Up Against the Wall:
A History of Resistance to Policing in Philadelphia

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Relations of Power and Force

One night in April 1936 on South Street, at the time a black neighborhood in Philadelphia, a large gathering of youths surrounded a white policeman who had struck Luke Carter, a black man, for no apparent reason. The group demanded Carter's release and argued that the officer was drunk. The cop in question called the riot squad and when they arrived Carter was arrested with two of his defenders from the crowd. A newspaper account of this incident would describe the spontaneous formation on the street as an "irate mob," while, of course, no such negative characterizations would be made of the belligerent police. The use of violence by the police is presumed legitimate.[1] What constitutes the realm of legitimated force? How can it change?

It is often said that "might makes right." But what determines which group is interpreted as "right" in the above situation is in the end much more than a superior organization of force. The conflict between the police, on the one side, and black youths protecting each-other, on the other, reflects an uneven relation of power. To be sure, such a relation of forces and their legitimacy cannot be fully understood without an analysis of the economic and political power of each group involved. Transformation of the unequal relationship between each group thus cannot be achieved solely on the level of force; it requires also power.[2]

The force and violence of the police is legitimated through the political and economic power of the rich. In societies like the United States, where the capitalist system developed through centuries of colonialism and slavery, the police maintain capitalist social relations by imposing a color-line, the crudest line of demarcation between the rulers and the ruled. Black proletariats in particular face the constant risk of incarceration or death in the most mundane of social circumstances. While driving, while walking across the street, while going to the store, while playing cards outside, while publicly listening to music. On a day to day level, the police crystallize and preserve the harsh boundaries that are necessary for the division of humankind and the continuation of the capitalist system. In moments of mass revolt and rupture, they contain and crush the forces that challenge the constituted structure.

The systematic policing, incarceration, and murder of poor black people is a normalized feature of U.S. society. The fact that police violence is disproportionately directed at black proletariats does not contradict the official duty of law enforcement to "protect and serve," but proves to be entirely compatible with it. The violence that manifested itself that April night in 1936 on South Street was the rule, not the exception, to the logic of policing.

A History of Resistance

This research of Philadelphia history was undertaken for the explicit purpose of formulating a critical narrative of how policing has upheld the racial contours of the capitalist economic and political order. However, more than an analysis policing in Philadelphia, this work is first and foremost an interpretative and qualitative history of the different ways and circumstances in which people fought back.

This work studies the practical activity of resisting police oppression. It attempts to outline some tactics and strategies that were taken up by those who clashed with the police in their pursuit of human dignity and freedom. Those who resisted the Philadelphia police are studied as subjects of history with their own motivations for struggling in the particular ways that they did. Drawing from a rich history of struggle among black Philadelphians, whose distinct

praxis (intersection of activity and consciousness) offers the most insights on the subject of resisting policing, this essay focuses on various methods of protest engaged in prior to 1965, with divergent strategies often times reflecting class differences.

Black Philadelphians of varying social classes developed a very wide range of methods through which to resist policing. These range from the reformist to the revolutionary, from activist campaigns to legal battles to street fighting, as well as a synthesis of various realms. In exploring resistance to policing in Philadelphia, different forms of struggle receive particular attention in their space and time in relation to the subject as a whole.

Given the wide-ranging research and theorizing this topic has received for the period following 1965, especially on issues related to the rise of Frank Rizzo, this work does not extend into what is known as the Black Power era. Rather it concentrates on the period prior to 1965, which has received less scholarly attention.

Origins of the Philadelphia Police

In *Our Enemies in Blue: Police and Power in America* Kristian Williams describes how policing has historically functioned to enforce capitalism and a white dominated racial order. In the city once the nation's capital, the predecessor of the modern day Philadelphia police was the civilian-run "night watch," which monitored the populace from the time of the early eighteenth century.[3] The night watch, which developed in Boston as well, was the Northern equivalent of the Southern slave patrols. In 1837 the mayor of Philadelphia declared, "Every colored person found in the street after (the posting of) watch should be closely supervised by the officers of the night."[4] Whether it was the night watch or the slave patrol, the white population as whole was expected to police black people.

