in Atlanta, that parts of it needed to be shot in Selma and Montgomery.

“Knowing that they filmed in Selma and Montgomery will be a big push as far as tourism,” Hathcock said. “It’s not one of these films where it is about events in your city but was filmed in Canada or some other place. In the movie, they will see the real bridge, the real Capitol, that type of thing, and they will want to see those places in person.”

Then there is the possibility of who might show up at the event. There is the hope that Winfrey or Pitt may come, as well as celebrities from the original march, such as Harry Belafonte.

And some of America’s most famous leaders are not just a possibility, but an expectation. President Barack Obama, when he was just campaigning for the office, took part in the March 2007 bridge-crossing celebration, walking across the bridge just feet away from Bill and Hillary Clinton.

Sentell said he fully expects the White House to be represented at this year’s event.

“All the living presidents have been invited,” Hathcock said. “We don’t know that they will all come, but it being the 50th anniversary, I think you can assume that we may have some very high-level dignitaries here.”

Sandra Taylor with the National Park Service serves as park superintendent for the Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site, the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site and the Selma-to-Montgomery National Historic Trail.

She will help coordinate any presidential visits, but she said it will be a while before she will know who might attend.

“I’m hoping we may know 30 days in advance, but I’m not sure we will get that much warning,” she said.

She did say she already knows three plane loads of congressmen and their staffers are flying down with Georgia Congressman John Lewis and Alabama Congresswoman Terri Sewell for the celebrations.

Note that she said “celebrations,” plural - something Sentell said will be one more huge publicity factor.

For there is a Selma march that will also publicize the successful Selma march.

The first attempt to make the march to Montgomery, on March 7, 1965, was met with violent opposition by state and local police, who attacked the peaceful marchers with billy clubs and tear gas. The event became famous as “Bloody Sunday.”

“It will also be the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, and there will be enormous press coverage of the Bloody Sunday re-enactment on every network across the country,” Sentell said.

“This will be two weeks before the anniversary of the successful Selma-to-Montgomery march and will only make people want to come to that event even more.”

How many people does Taylor expect to come to the celebrations?
“I don’t have a clue,” she said. “I can’t even estimate a number because we’ve never had anything like this before. We have done some big events but not anything of this magnitude.”

Montgomery Mayor Todd Strange said there may be upwards of 30,000 to 40,000 people for the Selma-to-Montgomery march, and if you add in those here for the Bloody Sunday event, there are estimates of crowds greater than 50,000.

“Some will be in Selma, and some may go to Birmingham for the civil rights sites there, and we hope many will come here,” he said. “But with that many people, the entire state will benefit from the events next year.”

With so many churches, schools, civic groups and universities planning activities, Hathcock said one of the best ideas was to create an inclusive website where groups that might not have the money to publicize their events can be included.

“We have created a website, dreammarcheson.com, and what we are doing is including events big and small from not just Montgomery and Selma but wherever the events are being held,” she said.



Protestors face off with police in Ferguson, Mo., after a grand jury decided not to indict Officer Darren Wilson. (Photo by LawrenceBryant/St. Louis American)