

THE FERGUSON SIGN

21,205

Population of Ferguson

65%

Black or black African

The hands-up -- a sign of surrender and submission black men and boys here say they learn early on when dealing with police -- has been transformed into a different kind of weapon.

"If you're angry, throw your arms up," said the Rev Al Sharpton, who travelled to St Louis in the wake of the death of Michael Brown.

"If you want justice, throw your arms up. Because that's the sign Michael was using. He had a surrender sign. That's the sign you have to deal with. Use the sign he last showed. We want answers why that last sign was not respected."

Brown was shot and killed

by an officer on August 9. The 18-year-old, according to witnesses, was running away with his hands up.

Just as "Ferguson" has transformed into instantly recognizable shorthand signifying the latest juncture in an unsettled national conversation over race and policing, the "hands up, don't shoot" chant has joined a long line of activist slogans that crystallize the heart of a community's moral outrage: Hell no, we won't go. No justice, no peace.

Demonstrators had taken up the chant on August 11 when hundreds of demonstrators, many older, marched in the streets in front of the Ferguson Police Department, their arms raised toward the blazing sun. About two-thirds of Ferguson's 21,000 residents are African American, but police and city officials are predominantly white.

The black teens and twenty-somethings

who took to the streets in Ferguson at night did the same, lifting their hands to the glaring lights of a police chopper and the line of police vehicles -- with officers in front -- trying to keep them at bay.

But they also used the hands-up sign as a tool for provocation, drifting toward the police with their arms up, as if daring for a response. They mixed the hands-up chant with a taunting, obscene anti-police chant. The police eventually drove the group away with tear gas.

Mark Sutton, 24, of St Louis recalled an incident when he was 18. He had gone to the Saint Louis Galleria Mall with his little brother to pick out a prom suit, but ID checkers at the entrance wouldn't let him in.

Sutton said that as he walked away with a cellphone to his ear, a police officer grabbed his hand; surprised, he yanked his arm away and then was thrown to the ground, handcuffed.

"That could have been me in

'08," Sutton

said of Brown's fate. "I wouldn't be here to tell this story. I wouldn't be here to protest."

Other men at the Clayton rally, young and old, shared similar stories.

"See this dent?" said Aha Sen Piankhy, 38, tapping a finger to a scar on his face. "I got smacked in the head with a flashlight because I didn't say, 'Yes, sir.'"

He added, "I was 14 years old."

Aha Sen said the hands-up chant was "a good tool" because it showed that police apparently violated the covenant not to shoot when hands are up -- a gesture resented among black boys and men in the first place.

Brown, he said, "knew to put his hands in the air, and they still killed him."

But Strong said he detests the new symbol.

"You're showing yourself as weak. It says, 'I give up, I surrender to your authority,'" he said. "Whether his hands were up, if they were down, it doesn't matter."

But when a police officer smirked at protesters on the morning of August 12, Strong decided, the gesture seemed the best way to express displeasure.