As society became more urbanized, the development of the modern police force reflected a shift in the balance of power, away from the citizen and towards the state, entailing a separation of civilian and policing duties. With the pace of urban growth beginning to increase in the first half of the nineteenth century, the ruling class of Philadelphia became more and more unable to control the unruly fiefdom of city wards the city was composed of. The fragmented ward territories were contested spaces between political bosses, local police, and neighborhood ethnic gangs. In the "Jacksonian" era, mobs of white workers in Philadelphia, including "European ethnics," rioted in defense of slavery, lynching black Americans and abolitionists. The social instability that resulted from urbanization demanded increased specialization and centralization of power.[5]

The first official police force in Philadelphia was created in 1850 by recruiting from youth gangs associated with white "nativist" fire departments.[6] This agency of professional marshals was one of the first citywide bureaucracies—it moved power from the localized ward territories to the consolidation of a municipal city government.[7] From the start police arrests were made on their own initiative (not in response to citizen complaints) for misdemeanors related to victimless crimes, such as public drunkenness, vagrancy, loitering, disorderly conduct, etc.[8] By the late nineteenth century it became a regular police practice to arrest people on suspicion and in advance of a crime.[9] Such a point of contact with the masses of people gave the state the capability to control all expanding segments of the increasingly industrializing society and to neutralize any potential contestation of its authority in advance.[10]

After the Civil War increasing numbers of black migrant laborers came to Philadelphia from the South and Border States looking for work in segregated shipyards and as domestic

servants. They moved into the city's oldest and poorest wards located between Center City and South Philadelphia, where the majority of Philadelphia's black population resided. At the same time, a small black middle-class started moving out into the new residential areas north of Market Street in West Philadelphia, where many whites lived, resulting in an intensification of white riots against blacks.

The introduction of the first black officers reflected the growing size of the black population. In *The Philadelphia Negro* W.E.B. Dubois described how in 1884 Mayor Samuel G. King appointed the first sixty black officers to the police department, a move that was opposed by whites. These police were put on duty exclusively in black neighborhoods and only permitted to arrest black people. Dubois also noted that none of the original black policemen would ever receive any promotions.[11] Thus, the incorporation of black police was not a sign of racial progress, but instead a means to control the rising black populous.

It was not until the onset of World War I that the size of the black population in Philadelphia grew large enough to have an impact on official city politics. With the labor shortage in the city during the war, a large wave of black migrants from the South came to work in the city's segregated wartime industries and to live in the overcrowded slums of South Philadelphia. Middle-class blacks continued to settle in West Philadelphia. In reaction to these new migrations and demographic shifts there was another cycle of white riots and lynchings of blacks, which was ignored or supported by white police.[12]

"Police Brutality" as a Civil Rights Category

By the nineteen twenties the growing refusal of northern blacks to quietly submit to racial segregation, reflected in the "New Negro" consciousness of the time, extended to police discrimination. Although black newspapers had been reporting on instances of police terror for decades, it was not until the late 1920s onward that the black press in Philadelphia, most notably the *Philadelphia Tribune,* began regularly reporting on what was being termed "police brutality" (a term which unfortunately denotes police violence as an aberration from standard policing practices).[13]Along with segregation and discrimination in housing, education, and employment, police violence was becoming a popular civil rights issue.[14] Black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender, Amsterdam News,* and *Baltimore Afro-American*, provided detailed coverage of regular incidents of police violence against urban blacks in Chicago, New York City, Washington, D.C., Detroit, and Boston. Searching through archives of these newspapers, it is not difficult to find documented cases of "police brutality" and different methods of resistance to it, from riots on the streets to activism in civil society.

