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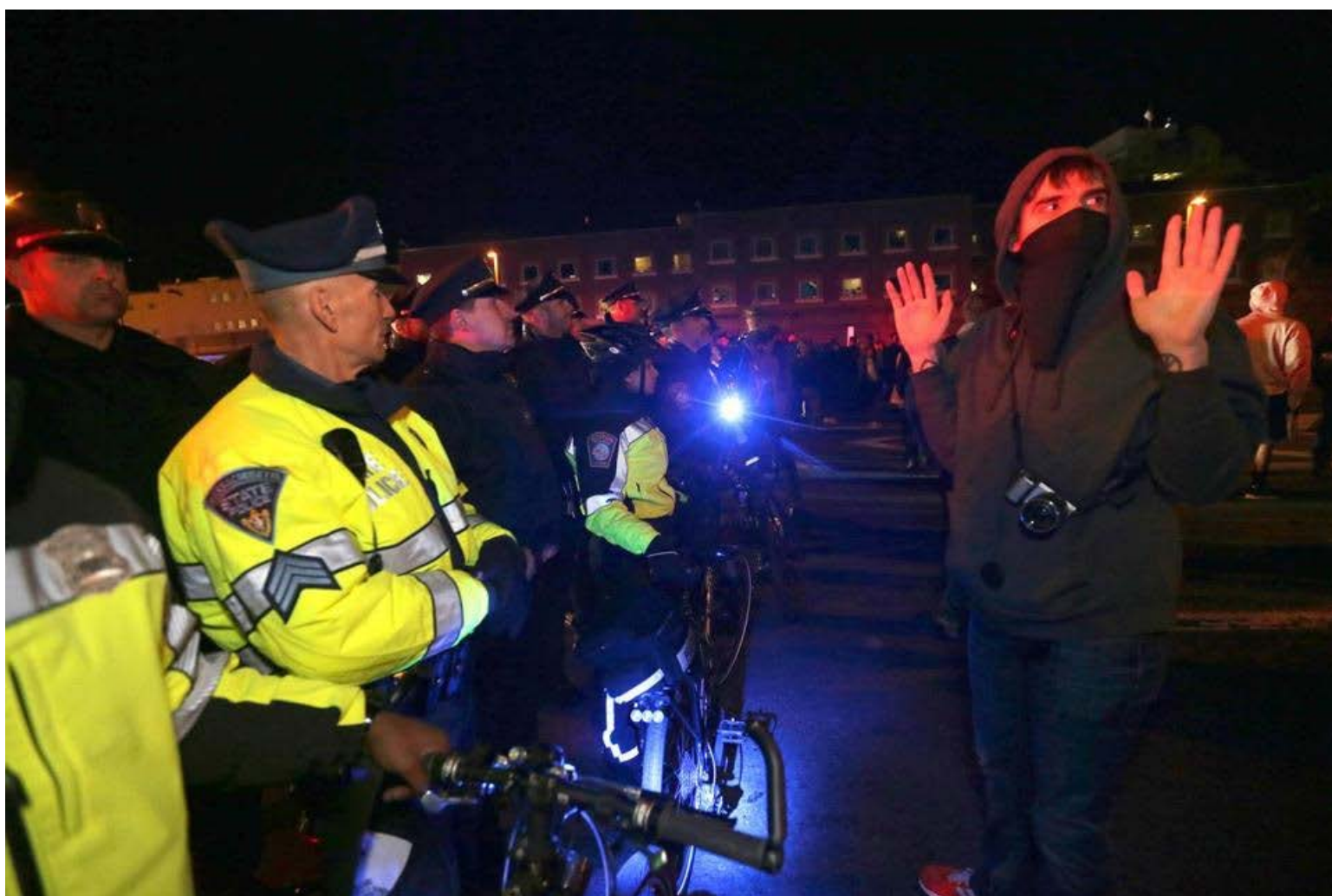
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# The Boston Globe

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BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF

**Police formed a line to prevent protesters from gaining access to Interstate 93 Tuesday.**

**By Peter Schworm**

GLOBE STAFF NOVEMBER 27, 2014

Boston police on Wednesday credited a “soft approach” in handling the street protests against police brutality and racism, which helped avoid the disturbances seen in other cities in the wake of the Ferguson, Mo., grand jury decision.