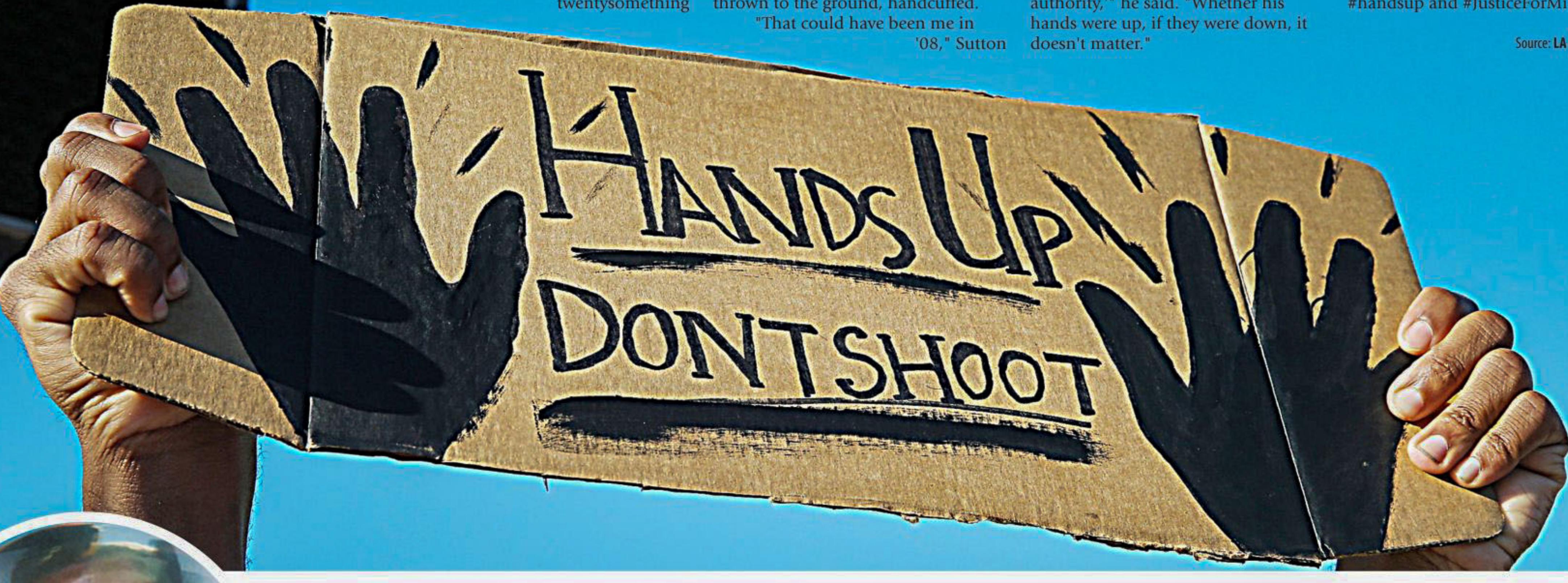
Colbi Drake, 22, a student at the University of Missouri, had a different outlook on holding her hands up, citing other cases of young unarmed black men around the country who were killed.

"This is a very peaceful way of representing the people who aren't able to do this themselves," she said. "That was always the symbol of surrendering. I have nothing! My hands are up! Why would you still shoot? It makes no sense."

And then Drake went back to watching the demonstrators facing police, with their arms raised to the sky.

Protesters have also taken their cause to social media, tweeting with the hashtags #handsupdon'tshoot, #handsup and #JusticeForMikeBrown.

Source: LA Times, Aug 12



SHOOTING OF MICHAEL BROWN

Michael Brown was visiting his grandmother when he was shot by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9. He graduated from Normandy High School in St Louis in the spring this year, and was scheduled to start classes at a Missouri trade college.

The unarmed teenager was shot at least six times, including twice in the head, an autopsy has found. One of the bullets entered the top of Brown's skull, suggesting his head was bent forward when it struck him and caused a fatal injury.

Source: Vox.com; New York Times

When trust is lost

Several dozen protesters gathered Wednesday outside the St Louis County prosecutor's office, calling for Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson to stand trial for the death of Michael Brown. Inside, a 12-member grand jury began hearing evidence in the case.

Nearby, US Attorney General Eric Holder, on a day trip from Washington, mingled with Ferguson community leaders and residents.

But so deep is the lack of trust among African-Americans in their nation's criminal justice system that many dread the idea that Wilson, 28, a police officer for six years, might get off scot-free.

"I honestly believe this is the beginning of a cover-up," said Jerry Christmas, a well-known African-American lawyer, amid growing calls for McCulloch -- whom critics say has a track record over two decades in office of not going after police wrongdoing -- to be pulled off the case.

Nationally, "although black men made up only 27.8 percent of all persons arrested from 2003-2009, they made up 31.8 percent of all persons who died in the

course of arrest, and the majority of these deaths were homicides," the American Civil Liberties Union has reported.

"It's hard for a community to have confidence in a system that only prosecutes them," said Christmas, a one-time

prosecutor and a leader of Wednesday's orderly protest.

