

African American man attacked by white supremacists in Charlottesville charged with felony

By Shelley Connor
12 October 2017

DeAndre Harris, an African American man who was savagely beaten by white nationalists during the deadly “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in September was charged by a local magistrate judge Monday with a felony of unlawfully wounding one of his assailants. Charlottesville police had just recently arrested a third man in connection with Harris’ beating.

Harris sustained spinal cord injuries and a head laceration during the attack, which occurred in a parking garage adjacent to a police station. Video of the attack circulated widely online, stirring widespread outrage; several men can be seen beating Harris with flagpoles and other blunt objects as he writhes on the ground with blood flowing from his forehead. As he attempts to stand up, his attackers continue to kick and pummel him.

Harold Ray Crews, North Carolina attorney and a chairman of the white nationalist League of the South, first attempted to file a complaint against Harris with the Charlottesville Police Department. When they did not respond to his complaint according to his wishes, he filed a complaint with a local magistrate. The magistrate made a highly subjective decision, divorced from the evidence gathered by the Charlottesville police, that there was probable cause against Harris, and issued a warrant for his arrest.

The detective overseeing the investigation into the assault on Harris told the media that he was blindsided by the magistrate’s decision. Harris’ attorney, S. Lee Merritt, characterized the charge against his client as part of a “successful campaign” by the League of the South to “manipulate the Charlottesville judiciary and further victimize Mr. Harris.”

The League of the South, a far-right, neo-Confederate

group, had been discussing strategies by which they might pursue charges against Harris ever since the attack. Merritt was aware of this; however, he has stated in interviews that he did not expect “a magistrate to sort of decide to independently run with it.”

White nationalist groups, including the League of the South, have pointed to the charges against DeAndre Harris as a victory for their causes. Richard Spencer, the leader of the National Policy Institute, a white supremacist think tank, chortled gleefully about “the end of the Deandre Haris [sic] myth.”

The Unite the Right rally began on August 11, when Spencer summoned various white nationalist groups to protest the removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville’s Lee Park. The rally was one of a number that occurred after the City of Charlottesville removed the Confederate general’s statue and renamed the park Emancipation Park. In the dark of night, Spencer led a motley assortment of militiamen, neo-Nazis, and other white nationalists in chants of “Jews will not replace us,” as well as the Nazi slogan, “Blood and Soil.” As the torch-wielding group swelled, Spencer quietly slipped away among his security retinue.

The next day the white supremacists marched to an adjacent park, where they surrounded counter-protesters and touched off a riot. Throughout the day counter-protesters were harassed and threatened by the nationalist groups. Charlottesville Police did little to intervene in the intimidation tactics.

By the end of the day, DeAndre Harris was just one of 19 people, most of them counter-protesters, who were injured in the melee. One counter-protester, Heather Heyer, who was white, was killed when a

white nationalist rammed his car at high speed into a group of counter-protesters.

President Donald Trump and his cabinet studiously avoided mentioning Charlottesville during the protests, and did not make any public statements until videos showing Harris' beating and Heyer's murder saturated the media. Even then, Trump spoke from a safe distance in New York City, where he pronounced that there was "blame on both sides." The president's efforts to draw a moral equivalency between rampaging white nationalists and those opposing them appeared to many, including the far-right elements who make up a portion of his base, as a tacit approval of the white supremacist's violent actions.

The events in Charlottesville have proven to be an inflection point in American politics. In the ferment of American capitalism's decay, confusion abounds. The video of DeAndre Harris' brutal beating was a jarring reminder of the brutality that accompanied the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Trump's response has further signified that the political establishment is in no way capable of confronting the rage at the root of the issue; in fact, both the right and the pseudo left have sought to harness that rage for their own political gain.

Identity politics has been leveraged by both the white nationalists and their opposition to portray what happened to Harris as a strictly racial issue. This is fully evident in the role played by the white nationalists. However, the Democratic Party, aided and abetted by the pseudo left, as usual, has also used Charlottesville in their own perverse way to blame poor, white workers for Trump's ascent and the subsequent rampage by his supporters.

However, as Harris' case underscores, the issues are not confined to simple divisions of racial antagonism. The fact that an attorney could prevail upon a magistrate to pursue charges against Harris, a teacher's aide, demonstrates that the courts do not exist to defend the public from the predations of groups like the Southern League.

Taken together, the brutal beating and victimization of Harris and murder of Heyer, both at the hands of white nationalists, makes clear that the crisis facing the United States is fundamentally not one of race, but one of class. White nationalism itself is a malignant feature of the rotten capitalist system; it will be rooted out by

nothing less than the unity of the working class across all racial, ethnic and national divisions fighting for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialism.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>