



Oakland, California 2009



UNFINISHED ACTS

january rebellions

Oakland, California 2009

REVISED EDITION PRODUCTION NOTES:

If you’ve read *Unfinished Acts* before, you might notice some things are different in this revised edition.

For starters, since its original printing, one of the main contributors was identified as having a pattern of sexual assault. After this person demonstrated no commitment to changing this pattern, he was asked not to show his face in our circles, and some of us committed to no longer distribute his writing. To this end, the writings and drawings of this contributor have been removed from this edition. While we have no illusions that these actions are necessarily effective in diminishing his future potential to do harm in other communities, we feel it is important to honor the collective decisions agreed upon by the majority of his former friends and comrades. The necessity of implementing this decision was the catalyst for the republishing of *Unfinished Acts*.

In light of the great number of rebels running in the streets of Oakland this last year, we also feel that now is an ideal moment to highlight ways in which the Oscar Grant movement prefigured much of the contemporary activity that has put Oakland at the forefront of social struggle in this country. We have added significant content to this end, as well as noted changes and developments from the last three years. However, we have strived to keep the *Acts* themselves in tact as important historical documents.

AUGUST 2012



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If you currently distribute older versions of *Unfinished Acts* please replace those with this edition.

----- **January 8, Early Morning** -----

We sat in a frigid holding cell in the downtown Oakland jail following the night of the 7th. Hunger began to set in as adrenaline faded and we speculated on the charges they would try to put on us. Someone spoke up, and didn’t have to say much to keep moral high:

In 10 years —nah fuck it, in six months— you ain’t gonna remember sitting here right now. All you gonna remember is the night the Town stood up.



themselves in Oscar Grant at least saw in his image their friend, their neighbor, their classmate, someone whose life was worth fighting over. I hoped that there were white people who, after watching a video of a black man being murdered by the police, would be angry enough to break windows. In time, I met these people, because they fought alongside us, throwing bottles and chunks of concrete, cursing the police and writing the names of the dead along the walls of the city.

July 17, 8:20am: The cops killed someone else. Once again in Fruitvale. Forty eight year old Fred Collins died after being shot multiple times when five officers from BART and OPD discharged their weapons.

July 18, 11:27pm: Shots fired at police from an upper floor of a high-rise building in the Acorn housing project complex in West Oakland. The officers were performing a traffic stop in the area and had to take cover when they heard the shots, however, no officers were hit by the gunfire

Today, the situation is every bit as dismal as it was yesterday. Every hour of our lives spent at work creates the revenue that strengthens the army that confronts us. In Stockton, in Livermore, in Bakersfield; the police continue to open fire on us, we continue to die. We have yet to create a force that can subject them to the misery that will one day confront them, however, we have come closer than we ever thought we would.

Until now, we believed we were fighting battles. On the day of a demonstration, we walked the streets, we fought, and we went home that night, unsure of what to do in the time until the next battle presented itself. Today, we understand that we are at the beginning of a war. Wars are protracted conflicts. Their results aren’t determined at the end of the day. The police have killed again, and, as of today, our response has been less than forceful. In warfare, it is necessary to develop weapons.

We need to learn new tactics. There is still so little we really know how to do. We could learn how to blockade roads or shut down BART trains. With better communication, we could attack police property or raid supplies in places where the cops aren’t waiting for us. We are working toward developing the capacity to respond forcefully every time the police kill one of us.

This movement has never had leaders. It is composed of independent and often disconnected groups of people. These groups tend to operate outside of the typical po-

litical and social justice networks. So far, their autonomy, their lack of reliance on both the non-profit world and the radical political scenes, has been a strength. We all come from vastly different places, and many people may not be willing to work with one another. Therefore, the point isn’t to try to bring everyone together into one organization. What is important is to begin providing supplies to people to assist their ability to continue to struggle autonomously.

“I know you’ll win in the finish all right. You have a formidable arsenal at your disposal, and what have we got? Nothing. We’ll be beaten because you’re the stronger and we’re the weaker, but in the meantime, we hope that you’ll have to pay for your victory.” - A Rebel

We have spent too many nights living in fear of the police. When we started fighting back, the world that surrounded us began to feel different. Today, we can tell the children in our neighborhoods that we stood up for our communities, that, when we all stand together, nothing seems so frightening.

Since that warm January night, we have made the mistake of allowing this movement to be confined to the borders of the city of Oakland. The BART police are a regional problem, policing in general a global problem. Disruptions are as relevant at Civic Center in San Francisco or Downtown Berkeley as they are at 14th and Broadway. The movement becoming entirely centered around the city of Oakland has confined us, it has weakened us because it defines the struggle by the borders created by the powerful instead of by the lines drawn by the outraged.

This system exists to erase memories, to evict us from our childhood homes, to incarcerate our loved ones, to execute the fathers of children too young to fully understand what happened. Our struggle has been an effort to create memories that they can never take from us.

Running toward the sunset, we have found that the horizon only moves farther away. We awake every morning to the same cycle of death and power that we escaped in our dreams the night before. Yet we continue to trudge to the ends of the earth, we continue to fight. It is when the air is still, when all seems quiet, that we are planning our next move.

At the very least, we have inflicted harm on our enemies, and because of this, we live with dignity.

Oakland, July 2010



UNFINISHED
ACTS

PREFACE TO THE 2012 EDITION:

14th & Broadway,
Three Years Later

From the 1946 general strike to the Black Panther Party, Oakland has a long and proud history of being a city that does not bow down to authority. Over the past year, Oakland received a barrage of attention from across the country and world as the most radical and militant city in the US. One of the primary contributions the rebels of Oakland handed the Occupy movement was an uncompromising politics stripped of any middle class liberal illusions about the police being on the side of the “99%.” Oakland helped force the whole movement to come to terms with a simple fact The pigs are our enemies and any successful uprising will have to confront them.

A close reading of recent history helps to illuminate the origins of the city’s current wave of antagonistic and anti-police street politics that helped make Occupy Oakland stand out from the crowd. It can all be traced back to the events covered in this publication: the Oscar Grant Rebellions that exploded in January of 2009 and again in the summer of 2010. With the hindsight of today, we can see clearly that those riots were the fiery beginnings of a new era of resistance in this city and beyond. They brought together new affinities that continue to fight side by side today and they exposed the harsh contradictions of the established activist left for all to see. Many of those who participated in the first assemblies which launched Occupy Oakland, a mix of anarchists, Black power organizers and militant rank and file labor, first began to work together and see each other as comrades during the movement that followed the Oscar Grant Rebellions.



This publication is an attempt to capture the moods, ideas, conflicts and passions of those early days when we were first finding our footing in this new era.

It makes sense then that when these comrades came together to kick off Occupy Oakland on October 10, they renamed the plaza in front of City Hall and at the corner of the city’s main intersection at 14th & Broadway, Oscar Grant Plaza.

This was not a solemn decision that emphasized a victimized city in mourning. It was a proud and rebellious declaration that the plaza had now been liberated in the spirit of those who participated in the insurrections of 2009 and 2010. One of the first decisions Occupy Oakland made was that the police were no longer allowed inside the plaza. And with the exception of the massive militarized raid on the camp during October 25, no uniformed officer was able to cross into the plaza until the camp’s demise at the end of November.

It is this trajectory that begins on January 7, 2009, and leads up through the rise and fall of Occupy all the way until the present that helps us see why Oakland has become what it is today. This publication is an attempt to capture the moods, ideas, conflicts and passions of those early days when we were first finding our footing in this new era. We hope it illuminates the struggles that have shaped our city and possible pathways towards the insurrections to come.

Demanding justice is not enough. The concept of justice for an individual doesn’t address the need to dismantle the system that murdered him. It doesn’t prevent any of us from being killed by the police. What is important now is not speaking in terms of justice, but attacking and weakening the institution of policing that continues to wage war against us.

For people who hold the weight of the earth on their shoulders, the fastest way from the bottom to the top is to turn the world upside down, to throw the property of the rich into the street and to dance on the roofs of police cars instead of riding in the back seats.

“When the South has trouble with its Negroes – when the Negroes refuse to remain in their ‘place’ – it blames ‘outside agitators’” – James Baldwin

The term “outside agitator” was popularized during the civil rights struggles of the 1950s, when southern politicians would blame the growing unrest in exploited black communities on the presence of (often white) radicals from outside of the city. Presently, it is a term used by Oakland politicians (and aspiring politicians) to try and keep the situation under control, to prevent local marginalized people from realizing the power they have.

Today, we face enemies that we could have never conceived of before this. Sometimes, it’s the people that pretend to be on your side that are the most dangerous enemies. The non-profit world has, for 18 months, waged a campaign against this movement.

Many non-profits that function independently of the local government have disparaged us. They oppose collective uprisings and spontaneous activity because they feel the need to control the movement. These organizations view themselves as they saviors of the downtrodden; when dominated people rise up on their own terms, it threatens

the position of leadership these organizations occupy in their imaginary worlds.

We have also come under attack from non-profits that operate entirely under the influence of the city government. One of

these city-funded non-profits has taken up a full fledged assault against us, using some of the \$2 million in city money they have received to wage a propaganda campaign against the unity we have found with each other through this struggle. They have even used city money to pay young people to come to their indoctrination workshops where they speak of the evils of people coming together and standing up to their enemies.

They have also helped to spread the absurd logic of the Mayor’s Office that only people born and raised in Oakland have the right to take to the streets. This micro-nationalism is an attempt to foster collaboration between disenfranchised people and their exploiters in a unified front against the enigmatic “outsiders.”

It is incorrect to assert that non-profits of this type have motivations of their own. They are simply

the hip mouthpieces of the city government that funds them. Their agenda is the agenda of the Mayor’s Office and the police department. They use the language of “peace” to try to preserve the institutions that created them. We have never been concerned with their peace. The peace of the powerful is the silent war waged against the dispossessed.

In the past, our enemies have attempted to divide movements by distinguishing the “good” elements from the “destructive” elements. This time, it seems that the primary division they created was not between the “peaceful” and the “violent,” but a racial division wedged between groups in the uncontrollable elements in an attempt to neutralize our collective strength.

I, identifying with a man whose photograph was not unlike my own reflection, wondered if people who did not see



jumped onto the roof of the police car was the most beautiful moment I've ever witnessed.

For an instant, we realized that we are strong, watching the police tremble as they cowered on the other side of the intersection, we got a glimpse of our potential.

Later that night, as the cars were still burning, we talked with friends, discussing ways to keep fighting, ways to ensure that the memory of the dead continues to haunt the living. In the following weeks, we continued to fight in the streets.

It was on those warm January nights, evenings which now seem so distant, that I met some of the greatest people I have ever known. Our friendships have created the foundations of a network of struggle and formed basis for a different kind of community.

We learned so much from the courage of some of the youngest people on the streets in those nights.

For weeks after that first night of outrage, everything felt different. People held their heads higher and the feeling of anger toward the police was finally out in the open. The violent and repressive nature of the police was the main topic of discussion everywhere I went. People openly disobeyed and



insulted the police to their faces every day and the cops were on the defensive.

We could finally breathe.

July 8, 9:30pm: A jewelry store is being looted. 30 people tear apart the riot gate and flood the store.

Across the street someone is writing a message about Oscar Grant on the wall of a business. A block away, people continue to fight

with police, in some places separated from the advancing lines by small fires.

We're moving slowly away from the center of downtown.

On Broadway the crowd is extremely thin, about 80 people spread across two blocks. Police are everywhere, yet are unsure of how to bring the situation under control. A bank window shatters and 20 people rush inside attempting to take anything that isn't bolted down. Nearby, a fire is burning inside a department store. Two blocks east a larger crowd is advancing near the lake, tailed closely by armored police as they break the windows of stores and throw their contents into awaiting hands of the crowd that surrounds them.

That night, the night of the verdict, we were reminded how little our lives mean to this system, and that police officers do, in fact, get away with murder.



"There were outbreaks like this one, the footlocker incident which we've been telling you about all evening, where in some cases the people weren't even... they were taking the shoes, breaking the windows, taking the merchandise, and just simply throwing it out on the street..." - News

**FORWARD TO THE
2012 EDITION:**

We Are All Oscar Grant (?)

Attacking White Power in the Rebellions & Beyond

The project of sustained insurrectionary activity must constantly chip away at the foundations of white supremacy. Although anarchist practice is assumed to be inherently anti-racist, evidence of this is often hard to find. This should be obvious, but it is worth repeating: to want the United States of America and capitalism destroyed means the task set before us is to attack and abolish the racial order that has enabled these beasts.

