



*Express and coordinate differences. Develop capacities.*



## Civil war revisited *conflict in the twin cities and beyond*

ly took the megaphone and corrected him: “He means ‘shut it down!’” and led the group in a chant. As soon as someone is shot by the police, Neighborhoods Organized for Change or Socialist Alternative is on the scene in orange marshaling vests handing out signs and leaflets before the information can spread through informal networks. The youth are told that “they have to play by the rules” if they want any meaningful change. The dedicated utopians are assimilated into the bureaucracies of the non-profits or else of local government, and the delinquents are alienated—uninterested or unable to participate in either. The latter are castigated by their former peers for being “a-political” when in reality the former joined the forces of management.

If hegemony wins, everyone will be off the street, and all power will be mediated through the abstractions of legitimate political discourse. The Left dominates the appropriate forms of public contestation. To break this cycle, disrupting their capacities by fragmenting their spaces or introducing heretical or inappropriate truths into their discourse will be necessary for those who desire to build power. The only thing the Left still has to offer us is its own dissolution and fragmentation. Only by breaking apart, dividing, and splitting can we find those who excite us, inspire us to fight and to build together.

The future will be messy for those who desire to take a side in a civil war and organize their power. Every blockade of the city, every occupation, every confrontation with the police will bring about new conflicts. And not just with the police, but with each other. In the face of new conflicts, we can either recognize an opportunity to experiment with new strategies of dealing with crises, of working them out through decision; or, we can normalize them and manage them through discourse, through spatial organization, and through preventative techniques.

Difference has been falsely equated with lack or negativity. Civil war reveals instead that it is the principle of our interaction with one another as ethical beings in a finite world.

One can’t say anything conclusive about civil war, so we won’t try to conclude. We won’t end with a hope or a prediction. We’ll end it the only way we know how: by letting it trail off, as a fragment, as if on a stray path...

an excerpt from *The Savage Peace*  
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easier access, running on and off the highway, breaking up concrete to throw at police, blasting music, driving around, arguing or even screaming at each other, evading undercover police, or just walking around. There was no attempt to pretend to be one group, to try to join together in some false unity, and yet we felt our possibilities increase. Spaces fragmented and multiplied and yet we actually felt more power going in and out of them. Hostility and anger abounded, and yet we were actually making contact — not always with words— rather than just performing. Disorder gave us access to our capacities. We know we have a lot to do.

Civil war guarantees disorders. Disorder names that moment when the speed becomes too fast, the spaces become too disconnected, the intensity gets too high, or the actions become too disparate for those who would like to manage political situations. It is not good or bad in itself. The police produce disorders for their own advantage, for instance, by firing concussion grenades into the middle of a crowd to produce a fleeing response. The horrors of the Congo, of Syria, and of Somalia are not the result of an over-intensification of civil war, but from its over-management. Their disorders —the paid rebel groups, the introduction of racist discourse and legal identification, the sudden removal of infrastructural supports, the robbery of essential materials, etc— were planned and structured. So let's make sure not to champion disorder for its own sake. We must learn how to sense those disorders that produce new possibilities and deepen them to increase our power. We must become familiar and comfortable with disorder.

The partisans of order perpetually fail to manage civil war. The only question is whether we will find new friends in the wreckage or pathetically cling to mythologized unities. Here in the Midwest, the greatest impediment to our self-organization are the non-profits and the wider Left who have perfected their preventative mechanisms of social management. We've had crisis after crisis here in the Twin Cities, and, as the energy widens and new conversations begin, the leftist groups step in. They set up tables and banners, assign bodies an effective placement for a symbolic protest, and bring megaphones to set the boundaries of acceptable discourse. At an event at the 4th Precinct, a family member of Jamar Clark's declared that "If Jamar don't get justice, we're gonna burn this shit down." An NAACP organizer quick-

## Civil war revisited

**N**O ONE CAN DECLARE A CIVIL WAR, they can only point it out. The fear that Donald Trump will bring about a new civil war in America is misguided. Civil war is here. Any conflicts that appear in the coming years have been latent all along. Social peace is well-organized force in a territory, and the result of someone else's daily experience of civil war.

