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Mayor Blames Gangs for Anti-Nazi Violence

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TOLEDO, Ohio -- A crowd that gathered to protest a neo-Nazi march Saturday turned violent, throwing baseball-sized rocks at police, vandalizing vehicles and stores, and setting fire to a neighborhood bar, authorities said.

Mayor Jack Ford blamed the rioting on gang members taking advantage of a volatile situation. He said he was declaring a state of emergency and setting an 8 p.m. curfew. He also ask the Highway Patrol for help.

"It's exactly what they wanted," Ford said of the group that planned the march, which was called off because of the rioting.

At least two dozen members of the National Socialist Movement, which calls itself "America's Nazi Party," had gathered at a city park just before noon and were to march under police protection. Organizers said they were demonstrating against black gangs they said were harassing white residents.

Violence broke out about one-quarter of a mile away along the planned march route.

About 150 police officers in helicopters and on horses and foot chased bands of youths throughout the afternoon. Officers wearing gas masks fired tear gas canisters and flash-bang devices designed to stun suspects, only to see the groups reappear nearby and resume throwing rocks and bottles. A group pounded on a convenience store and overturned vehicles. A fire was set in a nearby bar. At least six people were arrested.

Police Chief Mike Navarre said officers had a report of a man shot in the area, but they had not found a victim. No other injuries had been reported, Navarre said.

The mayor had appealed to residents the night before to ignore the march.

He said the city indicated it wouldn't give the Nazis a permit to march in the streets but couldn't stop them from marching on the sidewalks like other citizens.

When the rioting broke out, Ford tried negotiate with those involved, saying he would meet with them to discuss any grievances, but he said "they weren't interested in that."

He said they were mostly "gang members who had real or imagined grievances and took it as an opportunity to speak in their own way."

"I am disappointed that some folks who clearly are not strong citizens to begin with took this opportunity to make this statement," Ford said. "I was chagrined that there were obvious mothers and children in the crowd with them. Several intimated that they had guns."

Thomas Frisch, 76, said a large group of men destroyed the exterior of a gas station next to his home of 30 years.

"A whole big gang started to come in here. Next thing you know, they're jumping on the car. Then they overturned it. Then they started on the building, breaking windows, ripping the bars off," he said.

Keith White, a black resident, criticized city officials for initially allowing the march.

"They let them come here and expect this not to happen?" said White, 29.

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