

## Eric Garner and Michael Brown: Deaths Without Indictments

Weeks before the shooting death of Michael Brown this August in Ferguson, Missouri, the death of Eric Garner set off its own wave of protests. The father of six died in July while being arrested for selling illegal cigarettes in Staten Island, after a police chokehold rendered him unable to breathe.

On Wednesday, a grand jury decided not to indict Daniel Pantaleo, the plainclothes NYPD officer who was making the arrest.

There are plenty of differences between the cases of Garner and Brown, but one particular contrast remains salient: There was no footage of Michael Brown's death, only eyewitness accounts and conjecture, leaving minds to imagine a standoff between an officer and a civilian, a standoff that ended with the image of Brown lying dead in the street for over four hours.

Garner's death has harrowing digital footprints. His attempted arrest and struggle for air were captured on a widely-disseminated video. His final words were "I can't breathe."

In the aftermath of the verdict, many will likely point to the fact that the coroner's report ruled Garner's death a homicide, and that chokeholds are expressly forbidden by the NYPD. As the *New York Daily News* pointed out, the autopsy also "determined the victim's asthma, obesity and high blood pressure were also contributing factors in his death." Some will cite the police claims that Garner was resisting arrest. Others are already contending that body cameras for police are not the answer.

It's the similarities that bind Brown and Garner—two unarmed black men who died during encounters with police officers who were both white and ultimately not punished. In New York, authorities are already preparing for protests.

Some noteworthy reactions have followed the announcement. First, from officer Daniel Pantaleo, who emphasized that he never meant to harm Garner:

I became a police officer to help people and to protect those who can't protect themselves. It is never my intention to harm anyone and I feel very bad about the death of Mr. Garner. My family and I include him and his family in our prayers and I hope that they will accept my personal condolences for their loss.

Others have pointed to the case of Ramsey Orta, who filmed the infamous video of Garner's death and who (unlike Pantaleo) was indicted by a grand jury back in August on weapons charges.

On Wednesday afternoon, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio issued a very anodyne statement in which he christened Garner's death "a terrible tragedy" and called for peaceful protests. New York's junior Senator Kirsten Gillibrand also urged peaceful protests, but expressed some modicum of outrage at the verdict:

"Nobody unarmed should die on a New York City street corner for suspected low-level offenses. I'm shocked by this grand jury decision, and will be calling on the Department of Justice to investigate."

In Washington, President Obama alluded to the Garner case as he spoke to a Tribal Nations Conference. He said he had been briefed by Attorney General Eric Holder and reiterated his administration's commitment to strengthening the relationship between communities and police.

I'm not interested in talk, I'm interested in action. We are not going to let up until we see a strengthening of the trust and a strengthening of our accountability that exists between our communities and our law enforcement.