



About CopDB

CopDB is an attempt to build an approachable, community-powered, police database. Inspired by the Wikipedia-model of collective management of data, we hope that it can eventually expand into any region that wants to use it. They surveil us, it's time we surveilled them!

We are a group of abolitionists based in Utah that have decided to build a tool that can empower our community to keep tabs on the racist, armed, gangs that patrol our streets. Utah police regularly abuse our neighbors and these abuses go largely unrecorded.

The project is structured similarly to Wikipedia. Anyone with an account can submit "reports" which is how new police and incidents, as well as any media associated with them, get brought into the system. These reports are reviewed by moderators where they are either approved and published or feedback is given so the report can meet the standards required for the database to be useful.

If you would like to stay up to date go subscribe for email updates on the copdb.org homepage, otherwise head on over to app.copdb.org to test it out!

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SHATTERING ABOLITION

by some abolitionists

CopDB *Reading Discussion*



Against Reformist Counterinsurgency in the Streets

For our reading group, we read a short article called “Shattering Abolition: Against Reformist Counterinsurgency in the Streets of Oakland”¹ to get a scope of the terrain we struggle in and against. The following is a brief recap of what we felt was important from the text and our personal reflections of previous movements in Salt Lake City.

This piece, by some Oakland abolitionists, uses a ‘Justice for Tyre Nichols’ Emergency March and Rally in January 2023 as an example of how the Non-Profit Industrial Complex (NPIC) and the NPIC-adjacent movement ecosystem act as a form of counterinsurgency.

The event, organized by Anti-Police Terror Project (APTP), brought upwards of 500 people out into the streets and included an oh-so-familiar formula for these types of events. Speakers from non-profit organizations like the Ella Baker Center, Urban Peace Movement, and Communities United for Youth Restorative Justice, as well as “community leaders” like the “revolutionary” District Attorney, Pamela Price.

These abolitionists felt that pseudo-abolitionist canned talking points and rhetoric from these speakers, and the silly, performative chants that ensued served only to dampen the crowd’s furtive energy and tire out troublemakers, giving Oakland PD time to better position themselves.

“Counterinsurgency isn’t always a conscious conspiracy. It’s an operating logic of the State and Capital.”

The main takeaways from the ‘Justice for Tyre Nichols’ March for this group were as follows:

- 1) Abolitionist practice must support proletarian self-activity and foster the conditions for escalation and open revolt against the state and capital—and this happens on multiple scales;
- 2) NPIC “movement organizations” are structurally incapable of doing this, and indeed are compelled to act against self-activity by quelling or redirecting potentially conflictual energies; and
- 3) They achieve this in part by claiming to represent a whole “community” or “identity,” delegitimizing those who take approaches not compatible with theirs.

¹ <https://black-ink.info/2023/02/03/shattering-abolition-against-reformist-counterinsurgency-in-the-streets-of-oakland/>

The government abolishing the police would be sawing off the branch it’s sitting on and that’s something it will never do, regardless of how many bodies pile up below it.— Black Rose Rosa Negra: Turning the Tide

Like many abolitionists, we believe in order to fully realize abolition we will need a social revolution, and we see CopDB working towards that. Over the last few years we have seen massive popular revolt, targeted specifically against the police, have very little material impact. While the reasons these movement failed are numerous, we are building CopDB to help address two specific shortcomings:

- During the uprising many of the people in the street were newly activated and existing anti-police organizations were unable to help them avoid common pitfalls that ultimately unraveled the movement.
- The uprising had a critical lack of tactical knowledge about the specific organizations and people, specifically police organizations and police themselves, they were facing.

To help address these shortcomings, CopDB intends to build a durable, long-lived, anti-police organization where abolitionists can organize even during periods of demobilization such that when openings like 2020 occur there will be more people on the ground equipped with both a powerful theoretical anti-police critique as well as knowledge of their local police-context that can be used tactically.

Why CopDB

CopDB is more than a police database, it is an explicitly abolitionist project. It is not intended to "root out the bad cops" because that implies there are good cops that would remain. It is only intended to "hold the police accountable" insofar as the information held in the DB helps shift the narrative that cops are a necessary social institution, which conclusively demonstrates why we must abolish the police. CopDB's primary goal is to act as one small part of a much larger political movement that sees genuinely grassroots groups come together to radically improve our society directly, not through the state-endorsed (read: ineffective) channels. The goal of documenting the most domestically violent part of the state is one that we view as both key to further exposing the real purpose of the state and providing valuable tactical knowledge that anti-state groups will need to be effective. We aim to present a project that is built from below, and which will not succeed without abundant and direct community support, which is the type of engagement that is required in the abolitionist struggle.

Despite the currently rampant police violence in the US, the abolitionist struggle has a rich history with a number of successes. One of the clearest conclusions that can be drawn from this history is that anti-police struggle must be rooted in community empowerment, and going further, building popular power. This is evident in almost any conversation where someone not-familiar with the abolitionist movement opens with the question "what do you plan on replacing the police with?" The answer is that the police should not be replaced with anything, as that implies they currently provide something useful to the majority of people.

Abolition is not simply about getting rid of the prisons, police or systems of surveillance and punishment; it is about what we build in their place.— Sarah Lamble, Abolishing the Police

That said, our current society is one where police have laid claim to providing things like "safety" and "justice", both of which are things a better world should have more of, not less. To provide these things abolitionists, among others, propose building a society where communities are able to effectively run themselves without systems of domination; as Emiliano Zapata said "Strong people don't need strong leaders".