In October 1933, in nearby Camden, New Jersey, the Colored Women's Civic League (CWCL) campaigned against "police brutality." They tried to gain representation on community boards and appointed an investigating committee to report and publicize cases of police abuse and racial intolerance.[15] A few months later in December, in the aftermath of the police murders of two Polish youth, a multiracial coalition was formed between the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Polish Churches, and the local Socialist Party in Camden. In the context of prior police violence against blacks in the month of October, as well as the activism of the CWCL, the exoneration of the three white detectives who shot and killed the Polish youths was the catalyst that brought the coalition into existence.[16]

During the same time period that community groups were organizing against police oppression, spontaneous confrontations in the streets also became a popular form of protest.

While aggressive approaches often resulted in more police repression, such repression further tarnished the legitimacy of the police and the social order they represented. In 1938 in Darby, a close suburb of Philadelphia, a mass action occurred in response to a white policeman forcefully removing Florence Slater from the "white only" section of a 10-cent movie theater. When Florence refused to leave the "white only" seating, the policeman threw her on the ground, and kicked her. Slater retaliated by scratching the officer's face. As the officer dragged her out of the theater others left with her. After Slater was brought to the local jailhouse, or "lock up," a large crowd began surrounding the tiny building where she was being subjected to further harassment. Those in the gathering of about two hundred people openly threatened to riot if Slater did not receive a fair sentence. William Linvill, the local Justice of the Peace, tried Florence Slater for assault and battery and disorderly conduct on the spot, hoping to release her as soon as possible and avert a crisis. The charges against Slater were ultimately dismissed after the white manager of the theater agreed to pay for all costs of the trial. Several police escorted the manager back to the theater.[17]

The strength of street actions like this one is derived from the ability of oppressed people to advance their collective interests without relying on self-appointed representatives and official avenues of reform, like the courts and the government. Street resistance opens up the possibility for a dual-power situation, where the state is not only challenged, but a new society is also anticipated, a society where members collectively protect each other.

As new waves of black migrants from the South came to the city during World War II, many looked for better housing outside the congested slums of South Philadelphia, moving into North and West Philadelphia, where a large number of whites had settled. Once again, increased racial tension was felt all over the city. Clashes between black community residents and white police occurred in Southwest Philadelphia on July 18, 1940, when a mob of one thousand confronted a group of white police on motorcycles, who had fired ten shots at three black boys. The boys had taken off running after a black officer told them to stop throwing pebbles and were consequently chased by nearby white police who then shot at them. The boys were not hit by the bullets, but were beaten after the policemen caught up with them. As the beating was taking place a massive crowd from the neighborhood of 20th and Fitzwater Street surrounded the officers, threatening them with violence. The boys ended up being released without charges. Not only did spontaneous street actions like this one result in small, defiant victories, but they also spurred broader developments. In the aftermath of the near melee a coalition was formed between the NAACP, the Philadelphia Youth Movement, and the Allied Civic Clubs, while Superintendent of Police, Howard Sutton, launched an investigation of the beating.[18]

Attempts to Reform the Police

More and more organizations in civil society were trying to catch up to the rising levels of proletarian self-mobilization against the police. As widespread police violence continued into the 1940s, groups such as the NAACP, the West Philadelphia Civic League, and the Philadelphia Committee to Fight Terror against the Negro People, as well as the *Philadelphia Tribune,* exposed the incidents as they occurred.[19] Many groups organized public tribunals to demand that officers who violate people's civil rights be fired. By July 26, 1950, there was one such tribunal that was especially fiery, where survivors of police violence and civil rights activists aired their grievances. Reverend E. T. Lewis, president of the local NAACP chapter and pastor of the Mutchmore Memorial Baptist Church, proclaimed to the large audience that if the police did not stop abusing their power "the time will come when the race will not respect the

law at all, and it doesn't take a wise man to figure that one out." Dr. William Gray, a clergyman and educator, criticized the approach of "sell out artists and Uncle Toms" to police brutality. Thomas Gibbons of the Crime Prevention Division was also there in support of firing the officer in question, reflecting growing attempts by some police leaders to gain legitimacy among black constituents.[20]

