

# Toledo, Ohio: Neo-Nazi march sparks riot

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A riot broke out in Toledo, Ohio on Saturday, provoked by the plans of a group of neo-Nazis to march through the predominantly black neighborhood. Police used pepper spray, mace and wooden bullets against the crowd and arrested at least 60 anti-Nazi protesters.

City authorities had granted a march permit to the National Socialist Movement, which brought a dozen members from out of town. The group calls itself “America’s Nazi Party.” A spokesman for the group said it had come to the city because of “black criminal behavior.”

News of the planned demonstration provoked widespread anger among North Toledo residents, and front lawns throughout the area were peppered with “Erase the Hate” signs in anticipation of the march. According to the *Toledo Blade*, at about 11 a.m. the group of uniformed neo-Nazis gathered on the east side of Woodward High School, shouting racist slogans and carrying signs reading “White People Unite! Fight for Your Race!”

Toledo police, some on horseback, were stationed nearby to protect the neo-Nazis. Some 20 minutes later a cordon of 40 more police officers surrounded the marchers to protect them in preparation for the march. Some of the cops began to arm themselves with plastic shields.

Meanwhile, a crowd of counter-demonstrators had gathered across the street, chanting slogans such as “Nazi Hate Has Got to Go,” “Black and White Unite,” and “No Racists in Toledo.” At about 11:35 a.m., according to the *Blade*, protesters began throwing rocks at the neo-Nazis and the police, and police made their first arrest.

Several minutes later, the neo-Nazis marched to nearby Woodrow Wilson Park. Just before noon, Toledo police began firing the first of many canisters of teargas at local residents gathering to protest the march. The crowd, numbering now in the hundreds, began

throwing bricks and rocks at buildings and passing vehicles, according to the *Blade*.

Around noontime, police made a decision to cancel the march. Shouting “censorship”—and giving the Nazi salute—the neo-Nazis eventually agreed to leave the area and drove away by car.

The standoff between police and rioters, however, intensified. A pitched battle ensued in the area over the next several hours, with 30 or more vehicles pelted with rocks, including police and emergency services vehicles. The crowd numbered from 300 to as many as 600.

An estimated 400 Toledo cops, or about 60 percent of the city force, were on the scene. Police fired on the crowds with pepper spray, mace and wooden “knee-knocker” pellets. At about 2:15 p.m., Toledo Mayor Jack Ford, First Chief Mike Bell and a member of the local clergy arrived on the scene. Ford and Bell addressed the crowd by megaphone, trying unsuccessfully to disperse the anti-Nazi demonstrators and calm the violence.

The *Blade* reports that some in the crowd looted several local businesses, including a convenience store and a bar, which was set afire. Bricks, stones and shattered glass littered the streets. Initial estimates of damage were in the tens of thousands of dollars.

Police began a mass sweep and made about 60 arrests—including 43 adults and 17 juveniles, charged primarily with aggravated rioting, assault and vandalism. Mayor Ford told the press that gang members were among those arrested. By 4 p.m. the crowd had largely dispersed.

The decision of city authorities to grant the neo-Nazis permission to march in North Toledo was a clear provocation. In a previous interview with the *Toledo Blade*, Bill White, a landlord from Roanoke, Virginia, who serves as a spokesman for the group, commented that it did not want to “kill” minorities—“We just want

them to be removed from our country.”

The white supremacists claimed they came to North Toledo to support white resident John Szych, who had been feuding with a black neighbor and gang members in the area. Szych acknowledges that these tensions exist, but strenuously denies that he invited or encouraged the neo-Nazis to come. “I don’t need them to defend my rights,” he told the *Blade*.

The social tensions that came to a head in North Toledo on Saturday have been exacerbated by growing unemployment and poverty. Toledo, once a bustling center of auto production, has seen the loss of thousands of jobs over the past several decades.

Overall, more than 8,000 manufacturing jobs have moved out of the city since 2000. Young residents of North Toledo seeking to enter the workforce today stand no chance of finding a decent-paying job in an auto factory. The unemployment rate for blacks stands at 14.2 percent in Lucas County, where Toledo is located.

Jeep, which once employed tens of thousands of workers, is a shell of its former self. The Toledo North Plant, adjacent to the North Toledo neighborhood, began operations in 2001 as part of DaimlerChrysler. With about 2,800 workers, it employs 1,400 fewer workers than the old Jeep facility on Jeep Parkway.

Poverty figures released in August by the US Census Bureau show Toledo ranked 40th last year among the nation’s 70 poorest cities, dropping somewhat from 20th poorest the previous year. A total of 16.5 percent of all Toledoans lived in poverty in 2004.

In Lucas County, 32.4 percent of all African Americans, and 44.6 percent of black children are poor. These figures grossly underestimate the real level of poverty, since they are based on the federal poverty line of \$18,850 for a family of four—an absurdly low cut-off point.

The explosion this weekend in Toledo is an expression of the social and class tensions that simmer just below the surface of society, not only in Toledo, but in cities across the US. These tensions have been fueled by worsening economic conditions for broad sections of the working class, and aggravated by distrust and hatred for politicians—both Democratic and Republican—at the local and federal level. The election of Jack Ford, a black Democrat, as Toledo mayor in 2001 has done nothing to alleviate the conditions of

Toledo workers, either black or white.

The devastation in North Toledo is typical of conditions that exist in city after city across America. The anger over these conditions has been exacerbated in the recent period by the Bush administration’s response to the Hurricane Katrina disaster. Incidents such as the unprovoked beating of a 64-year-old black resident, a former schoolteacher, by New Orleans police last weekend—which was videotaped and televised nationwide—add fuel to this fire. (See “Videotaped police beating in New Orleans”)

A new NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll shows Bush’s overall approval rating has plummeted to 39 percent, the lowest of his presidency. The same poll reported that a mere 2 percent of African-Americans approve of Bush’s performance.



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