ANARCHIST RESISTANCE TO THE TRUMP INAUGURATION

UNDERSTANDING THE EVENTS

OF JANUARY 20, 2017

Two years have passed since the demonstrations against Donald Trump's inauguration. Thanks to an epic legal struggle, all the charges have been resolved or dropped. Now we can discuss what there is to learn from the events of January 20 and the ensuing court cases. This analysis focuses on the march that took place on the day itself, utilizing a wealth of information that came to light during the subsequent investigation. It will be extremely useful to anyone seeking to organize or participate in similar large-scale demonstrations that may face police repression.

On January 20, anarchists took on the most powerful empire in the history of the solar system at the heart of the spectacle intended to legitimize its rule—at precisely the moment that a new administration sought to introduce an even more authoritarian model of governance. This was a profoundly courageous act. In retaliation, prosecutors attempted to set a legal precedent that would criminalize protest itself, in hopes of being able to inflict the full force of felony prosecution on anyone in proximity to any act of resistance. The ensuing legal battle lasted a year and a half.

The mass arrest that occurred on January 20, 2017 was not inevitable. It was the consequence of specific decisions that the organizers and participants in the march made; it could have turned out differently. Everyone who might one day be compelled to take part in high-risk street protest stands to benefit from an analysis of this action. It is an especially interesting case study in that it represents a worst-case scenario: 500 demonstrators without scouts, a communications network, or a solid plan taking on 28,000 security personnel at a pivotal historical moment.

Was it a good idea to mobilize against Trump's inauguration? Was it a good idea to call for a confrontational march on that day? What did anarchists accomplish—and what can we learn from our mistakes and from the strategy of the police? Here, we will present a blow-by-blow review of the events of the day and address each of these questions in turn.

PERSPECTIVE: MAKING A BREAK

You're reading the news. You read about Trump's intention to ban Muslims from visiting the United States, put children in concentration camps, suppress information about climate change, and build new pipelines. You see the Democrats trying to cash in on your anger in order to get back into office and renew faith in the corporate media and the FBI. You see the sneering face of power, and you seethe with rage—but mostly you just feel helpless. You are alone, staring at a screen.

You meet at Logan Circle at 10 am on the first day of Trump's presidency. You are wearing a colorful outer layer so you can move through the streets of Washington, DC without attracting more attention than any other pedestrian. Beneath it is a layer of black clothing: black pants, black shoes with no logo visible, a black hooded sweatshirt, black gloves, a black mask. Concealed within a colorful bag, you carry a black backpack containing goggles and a water bottle (in case of pepper spray), earplugs (in case of LRAD), a black motorcycle helmet, perhaps a hammer cleaned with alcohol to remove any fingerprints, perhaps a selection of projectiles, perhaps a fire extinguisher. Maybe you carry a flagpole with a screw driven into the bottom, or a banner to stretch alongside the crowd, blocking the cameras of the police and articulating the things you are fighting for. If you carry a phone at all, it had better be a burner phone, so there won't be any metadata confirming that you were here. Beneath the layer of black, you are wearing another layer of colorful casual clothing so you can ditch the black clothing and become an ordinary pedestrian again when you need to. Before you arrive, you pick a place out of view of any cameras and change into your black gear, concealing your identity.

You're not alone with your anger here at Logan Circle, the convergence point for the anti-capitalist and anti-fascist march. There are hundreds of you. Your ages, genders, ethnicities, and physiques blur together into a single seething *sea of black*.

All your life, you have been taught to prize your individual identity, to cultivate your personal brand, so institutions can appraise and rank you or target and punish you. Only now, shedding your identifying features in the company of your comrades, can you freely act according to the dictates of your conscience. All your life, you have accepted the supremacy of the police and the inevitability of the world they enforce. Now, you cross the line from using all your resources to accommodate yourself to the prevailing order to using all your resources to contest it. Everything you have turned inward, you turn outward.

Time itself changes. A hour's worth of intense events takes place in what turns out to have been sixty seconds. A few moments like this can change a person forever. The people around you seem transfigured; you witness acts of courage and abandon so far outside your ordinary experience they seem to defy the laws of physics. They are bathed in an unfamiliar glow. Perhaps the word for this is *dignity.*

And it's terrifying. You're terrified of the police, of their sting-ball grenades and jets of pepper spray. You're terrified of the cameras seeking to capture your image so your body can be captured later. But most of all, you're terrified of your own potential. You feel it in the air, thicker than tear gas: freedom, the most powerful intoxicant there is. Ordinarily, it seems that nothing you can do has any meaning, but here, every choice has far-reaching consequences—both for you and for the world. If all of you truly released yourselves to this moment, gave yourselves to it entirely, it feels like you could rip a hole in history itself.

Feeling your strength here together, nothing is more terrifying than the prospect of acting on it. You are terrified that you will make a mistake, that you will fail, that you will be caught—but above all, that you could succeed, that what you want might be *possible*. For if the world you want is possible, then you have no choice but to drop everything and stake your life on trying to achieve it, and prepare to bear the consequences.

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The consequences, they tell you, could include up to 75 years in prison. This is how they keep you isolated, staring at your news feed, feeling powerless.

THE LEAD-UP

Anarchists have a long history of demonstrating against presidential inaugurations, including black bloc marches in 2001 and 2005. There had been abstract discussion about organizing for the 2017 inauguration since summer of 2016, but it didn't really take shape until November.

Shortly after Trump won the election, a call to action circulated under the title "No Peaceful Transition" for people to greet the arrival of the Trump era with a bold show of resistance. Meanwhile, organizers in Washington, DC formed the DC Counter-Inaugural Welcoming Committee and held two public meetings, each drawing over 250 people. Locals put considerable effort into creating infrastructure, hosting an action camp with workshops the week before the inauguration, reserving a local church as a meeting place and convergence center in the days leading up to J20, and coordinating three public spokescouncils ahead of the actions.

Much of this organizing centered on blockading the checkpoints to the parade route. This was the chief focus of the first mass meetings at St. Stephens. At the end of one meeting, someone asked if anyone was interested in discussing a march, and a large part of the audience stayed afterwards to hold another discussion about this. This was the origin of the call for the Anti-Capitalist/Anti-Fascist bloc.

It took some time for this call to assume its final form. Early on, some DC organizers were promoting what they called "operation clusterfuck," a plan to shut down traffic all around DC. (As grueling as the J20 cases were, we can give thanks that the action got better branding; imagine if the arrestees had been known as the "Clusterfuck 200.") Only a week before the inauguration, the point of departure for the Anti-Capitalist/Anti-Fascist March was planned for the Francis Scott Key Memorial in Georgetown, far from downtown DC. This could have been a disaster. The authorities had mobilized fully 28,000 personnel and the march was already on their radar. If the march had begun at such a distance from the rest of the demonstrations, the police likely would have had an easier time repressing it, and it would not have contributed to opening up an ungovernable zone around the inauguration in the way that it did. In the end, however, the call was changed to Logan Circle at 10 am.

