

More than a dozen arrests after protests over Zimmerman acquittal

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Protests over the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the killing of Trayvon Martin flared throughout the US over the weekend and have continued into this week. In Los Angeles, New York City, Oakland, San Francisco, Austin, Atlanta, Chicago, Baltimore, and Washington DC there were rallies of hundreds and in some cases thousands of people.

Despite the typically peaceful nature of the protests, police chiefs mobilized huge forces to arrest and corral protesters. Police have clamped down on protests in Los Angeles particularly, where, at the time of writing, over 14 people have been arrested and many more have been given citations.

The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) has declared a citywide tactical alert, which means that nearly every employed officer is on duty until the alert is called off. Hundreds of officers were mobilized throughout the city Monday night to patrol streets and block marching protesters in South Los Angeles.

In addition to the LAPD, fifty or more California Highway Patrol units have been brought in to guard entrances to freeways after protesters marched onto a major highway. In the Crenshaw neighborhood of Los Angeles, 350 police officers in riot gear deployed in the evening to arrest and quell protesters.

Police fired their guns into crowds with “non-lethal” ammunition, inflicting bloody wounds. Some of the protesters broke from the main group and threw rocks at cars and windows, eventually trying to enter a Walmart before being chased by police.

Anticipating that the exoneration of Zimmerman could tap into a reservoir of anger, Obama and other political officials have nervously and hypocritically invoked the virtues of the law and non-violence. The new Los Angeles Mayor, Eric Garcetti, tweeted on Sunday night “practice peace in City of Angels

tonight.”

A day later a news report showcased a video of LAPD officers violently assaulting peaceful protesters, smashing them with batons at a mid-day march. Non-violent protesters on the street have been arrested for unlawfully protesting and obstructing traffic; many others have been cited and made to pay fines for “jaywalking.”

At the time of writing, hundreds of police officers are flooding into South Los Angeles to prevent protests from igniting something larger. The LAPD warned the city in a statement that they would not tolerate vandalism, and that South LA “can expect a stronger police presence” Tuesday night. The police chief, Charlie Beck, said that the LAPD would be “very aggressive.” The BBC reports that the LAPD is attempting to show up in “mass force” to “deter” future protests.

This buildup of the police force in Los Angeles suggests that police fear a larger social explosion could be triggered by these protests. The general popular reaction against the acquittal of Zimmerman is connected to a much broader grievance over inequality, poverty and police brutality.

Under these conditions, supporters of the Democratic Party—including Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton—are intervening in the attempt to channel any social opposition behind the political establishment on the basis of promoting racial politics. The aim is to prevent any examination of the broader social and political issues at stake.

Sharpton declared over the weekend that the “acquittal of George Zimmerman is a slap in the face to the American people” and declared, “We intend to ask the Department of Justice to move forward as they did in the Rodney King case and we will closely monitor

the civil case against Mr. Zimmerman.”

On Tuesday, Attorney General Eric Holder delivered remarks before a convention of the NAACP in Florida criticizing “stand your ground” laws like those that exist in Florida, which allow for the use of deadly force, saying that such laws should be invoked only after an individual first attempts to retreat. He said that the Department of Justice had an “open investigation” into the shooting.

These toothless proposals are both an attempt to promote the Obama administration and to divert attention from the broader social and political context of the Trayvon Martin case. The Democrats and their political affiliates have no desire to discuss this context—including the promotion of vigilantism and law-and-order conceptions, the deepening social crisis in America, and the militarization and brutalization of American society—for which they, along with the entire ruling class and political establishment, are responsible.



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