



OUT PAST DARK

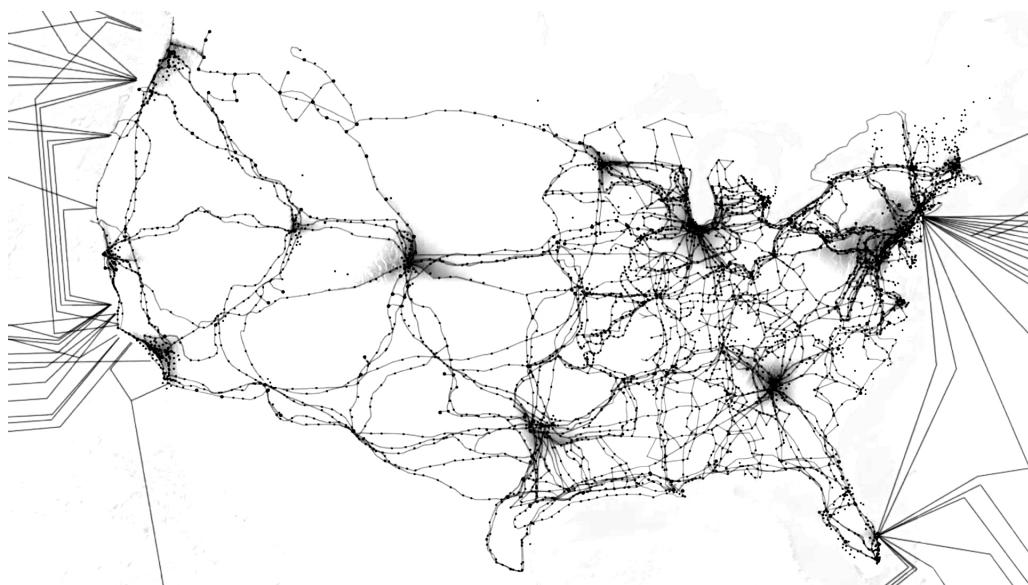
The State Responds to Revolt With Curfews and Surveillance

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New Oakland Mayor, Libby Schaaf has drawn scorn from liberals and civil-libertarians for her implementation of a “protest curfew” in Downtown Oakland. The curfew comes after the mayor bowed to pressure from Downtown businesses and developers after several months of riots. But the curfew is only part of a new wave of repression: from more FBI agents coming to town, the continuation of the Domain Awareness Center (DAC), to the increasing policing of everyday life. While those on the right howl for blood as young people continue to take the streets in the face of evictions, low-paying jobs, and continued racist police terror, those on the Left are just as quick to divide the “good protesters” from “the bad ones.”

pels us all towards disaster. And while these attacks are directed against the poor and the working-class more broadly, people of color by and large are hit the hardest.

In the face of the collapse of capitalist civilization, over the last few years in the Bay Area resistance has been brewing. From occupied universities to blocked freeways, and from massive assemblies in plazas to wildcat strikes and blocked ports. It is not only the riots that those in power want to smash, but also the collective confidence that grows from within a generation of young people who are faced with no future and have begun to get organized and strike back.



Gammon writes, “[I]n Oakland, at least, much of the vandalism in the past several years has been perpetrated by white so-called anarchists who are in no way victims of oppression.” Those taking militant action in the street have been black, brown, white, Asian, and a collection of other identities. Gammon seeks to play on racial tensions and fear of the revolutionary anarchist as a way to further his politics. One thing is clear: he wants to stop people – especially black and brown people – from taking militant action in the Bay Area.

For liberals like Gammon, the curfew went too far; but only because it appeared to trample the ‘democratic rights’ of everyday Americans. But for Gammon, the target of repression is the same as those on the right and in the government: they want to smash everyone who is causing disruption in the streets.

Gammon tries to obscure the dialog by labeling all of these people “white anarchists,” which falls in line with what is being said by cops and non-profits. What is most ironic about all of Gammon’s comments is that ultimately those most susceptible to this line of thinking are upper-middle class white liberals themselves. Anyone that has been on the streets during the riots knows that those fighting the police, looting corporate stores, and blocking freeways have been a diverse group of largely young people. Whether liberal commentators like Gammon realize this is beside the point; his goal is to drive a wedge in the resistance; to defang the revolt and remove people from the streets. Gammon, and others like him believe that there are structural problems within capitalism, but that the system itself should be saved and the angry mobs be moved from the streets into the voting booth.

