

# **FERG USON AND BEY OND**



**FIGHTING  
THE POLICE &  
WHITE SUPREMACY**



**CrimethInc.**

As we assembled this overview of the uprising that spread from Ferguson in 2014, our thoughts were focused on those who have not yet been killed by police—from whose number another life is subtracted every day. Honor the dead and fight like hell for the living.

from each other. Often, anarchists describe our role in social upheavals as pushing struggle further, but sometimes we are only playing at a criminality that others are much deeper in. In struggles where many of the people involved are responding to the reality of constant low-intensity warfare with the police, we have to be honest with ourselves about what strengths we have to bring and what overtures we are prepared to make good on.

None of the conflicts that came to a head in Ferguson have been resolved, nor do the authorities or their colleagues have any idea how to resolve them. Whether we bring the courage to act, an eye to security and collective safety, specific tactical know-how, or ideas that challenge embedded norms, let's be prepared to engage whenever the next eruptions occur.



# *I. Background*

## **Missouri Compromised**

Our story begins in the 1850s, when Missouri was a battleground between proponents and critics of slavery. Abolitionists and other well-meaning individuals repeatedly attempted to use the courts to secure freedom and rights for black people. This was as naïve and ineffectual then\* as counting on the courts to convict police is today.

In the Dred Scott Decision of 1857, concluding a court case initiated in Missouri, the US Supreme Court ruled that people of African descent—enslaved or free—could not be accorded the rights of citizens. It also overturned the “Missouri Compromise” of 1820, intended to maintain a balance between states that practiced slavery and states that prohibited it. The Supreme Court held that the Fifth Amendment barred any law that would deprive a slaveholder of his property, such as his slaves. Furthermore, if black people were entitled to the privileges and immunities of citizens, it would exempt them from the operation of the special laws and from the police regulations necessary for their own safety. It would give to persons of the negro race the right to go where they pleased at every hour of the day or night without molestation... it would give them full liberty of speech in public and in private, to hold public meetings upon public affairs, and to keep and carry arms wherever they went. And all of this would be done in the face of the subject race of the same color, both free and slaves, inevitably producing discontent and insubordination among them, and endangering the peace and safety of the State.

This is a concise history lesson on the institutions of US democracy. Property, the sanctity of which is asserted today by those who wring their

\* In St. Louis, racial codes prohibited a variety of relations between legally designated racial groups since the late 1600s. So-called miscegenation was prohibited well into the mid-20th century, and neighborhood ordinances effectively prevented black people from owning houses in Ferguson through the 1960s. These laws were essential in creating the racial tensions that persist up to the present day.

hands about the looting in Ferguson, is revealed as a justification for robbing an entire people of their lives. Citizenship, which has divided democracy into *included* and *excluded* since ancient Athens, shows its true colors: rather than a means of transcending racism, citizenship served to introduce racial disparities, as it serves to perpetuate them today.\* The court system put the stamp of legitimacy on all this, validating racial divisions so poor white people would have an interest in siding with the wealthy against poor people of color. Nothing was more terrifying to the honorable and learned men of the Supreme Court than the possibility that black people might speak, travel, and bear arms freely, mingling with the rest of society. The Dred Scott decision should make an anarchist out of any person of good conscience: for either one is bound to abide by the decisions of the Supreme Court, the highest law in the land, or one is bound to abide one's own conscience regardless of what any court rules.

Countless black and indigenous rebels came to the second conclusion, along with at least a few white people. One of these was John Brown, who led a raid into Missouri at the end of 1858 to liberate a handful of slaves, killing one slaveholder and seizing the belongings of another. Thus began the countdown to his raid on Harper's Ferry, which triggered the Civil War. It was illegal direct action in support of black resistance that forced the issue of slavery, not legal recourse or peaceful protest.

## Ferguson Today

Fast forward through the reorganization of capitalism from plantation slavery to industrial wage labor: capitalists have to pay for the upkeep of slaves through thick and thin, while workers can be hired and fired as needed. Fast forward through the restabilization of white supremacy by the Ku Klux Klan and similar groups that were autonomous of the state and yet complementary to it (just like the pioneers who formed the vanguard of colonization, whose frontier spirit is remembered so fondly by “libertarian” capitalists today). Fast forward through the civil rights movement, much of which was channeled into institutional struggles for inclusion that ultimately stabilized white supremacy once more—offering

\* See the article about the US-Mexico border, “Designed to Kill,” in *Rolling Thunder* #10.

dichotomy between fighting in the streets and “outreach,” as if those are the only options, as if they must be in opposition to each other. Certainly, there are physical limits to what any group of people can do, but there must be ways to connect with folks that increase our capacity for fighting together. Could we engage differently with people during those moments of conflict, in ways that could change what happens afterwards?

With so many obstacles in place to prevent us from finding common cause—from the far-reaching physical and emotional effects of police violence and state repression to the attitudes and actions of aspiring managerial activists—how *do* we find each other in those moments of instability? How do we engage with people without defining ourselves in a way that excludes us from everything, while still recognizing the ways we are different? How do we side with militants within embattled communities that we are not a part of, without further contributing to divisions within them that may endanger those potential friends and our relationships with them? And how do we search out new directions without obsessing so much over questions of relevance that we fail to recognize when this pushes us to irrelevance?

## Finally . . .

In the quieting time after such an historic upheaval, people are quick to ask: What's next? How do we prepare? Honest answers must acknowledge that there's no sure way to know. At best, our predictions will serve as a time capsule, holding a glimpse of what our priorities were to help provide insight for later reflection.

Likely, the next openings of social rupture—and the attempts to close them back up and reroute people's anger—will arise out of the past cycles of resistance and the cooptation that prevented things from going further. For now, social peace has been reestablished, but at a higher level of tension, with a greater degree of force. This precarious balance can only last until another sector of society rises in revolt.

The conflicts that spread from Ferguson were not initiated by anarchists, but drew great interest and participation from anarchists across the country. In this kind of situation, we have to show up prepared to contribute *and* with a perceptible humility. No one wants to start from someone else's pre-formed political agenda; we all have to figure out what we have to learn

we're rioting, we're not magically all the same, but we can fight together in a way that acts against our socially imposed positions in this world. We can choose to act against the parts of our own identities that otherwise cause us to wield power over others and/or to play the victim.

## Fighting Formations

Anarchists tend to fight from the outside. Whether or not we gather in self-identified radical circles of friends, anarchists intentionally position ourselves outside and against almost everything else. Perhaps this is because we are theoretically opposed to being involved in broad coalitions in order to steer them in a certain direction. Perhaps it is because we don't believe in politicking and don't want to legitimize it. Whatever the reason, this outsider status often positions us well in the beginning, when social ruptures crack open the center to render *everything* outside; but it often leaves us struggling to catch up as new insides begin forming. We reject this re-forming process, calling it recuperation, but we usually lack a meaningful way to engage with what comes next. How can we—not just anarchists, but rebels of all kinds—make something that transcends our social circles and immediate projects?

Reflecting on the most recent wave of anti-police activity, many anarchists are talking regretfully about not coming out of the days in the streets together with more new relationships that could become long-standing. Anarchists who were in Ferguson say they aren't surprised that some folks they met there got involved in leftist groups in the following months, partly because there weren't visible anarchist spaces or projects.\* During intense periods of social unrest, anarchists sometimes pose a

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won't be as bad as being on that receiving end.

\* Midwestern stereotypes aside, there has been an earnestness in many of the accounts from Ferguson that is sometimes lacking from anarchist discourse. A kind of bravado can fill anarchist texts as we front an offensive position when we are actually acting defensively, all while trying to figure out how to sound like we're being "real." Often that realness that anarchists search for is as simple as being in touch with your own personal capacity, and understanding how you allow yourself to be pushed beyond it when there is an outside need.

a pressure valve for an upwardly mobile minority while the majority of black people languish in poverty and, increasingly, in prison.

At the turn of the 20th century, St. Louis, Missouri was a thriving industrial center, drawing massive numbers of black workers. When globalization drew factory production out of North America, reducing cities like Detroit and St. Louis to Rust Belt ghost towns, black workers were the first to suffer, left to starve in decaying urban cores.

Despite formal desegregation, explicitly racialized power remained as economically spacialized power. Around the country, urban blight and aggressive development slowly broke up longstanding poor and black communities, dispersing people to new suburban ghettos. Ferguson is a satellite town just outside St. Louis; between 1990 and 2010, its black population more than doubled, while more than half of the white population fled to other suburbs.

In 2008, the economic crisis hit, once again impacting black people first and worst. Ferguson was in the epicenter of the foreclosure crisis in Missouri; for years, banks had preyed on families, extending them sub-prime mortgages. Consequently, as unemployment spiked, many were left impoverished and homeless, or crowded into housing complexes.

All this gives the lie to rhetoric about people "destroying their own neighborhoods." Many in Ferguson own nothing at all; they have only recently been forced to move there, driven by market forces that will soon drive them on again. Pundits bewailed the economic setbacks that the rioting might inflict on an already suffering town, but this confuses the profits of developers with the needs of actual residents. If Ferguson is developed and experiences an economic upswing, its poorest residents will not benefit from this—they'll be forced out by rising costs. In fact, for the poor and unemployed, rioting might be the only hope of improving their prospects: in March 2015, the QuikTrip Corporation announced that it would donate the property of the QT that was burned in August 2014 to host a job training center, to be funded by \$1.2 million in donations from St. Louis businesses. It took weeks of rioting and arson to secure this single concession from the profiting class.

# The Thin Blue Line Is a Burning Fuse

It would not be possible to sustain any of these inequalities without the police—the backbone of racialized power.

The militarization of the police isn't just a way to sustain the profitability of the military-industrial complex beyond the end of the Cold War; it's also a means of controlling the restless surplus populations of the post-industrial era. Just as it has been necessary to deploy troops around the world to secure the raw materials that keep the economy afloat, it is becoming necessary to deploy troops in the US to preserve the unequal distribution of resources at home. The austerity measures pioneered by the IMF in Africa, Asia, and South America are now being employed in the wealthiest nations of the first world; accordingly, the techniques of threat management and counter-insurgency that were debuted against Palestinians, Afghans, and Iraqis are now being turned against the populations of the countries that invaded them. Private military contractors who operated in Peshawar in 2006 worked in Ferguson in 2014, alongside tanks that had rolled through Baghdad. For now, this is limited to the poorest, blackest neighborhoods of the US; but what seems exceptional today will be commonplace tomorrow.

That explains why struggles against the police have taken center stage in the popular imagination over the past decade. Police form the front line of capitalism and racism in every fight. As a homeowner or renter, you might not meet the bank director or landlord who forces you out, but you will see the sheriff who comes to repossess your home or evict you. As a black person, you might never enter the gated communities of the chief beneficiaries of white privilege, but you will encounter the overtly racist officers who profile, bully, and arrest you. As an activist, you might never see the CEO who profits on fracking your water supply, but you'll see the police who break up your protest against him.

The civil rights struggles of two generations ago have become struggles against the police: today, a black man can become president, but he's exponentially more likely to be murdered by a police officer. The workers' struggles of a generation ago have become struggles against the police: in place of steady employment, a population rendered expendable by globalization and automation can only be integrated into the functioning

In Ferguson, the black managerial class tried to use this to link whiteness—in this rare case, an undesirable identifier—with property destruction, looting, and other undesirable actions. This was a divisive tactic to prey on people's fears, spread mistrust, and discourage others from showing up. How can revolutionaries and other activists parrot the media and police rhetoric that obviously serves to reinforce, rather than collapse, the power of the state?

The phrase “white anarchists” is ripe with problems and questions. It invisibilizes anarchist people of color—perhaps in order to separate anarchism out as a professional or political class, something that is not for poor people, and definitely not for poor people of color. Anarchism is not a white radical phenomenon—but let's be real, much of anarchist culture is intensely racialized. Anarchist cultures carry within them many of the problems we inherit from white supremacist culture; most of them remain disproportionately rooted in European history, and many suffer side effects from the exploitation and tokenization of people of color that is popular among the authoritarian left.

In the midst of post-Ferguson conversations about how whiteness and anti-blackness are normalized and maintained in this culture, we have to ask how we reproduce white supremacist culture in anarchist cultures. How do we fetishize and tokenize people we want to be in struggle with, or combative cultural norms that we idealize, in a way that keeps them outside? For instance, let's not use the growing popularity of Afro-pessimist critiques to make our anarchist projects seem more relevant without re-evaluating the foundations of our theory and practice in light of them. When it comes to future anti-police struggles, anarchists—as a body that is certainly not singular—will likely be both inside of and outside of the social dynamics and demographics of those struggles, and we will continue to have to reconcile the limitations and opportunities that situation creates.

The lifelong projects of destroying whiteness and class society necessitate attacking the structures that reinforce them. This is not just a question of our personal conduct, relationships, or social norms.\* It may be that when

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drawn as criminal outsiders were already painted as some of the protagonists of this story?

\* For those who are not on the receiving end of the legacy of colonization and slavery, these projects *do* mean being ready to take flack for looking like a dumb white person (or whatever the equivalent is in your case). But don't worry, it



# Inside and Out

When deep-rooted social conflicts are pushed to the surface, people rush to conceal them again. Hide away the problems. Keep trouble from spreading. Sew the ruptures in the social fabric back together. Whatever their motivations, proponents of social peace use both physical and rhetorical means to achieve this; sometimes, they're more dangerous than the cops.

Liberal leaders and authoritarian groups from far and wide fought hard for control of the narrative in Ferguson. The recuperative power of the black left was in full effect, expressed via an array of tactics to discredit everyone who could not be reconciled with the state. From organizing separate daytime protests that were coordinated with city officials, to using the legacies of dead militants to justify demands for nonviolence, to launching public smear campaigns, leftists vied to undermine the possibility of self-organization. Even corporate media picked up on the divergence of agendas between (more targeted) black youth and the people of color who hoped to “lead” them, practically all of whom were more integrated into the power structure and had more reason to remain compliant. Despite the forces arrayed against them, many of the people in Ferguson were determined to gain control of the streets, and pushed the would-be managers aside. What would it take for this rejection of the political left to outlast the days of open conflict?

In a parallel containment practice, media, politicians, and revolutionary leaders alike decried “white anarchists” as outside agitators.\* This approach to pacification, aimed at fracturing any possible cohesion those fighting state power might find through conflict, typically separates out good protestors from bad ones and draws lines along race and ethnicity.†

\* The operation of creating outside agitators is a microcosm of the process of re-inclusion/re-exclusion that stabilizes capitalism and white supremacy. This tactic has been used repeatedly, especially against populations of people who have been forced to relocate through immigration or exile. In the 1960s, for instance, it was frequently a defensive maneuver white Southerners used, labeling as “outside agitators” the black youth whose families had moved north during the diaspora after emancipation.

† How was this different in Ferguson, where the black youth who are typically

of the economy at gunpoint. What bosses once were to workers, police are to the precarious and unemployed.

In view of all this, it's not surprising that police violence has been the catalyst for most of the major movements, uprisings, and revolutions of the past several years. The riots that shook Greece in December 2008, sparked



*The army of the rich, the vanguard of white supremacy.*

by the police murder of 15-year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos, ushered in the era of worldwide anti-austerity resistance. The riots in response to the police murder of Oscar Grant in Oakland at the opening of 2009 set the stage for the Bay Area to host the high-water mark of Occupy. The day of protest that sparked the Egyptian revolution of 2011 was scheduled for National Police Day, January 25, by the Facebook page We Are All Khaled Said, which memorialized another young man killed by police. Occupy Wall Street didn't gain traction until footage of police attacks circulated in late September 2011. The police eviction of Occupy Oakland, in which officers fractured the skull of Iraq War veteran Scott Olsen, brought the Occupy movement to its peak, provoking the blockade of the Port of Oakland that served as a model for the highway blockades that spread from

Ferguson. In 2013, the fare hike protests in Brazil and the Gezi Resistance in Turkey both metastasized from small single-issue protests into massive uprisings as a result of clumsy police repression; then the same thing happened in Eastern Europe, setting off the Ukrainian revolution at the end of 2013 and sparking the Bosnian uprising of February 2014.

Other cities around the US have witnessed a series of intensifying rebellions against police murders: Seattle and Atlanta in 2011, Anaheim in 2012, Brooklyn and Durham in 2013. It isn't just that the police are called in to repress every movement as soon as it poses any threat to the prevailing distribution of power (although that remains as true as ever). Rather, *repression itself* has been producing the flashpoints of revolt.

