

Protest Continues After Hundreds Punctured the Silence in Cleveland

Amidst a crescendo of police killings, vigils and protests during the last week in Cleveland, OH, the “day-after” demonstration that took place on Tuesday hit the streets of Cleveland with anger and militancy NOT seen in decades.

The city was raw from the recent police killings of Tanisha Anderson, a mentally-ill 37-year old Black woman whose family called the police for help with her behavior. Soon after they arrived she was dead. The city was stunned by the police murder of Tamir Rice, a 12-year old Black boy playing with a toy gun in a park near his home. And everyone had been anticipating news of the ruling from the grand jury on indicting Darren Wilson in the killing of Michael Brown.

Word of a demonstration had gone out via eblasts, press releases and social media. People arrived alone and in groups, including 75-80 students from Oberlin College, students from Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland State University, John Carroll University and high schools in Cleveland.

After a brief 3 pm rally in the usual quadrant of Public Square, the crowd moved toward the “Justice Center”. But when it reached the intersection of Superior and Ontario, the center of Public Square in downtown Cleveland, people who did not know each other quickly formed a circle, blocking traffic in all 4 directions. An older woman organizer became a symbolic corpse lying down in the center under a white sheet that said “Black Lives Matter”. Chants of “No Justice, No Peace, No Racist Police” alternated with “Black Lives Matter, All Lives Matter, Justice for Tamir” and “The People United Will Never be Divided”.

Police arrived, cleared the older woman from under the sheet, made a swift arrest of a different protester (released without charge the next evening), and rerouted traffic. The circle stood firm and continued chanting as organizers conferred and solicited ideas from among the crowd about how long to stay, where to go next. The word went around the circle to lie down at 4:02. The press was arriving one after another, wanting us to stay long enough for them to report live.

Soon the word went out for the crowd to line up in rows, stick together and move toward the “Justice Center”, still filling the street. The crowd traveled 4-5 blocks, with an ever-increasing sense of power, chanting “Whose Streets? OUR Streets”. It turned down the entrance ramp to Route 2, a major crosstown highway, clearly taking the cops by surprise. Young people took the lead, hopping barriers to make a human blockade, stopping traffic going both directions. Chants rang out, “What do we Want? Justice. When do we Want it? Now.” “Ferguson on Fire, the Jury is a Liar.” “Hey, Hey, Ho, Ho, These Racist Cops Have Got To Go”. “Back up, Back up, we want Freedom, These Racist Cops, we don’t need’em.”

By then the crowd had swelled to 300-350, as live news and tweets let people know what they were missing and they rushed to join in. After shutting down the highway for an hour, at 5:30 protesters lined up and headed back to Public Square. Along the way they were greeted the flicking lights and raised fists of prisoners in the City jail on upper floors of the “Justice Center”.

A jubilant crowd rallied briefly back at Public Square. A Black activist conveyed heartfelt appreciation to the demonstrators from the family of Tamir Rice. An older organizer hailed the mainly young people in the crowd. A message got through that all the local TV stations had suspended regular programming, replacing Dr. Phil with live coverage of the dramatic protest. Spirits were incredibly high. Apparently some of the youth wanted to know what we were going to shut down next, but, many were off to a public hearing in Tamir’s neighborhood, where they became part of an outpouring of rage delivered to the Mayor and Chief of Police by area residents.

In answer to many requests for “What’s Next?” there was a “Black Lives Matter Friday” action at an east side Walmart yesterday. Today, one week after the police shooting of Tamir Rice, there will 3 pm spoken word and

a march from Public Square to Playhouse Square during Winterfest, followed by a march and vigil for Justice for Malissa Williams and Timothy Russell on the 2nd Anniversary of their 137-shot police execution.

The struggle continues.

Puncture the Silence –Stop Mass Incarceration

Cleveland

216-932-3474