

A photograph of a building on fire, with bright orange and yellow flames rising from the structure. In the foreground, the silhouettes of several people are visible against the fire. One person in the center has their right arm raised in a fist. The scene is dark, with the fire providing the primary light source. The overall mood is one of chaos and protest.

The Abolition of Law

NEVADA

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2022

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Stolen Dakota land.

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First edition.

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The uprising of 2020 was a life changing experience. For one to be among the massive crowds, who fought side by side against the police, pushed them back out of the streets, out of neighborhoods, and ultimately out of their own precinct. For one to feel that collective power and joy in being together, to loot, to redecorate, and set everything aflame. One could recognize in this the possibility, however fleeting, of a different way of life. The memory of this experience will stick with me forever.

However, there is a danger that we become frozen in time, unable to see past our nostalgia for such events as the world moves forward without us. It is not the purpose of this book to indulge in this nostalgia, but instead to clarify some of the stakes and limits that emerged within the uprising. It is these limits that will have to be addressed in the struggles to come. I believe it is from within this uprising that we can most clearly perceive the

lines of conflict that we will continuously encounter in future movements.

This is not, and could not be, a whole account of the uprising, nor a comprehensive analysis of it. This book is drawn from my direct experiences, although it deeply benefits from those of my friends and comrades from whom I cannot disentangle my existence. There are countless important lessons learned and useful questions posed by this uprising that could not fit into these pages. I aim to contribute to the generative collective thought that has emerged in order to develop more complete understandings of these events and their consequences.

The first section of this book offers a glimpse into the uprising itself and a firsthand experience of it. Both included texts were written in its immediate aftermath—the first days of June. They were written collectively by groups of a half dozen or more people, including myself in both cases. Both were synthesized by editors into singular voices and appear here almost completely unchanged. I hope that these can set the scene, to offer a timeline and personal impressions of what happened and how it felt.

The second section I wrote in the year and a

half following the uprising. It contains four texts, most of which have been previously published elsewhere and edited for inclusion here. Each of them attempt to dissect different tensions around the struggle for abolition as illuminated by the uprising. With them, I hope to address the following questions: First, what does it tell us about the vision of abolition for the discourse of “outside agitators” to be successful in demobilizing a movement? Second, what does the very idea of an “outside” imply for the abolitionist imaginary? Third, how do these ideas clarify white participation in the forefront of the revolt, beyond the limits of what allyship would relegate them to? Lastly, what is the relation between police and policing, or, how does the law survive the abolition of the police?

I hope to show that at the heart of the struggle for abolition is a battle between the abolition of the police and the abolition of *policing*, or what I call the *abolition of law*. By targeting the police while leaving the law intact, we—perhaps unconsciously—smuggle the same order of the old world into the new. It is this order as a whole that needs to be dismantled, not simply its most violent enforcers, and with it much of our current ways of

understanding property, punishment, race, and more.

Much of the writing included has previously appeared in the following online publications, in alphabetical order: *CrimethInc*, *Ill Will*, *It's Going Down*, and *The New Inquiry*. I want to express my deepest gratitude to my friends without whom none of this writing would have been possible, yet whom I cannot name, for reasons I suspect are obvious.

Nevada
Winter 2022



It's not destroying, it's creating something new

PART I

The Uprising



Be water, spread fire

Lundi Matin¹: *We were receiving bad news after bad news: the death toll in the USA was sizably larger than in other countries; a megalomaniac president was inciting citizens to inject bleach up their veins; militias were protesting to reopen businesses and invaded state houses with impunity; hardly anyone resisted. Then came the spark: the cruel murder of George Floyd. Are you surprised? How do you account for the uprising?*

Yes, in a way the uprising was completely unexpected. After the revolutionary movements all over the world in 2019, personally I was afraid that the pandemic would throw us into a new dark era. But just when we all lost hope, America showed the world that nothing is over. There are also a lot of clear reasons why it happened the way that it did. To start with, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine measures, people overall are much more plugged into the internet than

before. The video of George Floyd’s murder was able to spread at a bigger scale and more quickly than these things usually do, and the same goes for news of the protests being planned. Months of being deprived of the crowd experience, of human touch, certainly contributed to the unpredictable character of the uprising. I think people are just really exhausted, from the pandemic, but moreover from centuries of institutional anti-black² racism and oppression gone unchecked. People have

- 1 This interview was conducted on June 1st 2020, between the French publication *Lundi Matin* and several participants in the Minneapolis uprising. The English transcript was published on June 11th 2020 at *Ill Will* as “Dispatch From the Rebellion in Minneapolis.”
- 2 Throughout this book, I will not capitalize the word “black,” for reasons best articulated by Samuel Delany:

“...the small ‘b’ on ‘black’ is a very significant letter, an attempt to ironize and de-transcendentalize the whole concept of race, to render it provisional and contingent, a significance that many young people today, white and black, who lackadaisically capitalize it, have lost track of.” (“Racism and Science Fiction” in *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora*, ed. Sheree R. Thomas (Warner Books, 2000) 392.)

And more recently, Nicholas Whittaker:

“Through no fault of its own, ‘B’ has become indelibly tied to the project of definition. Definition is a field of [im]possibility, a limiting structure, within which the vast majority of race discourse—no matter one’s particular theory—is constrained.” (“Case Sensitive: Why We Shouldn’t Capitalize ‘Black,’” *The Drift*, September 17th 2021.)

protested for justice for years, and gotten nowhere. It shouldn't be a surprise that eventually people gave up pleading, and began to fight back.

Tell us your feelings, how did the day pass? How was a collective intelligence built (or not!)? What the people are saying, or not, about the uprising? What claims are being made? Any local variations? What kind of things happened?

I'm not entirely sure people outside the region understand the scale of what has happened. The first day already covered over two miles, between where George Floyd was murdered (38th & Chicago) and the Minneapolis Police 3rd precinct (Lake & Minnehaha). Multiple crowds made their way between these two locations, often with zero police presence whatsoever. The clashes were focused around the precinct, but things were getting out of control in the general area too. By the end of the second day, riots and looting had spread for miles in basically every direction. While the police were unable to advance much further than the immediate area in front of their precinct, crowds wandered in different directions, breaking into stores, writing graffiti, setting fires. Some people

drove to different neighborhoods to loot stores in small groups.

On the third day, spontaneous crowds began looting stores midday in Saint Paul (Minneapolis' twin city) and, later in the night, as the police were forced to retreat from their precinct, other groups were looting across town. When reinforcements from other law enforcement agencies and the National Guard arrived that night, they retook the area around the 3rd precinct. The next day, with very little prompting, crowds began to assemble over at the 5th precinct, which is almost two miles down Lake Street. Again, crowds roved around the entire area and police were mostly only able to defend the area immediately around their station.

All of this is simply to illustrate that there was no spatial limit to what was happening, it was all over both cities and beyond them. There was the incredible collective intelligence to simultaneously concentrate police forces in their precincts, while also diffusing around the district and refusing to be contained.

If you want to know the wildest thing I saw, it was someone driving a stolen post office van full speed into the barricades in front of the empty

police station, before setting it on fire. Later, we saw people walking out of the banks with a safe and bags of cash. There's also stories of teenagers in fast cars looting multiple diamond stores in Union Square in San Francisco on Friday night, with the police chasing them but failing to catch them. People fly from all over the world to shop in that district. What we are witnessing is the largest downward re-distribution of wealth in modern US history. I think that's pretty wonderful.

What happened with the execution of George Floyd has been a national, even global affair, as people in many countries are monitoring the situation. It's not surprising that demos happened all across the USA, but it seems like the intensity and the determination of the protesters of other towns have been comparable to those in Minneapolis. Why? Is this a big city movement, or is it a countryside movement also?

It's absolutely incredible that people in so many other cities are joining the uprising, and that it has taken on such a militant character everywhere. It is also not limited to big cities—Minneapolis itself is not such a big city already, compared to New York or Chicago. Not only have many other

medium and large cities risen up, but riots have broken out in smaller towns all over. So much has been happening locally it has been hard for us in Minneapolis to pay close attention to what is happening elsewhere.

It's hard to say why it has reached such an intensity in other cities too. Because everyone everywhere is sick and tired of police violence? Because everyone wants to be in a crowd of people again? Because everyone is watching their phones and can see how easily we have forced the police to retreat? There is probably a Marxian analysis that would point at the unemployment numbers because of the pandemic, with the increased precarity it has led to. This is certainly an element too.

It's also hard to say if the movement will reach the countryside. There's significant examples of actions in small towns like Fayetteville, North Carolina, where an old slave-auction house was burned. Cities are being burned because, especially after the pandemic, people know how hostile these places are. It's hard to say how the counterrevolution will re-format the city. The police have failed to impose their curfews, which were standard for the pandemic. On the other hand, Minneapolis Police have already announced they will use

“contact tracing” developed during the quarantine to surveil and repress demonstrators. We can expect an unprecedented wave of repression to follow.

Is there any inspiration from other context? Hong Kong, the Yellow Vests or otherwise? Is there a circulation of tales and experience?

The uprising in Hong Kong seems to have had a real impact on the uprising here, along with the more general experience of global unrest of the last years. People have circulated tips on extinguishing tear gas that was demonstrated in Hong Kong, they’ve taken up “be water” as a strategy to avoid being concentrated in only one spot, and lasers are being used to blind the police and force helicopters to retreat.

The Twin Cities have seen smaller uprisings against police murders in the past as well. In 2015 in north Minneapolis and 2016 in Saint Paul. Tactics that were first explored in these moments, most notably perhaps would be trapping the police inside their own precinct in 2015, have become common sense. This, paired with the general tactical intelligence that has permeated around

the world in 2019, helps define the strategic sensibility of the uprising.

I would even say that on a tactical level, the intelligence being built has synthesized “be water” with several important additional elements, such as cars, guns, and arson. The widespread and decentralized looting all over both Minneapolis and Saint Paul, much of it done by groups of people in cars, forced the police to spread their forces in every direction. So people would loot and destroy stores like Target and Walgreens and then move to a different location. In response, the police would then have their officers stationed outside of looted businesses like Taco Bell or Target to protect them from being set on fire, and this meant that there was not enough police to guard the 3rd precinct (which got burned). The tactics are quite simple: loot every store and burn as many of them to the ground as possible. The cops spent much of their time chasing fires, and were outpaced by the demonstrators. So the police stood on the roof of their precinct and could only defend themselves with tear gas. When they ran out of tear gas, they were forced to flee the building under fear of attack. Demonstrators then looted the building and set it on fire.

The crowds in Minneapolis were distinctly young people, though there was a lot of support from older people as well. In fact it's been interesting to see how the riots have worked without strict unity, how many people stood alongside each other even if they didn't agree about everything.

Who is organizing the demonstrations currently unfolding in the most important American cities? How do they occur? Do they come from preexisting activist networks, or are they mostly spontaneous?

In Minneapolis, there have been almost no organized protests happening. The very first day was organized by coalitions of Left groups, but they were not leading anything whatsoever. Many people in the marches organized by leftists were trying to doxx people doing anything subversive in the marches, so I think most people did not feel safe participating in the "peaceful protests". Aside from these minor protests, people just knew that they could go to the 3rd precinct and find a crowd. While some might have announced this or that "protest," our sense is that the crowds that really mattered were largely spontaneous and not responding to the organizing done by leftist groups.

