

Authorities Media Grossly Exaggerate Oakland Riot Reports

Written by Davey D ID4602

Wednesday, 14 January 2009 04:54 -

Authorities & Corporate Media Grossly Exaggerate Oakland Riot Reports by Davey D - So last week after the demonstrations for Oscar Grant, a 22 year unarmed, non resistant father executed in plain view of hundreds by a cowardly BART police officer, Johannes Mehserle who was finally arrested last night after two weeks of us waiting and protesting. we had to endure endless news reports and commentary most likely fed from police accounts and echoed by newspaper reporters who were not even on the scene that suggested that the city was burning and people were out of control. These pundits got on their pedestals and made pompous pronouncements about how the 200 young people who broke away from a larger demonstration held at the Fruitvale BART station in Oakland where Grant was killed on New Years morning, to march to downtown Oakland did irreparable damage.

The reports that went around the world were that over 300 businesses were destroyed and that hundreds ran amok in the streets. Well now we are finding out those reports were GREATLY exaggerated. As was reported on KTVU Channel 2 which was the TV station to first air the gruesome execution, the actual damage was 40-45 windows smashed and a couple of dozen garbage cans thrown in streets mostly on 8th, 14th and 17th, the latter two had been closed off to traffic. There was no looting. No gunshots. No robberies.

What many news reports focused on was the footage of people burning a police car and setting a nearby garbage bin on fire. It made for good television it got people talking and more importantly it got key officials to finally start moving and addressing the situation. Those actions on the streets reflected the undescrable anger that many were feeling especially since up to that point six full days had passed and the Mayor, district attorney, BART officials and other major leaders had made no public announcements to ensure residents that justice would be carried out. No one came forth and expressed shock, horror and grief at seeing such a heinous act. No one came forth and said "do not worry this will be thoroughly investigated. We did hear from BART police Chief Gary Gee who told us that the video was inconclusive. We did hear from a BART spokesperson that the officer Johannes Mehserle had not been interviewed by officials and was on paid administrative leave.

Shocked residents had to also endure some mainstream outlets like the SF Chronicle newspaper and KPIX TV who tripped over themselves to report early on that Grant had a criminal past and had served time in jail-which in most people's eyes had little relevance to him being shot point blank while he lay face down with his hands behind his back after playing the role of peacemaker and pleading with officers to not shoot him because he had a 4 year old daughter. The manner in which such reporting was done is the equivalent to us hearing about a rape and then announcing to the world that the victim slept around a lot.

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Early that morning leading up to the night the so called "riots" broke out, one hundred Black leaders, mainly clergy from all denominations, several Black elected officials, and the heads of numerous traditional civil rights organizations were turned away by long time District Attorney Thomas Orloff when they went to his office to get some answers as to what his intentions were and find out why no charges had been brought up against the officer. It's not everyday that the community makes a visit to the District Attorney hence he should've been more than willing to accommodate folks. His office was called the day before to announce that folks were coming and it wasn't like he was busy and not around. What Orloff did was try to pick one or two people to come meet with him, which was rejected by the group who insisted that this elected public official set brief everyone in one of his conference rooms. At one point the Oakland Mayor's Chief of staff who showed up about a half hour into the process was denied a sit down by one of Orloff's aids. Yep I stood right there and witnessed the rejection with my own eyes..

Three people from the group agreed to talk to Orloff to negotiate a place, time and space when he could address the entire group. Eventually a conference room was set up-after folks endured a stand off and negotiations for close to an hour. The dozen or so press that was on hand was told they were not allowed to come into this tax payer supported office and get the information first hand. The Black leaders did not object to press being present District Attorney Orloff did.

What we experienced during that meeting was a guy who seemed to be dismissive at times and somewhat arrogant. He didn't supply too many answers to our most pressing questions and even when vigorously challenged by several within the room. He made it clear that charges levied on the officer rested squarely on his shoulders. He stood between the community demanding justice and the officer who killed Oscar Grant. Orloff told the group that he wasn't going to share this conversation and answers with reporters and that it was up to the group to pass along the information he shared with the group to the rest of the community. At was at that point that some of us whipped out our camera phones and recorders to ensure we could accurately communicate to our community what Orloff was talking about. I have to be honest I feel uncomfortable with a guy like Orloff prosecuting this case. Will he go the full nine or just do a half ass job resulting in an acquittal or this officer getting off on some sort of technicality?

I feel even more uncomfortable after learning from former Black Panther Emory Douglass that Orloff was part of the prosecuting team that went all out to derail, incarcerate and jam up the Panthers back in the days. We all know the controversial history surrounding that.

Adding to this backdrop leading up to the night of the "riots" was Ron Dellums still had not spoken publicly and then about an hour before the planned demonstration at Fruitvale BART station, he scheduled a press conference at the exact same time on the other side of town.

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Some people seemed to think that was no big deal, all one had to do was get on BART and get from one locale to the other. The problem was BART shut down the station thus making it difficult for people outside the immediate area as well as reporters to get to both locations. The Mayor sent an aid to the rally, who read statement of apology about 45 minutes into the rally. People booed and rejected the apology. That's when a number of folks said it was high time to march down to city hall. They wanted their grievances heard before key decision makers.

