

A year after Michael Brown's death, Ferguson has changed

Things have changed for law enforcements agencies, community leaders and residents after fatal shooting

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FERGUSON, Mo. — A year ago, Ferguson, Missouri, was a mostly quiet working-class suburban town. The uneasy relationship between its growing black population and its mostly white police force barely registered in local headlines.

Everything changed on Aug. 9, 2014, when a white police officer named Darren Wilson shot and killed Michael Brown, an unarmed black 18-year-old. The street confrontation launched the "Black Lives Matter" movement.

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One year after Ferguson

A year later, law enforcement has been under immense scrutiny and has undergone undeniable change.

Now the city government, and the streets themselves, look much different.

The city has a new police chief, a new city manager and a new municipal judge — all blacks who replaced white leaders. All Ferguson officers wear body cameras. The city council has new members, too, several of whom are black. And the business district at the center of last year's sometimes violent protests is rebuilding.

Mayor James Knowles III acknowledged that events after Brown's death exposed fissures that had long existed.

"For whatever reason in the past — either through lack of communication, lack of outreach — there were segments of the community that really felt like they were disaffected and not really part of the community," said Knowles, who is white. "I think a year later, what you see is a community that's much more engaged, wholly engaged."

Adrian Shropshire, 62, and many other Ferguson residents applaud the changes, especially those aimed at overhauling the police force.

"When it comes to the community and law enforcement coming together, we've both dropped the ball," said Shropshire. "Most conflicts start with not listening. Everyone's listening now."

Wilson resigned in November, shortly after a St. Louis County grand jury cleared him of wrongdoing. Through his attorneys, he declined interview requests from The Associated Press.

In March, the U.S. Justice Department found no grounds to prosecute Wilson. But at the same time, the government issued a report so critical of Ferguson's police and municipal court system that it hastened an upheaval in the town of 21,000 people, two-thirds of them black.

Within days of the federal report, top city officials resigned. The city chose the new judge, city manager and police chief on an interim basis.

The city has made it a priority to recruit more minority officers — an admittedly slow process that hinges on departmental turnover. At the time of the shooting, just three of Ferguson's 53 officers were black. The force now has five African-Americans among a total of 50 officers.

Within weeks of Brown's death, Ferguson police began wearing body cameras donated to the city. Steps have been taken to establish a citizen police review board. Reforms in the police department and municipal courts have led to fewer traffic stops and fewer fines — and dealt a blow to the city budget.

In the first six months of the fiscal year that ended June 30, the city had a revenue deficit of almost \$700,000 "due entirely to the shortfall in fines and public safety revenues," according to a February report from the city finance director.

But some residents question the improvements. Emily Davis says she has seen little change for the better, especially along the busy roadway that was looted and burned.

"People are still being targeted by police officers," she said.

In May, on what would have been Michael Brown's 19th birthday, family and community members cleared out a collection of stuffed animals, candles and other trinkets that for months served as a shrine in the middle of Canfield Drive, the site of the shooting. A permanent plaque in his memory was installed nearby.

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