## Betrayed by the System

Despite widespread hope that Obama's election heralded the coming of a post-racial America, racial disparities only worsened while he was in office. In retrospect, this expectation sounds so naïve that few will even admit to it—but how else can we explain the euphoria that greeted his victory in 2008, prompting even anarchists to suspend their usual counter-inaugural protests?

During democratic presidencies in the US, there seems to be a period after the mid-term elections that is prone to social upheaval. The Seattle WTO demonstrations of 1999 occurred in the third year of Bill Clinton's second term, interrupting the neoliberal triumphalism that characterized the 1990s. The Occupy movement of 2011 occurred during the third year of Obama's first term, bringing anticapitalism into mainstream discourse for the first time in generations. It is not surprising, then, that the second wave of rebellion under America's first black president, occurring at the analogous point in his second term, focused on race. At this point in the electoral cycle, no one had any illusions that electoral politics could address racial inequalities, and there was no more incentive for even Obama's staunchest supporters to keep quiet.

It's tempting to believe that the general public is becoming progressively disillusioned—with neo-liberalism, with capitalism, with liberal notions of racial equality and “progress.” But just as Obama's initial campaign remystified the disenchanting millions, we will likely see future political parties accomplish the same thing, as Syriza has in Greece. There's a sucker born

of identity was never more than a gross oversimplification.\* A peculiar self-centering becomes implicit in this apparent self-abolition. When we remove all language about our experiences of difference, pretending that all we have to do to negate our socialization is to proclaim it so, which unspoken, singular narrative easily replaces all the others? This rhetoric also implied that in moments of open conflict, it would be easy to find each other across our socially imposed roles through a shared combative culture—because when we're rioting, we're all one. In a strange parallel with the identity politics it rejected, this rhetoric centered individualized personal experience once more, disregarding the challenges to achieving more than a fleeting connection across socially imposed gulfs.

For too long, anarchists have been left in a void between the rejection of identity politics and the rejection of identity, grasping for an approach to understanding narrative and experience while resisting the totalizing force of definition. Meanwhile, most of the major political struggles of the last several years have centralized questions about racialized power, specifically anti-black (and sometimes anti-brown) violence—foregrounding (in) visibility and (a socially imposed) lack of subjectivity† from a very different angle. Protest cultures that remain stuck in controlled or single-issue approaches have become obsolete‡; today's struggles force multiple axes of power to the surface. We need new ways of understanding and engaging with them.

\* See En Vogue's song, *Free Your Mind*. “Colorblind, don't be so shallow” is still the proper response.

† Check out Frank Wilderson, Saidiya Hartman, Achille Mbembe, and Calvin Warren to read more on Afro-Pessimism and anti-blackness.

‡ Fighting racialized power is increasingly central to the vital conflicts that are erupting today, in the same way that repressive inclusion is increasingly central to the shutting down of revolutionary possibility. The previously mentioned People's Climate March of September 2014 was a classic example of the latter: it boasted the diversity language central to the nonprofit organizing model and insisted that it “made history,” and yet it took up none of the questions, tactics, or strategies that Ferguson had pushed to the fore. Rather, the form of organization conspired to suppress them, using the language of diversity against diversity itself.



combative cultures past and reworking it into the rhetoric of social justice activism—once called civil rights activism—so that it can interface more legibly with power.\*

An important piece of the non-profit puzzle has been the institutionalization and specialization of anti-oppression politics, creating a new discourse useful for those interested in a specific kind of control: reform.† The rhetoric of identity politics and allyship flattens a complicated terrain of overlapping and oppositional experiences. It centralizes personal experience in a way that fosters both an overinflated sense of self-importance and an obsessive self-criticism that can be paralyzing.§ Also, by framing the project of taking leadership from *those who are most affected* as an objective moral duty, it obscures the essential question of how people choose who to ally with. We all exist in a multiplicity of realities that are in constant flux,‡ but the language of identity politics forces a static identification, falsely unifying people in categories according to a few characteristics, despite all other difference.

In response, some comrades theorized a few years ago that the refusal of fixed identity would be central to the coming insurrections—that rejecting our individual subjectivities was essential to rewriting our culturally held mythologies of power. As a reaction against managerial and pacifying identity politics, this made sense—but in practice, the abolition

\* About ten years ago, for instance, a former Black Panther noted that after he came out of prison, he was expected to give up all the information to the state that he had been careful to protect as a Panther—under the guise of grant writing. For more about the non-profit thing, check out *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence.

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‡ The middle class American/colonizer project is one of imposing stability on a system that will never stabilize. This gives some insight into how definition itself is violence.

every minute, ready to fall for age-old tricks. As long as representational politics commands the hopes and imaginations of so many US citizens, electoral rhythms will modulate the pace of social movements—triggering them every so often, but suppressing them the rest of the time. We should be ready to seize the opportunities that arise when politicians fail to deliver on their promises, but in the long run we have to transform that disillusionment into a feeling of possibility outside the electoral system.

## From Occupy to Ferguson

In early 2011, in response to austerity measures, protesters occupied the capitol building in Madison, Wisconsin. It was a localized struggle, but it gained traction on the popular imagination out of all proportion to its size. This clearly indicated that something big was coming, and some anarchists even brainstormed about how to prepare for it—but all the same, the nationwide wave of Occupy a few months later caught everyone flat-footed.

In August 2014, after white police officer Darren Wilson killed unarmed black teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, a week and a half of pitched protests shook the town. Once again, these were localized, but they loomed big in the popular imagination. Police kill people every day in the US, but until that August it hadn't gained traction on the public consciousness. What was new about the Ferguson protests was not just that people refused to cede the streets to the police for days on end,\* nor that they openly defied the “community leadership” that usually pacifies such revolts. It was also that all around the country, people were finally paying attention and expressing approval. Like the occupation of the capitol building in Madison, this portended things to come. Ferguson is a microcosm of the US; what happened there could happen anywhere.

The Occupy movement subsided without achieving its object of transforming society. We can identify three built-in limits that contributed

\* Occupy Wall Street was awkward to say the least for the first week of its existence; it only entered history because it went on long enough for more people to trickle in. The revolt in Ferguson was only one of many such outbursts in a series stretching at least back to the 2009 Oscar Grant riots in Oakland. The difference was that it persisted long enough to spread. *If a revolt can extend in time, it will extend in space.*

to this. First, it offered almost no analysis of racialized power, despite the central role of race in dividing labor struggles and poor people's resistance in the US. Second, perhaps not coincidentally, its discourse was largely legalistic and reformist—it was premised on the assumption that the laws and institutions of the state are fundamentally beneficial, or at least legitimate. Finally, it began as a *political* rather than social movement—hence the initial decision to occupy Wall Street instead of acting on a terrain closer to most people's everyday lives, as if capitalism were not a ubiquitous relation but something emanating from the stock market.

As a result of these three factors, the majority of the participants in Occupy were activists, newly precarious exiles from the middle class, and members of the underclass, in roughly that order; the working poor were notably absent. The simplistic sloganeering of Occupy obscured the lines of conflict that run through our society from top to bottom: “police are part of the 99%” is technically true, economically speaking, but so are most rapists and white supremacists. All of this meant that when the police came to evict the encampments and kill the movement, Occupy had neither the numbers, nor the fierceness, nor the analysis it needed to defend itself.

When a movement reaches its limits and subsides, it illustrates the obstacles future movements will have to surpass. Accordingly, the model of struggle originating in Ferguson transcended the failures of Occupy. Where Occupy whitewashed the issue of race, the Ferguson protests placed it front and center. Where Occupy confined itself to the unfavorable terrain of “political” physical sites and reformist demands, the people who rose up in Ferguson were fighting on their own streets for their own very lives. Whereas, with the temporary exception of Occupy Oakland, Occupy lacked the will to stand down the police, people in Ferguson braved tear gas and bullets to do just that. Where Occupy sought to conceal all the different forms of hierarchy and strife that cut through this society beneath the unifying banner of “the 99%,” the conflicts in Ferguson pushed them to the fore.

## The Center Is Everywhere

In today's hyperlinked world, revolt can proceed from the bottom to the top and from the periphery to the center, as Bakunin once prescribed. How many people had previously heard of Ferguson or of Sidi Bouzid, the

## IV. Looking Forward

### WHERE WE ARE, WHAT COMES NEXT

A compelling narrative with a protagonist that everyone can relate to is supposed to be the centerpiece of quality fiction writing, not to mention successful journalism. Yet no two people tell a story the same way. How does a story change depending on who tells it? What are its unseen roots? How is it racialized, for instance?

It's revealing how different people chart the lineage of the surge of anti-police activity in 2014. Some look back to the acquittal of the man who murdered Trayvon Martin, some to the murder of Oscar Grant, some to the Rodney King riots. Whose names do we remember? In Ferguson, graffiti at the QT proclaimed “LA '92/Watts '65/Spain '36.” Which lineage is that?

### Building the Story

Let's go back to the beginning/the middle/a long time back/a little ways back. In the US, for decades now, we've been experiencing the effects of the redirecting portion of a cycle of recuperation. Many of the people who fought in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s have been thoroughly incorporated into the system, so that they can be used to legitimize the state,\* while most of the people who refused to compromise have been incarcerated or killed. Diversity trainings for every police department, as well as black prison wardens and presidents, have become a palliative program for maintaining social inequities. As part of this process, the non-profit complex has been solidifying its role as the gentle hand of the state, taking up the language of

\* Read about Mayor Jean Quan and other activists turned politicians in the 'zine *Escalating Identities/Who is Oakland?*

[laughter]

**VERA:** Yeah, there were a ton of cars cruisin' up and down West Florissant.

**EMMA:** It was even fun when you were sitting in your car eating and you're like, "Well, I think we should go home now," but then we stay and then the split second you decide to leave something happens and then you're like "No, gotta stay." And that just happens all night long.

**RAUL:** The collective momentum and anger and excitement when people are flipping over a cop car. It takes a lot of people, you really gotta give it your all. Every inch of space on that cop car was somebody trying really hard. It's just a really beautiful experience. And how excited people are when it finally goes over.

**VERA:** And then the cop car on fire with things shooting out of its trunk. That was really beautiful.

**MASIE:** Yeah, I remember the first night of the riot. And being like, "Shit, there's a lot of people at that QT without masks on." And then an hour later seeing fire and I was like, "Well... that's one way of dealing with it. Won't be leaving any evidence."

[laughter]

**MASIE:** Yeah, the first night of the riot I remember us all getting back together at the house and everyone being euphoric, like, "Did that really just fucking happen, oh my god!"

**EMMA:** Well, should we say anything else, or... end it in some grand way?

**VERA:** That seemed pretty grand.

town in Tunisia where Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire and sparked the uprisings of the Arab Spring?

This poses further questions about the relationship between the hotspots and the hinterlands. Should aspiring insurgents focus on intensifying high-profile struggles in radical meccas like the San Francisco Bay Area, in hopes that they will catalyze revolt elsewhere? Or should we regard those as the effects, rather than the causes, of ruptures in little-known towns that are not already quarantined as radical enclaves? Although both Occupy and the wave of revolt emanating from Ferguson arguably reached their peaks in the Bay Area, neither began there, and many of the participants had moved there from elsewhere. Even if we measure the progress and intensity of revolt by what happens in the hotspots, it may be that to push things further, we have to focus on the hinterlands.

What *convergence* and *concentration* were to the anti-globalization movement at the turn of the century, *simultaneity* and *diffusion* are today. Just as capitalism and white supremacy are everywhere, any expression of resistance can instantly replicate and spread.



Demonstrators blocking the streets of Ferguson on August 18.

# II. From Ferguson to the Bay, August to December 2014

## AN UPRISING PERSISTS AND SPREADS

For the sake of concision, we've limited ourselves to the voices of our immediate comrades, sometimes at the risk of centering the experiences of predominantly white participants. This is a good place to learn about how some anarchists participated in the protests that spread from Ferguson, but not to form a comprehensive understanding of how and why they occurred.

We drew from the zine *No We Won't Go Home*, the *Missouri Prison Newsletter*, the Antistate STL website, and many other sources.

**AUGUST 9 (SATURDAY)** - Michael Brown is shot and killed in Ferguson, Missouri by police officer Darren Wilson. Brown was walking home from a convenience store to his grandmother's house when Wilson stopped him for jaywalking and a scuffle ensued. Witnesses report that the officer shot Brown as he fled with his hands up in surrender. A crowd quickly grows; shots are fired into the air and a dumpster is set on fire. Police respond with an armored riot vehicle, a helicopter, dogs, and assault rifles. As anger grows, the police are forced to withdraw.

As the night drags on, the politicians arrive. OBS, NOI, NBPP, UAPO,\* alphabet soup. They're trying, with little success, to grab

\* The Organization for Black Struggle (OBS) and Universal African Peoples

**EMMA:** And it was awesome how the QT became a monument. Everyone was there taking photos of themselves and of each other.

**RAUL:** And doing graffiti and having dance parties...

**VERA:** ...and handing out hot dogs...

**LUCA:** Yeah, and all the kids who were there. All the times that there were children or were pregnant women... especially earlier in the day, and sometimes late at night.

**MASIE:** I remember one of our friends saying... the second night after Vonderrit Myers was shot [Thursday, October 9th], she had her daughter there, and she was running around, doing all kinds of toddler-type things. She was hanging out with other children that age, and then our friend was talking to their mothers, asking them "Is this irresponsible of us to have kids here? You know, since it could get violent." And the moms were like, "It would be irresponsible for them *not* to be here. They need to be here, we need to teach them about this." I thought that was really awesome, really powerful.

**CAMERON:** There was some child psychiatrist who came out on the news saying, "Do not take your children here. They haven't formed their reality of the world yet."

**LUCA:** That's exactly why you need to take them there.

**VERA:** I was at Vonderrit's memorial one night, and there weren't that many of us there, but there was a woman there with five kids, and some asshole came by in his car talking about "another thug martyr," yelling all this racist shit. And then the people that were at the memorial attacked his car and were kicking it and throwing shit and he raced away.

And that woman was like, "That was so important for my kids to see that. To see people fight back. To not accept that sort of thing."

**MASIE:** All the people hanging out of cars.

**EMMA:** Oh god, like twenty people! On some car that could barely pull itself.



**CAMERON:** He started just pouring gasoline all over it. And I was like, “This is not what I expected.” Normally when someone’s running toward a fire, they’re putting it out.

**LUCA:** Going back to the people who the media made invisible out there... All the young women out there. All the young women on the front lines. Not backing down and not going home.

**EMMA:** Yeah, even when they\* would be like, “Get the women out of here.”

**VERA:** Yeah, so many women were like, “Fuck that.”

**MASIE:** I’m just gonna say it, I liked the party atmosphere down there and I liked smoking weed with those teenagers...

*[laughter]*

**LUCA:** I had a night when it was like a block party [Thursday, August 14th] where I got high at the end of the night and it changed everything... I was just like, “This is so amazing.”

*[laughter]*

**RAUL:** Yeah, you were texting me, like, “you gotta get down here! This is so amazing!” I texted Cameron and I was like, “So I need to get down there?” and Cameron was like, “Luca’s really high.”

**CAMERON:** Yeah, it’s cool, but... maybe you don’t have to rush down here.

**LUCA:** It just made everything that much more surreal and that much more beautiful. It was so cheesy, but, it was just like, “Oh yeah...”

Well, it gives you pause cuz we’d been in it all week, like all week this was happening and happening and it was like, “No way, this is really happening, this is my real life right now.”

\* The Nation of Islam and the some elements of the New Black Panther Party were most responsible for initiating these calls.

the attention of a relatively small crowd. Instead of joining us as we face the police station, they face us, trying to tell everyone how we need to act, what needs to happen next, who will be involved in a futile and meaningless negotiation, as if those of us on either side of the line that is being drawn have anything to say to those on the other.

**AUGUST 10 (SUNDAY)** - In the evening, crowds gather for a prayer vigil at the site of the shooting, in the Canfield apartments. The crowd marches to W. Florissant where police have massed. The protesters confront the police line, yelling insults and throwing things. Three or four police cruisers attempt to drive through the crowd. People surround them and smash out their windows.

