New video emerges of Chicago police officers tasing and beating high school student

Jacob Crosse
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A newly released surveillance video shows Chicago Police officers stationed inside Marshall High School viciously dragging a 16-year-old high school student down a flight of stairs, without provocation, before beating, punching, shocking and stepping on the girl in front of her father. The revelation of the incident which took place at the end of January has sparked national outrage and has exposed yet another attempted cover-up inside the Chicago Police Department.

On January 29, 2019, Marshall High Student Dnigma Howard was suspended for allegedly using a cell phone in class. The school called her father, Laurentio Howard, to come and pick her up from the school that morning. According to Dnigma, however, the officers never indicated to her that she was suspended or that she was to leave the premises of the school.

Dnigma is participating in the "Behavior Intervention Plan and Individualized Education Program," which is meant to help students resolve learning issues with the help of a guidance counselor. On the day she was suspended and attacked, her plan was not followed and a counselor was not made available before the police violently intervened against her.

Video footage initially released, which did not contain the beginning of the altercation, showed the attack only after the incident had already been needlessly escalated by police. One officer can be seen punching the young student with a closed fist to the face while she is being stepped on by another officer. The officer stepping on Dnigma, Johnnie Pierre, then brandishes a stun gun, which he uses multiple times on the outnumbered, unarmed and terrified child. Photos taken after the incident show a cut across her face; she was treated at a local hospital after the assault.

"My first instinct was to protect her, but they told me to step back, so I could only watch. I told them they didn't need to do that," her father told the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Echoing the last pleas of Eric Garner, murdered by New York Police in 2014, Laurentio continued, "when they had my daughter on the ground like that and throwing her around and the officer had his foot in my daughter's stomach, on her, she's screaming, 'I can't breath, I can't breath.'"

Based on a fabricated police report, Cook County prosecutors vindictively charged Dnigma Howard with two felony counts of aggravated battery against officers Pierre and Sherry Tripp. The officers' fantasy of a report stated that the teen had initiated contact with officers first, and that the student had "bitten, kicked and spit on the officers" before they all fell down the stairs and officers were forced to beat her in order to "gain compliance."

This canard was put to rest by the release of a second tape that shows what precipitated the onslaught of state violence. Howard can be seen at the top of the stairs talking to a fellow student while CPD officer Pierre can be seen standing near her at the top of the stairs.

As Dnigma turns around after finishing her conversation with her friend, the officer suddenly, and without provocation, grabs her across the chest and violently swings her towards the nearby descending staircase causing her to fall with the officer following behind. Another officer joins the fracas and soon students swarm the top of the stairs, obstructing the view, as the two officers began dragging the surprised Dnigma down the stairs by her ankle.

Once done dragging the child, they set to pummeling her in front of her father and her fellow students. "It was embarrassing," Dnigma related to the *Chicago Sun-Times*, "[other students] were watching."

The two officers have since been removed from the school while an investigation is underway. Laurentio

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Howard has filed a federal lawsuit against the school district, the Chicago Police Department and officers Johnnie Pierre and Sherry Tripp, accusing the defendants of violating his daughter's civil rights.

A lawsuit filed by attorney Andrew M. Stroth states, "the Board of Education and CPD continue to fail our children. An unarmed 16-year-old girl was beaten, kicked, punched and tasered by officers." The brief continues, "At no time during their contact with [Dnigma] did [police] seek assistance or involvement from any Marshall administration, staff members, or other security officer in escorting" her from the building.

In an transparent attempt to appeal to the power structure that protects the police, Stroth called on Mayor-elect Lori Lightfoot to implement recommendations and reforms that have been worked out between the school district and the Chicago Police Department regarding responsibilities and procedures of "school resource officers." These toothless reforms would keep the police in schools, and are part of a consent decree ordered by a federal judge following multiple incidents of violent cops beating students.

The "reforms" are also made with the intent to cap how much districts will pay out in lawsuits resulting from unrestrained police violence. Lightfoot has made a career out of protecting the Chicago Police Department and is keen to end costly payouts to working class victims of police violence.

Upon release of the second tape prosecutors have since dropped charges against Dnigma, "in the interest of justice." Until the charges were dropped, however, Dnigma was treated like a convicted criminal, placed on electronic monitoring and banned from school grounds.

A recent report by the ACLU found that millions of students across the United States attend a school which has police officers on staff but no counselors, psychologists or social workers. While they are starved of much needed funding for education, American schools have been turned into fortresses, complete with metal detectors, surveillance cameras and armed police officers. Without the necessary number of teachers and staff, even minor incidents are treated as a police matter, resulting in the brutalization and criminalization of students.

This act of violence inflicted upon yet another working class student is another expression of the social crisis wracking American society. Marshall High School is located on Chicago's West Side, in a predominantly African American and highly impoverished section of the city.

According to 2015 government statistics, the median household income of the community was just $21,482. According to government census data, over 70,000 people resided in East Garfield Park in 1950, now fewer than an estimated 21,000 remain. The exodus has resulted in a destruction of property values leading to a blighted area, bereft of social services or employment.

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