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Acrid Black Smoke

Revisiting Blessed is the Flame in Insurrection and
Anti-politics

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Images:

Front cover: Left: Clandestine Photograph of Treblinka during the uprising take by Franciszek Z?becki. Right: Mpls 3rd Precinct ablaze during George Floyd uprising. Back Inner Cover: Upper: Burning Mpls cityscape during George Floyd uprising. Lower: Explosion in CNN headquarter,Atlanta, GA. Back Outer Cover: Overhead crowd shot of 2 police cars ablaze in front of City Hall, Philadelphia, PA

Preface

The purpose of this zine is to revisit a particularly influential piece of contemporary anarchist and nihilist writing in Blessed is the Flame by Serafinski, with a heavy focus on history, and apply some of the concepts explored to the uprisings of 2020. The book examines concentration camp resistance during the holocaust, including insurrections and sabotages carried out by those abducted, enslaved, and slaughtered by the nazi regime. Most, if not all of these rebellions “failed”, they did not lead to the liberation of the camps in which they occurred, if people managed to escape, most of the time they were recaptured and executed. Worse so, in some cases the nazis would execute all those involved, as well as many who were not, as a form of collective punishment. This was a situation in which there were no illusions of the situation in rebellious minds. Fighting over crumbs of bread for nazi entertainment, ribs poking through their paper thin skin, confined to a factory of death...they had no reason to have even a glimmer of hope that anyone would come rescue them. With their last bits of strength and free will they chose to rebel, but what for? The author uses the term jouissance to explain the fleeting moment of blissful enjoyment in the now that one has in acting, and applies this concept to resistance in a hopeless situation. The author draws an analogy of concentration camp resistance to the present day through an anarcho-nihilist analysis, with the catastrophes created by climate change, industrial civilization, economy, and politics. In the face of the all encompassing nature of these problems, the collective humanity is nothing less than completely and utterly fucked.

This zine first explores the insurrections of 2020 through a negative and anti-political framework, noting the autonomous affinity formations, lack of explicit demands, fight for survival, and generalized uncontrollability of them. It ties these concepts into rebellions

seen in nazi lagers¹, where in many cases, desperate Jews mounted liberatory campaigns alone in final acts of rebellion against domination. This section also touches on the use of modern technology mobilizing to be used to facilitate extermination at the time, alongside the most primitive technologies of domination. The same could be said today, along with firearms, tasers, sound cannons, and pepper spray, people are beaten with clubs, fists, and shields.

The next section touches on how fear and specifically fear of collective punishment play into how people view and participate in rebellions. It starts by examining the outside agitator and adventurist critiques typically levied against those courageous enough to materially fight back against domination, speaking on the history of them. Within both these tropes and the narrative of collective punishment lies the blaming of the oppressed rebel rather than forces of power that are doing the collective punishing. It further touches on several instances where Jewish rebellions were left without leftist accomplices because of fears of collective punishment and for the leftists own self preservation. Ultimately within these critiques lie unacknowledged personal fears and from that comes blame laced with reactionary betrayal.

The subsequent section addresses the ideas of futurity and the marxist myth of societal progression, countering with negative ideas. In many cases in the lagers, Jews were left alone to revolt for their lives or simply their dignity, while organized communists waited for the nonexistent perfect revolutionary moment and planned for future governance. It further goes on to discuss the difference between positive projects being defined by their relation to conventional moral frameworks and position within the progressive myth, and negative projects in which the justification lies in the opposition to dominant systems they seek to negate. This section finishes with a discussion of the docility bred by

¹ Lager: nazi concentration/death camp

funny that he will face the same conditions that he has forced on people, perhaps interacting with some of his fellow prisoners who I'm sure will be ecstatic at his presence, this is not something that anarchists or abolitionists should be happy about. I don't think prisons or police should exist and I won't justify either. It is the system trying to save itself, not a beacon of change or retribution or justice (whatever that is). Its disheartening, because this will likely have its intended effect and pacify the intensity of struggle that we saw over the past year, especially with covid restrictions easing and biden being president. Those who desire freedom only have one option in getting free and that is the total destruction of police and law. Grandiose goal, I know, but there was a time without both of those and hopefully soon there will be a time without them again. Now is a time for more intense street conflict on a larger scale, not shying away from it. It will forever be fuck the US until its burnt to the fucking ground.