On the night of January 19, anarchists and others turned out to demonstrate against nationalists and fascists attending the "Deploraball" in downtown Washington, DC. The fact that so many people felt comfortable openly attending a racist event showed the extent to which white supremacist politics had been normalized. Although there were clashes, plenty of attendees and

supporters of the Deploraball walked among the protesters with impunity, and the police kept their weapons pointed exclusively at anti-fascists. Signs of the times.

> Things were tense going into the J20 protests. Every Nazi troll on the internet was promising to gun us down in cold blood. Newspapers were reporting that two million bikers had promised to form a "wall of meat" between us and the motorcade of the President-elect. We were all going to prison—if we made it out of surgery. If you want a picture of the future, imagine Pepe the Frog stamping on a human face, forever.

ACT ONE: THE BLOCKADES

Groups working with Disrupt J20 had organized 12 blockades, one at each of the security checkpoints to the inaugural parade route and commencement ceremony. At seven of these, activists explicitly set out to prevent people from passing through. Over 2400 people participated. The blockades were a tremendous success, offering a wide range of people an opportunity to work together to disrupt the inaugural ceremonies under a variety of banners. You can read a full reportback on them on disruptj20.org via archive.org.

One question remains: why didn't the police crack down on the blockades? There were practically no arrests, even at the checkpoints that were shut down. Some of the most effective blockades were maintained by the most targeted participants, such as Black Lives Matter. Lawsuits resulting from various civil rights violations have pressured DC police to be more cautious in their response to civil disobedience, but this did not restrain the police from responding aggressively to the march at 10 am.

Certainly, the diversity of the crowds that participated in the blockades helped to discourage the police from attacking them. But had the police believed that they could arrest people without escalating the situation, they likely would have done so. In this regard, the fact that anarchists had organized confrontational plans for J20 likely tied the hands of the police. They aimed to contain and suppress uncontrollable demonstrations, not to give more people cause to participate in them. This illustrates how confrontational organizing can open up space for a wide range of tactics.

If the blockades had successfully shut down *all* access to the parade route, the police would have been forced to attack them and carry out mass

arrests. This shows that the police attacked the march at 10 am because it explicitly interfered with their objective of maintaining the illusion that the population of the United States was prepared to accept Trump as a legitimate ruler. They were willing to permit a certain amount of protest activity to keep up appearances, but they were ready to use brutal force to keep Washington, DC under their control throughout the inauguration. This only makes it more impressive that so many people turned out to the march.

ACT TWO: THE MARCH

At cwc.im/J20Analysis, you can see a set of GIFs charting the route and chronology of the J20 Anti-Capitalist/Anti-Fascist March, which will make the following analysis much easier to follow. You can also find time-stamped links to videos bearing out the accounts below.

By 10 am, over a hundred people had gathered in the park, with more steadily arriving in feeder marches and affinity groups, many already masked. At least seven police vans were parked on the south side of the circle with groups of cops visible around them, along with some individual police cars.

The understanding had been that the march would depart at 10:30. This was widely known among locals and organizers, but the 10:30 departure time did not appear in any public venues.

At a quarter past ten, hundreds of people were assembled, chanting and burning flags. Several banners were lined up on the south edge of the island inside the traffic circle. The march spontaneously departed ahead of schedule, several minutes before 10:30.

People were still arriving at this point, and it is possible that the march could have been larger—and better organized?—if the participants had waited a few more minutes. Many who wished to participate spent the following twenty minutes scrambling to catch up to the fast-moving and unpredictable march. Of course, police would also have benefitted from the extra time to mobilize more numbers—they were already calling for reinforcements before the march departed. But this is a recurring issue: precisely the same thing happened during the 2005 inauguration, when out-of-town anarchists initiated the anti-capitalist march at Logan Circle ahead of schedule before many locals had arrived or gotten the pieces in place for their plans. ("The eternal hourglass of existence is upended again and again—and you with it, speck of dust!")

Already, as the march stepped off the curb, at least one umbrella was visible behind the banners in the front. The umbrella later became an iconic symbol of the day; umbrellas had been used to protect anarchists against video surveillance at previous marches, notably during resistance to the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York City, but people may have brought them to DC simply because the weather forecast for the day included a chance of rain.

Police cars and vans were parked on either side of the entry to 13th Street. The marchers made their way between them without encountering resistance, then fanned out to take the entire street. At this point, there were 500 or more people in the march; some estimate that up to a thousand participated at some point over the following half hour.

The police do not appear to have been especially prepared for the march. Although they had a tremendous number of officers on duty, they already had their hands full communicating between different agencies and dealing with the blockades. Like everyone else, the police, too, seem to have been caught flatfooted by the arrival of the Trump era, in which a great many more people were willing to show up to confrontational demonstrations.

Commander Keith Deville, who was in charge of police operations throughout DC during the inauguration, testified during the first J20 trial that "Our information leading up to the inauguration was this particular group gathering at Logan Circle was going to be problematic. They were anarchists." At 10:15 am on January 20, he reported over the radio: "This is a relatively large group and appears to be *all* anarchists." Estimating the group at 300-350,[1] he called for reinforcements, fearing that, "**If they get inside a pedestrian-only area where our vehicles can't go, we're going to lose them."** This detail should not escape our notice.

The march was loose, extending over a block. Two minutes in, people began dragging newspaper boxes and trashcans into street. Someone threw a projectile at the BP station a block south of Logan Circle; a block further, someone apparently started a fire in a trashcan at M Street. As the crowd approached L Street, participants vandalized Au Bon Pain.

There were cameras everywhere; several far-right reporters were livestreaming, including an NRA TV reporter and pro-fascist Lauren Southern. One individual attempted to block journalists who were filming someone repeatedly smashing a brick into the parking meter in front of Au Bon Pain. Generally speaking, it is more effective to block cameras with banners than by simply raising one's hands.

Police were tailing the crowd in vans at this point, but not yet engaging. The police helicopter overhead contributed to the charged atmosphere. Debating

whether to send officers on motorcycles and bicycles and whether to form a line blocking the march, the officer at the Joint Operation Command Center inquired as to what property destruction had occurred. This corroborates some participants' speculation that the march might not have been attacked as quickly as it was if participants had held off on property damage, but it's hard to know for sure; certainly the police would not have been thrilled about a large black bloc moving freely around the city in any case.

When the march turned right on K Street at Franklin Square, the banners were still arrayed at the front in an orderly fashion. A limousine was parked on the north side of the street, not far from the corner. Several individuals ran alongside it methodically knocking out its windows. The driver stood beside the limousine on sidewalk, calmly recording the event with his phone; mysteriously, someone threw a sandwich at him. Later, in court, when the prosecution asked him if he was frightened, he emphasized that he was not.

