

Oakland Police Department implicated in systematic abuse

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The Oakland Police Department, which narrowly escaped total federal control in December, has failed in its court mandate to curb its abusive conduct. To carry this out, Thomas Frazier was appointed Oakland's first compliance director by a federal judge March 4.

On January 31, the independent monitor for the Oakland Police Department released an eighty-one page report showcasing events from late 2012. The monitor found that every reported case of "disproportional" police aggression was indeed in violation of police requirements. In one instance the monitor reported police "pointed their firearms at a sleeping 19-month-old child" while investigating a misdemeanor charge.

The report's chief concern is that the OPD systematically ignores or covers up the violations that officers commit. Officers refuse to identify each other's abuses. There is no oversight, especially when it comes to high-ranking members of the department.

The monitor who wrote the report awaits a federally appointed compliance director who is supposed to "shape up" the department this year. While greater federal control could bring small cosmetic changes to the department, it will neither ameliorate the city's social crisis nor alter the response of increased police repression.

In the eastern part of Oakland, more than 35 percent of the population is below the federal poverty line. Oakland has seen its unemployment rate soar as high as 17.8 percent. Housing values have recovered partially, but by early 2012, home values in Oakland were still less than half of their peak.

The mayor's response has been to gut the city. Five elementary schools were shut down last year. City employees have been laid off in the thousands. Oakland is in the process of closing fifteen of its nineteen libraries. More school closures are planned for this year and 5 percent of the total 2012 budget will be cut for the 2013 fiscal year. Like other California cities, Oakland is

debating bankruptcy to cut pension costs. (See "The Stockton, California bankruptcy: A warning to all workers")

A result of this destitution has been a sharp increase in crime, particularly burglary. The *Wall Street Journal* reports that "there were 126 murders in Oakland in 2012, up 22 percent from 103 the year before... burglaries rose 43 percent and robberies were up 24 percent."

Throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, cities trimmed their police force for two years in the wake of the financial crisis. In response to the Occupy protests, cities quickly reversed this trend. While Oakland's total budget is just under \$1 billion, the city spent nearly \$4 million in suppressing Occupy Oakland, \$2.9 million of that in police overtime. Now with dramatic increases in burglary and murder, the mayor is further bent on increasing its police force despite deep budget cuts.

California will see a massive police recruitment effort this year. The San Jose *Mercury Times* reports that Oakland's police department will see its ranks increased by 18 percent in 2013.

In January, the OPD hired the consulting firm of William Bratton, the ex-police chief of both Los Angeles and New York. Bratton, notorious for aggressive pre-emptive policing, such as New York's "Stop-And-Frisk" policy, will counsel the OPD for \$250,000 a year. Bratton's appointment reveals the OPD's intentions.

Bratton was brought on as an advisor to the British government in suppressing the riots following the police shooting of Mark Duggan. While Bratton was advising, thousands of British youth were arrested, some were sentenced to years in jail for posts they made on Facebook, and the police adopted a policy of seeking to deny bail regardless of evidence or suspected crime.

Civil rights attorney Dan Siegel said the hiring was like "thumbing your nose" at the federal judge who nearly suspended the city's control over its police. The dispute

between the OPD and the federal government is, however, a debate not on the need to increase state repression, but on how to best carry it out.

Thomas Frazier, the federal compliance director who will “shape up” the department, oversaw the review of the OPD’s “flawed” crackdown on Occupy. Frazier’s critique included such helpful suggestions as, “All existing OPD chemical agents and less-lethal impact munitions should be replaced with state of the art munitions,” and “Due to the frequency of crowd management and crowd control incidents that occur in the City of Oakland, it is critical for OPD to develop a trained cadre of OPD professional staff, mid-level leadership, command and executive level personnel who are trained and qualified as Incident Management Team leaders.”

With the help of Bratton and Frazier, Oakland is exploring new “creative” tactics to control the population. In February, Oakland police came close to declaring a state of emergency. The police chief claimed that 90 percent of all crime since last August was due to gang rivalry sparked by the shooting of a 16-year-old girl in 2012. This was utterly fabricated. As the *San Francisco Chronicle* noted, the chief’s statistics meant that “51 slayings and 1,600 robberies” were due to the killing of this one girl. In truth, the state of emergency would not have been a response to a particular act of violence, as the chief claimed, but rather a reaction to a *general* rise in crime, particularly theft.

On another note, Oakland County’s police chief is pushing for the implementation of drones to patrol the skies of Oakland and neighboring cities. Also, zones of control have been set up in Oakland which, according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, will allow more “preemptive policing,” something that Bratton and Frazier excel at.



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