Further Reading

Blessed is the Flame by Serafinski

Afropessimism by Frank B. Wilderson III

The Black Liberation Army & the Paradox of Political Engagement

against. They are not organizing for uprisings, their organizations exist only to feed their own social and career aspirations, as well as virtue signal their moral “goodness”. The left relishes in their own irrelevance, not realizing that it is autonomous individuals acting in anti-political, asymmetric formations that are proliferating insurrections and not their “organizing” by any means. The paternalism of their concepts of organizing should warrant active hostility, it is nothing but a different domination. However, images such as the 3rd precinct burning down gave people a new idea of what is possible. It sparked insurrectionary ideas and actions in the collective consciousness that far surpass anything that leftists can imagine, or even anarchists for that matter.

Final Words

While the past year has been inspiring, we should not be complacent with the spectacle of generalized insurrection coming to the US. Just as many of the lager rebellions failed in liberation, the insurrections of 2020 are nothing but an inspiration, a demonstration of possibilities in moments. The continued existence of the US, capital, and the police that protect them shows that there is still much to do. 2020 was the instance in which we learned that we can hurt the system, but it was nothing but a minor scratch in the overall destruction of the monster. In the coming years, may the police and their supporters look upon 2020 as a “good” year. Rest in power to all those murdered by police! S/O to all rebels against police and law! FUCK 12! FUCK AMERICA! BURN IT DOWN! BURN DOWN EVERY FUCKING POLICE STATION! EMPTY ALL THE PRISONS!

Afterword

Since it’s taken me a while to edit this, on 4/20/21 Derek Chauvin was found guilty of George Floyd’s murder. While it’s cosmically

future oriented thinking, putting emphasis on the inspiration to be drawn from rebellious acts in seemingly hopeless situations.

In the final section of this piece, the failures of left ideology are explored, both contemporarily as well as in the nazi lagers. It explains their irrelevance in the recent wave of insurrections as they straddle the space between protecting the petty bourgeoisie academic status that comes from minor embrace of the liberal left and waiting for their fabled revolution, rather than materially participating in active insurrection.

The lager rebellions are incredibly inspirational, much of what is typically taught about events such as the holocaust, US slavery/civil war, and even the insurrections of today are propaganda of the progressive myth of history. Populations upon which unimaginable atrocities are perpetrated upon are more often than not portrayed as docile and accepting of their conditions, playing into the myths of innocence and moral goodness. In the way that these things are taught there is typically some paternal military force that “liberates” those in confinement accompanied by some legal outcome. While in many cases this is a more complete end of such situations, this telling of history discounts or neglects the rebellions of the subjugated. These are more powerful expressions of human resilience than any military or paternalistic action. Within the face of hopeless situations, with no expectation of victory, fighting back simply because one can be satisfied with nothing less of themselves. Approaching the leviathan of civilization, the perceived absolute control it has over everything, how could one feel anything but the urge to destroy it in their bones, yet absolutely powerless to do so. No individual action will in any meaningful way harm the system, but they do provide little sparks in the minds of those who think similarly. It only takes one spark to light a fire under the right circumstances. Actual rebellion in the streets can actively inspire others to rebel. This is why images such as the 3rd precinct burning down are so important. It is the only time in many’s lives that there is seemingly a path being paved for a world

without police. There was no militaristic campaign waged against the Minneapolis Police, it was simply the uncontrollability of thousands of peoples fury and their desire for true freedom. The state is actively murdering people, actively letting them die of disease, forcing them out of shelter, actively protecting food as commodity. The state and all its collaborators provide nothing but a constant cycle of misery for the people who are unfortunate enough to be under its subjugation. In this seemingly hopeless situation, when people were faced with the decision of docility or hostility, they chose hostility in a spectacular fashion. Anarchism in action does not occur because everyone in the riot has read all of the texts and learned all the riot techniques, it happens when people reach the same conclusion about their situation, there is myself and there is my domination, and I am against my domination.

The generalized revolts of the summer of 2020 were awe inspiring, it was likely the largest redistribution of wealth in US history, it also attacked society on various levels (capital, police, media, etc.). After years of watching social movements form, flounder, and not a damn thing changing...this is seemingly different. While nothing “officially” has changed in terms of the system, this wave of insurrections demonstrated peoples capacity to absolutely destroy the illusion of order the state likes to project. The incomprehensibility of the insurrections lended to their power, there was nothing for the state to grasp at, nothing for the recuperative forces to hop onto, this was something that lay outside of their frameworks. Once things cooled off and got peaceful again, these forces were able to weasel their ways in and manipulate “Abolish the Police” to “Defund the Police”... which even that milquetoast rhetoric is too much. We must “Destroy the Police!”. That is the only thing that people have the capacity to do, even abolition is an appeal to law. Recuperative forces must actively be fought against in insurrectionary moments and made to know they are unwelcome. Going forward, there must be ways for these insurrections to maintain their teeth for extended periods. Hopefully, in the coming years

And What of The Left?