Despite the radical orientation of this public tribunal, which was ahead of its time, most civil rights activists in Philadelphia continued to work with and ultimately rely on progressive police and government officials. This strategy was influenced by the growing demand for liberal reform that came with the citywide shift from the Republican Party political machine towards the Democratic Party. This shift in official politics was also the result of a fifty percent increase in the size of the city's black population during the Great Migration of World War II. Another contingent factor was white flight from West and North Philadelphia and the development of the suburbs.[21] The approval of a new city charter in 1951 was also an outgrowth of these shifts. This groundbreaking charter was the first in the country to include a ban on racial and religious discrimination in city services, employment, and contracts.[22]

In this context of liberal reform politics, the NAACP functioned through the fifties as a group that lobbied the city government for moderate changes in the police department. Pressuring the federal government to take action against police aggression was also seen as a strategy after the FBI investigated two policemen and a Grand Jury indicted them in January 1951 for violently forcing confessions.[23] A few months earlier, in September and November of 1950, the NAACP organized several meetings to demand that Police Superintendent Howard P. Sutton issue a directive to all police districts for officers to stop beating those already detained.[24] The NAACP also organized letter-writing campaigns, solicited community support for numerous petitions, and set up conferences to negotiate with police leaders like Howard P. Sutton, Thomas Gibbons, and Director of Public Safety Samuel H. Rosenberg. In one such meeting Rosenberg responded to the NAACP's demands for police reform with the promise "that the day of the policeman wielding a big stick to achieve law and order was over and that he was trying to develop a well-trained, intelligent force."[25] While pushing for police reform, the NAACP also had some success in getting people's false charges dismissed, such as "resisting arrest" and "disorderly conduct."[26] However, the well-publicized cases the NAACP took on contributed more to the de-legitimation of police hegemony.

Representing part of a small black middle-class that had grown substantially since World War II, the NAACP challenged police oppression only through the existing legal system. Other middle-class leaders, like the clergy, instead focused on internal social problems such as "vice" and crime. Leon Sullivan, a civil rights leader and reverend from the Zion Baptist Church, blamed the rise of what was being increasingly categorized as "juvenile delinquency" on the leniency of the police and court system.[27] Such an approach reflected the growing national concern over "youth crime" in the nineteen fifties, especially in urban areas. In Philadelphia this panic was fueled by the wave of black southern migrants and Puerto Ricans who settled in the city during and after World War II, whom whites and middle-class blacks blamed for deteriorating "their" communities. Functioning as a public voice for this bourgeois fear of the youth and underclass, the *Philadelphia Tribune* sensationalized the theme of the out-of-control "delinquent" as counter-posed to the "respectable" citizen.

Sullivan manifested this line of thought in his own way, organizing a citywide coalition of neighborhood block associations in 1953 known as the Philadelphia Citizens Committee against Juvenile Delinquency and Its Causes (CCJDC). CCJDC represented an alliance between

middle-class black people and the police, one of the earliest attempts in the country at what would later be termed "community-policing." Although the CCJDC launched a "Clean Block" campaign and also tried to close down neighborhood bars, the organization's main priority was the improving of community-police relations in order to fight "youth crime."[28] Black youth were thus criminalized by the CCJD and seen as the main problem in black neighborhoods. Accordingly, Sullivan endorsed the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) in their 1954 campaign against "juvenile delinquency." Sullivan also outspokenly supported the use of black officers to patrol black neighborhoods, arguing that citizens would better relate to police of their own race and vice-versa.[29]

CCJD's structure entailed a vast block-to-block communications network based on civilian patrols, neighborhood committees, police liaisons and police contacts.[30] It was a formidable organization. In the end, the CCJD's attempt to build a neighborhood-friendly police force was not viable as a long-term alternative to the strained relationship between black Philadelphians and the police. It was a failed attempt to mediate that tension, bourgeois blacks supposedly serving as a paternalistic buffer class between black proletariats and the mostly white police force. The police continued to hold their power, the source of the problematic relationship. The brutal nature of everyday policing was highlighted in 1956 with the beating of a pregnant woman by white officers for simply playing cards outdoors and another person for playing music.[31] Respectable bourgeois blacks were not exempt from this violence either. Not long after these incidents a middle-class black man was viciously attacked by a white off-duty policeman who yelled, "You colored people with your big cars think you own the city!" The man simply tried to pass the officer's stalled out car.[32]

