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<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/16/missouri-governor-curfew-state-of-emergency-ferguson>

Missouri governor declares state of emergency and curfew in Ferguson

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Missouri Governor Jay Nixon, with Captain Ron Johnson second left, declares a state of emergency and curfew in Ferguson.

The governor of Missouri declared a state of emergency and imposed an overnight curfew in Ferguson on Saturday, in an attempt to quell disturbances that have rocked the city since police shot dead an unarmed teenager a week ago.

The unexpected announcement by Jay Nixon, made at a raucous press conference, marked another shift in law enforcement tactics which have veered from overtly militarised to inclusive

and conciliatory in an effort to contain protests over last Saturday's killing of Michael Brown, 18.

Nixon, a Democrat, said the latest measure were necessary after a small group of looters smashed windows, lobbed bottles and ransacked three stores on Friday night. The looters sabotaged not just property but the community's peaceful protests, he said.

"We must have – and maintain – peace," he said. "The eyes of the world are watching." The curfew was scheduled to start at midnight and be lifted at 5am, local time.

As the curfew approached, hundreds of people gathered in the main street where clashes have taken place over the past week. Some drove through in cars with music blaring, and passengers sitting on the roof or hanging out of windows.

Dozens of police officers dressed in riot gear, some holding assault rifles, started filing in more than two hours before midnight, lining the street and guarding store fronts from potential looters. Several people called abuse to them as they passed.

Heavy rain, thunder and lightning occasionally flashing on the horizon appeared to be doing little to deter the mainly young and African American crowd to return to their homes. Few present expressed confidence that the street would empty by midnight.

"They're letting this all build up," said Jamal Harris, 23. "They could be out here gradually correcting things, mingling with us. But people are drinking, smoking and getting fired up. It could go down again."

Observers from Amnesty International, which earlier on Saturday condemned curfews as the tool of dictators, were walking the street in bright yellow tshirts to monitor the situation.

At the earlier press conference, Nixon said the media would be given access to the curfew zone in order to observe it and ensure transparency.

Captain Ron Johnson of the Missouri state highway patrol, handed responsibility for policing the protests on Thursday when it was taken out of the hands of the St Louis County police, tried to placate angry shouts from activists who attended the press conference, held in a church.

The curfew did not mean a return to military-style policing, he promised. "We won't enforce it with tanks," he said. "We won't enforce it with teargas." But it remained unclear how a curfew could be maintained without the use of at least some force.

Community leaders who flanked Nixon and Johnson appeared to welcome the move but some residents and outside activists called it counterproductive and feared its enforcement could fuel a new round of mayhem.

"I don't think this was wise," Malik Shabazz, the president of Black Lawyers for Justice, told the Guardian. "This could backfire." Expecting people to stay indoors on a Saturday night was

unrealistic, he said, adding that the move also sabotaged increasingly organised efforts by volunteers to rein in the troublemakers. Shabazz, a former leader of the Black Panthers, and who has a history of anti-Semitic views, came to Ferguson to organise some of the protests.

Police and protesters have repeatedly clashed since Brown was fatally shot in sharply disputed circumstances. For the first few nights Ferguson police and St Louis county police used tear gas and armoured vehicles to try to cow largely peaceful demonstrations, prompting criticism from President Barack Obama and protests across the US.

Nixon tried to calm the situation by appointing Johnson, an African-American, the de facto commander on the ground. A savvy communicator, Johnson personally engaged with protesters and ordered his officers to stand back.

The approach brought peaceful, exuberant scenes on Thursday, with cavalcades of honking horns, but a small riot marred Friday's peaceful protests – and left Johnson facing criticism that his officers had stood by as business were ransacked. Jay Kanzler, a lawyer for the owner of Ferguson Market and Liquor, said police did nothing to stop the pillage. "They were told to stand down and I don't know why," he said.



Sam's Meat Market & More employee Steve Sumad surveys damage caused by looters.

Tanya Littleton, the owner of a beauty supply store, also criticised police after thieves stole hundreds of dollars' worth of hair extensions. Other residents streamed towards stores to form human barriers and curb the looting. In the morning they swept broken glass and tried to repair damage. So many turned up to help the owners had to turn people away.

Community leaders vowed to organise and form a better defence for subsequent nights, helped by members of the Outcast and Dominant Breed motorcycle clubs who lined their bikes up in front of stores. But the curfew announcement undercut the budding volunteer force. Continuing anger over Brown's death erupted at the press conference, which developed into a rowdy town

hall meeting. Several speakers demanded the arrest of Darren Wilson, the Ferguson police officer who shot Brown after an alleged scuffle in his patrol car.

“You need to charge that officer with murder,” one shouted, drawing cheers. “Indict him!” shouted another, to more cheers.

Friday’s violence came after the release by police of surveillance footage that implicated Brown in the theft of a packet of cigars from a convenience store a few minutes before he was shot. In the early hours of Saturday morning, a small crowd later looted the convenience store. A meat market was also looted and other businesses had windows smashed. Police did not intervene.

Brown’s family condemned the release of the film as a “character assassination” designed to smear the teenager and divert attention from the actions of police. The FBI, which is conducting a federal civil rights investigation into the shooting, and has had a copy of the footage for some days, made it known that it disapproved of its release, NBC reported.



Demonstrators protest at the site where Michael Brown was killed, on Canfield Drive in Ferguson.

Dozens of FBI agents are in Ferguson investigating the shooting. Key details of the incident remain unclear, including the number of shots fired. Wilson, who has been on the force for four years and is said to have a blemish-free disciplinary record, is on unpaid leave.

Neighbours told reporters who visited Wilson’s St Louis home that the officer and his family appeared to have left several days ago. The television channel KSDK apologised for showing the home in one of its newscasts.

A rally in Brown’s honour is due on Sunday afternoon. A test of normality will come on Monday, when Ferguson’s schools are due to reopen. At least one, Normandy High, was planning a minute’s silence in honour of Brown.