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# OATHS OF BLOOD



# OATHS OF WATER

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*one*

## Oaths of Blood

In northern Nevada, the soil alternates between a dull yellow and a jaundiced gray, intercut with the washed-out color of skin-rending sagebrush, a sweet-smelling corpse of a plant that clusters in vast broken archipelagos scattered across endless seas of hyper-flammable cheatgrass. When the sun is at its highest, creatures rest in the intricate root work of the brush, bodies entwined in the shade, where undead tendrils offer respite to predator and prey alike—small dens dug by families of wild foxes, crevices filled with shivering shrews, weasels, and mice; lightless sinkholes hiding legions of night-black beetles; roots entwined with rattlesnakes biding their time. Everything stinks of sun-heated sage, and after working a day on the range, you return to the trailer with the same smell, covered in thin layers of yellow-gray dust. That scent burns its way into your memory like a callus.

I was stationed in Winnemucca, a small mining-and-gambling town just east of the Black Rock Desert and south of the borders with Oregon and Idaho. The town is at the heart of a large swath of arid countryside, roughly equidistant between Bunkerville, Nevada, and Burns, Oregon, the two sites of the recent Bundy family standoffs that helped to spark the nation's resurgence of an armed and organized far right. Its economy resembles those of other rural counties in the far West, dominated by the boom

and bust of global commodity markets, softened somewhat by seasonal work in tourism, wildland firefighting, and the management of federal land. I was there in 2011, still a boom year, with Chinese stimulus money driving up the price of natural resources and the economic crisis pushing gold prices to historic highs, all accompanied by the flow of new federal subsidies for natural gas pipelines and stimulus-funded employment programs.

It was also the first new boom for the growth of the far right. Having dwindled from their last peak in the 1990s, the election of Obama had stoked a nationwide resurgence of militias and affiliated groups, accompanied by massive purchases of arms and ammunition. Though nominally led by members of the old, more explicitly white supremacist militia movement (with its roots in posse comitatus, Christian Identity sects, and traditional neo-Nazi gangs), the new movement includes a number of young recruits who have no such history and who often hold no explicit white supremacist views. Many of these new recruits have been drawn from the generation of disaffected veterans who fought in the wars of the Bush era, only to return to hometowns crippled by economic depression and budget cuts. The movement has also been marked by a shift away from the militia as its sole basis for organizing, with numerous non-militia or quasi-militia groups forming alongside more traditional paramilitaries.

As part of the shift away from the militia, this rightwing resurgence has seen the emergence of new ethno-nationalist groups that have rejected traditional white nationalism in favor of a national anarchist or Third Positionist politics.<sup>1</sup> Instead of forming militias, such groups advocate the creation of cult-like “tribes” capable of building “autonomous zones” and returning to the land. These groups often use the language, tactics, and aesthetics of the radical left, and frequently exist within the same subcultures. Among the most prominent of these are clearing-house organizations such as Attack the System as well as more organized groupings such as the Wolves of Vinland, a neo-pagan

nationalist cult, organized like a biker gang and based around a land project they call “Ulfheim” near Lynchburg, Virginia, where the Wolves crowdfunded the construction of a traditional Viking longhouse.<sup>2</sup> The Wolves have three major chapters, with apparent organizational centers in Virginia, the Mountain States and the Pacific Northwest, as well as a larger propaganda wing called “Operation Werewolf” which yokes together the participation of smaller groups nationwide. Much of their material is distinguished by a well-designed aesthetic, with clean logos plastered on professional-looking photos of muscle-strapped white men standing near fires, their faces painted with runes and shoulders covered by animal pelts, all accompanied by terse taglines well suited to distribution over social media.

Their work is popularized by semi-mainstream theorists like Jack Donovan, founder of the Wolves’ “Cascadia” chapter and author of a series of books on tribalism and masculinity.<sup>3</sup> Donovan and the Wolves propose an across-the-board return to one’s own “indigenous” roots, which will allow for the formation of a new confederacy of non-state, self-governing communitarian “tribes,” defined in cultural terms but essentially reducible to ethnicities. They thereby discover a politics commensurate and compatible with the various ethno-nationalisms offered by the “decolonial” fraction of the miserable American left, and often understand themselves as part of this broader current. Such groups simply see themselves as building a place for white people within a communitarian confederacy of newly indigenous traditionalism, and their language often mirrors that of the left in arguing for a return to indigenous roots and the construction of autonomous zones.<sup>4</sup> Donovan, for example, often mixes left-wing and right-wing rhetoric in a single breath, arguing that the Wolves’ back-to-the-land project in Virginia is

about escaping to another world, not just for an hour or even a day, but for good. The Wolves of Vinland are becoming

barbarians. They're leaving behind attachments to the state, to enforced egalitarianism, to desperate commercialism, to this grotesque modern world of synthetic beauty and dead gods. They're building an autonomous zone, a community defined by face-to-face and fist-to-face connections where manliness and honor matter again.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, Paul Waggener, one of the group's founders, clearly lays out the tribal basis of the organization: "When I say tribe, family, whatever, that's a very very well understood idea that these people are inside and those people are outside."<sup>6</sup> The tribe, then, is understood as a closed, communitarian space, opposed to both the state as such and any left-wing universalism.

The Wolves, though offering a pristine example of the far right's ability to craft an attractive aesthetic and mobilize in quasi-left political projects, remain a somewhat specialized fringe group within the larger right-wing resurgence. Similarly, the "Alt-Right," which rose to prominence with the election of Trump, has a media presence that far outweighs its significance—doubtless due to the fact that its particular brand of frat-boy fascism finds its base on college campuses populated by equally out-of-touch leftists, creating a virtuous circle of confrontations that spread widely on social media but largely draw from two very narrow demographics.

Once its figureheads were defeated—Milo Yiannopoulos via public outcry and Richard Spencer via repeated punches to the face—the phenomenon faded with the spectacle. By 2017, Spencer's "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville was widely recognized as an explicitly white nationalist event, its violent conclusion (with white supremacist James Fields plowing his car into counter-protesters, resulting in numerous injuries and the death of Heather Heyer) served only to further crumble the carefully cultivated image of the "Alt-Right," widening the divide between "patriot" groups and the more explicitly racist factions

of the movement. Since the media backlash (and despite Trump's soft praise for the far-right protesters), even explicitly white supremacist organizations such as Vanguard America have rebranded themselves using the language and imagery of the Patriot Movement (see below), rather than the "Alt-Right," and Patriot symbols have begun to dominate the cultural field of conservatism in general. Though the "Alt-Right" phenomenon was significant insofar as it offered a space for a new far-right culture to gestate, it is only via the rise of new "Patriot" groups that this culture seems able to take flesh. At the same time, a certain degree of institutionalization came with the elevation of Steve Bannon into a central advisory position within the Trump administration. Though he has since exited the position, he has done so in the hopes of exerting even more influence via his ownership and management of various propaganda outlets. This represents an administrative mainstreaming of the far right, but doesn't signal much about its rank-and-file base.

Far more representative of the resurgence, then, are the original Patriot organizations such as the Oath Keepers and the Three Percenters, which have widespread bases of support (in the tens of thousands, measured by social media followings) and at least a few thousand actual members.<sup>7</sup> Both understand themselves as part of a vibrant "Patriot Movement" that is preparing for the coming of a second American Revolution, marked by civil war and social collapse, all inflected by a political philosophy in line with that promoted by Bannon, within and now beyond the Trump administration. Both include armed groups and regularly host paramilitary trainings, but neither group is simply a militia. Instead, they act as semi-decentralized umbrella organizations that include and exceed the activity of their constituent member groups, some of which are more or less traditionally organized militias and some of which are not. They often overlap (sometimes uneasily) with one another and with other far-right groups, but they have generally cut any lingering ties to explicitly white

supremacist organizations and even tend to distance themselves from the more terroristic wings of anti-immigrant and Islamophobic movements in the u.s.—even while opposing the resettlement of Syrian refugees and using border patrols in Arizona for informal military training.<sup>8</sup>

The Oath Keepers portray themselves as an association of current and former military, police, and first responders opposing the totalitarian turn within the u.s. government. Their name comes from the notion that their members are simply staying true to the oaths they took to protect the American People—under present conditions, they argue, the protection of the People means opposition to the government and a refusal to carry out “unconstitutional” orders. Though it is still unclear how this anti-government politics will render itself under a Trump presidency, on a grander scale, they see resistance forming first in the far hinterland, where local residents can be organized into self-reliant militias and local governments can be won over to their cause to create a rural base of power, parallel and opposed to that of the federal government. These are the core unifying features of the group, though its individual wings often wrap these ideas up in a wide array of conspiracy theories, anti-immigrant rhetoric and veiled racism, the prevalence and precise character of which depends on the chapter in question.

The Three Percenters are a somewhat broader organization often overlapping with the Oath Keepers, and in recent years both have undergone a general, loose fusion. Their name is taken from the claim that only 3 percent of the u.s. population directly participated in the original American Revolution, and that, therefore, only a minority of individuals will be required to overthrow government tyranny in a second revolution to come. Emblazoned with the Roman numeral for three and a circle of thirteen stars representing the original American Colonies, the group’s symbolism speaks to the commitment of its members to be this Three Percent when the time comes. Ideologically, both

the Three Percenters and the Oath Keepers draw strongly though somewhat haphazardly from American Libertarianism, and both advocate attempts at local preparation and self-reliance. The Three Percenters, in contrast to the Oath Keepers, are a much more consistently and vocally anti-immigrant group, with much of their non-militia organizing efforts going into openly anti-immigrant or Islamophobic organizing, such as a series of marches aimed at preventing the resettlement of Syrian refugees in Idaho.<sup>9</sup>

In those early years in Winnemucca, these groups had only just begun to congeal. After our ten-hour shifts in the desert, my co-worker and I would relax with drinks and free games of pool at a local bar called The Mineshaft, a catchment for dead-eyed miners coming off a twelve-hour shift, Burners biding their time until this year's brief slice of drug-addled reprieve, vaguely white supremacist bikers looking for blood, broken-bodied cowboys and old Basque men trying to wait out the sun.<sup>10</sup> Smoke drifted between muffled shouts and pictures of topless women on motor-cycles. On the weekends there were knife fights, fist fights, arguments, rounds of drinks, blood spilled in the dust outside. Sometimes train hoppers would wander in from the rail yard—mostly crust punk traveler kids with their dogs and denim jackets, soon chased off by the local sheriff who, rumor had it, used to rule the county with impunity, tying vagrants up and throwing them into the river. If I'd paid attention I would have maybe seen in all of this the slow encroachment of the new symbols over the old standards of bike gangs and run-of-the-mill desert Libertarianism. But at the time these things were just under the surface, swells forming before the wave took shape.

## Wastelands

In the midst of a far-right movement dominated by Internet threats, spectacular street brawls and run-of-the-mill white male terrorism, the Patriot groups stand out owing to their focus



on self-reliance initiatives. Faced with devastating declines in government services, many have stepped in to provide basic social services and natural disaster training. This is particularly notable in rural counties in states like Oregon, where the combination of long-term collapse in timber revenue and dwindling federal subsidies has all but emptied the coffers of local governments. In Josephine County, located in the Rogue River region of southwestern Oregon, the sheriff's department is able to employ only a miniscule number of deputies (depending almost entirely on federal money), and often cannot offer emergency services after-hours. In 2013 the county jail was downsized and inmates were simply released en masse. In the rural areas outside Grants Pass (the county's largest city, with its own locally funded police department), the crime rate has skyrocketed, and the sheriff encouraged people at risk of things like domestic abuse simply to "consider relocating to an area with adequate law enforcement services."<sup>11</sup>

In this situation, the Oath Keepers began to offer basic "community preparedness" and "disaster response" courses, and encouraged the formation of community watches and full-blown militias as parallel government structures.<sup>12</sup> They offered preparation workshops for the earthquake predicted to hit the Pacific Northwest and "also volunteered for community service, painting houses, building a handicap playground and constructing wheelchair ramps for elderly or infirm residents."<sup>13</sup> While often winning the hearts and minds of local residents, these new power structures are by no means services necessarily structured to benefit those most at risk. The Patriot Movement surge in the county followed a widely publicized campaign to "defend" a local mining claim against the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) after the mine proprietors were found to be out of compliance with BLM standards. This sort of vigilante protection of small businesses, local extractive industries, and property holders (in particular ranchers) is often at the heart of Patriot

activity.<sup>14</sup> And it is their skill at local organizing that makes the Patriots far more threatening than their more spectacular counterparts.

The Oath Keepers also piloted the Patriot Movement's "inside-outside" strategy within which local self-reliance initiatives were only one, slightly more direct, tactic among many. This strategy puts an equally strong emphasis on "inside" work via formal administrative channels (facilitated by entry into local government and the Republican Party) in a way that synthesizes well with the "outside" work they do in defunded timber country or along the U.S.–Mexican border, where they prepare and establish parallel structures of power. While filling in the holes left by underfunded law enforcement in Josephine County, for example, Patriot-affiliated politicians were also leading the opposition to new property tax measures that would have allowed the hiring of more deputies. This, of course, helps to widen the funding shortfall further, helping extra-state militias to step in and begin building their own power within the county.<sup>15</sup> The Patriot parties thereby seek to extend and secure the economic conditions for their own expansion.

The thing that makes the Patriots unique, then, is their recognition of the need to build power within these wastelands, and their surprising ability to outcompete the dwindling state and local progressives in this endeavor. These groups are essentially engaged in a battle for "competitive control," a term used by the Australian military strategist David Kilcullen (a senior adviser to General Petraeus in 2007 and 2008 and then special adviser on counter-insurgency to Condoleezza Rice) in describing the rise of guerrilla forces within the interstices of failing states. Kilcullen argues that the success of insurgencies such as the Taliban in Afghanistan as well as the rise of expansive criminal syndicates in places like Jamaica can both be explained by the ways in which such groups succeeded in providing "a predictable, consistent and wide-spectrum normative system of control"<sup>16</sup> that helps to win

over a population buffeted by the chaotic inconsistency of economic and cultural collapse.

By providing material incentives that guarantee stability, combined with threats of coercion for those who oppose them, such groups become capable of making the population complicit in their rise, regardless of ideological positions. In fact, Kilcullen points out that in such situations (epitomized by all-out civil war), support for one faction or another simply does not follow ideology. People don't throw their weight behind those they agree with, and often many in a population can't be said to have any deep-seated ideological commitment in the first place. Instead, support follows strength, and ideology follows support. Political or religious attachment is often an after-the-fact development, preceded by the capable intervention of a pragmatic, functional partisan group that begins as a small minority of the population. The notion of the "Three Percent" is essentially the recognition of this fact, and the entire model of Patriot organizing follows the insurgent logic detailed by Kilcullen.

## Deserts

In Nevada I could feel the Long Crisis with a terrifying intimacy, as if it was some sort of uncanny, bodily contact—like the feeling you get camped out in the swirling, galaxy-littered darkness of the open range when a reptile brushes up against your prostrate body. Except that the reptile at least shares with you some deep, serpentine connection, a lineage lost somewhere in the plummet of primeval time. The Crisis, on the other hand, is a vast creature, not contained by familiar scales of time or space. It is a social terror made of masses of machines and animals, yet not in any way kin to these components. And what we sense of it today is merely one of its many limbs extending backward from its true body writhing somewhere just out of sight, at home in our own incomprehensible future. In Winnemucca, the hotels were all

sold out indefinitely because a natural gas pipeline was being built somewhere out there in the trackless waste, this one small capillary opened by the Crisis flooding the worthless dust with gold. Workers swarmed into every available space, drawn from all the poorest parts of the country, as well as the poorest parts of neighboring ones. Some of the old timers in the bar talked about this boom in the shape of booms long past, seamlessly mixing casual racism with moral derision for those slightly lower on the rungs of white trash than they. Those workers come in for two weeks—they'd say in quiet, even tones, the brims of their sun-cooked hats cutting into the smoke—and after two weeks they're buying tricked-out new trucks on credit, hauling those big families in.

Yet everything remained somehow just out of sight. I never saw the pipeline, though the workers flooded through the hotels and restaurants and casinos around me. Every morning buses filled with people departed from a lot near our trailer park, some heading to the pipeline, but most carrying workers out to distant mines. Shipments of gold and silver were trucked out of these mines periodically, surrounded by heavily armed paramilitary convoys. But the mines remained tucked far out of sight behind mountain ranges and layers of perimeter fencing. Meanwhile, my co-worker and I would drive out every morning far into the desert, where we removed fencing put up by an identical crew almost a decade ago. We could see distant ranches, mostly growing alfalfa with water drawn up from hidden aquifers, but we rarely saw another person.

Every couple weeks, our bank accounts were filled electronically by the Department of the Interior out of stimulus money allotted to the BLM during the bailouts. Everything seemed animated by an invisible force, all choreographed in some indecipherable ritual that simply was not meant for us. The sparse character of the desert seemed to draw the Crisis so much closer because it stripped away everything but this ritual,

making peoples' orbits around the invisible gravity of capital discernible against the desert's flat plane. There was a sign just off the interstate near a small trailer-town called Golconda that had two arrows, one pointing north and one south. The first arrow said "Mines," the other "Ranches." We drove somewhere between the two to get out into the mountains, our orbits only small, errant arcs cast between occupations of greater gravity.

The Crisis is maybe most visible in the desert because the Crisis makes deserts. And it is these deserts that make the militias—or at least that make them an actual threat. The grim potential of these new Patriot parties arises via their ability to organize in the vacuum left by the collapse of local economies. It's easy for city-dwellers to dismiss the militias as simple far-right fanboys playing soldier in the Arizona desert, but that's because the real deserts are largely invisible from the metropolis—they are simply too far beyond its walls. The progressive narrative, embodied in an entire sub-genre of think piece that we might simply call Tax Collector Journalism, therefore tends to treat these issues as if nearby ruralites just "oppose taxes" and therefore bring such funding shortfalls upon themselves. A slightly more sinister variant argues that, by backing candidates that reject increases in property tax, small, often out-of-county Patriot groups actually construct the crises facing these rural areas.