The police pose a material threat to people, particularly black people. The reality of the US is that the police are an occupying force that use monopolization of violence to enforce the colonization of this land and its evolutions. The police grew out of the slave catchers and cut their teeth in warfare in the labor wars, modernizing their armories and tactics in the drug wars. Leftists who call for unity against a “common” enemy are woefully naive in what they are asking for. To be a leftist in the modern day is to have ignored the history of the 20th century, doomed to repeat it, not out of ignorance, but out of some misguided sense of historical progress and tradition. The irrelevance and history of counter-revolution of various leftist sects is well documented. Here again the focus will be on examples from Blessed is the Flame. While Communists and political opponents of the nazi regime did comprise a large percentage of population in the lagers, there are multiple instances in which their unwillingness to act, out of self preservation, lead to others rebelling and dying without allies. A few of these instances are outlined in previous sections. A line that encompasses this notion well is “It speaks to the very nature of our domestication that we resist insofar as we think we can win”. This quote well describes the attitudes of leftists, back in the 40’s and today, that the capacity for resistance is proportional to the probability of the desired outcome. Traditionally, this is some kind of revolution and building some kind of “better” industrial production society. The odds are never in the rebels favor. Underground resistance organizations in the lagers and leftist orgs of today have a common problem of “organizing” for a revolution that will never come. The underground resistance organizations were organizing not for an uprising, but for their own survival, fantasizing of the ways they could control others in the future. In the modern day, leftists organizations are not interested in rebellions. They turn their noses up and scoff at those brave enough to directly oppose the systems they claim to be

position here being that, as Serafinski puts it, “positive projects are the means of surviving the order, negative projects are the means of destroying it completely”.

To finish this section with a poignant quote from the text about futurity in the lagers “the ongoing promise of futurity kept many docile in a system that ultimately produced two things, german wealth and corpses”. The brevity and power of this sentence speaks volumes, and a contemporary analogy to the US would not be an exaggeration. The promise of a future is a carrot on a stick that leads many to a docile state in even the most dire situations. There was no rational positive political project to liberate the lagers from the inside, just as there is no positive political project that will destroy the US or the police. When presented with a futile situation, does one remain docile or does one decide to fight? The decision to fight against an insurmountable system is not a rational political project aimed at progressing to a better future, it is a decision to do so in spite of the lack of that future. Within this decision is a choice to pursue an unknowable orthogonal⁴ future, to break not just the perceived linearity of time, but break the dimensionality of that time, it’s simply a yes or no. In the text there is a story about a rebellion spurred by a woman whose name has been confused by the oral tradition, who shot an SS guard to death inside a woman’s dressing room. This action became mythos in the camp and also inspired a later rebellion the same day. It also reminded those enslaved that the SS were mortal. What happened at the 3rd precinct reminds us it was just a building. Watching police drop to the ground after a brick strikes them in the head reminds us they are mortal.

⁴ Orthogonal: Perpendicular; a space independent of another

the acrid black smoke of the infrastructure of domination will become a more frequent sight to look upon in the sky.

Blessed is the Flame is a few years old at this point and revisiting it in modern context would be interesting. This piece is not intended to be a full critique and analysis of Blessed is the Flame, it is just meant to flesh out some connections from the text to the current moment. With that being said, this piece is not trying to minimize the atrocities of the holocaust, nor embellish the current conditions that the average person in the western world experiences. The holocaust was a unique cruelty in the modern age because of the utilization of cutting edge industrial technology to orchestrate planned mass death. The continued anti-blackness and colonialism perpetuated by the US are inspirations for the cruelties of the holocaust and are disgusting atrocities in and of themselves. This is also not meant to be an all encompassing critique of the US, that would take a much more long form piece (i.e. some things might be missing). For brevity’s sake, the white supremacist colonial cis-heteropatriarchal system of oppression dominant in the US will be referred to as “ the system” in this piece, unless otherwise distinguished. The connections here to be emphasized are the hopelessness of the situations and not a direct comparison of the cruelties.