The Oscar Grant rebellions gave us a little glimpse of people in the bay area doing just this. In the riots we saw the collective power of Black and Brown young people battling,

with little fear, against the established white supremacist order. Surprisingly there was also a small showing of white people in the rebellion as well. This brief show of solidarity from white folks – both those who do have experiences of being criminalized poor young people and those who grew up with relative comfort – reveals that white people can have agency to violently oppose a clearly racist institution side-by-side with non-whites without pretending to share identity or experience with them when it is not the case. Also, contrary to dominant narratives that paint the essence of riots as male-dominated affairs, many queer and female (mostly non-white) comrades took their place at





the front-lines, participating in the supposedly masculine rebellion without apprehension. Their participation is significant as it throws a wrench into the logic of peace-loving, docile femininity and what self -determination looks like for some who live on the axis of gender tyranny and white supremacy. Although most police shooting victims are Black and Brown men, the Oscar Grant rebellions show us that their deaths affect and outrage masses of people across race and gender lines.

During each demonstration and riot where folks gathered to express their rage in the face of Oscar Grant’s murder and what his death represented, the chant “We are all Oscar Grant!” rang through the downtown streets of Oakland. For those indoctrinated into the logic popularized by the non-profit organizing culture that treats identity and experiences of oppression as one in the same, it is inappropriate for anyone other than people of color to yell this slogan. This critique falls flat for many as it is assuming that we yell this to declare collective victimhood rather than a collective proclamation to not be victims. We’d be hard pressed to find any individuals in this society who are victims, but have never been victimizers or vise-versa.

For those of us who are poor and Black or Brown, anarchist or not, we cannot claim to share every experience with Oscar Grant, but we do live our days with the knowledge that we could have the same fate as him if this class-society, with its racialized implications, is not reckoned with. For women and queers, especially those of us who also are not white, our experiences may not mirror Oscar Grant’s life and death, but we too live with the sick threat of violence on our bodies by both the patriarchal, trans misogynist, and racist system and the individuals who replicate the attitudes and oppressive actions of the state. For any of us who are not poor and Black or Brown, anarchist or not, we

may not usually fear for our lives when police are near, but it is plain as day that if we don’t all start acting like it’s our very lives at stake as well, not only are we an accomplice to these racist deaths, we foolishly assume we will not be next. For whites who joined in this chorus of “We are all Oscar Grant,” this declaration meant that we refused to be another white person, if being white means letting this shit continue to slide for the bogus justification that this racist violence keeps society (read: white people) safe.

The naiveté of identity politics fails us in this way, both in its obsessions with ranking and compartmentalizing privileges and disadvantages and in ignoring instances where actual human beings, their struggles and relationships to one another are far more complex than their identities would tell us.

The spirit behind “We are all Oscar Grant” is indicative of the attitude of the Oscar Grant rebellion as a whole. Despite the fact that many of us did not generally know each other before those nights because of the racial divisions imposed by society and maintained by ourselves, we found glorious moments of struggling with one another in the streets where our identities or experiences were not collapsed into a faux sameness.

TOWARDS A NEVER-ENDING UPRISING

Within these pages you’ll see, time and again, examples of racial unity and other social barriers crumbling as each

Do some of us –whites and people of all races– find ourselves shrugging and accepting that it is normal for Black people to go to jail?

Act proceeds. This should not lead one to believe that the days between or beyond these riotous evenings were days where police shootings ended or where social distinctions and hierarchies disappeared or solidarity was a given. Disappointingly, we all went back to our usual lives as individuals: dodging cops, reading about horrendous police brutality on facebook, struggling to make ends meet, drinking too much, dragging ourselves to school, or doing our hustles. Whatever different “normal” is for each person who ran wild in the streets of Oakland in the name of Oscar Grant, we went back to it.

CONCLUSION TO THE 2012 EDITION:

You Can’t Shoot Us All

INTRODUCTION:

The following piece was originally written and distributed as a pamphlet at anti-police demonstrations in 2010. This brief memoir of the Oscar Grant movement was written at the peak of militancy during the summer uprising in Oakland. While the bulk of the piece focuses on the days following the verdict that found Mehserle guilty of involuntary manslaughter and not guilty of murder, the first few pages reflect on the inception of the struggle a year and a half earlier. While the tone is, at times, somewhat grandiose in its description of events, it is representative of the sentiment of the time. It is important to understand that, in the days leading up to the verdict, it was widely believed that a rebellion would envelop the entire city, that, like the Los Angeles riots nearly two decades earlier, the fires would not be extinguished for days. While the actual scale of events turned out to be significantly smaller, the intensity of the resistance was remarkable.

This is not a piece that offers all of the answers, rather, it is an unusually honest portrayal of a moment in time where the earth shook and the forgotten and subjugated confronted the contemporary masters with whips of our own. There is certainly a rather somber undertone present, the result of the realization that the most dedicated resistance Northern California had witnessed in decades was still not enough to ensure that no more people would die at the hands of the police.

Until now, we have only succeeded in making our frustrations visible. It has become apparent that the conditions we suffer will not be stopped by protests or demonstrations, no matter how violent our expressions may be. We have yet to discover the mechanisms through which we will effectively disrupt the cycle of police violence; however, it is clear that this protracted struggle will need to utilize tools and methods that can be used in our daily lives.

August 2012

----- *Dedicated to the countless people who have died at the hands of the police, to those currently incarcerated for fighting back, and to the kids who jumped on top of that police car that night last winter.* -----

When we realized that, in the eyes of the powerful, our lives are just piles of bones waiting to be shattered, arteries and veins on the verge of tearing open, hearts and lungs that stop beating and expanding at the moment they pull the trigger, the only thing left to do was to come together and make them tremble before us.

Everyone saw the video. At least it seemed that way at the time. A young father’s last breaths press against a cold train platform, a cop holsters his firearm and calmly pulls out his handcuffs. Why would they kill an unarmed man with so many people around? Why don’t we know how to respond?

I wanted to break windows, to set fires, to strike fear into every cop on the streets that night. I wanted to show the powerful that they, too, would learn the meaning of violence, just as we have been forced to learn it time and time

again. They needed to understand that we don’t forget, we needed to feel that we were still alive.

But what could we do? We were so weak then, we didn’t know each other. Somewhere I heard a call for a demonstration a week later. I came alone.

A warm winter night, not too long ago. A long march and then the sun sets. Shortly after, there is a fire and kids are jumping on top of a police car, shards of glass glimmer along the asphalt, and strangers are, for the first time, coming together. To see people who hours earlier hung their heads in fear of the police, people who were afraid to step into the street, finally come together and stand up to the cops was amazing. Days earlier we ran from the police, that night, when we were all together, we ran toward them. No one will ever forget that evening; the moment those kids

Act 6

Scene 1:

January 30th. Bail hearing for Mehserle.

The court house is grey and sits on Lake Merritt. Six blocks from 14th and Broadway, a block or two outside of Chinatown. A sunny Oakland day.

This edge of downtown is usually sleepy, tranquil—office buildings, often empty small businesses, wide streets, and the looming and always quiet downtown library.

But today is different: representatives of the Left are out in force, so are the unaffiliated and the young. Three weeks after the initial uprising, Mehserle faces his first bail hearing. Family members of Oscar Grant and those who can fit fill the courtroom. Everyone else rallies on the street corner with a generator mic and a makeshift stage. There’s sloganeering, chanting, and threatening allusions to the price that the city will pay if Mehserle is released. Petitions are signed. *Why Riot?* flyers are handed out.

The rally is interrupted when someone announces:

They’re fucking letting him out! Those motherfuckers! Three million dollars! That’s three hundred thousand with the bond!

If those courts aren’t gonna get him, the people out here are gonna get him!

The crowd’s immediate response is to block the entrances of the building but soon folks are yelling and taking the streets in the direction of 14th and Broadway. 150 are now moving towards the police station on the opposite side of downtown. Kids are getting out of school, folks yell at us from bus stops and street corners. One man brandishes a

golf club and says through his smile:

Tonight shit’s gonna get fucked up.

Legal numbers are scribbled onto flyers and onto each other’s arms. Cops are scrambling to put on their helmets and riot gear as they form a quick line in front of their headquarters. There is a momentary standoff—some yelling, mad dog stares. The sun is still shining. There are not many of us but there is still energy.

We decide to head back up Broadway against traffic. The crowd threads through the lines of idling cars and cop cruisers. We move towards a grey SUV that is filled with five cops. Someone darts out of the crowd. A quick warning to friends:

Alright, watch out everyone!

The back window of the SUV is smashed and we scatter, cheering. The cop driving immediately opens his door, steps out and throws a handfull of flashbangs and small tear gas grenades over his shoulder in the direction we are running. They bounce off cars and explode at our feet, sending an older man flying to the ground. We help him up and get away from the gas.

Armored personnel carriers and police SUVs are deploying riot cops around downtown and they quickly block intersections, dividing us up. Eight people, mostly high school students who have joined the crowd, are brutally arrested in a standoff next to the McDonalds.

The police are nervous. We are in broad daylight.

End Scene.



For some, “normalcy” is going to jail.

Throughout the Oscar Grant movement and the occupy movement, despite whatever demographic took part in the street festivities it has remained that those stuck with heavy sentences have been Black and/or homeless, many of whom were on probation or parole. This fact should not reinforce the myth that only Black and Brown youth were arrested, but should highlight the intensely racist nature of the judicial system. If we are to struggle alongside these folks in moments of uproar, we must recognize that they often have more at stake if they get caught up in the bullshit justice system. When folks already criminalized by the system put themselves on the line, there should be unrelenting pressure on the system to the scale that we know we are capable of with hundreds of anarchists in the bay. It’s not that Black and Brown rebels are people to feel sorry for and “help,” nor feel protective of and “keep safe” as they rage in the streets, as paternalistic leftists might suggest. But if we take seriously that these fellow rioters will be our comrades and co-conspirators for bigger and badder insurrections to come, we cannot let them hang out to dry when they’re going down for the same acts that we (allegedly) took part in.

Do some of us – whites and people of all races - find ourselves shrugging and accepting that it is normal for Black people to go to jail? We feel indignant when someone is murdered by the state, but somehow feel less moved when someone

The question that anarchists must seriously grapple with is, do we blow just as much hot air as our leftist enemies?

is kidnapped and held captive by the state. Why is it so shocking to us when a white anarchist comrade goes down for a year, but not when many Black or homeless comrades are locked up repeatedly, and for longer sentences?

There is an unquestioned and deeply seeded logic embedded in the psyche of American society that has taught all of us, white or not and anarchist or not, that white bodies are to be cared for and coddled while non-white, especially Black bodies are assumed to be criminal, expendable, and not to be trusted. Without consciously and intentionally bucking against this logic, Black death —be it psychological, physical, slow, or fast— will remain the norm and will make any attempt of insurrectionary or revolutionary activity reek of insincerity and history lessons unlearned.¹

It’s more obvious than ever that leftist politicians and NGO admins with grant money dollar signs in their eyes have done and will do very little to address every day problems for —or with— folks from Oakland’s hoods. The question that anarchists must seriously grapple with is, do we blow just as much hot air as our leftist enemies?

Beyond our lackluster efforts in countering state-repression of our fellow rebels, have we also left the response to everyday atrocities to be tackled by those who we know are invested in the very institutions that perpetuate these everyday oppressions and exploitation? It's fine (great even) that we can't stand to do reformist campaigns to make daily life more tolerable. That being the case, what are we willing to do? If we can't stand the victim-making rhetoric that strips power from the very people who must wield it, if we loath representational politics and neither want to speak for or do anything for anyone who is "not us" where does this leave us? For many of us who are white and/or male anarchists we know that calls to "check privilege" and tip toe around language do little to nothing to topple racial and gender hierarchies. Throwing ourselves into the role of social service providers also misses the boat. What strategies are left available? Are these theoretical dead ends that cannot be solved or are we lacking the resolve and imagination necessary to answer these questions through meaningful deeds? Given the fact that we found ourselves struggling around the atrocious murder of



NOTES

1. It is worth noting that whiteness as a social category was created and promoted by plantation owners and other capitalists in the early days of America's colonization, to put a wedge between the workers they were exploiting and enslaving. Before this poor fair skinned people were dirty Irish, criminals expelled from England, indentured servants, trash, etc. This was done both through extreme terror campaigns against those who co-conspired in insurrections on plantations, shipping docks, and in urban centers and also in convincing the poor, recently-named "whites" that they had special privileges which were under threat by those of darker skin color, thus creating a perfect situation for the no-longer-shook capitalists where whites began putting racial solidarity above class solidarity. So now-a-days most darker skinned people live in crippling poverty while white capitalists are still rich fucks who rule over them. What is often over-looked, however, is that in

Oscar Grant, why don't we see ourselves in similar ruptures sparked by the daily abuses faced by oppressed people, your neighbors, your kids' friends, your co-workers?