I imagine that in most cities, some demonstrations have been called by left-wing activist groups, but the unrest quickly outpaces them. Already, the left has begun to cannibalize the insurrection and turn it into a new campaign for reform, but it's clear that this won't work very well.

Could you tell us about the atmosphere during these demonstrations and riots, both in terms of composition and in terms of emotions? Here in France we hear that the riots are pretty diverse, which also allowed the police and many politicians to lay the blame on white “infiltrators”. We heard that people were driven by grief and anger—are these the principal emotions that lead people to go out in the streets?

The uprising has had a very diverse character. It has been multi-racial, which reflected the south Minneapolis neighborhood around which it centered. It was only after the first four days that the government began saying that the violence was started by white supremacist infiltrators that paranoia began to spread within the crowds. The idea of white infiltrators being responsible for the violence is an old racist ploy.

Emotionally, yes, grief and anger of an unparalleled magnitude are the driving motivations of the uprising. But when the police are pushed out and people are openly looting or building barricades, there is also a very joyful and festive atmosphere too. I don't see this as a contradiction—people are angry at those who oppress them, but are also feeling, perhaps for the first time, the power of acting together with thousands of others.

I will never forget the people I met around the large bonfire that was the third precinct on Thursday night in Minneapolis. Everybody was smiling and sharing looted goods, dancing and relaxing, as there were no cops in sight. If you've ever read the novel *Dhalgren* by Samuel Delany—you can imagine what it was like. Entire blocks burned while people picked through the remnants of looted buildings, fired weapons and lasers into the sky, encountered new people, and danced—it's an especially American type of love.

Even if it's daunting to generalize, beyond the immediate context, what is the target of the movement? Racism? Police violence? Trumpism?

This movement is the contemporary analog of Nat Turner's insurrection in the 19th century. In America, the revolution will never begin because of austerity, over free healthcare, or for "communism". What we are seeing on the streets of Minneapolis and all over the country is an armed insurrection against the slave owning and property owning class. Walking through the streets with entire blocks burning, you keep hearing people saying things like "500 years, 500 years" (referencing the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade). This is an insurrection against the apparatuses of racialization. So the horizon is much bigger than reform and "justice", and I think this is really worth emphasizing, and something that would appear to set it apart from previous Black Lives Matter movements. Of course, many people are saying they want to have the police convicted of murder, and that's fine, because it's an almost impossible demand.³ But everybody on the streets keeps saying the same refrain: "Burn it all down.

3 Yet Chauvin was indeed convicted of murder. Despite the broader horizon, one need not look further than what is now called the "civil rights movement" to see how these insurrections can still be captured within the limits of reform. For more on this, see Shemon, "The Rise of Black Counter-Insurgency," *III Will*, July 30th 2020.

Blow it all up.” Nobody expects anything from the government institutions. When people resist here, they remember the last 500 years of genocide and slavery, but also 500 years of resistance.

In terms of demands, is it reasonable to contemplate a political response to these events? After six years of BLM and two Obama mandates, the situation has barely changed. And the upcoming presidential election is clearly not offering new hopes of change. What is there to hope for, according to the protestors? Is the movement opening new horizons, or is it fueled by vengeance?

Right now the media will tell you the cycle is focused on vengeance, and it definitely is. But there are many promising examples of positive horizons being set. First and foremost, people are setting up mutual aid tents all over the streets for redistributing looted water and snacks to people, and there was always a lot of looted milk people could use to clean the tear gas out of their eyes (even if this is proven to be a poor choice of eyewash). Medics are everywhere and constantly helping injured people. This is widespread, but of course the media will never show this.

Regarding its positive horizons, we were told that schools were opening up to people who were trapped by police in Chicago last night. In Minneapolis, some people took over a hotel and moved 150 homeless people into it.

This is the first time in modern American history that a police precinct has been captured, destroyed, looted and burned. There now exists a real and concrete possibility of forcing police departments to surrender—this is something new. The fence surrounding the White House was breached on the same night, which is likewise fairly unprecedented. We don't know what will come next, it's really hard to say.

Revolutions in the 20th century, inspired by the Russian Revolution always imagined the process as taking place through the siege of government offices, after which a dictatorship of those previously excluded would take place, which would install a new society in place of the old one. Today, it must be admitted that we simply do not possess any image of what form of "society" will replace the current one, if any at all. Perhaps it's just not how power works these days. As our French cousins wrote after Trump's election: "Maybe what we're seeing is a gradual but infinite

fragmentation of the national territory—an end to the United States of America—where the multiplication of militias would necessitate the multiplication of communes.” Are we the new Americans? Who knows. Perhaps these crowds will burn it all down and pick up from where others left off a century and a half ago, by fighting against colonial invasion and slavery.

What has BLM's role been since its creation, and what role does it have in the movement? It's difficult from where we are [in France] to grasp whether it's a slogan, a network, or a fully fledged political organization. Should we think of the movement and its innovations (until now mostly in the art of destruction) as a criticism of the failures of BLM, or rather as a continuation of BLM?

Black Lives Matter is basically all three of those things and the latter (organization) benefits from its confusion with the former (slogan), as it allows the organization to essentially speak for itself while at the same time being treated as if they speak for an entire movement. In the Twin Cities, there is no Black Lives Matter chapter anymore, which makes this a little easier to deal with.

That said, many people honestly appear to have given up demanding justice from the state, instead preferring to fight the police directly. Black Lives Matter, as an organization, have too often sought to canalize this rage and determination back into calls for reform and justice, as we see with the demand to “prosecute the officers.” There are only a minority of people demanding such actions at this point, which could be called a response to the failure of the formal Black Lives Matter. But it is this failure that perhaps allows “black lives matter” as a slogan to be put in contact with its full power.

As we've seen, the movement is very diverse, from young people who are respectable enough to be TV or sport stars, to looting youth. Is there dissension? If so, do they concern modes of action? Are there already leaders and organizations trying to channel collective rage?

Of course there's disagreement, but that's what gives the movement its power. Hong Kongers have this slogan: “each in our own way, we climb the mountain together”, which emphasizes how people can disagree and still come together to

form a coherent force. I think this is the reflex that still needs to be developed within the movement: the sense that we don't have to agree or arrive at a consensus in order to compose a revolutionary movement. I think people will learn this sooner or later, but the process won't be pretty. There's a lot of trust that needs to be built. This country is founded on anti-blackness, and it's long overdue that white people start taking very serious risks to fight alongside our black and brown brothers and sisters. That means doing a lot more than just protesting. We have to create real infrastructure to allow people to outlast the end of this world, since what we are seeing on the streets of Minneapolis is clearly the beginning of an entirely new world.

So many people feel abandoned and alone. In the USA, the COVID mortality rate was disproportionately higher for non-white community, as was also true of life expectancy more generally before the pandemic. Is there a sort of nihilism behind those destructions? Especially among the younger generations?

It's a tricky word, "nihilism". Perhaps their method is nihilism; but anybody who has seen these

people knows they have freedom in their hearts. Perhaps its more a sort of “hopelessness”, of the sort that befits a “no future” generation. It seems almost impossible to imagine revolution in the USA, yet on the other hand, I would not call the people burning everything down nihilists. They are our only hope moving forward; without the young folks shooting back at the police, the real horizon of collective possibility would close for all of us. Without the arsonists and looters we would be nowhere.

At the same time, it is decisive that we find ways to ensure that the movement is not transformed into a symmetrical armed conflict with the state, but I think many people know that. People have been fighting these fascist pigs for 500 years; there is a deep knowledge of resistance in America, and I think in moments like this we really see just how smart and resourceful Americans really are.

Nobody thought we could stop this shit, but there's too many of us and the police cannot stop us. Trump can't stop it, the left can't stop it. All the pain, all the trauma, all the grief is right there. We have brought this country to its knees. When there are fires lit at the White House, it means

the prospect of revolution has once again become real. This is only the beginning.



The world is ours

May 26th 2020

A thunderstorm was brewing.⁴

It was hot and humid on a Tuesday afternoon in Minneapolis. The COVID-19 pandemic had defined daily life for over two months. A horrific video of a police officer murdering George Floyd the night before was spreading rapidly across the internet. A protest was called for 5pm, with rain predicted to follow shortly. There was no telling what was going to happen that evening.

At 5 o'clock, thousands were already assembled at the intersection of 38th and Chicago where George Floyd had been killed the day before. The crowd stretched for blocks in every direction, with smaller groups spread outward around a larger radius. In time, groups began to break off to march to the Minneapolis Police 3rd precinct.

There were two large marches, one that went

northbound on Chicago Ave and another that traveled east on 38th. For the crowd traveling down 38th, we made a turn onto Hiawatha filling all the street lanes. At a passing intersection along Hiawatha, two police cars pulled up next to the massive crowd. Quickly, some folks began throwing rocks and yelling before the crowd moved on to the precinct. A similar scene was playing out on the other march that went up Chicago Ave as well when police cars couldn't escape the route of march in time.

I was in a smaller group that marched to the 3rd precinct a bit later, which departed not much later than the other ones. Over the two and a half mile walk, people began to spray paint slogans against the police and in memory of George Floyd and drag things into the street to act as barricades to protect us from rush hour traffic. At this point, the police were nowhere to be seen.

Before long, this group joined the large crowd that had formed around the 3rd precinct. When I arrived, banging could already be heard as the first floor windows were shattered, and tags had begun

4 This text is a collectively authored account originally published on *It's Going Down* on June 12th 2020 as "The World Is Ours: The Minneapolis Uprising in Five Acts."

being written around the building. “Organizers” stood with their backs to the police and the precinct, screaming against all evidence that this was a peaceful protest. There was a standoff in an alleyway behind the precinct between three people holding megaphones, trying to defend a squad car from destruction, and a small crowd that smashed it relentlessly, as the megaphones screamed that this wasn’t helping. This small conflict was quickly made irrelevant as the crowd finally succeeded in dismantling a segment of fence protecting dozens of squad cars and police officer’s personal vehicles. Cheers went up as people turned their attention to smashing every window in that lot. People’s rage at the police knew no bounds.

Around 8pm, a small group of protesters in safety vests began yelling that the protest was over and that people should go home. This was met largely with indifference, although a few people shouted back that no one gets to decide when the protest is over.

Upon the departure of these supposed organizers, police moved in with tear gas and flash bangs. They attempted to push the crowds out of their parking lot and out of the street in front of the precinct. However, the geography of the

immediate landscape basically rendered their attempts at dispersal futile. It was not a tight city block, it was a boulevard with an immense parking lot to the north, and an open hillside to the west. Everyone had ample space to retreat, recover from the tear gas, and then move forward again. Rocks that were taken from the nearby train crossing, alongside water bottles people had been drinking from, were thrown at the police lines to push them back. The police continued to use tear gas in large quantities, but were never able to hold any territory beyond their precinct.

Across the street to the north of the precinct, shopping carts are piled into and around a bus stop enclosure to provide cover. The police, holed up in their castle, were unable to block off incoming traffic and people warn drivers about tear gas ahead. At one point a semi-truck stops directly in front of the shopping cart barricade, providing the perfect cover from police munitions. Meanwhile, the crowd spread out in every direction.

