

Social media video shows Pittsburgh police kidnapping protester during Saturday march

By Jacob Crosse
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In a scene that immediately conjured up images of Portland protesters snatched off the street by federal agents last month, 25-year-old Matthew Cartier, a former information technology worker, was abducted by plainclothes, heavily armed local police and charged with multiple crimes during a “Civil Saturday” march in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Cartier is facing three charges, obstruction of a highway or other public passage, disorderly conduct and failure to disperse after being kidnapped and jailed Saturday evening. Cartier was a designated “marshal” for the protest; his purpose was to protect the participants by helping to alert and clear traffic ahead of the marchers.

According to the criminal complaint, “Cartier’s actions caused motorists to stop suddenly ... causing annoyance and inconvenience to the entire neighborhood.”

There have been at least 51 incidents of protesters injured or killed after being struck by vehicles since nationwide multiracial and multiethnic demonstrations against police violence began in late May, following the Memorial Day murder of George Floyd at the hands and knees of the Minneapolis police department.

It has been well documented that far-right elements, including police, have used their vehicles as weapons to intimidate and maim protesters, prompting protesters to take necessary measures in order to protect their constitutional right to assemble and protest.

Treasure Palmer, a cofounder of the group Black, Young, & Educated, which organized Saturday’s march, defended the group’s use of marshals to protect demonstrators, saying, “Our marshals work tirelessly to protect our protesters, when the police do not.”

Video of Cartier’s kidnapping at the hands of Pittsburgh police spread quickly over the internet,

where the initial video has been viewed over 136,000 times as of this writing.

Cartier, in a Twitter thread, attests that he was lured by police who initially asked him for directions before abducting him: “When I approached the van to provide directions the passenger grabbed me and multiple other men sprang out of the back of the van heavily armed to arrest me. I was driven to the busway where officers searched me and transported me to ACJ [Allegheny County Jail].”

Sergeant Donald Mitchell of the Civil Affairs unit characterized the illegal arrest as “a surgical maneuver to remove the person,” and said that police chose to arrest Cartier in this fashion in order to prevent the crowd from gathering around him, which would only “incite them further.”

Pittsburgh Police Chief Scott Schubert called the arrest, “a calculated movement” done to ensure that “everything was safe.”

Mayor Bill Peduto blamed Cartier for being kidnapped, writing on Twitter after video of his abduction began to go viral that “Constitutional rights ... have restrictions.” while name-dropping the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in justifying the police abduction.

Witold Walscak, legal director of the ACLU, responded to Peduto’s characterization during an interview with local CBS station KDKA on Sunday. Walscak remarked, “Mayor Peduto is correct that the ACLU of Pennsylvania consulted with the city in drafting guidelines for how to handle protests, specifically unpermitted protests that block roadways.

“However,” Walscak continued, “based on eyewitness accounts, the arresting officers were in clear violation of their own guidelines. According to those who were there, the law enforcement officers involved

made no effort to work with protest leaders to clear the area and gave no clear dispersal order. Instead, they tricked a protest leader to approach them and then whisked him away. The ACLU of Pennsylvania has never suggested that the snatch-and-stash arrest of a peaceful demonstrator is ever acceptable.”

During a Sunday press conference, Peduto fell back on a common lie told by mayors and governors throughout the ongoing demonstrations against state violence. Flanked by police and Pittsburgh Public Safety director Wendell Hissrich, he blamed outside groups for blocking streets and for failing to communicate or “consult with police about the planned protest route.”

A.D. Bagheera, one of the organizers of the march, disagreed that the group has not communicated with the city. “I have not gotten any communication from the mayor, the Public Safety department, or the police, except for one email seven weeks ago,” she said during a Monday press conference.

After roughly 200 protesters gathered outside Peduto’s residence on Sunday demanding his resignation, Peduto struck a different tone on social media Monday, tweeting out how “livid” he was after seeing the video of Cartier’s abduction, and vowing to “never tolerate these tactics being used at peaceful protests again.”

Saturday’s abduction is an important lesson for workers and youth who are under illusions that the disturbing scenes in Portland are just an aberration due to the intervention of US President Donald Trump and that “things will be different” or “go back to normal” under a new administration headed by a Democrat (like Mayor Peduto).

The assault on democratic rights is bipartisan and intensifying. Cartier was not abducted by federal agents sent into the city against the wishes of the Democratic governor or mayor, but by local police from the “Special Deployment Division” under the auspices of the mayor and a nine-person city council, all Democrats.

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