

Ferguson protests continue in defiance of state of emergency

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Protests continued Monday night and early Tuesday morning in Ferguson, Missouri in defiance of St. Louis County Executive Steve Stenger's declaration of a state of emergency across St. Louis County earlier that day. Hundreds of peaceful protesters gathered in the evening, demanding justice for Michael Brown and an end to police brutality.

St. Louis County Police Chief Jon Belmar, who is overseeing the state of emergency, responded by sending out hundreds of police clad in riot gear and wielding assault rifles. Officers formed a human barricade spanning several blocks along West Florissant Avenue, the center of protests over the past year. When protesters refused to exit the street, police carrying riot shields rushed the crowd, and officers began violently arresting many. At one point, an officer showered military-grade pepper spray on all the protesters in his vicinity.

During the crackdown, police evidently targeted *Huffington Post* reporter Ryan Reilly, ripping off the press badge around his neck as he shouted "I'm media! I'm media!" Reilly and *Washington Post* reporter Wesley Lowery were both charged with trespassing and interfering with a police officer while in Ferguson last year. In reality, the two were unlawfully arrested, and an officer assaulted Lowery by slamming him into a soda machine at the McDonald's where they were arrested.

Reilly and Lowery were both given their court summonses on Monday, two days before the statute of limitations would have expired. They face a potential \$1,000 in fines and up to a year in county jail. The two were among over a dozen journalists arrested during the police suppression of protests in Ferguson over the past year.

In total, police arrested 22 protesters over the course

of Monday night, according to a police spokesman Tuesday morning. This comes after 57 peaceful protesters were arrested Monday afternoon by officers from the Department of Homeland Security during a demonstration in front of the St. Louis County Federal Courthouse. On Monday afternoon, another 64 people were arrested for blocking traffic on Interstate 70 near Ferguson. In total, at least 150 people have been arrested since Sunday night alone, with more expected in the coming days.

The manner in which police have arrested protesters has been particularly brutal. When police arrived at Interstate 70, a man was jumping backward away from the crowd, waving his hands in the air, shouting, "This is what democracy looks like!" An officer approached him from behind, lifted him above shoulder height, and slammed him to the ground. Eight officers then pinned his body to the freeway in a dog pile with their knees to his back, handcuffing him.

Police also arrested a young girl, who told fellow protesters during her arrest that she was only 12 years old. Police claim that an ID card they later processed said she was 18. Numerous other protesters were arrested violently, with officers slamming them to the ground and jamming their knees into their backs.

Numerous aspects of the Sunday police shooting of 18-year-old Tyrone Harris remain unresolved, and the police story is still highly suspect. Harris was shot in the chest, back, arm, legs, liver and groin by four plainclothes officers who exited an unmarked car. He remains in critical condition at Barnes Jewish Hospital.

Harris's family maintains that the youth is innocent, with his father, Tyrone Harris Sr., calling the police story "a bunch of lies." Two witnesses told Harris Sr. that his son was unarmed and "running for his life" when police shot at him eight to 12 times, including at

least once in the back.

Police Chief Belmar alleged Monday that Harris was armed and involved in an exchange of gunfire late Sunday evening near the protest. He alleged that Harris fled and then opened fire on the unmarked vehicle of the four plainclothes officers. The officers then chased Harris on foot and repeatedly shot him, allegedly after Harris shot at them again.

Late Tuesday afternoon, the St. Louis County Police released surveillance video purporting to show Harris draw a pistol during the initial exchange of gunfire. However, the footage does not clearly show Harris's face, and the light color of his pants in the video does not match the dark red pants he was actually wearing, as shown in pictures taken by bystanders to the shooting.

St. Louis County prosecutors charged Harris with 10 felonies, including four counts of first-degree assault on a law enforcement officer, five counts of armed criminal action and one count of shooting a firearm at a motor vehicle. His bond has been set at \$250,000.

At around 2am Tuesday morning, roughly a half-dozen members of the right-wing, militia-style organization Oath Keepers began roaming the streets of Ferguson. Wearing camouflage outfits and bulletproof vests, and armed with unconcealed pistols and military-style rifles, they were barely distinguishable from the militarized police forces, who in fact paid little attention to the Oath Keepers.

On their website, founder Stewart Rhodes urges the estimated 30,000 national members of Oath Keepers to "Go armed, at all times, as free men and women, and be ready to do sudden battle, anywhere, anytime, and with utter recklessness."

Following the eruption of rioting last year, which itself came in response to the November 25 exoneration Darren Wilson, the Oath Keepers were hired by multiple business and property owners to protect their property from looting and arson. For this reason, the police see them as an ally in their effort to suppress working-class opposition to police violence and social inequality.



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