

Emerson rises up against Ferguson jury decision

by Agatha Kereere / Beacon Staff and Jackie Tempera / Beacon Staff • December 4, 2014

Members of the Emerson community are participating in protests and discussions after a Missouri grand jury decided not to bring charges against the white police officer who shot and killed an unarmed black teenager in August.

Many students said they are angry about the jury's decision not to indict Darren Wilson, the officer involved, questioning the case's larger racial context. Events around campus have sought to provide an open, safe space for these students to express their frustration, according to Tikesha Morgan, the multicultural student affairs director.

"Most people said it was unfair and wrong. People are still upset," Morgan said in an interview. "I thought, 'What do I say to students when I look into their faces?' I can't give them the answers, but what I can do is give the community a space to discuss."

On Aug. 9, Wilson, who has since resigned, shot and killed 18-year-old Michael Brown after an altercation in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson. Since the shooting, protests have emerged across the country, with people challenging Wilson's choice to shoot. After the grand jury announced on Nov. 24 that no criminal charges would be brought against Wilson, demonstrations intensified nationally.

Maria DiPasquale, a junior writing, literature, and publishing major, said she attended three protests around Boston along with numerous other Emerson students.

"There was a very powerful speak-out where many people of color in Boston spoke about their own experiences with police brutality, localizing the issue to the Boston area," she said.

Sarah Alli, a junior visual and media arts major, attended a protest in Times Square in New York City. She said she felt a general feeling of outrage from the crowd.

At Emerson, administrators encouraged discussion. In an email to the community after the grand jury's decision was announced, President M. Lee Pelton asked people to reflect on the verdict and consider where the nation stands in terms of equality.

"These events provide a valuable opportunity for the Emerson community to reflect on the root issues that make many Americans especially vulnerable to the trauma of poverty and violence," Pelton wrote in the email. "Our curriculum must be reflective and inspire our students to respond to these issues with compassion, rational inquiry and creative and innovative problem solving."

Morgan said she was pleased with Pelton's message and hoped to continue the conversation.

"It would be great to get people talking in an accepting and professional environment —

not just slaughtering each other on Facebook like I've seen on so many of my friends' feeds," she said.

On Tuesday, students met in the Cultural Center for a discussion about social responsibility and diversity. This event was sponsored by two multicultural organizations on campus, Emerson's Black Organization with Natural Interests and Asian Students for Intercultural Awareness.

EBONI will also host a day of silence on Friday, according to Morgan. Those participating will abstain from speaking from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. in Brown's memory.

Another event organized by several Emerson students, scheduled for Dec. 4, invites students to a walkout and protest on Boylston Street to demonstrate against injustices against people of color, including Brown.

Morgan said that when there is a public dialogue happening, it's important for everyone to contribute.

"We can't not have discussions, and it's one of the reasons why I push for all cultures to come together and help each other," Morgan said. "Tomorrow it could be you."