

Michael Brown, May 20, 1996 – Aug 9, 2014, 18 years old

Michael Orlandus Darrion Brown was born on May 20, 1996 to Lezley McSpadden and Michael Brown in St. Louis, Missouri. Michael, affectionately called “Mike Mike” by his friends and family, loved music, computers, and sports. He enjoyed rapping about life and playing video games. Michael attended Original Friendship Baptist Church with his family from an early age. His obituary describes him as “a very friendly, gentle giant who loved his family very much.”

Though Michael struggled in school at times, he graduated from Normandy High School on May 23, 2014, and was only two days away from starting at Vatterott College when he was killed. Michael had also been learning how to drive in his mother’s Chevrolet Equinox.

Chris McMillan, a childhood friend of Michael’s said: “He was a cool person. He was laidback and respectful. None of that nonsense. None of the crews and gangs. We’d just play [video] games, chill, and ride around.”

Ferguson, a city of about 20,000 people, is part of the greater St. Louis Metropolitan Area. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 67% of the population was Black, and that percentage increased to 71% by the 2020 census. Despite this, at the time of Michael’s death, over 90% of the police force was white, as well as the majority of local government, including Mayor James Knowles.

According to NBC News, in 2013 alone, the City of Ferguson filed over 12,000 cases of ordinance violations, including a range of charges from loitering to petty larceny (theft of personal items under \$500), as well as over 11,000 cases of traffic violation charges. A 2015 report by the Department of Justice found that Ferguson city officials routinely urged the Chief of Police, Thomas Jackson, to generate revenue through enforcement. Police officer evaluations and promotions were based largely on how many citations an officer issued. The report continues:

*Partly as a consequence of City and FPD priorities, many officers appear to see some residents, especially those who live in Ferguson’s predominantly African American neighborhoods, less as constituents to be protected than as potential offenders and sources of revenue.*

*This culture within FPD influences officer activities in all areas of policing, beyond just ticketing. Officers expect and demand compliance even when they lack legal authority. They are inclined to interpret the exercise of free-*

*speech rights as unlawful disobedience, innocent movements as physical threats, indications of mental or physical illness as belligerence. Police supervisors and leadership do too little to ensure that officers act in accordance with law and policy, and rarely respond meaningfully to civilian complaints of officer misconduct. The result is a pattern of stops without reasonable suspicion and arrests without probable cause...*

*Ferguson's law enforcement practices overwhelmingly impact African Americans. Data collected by the Ferguson Police Department from 2012 to 2014 shows that African Americans account for 85% of vehicle stops, 90% of citations, and 93% of arrests made by FPD officers, despite comprising only 67% of Ferguson's population. ...*

*These disparities are also present in FPD's use of force. Nearly 90% of documented force used by FPD officers was used against African Americans.*

Just before noon on August 9, 2014, Michael Brown and his friend, Dorian Johnson, were walking down Canfield Drive after leaving Ferguson Market and Liquor Convenience Store. Security footage released later showed Michael, unarmed, appearing to steal a box of cigarillos and shoving a clerk who approached him at the door. Ferguson PD officer, Darren Wilson, had just responded to a different call a few blocks away, and returned to his vehicle to hear about the incident on his police scanner. Wilson saw Michael and Dorian on the street, and they matched the descriptions given over the radio. Wilson then called for backup.

There is no video evidence of the interaction between the two teens and Wilson, so details vary between accounts given by Michael's friend, Dorian Johnson, Wilson, and other eye-witnesses. Audio of the gunshots was picked up accidentally on an unrelated video taken at the same time nearby, which determined that the entire conflict lasted less than a minute. The transcripts of the grand jury hearings were released by St. Louis County prosecutor Robert McCulloch, which is rarely done, but was possible in this case due to Missouri's Sunshine Law for public records.

Wilson stated that he called out to them to use the sidewalk and Michael responded, "Fuck what you have to say." According to Dorian, Michael did not say this and Wilson approached them in his vehicle and told them, "Get the fuck on the sidewalk." Accounts agree that after the teens continued walking on the

road, Wilson then passed them in his car before reversing quickly towards them to block the road at an angle - a common maneuver used to give officers protection in a gunfight. Wilson reversed so close to Michael that when he tried to open his door, it struck Michael, who pushed back at the car door.

According to Dorian, the officer grabbed Michael by the neck and struggled with him, threatening twice to shoot. Wilson's account is that Michael reached through the police SUV's open window, grabbed Wilson, and punched him. During the struggle at the SUV window, Wilson fired twice, one of the bullets hitting Michael in the hand according to the Department of Justice's interpretation of the physical evidence. However, Wilson's first statement after the incident included his belief that the first shot struck Michael in the stomach, not the hand, though he later changed his statement to say he was not sure where the shot landed. No bullet wounds to Michael's stomach were found during autopsy, but two bullets had passed through his right lung.

