

# Trial ruling results in three days and nights of protests in St. Louis

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 09.20.17

Word Count **796**

Level **1060L**



Protesters march in silence down Market Street in St. Louis, Missouri, on September 18, 2017, in response to the acquittal on September 15 of a white former police officer, Jason Stockley, in the killing of a black suspect, Anthony Lamar Smith, after a high-speed car chase in 2011. Cristina Fletes/St. Louis Post-Dispatch via AP

ST. LOUIS, Missouri — A crowd of demonstrators locked arms and marched quietly through downtown St. Louis, Missouri, Monday morning. Some of the protesters were black and others were white. All of the demonstrators were protesting the results of a trial against a white former police officer who shot and killed a black suspect. This protest follows another night of unrest and more than 80 arrests.

On Friday, a judge had announced that he found Jason Stockley not guilty in the 2011 death of Anthony Lamar Smith.

Stockley shot Smith after a high-speed car chase as officers tried to arrest Smith and his partner in a suspected drug deal.

Stockley is 36 years old. The former police officer said he shot Smith because he felt he was in danger. He said he saw Smith holding a gun when Smith backed his car toward the officers and sped away.

## **Lawyers Couldn't Prove Stockley Murdered Smith**

In the court case, there were lawyers defending Stockley and lawyers seeking justice for Smith. The lawyers helping Smith said Stockley put a gun in Smith's car after he shot him. The lawyers said that Stockley's DNA was on the weapon but Smith's wasn't. Video from Stockley's police car recorded him saying he was "going to kill" Smith. Less than a minute later, he shot Smith five times.

Stockley's lawyer dismissed the comment as "human emotions" during a dangerous pursuit. St. Louis Judge Timothy Wilson said Stockley's statement was not a clear indication of guilt. Wilson also said prosecutors didn't prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Stockley murdered Smith.

Since the court decision, there have been three days of peaceful protests and three nights of violence in the city.

Hundreds of riot police gathered downtown late Sunday, arresting more than 80 people and taking away weapons. There were reports of property damage and vandalism. The arrests came after demonstrators ignored orders to leave, police said.

## **Police Chief Says City Is Safe**

"I'm proud to tell you the city of St. Louis is safe and the police owned tonight," Police Chief Lawrence O'Toole said at a news conference early Monday. O'Toole is the acting police chief until a permanent chief is named.

Earlier Sunday, more than 1,000 people had gathered at police headquarters. The protesters then marched without trouble through downtown St. Louis, the upscale Central West End and the trendy Delmar Loop area of nearby University City. Protesters also marched through two shopping malls in a wealthy area of St. Louis County.

By nightfall, most had gone home. The 100 or so people who remained grew increasingly agitated as they marched back toward downtown. Along the way, they knocked over planters, broke windows at a few shops and hotels, and scattered plastic chairs at an outdoor venue.

According to police, the demonstrators then sprayed bottles with an unknown substance on officers. One officer suffered a leg injury and was taken to a hospital. His condition wasn't known.

## **Police Make Arrests And Seize Weapons**

Soon afterward, buses brought in additional officers in riot gear, and police scoured downtown deep into the night. They made arrests and seized at least five weapons, according to O'Toole. Later, officers in riot gear gathered alongside a city boulevard and chanted "whose street, our street" — a common chant used by the protesters — after clearing the street of demonstrators and onlookers.

"We're in control. This is our city and we're going to protect it," O'Toole said.

Mayor Lyda Krewson said at the same Monday news conference that "the days have been calm and the nights have been destructive." Krewson added, "destruction cannot be tolerated."

Early Monday, more than 150 protesters marched arm-in-arm, some carrying signs, to city hall. Police turned traffic away as the marchers blocked a busy St. Louis street during the rush hour crush. Once at city hall, the protestors found their voices, chanting: "I know that we will win." The protesters then marched four blocks to a city court building, where they chanted again, then left.

## **Peaceful Protests Are Best**

The recent St. Louis protests follow a pattern seen since the August 2014 killing of Michael Brown, an unarmed black man, in nearby Ferguson, Missouri. The majority of demonstrators, though angry, are law-abiding. But as the night wears on, a different crowd emerges. These people are more willing to confront police, sometimes to the point of clashes.

Protest organizer Anthony Bell said he understands why some act out. While change can come through peaceful protests, such as those led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., years of unfair treatment has caused some to turn violent.

Many protesters believe police provoked demonstrators by showing up in riot gear and armored vehicles. Police said they had no choice but to protect themselves once protesters started throwing things at them.