After police exit the scene, people begin to celebrate. Some march down to the Quick Trip; others attempt to march to the police station, but meet a wall of police. Protesters smash the windows of the QuikTrip and others flood in to loot the store. People openly drive cars onto W. Florissant and fill them with looted goods. Police respond with tear gas, but mostly remain clear of the crowd. Later, someone reportedly shoots at the police helicopter circling above.

The crowd remains in the street late into the night. By the time things die down, the looting has spread to twelve businesses, with multiple dumpsters on fire. A fire completely engulfs the QT and reduces it to rubble. Two officers have been injured by rocks and bottles.

It’s about 8:10 when I show up. Exiting the highway, I see six cop cars parked at the gas station. Across the street, there are more than 10 police SUVs parked in the cemetery. We comment on how they’re just being prepared for what might happen, yet nothing could prepare us for the amount of police ahead. We drive another mile down Lucas and Hunt, and as we head north, traffic gets incredibly thick. Then the police cars start speeding past us. It’s impossible for them to get through, so they speed dangerously past on the opposite side of the street. We can’t make it to the

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Organization (UAPO) are decades-old black-led organizations based in St. Louis. The Nation of Islam (NOI) and the New Black Panther Party (NBPP) are national organizations with a roughly separatist agenda. (“There is no new Black Panther Party” -members of the original Black Panther Party).



apartment complex by car because there are so many people, police, police cars, dogs, kids.

We park and make the hike in—past over a hundred cop cars.



The police on the southern end of the street, where the rowdier crowd is, call for more backup from the police blocking off the north side. Instead of navigating the side streets, the scared and hasty cops drive their cars through a mob of hundreds or more people who are growing bolder all the time. The first two or three cars slowly make their way through the crowd, but by the fourth people are physically stopping the cars, beating on them and eventually all you can hear is one loud thud after another as people stomp the police cars. The door of one cop car is pulled open, but the car speeds off before the cops inside are extracted. The police are just running a gauntlet of angry people. Lots of cheering. Almost everyone has stopped being afraid.

You might expect the crowd of attackers to be young men in their early 20s or teens, but all genders and all ages are getting their kicks in. I see people as young as 10 or 12 years old attacking the cars and people in their 50s too.

Once the police have made it to the south side, it seems clear that the block is ours. The police are maintaining lines at Ferguson Avenue (to the south) and just north of the bridge for the 270 interchange (to the north). The mile or so between is totally unpoliced and filled with thousands of people.

This commercial stretch, full of parasitical businesses, has numerous small roads leading east into the densely populated neighborhoods just a block away. The police, too afraid and outnumbered to enter a residential area seething with outrage, are unable to block those streets. As they hear about what is going on, people are pouring into the commercial district on foot, in cars, on motorcycles. For once, the geography of this suburb is on our side.



to go home and it's just the crazy people who we can't control that we're gonna give you. That are gonna stay here."

**CAMERON:** And also it's a great strategy for police, cuz they can just be like, "We can do whatever the fuck we want now." Whereas before, there were clearly peaceful protesters, and they couldn't. So they just mass arrest people.

*Moments of Joy*

**EMMA:** We were supposed to talk about the wonderful moments.

**LUCA:** Oh yeah... let's do that.

**VERA:** One of my favorite moments was the night... it was the last night when we were all on Canfield [Monday, August 18th] and there's that restaurant right there...

**LUCA:** Red's?

**CAMERON:** The BBQ place?

**VERA:** Yeah, Red's, I guess it was Red's... and the cops were not coming down Canfield, so people were sort of playing with that area in between where most of the crowd was and where the cops were. And this kid lit a Molotov and just threw it into the middle of the street. And everyone was like "What!? Come on! Don't waste it! Why the fuck did you throw it there?"

*[laughter]*

**VERA:** So he lit another one and poured a whole bunch of gas into Red's and then everybody was like "OK, make this one count!" And so he runs up there again and throws it and lights it on fire... and everyone's cheering.

**CAMERON:** But then the fire went out and some person started running towards it with a jug of something... And I was like, "Oh, man, c'mon. He's puttin' the fire out." And then it was just gasoline...

*[laughter]*

but it is like, “OK, you have a gun, you have the power now too.” And we should have the power, not just the police, but still, that’s real. It stops you a little bit.

**MASIE:** Yeah, it can . . . in these situations, where it opens it up and makes power more diffuse, sometimes when people start shooting, it’s like, “And now we’re all just running away, and the night’s over.” Which sometimes, if the night’s over, then it’s a good time to do that. But sometimes it’s like, “Well, you made that decision for all of us.”

**EMMA:** I do feel like the world that we dream of, and having those moments of uncontrollability or possibility open up, will entail violence. And so just normalizing that, being emotionally prepared for that, and dispelling the glorification of it or the romanticization of it.

There’s something too, though, in the dichotomy—or, it can feel like a dichotomy—that you either are militant or you’re passive. And the riot is crucial, but in a rebellion, how do you sustain this and how do you not make it just against police but against our whole lives? Yeah, we want a social revolution.

And somehow, for people who are supporting or don’t want to engage in the same way, there need to be spaces or other things they can do. Or when people are shooting guns and someone’s scared and has to leave, what else can they do? Or, you don’t want to stay in the middle of a confrontation with police, so what do you do to add something?

I mean, we need everything to be transformed. Every relation, everything. So there’s more than just fighting in that one way—even though it’s those moments where there’s violence that open up what we desire. And that’s brutal... and worth it. Or, you have to come to that for yourself—if it’s worth it to you.

**LOUISE:** It’s interesting how much the guns being around... that people having guns, sort of enables the Left and the organizers to blame everyone who does stay out on those nights, to be like “Here you go, cops, take these crazies, they must be crazy if they’re still out here. And they want to fuck all kinds of shit up and shoot everybody, so take ‘em.”

And that really enables people to say, “These are the non-violent people, and these are clearly the crazy, violent people.” And that really serves them, to sort of sacrifice the people like that. I mean, especially on the night of the curfew, that really served them. “We’re telling everybody

In the QT, it looks like people three or four deep just lining the windows. The gas prices are ripped down off the big sign out front and “SNITCHES” is painted on it. “RIP MIKE MIKE,” “187 County Police,” and other messages adorn the brick of the QT. Elsewhere along the street: “AVENGE MIKE MIKE” “FUCK DA POLICE,” “KILL COPS,” “THE ONLY GOOD COP IS A DEAD COP,” “SNITCHES GET STITCHES,” “AN EYE FOR AN EYE MAKES OUR MASTERS BLIND,” and “MIKE BROWN, THIS FOR YOU.”



A pallet of water bottles. I grab a case and hand them out; it’s August after all. “There’s more where that came from.” Everyone is eager for a first drink of looted beer and packs of smokes are passed around. Might as well, even though it tastes like shit. Come to think of it, I don’t actually want any of this crap. But that’s not really the point, is it?

Some have started to work on the cash register as lottery tickets rain down from the sky and celebratory shots are fired into the air. Are they taking aim at God or just sending a warning to the cops?

Either way, it’s a little too close for comfort. Fear is still with me, but it’s not controlling me.

Next, it’s Sam’s Meat Market, the beauty shops, Red’s BBQ. Someone has a go at the Liberty tax prep office while others are trying to get into the storage units across the street. Dumpsters are being set on fire as cars speed wildly up and down the strip. Young people with masked faces leaning out the windows showing off their looted bottles, flipping off the police helicopter.

A ten-year-old girl carrying a large sack full of food says, “We’re gonna eat good at school tomorrow.”



“Hey, can you get me some ‘rillos?” A group of young women peer around the corner at the gas station being emptied of its contents.

“Nah, but you can, they’re free tonight.”

"We don't got a mask though. You got another one?"

"Here, it's easy, just take the t-shirt and put your head through the neck hole like you're gonna put it on. Then turn it into a hood and tie the sleeves behind your head."

After two and a half hours, the looting has spread within fifty yards of the southern police line and backup has arrived in sufficient quantities to begin clearing the strip. The stationary phalanx has started to move and everyone is running back into the neighborhood. We hear a rumor that the Foot Locker on the other side of the cops is being looted, but then we see it: plumes of black smoke and an orange glow on the horizon.

Like moths we are drawn towards the flames. "The smoke so thick down there you can't even breathe." Armored personnel carriers block access to the fire, shining powerfully bright lights in our direction. Back the other way. Maybe we can still get some shoes to replace the ones falling apart on our feet.

A man runs out of the woods, coming from where we're headed. "It's over, Foot Locker's done. The cops showed up. They lockin' people up." He warns a few more behind us and then, loaded down with shoeboxes, dips into his house.

A young kid on a bike rolls up as we walk back to the car.

"Hey, y'all black bloc?"

"Uh... Yeah, sort of."

"Me too, I'm one of those anar..."

"Anarchists?"

"Yeah, that's me."

"Black bloc's not a group you belong to, it's just a way to stay safe in the streets. When everybody wears the same color and covers their face it makes it harder for the cops to arrest you."

"Cool. Why y'all out here?"

"Cause we're pissed about what happened. Isn't that why everyone's here?"

"Yeah... but I heard I could get some free shit too."

As we head back home, cop cars are still racing in from distant jurisdictions. I roll the window down and let the night air blow through my hair knowing that this moment will never be erased.

**AUGUST 11 (MONDAY)** - Crowds attempt to gather at the burned QuikTrip. As soon as people begin to block the street, they are attacked

**LUCA:** Yeah, like, this question of the role of firearms. It's hard to know what to say about them. But we all know they changed the way it went. It created this deeply inhospitable environment where the cops would not come in because of guns.

**MASIE:** And sometimes it was casual and it wasn't that scary. It was like firing a few rounds into the air, and the cops are gone. The police helicopters are gone.

**CAMERON:** And then the night... it was intense that our friend got shot, but even then, it was just like, these kids have guns and they're smoking weed and just hanging out.

**LUCA:** Right, that's just what it is. They're just everywhere.

**CAMERON:** Some of us were talking to them, you know?

**RAUL:** And the night of the verdict, people shooting at the cops was what instigated collective action. People were shooting off away from the crowd, and the crowd of people moved *towards* that. Towards the gunshots.

**VERA:** Intentionally.

**RAUL:** And as they started moving toward it, intentionally, they started also smashing windows, confronting the police...

**LUCA:** That moment that broke the tension... where everyone was standing around the night of the verdict for like 15 minutes [after the verdict was announced]... nothing's happening, we're all just standing there. Literally, there is like six shots fired and shit starts.

**VERA:** Someone actually said, "Well, that's gonna pop shit off." And it did.

**MASIE:** Which doesn't mean you have to fire gunshots to make shit happen.

**EMMA:** Right. Without guns it's us versus them, and the enemy is clear. And then, I know that people with guns are still against the same enemy,

also, I can dream of and put together strategically in my mind a social revolution that doesn't look like that, or a moment where the world changes dramatically in a way that I want it to.

But in those moments when I was in the streets and it was overwhelming, or there were guns everywhere, I also had the thought that this is just what it's always gonna look like. All these moments you've dreamed of, of the world changing and getting to be one that's worth living in for you and the people around you, this feels like a stage that we will inevitably have to move through—and participate in if we want it to go a way that we want it to go. If we're serious about the world changing, we have to adapt ourselves to the fact that maybe that's the reality that we'll have to deal with and learn to cope with. And maybe it's just a matter of not romanticizing it. If enough of us have gone through it, we wouldn't have the kind of fetishization, but maybe we could have a realistic acceptance that that's what stands between us and the world that we hope for. Unfortunately.

*Guns and Possibility*

**VERA:** Do we need to take a break right now? I worry about this conversation being hard.

**MASIE:** So... if people are using handguns, you might get shot, we realized.

*[laughter]*

**LUCA:** We realized that's real.

**EMMA:** It could be your friend and not just some stranger. And it could be like a permanent loss from your life.

**RAUL:** We shouldn't fetishize it, but we also shouldn't...

**VERA:** Avoid it.

**RAUL:** Right, we can't avoid it. We can't control these circumstances either. They're gonna come up. We can highlight the value of not bringing guns. But people are gonna do it anyway. So what are we gonna do?

by riot police with armored personnel carriers, tear gas, and rubber bullets. The cops set up static lines on either end of W. Florissant while neighborhood residents and others yell and throw stones. Neighborhood residents come to the aid of those from outside the area, giving them directions and leading them through the surrounding neighborhoods. Mild street fighting continues late into the night as protestors discuss the need for continued determination, more supplies, and new tactics such as strikes and walkouts.

Looting threatens to spread as smash and grabs occur in south St. Louis and the Galleria Mall in West County. Police deploy pre-emptively in dense commercial districts downtown and in University City.

**AUGUST 12 (TUESDAY)** - Again, people attempt to stage a protest at the QT and are attacked by militarized riot police. Some of the crowd marches to a rally at a local church where Al Sharpton is speaking. Outside, the mood is tense. Hundreds of people are milling around the yard of the church, the sidewalk, and the street, holding signs, yelling, and talking, while motorists drive up and down the street honking their horns in support. Racial conflicts surface within the crowd. Late that night, five people are shot, one by police.

The police have started to blame organized white anarchists for instigating the mayhem on Sunday night. Others on Twitter and Facebook are following their lead, unwittingly playing into the new police disinformation strategy of our era: the anarchist as outside agitator.

As we drive in, a large crowd is headed away from ground zero, the burned out gas station newly named "Mike Brown Plaza." We park and decide to go where the crowd is—a rally at a local black church. Al Sharpton presiding, Nation of Islam running security. The mood is tense given the previous nights of rioting, police attacks, and arrests, but hundreds of people are here, lining the sidewalks and the median. The street is full of cars. The incessant honking is overwhelming.

I'm facing the street, trying to work up the courage to strike up a conversation. Then from behind, a commotion. I see my friend being chased away by a stream of people. I try to intercede. "What's going on? What are you doing?" Immediately I'm surrounded. Large men are standing close all around me.

"Get out of here. This is a black space."

"If you an anarchist, you need to leave."

"We don't want that anarchist shit here."

*This is the most important moment of my entire life. They're gonna have to kill me to keep me away.*

"No. I'm staying."

A slender black arm reaches across my chest and pulls me out of the crowd. "No, we want him here," she yells. "Him being here proves this ain't about black versus white."

Another man approaches, wants to get his picture taken with me. "Come here, get in the picture," he yells to his friend. We hold hands like in a poster for racial unity. Another arm around my back.

"What was that about?" No one seems to have the answer.

I'm shaken. I don't want to leave. I want to stay with these people who just rescued me, who value my presence, who in this moment I feel closer to than my own brother. But I can't help feeling like an outsider, like I no longer belong. I feel small.

**AUGUST 13 (WEDNESDAY)** - A familiar scene plays out on West Florissant. Crowds gather and are attacked by police. This time some protestors come prepared. A small number of Molotov cocktails are thrown at the police lines along with rocks and returned tear gas canisters. Things are escalating.

**AUGUST 14 (THURSDAY)** - As President Obama speaks on the events in Ferguson, Missouri Governor Jay Nixon puts the State Highway Patrol in charge of the protests, under the leadership of Ron Johnson, a black officer. Johnson promises to be less heavy-handed than the County Police. Protesters fill West Florissant early in the day with cars and barbecues.

The QT has been a gathering point since it was burned, but today is the first day it feels like the epicenter of a movement. It has transformed from a gas station to a burned building to a thriving park where people exchange ideas, make friends, and prepare for the coming fight once the sun goes down. The mood is festive; cars blast music, some loaded with people shouting out of the windows or riding on the hoods.

Three separate times, the police attempt to enter the crowd and are chased out. Even the commanding officers are

week. And being able to function, to be OK and feel comfortable in that environment or that terrain. But then to come back later and have to listen to a trauma therapist be like, "Yeah, it's fucked up what happened to you. Really, really fucked up. And it's not normal." And just being like, "Huh..." It's my own internal process around being "tough" or "hard." What it means to grow up and spend your whole adult life within this culture.

**MASIE:** I wonder too about when to tell someone maybe not to do something cuz it's gonna affect them if it goes poorly, or when am I just like, "That's their own fucking life. I'm not gonna tell them what to do or control them in any way."

For example, I have a hard time not mouthing off to police, especially when I get really worked up. Repeatedly over the years, if I'm yelling in a cop's face, friends will be like, "OK, you need to stop doing that." I think it's partially for my own sake, but maybe partially for theirs, because they're the ones that will have to stay up all night to bail me out, right?