After many decades the legal fight against police brutality began to produce some concrete results, although they ultimately proved limited in their scope. Mayor Richardson Dilworth established the Police Advisory Board on October 1, 1958, the first independent agency in the country to hear citizen's complaints against police. The FOP, the legal arm of the police, declared that the board was part of a "communist plot to undermine law enforcement."[33] The NAACP successfully took on the first case brought before the board, resulting "in disciplinary action being taken against the officer."[34] Nevertheless, out of the nearly one thousand cases brought before the board, dismissal of police was recommended in only one.[35]

People in the late fifties increasingly represented themselves in court and gained media attention. In some cases people had charges against them dismissed and made small advances in contesting the legitimacy of police violence. James Lett, for example, who was severely beaten by three drunken white officers, had assault charges thrown out in 1959 when the police in question did not show up to the highly publicized trial on five occasions. The NAACP did not represent Lett in court, but they did play a secondary role by publicly supporting his case in the press and influencing the atmosphere surrounding the trial.[36] Ethel Lawrence was also cleared of assault charges after she agreed to not prosecute an officer that she and two other people publicly accused in the press of police brutality.[37] Later that year, staff inspector Edward Payne launched an investigation into the case of Robert Wood, who went to the press after his tooth was knocked out during police questioning.[38]

Within this atmosphere of increasingly visible de-legitimation of the Philadelphia police, City Council President James Tate advocated for better police training and began to work closely with the NAACP and the *Philadelphia Tribune*.[39] But despite the legal work of the NAACP, the founding of the Police Advisory Board, some small victories in the courts, and the attendant publicity, nothing fundamentally changed in the operations of the police department. They still

continued to oppress people. The concrete experience of the failure of police reform would become a step in the radicalization of black Philadelphians.

Exhaustion of Legal Means

At the turn of the decade a more militant and uncompromising stance began to emerge among black Philadelphians, especially among the youth and the poor, which rejected strategies of reform, and which would force a wide range of leaders to adopt new positions. Legal means for addressing the police were exhausting themselves. Having had access to legal avenues through which to make grievances, many people were beginning to realize that the law could not ensure their human rights. Rather than organizing a mass movement in black neighborhoods, many civil rights leaders had instead tried to ally themselves with the democratic and liberal wings of the state. Their strategy was to reconcile the antagonisms between the oppressors and the oppressed, not to deepen them and to overthrow the system of oppression all together. As anti-colonial revolutions were taking place across the world, the NAACP and CORE in Philadelphia asked the Democrats and the city-sponsored Commission on Human Relations to enforce the city's decade old civil rights laws.[40]

Nonetheless, students were beginning to organize direct-action protests, often in conflict with the police. In solidarity with the sit-in movement in the South, activists from the Youth Committee against Segregation began picketing Woolworth's stores in Philadelphia in 1960. The first people arrested in these multi-racial protests against segregation were two black students who had prevented customers from entering a Woolworth's store in West Philadelphia.[41] Disruptive tactics like these contrasted with those that operated according to a framework defined by the police and city government, allowing advances in as much as they were granted by the state.

A break with the old civil rights strategy was evident in June 1960 when a seven hundred-person rally was held in response to the police murders of two black men. A warrant was issued for the arrest of the white officer in question, but only after blacks in North Philadelphia took to the streets in protest of the initial attempt by Chief Police Inspector John J. Kelly to justify the murders. Kelly originally claimed that the policeman had "acted in good faith." Despite the assurances at the rally from Robert N.C. Nix (Pennsylvania's first black Congressman) that Police Commissioner Thomas Gibbons would fully investigate the case, former District Attorney Isaiah Crippins argued that "lip service alone won't end police brutality against Negroes."[42]

