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Portland, Oregon: The Perez Murder, One Year Later
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to grow that buildups of police vehicles near the precinct, or the sounds of late-night gunfire, could be attributed to the early stages of a rebellion.

One year on, Portland appears more tranquil. Perez's death triggered a series of institutional changes within city government, improving nothing but the quality of illusions. During 2004's mayoral election, Tom Potter was able to triumph over favorite Jim Francesconi in part due to the fallout from Perez's death. Francesconi had served on City Council at the time of the shooting, and lost favor in whole neighborhoods because of it

Potter used to be a Police Chief, but he talked loudly about police accountability and reform throughout his campaign. Now, with Potter at the wheel, Portland has a mayor who favors "participation," and shows up at Critical Mass bicycle rides and anti-Bush protests. Potter is both unable and unwilling to prevent further cop attacks, yet his image as a "listener" will hamper the efforts of angry Portlanders, until he is correctly identified as an enemy.

The ugly public inquest following Perez's death was itself a concession forced by the threat of mass rebellion. When Jason Sery made a last-minute decision to give televised, rather than audio-only, testimony to the inquest, this was likely the result of Rose City Copwatch having already widely distributed his image. Uproar from below forces a minimum of tinkering from above. Th e greatest guarantors of the Portland Police's ability to kill with impunity, however, are the activists and politicians who claim such adjustments as victories, and as proof that, in the end, the cooler heads prevail. Those who actively strive to be outside of power and politics, on the other hand, may prove to be a threat beyond their modest numbers.

In Portland, the cops will kill again. Nobody knows what will happen then. Th e charades of participation, activism and community leadership can only hold the system together for so long. At some stage, a calm consensus will collapse. In every consistent effort of today, we learn also to seize the opportunities of tomorrow. In acting now, we prepare.

On March 28th, 2004, Portland Police Officer Jason Sery shot and killed James Jahar Perez. A patrol stopped Perez, a Black man in an expensive auto, for failing to signal. Twenty four seconds later, Sery opened fire.

It was the second Portland cop killing of an unarmed Black person in less than a year. Local authorities braced for an angry response. Those most affected by cop brutality and violence did not create the uprising expected even by city government. One year after Perez's death, it is time to evaluate the lessons of this incident and its aftermath.

Portland, Oregon is one of the whitest cities in the United States. It also faces high unemployment, exceptional cuts in social spending and a pronounced class divide. Its low-income neighborhoods in North and Northeast Portland, as well as stretches of the suburbs, are home to most of the city's communities of color. Th e Portland Black community has been under sustained attack for decades, via drug wars, crudely oppressive policing, displacement campaigns and imprisonment. Latinos, Native Americans, Asians and poor whites don't fare much better in Portland's poorer neighborhoods. A wave of yuppie intrusion into North and Northeast Portland has further raised tensions. Gentrification of these neighborhoods has not only increased the cost of living, but also has focused police attention towards "undesirable elements," the most marginalized of the poor. For the cops patrolling Portland's North and Northeast, policing is a matter of holding down territory. Every day, they see residents that have little allegiance to local power structures. Th is frightens the cops. They often use race as a gauge of allegiance, a practice seen in their profiling of drivers of color. Th e consequences have been deadly.

Before Jahar Perez, there was Kendra James. A twenty-one-year-old Black woman, she was killed by police in a traffic stop May 2003. Following the murder, local politicians and clergy successfully turned spontaneous expressions of disbelief and rage into a "vote and pray" movement. Eventually, Officer Scott McCollister took only a three quarter year vacation from the force for killing James.

Ten months later, when Jason Sery unloaded three shots into Jahar Perez, the mood had changed. Folk on the Portland streets

talked about shooting back. Outside the Lucky Day Laundromat in North Portland, where Perez's life was stolen, an angry crowd of friends and locals gathered almost immediately. The police had difficulty containing the furious throng. Law enforcement would stay on the defensive for months to come. Th e media, politicians, and community leaders took the lead in encouraging a return to sleep.

The days following the murder brought a spate of superficial scandal. On the 29th, television news announced that Perez had been unarmed. Police Chief Foxworth raced to the Perez family home. Th rough conciliatory gestures, the Black police chief painted himself as a reformer, one who would bring needed changes to the force. After all, he was brought up in the same neighborhood as the Perez family. Another reformist, District Attorney Michael Schrunk, announced that a public inquest would accompany Officer Sery's grand jury hearing. Th e inquest would eventually serve as an after-the-fact public relations exercise for the city, yet it was cynically used by politicians as an argument for a "wait and see" approach. Meanwhile, newspapers examined every grim detail of Perez's death. The media hyped autopsy results of cocaine in Perez's blood, and dragged his family name through the dirt.