They highlight that the NPIC "movement organizations" are structurally incapable of furthering and developing the abolitionist movement in particular and social revolution in general because they have both a political and structural basis for recuperating and co-opting radical movements:

- Political element: "*conscious maneuvering by leadership in proximity to progressive elements of the State and Capital.*"
- Structural basis: "*how the funding and organizational structures of non-profits facilitate the kinds of moves that they make, the possibilities that are 'thinkable.'*"

Apart from simply critiquing the event and the vapid organizations involved, the authors offer a number of alternative approaches for interacting with these types of events and organizing for genuine, lasting change. For example, for future street actions with similar furtive energy, they recommend "greater coordination among autonomous networks," decentralized and based on affinity, "to form breakaway groups (with exit plans and specific targets/goals) that can act to escalate how they see fit," with an emphasis on looking out for and protecting each other on the ground, while fostering "the conditions for revolt to burst open."

With this broader tactic in mind, they highlight:

- *When a march like this happens in the downtown area, there is an overwhelming focus on the centralized Spectacle. At the very least, a Spectacle could potentially generate some momentum, the turn-out of people grows, and buzz draws more people in. This can increase the capacity of a march to: 1) plug up major business area and 2) protect people who move fluidly through the crowd to escalate on its periphery or through breakaway groups with clear exit strategies. But this also can mistake the march as that which catalyzes revolt in the first place...*
- *Concentrated attention on the march in a downtown area can also free up other parts of the city, as OPD [Oakland PD] resources would focus on a single site. If a disruptive march concentrates enough attention in a downtown area, then a few things may potentially happen:*
 1. *Large numbers people may continue to show up and support that march;*
 2. *Centralized groups can act and branch off from the march in different ways, without forcing the main march to be the site of a kettle;*
 3. *Organized groups of people can be freed up to act autonomously in other parts of the city.*

Aside from these thoughts on abolitionist street action, the piece stresses that there is an urgent need for unglamorous day-to-day relationship-building and taking on tasks that are necessary to sustain and deepen our resistance. These actions are taken outside of the streets, and in our homes, our neighborhoods,² our workplaces,³ our schools and universities;⁴ in short, in our everyday lives.

We at CopDB feel that this piece draws similar conclusions to our experiences in Salt Lake during the 2020 George Floyd Uprising and beyond.

In lieu of APTP or other similar 'abolitionist' non-profit organizations, we drew parallels to the Salt Lake branch of the Party of Socialism and Liberation (PSL) and to the leader of BLM-UT, Lex Scott.

While there are ample instances where these tensions have played out, few of them offer real-time effects as well as a rally that took place in SLC on June 1st, 2020. PSL planned a gathering two days after SLC Mayor Erin Mendenhall declared a state of emergency and instituted a curfew due to civil unrest. At this event, as the curfew time drew closer, PSL attempted to pacify a crowd that had gathered around a group of black youth who were directly confronting the National Guard and Salt Lake City Police Officers. Multiple PSL members demanded the crowd to disperse, immediately creating a separation between peaceful protesters and those willing to confront violent state actors. Once the crowd dispersed, SLCPD was able to rapidly target the isolated crowd. As SLCPD was forming a tactical line to surround the activated crowd, Lex Scott entered the scene with a megaphone to yell out, "You will not get violent! Any time you get violent, you ruin my work! I'm trying to pass police reform! You are treading on my work! I'm fighting for your lives!"

In a matter of minutes, SLCPD can be seen walking past Lex and shooting less than lethal rounds at the crowd that remained. Despite the trite peaceful reformist narrative centered during the rally, the immediate threat to the autonomous affinity group that formed spontaneously was heightened and materialized due to the actions of these self-appointed representatives and organizers.

² usufructcollective.wordpress.com/2023/06/04/kick-the-cops-off-your-block-2/

³ <https://www.blackrosefed.org/how-your-co-workers-and-you-can-fck-the-police/>

⁴ www.teenvogue.com/story/cops-off-campus-abolition-may

After the protest ended, PSL deleted the event from their social media platforms and posted an Instagram post in response.⁵ In their post, they say that Mayor Mendenhall and the media coverage praised their event for being a peaceful protest opposed to the 'violent demonstrations' that occurred the same day but, of course, PSL "completely rejects this position." Despite the fact that PSL even admits that they "ended [their] protest at 8pm to give every one of the over 1,000 demonstrators a safe opportunity to leave" (putting a very convenient spin on what actually took place), they claim to fully support the uprising.

By erasing their call for a peaceful demonstration and uploading in its place a watered down justification of actual events, they dodged critiques and accountability by regurgitating statements like 'riots are the language of the unheard' and by pretending that they didn't call for a peaceful protest in the first place!

Some of the lessons after these events enable us to identify when a protest or action is being neutralized, co-opted or being utilized as a tool of counterinsurgency which threatens the most radical elements, diffusing the potential of escalated actions.

In our reading discussion, we brainstormed how we can avoid the influence of the NPIC & emboldened White progressives in the context of Trump's victory. While we are still working through this problem, we decided collectively that when these events pop up in the Valley, we will show up as a bloc to distribute stickers and literature on peace policing and the NPIC in general to spread awareness of their failings. Additionally, we seek to take advantage of the police presence at these officially-sanctioned events by doing cop watches to demonstrate the viability of other tactics in fighting the pigs.

⁵ <https://www.instagram.com/p/CA8t6rTJwM2/?igsh=MnFlDnk5OTdmMjYz>