Contemporary Anti-Politics and Insurrection

Facing a global disease pandemic unlike any other in the past 100 years, the forces of domination were originally confused about what to do in 2020. In an effort to stop spreading COVID-19, initially many cities and towns stopped arresting people for minor offenses in efforts to avoid what could become mass death events occurring from packing desperate people into jails unfit to correctly implement pandemic protocols. There were also calls to and action on active decarceration of people to reduce

population density in prisons, again to attempt to implement correct pandemic protocols in the already overcrowded prison system. It is unclear when the system decided to return to the heartless norm of carceral functioning, but the pandemic protocols did not last for long. On May 25th, police officer Derek Chauvin joyfully choked George Floyd to death with his knee in Minneapolis, MN. The state once again murdered a black person, this time the justification was Floyd using an allegedly fake check for \$20 at a grocery store. In a culmination of unpredictable reaction, pandemic anxiety, and pure rage towards a system that continues to demonstrate its callous anti-blackness, Minneapolis erupted in days of unrest. Following George Floyd's murder, people across the US continued to exact their vengeance, furious at the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and Rayshard Brooks, among many others. Seemingly every city in the US erupted into immense rioting and looting. Several moments from these riots stand out, the most prominent being the burning down of the Minneapolis PD 3rd precinct, but also the siege of CNN HQ by rebels in Atlanta, and the overhead footage of burning police cars at city hall in Philadelphia come to mind immediately. These rebellions were continual throughout much of the latter half of 2020, with Portland, OR rioting for 100+ nights straight, an Autonomous Zone being established in Seattle, as well as one in Philadelphia, rebellions in Kenosha, WI, Chicago, and Lancaster, Pa as police continued to murder people. The most recent riots at the time of this writing have been those in Philadelphia and cities in solidarity against the murder of Walter Wallace Jr. by Philadelphia PD.

One striking element of the recent black-led insurrection wave was its anti-political nature. The people who were out there fighting back against forces of domination were doing so not in adherence to some political ideology or platform, but in negation of one. This is not to say that people did not have individual political ideologies, however the cohesive force of these insurrections was pure

ferent future within the context of existing in the same linear time as the current system. As the marxist theology states, the progression of production society is from primitive forms, to feudalism, through capitalism, then to socialism and communism. The political position does not require one to be at war with the existent, it only requires one to desire to conserve and reform it. Positive projects appeal to the respectability politics maintained by the status quo in order to take up a position of opposition to the system that demonstrates an illusion of choice in the matter. People participate in positive projects to make the status quo more livable, not to destroy the status quo. As put in *Blessed is the Flame*, there is a “magnetic compulsion to identify ourselves positively in society”, the text gives the examples of food not bombs, music, and community organizing as examples of positive projects that play into respectability politics on the terms of the status quo. Within this positive identification of oneself in the context of also being in opposition to domination, one plays into the system of morality defined by the very system itself. Food Not Bombs, for example, justifies its anarchism by saying something akin to “anarchists don’t want to just destroy, we give food to the hungry, we are good people”. This plays into a need to justify anarchism within the context of mainstream moral “goodness” and through doing so weakens an anarchistic practice of mutual aid through a food distribution that is more similar to charity than the mutual aid it strives to be. The lacking part is the mutual sustenance and relationships that propagate struggle against domination.³ The positive political views a need for moral justification of the positivity of the project, in reality boosting the positivists activist credentials through the game of clout. The negative position has no need for justification any further than the system of dominations existence. The differences in

³ This is not to say that people shouldn’t help others survive if that’s what they want to do, however, people should be authentic and realistic about what their projects and goals are. Is it mutual? Is it aid? What are the purposes of a project? What are the reasonings behind a project.

camps saying they were focused on “political fantasizing and planning future governments” while those who acted in spontaneous or “premature” insurrections were focused on “saving lives and staging resistance”. The case for action in the now can be summed up in the phrase “there is no need to know what is happening tomorrow to destroy a today that makes you bleed”. Herein lies the conflict between political positions and fighting against the system of civilization, politics as a whole is a positive project, building and planning for a future within some anthropocentric structure that exists or one hopes to exist. A more negative project accepts the uncontrallability of the future, throwing this notion by the way-side. In the insurrection, the only time that exists is the liberatory space of the now. The question becomes how does one act to liberate oneself in the immediacy? In the insurrectionary moment time both ceases and moves a million miles an hour, every moment is a lifetime, while also being precious in the necessity for immediate action. Within these moments lie the ability to rupture futurity itself, that is the futurity all but guaranteed by the status quo. The seemingly most effective means at combating that future are the complete ruptures seen in generalized insurrections. In these circumstances, the financial future is attacked by the looting and redistribution of goods and money en masse. The future of the police state is attacked through decentralized conflict with the police and the veil of control they presumably have on social situations. The police being a physical manifestation of the law, this is an attack on legality itself and thus the futurity of the state.