A handful of National Guard passed on the sidewalk to the south of this scene without engaging. Throughout the day, the National Guard rarely interacted with protesters. A massive line of police arrived at K Street behind the march: squad vans, lots of bike cops, motorcycle cops, and officers on foot. At this point, the order had gone out to get in front of the march and block it; officers initially were told to hurry ahead to form a line at 13th and K, but the march had already begun to zigzag.

The crowd turned south again, passing through the middle of Franklin Square, then turned left once more on I Street. Commander Deville hoped to surround the march in the park; officers scramble out to form a line on one side, but they were not moving swiftly enough. A police van, a few police cars, and a couple motorcycle cops were positioned on the south side of I street, along with a dozen bike cops who did not engage as the march passed them. From this point on, there were sirens in the air.

This video includes instructive footage of the middle portion of the march, from the first time the crowd passed through Franklin Square until it returned there some minutes later.

The march paused at the corner of I Street and 13th Street to wait for people to catch up, then continued east on I Street. Someone threw a projectile at a white government SUV in the south side of the intersection; others smashed its headlights and windows and spray-painted it. South of I Street, 13th Street was blocked with four jersey barriers on the sidewalk and a dump truck and several National Guard trucks parked sideways in the middle of the road. At this point, the march had been in the street for about 15 minutes, and appeared to have grown in numbers. It was a fierce but heterogeneous crowd, predominantly dressed in black.

Proceeding further down I Street, the march encountered a Starbucks and Bank of America; many people participated in thoroughly demolishing their façades. The march was large enough at this point that from the middle, it was not easy to tell what the police were doing outside it. In fact, a large number of police on foot and many more on motorcycles were shadowing the crowd from the back. They were already attacking civilians at random; soon after they passed the intersection of 13th and I Street, police seized an ordinary bicyclist and threw her to the ground for no apparent reason, then continued around her.

The march arrived at the traffic island between I Street, 12th and 11th Streets, and New York Avenue. Police were positioned at the intersection of I Street and New York on the other side of the park, along with a few National Guard and an armored vehicle. The march circled the traffic island indecisively. Things were becoming chaotic. Someone was grabbed and beaten by a Trump supporter who held them until the cops came and arrested them; their charges were later dropped, perhaps as a consequence of another demonstrator filming the confrontation.

Dozens of armored riot police blocked the intersection at 11th and I Street, still scrambling and disorganized. The crowd returned west on I Street,

but the police who had been trailing the march were blocking the west and north sides of 12th and I. Officers began pepper-spraying people at this intersection. Some participants feared that the crowd would be kettled in this area, though it was a relatively open space compared to the closed city block where the march was ultimately trapped.

There were no police on New York Avenue at the intersection with 12th Street, only a parked city vehicle turned sideways to block the street. The crowd headed southwest, breaking into a run. The next city block was open and clear. Deville ordered cops on bikes and motorcycles to pass the crowd on the left in order to get in front of them to form a line, but they were stymied by all the stragglers a block behind the march. Police estimated the crowd at 500 at this point; factoring in all the different groups that were spread out over an area of two blocks, it may have been significantly more.

The march turned north on 13th Street at the McDonald's, which some participants briefly attacked. At this point, had the march proceeded further southwest on New York Avenue, it was just a few blocks to the aforementioned pedestrian area around the inaugural parade route and the White House, where Deville had said his officers would not be able to control the march. Likewise, had the march turned south on 13th, it was only a few blocks to the pedestrian area and the queer blockade at the checkpoint into the parade route. According to *USA Today,* Trump left the White House only ten minutes later. If the march had reached the checkpoints to the south, it would have caused significantly more disruption; the participants might also have escaped mass arrest. The difficulty of following with police vehicles and the presence of mixed crowds would have posed considerable obstacles to the police. Of course, there might also have been violent confrontations with Trump supporters.

Why did the march go north at this point rather than southwest or south? Throughout the half hour that the march moved through the streets, it often changed direction simply on account of meeting a line of riot police, bouncing haphazardly around downtown DC like a ball in a pinball machine. But there was not a large contingent of police blocking the way south on 13th Street. The crowd only encountered a few police at this intersection, though this was the point at which officers began to employ sting-ball grenades and pepper-spray liberally. Still, there were so few that the march could have headed south past them without much trouble. Rather, it appears that the march went north simply as a result of internal miscommunication. This suggests the absence of experienced locals at the front.

A minute after the report went out that the march was destroying the McDonald's at the corner of 13th Street and New York Avenue, police were

ordered to mobilize a block west down New York, at 14th. Based on this timing, if the march had continued moving quickly down New York, the police probably would not have arrived in time to block them, and the way directly south on 13th Street would also have remained open.

As the march headed north, a few officers ran alongside it, pepper-spraying the participants. One demonstrator answered in kind, fending off an officer with a pole. At the back of the march, a large number of officers on foot, bikes, and motorcycles continued to shadow the crowd.

Now spread out, stressed, and disorganized, the march made its way through the parked vehicles and jersey blockades that had made the south side of the intersection of 13th and I Street appear impassable from the other direction. Arriving back at Franklin Square, many people hurried along the sidewalk, while others took the street. Footage shows the last arrivals to the intersection of 13th and I Street running past a large number of stationary police who did not attempt to engage.

The march was spread out over a wide area. It was almost a quarter to 11 as demonstrators made their way across the park, regrouping in the northwest corner of Franklin Square. The police, too, paused on the south side of Franklin Square to regain their bearings, then drove around the park to arrive at the intersection of 14th and K Street from the south just as demonstrators were arriving there through the park. This was probably the last opportunity the participants had to disperse before a mass arrest became inevitable.

A few officers and National Guardsmen had been positioned at 14th and K Street; they spread out to block the way west on K Street, reinforced by the large number of police arriving on motorcycles and bicycles. Had the march proceeded west here, it was one block to the permitted rally site at McPherson Square. However, McPherson Square was still sparsely populated; there was no large crowd to melt into. Heading for that rally might have been irresponsible, as it could have brought police pressure to bear on the rally area. In any case, the march proceeded north.

After the crowd crossed K to the north, bike cops and motorcycle cops at the back aggressively herded people into the march, riding their motorcycles up on people's heels. They were not aiming to carry out arrests, but rather to concentrate the group they hoped to mass-arrest into a controllable area. The police were likely relieved that the march was leaving the open square for long, canyon-like blocks in which they could trap it. Another police platoon was dispatched towards Logan Circle, to the north, in case the march continued in that direction.

