

Georgia Governor Declares State of Emergency Amid Protests Against Atlanta Cop City

A police training center has sparked consistent demonstrations leading to the law-enforcement execution of an activist and the jailing of many others

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***Governor Brian Kemp** of Georgia has enacted a state of emergency in Atlanta in the aftermath of the police killing of an activist protesting the construction of a law-enforcement training center in a municipality with a large African American population.*

Atlanta Cop City serves as a prototype of the current domestic policy towards policing in the United States.

The plan consists of utilizing 380 acres of Dekalb County South River Forest to construct the training facility despite objections from community activists and environmentalists. Kemp, who had deployed the National Guard during the demonstrations in the aftermath of the police execution of George Floyd in late May 2020, has authorized the usage of 1,000 of these military forces to suppress the protests up until February 9.

Kemp during his "State of the State" address on January 25 described those who oppose the construction of the police training facility as "out-of-state rioters" seeking to ignite violence in the capital city of Atlanta. He emphasized that the recent demonstrations justified his pro-police position in the state of Georgia.

A young activist, **Manuel "Tortuguita" Teran**, was killed by a SWAT team which claimed that they were fired upon by people in the Defend the Atlanta Forest encampment. There is no bodycam video from the police officers who fired the fatal shots that killed Tortuguita.

Demonstrations have been going on since December aimed at halting the destruction of the land and trees in order to build a police facility which will only harm the African American and oppressed communities. Police have conducted numerous raids into the area attacking activists conducting tree-sittings and other forms of protection for the forests.

18 people have been arrested and are being charged with “terrorism” under Georgia law. Kemp and other unconditional supporters of law-enforcement have characterized the recent demonstrations as acts of terrorism.

In a recent article published by Intercept on January 27, the author opined that the terrorist charges against the activists are stemming from the corporate and law-enforcement groupings which have a vested interests in the expansion of police training facilities and the further militarization of law-enforcement in the U.S. These efforts to obliterate any political opposition to state repression and environmental degradation transcend both ruling class parties in the U.S.

The [report noted that](#):

“The terror charges, all handed down within the last two months, were not from nowhere. Political and business interests behind Cop City have been pushing related rhetoric for well over a year. Communications records uncovered by activists between Cop City supporters — local self-identifying ‘stakeholders,’ business owners, council members, and Atlanta law enforcement officials — show that these parties have been calling the protesters ‘eco-terrorists’ since at least last April.... Notably, in recognition that the land on which Atlanta stands was stolen in the 1800s from the Muscogee (Creek) people, the forest protest encampment has been host to dozens of visitors from around the country who descended from the displaced Indigenous community.”

In response to the killing of the young activist by the SWAT team, a demonstration was held on January 21 through the Midtown area of Atlanta. A section of the march reportedly broke off from the peaceful action in order to break windows and ignite a police vehicle.

From Atlanta to Memphis: Empowering Law-enforcement Means Heightened Repression

Although there is no empirical evidence that the presence of large numbers of law-enforcement personnel in urban, suburban and rural areas result in any significant decline in criminal activity, the local, state and federal governments continue to pour resources into the maintenance and enhancement of these containment and repressive structures. The growing emphasis on policing inside the U.S. is taking place during a period where the majority of the population feels far less secure within their personal and social environments.

A record number of people were killed by law-enforcement agents in the U.S. during 2022 while the incidents of “mass shootings” are growing exponentially on an annual basis. Obviously, the profit motive of the arms manufacturing industry which vigorously lobbies against any notion of curbing the production and distribution of guns as being in direct violation of the slave-era second amendment to the Constitution, contributes immensely to the present situation.

In Memphis, where 29-year-old **Tyre Nichols** was beaten severely by the Scorpion special police unit on January 7 resulting in his death three days later, the existence of crime served as a rationale for the unleashing of these violent law-enforcement officers in African American neighborhoods. However, there is never any attempt to draw a correlation between poverty coupled with social deprivation as a causation for violent events within

oppressed communities.

Nichols, a worker at the Federal Express corporation which is a major employer in Memphis, was heading home when he was pulled over by the Scorpions without provocation. He was dragged from his vehicle, beaten, tased, chased and then bludgeoned to death in full view of a police video camera mounted on a pole near his parent's home in the Hickory Hill neighborhood.

U.S. **President Joe Biden** made a statement in response to the police murder of Nichols saying that all demonstrations against police violence should be peaceful. However, Biden is a major backer of increased funding to law-enforcement agencies around the country. The president said that he spoke with the family of Tyre Nichols, promising them he would make a renewed effort to pass the now-failed George Floyd Justice in Policing Act which could not pass a democratically dominated House of Representatives and Senate during 2021.

Nevertheless, these proclamations of condolences and pledges to do more to curb police brutality ring hollow in the minds of the majority of African American and oppressed peoples in the U.S. Biden knows quite well that if the Act could not pass a majority Democratic Party Congress, there is no way it can even emerge from a legislative committee when the Republican right-wing dominates the House of Representatives in 2023.

These repressive measures involving the strengthening of law-enforcement coincide with the increasing economic pressure being applied to African Americans and people of color communities being systematically forced out of urban areas. In Atlanta, the African American population has declined to less than half of the city residents. Major demographic shifts are taking place in urban areas throughout the U.S. while people from working class and impoverished backgrounds cannot afford to maintain homes, purchase houses and rent apartments due to the escalating corporatization of real estate.

[One news report](#) on the situation in Georgia's capital emphasizes:

"Atlanta's African American majority went away in the last 10 years, according to new census data analyzed by the AJC (Atlanta Journal Constitution). The new census data does show that African Americans are still the largest ethnic group in Atlanta, but they dropped below 50% in the 2020 Census. In 2019, the U.S. Census reported that 51% of Atlanta's residents were Black. However, the new data shows that number dropped to 47% in 2020."

In Memphis, African Americans remain a majority of 64% of the city's population. Memphis is located in Shelby County, which since 1860 has maintained the largest Black population in the state of Tennessee. Nonetheless, a disproportionate number of Black and Brown peoples live in poverty with official figures approaching 30% inside the city. The rate of poverty for African American and Latin American peoples living in Memphis is nearly three times as large as those of their white counterparts.

Consequently, the emphasis on militarized policing is part and parcel of the nationally oppressive system in the U.S. which has been in existence since the colonial and antebellum periods of enslavement and forced removals of the Native population. Institutional racism and economic exploitation remain as the source for the immiseration of large sections of the population. Until these structural issues are addressed on a policy level the police repression and mass incarceration will continue to exist in the U.S.

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Featured image: Atlanta police car on fire during anti-cop city protests (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

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