Systems of repression have worked such that they mobilize to protect the future desired by those in power. Whether that is a future dominated by an aryan race at the expense of “undesirables” or the ideological forefather of that in the white supremacist colonial system of the US. In defense of that future, the entire lineage of violence these systems are built upon will be used against those who wish to negate it. That is why the more desirable fantasy is the one of the positive project, in which people are planning for a dif-

negativity towards the totality of the US by black people fighting for their literal lives and those in affinity with that fight. This negativity is an active force that seeks the absolute destruction of the system, in contrast with a positivity that aims to change the system (or at least hopes to). Within riotous moments there were massive redistributions of wealth, direct combat with the police, even momentary possibilities of liberation. The insurrections were not a body the state could negotiate with, they were an amorphous collective lashing out, to which the state had 2 options, crush with massive force or hopelessly throw concessions to the public until the anger has subsided. There are no formal declarations to the end of a riotous moment, in one instance the destruction of all we’ve ever known radiates through the streets and in the next, life goes on amongst the broken glass, glimmering in the sunlight like the first snow flurries of winter. Anecdotally, to paraphrase a common refrain heard, “people have tried sit-ins, peaceful protest, boycotts, petitioning, legislation, training, funding, yet the police stay killing black people in the US and getting away with it...what options are left besides riot?” Within this sentiment exists the sobering reality that there is not a positive project that will stop the United States from murdering black people, or operating prisons, or subjecting people to the existential punishment of poverty. These systems require absolute destruction, pulling them up by the root so not a remnant is left, in order to end them.

The dynamics of anti-political rebellion brings to mind 2 uprisings highlighted in *Blessed is the Flame*, those of Sobibor and Treblinka. Philip Bialowitz wrote of Sobibor “... I am witnessing the tools of the modern age, trains, assembly lines, and gas engines to efficiently murder thousands of people on any given day. And yet, how new is this really? The primitive whips used by the Germans are no different from those used by brutal slave masters for thousands of years”. This quote wraps up well a core concept of this piece, namely how intertwined the systems we struggle against today are with those they owe their brutal lineage to. It also high-

lights the use of the most advanced technology of the industrial age as tools of domination being used along the oldest tools of domination. The all encompassing lineage of domination has only expanded its capacity for violence and surveillance in an attempt to control more of our lives as time progresses.

This piece will not go into great detail about the specifics of the uprisings for brevities sake. The Sobibor uprising was a planned uprising involving ~650 inmates. 365 people tried to escape, of those 185 died by either gunfire or landmines surrounding the camp. Everyone who remained in the camp was killed. In the following 10 days, 107 liberated prisoners were recaptured and murdered. About 40 to 60 people survived the Sobibor extermination camp and the end of the war. Following the uprising, Jewish slaves were brought from Treblinka to dismantle the camp. They demolished most of the buildings and planted them over with pine trees. The Jewish slaves were subsequently shot. This, however, marked the end of the Sobibor extermination camp. Another such uprising was that at Treblinka, where a worker could expect to live 1 to 2 weeks. The uprising at Treblinka was also planned. Prisoners had gained access to the armory and engage in armed combat with their overseers, however this happened prematurely before the phone lines could be cut and everyone could be armed. Arson was the method of choice for structure destruction. Richard Glazer, an escapee that survived the war, wrote of that night "The fiery glow that poured forth over Treblinka that night had a different color...than the one of all previous nights". Estimates of 150 to 600 prisoners escaped, where ultimately 52 survived the war.

In the cases of the Sobibor and Treblinka uprisings, they were clandestinely planned and executed. These acts were not political acts, these were acts of survival. They were an acknowledgment that there was no hope for savior, with all the capacity the prisoners had, they needed to fight back if themselves or anyone from the camps were to have a chance to survive, to tell the stories of the horrors they had witnessed. These uprisings were messy, they were

ences of those who talk and those who act, and the possibilities that lie within action.

Applying this collective punishment critique to the modern day concentration camps that are prisons, themselves a continuation of the chattel slavery that inspired Hitler, its odd that the adventurism/collective punishment critique is not typically levied against prison rebels. It should be noted that prisoners today face similar conditions to those in nazi concentration camps. That would be the conclusion to thinking about prison rebellion with the same logic. After a large scale prison rebellion, collective punishment can certainly be expected. The rebels, who know this and have weighed that reality, still opt to rebel. They realize that the actions that they take will have consequences, but they see action as the most meaningful response to their situation. Are these rebellions seen as other to rebellions on the outside? Are they neglected by the people who typically are making this adventurist/collective punishment critique?