IT'S GOING DOWN WITH OR WITHOUT US.

Insurrections, rioting, mass-expropriations, occupations, and all sorts of unimaginable forms of class warfare are not only inevitable, but are happening all over the place with more frequency and veraciousness as the crisis that is capitalism deepens.

It is crystal clear that various groups of the deprived, exploited, and violated have and will continue to organize formally and informally toward the demise of their oppressors, those who remain neutral, or each other.

The side of history on which we find ourselves is not determined by whether or not we share the experiences of one horror or another or how we individually identify, but on our own resolution to see the end of each of these miseries which perpetuate this racist, capitalist, shit show called society.

To those of us who cooperatively destroyed capitalist and state property, humiliated and terrified police and yuppies, and found power and a sense of dignity together that we had never known before; and to those who found ourselves high off the lack of social divisions in the streets of Oakland during a moment of open revolt, let's figure out ways to maintain these experiences outside of a riot. We must play a part in continuing this rebellious trajectory as a motley crew of insurgents, or be prepared to be deemed irrelevant – or worse – the recipients of the wrath of the righteous people who anger slowly but rage undammed.²

exchange for accepting the privileged position of White, whites still make up half of those in the US living in poverty, left to the whims of the same ruthless whites in power. This is to say, selling out one's class-members and helping to prop up a racist system through clutching onto a psychology that our white friends, family, and selves are somehow more exalted than non-white folks, has for hundreds of years effectively been a shot to our own feet.

2. "This monster — the monster they've engendered in me will return to torment its maker, from the grave, the pit, the profoundest pit. Hurl me into the next existence, the descent into hell won't turn me. I'll crawl back to dog his trail forever. They won't defeat my revenge, never, never. I'm part of a righteous people who anger slowly, but rage undammed. We'll gather at his door in such a number that the rumbling of our feet will make the earth tremble." – George Jackson, Blood in my Eye, 1970



the liberal baggage of the previous generation and embracing a militant street politics of insurrection. This new wave exploded in the streets of St. Paul during the 2008 RNC and to a lesser extent in Denver during the DNC. And then on December 6, 2008 on the other side of the world, Alexis Grigopolous was gunned down by Greek police in Athens leading to a month long anarchist-led insurrection which prefigured the revolts that have spread across much of the world over the past year and half. Anarchists in the US and elsewhere watched this spectacular insurrection very closely and took Greek comrades' words to heart when they proclaimed "We are an image from the future".

This was the context for anarchists when videos began to be posted online of Oscar Grant's execution on New Year's Day 2009. Their participation within the subsequent rebellions helped solidify the ascendent and uncompromising

The incident is caught on the security tape and released soon after. A series of black blocs and anti-police street protests decry the killing and disrupt the downtown commerical district in the year that follows.

SAN FRANCISCO July 3, 2011: Charles Hill, 45, is shot dead by BART cops after drunkenly shouting and throwing a small object toward them. Weekly protests follow called by 'Anonymous,' a hacker activist network, targets various SF BART stations. Anonymous also posts the names, home addresses, emails and passwords of BART PD officers on the internet.

July 16, 2011: Police attempt to stop Kenneth Harding Jr., 19, for fare evasion on the MUNI. He immediately flees, and while running away is gunned down by officers. Various anti-police marches, solidarity actions, and clandestine attacks of state property take place the year following, including an at-

trajectory of insurrectionary practices within local anarchist circles as well as those across the country. The riots exposed the contradictions inherent in working with non-profits for all to see and forced social rebels in the area to take a side. But what part did anarchists actually play in this early climax in the sequence of international urban unrest that continues to resonate across the globe to this day? The short answer is that their role was minimal. There were some anarchist affinity groups scattered throughout the streets during those days of unrest. A few did travel from afar to lend a hand but the vast majority lived and organized in the Bay Area. Either way, their participation was dwarfed by that of the crews of diverse Oakland youth who animated the rebellion and gave it the fierce energy that made the state tremble.

The longer answer is a bit more complicated and opens up important questions. As soon as the actual riots unfolded, Anarchists were relatively insignificant in the outcome of the street battles. But if it were not for their initial actions early on January 7, those riots would most likely not have happened. Anarchists helped instigate and protect the march that broke away from the vigil at Fruitvale BART. They made sure that no group could co-opt the anger or pacify the crowd. And when the march reached downtown it was the actions of a few anarchists that provided an initial spark which led to the first confrontations and the trashing of an OPD cruiser. They then quickly became lost in the crowd as the real anarchy took over and the full potential of the evening unfolded.

tack on the Mission district SFPD station, the MUNI Castro station, and the Glen Park BART station.

ANAHEIM July 21-22, 2012: Maniel Diaz, 25, and Joel Acevedo, 21, are executed by Anaheim police, sparking days of protests and clashes with police. A few hours after Diaz is shot dead, witnesses of the murder and nearby residents take to the streets to confront police. A police dog is released and attacks a woman and her baby as cops in riot gear fire bean bags and pepper balls injuring several people. In the week that follows, the shootings are decried by over 600 people as they storm Anaheim police headquarters lobby and city hall and then take to the streets. Tensions with police mount as protesters kick passing police cars and vandalize dozens of businesses. National media attention results in solidarity demonstrations and attacks on police property in Oakland, SF, Seattle, Portland, Denver, and elsewhere.

INTERMISSION

Anarchy & the Anarchists

The story of the Oscar Grant rebellions cannot be told without at least a modest attempt to sketch an outline of the anarchists who took to the streets during those early weeks of 2009. For the police and the existing left power structure in Oakland, (including a progressive mayor and an array of social justice nonprofits) the presence of anarchists within the riots was used to discredit the unrest as simply the work of opportunistic outside agitators who cared little for the struggles of poor and working class people of color. In response to this pacifying narrative of counter-insurrection as well as the very real threat of state repression, many radicals and anarchists publicly downplayed what roles they did play. It has thus been difficult to get a real understanding of anarchist intervention in this pivotal contemporary uprising.

Anarchists take an extreme anti-authoritarian position which fights for the abolition of all structures of domination and coercion such as the state, capitalism, white supremacy and patriarchy. Some anarchists extend this opposition to the foundations of civilization itself and others center their antagonisms on an anti-capitalist politics that rejects state power as a tool for liberation. Most anarchists seek forms of living and working together grounded in practices of self-organization, mutual aid, collective decision making

and direct action that undermine hierarchical power structures. This almost always puts anarchists in direct opposition to professional activists and the nonprofit managers of movements.

For contemporary anarchists in the US, the Oscar Grant rebellions represented an important turning point of enormous proportions. Following the decline of the anti-globalization movement in which anarchists had played a significant and militant role a decade earlier, there began a relative dark age for American anarchy. This was a period characterized by an authoritarian and reformist anti-war movement dominating the left as well as a campaign of state repression against Anarchists engaged in ecological struggles that came to be known as the Green Scare. In the Bay Area, many anarchists allowed themselves to become subsumed within the larger reformist circles of progressive politics dominated by a vast array of local non-profits. Their politics became confused and watered down and their tools of resistance were blunted.

Yet in the months before the rebellion in Oakland, things had begun to change. As the remains of the anti-war movement and much of the left threw their weight behind the Obama campaign, anarchists struck out on their own, discarding

fire. Williams, a Native American wood-carver who was deaf in his left ear, was killed with four shots. The officer resigned shortly after. Numerous marches, street take-overs, rallies, and a noise demo outside the city jail follow. Banks are attacked as symbols of the capital that police protect. Police stations are also vandalized in Seattle, Portland and Tacoma.

DENVER July 9, 2010: While trying to retrieve his shoes at a police station, Marvin Booker gets into an argument with a booking deputy. Deputies shock him with a taser, put him in a “sleepers hold” and maim him until he stops breathing. The coroner’s office rules that his death was a homicide.

FTP Near & Far

In the aftermath of the Oscar Grant rebellions in 2009 we saw a new trend: small and medium sized rebellions against the police state began exploding across the western part of the country with increasing frequency. Below is a brief overview of various anti-police uprisings in cities in the US over the past few years. Police violence is never an accident and unfortunately for the pigs, neither is the blossoming movement against them.

PORTLAND Jan. 29, 2010: Aaron M. Campbell, 25, is gunned down by a Portland pig while surrendering, attracting national attention and spawning local outrage. April 10, 2010: Twenty-five miles from Portland, Daniel Barga, 24, is tased to death by a Cornelius police officer who is a taser instructor for the department. Numerous anti-police demos and marches and clandestine acts of sabotage follow in subsequent weeks.

SEATTLE August 30, 2010: John T Williams, 50, is killed by an SPD officer. Audio of the incident was captured which documents the mere seconds that passed between the time the cop orders Williams to drop his knife and when he opens

Greetings Earthlings

We Come in Violence

ORIGINAL 2009 INTRODUCTION

What you hold in your hands is a collective recounting and analysis of events surrounding the shooting of an unarmed 22-year-old Black man in Oakland. Oscar Grant III was executed by Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) police officers during the first hours of 2009 on the platform of the Fruitvale station. *Unfinished Acts* was written collectively by a group of anarchists who were and still are actively present in the rebellion following Oscar Grant’s execution. We were in the streets during the spontaneous uprising in downtown Oakland on January 7th where numerous cars were torched and businesses were smashed during militant standoffs with the Oakland Police Department. We were in the many demos since, attended countless “community meetings” at locations ranging from Black churches to art gallery spaces to anarchist co-ops, and organized support and solidarity for those who were arrested during confrontational actions. In those free moments, which barely exist, we have put together this exposé on the events so far (as the story is still unfolding) and would like to share it with you.

The following pages include a few significant local histories to help contextualize the rebellions. This history acts as intermissions for a documentary dramatization (but factually correct!) of some of the events that unfolded in the streets

during the first month of 2009. We have reconstructed the narrative and dialogue from collective stories, personal experiences and videos of the rebellions posted online.

The opening of this letter is not merely an empty play on words. Anarchists within the contemporary global terrain of political struggle tend to be regarded as curious creatures with crazy, irresponsible, or romantic ideas about politics and social change. From this persepective, anarchists come out of their dark caves and like vampires (or the Taliban!), ruin it, sometimes violently, for everyone, again and again. They ruin it for authoritarian leftist organizations (self-proclaimed leaders of movements), and they ruin it in the mind controlling and numbing mass media. But outside of that narrow perspective, we simply desire political conversations and organizing with those whom we can identify a common starting point; one that involves a push towards militant direct action driven by solidarity in the streets of our cities.

It is with this desire that we have put out this publication. We hope that it can provide a starting point to spring from, a reminder to those of us in the Bay Area and to those who are afar, a glimpse of exciting and/or tragic possibilities in US urban centers.

WHO IS WE?

The pronoun “we” is used extensively in this manuscript. “We” refers to all of those who took part in the rebellions, and made the conscious decision to instigate and escalate confrontations. That “we” includes, but is not limited to, men, women, trans, queer, Black, Latin@, Asian, white, anarchist, communist, youth, and adults. Our sameness is in our participation, actions, and solidarities in the streets of Oakland, not in our identities or life experiences.

Throughout this publication, the dialogue is transcribed verbatim from the streets; the quotation marks refer to the state’s logic while the italics refer to ours.

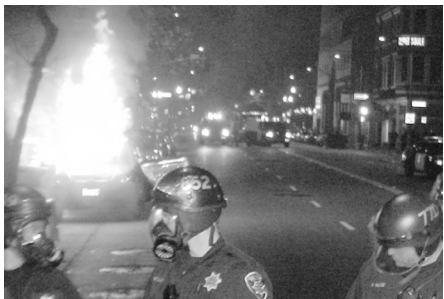
The “we” who edited this publication are anarchists in the Bay area who participated in the rebellions in the aftermath of Oscar Grant’s murder as well as much of the solidarity work that went into responding to the state’s repression of the movement.