These clashes continued long into the night. A liquor store, east across the street from the precinct, was broken into and looted. The police were able to send a team across the street to secure the building, but were forced to retreat eventually and

looting began again. Only after 1am did crowds thin enough for the police to make a second attempt at securing the liquor store. In the area beyond, the police had no control whatsoever.

May 27th 2020

Crowds reappeared the next day in front of the 3rd precinct, which by now had been fortified with concrete barricades topped with large metal fences. Police officers were stationed on the roof, sporadically shooting marker rounds—rubber bullets coated in a brightly colored chalk. In the early evening before the sun even set, bricks began flying as the clashes heated up—some breaking what few windows remained intact on the precinct, while others aimed at the officers themselves. The cops unleashed a hail of marker rounds, which on multiple occasions hit people in the head. Fellow protesters used their bodies and umbrellas to shield those providing first aid, as others continued to gather rocks to fight back with.

North of the precinct, another massive barricade of shopping carts was assembled to prevent the police from advancing and providing cover to those throwing objects at officers. Police on the

ground instead moved into the street east of the precinct, but despite fewer barricade materials in that direction, the crowd was able to hold the street fairly easily, and before long the police were forced to retreat back to the precinct itself. Spray paint cans were freely handed out and the already vibrant walls were adorned with further slogans. At the same time, the Auto Zone (renamed by graffiti as “Autonomous Zone”) began to get looted, before people re-entered the liquor store and then the larger stores around the area—Target, Cub Foods, and Aldi. The sun was still shining in the sky as people ran in and out of these stores, pushing carts full of looted items out into the crowd or into the nearby neighborhoods. Some grabbed boxes of food that they set out for others to eat and refuel next to graffiti that read “free shit for everyone.” Cars are constantly driving by, doing burnouts or loading up at the Target. Passengers hang out the windows to get a better view of their surroundings and shout “Fuck 12!” to cheers from the crowd.

In the clashes that continued, the police were unable to hold much of the street for very long. They would shoot tear gas and marker rounds, forcing people to retreat, only for them to return

moments later. So while the front lines of the clashes rarely moved back—only later in the night when the police attempted to escort firetrucks to the Auto Zone which had been set on fire did they actually reclaim any significant amount of territory—whenever the crowd retreated, people were dispersed further down the streets away from the precinct. These crowds stretched out, and stores further and further from the epicenter of the 3rd precinct began getting looted.

I saw youths of color in crews streaming down Lake Street. These crews were out to have a good fucking time, and there wasn't a cop in sight past 31st street. Here someone was beating the windows out of cars at the dealership, pleading "just one more" as his friend urged him to move on, while down the street a car rolled up to collect the bucket loads of change that had been freed from the TCF Bank coin counting machine. People streamed into Walgreens and excitedly emerged back onto Lake Street with their arms full. A confused person drove into the McDonald's parking lot and then tried to order from the drive thru, even though the trash can out front was on fire and the front windows had been smashed.

A late middle aged white woman emerged

and pleaded “I am begging you to please stop destroying my neighborhood. I live here.”

I saw some gatherings of older folks, talking and laughing while they watched the chaos.

Word goes around that the large apartment complex that was being built across the street from the Target has started to burn. People gather in groups on the edge of the Target parking lot to watch the six story tall inferno, sharing looted beer and cigarettes with everyone. By the end of the night, stores in several neighborhoods were getting hit, especially as people began using cars to assist in sporadic smash-n-grabs in wealthier areas of the city.

May 28th 2020

It was well before noon when spontaneous looting began at the Super Target across the river in Saint Paul. This spread around the Midway neighborhood until the police responded and clashes broke out, which would remain steady for much of the day. Upon hearing the news I decided to grab some water from a gas station (which would no longer exist by nightfall) and bring it to the people outside of the Target. I don't even make it

that far before I see crowds of hundreds of people joyful and exuberant while parading in broad daylight with looted goods from the Max-It Pawn shop and Sports Dome store. “Here’s some water for tear gas, you’re gonna need it” I cry out, to approving smiles and laughs as people reach out their hands to grab a water bottle from me. The police are nowhere to be seen.

I hear the distant explosions of police munitions outside the Super Target parking lot. This Target in the Midway neighborhood is located right next to the Western headquarters of the St. Paul police department and is also the 2nd most profitable store in the entire Target corporation nationwide. Today, it’s a battleground. Saplings are uprooted from the ground and used as battering rams against police cruisers. Rocks in the parking lot originally used for landscaping are quickly turned to projectiles. Lil Boosie’s “Fuck the Police” plays intermittently above the din of people shouting at police, laughing while sharing looted food and liquor with each other, the screeching of tires as people do burnouts in the liberated parking lots of nearby businesses, and the hilariously pathetic robotic commands to disperse coming from the police loudspeakers. Just like the 3rd

Precinct in Minneapolis, the St. Paul police are unable to control the territory immediately surrounding their headquarters without leaving it vulnerable to attack from the increasingly bold crowd. That attitude didn't change with nightfall either.

As darkness falls across St. Paul, SPPD strike teams move in to control hotspots where looting and arson was occurring only to be immediately pushed back by throngs of people throwing rocks and bottles and anything that could be picked up and thrown. Dumpsters are utilized as barricades and pushed into the streets behind us while we retreat into the quiet residential streets. This neighborhood was very well suited for the sort of "hit and run" rudimentary urban guerrilla warfare that was emerging tonight. While Snelling & University and Hamline & University were busy intersections with many businesses and strip malls up and down the main roads, the surrounding side streets were purely single family homes dotted with a few apartment complexes here and there. Alleyways and backyards provided ample space to hide from the police, regroup, and go out on the offensive once more. These clashes would continue throughout the night.

Crowds also remained determined around the 3rd precinct in Minneapolis. People collaborated to build elaborate barricades from anything and everything found around the area. Plywood from the nearby construction site, shopping carts, cart return terminals, stolen segments of the police's own fencing, and much more went up and began to provide cover behind which demonstrators gathered tools and assembled makeshift incendiary devices. Tables distributing food and water were set up close to the barricade, and people began to more confidently occupy the space. Around five pm, the police heavily tear gassed the area, and advanced to pull down the system of barricades. They pulled the majority into their own building, which was noted by many, and whispers started going around that they would definitely not be able to attempt the maneuver again.

During this time, looting and burning broke out with more intensity throughout the city. Elaborate sprinkler systems are what saved the larger stores like Aldi and Target from being completely torched the night before, but instead they flooded as the looting persisted throughout the day. Tons of food and aid supplies were gathered from stores and distributed outside for free. Throughout the

night, many of the stores that had been looted the night before were now set on fire—many burned to the ground. The large parking lot across from the 3rd precinct had become a riotous party. A bonfire raged, as cars packed with people arrived and circled the lot. The shell of a torched vehicle was at the conflagration's center; people tossed a burnt, looted beach ball back and forth across the flames. The collective din included cheers & conversation, the now non-stop blaring of sirens and security alarms, and live music coming from the tents used for distribution of supplies and respite from the sun.

Later into the night as the sun descended, the crowd began to get more and more daring. Tear gas was quickly thrown back or extinguished using tactics from the streets of Chile and Hong Kong. People moved between complicated setups of protective barricades, taking the edge off of the threat of less-lethal rounds. Whispers began to spread through the crowd that the cops would soon run out of rounds and tear gas. The intervals between the volleys definitely seemed to be increasing, even as the crowd grew more aggressive. People began throwing their fireworks directly at the police. Molotov cocktails were assembled by

groups of strangers ducked behind barricades, and it slowly dawned on the crowd there was a very real possibility of overrunning this precinct, something that had seemed like a pipe dream on Tuesday night.

As the pressure increased on the police, yells went up that they had run out of tear gas, and it suddenly seemed obvious that they had not launched any for at least an hour. At 10 o'clock, joyful screams rang out as the police threw one last tear gas canister (which was quickly diffused) and formed a caravan of vehicles that tore through the lot fence, running for their lives as they were pursued, pelted with rocks and blinded by lasers. A barricade quickly went up to protect against their return, and a trashcan full of rocks was dumped into the street in front of it. Within minutes of their retreat, the great floodlights in the lot that had been illuminating and blinding the crowd all night began to fall and crash one by one, and we could see the doors to the precinct. The shattered floodlights and the barricade were ablaze within minutes. Immediately, hundreds rushed and disassembled the fence to the lot. Dozens of people rushed into the side door of the precinct, the intent was clear: to level this place. I witnessed

people running out the door carrying pairs of boots, flashlights, and batons. People split into groups inside the precinct and began setting fires everywhere they could; with none significantly taking hold. Once the inside of the building had been thoroughly ransacked, the crowd retreated to celebrate with each other in front of the precinct as the fire gradually consumed the front facade of the building. Fireworks filled the sky above the precinct for hours as it burned, abandoned.

Later on, USPS vans were stolen and used to make a bonfire in front of the precinct, and on the peripheral streets large barricades were erected. All sorts of debris, metal fences, former bus shelters, planters, and more were assembled into barricades as bricks were stockpiled to defend from the suspected police counterattack. This counter attack came by daybreak, as State Patrol and National Guard arrived to reinforce the Minneapolis Police and reclaim a lot of the area around the 3rd precinct. The whir of Blackhawk helicopters in the sky became a constant reminder of this militarized presence, their constant surveillance and patrol of the streets.

May 29th 2020

With the area around the 3rd precinct thoroughly locked down by the State, the revolt was forced to either find a new target, or fade away. Given the collective intelligence rapidly emerging in the streets, it is no surprise that the next evening crowds marches past the police line down Lake street and makes their way to the 5th precinct, a couple of miles west from the 3rd.

Everything in the area was already boarded up, some stores likely hit in the previous nights of looting, others as a preventative measure. Smaller marches to Uptown wove in and out of the larger mass of people spread out from the intersection in front of the police station, expanding the territory freed from the illusion of police control. For a while, the relatively festive atmosphere continued from the previous nights. The Wells Fargo across the street from the 5th precinct was having its ATMs ripped apart while police stationed on the roof of their precinct dodged volleys of rocks and the glare of lasers. The energy of the crowd was joyful. I helped hand out water and first aid to the people who needed it with a group of medics who were monitoring the situation across the street.

Graffiti writers were decorating the area with tags against the police, in memory of George Floyd, or their own monikers. As soon as the interior of the Wells Fargo was breached, it was set on fire, joining a number of other businesses on Nicollet, several of which had plumes of smoke rising from within.

After 11pm, the police began advancing on the crowd, retaking the street in front of the 5th precinct. They then began pushing the crowd north along Nicollet Ave towards the K-Mart which was being emptied of its contents this entire time. Vehicles ripped along the corridor in front of the large lot, which had long-ago been dug up for construction. People moved quickly to help a van full of medics displaced by the police; its wheels spinning wildly in the loose sand and gravel. Quickly, large barricades were being assembled on the street to prevent police incursions. Crowds of strangers came together to move sections of fencing, while a fire within a nearby backhoe raged and threatened a large, diesel-fueled explosion. Rocks and smashed pavers were collected in piles for throwing. It became nearly impossible to see how far the police were advancing thanks to the thick smoke of so many fires, combined with

the tear gas that had been deployed. A crowd of hundreds, pushed into the expansive Kmart parking lot, still proved too massive and unruly to fall prey to the mass arrests threatened by the State.

