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Why Riots Are Actually Good

In response to the murder of Walter Wallace Jr. and
the uprising in so-called Philadelphia

Nemskii

October 28, 2020

A crowd of protestors marches in the street, a diverse group; a lot of black, indigenous, and people of color leading things, a decent amount of white-passing people, there are men, women, and nonbinary folk of all ages, you even spot an Imam, Rabbi, and Priest walking together, every kind of person can be seen in this crowd. Most people clad in black, faces covered, some are carrying signs, most are chanting, all are pissed off. You're walking with the protestors in the middle of the street, you're one of them, you want your voice to be heard, you're pissed off too, you have a right to be; another innocent black man executed by a white police officer.

The people ahead of you stop walking, you stop as well. No one really knows what's going on. There is some nervous chatter in the crowd when yelling starts towards the front of the group, you catch a glimpse of what looks like Darth Vader. It's a riot cop, dressed head to toe in thick body armour, wearing a black helmet and a huge gas mask, equipped with a telescoping baton in one hand and a clear shield marked "POLICE" in the other. You can't see their face, you can hardly tell there's a human under there.

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Multiple lines of these militarized cops block the entire street, backed up by armored trucks, enormous horses ridden by similarly dressed cops, and squad cars with flashing red and blue lights. The protestors aren't budging either, more people move up to confront the police, some are standing on top of nearby cars, residents are peering out of their windows. At the confrontation line there's some more yelling, some more pushing, there's a few people failing to calm everyone down, everything's getting more tense. A dystopian voice cracks out of a loudspeaker, it drowns out the yelling and chants coming from the crowd;

“This is the police department, this event has been declared an unlawful assembly. You are ordered to disperse to the east immediately. If you do not comply with this order you may be subject to citation or arrest, you also may be subject to tear gas and impact weapons. Officers are taking lawful action. Disperse now.”

You're shocked. You think “how is this an unlawful gathering? We're literally just marching in the street!” The crowd seems defiant. More yelling. More pushing. The stand off lasts for what feels like forever. Then, almost out of nowhere, you hear a shriek, you look over to your left, you see a cloud of pepper spray and a few protestors recoil, when a surge of officers runs towards the same area, batons cocked and in the ready. A brick soars over your head towards the cops, you hear it crack against one of their helmets as the officer drops to the ground in a heap. The crowd erupts into what can only be described as a primal, passionate war cry. You hear glass shatter near the convenience store on the corner and see tear gas canisters being fired from behind the police line as everyone raises their fists and leaps to action. The peace has ended, but the protest has just begun.

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If this scenario upset you, think about which part upset you the most. Was it the police murder of another black person? The property damage? The police confronting the protestors and instigating the violence? Or the fact that any of this has to happen at all?

When people criticize rioters and looters, they usually provide this perfect peaceful protest as the ideal model. Which is unrealistic, utopian, and historically dishonest. Why is it left to the oppressed to uphold this image of civility and peacefulness? Why do you not hold police officers to this level of accountability? Why are we just supposed to accept the police officers' authority without question? Why are police officers allowed to enact whatever violence they wish? Do you actually think any big, societal goal has been accomplished without any violence whatsoever? What does violence even mean to you?

This is perfectly exemplified by Democratic Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates Joe Biden and Kamala Harris when they said the following in the wake of the murder of Walter Wallace Jr.,

“No amount of anger at the very real injustices in our society excuses violence. Attacking police officers and vandalizing small businesses, which are already struggling during this pandemic, does not bend the moral arc of the universe closer to justice. It hurts our fellow citizens. Looting is not a protest, it's a crime.”

It goes on to talk about how only voting for them will fix this issue.

Let me translate that for you.

“It doesn't matter how many minorities the cops kill, it doesn't matter how many women receive forced sterilizations in concentration camps, it doesn't matter how many people we throw into solitary confinement you can NEVER damage property or attack our law enforcement. We value capitalist business interests

over human lives, especially if those lives are a racial minority. Our police officers not only enforce our laws with whatever violence they deem necessary, they are also the ones protecting the business owners who fund our political campaigns, so we have to stand by our cops, because they're the ones actually doing the beating! Er, I mean they're the ones doing the enforcement! Also, rioting doesn't even make a difference, it doesn't change anything. So stop. Same with looting, you're just stealing from your neighbor, which is a crime. And may I remind you that doing crime means we have to sic our cops on you. Ok thanks, vote for us."

Damaging property is not violence. Burning a car is not violence. Looting is not violence. Vandalism is not violence. Protesting is not violence.

Beating protestors is violence. Killing citizens (regardless of guilt) is violence. Imprisoning people is violence. Poverty is violence. Hunger is violence. Evicting people is violence. Killing dogs is violence. Separating families is violence. Tear gassing neighborhoods is violence. Stopping mutual aid projects is violence. Committing war crimes is violence.

So when people say that riots are violent and protestors shouldn't do it, they are accepting and excusing the police state's monopoly on violence. What's a broken storefront window compared to an innocent human life lost at the hands of a cop?

Most of the time, the property that's damaged in these uprisings is not owned by a neighbor or a member of the community. So much of property is held by the few richest people in the US, or it's held by the state itself, that very little actually belongs to the working class residents of the cities where these uprisings occur.

So when they vandalize or loot, they're not hurting their neighbor, they might scratch the surface of some trust fund manager living 3 states away, but they probably have insurance to cover these kinds of costs anyway. The state, bosses, capitalists, and cops have stolen far more than we could ever loot.

Imagine you lived in a community plagued by unemployment, poverty, drug addiction, food insecurity, and harassment by police officers on a daily basis. For a lot of you, you don't have to imagine this, it's a reality. At the intersection of all these different kinds of oppression, events like the killing of someone in your community, it is understandable and even admirable for people to go out into the streets, sacrificing their freedom to resist that oppression by any means necessary.

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Rest in Power Walter Wallace Jr.

No Gods. No Masters. All Cops Are Bastards.

by Nemskii
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