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Stand Your Ground law helps free Miami teens accused of MLK Day shooting that wounded 8

BY DAVID OVALLE

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Florida's "Stand Your Ground" law has helped free two teens of allegations that they took part in a gun battle that wounded eight people at a Martin Luther King Jr. Day Parade in Miami.

Prosecutors on Thursday declined to file charges against Gerrel "Woo" Brownlee, 18, and Robert "Bob" Britt, 17, in the Jan. 16 shooting that caused panic and a stampede at the annual celebration in Liberty City.

In arresting the pair, Miami-Dade police originally said that Brownlee and Britt were part of a gun battle that broke out between two rival street gangs at the event meant to honor the iconic civil-rights leader.

The firefight left five teens and children and three adults with wounds, while videos and social-media posts captured the chaos of the aftermath. The outrage surrounding the case was sufficient that Miami-Dade Police Director Juan Perez announced the arrests at a county commission meeting.

Some witnesses remained cooperative, a State Attorney's Office spokesman said, but a "conflict in the evidence" and legal issues surrounding "mutual combatants" under Florida's self-defense law made proving the case to a jury difficult.

Brownlee remains in jail awaiting trial on allegations of illegally carrying a weapon and auto theft.

Britt was released from custody. His lawyer, Antonio Valiente, said police "rushed to judgment" be-

cause of the pressure created by publicity surrounding the shooting.

"Robert was innocent, period," Valiente said. "So many videos circulating on social media, but not a single one showed Robert doing anything illegal. In fact, it showed him being shot at — and never in possession of any gun."

Miami-Dade prosecutors said the case will continue to be investigated.

Critics say Florida's 2005 Stand Your Ground law has made prosecuting people involved in public gun battles difficult, with each side asserting they had no duty to retreat in the face of a threat. The law — which received worldwide scrutiny after the 2012 killing of Miami Gardens teenager Trayvon Martin by an armed neighborhood watchman — also gave judges greater leeway to grant immunity to people they believed acted in self-defense.

Lawmakers are also considering changing the law making it more difficult for prosecutors to prove someone did not act in self-defense, a measure being decried by law-enforcement and gun-control critics.