May 30th 2020

With the reinforcements of other law enforcement agencies and the National Guard, the implementation of a curfew, in addition to the growing citizen reaction towards the unruly elements in the streets, the police were able to more efficiently crackdown on the protests beginning on Saturday.

It was the second night with the 8pm curfew in place, and crowds continued to gather near the 5th precinct. Not wasting any time police began to heavily tear gas the crowd after the curfew went into effect, and a lot of the crowd was easily dispersed. People began escaping into the streets parallel to the precinct, while others marched back down Lake Street where police moved to make mass arrests. Police and National Guard continued to patrol the area as the threat of arrest for being out past curfew lingers. I witnessed a few arrests as well as police ordering people to get off their lawns and into their houses. Some are even

shot by the police with rubber bullets from being on their porch after curfew.

Epilogue

Back at 38th and Chicago (renamed George Floyd Square), the vigil has been maintained for the duration of this uprising and ever since. The streets continue to be blocked off with barricades, murals adorn the walls, and music is almost always playing. Free meals are cooked, while supplies and groceries are likewise distributed freely. A stage has been set up for speakers to address the crowds that congregate there, which happens on a daily basis. Dance parties are also a nightly occurrence. Oftentimes, the speakers talk of God, or voting out the bad politicians, or coming together for peace. Nevertheless, the zone at George Floyd Square offers us the smallest glimpse of a different way of being together in the city. It remains mostly undisturbed by the police, with the tacit assurance that no matter how much those in the zone speak of peace, police incursion will mean war.



Every precinct an Autozone

PART II

Abolition



Let's destitute the world

The uprising had ended just as quickly as it began.⁵ While cities across the country would be lit aflame into the first weeks of June and beyond, the energy in the Twin Cities had been all but snuffed out completely. Attempting to understand what happened means investigating the notion of the “(white supremacist) outside agitator” and reckoning with all that it implies for the vision of abolition put forward both in the uprising and by those intending to carrying on in its spirit. We must ask ourselves why, at the height of what was easily the largest rebellion in over half a century, much of the city organized to assist the police in crushing it, often in the name of the very anti-racism at its heart?

In the aftermath of the Third Precinct’s torching, as insurgent crowds showed no signs of slowing, I witnessed the state deploy extremely novel techniques to reinstate law and order when nothing

seemed less possible. I am not talking of quantities of tear gas, or the National Guard, who arrived just in time to stand guard in front of the precinct's smoldering carcass. No, the state used far more insidious discursive measures that effectively halted the uprising in its tracks.

In the early hours of May 30th, after crowds refused to be satisfied with the burning of one police station and had begun laying siege to a second, the governor of Minnesota held a press conference in which he claimed that white supremacists were coming from out of state to instigate violent riots. The mayors of both Minneapolis and Saint Paul quickly backed him up, citing false statistics from arrestees before quietly retracting them days later. It is hard to overstate how effective this maneuver was—the following day crowds were dramatically smaller and law enforcement had no trouble clearing the streets, effectively ending the uprising.

In what follows, I will analyze three elements

- 5 This text has endured quite a journey. Initially a letter published by the Liaisons collective at *The New Inquiry* on September 9th 2020 as “Warning,” it was then reworked as a talk delivered across the street from the burnt remains of the 3rd Precinct on October 29th 2020 in Minneapolis. It was then further revised and published online at *III Will* on November 21st 2020 as “Imaginary Enemies: Myth and Abolition in the Minneapolis Rebellion.”

that, although they arose organically from the rebellion itself, nonetheless laid the groundwork for the state's narrative white supremacist agitation. These three elements are, first, the visible presence of the far-right in the first days of the uprising; second, white participation in the revolt; and third, the way the revolt quickly assumed a geographic and political scale that was beyond the comprehension of both observers and participants. Together, these elements undermined the traditional political narratives that framed what people expected to see from a rebellion against racism and the police. This opened the situation to competing narratives by which to make sense of white participation and the presence of white supremacists, including one that held white supremacists solely responsible for the violence of the rebellion. I explain how this narrative divided much of the sympathetic base of the uprising against it, which deprived rebels of popular support and allowed them to be crushed by the National Guard, thereby preserving the very order that was the enemy of the revolt.

Before addressing these three elements, I must first share a seemingly forgotten story. To the extent

that this story entails an encounter between white supremacists and protests against police brutality, it forms an important episode in the prehistory of the present moment, shedding light on how mobilizing the specter of white-supremacist violence has been so successful for the partisans of order, as if poking a stick in the scabs of an old wound. In late 2015, hot off the heels of the Ferguson and Baltimore rebellions, large protests were also sparked in Minneapolis. Protesters began to occupy the lawn of the Fourth Precinct, just a few blocks from where Jamar Clark had been murdered by the police just days before. During this occupation, which lasted about a month, there was one night in which a group of masked white supremacists showed up to “troll” the protesters. When recognized, protesters forcibly escorted them away from the occupation. Once they were a block away, one of them pulled out a pistol and opened fire. Five people were injured—all of them black—but thankfully everyone survived.

Yet from then on, the fear of such attacks was mobilized by activist organizers to further entrench their security protocols. Wearing a mask became taboo, and grounds for removal from demonstrations. Anyone who wasn't following

the rules—or even who looked like they might not follow them—was branded an “agitator,” conflating escalating protests with injuring protestors. For a time, “anarchists” and “white supremacists” were spoken of in the same breath.⁶

This practice wasn’t picked up by the state at the time, as it was wielded effectively enough by activists themselves. Eventually, the incident faded from collective memory. In the years that followed, targeting masked protestors as potential white supremacists fell out of popular use. The rise of highly visible clashes between white supremacists and anarchists (or “antifa”) put to rest any lingering conflation. However, it appears this maneuver was noted by the state and would end up being deployed again almost five years later—but this time on a much more massive scale, with much more dire consequences.

Speculation on white supremacist involvement in the 2020 uprising began already on the first night. A handful of Boogaloo Bois drove down from suburbs like New Brighton to join the clashes

6 For a short analysis of this event, see “Conflict in Minneapolis: Terrorism and Civil War,” *It’s Going Down*, November 26th 2015.

that had been taking place all evening on May 26 outside the 3rd Precinct. This is not the place to examine their ideology in detail, but suffice it to say that, despite their far-right positions, some of them saw the murder of George Floyd as the unjust action of a corrupt police department and affirmed the uprising as a valid response to it. They photographed themselves with their flag in the streets (their images were widely circulated online) and then left soon afterwards. In the next few days, this group of Boogaloo Bois received an upsurge of attention, starting with anti-fascist activists who attempted to alert demonstrators of their presence, marginal though it was.⁷

Regardless of whether the Boogaloo Bois did in fact view the escalating conflict in the streets of Minneapolis as a righteous cause, or merely as a means to bringing about their “civil war” with the government, the revolt exploded far beyond their narrow vision. Just as with the Yellow Vests

7 In Minnesota, the state’s attention to Boogaloo Bois continued months after the attack on the 3rd Precinct. On October 24th 2020, the FBI charged a Boogaloo Boi for shooting his gun at the 3rd Precinct *after* it was surrendered by the police on May 28th. This relatively minor act was magnified by news media outlets to falsely portray the destruction of the police building as the work of white supremacist agitators.

of France, the mass looting of shopping districts pushed the movement tactically beyond where the far-right was willing to go. They were thus given two options: to participate in an uprising that centers black liberation (and thus de-centers their own ideology) or to let themselves be sidelined and left behind by the uprising.⁸

- 8 This insight comes from the essay “Memes With Force.” The authors argue that, in the logic of Yellow Vests movement, there lies a way out of the traditional political narratives to which I refer here. Before going on to show how looting and vandalism marginalized the influence of the far-right, they urge us to see “radical actions,” not “radical actors”:

“Contemporary politics sees in action nothing but a conversation between constituencies and populations in society. It is for this reason that, when radical activity emerges in a way that is relatively anonymous, that lacks a consistent author, and persistently refuses to answer to our compositional (‘who are you?’) and projectual questions (‘why are you doing this?’), it tends to be unrecognizable to political analysts and activists alike. It is precisely this received wisdom that the Yellow Vests have been laying to waste, week after week. What is emerging today in France is a radical form of collective action that does not rely on a coherent ideology, motivation, participant, or regional location. Above all, it is not proceeding by means of a dialogue with its enemy.” (Paul Torino and Adrian Wohlleben, “Memes With Force: Lessons from the Yellow Vests,” *Mute*, February 26th 2019.)

In *Anarcho-Blackness: Notes Toward A Black Anarchism*, Marquis Bey, citing Fred Moten and Stefano Harney’s *The Undercommons*, also meditates on this refusal of ideological exclusion:

By the second day of the revolt, many Boogaloo Bois had already relegated themselves to defending private property in response to the widespread looting. A video that circulated on social media from the second day shows a group of them outside of GM Tobacco between the Target and the Cub Foods, walking a tightrope on which they try to balance “supporting the uprising” while protecting the store from the uprising. A week later, the narrative of white supremacist rioters allowed social justice groups seeking to defend private property to more easily navigate a similar tightrope. This led to an ironic turn of events in the case of Minnesota Freedom Fighters (supported by groups like the NAACP and city councilor

“Upon a re-reading of *The Undercommons*, I was drawn, obsessively, to one phrase, one that struck me at first as dangerously wrongheaded. But, then, the revolutionary will always be dangerous. The revolutionary call that Moten and Harney require and that I’ve been obsessed with is this: they insist that our radical politics, our anarchic world-building must be ‘unconditional—the door swings open for refuge even though it may let in police agents and destruction’. As my grandmother might quip, what kind of foolishness is this? But it is not foolishness precisely because the only ethical call that could bring about the radical revolutionary overturning we seek is one that does not discriminate or develop criteria for inclusion and, consequently, exclusion.” (Marquis Bey, *Anarcho-Blackness: Notes Toward A Black Anarchism* (AK Press, 2020), 28.)

Jeremiah Ellison), which collaborated with these same Boogaloo Bois to protect stores from vague threats of white supremacists—despite themselves being the only group visible on the ground associated with these threats. Just as this irony was lost on most, so too was the contradiction between the narrative of white supremacist rioters and the facts of the matter, namely, that the most prominent far-right presence in the uprising was engaged in the defense of capitalist property, not its destruction.

Despite the centrality of black liberation in the George Floyd Rebellion, it cannot be said that the uprising was entirely black. People from every conceivable demographic and identity participated. In his piece “How It Might Should Be Done,” Idris Robinson uses the metaphor of an avant-garde to describe black participation in the revolts of that year. He states “We were the avant-garde who spearheaded it, we set it off, we initiated it. What ensued was a wildly multi-ethnic uprising.”⁹ Skepticism or suspicion of white participants is

9 Idris Robinson, “How It Might Should Be Done,” *III Will*, July 20th 2020.

understandable, yet was relatively uncommon during the first few days of the revolt. However, by the fifth night, it had become a dominant reflex, due to the emerging paranoia around white supremacist involvement. White participants in the streets who broke the law were assumed to be outside agitators—if not fully white supremacists—without any other evidence than their skin tone. In the midst of tear gas, shattered windows, and hails of rocks, people were pressed to identify themselves and, in some cases, to give their street addresses. Those who refused could even be attacked.

