

Media and politicians whip up anti-immigrant frenzy over altercation in New York City with police

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5 February 2024

A frenzy of anti-immigrant hatred is being whipped up by the authorities in New York City and state. Both Democratic and Republican politicians, as well as major media outlets, including the *Wall Street Journal*, have seized on the January 27 altercation between two New York Police Department (NYPD) officers and several asylum seekers to call for the expulsion of asylum seekers and harder sentencing and bail restrictions on those accused of crimes.

The incident took place in front of a homeless shelter for asylum seekers on West 42nd Street in Manhattan. All of the migrants were apparently from Venezuela. A video, which is being run nonstop on the Internet, broken into two discontinuous parts, shows in one segment the NYPD officers dispersing a group of migrants. The second segment shows the two officers wrestling one person to the ground as several other people around the cops kick them and attempt to pull them off the person they are holding down.

Of the six migrants arrested, five were released without bail and one—who was being manhandled by police—was released on \$15,000 bail. Had bail been asked and not met, the migrants would have been held in the hellhole of Rikers Island. Allegedly four of the defendants have fled to California, and both police and the District Attorney's office claim that not all of those suspected of the crime have been apprehended.

New York County District Attorney Alvin Bragg—whose office has brought Donald Trump to trial in the Stormy Daniels hush-money case and prosecuted the fraud case of Trump's fascist henchman, Steve Bannon—has said that there was a case of mistaken identity of those arrested and that his office did not feel there was a danger of flight.

But Bragg has now come under considerable criticism by the police, media and politicians for his actions, not only from the usual far-right suspects including former Republican candidate Lee Zeldin and former Republican candidate for mayor, vigilante Curtis Sliwa, but from Democrats as well.

Both candidates for the congressional seat in Long Island of expelled former Representative George Santos proclaimed their anti-immigrant credentials. Democrat Tom Suozzi said, "Those guys that beat up the New York City police officers, they

should be deported immediately. They should be thrown out of the country." His opponent, Republican Mazi Pilip, a former member of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), said to the *New York Post* in an interview, "They attacked our police officers. We should absolutely send them back."

On Sunday, apparently referring to Bragg, the Democratic former governor of New York, David Paterson, told radio host and right-wing billionaire John Catsimatidis, "Maybe this is the right case for people to really start standing up and demanding more accountability from our government." Paterson also effectively criminalized every single immigrant by adding that these were "people from other countries, and you don't even know what their [criminal] records are in those countries."

One ranking NYPD officer, John Chell, Chief of Patrol, told an NYPD function in widely publicized remarks, "They should be sitting in Rikers right now, on bail." He added, "You want to know why our cops are getting assaulted? There are no consequences."

It is unusual for a high-ranking police officer to criticize a District Attorney. It is also a farce. During the most recent weeks, NYPD has been busy arresting protesters against the genocide in Gaza and ignoring the chemical attacks on Columbia University students by former IDF soldiers. More generally, it has a foul record of stop-and-frisk and a policy of shoot first and ask questions later for minority youth and the mentally ill. Few cops have even been investigated, let alone prosecuted.

Chell himself is a case in point of the level of NYPD hypocrisy. As was exposed by the *Daily Beast* in 2022, in 2008 Chell shot and killed Ortanzso Bovell, a 25-year-old black man, and was never charged with a crime.

The NYPD has been at pains to deny rumors on social media of an NYPD officers' protest over the handling of the incident.

On Wednesday the Democratic governor of New York, Kathy Hochul, in response to a reporter's question, also implicitly blamed Bragg by saying regarding the incident, "It's wrong on all accounts and I'm looking to judges and prosecutors to do the right thing." The next day she proclaimed in a press conference, referring to the accused asylum seekers, "Get them

all and send them back,” and added, “You don’t touch our police officers.”