Now we can go back and forth all day about the effectiveness of marching and direct action demonstrations.. Most of us including myself don't get down like that or condone innocent people's property getting smashed, but as I noted that is what finally got things moving. There was no mayor at the early morning meeting, not even a rep from his office. The DA had to be forced to sit down with folks. The officer wasn't talking and no decent cop or group of decent cops had the foresight to address the community and assure the public that what they witness was not good police work and did not represent them. It was silence.. But not no more..

And not that two wrongs don't make a right, but I've seen police cars get torched and windows smashed for far less including after sporting events and raucous frat parties on nearby campuses. From here to Philly and involving everyone rowdy Raider fans to rowdy Philly fans to rowdy students at top 10 schools like Cal and Stanford. Am I the only one recalling riots after damn near every Big Game resulting in stores along Telegraph and Bancroft Avenue boarding up their windows? Several years ago extra police units were called onto the field moments before the game ending to make sure our best and brightest-future generation scholars didn't go buck wild, but we rarely hear pompous concerns about rampaging college students.. If anything reporters seem to bend over backwards to put such activities into perspective. They'll point out it was handful of folks and not castigate the entire city or student body. They'll issue glowing reports about the events that took place before hand and not define a larger event by those actions which they describe as out of the ordinary.

Having been on the scene that night on 14th street I did see what went on when the 30 or so people ran away from the 40 or so cops in riot gear that had shot tear gas after a cup water was thrown in their direction. I got that on tape.

People ran down the streets and as they did some folks wearing scarves threw stones and spark plugs busting up car, store windows and bush stop shelter windows as they ran. Others

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followed down the street not so much with the presence of mind to break windows but to avoid being captured by police who at that time started picking off individuals. Most of us who found ourselves on 14th street were in awe of the fire that was set to the car of an Oakland newspaper reporter who saw his car set ablaze as he was typing about the happenings up the street.

The over exaggeration of damage was a way to minimize and take away from a police execution of an unarmed man laying face down on the ground begging for his life as a 6"5" police officer coldly shot him? Oscar Grant to our knowledge wasn't fighting breaking windows, burning cars or nothing like that... and what went on on 14th street in downtown Oakland should in no way remove focus from this young father of a 4 year old daughter.

One has to ask was this over exaggeration of damage an excuse to justify the police bringing out what looked like a small army tank coupled with scores of police who outnumbered the protestors? It must've been because I sure enough heard a lot of pundits who weren't there explaining how Oakland's finest was overwhelmed. I don't think so. Was it an excuse to justify all the overtime paid out?

What is interesting to note is that those arrested that night got charged and were forced to show up to court the next day. Many of those arrested were simply on the scene watching. One of those swept up and arrested was a newspaper editor and reporter Minister of Information JR of the SF Bayview and POCC who was there taking pictures and documenting what was taking place. When I saw him at his arraignment he ran down all sorts of stories of people who were getting swept up by overzealous police. They ranged from young brothers getting tasered to 40+ year old Japanese man who just came upon the scene himself. The fact that he's an outspoken critic of police terrorism makes us wonder if he became a convenient target. many of the folks got slapped with misdemeanor charges, he and some of the other brothers got hit with felonies.

Lastly another criticism being levied by armchair pundits was "why are folks in the streets about this police killing and not protesting when other crimes take place"? The question itself is faulty because it implies the community doesn't care and that everyone is comfortable with crime. Ray Ray shooting Pookie over drug turf or a petty beef is not something that the average citizen can safely confront. If they are of a criminal mindset then it would be fool hardy to directly confront them.

It also implies that there hasn't been any marches or vigils. Nothing could be further from the

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truth such activities take place all the time. It was just last week that there was huge march and vigil surrounding the gang rape of a sista in Richmond. There was another vigil/march for a former Oakland resident who came back to visit from Atlanta who got gunned down.. Over the years we seen large marches with organizations like Silence the Violence and Lovelife to name a few.

In addition many of the folks who organized last week's rally are involved with organizations that they formed that try to take preventative measures. In other words they work with "at risk youth" and try to show them a better way so that they don't ever have to get caught up in the legal system. Some have leadership camps, others have after school programs. Some run training and skill enhancement outfits. It ranges. Sadly those efforts are rarely recognize, by critics who wanna know why we the community doesn't object to Black on Black crime. Some people have argued that such prevention efforts are ineffective because our communities are still saddled with crime. I'd like to remind folks that the billions spent in tax payer money for the War on Drugs, dozens of new prisons in this state along, hundreds of extra cops, state of the art weapons etc hasn't made a dent in crime either. So what's really going on?

The other thing to keep in mind is that the police are there to protect and serve. When they kill or get killed its a big deal. Our tax dollars pay for their training. Our tax dollars pay for their salaries. Our tax dollars pay for their funerals if they get killed in the line of duty. And our tax dollars pay for their defense if they are accused of killing someone or behaving recklessly and brought up on charges.

And lets be real honest right here. this horrific crime was caught on video tape. It was brutal and harsh eye opener for a whole lot of folks. In all fairness, one could make the case that many of the people who came out last week for Oscar Grant have not come out for other police killings even when they were immersed in controversy. The big difference here was seeing this on tape. It clearly moved people into action.

Hopefully the actions taken are such that it puts a significant dent in this on going problem of police terrorism.