We completely disagree. The political, economic, and ecological contradictions in this system are so huge; we see the only solution is its complete destruction and the creation of a new way life. Across the Bay Area, people are working more hours than ever for less and less money. Meanwhile, the cost of rent and housing continues to go up while wages stagnate. Homelessness rises, public housing is destroyed and privatized, and tens of thousands are driven from their homes. In the streets, police continue to shoot people dead with impunity, while more people are incarcerated than ever before, and the government tracks our every move through email, surveillance, and cell phones. At the same time, the ecological situation grows worse and worse and pro-

Out Past Dark

As autumn went on, the reign of social peace went generally unbroken in the streets of Oakland. That social peace is not that of real peace, but that of *everything happening the way its supposed to*, according to the logic of capital and white supremacy. But as November came, tension began to fill the air. A grand jury had been convened in Missouri to decide whether or not to indict Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson for the murder of Mike Brown. No one knew when the decision would be announced, but everyone knew that something would happen when it did. As the days passed, flyers were passed out, stickers placed on every street pole, posters wheatpasted to walls and benches, murmurs shared between friends and acquaintances: everyone knew where to be when it happened.

And when it did, it certainly lived up to people’s expectations: thousands converged in downtown, blocking highways, attacking banks, looting a grocery store, and fighting with the police. And people instinctively expected to return the next night, and the next, and so on. Some people utilized social media such as Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter to spread the word of where people would meet the next day (if it changed) and provide live updates to those joining after things got moving.

The reliance on social media as a tool of outreach has been emphasized since at least the Arab Spring in 2011, if not earlier. And during moments of revolt like the one experienced here in the Bay Area as 2014 came to a close, it can certainly be a powerful tool of spreading information quickly when there is no time to print and circulate propaganda.

Fast forward a few months, in the last week of April, lots of plans had been announced for May 1st, International Workers Day. But only days before, an image began circulation on Instagram advertising a night demonstration in solidarity with Baltimore. In fifteen minutes, it had been shared just as many times, which only multiplied as days passed. And we all know the end result: several hundred took the streets, ending the night with demolished banks and luxury car dealerships, and a long trail of graffiti.

FBI to Work with OPD

Just weeks afterwards, it was quietly announced that the FBI would be seeking to establish a joint workspace in OPD's headquarters on 7th St. This workspace would involve installing new computers and DSL cables, which includes access to the FBI's intranet, and advanced encryption capabilities. The creation of the workspace is pitched as part of the Safe Streets initiative, a campaign that has seen the FBI team up with local officers in raids across the East Bay for the past few years, all in the name of fighting violent crime. However, in this particular project, the FBI will be bringing their social network analysis skills to track people they might deem to be threats.

Many people have previously denounced the participation of large tech companies like Facebook, Google, or Yahoo in the facilitation of displacement and development, but this usually focuses on their employees entering the housing market of particular neighborhoods. On the other hand, as more and more people connect themselves to social media, often owned by these same companies (Instagram is owned by Facebook, YouTube by Google, Tumblr by Yahoo, etc.) it allows law enforcement to carry out policing operations far more easily, which also paves the way for the gentrification that we see all around us in the Bay Area. Not only does your Facebook friend list represent a catalog of your connections, there are algorithms in place to figure out who you interact with most often and who you are merely acquaintances with. Google has integrated email, file-sharing, internet searches, in addition to an entire web browser, to say nothing of YouTube or its other assets. Put simply: while certainly OPD had dedicated some personnel to social networking beforehand, this will bolster their ability to track people in an age where we make it so easy for them to do so.

The DAC that Wouldn't Die

In Spring 2014, hundreds rallied against the expansion of the Domain Awareness Center, which aimed to centralize the city's surveillance infrastructure in coordination with the Department of Homeland Security. While a number of disruptions, both inside City Hall chambers as well as in the streets, prevented most of this expansion, the DAC remains in operation at the Port of Oakland as well as connecting the city's highway cameras. One year later, certain privacy activists have collaborated with the city in order to create a privacy policy, which is

protests following the murder of Oscar Grant. Similar documents have also shown a similar situation during the Occupy movement, with FBI and local police using a network of informants.

The move to enact the curfew also mirrors attempts made by other cities to clamp down on unrest, such as Ferguson and Baltimore, who have also brought in National Guard troops to try and contain those taking the streets. Liberals see the curfew as only a "bad law" that is illegal; in reality it is part of a nationwide crackdown against all potential insurgency against the State.