Orthogonal Futures of the Now

Positive illusions of the future continue to be an obstruction to liberation. The myth that as linear time progresses, society progresses to be more equitable, easy to live in, i.e. better, is pervasive in society writ large, as well as in utopian left thinking. Within this notion lies a sense of hope that motivates organizations to hold the rally or the leftist to vote for the democrat, the idea that they will be on the right side of history in a future that will eventually come to pass. The rejection of this futurity is present in many contemporary anarchist critiques and calls to action. The notion that nothing is guaranteed and the only semblance of time one has any ability to act in is the now is a powerful notion in inspiring people to act. In *Blessed is the Flame*, the author touches on the unwillingness to act by the communist underground orgs in the

realities, a spontaneous lager rebellion was enacted in Sachsenhausen by Jewish communists who caught wind of their imminent transportation to the gas chambers. They appealed to the communist leaders of a resistance organization with a plan for open revolt and an appeal for weapons. The communists, citing fear of collective punishment, let their supposed comrades fight back alone, perishing empty handed, striking back at the nazis with all they had, their bare fists. Time and time again this narrative comes up of desperate people looking at others who proclaim to be their comrades, only to be met with apprehension and fear. Another example from Auschwitz, where a detail of mostly Jews who operated the crematoriums, the Sonderkommando, were spurred to action by the ongoing liquidation of Hungarian Jews. Their detail was known for its frequent turn over as well. The Sonderkommando approached the resistance organization, the Fighting Group, about planning a revolt, but in a familiar rebuke were met with reluctance and told "the time was not ripe for revolt". The reluctance may have been due to the fact that the Fighting Group was not in any immediate danger. The Sonderkommando concluded that they stood alone, and although the Fighting Group did not provide arms, they did provide a small amount of explosives. On the day of the revolt, the Sonderkommando attacked their SS overseers in Crematorium IV using hammers, axes, stones, and handmade grenades. Eventually, they blew up a crematorium. Crematorium II also was attacked, a guard was shoved into an oven, the building lit on fire, and SS men attacked. People were also able to momentarily escape the camp. Eventually, everyone who participated in the revolt was executed, as well as 200 additional people accused of participation in some degree. This action was took near the end of the war, so the absolute effect of this rebellion can not really be gauged, but it was certainly more effectual than preparing for an uprising that would never come, as the Fighting Group did. The instances of rebellion at Sachsenhausen and Auschwitz demonstrate the differ-

not carried out by experts, they were carried out by people who saw these revolts as their only chance at survival. If they weren't to survive, at least they may take some nazi's with them. To gauge the success of these uprisings is difficult, a lot of the rebels and others were killed. However, the end of Sobibor as an extermination camp was a victory, as was every one that escaped and experienced even momentary liberation, and even more so those who survived to the end of the war. These revolts were only possible because some were brave enough to act in the face of hopelessness against an absolutely heinous system of domination. The fiery night sky over Treblinka and watching the 3rd precinct being set ablaze demonstrate the beauty in possibility, if people dare try to succeed.

What distinguishes between the passivity of everyday and active rebellions? Blessed is the Flame talks of Lauren Berlants work on the concept of "cruel optimisms", the idea that people, even when facing unimaginable horrors, would rather live governed by the "well" structured options set before them, out of some misguided sense of hope that eventually the progressive myth of history will be realized. This, for many, is easier to conceive of than that they may have to be the one to act themselves to achieve their desires...and they may fail. To rebel in situations such as the holocaust or in the face of police occupation is to acknowledge the true seriousness of the situation one is in, to dissolve these cruel optimisms, and understand that no structure will save or protect you, there is you, the people around you, and the choices you make. Accepting the seriousness of a situation and acting in accordance to that seriousness allows for the possibility of liberation, if only momentary. It is in these moments that the composure of an individual is evident, do they talk the talk as well as walk the walk.

The US rebellions of 2020 were insurrections proliferated by units of affinity. The affinities in these insurrections are frequently not political (however, in some cases they may be), but more often than not seem based on peoples relationships and goals. Affinity in this instance is a simple definition of the word, namely sharing

