

Arm police with cameras, not more military gear

Devin Rokyta/Moscow-Pullman Daily News

More than a couple of weeks have passed since the fatal shooting of an unarmed black teenager in Ferguson, Mo., by a white police officer, sparking days of riots and protests.

And we're still no closer to being able to accurately gauge what happened.

What we do know is that a teenager, 18-year-old Michael Brown, was shot at least six times and killed by Officer Darren Wilson. What led to the shooting is still murky.

Wilson says he fired the fatal shots because he feared for his life. During a news briefing following the incident, a St. Louis County Police official said Brown and Wilson had a physical altercation and that Brown tried to grab Wilson's gun before running away. According to the Washington Post, Wilson told investigators he shot Brown when the teen "charged at him."

Brown's family, however, says their son was shot while his hands were raised in the air in an execution-style slaying.

Clearly there's differing accounts of what transpired on that street. So what really happened?

The picture would be much more clear had the officer been wearing a body camera, as many in law enforcement do across the nation. Had Wilson had such a device activated, there would be little doubt as to whether his life was really in jeopardy or if Brown was a victim.

What we find confusing is how many of the nation's police forces are equipped with military-grade equipment and not these relatively inexpensive cameras. All that high-tech equipment, best suited for places like Iraq and Afghanistan, has done little to keep the peace in Ferguson, and likely only increased tensions. Who wouldn't be a little on edge at seeing officers decked out in camouflage and armed with assault rifles? Those armored personnel carriers and other vehicles don't help.

A simple camera, on the other hand, could have prevented the riots altogether.