But these positions are nonsensical when we consider the fact that the collapse of revenues drawn from the land via extractive industries also means a declining property value for these lands and therefore a diminishing base of property taxes to draw from, all accompanying the disappearance of any commodity tax from timber sales, for example. To claim that this crisis was somehow "created" by anti-tax conservative ruralites or by small, relatively recently developed anti-government groups simply ignores that the basis of tax revenue is in industrial production, whether taxed at the level of capital, commodity sale, land ownership, or wage income. Less industrial output means either fewer taxes or a

higher share of tax-to-income for most residents. Increased property taxes likely cannot be afforded by small landholders, for whom employment is sparse—and therefore the progressive’s alternative of increasing property taxes is simply a program of dispossession for small landholders. It is no wonder, then, that these smallholders align themselves with ranchers, miners, and even larger corporate landowners (all of whom will be paying the largest lump sum in taxes) to oppose such measures.

It is here that the class basis of the far right begins to become visible. With new members joining the Patriot Movement drawn from a generation less convinced by the old militias’ narratives of racial supremacy, the ideological focus of such groups has instead turned largely to issues of land politics. Visions of race war have been replaced by a (nonetheless racially coded) prophecy of oncoming civil war that pits diverse, liberal urban areas against the hinterland. It is easy to seize upon the more conspiratorial aspects of these fears (such as the claim that the UN is set to invade the u.s., with the help and preparation of the federal government) in order to dismiss these movements wholesale, but doing so tends to obscure the fact that these groups are responding, however incoherently, to their experience of the Long Crisis and the new geography being created by it. The results are inevitably grim and occasionally made visible in sweeping acts of political devastation, the urban liberal weeping at the shore of a blood-red ocean stretched between California and New York—an expanse somehow invisible until 8 November 2016, the 18th Brumaire of Donald Trump.

In reality, the far right’s political base is not defined by sheer xenophobia and idiocy, and their political analysis, though sprinkled with occult themes and mystical logic, is not entirely hollow. To take a common example, the idea of George Soros secretly funding the most violent aspects of things like Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter is a common trope, and it is only the more extreme version of a widespread perception that

urban elites use forms of government patronage (in particular welfare and affirmative action) to buy the loyalty of minority groups and thereby turn them against “working people” who have no access to such patronage. Progressive critics often point out the ways in which this theory and many affiliate conspiracies mimic the anti-Semitic narratives of the old militia movement, drawn from the historic far right. But what this critique misses is the simple fact that these conspiracies approximately, if incorrectly, describe structures of power so pervasive as to be mundane to most people.

The Democratic Party does (obviously and publicly) fund “radical” projects as a method of co-optation (rather than radicalization, as the right would have it) in its constant cultivation of a strong, radical-in-garb-but-centrist-at-heart base among labor unions, NGOs, local governments, and any number of “community” organizations claiming to represent particular minority groups or simply “people of color” as a whole. This patronage is not evenly allotted to the urban poor, however, and it largely does not come in the form of “welfare” as the far right argues, but instead as grants, campaign funding, charitable donations, and services provided by churches, NGOs, or local governments—much of which is allotted to the upper-middle-class segments of disadvantaged populations, rather than those most in need. This method of co-optation and recruitment is therefore part of a real alliance built between the liberal upper segments of dispossessed urban populations and the particular fraction of elites who fund the Democratic Party. This is the Democratic Party machine. There is nothing conspiratorial about it.

### The Carhartt Dynasty

The Republican Party operates on a roughly symmetrical base built up among rural white sub-elites and a whole array of urban

or peri-urban petty-capitalist interests. Most of the Patriot groups essentially acknowledge this in their rejection of both parties, but groups like the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters recognize openings in the base of the Republican Party that do not exist for them in the base of the Democratic Party, due to the Republicans' extent into the very areas of rural devastation that Democrats tend to ignore. Their attempt at tactical infiltration of this base in order to widen the power vacuum in which they operate is then seen by urban progressives as more evidence that conservative Republicans are somehow secretly behind the economic devastation experienced in these areas—and if poor ruralites only had better information, they would vote for Democrats who would raise taxes and thereby fix the funding shortfall.

But, again, it all returns to the issue of shrinking industrial output leading to a shrinking tax base. It is not “taxes” as such that the population opposes here, but the twin dependencies wrought from the economic collapse: on one side, people in rural areas are increasingly dependent on federal funding for employment (in wildland firefighting, in forest management, in local school districts and healthcare systems almost entirely maintained by federal aid, in agricultural production sustained by subsidized government purchase programs), and on the other hand they therefore experience class exploitation as largely a matter of rents, rather than wages.<sup>17</sup> This leads to a populist analysis that emphasizes this form of exploitation and its attendant crises over all others, obscuring the deep interdependencies between what such populists portray as the “real” economy and the “false” economy of finance. It should not be surprising, then, that the far right has seized upon this and put issues of land management and local governmental authority at the forefront of its political program. The border patrol operations staffed by such militias are often treated as mere training grounds for near-term confrontations with the federal government in the American interior and long-term confrontations with opponents



in the new civil war to come. The bulk of the popularity of the Patriot Movement has come not from such patrols, but instead out of direct confrontations with federal agents, all of which have ostensibly been protests about land use in the rural West.

The first of these was the Bundy ranch standoff in 2014, in Bunkerville, Nevada, followed by the slightly smaller Sugar Pine mine defense in Josephine County in 2015, and, finally, the occupation of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge in 2016, in Burns, Oregon. Despite being concentrated in a handful of states, the activities of this far western wing of the Patriot Movement have had a cohering effect on the far right at the national scale. There have thus far been no correlates among the militia movement of Michigan, or the KKK in Louisiana, though members of such groups certainly form part of the support base for the western Patriots. Similarly, the anti-immigrant border patrols in Arizona have been happening for over a decade now, and, though an important component of many far right groups' training, these patrols have failed to garner the same kind of widespread attention and popularity. This is because the specific land politics of the far western hinterland have offered the new right-wing movement an effective theater in which to oppose rent-taking and thereby form the rudiments of a mass base.

The crux of Patriot Movement land politics is the desire to see federally controlled lands returned to local management in order to revive long-dead local timber, mining, and ranching industries. At the same time, they argue that the devolution of federal power to states and counties will allow local communities to manage their own affairs. The harder edges of the movement (the "constitutional sheriffs") even argue that county sheriffs have a constitutionally mandated right to selectively apply laws passed at higher levels of government, and therefore sheriffs can act as a protective shield against state gun control laws, government surveillance, and the sort of federal mandatory-minimum charges applied to people like the Hammonds, whose

long-term imprisonment for arson on federal land was the focus of the Malheur occupation. Though somewhat distant from the interests of poor whites in the eastern states, these political foci make perfect sense in the far West, where the bulk of the federal government's more than 630 acres (255 h) of land is located (mostly in eleven continental states plus Alaska).<sup>18</sup> In Nevada, the federal government owns nearly 85 percent of the state's land; in Oregon, the number is just over 50 percent; and in Idaho (the stronghold of the Three Percenters), it's around 60 percent.<sup>19</sup>

Much of the immediate conflict inspiring the confrontations that have magnetized the far right has been explicit conflicts over federal rents charged for land use by miners and ranchers. Different states have different levels and structures of management, but the bulk of this land is overseen by either the BLM (35.9 percent) or the Forest Service (32.8 percent).<sup>20</sup> Though both of these agencies are targeted by Patriot groups, the BLM's role in overseeing grazing and mining rights has been the root of all three major occupations in the West thus far. Though often blown out of proportion and incorporated into ideological claims that privatization as such is superior to any sort of government ownership, it's hard to argue with the fact that these federal agencies are often corrupt and certainly fall short of their original mandates.<sup>21</sup>

While working for the BLM, the head of our office used to brag that the agency brought in five dollars for every four tax dollars put into it, while the Forest Service brought in four for every five.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, stories of BLM corruption were rife even within the agency, with people whispering at marked-down land sales on the edge of Vegas during the housing bubble. Much of what the BLM does, in fact, is apply a vast and bureaucratic system of rents to those using the lands under its domain. This takes the form of fees charged for the recognition of mining claims (the cause of the Sugar Pine conflict) as well as grazing fees for cattle ranches (the direct cause of the Bundy Ranch standoff and the indirect cause of the Malheur occupation). As the direct interface between

ruralites and the federal government, the BLM is a natural focus for the anti-rent, local-control politics of the Patriot Movement. But it also creates a real tension in these rural areas between those who subsist directly or indirectly off these rents and those who pay them (even while they may themselves benefit from similar purchase-end subsidies or government price-setting programs in the price of agricultural goods).

Much of the genuine opposition to the Malheur occupation, for example, came from the Burns area itself. According to data from the American Community Survey for the city of Burns (which does not include the surrounding county or the neighboring Burns Paiute Reservation),<sup>23</sup> government workers compose more than a third of the population (37.3 percent), and workers in agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining are only half of this (17 percent). Meanwhile, local services such as retail make up only a little less (14.6 percent), but this is by definition dependent on the base industries that receive inputs from outside the area economy (that is, the government workers' wages—originating in tax money in excess of that produced in the region—and the ranchers' income, originating in exports of beef, both go to support the local grocery store). The divergence between the two largest categories is narrowed somewhat at the county level, with government workers at 30.3 percent of all employees; agriculture et al. at 27.2 percent; and retail only slightly diminished at 10.5 percent.<sup>24</sup> The image here is nonetheless one of a bifurcated employment structure, with a large chunk of the populace dependent on federal government inputs for their employment, and another large chunk dependent on government employees' wages for their jobs in the local economy. It is only natural, then, that something like the Malheur occupation would not necessarily win over a majority of the local populace, who not only do not oppose federal land management, but in fact depend on it for their livelihood. In Burns, the Patriots were ultimately outdone by the state in the game of competitive control, since the state itself provided enough

stability to the population via its own normative framework, against which the Patriots could offer no real alternative, unlike in the more severely underfunded Josephine County.

Many urban critiques of the Patriot Movement have focused on these facts to construct “outsider” narratives of the Patriots, in which these militias enter local “communities” from elsewhere in order to sow disorder, against the wishes of the local population. Organizing against the militias is then portrayed as simply the upholding of the status quo via the silent majority, afraid to speak up when faced with the influx of heavily armed men. But these narratives tend to obscure or at least ignore in practice the actual conditions of economic collapse in the countryside, and simply reinforce the state’s own position relative to rural areas in the far West, which is one of continued, contingent dependence and fierce competition for a shrinking pool of government jobs. The work of groups like the Portland-based Rural Organizing Project is a case in point. Urban liberals are paired with locals within the progressive establishment to build grassroots opposition to the militias, but when it actually comes to offering some sort of solution for the widespread economic problems of these areas, the focus is not on building local regimes of dual power to oppose the current economic system but instead to push for increased taxes and petition higher levels of government for more extensive payouts.

The experience in Burns also hints at the fact that many of those who are most adversely affected by government rents are not necessarily the poorest rural residents, or even average rural-ites. Such fees, combined with property taxes, disproportionately affect landowners and the proprietors of local extractive industries, as well as a wide variety of small businesses struggling to survive amid conditions of widespread economic collapse. The Bundys themselves are a striking image of the class of landholder that forms the figurative and financial backbone of the Patriot Movement: their land value, combined with their yearly income,

actually puts them in the upper income brackets of such counties. Similarly, mine owners in southern Oregon or mill proprietors in Idaho are the literal holders of capital in their respective areas. They are a petty capitalist class that appears “working class” only through constant, active contrast with well-heeled coastal elites. An important part of this contrast is the fact that they do regularly work their holdings themselves (even while they oversee far less well-off, largely seasonal employees), and are substantially poorer than plenty of urban professionals, not to mention financial elites. Equally important is their constantly maintained, self-aware aesthetic, an amalgamation of traditionally middle-American clichés cultivated by large patriarchal families like the Bundys, variants of which are easily identifiable in most rural areas—the many local dynasties signified by their big trucks, camo hats, and Carhartt jackets, all often just a bit too clean and new.

It is this class fraction that is the real heart and focus of the Patriot movement. It is their property that is defended, and they are portrayed as the only forces capable of reviving the local economy. The devolution of federal lands to local control entails effective privatization of these lands into the hands of local holders of cattle and capital—those sleeping gods of the Old West, which the Patriots hope to awaken. All of the other participants in the Patriot Movement (many of whom are less-well-off veterans and other working-class locals) are nonetheless acting in accordance with the interests of the Carhartt Dynasty. There is little evidence that mass support for this politics extends all the way down, and much evidence that simply suggests that rural proletarians, similar to their urban counterparts, have been unable to cohere any substantial political program that has their interests at heart. In such a situation, we again see that support follows strength and belief trails far behind.

## Blood Debt

I, my co-worker, and most of the other residents of the trailer park in which we lived, were driven in our invisible orbits across the gold-gray desert of northern Nevada by the twin gravities of wages and debts. My co-worker had wanted to get work on a fire crew, where the wages were better, but he had no experience and no family connection to any of the contractors. He was originally from Washington state, and his car broke down in Reno while he was looking for work. He was forced to settle for what he could find in the city, still hard-hit by the collapse of the housing bubble. In the end, he found a job going door-to-door selling vacuums. His part of the job was the exhibition, in which he came in and vacuumed people's floors for them before the other employee joined him and tried to sell them the vacuum on an installment plan. In order even to be paid minimum wage, however, he had to be allowed into a certain number of houses to exhibit the vacuums. In the end, he told me, he'd basically just go to people's doors and beg them to let him vacuum their floors so that the company would pay him.

This gave him enough cash to drive out to Winnemucca for the BLM job, which he hoped would help him pay off his debts. We often compared debts—one of the foundational rituals of the millennial generation (after selfies, of course). Mine were substantially fewer than his, almost exclusively from a \$5,000 loan taken out to attend the last two years of college, which had quickly compounded until it was somewhere between \$6,000 and \$7,000. The monthly payments could not be deferred any longer, though they cost about as much as I'd been paying for rent in the trailer park. His debts were expansive, but not unusual for people our age. Part came from student loans—he'd been convinced by high school counselors to attend an expensive private school, where he learned how to read Egyptian hieroglyphics and dropped out before getting a degree. These summed above \$10,000, before

interest. Another portion came from medical bills. His family was poor and could not afford adequate insurance. He'd broken an arm once in a stupid accident (adding a few thousand) and also been hit in the head by an axe when the blade broke from the handle while chopping wood (adding several more thousand, with the necessity of hospital stays, brain scans, and all manner of painkillers). The head injury disqualified him from joining the Coast Guard, the one employment opportunity that actually seemed feasible and appealing, as he'd been a professional lifeguard and competitive swimmer. So, crippled by tens of thousands in debt, he made his way out into the desert, hoping that a fire would hit nearby and the crews would need extra hands.

As one of the poorest generations in recent history, debt and rent are the defining features of our lives. It is this fact that makes the current incarnation of the far right an actual threat, because it increases the probability that some variant of present-day Patriot politics might actually find a mass base, as a program formulated specifically to oppose the extraction of rents from an unwilling population in the far hinterland is translated into a more general opposition of rents as a primary form of exploitation in contemporary capitalism. This could rapidly move the far right inward, so to speak, building them a base among the poorer denizens of the sprawling American city, in the same way that both left- and right-leaning populist movements have found a base in an alliance of small proprietors, petty landholders, and the various members of the surplus population in Europe, Latin America, and Asia. The continued obliviousness of the urban liberal (most recently exhibited as a maddening overconfidence in a candidate as unpopular as Hillary Clinton) only helps the far right rise to power unopposed and largely invisible, its base in the exurb, the rust belt, or the third-order capitals of largely hinterland states like Idaho or Montana.

But can the far right offer any sort of solution to the Long Crisis? How can they represent the future when all

the demographic trends seem to be going against them—urbanization, immigration, diversity, and even “littoralization,” in which population becomes increasingly concentrated along the coastlines? The truth is that, at present, the most vital Patriot politics is largely limited to its current field of operations within the far West, though it may be possible for new strongholds to arise in Appalachia, the historic heartland of white poverty. Smaller groups of weekend warrior militias will certainly pop up elsewhere, and plenty of far-right violence is bound to emerge in all the old breeding grounds of racial resentment, but there are presently few places where collapse is so salient and the force of the federal government offers itself so clearly as an enemy figure, at least to the white population.

Though somewhat counterintuitive, the election of Donald Trump will also likely have a dampening effect on the most extreme wings of the far right, even while it emboldens a minority to violent action. In part, this is because extra-state militias affiliated with the far right tend to grow most strikingly under Democratic presidents and to disperse under Republicans. When a right-wing government is in power, federal agencies become a more ambiguous force in the eyes of the far right. At the same time, Trump’s government is almost certain to absorb large numbers of the far right into its own institutions. This is a terrifying phenomenon, of course, but it will also likely drag much of the far right back to center, at least for a while, since institutionalization is in essence submission to the fraction of the elite bankrolling those institutions. Meanwhile, the gutting of federal agencies and the devolution of ownership (now an actual possibility) of some federal lands to state and local governments may have contradictory effects. Rural areas will see further decline as federal funding diminishes, and local control of land use is unlikely to restore profitability in any substantial way. In essence, the election of Trump represents a premature seizure of power, opening more potentials for the far left than for right-wing militias.



