Ferguson and Beyond:

The Unfolding Rebellion in the United States

Unity & Struggle
is an
anti-state communist group
unityandstruggle.org

Unity & Struggle

have only just begun and much remains to be done.

This site is intended to be a space for discussion for those around our project, those we work closely with, movement friends and neighbors, and those we hope to meet and engage in conversation and, hopefully, common action. The goal is to explore the history of our people and our contemporary world, sharpen our knowledge, further discussion of organizing and organizing traditions, and search for both the fault lines of conflict and contradiction, as well as the outlines of a new society–the future in the present.

We hope folks will join the discussion. Let's continue to build the community and the links necessary to contribute to and advance a new movement. The ruling class is taking advantage of the crisis to deepen its agenda. It's time to push back.

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About Unity and Struggle

Our world is changing in uncertain ways. It is a time of transitions, as one period seems to be passing and an unknown one emerges. At the same time, the historic Left has long ago lost most of its organic roots among the working classes and oppressed communities. There is a profound discontinuity in American radical traditions and, to some extent, a crisis of historical memory among oppressed people.

This is a time of ideological and organizational changes. Small circles of people in all areas of social life, whether people unidentified with the Left or those who consider themselves part of it, are discussing the deepening problems facing this decaying society.

It is this recognition that has brought us together. We haven't come up with all the answers. Yet although we are young, we have arrived at a few basic ideas. There is a tremendous need to learn from those who have come before us, their achievements and mistakes, but we cannot just pick up ready-made traditions of the past. Keeping this in mind, we need to explore and discover new ways forward.

Yet, this is not simply a matter of ideas; it is also one of action. Not only is revolutionary organization needed, it is vital. We need to continue to try out new ways of organizing, learning from our successes and our mistakes. The aim must be to build new organizational roots in oppressed communities and the working class.

Finally, only the self-emancipation of the working class and the oppressed can lead to the overthrow of existing conditions and the arrival of a new, and better society. We are not the vanguard, but just one part of what needs to be a movement of millions. We are not a party, nor the kernel of a future party or organization that will lead the masses. We

Contents

Hands Up, Turn Up: Ferguson Jailbreaks out of History *(August 2014)*.....**5**

Five Ways to Build a Movement After Ferguson *(December 2014)*.....**19**

Burn Down the Prison: Race, Property, and the Ferguson Rebellion, *by TZ (December 2014)*.....**25**

Turn up HTown: Reflections on Nov 25th Day of Action *(December 2014)*.....**38**

The Old Mole Breaks Concrete: The Ongoing Rupture in New York City, *by JF (December 2014)* **46**

Points for Discussion on Race in the United States, *by Noel Ignatiev (November 2014)*.....**67**

HANDS UP TURN UP

Ferguson Jailbreaks out of History

Let the economists fret over the $27 million lost, and the city planners sigh over one of their most beautiful supermarkets gone up in smoke, and McIntyre blubber over his slain deputy sheriff. Let the sociologists bemoan the absurdity and intoxication of this rebellion. The role of a revolutionary publication is not only to justify the Los Angeles insurgents, but to help elucidate their perspectives, to explain theoretically the truth for which such practical action expresses the search.

- The Situationist International, on the 1965 Watts Rebellion

Things have unfolded rapidly in Ferguson, Missouri. On Thursday and Friday, we have seen reports of "festive" conditions, as locals hug the state highway patrol officers tapped by the Governor to replace the St. Louis County police force[1], and Captain Ronald Johnson marching alongside protesters.

Yet the mood changed[2] Friday and Saturday night, as some protesters returned to the militancy we saw Mon-Wed nights, facing off with the cops, sporadically blockading the street, occasionally looting, and defying the state of emergency and curfew that followed. The situation on the ground, as the pundits say, is "fluid."

U&S members and other comrades have engaged our respective communities with flyering, solidarity protests, and participation in larger, nationally coordinated demonstrations. In between, we have put our heads together to draft some

1 http://america.aljazeera.com/blogs/scrutineer/2014/8/14/st-louis-county-policetakenoutoffergusonsituationsaysmogov.html

2 http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/17/us/ferguson-missouri-protests.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&version=LedeSumLargeMedia&module=a-lede-package-region&region=lede-package&WT.nav=lede-package&_r=2

police into the arms of the fascists. Holder is up against the opposition of police unions local and national, an entrenched town bureaucracy, white bigotry, inertia, etc. The midterm elections may well have emboldened those forces to resist the pressure from Washington. It is impossible to predict the outcome. In this situation, revolutionaries must prepare themselves to oppose concessions just as they do repression, understanding that both serve the class enemy.

Note: I wrote the above before the Ferguson and Staten Island grand juries refused to indict. Since that time various actions and statements from the Obama administration and leading political figures plus New York Times coverage and editorials tend to support my argument about what leading circles want. How long it will take them to get it – indeed whether they get it at all – cannot be predicted with certainty. By way of historic parallel, it was years between President Eisenhower's first hesitant expressions of disapproval of hardcore southern segregationists and the changes of the Civil Rights era.

For further context behind Noel's position, please refer to his introduction to 12 Million Black Voices Heard*, and "My Debt and Obligation to Ted Allen", both of which are linked on unityandstruggle.org.*

multimillion-dollar fines against oil company executives caught on tape practicing explicit race discrimination. Eric Holder's visit to Missouri, aimed at dragging Ferguson into the twenty-first century, is not mere talk. By the way, Holder is a prime example of what I mean: a vigorous defender of corporate interests, including the right to assassinate U.S. citizens without due process, he is an opponent of classic race discrimination.

Of course, none of these measures represent the sort of intervention that revolutionaries would make. They do not address, except marginally, the effects of the past. They are all subject to reversal, depending on estimates by the governing coalition of what is politically desirable at the moment. Most important, none of them threatens the capital relation; at most they constitute *political*, not human emancipation. (See Marx *On the Jewish Question*.) But they are not trivial, nor are they mere demagogy.

The most class-conscious, farsighted sectors of the ruling class have adopted the policy of neoliberalism, which aims at removing all barriers, including race, to the free flow of capital. It does not follow that they prevail in every situation (any more than FDR's policy of benevolent neutrality toward labor unions prevented Chicago police from massacring Republic Steel strikers in 1937). As Engels pointed out, "[T]he final result always arises from conflicts between many individual wills, of which each in turn has been made what it is by a host of particular conditions of life. Thus there are innumerable intersecting forces, an infinite series of parallelograms of forces which give rise to one resultant — the historical event. This may again itself be viewed as the product of a power which works as a whole *unconsciously* and without volition" (Letter to Bloch, 21 September 1890).

In Ferguson, the smart thing – and clearly what the Obama Administration wants – would be for the grand jury to return some kind of an indictment that makes the protestors feel that justice has been served, without hurling the defenders of the

notes analyzing what is happening in Ferguson and nationally, since we see this moment as a qualitative leap forward for the U.S. proletariat and black politics. It is an exciting moment. We are all stretched to the max so please excuse the sparseness, partially thought, scattered nature of the notes below, which were thrown together by many different people as events unfolded over the week. We wanted to have a place holder on the blog where we can discuss what has been unfolding in Ferguson and have place to link to updates, report backs, etc., to draw out clearer, more substantive ideas, and help accomplish the task the Situationists laid out fifty years ago.

Ferguson's Racial Dynamics

We don't have a ton of knowledge about Ferguson in particular. Nationally, bloggers and activists have released information about racial profiling practices in Ferguson (apparently the NAACP had already been asking for a federal investigation in this regard):

Beyond these numbers, some of us feel Ferguson represents a kind of "perfect storm" of racialized social relations. St. Louis, like Louisville and Cincinnati, are long-time deindustrialized cities, which are very segregated, with a large black population and vastly white local government and police department. These cities, historically, have witnessed some of the worst "race riots" in US history, and today the police and other public officials in Ferguson are upholding this tradition of white supremacy in overt ways, in supposedly "post-racial" America: harsh repression of protests, leaving Mike Brown's body in the street for 4 hours, refusing to release the cop's name for several days, etc.

Further, some media coverage is portraying Ferguson as anachronistic, a place where "civil rights and black power never happened," while at the same time, we've seen other coverage saying "this could happen in any number of simi-

lar suburbs." Could both be true? We wonder, in this regard, whether the Ferguson rebellion is a reflection of the gentrification patterns of recent decades. After 1973ish, most big U.S. cities hired and elected blacks–but we are not sure the same can be said of outlying suburban areas, like Ferguson. And now, with gentrification pushing black and brown people out of urban cores, the latter are moving into suburban areas, which may display a more classically white supremacist state formation. As this process continues, might we see similar clashes in White Plains, New Rochelle, Worcester, New Bedford, and the like?

Many of us also believe the particularities of Ferguson has intersected with the militarized approach typical of contemporary capitalism. In "The Historical Production of the Revolution in Our Current Period[3]," Blaumachen argues that all aspects of Keynesian social reproduction today are delegitimized, save for repression. Repression is necessary for capitalist accumulation to manage the crisis of contracted social reproduction, and this repression manifests in racialized ways–in many cases, it is the process of racialization. Youth are largely locked out of the workforce, and work itself is restructured as increasingly atomized and precarious, contributing to a growing surplus population that is potentially dangerous for capitalism (while also serving as a replaceable and competitive labor pool, thus necessary for capitalist accumulation as well). To manage these populations, youth of color must be increasingly policed and incarcerated, migrants must be hunted down and detained at the border, women's and queers' bodies and sexualities must be disciplined and controlled, etc. In other words, the bourgeoisie must more and more rely on repression as the primary motivating factor of working class life.

In Ferguson, this dynamic is very clear. Although initially taken aback by demonstrations, the police came out in unprecedented force and an escalated response, including repression

3 http://libcom.org/library/historical-production-revolution-current-period

class in the subjection of other members of that class, thereby constituting them as a race. The hallmark of racial oppression, as Ted Allen taught, is the reduction of *every* member of the subject group to a status beneath that of *any* member of the dominant group: Huck Finn's Pap could push W.E.B. DuBois off the sidewalk. In addition to what it meant for the masses, it confined black entrepreneurs and professionals to a segregated market.

The system of racial oppression did not arise out of a bourgeois plot but out of specific historic circumstances; once it developed it became part of the U.S. social formation. Only value production is essential to capital; racial oppression is contingent, although under some circumstances it may become so vital to bourgeois hegemony that its fall would decisively weaken the entire system. (That was the underlying assumption of STO, which argued the centrality of the fight against white supremacy on *strategic* grounds.)

The attachment of the capitalist class and of individual capitalists to racial oppression is subject to modification based on various considerations, most of all, what is necessary to maintain political stability. Beginning in the 1950s (and perhaps earlier), decisive sectors of capital came to the conclusion that racial oppression as defined above was costing more than it was worth. They were pushed to this view in part by the cold war, in part by changes in production (the mechanization of agriculture) and in part by the struggle of black Americans and their allies. And so they moved to introduce change.

The Supreme Court decision calling for desegregation of public schools (followed by other decisions desegregating public facilities) was not mere talk. Nor were the Civil Rights and Voting Right Acts, the striking down of provisions that excluded black people from juries, the Labor Department's forcing the construction unions to open their doors to black workers, regulations outlawing "steering" by real-estate agents, affirmative-action policies in education, the Justice Department's order that police keep records by race of those they stop, the

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION ON RACE IN THE UNITED STATES

Noel Ignatiev

After a recent discussion and debate with the NYC local, we asked Noel Ignatiev (formerly of Sojourner Truth Organization and the journal Race Traitor) to clarify some of his theses on the status of "race" in the US on the eve of the Ferguson grand jury decision. We hope Noel's position can serve as a prompt for a reinvigorated and principled discussion, grounded in US history and our understanding of Marx. While the present moment is unique, we hope to understand the activities of the class today as part of an unfolding of the broader history of struggles against white supremacy and capitalism. If you are interested in responding to this piece at length please get in touch with us.

Capital is race-blind; the capitalist mode of production (cmp) tends to reduce all human beings to abstract, undifferentiated, homogenous labor power. However, the pure cmp exists nowhere; all existing societies, including those in which the cmp prevails, contain elements left over from the past as well as elements that are the product of the political intervention of various groups.

Racial oppression is not universal to capital. Four places developed historically on the basis of racial oppression: the U.S., South Africa, Ireland, and Palestine.

By racial oppression I do not mean the ethnic or religious bias that exists widely, or inequalities among census groups (defined by color or any other feature), but a system of oppression that incorporates *by definition* portions of a subordinate

of the media, militarized state-interventions (local police have been sent home and replaced by outside state-police), no-fly zones, SWAT raids, and other new forms of repression, as well as new expressions of resistance.