At 10:46, demonstrators smashed another Starbucks, this one located in a hotel between K and L Streets. At 10:48, meeting lines of police blocking

14th Street to the north and L Street to the west, the march headed east on L Street. Motorcycle police pulled onto the sidewalk on the north side of the street to race ahead of the demonstrators; this was the same strategy that Deville had ordered them to employ when he hoped to surround the march on New York Avenue. These same officers established the police line at the intersection of 12th and L Street. This, too, should not escape the notice of those who may participate in future marches: the police were not able to surround and block the march until the participants permitted the line of motorcycles to pass them. All it would have taken to block the motorcycles would have been for groups to walk in front of them with banners as others continued to launch projectiles or place things in the street.

At 10:49, there was an incident on the north side of L Street involving a demonstrator using a patio chair; this interrupted the police operation for a moment, leaving one police motorcycle disabled. Robert Hrifko, a self-proclaimed biker for Trump, also sustained a blow to his face at this point. At the time, he said something to the effect of "hell of a right hook," acknowledging the strength of the individual who allegedly hit him, but afterwards he told reporters variously that it was a chair or a rock that struck him. A confrontation erupted in which police pepper-sprayed people, bringing both sides temporarily to a halt. The officers could have made arrests, but they did not try to; their aim had been to form a line trapping the entire crowd, and when they realized that some people had already passed them going east, they resumed driving in that direction to try again at the intersection of 13th and L Street.

At this point, it was clear to experienced participants that a kettle was imminent. Many participants had already split off from the march and dispersed. The streets were largely empty, enabling the police to treat everyone present as a target. Rather than staying tight, the best policy in such a situation may be for participants who are fleet of foot to sprint as fast as possible whenever they see police lines forming, in hopes of getting to the other side and sandwiching the police between multiple groups of demonstrators; police facing a hostile crowd will rarely risk being surrounded. It is also important to avoid long closed stretches of street in which a march can be trapped—or else, if absolutely necessary, to traverse them as quickly as possible.

Sirens were ringing out continuously. When the crowd moved past the site of the confrontation into the intersection of L and 13th Street, there were no police to be seen blocking the way north on 13, although a couple dozen officers were visible further south on 13th Street (see 4:55 here). The march had come full circle, crossing from west to east the same intersection it had crossed from north to south half an hour earlier.

As the march approached the intersection with 12th Street, more and more motorcycle and bicycle cops continued to ride past on the left. An alley was open to the right on the south side of the street; a large number of participants fled down it, hoping that they would not be caught in it the way that participants in the night march following the 2005 inauguration were. The police were not prepared to block them where the alley let out in the middle of 12th Street, and they escaped; the mouth of the alley was strewn with black clothing and accessories until conscientious demonstrators eventually returned to gather them up.

The motorcycle and bicycle cops raced to the end of the block and formed a line, backed by a few police cars. It was not a tremendous number of officers blocking access to 12th Street, but they made themselves look more imposing by parking their vehicles behind them, creating an obstacle course of motorcycles and cars. Ten or more members of the National Guard stood along the building at the southern end of the street, ostensibly part of the police line but not actually taking action to participate. Beyond the police line, the canyonlike street gave way to two blocks of open parks in which it would have been much more difficult to kettle a dispersing crowd.

Unfortunately, rather than immediately charging the police line before it became any stronger, demonstrators paused and turned, hoping to return to the alley, only to find the way behind them blocked by two much larger lines of police: a large number of black-clad baton-wielding riot police on foot, backed by an even stronger line of police in fluorescent jackets. The black-clad police closed in with batons, while a few cops doused people in pepper spray, aiming to force them forward into a smaller and smaller area.

As the march drew together in confusion on the northern side of L Street, a small group of people clustered together on the sidewalk on the southern side of the street. This group managed to get away in the disorder after the umbrella charge, simply by letting the police run past them and then slipping out where they saw an opening. Before the umbrella charge, individual journalists managed to step right through the police line, and at least one black-clad marcher sprinted between officers to safety as well; the police were still scrambling to get a solid footing, with a commanding officer repeatedly shouting "line formation." In situations like this, when the orders of the police are to get control of an area rather than to make targeted arrests, it is often not worth it to them to pursue individuals who get through their lines. Demonstrators who can rapidly and correctly assess the priorities of the police can often escape at such a moment.

> "'We're being kettled,' a comrade correctly pointed out. 'We can't stay here, there's more coming, they're going to trap us, we have to break through. Tighten up and lock arms.' A couple of us echoed his sentiment louder and we came together and locked arms. Before anyone could think about what the fuck would happen, someone started the countdown: *'Three!'* More joined in: 'TWO!' Then almost all of us: *'ONE!'* We charged the storm troopers swinging their clubs."
>
> -#DISRUPTJ20 Report Back: The Logan Circle Black Bloc

Between the arrival of police at the intersection of 12th and L Street and the umbrella charge, fully two minutes passed—an extremely long amount of time under the circumstances. The remnants of the march still consisted of more than 300 people. The ones in front linked arms, one person holding a battered umbrella. Someone shouted, "We're going to do a countdown!"

The crowd counted from ten down to one and charged, aiming at the north end of the police line. Remarkably, the battered umbrella at the front of the line blocked the initial jet of pepper spray and the crowd broke through the line. Approximately fifty people escaped this way, fleeing northeast. As the police scrambled to reinforce their line to the north, openings appeared in the middle of the line; at least one journalist simply stepped through here, and a demonstrator who charged the southern side of the police line alone, though initially thrown to the ground by an officer, managed to stand up and sprint through between the confused officers. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

But the remainder of the march did not attempt a second charge towards the middle of the line, instead bogging down in a bottleneck at the north side where a significant number of people had fallen down, blocking the way. The line of police swept in from the back, pinning the crowd. From this point forward, the police employed a tremendous amount of gratuitous violence with the intention of intimidating people into ceasing to try to escape or resist. First they struck out at random with batons and pepper spray, then they threw sting-ball grenades right into the center of the trapped crowd. An officer radioed in confusion as out-of-control cops bullied the captive protesters: "Gas is being deployed at the 1100 block of 12th… We're not sure who it's by. We're not sure who it's by."

Making their allegiances clear, the police let fascist cheerleader Lauren Southern out along with her cameraman and security detail while continuing

to hold everyone else inside, including lawyers and journalists. Inside the kettle, everyone who was carrying something they did not wish to be arrested with let it fall from their pockets in what one eyewitness described as a "rain of sketch" onto the pavement. Outside the kettle, a couple individuals who had nearly escaped in the umbrella charge remained pinned down on the asphalt.

"Fuck Donald Trump," one repeated earnestly to videographers. "Fuck Donald Trump."

Within six minutes of the umbrella charge, a line of supporters had already formed on the other side of the street, chanting "This is what a police state looks like!" and "Fuck the police!" More and more people gathered there over the following hours, expressing support to the people in the kettle.