So is that just that experience multiplied by a thousand? Like, "You're going into an area where people are getting shot and almost killed. I'm the one that's gonna have to fucking bury you." I'm not gonna put that guilt on someone. It's just hard for me. Because in those situations, where people are just rushing out the door to go to the riot in North County, and I'm exhausted, and I need a night to not do anything, but it's like, "Well, realistically, I might be the one that has to bail them all out of jail and stay up all night." Does that make sense at all? I'm not telling people they shouldn't do those things, I'm just saying that's some sort of reality.

**LOUISE:** That's something that I've thought about for sure. When there is a sort of warrior culture where not everyone is going out and being a warrior, there are also the people at home who are going to experience the loss of someone and have to deal with that. And people who are always on alert that someone might be taken from them, or that they might have something really awful happen to someone else. I'm sure in Canfield, that's something that a lot of black women experience constantly. At any point, they could get a call that someone's been shot, someone they know. The element that's scary about some people being warriors is that it's not just those going out being warriors. There's also people at home.

**RAUL:** It makes sense in the context of the anarchist movement that romanticizes rioting and conflict to highlight the downsides of that. And



**VERA:** Is that what you [Raul] were trying to say before? I've been thinking about what you said when you said, "We didn't do anything, we just went home."

**RAUL:** Yeah, finding some other creative way of engaging if we weren't gonna stay in the streets. I wanna hear other people's thoughts on this, but I didn't notice us having a warrior culture where we just expected everyone to be tough and not have to feel anything about that, not ever have to take a step back. Like, I know that that exists. Has existed for generations and does exist and has existed among us sometimes.

But in this situation, I noticed us taking good care of each other. And like, fighting and coming home and crying together. And fighting and also taking care of our friends. And listening to each other when we couldn't fight anymore (most of the time).

So I took a lot out of the violent and directly combative aspects of what we were doing, and I felt really supported in that direct confrontation, or war-like scenario, by my friends. I didn't feel like I just had to try to be really hard. It felt like I could be brave when I could and then cry about it when I was done being brave so I could be brave again the next day.

*Care and Autonomy: "There Are Also the People at Home"*

**LUCA:** I think that we did do a good job of taking care of one another, especially that first week and the first couple weeks after our friend got shot. But it did come up a little bit in the dynamics of agency and power and who's comfortable in the streets, and how close they could be to police lines. And people feeling ashamed of their fear for not being able to be where other people were. That came up some. But I think people tried to handle it really well.

I'm also talking about how I've internalized that, as someone who's been an anarchist my whole adult life. And then having to go through and be so intimately connected to what happened to [our friend who got shot], and then trying to unravel all that for myself, you know?

And trying to figure out the ways this long-term trauma and violence impacted my own life. Looking at myself and trying to figure out where that trauma manifests, like when [in November] I was trying to be back at the intersection where our friend was shot. And like, knowing it's time to leave, and not being frozen. Being able to function in a space where we're surrounded by more gunfire and more literal fire than we were the first

surrounded, shouted down, and chased to their cars and out of the demonstration. One can smell the fear from the officers and see the sweat on their foreheads. Despite the efforts of wannabe politicians, the presence on the streets lasts long into the night as we all celebrate winning the streets from the police.



The police have pulled back. They're still there just around the corner, hiding behind the thin veneer of social peace, ready to jump into action at a moment's notice, but they're not attacking us tonight. They've retreated, strategically, but it was the fierceness of our fight and the threat of more to come that made them pull out. I've outrun and evaded the police before, but I've never seen them fall back, I've never been part of something powerful enough to bind their hands. Not until now.

It feels like everyone else is experiencing this small victory with me for the first time as well. The half-mile strip of W. Florissant is a victory parade ground. All that's missing are the streamers and confetti. There are a thousand people on the street tonight and a thousand more passing through in their cars.

Everyone must be feeling good. I'm back at the church and a large black man in fatigues motions for me to come talk to him.

"I saw you here the other night and I meant to pull you aside."

"Yeah, that was crazy. What was that all about? If there's a problem I hope we can talk it out."

"I don't even know. That's not what I'm about. I'm on some anti-government shit. I was one of them chasin' your friend away. I didn't want to see no disrespect for the Brown family. But I guess I just got caught up in it."

"Yeah me too."

"I seen you out here and I just want to let you know where I'm at. I got gas masks in my car. I'm ready for whatever. I been in touch with my militia brothers. They say they can have boots on the ground tomorrow."

"Damn, alright." Holy fuck, this shit is way over my head. Is this a trap? Is this guy for real?

"Be safe out here."

"You too. I'll see you around."

Later that night we see the guy who led the charge against my friend.

"That wasn't the time or the place to say something. When I realized who y'all were, I thought about it and I realized we're pretty much on the same page. Whatever differences we have, I'm sure we can work it out. Everything was just really tense the other night... I've been dreaming about this my whole life and I want it to last forever. But we gotta be organized and y'all are organized. Y'all are more ready than anybody."

In some ways we are more ready for this than most people: riot police, chemical weapons, days and nights of marching, becoming anonymous when we need to, fundraising, jail support, coming prepared. In other ways, we're in the rear watching as people of all ages and genders run ahead of us. The collective strategy people have enacted directly on the streets is more intelligent and brave than anything we could come up with in one of our circular, painful meetings.

**AUGUST 15 (FRIDAY)** - The Ferguson Police Department releases surveillance footage of the "robbery" Mike Brown allegedly participated in at Ferguson Market. During the day, the scene on the street is festive. By evening, the mood has shifted as a confrontation unfolds between protesters and police guarding the store. The police use tear gas and flash-bang grenades in an effort to disperse the crowd. Instead of running away, protestors fight back; some shoot into the air. A group of about 100 confronts police lines, throwing bottles and rocks and holding ground against overwhelming numbers of police. Ferguson Market is the epicenter of renewed looting.

**AUGUST 16 (SATURDAY)** - In response to the previous night's looting, Governor Jay Nixon declares a curfew from the hours of midnight to five in the morning. Almost immediately, there is a public call by activists to resist the curfew. The QT quickly fills up with people, eating, giving out water, and talking about what to do next. Although the crowd largely seems intent on resisting the curfew, a few "leaders" from the New Black Panther Party and the Nation of Islam successfully scare most people out of staying in the streets past midnight. As the clock hits midnight, the NOI, NBPP and even the activists that put out the call to resist the curfew are nowhere in sight. The only people left, while relatively small in number, are determined and defiant.

of us, people are gonna die, and you're just supposed to take it. It's just expected. It's just part of your struggle, and you're just supposed to suck it up. Like, I had to work through some of those ideas with some of my own trauma. That it's OK to be like, "This was devastating. It was awful and terrible and heartbreaking and hard." Working through that cultural idea that we have, that we don't address.

**EMMA:** Yeah, that we've gotta be hard and militant.

**CAMERON:** I also think about how there are other people who didn't come out because of that. There are so many people who were probably saying, "I don't wanna go out there. I fucking hate the police, but I'm not gonna go out there, because there are guns."

I don't know exactly what those people think, but I think it probably had an effect on people not wanting to be there, especially people that, because of their lives or their experiences, are opposed to a lot of the things in this world. I can't calculate it, but I definitely heard people saying that. I could see people being scared, screaming when gunshots went off, and crying. That's the warrior culture thing that's a part of that.

**LUCA:** Yeah, people thought we were crazy to put ourselves in that situation.

**MASIE:** I was gonna say that, too, about the expectations that these crazy things will happen and we'll just have to deal with it. There are people who can't deal with it, they realize that too late, and they just disappear. They just change their life completely, because the standard of what an anarchist is has been built up so much, it's like unchangeable. Or that's the reason why some people start snitching on each other. Like, "Holy fuck, now I'm facing all these years in prison, and I was told that I could handle this, and I can't fucking handle this."

**CAMERON:** It also seems to oppose this dichotomy that you're either the crazy one or you're the respectable one, where you're part of the movement or an organization. It ends up working out in favor of the organizations in some ways. There's no other way to be that doesn't fit into that dichotomy. There's not an infinite number of possibilities of how to engage. It whittles everything down to a few choices.

**EMMA:** We didn't expect that to happen, so it's good that people know that's a possibility.

**MASIE:** Immediately after we'd found out he'd survived and for a few weeks after, I was hearing from people, "Thank god this is over." Which makes sense in some way, but in my head, I'm like, "Well, if shit ever gets crazy again, it's not like people aren't going to be bringing handguns to shoot in America, or at least in a place like St. Louis." This actually might happen to our friends in the future. We might fucking die in the future. Or..."

**LUCA:** Or not even handguns. Like, state forces, you know? I don't think it was that far away from them starting to open fire on the crowd. Or, that was not out of the question.

**MASIE:** Sure, but I don't think it was close, necessarily.

**LUCA:** I'm just saying it wasn't out of the question. Like, if they'd gotten shot at enough. All it takes is one trigger-happy cop.

**CAMERON:** This is something that other people have talked about, but this sort of glorification of these situations... where from afar and in writing you can write about how it was this uprising against police and the state and it was all just this crazy, beautiful thing and sort of glorifying it as if it's a movie scene. It's a very fragmented understanding of it. But there was a push for a while, and maybe still is, of people being like, "Oh yeah, rioting is really cool! It's the best thing!" And for me, I'm actually more interested in the actual rebellion, which encompassed a lot of other things. Like people hanging out and celebrating, or eating or talking or whatever. Organically organizing things in the moment. And then the rioting was a part of that. And maybe it was crucial to that. But...

**LUCA:** I think that's what I mean, too. I mean the overall rebellion, not necessarily just the rioting. I wouldn't not want the rioting as well, but I think it's really good to differentiate that the rioting is an element of a rebellion.

There is a warrior culture that's not talked about. When I said that earlier, I meant more of the ghetto warrior culture, but also like anarchist warrior culture. Like, that we're gonna go to jail, get the shit kicked out

Armed with pistols and Molotov cocktails, some of the crowd has assembled under the awning of a boarded up barbecue restaurant and are preparing to attack the police when they advance. Around 45 minutes after midnight, the police begin to slowly clear the streets. When protesters refuse to disperse, the cops fire tear gas and smoke grenades into the crowd. People pick up the gas canisters and throw them back at the advancing police line. Multiple protesters collapse in the street and are carried to relative safety by others. Some people rip up chunks of asphalt from potholes while others grab rocks from storefront landscaping, but they are no match for the heavily armored police vehicles. The crowd is pushed back.

Out of nowhere, a lone police car with its sirens on screams down W. Florissant from the opposite direction of the advancing line of riot cops. In the ensuing panic, protestors run down side streets as gunfire rings out from people posted up underneath the awning. Chaos ensues as the police car loops back and more protesters flee, running straight into the crossfire of the people under the awning and the advancing police line. One protester is hit twice by gunfire, either from police or by friendly fire. He is loaded into a car and rushed to the hospital.



The governor has declared a curfew. No one will be allowed on the streets of Ferguson after midnight.

Of course we're going. "Fuck their curfew."

A local activist group has called for a march to defy the curfew. The rumor is that they want to march out of the boundary and then back in all together in a big crowd. Safety in numbers. Or maybe a trick to lead us all away from the coming conflict. *Leaders betray.*

It's been drizzling for hours. If anyone had any doubts, this confirms it: *God is a counter-revolutionary.*

Black army boots and a suit with silver starred epaulets. The national chairman of the New Black Panther Party is going around the crowd trying to convince everyone to go home. "I will not lead my people into a meat grinder. The art of war tells us that we should choose the time and place we fight, not our enemy. Brothers, we don't have enough guns out here today to defeat the enemy. We don't have enough gas masks or medical supplies. There are women and children here!"

Paternalistic, patriarchal, militaristic... completely out of touch with the mood on the street. And yet some people are buying the fear-monger's wares. Slowly, because of the rain or an exaggerated threat, the crowd thins. The clock strikes twelve. "Hands up, don't shoot!" "We still here. What you gonna do? Nothin'!" Somehow there are still two hundred of us left in the street. The crowd seems small, too small, compared to the hundreds here just hours before. The cops are keeping their distance, so what do we do? Close the gap.

We march towards the police line. Defiance that just won't quit. Scuffles. Rocks and bottles thrown and then comes the tear gas. Round after round filling the street, choking the air. I run after a spinning canister trying to catch it so I can throw it back. Someone else gets there first.

"Ow, that shit burns!"

"You gotta get some gloves."

I show him my leather work gloves.

"Two dollars from Home Depot."

He nods his head in agreement, appreciation.

I see my friend trying to help up a stranger who has fallen. My respirator in place I run through the clouds of gas to help him.

"Can you stand up? Can you walk? Here, lean on me." I put his arm around my shoulder and carry his weight.

"Watch my back!" I scream to a nearby stranger as we slowly walk away from the approaching police line.

like the violence, but I like what the violence opens up. But how does that violence affect us? How can we sustain it and not become what we hate about the violence? Which can be theoretical or interpersonal, like how we care for each other.

**LUCA:** One of the things that I've been thinking is that I still want this. Like, even though we went through this very real experience of violence, like maybe we're some of the very small pockets of people directly affected by the violence of that week and a half. I've been trying to make sense of that for myself, and realizing that this is still something that I want, even though that happened. I don't want it not to have happened. In any part of me.

**EMMA:** We could have done without it, but it doesn't stop you.

**VERA:** Well, it may have stopped me a little bit. In November, when we were out there and there was so much gunfire, I was ready to go because of what happened. There was a point at which I was like, "This is real." There's this person walking down the street next to me with a beer in one hand and a pistol in the other just shooting randomly into the air. And that was enough.

**LUCA:** Yeah, I'm not saying it didn't affect us. We were together in those moments [in November] where it was just like, "Yeah, let's go home. This is reminding me too much of what happened."

**CAMERON:** We were standing in the same spot [where our friend was shot during the August riots].

**VERA:** It goes back to that idea that maybe we weren't adding that much to the riot. Maybe we don't need to be there because we're not adding anything. We can go and try to push things somewhere else, you know?

**RAUL:** But we didn't. We just went home.

**MASIE:** Would it be upsetting to people if I talked about what happened to our friend who got shot? And the potential for that to happen in the future?



**VERA:** But yeah, every time I said, “Fuck the police,” there was some black person or group of black people around who would be like, “Oh my god, that white person just said ‘fuck the police.’”

**[SEVERAL PEOPLE]:** yeah.

**VERA:** And laugh at me!

**EMMA:** Sometimes I was like, is it cuz I’m white or cuz I’m a woman?

**VERA:** Yeah.

**LUCA:** It’s both, I think.

**EMMA:** I didn’t know if other people who aren’t women also got that.

**CAMERON:** I got laughed at for saying it. But I did get offered a joint once or twice after saying stuff.

**MASIE:** I think people just thought I was a cop. And so I’m not gonna ask someone for their number right now or what their name is or if they’re on Facebook... cuz they probably think I’m a cop.

**RAUL:** Sometimes people would laugh at me and repeat “Fuck the police” in my accent. I think we may have made a positive contribution in chipping away at the idea that white people don’t care about fighting the police. Or maybe next time, if things continue, maybe even years from now, there are many more people in the city who have seen white people willing to confront the police. And maybe that’s a step closer to us being able to link up with each other in conflict situations.

### *Trauma*

**EMMA:** I’ve been thinking about the impact that violence has on us, and how it can be glorified within an anarchist subculture. Something about the rebellion, the uprising... even on the nights where there weren’t guns, it was a war zone. And if we want to sustain, or to build, a culture of resistance where it’s normal for that to happen... It seems like moments of the world that we want to see opening up will contain violence. I don’t

“I got you, keep going.”

We’re breaking up chunks of asphalt and throwing them at tanks. Others are watching us, getting the idea, joining in. Then for no apparent reason a lone police cruiser, sirens blazing, comes screaming in from behind. Panic everywhere, people running, loud bangs, smoke and tears filling my eyes. Where are my friends? What’s happening?

Still frame: a body lying on the ground.

If I was in a movie right now, everything would go quiet for a second or two, the frames clicking by one at a time blurry and out of focus, and then it would all speed up again, the camera framing a shot of my closest friend, fallen, hurt, but unable to tell me what’s wrong, what happened. The only sound he can muster: a haunting groan. A crowd forming around us, me yelling for everyone to get back, to give us space, my voice cracking with emotion. A short stocky man with a high-pitched voice, his whole body shaking, gyrating, almost as if he were dancing, is screaming, “He’s been shot! He’s been shot!” over and over. And then seemingly out of nowhere a car pulls up, my friend is carried in and he’s rushed to the hospital, guided there by riot angels I’ll never know.

