

Seattle police beating caught on tape

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After being suppressed by the local media for several weeks, a video surfaced on May 7 showing Seattle police using racist language while beating an innocent man held on the ground.

The incident comes barely a year after a similarly brutal assault was caught on tape (See: Seattle, Wash.: Video captures attack on teenage girl at police station).

The video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=atni33H-5oA>), taken by a freelance cameraman, shows two suspects detained by Seattle police. One man is kicked and stepped on by officers while lying prone on the pavement. Detective Shandy Cobane from the city's "Gang Unit" yells at the man, "I'm going to beat the f___ing Mexican piss out of you, homey." He then proceeds to kick the man in the face. A female officer, since identified as Mary Woollum, steps on the back of the man's knee with her full weight. Although bloodied and obviously dazed, no effort was made to provide him with medical help.

The man was later released without being booked or charged.

Yesterday, civil rights leaders speaking at a news conference in the city described the attack as a hate crime and demanded that the Federal Bureau of Investigation launch a full inquiry into the matter.

On April 17, Seattle police began an internal investigation into what happened but kept quiet about the incident, so as to keep it from becoming public. At least one major media outlet in the Seattle area, local Fox news affiliate KCPQ-TV, assisted in the cover-up.

Initially refusing to air the video, the television station subsequently fired the cameraman when it was released by another news station. In the aftermath of the video's ultimate airing by ABC news affiliate KIRO 7, KCPQ-TV has been attempting to gain legal rights over the material, claiming the video belongs to them.

The cameraman, who insists that he was working off

the clock when he shot the scene, publicly stated that he believes the FOX news affiliate refused to show the video in order to protect the police.

Neither of the two officers involved in the assault has been dismissed for their conduct. Cobane was reassigned to another division. It is unknown whether Woollum was similarly dealt with.

Seattle Police Chief John Diaz attempted to justify the officers' actions in an interview with KIRO 7, insisting, "In the heat of the moment, people make mistakes.... I understand that." He went on to claim that the city's law enforcement agency has "a strong commitment [to] insuring that we hold all our officers accountable."

The city's Mayor Mike McGinn said he was "disappointed" with what happened. However, in reply to a question by KIRO 7 about whether he was bothered by the efforts of the Seattle Police to keep the incident out of the public eye, the mayor simply stated, "I have a very strong relationship with Chief Diaz."

The use of this kind of violence against suspects is not an anomaly. Last March, revelations came to light that Sheriff's Deputy Paul Schene savagely beat an unarmed teenager in custody in King County, the regional municipality that includes Seattle. Schene later claimed, in a legal proceeding that ended in mistrial, that he attacked the girl because he was afraid of her.

This latest incident of police brutality comes just weeks after the passage in Arizona of SB 1070, a law that legalizes the profiling and persecution of undocumented immigrants by the police. That legislation, variants of which are now being debated in state legislatures in other parts of the country, gives the police the right to stop people on the basis of the mere suspicion that they might be in the country illegally and arrest them if they are unable to produce, on the spot, the required documentation.

SB 1070 gives a green light to the targeting of

Hispanics and all others deemed to be “foreign looking” by police officers. It fosters and legitimizes the sort of brutal racism expressed in this latest police assault in Seattle.



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