ACT THREE: CHAOS IN DC

At noon, a permitted march departed from Columbus Circle, crossing the city to McPherson Square. Meanwhile, participants who had escaped from the Anti-Fascist/Anti-Capitalist March filtered south, mingling with protesters returning north from the blockades around the checkpoints to Trump's parade and people coming and going from the daylong permitted rally at McPherson Square. Soon the crowd extended across several blocks. The area north of the parade route became an ungovernable zone.

Around 1 pm, there were a hundred or more people still in black bloc gear in the vicinity of the permitted rally at McPherson square when a group of Trump supporters showed up wearing "Make America Great Again" hats. One of the Trump supporters gave a Nazi salute; another threw a projectile. Masked anarchists responded, inflicting significant injuries. The National Guard had to escort the injured Trump supporters out of the area. Something similar recurred around 2 pm.

The police were bogged down carrying out the mass arrest at 12th and L Street. They had surrounded nearly 250 people. Guarding, processing, and arresting them took a considerable amount of personnel. They maintained a line of cops around the arrestees and another line holding back the increasingly thick crowds who gathered to support them.

Around 1:45 pm, a clash broke out with these supporters. The police line pushed people south on 12th Street, throwing sting-ball grenades at protesters who threw stones and bricks back in return.

Pushing slowly forward, the police line eventually arrived at 12th and K, where they were held at bay for some time by a few protesters throwing

rocks from within a heterogeneous crowd that was sympathetic but not particularly thick. The officers were coughing from their own pepper spray and yelling "Watch out!" to each other in unison as one rock after another crashed into their ranks. For quite some time, they threw sting-ball grenades at random, mostly hitting the bystanders and photographers in front of them.

By this point, police had shifted from an offensive strategy in which they tried to control what happened everywhere to a defensive strategy in which they maintained fixed territory by means of thick lines of riot police but exercised very little control over what occurred outside those lines. The more pepper-spray and sting-ball grenades they threw at the crowds without suc-

ceeding in dispersing them, the more obvious it was that they were no longer the dominant force in the streets.

Footage shows masked vandals smashing up the limousine near the intersection of 13th and K long after the Anti-Capitalist/Anti-Fascist March had passed. People played on and inside it for hours. Beside the smashed limousine, a fire burned where trashcans and newspaper boxes remained heaped in the middle of the street just west of the intersection.

Masked anarchists were able to move freely throughout this area, enjoying the support of a plurality of the crowd, if not a majority. Police feared that any additional intervention would only escalate the situation further out of their control. This is why they were powerless to protect the limousine, put out the fire, or arrest the people who kept them at a distance with projectiles.

By 2:25, the police line managed to push forward to the east side of 13th and K by means of a tremendous amount of random violence. Here, they reached an impasse. A crowd gathered in response, chanting "Whose streets?" and definitively halting their progress. When a Trump supporter in a MAGA hat objected to the behavior of the crowd, a native veteran shouted him down, forcing him to take off his hat and withdraw to the police lines with his tail between his legs. When a police SUV tried to drive through the crowd from the west, endangering protesters, several people dressed in black blocked its way and smashed in its rear window. It reversed out of the crowd in a hurry. Over the following hours, this line of police repeatedly deployed pepper spray and sting-ball grenades, severely harming an indigenous elder and a child, among others, but the area before them remained an autonomous zone.

Around 2:30 pm, fascist spokesman Richard Spencer was answering interview questions on the corner of 14th and K Street, where the Anti-Capitalist/Anti-Fascist March had passed less than three hours earlier, when someone ran up and punched him, generating the most memorable footage of Trump's inauguration. Spencer had showed up to DC expecting to accept political power on behalf of white supremacists across the country, as symbolized by Trump's ascension to power; instead, he became a symbol of the widespread refusal to legitimize Trump and the determination to fight white supremacists by all means. Judging by attire, the person who punched Spencer had participated in the black bloc.

Around 3 pm, DC Mayor Muriel Bowser tweeted, "I respect your right to peacefully protest but the damage that has occurred today is unacceptable and not welcome in DC." Politicians and police had aimed to keep demonstrations against Trump confined to respectful civil disobedience, hoping that people would blow off steam by "speaking truth to power" so business as usual could continue under the new administration. Instead, the riotous atmosphere in Washington, DC was setting a precedent that would help to inspire countless further acts of rebellion around the United States over the following months.

Around 4 pm, a sit-in blocked traffic two blocks north of Franklin Square at 13th and Massachusetts, where the march had passed five and a half hours earlier. Actions like this and the march that shut down highway 395 continued to spread chaos and disorder throughout the nation's capital.

Half an hour later, the damaged limousine caught fire within full view of the line of beleaguered riot police. Huge clouds of black smoke filled the air, lending downtown an ominous atmosphere at the end of the afternoon. Alongside the punching of Richard Spencer, this was the most iconic image of the day.

The fire near the intersection of 13th and K burned until well past nightfall; even after the fire department extinguished the limousine, repeated interventions from police failed to extinguish the trash fire, as protesters simply lit it again and again.

PERSPECTIVE: DOWNTOWN DC, UNGOVERNABLE ZONE

I can see some of my friends inside of the kettle over the lines of riot police. Still wearing our masks, my friends and I are walking around trying to talk to others to make some kind of plan. "Can we get them out?" There is no way our resistance is going to end here—it's not even noon. Activists, families, and local residents are accumulating around us, punctuated by groups of people wearing backpacks and masks, hoods up, huddled together, waiting to see what happens. Before long, for better or for worse, someone in a mask throws a bright blue smoke bomb right under the feet of the riot police. They immediately begin panicking, shooting pepper spray everywhere; at one point, they directly hit a woman and her child. Bottles and stones are flying over my head at the police. Sting-ball grenades are exploding all around me.

Impossibly, hooded and masked protesters surround me once again. Where did all of these people come from? To my left, four or five people are using hammers to break up the asphalt; two people behind them are throwing bricks through yet another set of windows. To my right, about 10 people are dragging police barricades into the intersection. Stones are flying past me at the police while the entire crowd chants "A! Anti! Anti-Capitalista!" It's actually thunderous.

Eventually we are pushed back a few blocks, but now teenagers are arriving on bicycles, tying t-shirts around their faces. Newspaper boxes are being set on fire, police vehicles are attacked with stones, and before too long, a limousine is engulfed in flames. Near the park to my right, a convenience store is partially looted and an overturned trashcan spills empty glass bottles onto the sidewalk. For hours, this standoff holds the police at a safe distance from the family-friendly rally two blocks away.

By nightfall, my friends and I stop for a quick bite to eat at a cheap restaurant. When we come out, a local teenager is standing on top of a burning dumpster smoking marijuana with a ski mask on. In both directions, overturned trash cans block the intersections, the smoldering flames spitting ash into the amber lights of the adjacent

buildings and "road closed" displays. Punk music is playing loudly from somewhere. Our task is complete—it's time to leave. We couldn't save our friends in the kettle, but the morning black bloc was not the failure it appeared to be.