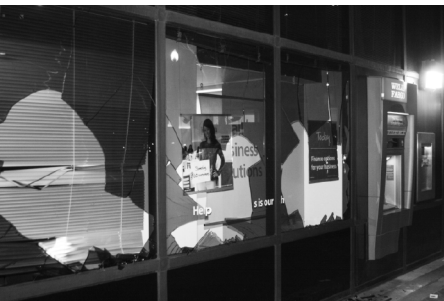
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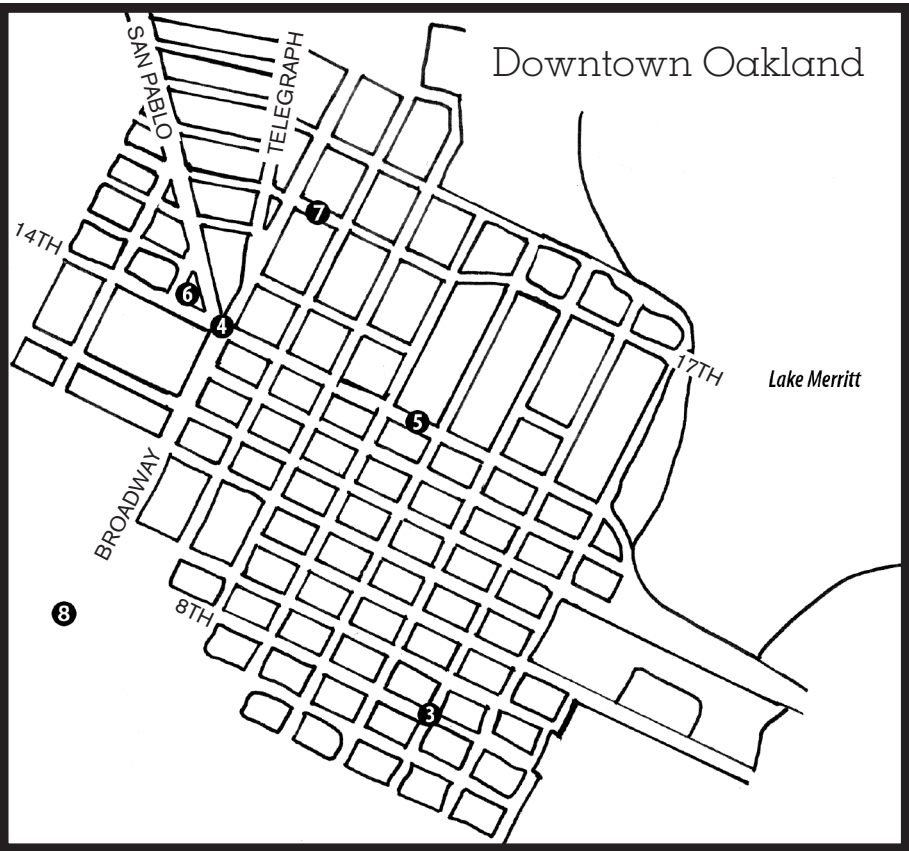
ACT 5 46



ACT 6 8

MAP LEGEND

- 1 Fruitvale BART
- 2 Highland Hospital
- 3 8th and Madison
- 4 14th and Broadway
- 5 14th and Jackson
- 6 City Hall
- 7 17th Street
- 8 Downtown OPD



Playing “movement cop” in a situation where people wanted to stay in the streets and face the cops enabled the security team to literally perform the police’s job. The security team effectively dispersed people who were enraged and wanted to express their anger at the state, denying people self-determination. These movement cops stripped away the power and momentum that had been established by separating people while police in riot gear formed blockades throughout downtown, preventing those involved from developing the kinds of solidarity, collaboration and informed decision-making needed to take an effective stance against the police.

When confronted on their tactics by protestors, some security volunteers explained they wanted to be between the people and the police in case the police decided to rush the crowd. This defense raises some key questions that security team members failed to acknowledge during the span of the night: If they were on the side of the people, then why did they face the crowd with their backs to the police? Why didn’t this so-called security team face the police like the rest of us that night?

How does deploying policing and control help us in any way? The state uses the threat of arrest and imprisonment every day to make us fear being in the streets and standing up to the state. It is these forms of intimidation and the criminalization of young people of color and communities of color that led to the executions of Oscar Grant, Gary King Jr., Andrew Moppin, Mac “Jody” Woodfox, Lesley Xavier Allen, Vernon Dunbar, Hector Jimenez, Anita Gay, Rosalyne McHenry, Casper Banjo, Jose Luis Buenrostro Gonzalez, Lovell Mixon, Alan Blueford and many more at the hands of police in Oakland. These tools of intimidation and criminalization that result in police executions must always be a part of what we fight against in the streets.

SO WHAT?

There would be no “Oscar Grant Movement” as we know it if it was not for the rebellion that occurred on January 7th 2009. If youth across racial and political lines did not come together to disturb the edifice of the Oakland police state, if the dynamics of direct action did not replace the illusion of the paper petition, if the flames of rage did not burn into the streets of downtown, then there would be no Oscar Grant Movement. Shortly after the Occupy Oakland en-



campment was claimed in Oscar Grant Plaza in the fall of 2011, the camp was declared a “cop free” zone. At the same time, while many Occupy encampments throughout the US struggled to articulate clear demands and goals, one of Occupy Oakland’s most coherent demands was to end the use of gang injunctions in Oakland. Occupy Oakland did something within the Occupy Movement

that many cities had not yet done—it placed policing at the forefront of this era’s struggle against economic inequality and powerlessness. What would Occupy Oakland have been without the Oscar Grant Movement and its formative January 7th Rebellion? In both of these struggles, we see that despite the call for dynamic and unified movements across gender, racial, political and economic lines against police violence and inequality/powerlessness, some members of various organizations and communities insist upon a passive, predictable, and controlled effort. How will we ever be free if we’re unwilling to take the smart risks that inevitably come with daring to break away from oppression? If we are serious about liberation, then we must struggle through contradictions in principled ways rather than hide, give up, burn out or perpetuate oppression and social control.

The execution of Oscar Grant is not exceptional and is not a consequence of one bad cop; rather it is a horrifying symptom of the system of policing. Similarly, the violence perpetuated by the security team at CAPE’s rally is not a consequence of one organization, or a few individuals, but of the ways that many people, regardless of what uniform they’re wearing, help the pigs in blue and riot gear. We have seen very similar tactics used or upheld as acceptable during Occupy Oakland demonstrations and general assemblies since then. Rather than negotiating ways of working with the police and the city to respond to the violence of policing, we need to look towards each other and practice self-determination right now here in Oakland, and collectively create responses to violence that don’t involve tools of policing, surveillance, and imprisonment. We are capable of doing this. The moment we attempt to pacify one another is the moment the state can declare victory. Let us learn from the events of January 2009 and Occupy Oakland and build a fierce movement that will not crumble but propel us forward to demolish our common enemy: the police state.

INTERMISSION

CAPE Cops Policing the Movement

The Coalition Against Police Exectuions (CAPE) is a group of individuals which formed days after Oscar Grant’s murder and planned a January 14, 2009 permitted rally. Several Bay Area based nonprofits and organizations were called on to provide “security” in order to ensure a “nonviolent and peaceful” protest. The struggle that unfolded at the intersection of 14th and Broadway that evening was not surprising given that CAPE had attempted to restrict the goals of the movement to only calling for the city of Oakland to arrest and prosecute Grant’s murderer. This notion of justice reinforces the violent ways Oakland already responds to harm and conflict, and strengthens our dependence on a system that promises little more than increased policing, an intensification of surveillance, and mass imprisonment—tools designed to target communities that challenge the status quo. This particular situation was also startling because of the relationships individual security volunteers had with the protestors they were policing. As CAPE’s January 14th program came to an end, a loud voice repeated, “We don’t need the police, we can police ourselves,” over the sound system. While we agree that we don’t need the police, we have to wonder: is “policing ourselves” necessarily what we need to be doing?

Despite conflicting opinions between individual security volunteers, the security team that CAPE assembled used a variety of state- and police-reinforcing strategies and tactics that created a disheartening environment which sent the message that this team’s role was to work with the police by fighting the protestors. These tactics are examples of how activists and/or people actively policed and targeted by the state can be seduced into using the very tools of political suppression that police and politicians use every day, tools of suppression that keep us from taking over the streets every time the police shoot, beat, or arrest anyone; tools that continue, each day, to deny us our self-determination.

SOME OF THESE TACTICS INCLUDE:

SELF-APPOINTED AUTHORITY: CAPE had people appoint themselves as authorities, empowering themselves to tell other people what to do. By wearing bright orange vests to separate themselves from protestors, it was clear who the security team was supposed to control. CAPE made sure to ask representatives from a spectrum of community-based organizations to ensure that those

who attended the rally would recognize at least a couple of those designated to be security. This could have been a positive attempt to make sure protestors felt surrounded by those they recognized, but because of the nature of policing this tactic created a situation where would-be protestors instead took on the role of policing the movement. Becoming “movement cops” by asking friends, allies, and potential collaborators to police each other, the security team created a situation where, in order to protest, demonstrators would have to actively work against their friends and comrades.

THREAT AND INTIMIDATION: Security volunteers repeatedly shouted, “Leave or you will be arrested” over megaphones at an anti-police rally.

SHAMING PEOPLE INTO NONVIOLENCE & PASSIVITY: Some security volunteers attempted to use guilt to convince protestors to leave, insisting that this rally was for Oscar Grant. If we cared about the Grant family, they argued, we would go home and stop ruining their protest. A few of these movement police effectively shamed protestors into following their orders of nonviolence and tolerance, while a large majority of security team members remained absolutely silent and made no noticeable effort to question or intervene.

USING HIERARCHIES TO DETERMINE WHO IS ALLOWED IN THE STREET: Security volunteers shouted and argued with protestors, starting a slippery competition over who was allowed to claim authority over the entire demonstration. This competition was typically based upon assumptions of who was the most oppressed and who had experienced the most suffering. Based on how you looked, security members assumed whether you were or weren’t capable of making good decisions; whether you should stay or whether you needed to go home. Security volunteers tried to justify themselves when making assumptions about protestors’ capability to make informed decisions in the streets against the cops, but these assumptions were clearly based on race, gender, age, and dress. The security team did what the police do every day—profiled and treated people like children, assuming we would be up to no good.

DENYING SELF-DETERMINATION: Many protestors wanted to be in the streets and face the police.

Act 1

Scene 1:

January 1st, 2009. New years day. A Thursday. We hear that a Black man has been shot and killed by a BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) police officer. People who took video of the incident had their phones and cameras quickly confiscated by the police. He was executed during the first few hours after midnight, while partygoers were on their way home from trying to burn a fond memory into their heads and kick off another time around the sun. They shot Oscar Grant III in the back.

He worked as a butcher at the grocery store where my friend and I shop at every week. When I saw his picture, I recognized his smile.

We were overwhelmed with depression, helplessness. Another Black man killed by cops in the Bay, and nothing being done about it. The general public digests the news with a frown and goes about their business. What cynical cruelty passes as normality.