Significantly, on Saturday the *Wall Street Journal*, the voice of the American financial aristocracy, published an editorial in its print edition that called on Hochul to fire Bragg. It reprinted chauvinist bile from the *New York Post* with quotes from supposed bystanders who depicted the immigrants as a criminal class and police as helpless to maintain order because of recent bail reform laws.

The editorial attacked Hochul for saying that she would not meddle with Bragg because, “I’m not prepared to undo the will of the people.” Bragg was elected to office in Manhattan, which constitutes New York County, in 2022. Now it seems that the *Wall Street Journal* thinks it is time to undo the will of the people.

Bragg got the message. On Sunday his office emailed a statement to the media that he was impaneling a grand jury to investigate the alleged attack. The email was sent along with a joint statement of Bragg and NYPD Commissioner Edward Caban, that said: “It is clear from video and other evidence that some of the most culpable individuals have not yet been identified or arrested.”

Caban added, “We will work tirelessly with the office of the Manhattan district attorney to identify and arrest every person who participated in this event.”

The reaction by the authorities to what cannot even be called a brawl, marks an escalation of attacks on immigrants in New York and nationally. The language of the *New York Times* in one of its recent articles on the incident is indicative of an intensified attack on immigrants across the capitalist political spectrum when it refers to “[m]any New Yorkers’ declining patience with footing the bill for the care of the nearly 70,000 migrants housed in city shelters.”

The “New Yorkers” that the *Times* is referring to here are not only the fascist-minded Republican politicians but the city’s right-wing Democratic mayor and former NYPD captain, Eric Adams, who has been ratcheting up anti-immigrant slander for months, claiming at one point that migrants were “destroying New York.”

Adams’ attacks on asylum seekers in New York are not only verbal. Without doubt much of the fear and anger that asylum seekers hold toward the NYPD is the cops’ constant confiscation of their eBikes, which many of them use to earn a living as delivery people.

Last year, Adams changed the city’s right-to-shelter law by mandating that families must leave city shelters after 60 days. Single adults were limited to a stay of 30 days. This forced 1,600 families out in the cold beginning on January 9 and has created a permanent need to reapply for a space without any guarantee that one will be found.

Budget cuts to the Department of Education have made it impossible for schools to meet the needs of immigrant students who have now entered the public school system. One educator

in a recent article in *Chalkbeat* noted the dire need for more social workers.

The role of the Democrats in New York in stoking the anti-migrant policy is directly related to the Biden administration’s embrace of the Republican far-right’s program on “border security” in return for funding to fuel war in Ukraine.

This is not simply political horse trading, however, but a marked shift of the Democrats to the right. On Sunday, Hochul’s office responded to the complaint of nine Republican New York members of Congress that Hochul had not joined 25 other governors in supporting Texas Governor Greg Abbott’s measures to close the US-Mexican border.

In response, State Director of Operations Kathryn Garcia wrote to the Republican lawmakers that they “have taken no action to help address this national crisis, and in fact waited until this past week to even reach out to our Administration and express your concerns.”

Hochul’s office did not condemn the New York state Republicans for offering aid to the fascist Republican governors, all of whom are attempting to implement Trump’s border policy, by supporting Abbott in undermining federal authority but instead condemned them for taking no action to address the “national crisis” of immigration.

The whole Democratic establishment engages in anti-immigrant scaremongering, even if its rhetoric differs from that of Trump. Its line is now: The immigrants disobey the law. They assault the forces of the state. They are a drain on our resources. They are the real problem, not declining wages, rising living costs, the rapid erosion of democratic rights or, most of all, the beginning of world war.

In fact, nationalist bile against “foreigners” is an essential ingredient for a ruling class preparing its population for total war.

The American ruling class, led by the Biden administration, cannot simply fund the genocide in Gaza, bomb several Middle Eastern countries, prepare for war against Iran, advance its proxies against Russia and prepare all-out war against China without whipping up a xenophobic frenzy. It has begun to do so with the one of poorest and most vulnerable layers of the population.



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