**WATCH NOW: Hundreds march in downtown Richmond on fourth night of protests; police and mayor apologize for tear gas before curfew**

Authorities in Richmond used tear gas Monday evening to disperse a peaceful demonstration at the statue of Robert E. Lee on Monument Avenue shortly before the 8 p.m. curfew. The department apologized on Twitter nearly two hours later and promised discipline for officers caught on video aggressively pursuing and spraying people with tear gas.

The confrontation came on the fourth night of unrest in the city, part of a nationwide rash of protests and riots that began last week after the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police.

"I came out here because I hurt for the people that live here," Richmond resident Yehshai Stringer said with streaming tears and the white dust of tear gas on her face.

"I want to stop the violence. I'm not crying because of the tear gas. I'm crying because I'm pissed off and my heart is broken," Stringer said. "They fired on us with no verbal warning. People got stepped on. This is not OK."

In a tweet shortly after 8 p.m. the Richmond Police Department apologized to the peaceful protesters for the use of tear gas but said some officers were in danger.

"We are sorry we had to deploy gas near the Lee Monument," the tweet said. "Some RPD officers in that area were cut off by violent protesters. The gas was necessary to get them to safety."

Mayor Levar Stoney also tweeted an apology to peaceful protesters who were tear-gassed and encouraged them to attend a protest at noon Tuesday at City Hall. "I want to apologize in person," the mayor wrote.

Demonstrators and observers on social media questioned the initial police account of what happened. Shortly before 10 p.m., RPD tweeted an apology from Chief William Smith.

"Chief Smith just reviewed video of gas being deployed by RPD officers near the Lee Monument and apologizes for this unwarranted action," the tweet said. "These officers have been pulled from the field. They will be disciplined because their actions were outside dept protocols and directions given."

Richmond police also warned protesters via Twitter to not attempt taking down any of the Confederate statues that were covered in graffiti over the weekend.

An image circulating on Twitter around the same time appeared to show someone trying to saw a horse's leg on the statue of Confederate Gen. J.E.B. Stuart.

"You are placing you and others in grave jeopardy by attempting to pull down statues on Monument Ave.," the tweet said. "They are extremely heavy and would crush anyone standing too close. Please be aware of the danger. Stand down!"

After the firing of the tear gas, some demonstrators returned to the Lee statue. One man urinated on it.

The demonstration at the statue started earlier in the evening with hundreds of people snaking through downtown Richmond in a peaceful march that visited the gates of Capitol Square before ending at the Lee statue on Monument Avenue.

Starting in Monroe Park, the marchers passed boarded-up buildings covered in graffiti. The marchers said they intended to be peaceful, though some in the crowd shouted anti-police slogans along the way.

"When they say all lives matter, they are right. However, today we are standing united because black lives are being treated like they don't matter," said 19-year-old Jared Ivey, one of the march's leaders. "We deserve justice and equality. And we're going to get it."

The killing of Floyd has sparked protests and rioting nationwide, resulting in property damage and violence against police and demonstrators as cities began enforcing curfews by the end of the weekend. The curfew in Richmond remains in effect through Wednesday.

With the damage to buildings and the pillaging of big and small businesses throughout the city threatening to overshadow the protests against police violence and structural racism, the leaders of Monday's march sought to take control of the narrative.

As the march stopped periodically before intersections on East Franklin Street, the march organizers sought to keep things organized and high-spirited.

Along the way, they chanted the names of Floyd and other people who have died in incidents with police, including Marcus-David Peters, a local high school teacher who was unarmed and naked when he was shot while charging at a Richmond police officer in 2018.

Before the march started Monday, Kimberly Garcia, a 25-year-old resident of Chesterfield County, asked for people to record and elevate videos of police violence rather than looting.

"That's not us," she said. "Show them that we are here for a cause. We're not here for the destruction. We're here for our people. We're here to be together."

On Sunday, after stores were set ablaze and ransacked in late-night demonstrations earlier in the weekend, police arrested more than 200 after the 8 p.m. curfew took hold.

Demonstrators alleged that authorities were overly aggressive Sunday night, attacking them with batons, removing them from vehicles and chasing after them.

Throughout the march early Monday evening, police escorted the marchers before they arrived outside the gates of Capitol Square. Demonstrators there then took a knee as they continued to chant the names of Floyd and others.

About 6:30 p.m., the march then headed to Monument Avenue.

Earlier Monday, Richmond firefighters responded to the Rite Aid at the corner of Broad and Belvidere streets for a fire - the second one in two days, according to the Richmond Fire Department.

Richmond fire Lt. Chris Armstrong said authorities believe embers from an earlier fire on Sunday somehow got inside a room in the store with paperwork, eventually causing a smoldering fire.

Crews initially responded to the Rite Aid at 3:27 a.m. Sunday - one of six fires Richmond firefighters dealt with Saturday night and early Sunday. Fire officials believe the blaze at the drugstore was connected to the protests.

Then about 9 a.m. Monday, the department tweeted that Battalion 3 had arrived on the scene of 520 W. Broad St. with smoke coming from the roof.

"Crews forced entry and located a fire inside in the upper area of the building," the department said on Twitter. Armstrong later clarified in an email that only smoke was present, no actual flames.

In a second tweet that quickly followed the first, the Fire Department said the situation was under control. There were no injuries.

An alert from nearby Virginia Commonwealth University said to avoid the area and evacuate nearby buildings. Twenty minutes later, the school said it was OK to return to the nearby buildings.

The Rite Aid had been boarded up after the fire early Sunday, ahead of protests resuming in downtown Richmond that evening.