A series of rallies followed. Th e first one took place downtown on April 4th. Organized by the Coalition of Black Men, the rally featured predictable speeches from groups such as the Albina Ministerial Alliance and the Nation of Islam. Similar to the rallies following Kendra James' murder, the crowd was encouraged to keep its cool. Yet things were also different this time. Local Black youth showed up in tee shirts with images of semi-automatic pistols and slogans suggesting an easy solution to police brutality. These shirts were openly sold on the streets the week before. One speaker, a former Black Panther, suggested tailing police patrols with videocameras. Th e suggestion was a tepid one, but it was one which no politician had the nerve to make. Th is further revealed the servility of the "community leadership." Some left the crowd determined to take action on their own.

Posters and flyers about the killing began to cover North and Northeast. Some of these materials were clearly anarchist, attacking

racist act by a racist institution, yet refused the immobilizing perspective of "ally" theory, began to shatter everyday consensus. They forced people to take sides. Both the Black community leaders who went easy on Chief Foxworth, and the irate well-to-do whites who called Rose City Copwatch to speculate on which unarmed murder victims "had it coming," made their opposition to entire neighborhoods and communities clear. We must continue to build an analysis of race and racism that stands up to reality. This begins with examining race as socially constructed category.

Race is not a fixed, inherent or "natural" classification. It was created historically as a support for, and an intensification of, class rule. While many recognize this, such a basic statement is generally treated as the end of a discussion, rather than serving as a beginning. One fruitful approach could be looking at race (and racism) in terms of its institutional bases. These bases may then be attacked in ways that destabilize racial solidarity with the dominant class. White racism should neither be exaggerated — see the liberal-statist campaigns against militias and gunfolk in the 1990s — nor denied, for example within the US police. It is still a serious enemy. On the other hand, the identities of oppressed racial communities ought to be looked at, particularly in the ways they are represented by "community" political leaders. In Portland, the Albina Ministerial Alliance sold the Black community as worthy of "equality" within a brutal class order, while the Nation of Islam propagated an essentialist Black identity and a separatist strategy. Both groups should have been undermined a long time ago, rather than being allowed to play games with people's lives. Collective legacies against oppression ought to be respected and learned from, yet they are only useful when pointing toward futures of individual liberty and difference, not as justifications for the way things are.

Directly following Perez's death, there was a distinct feeling that social peace was about to end in Portland. When police left their cars, those on the street would stop to watch their every move. Th e typically listless punk rockers at my neighborhood bar talked about how even full-blown race riots would be better than Portland carrying on as before — perhaps a dubious statement, but not one that misgauged the level of anger in North/Northeast. Rumors even started

Analysis within the anarchist scene is not always strong. Little Beirut, a journal with a left-anarchist history, drew the following conclusion from the murder of Perez: "Militant tactics will lead to more police violence and repercussions, particularly on people and communities of color." Th is statement is typical of the "white ally" theory dominant within the local anarchist subculture.

In this theory, all white people are so complicit with the racist system that their only role in struggle is as "allies" and "supporters" of people of color. Th is is a moral critique based on guilt, yet it also absolves white "revolutionaries" from ever having to put themselves on the line. As a theoretical framework justifying anarchist non-resistance to capital and state, it has proved incredibly popular. Th is theory has also led the worst of the anarcho-left to make de-facto alliances with middle class Black Democrats, on the basis that well-paid politicians of color are more oppressed than slum whites.

There is a "chain of complicity" connecting those holding apparently extreme positions to those in state power. Th is chain must be broken. Many anarchists, who ought to know better, tagged along with the usual faces on the Left following the Perez murder. The rationale of these anarchists was opposition to "exclusionary" and "sectarian" positions. In brief, they were so desperate for friends that they sacrificed all discernment. One group, which has since collapsed, decided that they wouldn't have anyone of importance to talk with unless they toned down their anti-authoritarianism. The Left and the North/Northeast community leaders, on the other hand, feign opposition to the power apparatus while desperately trying to enter into it. Radicals bind their own hands when they pander to such politicians. The "liberal" character of Portland city politics means that the ultra-conservatism of Bush's regime becomes used as a threat by civic leadership, as a means of securing loyalty no matter how deadly their rule proves to be. Th e only way to put a stop to this trend is stepping outside of left/ right, liberal/conservative dichotomies, maintaining intransigently radical perspectives instead.