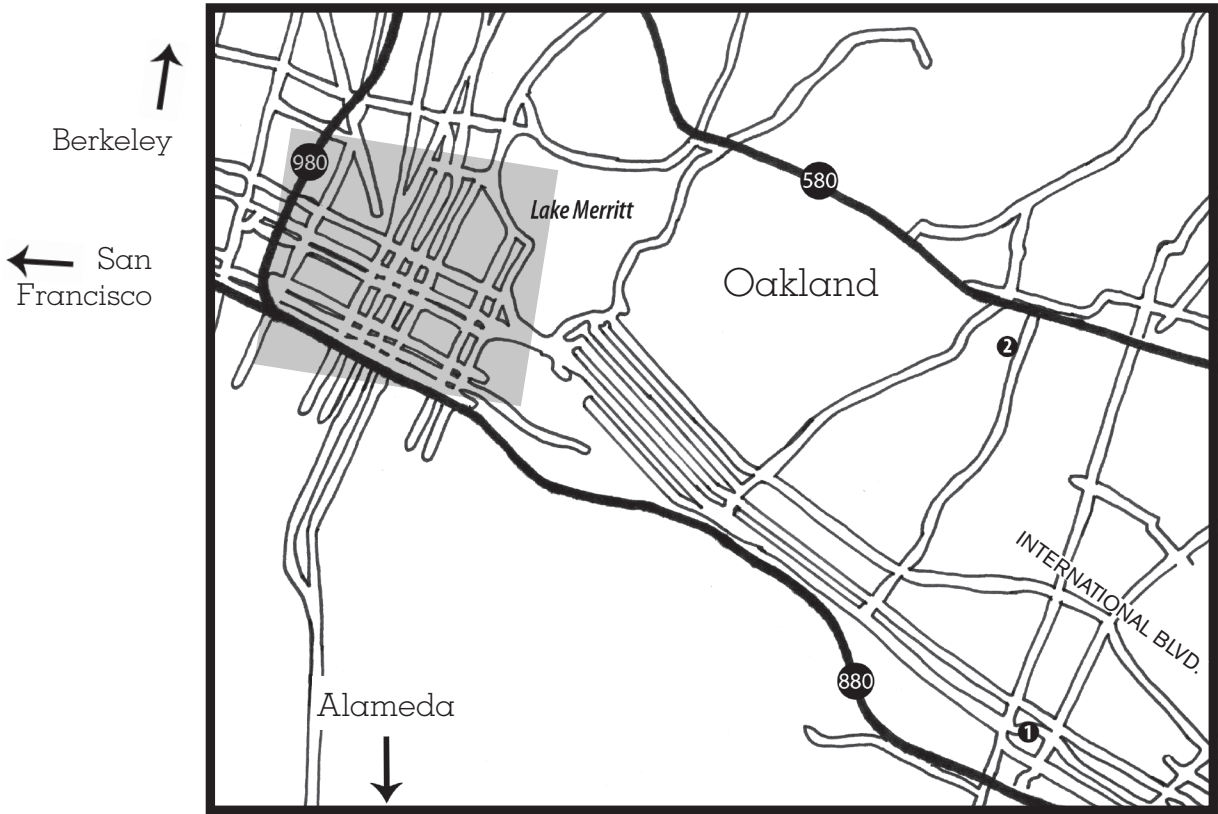
The efforts by the BART cops to completely cover up the execution started early. After spending time confiscating cell phones while Grant lay wounded, the cops tell paramedics nothing of how he was shot or by whom, withholding in-

formation that is routinely given in the interest of saving a life. The BART police have their own interests. They wait for the bullet to be extracted and take it for “evidence.” Hospital personnel have no reason to second guess their motivations. Weeks later, one health care worker who had treated Oscar Grant after he was admitted to the hospital is still shocked:

I had no idea he was killed by police until the next day when I saw the news.

The hospital is only the beginning of a blatant display of corruption and arrogance by the police. Despite efforts to bury the evidence, a video surfaces after a few days, and then another, until footage of the incident is running on local news channels. New camera angles make the execution undeniable. No action has been taken by BART or city officials. What a surprise. The thought of charging the police and exposing them as the thugs they are is avoided in the so-called halls of justice. Johannes Mehserle, this particular killer cop, refuses to go in for questioning. He sends in a letter of resignation instead. Days pass. By January 7, people –all of us– are pissed.

The stage is set.



Act 2

Scene 1:

A crowded Fremont bound train, evening rush hour, January 7th, six days after the murder of Oscar Grant. The train operator’s voice comes over the intercom:

“Attention we apologize for any inconvenience, but due to civil unrest this train will not be stopping at the Fruitvale station. Again, this train will not be stopping at the Fruitvale station.”

*Didn’t they just shoot somebody there?
That why we’re not stopping?*

Uh huh.

“For those passengers wanting to go to Fruitvale station, there will be a shuttle departing from Coliseum station that will bring you to Fruitvale.”

I’m not getting on a goddamn shuttle...

End Scene.

Act 2, Scene 2:

I’m not condoning violence, but sometimes to get justice, you can’t just sit around holding hands singing ‘Kumbaya.’
—An organizer of the Fruitvale rally

Masses of people had gathered at Fruitvale Bart station, one of those rare protests where you walk around and see different people from many different organizations and ideologies. There’s indignation, fear, and anger. The video of Oscar Grant is fresh, weighing on all of our minds. The speakers’ words hit live wires of memory not yet sealed over, not yet forgotten into the nasty legacy of Bay Area police violence.

Video after video had come out, each with a different angle, a different perspective; each with a somehow differently devastating effect. As the first videos made it onto YouTube there was frustration, disbelief, disgust. Millions of hits later, more videos began to emerge: the cops threw punches to their faces, bystanders with evidence confiscated. But according to BART police there had been no crime.

Somewhere, at some point, our disbelief gave way to rage, to anger, to a clarity of purpose and focus. The evidence was damning and the lack of response was infuriating. We may



not gather around many things publicly and collectively, but to pick up the newspaper on the first day of the new year and to read about such old news, so fresh, so painfully new and accessible through modern media, set the stage for an explosion of those angry with what passes as daily life, what cruelty that passes as sanity, the timeless status quo.

We are here, in the plaza by the entrance to the Fruitvale station, the site of the murder of Oscar Grant, a crowd of approximately 1,000. Our friends are getting off the shuttle. 4pm. There are many banners, many faces: Oakland youngsters, youth-organizers, communists, anarchists, mostly young, and multiracial. The station is closed and the PA is very loud. The rally has now begun.

Speeches are being made from the sound system in the center of the crowd. The emcee is a professional activist:

“Listen everybody, we need to get organized and be peaceful, not let our emotions take over.”

She’s greeted with an enormous silence from the crowd. She continues on, undeterred:

“But right now we’d like to open it up to anyone who’s ever been harassed by the police—would you like to come up and speak? Especially our youth, feel free to come up right now and tell your story.”

Young people begin to take the mic.

I’m feelin pretty violent right now, I’m on some Malcolm X shit: by any means necessary. If I don’t see some action, I’m going to cause a ruckus myself.

That’s right!

Act 5, Scene 2:

Finally groups settle onto either side of the street as the protest marshals shuffle in between.

A scuffle breaks out on a far corner, a group runs past. The spark is lit, people laugh as they realize everyone has come together to run off a bunch of evangelical Christians that feed off of public demonstrations.

Protest police move to surround us as we shift to the next corner. We are again broken up on various sides of the street. Someone tries to smash a bus stand, and then suddenly what everyone is waiting for, the loud crash of a breaking window.

Wells Fargo’s windows go first. A deliberate shift from the small businesses from the night of the 7th, or maybe just the best target available. Tear gas cannisters arch across Broadway and explode in front of the bank.

Protest marshals and police storm towards the action, and people run again. A small crowd funnels into an outdoor concrete mall filled with Jamba Juices and Radio Shacks. There is an eerie feeling of too much power at first: we wait for the other shoe to drop and the police to materialize at the other side of a dead end.

Get out! Get out! They’re gonna box us in here!

They do not and we are overcome with disbelief and laughter; we continue running.

Large potted plants and small signs are picked up and thrown through windows in the mall, people kick at whatever they can as they run by. The media crews are running



with full camera regalia to get in on the action. There must have been a memo to tell them to wear jogging shoes.

Cover your face!

When we find a moment, we remind one another to remain invisible to be seen.

Outside of the mall groups splinter and reform again and again, in smaller numbers than the 7th. Patrons in a downtown restaurant stare, or deliberately avert their eyes as if eye contact would make them the next target.

We run down the streets through a maze of bewildered business patrons, spontaneously reforming lines of riot police, and media. A street full of parked cars has their windows smashed in, kids jump up and down on them. A woman with a gigantic camera jogs to film the wreckage.

What the fuck are you doing filming this? You should be filming the cops!

“Hey, we’re just trying to make sure no one gets hurt!”

You’re going to GET people hurt with that shit!

The police announce that downtown Oakland is officially closed to the public. Unmarked cruisers filled with pigs in riot gear roam the streets, their back doors cracked open. One rebel shouts with a huge smile across his face:

Welcome to downtown Oakland.

Welcome. Welcome to the city that holds contempt for its own youth and is cruelly complacent in our deaths.

End Scene.



Act 5 Scene 1:

The march and rally on January 14th is much larger than the one on the 7th, more people and more energy, more cameras and more expectation for action. Meserlhe was arrested last night in Nevada and the DA is filing murder charges. The timing with today’s mobilization is no coincidence. There is still the lingering memory of the seventh: the freedom of large throngs of people roaming abandoned streets, working in cohesion with a total, terrifying freedom, a line of people standing together against the cops, deflecting anger and testing resistance, fleeting conversations, holding a line, each exploding car windshield making police push us backward, crews of friends methodically wrecking windows, beginning with a kick, a punch, a key mark.

But that was last week. At the end of the permitted march lined by protest-marshals, these self-appointed guardians of revolution force us to walk from a rally at City Hall, to the courthouse for another rally, back again to City Hall to tell us to go home. They are trying to wear us out. Their rallies say little. Lawsuits, healing spaces for businesses, how charming of a man Oscar was, and of course: “Stay peaceful.” They mean to say, “Stay the same,” or “Don’t act up,” or “Now’s not the right time.” They are little Napoleons trying to domesticate a new world.

We suppose they think we are too uppity.

Back at City Hall groups are split on either side of the street. We are divided somewhat racially. Members of the sponsoring organizations try to disperse us:

“OK everyone, it’s time to go home. The rally is now over, so you can go home.”

“Take your people, and go home. They are not going to arrest you, it’s going to be those kids over there, it’s going to be youth of color who are arrested when y’all do something STUPID.”

“Go home, please go home. Go back to Piedmont, Castro Valley, SF, or wherever you came from”

Lines of “organizers” in electric colored vests link arms, attempting to push people out of the streets and onto the sidewalks, telling us over and over again that the rally has ended. Everyone, the marshals, the would-be rebels, everyone is tense. The unity from the seventh feels tenuous as “politics” emerges on the street.

“We support the demands of the Grant family. The Grant family has advocated for peace. The Grant family does not want violence. Please go home.”

Some people move onto the sidewalk, others remain in the streets, still others cross back and forth, dodging organization security, but no one seems ready to go home.

End Scene.

There are cheers and applause, and chants:

No Justice, No Peace! Fuck the Police!

When you get bullied at the playground you don’t sit down and beg that fucking bully to leave you alone! You knock his fucking teeth out. We’ve been bullied for too long, we’ve been talking too long, we gotta take fucking action, you know what I’m saying? Because you don’t get results by pleading to the fucking bully, you beat his fucking ass and you let his ass know that you’re not to be fucked with. That’s how it goes.

Yes, right on!

The crowd listens but interrupts one particular speaker:

“Hi, I’m coming from the mayor’s deputy chief of staff’s office, the mayor could not be here—”

BOOOOOOOOOO, We want the mayor here, BOOOOOO

The police officer and the mayor have said that they are sorry but I’m making it very clear that we reject your apology.

We’re gonna march tonight everyone, we’ll be meeting at the “Fruitvale Village” sign over there.

There is silence... and then chanting:

March! March! March!

There is the usual feel of divergence of tactics, the speakers, the organizers, the organizations standing strong to maintain a front of righteous anger while others want to move this anger to another target, to see that this righteous indignation keep going, keep moving, doesn’t just, for lack of a better idea, go home.

End Scene.



Act 2, Scene 3:

Fuck the Police, We’re All Oscar Grant.

Most of those tired or made restless by the rally leave to march: young people, communists, anarchists, neo-Black Panthers. All kinds of signs and styles of dress represent their affiliations: the fitteds of hip-hop heads, the berets of the Panthers and Brown Berets, Maoists and their ubiquitous paper, anarchists and their all black clothing, but mostly it’s Oakland’s children: Black and Brown youth. At the front of the march is a crew on their scraper bikes. The march leaves down International Blvd, a thoroughfare that crosses the largely Black and Latin@ Fruitvale neighborhood and the largely Asian Lake Merritt neighborhood. The police presence is light, mostly staying ahead and behind the march clearing traffic. Hundreds of black masks are being handed out; residents and car commuters voice their support. The mood is spontaneous, loud, and unruly: groups of kids run up and down through the march, no one was solemn, tired, or quiet. The mood is electric with anger.

Police are mobilizing and blocking traffic far down the road. But they keep their distance and follow us on parralel streets.

Strong in numbers, we start to gather momentum as we move through Fruitvale, feeling that we are ready for action. While there is a feeling of ignitable anger within the crowd, there is a feeling of fear and paranoia among police forces. Helicopter lights flash over us as we march in surreal soft evening California light through the streets of Fruitvale. We are black clad figures standing out against abrasively neon banners. Shy smiles exchange in the crowd with the flash of cellphones, teeth, scraper bikes,

jewelry and the various adornments of a million subcultures. It is getting dark.