ASSESSMENT

In assessing the events of J20, we can identify a few distinct questions. Let's address these one by one.

WAS IT A GOOD IDEA TO MOBILIZE AGAINST TRUMP'S INAUGURATION?

Can we imagine the first day of the Trump era without the footage of windows shattering in DC, the smashing and burning of the limousine, the punching of Richard Spencer? Make no mistake, it was the Anti-Fascist/Anti-Capitalist March that opened up space for these iconic moments in downtown DC on January 20.

If no one had made an open call for a concrete, confrontational action, fewer people would have arrived in DC prepared to defy the control of the police, and those who sought to do so would have had difficulty finding each other. As it was, no significant disruption occurred before the march at 10 am, and after the march dispersed, those who desired to engage in open resistance never reached critical mass to assume the offensive again. Rumors about another march never came to fruition; although an increasingly broad range of people participated in ungovernable behavior, the vast majority of it was reactive, responding to police incursions and defending territory that had already been psychologically transformed by the passing of the Anti-Fascist/Anti-Capitalist March. It's all well and good to argue that anarchists should act alongside other rebels rather than in isolation—but when we do, we often need a way to find each other in order to achieve critical mass and take the initiative.

We can critique the time (too early?), place (too far from the other crowds?), and tactics (too costly?), but if the goal was to legitimize and inspire direct action at the opening of the Trump administration, there was no better way than to call for confrontational action in DC. Downtown DC was the epicenter of the world's attention: every burning piece of litter on K Street was worth a burning bank or tank anywhere else. If the blockades had been the most confrontational action that took place in response to Trump

assuming power, this would have sent a message to the rest of the country that people were responding to Trump's ascendancy with civil disobedience, not by *becoming ungovernable.*

It's possible that the airport blockades, the shutting down of Milo , the battles of Charlottesville and Berkeley, and all the other epic struggles that wrenched the US off the course Trump had set for it would have occurred even if there had not been an inspiring show of resistance in DC. But the events of the inauguration occurred at such a pivotal point in the narrative that it's hard to imagine they didn't play any part in shaping what others around the country expected of themselves and each other. Sometimes there are battles one cannot afford to stand aside from, no matter how great the risks, no matter how unready one is.

DID THE MARCH GO WELL?

However important it was to take action in Washington, DC against the inauguration, our assessment of the results is complicated by the fact that by almost any measure, the march went very badly indeed. It was disorganized, dangerous, and disempowering; within a half hour of setting out, the march had been dispersed, with a large number of participants caught in a kettle. Considering how badly it went, it was amazing that anything inspiring happened in DC at all.

Who is responsible for the march going badly? There are four basic narratives addressing this question. One blames individual participants; another, the organizers; the third, the police; the fourth, the black bloc tactic itself. Let's address each of these in turn.

Certainly, plenty of participants had never been in a black bloc before. Not all of them dressed in clothing that effectively concealed their identities. Some people have expressed frustration that property destruction began almost immediately, assuming that this prompted the police to attack the march earlier than they otherwise would have; others felt that the seemingly arbitrary choice of targets (a bus shelter, a local café) and the carelessness with which some of them were attacked (without giving customers enough warning to get away from the windows) only exacerbated the challenges arrestees faced in the courtroom without making the message of the demonstration any clearer.

Regarding property destruction, in the weeks leading up to the march, many longtime anarchists agreed that the important thing would be to stay

together and present a strong, united front against police and Trump supporters, not to destroy property. It turned out that some attendees brought the opposite agenda, being prepared to break windows but scattering quickly in the face of police pressure. In the continuum between "rapport du force" and "smash and dash," the march erred on the side of the latter. When it comes to the ambience of a march, "destructive but weak" is one of the worst combinations.

Of course, if organizers had intended for people to come with a different agenda, they might have taken more steps to make that clear.

Years ago, during the anti-globalization era, a big black bloc march like the one that took place on January 20 would have included a scouting team on bicycles exploring the streets around the march to keep up with police movements, a comms team within the march communicating with the scouts and listening to a police scanner, and a group of locals near the front who could navigate wisely through the terrain—bringing the march towards its

objectives and, if necessary, to a safe place to disperse. In those days, black blocs were often organized through a series of confidential spokescouncils in which the participants agreed in advance on shared visions and expectations. So far as we can tell, the J20 march benefitted from none of these traditions.

It's debatable how much scouts could have helped—in a small area occupied by 28,000 law enforcement personnel, the scouts might simply have repeated "OK, this block is crowded with cops too" over and over into their radios. But the absence of any sort of guidance, communication, or decision-making structure was painfully felt, as the march repeatedly made decisions arbitrarily—crashing randomly around a city filled with targets and threats like a blind bull fleeing butchers through a china shop.

Many people were understandably afraid to do more coordinating to prepare for the Anti-Fascist/Anti-Capitalist March for fear that, in the repressive climate of the dawning Trump era, this would result in conspiracy charges. However, there are many different kinds of danger; it may have been worth it for a few people to take on more risk as organizers if that could have offset the risk that hundreds of less experienced people would end up with conspiracy charges of their own. There are ways to engage in public organizing for potentially confrontational actions that minimize your vulnerability to charges. As we enter an era of greater unrest, in which more people will be eager to participate in anarchist-organized actions, it may sometimes be worthwhile to take courageous risks in public organizing as well as in street action.

All that said, it is possible that the police forces arrayed against the J20 march were so powerful that the march could not realistically have turned out much better than it did. If that is the case, then perhaps it was a good thing that the march immediately began destroying property and creating chaos before the authorities were able to stop it. Certainly, it does not make sense to lay *all* the blame for police repression on those who initiated property destruction when the police were sure to do their best to crush any group that interfered with their mission of assuring Trump a *peaceful transition* to power.

If the police were bound to come down hard on the march, then we should ask if the black bloc tactic itself is to blame for our not being able to accomplish more than we did.

PERSPECTIVE: DC LONGTIME ORGANIZER

I have mixed feelings about the bloc on J20. The turnout to the black bloc was impressive. But impressive is relative. It's relative to the context of the anarchist milieu in the US, which, in my opinion, had been in a state of stagnation and decline for the ten years preceding J20. Folks of my generation largely seem to have taken their anarchist politics out of street-level grassroots activity and channels it into other areas of society—academia, non-profit organizations, arts and culture or business ventures—or

else quit altogether. Anarchist ideas are more popular than ever, and we've radicalized the left, even the mainstream left, in countless ways—but despite this, the anarchist movement has mostly stayed the same size, if not perhaps shrunk since the turn of the century.

