



Trump jokes, because that's what he thinks police brutality is. A joke

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In response to top law enforcement officials relentlessly blasting President Trump's recent celebration of police brutality, the White House continues to insist that it was just a joke.

This was supposed to be a law-and-order speech before hundreds of cops on Long Island on Friday: The "jokey" part was when our President, sworn to uphold the Constitution, made a mockery of basic constitutional rights.

Police officers should be more violent when making arrests, Donald Trump told them, in a bit of wink-wink, do-you-get-my-drift freestyling. They should be "rough" on suspects when tossing them into "paddy wagons."

Get it, Freddie Gray?

That's the man who died from a "rough ride" in the back of a police van, you may recall, sparking protests and a riot in Baltimore. But Trump was just kidding.

The president "was simply making a comment, making a joke, and it was nothing more than that," his spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders says.

The fact that the officers laughed and applauded - from the Suffolk police department, of all places, whose former chief was sentenced to prison last year for beating up a suspect - only made things worse. Top law enforcement brass from across the country didn't find it funny.

What they saw was the President trampling on the community relations they've spent years trying to improve. From New York to Los Angeles, where four cops were filmed in 1991 beating a helpless Rodney King with batons, but were acquitted, police leaders slammed the president's remarks.

So did the acting head of the Drug Enforcement Administration, Chuck Rosenberg, and leaders of a prominent black policing group, who arranged a personal meeting with Attorney General Jeff Sessions this week to discuss how this could damage relations between police and minorities.

A defense lawyer even told the New York Times he might use video of the president's speech in court. Yet Trump's spokeswoman had no apology or retraction. "It wasn't a directive. It was a joke," she continued to insist on Tuesday. "There's a very big difference."

Is there? Here is a directive from the Trump administration: Trump's Justice Department will no longer investigate local police departments, despite well-documented abuses like officer beatings of unarmed people in Cleveland, or the excessive use of dogs and Tasers against blacks in Ferguson. It's bad for "morale," his attorney general says.

Police are now immune from federal scrutiny. But Trump was just kidding.

That's all he had to say this week to critics like Jonathan Blanks of the libertarian Cato Institute, who noted that causing intentional injury to a handcuffed suspect is "a federal crime for which police officers have been sent to prison."

Blanks added, "The reaction of the crowd of officers should strike fear into the heart of every parent on Long Island, particularly those of black and Hispanic young men, who fit the stereotypical description of the gang members President Trump described."

This same President who to this day denies the innocence of the Central Park Five, despite conclusive DNA evidence. What happened to the idea of innocent until proven guilty?

Trump - who when he's not trying to wriggle out of trouble, insists that "I don't kid" - has turned it into a joke.