



Video of black Minnesota man's "humiliating" arrest for walking in the street surfaces

By Mathew Rodriguez | Oct. 18, 2016



On Oct. 12, in Edina, Minnesota, Janet Rowles drove by Larnie B. Thomas, 34, who was walking on the white line separating traffic and the road's shoulder because there was construction blocking the sidewalk.

When Rowles noticed Thomas was being stopped by a police officer, she began to film the interaction. The [recording](#) has garnered over 480,000 views since its release Wednesday.

"I'm not against the police," Rowles told the [Minneapolis Star-Tribune](#). "I was against what he was doing."

In the video, Lt. T.F. Olson grips a visibly shaken Thomas by his jacket and leads him to the squad car. Thomas wants to know why he's being led by the police officer.

"You're walking in the middle of the street," Olson says.

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Source: Mic/YouTube

"I'm on the damn white line!" Thomas says. As Thomas speaks, Olson walks him farther into traffic and tells him he's being disruptive.

When asked to put his hands on the hood of the squad car, Thomas hurls his backpack, hitting the hood, and asks why he's being taken to jail. Thomas asks several times for Olson to take his hands off him.

Rowles, the woman who shot the video, told *Mic* that Thomas' behavior was par for the course for someone in his situation.

"To me, as a mediator, the pedestrian's angry behavior didn't look that bad to me, because I understand that when people are upset, they act upset," Rowles said. "I have a philosophy that we should stop expecting people who are upset to act calmly, that's just not rational."



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Rowles is a mediator specializing in "high conflict" and "emotionally difficult" situations. She told *Mic* that she has been hesitant to speak with media outlets because she doesn't want

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to draw potentially unwanted attention to Thomas or take attention away from the subject of the video.

"If the white policeman knows what's going on with this country and is stopping a nonwhite pedestrian, he could actually expect him to behave in ways that he's not going to like very much," she said.

Thomas eventually removes his jacket, since Olson had been holding on to it, and then his shirt and undershirt. By that point, he's shirtless in the street when another squad car comes just to handcuff him.

"My partner told me you're under arrest," the arresting officer says.



"No, he never said that," Rowles shouts. "He never said that."

As the arresting officer puts Thomas in handcuffs, Rowles reminds him that Thomas is frightened for his life.

"He's scared," Rowles calls out twice. "People die in these situations. It's scary."



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According to the *Star-Tribune*, the officer cited Thomas for disorderly conduct and pedestrian failure to obey a traffic signal. According to a [statement](#) from Edina Mayor Jim Hovland, Thomas was not taken to jail, but was taken to a local shopping mall and released.

Thomas did not immediately respond to a request for comment, though he [posted Monday](#) on his Facebook: "Leave me the fuck

alone I don't care about the Edina police incident."

On Friday, the city of Edina released a statement saying Thomas had deliberately ignored the squad car several times and that the officer "smelled alcohol on the man's breath," which was later confirmed by a breathalyzer.



City of Edina, MN (Local Government)

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The city also chided Rowles for her part in the incident.

"As a bystander, it's your right to film officer interactions," the statement reads. "However, it's important to note that attempting to interact with the officer and/or suspect creates a greater risk to the safety of the officer, suspect and bystanders. Public safety is our first priority. It makes it more difficult for officers to deal with the situation on hand when they are at the same time dealing with the distractions of bystanders."

According to a press release from the Minneapolis chapter of the NAACP, Rowles began recording because she "felt that the pedestrian might be safer with my presence as a recording witness."



NAACP MPLS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact: Nekima Levy-Pounds

612-210-3734

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According to the statement, the Minneapolis NAACP is calling for a formal investigation of the incident, police training, an apology to Thomas and policy changes.

NAACP Minneapolis chapter president Nekima Levy-Pounds hopes this will lead to change in the city.

"I have concerns about the city of Edina's failure to accept responsibility for the way in which the officers treated Mr. Thomas," Levy-Pounds said in a phone interview. "Many of us feel as though Mr. Thomas was discriminated against in terms of the manner in which he was treated and the fact that the officer put his hands on Mr. Thomas."

Edina is an affluent suburb that is 88% white and 3% black, according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#). It's located less than 20 miles from Falcon Heights, Minnesota, where [Philando Castile](#) became the 115th known black man to be shot by police in 2016.

A spokesperson for Edina said in a phone interview the city does not yet have any meetings or town halls scheduled to address the incident, but that they will be looking into the incident more closely to see if they can be more sensitive in the future. The spokesperson also pointed to the [city's official response](#) to the NAACP statement, released Monday, which includes responses to each of the NAACP's requests.

In the statement, the city of Edina said officers followed protocol, and that Olson will remain on the job, despite the NAACP's demand he be suspended without pay.

"I'm wondering in particular, what protocol could the officers have been following that would allow for such egregious treatment of Mr. Thomas?" Levy-Pounds said. "Especially given the fact that he was initially told that he was not under arrest."

According to Levy-Pounds, the city's failure to acknowledge wrongdoing is consistent with patterns around the country of law enforcement failing to take responsibility for wrongdoing against citizens, especially black citizens.

Even in cases where surveillance video catches police officers in the wrong, or officers are caught [changing stories on Wikipedia](#), the [shocking statistics around police misconduct](#) don't change.

"Had Mr. Thomas been a white man walking in the city of Edina, it's hard to believe he would've been treated in such a disturbing manner by police," Levy-Pounds said.

Edina Police Incident 10/12/16



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