The Lineage of Grant, Martin and Brown

As mentioned above, we believe what is happening in Ferguson, and the reverberation felt across the country (and globally) is qualitatively different from what we've seen over the last several years. Here are some notes on the phenomenon. We have been drawing again from Blaumachen (see, for example, "The Era of Riots") to understand what qualitative leaps, or rifts, like this represent.

This is the first time a police murder has reverberated so visibly on a national scale since Rodney King (which of course was much bigger), and it reflects a process of critical reflection on struggles that has been underway for several years. The responses to Oscar Grant were largely localized; the Trayvon Martin protests signaled something was shifting on a national level; and now the Ferguson rebellion marks a further advance. We cannot underestimate the effect of Trayvon's murder and Zimmerman's acquittal on the events in Ferguson. This experience rippled through every facet of black social life, as well as beyond black communities, and helped to make self-aware the social upheavals which had struggled to articulate themselves up until then.

There are a lot of contributing factors to this process, including: (1) the proliferation of black middle class views in the mainstream and new media outlets, and (2) the proliferation of social media, especially twitter and instagram, which allows for a diffusion of meaning that 5 years earlier wouldn't have been possible among black (and other) working class people. You even see the same effect in professional sports today, where, for the first time in decades, owners and corporate sports media are growing concerned about the political expression of a new generation of athletes.

In Ferguson itself, we think it's fair to say people understood Mike Brown's murder in the context of Trayvon Martin. On the first night of riots (Sunday 8/10), young people confronting the cops were saying "this ain't Florida, this is St. Louis" (captured in a Vine from the local Alderman who was later arrested). Later that night, one young guy looted the QT while sporting an "RIP Trayvon" t-shirt[4]. Ferguson has raised the Trayvon moment to another level: with direct and sustained confrontation with the police, property, and the state (objectively, the whole system) in the streets, Ferguson makes explicit what the Trayvon protests only approached implicitly. Now the connection is clear.

The historical trajectory of uprisings in response to police brutality has allowed Ferguson to escalate more quickly, and politically develop quicker and deeper, than similar protests in the past. The Rodney King riots popped off only after the cops were acquitted. The Oscar Grant riots toed the line between large, rowdy and very well coordinated protests on the one hand, and small, isolated riots, on the other. People didn't take to the streets for Trayvon Martin until the Zimmerman verdict was delivered, allowing the issue to be absorbed into the "untouchability" of the State. We are indeed dealing with something different in Ferguson. We saw an immediate, extremely militant, informally organized and articulated response mushroom into a national wave of activity.

"Rioting Doesn't Work," and the Unquestioned Use of "Violence."

There is a sentiment in many working class black and brown communities, going back for years, that "rioting doesn't work." It seems to us that this feeling is based on a collective reflection on past struggles and their limits. There is also an element of earnest cynicism and self-negation that leads to that sentiment: why give up or seriously mess up your life for a lost cause? But this "good sense" has also regularly fallen into

4 http://www.stltoday.com/gallery/news/multimedia/looting-in-ferguson/collection_be35e468-a67c-5b30-84ba-50a7384dfd62.html#3

It is now tempting, in the fashion of the day, to conclude with some grand theory that casts all these goings-on in a neat framework. But that would sell the presently polymorphous phenomena short, and not do us any favors by reducing their complexity. Instead we must outline a tentative and actionable map of the movement's contradictions, be careful not to downplay them, and be ready to take decisive action on its fault lines. The real resolution to the questions this pieces raises and thousands more unspoken above can't be obtained by forcing these events into a theoretical schema, but by engaging with these questions in the streets on a micro level, by meeting individual people, pushing along individual acts of defiance toward their generalization, blocking with the right voices in meetings, boldly making mistakes, and occasionally getting it right. And the theory we write should serve this purpose, or otherwise be met with detached curiosity.

It is impossible to say almost anything definitive about any rupture from the midst of it. Nor is it possible to periodize with finality the recent present (or distant past, really). For all the critiques leveled at Occupy, many of which remain justified and relevant to today, it is possible that on a long enough time frame we will come to see the Occupy moment as part and parcel of the rupture now underway. It is not important right now to make such judgments; we can leave it to posterity, or more likely, the US's failsafe memory hole. What we do know for sure is that most of what happens in the course of human social relations is outside of the control of the small pockets of self-identified revolutionaries like ours, the world over. The question, paramount at moments like this, is not: What is outside of our collective power? Instead: What isn't? And this is a question that only tireless experimental praxis can resolve.

Likewise there is now the capability to coordinate meaningfully on a national scale, to socialize resources, experiences, and coordinate actions together. The risk of course, as always, is falling in love with our own organizations, and putting them ahead of the imperatives of class struggle. But this ever-present risk is no excuse for inactivity on the national level when the struggle seems so likely to generalize. What we need is no less than a radical alternative to the non-profits on the local and national scale, not a project in building a better non-profit, "boring from within" to change them, or blocking with the "radical ones". Right now we on the far left have our own shit, with its own momentum, and if we can't meet people outside an institutional framework, that says more about us as organizers than it does about the importance of working within reformist institutions.

This also means engaging as much as possible with the new groupings, the hastily constructed infrastructures, and all other forms of social relations that have arisen out of necessity over the past two weeks, and more broadly since the Ferguson uprising began. Many informal networks, small organizing crews, social media groupings, and so forth have sprung up under necessity. In many cases attempting to formalize such entities beyond their role as mere tools of advancing struggle kills them. But it is important to begin asking what they are, how they relate to prior-existent groupings (if at all), and most importantly, how they relate to each other. Most political groupings never overcome the accidents of their birth, and while this may help sustain small crews, it is not necessarily a good thing. We should be encouraging and facilitating the generalization of as many projects as possible, or at least the facilitation of a common ecosystem for them to inhabit in relation to each other without forfeiting their autonomy. This will be messy; it will entail nasty splits, bitter polemics, lots of hurt feelings and maybe some tears, but this is work as risky and uncomfortable as it is necessary. In other words, it is in keeping with the order of the day.

self-defeatism. In our experience, many people respond to incidents of police brutality with the adage that "rioting doesn't work," and then advocate some other "positive" strategy–usually premised on respectability and appeals to the liberal state. Not everyone says this, but a majority. In the case of Ferguson, something shifted.

The shift was foreshadowed in Ferguson in the sense of desperation[5] that followed Mike Brown's murder, and which was captured, in many cases, on video. We could guess that after Trayvon, the Sharpton wait-and-see model has been proven ineffective in many people's eyes–while, nonetheless, after a murder as brutal as Mike Brown's, people feel they have to do something. This doesn't necessarily mean people suddenly believe rioting will work. Only that, in the absence of any proven course of action, more people feel rioting is morally justified. And some are even open to testing its effectiveness, because fuck, it's as good as anything else right now. This sentiment is apparent in this excellent commentary[6] on the first night of rioting.

At the same time, some of us question whether "the riot" is the defining feature of Ferguson after all. In reality, a mini-riot occurred for one night, focused on a couple of stores, and a smaller spate of looting occurred on 8/15. In both cases, stores were looted and burned because people believed their owners had "snitched," whether by calling the cops on Mike Brown, or releasing surveillance video to the cops to sully his name. Regardless, the "riot" was never used again as a tactic, although there was one more attempt Friday to tear up a store again. However, this tactic was fiercely debated among the militants, some of whom stood guard to prevent it. Instead, people have employed something more like a blockade or a tactic of "the squares," characterized by continual marches, driving caravans (including, at one point, Thomas the Train Engine), and parade-like crowds along major streets. This ac-

5 https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=10152175787231568
6 https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=10202501968341010

tivity recalls the dynamics of the Squares, in which people take over public space, and proclaim their "citizenship" (for more on this, see Endnotes, "The Holding Pattern[7]"). However, given the particular place of black people in U.S, this tactic contains a more immediately radical content.

From what we can tell, the leading elements of the protests are a small minority, but they have crossed an existential threshold. A common sentiment is "we aren't afraid anymore," "we aren't afraid to die," and for those coming in from outside the area, "we are bringing this back to our neighborhood." Walking up to police tactical units with one's hands up, or simply refusing to leave the street with red laser sights tagging one's head and chest, captures this complex, moving and contradictory content. A militant statement on civic belonging, and simultaneously, a threat that can't be contained by the system. This experience is reverberating far beyond the left, for example in the photo below from East St. Louis, and in a near-riot that unfolded this week in Detroit.

Then there is the question of "violence" itself. The mainstream media's use of the word "violence" is hegemonic. It is obviously dependent on a bourgeois definition of violence, in which property becomes an extension of one's true and existing self. The same script is parroted on CNN and MSNBC, repackaging Obama's statement that the sentiment is justified, but there is no need for the people to intervene. "No violence in Michael's name", however, has fallen on deaf ears among the protesters. Perhaps it was in seeing how non-violent looting

7 http://endnotes.org.uk/en/endnotes-the-holding-pattern

when we're told we don't have a right to intervene. And we must call out and shame the "de-escalating" peace police in the streets, online, and wherever their despicable collaborationism with the state can be publicly denounced.

The flip side of this last item is popularizing militant street tactics, not only by our example, but also by popularizing the reasons for them. Why do we throw trash barrels in the streets during marches? To many liberals this is simply a symbol of lifestyle anarchism. Will peace police still interfere with this practice, and put the barrels back in place, when they know that this is a measure meant to prevent NYPD scooters from charging them and potentially running them over? Likewise with de-arresting, will people still get in the way of de-arrests when they are confronted with the facts that not only does this maneuver successfully keep people from the brutal hands of the state, but that interfering with it makes one an agent of the state itself, no matter how well-meaning they may be? This all remains to be seen, but in moments of mass upsurge we should try to err on the side of the masses of people wanting to do the right thing for the movement, without falling into pure naivety.

So just what should we be striving to build? For the first time since Occupy and perhaps for longer, the possibility is on the table for a serious anti-state anti-capitalist (as opposed to anti-"corporate") political and cultural milieu in the city capable of attracting, educating, building with, and most importantly, learning from people outside of the traditional academic or subcultural pipelines to revolutionary politics. We should take seriously the panoply of social and political institutions this entails, and a practical critique and analysis of the success of the non-profits and CBOs in engaging the class (albeit in a disempowering way) is a project to consider. For those of us with active projects and perhaps a little baggage in the left, now is the time to talk to each other, see if we can network our projects, set aside old differences, and figure out what really matters, even if it means we hate each other all over again (maybe this time for better reasons).

weeks and months Unity & Struggle will continue to advance theory, analysis, and rigorous praxis around these pressing questions, with the combination of due humility and necessary audacity required by conditions as amorphous as ours. But we are only advancing a miniscule part of what needs to be done. For those who take their groupings seriously, this should be a time of self-clarification, advancing positions, and engaging in rigorous principled debate.

When in the streets, we must continue to push the situation while laying the foundation for groupings and political projects which will sustain and entrench a baseline of the present level of militancy should this movement prove to have hit its crest. To be clear, we should be among the last to accept that this movement has hit its crest. But we should be prepared for it at all times. This is not a defeatist position (that the struggle certainly has hit its limitations, and that the Millions March is evidence of this, etc.) but a responsible consideration that we should be ready for the lull period, and should be asking ourselves how we can best position ourselves for that time right now. This could be distributing literature and critiques at the coming marches, meeting as many new folks as possible, and most importantly, populating or helping to build sustainable radical projects (social centers, solidarity networks, community speak-outs, reading groups, writing projects, Cop Watches, public debates, social events, and so forth).

Further, we must push against the centralization of this movement by recuperators wherever they arise, including being open to the possibility that they are in fact us. In power struggles against centralization and co-option we must find the dissidents already struggling and bloc with them. We must find those practicing the most promising escalatory street tactics and support them. We must keep an eye out for the fissures of promising leftward splits in ruling class organs, especially the non-profits, and position ourselves to facilitate these splits, and given them political context if necessary. We must fight the deployment of identity politics as a tactic of "de-escalation" back to the framework of civil society and legality, even

and rioting can actually be, that there occurred some sort of leap in consciousness. Blaumachen discusses the historic "irreconcilability of the activist's "radical democratism" with the interests of rioters, who are tactically ahead of activists and therefore represent a rift in a single encounter. We can't know what kinds of conversations rioters are having among themselves, but we can still get a feel for where they are at by an analysis of their activity.

Liberalism and its Cracks

The leaps in practical activity in Ferguson have, in turn, opened fissures in liberal public opinion. On the first night of rioting, the twitterverse included a mix of first-person accounts, media decrying the events, and "progressive" types justifying the riot, often along identity-politics lines (posts that opened "dear other white people," insisting the anger in Ferguson was totally understandable, etc.)

