

NYPD runs amok during post-Election Day protests

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The New York City Police Department (NYPD) has reacted to days of demonstrations in the aftermath of November 3, Election Day, with brutality and mass arrests. In a particularly disturbing move, they have published mug shots of arrested protesters, something which is rare and potentially illegal.

After President Donald Trump, in the early morning hours of November 4, denounced the fact that legally cast ballots continued to be counted, eroding his margin in several states which would later flip to President-elect Joe Biden, protests erupted in cities across the country demanding that the votes be counted.

The NYPD, after having prepared for weeks for “unrest” after the election, reacted to relatively small protests on November 4 and 5 with overwhelming numbers of officers, who kettled demonstrators and arrested dozens of protesters. The Gothamist reported that protesters the day after the election “shouted ‘let us disperse,’ but the NYPD closed in to arrest them, swinging fists and batons. Many of the officers wearing armor did not display any identification. One officer told a report they didn’t need to.”

The NYPD arrested 19 people the next night primarily at a peaceful protest, including Joel Rivera, who has been organizing “marches for Black trans liberation in New York City every Thursday for 21 consecutive weeks since the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis,” according to the Gothamist. Rivera was arrested after using bullhorns to ask police why they were making an arrest. She says that the NYPD denied her a bandage in jail after the arrest left her leg bleeding and offered her only manila envelopes to replace the shoes she lost during the arrest.

In the early morning hours of November 7, the NYPD enforced Washington Square Park’s midnight closing with riot gear, batons and arrests, after anti-Trump

demonstrations had already dispersed. Parkgoers earlier in the evening had been celebrating the defeat of Trump after the news networks recognized Joe Biden’s victory Saturday just before noon.

“It was like storm troopers coming in,” Megan Lynch, who lives in the West Village, told the Gothamist. “Batons were up and ready. I’ve never seen anything like that.”

No doubt the cops were incensed at the election outcome and at the broad and deeply felt anti-Trump sentiment among most New Yorkers.

NYPD brass have claimed that the arrests were of “agitators,” a line parroted by Mayor Bill de Blasio, a Democrat, on a radio show November 6. After being asked by a caller to WNYC why overwhelming numbers of officers and equipment were used for relatively small protests, de Blasio claimed that this was necessitated because “a new element came into the equation this year, all over the country ... a small group of people who aim to do violence, who bring tools of violence.”

He also claimed kettling, whereby officers trap protesters before demanding that they disperse and then arrest them for failing to disperse, is “not a part of the NYPD tactics in the patrol guide,” although it has been common practice for the NYPD, particularly after protests erupted in the aftermath of the police murder of George Floyd in May.

Despite the thuggery of the police, NYPD Commissioner Dermot Shea told NY1 that the situation had been “overwhelmingly positive” since the election. Echoing the condemnation by police and by most of the Democratic Party of mild calls to “defund the police,” he cynically said: “We do have some violence issues that are going on in New York City. Is that tied to the defund movement? Well that’s the discussion that has

to be had. I think we have to grapple with that.”

In an unusual and intimidating move, the NYPD released mug shots of some of the arrestees from protests on November 4, saying they were arrested for “various crimes, including assaulting police officers & weapons possession.” The gutter press, including the tawdry *New York Post*, dutifully republished the photos of five people aged 23 to 28. To justify the release of the photos, the NYPD released them along with a statement asking for “any info related to these individuals, or others regarding violence at protests.”

A 2019 New York state law only allows for releasing mug shots for such information-gathering purposes. The NYPD also released mug shots of protesters earlier in the year who allegedly damaged Manhattan stores during protests against police brutality. Even the *Post* admits “it was unclear if the release [in this case] led to any additional charges,” the ostensible purpose of releasing the photos.

The NYPD prepared extensively for post-election protests, and these preparations will not be entirely dismissed simply because mass protests have not yet materialized. Especially since the global protests against police violence this summer, and with Trump refusing to concede the election, the NYPD is acutely aware of the potential for substantial protests and is deeply fearful of the possibility of demonstrations getting out of the control of the political system.

In the lead-up to the election, the NYPD was prepared to “freeze areas of Manhattan should wide scale looting occur.” Retailers and schools closed for the week and apartment buildings, especially luxury ones, hired additional security, sometimes armed.

Under this rubric, the NYPD prepared to shut down large parts of Manhattan using similar tactics as are used around Times Square on New Year’s Eve. While mass protests have not yet occurred, there can be no doubt that if Trump’s efforts to overturn the election result build momentum, there will be significant opposition among workers in New York City who, if they voted, voted overwhelmingly against Trump.

The fact that many within the NYPD supported Trump and otherwise hold fascist and racist views no doubt plays a significant role in the police violence against anti-Trump demonstrators and those opposed to police violence and racism, while they have stood by as Trump supporters obstructed traffic and threatened

counter-protesters.

As early voting began, an NYPD officer blared “Trump 2020” repeatedly from his squad car’s loudspeaker in Flatbush, Brooklyn, at one point taunting a passerby, “Put it on YouTube, put it on Facebook.”

When the video indeed went viral on social media, the officer was suspended without pay pending an investigation. He received support not only from Trump but from Ed Mullins, president of the fascist Sergeants Benevolent Association (SBA). Both the SBA and the larger Police Benevolent Association (PBA) endorsed Trump.

Deputy Inspector James Kobel, the head of the NYPD Office of Equal Employment Opportunity, has been exposed by a City Council investigation as being the author of hundreds of graphically racist, misogynistic, Islamophobic, homophobic and anti-Semitic messages on a private messaging board. No doubt his posts did not come as a surprise to his coworkers and superiors.

The repression of protests has been a bipartisan policy in New York City and across the US, however. De Blasio, the supposedly “progressive” mayor, has repeatedly covered for police violence and has claimed that the obviously pro-Trump police have been politically evenhanded in their repression, saying recently: “I just don’t see any evidence of disparate approach. It has to be, it will be and it has been fair treatment across the board.”



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