A new American fascism will not spring fully formed from the body of the Oath Keepers or the Three Percenters, nor from some unholy alliance between these groups and their more traditionally racist counterparts farther east. The far right cannot be sustained if it remains sequestered in the far hinterland, which is, after all, increasingly depopulated. The focus given here to the Patriot Movement is instead due to its nearly systematic encapsulation of the kernel of far-right politics in the near future. With the abolition of rents, the Patriot Movement envisions a return to the “real economy” through the revival of extractive industries across the American West, accompanied by the extreme localization of political power. Aside from the magnetizing effect of the various Patriot standoffs in the far West, it is this populist ideology of the communitarian “real economy” that makes the Patriot Movement of the western states, alongside Third Positionist groups like the Wolves of Vinland, an image of the future far right in microcosm. After all, Trump’s economic program, drawn from Bannon’s philosophy, is almost identical, though writ at a much larger scale: raise tariffs, build walls, deport outsiders, and thereby begin the reconstruction of domestic industry, driven by the “real” economy of manufacturing and resource extraction. The main difference is simply one of scale, and whether the driving force of this economic revival will be large industrial corporations unified through a new national investment drive or instead the vital force of the “entrepreneur,” petty proprietor, or even “tribe,” unified by local autonomy.

## Barbarians

Those debts driving us to and fro across the desert were only one part of a vast ritual forcing human life into endless, mechanical processes determined by the vastly irrational rationality of an economy that is premised on infinite growth. But the ritual is simultaneously one of expansion and of separation. Everything

blooms outward and splinters apart. Each individual is gradually alienated from all others as the heart of production becomes more opaque, the connection between every node in the supply chain more distant, and the basic infrastructure of the world more complex. The ritual reaches down to the depths of human identity. We are defined increasingly by work and debts and purchases and each seems every year to resemble more the others until maybe sometime soon all three will simply fuse into a single form of near-complete evisceration. Our families grow smaller, our groups of friends diminish. Our subcultures are evacuated of all sacrifice and intimacy until they resemble little more than many minor bureaucracies propping up the great palace of consumption. When some fragment of the communal does find some space to congeal in the world's wastelands and factory floors—maybe in the midst of a riot, in the heat of a war, in the cold lonely life led in high steppes and deep mountain valleys not yet fully subsumed by crisis and capital—this fragment is ultimately found, pieced apart, drained of its intensity until it also can be thrown into that same dead, world-rending dance. The ritual has neither name nor mother tongue, but we communists call it the material community of capital.

Since this material community unifies only through a wide-ranging alienation that forces all individuals into dependence on its own impersonal infrastructure, the emergence of new, intensive communal practices are a recurring threat. All unity that is not the unity-in-separation offered by the mechanisms of the economy poses at least some level of risk, since such spaces offer the germinal potential of a dual, communal power capable of seizing and repurposing this infrastructure to truly human ends. Most of the time this risk is minimal, and communal structures are indeed created and preserved by market mechanisms in order to offer a false sense of respite, escape, or “tradition,” each of which is strongly hemmed by the surrounding economy and almost always linked to it as an object of consumption (Burning

Man) or a source of credit (such as church- or clan-based lending associations). The ejection of growing segments of the population from the immediate sphere of production also ensures that the old threat of a global, communal archipelago arising from the “workers’ movement” is not reproducible in the present moment.

This also means that what we might call “traditional” Fascism or Nazism is not coming back in any recognizable form, since these far-right phenomena were born of a now-extinct mass politics, their programs and aesthetics developed through a combination of mimesis and romantic rejection of the workers’ parties of the twentieth century. The contemporary far right can only be characterized as “fascist” or “neo-fascist” insofar as one hollows these terms of their historical content, until they designate little more than the inclusion of racist or misogynistic elements in a political program. As a shorthand, “fascism” is accurate enough, but at the theoretical level it tends to imply a false historical analogy. The new far right is still embryonic. It’s difficult to predict exactly how it will develop, but the conditions that determine this development are more or less visible.

One dimension of the intense fragmentation of the proletariat has been an increase in self-employment and petty proprietorship, fragments of the middle strata that have always become active elements in right-wing populist upsurges, and for whom the radical localization offered by national anarchists, Third Positionists, or Patriots seems to accord with common sense.<sup>25</sup> Another dimension is the fact that, without mass industrial production and the workers’ movement that attended it, communal spaces are scarce and their absence felt more intensely. Rather than developing as a form of romantic communitarianism contra the scientific communism of the workers’ parties, the far right today finds the most success in its capacity to intervene in the spectacular communal events opened in moments of insurrection, as well as in its ability (especially after the insurrection)

to outcompete the anarchists in their own game of local service provision. Faced with such strategic openings, the far right can mobilize its connections to police and military bureaucracies as well as the criminal and mercenary underworld in order to assemble and deploy its resources much faster than its largely undisciplined, untrained leftist opponents.<sup>26</sup> In this way, the militia or tribe is capable of fusing with enclosed national/cultural/local “communities” in order to offer communitarian inclusion contra the alienating disaster of the presently existing economy—but also as a violent reaction against any sort of left-wing universalism. This is the defining feature of the far right’s anti-communism.

It is not coincidental that groups like the Oath Keepers have veterans at their core, then. Brought together into tight-knit units by the demands of military life, soldiers experience an intensity of communal ties that is difficult to replicate under other conditions. Upon return, the absence of these ties easily turns into an existential void, as the soldier is not only cast out of their “tribe,” but thrown back into the material community of capital, where devotion to such tribal units is considered not only backwards but even barbaric. The intensity of their experience marks them as outsiders to the palace of urban liberalism, but the necessity of living within the material community of capital forces them to do its bidding in order to survive. Many of these individuals—not only veterans but those who have experienced basic communal attachment through simple deprivation or religious upbringing—thereby adopt the traditional role of the warrior, simultaneously shunned by civilized society and necessary to its protection. The Norse martial-occultism of the Wolves of Vinland is not just a curious side-effect of their racial theories, then, but a concrete expression of their position at the walls of the palace. Getting jobs as security guards, first responders, or police officers, or simply play-acting in the militia or *volkisch* Odin cult are all duties taken with a bitter pride, the warrior patrolling the borders of the

kingdom, facing the threats that the soft-handed city liberal simply cannot stomach. In Italy, the leader of the populist “Five Stars Movement” echoes Jack Donovan’s call to “become a barbarian,” praising the election of Trump with a new slogan: “It is those who dare, the obstinate, the barbarians who will take the world forward. We are the barbarians!”<sup>27</sup>

## The Oath

In Nevada the real desert was not the dust or the sagebrush but the massive industrial leveling that characterizes the day-to-day functioning of a “healthy economy.” The undead sagebrush at least held multitudes of life in its roots. Once, when one of my higher-ups had been out on a job, he’d run across a den of wild foxes. He spent several days watching them, counting their numbers, excited that the nearby mine hadn’t driven away all the sparse desert fauna. But he made the mistake of telling his co-workers, and the next weekend one of the other employees—a red-faced, blundering man originally from some exurb in Florida—drove his truck out to the area, tracked down the foxes, shot them all, skinned them, and took the pelts as trophies. It often seems as if there is an unbridgeable gap between the minds of those enmeshed in the present world and those who see it as almost unthinkable monstrous, something that is not even a “world” but the name for an utterly atonal status quo constructed on the continual ruin of worlds as such. There are those who see foxes and those who see pelts.

The myth of the Third Position (the idea that people can and should take a political stance that goes “beyond left and right”) comes from the observation that both the far right and the far left see the present world as untenable. They make no distinction between the fact that the far right is almost always dependent upon a mythic past to illustrate its illusion of order—whether national, tribal, filial, or simply some variant of the strong winning

out over the weak—because their supposed “neither left nor right” politics is often founded on the same anthropological sleight of hand. For someone like Donovan, opposition to the present order is a call to “start the world.” What this looks like, however, is a rather traditional masculine eco-tribalism, defined by the ability of men to become men again, the ability of white people to return to their “indigenous” roots, and the ability of local self-reliance to foster meritocracies in which the crippling effects of the present atonal order of status quo liberalism (poetically characterized as a “sky without eagles”) is dissolved into local communitarian units defined by an organic hierarchy that ascends out of people’s personal endowments, enhanced by training and discipline.

One day, while hiking around a dried-out wash to get at a particularly inaccessible stretch of fence, I also came across a den of foxes. Startled, one of them had shot out from the dark trellis of sagebrush to retreat across the flood bed, its paws scattering the rain-gathered stones. At some distance, it stopped and turned to look back at the threat from which it had fled. It met my eyes with its own, two dark pools as slick as oil, glinting with that wild light you can only catch for an instant, flashing across feral bodies like some force inside them writhing to get out, to spill into the world uncontained and that struggle itself driving the body forward, a glimpse of wilds untamed though plundered. In those eyes was a reminder that despite the mundane world-breaking driven by price and profit, worlds could still be born, linked together, made to bloom—that even when the economy seemed to have reached an unprecedented expanse, it was driven by a crisis that forced its very core constantly to decay, interstices opening within the cycles of accumulation and devastation. Wild, unpredictable potentials stirred in the desert. Insurrections shuddered out of the economy’s roots like so many feral animals. Time seemed to slow, strung between myself and those glimmering eyes, both of us frozen, each seeming to expect something of

the other. Then the fox turned and shot around the bend. I never saw it again. I never spoke of its existence.

Someone like Jack Donovan would also see the fox and not the pelt, maybe even seeing it much as I did. We might see the same economic apocalypse, the same increase in the valence of riots and insurrections, the same strategic openings offered by these events, the same placid misery offered by the status quo. But none of this makes us allies. The myth of the Third Position is precisely that opposition to the present order and all gradualist attempts to change it is the only unifying force that matters, with left and right being mere ideological accessories. But dig deeper and politics is inevitably replaced by nature, tradition, or some other seemingly apolitical order, in which the sanctity of the community is preserved by its ability to wall itself off from all others. Third Positionism, national anarchism, the Patriot Movement, and even the simple populism of Trump are all forms of blood politics. Political practice only exists for them insofar as it can be performed by kindred actors, and politics is the performance of this kinship.

What is nonetheless fascinating about the new far right is its commitment to pragmatic action. The Oath Keepers and Three Percenters offer a fundamental theoretical insight here, since their existence is dependent on the ability to unify across the fragmentation of the proletariat via the “oath” as a shared principle of action. In contrast to the unwieldy populism of “the 99%,” the Patriot Movement proposes a focus on the functional abilities of an engaged minority (the “111%”), which can gain popular support via its ability to outcompete the state and other opponents in an environment of economic collapse. And it is this fact that is missed in most “anti-fascist” analysis. Rather than attempting to identify individual grouplets, parse their ideologies, and see how their practice accords (or doesn’t) with whatever programs they’ve put forward (per the usual leftist formula), it is far more useful to explore moments like ours as chaotic

processes in which many different actors have to take sides in relation to political upheavals, the collapse of the economic order, and the various new forces that arise amid all this. Such grouplets are often ad hoc, and frequently do not state any political positions. They seem empty of ideological content, or it is so vague as to be inconsequential. They are driven not by the program, but by the oath. The feature that distinguishes them is not so much their beliefs, as laid out in founding documents or key theoretical texts, but the way that they act relative to sequences of struggle and collapse. These are concrete things such as how they approach influxes of refugees and migrant workers, how they participate in (or against) local cycles of unrest, whom they ally themselves with in the midst of an insurrection, and whose interests they serve when they begin to succeed in the game of “competitive control,” creating local structures of power.

The far right is defined by an oath of blood. They share the commitment to pragmatic action and the ability to see the untenable nature of the present economic order, but their actions are exclusionary, and their strategy envisions closed, communitarian solutions to systemic collapse. This is most visible in the more experienced, thought-out form of the Patriot Movement or the Wolves of Vinland, but it exists on a continuum, as more residents of the hinterland become aware of the apocalypse surrounding them. But the real political advance visible in the far right—and the thing that has made possible its recent ascendance—is the pragmatic focus on questions of power, which are religiously ignored by the American leftist, who instead focuses on building elaborate political programs and ornate utopias, as if politics were the exercise of one’s imagination. It is this focus on building power in the midst of crisis that distinguishes the partisan from the leftist, and the oath is the present organizational form of partisanship.



## Partisans

In more abstract terms, we can roughly schematize present political allegiances according to how they understand partisanship and position themselves relative to global sequences of struggle and insurrection. First, these global cycles of struggle are themselves the return of what Marx called the “historical party,” which is essentially the name for the generalization of some degree of social upheaval across international boundaries, the increase in the rate at which new struggles become visible, and the intensity that they are able to reach. All struggles within the historical party tend toward what might be called “demandlessness,” for lack of a better word. This isn’t to say that individual struggles don’t have particular demands, but that they tend actually to overflow with demands in such a way that the only thing that coheres them is a generalized rejection of the present order—the idea that all the politicians must go, that there just needs to be some fundamental change no matter its character, that the present cannot be borne any longer. This also often infers that they tend towards a generalized becoming-riot, since no simple suite of reforms can be pushed through, and all attempts to do so (via Syriza, Podemos, have ended in failure no matter their level of electoral success. It is through this demandlessness—the recognition in action that the present system is fundamentally impossible, rather than mismanaged—that the specter of communism is resurrected. The “invariant programme” of communism (a term used by Amadeo Bordiga, the leader of the Italian Communist Party in its insurrectionary heyday) is inferred by peoples’ generalized action against the present, in which some sort of vaguely defined communalism is opposed to the material community of capital. But the specter only haunts the riot from its fringes, and the communal easily transforms into the communitarian.

In contrast, the “formal party” is the name for the emergence of organization from the motion of the historical party.

Organization here means the confrontation and overcoming of material limits to a given struggle. Whether those involved in this process think of themselves as in “an organization” is irrelevant. The reality is that such acts are unified more by the shared action implied by the oath, rather than card-carrying membership. Speaking of only the proto-communist partisans, Bordiga calls this the “ephemeral party,” since its form and existence are contingent on historical conditions. Marx, mocking the fear-mongering press of the day, calls it the “Party of Anarchy.” Whereas the historical party refers to content, the formal party refers, precisely, to pragmatic form—in this case the oath and the building of power—since it is positioned within a contingent array of historical conditions that require practical overcoming.

Bordiga and Marx both saw the union of the formal and historical parties as the emergence of the Communist Party proper. But there are also various forms of non-union between formal and historical party, in which individuals can play the role of anti-communist partisans—either in defense of the liberal status quo or as advocates of a reactionary alternative. In opposition to the “Party of Anarchy,” Marx portrayed the alliance of ruling interests as a “Party of Order,” since their conception of political upheavals was one that could see such events only as chaotic aberrations. These are individuals for whom the world is nothing but pelts, the economy a vast machine that unites the interests of humanity with that of capital. To be slightly more concrete, they are those urbanites who woke up on the morning after the election and looked around themselves in shock, as if someone had tied ropes around their ankles and dragged them out into the rust-spattered American bloodlands while they slept. Their expressions utterly ashen, they frantically tapped their phones trying to order an Uber to take them back home. But the Uber would never come. They earnestly could not conceive of a world in which Hillary had not won. How could people be so utterly crazy, they asked themselves, before scouring Facebook for a litany of responsible

parties—racist ruralites, third-party voters, those infinitely troublesome anarchists, or that vast majority party in American politics: the faithless zealots of the “Did Not Vote” ticket. The Party of Order is defined by its desire that the riot or insurrection be simply smoothed over. They want reforms to be implemented. They want us to let the slow gears of justice turn. They want body cameras on cops. They want community policing. They don’t see enough black faces in the room. They just want everyone at the table.

The Party of Order therefore opposes both the extreme left and the extreme right. For them, the problem is “extremism” as such, and the maintenance of the placid, atonal status quo. They have no politics, only administration. Donovan’s characterization of liberalism as a “sky without eagles” is not an incorrect portrayal of their flattened world. The far right does, then, understand itself as opposed to the Party of Order, and may even conceive itself, broadly speaking, as part of the Party of Anarchy, since they also ride the tide of the historical party’s upheavals, intervening in the same insurrections and wreaking destruction against the violent, mechanical order defended by global elites. But it is Donovan’s solution to this atonality that hints at the true nature of the far-right position in an era of generalizing partisanship. His cure for atonality is an organically hierarchical Nietzschean tribalism, a return to some sort of primal indigeneity, encapsulated in the demand to “start the world.” But what is the world he wants to start?

The formal parties of the far right are unable to fuse with the historical party because in essence they see the potentials opened by it as doors through which they might return to some sort of wholesome, organic order, which is opposed to both the anarchy of insurrection and the corrupt, false order of the status quo. For them, uprisings of the truly dispossessed are just as much symptoms of the system’s decadence. Even while they draw from this anger, their politics is defined by its attempt simply to ignore the

actual potentials offered by the historical party—to deny the specter of communism and execute its partisans. For them, these are only opportunities insofar as they are opportunities to hasten collapse. They thereby obscure politics as such, and thus it is natural that they claim to have moved “beyond left and right.” Their practice is one that occults the potential for a communist response to the crisis, and their ideology is therefore not marked by any sort of consistent political program but by conspiracy and obfuscation. They don’t see the historical party as foreboding a possible future at all, but instead as simply signaling the *return* of worlds amid the collapse of the world-shattering rituals of capital. The political event is obscured, the hastening of collapse replaces revolution, and wall-building preparation replaces communization. The far right is therefore neither the Party of Anarchy nor the Party of Order but the Anti-Party.

