

New Leaders Emerge in Struggle for Police Reforms

Hip hop artist faces down riot police

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Fed up with police brutality, Portland activists brought the downtown mall to a standstill. It was Dec. 6 and after having their say, and making their point, the large crowd of people exited Pioneer Place peacefully. I was observing the protest, and coincidentally ended up taking the same route as Glenn Waco, a young activist in Portland's civil rights struggle.

Waco was leading the way for one column of protesters through the food court, to the escalator and up to a ground level exit. He was out in front, and for a moment, it was just Waco, myself and a white woman who was not a part of the protest.

"Are you filming this?" she asks, looking at me clutching my camera and cellphone.



Like Martin Luther King Jr. before him, Portland activist Glenn Waco is on the front lines in the battle against racial inequality, leading members of his generation and others to protest, and then face a violent response from police.

I reply that I am not strictly filming but that at times I am.

"Keep an eye on him," she says of Waco. "He's a leader—the police are going to be targeting him."

The woman probably thought that because Waco is a 6 foot 5 brother equipped with a mega-

phone and an assertive personality, he wasn't hard for the Portland Police to miss.

Little did the woman know that about a week prior, at another demonstration, news coverage and video made it look like police were going out of their way to target Waco when flash

grenades were used to break up a Don't Shoot PDX protest.

Like Martin Luther King Jr. before him, Waco is on the front lines in the battle against racial inequality, leading members of his generation and others to protest, and then face violence at the hands of the police.

"I was pissed," said Waco, about the explosives police used. "I locked eyes with the officer that was giving the commands."

The police officer was telling the crowd to get back, and he could see Waco was also telling the crowd to move back. Not because the officer was asking, but so the crowd could move away from the line of riot police and get back on route to taking the streets and marching.

"I'm doing that... I'm in the middle. There's this big gap between the officers and protesters. So I'm telling people... Yo' let's move back," Waco said.

But the frontline wasn't budging and instead took a step towards the line of police. The next thing Waco knows, he sees "lights on the ground. I'm thinking they're shooting! They're all going off by my legs!" and material from the explosion stings Waco when it hits his leg.

Police and other media accounts say only two flash grenades were lobbed, but Waco estimates there were at least six

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... everybody can be great, because greatness is determined by service.

Martin Luther King Jr.

Together, we're making a great place.