I stare at the spot where he had just been. Rain mingles with small puddles of blood in the dimpled surface of the sidewalk. A police tank stops at the intersection. “Fuck you, motherfuckers!” as I throw the stone I’ve been holding. I want to hurt them, to draw the blood that was drawn from my friend. If I can’t do that, I’ll have to settle for letting their hell fall down on my body. It’s nothing I haven’t felt before: the sting of rubber bullets ripping into my skin, metal cuffs cutting off the blood flowing to my hands, the relentless fire of pepper spray burning my face, the choking cloud of tear gas condensing in my eyes, the dull thud of a four foot wooden pole on my head.

*Give it your best shot. I can take it.*

*I even kind of like it.*

Perhaps *this* is the moment in which I lose my fear.



They won’t let us all into the hospital. Gun violence, protocol, protective custody. A friend is lying on the sidewalk, unable to



go further. Others are walking around aimlessly, in a daze. I'm talking on a cell phone to a drunken friend, trying to explain what's happened.

I see him walk up. A suit and a tie, a badge on his hip.

"So were any of you there? Did you see what happened?"

Without thinking, just wanting him to leave, "Nobody's going to talk to you, just go away."

"Ok, well, I hope your buddy dies up there."

Shock. *Did he really just say that?*

"Get the fuck out of here! Go shoot yourself in the fucking head!"

**AUGUST 17 (SUNDAY)** - Violence breaks out hours before the curfew, in what the media call the worst night of rioting. The past few days have only increased the audacity of the crowds. This time, protestors attempt to march on the police command center located in a nearby strip mall. Some throw Molotov cocktails at the police; gunshots are reported. The police respond with a rain of tear gas and rubber bullets, eventually pushing the crowds back down the street. The looting becomes more dispersed and widespread, with incidents reported in multiple locations miles away from the QT.

After a few hours, it becomes obvious. We have to go back out there. Can't just sit around the house all day rotting inside, letting our sadness turn into paralyzing fear. A friend brings some candles and flowers from our garden. We head for the spot where he was shot. There's still some police tape tied to the fence. We rip it off and I push it into the mud with my shoe. We light the candles and scatter the flowers. I sit down wondering if anyone walking by will know what happened here, in this exact place, not even twenty-four hours ago.

I want to write something. A paint marker and some toilet paper. *"The only way to heal this pain is to change the world."*

I need to walk around, to feel the crowd surround me, to be covered once again in the warm blanket of an anger that refuses to die.

I see the top cops walking around, so sure of their safety, pressing the flesh. *What do they think they're doing?* "Hey, I just wanted you to know that not everyone here likes you. You know, in case you forgot." I follow them around for a while, looking right at



Oakland, November 24.

**CAMERON:** Yeah.

**LUCA:** At the beginning.

**VERA:** And in November.

**LUCA:** On South Florissant.

**VERA:** You mean West Florissant?\*

**LUCA:** Yeah, West Florissant.

**CAMERON:** South Florissant was a little more mixed.

\* The two main roads where riots broke out in Ferguson are several miles from each other but are both called Florissant. West Florissant is the main road near the Canfield Apartments where Mike Brown was murdered and is the site of the famous burning QT. South Florissant is a more developed, racially mixed part of Ferguson where the Ferguson Police Department is, and where much of the rioting that happened after the November 24 announcement of the grand jury decision took place.

**VERA:** I can only think of that answer in terms of what we were *not* doing. Like, we were not doing what ARC (the anti-racism collective) was doing.

**TODD:** We were referring to that earlier, how we chose not to engage in typical ways that activists engage.

**CAMERON:** Also, it seems like white radicals or anarchists being there had an effect on people in terms of their understanding of racial dynamics and personal experiences. I'd talk to a lot of people who'd ask, "Whoa, why are you here?" being really perplexed and me being like, "I think about this all the time. I have some personal experience with police violence... It's different, but it's something that is pushing me to be here." I think that blew some people's minds.

Most of them were not political or had not read anti-racist theory. And the argument from an activist point of view is that they should be reading it, and if they were, they would realize that we're actually a bad influence or something. Maybe that was a way we influenced things, by being there and not being pawns. Like, actually having thoughts and engaging people without being condescending.

Because sometimes, like that week in August, we were some of the only white people around. That's pretty awkward, cuz of historical shit. And then for some reason, it became way more white. So that's an interesting question, too, how did that happen...

**EMMA:** You mean the Leftists being there made it more white?

**VERA:** Yeah.

**CAMERON:** Did it become "safer" for people? Were there figures people could point to, to be like, this is the new leader of the radical movement and I can talk to them, instead of it just being alienating and scary in some racist way.

**VERA:** Well, OBS [The Organization for Black Struggle] got huge during all of this. That was part of it. That was a way people could engage and feel good about themselves as white activists.

**MASIE:** Do you all feel like between daytime and nighttime the racial make-up was different? Because the few times I was there at night, I was like "me and my friends are the only white people here."

the center of their eyes. And then I'm screaming.

"Hey Johnson, let me get your kidney. I want your kidney."

"Calm down son."

"Don't tell me to calm down. My buddy's in the hospital right now with all kinds of tubes and shit comin' out of his face. He lost his kidney and his spleen. There's a bullet right up in his heart. And that's on you motherfucker. Fuck your curfew. If you hadn't come down here with your tanks and tear gas none of that shit would've happened. I want your fuckin' kidney! If he dies, you're gonna pay."

"Listen, I'm here to protect your right to protest peacefully."

"What do you think I'm doin? Just because I'm getting loud? What're you gonna do? You gonna beat me up? You gonna shoot me? Go ahead. Get the fuck outta here. Are you gonna wait till somebody else gets shot, till somebody else dies before you wake the fuck up."

He's trying to ignore me, talking to the media, trying to appear calm and reasonable in contrast to my out-of-control raw anger.

"I'm gonna get that kidney one way or another."

They don't even touch me. They just walk away and get in their cars, sweating, stinking of fear.

**AUGUST 18 (MONDAY)** - Governor Nixon declares a State of Emergency and calls in the National Guard to protect the police command center. The police announce that they will not allow crowds to assemble and that all protesters will be forced to continue moving along the street or be arrested. The curfew, however, is lifted from the city of Ferguson. Police block off W. Florissant to cars and set up checkpoints at both ends of the strip. Many of the side roads through the neighborhoods that lead down to the strip are blocked as well. This new police tactic is a blow to protesters who had previously used the side roads to flood onto W. Florissant and escape when things got too hot.

In the afternoon, pop star Nelly arrives on the scene, telling people they have options. Someone in the crowd shouts back "You have options, you're rich!"

As darkness approaches, the crowd swells and people begin to defiantly march in the streets. As a standoff with the police line develops, rocks and bottles fly through the air. Peace marshals link arms in response, forming a line between the march and the police and attempting to push people back off the streets. Despite the efforts of the "peace police," some continue to confront the police throughout the night.

*What does that even mean? State of Emergency. National Guard. Will the army be the new police? Will they have live rounds? What are the rules of engagement for this new situation?*

We're marching again. Up and down the strip, cops blocking off either end. "Stay on the sidewalk." We're in the street. "Stay in the right hand lane." We've taken up both. "Move back towards the sidewalk." We take over the whole street. Every passing car is simply a part of the demo. "If you scared go to church." "No justice, No sleep!" There's a thin police line ahead but we go right through it and they don't lift a finger. That's how afraid they are of another confrontation, another spark. It's clear they've been ordered to stand down.

We're back at the other end. This time they've made a line we won't be marching through. They don't want a replay of the night before. But wait, they've brought help. Fifty preachers and liberal do-gooders, the "peace keepers" link arms and walk toward us with their backs to the police. Non-violent resistance now means doing the job of the police for them, weaponlessly.



Back at Canfield, there's a crowd around two or three police tanks. The cops are all wearing fatigues, helmets and body armor. They've got pepper ball guns, beanbag and wooden dowel shotguns, AR-15s, tear gas launchers, sniper rifles, tazers.

A woman has ripped up a "Do Not Enter" sign and is holding it up in the middle of the street. She's all alone. Every once in a while, she drops the sign and goes back into the crowd to check on her baby.

The police, through their loudspeaker, are telling us not to do everything we're doing. Even when we comply, they threaten us.

"If you are ripping out a street sign you may be subject to arrest or other measures.

"If you are standing in the QuikTrip lot you may be subject to arrest or other measures.

"If you are carrying a street sign that you have illegally removed you may be subject to arrest or other measures.

"If you are standing still you may be subject to arrest or other measures..."

**VERA:** And I think it does affect us, because the louder voices of the church leaders or other people who have some amount of power were trying to represent what the "black community" is all about, and we decided not to listen to those voices. We were listening or finding other people, who were maybe involved in the more radical things that were happening. Then we were called out for being racist or white supremacist, or people targeted us with that language because they said that "We weren't listening to black people," by which they meant black people with power.

**LUCA:** Well, it challenges this idea of allyship. Traditional allyship. They say that we should be "listening to black voices," but to them that means we should be listening to, like, church leaders, people whose ideas we would never align ourselves with under any other circumstances. We're all the sudden supposed to be listening to those people instead of finding allies we actually have affinity with, who maybe want to fight in the streets. So instead, it calls us into question—"You're being racist"—instead of allowing for a multiplicity of voices.

**MASIE:** That traditional idea of allyship only makes sense if the only black people in your lives are those community leaders. If you look at black people as not being homogenous, then there is no singular "black voice," there are all these different black voices, and you can choose who you want to align yourself with.

*"Oh My God, That White Person Just Said 'Fuck the Police'"*

**EMMA:** What is this second part of the question, repressive strategies of definition? Just these... identities?

**CAMERON:** Using words to obscure things that are happening. Like the "black community doesn't want this" or "this identity isn't supposed to do this."

**RAUL:** I read that as saying, "How do you deal with the fact that race and racism and these very tangible forms of oppression are actually what's going on here?" Definitely, that's what this is about, that's what people are responding to—without reinforcing those rigid identity categories. Like, did you find ways to engage with the fact that this is a struggle against white supremacy, without reinforcing those rigid identity categories? Without putting everyone in rigid boxes and homogenizing their experiences?

[laughter]

**EMMA:** I feel like I have a sense of what they're asking, but...

**LUCA:** Yeah, we have to deconstruct this question before we can answer it.

**CAMERON:** I think they're basically saying, "Was there a tension between this undisciplined force and the positive, respectable black community?"

**LUCA:** I mean, there was this tension between the black insurrectional force and black forces of identity. I think that was playing out with people who wanted to loot versus Nation of Islam people guarding stores, or the woman guarding the Sam's\* being like, "This is not what we're about."

**VERA:** That phrase keeps coming to my mind too, "This is not what we're about." That kept coming up throughout all of our experiences there, that people would somehow take ownership of what was happening and make it like there was nothing else besides what they were experiencing. Like, how *they* were experiencing Ferguson was how it was supposed to be. So when someone would throw a rock at the cops, "That's not what we're about."

That's continued through to now. That's consistently the conversation that comes up.

**EMMA:** So is the answer to the question just "Yes"? Yeah, there was a tension between the peacekeepers who were sometimes black, and the combative black youth.

**TODD:** It's also that people are trying to represent blackness or people who have faced police violence or young black people or "the black community," and then there's also the other side. But on that side, there are people who think that it's morally wrong to loot or to respond in certain ways, and then there are other groupings of people who are not trying to affirm their identity in any way to represent other people. People who are just trying to riot, to act out their emotions.

\* Sam's Meat Market and Liquor on West Florissant Avenue, which was repeatedly looted during the rebellion.

The lone woman comes back into the street with her large metal sign. One by one people drag out traffic cones to symbolically block the way. A few dumpster lids are propped up between them, creating a flimsy defense against rubber bullets. The street slowly fills with people.

Ten, fifteen, twenty tear gas canisters fly through the sky. They've also brought flash-bang grenades and smoke bombs. This time, everyone is throwing them back. Rocks are flying through the air. It's still not enough, but at least people are learning to work together, to throw in waves.

An armored car approaches and we run down Canfield back to the safety of a neighborhood the police have yet to invade. Shots ring out. "If you gonna shoot, shoot straight!" The tear gas is thick tonight and we take a minute to wash our faces in the spigot of a house just down the block.

Some kids next to us light a Molotov and either out of excitement or nerves drop it in the middle of the street. "You've got to run up before you throw that." Everyone is laughing, teasing the youth for his lack of experience in something we're all still novices at.

"Make this one count!" Someone runs up to the window of a nearby building, breaks the glass and tosses in a Molotov. The small crowd cheers to the sight of reflected flames. Someone else runs up with a bottle of gas and dumps more fuel on the fire.

Some trash is added to the small fire burning in the street in hopes that it will disperse the low-hanging clouds of gas.

Another armored car speeds in and we run away. At least for tonight, we've had enough. Back home, we're giddy with the knowledge that this rebellion has been going strong for ten days and nights. Despite the overwhelming show of military force, despite the recuperators and their longer leashes, despite the good cops and their bigger cages, the rebels on the streets refuse to back down.

**AUGUST 19 (TUESDAY)** - Shortly after noon, police kill Kajieme Powell a couple miles away from Ferguson in North St. Louis. An angry crowd gathers.

Meanwhile, for the first time in over a week, police and their political counterparts succeed in imposing order on W. Florissant. Despite an intimidating police presence, people continue to march up and down



the street. Members of the Nation of Islam, church leaders, and liberal activists urge, shout, and push people onto the sidewalks and away from police lines. Some small conflicts erupt, but nothing gets out of control.

**SEPTEMBER 10** - Organizers call for a shut down of I-70 in solidarity with Michael Brown and to put pressure on the prosecutor to indict Darren Wilson. Police respond with an overwhelming show of force, deploying roughly 300 officers. Protesters gather in the street and boldly march towards the police line. The police succeed in stopping protesters from reaching the highway, but are unable to calm the crowd, some of whom throw bricks and bottles at them. Police make a few arrests but fail to catch some of the culprits, who escape into the surrounding neighborhood.

**SEPTEMBER 23** - Mike Brown's memorial is burned in the early morning. Residents blame police or white supremacists. Throughout the day, supporters rebuild the memorial, while tension builds as word spreads. When night falls, the streets fill once again, this time without the presence of "peacekeepers." Police are met with bottles and rocks as they push people off the streets and into the neighborhood. After a brief standoff on Canfield Drive, which the police are still too scared to enter during protests, shots ring out. The next morning, two high-ranking officers complain of having to dive behind cruisers to avoid being hit.

**SEPTEMBER 28** - A large crowd of protesters throws bottles and rocks at officers outside of the Ferguson Police Department.

**OCTOBER 2** - Police evict a protest encampment that had been occupying an empty lot in protest of Mike Brown's killing.

**OCTOBER 4** - Protesters briefly disrupt the St. Louis symphony, singing "Which side are you on?"

**OCTOBER 8** - Just before dusk, a white off-duty police officer moonlighting as a security guard in a wealthy St. Louis neighborhood shoots and kills 18-year-old Vonderrit Myers. Within a few hours, hundreds have gathered at the intersection. Police spout off the usual story that the kid had a gun and shot first. But many witnesses and friends claim the "gun" was actually a sandwich Vonderrit had just purchased. The crowd's anger grows and people begin to surround the nervous police officers, shouting at them. The

**JANE:** As far as it going so far so fast... the first day [August 9] I didn't think it was gonna get too crazy, but I think because of the police response on the second day, that's why people rioted. Cuz there were so many police. I don't think it was gonna get so out of control. People were just gonna march to the police department. I don't think it was gonna turn into a riot, but then people felt trapped and they had that energy.

**LUCA:** So the question is, "Why was this event different than other anti-police struggles, why did it go so much further?" There are all these elements that we can try to put together to answer that question, like seeing this moment on a continuum of social uprisings, extreme repression, warrior culture (which is something that people don't account for too often)... to create the situation where people didn't back down this time. But I'm more excited about the notion that it's linked to all these other moments that create social uprisings, and it's just part of the social condition that we live under that this can happen.

**LUCA:** Yeah, you can't make it happen, nor is it exciting to me to come up with a theory as to why these moments happen.

**EMMA:** Right. Cuz it's uncontrollable...

**TODD:** I don't feel like anarchists should be trying to be political scientists. There's no formula for revolt. It's been happening for as long as we have history.

