Florida deputy's assault on high school student caught on video

By Genevieve Leigh
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Bystander footage from an incident last Thursday caught a Florida sheriff's deputy savagely attacking a high school student in a McDonald's parking lot. The assault took place in suburban Fort Lauderdale in Broward County, the same county as the deadly shooting at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School last year.

The video, taken by a young bystander and posted to social media, shows Deputy Christopher Krickovich and Sergeant Greg Lacerra in a crowd of young people about a half-mile from J. P. Taravella High School in Coral Springs. The deputies were responding to complaints that a fight had broken out among a group of teens, but the fight had already broken up by the time they arrived.

In the video, Deputy Krickovich is straddling a young boy who is face down on the ground being arrested. A young girl tries to pick up the cell phone of the boy being arrested. Sergeant Lacerra kicks the phone away. When another young boy wearing a red tank top and a backpack tries to pick up the phone, Lacerra quickly approaches him, pepper sprays him in the face and then throws him to the ground. Deputy Krickovich then jumps on top of the unarmed teen repeatedly slams the boy's face into the concrete pavement, punching him in the head as he tries to block the impact with his forearm.

The dozens of students looking on, which Krickovich describes in his written report as a "threatening" crowd "converging on the officers", are unarmed children. Many are watching the abuse with gaping mouths, standing mostly still around the officers, fresh out of class with their backpacks over their shoulders.

As the officers begin to escalate the violent attack on the student in the red tank top, the youth begin to scatter away screaming. Some turn around only after moving away a safe distance, covering their mouths in disbelief.

One can hear screams of horrified teens in the background of the video. One pitched voice is heard above the rest yelling, "What are you doing!? He is bleeding!"

According to Krickovich's written report, the officers had been assigned to the plaza on "proactive protocol" because of incidents of fighting among youth in the days prior. Officers noticed one of the young students from the day before who had been "trespass warned," according to Krickovich's written incident report. The officers arrested this young boy, who is seen on the ground as the video begins.

The most brutal few seconds of the video are undoubtedly when Krickovich slams the second young boy's face into the concrete. Krickovich absurdly justified this action in his report by claiming, "The male with the red tank top felt like he was trying to push up while I was pushing down." He goes on to justify punching the boy in the face, "At one point his left arm was free and next to him while he placed his right arm under his face. I struck the male in the right side of his head with a closed fist as a distractionary (sic) technique to free his right hand."

The teen, whose name was not released, was charged with assaulting a sheriff's deputy, resisting arrest and trespassing. As for the officer, the Broward County Sheriff placed Deputy Krickovich on restricted duty Friday as outrage grew across the country.

While Krikovich is white and the teen in the video is black, Broward County Sheriff's Office is headed by Sheriff Gregory Tony, an African American. He took office in January after Governor DeSantis suspended the previous sheriff, Scott Israel, for his handling of the massacre Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

Sheriff's deputies were disciplined for not charging into the school during the shooting rampage.

Sheriff Tony appeared on a Twitter video in front of the Broward County Black Elected Officials group ensuring those in attendance that his department would conduct a "very tactful" investigation. However, investigations into police violence hardly ever produce indictments; only 80 officers were arrested on homicide charges between 2005 and 2017, according to CNN, despite the fact that American police kill approximately 1,000 people each year.

Since the Parkland shooting, states throughout the country have responded with an unprecedented militarization of life for youth. High school students across the country are increasingly facing an authoritarian environment. The political establishment treats the epidemic of school shootings not as the outcome of the social crisis facing young people, but as a policing problem to be resolved with more guns and police officers.

The state of Florida, and Broward County in particular, has taken particularly aggressive measures. A bill passed by the Florida state legislature last year allocated $58 million toward arming public school teachers. The state also launched a new app designed to anonymously report suspicious activity in the state's schools. The app, FortifyFL, cost state legislators $400,000 to develop and is a further step in an effort to monitor and essentially spy on students 24 hours a day.

The flooding of schools with weapons, guards and other security measures has had no recorded practical impact in protecting youth in an armed shooter situation. However, the influx of police into public schools resulted in high-profile incidents of police brutality. Chicago police were recently caught on surveillance footage dragging 16-year-old Dnigma Howard down a flight of stairs and beating and tasing her in front of her father.

President of the Broward Sheriff's Office Deputies Association, Jeff Bell, stated in the aftermath of Thursday's incident that the blame for the abusive tactics employed on Thursday lies not with the officers, but with the sheriff. Bell reported that the self-defense training Sheriff Tony instituted has been so aggressive that the union had to file a grievance because, deputies suffered concussions, broken bones and and even a brain hemorrhage from the exercises. The officers "did exactly what they were trained to do," Bell said.