

New Mexico protester wounded by far-right shooter

By Jacob Crosse
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Just over three weeks after President Donald Trump gave a fascistic speech in the White House Rose Garden, proclaiming himself the president of “law and order” while calling on the military and police to “dominate the streets,” right-wing militia groups and fascist bands have taken up the president’s call and are coordinating with local officials and police departments across the country to intimidate, harass, attack, and in some cases, shoot peaceful demonstrators.

In Albuquerque, an anti-racist protester was shot by a former city council candidate, Steve Baca, 31, during a protest Monday evening over the “La Jornada” sculpture at Tiguex Park in the city’s downtown. The monument features horse-mounted conquistador Juan de Oñate. Oñate is despised, particularly by Native Americans, for his role in the Acoma Massacre of 1599.

Baca, the son of a former Bernalillo County sheriff’s deputy, was safely escorted from the scene of the protest by police Monday evening after shooting protester Steve Williams at least once in the torso. Baca was not formally charged and arrested until Tuesday morning according to the criminal complaint filed by the Albuquerque Police Department.

Baca ran for city council in 2019, garnering six percent of the vote. According to a campaign flyer, if elected, Baca promised to “crackdown on crime” and let “police officers do their job.”

In an interview with the *Albuquerque Journal* last year Baca railed against the homeless, advocating for a “criminal justice perspective-crack down on the low-level crimes that the homeless community is doing; have officers do warrant pickups, crack down on those very small crimes like drug abuse... A lot of the people [who are homeless] are addicted to drugs; you need to get those people into the court system so they

can be forced to go to rehab.”

Baca is being charged with aggravated battery with a deadly weapon. The complaint, in contradiction to witness statements and copious video evidence, paints Baca, who was recorded physically assaulting multiple women as well as brandishing the firearm he would later fire against demonstrators, as simply an innocent person “protecting the statue” and defending himself from “malicious ... pursuers.”

Monday’s protests turned violent once several armed men, who identified themselves to a *New York Times* reporter as members of the New Mexico Civil Guard of Curry County (NMCG), tried to insert themselves between protesters—mostly local youth—and the monument they were trying to dislodge. While it is unknown at this time if Baca is a member of the “Civil Guard,” video posted to social media after the shooting shows him being protected by the heavily armed militia members while waiting for a police escort.

Once police finally arrived to safely escort Baca from the scene, riot police fired tear gas into the crowd of remaining protesters and ordered them to disperse. Six NMCG members were also handcuffed and taken into custody by Albuquerque police at the same time.

A recent Facebook post from the group page declared that Baca was not a member of NMCG and that the NMCG only got in between “the man in the blue shirt” and the “angry mob” to ensure “no protesters were shot.” The NMCG is led by local painter O’Rion Petty, who according to the *Eastern New Mexico News* started the Facebook group to “Defend citizens and their private property.” A featured photo on the page depicts the logo from the hate group the Three Percenters.

The recently formed group first made their appearance during a June 2 vigil for George Floyd in Clovis, New Mexico. Eight members of the group

showed up to the vigil, made up mostly of local youth, wearing body armor and carrying semi-automatic rifles, their faces obscured by balaclavas. Speaking to the *News* Petty claimed they were at the vigil “not ... to intimidate the protesters or anything like that. We’re not with antifa. We’re there because of everything that’s going on [around the country] and we’re not going to watch our community be destroyed, if it comes to that.”

Petty noted that the police are “completely fine with us being around. They wanted to make sure we don’t look like law enforcement or military and so we’re staying in plain clothes *for this*” (emphasis added).

When questioned what would happen if the situation turned violent, Petty advised that the group “will always go [with] the non-lethal option when it’s available. We do carry things like pepper spray ... but if we feel like someone’s life is in imminent danger or our lives are in imminent danger, at that point we would have to go ahead and use lethal force if necessary.”

Notably Baca can be seen in several videos prior to Monday’s shooting carrying a silver can of pepper spray as well as the Glock pistol which was spotted by worried protesters prior to the shooting.

Meanwhile, in the small town of Bethel, Ohio, 30 miles east of Cincinnati, the Bethel Police Department is investigating roughly 10 different assault cases after more than 250 people identified by city officials as “motorcycle gangs, back the blue groups, and Second Amendment advocates,” assaulted and harassed a small group of roughly 100 protesters during a Sunday Black Lives Matter march.

Alicia Gee, 36, lifelong resident of Bethel and substitute teacher, organized the march after seeing a similar event was being held in neighboring Kentucky. Gee, who only expected about 25 people to show up, was pleasantly surprised when over 100 had arrived by 1 p.m. in the town of less than 3,000. Gee had contacted Bethel police on Tuesday to ensure the protest would be legal and that adequate arrangements could be made.

Once the protests began, however, Gee received word that the armed group of thugs was trying to interrupt the march. Gee attempted to move the group away from the far-right mob but they were soon discovered and surrounded. Bethel police stood by, refusing to call

for any back up as the bikers and their police supporters crossed the street dividing the two groups and began to assault the anti-police violence protesters, including Andrea Dennis, who brought her 63-year-old mother to the protests.

“I was really scared because they were carrying guns and they were so aggressive,” Dennis told the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. “They were grabbing me and grabbing my mom and they just seemed to have no respect for the law.” By 3:45 p.m. multiple protesters had been physically assaulted, with social media photos showing young, mostly white youth, bruised and bloody. No arrests were made on Sunday by Bethel police who said that their investigation is “still ongoing.”

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