**LUCA:** Yeah, as long as there's repression, oppression, there are gonna be these moments. We're gonna push back, it's part of who we are.

*Race and Representation*

**RAUL:** Should we read another question?

**LUCA:** "Was there a tension between the black insurrectional force that erupted in Ferguson and the construction of blackness as a positive identity within the existing social order that suffused the subsequent national discourse? Have you learned anything about how to engage with the existing forms of oppression without falling prey to repressive strategies of definition?"



But we influenced it even in small ways, like with the addition of graffiti. That resonated. I remember seeing graffiti go up that said “we are ungovernable” and watching people read it back and laughing and nodding. Putting those little seeds of ideas out there, helping feed the fires.

*Where It Came from and Why It Was Different*

**LOUISE:** What we were just talking about speaks to the first question. “What made this different from other anti-police struggles that you’ve witnessed or heard about? Why did it go so far so fast?”

When you talk about it resonating with people, with the most immediate community, like in Canfield\* and the surrounding area... we’re talking about people who already know that the cops are an enemy. And have for years and generations. Because of race, because there’s so many white cops there and the area’s majority black, it’s really obvious that they’re an enemy.

**MASIE:** My take on police struggles in the past in St. Louis is that they fit into one of two categories. They’re either these lone gunman-type attacks against police, which happen all the time, and then probably once a year or so someone actually kills a cop. Or it’s these vigil-type marches or gatherings after someone is killed. Which maybe are meaningful or feel good to people at them, but also maybe it doesn’t feel good to be at them cuz they’re not that powerful, and outside of that, it doesn’t really have a lot of noticeable effects. So, for example, the Scott Perry protests. Every year, the family of Scott Perry, who died in the city jail, protest outside the jail. And that gathering is meaningful, but I feel like outside of that, it’s maybe not having a lot of effects.

And then there’s all these people who have killed cops, like Cookie Thornton, Todd Shepard, Kevin Johnson. Culturally and sub-culturally, that can have meaning, but in terms of being an actual force that can change things, I feel like there wasn’t a whole lot before Ferguson. Or Ferguson was all these different elements coming together and going beyond the limitations of those two things.

\* The apartment complex just off West Florissant where Mike Brown was murdered, and the original site of the militant street presence that produced the rebellion.

police, realizing they are outnumbered and that the situation is beginning to be unsafe, try to leave in their cruisers. People surround the cars, smashing out taillights and the window of a detective’s car as he drives off.

After the police withdraw, protesters take the street and block traffic on the major boulevard, Grand. A few more minor scuffles occur. Police are attacked whenever they approach the march; instead of calling in backup, they withdraw. The city is clearly afraid of having a “Ferguson” on their hands.

**OCTOBER 9** - Once again, a large crowd gathers at the intersection where Vonderrit Myers was killed. The crowd marches down to South Grand and proceeds to shut down the on-ramp and exits for highway I-44 for close to an hour. The police keep a safe distance, hoping to deescalate the situation. Eventually, the crowd starts to march down Flora Place, after one woman points out that it is the wealthy residents of that street that pay for the private security who killed Myers.

As the crowd approaches Flora Place, people bang on cars, scream at the residents, and blare air horns. Protesters steal American flags off of front porches and a few houses have bricks thrown through their windows. The crowd gathers in an intersection and burns the collected flags, then marches back to the main street. When protesters reach the main intersection, three cops boldly run into the crowd. The officers are immediately surrounded and shoved out. Within minutes, roughly 100 officers flood the area to rescue the three, spraying the crowd with mace. Brief scuffles follow, but the crowd is mostly dispersed.

Someone pushes her head in the window of a cop car. “See this face?” she screams at the driver. “Every time you put your fucking finger on that trigger know this face is gonna be there. Every god damn time, this is what we’re gonna do.”

Afterwards, the media repeats the usual line of “a peaceful protest turned violent.” But from the moment the group left the vigil, it was rowdy and militant. There was no “turning” at any point for this group, nor a small group whose actions stood out from the broader group.

**OCTOBER 12-14** - Activists called for this to be a weekend of disruption in solidarity with Mike Brown and to push for an indictment against Darren Wilson. During the day, protesters disrupt various sites and events,

including political campaign rallies, the Rams game, and Wal-Marts. At night, people gather outside the Ferguson Police Department. The weekend, while “peaceful,” achieves its goal of interrupting the normal flow of life in St. Louis and returning nationwide media attention to the case. Over the following month, suspense builds as a Grand Jury prepares to announce whether to indict Darren Wilson for killing Michael Brown.

**NOVEMBER 17** - As the Grand Jury continues to deliberate, Governor Jay Nixon declares a State of Emergency. National Guard troops move in to guard 43 locations around Ferguson including electrical substations, police stations, shopping malls, and government facilities. An eerie tension descends on the city as residents await the verdict and National Guardsmen roam the streets in armored cars.

All around the country, the authorities have been scrambling to prepare for the impending storm. Some are trying to make agreements with protest leaders, in hopes of isolating troublemakers. Others emphasize that the protests will be dramatic and disruptive, no longer trying to preserve the illusion of social peace. Corporate media widely reports an announcement from the FBI that “extremists” will likely attack police officers and other targets.

**NOVEMBER 20** - 28-year-old Akai Gurley is “accidentally” shot and killed by the police in Brooklyn in the stairwell of the apartment where he lived.

**NOVEMBER 22** - Police murder Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old boy, in Cleveland, OH, firing the fatal shots within two seconds of arriving on the scene and refusing to provide first aid to the child. This makes national news—not because it is more egregious than other police murders, but because of the attention already focused on the issue.

**NOVEMBER 23** - Protesters gather where Vonderrit Myers was killed and march through south St. Louis, disrupting traffic throughout the city. A website lists scores of gathering points around the US for protests responding to the forthcoming Grand Jury announcement.

**NOVEMBER 24** - Hundreds gather outside the Ferguson Police Station, awaiting the announcement. People huddle around cars and stereos listening to live news broadcasts. When it is announced that Darren Wilson will not be indicted, the crowd rushes the police station, shoving down

force. It was really refreshing not to be the ones to bring the fight. And so it’s interesting to think... do we have any ability to push that further than it went? I don’t know. It was a tide unto itself that we got to be a part of.

**EMMA:** People were already pushing it.

**MASIE:** The irony, too, is that what brought all the fucking Leftists, what brought everyone’s attention, was the rioting. It was like, we’re taking a step away from what people normally do. We’ve caught the nation’s and the world’s attention, and so of course all these fucking vultures come in...

**VERA:** And rewrite the story...

**MASIE:** And then... pushing the riot further, what does that mean? Cuz a lot of the more militant sides of the rioting involved guns. Did we actually want more of that?

**CAMERON:** I wasn’t saying I wanted to push the riot further, specifically, but to push the situation. The rebellion. It seemed like people were sort of making allusions that this QuickTrip parking lot was the space to be, there was talk of it being dedicated to Mike Brown, but then it got fenced in and it puttered out.

Even just the murmuring about that space becoming an occupation was spreading. Some of us who maybe are in this room or maybe outside this room had some say in pushing that. It resonated with people.

And another thing, in a more riotous situation, people are gonna be on the front lines. Some of us like to be on the front lines, but also, they’ve got it covered, so what do we do while they’re on the front lines? For example, all these cameras and journalists taking photos of people doing illegal stuff, what do we do with that? How do we make that situation safer?

**LUCA:** Yeah, that’s part of the learning experience. Watching it happen and participating for the first couple days and being carried away and not wanting to shape it. And then pausing and being like, oh wait, we don’t just want a riot. Something a friend said to me when we were talking about what small ways we might want to influence it, “Remember, what we want is a social revolution.”

It helped reframe that in my brain, because I was just watching it go for so long and thinking, “this is just amazing.”

**LUCA:** Yeah.

**MASIE:** So I don't know what to do with that.

**LUCA:** Well, it's like, how do we do that more? That's always been the question throughout this whole entire struggle, since August. How do we create long-lasting genuine connections?

**MASIE:** And not just be proselytizing.

**LUCA:** And not be trying to get dated....

**VERA:** Get what?

**LUCA:** Dated. "Hey baby..." People were talking about getting people's numbers so they could hang out or be friends. You know how many phone numbers I could have walked away with? But fuck that...

*Pushing the Rebellion: "We Don't Just Want a Riot"*

**CAMERON:** My solution to not being a part of the greater Left is to have autonomous events outside of it that are advertised. I mean, I think we're still gonna fall into that no matter what we do. There will still be alienated relationships where we're like "we're the anarchists," or "we have this idea." But I think there are ways to mitigate talking to people like they're recruits.

Another thing, I wish that... I think the most active thing we were able to do is when things were actually happening. When West Florissant was autonomous in some ways. Pushing that further—that's what I think my role is. Making that space more powerful, cuz that's where you actually have some real conversation.

**VERA:** But do you think we could have acted more or done more to continue that? Or could we have, like, been out there before the Leftists, before they started coming in and recruiting people? Could we have pushed the rioting further before they came in?

**LUCA:** I think that one of the things that was coming up for a lot of us was that we got to act not as anarchists. We got to act as part of a larger social

the crash barriers surrounding it. Mike Brown's stepfather is recorded screaming, "Burn this bitch down!" Later, the police threaten to charge him with "Inciting a Riot" if he doesn't apologize for this. Within the hour, the crowd has started to attack police and break the windows of buildings surrounding the police station. Protesters surround the riot cops and armored trucks, throwing rocks and bottles at them as they hide behind their shields. A crowd rushes an abandoned police cruiser, damaging it and attempting to flip it over. Police fire tear gas, then fall back as gunshots are fired from the crowd. With the police retreating, the crowd starts to loot and set fires. Two police cruisers are completely burned.

On West Florissant, hundreds of people take over the street. People are openly looting as police watch helplessly from a few hundred yards away. By the end of the night, two dozen structural fires have been set and many cars at a dealership have been completely torched. Gunshots ring out all night through the smoke and flames. Interstate 44 is shut down by hundreds of protesters.

On South Grand, people riot through the bar district, smashing out windows and looting various stores. A few protesters try to stop the crowds from looting businesses, mostly without success. Eventually, police overpower the crowd with armored trucks and tear gas and disperse protesters into the surrounding neighborhood.

Elsewhere in Ferguson, there are apparent reprisals, as the church Michael Brown's father attends is burned and the body of another young black man, 20-year-old DeAndre Joshua, is found near the location of Michael Brown's death. He has been shot in the head and then burned.

Meanwhile, solidarity actions explode around the country. Tens of thousands of protesters converge in New York, shutting down all three bridges into Manhattan; the Police Commissioner is splattered with fake blood at a demonstration in Times Square. Protesters shut down highways 10 and 110 in Los Angeles and Interstate 5 in Seattle. In Oakland, over 2500 meet downtown and block highway 580 for hours. Then the crowd marches back downtown to the police station, where clashes erupt on Broadway. Participants erect burning barricades and loot several corporate stores, including a Starbucks and Smart & Final grocery store. Dozens are arrested.

We are gathered in downtown Ferguson. The moment comes for the prosecutor to read the verdict. Someone has rigged up a PA system to broadcast the speech. He's cutting in and out. I can barely hear it.

I see people shaking their heads. The verdict is clear: no indictment. Word is spreading through the crowd and folks start to yell at the police line guarding the station. Some throw things at them. I hear later that the first thing thrown was a bullhorn, which has all sorts of meaning if you think about it. *We yelled at you for too long, this thing has proved useless! The time for talk is over!* At this point, there are only ten or so riot police around. Some of them start to back away frantically, almost tripping over each other.

A woman comes through the crowd sobbing. I try to comfort her and she tells me, “We’re so far from ever getting any justice! Why?” We hug and another woman comes up to hold her. I let go just as CNN comes over to record this moment. I get in front of the camera and yell at them for being vultures, for not letting this woman have this moment alone. They eventually leave. Antagonism towards the media is pretty strong. Earlier in the night some media were robbed and others threatened with violence.

Suddenly, gunshots ring out and people surge in that direction. Windows start breaking all around. Some peace police are trying really hard to guard the businesses, but failing.

Meanwhile, a large part of the crowd is marching to a formation of riot police down the street to confront them. People start to bust up blocks of paving stones, concrete, and anything they can find to throw. The sound of rocks hitting riot shields is ubiquitous.

A cop car is parked about fifteen feet in front of the line of cops, where most of the crowd is. Folks start to trash it. Windows are smashed and anything loose in the car is grabbed. I heard later that someone popped the trunk and got an AR-15 out of it. No one is stopping anyone. Two young black girls are yelling expletives at the police. One of them, embarrassed, says, “Oh, I’m sorry! I don’t usually cuss. I go to church every Sunday!” They laugh, pick up rocks, and throw them at the cop car. There are numerous cameras around and they aren’t wearing masks. I try to warn them, but they just shrug.

The police yell over the intercom, “PLEASE STOP THROWING ROCKS! YOU WILL BE SUBJECT TO ARREST OR OTHER MEASURES! STOP IT NOW!” People start to rock the car to try to flip it. “PLEASE STOP TRYING TO FLIP THE POLICE CAR, OR YOU WILL BE SUBJECT TO ARREST! STOP NOW!”

Then they fire tear gas and beanbag rounds. As we run from the gas, I see an older black man asking younger kids if they’re leaving.

circles that came afterward, not to try to influence this building of the Left in St. Louis.

And that doesn’t mean we didn’t align ourselves. We aligned ourselves with people in the streets. But we walked away without having long-term relationships with people, because things were just happening in a moment rather than in this structured environment. We avoided that. You know?

In some ways, it was a benefit to us, in terms of not being identifiable too much by the Left... I mean, identifiable to put blame on us individually. But it does mean we haven’t thrown our hat in the ring as far as trying to influence this thing that the Left is building. We haven’t even been doing the things we normally do, like tabling or handing out newsletters. We’ve stayed away from that for a lot of great reasons, but at the same time it means we’ve missed out on being influential. Often, what anarchists have done in the past is to be the influence. To be like, “Hey shit’s fucked up, shit’s fucked up.” Like pushing... but now we’re pushing in a really different way.

**CAMERON:** It also seems like a lot of the Leftist activist groups are in a similar predicament. They’re not building. They’re bigger, but I don’t think they’re really blowing up with people. The people still involved are those who have the stamina to deal with being political or being recruited, or being in long meetings.

**EMMA:** I did realize, though, that it sucks that the people that maybe I’ll have a real conversation with or build something with... it’s cuz they’re locked up, and then maybe I’ll write them a letter.

**VERA:** Right.

**EMMA:** And then, yeah, it’s a less than ideal way to have a conversation with someone.

**MASIE:** There are some anarchists in town who have gone the activist route. And it’s interesting because some of them were invited to table at Antonio Martin’s funeral, or maybe the dinner afterwards. And that led to one of Antonio Martin’s family members reading stuff that we had written and stuff that other people had written about Ferguson, like, critiquing the police. And apparently the cousin was like, “I can’t believe white people think this, I can’t believe a white person wrote this.” So they actually made this worthwhile connection.



[laughter]

**EMMA:** People who have been arrested since the August and November events... some of us have gone to court for their appearances. And, yeah, the RCP is there, trying to recruit them. When we were there recently, they were trying to get people to come to some phone drive or something.

**VERA:** They were even trying to recruit us. They were like, “What’s your website? How can we get in touch with you?” I mean, not that they knew who we were, but... well, they do now.

**MASIE:** It sucks, though, because, say you’re not involved in any group, you’re not some sort of politico, you’ve never been involved in any of this stuff before... The way people “get involved” in things is that they become activists or something. So unless anarchists are gonna do the anarchist form of activism, then what do we do? And also, how realistic is it for us to be frustrated with people who go to NGOs, or who go to these socialist organizations? Because it’s not as though they know obscure post-left theory or stuff that our friends have thought about and read for a long time.

I understand, too, that those theories come from people’s actual experiences of having to deal with this bullshit and being frustrated with it. So there’s that hope, maybe people will get disillusioned with activism and get more into the stuff we’re interested in. But then, maybe they’ll just write off *everything* instead.

**EMMA:** Yeah, it did make me question going to court because... MORE [Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment] is there, and the RCP is there, and I’m wondering, why am I there? Do I really want to stand in line next to these other groups that are trying to recruit this person? I mean, I’m not there because I know them.

