

Police beating of Maryland student caught on video

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Police officers from Prince George's County, Maryland, savagely beat an unarmed University of Maryland student on March 3. The attack came to light on April 12 when a video of the incident was released by the family of the student, John McKenna.

The video, which was taken by a fellow student and uncovered by a detective working for McKenna's family, can be viewed on *YouTube* here.

Police also attacked another student, Benjamin Donat, though this is not shown in the video. The events took place in College Park, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, DC, where the main campus of the state university is located.

McKenna, 21, sustained head injuries resulting in a concussion. He required eight stitches and was badly bruised all over his body. Donat also suffered bruising and head injuries, leading to memory loss for several days.

Celebrating a win by the University of Maryland basketball team, McKenna and dozens of other students were reveling in the street, while heavily armed police on horseback and in riot gear waited nearby. The police originally claimed that McKenna and Donat had assaulted an officer and struck at police horses. The documents charging them stated that the two youths sustained injuries as a result of being inadvertently kicked by the horses.

The contents of the video directly contradict the police account of the incident. In fact, McKenna did not attack the police and was not acting in an aggressive or threatening manner. Rather, having approached an officer on horseback, he was then slammed into a wall by another riot-gear-clad officer on foot, before being repeatedly beaten with clubs by three cops while lying defenseless on the ground.

Police arrested or cited 28 people following the

basketball match, 23 of them students.

On Wednesday, University of Maryland officials demanded an investigation into the disappearance of university surveillance videos of the area around the scene of the incident. When lawyers for the two youths subpoenaed the university to hand over the footage, it was discovered that one 90-minute tape had disappeared. When it turned up, two minutes of material covering the time that the police assaults took place was missing.

A spokesperson from the university denied that there had been a police cover-up, but called on Maryland State Police to investigate the disappearance of the tape and the alteration of the footage.

Local ABC news affiliate Channel 7 reported that the campus official in charge of the video surveillance system, Joanne Ardovini, is married to one of the mounted police officers involved in the assault on McKenna.

Following the disclosure of the video, the police dropped efforts to prosecute McKenna, who had been charged with assaulting a police officer and disorderly conduct.

"The video shows the charging documents were nothing more than a cover, a fairy tale they made up to cover for the officers' misconduct," Chris Griffiths, the lawyer for both students, told the *Washington Post*. "The video shows gratuitous violence against a defenseless individual," he added.

The youths are planning to sue the officers involved, according to Griffiths. A statement from the McKenna family called for the police officers involved in the attack to be jailed.

Prince George's County police chief, Roberto Hylton, attempted to defend the officers and smear the students. He told a press conference that while he was "disappointed" at the actions of the officers involved, they were responding to allegations that things had been

thrown at police and fires started. “There is a two-party fault here,” said Hylton.

Until recently, Hylton’s department had been under the oversight of the US Justice Department, which was monitoring Prince George’s County police in response to previous allegations of brutality.

The savage actions of the police and the military-type operation used to deal with the crowd watching the college match are expressions of what has become a norm in American society: the criminalization of youth and their routine brutalization at the hands of the police.

In September last year, during the summit of the G20 group of nations in Pittsburgh, a police SWAT team attacked students—both protestors and bystanders—at the University of Pittsburgh, assaulting them with batons, and firing tear gas and pellet bags. Clad in full riot gear, police also raided student dorms, threatening those who voiced opposition with arrest.

Police violence and harassment of youth in the inner cities are especially common.

Officers in the US are using Taser stun guns, which are known to be potentially lethal, against youth. A police officer in the suburbs of Indianapolis was suspended this month after slapping and Tasering a ten-year-old child.

There are over 90,000 youths in juvenile detention in the United States, part of a vast prisons system that incarcerates a higher percentage of the population than any other country in the world. In recent years, almost all states have made it easier to try children as adults, often sentencing them to long periods in prison.

A January 2010 report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that 12 percent of incarcerated youth had been sexually assaulted in the previous year, mainly by facility staff. The bureau acknowledges that their findings are likely an underestimation of the extent of abuse, as many youths are reluctant to admit to being victimized.



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