As a consequence of this, the grassroots anarchist movement in the US is perpetually forced to reinvent the wheel. One generation after another of 20-something anarchists cycles in and out of default leadership roles—in the sense of contributing the most time to anarchist projects and taking up the most space in anarchist work.

My own involvement dates back to the mid-1990s. I've participated in organizing most of the major anarchist gatherings in DC over the last 20 years. Older people like myself, who have tried hard to stay involved, often see younger folks dismiss our experience or even respond with hostility; it can be easiest to stay out of the way and let younger anarchists reinvent the wheel. J20 was no exception. Generally speaking, there wasn't much room for experience or strategic thinking in the lead-up to the day.

Still, experienced locals had engaged in some planning and strategy. This was undermined when people from out of town departed from the convergence point earlier than local organizers had planned and deviated from the route that locals had chosen. This sabotaged plans to hit more strategic targets, engage in clearer messaging, and bring more visibility to anarchist politics on J20.

When the crowd gathered at Logan Circle that morning, I saw many faces I had not seen in an organized anarchist contingent in almost a decade. It was clear that many anarchists who had avoided the streets throughout the Obama years, or at least since Occupy, felt a sense of urgency and responsibility to assert a militant resistance to Trump and the authoritarian turn in American politics that his victory represented. In returning to the streets, many on the radical left went to the ant-fascist and anti-capitalist bloc out of ideological affinity, not necessarily because they were prepared for direct action that day.

That day's black bloc was comprised of an equal mix of the following different demographics:

- Radical leftists who wanted to express opposition to Trump by attending the gathering most aligned with their politics, but not necessarily prepared to do more than march.
- Militant anarchists and radicals who wanted to participate in a direct action bloc as an anti-fascist and anti-capitalist contribution to a broader showing of resistance.
- Journalists who wanted to go where the action was.
- A minority of affinity groups and individuals who wanted to use the bloc to carry out property destruction: some with a collective strategy in mind, some simply playing out a role.

I believe the property destruction on J20 was righteous. It was necessary and beautiful. But it was not the best thing that we could have contributed to the day as militant anarchists. Or else, even if it was under the circumstances, our standards should be higher.

Unlike the property destruction in Seattle during the 1999 World Trade Organization summit, which targeted many of the same corporations, there was no articulation of why it made sense to target multinationals on that particular day. Downtown Washington, DC is crowded with the headquarters of right-wing think tanks and lobbyists who have played a direct role in the rise of the far right and Trump's ascension to power. Although corporations like Starbucks and McDonalds deserve the utmost fury and destruction, it sent a confused message to our critics and the uninformed that we focused on those. I'm not saying it was a bad thing—but could the actions have been more targeted, spotlighting a more coherent anarchist analysis of power in this political moment?

If we had delivered on that—could we have had a better impact on public discourse? Would there have been more immediate public support for the J20 defendants and less support for the prosecution?

This brings up more questions for me. Could the bloc have employed a strategy that would have kept us in the streets longer? If we had managed to stay together throughout the day, we probably would have gained more and more participants over time. What could we have done together if we had?

How else could we have made anarchist politics visible and accessible on J20? I'm not saying property destruction is at odds with accessibility to the public—on the contrary—but breaking things is not always sufficient, in and of itself, to convey anarchist politics in all their nuance.

In conclusion, I think it's important to be able to consider the events of J20 a success and a failure at the same time. Whatever resistance we can muster in the face of the assault that capitalists and the state are carrying out on people and the planet counts as a success. But it is a failure that we can't seem to access more of our potential. Many of our shortcomings are products of a failure to decolonize our minds and rid ourselves of the mentality of the system we oppose.

Also, let's not underestimate how long or how deep the trauma of the J20 charges will linger in our movement. We have to bear this in mind when we discuss whether to consider the day a success. Yes, the state is to blame for the trauma and assaults. But if we say it was worth it on our side, let's be sure we understand the full impact of the consequences.

DOES THE BLACK BLOC WORK?

Considering how much information as the state was able to gather on the defendants, can you imagine how many criminal convictions there would have been if people had *not* been wearing masks and the same color?

It's true that in many cases, prosecutors believed that they could identify the defendants even in their black clothing. But if they were not able to get convictions, this shows that the state needs more than *data* to target people. By creating confusion among the enforcers of authority and solidarity among demonstrators, the black bloc model served to keep arrestees safe in the worst conditions. The prosecutors wanted to use the fact that everyone was wearing the same color to as evidence of conspiracy, but ultimately, they overreached; jurors felt "reasonable doubt" both about whose face it was under any particular black mask at any given time and also about whether wearing black proved that a defendant was attempting to facilitate criminal activity. If the police had snatched 20 people and charged them with felonies, some of them might still be in prison today. Instead, the *sea of black* made it through the streets and the court system together and came out the other side.

Likewise, the vast majority of those who escaped in the umbrella charge were never charged.

So the black bloc worked—this time. We can be certain that new technologies and new laws are on the way. J20 was a victory of sorts for the black bloc model, but one rarely gets to experience the same victory twice.

The strongest argument *against* the black bloc model is that Commander Deville immediately identified the march from Logan Circle as "anarchists" and singled it out for repression. Deville may have been determined to attack the march regardless of what people were wearing, but it is noteworthy that he used the black bloc branding to identify the march as a legitimate target. The paradox of the black bloc is that it simultaneously provides personal anonymity and collective political legibility. The question is what kind of political legibility will serve us best: what risks are we willing to run, when it comes to being politically legible to our enemies, in order to become politically legible to potential comrades?

In the era of doxxing and camera phones, we can hardly do without some way of preserving our anonymity in protest situations. It was prescient of the previous generation of anarchists to associate militant anonymity with anarchism in the popular imagination, since practically all who are pushed into conflict with the prevailing order will be compelled to experiment with forms of anonymity—and hopefully, in the process, to consider whether they too might be anarchists.

For that to be possible, we have to do everything in our power to normalize anonymous collective action and set wider precedents for it. Collective anonymity should not be associated with the immediate escalation to property destruction. It serves the authorities' interests for every black bloc to immediately commit vandalism and be surrounded or break up in flight before it can cross-pollinate with other groups. It would be better if, as in the anti-globalization days, there were regularly large black blocs that simply marched around, normalizing the tactic, assisting other groups, defending themselves as needed, and providing visibility for anarchist values.

We should also experiment with other means of preserving anonymity that do not immediately draw state attention or identify the participants as "extreme." It is easier to hide in numbers than in the darkest shade of black. Ultimately, our safety will derive from being part of broad, powerful, creative social movements that are prepared to support us the way people supported the J20 defendants, not from our technical skills when it comes to rendering ourselves invisible. The greatest danger that we will be isolated and contained is not that the police will race ahead of us in the streets and kettle us—it is that we will go on thinking of ourselves as exceptional, missing one opportunity after another to make common cause with others.