The political practice of the Anti-Party is centered on the masculinized practice of violence in the name of a wholesome, salvific order-to-come. In material terms, the far right tends to cluster among the interests of the petty proprietors or self-employed but still moderately wealthy workers of the hinterland. But the truth is that none of these phenomena have made country people inherently turn toward right-wing solutions, and the far hinterland is as much an ideological as material base for the far right. There was not even resounding support for Trump across the mud-soaked trailer parks and wind-swept mountain hamlets of the American hinterland, where most people simply did not vote. The material core of the far right is instead the whitening exurb, the actual home of most Patriots and Third Positionists, which acts as an interface between the metropolitan and non-metropolitan, allowing the wealthier landholders, business owners, cops, soldiers, or self-employed contractors to recruit from adjacent zones of abject white poverty, essentially funneling money from their own employment in urban industry into hinterland political projects.

Violence plays a central role here, since many of these individuals are active in the suppression of the surplus population in the near hinterland—the exurb bordering newly impoverished, diverse inner-ring suburbs where immigrants settle in large numbers alongside those forced out of the urban core by skyrocketing rents. This reactionary politics is simply the idea that the regular violence used by the status quo in its maintenance of the present world of police, prisons, and poverty might also be widened, aimed at the urban core itself and the soft-handed liberals made to suffer. The world can be restored into the hands of the barbarians through salvific acts of violence, capable of forcing the collapse and hastening the approach of the True Community. It is in this way that the far right in the U.S., as elsewhere, is an essentially terroristic force, and will almost always target the innocent, the weak, and the dispossessed in its exercise of power. Behind the call to “start the world” lies a desire simply to watch it all collapse, to force the world to burn, and everyone to burn with it.

### Drawing the Eagle from the Flesh

Stories changed hands in the trailer park like contraband. You were never sure of their source or their reliability, but everyone seemed to have an insatiable thirst for news of what was happening in other mines, along the pipelines, out on the ranches, and amid the intricacies of the BLM bureaucracy. One story that stuck with me was about a miner in Golconda, that small town wedged between mines and farms, where workers would park their cars outside the bar in order to bus out to their work sites. No one knew what the guy was on, but everyone seemed to think it was more than whatever it seemed to be: some weed laced with something, some new sort of meth brought up by the cartels. Or it was angel dust, as if we were stuck in the fucking 1990s. Regardless of what he'd taken, the miner had gotten off his night shift and headed to that small bar in Golconda. The mines were worked in two shifts,

day and night, each split between aboveground and underground work. You were paid the most for night work and for work underground, and that's what this miner did. He had some sort of condition, they said, a special sensitivity to light, like a vampire. He had to cover his skin in the desert sun or he'd start to burn, his flesh reddening and then bubbling up like the skin on an overcooked soup. So he worked nights and he worked underground, the farthest he could get from the light. This also meant that he made an enormous amount of money, ensuring that he could live comfortably for years after the boom had ended.

It was because of this fact that everyone assumed he must have been tweaking—he must have seen something in that haze of stimulants and just been broken by it. Because otherwise none of it made sense. He ran from the bar screaming incoherently, straight out into the midday light. Once outside, he ripped off his clothes as soon as the burning began, exposing the entirety of his nocturnal white body to that scorching, flesh-tearing avalanche of desert light, each ray reflected off the glass seizing into his pale skin like a meat hook. And he ran like that, naked, burning, smashing the windows of all the other miners' cars and throwing their belongings out into the sun with him. The sheriffs came eventually and tackled him into the dust, hardly able to get a grip on his shimmering, sun-boiled body. No one could understand whatever he was screaming. He just stared into the sun, yelling words that seemed not to be words—words occulted by the unspeakable sublimity of whatever salvation he'd seen through the drugs or through the simple misery of his lightless toil, all night digging into the hollowed earth, melting dust into gold for unimaginably rich men whom he would never see. They say that when they put the handcuffs on him his skin sloughed off like that of a snake, revealing the blood-red pulse of pure life like an incarnadine second body sitting beneath the first. That salvific, absolute body to come, maybe. The tribe, the nation, the ever-approaching community. The maddened eagle rising from the flesh.

### 1 Oaths of Blood

- 1 The “Third Position” comes from the old right-wing claim to be “beyond left and right,” and today generally refers to an array of groups who merge right-wing and left-wing elements in novel combinations that make it hard to identify the far right thrust of their politics. Among the most successful are Casa Pound in Italy; the extremist wing of the Yellow Shirts in Thailand, with its core among the Buddhist fundamentalist group Santi Asoke; and an array of Ukrainian national anarchist and neo-fascist groups that rose to prominence during Euromaidan. For more on this global phenomenon, see NPC, “The Solstice: On the Rise of the Right-wing Mass Movements, Winter 2013/2014,” Ultra, [www.ultra-com.org](http://www.ultra-com.org), April 27, 2014.
- 2 For an overview of the Wolves of Vinland, see Betsy Woodruff, “Inside Virginia’s Creepy White-power Wolf Cult,” *The Daily Beast*, [www.thedailybeast.com](http://www.thedailybeast.com), November 11, 2015.
- 3 Donovan has written a number of books with titles such as *The Way of Men* and *Becoming a Barbarian*; he also runs an eponymous blog, in which he regularly profiles the activities of the Wolves and similar groups.
- 4 At the same time, connection to the more traditionally racist thrust of white nationalism is by no means absent. One of their active Virginia members, Maurice Michaely, spent time in prison for burning down a black church, and much of the support for their early projects came from traditional white nationalist groups.
- 5 Jack Donovan, “A Time for Wolves,” [www.jackdonovan.com](http://www.jackdonovan.com), June 2014.

- 6 Qtd. in Woodruff, “Inside Virginia’s Creepy White-power Wolf Cult.”
- 7 “The Oath Keepers: Anti-government Extremists Recruiting Military and Police,” Anti-defamation League, [www.adl.org](http://www.adl.org), September 16, 2015.
- 8 For a detailed look at one such border-op, see Shane Bauer, “Undercover with a Border Militia,” *Mother Jones*, [www.motherjones.com](http://www.motherjones.com), November/December 2016.
- 9 David Neiwert, “III Percenters’ Ride Wave of Islamophobia in Idaho to Lead Anti-refugee Protests,” Southern Poverty Law Center, [www.splcenter.org](http://www.splcenter.org), November 4, 2015.
- 10 There is a substantial Basque population in Northern Nevada and Southern Idaho, part of the global Basque diaspora. Most originally migrated during the Gold Rush and went on to work as shepherds during the grazing season. Many towns in the area have visible Basque architecture and host annual Basque festivals.
- 11 Byard Duncan, “In the Rural West, Residents Choose Low Taxes over Law Enforcement,” *Reveal News*, [www.revealnews.org](http://www.revealnews.org), June 2, 2016.
- 12 Spencer Sunshine, Jessica Campbell, Daniel HoSang, Steven Besa, and Chip Berlet, “Up in Arms: A Guide to Oregon’s Patriot Movement,” *Rural Organizing Project*, 2016, p. 11, available at [www.rop.org/up-in-arms/](http://www.rop.org/up-in-arms/).
- 13 Tay Wiles, “Sugar Pine Mine, the Other Standoff,” *High Country News*, [www.hcn.org](http://www.hcn.org), February 2, 2016.
- 14 “The Oath Keepers Are Ready for War with the Federal Government,” *Vice*, [www.vice.com](http://www.vice.com), September 14, 2015.
- 15 “They Are the Oath Keepers, We Are the Peace Makers,” *Rural Organizing Project*, [www.rop.org](http://www.rop.org), May 7, 2015.
- 16 David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla* (New York, 2013), p. 126.
- 17 Rent is used here in its more expansive definition drawn from Marxist economics, which includes taxation, interest paid on debt, land rent, and all forms of simple extortion.
- 18 Carol Hardy Vincent, Laura A. Hanson, and Jerome P. Bjelopera, “Federal Land Ownership: Overview and Data,” Congressional Research Service, December 29, 2014, p. 1.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 7, Table 1.
- 20 Andrew McColl, “The Massive, Empty Federal Lands of the American West,” *The Atlantic*, [www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com), January 5, 2016.
- 21 For a good history of the phenomenon, see Steven C. Beda, “Landscapes of Solidarity: Timber Workers and the Making of Place in the Pacific Northwest, 1900–1964,” PhD Diss., University of Washington (2014).
- 22 I haven’t been able to verify these exact numbers, but it is notable that the right-wing think tank the Property and Environment Research Center calculated roughly the same proportional difference



- in the two agencies in a report designed to emphasize the opposite point, arguing that state management returned higher revenues than federal. See Holly Fretwell and Shawn Regan, “Divided Lands: State vs. Federal Management in the West,” The Property and Environment Research Center, [www.perc.org](http://www.perc.org), 2015.
- 23 Table DP03, “Selected Economic Characteristics” for Burns city, Oregon, 2010–2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.
  - 24 Table DP03, “Selected Economic Characteristics” for Harney County, Oregon, 2010–2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.
  - 25 There is at least rudimentary evidence, at the time of writing, that this population provided an essential support base for Trump in the 2016 election. See Michael A. McCarthy, “The Revenge of Joe the Plumber,” *Jacobin*, [www.jacobinmag.com](http://www.jacobinmag.com), October 26, 2016.
  - 26 This is an observation of present dynamics, not an absolute fact, and it appears to be a phenomenon contingent on both national history and the incredibly recent rebirth of an earnestly insurrectionary left. In fact, in countries such as Greece, which has suffered for years under the extremities of the crisis, the far right and far left appear much more evenly matched.
  - 27 Crispian Balmer, “Trump’s Triumph Puts Italy’s Renzi in a Difficult Position,” *Reuters*, [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com), November 9, 2016.

*four*

## Oaths of Water

St Louis is where storms collide. Without the moderating effect of a coastline or major mountain range, cold air sweeps unopposed down from the Arctic to meet a warm, humid front marching north from the Gulf of Mexico. The two finally lock in combat over the Mississippi flatlands, emptying their arsenals to barrage the area with blizzards, thunderstorms, and tornados. In recent years, growing climate chaos has only intensified this ambient war, each “extreme weather event” more volatile and less predictable. And as the air currents grapple over the middle-American sky, the storm-swollen Mississippi grinds forward below. Once-uncommon “freak floods” are now standard, the levees overcome every few years and large chunks of St Louis and its surrounding suburbs washed away by the intractable inertia of a river bound to outlive any city.

The result is another slow apocalypse. In January 2016, people from the surrounding suburbs poured into Red Cross shelters, unable to return to homes torn apart by the rising water. But even with such disasters gradually becoming the new, more violent equilibrium, federal aid is perpetually insufficient. The Red Cross itself was a minimal presence compared to the swarm of church groups sifting through the wreckage to offer disaster relief.<sup>1</sup> In a landscape of increasingly perpetual crisis, even the somewhat mundane organizing of church groups takes on an

almost prophetic weight. Politics in these conditions can only appear apolitical, as all functional organizing is given political significance when confronted with devastation of such scale: Baptists and Mennonites organizing supply caravans through the wreckage of long-decayed postwar suburbs, the crosses emblazoned on their white vans floating above silt-clogged cul-de-sacs.

Such stories of environmental destruction are, however, only one dimension of a much-deeper global economic catastrophe that takes different forms in different regions. In many ways, St Louis is a city without a region, stuck between the Midwest, the South, and the Great Plains—and as such it seems to act as a sort of vaguely generalizable image of a mythic middle America slowly being lost. Economically, it's an intersection between Rust Belt and Corn Belt, only barely outside the new sunbelt yet falling short of its river-port counterparts. It was one of the many cities left behind by the wave of deindustrialization. After its postwar heyday, the entire metro area saw massive population loss, at first concentrated downtown but soon spreading out to neighboring suburbs as well. This process only deepened long-standing racial divides. Meanwhile, attempts to resuscitate the city by focusing on capital-intensive manufacturing and biotech have only ensured a further cloistering of wealth and a hardening of racial divides between neighborhoods.

Today postwar houses and small clusters of low-rise apartment complexes are sprinkled out across the humid floodplain. When the river overflows its levees, entire suburban cities can be washed away, as was the case in the small, predominantly white working-class suburb of West Alton in 2016. Wedged between the Missouri and Mississippi, just before their confluence north of St Louis proper, the entire city was evacuated, with a quarter to a third of the population expected never to return.<sup>2</sup> Even without the floods, economic pressures have created a different dynamic of flight and decay, as formerly white

working-class suburbs such as Ferguson, Berkeley, and Florissant (all once demographically similar to West Alton) grow increasingly impoverished, the declining rents acting as a magnet for people attempting to move out of the inner-city slums in search of better schools and infrastructure. A new wave of white flight follows, in what is essentially an unprecedented expansion of the interior slum zone outward into a select few suburbs lying along major transit routes.

There are small islands of gentrification within the city proper, as well as the remains of more affluent suburbs, largely west of the city—the foremost of these being small municipalities like Town and Country, a largely white golf course suburb that boasts the highest median income of any city in Missouri. These richer locales are buffered by a spectrum of poorer ones, including largely white working-class suburbs and satellite cities such as St Charles and Alton, as well as cities like Florissant, once almost entirely white, now two-thirds white and one-third black. In some places, the spectrum between wealth and poverty is truncated, and the borders between areas of affluence and areas of absolute impoverishment are harsh. In others, the spectrum is wide, and a number of middle-income zones persist in the interstice between city and country. In St Louis, these divergent dynamics are colliding, and the city is being reshaped according to this economic battle, itself only an echo of that greater chaos foreboded by warring storms.

### Ferguson, Missouri

I was in Ferguson years before the floods, weeks after the burning of the QuikTrip, and months before the burning of everything else.<sup>3</sup> People were still gathering on Florissant Avenue every night, undeterred by the alternating heat and rain or by the army of police that had been deployed to patrol the picket fences, geometric lawns, and big-box stores of the postwar suburb. The first round of riots was the only major uprising in an American

suburb within living memory. And I was there in what was only a momentary lull, the eye of the storm. Walking around in the scorching heat through the low-hanging brick apartment complexes where Michael Brown was murdered, everyone I spoke with knew that nothing else would happen until winter. The verdict would be postponed until it was cold, the government hoping that the weather might deter another round of protests. But everyone was equally adamant that winter was not an issue. We can start our own fires, they said. And when it came, the second round of riots saw much of the suburb burn.

The perfect storm had been building for some time. Ferguson is at the bottom of the income spectrum and has acted as a sort of vanguard for the outward march of suburban poverty. Like many postwar suburbs, its heyday was in the 1950s and '60s, which saw successive doublings of the population until it reached a peak of nearly 30,000 in 1970. Deindustrialization beginning in the '70s was then matched with a continual drop in population to about 21,000 today, in line with St Louis's historic population loss. As the city grew smaller and poorer, its racial demographics also flipped. As late as the 1990 Census, Ferguson was still 73.8 percent white and 25.1 percent black (close to the proportions of neighboring Florissant today), but by 2010 this situation had entirely reversed (to 29.3 percent white and 67.4 percent black). Inflation-adjusted income dropped, and unemployment doubled from around 5 percent in 2000 to an average of 13 percent between 2010 and 2012.<sup>4</sup>

The political establishment reflected this history. At the beginning of the riots, the city government was helmed by a white mayor, a white police chief, and five white and one Hispanic city council people. Combined with this, the dwindling population, fleeing industry, and plummeting property values had created a budgetary crisis, forcing many of the area's small municipalities to rely less on their shrinking tax base and more on extra-tax fees and fines, enforced by the police and facilitated by the city's

arcane court system. The result was that Ferguson and similar suburbs existed in what the *Huffington Post* called “a totalizing police regime beyond any of Kafka’s ghastliest nightmares.”<sup>5</sup> Out of a population of roughly 21,000, over 16,000 Ferguson residents had arrest warrants issued. And this number only counts individuals with warrants, not the total number of warrants. In 2013 this figure was a staggering 35,975, roughly 1.5 warrants per person in the city.<sup>6</sup> These warrants were part of a complex racket designed to impose unrelenting fines on the poor population in order to fund the city government, which itself had largely been redesigned to facilitate this predatory practice. In 2013 fines, court fees, and other such extortions accounted for some 20 percent of the city’s budget. These fines were disproportionately applied to the city’s black residents, with black drivers twice as likely to be stopped, searched, and arrested as their white counterparts.<sup>7</sup>

In one sense, this reflects the age-old pattern of racially uneven impoverishment common to American economic downturns. In the old industrial northeast, black workers were “last hired, first fired,” and when the factories began to close, they were consistently given the worst deals in terms of severance pay, retirement, or new employment opportunities in the suburbs. The disproportionate racial character of policing in Ferguson and elsewhere in the U.S. is simply undeniable—facts attested to with a bloody consistency by incarceration rates and the likelihood of police murder. But overemphasizing these features can also obscure the broader trend, which is distributed along class lines even while this distribution is disproportionately distorted according to race. This is most obvious in zones of white rural poverty, as mentioned in earlier chapters. But it is also apparent in the white–black divide of the St. Louis area, where the white working class is faring only a little better than its black counterpart. In fact, Ferguson was only ranked third in the area for its predatory financial system, trailing behind the majority-white

working-class suburbs of St Ann (39.6 percent) and St John (29.4 percent) in its dependence on extortion.<sup>8</sup>

These funding systems are not unique to St Louis, but instead became a national trend as more and more municipalities found themselves in dire conditions after the last crisis. The suburbanization of poverty and skyrocketing incarceration rates have thus been paired with growth in these massive, extra-tax extortions applied to the poor—and particularly the suburban and rural poor, who are more likely to live in small, cash-strapped municipalities (or counties) with a dwindling tax base and less access to federal aid. In most places, this takes the form of an expanding net of legal search, supervision, and harassment that essentially extends the walls of the prison out into the new suburban ghetto. Increasingly expensive incarceration is gradually replaced by a predatory probation system composed of extra-carceral monitoring, fines, and seizure of property, all amplified by the fusion of public budgets and for-profit probation companies.<sup>9</sup>

Many of these are relatively recent trends, with Ferguson's dependence on probation funding skyrocketing after 2010.<sup>10</sup> But rather than an unfortunate exception, Ferguson is a window into the future. As low growth, deepening crisis, and general austerity continue, more of the new ghettos will find themselves struggling for shares of a shrinking tax base. These cities will be forced to find new sources of funding, and the easiest way to do this is for better-off residents to utilize existing legal resources in order to prey on the poor. As the economic situation becomes increasingly dire, similar patterns emerge at greater scales: the county, the state, and the federal government will all turn to such predatory practices, facilitated by growing armies of police and preexisting legal mechanisms for debt collection, surveillance, and incarceration.