A similar sentiment was echoed in the blog posts that followed the riots: Albert Butler at The Root declared[8] "There are no good cops. Yes, you read that right. …in the wake of tragic incidents that have transpired over the last few weeks, there are no good cops in this country." On Salon, Brittney Cooper insisted[9] "I don't support the looting in Ferguson," but went on to argue in defense of "black rage," before quoting Claude McKay and offering "no answers…only grief and rage and hope." Mychal Denzel Smith at The Nation did basically the same thing[10], but with a more despondent tone. All three articles took this stance because the authors can't plausibly denounce the riots and advocate liberal solutions with any degree of self-honesty, and thus found themselves caught between anger and despair.

8 http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2014/08/where_are_the_good_cops.html

9 http://www.salon.com/2014/08/12/in_defense_of_black_rage_michael_brown_police_and_the_american_dream/

10 http://www.thenation.com/blog/180943/death-michael-brown-and-search-justice-black-america

We also see a parallel fissure in the struggle over "innocence": in one moment, Mike Brown is being defended for being innocent; at another moment, the very notion of innocence in a bourgeois state is drawn into question. In the interview with Mike brown's friend[11], he says that while they didn't attack the cops, they did refuse to obey their orders to disperse from the street. And while they did not attack the cop, they didn't surrender to him either. On the one hand, one of the most powerful acts for many watching the protests has been people raising their hands and saying "hands up, don't shoot." On the other hand, when NYC's Mayor Bill De Blasio implores the public not to resist arrest[12], he looks ridiculous and out of touch in the face of racist police murders which most consider unjust.

We view these ideological cracks as the fruit of broader shifts in public consciousness, which have been pushed forward by struggles: the mainstreaming of critiques of solitary confinement; public debate over mass incarceration; a growing liberal sense that cops aren't fair to black people and it's endemic (including the stat that a black person is killed in the U.S. every 28 hours); legit disappointment over the Trayvon verdict, a constant stream of police brutality stories on social media, etc. Other indications that ideological fissures are opening include a recent flashmob piece by black Broadway performers[13], outside the NYPD station in Times Square after Eric Garner's murder. And of course, the recent #IfTheyGunnedMeDown[14] hashtag.

The Possibility of Recuperation

The classical relation (or what has now become a tension) of

11 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AlMjhoYPmZ8

12 http://nypost.com/2014/08/13/de-blasio-tells-new-yorkers-dont-resist-arrest/

13 https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=10152524845531928

14 http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2722613/African-Americans-Twitter-protest-media-s-portrayal-black-people-wake-police-killing-teenager-Michael-Brown-iftheygunnedmedown-hashtag.html

intellectually articulated political alternatives to liberalism. It is difficult in 2014 to imagine spontaneously arising consciousness rising to this task, though it is surely not without historical precedent. In any case the class is hungry for news, analysis, and debate. If people don't get it from us they will likely get it from the "police reform" liberals, or worse. One of the strengths of the non-profits is that they take people seriously as capable of learning and debating complex political positions. The city is awash in liberal identity politics, individualized privilege theory (think Tim Wise, not Noel Ignatiev), talk of reforming the police, simply removing Commissioner Bratton (to be replaced with another functionary with the same social role), and so forth. This is not spontaneous mass consciousness. This is the product of a hard working segment of the New York City political establishment – the non-profits, the community based organizations (CBOs), the alternative parties (Working Families, etc.), shadowy political action committees like New York Communities for Change (NYCC), the "alt labor" movement (like Fast Food Forward), and a slew of academic institutions, anti-oppression workshops, etc. – taking working class people seriously as capable of engaging political questions. These reformists provide the liberal ideological framework, which has been challenged by the street activity but remains standing and will likely carry the day.

So where is our framework? Are we relying on mass action to solve the problem of mass consciousness? Do we seriously think that a highway blockade (and most certainly the more toothless "die-in") can't easily be recast as an act of "civil disobedience" intended to influence legislation? Most importantly, in our engagements with the people that we meet on the streets, how do we understand and represent the questions race, and more broadly, difference itself, in this period? Coherent and actionable theories of white supremacy, patriarchy, homophobia, transphobia, and the like, should be the hallmark of any political groupings deserving of the class's attention right now. Otherwise these burning questions will happily be answered by the liberals, or the nationalists among the revolutionaries, or the outright white supremacists. In the coming

ness. Refusing anti-police chants while defying police orders to cease blocking a major artery of the city, or even while actively fighting back against police, is a puzzling subject position indeed. We must grapple to understand it in theory while experimenting constantly in practice.

It is always a given that the working class taking decisive action does not need our leadership or sanction, and it's a good thing, because events never seem to pan out that way. But if we as revolutionaries are to avoid abstracting ourselves from the class (of which we are surely a part) altogether, and consigning ourselves to inactivity and idle speculation, it doesn't hurt to reflect on our position and its relation to the struggle. First and foremost, what is needed is for us to find the most advanced layers of the class in action, document and publicize their activities, assist when strategic, and help by any means necessary to generalize this activity more broadly across the class. And in each situation, like all combatants in the proletarian class struggle, we must weigh heavily whether our activity helps or hinders the class in motion. It is in the spirit of this humility, and the foreknowledge that such prescriptions as follow always lend themselves to easy parody, that we offer up discussion points for what we can and should do amidst the present rupture. It is of course a common mistake we constantly risk as revolutionaries to assume we are the most advanced elements of the class, and typically finds us comically chasing after the very masses we kid ourselves into imagining tail behind us. It is from some controversial premises — that not everything self-identified revolutionaries do is a meaningless waste of time that leaves the struggle worse off than it would be without us, and that we may have a thing or two to show for our years of study, debate, and experimentation — that we move to the following points of discussion meant to inform taking action amidst the present rupture.

Revolutionaries should operate on the wager that consciousness is surely helped along substantially by mass action, and qualitative shifts of sociality are no doubt affected by common experiences, but ultimately there exists a basic necessity for

reform and revolution–that the development of labor power and citizenship (and its attending political forms) can be incorporated into the capital's accumulation, so as to gradually strengthen labor's ability to seize control of society–is probably broken. But even if capital today shows an inability to incorporate reforms as it did in earlier periods, it clearly still has the ability to adapt, and play upon real unevenness in development and the political order. Capital has an insidious pattern of trying to absorb and reconcile it's conflicts, and Ferguson is no different here. A range of mediations remain viable, including what we would think of as a "rainbow coalition" of political organizers and rioters. Beyond that, the trajectories of reform are not being explicitly drawn here, leaving different paths for this struggle to take.

In Ferguson as elsewhere, local politicians speak with a militant voice among the younger crowd–but also, at the same time, speak 'for' them–while the national black establishment scrambles furiously to sew the whole thing up. The NAACP spokespeople (which has a well-established presence in St. Louis), and much of the black political establishment, has spoken as much about "nonviolence" as they have about killer cops. Yet the local class dynamics complicate the early picture of the St. Louis and national leadership coming in and trying to overlay itself on the militant protest. Calls for black political representation in Ferguson and among the cops, calls for jobs, etc. intermingle with radical tactics, while at the same time the content of the confrontation with the police contains within a whole questioning of the system itself. This moving against limits, and testing the meaning of these protests, expresses the complicated nature of 'reform' versus 'revolution' in real time. As shown by the contested terrain of the riot tactic and 'looting', the calls for 'reform' are not simply an imposition by the old guard, but also represent a searching for a new way forward, a strategy, a semi-permanence in coordination and organization.

This process is opening up cracks in the state. On Wednesday

night, media reports of a mass incendiary gassing and flash banging the protests exploded. Journalists were roughed up and arrested. Antonio French, a local alderman and one of the most consistent documenters of the on-the-ground situation, was arrested. While the national media coverage was already shifting by Tuesday, after Wednesday night Obama seems to have felt he had to act. The feds had already been in motion, but passively and in the traditional manner.

We can speculate that Governor Jay Nixon wouldn't have acted if Obama and Holder didn't basically forced him to do so. Nixon, a Democrat in a closely divided state, was already facing impeachment maneuvers in the state legislature at the hands of the Republican Right. This means that Nixon, and centrist Senator Claire McCaskill, had little room to move against the local white establishment in Ferguson, even if they had suddenly felt an inclination to do so (they probably didn't feel much). They are constrained by the white vote at the state level. Obama and the Justice Department may well have forced Nixon to carry out something of coup, removing the local and county police, and replacing them with state police.

The police reshuffling immediately altered the character of the protests. A Highway Patrol captain, Ron Johnson (who was probably chosen because he grew up in the area) spoke to the crowd, telling them they could protest all night, take to the streets, etc., as long as some traffic moved, however slowly. He told them the whole neighborhood would be heard, they could blast horns. He even walked in front of one of the marches, hugged and spoke to protesters. Last night, some protesters protected local businesses from looting, while members of the New Black Panther Party appeared to marshall marches, direct traffic, and discourage confrontations with cops. Liberals, and even some leftists, celebrate these shifts a moment of liberatory "community policing." But they actually herald a retreat into respectability politics, and signal a phase of recuperation in Ferguson. At the same time, as the concrete,

quired (the first of the entire upsurge, and perhaps its death certificate), a stage planned and speakers announced, a list of social democratic demands quickly affixed to the webpage, and the organizers are now scrambling to poetically qualify the event's original "Day of Anger" subtitle. "Millions" proclaims itself to be in the spirit of the previous marches, only more organized and centralized, which of course defies the spontaneous tactical genius of the previous marches, and the empowerment of countless New Yorkers this enabled. Millions threatens to discipline and demobilize the momentum of the class by returning to the rigid parade style marches, lead by politicians and penned in by police barricades, so beloved by the moribund NYC institutional "left". This little band of amateurs could prove to be the accidental Thermidor of the entire present rupture. Of course whether this disciplining of autonomous class action will be possible remains to be seem. And our experience of the last two weeks tells us that they will need a lot of "marshals" (paid movement police, likely union or non-profit staffers who they plan to have on hand) to push the class back into the pens which it has been pushing out of for two weeks.

What Is It That We Should Consider Perhaps Suggesting To Be Done?

For the revolutionary (the term meaning here the self-identified far leftist, though this is surely not the horizon of revolutionary actors) not simply content with writing on the sidelines, organizing mass marches, or giving canned speeches to captive audiences – and especially for those of us who see independent class activity as a goal far more important than bolstering our particular sect – this is a dizzying moment. While it may be possible to rest content with the class in action, and seek only to push things along tactically in the streets, or to call for the next big march (or occupation), we are presented in part with the fundamental problem (at the risk of using a reductionist formulation, and seeming to contradict some of what's been said above) of mass activity outpacing mass conscious-

attention to. If the mayoralty and the NYPD continue to break ranks, an opening unprecedented in recent NYC history may present itself... Have you heard any news out of Oakland lately?

Further, in the chasm created by the non-reproduction of the class, the non-profit complex and its growingly indistinguishable partners the business unions have emerged as a powerful force in political organizing, as well as a powerful economic and political presence in the reproduction of the class. Able to provide resources the state refuses to provide, including employment, to communities of color, while simultaneously espousing far left rhetoric and channeling all political energy into the mechanisms of state reform, the non-profits are a daunting challenge to revolutionary activity in this period and will no doubt comprise the bulk of the coming reaction to this spontaneous mass activity. This reaction will surely draw heavily on identity politics, taking the multiracial composition of the protests as a threat to the hegemony of established movement leaders and the liberal ideology in radical garb which they push on the movement. When the multiracial nature of the protests are attacked using identity politics, especially by legitimately enraged black and brown people, much of it comes from a genuine place of defending the autonomy of black political subjects, and not wishing to de-racialize the movement, place it under white leadership, or otherwise abstract from the historical context and lived experience of white supremacy. But from many liberal, academic, and definitely non-profit circles, especially those which traditionally funnel revolutionary enthusiasm into reformist channels, what is also being attacked is the threat of continued breaks with legality, and the specter of a multiracial revolutionary movement escaping the framework of liberal institutions.

At the risk of being alarmist, this pushback is actually already underway. A march planned for this coming Saturday titled the Millions March, originally called by a small group of friends, has earned the attention of the entire city, including many professional activist groups. Suddenly a permit has been ac-

tenuous, feeling a way forward strategically by the militants indicates, such impositions are being generated from within the protests as a pushing against limits and not a simple external overlaying by middle class forces and ideologies. The problem of strategy and semi-permanent organization/coordination is pressing in as a concrete necessity. Only then will the ideological hegemony of the middle class be consistently contested.

Nevertheless, young people in Ferguson have continued to press against the new, nicer limits placed upon them by the state. Just last night, demonstrators defied the midnight-to-5 a.m. curfew imposed as part of a state of emergency declared by state police, and faced down officers in the streets. The same officers who, a day before had taken selfies with protesters were now forced to tear gas them. For the New York Times, this development reflected the troubling gulf[15] between

young Fergusonites and their black establishment leaders. Yet similar gulfs are appearing beyond Ferguson: on Staten Island for example, where some residents have angrily repudiated Al Sharpton[16] for backtracking on a proposed march over the Verrazano Bridge after pressure from authorities.