This crackdown in Oakland is also not limited to the protest curfew, but also into other aspects of everyday life. From bans on BBQs at Lake Merritt to the police checking of IDs and bags at City Council meetings in the wake of protests against gentrification that shut down the proceedings, the city is attempting to control and monitor crowds of people in as many ways as possible. Several days before the #SayHerName protests in Oakland in which the protest curfew was unveiled, a massive police build up was seen around 14th and Broadway on Malcolm X's birthday. Circling a vacant plaza were undercover cars, police vans, and motorcycle cops. We believe that due to police receiving old reports of planned marches in the Downtown, they were in fact ready to start the curfew then and there – just no one showed up. It appears, that such a plan had been in the works some time.

The Protest of Politics

Before the curfew was in effect, right-wing columnists in the *San Francisco Chronicle* were calling for bans on night-time protests. This was the voice of the rich; those that owned property and who wanted the poor and the rabble to return to their slums and be driven off of the streets. After the curfew was passed however, Robert Gammon, editor and chief of the *East Bay Express*, decried the curfew as an attack on the free speech and assembly against the people of Oakland. However, Gammon went on to make one key point: "In this case, Schaaf's ban is designed to stop acts of vandalism perpetrated by small groups during large protests at night in Oakland. But the problem is: The protest ban — like curfews, stop-and-frisk, and surveillance — also tramples on the civil rights of far more people than it targets." Gammon goes on to further pin-point who "the target" is. In *The Politics of Protests*,

Oakland police tactics and formations may change, but in the end, the goal is the same: repression by any means necessary.

Protest Curfew

According to the Mayor, the protest curfew is an attempt to stop “violence” and “vandalism.” While these buzzwords often attract the sympathies of people flipping on the nightly news for 5 minutes, in reality the crackdown has nothing to do with ending any sort of violence, (that of racist police, prisons, evictions, homelessness, poverty, and displacement), but everything to do with making Oakland safe for development. After months of massive riots, freeway shutdowns, school walkouts, looting of stores, attacks on banks, and demonstrations that shut down everything for hours – corporations that are looking to make billions in Oakland are putting pressure on those in power to reign in those on the streets. The government also sees the waves of black and brown youth on the streets, along with those of various racial backgrounds, and grows afraid.

The protest curfew has not been at all popular; and has been met with numerous protests and more are planned. But after the first night of marching, police had changed their strategy. They now simply marched with those in the street; a “mobile kettle,” as some called it. Police also deployed the use of CS gas in an attempt to clear demonstrators. Through loud speakers the police proclaimed that as long as people were “non-violent” (as they in turn used violence against them) they could stay in the street. In the end, all of these actions attempt to pacify people in the streets, turn demonstrations into simple parades that contain and manage anger, and moreover, divide the “good” protesters from the “bad” ones.

In many ways, the crackdown against the Black Lives Matter protests in Oakland are similar to the crack-down against the Occupy movement – in that it is being coordinated with the help of the FBI and Homeland Security. For instance, the national “sweeping of the camps” was organized by DHS and the Obama Administration, and coordinated through the FBI and local law enforcement. We can be sure that similar strategies are being employed now as well. These networks of repression are also nothing new. In the past months, it has also come forward that police and FBI worked closely during the initial wave of

being voted on at the same time as this FBI buildout. This privacy policy will massage the consciousness of citizens while the DAC remains in operation and expands in the future.

While the DAC which was billed as an anti-terrorism project, officials repeatedly stated their intention to use it against demonstrations. And while the so-called privacy policy is supposed to prevent peaceful protests from being monitored, demonstrations that disrupt the flows of capital will still fall under the jurisdiction of the DAC, assuming it follows its own rules. It would be predictable that the new joint workspace with the FBI will follow the same trajectory: presented as a crackdown on violent crime, it can just as easily be utilized against those rebelling in the streets. In fact, the FBI has used such pretenses to surveil revolts as far back as 2009 after Oscar Grant was shot, and again during the Occupy movement. More recently, this past winter, law enforcement operated out of fusion centers (centers for the collaboration between local, state and federal law enforcement agencies) to monitor and repress Black Lives Matter actions. This was primarily done through social media.

As with the Domain Awareness Center, activists and other concerned citizens will likely protest the use of this new workspace against what would be considered lawful first amendment activities. But all this serves to do is provide further legitimacy for using it against unlawful activities, which is the core of any rebellion. Even against violent crimes like homicides—which we surely wish to stop—it will only funnel more people into the prison industrial complex. In short, more state repression won’t solve the social ills brought on by a racist, capitalist society.

