Pummeled for Publishing

Ron Harper brutalized by cops in front of me

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They didn't tell us this was going to happen in journalism school... at least not in the United States of America.

On June 3, 2008 at approximately 2:00 p.m., I met Ron Harper, Jr., my business partner and co-Publisher of the Lancaster Post newspaper at the southwest corner of Marietta Avenue and School Lane in Lancaster Township, Pennsylvania. Mr. Harper and I were going to install a newspaper box at the northwest corner of Marietta and School Lane on public property.

We brought the newspaper box across the street and were securing with a chain lock to the street sign when we were approached by a man approximately 55-60 years of age, white, wearing a shirt with the Franklin & Marshall insignia who said we could not put a box where we were putting it. This man appeared to be the groundskeeper or gardener of the property.

Mr. Harper replied, "The Constitution says that I can."

The man asked, "How long are you going to leave it there?"

Mr. Harper replied, "As long as I want."

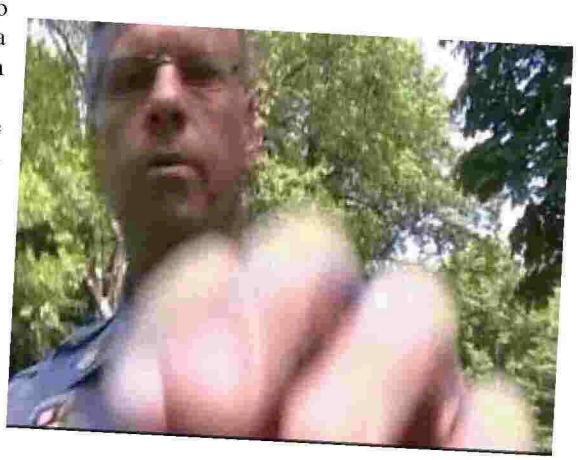
"We'll see about that," the man said.

I took photographs of the man and Mr. Harper speaking. The man walked back toward 508 N. School Lane. I then walked up School Lane, never entering the property, and took at least two photographs of the man speaking with a middle aged woman in civilian clothes in the driveway.



Mr. Harper's wounds still contain the gravel from the roadway where he was slammed to the ground and kneed in the back by F&M police.

I walked back down (south) School Lane to return to my car. Mr. Harper had crossed the street and was standing near his car when I heard sirens and saw several official police-type vehicles, lights flashing, approaching us at a high rate of speed. I crossed the street and stood next to Mr. Harper as several (I would estimate six) Franklin & Marshall College security vehicles screeched to a halt surrounding us.



Sgt. Ed Carroll rips the camera from Mr. Harper's hands.

We were on the southwest corner of Marietta Ave. and School Lane, a public road, standing next to Mr. Harper's vehicle. Many uniformed Franklin & Marshall uniformed security staff emptied out of the vehicles and immediately went for both of us, with most of the uniformed men surrounding Mr. Harper.

I heard one of them say, "So you are Mr. Harper?"

I took a few photographs of the uniformed men; Mr. Harper was videotaping at the time. I took photographs of several of the uniformed men as they closed in on Mr. Harper and grabbed first his camera, then Mr. Harper. One of the men grabbed my camera from my hand as I was taking pictures of the incident and confiscated it. (When my camera was returned, several photographs of the encounter were deleted.)

I was told to put my hands on the hood of the car. Mr. Harper was directly in front of me to the right when I saw several of the uniformed men grab Mr. Harper forcefully. I heard Mr. Harper say, "I am not resisting you." I saw that Mr. Harper was not resisting the men.



F&M police captain, just before he and the other officers assaulted Mr. Harper.

Then the uniformed men, four of them, brutally slammed Mr. Harper face first onto the public street. The violence of the body slam was shocking to witness.

I heard the "Sergeant" instruct the uniformed officer who had his hand on my back as my hands were spread on the back of one of the vehicles to "cuff him," referring to me. I was told that to protect their safety I was being handcuffed. I had not said a word, had cooperated without any resistance, and was wearing sandals and shorts. I was a threat to no one and exhibited absolutely no threatening behavior.

Sitting in the back of the car handcuffed for approximately half an hour, I heard on the uniformed men's radios that "The president is here." I could see Franklin & Marshall president, John Fry, dark suited, on the lawn across the street watching Mr. Harper and me being taken into custody.

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Mr. Harper and I were taken, handcuffed, in separate vehicles to Franklin & Marshall College, where we were detained and interrogated.

I was released with a Defiant Trespass Warning, which states that I will be arrested if I step onto any Franklin & Marshall property, including public restaurants on land owned by the college. I was accused of "criminal trespass on Franklin & Marshall properties." This was verifiably false, as Mr. Harper videotaped the entire incident, and it is clear we were very careful not to enter F&M property at any time.



One of the F&M police cars sent to the scene speeds around the corner and screeches to a stop.

My digital camera was returned, but several photographs I had taken of the incident were deleted. We later recovered some of them using software that could read the memory card.

This incident was completely without justification. We committed no crime. We published a newspaper story critical of the college president, and we were assaulted and taken against our will, although we broke no laws. Part of the record of this incident -- pictures that I legally took -- were stolen or destroyed.



Though he did not resist arrest, Mr. Harper's injuries bear witness to the treatment he received at the hands of the F&M police.

Ron Harper, Jr. was assaulted because he wrote a story that the man across the street didn't like.