This raises the question of the historical dynamics of black movements in the U.S. in regards to the state. We see the same dynamic in the immigration struggle, which is deeply related nationally. The temptation has been to think of the

15 http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/17/us/lack-of-leadership-and-a-generational-split-hinder-protests-in-ferguson.html?_r=0

16 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MqwmcVh0LcU

relation of the state and the establishment, and struggles in somewhat linear ways. We think of the 'impossibility of reform', or the system being unable to appropriate struggles. Ferguson, like Fast Food Forward, and similar to immigration movement, shows that this picture is more complicated. We can't let this become isolated from the other struggles which inevitably influenced it. Beyond that, we can't allow ourselves to be fooled that we are any more distant in our own struggles from Ferguson. We have to bring to people the idea that they are a part of Ferguson, rather than apart from it.

Moving Forward: Hands Up, Turn Up

The situation in Ferguson has raised the question of the entire system, which bourgeois society ultimately cannot tolerate. Thus, while splits in the liberal world and state (nationally and locally) have provided breathing room for these protests, this isn't a permanent phenomenon. When the Ferguson rebellion subsides, we are likely to continue seeing polarization in the U.S: militarization, rightwing advance, deepening attack on the working class, black people, immigrants, etc. on the one hand, and gathering militancy from below on the other. This process may force more splits in progressive/liberal society, and move a section of them onto the terrain of revolutionary thought and action.

An important lesson the far left can draw from Ferguson is the need to regularly practice coordination. We need to share resources and connect with each other much more quickly. We are getting better and better. It took until the Zimmerman verdict for people to start coordinating nationally after Trayvon's death; this time it took only a few days after Mike Brown's death. Among other things, this is what U&S members and comrades will be up to in the coming weeks. We encourage you to join us.

Participate in the "Hands Up, Turn Up" National Day of Action on Wednesday, August 20th, coordinated through the Trayvon

titious capital (which generates no value of its own but only circulates speculative capital that often doesn't exist). Even the utopian liberal economist and anti-Marxist Thomas Piketty had to settle for a plan for remedying worldwide income inequality that would be slightly more difficult to implement than world revolution itself.

Contrary to the quixotic police reformers, we know that in order to even begin to end wholesale police murder the state would have to somehow manage to reproduce the class by traditional social democratic means. And even then, with perhaps the most egregious murders out of the headlines, the racist imperative of devaluing and disciplining black labor power, to say nothing of the racist imperative central to the foundation of the police and the state itself, would of course remain. While politicians like Bill de Blasio and the army of non-profits and unions who channel grassroots energy into electoral campaigns have made much of the desire to return to this mythic golden age of American capitalism, it has proven to be quite impossible. This does not mean there is no desire on the behalf of a fraction of the ruling class to escape this situation; quite the contrary. The current tension between the mayor and the NYPD — the latter denouncing the former through the mouthpiece of their company union the Policeman's Benevolent Association, and the former distancing himself from the latter as they double down on their paranoid mantra "Its better to be judged by twelve men than carried by six" — is emblematic of the growing rift in the ruling class between its ideological figures (NY Times, Obama, Holder, De Blasio, Hollywood, etc.) and the executors of its practical functions (the police).

It is possible that the police have fewer illusions in this case; namely, they know it is impossible to reproduce the racialized lowest rungs of the class in any other way, while the ideological mouthpieces of capital still proclaim a 20th Century line on upward mobility and the rule of law, which was never true to begin with and is now incommensurable with even the pretense of reality. This tension is particularly important to pay

tive, however vulgarized) or 3. an exercise in building social relationships toward increasingly militant confrontations and breaks from legality (the communist perspective — according to which the bridge itself is meaningless and if the social relations could be better forged elsewhere doing something else, even with less media attention, that would be desirable). To be fair, as much was characteristic of the "civil rights movement," to which today's movement is being hastily compared.

Let's keep this discussion brief and take our questions to the streets. In advancing forward we advocate an agnostic position on grand theories of consciousness, which nonetheless takes them seriously. The emphasis however should fall on an experimental approach to engaging revolutionary openings, with an emphasis on the particularity of the situation encountered, mirroring and flattering the experimental nature of this entire period.

The Bedrock of the Present Moment

To return to the civil rights comparison, is a key difference today from the civil rights era: the intransigent impossibility of reform. As the communizers have argued compellingly, the contemporary police force is the twin of the non-reproduction of the class by capital. As labor power is purchased below the rate necessary to procure means of subsistence, and supplementary programs traditionally provided by the state (welfare, public housing, public sector work, school lunches, childcare, etc.) are continually withdrawn, a vast and disproportionately racialized fraction of the class is left with its social reproduction ensured by the threat of violence and with otherwise no incentive to keep working. This is not due simply to the greed of bankers or the so-called 1%, but in the worldwide reconfiguration of capitalism away from productive labor in the advanced industrial countries where its value had risen thanks to workers struggles, an increasingly falling rate of profit due to mechanization, and the transformation of capital accumulation based on exploiting variable capital to the trade of fic-

Martin Organizing Committee[17] facebook page (contact us if you want editing privileges to make your own flyer).

Support the Ferguson rebellion on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, etc. Fight the memewars, and provide rearguard ideological defense for the riots.

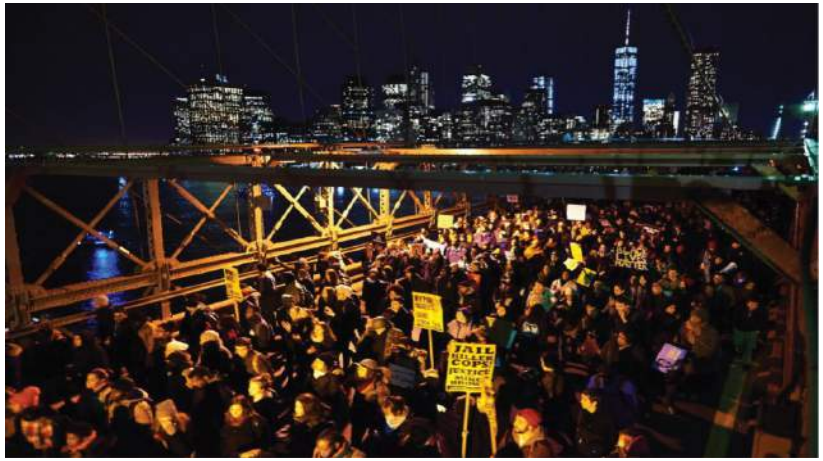
Hold community discussions about the events in Ferguson and their significance. If events already happening, go to them. Take a general line that (a) the Sharpton method has passed its expiration date; (b) rioting, blockades, and not backing down from police is not only morally justified, but can produce tangible results and shift the political terrain, as Ferguson has demonstrated; (c) to end police murder, we need to not only resist, but take the offensive and win; and (d) we should pivot this and other riots and blockades into a general offensive against police and mass incarceration, with the aim of taking control of our communities, workplaces, and society as a whole.

Raise slogan of amnesty for all Ferguson rebels, hold fundraisers for the legal fund[18] set up by local anarchists in St Louis.

17 https://www.facebook.com/TrayvonMartinOrganizingCommittee

18 http://antistatestl.noblogs.org/post/2014/08/11/bail-and-legal-fund-for-those-arrested-during-ferguson-anti-police-demonstrations/

5 WAYS TO BUILD A MOVEMENT AFTER FERGUSON



1. Work to *abolish* police and prisons, not to reform them. President Obama has passed legislation to put body cameras on police officers, but this won't stop the cops from killing black folks. Eric Garner's murder was caught on camera like many others, and it didn't save his life. Even worse, this reform can be used against the people it's supposed to protect: a recent study showed body cameras help police[1] far more often than their victims.

The police and the prison system can't be reformed, because their basic role is to maintain a racist, unjust, unequal capitalist society--and this requires violence. As Kristian Williams documented in *Our Enemies in Blue*[2], police forces developed in the U.S. to capture runaway slaves, crush strikes, and prevent hungry mobs from taking what they needed to live. The

1 http://fusion.net/story/31986/investigation-of-5-cities-finds-body-cameras-usually-help-police/

2 http://www.amazon.com/Our-Enemies-Blue-America-Revised/dp/0896087719

ant to keep in mind is that these experiments, gropings toward a new form of expression, and pushing of the limits of the present form of political activity, remain open ended and their horizon is by no means clear.

Predictably enough the foremost observable contradiction has been between what people say and what they do. This much is reminiscent of Occupy: liberal rhetoric of justice and democracy accompanying the (sometimes felonious) breaking of the law. Some of us have found ourselves in the paradoxical situation of militant chants meeting resistance amidst such unprecedented acts of mass illegality as thousands blocking Manhattan's West Side highway in defiance of explicit police orders, and then police violence. This is not simply a matter of "dual consciousness," in which militant actions outpace engrained ideology. Instead, this marks a contradiction central to the movement itself, between civil disobedience as a tactic of achieving civil rights, and direct confrontation with the state as that which has lost all legitimacy. It is of course impossible to extricate where one ends and the other begins, as the two are often coextensive. And it is equally important to emphasize the qualitative role mass action plays in advancing class consciousness.

In mass action, the radical ambiguity between "sending a message to the masses/lawmakers," taking on capitalism as an object of attack, and building social cohesion – which are so hopelessly intertwined it almost doesn't make sense to parse it all out on paper — prevents us from making any definitive analysis of these tactics. However we can only point to the fact that none of these explanations are a given on their own, and it is possible for this tactic (and other blockade tactics) to definitively break in one or another direction. In many ways this contradiction is contained within the blockade tactic itself. The act of blocking a highway, obstructing a store, etc., can be 1. civil disobedience meant to call public attention to a wrong to be righted by civil society (the liberal perspective) 2. the weakening of the circulation of capital, and in itself a victory against our foe the state (the "block the flows" perspec-

boil down to a slogan which has been oft chanted from everywhere and nowhere in particular: “Shut it down!” The instinct to stop business as usual, no matter the panoply of political possibilities this implies, should be taken very seriously (and is perhaps here understated). Everyday people want to “shut it down”, echoing Eric Garner’s words “This stops today!” and Michael Brown’s refusal to get out of the street. The instinct to “shut it down”, to be diffuse, mobile, amorphous, and all the while belligerent, is a defining characteristic of this period. At the risk of being excessively literary, it is tempting to imagine this as a broader call to cease the suicidal momentum of capitalism toward untold debasement of human life and the planet itself. Given the vast difference of protesters perspectives and agendas, even within the liberal camp, perhaps it is more pragmatic to imagine this impulse to “shut it down” as devoid of overarching positive political content beyond this refusal. Perhaps this places the “shut down” space on par with the square of the “movement of the squares”, in which an opening is created through the cessation of daily life, in which a politics must be created (not inserted). Shutting it down could be a constitutive act, towards a praxis which does not yet exist. The question becomes: from what will this concrete political content arise? How much of its form will be determined by conscious activity of political actors, and how much will arise from the conditions themselves?

The Thorny and Overdetermined Question of Consciousness

Much of how we situate these tactics, their underlying impetus, and the broader questions they imply hinges on our understanding of consciousness, a subject which we find to be overrepresented in revolutionary theory and underrepresented in revolutionary praxis. Beyond all the grand theories addressing this issue *en toto* with proper names neatly affixed to them like a hermetic seal, the questions surrounding consciousness are more likely to be slogged out on an individual basis with the folks we meet in ones and twos. What’s import-

system isn’t “broken” when it kills someone like Mike Brown, it’s working just as intended.

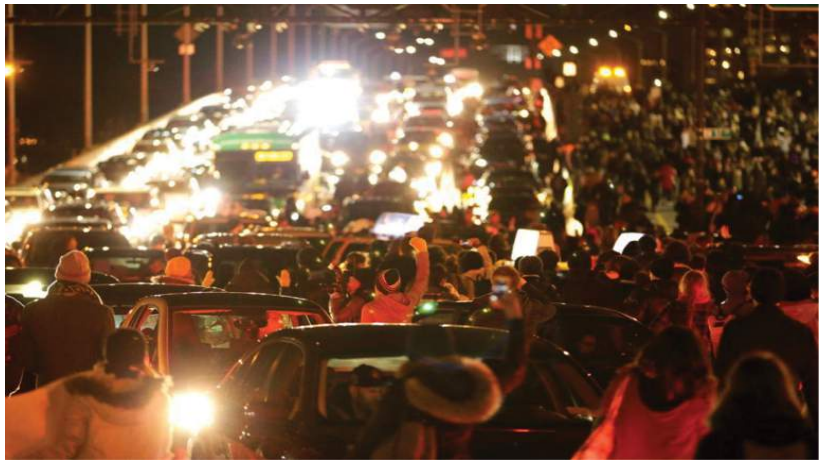
Instead of chasing reforms, we should work to abolish police and prisons. It won’t happen all at once, but we can guide our efforts with the catchphrase: *disempower, disarm, and disband*. We can disempower the police on the streets, by building neighborhood groups that respond to police abuse, and deter them from terrorizing us. We can demand the police be disarmed, taking away their military gear and firearms. And we can work to disband police units one-by-one, starting with the most vicious.