These patterns are piloted in the poorest areas, applied first to the most disadvantaged social groups. In Anaheim, California, the poorer, predominantly Latino neighborhoods in the city have

seen a series of gang injunctions, allowing plainclothes police to arrest and open fire on residents for things as simple as their clothing color or gathering in a crowd. In 2012 a sequence of police shootings in the city led to nights of rioting just outside Disneyland.<sup>11</sup> In the poorer parts of New York, stop and frisk policies and the enforcement of laws against minor offences (such as selling loose cigarettes) have allowed for similar practices, resulting in local riots around the killing of Kimani Gray in Flatbush in 2013 and national riots around the killing of Eric Garner in 2014.<sup>12</sup> Similar practices have long been applied to the rural poor, including the black residents of regions such as the Mississippi River Delta, Native residents of reservations such as Pine Ridge, Latino farmworkers across the country, and the white poor in places like the coal-mining towns of Appalachia. The difference today is simply that these pilot programs are generalizing at the same time that the demographic inversion pushes the poor into the underfunded near-hinterland of sprawling suburbia.

### Suburban Warfare

There were maybe ten police for every person on the street. They formed lines to keep people walking an interminable circle on the sidewalk. They stood in clusters in the background, commanders from the state patrol talking with equivalent authorities drawn from the local departments. Even more were deployed out of sight: mostly bored soldiers from the National Guard scrolling through Facebook next to armored vehicles parked in front of Target or Ross Dress for Less. They flew above us in drones. They walked among us in plain clothes. Some drove by in unmarked suvs, “black leadership” from local churches and NGOs sitting next to them, pointing out the “troublemakers.” Amid all of this, the most oppressive force remained the scorching Missouri sun, its light shattering down onto the pavement like hot metal. Those not deterred by the heat shuffled under it in shifts, retreating



periodically to the nearby McDonald's for shade and water. People drove by with their phones held out the open windows of air-conditioned cars. A teenager in town for a national meeting of the Model UN asked me to take a picture of him in front of the fenced-off ruins of the QuikTrip for his Snapchat story.

I'd gone to Ferguson with a small group of friends who worked on shared political projects, all of whom had met through Occupy. Just a few weeks after the initial uprising and a couple days before Mike Brown's funeral, the small city was swarmed with people. Most of these were journalists or activists driven in by NGOs, often funded by hefty grants from church groups and liberal philanthropists. There was also the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), with its army of bullhorns and crazy-eyed followers.<sup>13</sup> While most of these groups were there to catch some screen time on CNN or harvest fresh meat for the Ford Foundation and the cult of Avakian, they hardly fit the media's favored image of the "outside agitator." We, on the other hand, were fashionably black-clad white people from the West Coast. With good cardio and edgy politics, we were outside agitators par excellence.

But we hadn't flown all that way to waste our time spitting into bullhorns and walking in circles. There was no need to explain how the police were bad and how life was fucked—these were already salient facts. The unrest was in a lull until the verdict, and no amount of forcing would hasten the next round. Many who lived in the town were busy breaking leases and packing their belongings, fully aware that in a few months the entire city would burn. So we weren't really there to agitate, but simply to observe how politics and repression might play out in our era's first major revolt in the American hinterland. This was something utterly unique, a picture of our future as poor people consigned to urban fringes and inner-ring suburbs. The driving questions were, how does a riot grow in this decentralized space, and what limits its growth? Can a new communist politics emerge from capitalist sprawl?

As the miserable Missouri sun set, a new energy seemed to mobilize alongside the encroaching darkness. The crowd would grow as the air cooled, adrenaline buzzing as contact was amplified between so many strangers aligned against the police. It became clear that darkness—one of the key components of riots everywhere—takes on an added significance here. Driving through Ferguson, Florissant, Berkeley, and other St Louis suburbs at night, the first thing one is struck by is the simple density of the night, full of humid air and hissing insects. Most of the highways are not lined with streetlights, and many residential streets are lit more by the intermittent glow of porch lights fading quickly against a border of hot, weed-choked blackness.

Throughout history, streetlights have been used as tools in riot prevention, and their earliest implementation in the coal gas lamps of Great Britain was closely allied with the simultaneous deployment of London's early police force. In 1785 the *London Chronicle* proclaimed that "Light and watch are the greatest enemies to villains," and by 1823 the newly professionalized night watchmen would be accompanied by "nearly forty thousand lamps" that "lit more than two hundred miles of London's streets."<sup>14</sup> When Baron Haussmann redesigned Paris after the uprisings of 1848, wide, well-lit boulevards were a centerpiece of his strategy for riot control.<sup>15</sup> In the u.s. the redeveloped inner city has followed an almost identical pattern. Dense, narrow-all-eyed warehouse districts and project housing were demolished to make way for wide, brightly lit boulevards sprinkled with surveillance cameras. After the anti-World Trade Organization riots in Seattle, much of the city's downtown was renovated by a new round of real estate development led by the billionaire Paul Allen. Trash cans and newspaper boxes were chained to the sidewalk, thoroughfares were widened, and most of the dark, circuitous industrial territory on the central city's north edge was bulldozed, replaced with condo towers and Amazon's

gleaming bio-dome headquarters. Similarly, in New York the last remnants of the old, dangerous city were reformatted into public spaces comfortable enough for the enjoyment of the elite, such as the conversion of an old New York Central Railroad spur into Manhattan's elevated High Line Park.

But the suburbs were never designed for riot prevention. They are under-lit, under-surveilled, and under-policed. When the riots broke out in Ferguson, they were confronted with a police department of only 53 officers, fifty of whom were white and none of whom had any training in riot suppression, counterterrorism, or the operation of the military equipment that had been bequeathed to them.<sup>16</sup> Compare this to New York, where the riots in Flatbush in 2013 and over the killing of Eric Garner in 2014 were met with the New York Police Department (NYPD), the world's seventh-largest standing army. These riots were quickly and deftly suppressed by well-trained tactical squads operating on an urban battlefield that had literally been built for them. This resilience operates on more levels than just the efficient monopolization of force, however. When confronted with claims of racial bias, the NYPD could easily turn to its own internal diversity in defense. When two officers were shot in Brooklyn in 2014 by Ismaaiyl Brinsley (ostensibly in revenge for the killings of Eric Garner and Michael Brown), the department quickly pointed out that the officers (Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu) were not white, using the incident to push for police to be protected under a hate crime law.<sup>17</sup> When another NYPD officer, Peter Liang, shot and killed Akai Gurley, an unarmed black man, many local Asian Americans even mobilized in a series of protests defending Liang, rather than Gurley.<sup>18</sup>

These events hint at the fact that the policing apparatus in many central cities extends far beyond the borders of the police department itself. A key element of riot suppression in these places has been the mobilization of a vast array of non-profits, church groups, activist organizations, and progressive wings

of city government to encourage an “end to the violence.” After the killing of Kimani Gray in Flatbush, the first few nights of rioting were met largely by the presence of the NYPD, which used traditional riot suppression techniques to break up the main body of protestors and make sweeping arrests. But softer forms of suppression soon followed, with Councilman Jumaane Williams and non-profits such as Fathers Alive in the Hood (FAITH) arriving to blame people from “outside the community” for the violence, driving a wedge between the black youth who had been leading the riots night to night and the array of radicals who had come out to support them.<sup>19</sup>

In Baltimore a similar sequence unfolded in 2015. After widespread repression on the part of police, the riots were capped by a series of arsons, including a church and a non-profit-funded senior center. The NGO response makes their policing function clear:

In a curious twist of cause and effect, the riots provided a means of blaming this already-existing austerity *on the rioters themselves*. During the fires, community leaders went on-air to say that they had no idea why the youths would burn the very infrastructure on which their futures depended. Pastor Donte Hickman Sr. (pastor of the church that burned) argued on CNN that the rioters were “insensitive to what the church and the community was doing here,” and that the focus needs to be “on how we rebuild.” Other news programs underlined how the fires and looting would destroy services and jobs, taking money away from schools and recreation centers, and keeping the poor in the same state of austerity they brought upon themselves in the first place.<sup>20</sup>

These talking points are largely consistent with those used by progressives in New York and elsewhere, who hope, through peaceful protest, to attract the attention of elite saviors capable

of restoring their “communities” from the outside: “With his church still in flames, Hickman pled for ‘private investors to come in to East Baltimore and change it for the better.’”<sup>21</sup> Others uphold a more self-sufficient philosophy:

within the riots themselves the most reactionary protestors were the senior Bloods, Crips, and Nation of Islam members who guarded storefronts, called for peace and order and even stood between protestors and police. . . “We don’t really need [the police],” said one Bloods member, “We can do this ourselves. We can police them ourselves.”<sup>22</sup>

In both New York and Baltimore, the hard repression of the police department is clearly accompanied by the soft suppression dealt by an equally vast and equally vicious apparatus of non-profits, progressives, churches, and reactionary religious, nationalist, or criminal groups, all of whom have strong vested interests in the currently existing distribution of power.

They represent one pole of the changing racial structure of the u.s., and are often operating on behalf of recently elevated non-white fractions of the local upper class. These fractions are positioned such that they perceive themselves to be threatened both by the entrenched old-money white bourgeoisie and simultaneously by the building unrest in the lowest rungs of their own racial “communities.” Their assumed connection to these “communities” provides a certain legitimacy and plays an important ideological role, even while they often seek meticulously and thoroughly to sever any substantial connection with the lower class. Despite otherwise substantial differences, then, each of these sects mobilizes in its own way to suppress any violent break with normalcy, even while speaking of police reform and the redistribution of wealth, often conceived as simply the elevation of a more equitable share of non-whites into the ruling class. The key to understanding these dynamics is not attempting to sort

such groups by their professed beliefs—which vary widely—but instead to analyze their actions when confronted with such uprisings. In this respect, they all behave in an almost identical fashion, as ancillaries of the police.

In Ferguson, however, a grassroots “black leadership” was almost entirely absent. Without local church groups, non-profits, or black cops and city council members, the government had to ship in a liberal leadership wholesale from neighboring St Louis, throwing in Al Sharpton for good measure. The governor appointed black highway patrol captain Ronald Johnson temporary commander of the local police department, and officers were ordered to march alongside the black liberals bused in by civil rights NGOs. Johnson himself was soon pictured hugging protestors in staged photo-ops, attempting to send a message of peace and reconciliation. But the effect of this soft counterinsurgency was diminished because it had no truly local roots. Despite the attempt of elderly civil rights leaders and their young crop of Americorp-bred, Ivy-League-educated, middle-class-POC apprentices to act as the universal leadership of the “black community,” the reality is that no such community exists. Despite shared race, there are few other unifying factors tying this outside leadership to the rioters themselves. When Jesse Jackson’s motorcade showed up in front of the McDonald’s on Florissant, he was quickly confronted by a crowd of protestors yelling for him to “go home.” The soft counterinsurgency seemed just as inept as the Ferguson police, and only a few days after the staged hugs, the governor was declaring a state of emergency. Deployment of the National Guard followed, dropping any pretense of gentle recuperation.

The other features that extended the riots in Ferguson were largely artifacts of the area’s own affluent past: the lack of surveillance, its decentralization, the ease with which rioters could move between street, forest, and fenced-in yard. Quite unlike the narrow street-and-alley geography of the urban riot, this suburban unrest had an enormous amount of space within

which to operate—the main constraint was not the police or the physical obstruction of traffic and buildings, but instead the long, flat distance between decentralized targets. The police tried to use this space to their advantage, forcing the protestors to march in an unending circle up and down the suburban strip, rather than kettling them or otherwise hindering their motion. But it was difficult truly to control such a large territory, and when the National Guard arrived, they were largely seen protecting big-box stores or other presumed targets, rather than attempting to patrol the entire area.

It was also impossible to constrict the flow of people to the protests via public transit shutdowns—another common feature of urban riot control. Relatively few people were dependent on public transit in Ferguson, and the city has no central transit center or rail link that could be shut down. Cars quickly became an integral part of the protest, something almost completely unseen in urban unrest but remarkably natural in a town where 79.8 percent of workers commute alone in a personal vehicle, according to census data. Vehicles were used not only as a means of quick transportation, but as a method to intensify the energy at different nodes of the riot. People gathered on top of cars, rode in slow circles around the strip and blasted Lil Boosie's "Fuck the Police" at the police.

On top of this was the use of Molotov cocktails and widespread reports of people shooting at the police—all greatly assisted by the abundance of dark, greenery-covered spaces for preparation and escape. When the arsons began in the second wave of rioting (in November), it was fairly straightforward for people to target particular buildings and then flee to nearby tree cover (either disappearing or, according to some reports, firing warning shots at the firefighters who came to put the fire out). The abundance of suburban side streets enabled a quick getaway, with or without a vehicle. All of these features allowed the Ferguson riots to be the longest wave of unrest seen since last century's ghetto riots.

## Dead Labor

St Louis and its surrounding cities are built on a series of bluffs and terraces rising over the lowest segments of the Mississippi floodplain, all layered on a bedrock of limestone and dolomite laid down during the aptly named Mississippian age, when waters covered much of the Northern Hemisphere. Rock beds from such aquatic epochs tend to be dominated by carbonate sedimentary deposits left behind by long-dead oceans—a combination of evaporated salts and the multitude of corpses left by extinct marine organisms. Such deposits are a spare record of an alien earth, where land gave way to water and worlds drowned in the dark, historyless expanse of deep time. And today, in a strange, mindless echo, such deposits tend to be defined by the flow of water. Limestone and dolomite are particularly soluble rocks, easily dissolved by exposure to the mild acidity of groundwater. Though their surfaces often lack large bodies of sitting ponds and lakes, this is because rainfall and floodwaters quickly seep through joints in the limestone to flow through underground rivers and fill hidden reservoirs. Areas dominated by such deposits are often defined by water-cut karst topographies—pillars, caves, gorges—and expansive underground aquifers. In the U.S., roughly 40 percent of drinking groundwater comes from karst aquifers despite karst only composing 20 percent of its land mass. Globally, more than a quarter of the world's population either lives on or draws water from karst aquifers.<sup>23</sup>

The remains of dead oceans therefore gestate new ones, growing slowly in the darkness through the trickle of rainwater into lightless chambers beneath the earth. Dead things have a way of coming back. Before Ferguson, racial unrest was supposed to have been conclusively beheaded by the joint success of Civil-Rights-era institutional reforms and the subsequent expansion of the policing and prison apparatus. We were told that this victory had created a “post-racial” America, in which a black president



could preside over the world's largest prison population, and ghetto riots were a thing of the past—Los Angeles '92 being nothing but a late-stage echo of this decisive defeat. But then after Ferguson there was Baltimore; there was Minneapolis; there was New York again; and there was Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Charlotte, North Carolina. And these were only the most notable in a wave of discontent flooding from the Rust Belt out to every coast. Ferguson could not be written off as Los Angeles was in '92 as a late outlier. Instead it marks a sort of tectonic shift recognized across the political spectrum—the moment when something fissured and the first rushes of cold, dark water started pouring forth from long-buried aquifers.

While Occupy Wall Street several years prior had hinted at the possibility, the events in Ferguson guaranteed that the U.S. would not be immune to the return of the historical party. The form of this return (evidenced by the increasing violence and depth of global unrest) is fundamentally shaped by the character of production, since the character of production sculpts the character of class, and class conflict is, at bottom, the driving force of such unrest. In the present, the riot is both the natural evolution of otherwise suffocated struggles and a constituent limit in expanding or advancing such struggles beyond narrow territories and brief windows of time. Ferguson, then, is the unambiguous entry of the United States into a global era of riots. And this global era of riots is itself an outcome of the current extent and composition of the material community of capital, an always collapsing, always adapting edifice built from strata of dead labor, fissured now and again by the tectonic force of crisis and class conflict.

People in Ferguson therefore had to grapple with practical questions of cohesion and organization in a thoroughly atomized environment, just as those in Occupy did—a less developed though significant precursor. Alongside deindustrialization, the

global workforce has, in general, been pushed away from direct access to the factories, farms, and machinery that build our world. As automation has grown more complex and computerized, production itself is split into minute segments coordinated by inscrutable algorithms, all overseen by a highly skilled workforce of specialized laborers and engineers, themselves constantly being made redundant by new waves of computerization. Even where manual laborers still toil in factories and workshops, they do so in shrinking numbers and as only one link in a globe-spanning supply chain, with little knowledge of the stages that precede or follow their particular factory. More of the workforce is to be found today in service and logistics, outside the “immediate process of production,” where capital meets labor to produce new value. And even these new occupations are increasingly part-time, temporary, or simply insufficient. The proletariat thus returns to something more akin to its original condition, defined more by its dispossession than its privileged access to the gears of the world as an industrial workforce. Both Ferguson and Occupy, then, were early experiments in how proletarian factions might operate within the widening fields of competitive control being opened by the Long Crisis.