In July a small riot occurred in North Philadelphia at Broad and Dauphin Street in response to the police beating of a black man who had tried to "make a pass" at a white woman. The official police story was very different from that of eyewitnesses interviewed by the *Philadelphia Tribune*. After police attacked Curtis Graham, who was accused of sexually harassing an unidentified white woman, two other black men, Herbert Hirshfeld and Ernest Davis, joined the battle against almost fifty policemen.[43] Six people who were caught up in the police riot were sent to Temple University Hospital for injuries, five of whom were charged with assault and battery on officers. Many victims were bystanders like Mary Fletcher, who was struck in the face with a police club and lost four teeth after she objected to the ruthless beating of Delcine Kendust, another observer who was assaulted by the officers. Edward Byng was arrested at the hospital for trying to call the relatives of one of the injured women. The white woman who made the allegations of "molestation" never ended up pressing charges against

Graham.[44] This incident evokes the history of lynching and riots against black people in defense of the "purity" of white womanhood.

In September of that year four policemen and four participants in a mob of one hundred people were injured in South Philadelphia after the large crowd tried to de-arrest Kenneth Reynolds from the custody of two highway patrolmen.[45] Within this atmosphere of growing tension advocates increasingly pressured the police for "accountability." Congressman Robert N. C. Nix publicly promised to take action against "unnecessarily violent" officers and invited survivors of police violence to personally report their cases to his office.[46] The North Philadelphia Committee for Equal Justice (NPCEJ) presented a 3,000 person petition to Mayor Dilworth in November demanding an end to police brutality.[47] The NPCEJ also accused then Police Commissioner Albert M. Brown of "dodging" the problem of police terror in black neighborhoods after he declined to comment on the topic at a conference organized by the Commission on Human Relations.[48]

The city government, sensing that it was losing control over the public image of its police department, scrambled to save face by allying itself with "respectable" black leaders. In April 1961 Mayor Dilworth held a private meeting with roughly thirty North Philadelphia ministers and police leaders to talk about the problem of "police brutality".[49] In spite of the attempts by the Mayor to form an alliance between the police and the self-appointed leaders of black Philadelphia, the tide was turning.

After the policemen who killed the two black men back in June 1960 were found not guilty, the NPCEJ organized a very large motorcade around city hall and a memorial rally.[50] This march reflected a substantial disillusionment in the ability of the city government to protect black people from police oppression. Reinforcing this growing frustration and further tarnishing the facade of racial progress, in November 1961 the U.S. Civil Rights Commission cited police brutality as one of the nation's most serious social problems, but stated in its report that the prosecution of police was "useless" for the simple fact that there was not one successful case of a police officer being prosecuted for either the blatant murder of innocent people or using excessive force against non-threatening individuals.[51] Although not intended to, the report confirmed the fears of many, substantiating the belief that justice could not be found in the legal system. NAACP lawyers publicly criticized the report for only citing one of their cases and praising the supposed "effectiveness" of the Philadelphia police, the city government, and the Police Advisory Board in responding to police violence.[52]

Exposing the hypocrisy of the Civil Rights Commission report, in December 1962 a young black man named Elmer Ricks was murdered by a white officer who fired into a crowd of people near a dance hall in Chester, a suburb of Philadelphia. That night a rebellion of five hundred erupted on the streets as people threw bottles and bricks at thirty police who tried to disperse the crowds.[53] In 1963 there also were several moments of near-riots as large groups of people in Philadelphia surrounded police who were engaging in brutal beatings.[54] Within this unstable environment, young rebels were becoming more defiant and determined.

Power in Crisis

In the struggle for human dignity and freedom oppressed people inevitably find themselves in conflict with the police. This became apparent during a campaign to desegregate the construction of a school building at Strawberry Mansion in North Philadelphia in May and June 1963. The protests were officially led by a broad coalition headed by Cecil B. Moore, then

president of the local NAACP chapter. Moore was in direct negotiation with the Board of Education in regards to the all-white labor contracts. The traditional strategy and tactics of civil rights leaders were abandoned in this collective challenge to the cross-class racial alliance between white workers and the capitalists, an alliance which results in the exclusion of black workers from the labor market. Hundreds of black protesters formed pickets around the construction site located at thirty-first and Susquehanna Street, resulting in violent clashes with police and white construction workers who tried to break the picket lines in order to enter the site.

