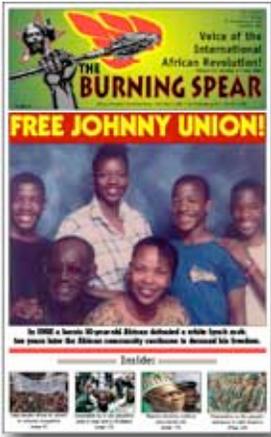




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San Francisco Police Brutality: Ignored When It Victimizes African Community; Exposed When It Touches White Community

SAN FRANCISCO — The San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) is currently under unusual public scrutiny as a result of an incident of police brutality. On the night of November 20, 2002, three young off-duty San Francisco police officers led by Alex Fagan Jr. were returning from a night of drinking and celebrating with their peers. They stopped at a local tavern and severely beat up two citizens for no apparent reason.

The beating and the subsequent cover-up at the highest levels of the SFPD resulted in a significant grand jury indictment on February 28, 2003, against the police chief, three deputy chiefs, three command officers and the three brutes who carried out the attack.

Liberal District Attorney Terrance Hallinan presented the case of the attack and cover-up to the grand jury — made up of 19 citizens, half appointed and half pulled from the voter registration rolls — and instructed them to do a thorough investigation. The grand jury interviewed and investigated over 42 members of the SFPD from the lowest patrol officer to the police chief himself.

Their presumably thorough investigation resulted in the indictments on basically two counts. The three officers who carried out the assault were charged with felony assault. The command officers were charged with felony conspiracy to cover-up the incident and the mishandling of the investigation of the incident. The cover-up occurred because Alex Fagan Jr. is the son of the powerful Deputy Chief Alex Fagan Sr. who also has a history of misconduct. Fagan Sr. was also indicted.

SF police officers reprimanded because victims were white

This appears to be a serious response to the brutal attack, but after a long history of unfettered brutality by the SFPD, we have to ask "Why, why now?" The two citizens who were attacked were white. As did the German government dealing with Jewish citizens in the second imperialist war (WW2), Officer Alex Fagan Jr. and his drunken buddies "crossed the line" by attacking fellow whites.

Like many SFPD officers, Officer Alex Fagan Jr. "cut his teeth," as a patrolman, by brutalizing the African population of the Hunters Point/Bay View district. These attacks on Africans are mandated by the counter-insurgent practice of police containment, which is the nationwide public policy for black communities. Two incidents shortly before the beating of the two whites clearly illustrate this policy:

On the night of January 20, 2002, approximately 20 San Francisco police officers attacked four young Africans. It was the night of the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday and with no school the following day, the youth were hangin' out in their Hunters Point/Bay View neighborhood. As usual the police concocted a phony pretext for their action but the real reason for the attack is stated clearly in Point #8 of the Working Platform of the African People's Socialist Party: "the police are an occupying army of the State."

As word spread of the police attack, parents came out to support and defend their children. The police, with guns drawn, threatened the parents with being shot if they made any attempt to aid or assist their children.

The parents and other residents were kept at a distance and forced to watch helplessly as their male children were beaten and their female children were sexually assaulted by inappropriate "frisking and searching." One resident made it clear that the purpose of the incident was "a show of force" and intimidation.

As you can imagine, there was no grand jury indictments and no criminal charges filed after these events even though the families protested and filed complaints. It is now 15 months later, and the scandal over the beating of two white citizens and the subsequent grand jury indictments have created enough democratic space for the just demand of the African families to be recognized and acted upon. Consequently, five of the officers involved in the attack have now been criminally charged.

The second illustrative incident of normal anti-African police behavior happened at Thurgood Marshall High School. Thurgood Marshall, also located in Hunters Point/ Bay View, has a predominantly African student body.

The school had a high academic standard, which was mandated by the black community. On October 11, 2002 a

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fight occurred on campus. Sixty baton-wielding police responded and created chaos and a police riot. Many students were hit by clubs. A police officer threatened one student with his gun. The brave and always struggling African youth confronted the police with their voices and their unity. In this case, charges were brought against some of the students and one teacher. Eventually the bogus charges were dropped, but no charge was ever brought against the SFPD.

Attacks on the SF black community have historically been a strategy of State oppression

For Burning Spear readers to more clearly understand the context of these events, a little San Francisco history is necessary: In the late 1940's, the SF Fillmore District was a thriving commercial and cultural hub of the African community, similar to Tulsa, Oklahoma and Rosewood, Florida.

Approximately 20 years later, at the height of the Black Power Movement and during the political reign of the Black Panther Party, the Fillmore District was attacked by the SF Redevelopment Agency and literally razed to the ground. For decades the heart of the once thriving Fillmore District remained dozens of empty weed-filled lots. Some of the African community was dispersed out of San Francisco and some concentrated in the Hunters Point/Bay View neighborhood.

Hunters Point/Bay View has little commercial activity beyond the usual liquor stores and chicken houses. However, it does have sunny weather, easy access to downtown and the recreational activities of the SF Bay.

Consequently the City of San Francisco, led by the neo-colonialist Mayor Willie Brown, has a grand plan to "redevelop" Hunters Point/Bay View. One of the white police officers involved and charged with brutalizing the African youth on Martin Luther King Day alluded to this plan when he said "As long as you [African] people are here [in Hunters Point] we will act like this."

The SFPD has a long history of violence against the Africans and the colonized communities of SF. No attack on the black community has ever resulted in grand jury indictments. Indicted commanders — Chief Earl Sanders, Deputy Chiefs Suhr, Alex Fagan Sr. and Captain Corrales — have long histories of brutality and misconduct. Most recently Deputy Chief Suhr has authorized illegal spying on antiwar demonstrators. For their various misdeeds, these men have all been promoted.

As The Burning Spear goes to press, the dates of the court hearings for the three officers charged with felony assault on the white citizens, and the five officers who assaulted the African youth have not been made public. The indictments against the top command officers for conspiracy have been dropped. While it is obvious to everyone that a cover-up took place, the DA was unable to prove the more technical charge of "conspiracy." A police cover-up is a common occurrence, but since the charge of conspiracy does not revolve around African militants or other radicals challenging the State, it requires definite proof that the individual officers met and talked and planned to conspire to protect some of their own. To any thinking person, it is obvious this happened.

Consistent with the colonial history of "the good old white boy" network at the SFPD, Alex Fagan Sr. has been rewarded for his history of misdeeds, the most recent being the cover-up of his son's crimes. Neo-colonial African Chief Sanders, who has a long history of brutality against the residents of Hunters Point/Bay View and is currently out on disability leave, has paid homage to white power by promoting Alex Fagan Sr. to be the acting police chief.

The actions of the San Francisco Police Department are consistent with the actions of police departments throughout the U.S. when it comes to African people. The police are arms of a colonial State. They function as the first line of defense of the oppressive status quo. They are there to crush the revolutionary aspirations of the people to be free and independent even when the people are not conscious of their own interests in striving for freedom and independence.

It is the task of our Party and of African militants in general to expose the real nature of our relationship with the police and to organize to build the African People's Socialist Party as the political army of the oppressed African masses.

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