And this is not a field in which industry has somehow disappeared. As the previous chapters have shown, the opposite is true: today industry is more expansive than ever, reshaping the globe in an unprecedented wave of urbanization that has all but eliminated the “countryside” or “wilderness” as a space marginally outside the capitalist mode of production. The primary form that this takes is the expansion of a network of logistics infrastructure across the hinterland—at its most dense in the near hinterland on the outskirts of major metropolitan zones, growing to thin strands or spare nodes the farther one travels out into the farms and opiate-scarred wastelands of the far hinterland. The proletariat, though largely dispossessed of privileged access to the inner chambers of the economy’s beating heart, is

nonetheless distributed across all of its major veins and arteries. Due to its relative industrial density, the near hinterland will likely be the central theater in the coming class war, the most concise summation of which is simply the fact that large populations of people who have been made surplus to the economy live and work along its integral corridors. Dead labor, too, has a way of coming back.

## The Squares

The thing that people get most consistently wrong about Seattle is the rain. Watch movies or tv shows set in the area, and the rain is always shown barreling down in thick torrents, dialogue sinking into its ambient roar as the water soaks through people's clothes until all the characters are just hauling layers of dark but mildly fashionable North Face fleeces and charcoal-colored hoodies on their shoulders, physically yoked to their directors' heavy-handed metaphors. The truth, though, is that the rain hardly even falls. It just hangs in a slow drizzle, heavier in some areas, lighter in others, disappearing and reappearing at a moment's notice as the whim of the many microclimates shifts unpredictably. In most seasons, it's simply ambient—a thin atmosphere of mist plummeting in slow motion. It doesn't soak you in one large, catastrophic wave, like the torrential downpours of our sister rainforests in the tropics. Instead, it joins with the darkness of the northern winter to grind you down with a miserable, slow indifference. Your clothes don't soak through in a single storm, but after a month or two, nothing seems capable of fully drying, and you've forgotten when it got wet in the first place. Then the mold comes, and that deep, bone-cold you get from a winter that hangs just above the edge of freezing. You remember that the water in a frozen lake is coldest not near the dried-out ice on the surface but instead at the lightless bottom, where the liquid settles as its chemical pandemonium grows lethargic,

constrained by the vacuum of dead energy and the pressure of the water overhead, capable of pushing benthic currents well below the atmospheric freezing point.

The last time I needed an umbrella was in the fall and winter of 2011 when Occupy Seattle was still Occupying something. At first the camp was in Westlake Park, in the middle of a “public square” that was neither public nor square, but instead a sort of angular polygon jammed in the middle of a high-end shopping center. The occupation grew in fits and spurts, and was spectacularly evicted on two different occasions for the same droll reasons of “public safety” offered elsewhere, largely at the behest of groups like the downtown business council, who feared that a bunch of indebted twenty-somethings and the myriad homeless people who gravitated to the camp might threaten the sanctity of their shopping district. The umbrellas were as much for the pepper spray as for the rain, and between the evictions, the police started confiscating them en masse. Alongside the revival of obscure anti-mask laws to prosecute protestors in places like New York, the Seattle umbrella ban was justified in terms of vague wording about the erection of “structures” within the park. The umbrellas were technically “structures,” claimed the police, and thereby subject to confiscation. This was part of a good cop, bad cop game played by the city government, in which the mayor’s office and a whole array of liberal NGOs would flock to the camp in the morning, handing out leaflets and offering to “host” the camp at City Hall, where it could “speak truth to power” directly and “begin the dialogue.” Then, at night, the police would move in, also under orders from the mayor.

This is Seattle politics in a nutshell, and it is remarkably effective. Most unrest in the city is easily contained through continual police presence paired with abysmally long periods of “process” and “dialogue” that function like a war of attrition, similar to the way the judiciary process operates for the poor—a nominally fair and open system that is only really functional for

those with the right connections and an excess of time. The rest plea out. The war never looks like a war, and there is no point at which any given battle is decisively lost. In a strange inversion of roles, the political apparatus itself operates with the fluidity of a guerrilla force, receding before the oncoming marches and ceding territory to be occupied. Meanwhile, it encircles and lures its opponent into an overextended foray across inhospitable terrain, fragmenting the opposing force and absorbing the edges that split off. It sequesters the danger in Potemkin villages and empty cathedrals of power: city halls, parliaments, parks, and shopping centers—all the while transforming what was an occupation into a siege, and when the time is right, moving in with a ruthless efficiency. Afterward there was not even a war. There was a dialogue. We all agreed on the fundamentals. Occupy Wall Street raised important questions. The websites of the mayor's office and city council members now have a section for wealth inequality on their drop-down menus.<sup>24</sup>

After the first two evictions downtown, it was decided that the camp should relocate to the campus of a local community college in the nearby Capitol Hill neighborhood, an old counter-cultural holdout rapidly being converted into a hip location for “creatives.” This decision was nominally made by the “General Assembly,” debated late into the rain-spattered night, pros and cons intercut with the incoherent babbling of screaming wingnuts dutifully repeated by the audience acting as “people’s mic.” Recalling it today, these audience-echoed debates seem insane, the kind of feeling I imagine a former cult-member gets recalling his life on the compound. This isn’t true of everything in Occupy—most memories of it shrouded in the perfume of a half-remembered, briefly exciting if ultimately disappointing party—but it is particularly salient when remembering the General Assemblies and everything else associated with the passion play of “direct democracy,” performed more for the public eye than for any functional value.

The truth is that decisions in Occupy were never made democratically, though they were direct. The General Assembly was not a decision-making body, even though its social essence lay in its own claim to be just this. Instead it was the pulpit in a church founded by dispossessed millennials, attracting its fair share of wingnuts and older converts. It was a space where one could publicly say all the things that had been welling up over the years but somehow remained unspoken amid the day-to-day drudgery of two foreign wars and a global economic collapse. Because of this, it remained fairly inchoate: a fountain of gut-feeling and undeveloped ideas, hemmed by the incessant, miserable pattering of the drum circle. The repetition of the people's mic made the speaker feel listened-to and instilled a basic element of emotional parity between pulpit and audience. For once it seemed that the recognition of our world for what it is was not a lonesome fact grasped in darkness but instead one of the spare few things that we truly shared with others: a communal hatred toward that monstrous material community of capital within which we'd all been born and bred.

The myth of direct democracy was promoted widely by its true believers, whose fanaticism united them across otherwise unbridgeable divides between "anarchist" and "liberal." While Chris Hedges could debate David Graeber on the finer points of property destruction, both shared a devotion to the movement's populist deity: the 99 percent. This deity conveniently spoke through the congregation itself ("We are the 99%"), reviving a long tradition of immanent theology that has often interwoven itself with the emergence of nascent communist politics. But beneath the populist gospel and the nightly sermons of the dispossessed, material forces were grinding away, determining the array of probabilities that would define the direction of the Occupation. In order to understand the emergence of some sort of communist politics between the opacity of the riot and the hyper-transparent jubilation of Occupy, it's necessary to

examine the concrete ways in which the movement advanced and receded.

In reality, decisions were made by relatively small groups of people operating outside the public eye, united by affinities that had either been present before the Occupation or had been built up haphazardly within it. These groups sorted and re-sorted several times over the course of the movement, but this sorting was mostly a process of ejecting those who disagreed with the fundamental unifying principle of these groups, which was simply the advance and defense of the Occupation. Those who capitulated to the city's many offers of truce were gradually banished from these small decision-making bodies, and thereby failed to serve the function of a co-opted leadership despite their continued presence at the camps. In some instances, the small grouplets pushing the Occupation forward were largely tactical in nature. In many cities these fractions were composed of juggalos and street kids, whose long-standing opposition to the police helped to advance various Occupations beyond the stage of marching on sidewalks and claiming that the police pepper-spraying us were also "part of the 99%." In other instances, these grouplets were more strategic, leading the Occupation through the planning of things like camp relocation, bank occupations, or the port shutdowns. It was here that political affinities became marginally important, as many of these strategic advances were led by groups that had at their core people who had come together in previous years around protests against police murders—particularly those of John T. Williams in Seattle and Oscar Grant in Oakland. The internal stability of the camp was sustained, meanwhile, by equally small groups of people committed to finding food, running communal kitchens, doing basic cleaning, and offering whatever services they could. In these cases, people were often brought together by the camp itself, with some infrastructural support offered by those who had experience in charities and social work.<sup>25</sup>

This phenomenon was not unique to the Occupy movement in the U.S., but seems to have been a sort of general organizational principle spanning the Arab Spring and European Movement of the Squares, as well as later events in Turkey, Ukraine, Brazil, and Hong Kong. It is in the pragmatic function of such small groupings that we begin to observe a shift from historical to formal party. At times, this overlaps with the formation of the anti-party of the far right, as in Ukraine. But more often this shift seems to stall in an apparently apolitical terrain, where the tactical necessities of the struggle itself define the character of one's partisanship. In such situations, it's impossible to characterize participants by any political ideology or to correlate activity to identity.

A case in point is the role played by football gangs in the Squares Movement and North African insurrections. The football Ultras, who had a long history of street fighting experience and sometimes incorporated a (not always left-wing) vaguely political edge into their work, doubling as antifa groups and attracting exiled communist guerrillas or acting as youth wings for various nationalist projects,

are a small, hard-core, organized, violent minority within a much larger and more diverse movement—an urban vanguard, as it were. Their tight cohesion, self-synchronizing swarming behavior, willingness to engage in violence, and battle-hardened tactical competence in the scrappy business of street fighting combine to give this radical subset of fans a great deal of latent military strength.<sup>26</sup>

Because of this, the Ultras were able to lead tactical advances that ultimately pushed the constellation of riots and protests into outright insurrection. Where Ultra clubs were most established and most experienced, the state had a much harder time suppressing nascent uprisings.



I therefore use “ultras” in the lower case to refer to all of those small grouplets enmeshed in larger struggles who wield some sort of “latent military strength,” unified by something other than basic political agreement and who operate to advance and defend the potentials opened by recent unrest. In this sense, the ultras are active, non-state forces that operate within the more volatile spaces of competitive control—but their true distinguishing feature is a self-reflexive connection to particular local sequences of struggle, in which their actions are specifically partisan actions aimed at widening the potentials of the struggle and pushing it forward on behalf of and alongside the larger crowd. This mass element distinguishes them from the simple minority intervention of warlords, gangsters, or religious fundamentalists, though it is perfectly natural for such grouplets to devolve into similar formations when the greater struggle atrophies. Though generally aligned with the “Party of Anarchy” at the height of the unrest, ultras are defined by an apolitical pragmatism, seeking the maximal program of action capable of spreading the unrest across greater territories and driving it deeper into the structure of society. As formal parties gestate within the historical party, it is just as possible for ultras to turn to the right, joining the anti-party, as it is for them to retain fidelity to the Party of Anarchy. It is this polar volatility that makes such apolitical groupings central to the political outcomes of greater struggles.

## The Streets

I never understood the need for umbrellas until I went to Hong Kong. There, the rain is torrential. Humid tropical sunlight is cut open by heavy clouds, the edge of the typhoon visible from the distance like a great fissure across the city—severing the sun-glittering skyscrapers of the main island from the clusters of New Town public housing built in the jungle near the border. Li Ka-Shing’s port and all the glass buildings sitting on the land

he purchased in the wake of the '67 riots are divided from the rooftop shanties and torturously subdivided closets housing the city's poor. The rain divides the steak houses from the noodle carts, Mandarin from Cantonese, and the streets from the alleys. It's little surprise, then, that the umbrella would soon become the symbol of a crowd capable of traversing that divide.

Oddly enough, there are no proper football hooligans in the former British colony. When the riots came in late 2014—building after years of soft populist protest led by old “pan-democrats”—they were thus led not by football Ultras but instead by ultras in the lower case. This took many forms, most of which were apolitical (though they were ultimately utilized as a stepping-stone for the far right).<sup>27</sup> Construction workers, skilled in the careful weaving required to build the city's signature bamboo scaffolding used on construction sites, came together to craft intricate meshwork barricades out of the same material, essentially converting a tool of the elite—for whom real estate is a key investment in one of the most expensive cities in the world—into a weapon against the police attempting to protect the very property values that the construction workers had helped to create. In other cases, the forms of affinity were smaller and simpler. Groups of like-minded friends smashed the windows of parliament. Others built shields emblazoned with images of Guan Yu, patron deity of police and gangsters, again inverting the tools of power against its practitioners. But throughout the Umbrella Movement, the ultras had found themselves in conflict with a large mass of traditional activists advocating peaceful protest, and such tactical advances only occurred at the margins, surrounded by controversy. By 2016, however, these forms of small-scale coordination would become almost second nature, as people rapidly mobilized against a crackdown on street hawkers in Mong Kok. Protestors brought shields and goggles, hurled projectiles at police, set fire to trash cans, and built barricades across major thoroughfares.

Each of these examples hints at one of the essential characteristics of the ultra that defines them in opposition to the activist: they raise the question of concrete power, instead of politics as proper language, proper analysis, or simply the act of being proper and respectable in the face of the police. We therefore come full circle, returning to the oath as the present form of partisanship, its pragmatic focus on the functional abilities of an engaged minority capable of at least temporarily cutting across an otherwise-unbridgeable atomization. For these partisans, there is often no self-conceived “politics,” or at least no political strategy as such, only power and the tactics that build it. Counterinsurgency theorists like Kilcullen see this in purely military terms, and the average leftist sees in it only the specter of fascism. There is truth to both of these dimensions, of course. Since such grouplets can become “a politically biddable, readily mobilized, self-organized, street-savvy, battle-hardened *corps d’élite* in urban conflict,” as Kilcullen says of the football Ultras, it is certainly not coincidental that they have played equal roles in both emancipatory insurrections (as in Egypt) and brutal sequences of violence (as in the Balkan Wars), as well as more politically ambiguous events that nonetheless have slanted toward the far right (as in Ukraine).<sup>28</sup>

But this doesn’t make the phenomenon purely military or inherently fascist. In fact, this illusion is often the concrete cause of such rightward turns. In Hong Kong, leftists decried the actions of youth who smashed the windows of parliament, imagining that such violence was inherently opposed to the aims of the movement. Many of the youth who supported the action, therefore, began a slow turn towards the right, since right-wing localists were some of the only people who supported and defended these more violent advances.<sup>29</sup> The left’s refusal to engage with these partisans is often the guarantee that turns the apolitical to the far right, since all varieties of nationalist, fascist, or simply authority-loving strongmen will have no qualms about organizing amid groups that have expressed minimal amounts of strength and

discipline. The leftist, however, tends to quiver in the face of the juggalo screaming “faggot” at the cops or the black youth who brings a pistol to the memorial march.

The specter of fascism arises here because both the pre-political ultras and the resurgent right share the pragmatic focus on power and understand themselves as defined primarily by activity, rather than analysis. They both perceive their field of operation as one of competitive control, where political support follows strength, not vice versa. Neither have programs, but both adhere to the oath as an organizing principle. Leftists (and most specifically those whom the far right in Hong Kong quite appropriately took to calling “leftist pricks”) demand a program as a necessary preface to “political” action, or simply presume that one will emerge naturally out of the activity of particular demographics. The absence of such a program is seen as an inherently fascistic elevation of might in the place of morality. It’s true that the oath has no such program, since it is an oath to shared action within the many political rifts that are just beginning to open. But, unlike the far right, what we might think of as the proto-communist oath is not unified by identity but by a reflective fidelity to the unrest itself. It was the universal character of this oath that was able to bring juggalos together with indebted college graduates in Occupy and to unite football hooligans with slum-dwellers in Egypt. The unity of this oath is therefore the inclusive, flowing unity of those who wish to push the rift open, to spread it further, to extend it longer, or to ensure that the potential spreads. Instead of an oath of blood, it is therefore an oath of water, the “party of Anarchy” that seems to seek nothing but further erosion, the growth of the flood.

The oath of blood is an oath of exclusive unity, in which action is taken on behalf of a “community” to be defended or actualized. It is therefore easy for those beholden to this oath to sever themselves from the dynamics of the crowd and even to abhor mass unrest as such, seeing in it only the rise of an undifferentiated

mob or rabble capable of nothing but degenerative chaos. The oath of blood reaches its apex, then, in militia- or gang-like minority groupings of the type described by Kilcullen. These groupings will seek to build local, communitarian spheres as part of a drive to “start the world” in the midst of the material community of capital’s widespread social decay. In contrast, the oath of water is an oath of inclusive unity, in which action is inherently partisan action taken alongside and on behalf of the crowd, dependent on constant expansion. When severed from the mass momentum of the historical party, those beholden to this oath cannot properly act in its name. There is no true “autonomy” from the material community of capital, only fidelity to its destruction.

## Fucked Generations

In Hong Kong, defeat came like the rain. First the gangsters attacked in isolated downpours on behalf of the government, weakening morale in the already late stages of a stagnating movement. Then torrents of police overtook the barricades at their weakest points, targeting the strongest occupation (in Mong Kok), after the others had fallen. In Seattle, defeat also came like the rain. After the camp moved from downtown to Capitol Hill, it was slowly ground down. Shuffling through the mud between rain-soaked tents, the moment at which it all collapsed could hardly be identified, but that defeat was clear. The homeless had slowly filled the camp as others left and the minimal services provided had begun to atrophy. Here the police never came in torrents. They just hovered around the camp in small groups, like a light, drizzling mist that slowly soaked through everything until no one was quite sure who was a plainclothes cop and who wasn’t. The community college used the presence of the homeless as an excuse to finally evict the occupation, complaining of open-air drug use and harassment of female students. The

police never even had to clear the camp. At the end of one of the longest-lasting Occupations in the country, people ultimately just packed up and left.