As has been discussed elsewhere, to blame what happened on outsiders or provocateurs robs the rebellion of its power, by delegitimizing it along with its participants. And we should not forget the racist history of the “outside agitator” as a tool of counter-insurgency, which was a narrative originally used to explain slave revolts, as enslaved blacks were said to be docile until stirred up by white abolitionists from the North.¹⁰ Beyond

10 For further analysis of the “outside agitator” as a strategy of delegitimation, with historical comparisons to the George Floyd Rebellion, see “The Anti-Black and Anti-Semitic History of ‘Outside Agitators’: An Interview with Spencer Sunshine,” *It’s Going Down*, June 2nd 2020.

disempowering rebels and reproducing racist tropes, however, I want to insist on the legitimacy of white abolitionists who decide to join the frontlines. The truth is that we all have a stake in black liberation. As Fred Moten once said, “I just need you to recognize that this shit is killing you, too, however much more softly, you stupid motherfucker.”¹¹

The revolt in May occurred on an unprecedented scale. As we know, the 3rd Precinct was the epicenter of the first three days of unrest, before

11 In an interview, Moten discusses Fred Hampton’s statement, “White power to white people. Black power to black people.” Moten follows:

“What I think he meant is, look: the problematic of coalition is that coalition isn’t something that emerges so that you can come help me, a maneuver that always gets traced back to your own interests. The coalition emerges out of your recognition that it’s fucked up for you, in the same way that we’ve already recognized that it’s fucked up for us. I don’t need your help. I just need you to recognize that this shit is killing you, too, however much more softly, you stupid motherfucker, you know?”

See Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Minor Compositions, 2013), 140-141. On this connection, see Shemon and Arturo’s article on the participation of white people in the revolt and its significance. See Shemon and Arturo, “The Return of John Brown: White Race Traitors In The 2020 Uprising,” *III Will*, September 4th 2020.

the police inside were forced to flee, before the precinct was burned, and before the focus of the crowds moved on to other targets, including the 5th Precinct which very nearly almost fell as well. However, even before the burning of the 3rd Precinct, crowds flowed outwards and brought unrest across the city, into Saint Paul, and even into the suburbs—distance from the epicenter ceased to be any guarantee of security. While crowds kept many officers pinned down at the precinct, these swarms would assemble in other areas to loot and burn stores—generally with the assistance of cars, where a group of people would pull up, break in, grab what they could, and peel out before police could respond. In other words, from the very start, the rebellion was also a mass phenomenon of smash-and-grabs.

In attempting to make sense of the early stages of the rebellion, inherited logics of both representative protest and of militant protest fail us. From the perspective of representational politics, those who were swarming and looting stores across the city were not “protesting,” as their actions did not present a grievance for which they sought recognition. That is, these actions were not only deviations from “legitimate political protest,” they

opportunistically took advantage of such protests by using them for private gain. In reality, however, the looters were directly abolishing property relations, which are inextricable from the violence of anti-blackness. Let us recall that the order of private property is what killed George Floyd in the first place. It is one thing to hold a sign that says “redistribute the wealth;” it is another to decide that all that shit on the store shelves is ours for the taking—and take it.¹²

While it is commonplace to adopt the frame

- 12 I am building off of what philosopher Giorgio Agamben and others have called *destituent power*, which has influenced the writings of other revolutionaries on the uprising, such as a piece that appeared in *CrimethInc.* earlier this summer:

“Unlike protests, which employ a means (e.g., a march or a blockade) to reach an end (e.g., sending a message or making demands), the events of the uprising [...] blur this distinction. They create a kind of means-as-end, or means-without-end, in which the purpose is inextricable from the lived experience of the event itself. To fuse means and ends in this way, we have to move beyond the predetermined choreography of protest to a more transformative paradigm of action. ‘I’ll never forget that night’ reads the latest graffiti written on the barricades surrounding the precinct, referring to the night of May 28th on which unrelenting crowds forced police to retreat from their station and established a brief yet real police-free zone—abolition in real time.” (“July 4th in Minneapolis: The Logic of Autonomous Organizing,” *CrimethInc.*, July 6th 2020.)

of representational politics and to dismiss looting as opportunistic, when such looting and destruction turned to businesses that ostensibly identified with the cause of social justice—that is, businesses owned by racial minorities—they were often deemed malicious, or worse. The crudest form of identity politics involved postulating that these stores could not have been targeted for any other reason than racist motivations. There was often no evidence for this speculation; it was posited as self-evident. In the most absurd of cases, corporate stores falsely labeled themselves as “black-owned,” either by writing it on plywood boards like modern-day lamb’s blood, or by those protecting them to legitimate their defense of property. But if we cease to view every act of property destruction or looting as an expression of a grievance, this logic begins to erode. It is not my intention to argue that minority-owned stores should be targeted, but that such incidents do not offer any insight into participants’ racial or ideological backgrounds.

Instead, I argue that this created a new division within the uprising that helped to transform it into a “militant” protest movement. Here, the classic dichotomy between the “good protester” and the “bad protester” was replaced by the

dichotomy between the “good rioter” and the “bad rioter.” In other words, rioters were now divided into those whose militant action can still be understood within the grammar of protest (fighting the police or attacking a corporate department store) and those whose actions exceed and escape this traditional understanding.

After four days, the upheaval had spread far beyond what anyone could have anticipated. Refusing to play by the rules of non-violence, it escaped the trap of representational protest. Its composition was too diverse to be neatly categorized by any demographic or political affiliation. Then, on the morning of May 30, Governor Walz hosted a press conference describing the rioters as white supremacist outsiders who were out to destroy the city. He was followed by both Minneapolis and St Paul mayors, who fabricated statistics to back up those claims—only to be quietly retracted days later. Online rumors were amplified and misinformation was circulated at truly dizzying speeds. In the midst of the chaos, they offered a legible and understandable enemy to all of those who were searching for stability, but could not be mobilized by the explicitly racist rhetoric of “black looters,”

or the right-wing's fear-mongering about "antifa." This fear would instead be ascribed to the face of evil par excellence: the white supremacist.

Blaming the violence of the uprising on "white supremacists" allowed the state to undermine the anti-police rage of the rebellion and resume its prior role of protecting citizens against extremism. The state intentionally shifted the target of people's anger from the systemic racism that murdered George Floyd (and countless others) to relatively marginal actors. I have identified this as the rhetorical figure of synecdoche, a movement from part to whole, or whole to part. The location of white supremacy and anti-blackness is displaced onto an extremist part—a small assortment of bad actors—that only serves to mask their true whereabouts in the heart of civil society as a whole.

This displacement made room for a new alliance between social-justice advocates and anti-fascists on the one hand, and vigilante law enforcement on the other. While police were forced to retreat, this alliance was forged with new neighborhood watch groups and citizen patrols protecting against the lawlessness of the riots. Armed patrols guarded businesses, while smaller roads were blocked by citizens who performed

ID checks. After curfew, citizens' checkpoints allowed only residents and police to pass, while many more stayed home in fear of vague threats of indiscriminate violence. Frightened citizens called the FBI to report out-of-state license plates, while others preferred taking to social media to spread rumors and report "sketchy activity." Meanwhile, the National Guard had little trouble mass-arresting the few who dared to continue defying the curfew.

These patrols varied from neighborhood to neighborhood, block to block. They were also ideologically diverse, and while they might not have directly collaborated with one another, they all effectively accomplished the same goals. In some areas, white homeowners sat on their porches and called the police on neighbors they'd never met whom they deemed to be suspicious. There were of course many small business owners who armed themselves to protect their stores, such as the owner of Cadillac Pawn on Lake Street, who murdered Calvin Horton Jr. Majority-black and Native American neighborhoods also set up their own armed patrols, often with the help of non-profits that considered themselves an extension of the protests (or at least in support of them).

Examples include the Minnesota Freedom Fighters that I mentioned above (who collaborated with the armed far-right) and the American Indian Movement (AIM) patrol near Little Earth, a majority-Native neighborhood. The AIM patrol was celebrated for its role in protecting property, including the apprehension of some white teenagers for looting a liquor store that had been broken into two nights before.

Patrols like these justified their actions along racial lines. However, like AIM, they consistently helped protect white-owned businesses, corporations, and banks. In some cases, these patrols inadvertently ended up protecting racist property owners who just happened to be located on their “beat,” but even in those cases where businesses were truly owned by racial or ethnic minority groups, these patrols and their valorization of property structurally aligned them with the forces of civil order. As Idris Robinson observed, “whenever property is protected, it is protected for white supremacist ends.”¹³

13 Idris Robinson has argued that the attack on this inner connection between race and property was at the heart of the George Floyd Rebellion. He says:

The formation and alignment of racially diverse neighborhood patrols in defense of private property was only possible by way of a counterinsurgent, synecdochal displacement that identified violence with white supremacy. This is the only way that such a massive project could emerge so quickly

“[W]hitey loves property. Property enjoys a special prestige in American life, it has a special kind of sanctity. [...] There is a very important reason that property has this particular kind of sanctity in America, as many historians are starting to confirm and argue. For most of its history, the most important property in America was human property, shackled and chained. We need to weaponize this argument, and say that whenever property is protected, it is protected for white supremacist ends. If property is truly the pursuit of happiness, in that trifecta of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the existence of that happiness and property is premised upon the negation of Black life and the negation of Black liberty. So the protection of property is something that we need to attack explicitly.” (Idris Robinson, “How It Might Should Be Done.”)

In her recent book, *In Defense of Looting*, Vicky Osterweil traces the inextricable history of race, settler-colonialism, and property, building off thinkers such as Cedric Robinson, who coined the term ‘racial capitalism.’ The thrust of what I have written here can be summed up by the following passage from her book: “Not only is capitalist development completely reliant on racialized forms of power, but bourgeois legality itself, enshrining at its center the right to own property, fundamentally relies on racial structures of human nature to justify this right. Private property is a racial concept, and race, a propertarian one.” Vicky Osterweil, *In Defense of Looting: A Riotous History of Uncivil Action* (Bold Type Books, 2020), 36.

and with such popular support. This counterinsurgent initiative even cloaked itself in the language of police abolition, with neighbors suggesting that they were “prefiguring” what would replace the Minneapolis Police Department when it was abolished, with no concern for the fact that they were assuming the enforcement of the very same legal order here and now. Truth be told, they are not wrong. The type of police abolition that has gripped the city’s imagination is merely the same regime of law, only upheld by nicer faces. Instead of police, there would be “community security forces”—or as is the case here, the “office of violence prevention” (which I will address in detail later). The only effect such institutions could ever have would be to integrate the population ever more profoundly into the police operations that already govern their lives today.

