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COULD KEY WEST REACH THE FERGUSON FLASHPOINT?

by ARNAUD AND NAJA GIRARD ([HTTP://THEBLUEPAPER.COM/AUTHOR/ARNAUD-NAJA/](http://THEBLUEPAPER.COM/AUTHOR/ARNAUD-NAJA/))

“Cartwright began yelling as loud as he could, and almost immediately a large crowd began forming around us [...] Within minutes a crowd of at least 50 bystanders surrounded us and Det. Wormington called for additional Officers while I held down Cartwright.”

Police officers were arresting bad boy Ricky Cartwright who had ridden his bicycle through a stop sign while texting, allegedly with a beer in his hand. They tased him in the back. He was now screaming in pain in the middle of the road, attracting an angry crowd which, according to Detective Siracuse’s police report, kept “drawing closer and closer... despite numerous commands to stay back.”

No, this is not Ferguson, Missouri. This is Bahama Village, Key West, May 9, 2014. Detective Siracuse had just tased a black man on Emma Street and yes this is the same Siracuse who three years ago tased Matthew Murphy into a coma.

On May 9th, lost in their imaginary war, Detectives Siracuse and Wormington believe they are now under siege. Wormington calls for the cavalry – literally – First on scene is an officer riding a horse; the one you see during Fantasy Fest. He is working “crowd control” by rearing the butt of his horse into the crowd of protesters. More police cars show up. Siracuse and Wormington decide it’s safer to move north to the next corner of Emma Street where they would be more protected. Quite a circus.



So, could Key West reach that “flashpoint”? Could we find ourselves watching angry mobs throw rocks through shop windows on Duval Street?

Why were the residents of Bahama Village so upset? According to one bystander, Siracuse kept jerking the electric wires connected to the Taser probes buried in Cartwright’s back causing him to scream in pain.

In the crowd, Siracuse recognizes a man he knew as Johnny Taylor. Taylor is visibly upset at Siracuse’s treatment of Cartwright. [Taylor is the man wearing the neck brace in the video.]

“Ya’ll quick to put that shit in somebody but y’all don’t want to put that shit outta nobody,” Taylor is heard saying on the dash cam video.

A female voice:

“Illegal search! Illegal search! What they stop the man for? For nothin. They stopped him for nothin.”

After sending Cartwright off to jail, Siracuse came back to arrest Taylor for “resisting an officer without violence.”

Protests against police methods have now become one of the most explosive issues in the nation.

“Freedom of speech,” said Taylor, “I can say whatever I want to say. What are you arresting me for? For speaking my mind?” Three months later Taylor is still in jail awaiting trial.

Siracuse disagrees with Taylor on the free speech issue. In his report he claims that Taylor “kept drawing closer and closer, egging on the crowd,” that he ordered Taylor to stay back but that he kept coming. He finally claims that another officer, Officer Hall, was also unsuccessful in containing Taylor. The problem is the dash cam video clearly shows Taylor very upset, but not moving from the area where he stood when the incident began, even after Cartwright is taken away in a police car. It’s hard to discount that officers intended to retaliate against free speech in the charge against Taylor.

It appears that police officers don’t react well to criticism and have alienated themselves from many black communities. This is what is really at stake in these protests. As in Ferguson, this explosive mix was not created in one day. The shooting of Michael Brown was just “the straw that broke the camel’s back,” as one Ferguson resident interviewed by CBS News put it. Abuse and apparently police discrimination against blacks had been going on for years in Ferguson.

Stopping and searching Cartwright gave officers the opportunity to [allegedly] find a minute amount of drugs [which apparently was so small that Cartwright managed to smash it into the ground.] But how many young black men are frisked in this way before police score that half-gram of cocaine?

One resident explained: “By the time the police has searched 100 people for drugs, nobody cares if on the 101st time they caught a guy with a crack rock. Everybody hates their guts by then, for not letting us have a life.”

Some comments are more colorful: “The police ain’t worth two dead flies in Chinese money.”

“All people want is to go about their business in peace.”

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The methods used by certain officers who work Bahama Village are simply appalling. Officer Siracuse is now famous for the latex gloves that he slaps on in order to, in plain view of the public, proceed with cavity searches of suspected drug dealers. There are at least two videos showing black men on the street with their legs spread apart, while Siracuse apparently sticks his fingers up their butts.

"We still have rights," said Bobby Mosby, who personally experienced Siracuse's humiliating search methods, "I could see doing that inside, at the jail. But out in public, in front of everybody?" As a matter of fact, those searches are prohibited. Under Florida Statute 901.211 (http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=0900-0999/0901/Sections/0901.211.html), "**visual or manual inspection of genitals; buttocks; anus; breasts,**" can only be performed "***on premises where the search cannot be observed by persons not physically conducting ... the search pursuant to this section.***"

Glenn Hanes, also a black man from Bahama Village, was filmed standing at the back of a police cruiser. Sergeant Pablo Rodriguez kicks his feet apart while Officer Siracuse gets into "exploration mode".

