

Notes on September 26th: Reflections on looting, black liberation and anarchism

Anonymous

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On Monday August 14th 2023, Philadelphia police officer Mark Dial shot and killed Eddie Irizarry as he sat in his car. Police initially lied saying that Eddie attacked the cop with a knife, but video footage showed that Eddie was shot in mere seconds while seated in his car with the window up. Following this Dial was suspended for 30 days pending termination. In early September Dial was charged with a number of crimes including murder but the presiding judge would eventually dismiss his charges. The cops who attended the court date in uniform cheered and celebrated when the charges were dropped. On September 26th, that same day Eddie's family and the Party for Socialism and Liberation (alongside Black leftist groups like Black Alliance for Peace and the W.E.B. DuBois Movement School) organized a peaceful march through Center City protesting the decision. That demonstration dispersed after a couple hours but was followed by looting, initially in Center City before spreading to West, North, and Northeast Philly as the night went on.

The Black liberation movement is alive! Those who say it's dead are either racist or not in the street and these revolts are the proof. Although the number of people in the streets was smaller than in 2020, there was widespread revolt across Philadelphia. Police killed Eddie Irizarry, a non-Black Puerto Rican, and Black people responded with revolt. Similarly in 2020 in Kenosha, WI when Kyle Rittenhouse killed two white people in the midst of a riot against police and later had his charges dropped, Black people rioted in the Bay Area. These are both examples of a Black consciousness that recognizes anti-Black systems regardless of if they are targeting Black people in a specific instance.

Here in Philly looters and rioters were well prepared. People were overwhelmingly masked, wearing black clothes, and many were brandishing tools. The looting was organized spontaneously over social media the same day as it took place. People used police scanners to monitor police and prepare for their responses. Numerous businesses, car lots, and ATMs were targeted throughout the city, spreading the PPD thin. Many participants used cars to move between businesses, as getaways, and to generally stay mobile.

It is a far too common belief among radicals that the state is omniscient. This night of rebellion proves otherwise, that opportunity is abundant for insurrectionary activity! As Black radicals (and generally for "political" people) we need to understand it's possible to get away with things if we plan on challenging the state. Many ordinary people already know this and behaved accordingly.

The riots on Tuesday night into Wednesday are an image from the future. Sprawling and scattered rebellions are becoming the norm. Better prepared participants spread across the city, overwhelming police forces that feel they cannot defend everything at once. What moves do we want to make in this new context?

After the run on the Apple store, as people saw that their looted iPhones and iPads were being tracked and bricked by security systems, they smashed them im-

mediately. Poured orange juice on them. Dropped them into the sewers. A beautiful display of how commodities are bullshit. Destroying anti-Blackness necessarily involves attacking property and the relations needed to maintain it, whether commodities or capital. Black consciousness cannot be separated from class consciousness.

It is important to note that this revolt and the George Floyd Uprising (including the Walter Wallace rebellion nestled within it) hold key differences. This recent riot was overwhelmingly Black with minor Latine participation in the Northeast, as opposed to the multiracial character of 2020. This lines up with the reality of Black people being the most advanced in struggle against the so-called United States. September's revolt also saw a more chill vibe with little focus on fighting police, as looters helped each other attack property and evade capture. They seemed to have a more collaborative and joyous attitude compared to the Walter Wallace rebellion of October 2020, which saw more skepticism and lateral violence amongst participants. Another interesting difference from those events was that September 2023 saw Black people of various ideologies and walks of life moving together in insurrection. As a result the revolt rejected a conventional political character while still maintaining an inherent black consciousness (best exemplified by the occasional Black Trump supporter joining in on the smash-and-grab).

The second day, looting continued in a smaller capacity although the larger crowds that gathered were noticeably absent. Instead, people mostly used their cars to do smash and grabs. The police were also more prepared and mobilized on the second day. Understandly, this probably meant a lot more people stayed home because the police presence was far more intense on the street.

The Left was either too afraid of or uninterested in participating in the Black revolt, sidestepped and left behind by young people who organized themselves via social media. These socialist groups constantly talk about the need for organization. But young Black people on the 26th were ready to go. They didn't need any self appointed community organizers then and they don't now. The looting on September 26th is just a form of self organization that the Left refuses to take seriously. At best we saw boilerplate analyses that looting pales in comparison to corporate wage theft. The WEB DuBois School of Abolition went so far as to make a statement saying "it isn't our task to either celebrate or condemn the actions" of the looters. The inability (and cowardice) of leftist groups to even consider publicly celebrating attacks on capital by young Black people speaks to a real division between what Black people are doing versus what the Left is doing. The issue of how to include more activist and leftist organizations is as irrelevant as ever, the question now is how do we continue to sidestep the left and add to the growth of ever more terrible revolts?

Anarchists made an effort to add to the situation. Anarchists were not only present during the riots (albeit to a limited degree), some also carried out attacks.

Although anarchists were largely late to the game in terms of intentionally participating, a good amount of anarchists showed up. Segregation and being in different social networks may have played a part in why our response as anarchists was delayed. A proposal of dispersed attacks was made and followed through on. That said, an opportunity to raise morale was missed by prioritizing atomized attack over group action. The anarchist space in Philadelphia is growing right now, and tempering cautious attitudes with encouragement and support can further encourage that growth. Black clothes are cool again, anarchists need not worry about alienating others with monochrome outfits, though some sportswear brands (Nike, Adidas, and Champion were common) might go a long way.

This moment felt like an opening salvo of mass revolts to come. Let's stay ready for next time.

– Some black anarchists in Philly

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