

# Police Misconduct Case Brought by Three Journalists Settles for More Than a Quarter Million Dollars

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Civil rights case by Al Jazeera America journalists tear-gassed by St. Charles County, Missouri Regional SWAT Team during protests settles

St. Louis (June 23, 2021) — Three Al Jazeera America journalists who were tear-gassed by the St. Charles County, Missouri Regional SWAT Team during the protests that followed the killing of Michael Brown by police in Ferguson, Missouri, in August 2014, have settled their federal civil rights case against the county for \$280,000. The settlement comes after defeating the SWAT Team member's qualified immunity claims. The Al Jazeera America journalists represented by Lathrop GPM partner Bernie Rhodes are Ash-har Quraishi (Correspondent), Marla Cichowski (Producer), and Sam Winslade (Photojournalist).

The settlement is significantly larger than settlements in prior cases brought by journalists who were victim of police misconduct in Ferguson. For example, a journalist who was thrown to the ground for trying to photograph the police and subsequently arrested settled with St. Louis County for \$8,500 in 2015. In 2016, four journalists who were wrongfully arrested for refusing to leave a McDonald's restaurant settled with both St. Louis County and St. Louis City for a total of \$87,500.

According to Rhodes, "There is a simple explanation why this case settled for an amount greater than previous police misconduct cases. Earlier settlements happened before America saw Derek Chauvin kneel on George Floyd's neck for nine minutes and 31 seconds as Chauvin squeezed the life out of Mr. Floyd. The jury's verdict finding Chauvin guilty of George Floyd's murder represents a turning point in America: jurors will no longer rely on law enforcement's version of what happened, especially where there is video that affirmatively disproves the police."

In this case, the day after the three Al Jazeera America journalists were tear-gassed in Ferguson, St. Charles County issued a statement denying that its SWAT Team fired the tear gas. Instead, the county claimed that its officers had "rescued" the journalists from an angry crowd. Later in the lawsuit, the county admitted that one of its officers had fired the tear gas claiming he did so because he feared for his safety because bottles and rocks were being thrown at officers from the area where the journalists were standing, preparing to do a live report.



Numerous videos of the incident proved that there were no protestors in the area and that no one was throwing anything at police. These videos convinced the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri and the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals to allow the case to go forward.

"Since 2017, more than 500 journalists have been attacked in the U.S., in many cases, by police. At a time when press freedom is under siege here at home and around the world, we must stand up for First Amendment rights," said Quraishi. "In our case, the official narrative of the police officers who assaulted us without justification or warning did not square with reality. Truth matters, and those in power must be held accountable."