"I didn't know y'all could go in their behinds and look in their assholes," says Sheila Butler sarcastically, as she films the whole thing. "I didn't do it," laughs Rodriguez. Hanes asked for a rape test when he was booked into the Monroe County jail.



"This is not new," says attorney, Julio Margalli, "my office used to be on Petronia Street. I remember looking at the police systematically stopping and frisking black kids — boys really. I got so sick of it I threatened one officer with a lawsuit. And what happened? He came back the next day to slap a parking ticket on my car. My car, I might add, parked inside of my own parking lot."

Three weeks ago we reported (<http://thebluepaper.com/article/police-point-gun-at-six-year-old-boy-and-more/>) on an incident that made us about fall off of our chairs. Detective Leahy had taken three officers over to Grandma Yvonne Edwards house in the Village. Wearing hoods on their heads, they burst into the tiny home to arrest then 23 year-old black resident, Shamika Clark on a theft charge. [We wrote: "granted the hoods were not white and pointy, but what could possess four white police officers to do such a thing considering this country's history?"]

This week we discovered a disturbing photograph those officers took of their catch: handcuffed, partially-clad, Shamika. "They stayed way too long with her inside that bathroom," said grandma Edwards, "Why wasn't there a woman officer in there with them?"

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No drugs, no weapons, the whole affair revolved around a dispute between two ex-lovers over the ownership of a puppy and some electronics. With what ease the Court handed Shamika five years probation and 15 months in prison!

We also reported (<http://thebluepaper.com/article/police-point-gun-at-six-year-old-boy-and-more/>) that the same Detective Leahy took a SWAT team over to an apartment at Fort Street Village last April. There they found eleven year old Shanyia Winn home alone and pointed all of their guns at her. Leahy interrogated her outside her home with a shotgun to her head. Did we say she was eleven years old? Eleven years old!!! "They pointed guns at me so that if I had moved or my dog had barked I would have been dead."

The same day (<http://thebluepaper.com/article/police-point-gun-at-six-year-old-boy-and-more/>) KWPD officers stopped a car carrying Sheila Carey. They pulled her out of the car and pushed her to the ground to handcuff her. Then they forced her six-year old son and her eleven-year old daughter out at gunpoint. The police claimed they were looking for Carey's boyfriend Marvin Smith, but it was later learned that he was already in police custody at the time. [We asked, "Would these children have been treated that way if they had been white?"]

Warning the City Commission last Tuesday about the possibility of similarities between the problems in Ferguson and in our own City, Key West citizen activist Christine Russel quoted from the poem "Harlem" by Langston Hughes. "What happens to a dream deferred?... Does it explode?"

But Mayor Cates dismissed Russel's concerns saying [and we are not making this up], "There are organizations all over this town being involved with children... They try to give them brand name stuff that people donate so they do have some sense of pride, so they can go on and be productive."

The most disturbing thing is not that much the unnecessary brutality, but the fact that it appears to be systemic, with the City seemingly willing to rubberstamp, disguise, or cover-up what is occurring.

When Glenn Hanes arrived at the jail complaining of Siracuse's intrusive cavity search, the jail called the hospital about a rape test, but it also contacted the KWPD. According to Hanes KWPD officials asked the jail not to send Hanes to the hospital because FDLE was going to send their own nurse to conduct the examination. "I have no idea what is going on with my complaint," said Hanes who is at the Monroe County Detention Center awaiting trial.

As observed in the Charles Eimers death-in-custody case, FDLE appears to have an overly cozy relationship with KWPD, and the fact is, evidence incriminating to the police has been jeopardized: Eimers body was nearly cremated before autopsy on FDLE's watch. Matthew Shaun Murphy's Taser accident was never even investigated. Donnie Lee, the Chief of Police, appears ready to add to misinformation about police activities, publicly stating that Siracuse repeatedly ordered Murphy to stop fighting before firing his Taser, even though that account is contradicted by all witness statements, including the officer's own testimony.

In Bahama Village, the police are the "Princes of the Projects." It seems that the Housing Authority rarely has to bother with civil process. Complaints by tenants are often met with police force. Any guest or family member can be issued a "No Trespass Warning" followed by an arrest. Police officers are literally on the Housing Authority's payroll. The entire community lives in a parallel legal universe.

And the police, apparently stick to their own, no matter what. Officer Henry Arroyo Jr. was recently discharged from the force over several very serious accusations of child sexual molestation. He was, however, immediately hired by the Housing Authority, which already employs many of his fellow officers as security guards. No one, aside from the residents, seems to be concerned that an alleged sexual predator was hired to work in housing complexes where hundreds of children are at risk. The residents of course perceive it as yet another slap in the face.

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People wonder if our police force is lost in a dark and disconnected dream of paramilitary violence. There are approximately 90 Key West police officers and so far 99% of the problems that have been reported to *The Blue Paper* have been about the actions of a handful of officers. Those few, however, appear to be operating under the total protection of a system that will obstruct justice, endorse the officers' lies and even lie for them, defend them at any cost, or simply fail to take action, all in line with what the good Doctor King called, "The intolerable silence of the good people."