A day after throngs of people took to the streets of Boston, police officials said they made a concerted decision against an aggressive show of force, worried it would stoke anger. Police did not wear riot gear, for example, and held many officers in reserve. Many officers tracked the march on bicycle, a symbol of community policing.

Boston police Commissioner William Evans said he wanted to maintain public safety while allowing people to “express their frustration.” A measured approach is often more effective, he said, because it shows officers to be “more human.”

“It’s about establishing respect and setting expectations and making sure people understand that,” he said. “Sometimes helmets and sticks can get in the way of that.”

Evans went out of his way to thank the protesters for maintaining relative calm. The rally was also, with an estimated 1,400 people, small compared to protests in other cities — or the street disturbances that followed championship victories by Boston sports teams.



Thanksgiving is different this year for residents in Ferguson, Mo., a community roiled by cataclysmic events in recent days and weeks.

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## **Boston protests**

### **Photos: Protesters march in Boston**

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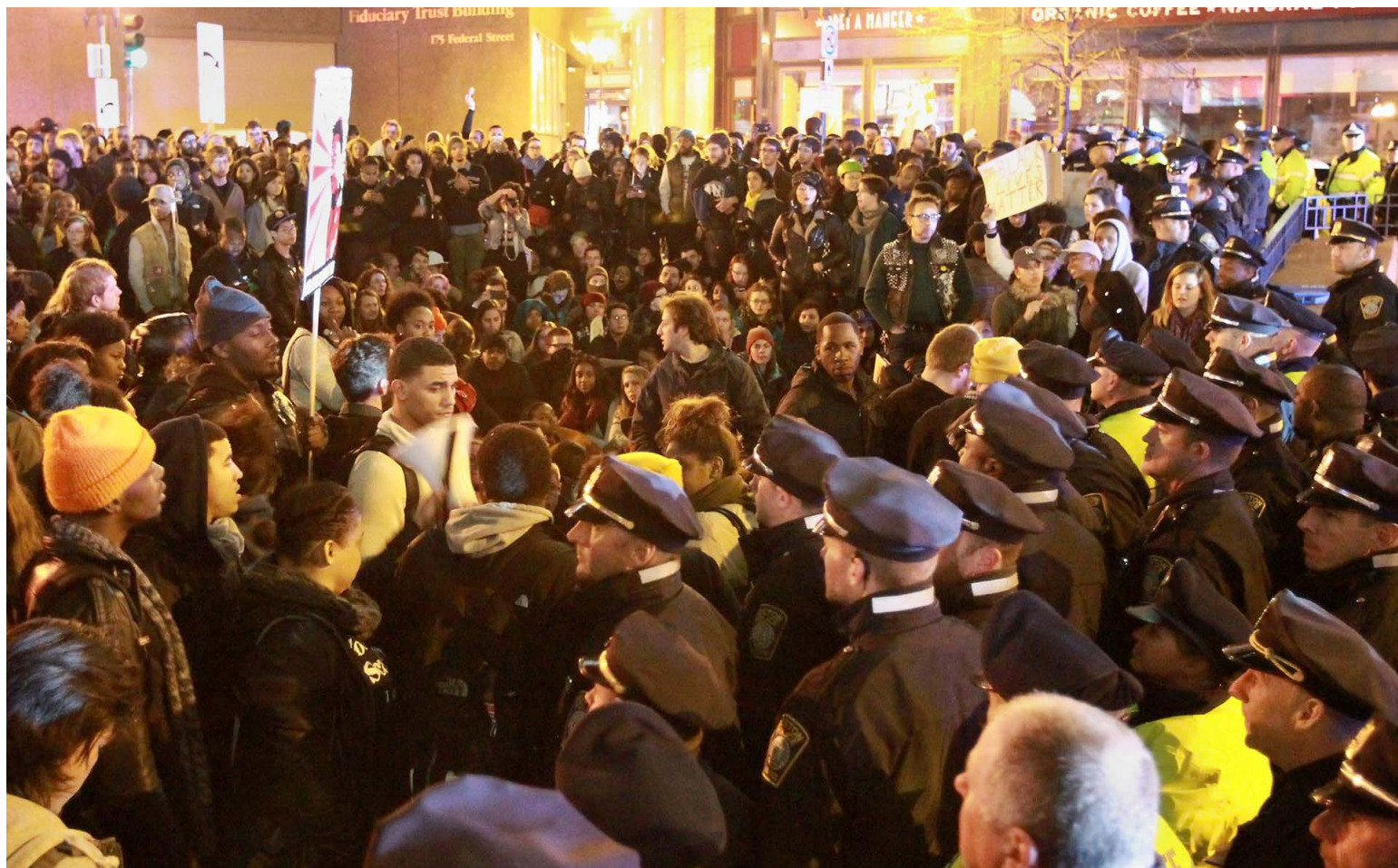
On Tuesday night, nearly 50 people were arrested on charges of disorderly conduct and disturbing the peace, but authorities reported no serious confrontations or injuries. About 40 had their criminal charges converted to civil infractions in court Wednesday, authorities said.

