



The Sacred Web of Abundance

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The day after spreading their child's ashes in Welaunee, also known as the South River Forest outside of Atlanta, the family of Manuel Páez Terán, "Tortuguita," held a [press conference](#) to share the independent autopsy report. The independent autopsy found that Tortuguita had their hands up and was seated in a cross-legged position when they were shot 14 times by multiple officers during a multi-agency raid of Welaunee Forest, also known as South River Forest. Tortuguita loved and died for the forest and a vision of the world in which everyone would have access to and enjoy abundance.

I have been following the movement in Atlanta to defend the forest and stop what has come to be known as cop city for some time. The movement started in 2020 following the summer of uprisings protesting police brutality, the killing of George Floyd, and others across the country. In Atlanta, it was [Rayshard Brooks](#). The city responded with an increase in funding to the police, and still the Atlanta Police Foundation proposed a [300-acre militarized police training facility](#), including a "rehearsal space" with a mock city where bombs and tear gas could be deployed. This would be the largest training facility in the country and the city of Atlanta would raze part of the largest urban forest in the country to do it.

After nearly two years of incredible organizing and coalition building, over [17 hours of comments were logged at the City Council meeting when the proposal came to a vote](#), with overwhelming dissent against the proposal across diverse communities, citizens, and interest groups. The proposal was approved by Atlanta City Council anyway. So protesters changed tactics and started occupying the forest, including tree sitting. The effort was successful in that it delayed the project and allowed time for lawsuits to prevent the construction company contracted to build cop city from obtaining a permit. Education and advocacy have continued to spread, and eventually I caught stories from trusted organizers that I knew.

In January, the police escalated with a heavily armed, multi-agency operation. They killed Tortuguita and arrested others, charging them with domestic terrorism, which carries a minimum 15-year sentence. Despite permits still not being issued, the construction company has razed trees to prepare for construction. Local organizers quickly planned a week of action and invited help and solidarity nationally. I connected with local Atlanta clergy and helped to draft [a letter](#), which has now been signed by over 300 faith workers and faith leaders representing hundreds of congregations across different religions and denominations.

I am horrified by the failure of democracy in Atlanta and the severe abuse of power by police leveraging terrorism charges. I am staying connected to this struggle because cop city will mean increased police repression across the nation and internationally, as plans include police departments from other cities and even other countries coming to “train” and “rehearse” urban warfare against citizens.

Being a part of this struggle, I also have been exposed to the vision of life and abundance that Tortuguita and others defending Welaunee held. Prior to the week of action, a collective of people from the movement [published a piece on the Sacred Web of Abundance](#). As Jesus said, we will recognize a tree by its fruit. I see the Gospel of life and so many of the living fruits of the Holy Spirit in this vision of the Sacred Web of Abundance as well as the people who are risking so much for it.

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