

Journalist Don Lemon, anti-ICE protesters arrested on orders of Trump administration

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In a major attack on the First Amendment and the democratic rights of everyone, Attorney General Pam Bondi announced Friday on social media that she personally ordered the arrest of four individuals for documenting or participating in an anti-ICE protest at a church in St. Paul, Minnesota earlier this month.

Bondi wrote: “At my direction, early this morning federal agents arrested Don Lemon, Trahern Jeen Crews, Georgia Fort, and Jamael Lydell Lundy, in connection with the coordinated attack on Cities Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. More details soon.”

Lemon is a former CNN anchor; Fort is a three-time Emmy Award-winning independent journalist. Trahern Jeen Crews is a co-founder of Black Lives Matter Minnesota, and Jamael Lydell Lundy is an aspiring candidate for the state Senate.

Lemon and Fort were present at the January 18 protest in their capacity as journalists, documenting the events as they unfolded. This has not stopped Trump’s Justice Department from charging all four individuals with Conspiracy Against Rights—a post-Civil War statute originally enacted to combat the Ku Klux Klan—as well as violations of the FACE Act, a federal law intended to protect access to abortion clinics and places of worship.

Both charges are serious felonies that carry penalties of up to 10 years in prison. Last week, Nekima Levy Armstrong, Chauntyll Allen, and William Kelly were also arrested in connection with the January 18 protest at the church. The three were released after being charged under federal civil rights statutes for allegedly conspiring to interfere with the free exercise of religion and disrupt a worship service.

Lemon was arrested Thursday evening in Los Angeles, California, while Fort was taken into custody early Friday morning by federal agents at her home.

Before her arrest, Fort went live on Facebook to inform the public, stating, “Agents are at my door right now.”

She continued, “My children are here. They are impacted by this. This is all stemming from the fact that I filmed a protest as a member of the media. We are supposed to have our constitutional right, freedom to film, to be a member of the press. I don’t feel like I have my First Amendment right as a member of the press because federal agents are at my door arresting me for filming the church protest a few weeks ago.”

The Cities Church in St. Paul was not randomly selected, but specifically chosen by protesters because one of its pastors, David Easterwood, serves as the director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) in St. Paul.

Cities Church is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, a Protestant denomination formed in 1845 to defend slavery and provide religious justification for slaveholding. Joe Rigney, one of Cities Church’s founders, now serves as an associate pastor at Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho, alongside the church’s founder and increasingly influential pastor, Doug Wilson.

Wilson is a Christian nationalist figure popular among “MAGA” Republicans. He has spoken at Turning Point USA events and the National Conservatism Conference (NatCon). A 71-year-old reactionary, Wilson has referred to women he disagrees with as “lumberjack d*kes” and “c*nts,” and has described the Civil War as “the war between the states.”

Wilson is based in Moscow, Idaho, where he founded the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC) in the 1990s. According to *Politico*, the CREC has grown to include more than 500 congregations

across four continents, including a church in Tennessee whose membership includes Trump's Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth.

Nothing about the January 18 protest at Cities Church was violent or threatening. Protesters held cell phones and peacefully chanted slogans such as "Justice for Renée Good" and "ICE out of Minneapolis." After a period inside, they moved outdoors and continued their demonstration, calling for justice "for our neighbors."

Lemon and Fort documented the protest but did not participate in it. Lemon's attorney, Abbe Lowell, shared a written statement with the press following his client's arrest, which read in part: "Instead of investigating the federal agents who killed two peaceful Minnesota protesters, the Trump Justice Department is devoting its time, attention, and resources to this arrest, and that is the real indictment of wrongdoing in this case."

Lowell added, "This unprecedented attack on the First Amendment and transparent attempt to distract attention from the many crises facing this administration will not stand."

After he was released on Friday, a defiant Lemon said he would "not stop covering" the news, adding, "There is no more important time than right now, this very moment, for a free and independent media that shines a light on the truth and holds those in power accountable."

After she was released Friday afternoon, Fort posed one central question: "As a journalist who has worked in media for more than 17 years, I leave this federal courthouse with one question: Do we have a Constitution?"

These arrests, and the ongoing occupation of Minneapolis by federal agents, are part of a broader Trump administration effort to criminalize not only political opposition, but activities guaranteed under the First Amendment.

In addition to journalists, earlier this week Bondi announced that 16 people were facing charges for allegedly assaulting, resisting or impeding immigration Gestapo. They face up to 20 years in jail.

None of the claims from the federal government should be believed. Nasra Ahmed, one of the 16 charged, said at a news conference last week that she was wrongfully arrested while immigration police were attempting to detain two Somali men. She said agents

assaulted her and called her racial slurs before transferring her to the Sherburne County Jail for two days, after which she was released and, at the time, faced no charges.

Christina Rank, a special education teacher at Concord Education Center in Inver Grove Heights, is also facing charges after ICE agents appear to have rammed her vehicle as she was arriving at work on January 12. According to her mother, the teacher was held for 12 hours at the ICE detention center in Fort Snelling after agents boxed in her vehicle. Sarah Hunkele, Rank's mother, said her daughter was released without charges two weeks ago but is now facing federal assault charges.

Video posted on social media at the time of the incident shows ICE agents surrounding Rank's vehicle. A witness said they saw ICE thugs break Rank's window and rip her from the vehicle as she was "pulling into the parking lot for work!"

The arrests of these protesters and journalists mark a massive escalation in the Trump administration's assault on core democratic rights. Journalists, teachers, healthcare workers and ordinary residents are being arrested and charged with felonies for doing nothing more than filming or opposing the brutal actions of a paramilitary police force.

Far from retreating, the Trump administration is advancing its agenda to establish a dictatorship. Claims of a "retreat" promoted by the Democratic Party and the media are a political fraud, designed to disarm and disorient opposition.

In this context, the role of the Democratic Party is particularly despicable, which has worked over the past week to reach an agreement with Trump. This includes keeping the Department of Homeland Security funded and facilitating war preparations.



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