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Christmas pinned part of the blame on a significant lack of African-Americans in key positions throughout the criminal justice system.

According to a Justice Department report, blacks as well as Hispanics are

high school students are far more likely to be arrested than white classmates, the liberal Center for American Progress think tank has noted.

Jess Luby, who came down from Minnesota with fellow activists, said she



PHOTO: VOX.COM

"Hands up, don't shoot". Ferguson has turned the gesture into a defiant symbol.

three times more likely to be searched during a traffic stop than whites, and four times as likely to experience the use of force in encounters with police.

Statistics also indicate that one in three African-American males can expect to

spend some time in prison, while black

was 23 years old when she was pulled over late one night for alleged careless driving.

She said she spent two years fighting the charges, which were finally dropped last month. "They try to suck you into the system," she told AFP, "and that's why people don't want to fight it."

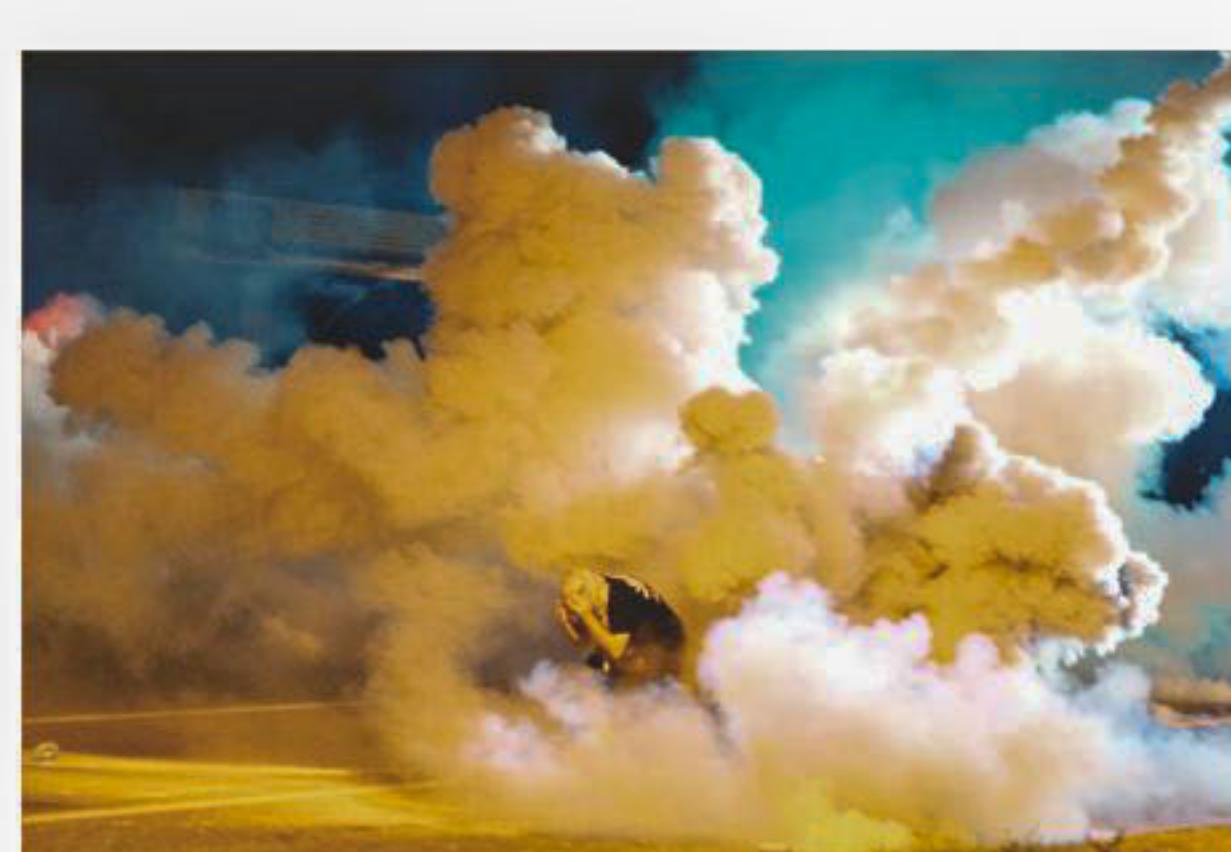
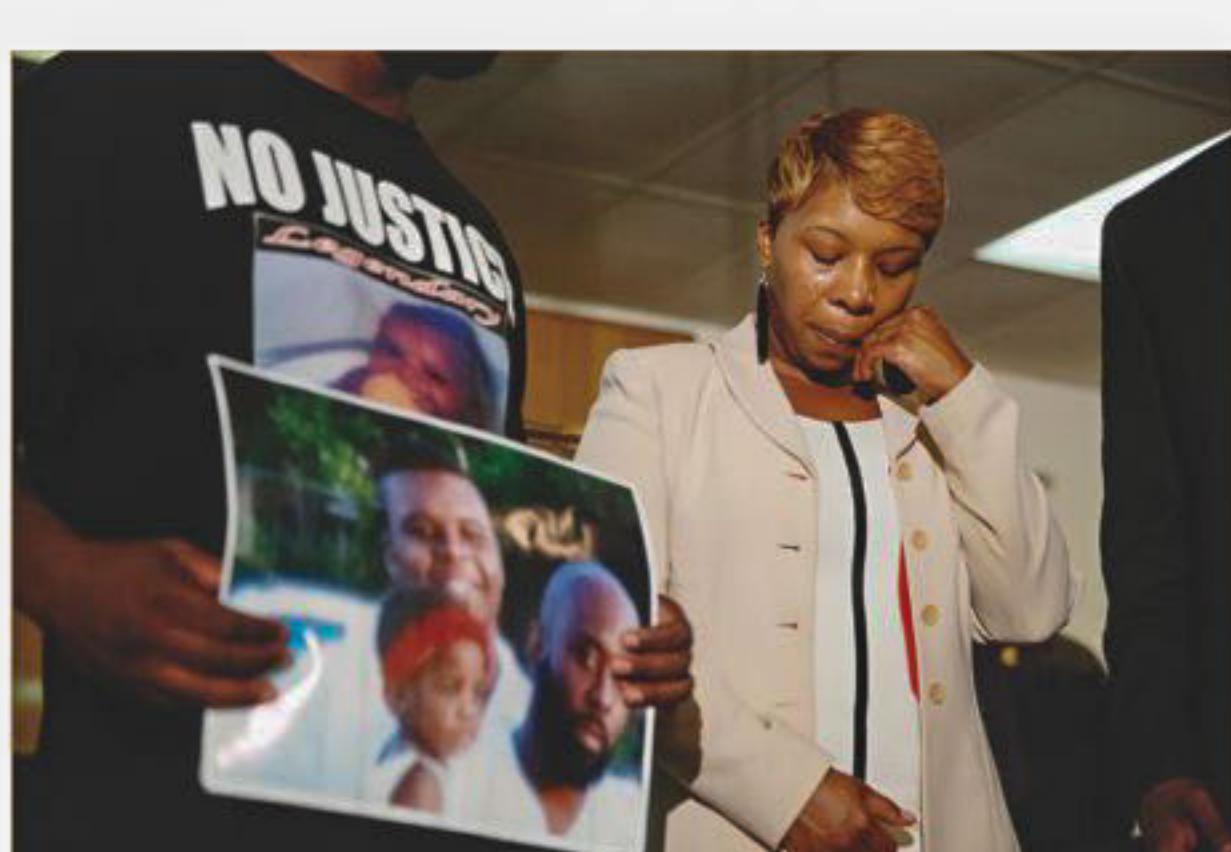
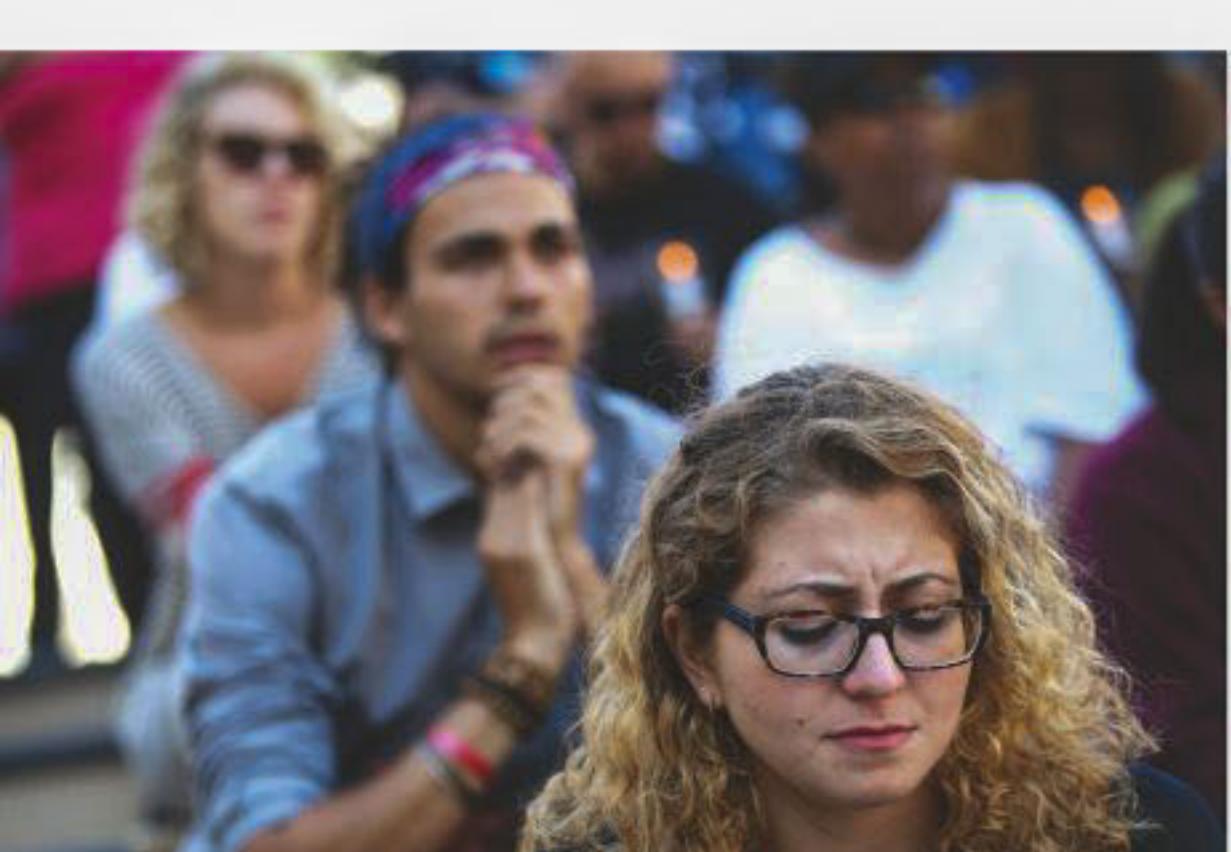


