

More than 300 arrested in Los Angeles during Ferguson protests

Marc Wells
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Some 130 demonstrators were arrested Wednesday night in Los Angeles during the third night of protests against the failure to indict Darren Wilson, the Ferguson, Missouri police officer who killed Michael Brown. The latest mass arrests bring the total to 323 people in three days in Los Angeles alone.

In Oakland, California 35 people were arrested Wednesday, with police alleging vandalism on the part of some people participating in protests. This followed more than 100 arrests in the first two days of protests in that city that began on Monday night.

The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) carried out dragnet-style mass arrests against peaceful demonstrators despite the fact that no injuries or property damage were reported, as acknowledged by Police Chief Charlie Beck.

On Wednesday, 200 protesters were reported marching downtown when riot-equipped police stopped them near the Central Library. As demonstrators proceeded, the police arrested many for failure to disperse.

There was no reported use of violence on the part of protesters. The high point of the confrontation was a handful of demonstrators shouting at officers who were ominously waving batons.

Beck declared, following the arrests, "If you're here to disrupt the flow of traffic, to put people at risk, to get up on our freeways, to run in and out of traffic, to attack cars by kicking them or with skateboards, we're not going to let you do that."

CBS reported Thursday that the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is questioning the lawfulness of the mass arrests.

James Lafferty, executive director of the Los Angeles chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, said, "It was entrapment. ... Protesters had every reason to believe ...

when in the street they would not be arrested."

California state law requires an officer to witness a person committing a misdemeanor in order to make an arrest. However, Lafferty reported that in the last few days, officers arrested people who had simply gathered in the vicinity. What LAPD "have to do is declare this an unlawful assembly and give them time to disperse. That's not what they did last night. They just arrested everybody," Lafferty said.

The LAPD has made a name for itself through the years for corruption and police violence. Bloody Christmas in 1951 shocked the world when seven men were severely beaten by police officers. Eventually, 8 officers were indicted, 39 suspended and 54 transferred.

In more recent years, countless cases of police brutality earned LAPD an infamous reputation. The tenure of Chief Daryl Gates was characterized by the paramilitary approach he took.

The Rodney King beating in 1991, which resulted in the 1992 Los Angeles riots, was the culmination of Gates' violent incumbency, leading him to resign.

In the late 90s, the Rampart scandal implicated more than 70 officers in a long series of crimes, from unprovoked beatings and shootings, to stealing, drug running, perjury, and planting and covering up evidence.

A recent report by the Los Angeles Youth Justice Coalition sheds some light on social reality in the US: At least 589 people were killed by the police in Los Angeles since 2000, or one person a week in the last 14 years.



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