Among many others, the police beat up Stanley Daniels and Maxwell Stanford, Jr., both members of the Revolutionary Action Movement, an organization that led the way in organizing the protests. Daniels, who was taking pictures for *The RAM Speaks*, explained how he "was shooting pictures of the line, when all of a sudden these construction workers rushed up and tried to crash through. The police came from everywhere."[55] In *We Will Return in the Whirlwind* Stanford described the move by the white construction workers to break through the picket lines as a "flying wedge," which was then proceeded by a barrage of police clubs, "singling out Daniels and myself, twenty police jumped us and we fought until unconscious."[56] Three officers, one black and two white, claimed that the radicals assaulted them and were trying to incite a riot.[57] The confrontational approach of Stanford and Daniels mirrored the autonomous development of a revolutionary tendency among the black underclass of Philadelphia, reflected in the growing frequency of riots against policing. The popular phenomenon of people encircling and skirmishing with police who abused their neighbors was somewhat disturbing to the established civil rights leadership. Nonetheless, the NAACP, led by Moore, and the clergy, under the leadership of Leon Sullivan, now had to make space for militant protest actions.

At the Strawberry Mansion pickets those who "manned the lines included everyone from students and gang members to the clergy, from wild-eyed revolutionaries to professional members of the community to pimps and whores."[58] At one point during the protests Sullivan tried to calm the angry crowds after a gun wielding black truck driver threatened to shoot any protester who interfered with his unloading at thirty-second and Dauphin Street.[59] Ultimately, the militancy of the picketers was too much for Moore and Sullivan to handle. As the masses of protesters escalated their tactics, by the end of the summer Moore and Sullivan and other leaders backed off from the campaign all together.

By fall 1963 there was growing unrest in North Philly. The radical experiences of the summer lingered in people's minds. In October, a mob of seven hundred people hurled bricks and bottles at twenty police officers and fifteen squad cars after William Simpson was arrested for refusing to clear the corner of Ridge Avenue and Jefferson Street. At the end of the riot six people were arrested and the windows of a stalled out police car were smashed.[60] A few months after this, the police shot and murdered Willie Philyaw, a handicapped black man, for fleeing, and also shot a bystander. This incident sparked a week-long rebellion in North Philadelphia where mobile gangs of youths fought against hundreds of policemen and looted the stores of white merchants along Susquehanna Avenue. Local ministers tried unsuccessfully to persuade the crowds to leave the streets. The District Attorney's office claimed that the killing was justified, clearing the police of all charges.[61]

In Philadelphia, a city that was nationally promoted as a model for managing tensions between blacks and the police, the conflict had clearly reached a tipping point. Desperate attempts were made to placate popular hostility against the police and limit protest to an acceptable level. The Commission on Human Relations and the Fellowship Commission worked

closely with police leadership to avert a full-blown crisis. Police Commissioner Howard Leary collaborated with Cecil B. Moore to allow legal observers from the NAACP into local police precincts on summer weekends as legal observers.[62] Despite these efforts, the Philadelphia "model" was broken. A rupture had occurred in the normality of unchecked police hegemony.

The State Fails to Contain the Rebellion

In the midst of mounting resistance to the police and failed attempts by the state to pacify this, the Philadelphia police took an early stab at political policing. In February 1964 Police Commissioner Howard Leary created the Civil Disobedience Unit (CDU). The official purpose of this unit was to protect the civil rights of protesters. They did this by spying on them, the unit amounting to little more than what is known as a "red squad."[63] As Philadelphia Police Inspector Harry G. Fox described in a 1966 interview in the *Police Chief* magazine, members of the CDU would build personal relationships with movement leaders and rank-and-file organizers in order to "develop intelligence about their connections, background, personal life, and ambitions." This process entailed files, photos, reports, interviews, and under-cover informants, all of which allowed the police to intimately understand the strategy and tactics of a political group's activities in advance of an action.[64] Like the CCJD in the fifties, the CDU attempted to re-imagine the police as benevolent civil servants, as more than a badge and a uniform. Despite these efforts to reform the police, the relationship between black people and the police became more and more volatile.