As we move towards the Lake Merritt BART station people in the crowd chant about BART as the target. Moving off freeways and into the edge of downtown, the frustration begins to feel more focused; we're moving towards BART police headquarters. A young woman lights a bundle of paper on fire and raises it defiantly above her head. As we all move towards the BART station there's the feeling of moving as a single unit. There's the moment of confusion between taking over the freeway which is right in front of us or going for the gold: moving into downtown Oakland and wreaking havoc. Where are we going? But with so many people, with so much energy, it doesn't seem to matter.

At the front of the march kids on scraper bikes and a few individuals on foot make the decision to move onto 12th street away from where cops are gathering up ahead. We've ducked out of the helicopter's spotlight. We find ourselves momentarily without any police presence. We are now very close to the Lake Merritt station.

Hey there is a dumpster down that block. You guys want to go get it?

What about the cops down there?

They're far away enough that they won't mess with us.

Five people move the dumpster into the crowd and start to bang on it; cheers erupt.

At 8th and Madison a police cruiser is blocking traffic next to BART police headquarters. It becomes the focal point of people's anger as people start to surround it. Two officers



get out, noticeably concerned about the angry crowd.

Pigs go home! Pigs go home!

The cops quickly grab whatever they can out of the cruiser and retreat into the lines of backed up traffic. Young folks emerge from the crowd and start to jump on the police cruiser, kicking and smashing out its windows. A rare moment of cross-racial solidarity sets in as people dance on the cruiser: Latin@s, Black folks, Asians and whites are tearing down well-guarded day to day boundaries. Owning and making real our shared fury at the police, we find a crucial point of political intersection and act on it.

A masked kid approaches the group around the dumpster on the other side of the street:

Should I spark this shit?

Yeah go for it

The dumpster catches fire and is passed from hand to hand before being rammed into the police vehicle, which at this point is almost entirely destroyed. The crowd starts to rock the police car trying to overturn it. OPD riot cops who have been gearing up a block away spring into action and advance on the crowd opening fire with tear gas, bean bag rounds and other projectiles. People are yelling and running.

Our numbers fall to 200 as we sprint away through Chinatown towards the skyscrapers of Broadway, the main street in downtown Oakland. We pull dumpsters, newspaper boxes and garbage into the street to prevent the police from catching up and charging.

End Scene.

Act 4, Scene 2:

It is some time later that 100 of us are rounded up and mass arrested on Broadway under the lights of the Paramount theater and police helicopters. It's the rubber bullet gun that looks like a rifle in the hands of an anxious pig that puts our untouchable mob into a frenzy that makes us vulnerable. Maybe we are too cocky. Maybe the fact that we are mostly young and inexperienced in street tactics is becoming apparent. Whatever the reason, most people panic and OPD takes its opportunity to close in on us.

A hundred of us enter into the custody of the state. We are partially booked on the street. We wait about two hours. Shivering as one by one we all remember our obligations for the next day.

Hey officer! Do you think I'll be out by 10 am? I gotta go to work.

"I don't have any information for you."

What about three? I'm definitely getting fired for this shit...

Lemme call my mama. She thinks I'm getting my sister from school tomorrow. No one's going to be there to get her. I need to call my mama! Goddamn it! I don't give a fuck if I'm 26. I gotta call my mama!



People give us props, excited about our riot charges, which seem out of place. They'd all seen it go down on the news and say they wished they'd been there too. Congratulations.

There is no security culture. A few people are excited and bragging—all sorts of who's and what's and where's. We tell each other to keep quiet, talk about other things.

Other people occupy themselves by trying to slip out of the zip-tie cuffs. Freeing a wrist is a small joy.

Later in the holding cells we continue shivering on cement blocks as we try to get some rest and wait for our release. We are all too grumpy and tired to congratulate one another. We finally get a glimpse of riot's significance when newly arrested people join us in the holding cell and ask us what we are in for. People give us props, excited about our riot charges, which seem out of place. They'd all seen it go down on the news and say they wished they'd been there too. Congratulations.

End Scene.

Act 4

Scene 1:

After Dellums marches himself back into City Hall, we pick back up where we left off. People scream:

Round Two! Round Two!

There are 150 of us, new faces, just outside of the downtown plaza. There’s shouting, and the police decide to shoot tear gas. We are running, but without fear, and with wide smiles across our faces. After the few block sprint we looked behind us and realized the pigs didn’t follow.

Shit, they thought we’d scatter like scared rats.

You realize, we can do ANYTHING...

The world, as it is always upside down, is tonight, finally, right side up. Somehow, cars are trampolines and windows are smashed. Someone ghostrides their car, beats pouring out adding rhythm to our step.

There is one dumb-as-fuck white yuppie man who thinks now is a good time to confront us. He tries to use his dog to threaten us. A verbal fight carries out, but we do not smash him. He is advised to go inside; he scurries back indoors.

Hey! We got to get shit into the street!

A dumpster is pulled into the street and people gather around it, pulling trash bags apart.



Who has a light?

Here. Anyone have matches?

Damn. We need to be better prepared.

The police roll down tree lined 17th street. It is a war zone. Every storefront and every car are hit, trash cans and dumpsters are on fire, smoking debris litters the street. We scatter and disappear. We do this over and over: evading cops, pulling things into the street, windows broken, jokes cracked. We turn each corner quickly.

Enough is enough! is the messaging. But not in the form of signs or anything stated to a reporter. Enough is enough! says the dancing on the cop car. Enough is enough! says the broken windows up and down 14th and 17th Streets. We outrun the police, we laugh at them, we taunt them. Enough is enough!

By this point most of the anarchists and the wider Left have disappeared, either because they are sketched out or because they thought the night had already come to a close. We are running with an entirely new crew of people; it doesn’t seem like anyone from the initial rally. Many join in from text messages, or from seeing shit unfold before their eyes.



Act 2, Scene 4: EVIDENCE

“Reporting live, NBC Bay Area’s George Kiriyama is in the crowd with them. George tell us a little bit about the anger and what’s happening and what they want.”

“We kind of stopped at the intersection now near Madison and 8th in downtown Oakland. Their goal is to get to BART police headquarters to have their wishes known that they want justice for Oscar Grant’s family. That was a chant they were chanting for about 20 minutes, ‘We are all Oscar Grant!’ over and over again. That says it all right there. I just got out of the car. The crowd right now is surrounding a police vehicle, I can’t see what’s behind the top of the crowd. They are chanting ‘No Justice! No Peace.’ Motorists are stuck at this intersection and can’t get anywhere because the crowd is blocking the way to go forward. They are surrounding a police car. Now they have... it has been set on fire!”

“They’ve set what on fire?”

“They’ve set a dumpster on fire in the middle of this intersection and now they are on top of the police car, they are jumping on the police car. This crowd has gotten rowdy now.”

“George, where is the police officer? WHERE IS THE OFFICER?”

“The officer... I can not see over the top of people’s heads. Now they are throwing stuff, they have just thrown what appears to be a rock at the police vehicle, they are vandalizing; they are damaging the police vehicle.”

“This has obviously taken a very ugly turn at this point, we can see the fire, which is in that dumpster you were talking about, on the police car. Uh... George can you move closer and give us a better perspective? We can see them rocking the police car now.”

“The police car is getting trashed by the protestors. They are throwing stuff. They have broken the windows. They look like they wanna topple this police car. If they do that

it may hit some of the cars in this intersection here. Some of the cars are backing up right now because they are afraid that if this crowd topples over the police car it is going to go on top of their car. This crowd has turned ugly in the last few seconds. They have brought the dumpster to within feet of where the cars are right now. The dumpster is totally on fire right in front of the police car.”

“George do you have any idea where the police officer is, what is the status of the officer?”

“They are just... right... looks like the poli...wow... I GOT HIT, I got hit by a...”

“George you’ve been hit !?”

“I got hit by a beanbag in my arm! The police are shooting into the intersection! The police are shooting into the intersection to disperse this crowd! I just got hit in my arm!”

“George you need to move away. You need to back away! Move away George!”

End Scene.



Oakland Pigs: Knee Deep in Shit

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF OPD’S RECENT HISTORY

1996 – 2000: The Rough Riders, a gang of police officers embedded within OPD, routinely beat down and plant drugs on Oakland residents as well as falsify incident reports with impunity.

2002 – 2003: Three of the Riders are acquitted of eight felonies and the remaining 25 felonies are declared mistrials. The fourth alleged leader of the Riders flees the country. The city of Oakland pays out \$11 million dollars in a negotiated settlement to 119 victims. A federal judge mandates a long list of reforms within OPD to clean up the legacy of the Riders and other kinds of corruption within the force.

April 7, 2003: After protestors ignore a dispersal order at an anti-war demonstration at the Port of Oakland, OPD open fire with various projectiles, flashbang grenades and tear gas at point blank range, injuring both longshore workers and protesters. A lawsuit is won against OPD, requiring them to pay over \$2 million and follow new crowd control procedures that they violate to this day.

June 17, 2008: Operation Nutcracker: 400 officers including the OPD, FBI, DEA and 14 other law enforcement agencies conduct a military style door-to-door sweep of the Acorn Housing project in West Oakland, as well as other houses throughout the East Bay, in a drug sting aimed at the Acorn street gang. Community outrage follows with witness reports of indiscriminate brutality and racism in the homes of the alleged. Meanwhile Attorney General Jerry Brown tries to justify the raids by calling gang members “urban terrorists.”

October 1, 2008: Twelve more Oakland Police officers connected with the Riders are charged with falsifying evidence. Case is ongoing.

January 27, 2009: Oakland Police Chief Wayne Tucker resigns in the wake of the January Oscar Grant riots under pressure from City Council.

March 21, 2009: After a routine stop, two OPD officers are shot to death by 26-year-old Lovelle Mixon. Mixon flees to his sisters house nearby from where he defends himself from the SWAT team, killing two more officers and shooting a third before he is killed. OPD’s response to the killing of police officers is much heavier than that of any other gun violence which plagues the town on a regular basis. Reports surface that the

INTERMISSION

SWAT team commander did not follow protocol and that the death of the two SWAT officers could have been avoided if the force wasn’t acting vengefully and impulsively.

March 27, 2009: A \$10 million funeral is held for the “fallen heroes” in the Oracle sports arena. The media hypes the attendance of over 20,000 people, the vast majority of which are police from as far away as Canada, not actual people. Anthony Batts, the chief of police in Long Beach who has just been caught abusing his wife attends the funeral and is so moved, he agrees to be the next Oakland chief of police.

June 2, 2010: The North Oakland Gang Injunction is sanctioned, naming 15 young Black men, defining a 100 block safety zone criminalizing such activities as appearing in public (with the exception of attending school, work, or church), wearing colors that police associate with the target street gang, and being outside between the hours of 10pm-5am. These injunctions give impunity to cops that practice racial profiling by sanctioning the practice of random search and seizures by OPD officers. A second injunction against young Latino men in the Fruitvale district is implemented before a strong grassroots opposition to the special policing powers brings the city’s plans for expanding the program to a standstill.

August 4, 2011: The white chief of Oakland Schools Police abruptly resigns after being outed for using racial slurs. His temporary replacement is the officer who shot dead Raheim Brown Jr, an unarmed student just 7 months prior. He is removed from the posting after community members decry his promotion.

October 11, 2011: In anticipation of an upcoming Federal review of mandated department reforms stemming from the Riders case, Police Chief Batts resigns a day after the Occupy Oakland encampment begins.

Fall 2011: In their campaign of repression against Occupy Oakland, police arrest hundreds and unleash a wave of brutality against demonstrators nearly killing two veterans including the highly publicized incident with Scott Olson.

January 2012: A federal judge begins the process of moving OPD into federal receivership in response to the inability of the department to implement the reforms mandated a decade earlier in response to the Riders case. The total legal costs for police misconduct in 2011 alone is \$13.1 million.