So, yeah, it can be disheartening or something... that outside the riot or those moments I didn’t really make any friends. So I go to court cuz I hate prisons and I don’t want people to be abandoned when they get arrested, but then I don’t really know how we should...

**LUCA:** Well, to overgeneralize and to speak as a “we,” I think we were really careful the way we moved through things not to be a group, not to be an entity, not to recruit, not to participate in a lot of the formal activist

“You all leaving already? Or are you just taking a break and gonna go back for more? Yeah, take a break, but don’t leave! Keep your strength. Go back for more.” Sage advice.

People wait until the tear gas dissipates and come back to throw more rocks at the line. The cop car is totaled. There’s nothing left to do except to try and flip the motherfucker again. In response, the police shoot more tear gas, this time a whole lot.

The crowd is dissipating into the neighborhood side streets and the police are advancing towards the police station and firing gas into the side streets. Some folks are looting a BoostMobile store and a few other shops.

My group decides to circle back to the police line where our cars are. We walk through the neighborhood, and someone near us pops off a few shots in the direction of the police, pretty nonchalant. The police fire more gas. We loop back to S. Florissant, where the cop car is now on fire.

It’s beautiful. A rare sight. Later, I hear that another cop car behind it got set on fire too.

**NOVEMBER 25** - Governor Nixon has deployed over 2000 National Guardsmen in Missouri. Protesters rally again outside the Ferguson Police Department. The crowd has dwindled significantly since the previous night, but people are still angry and confrontational. The police and National Guard have increased their presence in front of the police department and are largely able to maintain control, rushing into the crowd and attacking people every time a bottle or rock is thrown.

After a few hours of standing off with the police, the crowd begins to march quickly down the street, leaving the police behind. A few blocks later, protesters round a corner and approach the Ferguson City Hall, which is unguarded with a single empty cop car parked in front. People break the cruiser’s windows, attempting to flip it over and set it on fire while others break the windows of City Hall. By the time the police arrive with their armored vehicles and cars, the crowd has moved back towards the main street. A few cruisers have their windows smashed out as the armored vehicles shoot tear gas into the air.

Solidarity actions continue nationwide, in what will add up to more than 170 cities. Thousands march again through Manhattan—taking over Times Square and Wall Street, shutting down an entrance to the Lincoln Tunnel and both sides of the FDR and West Side Highways, and blocking

traffic for hours. Protesters block highways and clash with police in Atlanta, Durham, Portland, and many other cities. In Oakland, a small crowd takes over highway 880, then a larger crowd blocks highway 580, ending in nearly 100 arrests. The remaining crowd creates massive burning barricades across Telegraph Avenue to hold back police, looting a series of corporate stores in North Oakland and smashing gentrifying businesses. Another mass arrest occurs near Emeryville at the end of the night.

We're leaving downtown Durham, North Carolina, and I'm looking with caution into the darkness of smaller neighborhoods as our police tail increases. But upon seeing the signs of the Durham Freeway, NC-147, the crowd starts shouting, "1-4-7" over and over. We steer effortlessly onto the on-ramp, no police in front of us. A large piece of construction fencing appears magically to our right, and I help several other masked folks pick it up in stride as we march down the hill. The fencing is too small for a barricade, but maybe it will help to slow traffic so no one gets hit by an aggressive driver.

The fencing gets suddenly heavier; a middle-aged white woman has grabbed onto it, yelling that we need to "be peaceful." I want to tell her that the fence is going to help keep people safer, but instead I just ignore her and keep walking toward the highway. We can argue later—this moment feels crucial and she is a distraction. Unfortunately, the woman refuses to let go and is futilely trying to win a tug-of-war over this little bit of fence. She's pulled along, until another person pulls her hands off the fence. They both trip and fall. Others help her up and make sure she's not hurt, but she's already screaming about being knocked down. I think of all those nonviolence advocates that have been tugged along as they pull backwards, finally to be abandoned to the side of the highway as a struggle explodes beyond their comfort level. Right now, I think that all of us, even those who have dreamt of our cities on fire for years, have been totally surpassed by what we've seen and heard from Ferguson. Honestly, I'm just trying to catch up.



From the sidewalk of a park a block away, I watch three thousand people fill the plaza above Underground Atlanta. Left-

**LUCA:** And now there's becoming an established Left. It sucks!

**CAMERON:** I was starting to have some real in-depth conversations with this socialist person, and then I realized that he's lobbying to get some alderman elected...

**MASIE:** Goddamn socialists...

**CAMERON:** And I was like, I was really into what you're saying, and now I realize all you want to do is get to a point where your political party is a contender. Which to me is a waste of time.

**VERA:** There was a lot of recruiting going on all around. At some point, it became like a political fair for the different groups.

**LUCA:** Yeah, even that first week, by... was it Thursday [August 14]? When it was just like a street party. With the Christian mimes and all the wingnut preachers showing up...

*[laughter]*

**TODD:** And there was even that Christian rap circle.

**LUCA:** The prayer circles.

**VERA:** The people who would walk between the riot cops and the crowd just saying "Jesus" over and over again.

*[laughter]*

**VERA:** But even the RCP [Revolutionary Communist Party]... they were there to recruit people and they did recruit people.

**LUCA:** Oh yeah, they were there so fast.

**CAMERON:** But we were there before them. *[laughter]*

**LUCA:** Cuz we live here! They're from Chicago! They had to come from out of town cuz there is no RCP in St. Louis. Well, now there is. Great!

and there's more socialists and more Black Power nationalists or people involved in trying to get "police oversight."

**CAMERON:** It seems like there's always going to be a disconnect between those people and those who are not organizers. It's gonna happen, but during the months between August and November, I was like, man, I feel kinda pessimistic that people are not gonna react like they did in August. The energy was different between August and November. It was more passive, though there were flare-ups from time to time.

But then in November, that happened, and I was like, "Oh, there's clearly some division or distinction or separation going on and I'm not even a part of that." I'm not a part of any of those groups of non-organizer/activist people and I'm just as outside of it as the activist groups are. Maybe that also makes it seem like I think there's some fictional group I need to penetrate and join. But I think that's really problematic. There's no inside I can join or a vanguard that meets who are the realest of the real. There's just people, some who are organized in sketchy ways that I can probably never be a part of, some who just show up and fight.

But yeah, there's gonna be activists and organizers doing stuff in response to these killings and I think that's still good. But before this, they were doing the same thing, that is, they were making it their "issue," but maybe with less people. And now it's just another single issue. Sometimes I get depressed when I think about that. But then random shit happens, like the rioting in Ferguson in November. And I see people I don't see at meetings or at the usual organizer protests attacking police.

I ran into some people on November 24 that I had seen in August on some of the crazier nights. They seemed prepared; it was a large group and they were just roving the streets and causing havoc. They seemed to have no interest in being peaceful.

*"There Was a Lot of Recruiting Going on"*

**MASIE:** I imagine by asking about "social bodies," though, they wanted to hear about what new people had come out of all this.

**VERA:** Like, there's more socialists in St. Louis now.

**MASIE:** Yeah, there used to be almost no Left in St. Louis.

wing organizers are leading emotional chants from a small stage. Speakers blasting Public Enemy, a few musical acts, and a series of vehement speeches lend a communitarian, cultural mask to the result of the previous day's private meeting between organizers and law enforcement: a four-hour rally with no plans to march.

Two hours later, I'm departing from the park with sixty others, tinny music playing on a sound cart. I'm shouting through a t-shirt tied around my face. Nearly half of the crowd joins as we march past, splitting the static rally in two. Tensions are emerging that will intensify as the night goes on. On one side, lit road flares, knocked over trashcans, and homemade masks; on the other, cleanup crews and indignation.

The cover of last week's independent weekly showed people blocking the highway near here; we head for it again. The red light of road flares reflects off the concrete walls, matching the tail-lights of oncoming traffic on the Interstate 75/85 connector. Within moments, six lanes of traffic are at a complete halt in front of nearly 250 of us. I hear shouts from the other side of the interstate. Glancing back, I realize that half the crowd has stopped in the on-ramp: a protester is face down, one shoe off, a cop's knee in his back. Rocks start to fly, but we're disorganized and it takes too long to make our way to the nearest off-ramp. As we crest the hill, I see a cruiser drive away with an arrestee behind a smashed windshield.

There are about 80 of us still going. We dip right, my shoulder a little too close to one of the many motorcycle cops at the bottom of the hill. Nearly all of us flood the CSX train yard, filling jackets and packs with stones. A block later, young people are shouting the names of their sets and cliques as we chuck rocks at police officers, cruisers, storefronts, and parked cars. I see one cop fall to the ground, hit in the face by a flying stone, taking a second officer with him.

A bridge ahead: at once the gateway back to downtown and the easiest place to get kettled. We're in before the realization hits the whole crowd—a line of riot police in front of us, a line of cruisers at the back. I'm certain we're getting arrested as the banner holders at the front press forward. Yet, at what must be a command from some higher authority, the riot police scramble to part before us.

Two hours after the march began, we pass the plaza where we started. There are still nearly 300 people at the rally; this time, all

of them join the march. As the composition of the crowd changes, the shape of the march shifts: the new participants drag behind, creating a physical gulf between the front and the back. In the front, my mask enables me to blend with a mix protestors, young college students, gang members, graffiti writers, parents, white east side hipsters, black and brown streetwear partiers, middle-aged radicals, and other angry people. The back seems to be more reactionary: upwardly mobile students, private school alumni, left-wing activists. A masked demonstrator leaps atop a parked taxicab, smashing in its front and back windshields: cheers from the front, boos from the back.

Young people are rushing into stores ahead, screaming that if they don't close for the night, they'll be attacked and looted. Several oblige as construction equipment, trashcans, newspaper boxes, and a decorative display of Christmas trees are overturned and dragged into Peachtree Street. I'm keeping count in case the news crews don't: a window each out of Meehan's Irish Pub, Wells Fargo, and a vacant storefront.

Clad in a Morehouse jacket—an all-black private school on the city's west side—a protestor rushes from the back of the crowd to start swinging on a vandal. His blows are interrupted by another black man, screaming "If you fuck with my bloods, you're gonna get killed." I'm shocked, but not as much as he is; fifteen people surround him and another demonstrator knocks him out flat.

Two blocks up, a hundred riot police block the road. We're being pushed to the sidewalk as more than twenty demonstrators are snatched at random. As we're forced to retreat south down Peachtree, I see the remains of the banner from the front of the march, now burning.



Oakland, California. I was grabbing a quick dinner when I started getting texts that the 880 highway had been blocked. After the insanity of the previous evening's demonstrations, I was reluctant to get back out on the streets. But the frantic texts started multiplying. I met up with some friends and we drove around the edges of downtown, trying to find the march by following the spotlights of the police helicopters.

people, people will respond again? Or is it just me? Do you think that there is that momentum? Even though we've seen people both respond and not respond to police murders since Mike Brown's murder?

**VERA:** I just hope that when it gets warmer that's gonna happen.

**LUCA:** There's also this question of guilt that plays into it, of how people respond if there's a gun involved. The question of whether they think the person killed by the cops is guilty. But even that person on Minnesota\* who had a gun, people still responded. Anyway, I feel hopeful. I don't expect it, but the possibility feels much greater now that something could happen when the police kill someone.

**EMMA:** And how do you think it will move beyond people responding only when the cops kill someone to responding to confront the shitty conditions of everyday life?

**MASIE:** My hope is—tons of people gathering, being pissed off, spilling onto whatever major street is nearby, maybe confronting police and pushing them out...

**JANE:** ...burning the nearest QuickTrip...

**MASIE:** Maybe people could just start doing that when they get an eviction notice or when cost of living is going up or food stamps are being cut. That would be my hope, but I'm not holding my breath for that to happen.

**LUCA:** I think that's one of things about the limitations of the riot. There's this disconnect between people being in the streets together and larger or more nuanced social struggle. How does rioting lead to bigger occupations or general strikes or occupied neighborhoods or completely autonomous zones or neighborhoods where the cops can never go?

Because there are these other entities now. To answer the question of how the social terrain in St. Louis has changed, there are more activists now, these politicized people, and they're still trying to find their way,

\* LeDarius Williams was shot and killed by St. Louis police on Minnesota Avenue in St. Louis city.



**LUCA:** The other thing about how this related to St. Louis is that this place is really hard to live in, like a lot of shitty cities or rust belt cities in the Midwest. The quality of life here is pretty low. Even though cost of living is pretty low, too.

**MASIE:** Should we list all the ways it's horrible to live here, so people don't feel inclined to move here?

*[laughter]*

**MASIE:** Air quality, interpersonal violence... it's terrible.

**CAMERON:** The police are... brutal. They're just terrible.

**MASIE:** There's tons of Superfund sites.

**VERA:** So much poverty and crime...

**EMMA:** You cannot swim in clean water.

**LUCA:** The water's not clean that you're drinking either.

**MASIE:** You're at least an hour away from wilderness. At least.

**LOUISE:** It's crazy segregated.

**CAMERON:** Even the wilderness is polluted.

*[laughter]*

**MASIE:** There's microchips you have to wear when you're here. Microchips under your skin...

*[laughter]*

### *Momentum and Limitations*

**EMMA:** Do you think people in general hope that when police keep killing

The crowd is roughly 1000 people. After successfully blocking the 880, they're facing off with a line of California Highway Patrol (CHP) officers who are preventing them from taking another onramp. A moment of confusion; people are yelling out suggestions for what to do next. Someone tries to do a mic check, hearkening back to Occupy. They're completely ignored.

The crowd pushes ahead into uptown and onto Telegraph Avenue, leaving the onramp behind. A group of young people—mostly black and brown, mostly hooded and masked—has taken the initiative, and the crowd is following. Cars honk in support; spectators cheer from the sidewalks. A dumpster is pushed into Telegraph and set alight, a preview of things to come.

Suddenly, I understand where we're headed. Up ahead, past 34th, the 580 overpass crosses Telegraph. There's no onramp here, just a chain-link fence—and beyond it, a vine-covered hillside ascending to the highway. People knock down the fence and hundreds rush up the embankment in the surreal glare of the police helicopter spotlight.

At the same time, a burning dumpster appears behind the march, and another on a side street. Riot police have been gathering farther back in both those directions, but they're hesitant to advance on the furious and ecstatic crowd. Masked kids are smashing the windows of the Walgreens at the base of the embankment.

The police continue to hold back, so we follow the hundreds that have climbed up onto 580. Multiple highways converge in Oakland near this point, creating a tangle of overpasses and elevated connectors. The section of highway we stand on is completely blocked by the crowd. About thirty feet ahead of us, across a chasm, lies another parallel elevated highway, swarming with riot police and police cars.

An unmasked woman in a button-down shirt is screaming at the police: "How does it feel to know that everyone hates you?" The blue and red lights of the police sirens illuminate her enraged expression. "This time it's not about the economy, it's not about the war, it's about YOU!" A young guy adds, "How does it feel to be losing, you motherfuckers?" We can see the bulky silhouettes of the riot police puffing out their chests and pointing at us, but all they can do is shine their flashlights across the dark chasm in our direction.

Much of the crowd on the highway begins marching east, so we scramble back down the embankment to Telegraph, where around 500 people are still holding the intersection to prevent the growing lines of riot police from cutting off those up on the 580. An old-school Bay Area anarchist approaches me with concern. "Keep an eye on that truck," she says, pointing to a big expensive-looking pickup speeding off into the darkness down a side street. "They just tried to run down those kids building barricades."

The march has now split. Roughly half the crowd is continuing east on the elevated highway. Within the hour, many of them will be mass-arrested. Our half of the crowd starts to push north up Telegraph as the riot police slowly advance behind us. As we march under the overpass, a thunderous boom echoes through the crowd, followed by a moment of frightened silence and then cheering. Someone in the crowd has come prepared with some intense firecrackers.

The California Highway Patrol is out in full force, with officers decked head to toe in tactical gear guarding their outpost just beyond the overpass. A tense silence falls on the marching crowd for the duration of the block. When the last of us arrive at the next major intersection at MacArthur, the riot police begin to move in behind us. A startling explosion punctuates the night and cheers rise from the crowd. From the top of the small mound at the corner of the intersection, I see a puff of smoke rise from the police lines and the CHP officers in that section of their line stumbling backwards. Another explosion next to advancing CHP cruisers on MacArthur inspires more cheering and chanting.