Civil war is out in the open. Blue Lives Matter continues to grow, and so does its explicitly martial language. “We are at war!” exclaimed officer Travis Yates on Lawofficer.com. Larry Klayman, the founder of Judicial Watch, has filed a lawsuit alleging that Obama, Al Sharpton, and Black Lives Matter are intentionally inciting a race war. David Clark, the cowboy sheriff, raves that the “vulgar, vile, slimy movement” of anti-cop touting revolutionaries is a “slime [that] needs to be eradicated from American society and American culture.” Natives at Standing Rock (who have been hosed, pepper sprayed, gassed, and arrested since April 2016) have known about civil war for 500 years. Black kids who get stopped by the cops outside their own houses because they look “suspicious” have known about civil war. The media frenzy about civil war means that the liberal and center parties who shielded themselves from war for so long are finally having to experience it as well.

Civil war is unruly. Some parties represent their enemy as a flaw or sickness to be managed. In times of crisis, these representations tend to collapse back into the figure of the outlaw. The religious extremists, the demonstrators who throw rocks, and the police who murder are all called “terrorists” by their opposition. “Terrorist” is the most extreme form of the refusal to recognize in the enemy a legitimate combatant. The terrorist is the dark side of the democratic citizen —the latent possibility that one’s “rights” could disappear at the exact moment one is identified as an outlaw and exposed to death. Those who cannot speak the language of democracy, but continue to speak and act anyway, will be called terrorists or agitators. To say “terrorist” is to demand the great forces of the world to recognize a moral calamity and eliminate it. We learn nothing when the police eliminate the terrorists. We learn from our battles. Rather than calling the next bombing an “inhuman” act, let’s uncover the history that made it a viable strategy; rather than being content calling the police “monsters” when they murder, let’s examine the discourse that legally actualizes and protects their acts. Let’s call our enemies our enemies, and strive to defeat them.

Civil war demands patience. If we desire to have power over our lives, our daily activities, or the spaces we dwell in, we must be open to conflict. Our daily lives are today so heavily managed, surveilled, and controlled that the appearance of conflict is fol-

lowed by feelings of despair and dismay —or interpreted as a sign of deadly divisions that will ruin the community. One can coordinate with others without unifying with them. We have to get used to disorder to analyze its contours and the possibilities it opens.

Civil war is dynamic. The peak of conflict in the Twin Cities in the last two years was undoubtedly the I-94 occupation following the police murder of Philando Castile. What was supposed to be a simple highway demonstration —with the die-hards offering themselves up to arrest, the self-elected leaders making speeches, and the marginalia that was supposed to disband at the point they felt alienated from the spectacle— ended up fragmenting into something much greater. We could learn much from that night. Whenever the perpetually peaceful Twin Cities experience a major disorder, that means something went very right. The space was partly to blame: I-94 is huge, and the group on the ground, while large, was eventually scattered around. There were also two hills on either side whose trees provided cover for those running on and off the highway. At the top, the streets were the sight of much activity. Even worse for the champions of order, the group stopped underneath a land bridge in the Rondo neighborhood, where many are distrustful of police. The fence of the land bridge was chained on the sides but open on the top. This allowed aggressors to be completely embedded and hidden in the crowd while being able to occasionally climb up and throw bottles or bricks down at the line of police. The activist groups tried their hardest to stop it, but their megaphones just reverberated in ambient waves, barely understood even by those standing nearby. Not only that, but participants were carving out their own aural space by blasting Lil’ Boosie’s “Fuck the Police,” shouting at their friends, or shooting fireworks. The police naturally tried to diffuse the situation. In one major misstep, they threw colorful smoke bombs, which only added to the extra-worldly atmosphere of the night and emboldened even more of the crowd to stay.

Civil war reveals the possibilities of the world, even as it dissolves or fragments them. The activists on one side of the highway were letting themselves be arrested. Everything centered on two actors: the peaceful activists and their aggressive antagonists. Those on the other side were tearing up the highway fence to make for