a commonality of thought with others, whether that be goals, desires, friendship, etc. People may roll up to a thing with their friends having the intentions of being a presence, or looting, or fighting the police, or this or that, these are pre-existing networks of affinity that participated in these insurrections. Other affinity formations are the goal oriented ones that happen in a moment. When people are fighting the police to get them off the block, they are not taking a democratic survey of everyone there to determine who is down to throw a rock or not. There simply are the people who are throwing rocks, together, in momentary affinity with each other to accomplish this specific goal. This obvious point is stated to undermine notions of preconceived or orchestrated attack that have been dominant in public discussion, these affinity formations are not the product of some form of organized political agitation, but micro-scale pre-existing formations that freely come together and apart incoherently in specific moments. These moments accounted for some of the most beautiful interactions of the insurrections, whether it was people congratulating strangers for beaming cops in the head with cement pieces, people sharing projectiles with strangers, strangers jacking open the roll down of the pharmacy together, breaking windows to get into the store, liquidating an entire store onto the sidewalk, or letting people know what stores were open so car caravans could make their way there. These momentary affinities not only lend oxygen to the fire of insurrection, but these formations build a communal knowledge of rebellion in the streets that is unbreakable by infiltration.

The anti-political nature of these insurrections is exemplified by an explicit lack of demands or appeals to authority within them. That is not to say individuals within the rebellions do not try to negotiate or make demands in bad faith, but ultimately the state can not negotiate with chaos. The chaos of the insurrection is what gives our desires power. The simultaneous asymmetric attacks on the system that is the riot undermines a central operating principle of the state in maintaining the order of the system, that of central-

mitted by her murderers being a stray bullet in the wall that put her neighbors in danger. The design of the laws of the US justified these murders because anti-blackness is fundamental to them, they are not anomalies in the law, but explicitly how the law is meant to function. Many live under the assumption that if they behave, that if they obey the laws of the US, that they can steer clear of these cruelties. For black people in the US, this is simply not an option, the murders of Tamir and Breonna, among many others shows this. It should be noted that the entrenched cruelty foundational to the US can be waged against anyone whose existence or actions deviate from that codified by the norms of white civility. This is exemplified in the way that white supremacists are able to murder rebels in the street and get away with their lives. Resistance to white supremacy and colonial power is always a life or death issue. Extra-legal white supremacist murderers are functionaries of the philosophy of the US, not deviant from it. They are more often than not peaceably apprehended by police, with rounds upon rounds of extra ammunition, their weapons still strapped to their bodies. They are even taken to Burger King on their ways to jail or are able to make their 2 million dollar bail because of the coalescence of support by the forces of white supremacy. The police and these murderers are 2 wings of the same ideology, they are not adversaries, and thus the cruelties of the system are not waged upon them. While fear of these forces is understandable, resistance to the system is an urgent issue and this fear should not be reason for hesitation and inaction, but intuitive planning in the ways one resists. At the very least it is courageous to actively resist the institutions of violence that govern our lives, the lineage of violence that upholds domination will not be brought down by good vibes and intentions.

Reiterating the inspiration Hitler took from the US, the lagers were designed explicitly to “shatter the adversaries capacity to resist”, where Jews were experimented upon to create a sterile race of animal like creatures solely adapted for work. In the face of these

nazis and the brutality that they exhibited toward the enslaved was designed to make them lose all hope and depersonify them, in many cases it did. In the loss of hope, however, many discovered a freedom. If they were completely and utterly fucked, there was no escape from the death camps, the only certainty was misery and pain, than why not rebel, if not for the mere satisfaction of the look on a nazi's face when they saw the last bit of free will of the imprisoned was pure hostility towards their oppressors.

For those of us living in the shadows of colonization and capital the illusion of safety for some is predicated on the institutional domination and mass death of others. The use of extraordinary violence to maintain this illusion is built into the philosophy of civilization. The subjugation intended by violent oppression is a commonality among regimes of domination. A particularly striking anecdote exemplifying this comes from Elie Wiesel, a survivor of Buchenwald and Auschwitz. In Buchenwald, Elie listened as his father was beat to death by nazis, his father crying out for him. Elie was unable to mutter a word, lest he suffer the same fate. This brings to thought the many, mostly black men, the US has watched be murdered by police, crying out for their loved ones. The cruelty of those who can do that can not be overstated. This cruelty is intended to breed a desired response in populations...fear. These cruelties are designed into systems such that resistance to the dominant order illicit a fear response in a dominated population. However, by explicit design, these cruelties are not relegated to just those who resist dominant systems actively, they are also relegated to those whose very existences were explicitly excluded from the benefits of white civil society by the mythos upon which it is constructed. This is evident through the murders of Tamir Rice, a 12 year old child who was legally murdered by police for playing in a park or Breonna Taylor who was legally murdered by the police in a botched raid, as she was asleep, the only crime² com-

² What is meant by "crime" in this instance is crime as defined by law.

ization of resources and force that allow for the illusion of the security of the state to be preserved. As the police themselves have stated in many cities, they can handle one 10000 person protest, but not 10 1000 person protests. Thus, the riot is not some apolitical desire to destroy for destructions sake, but a strategic manifestation of the fact that absolute destruction is the most meaningful response that can be mustered against the all encompassing systems of domination. To paraphrase Bakunin, "destruction is a creative passion", within the void of a blank canvas one can imagine infinite possibilities. The lagers were not liberated by reform, appeals to the SS's humanity, petition, peaceful protest. They were liberated by people dedicated to the destruction of the nazi regime. There are many comparisons of the US government being akin to the nazi regime in the ways that they murder and incarcerate those deemed undesirable by the underlying national philosophy. What people are doing now is exactly what they would have been doing in the 1930's and 40's.