2. Build democratic groups, where we create our own leaders. The old Civil Rights-era leaders are falling back. Jesse Jackson was booed off stage in Ferguson in August, when he tried to pass a collection plate. Al Sharpton was booed when he told everyone to vote for the Democrats. The change is long overdue: these leaders gained prominence[3] only when the movement of the 1970s was defeated, by substituting their own interests for those they claimed to represent, and have stayed in the spotlight ever since.

Now we have the opportunity to build directly democrat-

3 https://libcom.org/library/black-particularity-reconsidered-adolph-l-reed-jr

ic groups, events and activities, in which poor and working class people can lead collectively. Yes, the movement needs leaders. But real leaders don't exist just to stay in power, or make themselves famous. Instead they help the movement develop, and help new leaders to emerge to grapple with new problems. We need leaders from our own neighborhoods and workplaces, who fight in the streets with us, and who make themselves unnecessary over time.



3. Judge people by what they *propose and do*, not by their identity or rhetoric. This movement is about fighting against the oppression of black people. But at the same time this movement holds promise for everyone: smashing racism and the police will help all poor and working class people, and enrich our common humanity. The movement should welcome everyone who's really about these goals on as equal footing as possible.

Not everyone thinks this way. With good intentions, many people use "ally" or "privilege" politics to try to correct the inequalities of capitalism and racism within the movement. But most of the time, this just causes those not at the center of these struggles (often, white people) to get involved out of guilt or self-gratification. People constantly think about their

police is the "de-arrest" (the forcible removal of a seized person from police hands), which should be put in the forefront by practice and propaganda (including shaming those who interfere). More generally there is a need to recognize the widespread class activity capable of bridging the current gulf between the most advanced actors of the class struggle (directly confronting the state with property destruction and violence on the table) and the broader mobilized masses, and to push forward these activities wherever they are found.

It is of course possible that the emphasis on entering retail stores in particular is a sign of the kind of "consumerist" fixation which many bring to contemporary politics, in a period where many on the left externalize political projects from their participation, and literally review them on the Internet as if they are rating a restaurant on Yelp (*I wasn't welcomed with a smile, the rhetoric was a bit alienating, I didn't feel comfortable,* etc.). However, may we not infer that this is a groping toward what it means to stop production in a largely post-industrial setting like Midtown Manhattan? Is there not an instinctive wisdom toward the site of commodity purchase as a moment of expanded reproduction in which capital accumulation just as disreputable as grinding the factory to a halt? Surely the emphasis on spectacle (e.g. the selection of glitzy shopping districts instead of more proletarian shopping areas like Brooklyn's Fulton Mall, across from the Barclay's Center, a popular spot for "die-in" actions) raises some skepticism on this note. Regardless, tactics have ranged from active disruption through chanting and literally running around, to the more docile and media-oriented "die-in," which is nonetheless disruptive in its own right in the right place. And is it not so tantalizing to have so many taking direct action in such close proximity to so many wonderful commodities… In any case, the fact remains that the class is getting more comfortable entering "private property", the flow of the city, and generally breaking the law, and in a period that's conservative as hell, that's saying a lot and we should be attentive to its minutia.

On a very basic level, the tactical ensemble of the moment

importance to all revolutionaries.

If not the square, what? What is the highway blockade? What is the bridge crossing? What is the Macy's disruption? What is the seemingly endless (up to *ten hours* in some cases) snake march, diverging from one march, converging with another, flowing amorphously from one major infrastructure blockade to another? In our view this is the class groping toward a form of militant action in a period when direct confrontation with the state seems to be off the table. Ferguson has set the tone for the class struggle in the US, but Ferguson, where rioting has flared and at times live ammunition has been fired at the police, is difficult to emulate outside of its context. In New York City, state violence is advanced far beyond the rest of the US. Not only are the formal police the most developed in perhaps the world, but the informal police — from a gamut of non-profits, to trade unions, to local politicians like Charles Barron, Jumanee Williams, Letitia James, and even the mayor himself — serve the state well demobilizing militant struggle and channeling it into legal channels. Unlike the pigs in Ferguson, the NYPD didn't need tanks in the street when the black youth of East Flatbush rose up after Kimani Gray was murdered last year, because they had Charles Barron and Jumanee Williams to give the counterinsurgency with a softer touch.

But beyond the "shock absorber" politicians, there seems to be something stubbornly intransigent about property destruction, skirmishes with the police, etc. in this present upsurge in NYC. It may be an ideological barrier, a practical fear, or perhaps overall a bedrock reality of the moment. One tactic ruling class has in mind when it denounces the brutality of the out of touch white establishment St. Louis. Up here, they congratulate themselves, class domination, like everything else the NYC ruling class loves, is so much more *authentic, organic*, and *locally grown*!

One tactic we can use to bridge the gap between demonstrators being unwilling to face the police but simultaneously being interested in outmaneuvering and otherwise escaping

own identity and how we *can't* work together, instead of seeking out how how we can work together, and what we need to do to win. Instead of uniting us through smashing capitalism and racism, these methods actually reduce us to what we *are* under these systems. As recent zines[4] and blog posts[5] have argued, this keeps us neurotic, divided, and separated.

Even worse, conservative and middle-class mis-leaders use this guilt to draw lines according to identity, and divide those of us who are fighting in the streets. Guilty, confused "allies" don't know whether to support the radical black rebellion, or the mis-leaders working to stifle grassroots militancy and shut down debate. When we decide if someone is right based on identity alone, we keep the movement from growing through experience and debate[6]. Instead of judging people this way, we should weigh if their proposals and actions actually contribute to liberating poor and working class black people -- and therefore liberating us all.

4. Upshift from disruptive protests to collective care and power.

Taking streets and freeways has provided a huge leap forward for the movement, but all tactics have limits. If we stop building our capacity to fight and sustain ourselves, then even freeway occupations could become a kind of militant reformism, simply causing disruption to get the attention of those ruling over us. To

4 http://www.indigenousaction.org/accomplices-not-allies-abolishing-the-ally-industrial-complex/

5 https://blackorchidcollective.wordpress.com/2012/03/12/guest-post-privilege-politics/

6 https://escalatingidentity.wordpress.com/2012/04/30/who-is-oakland-anti-oppression-politics-decolonization-and-the-state/

keep building the movement's strength, we need new ways to assert our collective power, and to take control of more and different spaces, for our own good.

One small step is to support one another when we fight back. Some people weaken and endanger[7] the movement by stopping protesters from confronting cops, damaging property, de-arresting their friends, or moving objects into the street. But the system is violent toward us every day, by definition. Calls for "nonviolence" and "peaceful protest" only perpetuate this condition, by insisting the capitalist state alone can use force--on us. Instead of policing one another, we need to have each other's back.

We also need to hit back against capitalism and the state, and seize the means to sustain our lives and resistance. Encampments around the world, from Tahrir Square to Occupy Oakland, did this in miniature. Now we have to start thinking and acting bigger. To overcome the police, white supremacy and capitalism, we will have to occupy state offices, city halls, and police stations; take over our schools, workplaces and transit systems; and provide education, health care, transport, goods and services to our communities for free. We can start by building groups with others who've been protesting, and with people where we work, learn and live.

5. Deepen our knowledge of race, capitalism and revolution. If police murders aren't caused by a few "bad apples" or a "broken" system, but are instead the logical result of the system itself, then we need to understand how this system works. The experiences of black people, women and queers, and the working class as a whole, are all fundamentally shaped by capitalism and the state. To learn how this world works, we can explore the ideas of Marx[8], and many others in the his-

7 http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/peter-gelderloos-how-nonviolence-protects-the-state

8 http://www.libcom.org/library/introduction-three-volumes-karl-marxs-capital

the police (which extends right down to using unkind words). The class and political tensions within such abstract entities as "communities of color" are coming to the fore in the streets. With all due respect to the immense differences between people in different racialized stratas of the working class, the foremost division in the streets, as usual, remains between those who want to things to stay under control and those who want to push the envelope toward more militant tactics, both camps being thoroughly multiracial.

Interestingly all this movement does not appear to be an extension of the so-called "movement of the squares." This concept as described by *Endnotes* includes occupations across several city centers that involved alliances between multiple fractions of the working class and middle class. Outside of Ferguson, there has been no attempt to seize a piece of land and hold it while surrounded by police. Perhaps it is a shortcoming of these marches that the organic mass instincts seem to be wanting to out-maneuver, out-smart, and otherwise get away from the police. Nonetheless the success of the mobilizations and their momentum call to question the wisdom of a "square" for a movement comprised of locals in contemporary New York. If we can have daily activities carried out by well rested folks not constantly braving the winter elements, if we are freed from focus on the practical questions of holding a small piece of property, are we the better? Can we bypass the square? Do we need the square? Do we need an occupation? Did we ever? Or have we simply surpassed that moment?

It can of course be objected that the social relations being produced in the square or the occupation, especially taking on the reproduction of the class outside of the state as a concrete problem, created a qualitative shift in the relationships in the movement of the squares, and qualitatively shifted the content of the politics toward, in some cases, a revolutionary paradigm. However we should not discount that these relations are being forged in the streets, and that these shifts are occurring on the run. This question, which is in no way answerable by mere analysis, should be of paramount practical

a momentary tactical advantage for anti-authoritarians, but it is also fleeting. Soon enough, and this is already underway, the media-savvy and well funded organizations around “Black Lives Matter” and the various statist non-profits accustomed to swallowing up disorganized networks will attempt to gobble up all diffuse activity into one cohesive strategic umbrella, relying heavily on the “good protester / bad protester” dichotomy and a healthy dosage of liberal identity politics to purge the official movement of confrontational tactics and the larger revolutionary element. This will be compounded by the moment of street tactics meeting their limit, with a militant minority earning the ire of the mass movement, which has yet to noticeably occur but could be right around the corner. Thankfully this time the far left is not so naïve with technology, organization, and in New York City actually has a presence in the broader organizing scene, beyond the reach of its politics even, and in the least has created a small lacunae which will never be co-opted, around the figure of the Trayvon Martin Organizing Committee and other revolutionary organizing crews.

Despite the best intentions of academic identity politics, there is no clear political line along the lines of race. What has emerged instead are the class ruptures within racial designations, as well as long-standing political lines between sects and organizations. At a march in East New York called after the murder of *another* unarmed black man (Akai Gurley) just before the Ferguson decision was announced, a group of older black militants berated the multiracial crowd for chanting “Hands up, don’t shoot!” advocating instead “Arms down, shoot back!” This chant naturally caught on with the multiracial far left. However, it has met much resistance along the supposed lines of race by the non-profit crowd. We’ve witnessed non-black chanters being told to “check your privilege”, and the blackness of the black people chanting it questioned. Similarly militant street tactics have been pursued by a diverse swath of New Yorkers, perhaps most predominantly young black and brown people with no discernible group ties, while the right wing of the non-profits and more conservative voices advocate respectable behavior and non-provocation of

tory of revolutions. To learn how to transform it, we can look to communists who opposed[9] authoritarianism and the state, and many other great revolutionaries, while drawing on the history of world revolution.

Past revolutions can show us the general features of how capitalism might be overthrown. Russia 1917, Spain 1936, the high points of the anti-colonial revolutions, and more recently Egypt in 2011, offer lessons good and bad. We know that forms of counter-power tend to emerge, first as small seeds, and then on large scales in moments of crisis. We know internal divisions among the oppressed become barriers to the continued growth of movements, and must be overcome. We know movements can generate new would-be ruling groups, who try to stop the revolution and consolidate class power. We know new forms of social life and creativity tend to emerge in the heat of struggle.

We can draw general lessons like these from past revolutions, but each one is different. What will ours be like?

9 http://www.bringtheruckus.org/?q=node/109

BURN DOWN THE PRISON

Race, Property, and the Ferguson Rebellion

TZ

Work?
I don't have to work.
I don't have to do nothing
but eat, drink, stay black, and die.
This little old furnished room's
so small I can't whip a cat
without getting fur in my mouth
and my landlady's so old
her features is all run together
and God knows she sure can overcharge—
Which is why I reckon I does
have to work after all.

-Langston Hughes, "Necessity"

"A lot of people in the bourgeoisie tell me they don't like Rap Brown when he says, 'I'm gon' burn the country down,' but every time Rap Brown says, 'I'm gon' burn the country down,' they get a poverty program."