The figure of the white supremacist agitator does not simply tarnish the memory and legacy of the revolt. It also illuminates the very stakes of the movement itself and its call for abolition. It must be said that revolutionary abolition does not simply mean the defunding of any specific department, as many activists advocate today. Nor does revolutionary abolition simply mean doing

away with the brutality that police use to enforce the law, as offered by restorative justice.¹⁴ Instead, revolutionary abolition must mean the abolition of law itself, along with the property relations that the law upholds.

In May, we witnessed a revolt of such magnitude and ferocity that it has no equal in this country for at least half a century. To be sure, revolution consists of so much more than merely burning and fighting, but it does involve these actions. These actions were at the very heart of the uprising this Summer. To condemn them is to condemn the uprising.

Just as we approached the precipice of total insurrection, stability and order were reintroduced to the city, when nothing seemed less likely. The next time revolt erupts in our streets, let us be prepared to resist the reimposition of law and order, no matter how “radically” it presents itself.

14 As Frank B. Wilderson has put it, “I’m not against police brutality, I’m against the police.” See “Irreconcilable Anti-Blackness and Police Violence with Dr. Frank Wilderson,” *IMIXWHATILIKE*, October 1st 2014. On the crucial distinction between restorative and transformative justice, see *Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement*, ed. Ejeris Dixon & Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (AK Press, 2020).



This world was made to be free in

The geography of the uprising sketched thus far has helped clarify the context in which the state deployed its discursive measures that helped crush the uprising.¹⁵ To go further, we must investigate the material foundations of these measures—revealing that the myth of outside agitators is fueled by an inherent desire for a closed, stable social space. Yet the only thing preserving the notion of an “inside” and “outside” is a thin blue line.

Capital is on the move, and so are the police.

The economy functions in the space between people. It takes place in the flows: things and money change hands; move between countries, towns, and cities by truck, boat, and train; and are mediated through complex interwoven webs of social relationships. The relations of power, of exploitation, and of anti-blackness and racism materially tied to this mobile capital unfold over time and are constantly adapting to the addition of new

material and new terrain. The history of American capitalism begins with massive *movements* of human beings: its origins lie in the transatlantic slave trade that involved the forced movement of more than ten million people out of Africa combined with an ongoing project of theft of Native land and genocide of Native people—a project which has consistently forced populations to march onto smaller and smaller foreign tracts of land whether at gunpoint or through poisoning the environment.

The history of Minnesota is no different. A brief glance at the map reveals myriad names of either European or Indigenous origin as well as some of mixed origin, like Minneapolis. The mixture is an uneasy one as it conceals a brutal history and represents above all the triumphant violence of European hegemony on the one hand and a hollow homage to a Native history actively being erased on the other. To follow the highways on a map with your finger is to review the names of black neighborhoods intentionally divided,

15 This text was originally a collaboration between myself and Jamie drafted at the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021 titled “An Imaginary City Up In Flames: The Impossible Geography of the Minneapolis Uprising.” It was never published.

diminished, and impoverished by city planners.

These local parallels are not accidental: individual states acquire a specific character based on a number of factors, but each state contributes to the functioning of a capitalist economy and a loosely unified political system. It's hard to understate the homogenizing tendencies at the heart of modern capitalist development: look at a picture of a new apartment complex in Minneapolis in isolation, and you'd be hard pressed to say whether it's located in Minneapolis, San Antonio, Portland or really whether it's even in the United States at all. Same for the administration of local politics: read a story about something as mundane as a budget hearing or as catastrophic as a police shooting without local place names and try to figure out if it takes place in New York City, St. Paul, or Oakland.

But it's not just power and exploitation on the move; rebels are on the move, too. The resistance movements that respond to these forms of violence have been notably mobile throughout US history. W.E.B. Du Bois argued in *Black Reconstruction* that the opening shot announcing the end of the era of plantation slavery was the

general strike of the enslaved that involved a mass abandonment of plantations. The enslaved stole themselves, to paraphrase Frederick Douglass, to maroons, to the North, or into the ranks of the Northern army.¹⁶ Movement and travel have been recurring features of black resistance movements since then: from the maroons in the south to the riots in the north, from Freedom Summer to the Black Panthers, black resistance in the US has involved intercity, interstate, and international mobilizations and acts of solidarity.

Nick Estes, author of *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*, noted in an interview with Dissent that when the settlers first began to capture the waterways, this was not just an attack on drinking water, but on “the ability to move and to travel, to hunt and fish.”¹⁷ The capture of rivers was an obstruction to the free movement of people: “Water is life,” he adds, “in the sense that mobility is life.” It should come as no surprise that the history of

16 For a contemporary discussion of this notion of “stealing away,” see Zoé Samudzi and Vicky Osterweil, “Stealing Away in America,” *Jewish Currents*, June 10th 2020.

17 “Indigenous Resistance Is Post-Apocalyptic, with Nick Estes,” *Dissent*, July 31st 2019.

Indigenous resistance is marked by mobilizations of people to the site of major confrontations. The most striking recent example is Standing Rock, when thousands of Native people from around the country gathered together to oppose the Dakota Access Pipeline, but every act of resistance after the original displacements of tribes must, by definition, be characterized by this basic fact of mobility and flux.

In their book *The Many-Headed Hydra*, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker argue that fluctuation and border-crossing were the rule so far as protests, riots, and revolutions in the New World were concerned. Uprisings were marked by the cross-participation and inter-movements between the masses of enslaved people, free black people, Indigenous people creating cross-tribal coalitions, indentured servants newly arrived from Europe, and sailors. Linebaugh and Rediker paint history with a romantic gloss that tends to ignore the strife that just as often plagued these disparate groups, but the authors argue rather well that if anything was common to the rebellious and seditious peoples bound to trade in the Atlantic, it was

their “motley” character and the fact they were always “onamove.”¹⁸

The constant flows of people since the transatlantic slave trade, from massive black migrations to the North to forced marches of Native people and the constant inward flows of immigration, along with the comparatively open borders of commodities and money creates a complex and disorderly social world. The police, who were the main object of contestation in the 2020 uprising, were formed in response to the disorder arising from this mobility and flux in order to contain and manage it. Their function is to maintain order in a dysfunctional world: they protect property from destruction and expropriation, carry out evictions, and enforce myriad laws regardless of their impact, and are even permitted to take extra-legal discretionary action for expediency’s sake. The police are thus at the center of every hot-button conversation framed around the notion of justice:

18 Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, (Beacon Press, 2000) 332–333. “Onamove” is a reference to the MOVE organization in Philadelphia. See Mumia Abu-Jamal, *Live from Death Row* (Addison Wesley, 1995).

the distribution of wealth, the effects of racism in housing laws or codes, environmental projects like Line 3, incarceration and its well-known disparities, and much more.

The idea that the killing of George Floyd is a “local problem” was the predictable result of a public relations strategy that has normalized the fundamental premise of policing and offered a narrative of corruption—individualized or even department wide at most—to explain away these supposed bad apples. If one sees the police as primarily determined by the local character of specific cities and therefore fundamentally different everywhere, then traveling from Brainerd to protest them in Minneapolis makes little sense. It is from this perspective that we can see the notion of the “outside agitator” emerge. Yet, those who traveled here to oppose the police grasp a basic fact of American political life that those concerned with figuring out who is an “outsider” just don’t get: the police are everywhere the same. Their structure, role, and function in each place is the same because they emerged to respond to social and material conditions that emerged contemporaneously (if at unequal speeds) throughout the United States.

The police can stand in for everything seen as wrong with the political administration of the country (from climate disaster to evictions to broken treaties to the murder of black people) because they are its most immediate, aggressive, and visible defenders and enactors. If the police are disrupted in one place, it reverberates out. This is clear from the course of the summer: once the riots began in Minneapolis, they quickly spread across of the country and ultimately constituted the largest demonstrations in the country's history (a fact that makes the concerns of "outside agitators" particularly comical). These recent mobilizations following George Floyd's death were the largest in the history of the country due in part to the frequency with which police *around the country* extra-judicially kill black people.

More than delegitimizing any given social movement or uprising, the persistence of the "outside agitator" myth illuminates something fundamental about the geographic imaginary it presupposes and naturalizes.

The rubric of inside versus outside itself is untenable in the face of geographic realities of the uprising, which was anything but contained. A

map of property damaged released by the *Star Tribune* reveals that the criminal activity associated with the uprising (vandalism, looting, and fires) was spread throughout the region as far as Blaine, Apple Valley, and Maplewood. Individuals from Brooklyn Park or Richfield clearly came to Minneapolis or St. Paul to protest or to riot, but if rioting was diffusely distributed all the way to those very locales, what threshold of inside/outside was actually crossed?

The idea of the “outsider” is further troubled by demographic trends in US cities. The country is generally becoming less white, the suburbs are seeing an influx of non-white residents, and the children of the whites who took flight are returning to urban cores around the country (and the Twin Cities are no exception).¹⁹ Demographic and population movements are not natural phenomena. The majority of people who move in the United States do not do so because they read a *Vanity Fair* list about the ten coolest cities; most move out of necessity. In the 20th century, highway construction dispersed, racial covenants

19 For a thorough analysis of this dynamic and much more, see Phil A. Neel, *Hinterland: America's New Landscape of Class and Conflict*, (Reaktion Books, 2018).

excluded, and lynch mobs terrorized black residents into certain concentrated neighborhoods of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Today, gentrification of the urban center has come to define these population movements. Gains of black residents in some neighborhoods undergoing gentrification like Uptown were offset by the larger displacements in neighborhoods with large black populations in north and south Minneapolis over the last two decades. What this means is that wealthy white property owners can blissfully flip houses and open up new businesses on Broadway, all the while spouting off their own ideas of what “the neighborhood” wants, or how it feels about riots or the houseless people sleeping nearby.

The difficult truth concealed by the idea of “white supremacists coming into the city to cause trouble” is the fact that the city of Minneapolis has no need of outsiders to carry on a legacy of white violence. Politicians, city planners, the police, white homeowners, and business owners have done it just fine. White supremacist violence is not “outside coming in” as if into some otherwise peaceful and harmonious fortress; it has always been here since the arrival of European settlers.

The myth of the “outsider agitator” does nothing but obscure this fact. How else could Jacob Frey claim to somehow be “inside the Minneapolis community” while he forcibly evicts houseless residents from their tents? That one can claim to be an “insider” in a community while carrying out this displacing violence makes plain that the function of this discourse has nothing to do with a neighborhood’s general interest—only the reproduction of the status quo and the interests of the powerful.

Activists are by no means free of this imaginary geographical belonging either. No matter how radical, in such spaces all too often one still hears the conservative notion of “community” that is ultimately wed to this same geographic thinking. Any concept of “community” is bound to run into problems very quickly. The term is incredibly ambiguous—is community a place, a shared identity, an assortment of shared practices, a shared history?—but leftist activists tends to surround it with aura of uncritical moral sanctity and center it to such a degree as to nearly always make one or another “community” the subject of struggles for justice. Yet in every case, the declarations of

“community” provide no insight into the power dynamics at play in any given struggle, and can only delay the inevitable eruption of conflicts and rifts within it.

