

Violent arrests of protesters follow charges against Baltimore cops in murder of Freddie Gray

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2 May 2015

Police in Baltimore, Maryland moved aggressively to arrest protesters Friday night, following an announcement earlier in the day that state prosecutors were charging six police officers in the murder of 25-year-old Freddie Gray.

Shortly after the 10:00 pm curfew imposed earlier this week, riot police with shields and batons began making arrests. National Guard troops and armored vehicles stood by, and a helicopter flew overhead. One young protester told CNN that she saw two of her friends beaten during the arrests.

Police ordered reporters, under the threat of arrest, to stop interviewing arrested protesters and forced them into a special pen some distance away. It was evident that the aim was to block cameras from filming the crackdown.

The arrests were aimed at reinforcing the authority of the police following the announcement of charges earlier in the day. It was also intended to make clear to residents of Baltimore that the antidemocratic curfew and “state of emergency” remain in effect.

Maryland State Attorney Marilyn Mosby unexpectedly announced the charges early on Friday, saying that Gray had been “illegally arrested” by the police and had died from fatal injuries incurred inside a Baltimore Police Department van.

The charges include second-degree murder, involuntary manslaughter, manslaughter by vehicle and second-degree assault for the driver of the van, Officer Caesar Goodson. Lesser charges were filed against the five other cops. If convicted, they could face 20 to 60 years in prison.

The six—three of whom are black and three white—were released Friday immediately after posting bond, which was set at significantly less than the bond for many Baltimore youth arrested earlier in the week.

The prosecutor’s action was a highly political decision, made in close consultation with the Obama

administration, as protests in the city expanded and a wave of solidarity demonstrations spread across the United States. The decision is aimed at keeping the lid on the explosive social tensions in the city, while delegitimizing any further protests against police violence and social inequality.

Protracted legal proceedings could end up with the lessening of charges or outright exoneration. There are already signs of efforts to throw out the indictments, with charges that Mosby violated the law by releasing too many details from the state investigation.

The Baltimore Fraternal Order of Police union denounced the “rush to judgment” and said that the actions of the cops were “reasonable and in accordance with police training.” The FOP called for Mosby to recuse herself and appoint a special independent prosecutor, saying that there was a conflict of interest because her husband, Nick Mosby, is a Baltimore City Council member and she has personal and professional connections to Gray’s family attorney, former Baltimore Circuit Court Judge William Murphy.

Announcing the charges, Mosby insisted that they were “not an indictment of the entire force,” adding that she came from a family with five generations of police officers. “The actions of these officers,” she added, “do not and should not in any way damage the important working relationships between police and prosecutors as we continue to fight together to reduce crime in Baltimore. Thank you for your courage, commitment and sacrifice for the betterment of our communities.”

Mosby appealed to the city’s youth to trust the judicial system, which contrary to their daily experiences, supposedly meted out equal and fair justice to all citizens. “To the people of Baltimore and the demonstrators across the United States,” she said, “I heard your call for ‘No

Justice, No Peace.’ Your peace is sincerely needed as I work to deliver justice on behalf of this young man.” In other words, further protests should cease now that the officers had been charged.

For the first time, Mosby outlined the chain of events that led to Freddie Gray’s horrific injuries and death, which the Baltimore Police Department and city officials have previously sought to conceal. Her description essentially confirmed suspicions that police gave Gray a deliberate “rough ride,” bouncing the shackled young man around the back of the van until he was fatally injured.

Gray was arrested on the morning of April 12 after making “eye contact” with cops and running. He was chased by Lt. Brian W. Rice, Officer Edward M. Nero and Officer Garrett Miller, captured and handcuffed. Gray told the cops he could not breathe and asked for an inhaler but was not provided with any medical treatment.

A small knife was found on Gray, but Mosby said it was folded and legal under Maryland law, and therefore the police had no probable cause to arrest him. Gray was put on his stomach as he began to flail his legs and scream. Officers put him into a tactical hold called a leg lace and held him down “against his will” until a police van arrived.

Gray was then put in the police van without being buckled to the seat, in violation of police department rules. After riding for a block, the cops stopped and took Gray out of the van. They then shackled his ankles and wrists and reloaded him into the van, head first and stomach down, Mosby said, once again not belting him into the seat.

A short while later, Officer Goodson stopped the van again to check on Gray. “Despite stopping for the purpose of checking on Mr. Gray’s conditions, at no point did he seek nor did he render any medical assistance to Mr. Gray,” Mosby said. He drove on again without buckling him in.

At a third stop, Gray again requested help and said he could not breathe. Officer William Porter asked him if he needed a medic, Mosby said, and Gray said “yes” three times. This was ignored, and he was put back in the van unbelted again.

At a fourth stop, Goodson picked up another prisoner, Donta Allen. At that point, Goodson, Officer Sgt. Alicia D. White and Officer Porter observed that Gray was unresponsive. Once again, no medical treatment was given, and Goodson drove on another 25 minutes until they reached the Western District Police Station. Only

after the second prisoner was unloaded was a medic called to assess Gray, who was “no longer breathing at all,” Mosby said. The medic determined that Gray was in cardiac arrest and critically and severely injured.

Gray was transported to the University of Maryland’s shock trauma center where he went into a coma several days later and died a week after, on April 19.

The indictments came as it became clear that the predominantly African American Democratic Party political establishment in Baltimore was unable to mollify social tensions, which are erupting not only against police brutality but decades of chronically high unemployment, poverty, decaying schools and other services and the explosion of social inequality.

Like many other big cities, the political establishment in Baltimore is dominated by a layer of affluent African Americans who have prospered from reactionary, pro-business policies pursued by both corporate-backed parties, even as conditions for the vast majority of the population have declined.

After limited rioting erupted earlier this week, Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake denounced the dispossessed youth as “thugs.” The *New York Times* commented that this was “a vivid reminder that the presence of a black mayor (and a black police chief as well) does not guarantee an intimate bond or rapport with poor black residents that might help calm a city going through the kind of trauma facing Baltimore.”

After the indictments, Rawlings-Blake declared she would work relentlessly to “ensure everyone is treated equal and there will be justice for Freddie Gray, his family and people of Baltimore.” President Obama also spoke saying that “justice had been served,” and said that he had just met with mayors to discuss how to “rebuild trust between the community and the police.”

In fact, the epidemic of police brutality and murders is the product of the immense social inequality defended by the entire political establishment. Whatever the outcome of the legal case in Baltimore, the corporate and financial elite will continue to employ police and military violence to defend its wealth and power against the overwhelming majority of society.



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