A squad car in the intersection that has been partly surrounded by the crowd begins accelerating in an attempt to escape. Someone completely masked up runs over and starts taking out its windows with a hammer. Police surge into the crowd and fistfights erupt. The masked person is tackled; batons swing to keep the crowd back. Dozens of riot police charge up Telegraph towards us as we once again continue north.

I've seen many demonstrations and riots in this city over the years. But I've never seen something like this traverse multiple neighborhoods in one evening, employing so many different tactics and forms in quick succession. It's as if we've crossed some kind

**LUCA:** Yeah, this is an event on a continuum of events that start way back, before Trayvon Martin and before Oscar Grant, that maybe goes back to the 1992 riots in LA. And how do those things relate to Occupy or the Arab Spring or the popular consciousness of these mass social uprisings? They're interconnected, even though they're not connected in an obvious way.

**CAMERON:** Like, there was one guy at the Trayvon march who was getting pissed because we weren't marching yet. And he was quoting a Tupac song, "We riot, not rally." He kept saying that. When I saw him in Ferguson, I felt that there was definitely some kind of continuum.

**LUCA:** Yeah, and because that rally that happened before the Trayvon Martin march was so official, there were all these senators and church leaders there that later were also connected to Ferguson. Even though that's a completely different population, there was some momentum connected in that way.

**VERA:** They tried to turn over a police car at the Trayvon march...

**LUCA:** Oh, that's right...

**VERA:** ...and didn't know how to do it and people were telling them, "Well, this is how you could do it..."

**LUCA:** "And you should be covering your face right now..."

**VERA:** I heard those conversations happening. And then to see what happened in Ferguson... I do think there was a connection there beyond just our friends.

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Police barricades were moved and pushed through, graffiti was written on the back of moving buses, things were thrown in the streets. It quickly became the most notable anti-police march St. Louis had seen in recent history. This march took the cake until Ferguson, which took the whole bakery. A short article on the march entitled "The Storming of the Bastille" can be found at the dialectical-delinquents.com page of Ferguson coverage.

witnessed some of the hope that dwells in our deepest places, and we cried because we touched the edge of great, great loss. And this brought us to perhaps the most important question of all: after all you've been through, what do you still hope and dream for?

*Background and Context: "I Was a Lot More Pessimistic before This"*

**LUCA:** *[reading]* "How did you see the future of the St. Louis area before this and how do you see it now? What are the long-term effects shaping up to be? What new social bodies coalesced around the rebellion and the reaction against it or broke it up?"

**MASIE:** I was a lot more pessimistic about the world and St. Louis before this.

**CAMERON:** I definitely was.

**EMMA:** It was incredible to be going to things that you weren't trying to make happen. It was such a relief.

**LUCA:** Yeah, it seemed like this place was in a malaise, like much of the country, but here particularly because of how this place is. And so it was totally unexpected.

**CAMERON:** I didn't expect this to happen and it was amazing that it happened, but I'm also thinking, is this just the sort of thing that might just happen every twenty years and then we're just back to nothing happening in between? I'm just not sure that it's a thing that will keep happening. Because it happened, like, twenty years ago, in 1992, and police have kept killing people for years and years.

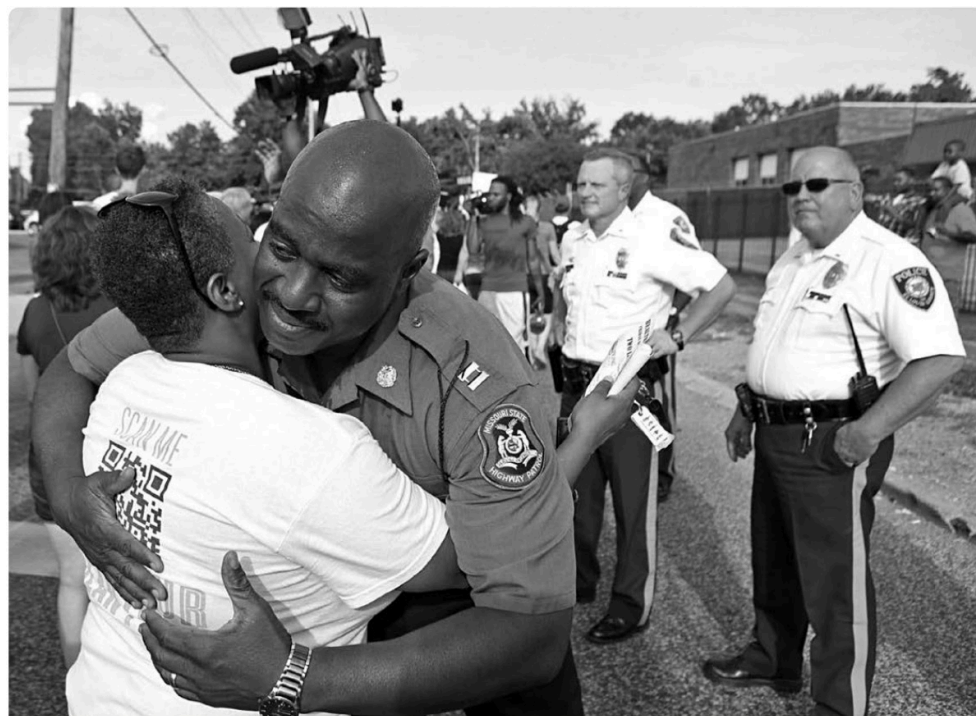
**VERA:** We have to take into account what was happening just locally in

St. Louis. Maybe riots like this only happen every twenty years, but things were happening in St. Louis that led up to it. Like the Trayvon march.\*

\* On July 14, 2013, there was a rally in St. Louis in response to George Zimmerman being found not guilty for the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin. The rally culminated in 800 or so people marching through downtown St. Louis.

of line. We're back again, finally, in that magical and euphoric uncertainty where everything suddenly seems possible.

A massive wall of fire rises across Telegraph at the back of the march. A strange mix of neighbors and participants hold their phones up to snap photos of the eight-foot-tall flames stretching across the wide street, while others put the final touches on the burning barricade: a last dumpster here, another recycling bin there. Some people are staring into the flames; I hear others saying prayers. A second massive burning barricade is already shining half a block ahead. This one has been artfully constructed



*Where brute force fails, try cooptation: Missouri Highway Patrol Captain Ron Johnson attempts to ingratiate himself to protesters in Ferguson, as white police look on.*

out of materials from the nearby MacArthur BART transit village development. We hurry to join back up with the main section of the crowd.

Standing in the intersection of Telegraph and 40th, the gateway to the increasingly posh and gentrified Temescal district, I no longer see the lines of riot police behind us. Only fire.

The crews that came for looting see their opening. Sounds of shattering glass and cheers draw my attention first to the Subway up on the left, then to the BMW and Audi dealership across the street on the right. In both cases, lockboxes and cash registers are carried off into the night. I look through the broken glass into the car dealership. Young people are jumping on all the cars on the showroom floor to the sound of the high-pitched burglar alarm. The crowd is still hundreds deep. Next to go is the corporate paint store. Expropriated full cans of paint fly through the windows of a pretentious new coffee shop, exploding white paint inside.

Suddenly that pickup truck is on us, revving its engine as it tears through the crowd, barely missing several people. It flips a U-turn down the street and accelerates towards us for a second pass. People around me are screaming as we scramble to get out of its path. Someone with great aim smashes out one of the truck's windows with a rock as it passes. It screeches to a halt, the doors fly open, and two big men jump out, pointing in the direction of the rock thrower. Another woman sitting in the back seat does not get out. An argument breaks out between the men and the closest protesters. As an angry woman turns to walk away from the men, one of them punches her in the back of the head, knocking her to the ground. The crowd instantly swarms the two men. They lie unconscious beside their truck as we continue north.

A T-Mobile store is thoroughly gutted; the looting continues to escalate. Things are starting to blur together; it becomes difficult to count the number of stores looted, highways blocked, and confrontations with police and vigilantes. Scenes like these continue in the Bay Area on a near-nightly basis for the next two weeks. Later, as we walk back on side streets towards downtown, where we left the car hours earlier, I see the helicopters circling far off to the west. For us, the night is over; we'll be back tomorrow. For others, the night is just getting started.

## **Then, in the San Francisco Bay Area...**

*As momentum plateaued in Ferguson and other parts of the country, it picked up in the Bay Area. Oakland, which hosted the high point of the Occupy Movement in 2011, became the epicenter of two weeks of nightly clashes.*

# *III. Looking Back*

## **GROUP REFLECTION ON THE EVENTS ST. LOUIS, FEBRUARY 2015**

*Introduction from the Participants*

When we talk about Ferguson, it's imperative that we recognize that what became a beautiful uprising began with a tragic loss, a brutal murder. The endless list of those killed at the hands of the state in St. Louis and elsewhere stokes our rage and fuels our tears. But like those we saw in the streets of Ferguson, we refuse to turn this profound anger and misery inward on ourselves.

The issue of this rebellion, at the heart, is far from a simple one and therefore the answers to questions posed are far from straightforward. The editors of *Rolling Thunder* put together a compendium of thoughtful and critical questions—analytical and clearly posed from a distance. But because of the nature of our experiences where our lives were ripped open—exposing us to the highest highs and lowest lows—the discussion strayed far from the questions posed. Ultimately, we didn't answer very many of them.

We, who were in the streets together over the course of several months in some of the most intimate and exhilarating moments of our lives, had a meandering discussion. At times, we started with the questions; at other times, the discussion sparked some of our own. We were more drawn to start at the heart—how does it feel to touch the edge of your dreams? How do you possibly return to life the way it was before? Who holds you when you cry?

Because we did cry: from the intense moments of rage, to the unbelievable and unbearable beauty we witnessed and created. Because we witnessed what often seems untouchable—witnessed the impossible—



The crowd retreats to the Mobil after police push people off the highway. People smash out a beauty supply store and begin to loot. Tonight the police are far more prepared and are able to arrest many of the alleged looters.

The next evening, a few dozen protesters in Oakland vandalize businesses and the city's main Christmas tree; but as in Greece in December 2008, the onset of the Christmas holidays marks the end of the trajectory. Over the following month, St. Louis police murder two more young men of color—23-year-old LeDarius Williams, who had already been shot once by police as a teenager, and 19-year-old Isaac Holmes.

Despite everything that has happened, to this day, the police in the St. Louis area have stuck to their pattern of killing a person every month. If we want a world without police murders, we need a world without police. The struggle continues.



Protesters in Ferguson wait for the announcement from the grand jury on November 24.

**NOVEMBER 26** - A destructive march plays cat and mouse with Oakland police in downtown and West Oakland for hours before being dispersed by police. Multiple downtown businesses are damaged.

**NOVEMBER 28** - Black Friday protests interrupt shopping all around the country. In Missouri, crowds of protesters march through the St. Louis, West County, and Frontenac shopping malls, shutting down all three.

In West Oakland, coordinated civil disobedience at the Bay Area Rapid Transit station shuts down all service in and out of San Francisco for over two hours. In San Francisco, nearly 1000 protesters besiege the shopping district of Union Square, clashing with police and damaging fancy stores. They march into the Mission district, looting stores and smashing banks. The night ends in a mass arrest of the dwindling crowd.

**DECEMBER 3** - A New York grand jury refuses to indict the police officers who choked Eric Garner to death in July. Solidarity demonstrations adopt his last words, "I can't breathe." Crowds block Market Street in San Francisco. In Oakland, a march weaves through downtown; riot police prevent it from reaching OPD headquarters. Instead, participants march through the wealthy Piedmont neighborhood.

**DECEMBER 4** - Another march weaves through Downtown Oakland, eventually heading east towards the Fruitvale district, where there is a showdown with Oakland police and a mass arrest. In San Francisco, a die-in blocks Market Street for a second night. In Minneapolis, demonstrators march three miles on Interstate 35W.

**DECEMBER 5** - Hundreds march through downtown Oakland, holding a noise demonstration in front of the jail to support arrestees. The crowd moves on to take over the 880 freeway before being pushed off by police. Next, the march surrounds the West Oakland BART station and destroys the gates protecting the riot police inside. The station is shut down for an hour before the march moves back downtown for more property destruction, clashes with police, and arrests. In Durham, another march hundreds strong blocks the highway and clashes with police.

**DECEMBER 6** - A march originating near the University of California at Berkeley campus clashes with Berkeley police near their headquarters and loots multiple stores, including a Trader Joe's and Radio Shack. The

crowds grow as students join in. In response, police departments from across the region pour into central Berkeley, firing dozens of rounds of tear gas and physically attacking demonstrators and bystanders, inflicting serious injuries.

**DECEMBER 7** - On Sunday night, another march starts in Berkeley and moves into North Oakland to clash with police, destroy multiple California Highway Patrol (CHP) cruisers, and take over Highway 24. CHP officers use tear gas and rubber bullets to push back the crowd. People respond with rocks and fireworks, then march back into downtown Berkeley, destroying bank façades and ATMs. They attack cell phone and electronics stores, culminating with the looting of Whole Foods. The night ends with hundreds of people gathering around bonfires in the middle of Telegraph, popping bottles of expropriated Prosecco. Police are afraid to engage the crowd, but some participants are snatched in targeted arrests.

**DECEMBER 8** - The third march from Berkeley is by far the largest. Over 2000 people take over Interstate 80, stopping all traffic for two hours, while another segment of the demonstration blocks the train tracks parallel to the freeway. The crowd attempts to march on the Bay Bridge but is pushed back into Emeryville, where over 250 people are arrested.

**DECEMBER 9** - The fourth march from Berkeley sets out once again down Telegraph Avenue into Oakland and shuts down another section of Highway 24 and the MacArthur BART station. Increasingly violent clashes ensue with CHP officers in full riot gear, who fire rubber bullets and beanbag rounds, causing numerous injuries and ultimately pushing the crowd off the freeway. The march then loops through downtown Oakland and makes its way into Emeryville, where a Pak-N-Save grocery store is looted along with a CVS pharmacy and 7-Eleven.

**DECEMBER 10** - Hundreds of Berkeley High School students stage a walkout and rally at city hall. A smaller fifth march from Berkeley makes its way into Oakland, where a T-Mobile store is looted and other corporate stores are attacked. People point out and attack undercover CHP officers, who pull guns on the crowd as they make an arrest.

**DECEMBER 13** - Rallies called by civil rights organizations in New York, Boston, Oakland, Washington, DC, and elsewhere around the country

draw tens of thousands—but they also signify the end of the unruly phase of the movement as the old guard of black leaders regain control. Like the People’s Climate March in New York two and a half months prior, most of the demonstrations are scripted affairs in which the police need not make arrests, although hundreds manage to take the Brooklyn Bridge after the official protest ends. In Washington, DC, a group of young activists from Ferguson and St. Louis interrupts the scheduled programming to declare that the movement has been hijacked from its confrontational grassroots origins.

**DECEMBER 20** - A gunman shoots and kills two NYPD cops in their patrol car in Bedstuy, Brooklyn. Media and city officials blame the Black Lives Matter protests; NYC Mayor de Blasio calls for a moratorium on demonstrations. NYPD officers respond with a sort of strike in which they only make “necessary” arrests, and publicly catcall the mayor for not being supportive enough. This slowdown dramatizes how most arrests are needless, intended only to accrue profits for the government, but it is also a sign that the police are beginning to conceive of their interests as distinct from the power structure they ostensibly serve—a development that sent police into the arms of the fascist Golden Dawn party in Greece. A flood of racist invective on the internet also hints at a possible resurgence of extra-governmental white supremacist activity.

**DECEMBER 23** - Police in Berkeley, Missouri shoot and kill 18-year-old Antonio Martin outside of a Mobil gas station. Police claim the teen pointed a gun at an officer but many witnesses claim otherwise. Within the hour, a crowd of roughly 200 people has gathered around the Mobil, which by now is completely full of police, medical examiners, and forensic teams. After a few hours of being yelled at, the police attempt to snatch a man from the crowd. People instantly rush the officers and a scuffle ensues. Eventually, the police throw flash-bang grenades to clear the area. People respond by throwing bottles and fireworks, then run into the street and attack police cruisers. Some rush across the street and begin to loot the adjacent QuikTrip.

People calmly loot the QT for roughly an hour before a fire is set inside it, causing the police to rush in with assault rifles and extinguish the fire.

**DECEMBER 24** - Protesters in Berkeley, Missouri gather again outside the Mobil gas station to protest the killing of Antonio Martin. This time people march towards the highway and block I-70 for roughly 45 minutes.