

Revolt in the East Bay



What's been going on? On January 1st, a BART cop shot a 22-year-old working-class black father named Oscar Grant in the back as he lay facedown and restrained, killing him instantly. The shooting was captured by several people's cameraphones and circulated widely.

On January 7th, Oscar was buried and a crowd gathered in protest at Fruitvale BART, the scene of his death. After dark, hundreds of demonstrators swarmed through downtown Oakland, smashing windows, blocking streets and lighting fires. 105 were arrested and many more experienced brutal police violence and chemical weapons.

In the days since, there have been several smaller, less destructive protests in Oakland and San Francisco, as well as a wave of nighttime sabotages against cops, banks and BART by anonymous anarchists in Oakland and Berkeley.

More reports of what's been going down can be found at indybay.org/police, news.infoshop.org and elsewhere on the web. Here we take up some of the questions of "why?"

Why were locally-owned businesses attacked on Jan. 7 by a crowd made up mostly of local Black and Latin@ youth? For one thing, this has probably been exaggerated. Some have tried to depict

the scene of the riots as "a working-class Black neighborhood"—a very misleading description of downtown Oakland and surrounding areas which are undergoing gentrification.

Any remaining mystery is further cleared up when we consider how race is being used to hide class. Consider Oakland's Black mayor at a press conference on Jan. 8 urging the city's poor to stop rebelling by invoking the recent presidential election—as if a Black president is any more a sign of a "post-racial" America than Black secretaries of state and defense, or a Latino attorney general—alongside remarks of blatant class contempt like "stop pimping and hustling."

Of course, most people of any skin color aren't business owners or politicians; we are the multitudes they exploit and govern. We know that police violence is never a "mistake," but part of a deliberate strategy of social control; reforming the police would only strengthen the state. We know that it is ridiculous to claim that a society divided into classes is ever at "peace."

It's true that local businesses aren't the core of the capitalist economy any more than individual cops are the whole of the state's repressive force. But they are real centers of power that people experience on a daily basis, and breaking their windows could be seen as a message from

people rejecting the American dreams of capitalist success and political democracy.

And the cars, why were they smashed? It has been reported that expensive-looking and state-owned vehicles were mainly targeted, again indicating the class-conscious nature of the attacks. Also, it's not hard to see how the automobile itself, through its physically dominant and omnipresent role in a polluted, overcrowded, and oppressive social reality, could be a target of rage.

What to make of all this negativity? The media both Left and Right have described rioters as not only mindless (though we have seen that they weren't), but as "opportunists." And what would be wrong with that? Again, we can only act in the specific situations in which we find ourselves. Revolt begins with our determination to act on our circumstances in society, rather than simply be acted on by it. The question is not how much force we "should" use, but how much force we can use. Under the right conditions, small stones can start an avalanche. **This is the "why" of anarchist involvement.** We should all be thinking about how we can use our power to destroy the power of the elite and all the cages they have built around us in this world. As Oscar Grant found out, we can't count on full submission to save even our lives.

Don't take shit... start it.

Solidarity means attack!