The liberal voices who advocate defunding, more funding, more training, etc. have been successful at recuperating messaging around the more peaceable space on the edges of the insurrections, but these voices have not been the dominate voices, just the ones given the majority of mainstream attention. The recuperative efforts did not end the riots, but became louder voices after they had burned out. How can milquetoast calls for reform compete with the image of the 3rd precinct being burnt to the ground? How does one recuperate that? This is the point of a decentralized anti-political insurrection... they can not. Try as they might, one can not logically work within the system to burn down every police station and loot every target. That's why there has been so much effort put into snitch jacketting, othering, and moralizing how people participate in these insurrections. The burning down of the 3rd precinct, the now ritualistic burning of police cars, these are symbols in our collective consciousness that recuperative forces can never take away. These are hopeful symbols,

not because they will aid in the progression of society towards something better, but because in the acrid black smoke of these acts of symbolic destruction liberatory possibility demonstrated. There is nothing stopping every precinct from being the 3rd side from our collective desire to do so.

Fear & Collective Punishment

There is an interesting connection to be made between the collective punishment experienced in the lagers and the collective punishment warned about in the modern day leftist critique of “adventurists” and “outside agitators” that is used to paint escalatory rebels as other to a movement or to collective goals. The crux of this critique is that one will get others hurt if one decides to rebel too “aggressively”. This conclusion, is not only naive on the part of those levying the criticism, but it also does not come from a place of tactical understanding or genuine wisdom, it is a fear response. The argument of “collective punishment” as a consequence for “outside agitators” being “adventurists” is an overall harmful argument at best, taking away power from those courageous enough to directly confront the dominant forces that stand in the way of collective liberation. Those making this critique eschew radical solidarity to tie themselves in a Gordian knot of pseudo-radicalism to side with domination. There is nothing wrong with experiencing fear, however that is a personal response one must deal with themselves and not project their fears onto others. Not only is it a projection of fear and a failing of solidarity, it plays into the historically racist trope of the “outside agitator”, as well as the privileged perception that the police will not hurt people if they are not doing anything “wrong”. Both of these gut-reaction ideas are ridiculous. The outside agitator trope was used to disempower and delegitimize organic black resistance in the southern US in the 60’s by casting blame on northern white radicals instigating and driving

protests. The wrongfulness of this concept should not need to be explained, however, the problem with perpetuating this concept is the erasure of people rebelling in any circumstance. Whether it is spontaneous rebellion over the police killing of another black person, a planned targeted attack, or a more rowdy break off of a “peaceful” march, this concept homogenizes and erases people participating in resistance because of assumptions that are made to perpetuate the trope. The “adventurist” trope is similar, but is usually used by communists to critique anarchistic action from a place of paternalism and their lack of control over a situation, separating rebels into “good” and “bad” and homogenizing both categories. Again, the wrongfulness of “the police won’t hurt us unless we’re bad” should not have to be explained, but it’s something that gets perpetuated EVEN at the protest against police brutality. The police can act as cruelly as they desire and murder people with near impunity, they don’t need an excuse to use violence, their entire existence is to perpetuate violence.

While on the surface level collective punishment might seem blame worthy, drawing comparison to the lagers, nazis would subject those in the camps to all kinds of atrocities and torture. While one may assign blame to rebels due to the perceived action/consequence dynamic between collective punishment and rebellion, this is both a reactionary and reductivist view. It neglects to take into account the material reality people were facing in the camps. Upon entry people deemed not fit to work were systematically exterminated using the peak of modern industrial technology. Those left alive only heard whispers of what happened in the showers, but as they were digging mass graves, sifting through piles of teeth for valuable metals, and collecting human hair for pillow stuffing they knew what fate they had in store. There were no illusions, no reason to believe that they would escape the all encompassing reality that was the hell of concentration camp life. They never knew whether or not they would survive for another day, let alone see their friends and family again. The perceived total control of the