In the summer of 1964 black urban rebellions spread like wildfire through the United States, starting in July with Harlem, New York, and eventually spreading to North Philadelphia on August 28th. As usual, the spark that exploded into an uprising began as a routine occurrence. Two officers, one black and one white, tried to pull a black woman out of her car and on the spot people in the neighborhood began fighting back. This incident escalated into pitched street battles that lasted for three days. Roaming groups looted and burned white owned businesses, as had occurred in 1963. Cecil B. Moore and other official leaders fruitlessly tried to disband the angry masses.[65] Of the 339 people reportedly injured during the rebellion, 100 of them were police.[66]

The uprisings of 1963 and 1964 in North Philadelphia re-framed the struggle against the police into a struggle against a racist society, not just a few bad officers. These rebellions came on the heels of decades of daily struggles involving countless victories and defeats, where the enduring lessons of fighting for freedom were learned through trial and error. The exhaustion of reformist means for challenging police oppression gave rise to more radical and extreme forms of struggle. Although Philadelphia boasted of having the first civil rights legislation, community-policing project, and Police Advisory Board in the nation, the compromises between the police and civil rights leaders failed to resolve the conflict. Legal avenues through which to address discrimination did not alter the material reality. Harlem Congressman Adam Clayton Powell insightfully argued that the urban riots among blacks in New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Philadelphia in 1964 occurred *as a result* of the limitations of legal reform.[67] The impetus for social change could no longer fit into the liberal framework. In defiance of the illusion that the police and the city government could ensure equality, security and justice, black Philadelphians fought for their own liberation.

Towards a Revolutionary Praxis

By examining a multiplicity of political methods, from the reformist to the revolutionary, from the organized to the spontaneous, this work allows us to trace the development of a variety of struggles which would eventually explode into mass rebellions. Such an investigation goes against the pervasive tendency of studying oppressed people as homogeneous entities with a single conception of struggle. More than a mere reaction to their oppression, the meaning accorded to each form of struggle detailed here reveals much about the constellation of forces, the process of combinations, which brings about the possibility of revolutionary situations.

In response to the terror of policing, black Philadelphians developed a diverse array of strategies and tactics in many centers of action. From the press to the courts to coalitions to public campaigns to riots, distinct approaches combined and diverged in various ways and were adapted to shifting historical conditions, according to differences in class orientation. Philadelphia's pioneering of community-policing, civil rights legislation, police review boards, and political policing reflects how the upper and middle classes adjusted to changing circumstances by mediating antagonisms and devising legal solutions. When oppressed people attack their oppressors, the liberal layers of the ruling class and those in alliance with them loudly proclaim the need for judicial and legislative reforms within the existing structure. The main conclusion of this study is that such mitigating approaches cannot in the long run change anything fundamental in society.

The growing demand for police reform is even more doomed today than it was sixty years ago. Rather than settling for the strategies and tactics of those who fight for concessions from the ruling class, this research instead looks towards methods of struggle which can sustain a protracted transformation of power relations. In setting out to analyze the problem of policing, of how the police have historically maintained the color line in Philadelphia, many concrete lessons have been discovered which provide the tools for developing a revolutionary praxis and for avoiding the mistakes of the past and constructing present and future histories. As this history of riots and uprisings shows us, the practice of people protecting each other from the police suggests immediate tactical operations. In light of the July 2012 anti-police riots in Anaheim, California, and the more recent anti-police riots in March 2013 in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, NYC, the prospect of revolt is today just as much around the corner. It is not a distant and far-off abstraction, but a moment that revolutionaries must prepare for in the present. To transform the spontaneous riot into an organized insurrection, to support it in making a far reaching impact on society, a patient and well prepared revolutionary force must be organized around a revolutionary class of people which can seize such moments, effectively intervening in favorable conjunctures of circumstances.[68]

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