

# Thirteen arrested at California protest against acquittal of police who murdered homeless man

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20 January 2014

Police arrested 13 out of a crowd of about 200 demonstrators Saturday outside the Fullerton, California, police station. The protest was directed against the January 13 not guilty verdicts in favor of two former Fullerton officers, Manuel Ramos and Jay Cicinelli, charged with killing 37-year-old Kelly Thomas, a homeless, mentally ill man, in the course of a savage, video recorded beating.

The victim's family—his father Ron Thomas, mother Cathy Thomas and sister Tina Kinser— spoke to the crowd, which included family members of other people killed by police violence. Ron Thomas, in particular, thanked the crowd for the demonstrations shortly after his son's murder that led to the filing of the criminal charges.

Demonstrators carried signs with large blowups of Thomas' bloody face captioned "This was the trial cops gave Kelly," and demanding an end to police violence, with slogans such as "The police should protect the innocent, not murder them."

The day-long protest swelled until demonstrators filled Commonwealth Street, in front of the Police Station. Strangely, no uniformed officers appeared to help control traffic, and cars drove through the crowd dangerously close to demonstrators. The sounds of passing vehicles honking in support were deafening.

Apparently, there were several officers working undercover among the demonstrators, identifying certain people for later arrests.

Fullerton made two arrests for minor vandalism, one demonstrator who "chalked" a slogan and another who spray-painted an anarchist symbol on a wall of the Police Department.

The most significant incident—captured on video and

wildly exaggerated in media reports—was a short-lived pushing match between a young woman wearing a bandana over her face and a camerawoman for a local television news outlet. The news crew retreated into a van and called 911 as demonstrators chanted and yelled outside.

A video shows that the first push was by the camerawoman, apparently in response to the demonstrator putting her sign directly in front of the camera. When the demonstrator pushed back, much harder, another masked demonstrator held the demonstrator back, bringing the incident to a harmless conclusion.

Regardless, dozens of Fullerton officers in full riot gear, accompanied by a heavily armored, military-style truck—a clear display of intimidation in response to overwhelmingly peaceful demonstrators—appeared suddenly to announce a provocative, unnecessary and probably unconstitutional "dispersal order." Ten more demonstrators were then arrested over the next few hours for refusing to leave.

A Fullerton police spokesman raised the total of announced arrests to 14 by lumping in a shoplifter arrested at a nearby grocery store. He also claimed that Fullerton officers were reviewing video, and that there would likely be more arrests.

The trivial and ultimately harmless pushing between the female demonstrator and the camerawoman contrasts starkly with the surveillance video of July 5, 2011, that shows Ramos, Cicinelli and four other officers hitting, kicking, tasing and asphyxiating Thomas, a diagnosed schizophrenic, leaving him motionless with his hands and legs bound together at the Fullerton Transit Center where he frequently spent

his time.

Orange County District Attorney Tony Rackauckas asked that manslaughter and excessive force charges be dismissed against a third former officer, Joseph Wolfe, on Friday. Ron Thomas objected, and asked that Wolfe be put on trial too. “He’s a very, very bad character. He was the first one to strike Kelly with a baton with his hands up surrendering, and then the devastating elbow blows crushing his face,” Thomas explained.

Judge William Froeberg, however, dismissed the case against Wolf.

The three other officers were never charged at all.

FBI spokeswoman Laura Eimiller confirmed that an investigation was opened in 2011. “With the conclusion of the state court trial, investigators will examine the evidence and testimony to determine if further investigation is warranted at the federal level,” Eimiller said.

Although double-jeopardy laws do not prevent federal prosecutors from filing new charges against the officers, such measures are exceedingly rare.

Cathy Thomas settled her civil claim against the Fullerton Police Department in May 2012 for \$1 million. Ron Thomas’ case, however, is now expected to move forward.



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