

Missouri Judge Acquits Ex-Cop Jason Stockton of Murdering Black Motorist

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Footage from the shooting of Anthony Lamar Smith. Photo courtesy of St. Louis Post-Dispatch.[/caption]

Summary: A former St. Louis police officer was acquitted of the killing of Anthony Lamar Smith in 2011.

On Friday, a St. Louis judge found ex-police officer, Jason Stockley, not guilty of the death of a black motorist, Anthony Lamar Smith. According to *CNN*, Stockley faced first-degree murder charges for Smith's 2011 death.

"This Court, in conscience, cannot say that the State has proven every element of murder beyond a reasonable doubt, or that the State has proven beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant did not act in self-defense," St. Louis Circuit Judge Timothy Wilson said in his ruling.

Stockley waived his right to a jury trial, which meant that the decision was based solely on the judge, who also acquitted the former cop of armed criminal action.

St. Louis Circuit Attorney Kimberly Gardner said she was disappointed with the decision.

In December 2011, Anthony Lamar Smith was involved in a police chase over a suspected drug deal, and he was fatally shot by Stockley. Stockley said that he had shot Smith out of self-defense, and prosecutors claimed the cop had planted a gun to justify the shooting.

Friday's decision has some St. Louis locals wary that there will be possible violence. After the verdict was announced, groups of protestors gathered downtown and blocked roads before the police arrived to stop them.

Al Watkins, an attorney for Smith's fiancée, said that people had a right to be angry about the verdict.

"What the country needs to know is, every single person in our country, we have a right to be mad," said Watkins to *CNN*. "We have a right to disagree. We have a right to express our opinion. We have a right to protest."

Stockley's trial began on August 1, and *CNN* reported that Judge Wilson agonized over the evidence, which was footage from Stockley's vehicle dashcam as well as cell phone video of the shooting's aftermath. Wilson used these videos to determine whether or not Smith was in possession of a gun at the time of the shooting.

The prosecution said that there was no evidence of a gun in any of the videos and that Stockley could have planted a revolver. They said during the trial that Stockley's DNA was found on the weapon. Wilson, however, said there was no evidence to support this claim.

"This Court ... is simply not firmly convinced of the defendant's guilt," Wilson said in his decision. "Agonizingly, this Court has (pored) over the evidence again and again."

Wilson said that the gun was too large to be hidden by Stockley if he was trying to plant it and that the location of Smith's wound seems to corroborate that he was reaching to his right when he was shot. He also said that it was not out of the ordinary for a drug dealer like Smith to be in possession of a firearm.

Stockley was not initially charged for the 2011 death, but after the controversy that erupted after the killing of Michael Brown by Officer Darren Wilson in 2016, the then city attorney charged Stockley with first-degree murder.

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Source: *CNN*

What do you think of the verdict? Let us know in the comments below.

