

Police crack down on renewed protests in Ferguson, Missouri

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Dozens of police officers from multiple departments across Missouri descended on the city of Ferguson last night in a coordinated attack on demonstrators. Video of the crackdown shows police dragging demonstrators on the asphalt to jail-bound police vehicles. At least five arrests were made in the most recent police attack in the beleaguered suburb.

The renewal of protests was literally caused by a spark, laying bare the fragile state of social relations in the United States. A street memorial for Michael Brown—the victim of last month’s police murder—caught fire Tuesday morning, prompting widespread outrage. Residents said that the police delayed a firefighter team from responding so that the neighborhood could watch the memorial burn.

The 200 people who gathered in protest on Tuesday evening gave expression to the failure of the Obama administration’s best efforts to sweep social tensions under the rug. Neither the repeated police crackdowns nor the duplicity of professional identity politicians like Al Sharpton has succeeded in stamping out popular indignation toward decades of extreme social inequality, widespread poverty, and regular police repression.

Police claim the evening crackdown that injured several protesters was justified by allegations that a handful of people broke into a nearby beauty store as the demonstrations were taking place.

Speaking at a Wednesday morning press conference, Missouri State Highway Patrol Captain Ron Johnson said “there were several individuals who attempted to take the cash register” from the building.

Johnson said he gave the green light for the assault not because the police were under attack, but because demonstrators were making threatening remarks toward officers and were invading officers’ “personal space.”

After police began moving against the demonstration, some protesters attempted to defend themselves by throwing rocks at the advancing officers. Four officers were injured in the course of their attack. Police also claim that an officer was shot at from an apartment building near the burnt remains of Michael Brown’s memorial.

The crackdown is part and parcel of the Obama administration’s two-pronged response to demonstrations in the wake of the August 9 police shooting of Michael Brown.

The first prong involves the administration’s full support for the use of violence against demonstrators through repeated police attacks, the imposition of de facto martial law, and the mobilization of the National Guard.

The second prong is made up of an effort to paint the events in Ferguson as primarily a racial issue.

As demonstrations grew in the days following the shooting, the administration quickly dispatched charlatans like Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson to urge demonstrators to give up their nightly protests and register to vote for the Democratic Party. The Obama administration also supported Democratic Governor Jay Nixon’s decision to appoint Johnson, a black police captain, to oversee the police crackdown.

Attorney General Eric Holder, also African-American, was sent to Ferguson in order to sooth tensions and protect Darren Wilson, the officer who shot Michael Brown dead. Wilson, for his part, remains free of custody on paid leave.

Attorney General Holder, who the Washington Post described as “the most outspoken member of the Obama administration when it comes to matters of race issues in America,” made remarks Tuesday at New York University’s Brennan Center for Justice that

exemplified the administration's use of identity politics to hide the class character of the shooting and the subsequent crackdown.

"As an African American man who has been stopped and searched by police in situations where such actions are not warranted," Holder said, "I also carry with me an understanding of the mistrust that some citizens harbor toward police."

The nation's head prosecutor delivered these remarks the day after the Department of Justice announced that the media would be banned from attending town hall meetings in Ferguson.

Justice Department spokeswoman Dena Iverson said that the decision was justified by a statutory mandate issued under Title X of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Section 2000g of Title X established a "Community Relations Service" (CRS) under the Department of Justice, the express purpose of which is to "provide conciliation assistance" during periods of social strife.

According to the statute, "[t]he Service may offer its services in cases of such disputes, disagreements, or difficulties whenever, in its judgment, peaceful relations among the citizens of the community involved are threatened thereby" and in order to prevent events "which affect or may affect interstate commerce."

The activities of this "service" take place in total secrecy. The statute reads: "The activities of all officers and employees of the Service in providing conciliation assistance shall be conducted in confidence and without publicity," and "[a]ny officer or other employee of the Service, who shall make public in any manner whatever any information in violation of this subsection, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor and liable for up to a year's imprisonment."

By placing town hall meetings under the auspices of the Community Relations Service, the Obama administration is carrying out a violation of the First Amendment to the US Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

The decision to ban the press from meetings was made less than two weeks after the last public city council meeting erupted in chaos as residents voiced their opposition to the police and local government, shouting "What about Michael Brown?" and "Shut it down!"

The move is further proof that the ruling class is afraid that anger over the shooting of Michael Brown

might develop into a broader opposition to the militarization of American society on a national scale. The government cannot afford to have the images of angry residents at town hall meetings shown on national television.

It should be noted that the same administration that is carrying out an attack on democratic rights in Ferguson is waging permanent war abroad.

During a speech yesterday before the United Nations General Assembly, President Obama made reference to the "problem" of Ferguson, Missouri while defending America's military ambitions in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere. Obama noted that the events in Ferguson showed that "we have our own racial and ethnic tensions."

"But we welcome the scrutiny of the world," Obama continued. "Because we hold our leaders accountable, and insist on a free press and independent judiciary. Because we address our differences in the open space of democracy...."

As Obama's remarks and actions show, the justifications for war abroad contain the same amount of truth as those for repression at home: precisely, none.



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