

Dueling protesters including armed men face off in Utah

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A protester is led away by Cottonwood Heights police officers during a march Sunday, Aug. 2, 2020, in Cottonwood Heights, Utah. The protest was a "March for Justice" focused largely around Zane James, who was fatally shot by police in Cottonwood Heights in 2018.

COTTONWOOD HEIGHTS, Utah (AP) — Groups of dueling protesters that included police supporters carrying rifles and flags supporting President Donald Trump faced off outside a suburban Salt Lake City police department Monday night in response to use of force by officers at a demonstration the night before that resulted in the arrest of eight people.

The two groups yelled and chanted at each other from across the street, but no violence was reported.

About 100 people came to show their support for the officers' actions, some holding signs that read "Back the Blue" and others who carried large guns and said they were part of a group called Utah Citizens Alarm.

Across the street from the Cottonwood Heights police department, a nearly equal amount of protesters held "Black Lives Matter" signs to protest what they say was police brutality at the rally Sunday night. The Sunday protest march was meant to remember a man who was fatally shot by police two years ago. His father was one of the eight people who were arrested. He and his wife blamed police for inciting conflict and ruining a peaceful rally intended to honor the memory of their son and bring attention to police brutality.

Officers used pepper spray, stun guns and batons during the arrests made after some protesters refused orders to keep the protest on sidewalks in the suburban neighborhood, said Cottonwood Heights police Lt. Dan Bartlett.

He said police were kicked, choked and hit, sending five officers to a hospital with broken ribs, a broken nose and other injuries.

Several protesters were wrestled to the ground by police, including one man who was left with a bloodied face, according to images of the events.

The ACLU of Utah questioned what motivated police to "escalate a peaceful dance/rally," and a left-leaning watchdog group known as Better Utah called for an internal investigation of what it characterized as a "gross overreaction" by officers.

Bartlett said officers were defending themselves after getting "jumped" by protesters who sought out a confrontation.

"It's a shame that we're put in these no-win situations," Bartlett said. "Use of force is never pretty. It never looks good. And it's disturbing to people, which we certainly understand. We don't want to be put in that situation... to get people to follow the law."

The protest march was held in memory of Zane James, a 19-year-old white man who was shot and killed by a Cottonwood Heights officer in 2018 as he left the scene of a robbery. Police said they found a pellet gun in his pocket after he was shot and that James was suspected of committing two armed robberies. He was shot by the officer who said James was reaching into his pockets and clothing as he fled. His parents, Tiffany and Aaron James, previously alleged in a lawsuit against the police department that their son didn't pose a threat and shouldn't have been shot.

Aaron James was among those arrested Sunday on suspicion of riot, assault on an officer and interfering with an officer, Bartlett said.

James and his wife, Tiffany James, said Monday that police escalated the situation.

"This is exactly why we marched. This is exactly why we came together with this group of people. This is exactly why our son was shot," Tiffany James said. "This is a culture of police power that is not community friendly and it needs to be addressed."

Bartlett said he can't comment on the lawsuit filed by the James family because it's pending litigation.

Sunday's rally began at a park in the community about 15 miles (24 kilometers) south of Salt Lake City.

Protesters marched and danced into a residential neighborhood where the clashes with police occurred.

Sophia Eppolito is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on under-covered issues.

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