George Floyd Square—the block where George Floyd was murdered which has been occupied since late May—perhaps can provide some useful examples in this regard. Activists at the square have, at times, characterized their group belonging in geographic terms by defining the community in question as *the formal space of the square*, i.e. not just as participants involved in an occupation at that space, but as representative of the blocks around 38th and Chicago. At one point, a white homeowner from the area confronted activists at the square about the presence of vulgar graffiti and attempted to remove it on the spot. During the ensuing argument, activists insisted that this was a decision that only “the entire community” could make. The man responded by pointing out his house on the block and asking the others tell him where they live (while insinuating it was probably elsewhere).

38th and Chicago is in the heart of south Minneapolis, on the border of multiple different

neighborhoods each with their own histories. While racial covenants were common just south of the intersection, the historically-black 4th Ave corridor was only a few blocks to the west.²⁰ As is increasingly common, many older residents are actively being priced out. It's true that plenty of people who help out around the square don't live directly there, but somewhere else in South Minneapolis or even further away. Treating "the community" as a source for legitimation doesn't allow us to grasp the power dynamics at play after white homeowners move into these neighborhoods and push others out.

We must go further than this, however, as we are still appealing to a mythical "community" that has simply been fragmented in our current situation, but was whole in the past. This white homeowner could have lived by 38th and Chicago his entire life, and every activist at the Square could be a transplant (even if we know this not to be true), and the notion of "community" would still tell us nothing of these power dynamics. Variations of this paradigmatic episode centered

20 For further information on racial covenants in the Twin Cities, see the *Mapping Prejudice* project at the University of Minnesota.

around the confusion of “community,” its borders, and what sort of authority it has have been repeated in meetings, in interpersonal scenes, and continuously in the local media. “Community” cannot bridge the chasms produced from our material differences. When these differences are not taken up as a component of struggle, “communities” are bound to split into self-contained milieus each claiming to represent the same thing while differing greatly in potentially every material way.

This notion of “community” is nothing more than the inherited legacy of police control, dressed up in varying degrees of progressive discourse. For there to be an outside, there must be an inside with borders in need of protection. The investigation of who does and does not belong—in a neighborhood or in a riot—has at its heart the desire for the fort²¹, which cannot lead us to any

21 Fred Moten and Stefano Harney begin the first chapter of *The Undercommons* with the following paragraph:

“In Michael Parenti’s classic anti-imperial analysis of Hollywood movies, he points to the ‘upside down’ way that the ‘make-believe media’ portrays colonial settlement. In films like *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939) or *Shaka Zulu* (1987), the settler is portrayed as surrounded by ‘natives,’ inverting, in Parenti’s view, the role of aggressor so that

meaningful form of abolition. It is this fort that must be abolished too.

colonialism is made to look like self-defense. Indeed, aggression and self-defense are reversed in these movies, but the image of a surrounded fort is not false. Instead, the false image is what emerges when a critique of militarised life is predicated on the forgetting of the life that surrounds it. The fort really was surrounded, is besieged by what still surrounds it, the common beyond and beneath—before and before—enclosure. The surround antagonises the laager in its midst while disturbing that facts on the ground with some outlaw planning.” (17)



Choke out whiteness, breathe together

As the one year anniversary of the uprising approached, repression was in full swing.²² Many cases—particularly federal arson cases—stemming from May 2020 were beginning to wrap up. In one of them, four men were sentenced for the burning of the third precinct. One of these men is Dylan Robinson, a young white man who was alleged by the Department of Justice to have lit a molotov cocktail held by an unidentified black man who then threw it at the precinct, before lighting and throwing one of his own.

I am interested in exploring the actions Robinson has been prosecuted for as paradigmatic for understanding what many try to grasp as “race treason.” Robinson is one of many white people, including myself, who have become deeply entangled in the fight for abolition. Yet contemporary understandings of race don’t allow us to grasp the full meaning of these actions. This incomprehension is palpable in the outcry that Robinson was

an outside agitator or even right-wing instigator, the possibility of his commitment to abolition rarely considered. Shemon and Arturo note in their essay “The Return of John Brown” that, unlike past periods of heightened black struggle such as in the 1960s, a new generation of white people are now “fighting and dying alongside black proletarians in the streets.” This reality has to be grappled with, not ignored because it doesn’t fit conventional narratives.

We have long inherited an idea of whiteness related to skin privilege, which correctly suggests that white people don’t face discrimination because of their race and, because of that, have access to many more opportunities. Today, even the most radical approach to anti-racist activism for white people can only think itself as the relinquishing of this power. According to this logic, to betray whiteness is to give up the privileges it offers or to take advantage of them in place of non-whites who cannot. White people are relegated to self-sacrifice either way, motivated primarily

22 This text is based on a letter originally published by the Liaisons collective at *The New Inquiry* on July 16th 2021 as “In The Wake Of An Erosion.” It was then expanded into a talk delivered on August 18th 2021 in Minneapolis.

by feelings of shame. But no one sets fire to a police station out of shame, nor does white privilege offer much defense against the consequences of doing so—of the two black and two white codefendants, Dylan Robinson received the longest sentence in the precinct arson case at 48 months.

Against this negative understanding of race treason, I want to use this as an opportunity to formulate an *affirmative* race treason. I've found that philosopher and poet Fred Moten offers a compelling way out of this dilemma. Against the grain of increasingly popular theories within black studies such as Afro-pessimism that have posited blackness as the imposition of social death with no substance prior to racialization, Moten suggests "that black life—which is as surely to say *life* as black thought is to say *thought*—is irreducibly social."²³

Beyond this, Moten understands this imposition of not social but *political* death as instead a *response* to the social life of blackness. Analyzing the thought of W.E.B. Du Bois, Moten writes:

23 Fred Moten, *The Universal Machine* (Duke, 2018), 194

“At stake, here, is the notion that blackness is a general force of fugitivity that racialization in general, and the more specific instantiation of the color line, exacerbate and focus *without originating*. Such focus could be said to create the condition wherein blacks are privileged insofar as they are given (to) an understanding of blackness.”²⁴

If blackness does exist prior to the instantiation of the color line, as Moten consistently postulates, then racialization would in fact *invent whiteness* through the destruction of sociality, rather than the other way around—Moten suggests that it is white people who are actually “the socially dead.”²⁵

Moten goes to great lengths throughout his work to articulate how the sociality of blackness undermines the possibility of subjectivity and individuality that is constitutive of what we understand as Western ontology, which is inextricably bound up with whiteness. Moten claims that “slipping inside oneself is understood, properly, to

24 Fred Moten, *Stolen Life* (Duke, 2018), 34–5, emphasis mine.

25 Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (Duke, 2017), 280.

be a function of abuse rather than the originary condition that is elsewhere assumed to be the ontological foundation that requires everyone else in the world, ultimately, to be understood as a stranger.”²⁶ In other words, individuality is not the origin of being but rather an imposition that separates us from each other so that there is an “other” to speak of. By recognizing this as abuse, we can imagine whiteness not as a privileged position for humanity to attain equally, but instead a mutilation of a common sociality that we must be rid of.

In the above quotation and elsewhere, Moten has differentiated between blackness and black people, the latter simply having a “privileged relation” to the former. If we see whiteness as this metaphysical regime of individuality, and I should remind us also *property*, then we can likewise see whiteness not as synonymous with white people, but rather that we have a more strongly predetermined relationship to it. This allows us to think both how white people can sever this relation (i.e. engage in race treason), and also how non-white people can and often do also have relations to

26 Moten, *The Universal Machine*, 105.

whiteness that clarify all what prevalent notions of identity obscure.

Now, this might all sound unusually sympathetic towards those who are accustomed to the privilege of an anti-black settler society. Yet even Aimé Césaire made a similar claim in his seminal 1950 text *Discourse on Colonialism*, when he wrote:

“[C]olonization, I repeat, dehumanizes even the most civilized man; that colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it; that the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform *himself* into an animal.”²⁷

This is not another tired argument to put race aside to fight a common enemy, or to put class

27 Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (Monthly Review Press, 2001) 41.

first. Nor is it to deny the material benefits of whiteness we call privilege. Instead what I want to argue is that these benefits can only exist within a certain order of the world, and this order is defined by this ontological abuse Moten describes. The same systems of anti-blackness are killing white people too, as I quoted Moten earlier, “however much more softly.” Understood this way, we might be able to reformulate race treason not as a relinquishing of power, but as putting an end to this mutilation.

In identifying Dylan Robinson’s actions as paradigmatic, I don’t intend to insist that race treason can only happen within the moment of revolt. It is certainly possible, and indeed necessary to discover forms of race treason that exist within daily life and don’t only appear in events of rupture. Yet I will stick to the matter at hand—the George Floyd uprising—as I believe it offers us the most clear and visceral demonstration of this race treason.

When it comes to the question of revolt, Adrian Wohlleben put it well in his text “Memes Without End.” He writes:

“To describe the experience of last summer’s rioting as ‘treason’ is to read it only through the ‘ban’ that structures the anti-black civil society it left behind, while passing over in silence the penchant that it *abandons itself to*. When we consider things internally, what could appear from the outside only as a betrayal of hegemonic norms often feels like quite the opposite. From the inside, it felt like the *recovery* of a type of qualitative experience that racialized bourgeois society has starved us of: a luminous and confident presence to a shared situation, rich with practical stakes, shared risks and mutual dependencies. An opportunity to express our non-belonging to the dominant historical order. Before we can betray our ascriptive identities, we must first put an end to that *treason to ourselves*, that ceaseless betrayal and mutilation of our senses demanded of us by the ‘sensory religion’ of Empire.”²⁸

28 Adrian Wohlleben, “Memes Without End,” *III Will*, May 16th 2021.

Who could describe being among the enormous crowds of rioters and revelers last year in any other way? With the police forced into a defensive posture or simply absent entirely, Minneapolis was transformed by the collective power of the uprising. The same streets I always walk down became the site of a festival of looted goods, revving engines, and fire. Every wall, once private property, was made into a canvas for the artistic output of the ensemble, welcoming us back to the world. Against the long-standing segregation of the city—both spatial and social—the uprising was one of few, if not the only, space in which this mutual presence could be felt across racial lines.

The revolt in Minneapolis was not simply a burned precinct or the calculated total of property destruction. It was *irreducibly social*, a shared experience of being together that challenged the racial arrangement of the city, whether enjoying looted goods in the Target parking lot or dodging rubber bullets outside the precinct. We exchanged tips on how to fight more effectively, ran for cover together, or just shared conversation with people we would likely otherwise never meet. The uprising not only fought the police enforcement of anti-blackness, but its ontological basis as well.

The revolt didn't—and can't—suddenly undo the effects of racialization's centuries-long entrenchment, but it can open the door to eroding these effects. This erosion was palpable in the streets last summer, as the sociality of the uprising spilled across these borders. This also helps us understand why the reinscribing of racial division was a core element of halting the uprising, as Idris Robinson has crucially pointed out.

This erosion allows us to see the prospect of race treason, again, not as relinquishment but as *recovery*, as *affirmative*. I believe this is necessary to understand the actions of white people in last summer's uprisings, including those of Dylan Robinson. It is only by seeing that white people have something to gain, not just to lose, by betraying whiteness, can we truly understand the potential to be found in *complicity*. It's no surprise that in their latest book *All Incomplete*, Moten and Harney invoke the same term Indigenous Action Media did several years ago in their attempt to address the poverty of white allyship in "Accomplices Not Allies."