PHOTO: AFP/ BOSTON.COM

National Moment of silence; Brown's mother wipes away tears while father holds up a family photo; police use smoke bombs and teargas; a man backs away from police.



PHOTO: AFP/ BOSTON.COM

Get back! Get back!

An officer who pointed a semi-automatic assault rifle at a Ferguson, Missouri, protester and threatened to kill him -- a tense episode caught on video and posted online -- is off the job, at least for now.

The St Louis County Police Department announced Wednesday that a police officer from St Ann, Missouri, "has been relieved of duty and suspended indefinitely" over the incident.

The county police department laid out its version of the more recent incident, which happened shortly before midnight Tuesday. This account jibed with video later posted to YouTube.

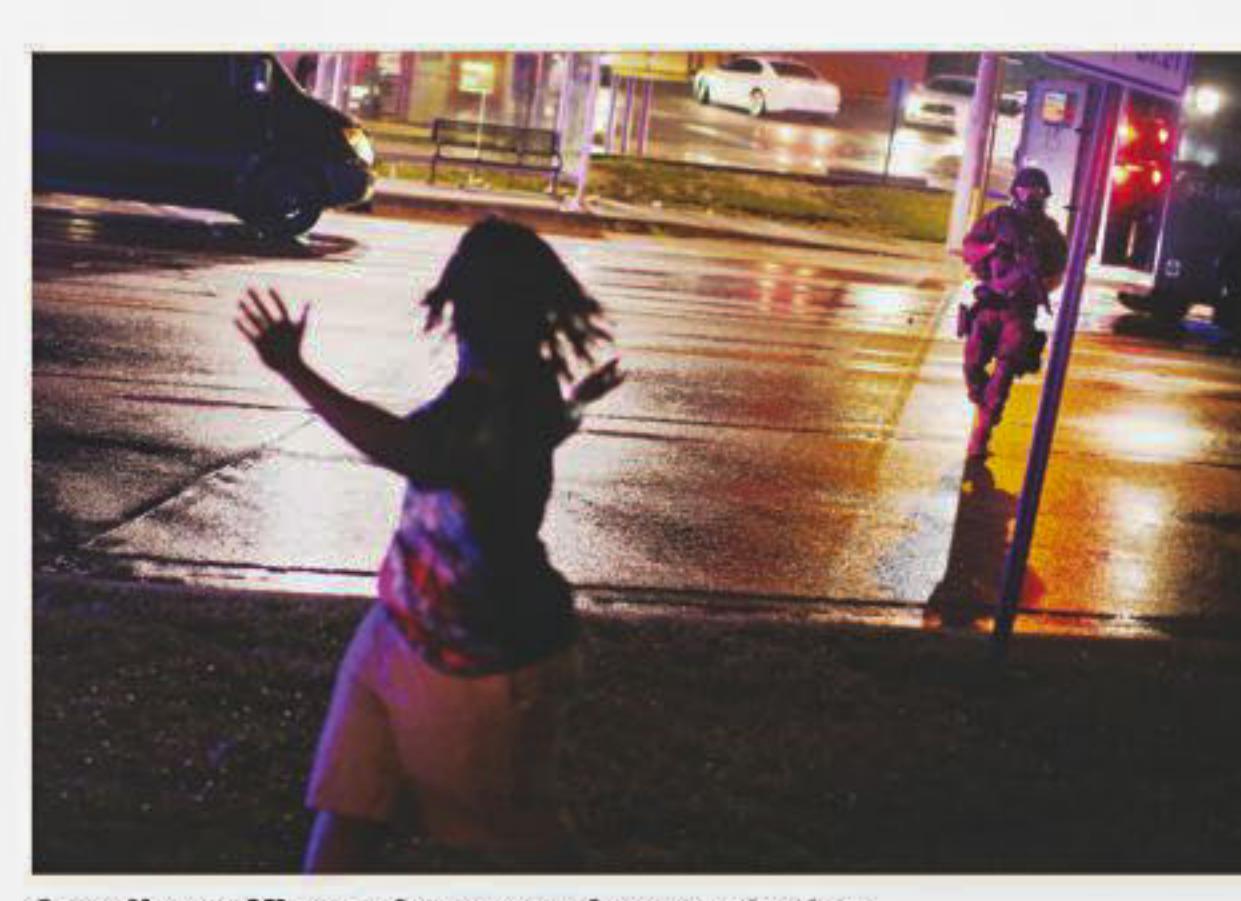
In the video, an officer can be seen walking around with his assault rifle raised, then pointing it in the direction of protesters.

"I'm going to f---ing kill you," he says. "Get back! Get back!"

The St Louis County Police described the protester involved in what it deemed "a verbal exchange" to be "peaceful." Another man in the crowd then says out loud, "Did you threaten to kill him?" The officer is asked for his name, to which he responds: "Go f--- yourself."

Protesters proceed to mock the officer before he's led away by another member of law enforcement.

Source: CNN, August 21



A police officer chases a demonstrator.