Whether the rain is torrential or perpetual, both Occupations found themselves confronted with cities that were built as little more than sluices for water and capital. Westlake, Mong Kok, Zuccotti Park: these are areas behind the palace walls, yet somehow below the conference rooms and executive suites that helm global circulation. And circulation is one key to this riddle. As Joshua Clover has argued, our era of riots is not unprecedented, but instead corresponds to long global economic cycles in which production and circulation alternate in their centrality. In eras when production dominates, the strike becomes the primary weapon of proletarians because the productive upswing tends to push more people into the industrial workforce, bringing them into direct contact with the immediate process of production and thereby making it possible to halt this process through a refusal to work. In periods such as our own, when circulation dominates and people are forced outside the immediate process of production, things like riots, occupations, and blockades rise to the forefront of global unrest, all defined by their attempt to attack the economy's circulatory system—in the form of blockaded highways and ports or attempts to occupy and thereby disrupt centers of commerce, such as Wall Street in New York or Central in Hong Kong.<sup>30</sup>

Clover also offers a social anatomy of recent unrest, which is marked by a “double riot,” in which the indebted, overeducated graduate with no future finds herself unified with those more entirely excluded from the economy in the course of the Long Crisis. This is not some sort of overlap of simple sociological categories, however, since the two dimensions of the double riot are really just two faces of the same global surplus: “The explosive growth of the indebted sector is another face of informalization in which finance capital's need to find debtors dovetails with

the explosion of populations driven below subsistence wages.”<sup>31</sup> In many instances, the social base of recent conflagrations has quickly extended beyond just these two key demographics, as should be the goal of any truly expansive political event. But in almost all instances, one or both of these social strata seem to be the necessary kindling.

In part, this is because both sides of the “double riot” have a sort of bare exposure to circulation that other demographics do not. While the secular decline in the rate of economic growth has meant that surplus characteristics are more generally distributed across the population, they are not distributed equally. Many of those who are materially within the surplus population in some way (most often as completely superfluous service workers in some arcane insurance, healthcare, or education bureaucracy) nonetheless retain stronger forms of insulation from the immiserating effects of economic stagnation. This insulation takes the form of selective holdovers from the last economic boom: things like access to affordable health insurance, consistent credit, a viable mortgage, the ability to claim bankruptcy on one’s debts, and social security eligibility and other retirement benefits. Taken together, these features ensure that some strata of the population retain strong access to the market despite both the relative superfluity of their employment and the insufficiency of their direct wage income.

The Marxist economist Andrew Kliman has even gone so far as to argue, somewhat controversially, that the total combination of non-wage benefits u.s. companies offer to workers, when calculated as part of their wage, completely eliminates the appearance of overall wage decline or stagnation for the American working class as a whole.<sup>32</sup> Instead of across-the-board wage loss, there is a series of new polarizations within the class, the most important of which is the split between those with salaries and benefits, and those subsisting purely on wages.<sup>33</sup> Rather than corporations gaining profits at the expense of workers, then, Kliman argues

that “although the typical worker’s share fell to some degree, what actually rose at his or her expense was the share of the income distributed to more highly paid employees.”<sup>34</sup>

The racial dynamics of this divide have been widely demonstrated, and are most salient in the disparity in subprime foreclosures after the burst of the housing bubble. But the particular ways that this polarization breaks down according to age are often less emphasized, though arguably more important since they span racial groups, aggravate already existing racial inequities, and perfectly match the J-Curve model of rising expectations reaching a sudden reversal, leading to widespread discontent. This generational dimension is also deceptively fundamental to understanding class and crisis for the simple fact that class does not return to the forefront of politics as soon as crisis breaks out. The return of class is instead part of the unfolding of the Long Crisis over time. As class conflict intensifies, the traditional methods of separation and sequestration of struggles—as “issues” concerning particular “communities” or “interest groups”—will tend to strain and then shatter.

This dispossession occurs across decades. The sphere of those who are insulated from the crisis shrinks, though white baby boomers remain at its core as the demographic who most benefited from the last golden age. In part, this shrinkage entails the pushing-out of the less fortunate, never fully included blue-collar members of their coddled generation—a phenomenon already visible in mortality and morbidity rates among the poorest strata of older whites, the political consequences of which were already examined in previous chapters. But it also occurs through the retirement and subsequent, well-deserved die-off of the elderly. It is this process that will ultimately guarantee a return to more distinct class lines in the future, sketched around new polarities of access to the historically unprecedented mass of wealth flowing through inheritance and all its effects on housing prices, inflation, and taxation. This slow game of class warfare is politically



palatable precisely because it does not entail stripping a privileged generation of its benefits all at once. It is substantially easier never to offer things than to take them away.

But as millions of Beatles-loving, Trump-and-Hillary-voting, homeowning baby boomers die off, their particular anti-communist brain-rot dies with them. The generational divide here really does drive down to the most basic level: around the same time that the u.s. had finally imprisoned the same share of its population as the USSR under the height of the gulag system, I remember a baby boomer explaining to me that the most important difference between capitalism and “communism” was that under capitalism the government can’t just spy on you, kick down your door, and search your property. A few years later, of course, the government was kicking down my door and searching my property, all because I was identified out of a picture-book of “known anarchists,” based on intel gathered by thorough surveillance of my house, local protests and online social networks. For these people, the urn cannot approach quickly enough.

## Tombs

Sometimes I can only remember Occupy as a sort of impressionistic mesh of bodies pushed together and hurled for a moment through a cacophony of echoes: the crowd echoing back its own words, the police grenades echoing off the asphalt, our own chants echoing off the cold glass palaces built for money and the people designated to handle it in lump sums—for a moment these echoes seemed to vibrate something deep down in things, stirring our flesh as if it were a fluid that could never quite be trapped in its entirety, throwing our voices back at us from the steel and glass in a languageless roar as if to invoke the utterly world-breaking, if ultimately fleeting, realization that such palaces could fall. As everything else gave way to work, jail, and simple, grinding time, something of that feeling has nonetheless

remained: the vague impression of power, glimpsed for a moment by the first of many proletarian generations to come.

The echoes also hint at how and where that power ran up against insurmountable limits, like a soft, organic thing crashing into a hard wall of granite. Despite all the tactical centrality of small, pragmatic grouplets and the self-absorbed, self-declared leadership of the activists, the reality is that struggles today have a limited range of motion, and most decisions are not really choices between equally valid tactics (or a “diversity of tactics”) but simply the path of least resistance that allows the struggle to advance or consigns it to stagnation. In the vast majority of cases, this path of least resistance is strongly determined by geography and wears down rapidly in environments that have been built to be inhospitable to such events. At the same time, the unrest does not simply end, because the large-scale material conditions that summon it have not disappeared. Individual struggles are therefore submitted to a sort of evolutionary meat grinder. The vast majority are dead ends, due to either their environment or their internal incoherence or completely random contingencies or likely some combination of all the above.

Occupy Wall Street, the Movement of the Squares, Occupy Hong Kong, and even earlier, more subdued events such as the 2011 occupation of the Wisconsin State Capitol building were all starved in similar ways. The Invisible Committee, an amorphous global analytic body founded around an obscure group of French communists, describes this predicament with a suitable eloquence:

when the insurgents manage to penetrate parliaments, presidential palaces, and other headquarters of institutions, as in Ukraine, in Libya or in Wisconsin, it's only to discover empty places, that is, empty of power, and furnished without any taste. It's not to prevent the “people” from “taking power” that they are so fiercely kept from invading such places, but to prevent them from realizing that power no

longer resides in the institutions. There are only deserted temples there, decommissioned fortresses, nothing but stage sets—real traps for revolutionaries.<sup>35</sup>

And this argument can be extended beyond their list of political holograms to include the spectacular centers of circulation and high-tech production embodied in the downtown core. On the one hand, the activity of such centers is rarely shut down by these kinds of protests, since they are confined to the vaguely defined “public” sphere of parks and boulevards, and thereby exist just beyond the final wall of the fortress, contained in those cavernous avenues designed for the easy movement of police tanks and hordes of tourists. On the other, if such unrest does grow to sufficient proportions to be capable of disrupting these high-end services, the riot fails via its very success, finding the skyscrapers and shopping malls to be little more than deserts once capital has fled. These are not hospitable places for any sort of struggle to reproduce itself—they are hardly hospitable to humans whatsoever. Meanwhile, the executive functions of the global city are quickly shipped away to other brain hubs, remaining funds transferred to offshore accounts. The victory of such an insurrection is its own tomb.

Other than a handful of half-abandoned cities in global rust belts, the downtown cores of most metropolises in the U.S. are little more than gigantic, airless coffins built to suffocate such movements in their infancy. This constitutes one of the first major limits in the early evolutionary chaos that dominates present struggles. Nonetheless, collision with this limit remains the path of least resistance, evidenced by the unerring tendency for protests to gravitate toward simple, largely nonessential circulatory systems in the urban core. The seemingly natural response to the late 2014 Grand Jury non-indictment in the murder of Michael Brown, for example, was for nationwide solidarity marches to storm freeways, shutting down the flow

of interstate traffic in several major cities, including Los Angeles, Oakland, Seattle, St Louis, Dallas, and Nashville, as well as major bridges in New York and Washington, DC. Aside from a certain symbolic victory, this response met with the same hollow anticlimax as Occupy's attempt to storm the empty corridors of power years earlier. Freeways could not be held for more than a few hours, freight was rerouted, and the ports, factories, and warehouses all kept running as per usual.

At the time, I remember people flooding onto I-5 in Seattle where it dips down and tunnels beneath Freeway Park. Most ran forward into the dimly lit cavern of the express lanes, attempting to catch a glimpse of the front line of police vehicles and the bright storm of headlights behind. Others fled back as the police moved the line forward to make arrests. I stayed in the middle, just walking in the empty, echoing chamber. That insufferable local rapper Macklemore ran by me with a few members of his entourage and a handful of people from the black bloc, all pointing and yelling in the direction of some approaching but unseen contingent of police. In a surreal few moments, we all escaped over the embankment and fled into the winding, modernist maze of Freeway Park, stumbling around homeless people, running into other protestors who came up to shake Macklemore's hand and say something about white privilege. Macklemore's picture would be on the news the next day, his fist raised in the center of the abandoned road. And that image, if anything, is the sum of the present limit of struggle: a celebrity on a blockaded roadway, where spectacle overlaps with peoples' rudimentary grasp of circulation, rather than parliament or the "public," as the present ground for class conflict.

## The End

They don't have a Macklemore in Baton Rouge, thank God. But everything echoes. As soon as the shots are fired, we know

the repetition well enough to play along: the first round of protests, the promise of justice, the National Guard put on alert, things calming as the slow legal machinery grinds away in the background, paid leave for the shooter, pundits and politicians praising “the dialogue” that has begun. And then the grand jury or the committee or just some fucking chief or judge comes back with the verdict: not even a trial but simply the conclusion that there will not be one, that all was justified. Then there is the second round, like the first, a million rehearsals of a stalled revolution. And by then how many other cities? How many other repetitions? Regardless of the number, each repetition brings a certain change in the valence of struggle. Things mutate. They retreat and advance in increments. But they all have the same soundtrack. If this soundtrack could be reduced to its purest form, it would probably just be the sound of guns cocking over an infinite progression of trap snares, and maybe a vocal track with Young Thug at his most incoherent. But in its concrete form, it is an anthem.

In Ferguson, I watched as someone dragged a loudspeaker from a nearby car out into the street directly across from a line of police, plugged in some shitty cell phone with an aux cord, and then held the phone up toward the line of cops as if it was a dead man’s switch. His head hooded, eyes utterly placid, he pushed the button and the police moved forward almost immediately, like automatons activated by the same mechanism. Lil Boosie’s “Fuck the Police” blasted out of the speaker directly toward the police. The song spun into the crowd and seemed to push it forward. Despite their absolute numerical advantage, the police moved faster, sensing the precipice, as if the track could simply not be allowed to complete—like some sort of ancient incantation begun by this young hooded black man on the humid, moonlit streets of Missouri and all of us in the crowd now disciples of it, drawn toward the song as if we were circling the event horizon of a black hole sunk in the middle of Florissant. The police were

there before the first verses had ended. They ripped the aux cord from the speaker with a loud pop and forced the hooded youth onto his knees.

The song was by a Baton Rouge rapper sentenced in one of America's harshest state penal systems to eight years for drug charges, the bulk of which involved simple marijuana possession.<sup>36</sup> The events in Ferguson broke out only months after his early release. Boosie had served roughly five years in Louisiana State Penitentiary some 50 miles from Baton Rouge in Angola, a notorious prison often likened to a modern-day slave plantation.<sup>37</sup> Several months after his release and two months after his song had become a new national anthem in Ferguson, he changed his name from Lil Boosie to Boosie Badazz. The song would continue to be played in later protests, until two years later everything seemed to come full circle when another black man, Alton Sterling, was shot to death by the police point blank in Boosie's hometown.

In some slow, imperceptible way, the storms above St Louis had flooded into the rivers and the aquifers and the slow grind of that ancient river had washed it all southward with a vast, writhing indifference. But when it emerged in this new climate, the unrest had changed somehow. On these southern shores, the repetitions suddenly seemed to be amplified, everything echoing everything else. Baton Rouge is a decentralized city on the banks of the Mississippi, a sprawling New South sister to Rust Belt St Louis. It helms the tenth largest port in the U.S. (by tonnage shipped)<sup>38</sup> and sits at the center of the region's petrochemical and manufacturing industries. This also places it at the northern end of Louisiana's notorious Cancer Alley. When the protests came to Baton Rouge, the police were no longer concerned with simply forcing people to march in circles and stay off public streets. With little in the way of public space in the sprawling near hinterland, they instead chased protestors onto people's lawns, making mass arrests, flanked by armored vehicles emitting painful acoustic

blasts designed for crowd control.<sup>39</sup> And the crowd seemed to have changed as well. Police had their teeth knocked out, and guns were reportedly confiscated from protestors.<sup>40</sup>

Despite attempts by activists to focus the protests on City Hall, they quickly spilled out into the surrounding residential area, embedding the protests within neighborhoods, rather than sealing it off in the empty corridors of downtown.

The sequence was cut short when a man named Gavin Long shot six police officers in a targeted attack, following a pattern already established by Micah Johnson in Dallas ten days earlier. The same conditions that prevent political cohesion within the tomb of the downtown core amplify the already-extreme atomization of the material community of capital, each defeat seeming to isolate its sympathizers even more, the sequence of failures first like waves of rubble deposited on top of you and then like great, crushing strata of stone. The very inescapability of a world with “no alternative” generates an isolating pressure that hardens those already lost, condensing any remaining hope down into a diamond-sharp hatred of the world in its entirety. Though in essence a far-right phenomenon, the lone wolf often simultaneously lays claim to right-wing and left-wing discourse, fusing the two together in a spectacular but otherwise incoherent reduction of politics to a single moment of sublime violence.

The lone wolf has no politics. For him (and they are almost exclusively male), left and right collapse into the pure act, the sovereignty of the individual will. Whether targeting the correct enemy (police, the rich) or a scapegoated one (immigrants, Muslims, black people), there is no revolutionary thrust to the act other than a vague expectation that the spectacle might by the slimmest chance inspire some sort of larger break in the status quo—that people might finally see the ostensibly unseen operation of power, or that the sleeping might become “woke.” In a way, these conspiracy-theorist, sovereign citizen mass murderers are less respectable than their purely apolitical

cop-killer counterparts—the ones who are simply in it for mild revenge and simple mathematics, figuring that as long as they take out more than one cop, the world will be a better place, on balance. With no other perceptible options, the lone wolf proclaims that he has become a vanguard-unto-himself and performs the only action that seems possible. Founded on absolute exclusion, this is the oath of blood metastasized until it is nothing but an oath to pure, salvific action, exonerated of all commitments and worthy of judgment only according to an utterly abstracted ethics of fidelity.

But despite its dampening effect, the unrest in Baton Rouge was not ended by Long's actions alone. The following months brought not only a wave of extreme police repression but historical flooding in Louisiana, at first largely ignored by the media despite being the worst natural disaster since Hurricane Sandy in 2012. One interview with a participant in the Baton Rouge protests notes the significance of this sequence:

In a broader sense, it's also worth noting that in quick secession [sic], a large American population just experienced firsthand three of the most paradigmatic phenomena of our times: an anti-police uprising, a mass-shooting, and a climate-related catastrophe. Taken together we have a neat diorama of the existential disaster capitalism has thrown us into.<sup>41</sup>

It's worth wondering what might have happened had this sequence been reversed, with a mass uprising occurring in the wake of environmental destruction and a lone wolf attack against the police. The confluence of events here begins to open unseen possibilities, as ultras from new rounds of riots might operate within a scene of massive environmental devastation and the extreme polarization caused by anti-police attacks.

Though it is yet to be seen how such struggles might mutate in the future, we are now approaching a point at which the



expanding unrest of the Long Crisis is beginning to overlap more directly with the geography of the near hinterland, which will soon become its center of gravity. After yet another police shooting in Charlotte, North Carolina, protestors not only blocked the interstate (I-85), but began looting container trucks and setting the contents on fire. Such events hint that our era's constellation of constantly sparking and dimming riots, occupations, and blockades is thereby on a slow collision course with the mainline of the global economy. This coincidence between a more hospitable environment and constantly innovating waves of unrest is likely to begin to provide (over the next five, ten, or fifteen years) the rudiments of some sort of adaptation capable of overcoming the present limits of the riot. Baton Rouge provides one window into what this might look like, laid out first in reverse.

