

Georgia police officers charged after brutal assault on college students returning from protest

Dan Conway
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Charges have been brought against six Atlanta, Georgia police officers involved in the brutal and unprovoked assault of two young college students returning from protests against the murder of George Floyd on Saturday. The two African American youths, 20-year-old Taniyah Pilgrim and 22-year-old Messiah Young, were driving on a congested street in a blue sedan and were seen interacting with another young man, Chancellor Meyers, who was on foot and apparently targeted by the police for arrest.

The police, after tackling and apprehending Meyers, turned their attention to Pilgrim and Young, while Meyers could be heard tearfully proclaiming his innocence in the background.

Young, the driver, was filming the incident on his phone, as would have been his right. With Meyers' horrified screams in the background, Young pled with the officers to leave Meyers alone. Young asked the officers to allow Meyers to get into his vehicle to which one of the officers replied that he could "go or go to jail." Young then drove away, fearing for his safety, repeating the phrase, "I'm not dying today."

A short distance down the road, the car then got stuck in traffic. The officers easily caught up with Young and barked orders to put the car in park and open his windows, while beating the windows with their batons before completely smashing the driver's window. The police then repeatedly screamed, "He has a gun! He has a gun!" and then tased the young man, forcing him out of the car. No gun was found in Young's possession nor in the car after the incident.

A second group of officers confronted Pilgrim on the passenger side. Even though Pilgrim screamed that she was exiting the car, police deployed a taser against her

anyway. The fact that several of the officers wore gas masks and issued muffled commands that could not easily be understood only added to the students' horror and confusion. Pilgrim later told ABC News, "I thought both Messiah and I were going to die." A video of the incident caught on police bodycam can be found [here](#).

According to statements by lawyers for the pair, Pilgrim was detained in a police paddy wagon for several hours, sitting side by side with three other detained women in extremely hot and cramped conditions. Her requests for a face mask to prevent coronavirus infection were repeatedly ignored. In televised remarks, Pilgrim stated that the officer who led her away glibly told her she and Young were on the verge of being shot before exiting the car.

Young informed reporters and interviewers that the arresting officers punched him in the back 10 times after he exited the vehicle and that the arrest and brutal treatment at the hands of the police led to a massive gash on his forearm requiring 24 stitches. Video of the incident also shows an officer tasing Young even after he was already immobilized on the ground. Young also reported that one of the barbs from the taser gun remained in his back for six to eight hours while his requests to remove the barb were repeatedly ignored by police and staff.

Footage of the arrest was broadcast on live television and has been widely shared on social media, attracting national and international attention.

The city administration was thus compelled to act against six of the officers involved. Arrest warrants have been issued for officers Lonnie Hood, Willie Sauls, Ivory Streeter, Mark Gardner, Armond Jones and Roland Claud. The charges include aggravated assault

of Young, aggravated assault of Pilgrim, as well as simple battery and criminal damage to property.

Pilgrim and Young were both pleased with the arrest of the officers. “I’m so happy they’re being held accountable for their actions. There was not one justifiable thing that they did,” Pilgrim told ABC News. “I feel a little safer now that these monsters are off the street and no longer able to terrorize anyone else from this point on,” said Young.

Two of the six officers, Streeter and Gardner, were terminated from their positions Sunday while the remainder have been reassigned to desk jobs with the department. All have until Friday to surrender with a \$10,000 signature bond set for each. With a signature bond, a defendant will forfeit the bond amount if he or she does not appear in court, but a deposit is not required with the court beforehand. It is typically reserved for minor felony type cases involving defendants with no prior criminal history. However, the city of Atlanta is providing this concession to police officers whose actions led to severe unprovoked injury and trauma and nearly cost the lives of these two innocent young people.

It is notable that the two terminated officers having the most prominent roles in the assault, Streeter and Gardner, are both African American. Moreover, the city of Atlanta has a female chief of police, Erika Shields, and a black female mayor, Keisha Lance Bottoms, the latter considered to be a serious contender for the vice presidential nomination by Democratic presidential front runner, former Vice President Joe Biden. This gives the lie to claims that police brutality is simply a product of white racism even though it is certainly a factor in many instances of police brutality.

Biden has been particularly impressed by Bottoms’ “incredible” response to events in Atlanta last Friday in which she publicly lambasted “violent” protesters. “You are disgracing our city. You are disgracing the life of George Floyd and every other person who has been killed in this country,” she cried out. Her response to the officers involved in the assault on Young and Pilgrim, however, was far more muted and conciliatory. She agreed with Shields, who characterized the officers as good men who had just “made some mistakes.” Bottoms’ tenure on the city council and now as mayor has been marked by vicious attacks on the poor and working class, in particular, draconian legislation

against panhandling by the homeless and attacks on city workers pensions.

Police brutality, as the events in Atlanta make clear, is fundamentally the product of capitalism. The shuffling of personnel within police departments and city halls on the basis of race, ethnicity or gender does nothing to address the problem.

Claims that police departments can be reformed, such as the #8cantwait campaign being pushed by Democratic Party activists and Hollywood celebrities, are likewise a dead end. Legislation changing use-of-force methods and requiring more stringent reporting of police misconduct, even if passed, will be largely ignored. The police are now acting, with the instigation of President Donald Trump and the full support of the Democrats and Republicans, as a domestic occupying army on behalf of the financial aristocracy. Use-of-force restrictions at home will be ignored, just as rules of engagement are ignored in wars abroad.

It should be noted that the implementation of body cams after a wave of high profile police killings sparked popular protests during the Obama administration did nothing to prevent the attack on Young and Pilgrim even though officers had their body cams in operation the whole time.

Furthermore, the attack on these two students is not isolated as the ruling elite is desperately trying to stamp out resistance and assert its authority over the working class. Not only protesters but uninvolved bystanders have been brutally assaulted: Seattle police pepper sprayed a seven-year-old girl; New York Police Department cruisers mowed down protesting pedestrians, and police fired rubber bullets at residents watching National Guard troop transports drive down city streets, to cite only a few examples.



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