Some protesters said police overreacted to what was a peaceful protest, and in some cases used excessive force.

Tripp Diaz, 24, who lives in Roxbury, had a large abrasion on her right cheek and said she had bruises all over her body, which she said were sustained during her arrest. She was among two dozen protesters brought before a Boston Municipal Court judge on Wednesday.

Holding an ice pack to her head, Dernice Oliver, 20, said she was kicked in the head by a police officer when she was arrested. She was treated for neck and head injuries at Tufts Medical Center.

“The police were very excessive,” Oliver said. “I was taken to the ground by five police officers and just thrown around like a rag doll.”



JOHN BLANDING/GLOBE STAFF

**Demonstrators gathered in Dewey Square near South Station and an entrance ramp to Interstate 93.**

Oliver said she was arrested after she fell to the ground when protesters tried to get onto the Massachusetts Turnpike near South Station. Oliver said she and other injured protesters are considering taking legal action against police.

State Police spokesman David Procopio declined to address the individual allegations but said troopers used “exemplary restraint in a very chaotic situation, holding a line against a surge of more than a thousand people who were trying to trespass onto major highways.”

Officials said that while officers were subjected to taunts and in some cases pushed to the ground, the march was generally peaceful. A police spokesman declined to comment on specific complaints about injuries.

Evans praised officers for their restraint in the face of goading from demonstrators, preventing the situation from escalating. “We were engaged with the crowd, and as much as they tried to take us to the next level, we were disciplined,” Evans said.

State Police said they did not activate specialized crowd and riot control units, opting to keep them on standby given the peaceful nature of the protest.

“We allowed the patrol units already in place to handle the crowd control,” Procopio said. “We showed all

possible restraint."

Tactical units were ready to respond in a matter of minutes if the protest had become more unruly, he said. "We made a conscious decision that we would not use them if they were not absolutely needed," he said.

Police officials said a primary goal was to prevent protesters from reaching highways, as had occurred in other protests across the country. Evans said he worried that large crowds on the highway could potentially cause a panic.

"We made the decision to hold the line," he said.

Boston has become known in law enforcement circles for its measured approach to mass demonstrations, a strategy honed through numerous championship celebrations and the Occupy movement in 2011.

"You have a police commissioner who had first-hand experience in dealing with the Occupy movement, and this is one of the lessons," said Chuck Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, a Washington, D.C., research organization. "I think that carries over."

Police officials are increasingly recognizing that outfitting police in riot gear and bringing in military vehicles in an effort to control crowds can backfire.

"The unintended consequence is that the crowd thinks you expect violence," he said. "It's a self-fulfilling prophecy."

Specialists said Boston police have adopted a more conciliatory approach to crowd control through painful experience.

In 2008, a 22-year-old college student stopped breathing and later died after a confrontation with police during a Boston Celtics championship celebration. In 2004, a 21-year-old man was killed by a drunk driver during rioting after the Super Bowl, and a college student was killed when police fired pepper pellets into a crowd celebrating a Red Sox victory.

"Boston police definitely learned lessons from those unfortunate tragedies," said Tom Nolan, associate professor of criminology at Merrimack College. "The sentiment at the time was might makes right."

The approach Tuesday, Nolan said, stood in sharp contrast to the militarized approach seen in Ferguson.

"What that serves to do is exacerbate the situation," he said. "It just fans those flames."

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*Globe correspondent Matt Rocheleau contributed to this report. Peter Schworm can be reached at [schworm@globe.com](mailto:schworm@globe.com).*

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