Here I would argue that Indigenous Action Media did not go far enough in their reformulation of accomplices. By remaining attached to the

subject or actor (ally/accomplice) rather than the act (complicity) they leave the door wide open for the exact same problems they sought to fix. The “accomplice” as the privileged subject relating to the less so, except instead of bringing signs to the rally perhaps they bring hammers instead. This recuperation could be most easily seen when a co-founder of the Women’s March declares “we don’t need allies, we need accomplices” before Lil Baby’s performance at this year’s Grammys award ceremony. This relation reproduces our racialization rather than undermining it. *Complicity* on the other hand, as Moten and Harney use it, subverts individuation, and can help us see how actions can’t be reduced to the subjectivity of the actor. How could this complicity be better demonstrated than by one who lights another’s molotov across the color line?

As Shemon and Arturo wrote last year, “the glue of whiteness can no longer be counted on” to preserve white people’s “alliance with capital and the state” in 2020.²⁹ And while there is no guarantee that this fracture will persist, this could also

29 Shemon and Arturo, “The Return of John Brown.”

be just the beginning of a longer trend towards fragmentation. In all likelihood, I think we can expect to hear more stories like Robinson's, to see more brave actions for black liberation from white people going forward. Actions that will remain incomprehensible to us without a qualitative leap forward in our understanding of race and race treason. It is this lack of comprehension that leads to the "white outside agitator narratives" that have become so familiar. Coming up with new ways of understanding our responsibility to fight against whiteness ourselves will be crucial to clearing the path for the multi-racial struggle for abolition.



Welcome back to the world



To hell, or utopia?

With the George Floyd rebellion definitively in the rear-view mirror, campaigns to “defund” and “abolish” the Minneapolis Police Department began to pick up steam.³⁰ This culminated in the vote on Question 2 on the 2021 ballot, which was championed as the first step towards abolition by its supporters. While it was ultimately unsuccessful, I believe it is necessary to concern ourselves with what it would have looked like had it passed, as it offers valuable insight into highly divergent—and importantly, *contradictory*—visions of abolition. If we do not examine the underlying premises of these initiatives, we could end up contributing to the further entrenchment of police power and control, right under our noses.

Even residents could be forgiven for not following the last year and a half of discourse and policy around abolition in Minneapolis. At a June 2020 press conference, nine of twelve city council

members—a veto-proof majority—announced their intention to abolish the MPD. This was to take the form of an amendment to the city charter, which currently requires the city to fund a police department with at least a certain number of officers. Shortly thereafter, the city’s Charter Commission intervened to strike down the amendment, letting the politicians themselves off the hook.

In late 2020, a petition began circulating to seek to enact the proposed amendment via a question on the 2021 ballot. Despite many obstacles, this vote took place on Election Day. The amendment would not itself have abolished the police. Rather, it would have replaced the MPD with a “Department of Public Safety” and removed the minimum requirement for the number of police officers.

The ballot question (Question 2) did not succeed, but it did do relatively well for such a controversial proposition—well enough that we will likely see it again. But we’ve already started to see what kind of “police abolition” it would allow for, and it is not the abolition that so many of us risked

30 This text was originally published at *CrimethInc.* on November 7th 2021 as “How (Not) to Abolish The Police: A Guide from the City of Minneapolis.”

our freedom to propose in 2020.

While these debates raged on—with tremendous quantities of ink spilled writing these policies, suing to stop them, and distorting their meaning in the media—the government of Minneapolis got started shaping what *abolition from above* will look like from this point forward, whether or not we ever see it officially introduced. We can identify two hallmarks of their approach, both of which are already being implemented today.

First, they are introducing closer collaboration with other police departments to supplement an MPD that is already logistically and emotionally weakened from the George Floyd rebellion—not because of any supposed “defunding,” but as a practical consequence of the grassroots resistance that their murders have provoked. Second, they are arranging for funded non-state groups to do the jobs of the police for them through the Office of Violence Prevention.

This first strategy should be familiar to anyone living in a large metropolitan area in the United States. There are numerous departments with widely overlapping jurisdictions that can shoulder the tasks of policing, even if one department were

to disappear. Minneapolis Parks police, Metro Transit police, University of Minnesota police, Hennepin County Sheriffs, Minnesota State Patrol, the police departments of every surrounding city and suburb—these are some of the many departments that can take on the job of the MPD, that *have been doing* the same job all this time. Ironically, in many parts of the United States, the frameworks through which different police departments collaborate are called “mutual aid agreements.”

The repression of illegal car meets that occurred toward the end of 2020 was an example of one such multi-agency collaboration. When MPD attempted to shut down these meets by themselves when people began to hold them again in spring 2021, the officers were quickly forced to retreat.

Regardless of whether MPD is ever abolished, it has already taken more of a back seat in its duties. This past winter saw a large police operation against a spate of carjackings, assisted by the County Sheriffs and State Patrol. Then, during the lead-up to the trial of Derek Chauvin, Minneapolis mobilized countless agencies plus the National Guard to assist them in locking down the city—

and that still wasn't enough when a Brooklyn Center (not Minneapolis) police officer murdered Daunte Wright in April, leading to a week of unrest. It was the State Patrol and National Guard, not the MPD, that headed up the response to that unrest.

In June, a task force comprised of sheriffs and federal marshals, not local cops, murdered Winston Smith in Minneapolis. This illustrates the extent to which policing in the Twin Cities is already distributed across a wide range of institutions. This has been especially necessary since hundreds of MPD officers have left the department since the uprising of 2020.

The second strategy is more insidious. A number of preexisting community groups have been tapped to assist the police or even take over their roles entirely in situations that might be sensitive for uniformed officers. We saw the most brazen example of this when the Agape Movement assisted city employees in dismantling the barricades around George Floyd Square—the site of his death, which mourners had barricaded and transformed into a memorial. The police did not even have to be on site for this, though they were

seen in nearby areas in case their intervention was necessary. Yet as it turned out, they were not needed—all it took to desecrate the memorial to George Floyd was for a “community group” to take over the role of the police.

Incidents like this have become more and more frequent. In response to police killings in April and June of this year, state-funded community groups like the Minnesota Freedom Fighters violently adopted the role of “peace-police,” a term used to describe people who interfere with and sometimes assault those who resist the police or engage in other confrontational actions.

The most insidious aspect of this approach is that the groundwork for it was laid in the very discourse of abolition that arose in the uprising. During the rebellion, when countless people ceased to accept the legitimacy of the police, many people and organizations arose to fill their place, using the language of abolition to justify their role as “the community policing itself.” Notably, the Minnesota Freedom Fighters were one of the most prominent groups doing this at the time. This same tendency towards self-policing emerged in George Floyd Square with the Agape Movement; up until the removal of the barricades

in June—and even since—the Agape Movement was a clear part of the Square’s composition. In the “Justice Resolution” published in August 2020 by activists seeking to represent the Square and the movement that arose from it, Agape is mentioned by name twice, once acknowledging their role in “providing safety” in MPD’s absence, and again in demand number 18 (of 24), which calls for them to receive a permanent space within the Square to continue to operate.

This idea of self-policing, of the community *policing itself*, forms the nexus in which police abolition and police enforcement fuse and become one. Unfortunately for earnest abolitionists, the city is well ahead of us in developing this model. The coming years could plausibly see the phasing out of anything called the Minneapolis Police Department—and in its place, an array of officers from other agencies, activists, psychiatrists, neighborhood watch organizations, and others enforcing the very same violent law and order that MPD did.³¹

31 Much could be said on the discourse of “mental health” in abolition, with many advocating that psychiatrists and social workers take over the role of police officers. Sasha Durakov Warren has written extensively on the inseparable histories of policing and psychiatry as a

If we recognize this now, we can begin to prepare for this potential future. We need to be able to identify policing, whatever form it assumes, however it is disguised. We need an analysis and a language with which we can point out new forms of policing as they are introduced. We need to popularize visions of what our lives could look like without policing and open up spaces in which to experiment with making that a reality.

It is not the uniforms and badges that make police so destructive to our communities and our aspirations. It is the role that police play in maintaining structural white supremacy and other forms of oppression. It is the way that they con-

part of their project *Of Unsound Mind*. Quoting from the website:

“Critiques of the involvement of police imply that the problem of violence perpetrated against the mad could be stemmed or at least reduced by sending ‘experts’ instead of armed officers. [...] This push for expert jurisdiction ultimately brushes to the side the psy-police function of surveilling, detaining, or forcing treatments on patients, framing them as the relatively innocent and intelligent foil to the brutish police’s senseless brutality. To create ‘non-police’ psychiatric teams would conceal that fact that psychiatry is at present fully embedded within a coercive civil and criminal legal system, the violence of which would continue unabated behind the scenes in psych wards, the courts, locked residencies, jails, and treatment centers.”

concentrate power and legitimacy, monopolizing force and using it to enforce the agenda of the ruling class, focusing violence on targeted populations and those who practice self-determination rather than permitting the ruling class to dictate all that they can do and be. All of the roles that police currently play can be passed on to badgeless, uniformless “community groups” without the results being any less destructive. We don’t want a society in which the police have been formally abolished but everything else continues as it did before. We want to abolish the disparities and alienation that the police exist to enforce.

Movements for police abolition will remain trapped in this nexus as long as we imagine abolition as a policy proposal to be implemented by a government—as long as we conceive of the police as something distinct from the laws they enforce. The effective police abolition that we saw prefigured during the George Floyd rebellion was not represented by citizen patrols—rather, we glimpsed it in the crews of rioters and revelers who transformed the city over the course of a few days. Acting in defiance of the law, they collectively expressed that the power to shape our

lives should be in our hands, not monopolized by the city government, or developers, or banks, or anyone else. Everything we're usually forced to pay for—necessities, luxuries, spaces, and togetherness itself—was liberated and shared with all.

Likewise, true police abolition demands a deep engagement with the ideas of accountability and transformative justice. Horizontal violence will not automatically disappear if we defund and disband the police. If we want to diminish the amount of violence and suffering in our society, we have to abolish all the other systems that create and enforce inequality, as well.

Ultimately, we aspire to cultivate new ways of living together that allow us to address harm without reinventing laws and police under new names. This must occur in our daily lives, not just in exceptional moments of rupture like the George Floyd rebellion. If we succeed in developing new ways of addressing harm, we will become more capable of defending ourselves and each other against the police, and we will be able to offer more concrete alternatives to those who still cling to the only order they know. Only by building communities worthy of the name can we abolish the police once and for all.



I had a dream I got everything I wanted

“This is a powerful and important contribution to the legacy of the George Floyd Uprising. Written from the heart of the uprising, Minneapolis, this is an account which brings together on the ground reporting and theoretical analysis. Read this now, in order to prepare for the next uprising.” –SHEMON SALAM

As the call for police abolition echoes around the country, *The Abolition of Law* aims to realign our sights at a different target. After taking the reader through firsthand accounts of the rebellion that followed the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Nevada argues that a revolutionary abolition must abolish not only the police but the law itself. It is this difference where they locate the limit of the uprising in Minneapolis, and the limit of the future uprisings to come.