-Stokely Carmichael, Free Huey rally, 1969

"We may risk the prediction that we are entering into an era of riots, which will be transitional and extremely violent. It will define the reproduction crisis of the proletariat, and thus of capitalism, as an important structural element of the following period. By 'riots' we mean struggles for demands or struggles without demands that will take violent forms and will transform the urban environments into areas of unrest; the riots are not revolution, even the insurgency is not revolution, although it may be the beginning of a revolution."

-Blaumachen, "The Transitional Phase of the Crisis: The Era of Riots," 2011

The long term results of the Ferguson struggle and the emerging movement against police terror cannot possibly be known, for it represents the longest and deepest rupture within Black America since the riots of the late 1960s. While the LA riots

surprise as three different bridges were blocked the night the verdict was released. It is impossible to imagine such popularity of these tactics before Ferguson. Ironically, they would have no doubt been met with charges of "putting black and brown bodies at risk." Perhaps it was only when the proletarians of Ferguson elevated this risk to an accepted premise of the class struggle in the US that the class could move *en mass* elsewhere.

This level of mass militancy is something we haven't seen since Occupy, or arguably before that. What we have seen is the better parts of Occupy (emphasis on cohesive street tactics, socializing the response to police violence, media savvy mobilizations, ostensibly horizontal organizing structure) breaking free from the ghetto of the middle class professional organizer and taking hold within the consciousness of large numbers of New Yorkers. Chants of "Slow down stay together!" have emanated from all corners of snake marches, and an often excessive insistence on form (e.g. locking arms when not necessary) by very young marchers would be irritating if not so beautiful to behold. On the flip side, much of Occupy's liberal illusions such as "the cops are the 99%" have a harder time taking root in an issue that attacks the crisis of social reproduction, not from the perspective of Occupy's demand for a return to/of the middle class (which, tellingly, was nonetheless still greeted by police violence), but aimed at the central figure of contemporary social reproduction, which has replaced the welfare office: the violent police.

The degree of de-centeredness is something definitely not seen even during Occupy. Since the marches do not emanate from a central position, it is harder to bureaucratize them under a common leadership. Further the plethora of existent organizations, community groups, student groups, and generally pissed off people around the issue of the police is almost endlessly multiplicitous, and for many of these groupings this is not their first rodeo. At the present the imposition of a centralized authority has proven impossible, with so much spontaneous activity emanating from seemingly nowhere. This is

on the West Side Highway remarked during an intense skirmish with the NYPD in which the police were embarrassingly outflanked and at times assaulted: “It’s black on blue tonight!” Not only have the majority non-white non-profits been mobilizing with a vengeance. While of course this is a large umbrella of organizations, we can broadly define the base as working class, and potentially militant, but organized under the banner of reformist politics (sometimes in radical garb). This tension in itself, between enthusiastic young people trying to change the world, and the cold reality of the bureaucratic statist non-profits that trade in their enthusiasm and energy, is worth keeping an eye on, though we are not aware of any prominent splits at present. (A more satisfactory topography of this tension, and technical definition of the admittedly overgeneral signifier “non-profit” used throughout this piece, is forthcoming in future analysis.) There has also been an upsurge of unaffiliated proletarians of color taking part in these protests, rolling in small groups of friends or even alone, joining the marches from the streets and canceling whatever plans they had. Once in the streets, these young proletarians are quick to block traffic, lead militant chants, spontaneously hatch, advocate for, and execute direction changes to outmaneuver the police, and in many places surround and sometimes shove officers arresting marchers. This is at odds with (at least the leadership and guiding principles of) the more established non-profit sector, much more conservative in chants and tactics, to say nothing of a hard line against the police.

The major tactical figures we have witnessed are the unpermitted street march, the intersection blockade, the highway blockade, the bridge crossing, the bridge blockade, “die-ins,” and various actions inside major retail stores to impede or shut down consumption. While none of these are totally new, what is remarkable is how general, diffuse, de-professionalized, and almost instinctive they have become, in addition to how frequently and coextensively they have been executed. Many far left comrades here predicted some months ago that a highway blockade the night following the Wilson verdict would be an unprecedented act of escalation, only to watch in

of 1992 where no doubt much more intense and destructive, and involved broader sections of the LA working class, the fruits of that struggle—namely, the gang truce and united front against the police—were eventually absorbed by the Million Man March and the New Democrat alliance behind Clinton’s election, and contributed to no lasting independent political developments. In the long view of Black liberation it remains a blip, even if an important one. Finally, LA was an episode happening in a sense in the wake of the Welfare State, while an emerging new period, what the Left often calls “Neoliberalism,” was still largely in infancy.

Ferguson, in contrast to LA, is unfolding in a new period of crisis, in which the growth of wealth is taking place against an unparalleled decrease in the living standards of working people: stagnant and declining wages; casualized part time labor; deep and systemic slashes in public assistance; cuts to infrastructure, public health, education, and transportation; mass incarceration and criminalization of Black and Brown people. No longer is there a unity between, on the one hand, growing productivity yielding greater quantity of commodities and capital, and on the other hand, rising wages, paid by employers or administered by the State through publicly-funded schools, hospitals, transportation, and infrastructure. Now capitalists can only keep the profit rate from falling by refusing to reproduce working people, who have been forced to shoulder debt in order to survive. The specificity and the acuteness of this crisis upon Black workers sets up the particular context in which Darren Wilson, a cop, murdered Mike Brown, and a Black community fought back.

The form of the struggle in Ferguson is not exclusively limited to riots. It has seen street and highway blockades, mass marches, street battles, sit-ins, combative pickets and store occupations, among others. Yet at its peaks, in the days after Mike Brown’s murder and the non-indictment of Darren Wilson, riots were integral to the overall resistance taking place. Just a few years ago, the mere occupation of public space and its physical defense against police incursion were com-

pletely taboo. The traditions of direct action had been long forgotten, buried under decades of inactivity, and meanwhile the fetish of legal redress of grievances grew: petitions, voting, city council testimonies, and permitted symbolic demonstrations. It appeared that even the discussion of riots took away from the almost overnight shift in public consciousness about the totally obvious legitimacy of occupying public space and refusing to disperse.

Riots and looting, however, have been the most polarizing question since the struggle kicked off. Ever since this first wave of struggle in Ferguson, an ideological war has been waged from the highest levels of official society to the local street auxiliaries of city wards, from Barack Obama to Antonio French and the New Black Panthers, to justify repression of direct action tactics. Now with the decision of the Grand Jury to not indict Wilson, riots have returned, again not as the primary form and not—sorry, liberals—as an isolated low point by "outside agitators," but as part and parcel of a beautiful composite of struggle. The reason riots and looting have been so polarizing is because they strike at the heart of American capitalism: the sanctity of property.

Interestingly, recent weeks have seen a spate of pieces analyzing and even justifying riots, under liberal auspices: riots as morally justified, riots as effective engines of reform, and so on. However, none of these pieces have gotten to the essence of the matter; what is the basic framework of today's crisis and Black people's specific relation to it? What is private property and what are its current racial dimensions? Finally, what role does class play inside the Black community in terms of the divisions over whether to support or subvert attacks on private property?

What I argue is, first, that capitalism today finds it an indispensable necessity to increase the rate of profit through the non-reproduction of the working class (which is, contradictorily, the only basis for capitalism's expansion). Secondly, private property is a form of social labor that has been estranged

class struggle and whose reward is almost always anonymity, at best.

Blurred Snapshot of a Rupture in Progress

In New York City there have been four major mobilizations since the Wilson verdict, two of which corresponded with the non-indictment in the case of Eric Garner's choking death by the NYPD. Each mobilization originated from multiple points (or at least times) of convergence, and featured multiple marches disabling major infrastructure simultaneously almost constantly. While these larger marches have been called by mostly traditional organizers, like various front groups for the old Stalinist parties, the leadership quickly becomes irrelevant, especially as marches split. (Notably the Trayvon Martin Organizing Committee, comprised solely of anarchists and anti-state communists, has managed to call and lead two massive mobilizations, complete with militant chants and literature.) Marches of thousands converged at strategic (or miraculous) moments to outflank police, and diverged just as fluidly as police struggled to keep a handle on the situation. Diverse as the city itself and equally unwieldy, on New York's streets the class has become once more a "many headed hydra," popping up in three places when repressed in one.

More importantly, there have been an almost daily diffusion of small activities by small or unaffiliated crews, spontaneous breakaway marches, unaffiliated folks new to organizing calling for marches that receive tens of thousands of responses. Everyday New Yorkers have been joining spontaneously, blocking traffic, at times confronting the police, and demonstrating a tactical militancy that would have put them in league with the far left only six months ago. While much has been made in the media of the prevalence of white faces at the New York demonstrations (so much so that a French comrade reached out to us for an explanation of this), this is largely bullshit, as the demographics at these marches, while skewing toward youth, have been a wonderful representation of the diversity of New York, and heavily black to boot. One protester

police existence can be any other way— how do we view these acts of refusal, and the movement they have catalyzed? It is surely a black struggle against white supremacy. But is this within civil society? One could hardly argue that to be the example set by Ferguson's sustained militancy. Is it verging on a more generalized rebellion? The events of the past two weeks make this hard to dispute. In any case, central is the figure of the refusal — the refusal of a racialized position in the capitalist division of labor, the refusal of policing as the central figure of social reproduction, and the refusal of an ever downward standard of living for the US working class, disproportionately weighing on working class black and brown people. This refusal has not been voiced in the halls of justice into which liberals now seek to push it, but as with Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and the militants of Ferguson who kicked this rupture off, the refusal has been in the streets, articulated with one's body on the line.

As we work toward an understanding of this refusal, what it means in terms of racialized class stratification, and what it portends for the coming class struggle, we'd like to also take a slightly more empirical look at the struggles in the wake of the Ferguson rebellion as they have played out in New York City. On a practical level, what do we make of the movement in the US since the Ferguson rebellion, and now Darren Wilson's and (Eric Garner's murderer) Daniel Pantaleo's acquittals? What is this movement, where is it headed, and what is the role of revolutionaries?

If what follows seems amateurish, improvised, frantic, eclectic, and riven with contradictions, it will have perfectly grasped the flavor of present rupture. The term "far left", used throughout, refers loosely to a local agglomeration of anarchists, autonomists, left communists, communizers, and other anti-state communists; a rowdy bunch indeed. This piece has benefited tremendously from their insights, actions, courage, genius, and love. Special thanks are due to the Trayvon Martin Organizing Committee, and of course the countless anonymous proletarians who are always the real heros of every

from us, and the Black working class condition today is a peculiar kind of estrangement, (in which Black people are pushed into surplus populations, permanently unemployed and criminalized). The property question for Black people today has an immediate racial dimension, as they are owned largely by people of Arab and Asian descent, held up as model minorities, and accepting the terms of white supremacy. Finally, this condition is one inherited from the failures of the last cycle of Black revolt, the 1960s, when a new Black elite ascended to manage and ultimately pacify Black struggle.

Black power in St. Louis and in America

St. Louis, with some exceptions, follows the general pattern of capitalist decay and crisis as well as Black political developments. Once a thriving industrial city in the early 20th century where Black people fleeing field work in the South could find employment, by the 1970s the city saw an economic downturn, the slow but continuous contraction of industrial labor, and the subsequent decay of the Black community. Of course, while work in production was segregated, with Black workers paid lower than white workers and relegated to the most unskilled and dangerous jobs, it nonetheless got them away from the debt peonage system of sharecropping and the post-Confederate guerilla insurgency of the KKK.

The inception of "Black power" in the late 1960s, while nearly unanimous in its critique of assimilationist civil rights organizations, produced two antagonistic trends within the movement. On one side were those fighting for the power to represent the lower classes, and manage systems of state patronage; on the other side were black proletarians, fighting for a more communistic control over production and reproduction in daily life. The first trend was expressed in the Black convention movement and the various local efforts to elect Black leadership (mayors, aldermen, police chiefs, superintendents, etc.) who would assume control over the existing municipal State institutions. The second trend was represented in the riots of the late 1960s, through which the Black working class

emerged as an independent political subject, and in hundreds of factory wildcat strikes across the country in the 1970s that were Black-led. Unlike many other major cities, St. Louis did not experience this latter trend of Black power, though it was certainly not immune to Black working class struggle historically, as working class Black class struggle appeared in the form of rent strikes, and in earlier battles over desegregation in the 1950s.

The Black patronage systems that arose in many American cities, including St. Louis, did so in a degenerated and uneven form. Black people were given access to public employment and civil service jobs, but this concession, while enough to consolidate the power of Black elected officialdom, was not enough to absorb the Black working class and lift them out of their decrepit conditions. Such patronage could come to fruition only on the an account of a restive Black working class and the inability for the old Jim Crow machine to maintain order. The new Black elite which comes to power through patronage represented a cultural shift away from the assimilationist civil rights struggle. Instead they wore dashikis and afros; with one hand they pumped a fist and yelled “Black power!” while with their other hand they signed off on tax abatements for the rulers.