PERSPECTIVE: WHAT WE LEARNED

I think that we can be positive about the lessons we learned via the prosecutions. Although it turned our lives upside down, we learned a lot about the way the state is and is not able to crack phones, about legal campaigns and how to get charges dropped. Over 200 strangers somehow managed to not snitch on each other. We expanded our networks to resist repression and, against all odds, we overcame in totally ridiculous circumstances to win.

As a former defendant, I personally am still recovering from the ways it turned my life inside out and the stress and trauma of the case, but am grateful for the skills and insight I gained to support others on the receiving end of state repression. The case posed challenges we hadn't met before and gave us an opportunity to learn and strengthen ourselves. If someone had asked me whether the action itself was worth it during the scariest parts of the case, I would have said no. But now, with the scope of the entire thing in view, I feel that it was worth it. A person's perspective on such questions can change over time.

WAS IT WORTH IT?

Whatever victories we won on J20 and in the subsequent court cases, they came at a tremendous cost. Was it worth it?

To answer this question, we can't just look at a single day of action; we have to evaluate an entire way of life, the way of inhabiting the world that led anarchists like us to participate in the J20 march and so many other actions before it. Some of us have lived through years or decades of high-risk political activity. So many of the accomplishments of a century and a half of anarchist movements resulted from people like us throwing ourselves into the unknown, entering situations in which there are no guarantees. We have to weigh all of the victories that resulted from that way of being if we are to make a fair assessment of whether the risks we took on January 20, 2017 were worthwhile.

For other defendants, J20 was their first major action, and they were immediately subjected to an ordeal that some anarchists have not experienced in two decades of black blocs. It is easy to understand how this might put one off from participating in high-risk political activity. Certainly that was the goal of the government, at a moment when more and more people are looking to join revolutionary movements.

If anarchists were the only protagonists of revolt, it might make sense to save ourselves for contests with better odds. But the important thing is what *everyone* does, not what we do alone. There are certain times and places—certain brief windows in history—when a single action can have tremendous impact. In such situations, we can humbly offer ourselves as catalysts, hoping to do our part to create situations that everyone can participate in. If our actions on J20 helped inspire thousands outside our social circles to occupy airports and stand up to fascists, they may have been worth it, even if the upshot was that we ourselves were out of action for a year or more.

We are never going have auspicious odds going into a frontal assault on the state at its strongest. Unfortunately, there are times when the consequences of not doing so will be even worse.

For those who were critical of the call for a confrontational march on J20, then, in place of the question of whether people should have gone to DC, we propose another question. If we are ever forced to confront the state again in the way that many felt compelled to that morning in 2017, what will we wish we had done in advance to prepare for that? How can we be preparing *right now?*

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We should always try to be strategic and to accomplish as much as possible with the minimum losses. But we should not blame those who called for the march for the intensity of the ensuing crackdown, nor write off an entire kind of action as "too risky." DC police have carried out mass arrests before—during the IMF/World Bank protests in April 2000, the "People's Strike" in September 2002, and on the night following the Inauguration in 2005. They kettled the October Rebellion black bloc in October 2007. But the charges that the DC prosecutor pressed were unprecedented. The J20 charges clearly represented a new experiment in the evolution of state repression—an experiment which, like many of Trump's innovations, was thwarted only because people immediately threw all they had into opposing it.

The police could also have carried out mass arrests at the blockades—indeed, had they not been stretched thin trying to police the entire downtown area, they might have done just that. Would we then have blamed the blockade organizers? They certainly could have cracked down on the black blocs elsewhere around the country the same way—in Berkeley on February 1, for example, or in Philadelphia a few weeks later, or in the various clashes with fascists that have taken place since then. Would we then have accused the organizers of those actions of an error? Those black blocs were essential in halting the spread of fascism and inspiring people around the United States

to rise up. If they involved some of the same risks that the J20 actions did, we must also add those accomplishments to the list of reasons to be open to taking risks like the ones we took on J20.

The fact is: the kind of action that can interrupt a high-security spectacle like a presidential inauguration is high-risk activity, just like the kind of action it will take to halt the rise of authoritarian nationalism and the kind of action it will take to stop the destruction of the natural world. The results of our efforts are never guaranteed in advance. Sometimes, in what seems a hopeless situation, the courage of a few people can become the power of thousands. Other times, one takes a risk and fails. We can analyze our victories and failures in hopes of being better prepared to identify the strategic opportunities and risks the next time around, but the world will go on changing ahead of every effort to map it and predict the future.

Some people in the US already experience more risk in their daily lives than any of us were exposed throughout the entire J20 ordeal. Others who made the rational choice not to go to the demonstrations in DC still found themselves confronted with the necessity of supporting their comrades through the ensuing court cases and bravely rose to the occasion. We don't get to determine the level of risk that the state subjects us to or the challenges that come our way. What we *can* do is stand courageously by each other throughout the worst misfortunes, facing the unknowable future together. It may hold miracles or horrors—it almost certainly holds both—but if we meet it together, we will learn more about each other and ourselves.

PERSPECTIVE: I'D DO IT AGAIN

Now that the case has ended, it's given me a chance to reflect. There are many conversations that remain to be had amongst trusted friends about what happened that day, but now that the prospect of prison isn't hanging over my head, I've finally had some room to breathe. Despite all the grief of the past year and a half—I'd do it again. And I know that I will.

FURTHER READING

- #DisruptJ20 Report Back: The Logan Circle Black Bloc
- #DisruptJ20 and the Black Bloc: An Opportunity Lost?
- We've Got Your Back: The Story of the J20 Defense
- I Was a J20 Street Medic and Defendant
- Between the Sun and the Sea: Icarus at 12th and L—A Voice from the J20 Black Bloc and Kettle on the Practice of Anarchy
- DC Office of Police Complaints Report on the Inauguration
- J20 Protest Simulator—Choose Your Own Adventure in the Streets and Courts of Washington, DC

1. When it comes to approximating crowd size, the conflict between police estimates and protester estimates goes back generations. Regarding the accuracy of police estimates of crowd size on January 20, we simply note that when the march was kettled at 12th and L Street, the first two officers to estimate the number of arrestees put it between 50 and 100. In fact, it was more like 250.

"We are often defeated. However, no matter how often beaten, we cannot forget the joy we felt during the fight. The pleasure of stretching our will power. The pleasure of trying out our own strength. The pleasure of seeing a manifestation of real comradely emotions among comrades. The pleasure of seeing the world clearly divided into friend and foe. And above all of these various pleasures, the pleasure of seeing faintly and gradually our own future and society's future. The pleasure of seeing an improvement in our own personalities."

-Ōsugi Sakae, 1920

Together, we would open up like an abyss, immeasurably deep, and some unknowable, uncontrollable future would pour out of us.

CrimethInc.