

 **TODAY'S "SHORT TOPIC"**
**OFFICER WILSON:
INNOCENT? OR JUST
NOT GUILTY?**

By Stephen L. Bakke  March 22, 2015



Here's what provoked me:

Two letter writers took exception to using "innocent" to describe the status of Officer Darren Wilson relative to the Ferguson shooting of Michael Brown. After an extensive investigation by local officials and the Department of Justice, no charges were made. If not innocent, what is he?

Here's my response:

Officer Wilson: Innocent? Or Just Not Guilty?

David Spohn takes exception to the D.J. Tice column which reminded readers that Officer Darren Wilson was clearly innocent of potential charges in the shooting of Michael Brown (March 15). Spohn points out that: "... inability to present evidence sufficient for conviction is not the same as a declaration of innocence ... To speak of exoneration in the face of such a failure of justice is a dangerous leap of logic." ("What columnist says is an exoneration, others doubt"- March 22) The same day, Nick Dolphin agrees with: "'... not guilty' doesn't mean 'innocent.' O.J. wasn't guilty, either."

Gentlemen, O.J. was tried and found "not guilty." In that case, given the guilty verdict of O.J. in the civil proceeding, it apparently is appropriate to make an assertion that "not guilty" doesn't mean "innocent." However, Officer Wilson was never tried for anything; was never even charged with anything; there was NO evidence to support charges! You may not like it, but it's true!

Spohn and Dolphin apparently desire a nuanced system of justice in which anyone whose actions are investigated might still be subject to some form of punishment, whether charged or not. Perhaps they would choose professional censure and/or societal "excommunication."

Remember, our system of justice assumes innocence until tried and proven guilty. To follow these writers' advice would be a dangerous leap in the direction of a "two-bit" tyrannical society.