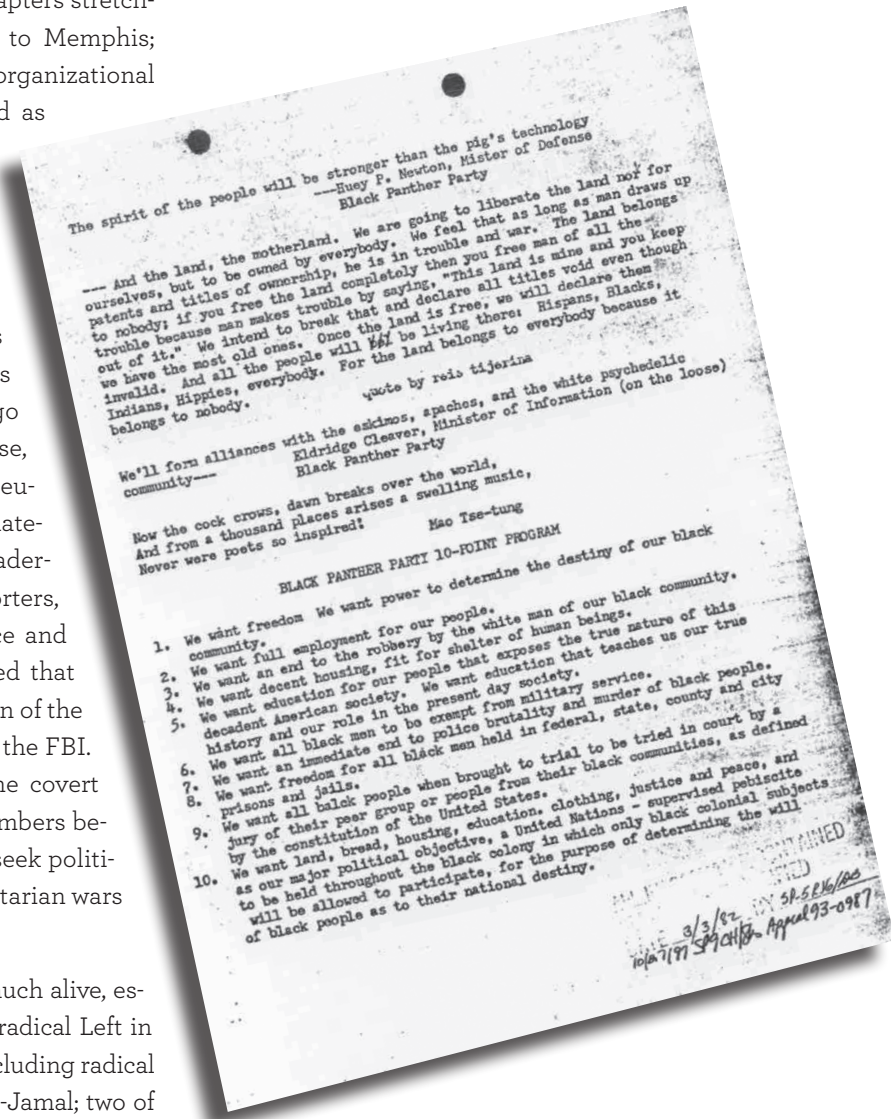
had also been shot a few days earlier. Regardless, the MLK memorial took place at De Fremery Park in West Oakland, which was renamed Lil’ Bobby Hutton Park.

The BPP emphasized autonomy for their community and implemented programs for survival while working towards revolution. Perhaps the most popular of these was their Oakland Free Breakfast Program. According to BPP member David Hillard, “The breakfast program provided a free, hot, and nutritionally balanced breakfast for any child who attended the program.”

By 1969 there were hundreds of BPP breakfast programs around the country. A top government official was forced to admit, “The Panthers are feeding more kids than we are.” They also distributed free food, published a newspaper, and operated clinics where diseases and illnesses that were primarily present in the Black community were tested for and treated.

The BPP quickly spread across the US with chapters stretching from Atlanta to Chicago, from Dallas to Memphis; bringing to the Black Power movement an organizational structure. The politics of the BPP changed as the organization grew: initially an explicitly Black nationalist group the Panthers started to move closer to revolutionary socialism while forming cross-racial alliances. Pig departments responded to the threat of Panthers with deadly force such as the execution of Fred Hampton, 21, who was gunned down while sleeping in his Chicago home. The FBI used COINTELPRO to “expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize the activities of Black nationalist hate-type organizations and groupings, their leadership, spokesmen, membership, and supporters, and to counter their propensity for violence and civil disorder.” Decades later it was revealed that the conflicts which led to the fractionalization of the Panthers were fueled by people working for the FBI. The BPP ultimately disintegrated under the covert yet steady hammer of COINTELPRO as members became careless and paranoid, fled the US to seek political asylum in other countries, and waged sectarian wars against each other.

Today the legacy of the Panthers is still very much alive, especially among Black communities and the radical Left in Oakland. There are still political prisoners including radical Panther journalist on death row, Mumia Abu-Jamal; two of





INTERMISSION

Black Panthers

On the prowl for pigs

Oakland is the birth place of what is arguably the largest revolutionary organization in the United States during the second half of the 20th century: The Black Panther Party (BPP). Within two years of their formation the Black Panthers grew to 5,000 active members and 31 chapters across the country. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover labeled them as “the biggest threat to internal security in the US.” Eventually the Panthers would become one of the primary targets of the FBI’s Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) and were disintegrated by counter-insurgency attacks.

In October of 1966, Oakland City College (now Merritt College) students Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale decided to form a new revolutionary organization after gaining experience in Black Power political organizing in the Revolutionary Action Movement and the North Oakland Neighborhood Anti-Poverty Center. Originally named The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, the Panthers were concerned with countering the para-military style presence of the Oakland Police Department within Black neighborhoods as well as lifting these neighborhoods out of extreme poverty. Newton and Seale wrote the founding document and manifesto of the BPP, their Ten Point Program.

The original Panthers were well versed in their legal rights and made it a point to assert them, most notably in the form of unconcealed shotguns and other firearms while patrolling their neighborhoods and during political rallies. In one of their most notorious actions a delegation of about 30 armed Panthers entered the state capital building in Sacramento on May 2, 1967 in order to demonstrate their opposition to the Mulford Act which made it illegal to carry guns in public, a measure taken to counter the popularity of the Black Panther’s neighborhood patrols.

On April 6, 1968, the OPD attempted to pull over some of the founding members of the BPP while driving in Oakland. Amongst them was Lil’ Bobby Hutton, who joined the BPP at 16, making him the youngest member of the organization. Another panther, Eldrige Cleaver, and Lil’ Bobby Hutton escaped into a nearby basement while more than 50 pigs rained bullets into the building. After teargas was launched into the house both Cleaver and Hutton came out into the police floodlights. Pigs shot Lil’ Bobby twelve times even though he had taken his shirt off to show that he was unarmed. This execution took place the day before a scheduled rally in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr., who

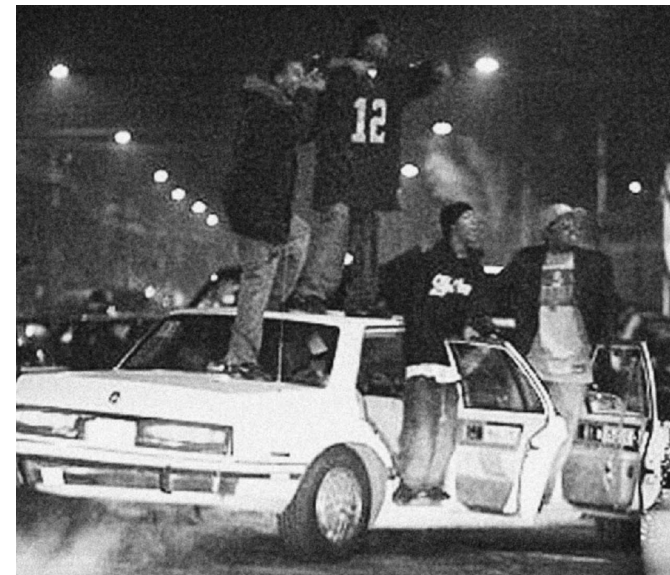
The Panthers were concerned with countering the para-military style presence of the Oakland Police Department within Black neighborhoods



PHOTO: THE LEGACY OF THE PANTHERS 1995

Sideshows:

talk of the town



sideshow (sīd-shō) n. A spontaneous street gathering in which young people perform wild car maneuvers, including spinning donuts and figure eights, while spectators cheer them on.

Sideshow culture is related closely to the Hyphy rap movement, which originated in the Bay Area, and is full of unique terminology that is used to describe its activities. “Ghost-riding the whip” brought this movement into the limelight nationally in 2005.

The gatherings are considered illegal, and the Oakland police spent several years trying to shut them down. At the peak of sideshow activity in the mid-2000’s the police and the state promoted all types of legislation to criminalize spectators at vaguely defined sideshow gatherings.

For the police, this criminalization of “sideshow activity” is justified in order to better target social gatherings that they otherwise would have no chance of stopping. In a city

As long as I was old enough to go out and mingle, people been sideshowin. Every weekend there’s a sideshow somewhere. Every club, every event, somebody gonna start a sideshow.

- MAC DRE, BAY AREA RAP LEGEND

with an average of well over 100 homicides per year for the past six years running, sideshows are an easy scapegoat for violence that routine policing never diminishes.

As night fell on January 7th 2009, the cast of kids in the streets rotated as the clashes moved, much in the way that young people in Oakland were accustomed to by their participation in sideshows during the previous decade. People moved in groups, hollered out when they saw cops, and used cell phones to spread the word about where to meet up next and where to avoid.

It’s mobile. If it’s occurring at High and Foothill, and we go there, they simply get in their cars and go to another location where we’re not. We can’t be everywhere.

—Oakland Police Lt. Charles Gibson

It’s 3:18 [am] but now the sideshows fittin to start up... we got everybody gatherin in one central location. Everybody gettin together, that’s what the sideshow is all about.

—Youtube video sideshow spectator 1

All he’s doin is swingin his car, know what i’m saying... He ain’t killin nobody. See him killin somebody? All he doin is swinging. And leaving, see him leavin? He gone.

—Youtube video sideshow spectator 2



Act 3

Scene 1:

We are now on Broadway approaching Oakland Police Headquarters when riot police charge the crowd dispersing them through the streets of downtown.

There is dispersal and reconvergence. Groups of friends storm across Broadway, from Chinatown into an area of commercial downtown Oakland. The police are setting up lines now, there is some yelling. A rumor finally passes around that we are all gathering back up at 14th and Broadway.

We reconvene at 14th and Broadway, the main intersection of downtown Oakland. Trash cans are lit on fire and knocked into the streets. There is festivity. Young people and communists take turns on the bullhorn berating the line of riot police. Some people lay down in front of the police symbolically, the same way we all watched Oscar Grant executed. The media takes pictures.

The police are charging now, but they don't sprint. After we burn all the trash cans, young folks on skateboards begin smashing windows on 14th. The police come and they stop, hesitant. We are unyielding: glass bottles are thrown, a car is set on fire and flames reach high into the Oakland sky—our very own skyscraper. We roll dumpsters into the cop line. We see groups of friends gallop like horses over parked cars, dancing and stomping on hoods and windows.

End Scene



Act 3, Scene 2:

EVIDENCE

A Participant's Account of the 14th Street Rampage:

I arrived at 14th and Franklin an hour later, just as police were backing up the crowd that had gathered a block up on Broadway.

As I looked around at the diversity of the people who were gathered in the intersection I realized the profound potential of what was beginning to unfold in the streets. An older Black woman was screaming at the police. A group of young Latin@s were standing in front of the police line refusing to be moved off the streets. A white 30-something-year-old was being dragged away behind police lines. These were “everyday” people, indignant, refusing to be moved.

Everyone was out together, defying police orders and screaming their disgust at the system. The police first corralled us on three sides. Then they charged into the crowd, grabbing people and making arrests.

Some of the moments when solidarity among strangers and defiance to authority were most felt was during unarrests. Throughout the night, unarrests were made unflinchingly and without second thought by all sorts of people who came together in the streets and knew that their common enemy was the police.

As the police continued to move their line down the street, a sudden tactical decision swept through the crowd. People turned around and began heading the other way down 14th Street, with the police behind them. It was then that the first SUV went up in flames, and windshields of lines of cars began to get kicked in.



INTERMISSION

Enemies on the Left

“It’s because of the foundation we laid that every Black and person of color and woman on this council is even here. This used to be an all white, male republican council. And you need to remember that the blood that was shed is what put you here... We, the people, will judge you in the streets... You will be taken out De la Fuente! You will be taken out Larry Reid!”