## The Coming Flood

In Egypt, the early sequence of demonstrations, strikes, and small-scale riots was transformed into an insurrection only by the intervention of small, competent tactical teams who fused with the crowd and demonstrated a degree of strength in the face of a seemingly unshakeable regime. On the streets, the key battles that turned the movement into a genuine insurrection were led by football Ultras—first in the successful battle for Qasr al-Nil Bridge on January 28, and then in the “Battle of the Camels” six days later, in which Ultras (now joined by the youth wing of the Muslim Brotherhood) led the demonstrators in fighting off regime-backed militias and gangs of hired thugs bused in from outside the city. In the digital realm, the soft war counterpart to the street war below was led by similarly small tactical groupings of hackers (some from Egypt, but many operating elsewhere) who were able to breach the communications lockdown imposed by the regime—a key element in spreading the news of the uprising

across Egypt and abroad. Similarly, after the police were defeated and the demonstrations had evolved into a full-scale uprising, many districts in Cairo fell into the control of local, anti-regime “citizens’ committees” and neighborhood watch groups, many members of which had not participated in the uprising itself but now sought to help sustain it. By building strength in an environment of competitive control, all of these small groups had helped to amplify the conflict, extend it to new territories and drive its roots deeper into society.<sup>42</sup>

The actions of lone wolf attackers, absent any collective dimension, cannot lead to such amplification, since they are fundamentally symptomatic figures. But small, capable groups of ultras, even if ad hoc ones, clearly can create such an amplification, given the right conditions and the ability to demonstrate a certain degree of strength in street wars, digital conflicts, and social reproduction within liberated territories. It’s also via these small groupings that adaptations capable of overcoming the riot can take hold, and future organizational potentials can be dimly glimpsed, since their fidelity to the unrest itself is capable of carrying over after the immediate window of the riot has closed—the historical party gives birth to many formal parties that may play important roles in future sequences of unrest. The ultras, then, are a sort of vanguard for the historical party, not in the sense that they lead its advances or helm it ideologically, but in the sense that they represent the forefront of mutation and adaptation in the evolutionary meat grinder of global struggles.

This is where the question of the Baton Rouge sequence in reverse might offer a potential window to the future, the floods of 2016 foreboding a greater flood stirring in those aquifers buried deep beneath St Louis, beneath Baton Rouge, and beneath even the inhuman body of the Mississippi, that great engine of destruction cast in the shape of a river. In an atmosphere of deep pro-regime/anti-regime polarization, on a chaotic terrain isolated by natural disaster, what shape might a mass uprising take and how might

small groupings of ultras operate to advance it? Such an event is most likely to take place in capital's near hinterland, where population is increasing alongside immiseration, and power has not yet adapted to the threats arising beyond the palace walls. In a way, this is an impossible question to answer. The process is fundamentally evolutionary, and any overcoming of the limits of the riot remains unknown. But the conditions in which this overcoming takes place can be roughly predicted.

As the Long Crisis continues, the hinterland grows and peri-urban zones undergo the harshest forms of stratification. White poverty deepens alongside an influx of new migrants and the displacement of inner-city poverty into the suburbs. There are very few areas that might be able to guarantee some sort of general social safety net to their urban fringe, and even where such guarantees might emerge, they will be contingent on the rapidly shifting predilections of finance capital. Meanwhile, the urban fringe in many places will move inward, especially when the next bubbles burst and the gains of the tech industry are shown to be hollow. In general, then, those within the hinterland will increasingly be thrown into a condition of survival on the edge of the wage relation, mirrored by their sequestration at the geographic edge of the city or within the vast catchment of the abandoned Rust Belt core. Survival here will take many forms, and is certain to depend on intricate methods of second- and third-hand profiting off various state bureaucracies as corruption and credit fill the holes left by a receding tide of formal employment. All of this will be thrown disproportionately on the shoulders of younger generations.

This will raise the question of reproduction for future struggles in these zones—such as the citizens' committees and neighborhood watches organized in Cairo. Such questions were already hinted at during Occupy, with its communal kitchens, trash-disposal working groups, and even attempts at voluntary, free provisions for basic healthcare. But in each instance, these

communal footholds were founded on inhospitable terrain, forced to use all their effort not to be scrubbed off the concrete by police or Parks and Recreation crews sent to keep the downtown core clean of such nuisances (which, it might be noted, don't fulfill any unmet needs for most of downtown's residents, with the notable exception of the homeless). In the hinterland, by contrast, most oppositional forces are poorly organized, and the population is often actually in need of such services, particularly in times of ecological disaster. Service programs—suitable for the present but roughly analogous to the Black Panthers' breakfast program, the iww's (Industrial Worker's of the World) housing of itinerant laborers, or the social clubs of the early workers' movement—are likely to be an essential component of any attempt to overcome the present limits of struggle in the u.s., as are emergency preparedness courses such as those offered by the Oath Keepers and disaster relief services like those run by church groups in the wake of the floods.

At the same time, the intricate ways in which exclusion from the wage forces proletarians into vicious, predatory behavior for survival also ensures that the expanding bulk of corrupt bureaucracy will cleave such neighborhoods into warring parties, dividing them along lines of predation disguised as order on one side and abjection disguised as simple criminality or moral failure on the other. As in Ferguson, we will see local solutions to the problem of austerity that take the form of extra-tax fees, fines, and simple expropriations of the worse-off populations within crisis-stricken cities. In Egypt, those deeply dependent on the corrupt government were the ones who staffed the pro-regime militias, while others were simply paid lump sums and bused in from the exurbs to fight on the conservatives' side in the Battle of the Camels. In some instances, the expansion of such corruption in the u.s. will still be public in character, enforced by the local police, feeding into the courts, and funneling cash into a number of other arms of local government that may appear to have nothing to do with

such corruption yet nonetheless depend on it for their sources of funding—the welfare of the elementary school teacher here alloyed with that of the police. In other instances, such corruption might take on a more private shape, whether in the form of local criminal syndicates, scam artists, or loan sharks.

In most places, the center has already fallen. Liberalism offers no solution, and the new rents of the near hinterland begin to determine new political polarities, just as access to federal money determines politics in the countryside. There are those who collect the fines, and those who pay them. In Baton Rouge, the geography of this stratification is particularly clear, with opposing poles of the near hinterland warring against one another:

As capitol [sic] of Louisiana, Baton Rouge and the neighboring parishes are home to a lot of the state's most racist populations whose sentiments played a big part in passing America's first Blue Lives Matter Bill back in May, which makes targeting police a hate crime.

Nearly half of the BRPD itself is manned by residents of neighboring Livingston Parish, an overwhelmingly white area known in the recent past for kkk activity. Even the cops who actually live in Baton Rouge Parish are mostly from the white neighborhoods.<sup>43</sup>

This is the geography of latent civil war, the interests of the wealthy downtown core aligned with its extremities in the form of the militarized white exurb, a recruiting hub for the far right. Any evolution of the riot in these conditions will be defined by how it manages this polarity. The state will almost certainly ship in Klansmen from the exurbs or simply recruit angry whites with the promise of painkillers, just as Mubarak bused in scimitar-wielding conservatives from the countryside to lead gangs of poor men paid in free meals and Tramadol.

In such a situation, the correctness of one's political analysis is irrelevant.

Far-right solutions—even spectacular ones that might glory in some success over parliamentarians or armed federal agents—will tend in the final instance to fuse with the predatory party in this civil war, as is obvious in the case of groups such as Golden Dawn in Greece, bolstered by the votes and donations of police, civil servants, and nativist workers. Communist, or at least proto-communist, potentials will exhibit the opposite tendency, advocating an inclusive allegiance with the abject, including poor whites, and the absolute rejection of any “community” that denies such universalism.

The far right is currently based in the hinterland's white exurbs, finding in these neighborhoods a pragmatic border between the poverty of the far hinterland and the predatory flow of income drawn from the city and the near hinterland. These “small town” exurbs often play an equally central role in the ideology of the far right, as its community in microcosm—all despite the fact that such neighborhoods are entirely dependent on their economic links with the downtown core. The liberal residents of the city proper are, meanwhile, able to build political legitimacy by disavowing these right-wing hubs while still depending on them for the security of the palace walls. All of this reinforces the warrior mythology of the far right, which sees itself as a form of bitter but necessary barbarity mobilized against the greater barbarity of the proletarian horde (of which they are just one disavowed fragment).

There are at least two identifiable dimensions, then, to the future overcoming of the riot. There is first the intensive dimension, defined by questions of provision and reproduction, and, second, the extensive one, defined by latent civil war. But both dimensions exist within the larger framework of national states and global production. Extensively, the near hinterland is particularly important, since future struggles on such sites have

the capacity to fundamentally cripple global supply chains in a way that the occupation of parliaments or parks in front of financial centers simply do not. Again, these conditions are best visualized in the sprawling Sunbelt: “the L.A. region is currently the largest manufacturing hub in the United States,” even while “two of the three major metro statistical areas present in Southern California accounted for the 3rd (I.E. [Inland Empire]) and 6th (L.A.) highest unemployment rates in the country in terms of regions with over one million inhabitants.”<sup>44</sup> A central Pacific Rim manufacturing hub, integral to global production, thereby exists directly alongside one of the country’s greatest concentrations of the unemployed, sequestered in logistics cities on the urban fringe:

This concentrated conflation, between carceral surplus populations and capitalist functionaries, is mirrored in the fortified infrastructure of Southern California’s logistics networks. Commodity-capital flows, with cargo throughput reaching millions of dollars per day, pulse through the below ground-level trench of the Alameda Corridor (while hidden from view) through the very dispossessed South LA communities that many of those incarcerated in the MDC [Metropolitan Detention Center] come from.<sup>45</sup>

It is this neighbored concentration of industry and dispossession that opens new extensive horizons for struggles as they evolve past the riot, giving them the ability to spread disruption beyond their local sphere in a way not dependent on media spectacle.

A number of theories have arisen to try and account for how these features might be combined in some speculative future evolution of current struggles. Clover condenses a number of loosely fitting theories about “communization” into a clear argument for “the commune,” defined by its ability to facilitate self-reproduction while also “absolutizing” the antagonism of

the riot. The Invisible Committee offers fleeting glimpses of something similar, though too shrouded in smoke and flowery French prose to be entirely visible from our present vantage point. Many anarchists offer yet another sketch, founded this time on an “autonomy” that tends to conflate small-scale moments of self-reproduction in squats and occupations with the nationalist or proto-nationalist enclaves of populist movements in the global countryside. Frederic Jameson, meanwhile, represents a popular strain of academic Marxism in opting for the older language of “dual power,” founding the reproductive and extensive capacity of future struggles on the reinvented institution of the “universal army.”<sup>46</sup> Despite their myriad shortcomings and many different vocabularies, all of these theories share the recognition that the evolution of the riot is a process of building power within the interstices opened by the Long Crisis.

Personally, I don’t understand the compulsion to mine history for words that might describe what’s to come. The fact is that the approaching flood has no name. Any title it might take is presently lost in the noise of its gestation, maybe just beginning to be spoken in a language that we can hardly recognize. There will be no Commune because this isn’t Paris in 1871. There will be no Dual Power because this isn’t Russia in 1917. There will be no Autonomy because this isn’t Italy in 1977. I’m writing this in 2017, and I don’t know what’s coming, even though I know something is rolling toward us in the darkness, and the world can end in more ways than one. Its presence is hinted at somewhere deep inside the evolutionary meat grinder of riot repeating riot, all echoing ad infinitum through the Year of our Lord 2016, when the anthem returned to its origin, and the corpse flowers bloomed all at once as Louisiana was turned to water, and no one knew why. I don’t call people comrade; I just call them friend. Because whatever’s coming has no name, and anyone who says they hear it is a liar. All I hear are guns cocking over trap snares unrolling to infinity.



- 1 Oliver Milman, “Missouri Residents Pack Up and Leave as Once-rare Floods Become the New Normal,” *The Guardian*, [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com), January 8, 2016.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 A convenience store and gas station common in the American Midwest and South. During the 2014 riots in Ferguson, Missouri, following the murder of unarmed black teenager Michael Brown, a QuikTrip that was alleged to have called the police on Brown was burned to the ground and subsequently became a gathering place for protestors.
- 4 This data comes from the U.S. Census and American Community Survey, all of which is reviewed here alongside a number of other sources: Phil A. Neel, “New Ghettos Burning,” *Ultra*, [www.ultra-com.org](http://www.ultra-com.org), August 17, 2014.
- 5 Nathan Robinson, “The Shocking Finding from the DOJ’s Ferguson Report that Nobody Has Noticed,” *Huffington Post*, [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com), March 13, 2015.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Gwynn Guilford, “Ferguson—and Many Other American Cities—Wring Revenue from Black People and the Poor,” *Quartz*, [www.qz.com](http://www.qz.com), August 28, 2014.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 These trends are all detailed here: “Profiting from Probation: America’s Offender-funded Probation Industry,” Human Rights Watch, [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org), February 5, 2014.
- 10 Guilford, “Ferguson.”
- 11 Sarah Parvini, “Anaheim Police Shooting Survivor Says Cops ‘Shot Again and Again,’” *Fox News Latino*, <http://latino.foxnews.com>, July 30, 2012.
- 12 “The Flatbush Rebellion,” *Fire Next Time*, 2013, see <https://eastcoastrenegades.wordpress.com>.
- 13 Among the few remaining Maoist cults in the U.S., originating from one of the larger and more vibrant sects of the long-extinct “New Communist Movement,” the RCP today is a shrinking, cloistered group split between a mass of gray-haired baby boomers and a minority of young converts harvested from high schools in the inner city (particularly in places like New York and Chicago), rapidly indoctrinated in true Bible Belt fashion through exclusive reading lists

- and total daily mobilization into the culture of the cult, which largely involves standing in front of other peoples' protests, finding brown people to hold up their signs (complete with URL and exclamation points) and screaming empty slogans toward the news cameras.
- 14 Paul Ekirch, *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past* (New York, 2006), p. 331.
  - 15 See David Harvey, *Paris: Capital of Modernity* (New York, 2005).
  - 16 Katie Sanders. "Ferguson, Mo. Has 50 White Police Officers, Three Black, NBC's Mitchell Claims," PunditFact, www.politifact.com, August 17, 2014.
  - 17 Brian Mahoney, "Police Union Wants Protection Under Hate Crime Law," *Politico*, www.politico.com, January 5, 2015.
  - 18 Jennifer Bain and Eileen A. J. Connelly, "Asian and Black Communities Square Off Over Cop Prosecution," *New York Post*, www.nypost.com, February 20, 2016.
  - 19 See "The Flatbush Rebellion."
  - 20 Key Macfarlane, "Riots of Passage," *Ultra*, www.ultra-com.org, May 12, 2015.
  - 21 Ibid.
  - 22 Ibid.
  - 23 "What is Karst? And Why Is it Important?," The Karst Waters Institute (Leesburg, VA, 2016).
  - 24 After the collapse of the New Communist Movement, many American radicals began a "long march through the institutions," joining progressive political campaigns, labor unions, NGOs, and city governments, ostensibly to begin to radicalize them from within. In many coastal cities, it is this crop of politicians who staff much of the current municipal power structure. It is possible that the influx of former Maoists into local government brought an element of protracted people's war to city management.
  - 25 It should also be noted that it was very rare for such groups actually to overlap with the "working groups" formally established by the general assembly, even where "tactical" or "food" working groups had formed. Most working groups were at best nonfunctional and at worst obstructive to these advances.
  - 26 David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla* (New York 2015), p. 183.
  - 27 Similar phenomena were visible in Ukraine, where football Ultras did play a role. For more detail on Hong Kong, see "Black Versus Yellow: Class Antagonism and Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement," *Ultra*, www.ultra-com.org, October 3, 2014.
  - 28 Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains*, pp. 181–2.
  - 29 "Black Versus Yellow."
  - 30 This is of necessity a brief review, and it elides the detail used by Clover in distinguishing previous eras of riot from our current era

- of “riot prime.” For his theory in its complete form, see Joshua Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot* (New York, 2016).
- 31 Ibid., p. 157.
- 32 The claim is laid out most rigorously in his book: Andrew Kliman, *The Failure of Capitalist Production: Underlying Causes of the Great Recession* (London, 2011).
- 33 This is also not synonymous with a split between the managerial or supervisory strata of the working class and those beneath them, as Kliman makes clear in Andrew Kliman “More Misused Wage Data from ‘Monthly Review’: The Overaccumulation of a Surplus of Errors,” *The Marxist Humanist Initiative*, April 10, 2013, available at [www.marxisthumanistinitiative.org](http://www.marxisthumanistinitiative.org).
- 34 Andrew Kliman, “Are Corporations Really Hogging Workers’ Wages?” Truthdig, [www.truthdig.com](http://www.truthdig.com), April 9, 2014.
- 35 The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends* (Cambridge, MA, 2015), p. 81.
- 36 A suite of other charges, including murder, was initially leveled against Boosie, but he was ultimately exonerated by a jury of everything but the drug charges and several probation violations.
- 37 Laura Dimon, “A Modern Day Slave Plantation Exists and Is Thriving in the Heart of America,” Mic, [www.mic.com](http://www.mic.com), May 8, 2014.
- 38 “Top 25 Water Ports by Weight: 2004 (Million Short Tons),” Freight Facts and Figures, 2006. Federal Highway Administration, November 2006.
- 39 Daniel Denvir, “Sunday’s Police Riot in Baton Rouge: Anti-brutality Protests Met with Brutality,” Salon, [www.salon.com](http://www.salon.com), July 15, 2016.
- 40 Michael Edison Hayden and David Caplan “Protests Continue in Baton Rouge and St. Paul Following Night of Arrests,” ABC News, [www.abcnews.go.com](http://www.abcnews.go.com), July 20, 2016.
- 41 “Open to Unorthodox Methods’: An Interview on the Baton Rouge Uprising,” Rigole Rise, <http://rigolerise.wordpress.com>, August 27, 2016.
- 42 Kilcullen, pp. 188–99.
- 43 “Open to Unorthodox Methods’.”
- 44 “Fortress L.A. in the 21st Century,” Lucha No Feik, [www.luchanofeik.club](http://www.luchanofeik.club), August 24, 2016.
- 45 Ibid.
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