When Dorian, who was standing right next to Michael, described the scene, he stated the first shot struck Michael in the chest. Pathologists who testified before the Grand Jury estimated the shot to Michael's hand occurred at a distance of 2 to 12 inches. The lower estimate could corroborate the police account but the higher estimate could be a sign that Michael's arm was not in the police vehicle, meaning the shot could have occurred later, when his hand was stretched forward as a defensive gesture.

After the first two shots were fired, accounts agree that Michael and Dorian attempted to run, and Wilson exited his vehicle to pursue them. No bullet wounds were found in Michael's back, but one bullet from the five Wilson fired in a burst hit Michael in the back of the arm, shattering the bone. All three medical examiners felt this indicated he was shot from behind. Dorian said that as this shot struck Michael's arm, Michael "kind of jerked and that's when he stopped running. He just kind of stopped and turned around at the officer." Many witnesses described Michael's subsequent movement in the direction of the police car as "staggering" while Wilson described Michael as "charging" and resembling both a demon and Hulk Hogan.

When Michael, who by then had multiple bullet wounds, did not stay still enough for Wilson to consider him "compliant", Wilson then fired another round of shots after waiting only 3 seconds. From the physical evidence, investigators said it is likely all of these shots struck Michael. This is supported by the angle of bullet wounds in Michael's head and shoulder, which indicate his head was resting on his

shoulder, possibly due to him being unconscious. One shot hit Michael in the top of his head, which suggested to examiners that the 6'5" teen had already fallen, in agreement with Dorian Johnson's testimony.

Wilson initially declined medical care after the incident, but went to the hospital after speaking with an attorney provided by the Fraternal Order of Police. Wilson testified to the Grand Jury that Michael hit him twice, and he feared a third punch could be fatal. However, in the photograph Wilson said best depicted his injuries, there were no cuts or broken blood vessels. At the hospital, he was prescribed the equivalent of two over the counter Aleve for his claim that he was in pain. Additionally, Michael's hands showed no signs of the bruising, cuts, or broken blood vessels that examiners expect to see from punching.

Michael's body lay in the middle of the street for four hours in hot summer weather before being taken to the morgue.

The next night, thousands attended a prayer vigil on the street where Michael was killed. Another larger crowd gathered on West Florissant Avenue nearby. While many who gathered were peaceful, for others, anger over years of increasing racial tensions and mistreatment by police came to the surface in the wake of this tragedy, made worse by the treatment of Michael's body. A convenience store was set on fire and other businesses were also damaged. Subsequent protests saw heavy police presence, with officers pulled from the surrounding St. Louis area, equipped with armored vehicles, riot gear, and military style weapons. Videos captured police using tear gas, pepper spray, and striking protestors with batons.

On November 23, 2014, the grand jury found no reason to indict Darren Wilson for shooting Michael Brown. That night, protests began again in Ferguson as well as other cities including Oakland, New York, Washington D.C., Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Seattle.

On November 29, 2014, Wilson announced his immediate resignation from Ferguson Police Department.

On March 4, 2015, the U.S. Department of Justice released the report on racial bias in Ferguson policing, but also announced Wilson would not be prosecuted. On March 11, 2015, Thomas Jackson resigned as Police Chief.

On April 7, 2015, in Ferguson's first municipal election since Michael Brown's death, two of the three elected City Council members were Black. In June, Ferguson hired a new municipal judge and interim City Manager, both Black.

On July 10, 2015, Missouri Governor Jay Nixon signed legislation to limit cities' ability to profit from traffic tickets and court fines.

In June 2017, Michael's family received a \$1.5m settlement from the City of Ferguson.

Michael's father and step-mother, Michael Brown Sr. and Cal Brown, created the *Michael Brown Foundation: Chosen For Change* in 2014. "Chosen for Change focuses on providing support to other families who have lost loved ones due to police brutality or community violence."

*The Michael O.D. Brown We Love Our Sons and Daughters Foundation* was established in 2015 by Michael's mother, Lezley McSpadden. The foundation created the *Rainbow of Mothers* program, to "bring together a rainbow of mothers from all races and backgrounds who had either lost a child to street violence, gun violence, excessive police force, or just untimely death due to illness." The program aims to both support grieving families and to raise awareness of the issues that led to the deaths of their children.

In April 2016, Beyoncé Knowles released her 12-track visual album, *Lemonade*. The video for the song *Freedom*, which discusses Blackness in America, includes a cameo by Lezley McSpadden, as well as cameos by Gwen Carr, Eric Garner's mother, and Sybrina Fulton, Trayvon Martin's mother.

In May 2016, the book, *Tell the Truth & Shame the Devil: The Life, Legacy, and Love of My Son Michael Brown*, written by Lezley McSpadden, was released. In it, she writes:

*"After Mike Mike died, I believed we would have justice. I waited for the police to right the wrong, I waited for the county to bring justice to Mike Mike, I waited for the DOJ to discover the truth. The system has failed my son. It has failed me and it has failed all of us. But, now, I know that I can't wait for anybody else to make change. I must make change myself, that will be Mike Mike's legacy; that will be his justice. That's the truth of it."*

In loving memory of Michael Orlandus Darrion Brown.

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