Ferguson proper never experienced this Black patronage system. Already in the late 19th century, St. Louis had disincorporated from St. Louis County, in order to avoid providing public and social services to the surrounding area. In the wake of Black Power, the result was the city’s suburbanization. First, many white workers fled the growing and insurgent Black population. The resulting population vacuum, combined with deindustrialization, devastated St. Louis, and then prompted Black workers to leave the city as well for suburbs like Ferguson. Yet the politics of Ferguson were more akin to Jim Crow, since the area had never experienced the Black elite takeovers that occurred in larger cities.

However different Ferguson might have been from the rest of

THE OLD MOLE BREAKS CONCRETE

The Ongoing Rupture in New York City

JF

“When history is written as it ought to be written, it is the moderation and long patience of the masses at which people will wonder, not their ferocity.” -C.L.R. James

Toward a Practical Grasp of the Present

The US working class is on the move. The Ferguson militants are the vanguard of a rebellion threatening to generalize across the United States. Individual cases of police murder are escaping the confines of their particular context and blurring into the total condition of life under white supremacist capitalism. The ruling class is breaking ranks on the question of police violence. The movement politicians are running behind the movement. The police are scared. There is no talk of the 99%.

As unarmed black men murdered in the street by pigs who the state calls innocent, Michael Brown and Eric Garner have many things in common. But most important to understanding the last four months in the United States is that they both stood up and said *no more*. Ordered rudely out of the street in Ferguson, Michael Brown refused. Harassed constantly by the NYPD, Eric Garner took a stand: “This stops today!” We can cite a million subtle causal factors for the ensuing mass movement, but we should not lose site of its grounding in brave acts of defiance that cost two black people their lives.

If we are to understand this as something besides a movement against “police brutality” — a liberal myth purporting that

- Our efforts should be focused on abolishing police and prisons, not reforming them - there are a lot of groups and people who are putting forward tactics of police reforms - body cams, meet and greets with police, sensitivity trainings, and so on. Here we need an ideological battle against reformism and against mainstream liberal bandaids.

- Develop fighting organizations - At some point a direct confrontation with the police will be necessary to keep them from brutalizing us and in an effort to keep them out of our communities altogether. This will also mean developing fighting organizations in communities of color that can respond to instances of police brutality and pose a serious challenge to police presence.

the Black urban experience after the 1960s, the Black experience in St. Louis proper is not an ounce different. The growth of Black police, despite phony and insidious “community policing” efforts, has not yielded a decrease in brutality and murder. In fact, the opposite has been the case, as capitalism proves unable to employ and reproduce specific sections of working people, and relies ever more on police violence to hold the line.

The lie of private property

While it might appear that everyone is understood on the importance of rioting, whether they are for or against it, the conversation has actually confused the essence of the question. Of course, this question is what Karl Marx dedicated his life to; not only uncovering the social nature of private property but hastening its overthrow.

First, the term “private property” is nothing but the legal expression of (or, legal title to) *capital*, whether it be in the form of money or means of production (buildings, machines, infrastructure, tools, raw materials, etc.). The political economists and liberals that Marx argued against understood capital as a *thing*. For Marx, however, capital is a *social relation*, continually reproduced through the exploitation of social labor.

When viewed as a thing, capital conceals the exploitative relationship between *necessary labor* and *surplus labor*. Necessary labor is the part of the workday in which we create value equal to the wages we will eventually be paid, while surplus labor is the rest of the workday, in which we create value that can be realized as profit by the capitalist employing us. Our wages hide this relation, since it appears we are paid for “a full day’s work.” But in reality we are only paid what it takes to maintain ourselves within capitalism; a rough social average based on what it takes to reproduce the worker and her offspring.

The stuff we make is taken by capitalists, and sold if they can

manage it. Part of the resulting profit covers necessary labor (wages), and the rest is appropriated as surplus. Every existing commodity in the world has this story behind it. With our wages, we can buy back a few commodities to sustain ourselves. With their profits, capitalists can buy a lot more—not only luxury goods, but also machines, raw materials, factories, and other investments. With it they establish the basis for even more exploitation, further expanding the system of capitalism.

The term “private property” is often used as an umbrella category for all commodities, whether they’re purchased with workers’ wages or capitalist profits, and whether they’re used for reproducing life or expanding exploitation. Defenders of private property focus on its legal title, and insist that bosses, small businessmen and workers alike all have a “right” to property because of their “hard work.” But the “right” to property is inherently unequal, and hides the exploitative relationships through which property is created. Our “right” to private property lets us to scrape together enough money for an Xbox, but it lets capitalists purchase sweatshops with money they got from appropriating our labor. In all cases, property is only the unpaid labor of actual workers. When we defend it, we may think we’re defending our personal stuff, but we’re actually defending capital’s right to continue exploiting us.

The violent separation of labor from our means of production was the historic backdrop for the rise of capital. The forced takeover of common lands, and the break-up of the family into productive and reproductive laborers, meant we were no longer able to produce our own means of subsistence. As landless, propertyless laborers we were compelled to sell our abilities to others, who would appropriate them for their own ends.

Private property is the result of our own social labor, alienated from us, and turned into a thing that dominates us. This alienation is the basis of class struggle. While workers have always fought for better conditions, these gains don’t make work less

activity to leaping ahead. At the August 20th march through Third Ward it appeared as if they had no idea what we were planning. We broke through several police lines and took the streets for over an hour. There was a lot of mixed communication between the cops and the crowd, some cops being very aggressive, others allowing us to march. Now, they are coming out strong in very large numbers, hundreds police being present at this Nov 25th action, and playing crowd control.

There is a need to understand police tactics both locally and nationally in an attempt to think and move forward. The August 20th action was absolutely the right thing to do and we know this because we not only caught the cops off guard, but we were making leaps in terms of what kind of activity was acceptable in Houston. This became even more generalized and even advanced at the non-indictment march on Nov 25th, where we not only held a mass unpermitted march, but also attempted to take the freeway. How can we think about developing and pushing the most militant tactics without allowing their attempt to burn out our energy to be successful?

Next Steps

The destruction or shutting down of business as usual is an important development, and has taken the shape of highway shutdowns, die-ins in stores, malls, or public spaces, to property destruction in places like Berkeley, and obviously Ferguson. These are really important developments because they have pushed forward new kinds of energy and tactics. But they also have their limits. In order to tackle the question of how we are going to put an end to police brutality, we have to be looking forward, pushing the most militant tactics, and developing fighting organizations within communities of color. Below are a few thoughts on how we can accomplish these things given the current energy and tactics being taken up both nationally and locally.

- These actions must be honed in on specific targets - Next steps for facing power need to take the forms of direct confrontation with the phony politicians who claim to be representative of our struggle but constantly throw us under the bus, and the police directly. In Houston certain key political targets should be Sheila Jackson Lee and Al Green. Also targeting police departments, or the Sheriff’s office.

veneer. Those dead-end tactics are what young folks in Ferguson have spurned as they've fought to hold public space, establish street and freeway blockades, unarrest fellow protesters, organize mass marches, engage in street battles with police, hold sit-ins, store occupations and more.

Marches like this and other actions provide us with the space to debate and reject interventions by reformist elements. These spaces are an ideological and tactical battleground we contend in where we must help facilitate or support the most radical tactics that arise organically from the crowd. Ignoring the ideological differences means conceding ground to the most conservative and reformist forces present.

The Police

Nationally there has been the police strategy of letting people blow off steam, not making too strong of an intervention unless there is property damage and in the case of Houston if people try to take the freeways. This ABC News interview[6] with HPD executive assistant chief George Buenik, demonstrates the coordination of this police strategy at the Nov 25th march. Buenik says, "They can march. They can chant. They can say whatever they want. We're not going to tolerate property destruction like we've seen in other cities. We're not going to allow them to shut down any freeways or throw rocks, bottles or break any windows in the city."

What this looked like in practice the day of was HPD relying on the information provided by the so-called leadership of people like Pastor Deckard and others mentioned above, about the route and what our next moves were, in order to keep things contained and plan ahead. We have also noticed in Houston HPD's extensive use of horses, part of the Special Operations Unit[7], which act as a barricade when people try to take the freeway. Aside from that they were very hands off, allowing us to take intersections, block traffic, even burn an American flag without any intervention.

Contrasting this to the unpermitted Ferguson march we did just weeks before we can see how they have gone from tailing our

6 http://abc13.com/news/houstonians-protest-ferguson-grand-jury-decision/411246/

7 http://www.houstontx.gov/police/special_operations/

alienating. Instead, many struggles—whether through looting, destruction, occupations, utopian communities, graffiti art, strikes for more leisure, and so on—have sought to do away with alienation altogether, if not always consciously.

The crucible of race

When people revolt, they are revolting against their alienated existence under capital. This existence assumes the form of a division of labor, with different kinds of labor necessary for different tasks, and a corresponding scale of wages. It is here that "race" is produced. Not only does one's one-sided labor come to mark of the individual, but the physical appearance of people comes to mark them as specific types of workers.

The division of labor assumes a white supremacist and patriarchal hierarchy, in which the gender, skin color, and physical characteristics of people come to designate them as belonging to one rung or another. Just as their labor is one-sided, it also reproduces them as one sided people: white, Black, Mexican, disabled, male, lesbian, but in any case not a full creative human being. The spatial arrangement of the division of labor further produces geographies in the same terms: Black ghettoes, Mexican barrios, the Gayborhood, white suburbs. These categories have ZERO social meaning outside of this division. There is nothing natural about individuals being reproduced within the categories of race, gender, and sexuality, or identifying accordingly.

Because these categories result from a complex, dynamic, unplanned social process, they aren't entirely rigid. Yet the existence of Black CEO's, women mayors, or transgender cops doesn't mean that racism, patriarchy, and transphobia doesn't exist, or that we are getting closer to overthrowing it. On the contrary, these individuals and class fractions have escaped their position in the division of labor, only to find they're sometimes still marked by their former categories, which enjoy a wide circulation in the popular consciousness and dominant institutions. Thus these groups often struggle for integration

on colorblind terms—or, like Pharrell and Raven Symone, declare themselves “new black” and “colorless”—all while upholding the system of exploitation.

The defense of private property not only perpetuates the subjection of labor, but also our subjection to the hierarchy of labor that reproduces humans as Black, female, disabled, bank tellers, cab drivers, food service workers, and so on. It is a defense of white supremacy, of patriarchy, of ableism, of mutilated and one-sided labor for profit. It often proves necessary to embrace these alienated expressions, in response to a society that devalues us for the same reasons: “Black is beautiful” is a negation of “Black is ugly.” But without attacking the class essence of our condition, these efforts will stall out, and become new justifications for the rule of capital. Black power, Chicanismo, or Women’s and Gay liberation, can be the means to reunite with our essential humanity, or it can be a new means of management to ensure we “stay Black and die.”

The positive political content of riots

Today, the Black working class finds itself forced out of productive labor (along with much of the working class in general). The civil service and state jobs that were used to contain the Black struggle have been eviscerated, and those jobs that remain have seen their pensions sold off and wages frozen. Black workers have been pushed downward into precarious, casual, part-time employment, and unskilled labor in the health and service industries. The unemployable are warehoused in public and private prisons, where they labor for a microscopic fraction of the minimum wage. The existing Black leadership has abandoned the social democratic demand of “full employment,” and contents itself with managing these conditions.

Black cities and neighborhoods are in absolute decay, a place where security loan sharks, check cashers, liquor stores, layaway shops, convenience stores and other petty property-owners have vampiristic relation to the community. They

struggle has partly resulted in the explosive events we’ve seen unfold.

However, being that the location of the march in Houston was held in the Greater 3rd Ward which is one of the few remaining neighborhoods with a history of the civil rights and black power movements, we came into direct conflict with the political and black nationalist forces that are remnants of that era. It can be dumbfounding for newer, younger militants coming out to see a man or woman dressed in all black fatigues and beret yelling loudly at the cops in one instant, and in the next actively communicating with them in attempting to herd and direct the crowd. Nevertheless, this contradiction doesn’t stop with groups like the NBPP or NOI.

This hypocrisy is evident as well when recently Democratic Party members Sheila Jackson Lee and Al Green used the hands up dont shoot[4] gesture during a Congress meeting. Both Lee and Green voted against[5] limiting the transfer of weapons by the Department of Defense to local police agencies. Lee and Green are representative of the layer of black politicians that were integrated into the system to help quell the last cycle of mass struggle during the 60’s and 70’s. As they try to position themselves at the head of the movement we must remind ourselves that the Democrats have signed off on massive neo-liberal austerity measures that have gutted health care, transportation, infrastructure, education, housing, and food assistance while at the same time increasing police spending. Given the role the democrats have played in crushing and stifling black struggle makes Sheila Jackson Lee’s little photo op even more appalling.