- FORMER BLACK PANTHER ELAINE BROWN ADDRESSES OAKLAND CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS, 2/6/12

Here in the bay area, domination and control is exerted through the established and institutionalized Left who derive their power from the legacy of previous generations’ failed or crushed revolutionary projects. Politically, the far reaching socio-economic gains of the 1960s era of organizing include the formation of non-profits and seats for reformist people from marginalized identity groups in the very power structures that more radical elements within the movement had once fought to take down. Many of these reformist leaders and non-profits have become arbitrators of a successful process of co-optation and pacification of any revolutionary movements or antagonistic moments that have come along since.

Even when it is people of color, women, or queer/LGBT people leading campaigns to improve the lives of marginalized groups, they can do little to quell the ongoing deportations, incarcerations, police shootings, poverty, and a million other miseries that remain at an all time high. In Oakland and other progressive regions, we are reminded of the leaders in decolonized countries who replaced colonial elites only to sell out their own people to the IMF and World Bank.

This is how we can understand the two most recent mayors of Oakland whose combined terms in office have pitted them both against the wave of uprisings in this city that began with the January 7 riots and continued into this year with Occupy Oakland. On one hand we have Ron Dellums who came from a prominent family of Black labor leaders in Oakland. He worked as a civil rights activist during the 1960s and would eventually serve as a progressive congressman and lobbyist before becoming mayor of Oakland. And on the other hand we have Jean Quan who fought for the creation of an Ethnic Studies program at UC Berkeley in 1969

and would follow Dellums as mayor starting in 2011. Both of these civic leaders are well versed in the language of social justice, diversity and civil rights and they both speak as activists and members of social movements.

The Oscar Grant rebellions drew a line in the sand between those rising up from the streets and the puppets of American capitalism who disguise themselves with a facade of progressive politics, racial diversity and the language of social justice. In addition to city officials, many non-profits exposed their true colors by circulating directives handed down from the OPD with each new development in the Mehserle case.

Not long after the rebellions, a non-profit called Youth Uprising put out a short video called “Violence is Not Justice,” in which youth, police, non-profit leaders, and a District Attorney condemn the uprising. In collaboration with OPD, they also made an anti-sideshow video narrated primarily by a police captain who criminalizes all sideshow activity. The video quickly switches gears to become a promotional piece for the organization. Although they are well funded, non-profits such as Youth Uprising did nothing materially to support young people that were arrested in the rebellions, and instead used their resources to make public and paternalistic denunciations of youth who chose to take to the streets. As people of color, many non-profit leaders used their credibility in communities of color to sell police and media instigated rumors demonizing ‘white anarchist outside agitators’ as responsible for the riots. By following this narrative, in one move they stripped rebellious youth of their agency and ignored the existence of non-white anarchists and militants.

“I’ve asked the police to step back, the armored vehicle is gone. Lets remove these symbols of confrontation. This is what I’m asking: Let’s disperse.”

When they leave, we’ll leave. That’s what it should be about!

“I’m asking you to disperse.”

We’re not leaving until we find out who they took. They took three or four people!

“Let’s demonstrate how big we can be in this moment.”

Release all the protestors!

I got a question! Mr. Dellums. Excuse me.

“Please go home.”

Just ask your question

Why do you let your police officers kill Black people?

Applause and an *amen*.

The mayor fails to disperse us and begins to head back towards City Hall. A leisurely procession follows him back down 14th Street alongside a line of cars with smashed windshields. The fires have been extinguished.

A heated discussion is heard nearby about the car that went up in flames.

“You don’t know me! This is my community. I agree that we gotta organize and mobilize out here. But it’s gotta

be directed. Why don’t they shut down the BART station one day during rush hour? That’ll get the attention of the people in Piedmont coming home from work. But this ain’t working! “

Fuck the car, someone DIED! Do you know the difference between a LIFE and a Lexus? Did you see the person get killed? He was lying down and they shot him in the back! A car is not the same as a human life. I’m sorry you don’t understand that. You’re lucky it was just a car! ONE CAR!

The procession stops near a BMW with its windshield kicked in. A familiar chant starts softly, but grows... *no justice, no peace, NO...*

City Hall. It sits back from the intersection of 14th and Broadway, separate from the street by a large square called Frank Ogawa Plaza. The mayor stands on the steps to address crowd, now numbering over 100, one last time. He repeats his lines on non-violence and homicide investigation and is booed. As he turns to head inside, the crowd runs through Frank Ogawa Plaza.

Two onlookers stay put near the steps, and debrief.

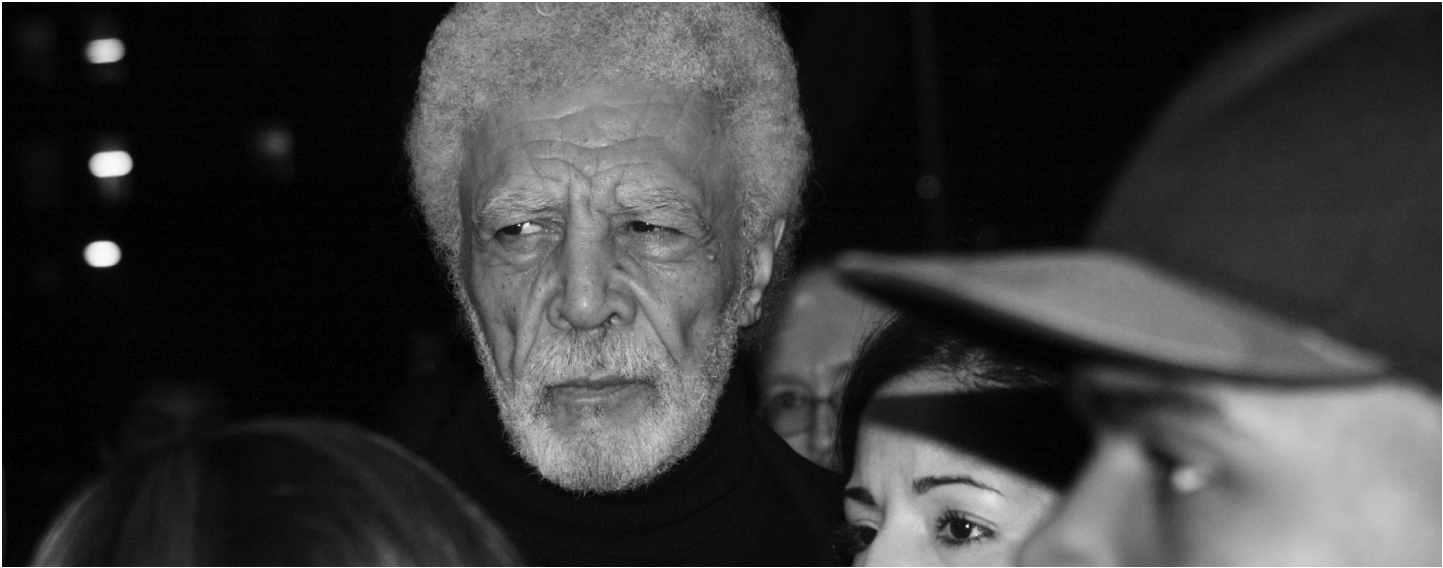
Yo, dats da mayor?

Yup.

I never new dat nigga wuz so white!

We erupt in laughter.

End Scene.



The crowd moved quickly and hit a McDonald’s on the way. The riot police, confused by the burning SUV, stayed behind to order people away from the car that was now engulfed in towering flames. Suddenly an armored police truck came tearing wildly down the street toward the destruction at the McDonald’s, sending people running in all directions.

People began to casually regroup fifteen minutes later. Another SUV had been set on fire, and police were still trying, and failing, to get people off the street.

Before a group of us turned and ran down side streets, I was struck by the image of a dozen white police officers tackling a Black man to the ground while behind the orange flames licked the evening sky. For some unknown reason, almost every cop on the streets that night was white, and at one point while they pulled Black youth from the crowd, I heard someone shout, “What? You looking for a race riot now?”

I was one of the only white people running down the street with about 50 Black youth. More cars were being destroyed and the helicopter with its intrusive floodlight wasn’t anywhere near us. We were alone in the streets and we thought we were in the clear.

In the chaos of the group trying to decide where to turn and nearly running into a deadend courtyard, we almost didn’t

get away. I felt a billy club sting the back of my head and a sharp pain shoot down my spine. All at once I felt blows land all over the right side of my body. Instinctually, I put my arms over my face. My right arm was swollen for days after the riot.

Every car on Lakeside Avenue was being smashed. People were walking casually, from car to car, with two-by-fours or poles in their hand, smashing out windows. From above we heard a gunshot from someone on a balcony, most likely watching their car be destroyed.

When we saw the armored vehicle appear again, two blocks behind us, we all split up. I headed up towards 14th Street. The adrenaline from the police beating I had received earlier was beginning to wear off and I winced with pain as I walked. I need a cigarette, I thought. Walking to the next corner, I came across two men with masks on, casually standing around smoking. I bummed a cigarette and told them where I had last seen the police. “I don’t care about no police,” one of them said. “We got this shit tonight.”

Practically limping from the blows to my right leg, I continued to head up 14th without a plan. Then I ran into the mayor...

End Scene.



Act 3, Scene 3:

Riot cops still stand idly for the most part, awaiting orders. The armored carrier is still roving around slowly. A crowd has formed in a circle, and it appears they stand around one man in particular. He is a head taller than most people in the crowd, a Black man with white hair and a white beard. More and more people push their way toward him.

Mayor Dellums, Vietnam-era civil rights activist turned mayor, tired, stoic, old. His presence in the street results in the crowd growing again, to upward of 75 people. The number of police also swells. The crowd is now widely varied in age, race, and gender. The mayor stands amid a mounting media blitz, hunched over while someone speaks into his ear. They confer and move together, dragging the crowd along with each slow step. The mayor prepares to give a statement. After calculating his words, he alerts the presses.

Predictably he condemns the destruction; he asserts that this type of violence isn't what we should be teaching our kids. He ignores the fact that it is largely kids who enacted the so-called violence.

"Earlier today, a representative from my office... blah blah blah BART investigation blah blah blah Martin Luther King, non violence blah blah blah people should be civil..."

Why we always gotta advocate peace when they killin us?

It's been seven days and no charges were filed. Seven days!

What's wrong with that, Mayor? You've been a congressman. You've been a lawmaker before. What's wrong with the law right now? It's not working for the people, man. You can sell that [be civil] stuff to people that really don't know, but the intelligent people here really understand.

"Earlier today I did talk with the district attorney's office."

We were there, we were with the district attorney too.

"My sense of it is, the reason that people are out here, for whatever reason, right or wrong, people have lost confidence because they haven't been communicated with. I said (to the DA) that I believe that we need to communicate and convey what this process is all about... Then I went to the police and I said I want you as the police department to investigate this homicide the same way you would investigate any other homicide. We gotta do what we can do—"



Police brutality is a problem all over this country, it's not just here in Oakland!

There's an attitude among police! There's an attitude among government as it relates to people of color!

We were at the same meeting. The attitude of the DA was horrible! We have it on tape. He put his hands on his hips and he basically said it's his decision, and he wasn't gonna talk to no one

I mean people were nearly left in tears... You had Black men at the District Attorney meeting shocked!

What was impressive today was that the citizens realized for a change that they have the power to tell the government what to do... I witnessed today the citizens and the community coming together and telling the government that we need to talk to you, that we need answers to these questions.

The mayor hears these concerns and tries to come up with a response that isn't a regurgitation of soundbites. Meanwhile a riot police snatch squad on the next block chases yet another protester, seemingly at random, and suddenly the crowd is on alert. The police line stands poised.

Look! LOOK! Mayor, call them off!

We need help today! Not tomorrow!

My little cousin is looking out his window and watching peoples' heads get crushed to the ground!

About 15 minutes ago, at the steps of the Oakland library... this big six-foot-five Latino man snatched her by her hair and hit her.

It was cop?

It was a cop that did it! And her crime was, she told this little kid to run! And when she did that, they grabbed her beautiful ponytail, slung her to the ground, and HIT HER SEVEN TIMES! This is evil! I been to Mississippi. THIS is Mississippi! I saw young people of all races, they were telling the police in a very positive way that they're sick of it, and they're taking their streets back! You got police running around—

With shotguns!

Twenty deep in the armored vehicle, jumping off, just chasing kids. They [the police] are provoking this! I'm 40 years old, but everybody else out here, these are kids!

