



THE FERGUSON LIE

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One of the most significant events of this century happened in the early afternoon of August 9, 2014. It took place in Ferguson, Missouri, a city on the outskirts of St. Louis. So embedded in the popular mind is this event that if you just say the name “Ferguson,” everyone knows what you’re talking about: police brutality and racial injustice.

President Barack Obama referred to it in a speech before the United Nations in September 2014: “I know the world also took notice of the small American city of Ferguson, Missouri, where a young man was killed, and a community was divided. So, yes—we have our own racial and ethnic tensions.”

The president understated the case. The shooting in Ferguson led to nights of riots and gave fuel to a new social movement, Black Lives Matter. Given its historical importance, it would be useful, then, to make sure we have our facts straight. So here’s a quiz to test your knowledge.

First question: True or false? A young, unarmed black man, Michael Brown, 19, was killed by a white police officer, Darren Wilson. The answer is true.

True or false? Wilson stopped Brown for no good reason. False.

Wilson, driving a police SUV, had just received a call on his radio that a local convenience store had been robbed. He saw two men walking in the middle of a nearby street who met the description of the store thieves. Wilson drove up to them.

When he asked the two men to move to the sidewalk, one of the men, Michael Brown, refused. Officer Wilson then attempted to get out of his car. But Brown blocked the door, punching the officer through the open window. As Brown tried to grab Wilson’s gun, a struggle ensued. Wilson managed to fire his gun, wounding Brown in the hand.

True or false? Michael Brown’s back was turned to Officer Wilson when he was shot and killed. False.

After being shot in the hand, Brown ran away from the police car. Wilson got out of the vehicle and pursued him. Brown then suddenly turned and charged Officer Wilson. Here’s how one witness, whose testimony closely fits the forensic evidence, described the scene: “[Brown] ran towards the officer, full charge. The officer fired several shots at him and... Mike Brown continuously came forward in the charging motion... And when he stopped, that’s when the officer ceased fire... When he charged once more, the officer returned fire with, I would say... three to four shots. And that’s when Mike Brown finally collapsed.”

The Brown family's own medical expert, respected pathologist Dr. Michael Baden, also conceded this point. The wounds Brown suffered were consistent with Brown charging toward Wilson, not running away.

True or false? Before Michael Brown was shot and killed, he raised his hands above his head and shouted, "Hands up. Don't shoot." False.

Federal investigators from the Department of Justice found no credible evidence that Brown ever raised his hands in a "don't shoot" gesture—or in any way heeded the officer's commands for him to surrender.

The federal report concluded that "...witnesses who originally stated Brown had his hands up in surrender recanted their original accounts, admitting that they did not witness the shooting or parts of it..." Investigators also concluded Brown never uttered the now iconic phrase.

Again, from the report: "The media has widely reported that there is witness testimony that Brown said 'don't shoot' as he held his hands above his head. In fact, our investigation did not reveal any eyewitness who stated that Brown said 'don't shoot.'"

Where did this phrase come from, then? The best guess is that it was made up by Brown's companion, Dorian Johnson, immediately after the shooting. Witnesses described him saying, "The police shot my friend and his hands were up." And, like a game of telephone, the phrase spread quickly throughout the neighborhood, morphing into "Hands up. Don't shoot." Picked up and amplified by the media, it then became an anthem for activists.

True or false? A local grand jury investigation and a federal investigation both concluded that Officer Wilson was justified in his use of force. True.

The local grand jury and the federal investigation supervised by Attorney General Eric Holder reached the same conclusion: Officer Wilson did nothing wrong. There was no basis on which to prosecute him.

Here's how Heather Mac Donald of the Manhattan Institute put it in her book, *The War on Cops*: "It was not a question of evidence 'not supporting' high-threshold civil rights charges; it was a question of evidence eviscerating virtually every aspect of the pro-Brown, anti-Wilson narrative."

There's another way to put this: The statement that an innocent black man was killed by a racist cop in Ferguson, Missouri is a lie. Those who say otherwise are either willfully deceiving you for their own purposes or are wholly ignorant of the facts.

Now you know. Act accordingly.

I'm Larry Elder for Prager University.