Some of these groups claim the legacy of black power, such as the NBPP. Yet they embody its exact opposite through respectability politics and reinforcing the prescription of struggle by official society through electoral politics, petitioning, and collaborating with and trying to reform the police. All of the communist and radical content that animated groups like the original Black Panther Party has been stripped away and what we’re left with is a militant

4 http://culturacolectiva.com/la-mejor-pelicula-de-cada-pais-latino-americano-segun-imdb/

5 http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/dems-who-raised-their-hands-to-support-ferguson-voted-against-limiting-police-militarization/article/2556888?custom_click=rss

everyone to sit down and do a four-and-a-half minute moment of silence. This allowed the cops to prepare themselves and kill off some of the militancy of the crowd. We tried to intervene, calling on people to reject Deckard's "silence is your strength" calls. About 100 people ended up leaving at this point.

After people started leaving, the cops let us through to get to the next intersection which was right next to the bridge of the freeway and around some stores and a gas station. There they were prepared already, with a row of horses and cops on foot, and behind them several rows of cop cars, and there was another stand off. People started linking arms and slowly making their way toward the cops on horses, one step at a time. The police line did not budge and the surge by the crowd began to dissipate.

After a while people were debating what to do when the cops showed up with paddy wagons. The preacher and the other man with the NAACP led the march from there, taking people away from the freeway and back toward TSU to do a speak out. There some students who were still on campus came out. A lot of different ideas were put forward, people booing at the more reformist ones, especially the "pull your pants up" kind of stuff.

There are many lessons we can take from this experience, and many things to consider while moving forward in Houston. These things include dealing with black nationalists including the NOI and NBPP and black church leaders, how the militancy in Houston is shifting, and what the response by the pigs has been to this activity.

Tensions with Black "Leadership"

As illustrated above, Houston has experienced similar dynamics that we've seen play out in Ferguson with regard to the self-appointed black leadership. It is no surprise that the black middle class has always had a relationship to black struggle. Yet its role has been that of silencing and taming black revolts when they happen, the usual line of "we'll take it from here" playing this role. However, their interventions have repeatedly been repudiated by younger militants. Ferguson has been described as a place where civil rights and black power never happened. This void in local bourgeois black leadership and the inability of outside leadership like Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson to contain and mediate the

take a cut of people's welfare, EBT, WIC and part-time wages by bleeding buildings, selling cheap and shitty food, and preying on addiction or people's lack of bank accounts and savings. Section 8 housing is cordoned off with iron rod gates and razor wire, where residents must pass through checkpoints and endure 24-hour surveillance.

These cities are the reproductive counterpart to the crippled state of Black labor. They are not only divested of any ounce of basic amenities, but are also highly militarized zones aimed at disciplining Black people, and ensuring they will not rebel against their conditions. Instead of factories, the hood is the means of maintaining Black exploitation. And instead of the foreman or the union boss ensuring discipline at work, now the police ensure discipline on the streets. The Black elite will turn over their sofa cushions to ensure the police retain their bloated budgets. From NYC to Detroit to Houston one will find billboards attempting to recruit a segment of Black workers to police the other segment. Of course, there is never a budget crisis where police are concerned.

Alienation appears in different forms when you are immediately producing capital, versus only being dominated by it. It meant one thing for Black workers on the assembly line, who saw an interest in assuming control over the factory, and running it for society's needs instead of a small group's profit. It means another for a precarious, criminalized surplus population, for whom the product of exploitation assumes the form of convenience stores, nail salons, a Walgreens, a dying mall, a McDonald's. The relationship to the labor process generates the form of struggle.

In the hood, small shops and stores exist to keep the community in a subjugated position. Often this relationship takes on a racialized form. The propertied class in the ghettos are generally composed of Arabs as well as South and East Asians. These groups are viewed as supposed "model minorities" (which defies their own rich class struggle histories) who, unlike Black people, achieved prosperity through docility

and hard work. In reality, their ability to become owners was predicated firstly on not being Black, and secondly, on assimilating into white supremacy through the exploitation of Black people.

Every hood is specific, but in LA for instance, much of the destructive force of '92 was aimed at small businesses owned mainly by Koreans. This was not accidental, nor was it automatically racist, even if it was expressed in racialized terms. The relation of Korean shop owners to Black communities in LA was straight-up vulturistic. It was not simply the acquittal of Rodney King's attackers that set the tone of the riots. It was also the murder of 15-year-old Latasha Harlins by shop owner Soon Ja Du, who believed she was stealing orange juice, less than two weeks after the King incident. In both cases, race was the concrete form of appearance of a class essence.

Even in retail stores such as Marshall's or Family Dollar, the sense is that money goes to these businesses but doesn't come back to people. There isn't enough work to employ everyone, and where jobs exist, they are minimum wage. Many businesses don't see it as profitable to open up shop in Black neighborhoods. They don't want to be there, and if they have to be, it is buy or get the fuck out.

The Black ghetto is a prison, in which people are immobilized, confined to poverty and debt, and made to die quietly. Where elements of a better society exist in the present, whether in cultural forms like hip-hop or the struggle and organization that emerges temporarily, they can only be positively forged in the fires of the ghetto's demise. Unlike the 1960s, capitalism today is probably unable to respond to riots with social democratic reforms. But as in the past, riots today give impetus to a new range of mass struggles, which hasten the political crisis of capital, put the Black working class in the driver's seat of history, and create the possibility for capitalism's overthrow.

The limits of riots

minutes we decided to get the march going. The NOI attempted to guide people back into the park, but we were able to intervene and get people to stay in the streets.

With a crowd of 400-500 mainly young black folks, we did an unpermitted march through Third Ward, going along side the two universities, UH and TSU, then through Cuney Homes (project housing). The crowd grew to close to 1,000, picking up people from the community and campuses as we passed by.

Throughout the march, there was a uniformed HPD Captain by the name of Troy who marched behind the frontlines, attempting to speak with protesters, gather information, and eavesdrop on conversations between the organizers. He even passed out his business card as he if is a "friend" to the struggle. This officer should not have been allowed to march among our people. There was a pastor, Pastor E A Deckard[2], who was up in the front of the march, talking to the cops in tandem with a member of the NAACP, telling them where our route was going, what we were planning, etc. The pastor made several other interventions that included stopping people from pushing through police lines. The RCP created a division because they wanted their signage to be visible. At one point, they were trailing a solid 30 feet behind which allowed a small splinter as we got into Cuney Homes.

When we got to Cuney Homes, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee[3] came with her police escort for a quick photo op in front of the march before jumping back in her car and driving off. After that, people leading the march wanted to keep marching and shut down the 288 freeway. We marched to the edge of Third Ward where the freeway is and had a standoff with police, first at an intersection that was mainly houses, a couple blocks down from the freeway. The decision to attempt the takeover of highway 288 came naturally from the crowd.

At that point, the cops had started surrounding us and people started trying to push through the police line made up of cops on foot. There was some shoving back and forth with the cops when Pastor Deckard and another young man with the NAACP (who was also talking to the cops), made another intervention telling

2 http://www.ghic.net/#!pastordeckard/galleryPage

3 http://jacksonlee.house.gov

has there been a groundswell in activity, but a shift in the mood of protesters. People are willing to push the limits at protests and get in the streets to disrupt business as usual. Throughout the night the energy was high and our confidence grew as we chanted. The aim of this article is to show 1) our own tactical mistakes during the march 2) the reactionary orientation and methodology of specific groups 3) the ideological and historical reasons these groups relate to actions in such a manner and 4) the evolving strategy of the police in relation to Ferguson protests.

In the lead up to the rally, there was a disagreement between the different organizing groups over who should lead the action. Some felt that the New Black Panther Party or other black nationalist groups should be placed at the head of the action, on the assumption that those forces "represent" or speak for the black community. Folks with Out of the Flames of Ferguson (OOTFF) argued against that position and expressed that activity trumps identity. We called for facilitating an organic leadership to emerge from among the community that showed up the day of the action.

When we arrived at the park the day of, people were already gathering inside the park, and there was the media surrounding a group with the Nation of Islam (NOI) and the New Black Panther Party (NBPP). Despite not having been involved in the month-long effort of outreach and planning for the rally, the NOI presented themselves to the media as spokesmen for the rally. Although the orientation to these groups was out-debated they were able to attempt to coopt the rally because of our tardiness. This was the beginning of a chain of events where other liberal forces also intervened and tried to lead it.

So the NOI had people go stand around an MLK statue where we were able to intervene and start an open mic for everyone to speak, not just the NOI. There a woman, Assata Richards[1] who we later found out was running for city council and is vice chair and program director for a non profit housing complex in Third Ward called Project Row Houses, said we should block traffic, so we did. She also didn't want the march to go through Third Ward and instead to stay in the intersection at MLK and OST. But the energy was high, and after holding down that intersection for about 15

1 http://www.housingforhouston.com/about-hha/board-of-commissioners/assata-nicole-richards,-vice-chair.aspx

Riots, like all forms of struggle, express the arrangement and composition of social forces. They contain within them the potential to advance the struggle, but they also have built-in limits that, if not transcended, will cause the struggle to stall out. Riots are destructive toward property, but potentially constructive when they facilitate the growth of an independent Black political force. This is only a potential: without semi-permanent forms of organization to carry forward the flames of revolt, and without a clear political defense of their militancy (including a critique of property) they risk isolation. Like the LA rebellion, the established Black leadership might swoop in, and harnesses popular energies in patronage systems and non-profits, so that no lasting organization emerges. We must understand why riots happen, and how existing conditions will inevitably produce more riots. But without a reflection on the direction of the struggle, and the maturation of organized political forces, they will eventually die.

Immediately Darren Wilson was let off, the strategy of the Ferguson police was to allow certain businesses to burn, sacrifice a squad car or two, and then use the destruction as justification for a physical crackdown. This is not conspiracy, but a strategy of the police and ruling forces, a strategy which so far has not been met with one of our own. Rioting so far has expressed rage and revenge, but has not necessarily tilted the balance of class forces in favor of Black workers.

In some riots, militants and revolutionaries have redirected people from targeting smaller businesses to larger ones, which play a greater role in the exploitation of the community. In LA, the gang truce allowed local street organizations to eventually form armed wing of the rebellion, directly fighting the police. This engagement with the state is what allowed the LA working classes to attack capital, in the form of rioting and looting. Whatever the long-term limits of the LA rebellion were, direct conflict with the State was at its forefront. Today in Ferguson and around the country, directly confronting the police and other political targets is paramount. We are seeing the emergence of a political narrative in which the police are

the face of a capitalist and racist system. We need tactics that express this emerging narrative.

Like the police, the vultures that loot the Black community through petty property and debt are sustained by forms of labor that are socially useless and even harmful, which would be immediately abolished in any free society. However, there are also useful forms of labor in and around the hood, which could be directly taken over rather than burnt down. In these cases, it is the form of capital that needs to be abolished—not clothing, farms, technology, or health care as such. In settings where socially useful labors take place, where we must begin to propagandize and agitate for working people and students to struggle directly against their rulers, bosses, and administrators.

The hood is a prison. "Burn this bitch down."

TURN UP HTOWN
Reflections on Nov 25 Day of Action

Intro

The decision made by the grand jury to not indict Darren Wilson for the merciless killing of Mike Brown came at no surprise. I had been hearing and reading about similar stories prior to that one of Brown and realized the outcomes were pretty much the same. A black man dies at the hands of our American brothers and sisters and the system continues to work flawlessly. No indictment. No charge. Paid vacation. Half of me wishes this was fiction but all of the conscious me knows it is a full blown reality.

Knowing that it would not be anytime soon before any kind of justice would be displayed regarding such cases, many individuals including myself took our frustration to the streets. We marched tirelessly throughout Third Ward the following night...

It seemed as though I had arrived to the protest at precisely the right time. There was at least one thousand people there with signs that read BLACK LIVES MATTER and HANDS UP DON'T SHOOT. The momentum had been building for some time now and I could gather from observation, that at that corner of Southmore Boulevard and Dowling Street, the massive group in its entirety had to make a decision. The energy was perfect and our power as group was getting more intense by the second; however, there was a problem. We had no direction. Our mission has suddenly started to unravel. We began to look like fools in the eyes of the oppressor. While the majority wanted to push through the barricade of horses and pigs in uniform, those individuals who we thought were on our side presented their own agenda.

-Jemn

Summary of the Action

In Houston we had our day of action the day after the non-indictment, Nov 25 at 5pm, starting at MacGregor Park, a park near the University of Houston in Third Ward. The rally was organized by several radicals from Houston. What's important to note is not only