Opposition to the latest developments of repression can be as varied as the repression itself, but we would like to offer some simple remedies. In a world that is increasingly engulfed by the digital realm, and as law enforcement increasingly relies on that, we should be working to break away from social media. Actions and demonstrations should not be organized through the internet, in fact we should be very careful using social media at all if we don’t wish to do away with it all together. Ultimately, our project is the destruction of the social order: the death of capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and the state. The social order is sure to resist this project, let us not make it easy.

Always Reforming, Never Reformed

On Thursday, May 21st, police pushed a Black Lives Matter demonstration at 14th and Broadway onto the sidewalk and threatened participants with arrest. After being moved onto the sidewalk, the march continued toward the Oakland Police Department and then returned to the plaza. The next day, the Mayor's Office released documents that showed that a nighttime protest curfew on demonstrations was in effect. The *East Bay Express* wrote: "In an interview today, Mayor Libby Schaaf acknowledged that she ordered the prohibition on nighttime street marches in Oakland. However, she argued that it was a not new city law, but rather a reinterpretation of an existing one....Under the mayor's new tactic, OPD will block demonstrators from marching in the streets after dark, and marchers will only be allowed on sidewalks." According to an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the push for restricting street demonstrations came from large downtown Oakland businesses, which were angry after rioters attacked property on May Day as night fell. For the rich, the halls of power were always open. For the poor, angry over foreclosures, failing schools, polluted air and water, low paying jobs, and a brutal police force: "let them eat cake."

Liberals declared the move illegal, including Rachel Lederman, who helped write Oakland's current ordinances on crowd control, which was drafted in the wake of violent attacks by police on anti-war picketers at the Port of Oakland. The assault led to protesters and Longshore union members being hospitalized after being shot with projectiles. In the fallout, the city agreed to have a more hands off approach when it came to policing demonstrations and were not allowed to use projectile weapons against protesters. However, time and time again, Oakland police have unsurprisingly broken these rules, such as during protests after the police murder of Oscar Grant and during the Occupy movement. Lawsuits from these arrests and brutality cases have resulted in tens of millions in payouts.

In October 2011, an Iraq war veteran Scott Olsen was shot and almost killed by a tear-gas canister during a protest against the police raid of Occupy Oakland (which in itself was bolstered by attacks through the media). The attack helped push for the massive general strike in Oakland on November 2nd, 2011, while Oakland police continued to draw criticism for their heavy handed response to large demonstra-

tions. Only several months later, Oakland police arrested hundreds of people in the Downtown, as a large crowd attempted to take over an abandoned building. The resulting lawsuits cost the city millions. Over the next two years, the city also attempted to push for a youth curfew on the streets of Oakland as well as ban on transit strikes. At the same time, California Highway Patrol (CHP) took a much more active role in pursuing suspects, leading to high-speed chases and numerous police killings. The times may have changed, but the brutal tactics used by OPD over the years remained the same – as repression only grew and proliferated throughout the Town.

As the Ferguson inspired revolt in the Bay Area took off, Oakland police drew accolades from the *East Bay Express* for their "reserved nature" and "restraint" during the riots. At the same time, the Express condemned the Berkeley police for their heavy handed attacks on students as the riots spread out of Oakland. In the eyes of the mainstream and "progressive" media, the Oakland police had become a reformed department, able to handle protests and rowdy crowds with extreme restraint.

This narrative is as laughable as it is sad. When the riots started, Oakland police called in mutual aid. In November and December 2014, it was now out of town pigs shooting projectile weapons (a tactic generally used to clear intersections and drive people off the street) instead of Oakland cops, while CHP officers were seen sniping at people from freeway on-ramps with rubber bullets. Repression and police violence was outsourced; to Hayward, Pleasanton, Alameda, to various CHP units, and beyond. Nothing had changed, while the media sang the praises of the cops in hopes of dampening the fires of the uprisings.

This coordination, which has been documented to have taken place along with help from the FBI, (who was closely monitoring the protests across the US), allowed the Oakland Police to look calm when in reality the government was using its vast resources to drive off the streets thousands of young people. Also, while the media drew attention to police in Berkeley, in reality, during the first night of the riots spreading to near the UC campus, there were just as many Oakland police out on the streets (if not more) than Berkeley officers. The continuing liberal view of the police as an "institution of the people" beholden to the public and subject to accountability is a complete and total fallacy.