

Outrage spreads over video showing police ripping child from mother's arms at Brooklyn food stamp office

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Outrage continued to build on Monday in response to video of vicious police abuse of a young mother at a Brooklyn food stamp office last Friday. The woman, who had been sitting on the floor with her 1-year old son because of overcrowding in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) office, was surrounded by three police officers and a female police sergeant. The video shows one of the cops literally yanking the child in an attempt to separate him from his mother.

Jazmine Headley, 23 years old, had apparently gotten into a dispute with a security guard, who then called on the police. She is shown on the floor of the office, repeatedly shouting, "They're hurting my son!"

The officer who yanked on the infant then turned around and waved a stun gun at the outraged crowd of witnesses of this brutality. Several people were filming the event on their cellphones. One witness, Nyashia Ferguson, uploaded a video which has, according to the *New York Daily News*, been viewed almost 150,000 times.

Headley is now being held at the notorious Rikers Island prison, facing charges of resisting arrest, child endangerment, obstructing governmental administration and trespassing. The latter charge apparently stems from the mother's effort to register for food stamp benefits and resisting the demands of the security guards and the police that she leave the premises. Child endangerment is apparently a reference to her refusal to give up her child as the cops sought to tear him away from her. The young mother is being held without bail, while her child is in the custody of a relative.

"They're always rude," Ferguson told the *New York*

Times, speaking about the office guards. "They think that people that are poor don't have nothing, so you can treat them any kind of way."

The police "didn't help at all," the eyewitness added. "They made it way worse."

Ferguson said the wait for service in the food stamp center was extremely long, and that Headley had been waiting for about two hours, sitting on the floor for that entire time. This took place in the part of the office that helps arrange child care, according to Ferguson.

"A female security guard eventually approached Ms. Headley, and several more guards followed as a verbal dispute escalated," according to the *Times*. "Ms. Ferguson said they taunted Ms. Headley and laughed in her face before leaving."

After ten minutes, the guards returned with the police, who demanded that Headley come with them. The incident quickly escalated. According to Ferguson, "The baby was screaming for his life. The lady was begging for them to get off of her. I was scared."

The incident, reminiscent of the infamous chokehold murder of Eric Garner by a police officer on Staten Island in 2014, provoked outrage from thousands who saw it online.

The killing of Garner led to mass protests, especially after the officer involved was not charged. The cop who killed Garner, Daniel Pantaleo, is only now going through internal departmental charges, more than four years after Garner's death.

The New York Police Department adopted new guidelines after the Garner killing, including on the use of stun guns. According to the *Times*, "The Patrol Guide, the official police manual, states that stun guns should be used in limited circumstances: against people

who are physically resisting being taken into custody; people who indicate verbally that they intend to do so; and people who are acting in a manner that could cause injury to themselves or someone else.”

These guidelines, of course, did not prevent one of the cops from waving the stun gun at angry witnesses to Friday’s assault, in an obvious attempt to silence and intimidate them.

The officers involved are all assigned to the 84th Precinct in Brooklyn, and all of them remain on full-time duty, according to the police department. The police brass acknowledged that the video evidence was “troubling,” and said that the incident was being investigated, alongside the Human Resources Administration, in whose offices the fracas took place.

Mayor Bill de Blasio, now in his second term after first winning office in 2013 on the slogan of “A Tale of Two Cities” and on his stated opposition to such police tactics as “stop-and-frisk,” as of the afternoon of December 10 had said nothing at all about the latest outrage.

A number of other elected officials, including City Council Speaker Corey Johnson and recently elected State Attorney General Letitia James, were quick to register their alleged concern, with James tweeting, “Being poor is not a crime. No mother should have to experience the trauma and humiliation we all witnessed in this video.”

The comments of Johnson and James, however, are designed to cover up their own guilt. Both Democrats, they share responsibility for the functioning of the city’s public assistance centers, where the poor are subjected to daily mistreatment, disrespect and abuse, and for the functioning of the police department as well.

The December 7 incident demonstrates the indignities that millions of workers face daily, and what in this case only became widely known thanks to the use of social media. While new luxury residential towers sprout up in Manhattan, the reality in most of New York City and for most of its population of more than 8.5 million is far different. The official, and heavily understated, poverty rate is about 30 percent, and basic social services and conditions, including housing and health care, continue to decay.

Under these circumstances, the horrific treatment of Jazmine Headley and her child represents the inevitable

lashing out by the forces of law and order. It is directed against the working class as a whole. The police are assigned to keep the lid on the simmering social discontent, and their viciousness is only the surface expression of the viciousness of the system they are paid to enforce.



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