

US: Los Angeles police violently disperse immigrant rights demonstration

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Police violently broke up an immigrant rights demonstration in Los Angeles on the evening of Tuesday, May 1, attacking demonstrators with tear gas, rubber bullets and batons. Many were injured, including TV news reporters and legal observers.

The crackdown took place in MacArthur Park, at the heart of a Los Angeles neighborhood mostly populated by Central American and Mexican immigrant workers. Hundreds of people had gathered at the park at the conclusion of demonstrations involving tens of thousands throughout the city.

An eyewitness account by Ernesto Arce of KPFK radio indicated that the police initiated a deliberate provocation when police cars drove into the center of the rally, disrupting a performance there. The squad cars were followed by motorcycle cops, and these were followed by riot-equipped police at 5:30 pm.

Less than an hour later, at 6:15 pm, the police descended on the crowd, which included families, reporters and street peddlers. The attack lasted half an hour. People that did not move quickly enough were hit in the back of their legs with police batons

Arce described how the riot squad chased people out of the park. Some of the injured were hit in the back with rubber bullets. Children and families were pushed or struck with batons. The police assault did not stop even after clearing the park. They chased protesters down 7th Street, a major thoroughfare, for six blocks.

Over a dozen volleys of rubber bullets were fired into the crowd. Other witnesses reported seeing police officers beating people with rifle butts and clubs and seeing parents shielding their children. There were reports from the media and from demonstrators that some police officers had removed their badges.

Witnesses that spoke to KPFK radio indicated that police officers provocatively taunted protesters.

News videos show images of people, including camera operators and reporters, being shoved to the ground and beaten. The beatings took place even as people were complying with police orders and moving out of the park. At least ten people were injured, most with head and neck wounds.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported, "Late Tuesday, a spokesman for Telemundo confirmed that one reporter and three camera operators from Channel 52, the Spanish-language TV station, had been injured and had been taken to a hospital by police. Another TV station, Fox 11, showed video of a Fox camerawoman apparently being struck by a baton-wielding police officer."

A videotape of the Fox news reporter's encounter with the police can be found [here](#).

The *Times* quoted Hamid Khan of the South Asia Network, who was present at the park, describing the police action as an "atrocious."

LA City Councilman Herb Wesson, an African American, witnessed the police riot and compared it attacks on Civil Rights demonstrators in the 1960s: "I had a flashback of 45 years ago, It was a nightmare to me," said Wesson.

Police accounts blamed anarchists that were attempting to block a thoroughfare. Officials claimed that some demonstrators threw stones or bottles at police officers. Even if this were true, the response was clearly excessive and indiscriminate. The LA police department evidently wanted to make a show of force in clearing the demonstration, and have seized on the alleged bottle-throwing as a pretext.

Public officials scrambled on Tuesday to contain the public outrage at the brutality, while justifying the police behavior. On Tuesday, the Los Angeles City Council voted 12 to 0 for an emergency motion to

request that the Police Commission and LA Police Chief William Bratton testify before the entire Council.

John Mack, president of the Los Angeles Police Commission, declared that his organization will initiate an investigation of the incident. Any such investigation will be a whitewash of police actions, a fact indicated by Mack when he sought to blame “some individual officers.”

Both Bratton and LA Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa sought to shift blame onto demonstrators, suggesting that some demonstrators may have thrown rocks at the police. Given videotapes of the incident, however, Bratton was forced to acknowledge, “Some of the officers’ actions ... were inappropriate in terms of use of batons and possible use of nonlethal rounds fired.”

Villaraigosa pledged an “immediate and transparent review,” however he indicated the nature of this review by again seeking to justify the police brutality, saying that those who threw rocks at police instigated the violence, but that “members of the media and the public appear to have been caught in the exchange between the LAPD and these instigators.”

This is a fraud. Video evidence clearly shows police officers roughing up nonviolent protesters, seizing and throwing camera equipment, and striking media representatives who were filming the incident with batons.

Legal observers, volunteers sent by the Lawyers Guild, insisted that no order to disperse was given before the police began their assault. Only after the shooting began did a police helicopter give an order to disperse, an order that few people actually heard.

That, added to the video evidence, indicates that that the police provocation and the LAPD disciplined sweep that followed was intended to create a pretext to intimidate immigrants and workers peacefully assembling to demand their rights.



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