

Massive police presence in Michigan town

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Benton Harbor, Michigan remained generally calm Wednesday night, as a massive police presence deterred protesters after two previous nights of rioting. Heavy rain also contributed to preventing any new disturbances. Angered over the death of a man pursued in a high-speed police chase in the early morning hours Monday, hundreds of city residents had taken to the streets Monday and Tuesday nights.

Terrance Devon Shurn, 28, was pursued into Benton Harbor by police from nearby Benton Township at speeds of up to 100 miles per hour. He died instantly when his motorcycle slammed into an abandoned home. His death outraged residents of this predominantly black city in southwest Michigan who have endured years of pervasive poverty as well as harassment and brutality at the hands of the police.

In the two previous nights of rioting, crowds estimated at more than 300 gathered in the area of Empire Avenue and Broadway, near the site of the fatal crash. Some in the crowd hurled rocks at police vehicles and there were reports of passing motorists being dragged from their cars and beaten.

Protesters set fire to at least 19 houses, most of them unoccupied. Many of these burned to the ground as firefighters were prevented from reaching the blazes by the rock-throwing crowd. Police reported 13 arrests over the two days and 15 injuries.

Local authorities were determined to prevent residents from taking any renewed action Wednesday night. About 250 police officers were deployed, including state police from across lower Michigan, the Berrien County Sheriff's Department and the Van Buren, Kalamazoo and Macomb county sheriff's departments. The police presence included armored personnel carriers, tactical response teams, dogs and helicopters.

Police patrolled in force in the five-block area around Empire Avenue and Broadway, the center of the

previous two days' violence. They strictly enforced a 10:30 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew for those 16 and under and dispersed any gathering crowds, even those on private property. They threatened to arrest without warning anyone failing to obey police orders.

Local church leaders from the Benton Harbor Ministerial Alliance campaigned in the community throughout the day Wednesday urging calm. In their comments to reporters the group emphasized, however, that the reaction of residents to Monday's police-chase death was indicative of deep-going social tensions in the community. They spoke of rampant poverty and unemployment in the area and the bleak future for young people, who attend dilapidated schools and have few recreational opportunities. The city's one public recreation center has been shut down.

Terrance Shurn's death follows a string of fatalities area residents blame on local police. On September 1, 2000, 11-year-old Terrance Patterson died when he was struck by a car driven by a Benton Harbor man trying to elude Benton Township police pursuing him in a high-speed chase. The driver, Kenneth Flowers, 22, is serving a 15-40 year prison term for second-degree murder, while the police officer was found not at fault.

Another young man, Arthur Partee, was strangled to death by police only two months ago. And in 1991, a 16-year-old Benton Harbor boy drowned under mysterious circumstances after being chased by police. The youth's death was examined in the 1998 book by Alex Kotlowitz, *"The Other Side of the River: A Story of Two Towns, a Death, and America's Dilemma."*

Benton Harbor resident Nanette Partee told the *Associated Press* that the area's young African-American residents are angry over constant police harassment, particularly by the Benton Township police. Commenting on Monday morning's police chase, she said, "Some people say Terrance wouldn't stop because he feared for his life."



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