Honest discussion of race is one way of damaging the "chain of complicity." Those who openly stated that the Perez murder was a

all "community leaders," and suggesting independent revolt. Days after the April 4th rally, a new poster began appearing on poles throughout the neighborhood. Entitled "Th e Pigs Are Getting Away With Murder," it was produced by Arissa, an organization committed to "building a revolutionary movement in the United States of America."

Arissa's best-known member is Craig Rosebraugh, who served for years as the spokesperson for underground ecosaboteurs the Earth Liberation Front.

Arissa desires a "social and political revolution in the United States" to create a "political structure . . . to allow for an atmosphere of change." The group is militant: they conceive of change coming from a "by any means necessary" political movement, which will force the US establishment to either radically reform itself or crumble. According to the Arissa Mission Statement, the group aims to meet this goal through "community organizing." Their cadre moved quickly from print propaganda to attempts to rally a whole community behind them.

At a cost of hundreds if not thousands of dollars, Arissa bought advertising space in a local weekly paper, and sent out a bulk mailing to residences in North and Northeast, announcing a "march for justice and police accountability." Th e demands of this march were: 1. "Ensure Jason Sery, the Portland Police Bureau officer who shot and killed unarmed James Perez is prosecuted for murder. 2. Ensure a Citizens' Committee to Oversee the Portland Police conduct is established with independent disciplinary power." These demands represented a noticeable departure from the Arissa style of just two weeks before, with their earlier poster claiming that "Sometimes an eye for an eye is the only way to make the pigs stop terrorizing the community . . . They have got to learn they cannot continue to kill us without severe consequences."

Arissa's leadership was soon questioned. A major controversy erupted on Portland Indymedia, an internet forum, concerning Arissa and "white privilege". While some of the criticisms made of Arissa were inane — written proofs why Pacifi c Northwest urban centers are known just as much for political correctitude as for coffee chains — others were more cutting.

Arissa had not done their homework; their links with the communities in

North and Northeast were tenuous at best. Others accused Arissa of playing at being saviors.

Meanwhile, another group of organizers Rose City Copwatch, were obtaining slightly better results. Before Perez was murdered, the group had sponsored a competition — the first individual to bring them a photograph of Scott McCollister, the killer of Kendra James, would receive a prize of forty dollars worth of groceries. Th is announcement created a major political controversy, with Black community leaders making statements to the press such as "It's definitely the wrong approach to take. We have to create a community where the police and the citizens are equal . . . It's wrong for them to use James to justify their attack on McCollister" (Jo Ann Bowman, quoted in the Portland Tribune, February 20th, 2004). Th en- Mayor Vera Katz and Police Chief Foxworth denounced Rose City Copwatch as vigilantes.

By April, Rose City Copwatch had pictures of both McCollister and Sery. They distributed one thousand copies of these in a single afternoon. When the group sent out press releases about this action, they received hostile media coverage. Despite this, and despite the group's own political ambiguity — the organization cannot decide whether to abolish or transform the police — their modest action was the best from any mass organization. It was simple, imaginative and immediately useful. Th e group emerged from weeks of frantic activity without looking too bad.

On Thursday, April 22nd, a Multnomah County [Portland] Grand Jury refused to bring charges against Officer Sery for killing Perez. Those who had been told to wait and see before acting, now responded to the predictable Grand Jury findings with silence. Th e initiative was lost. Th e following day, the Black church leaders of the Albina Ministerial Alliance held a rally, attended by one hundred fifty to two hundred people. A fl yer was distributed at this event urging non-attendance at the next day's Arissa rally. It was signed by the Perez family, the James family, and the Keller family (Deontae Keller was killed by the Portland cops in 1996).

Two hundred to three hundred people took part in the April 24th Arissa march. Th is was a minuscule attendance considering the group's outreach expenses. Th e crowd reflected local activist circles, not the overall communities targeted by Arissa's direct mail campaign. No speaker at the initial rally was based in North or Northeast Portland. The protestors marched, with a heavy police escort, to the Mayor's house. Media presence prevented a police attack. In the days that followed, Arissa claimed that the demonstration was the start of a major campaign, with the promise of escalation. Predictably, the group has done little but issue press releases since then.

The Arissa rally was the last largescale demonstration confronting Perez's death. A public inquest followed the Grand Jury verdict, whitewashing the murder with more lies. Small groups remained committed to action. One group that formed after the Perez murder, the Portland Community Liberation Front, continues to monitor the police with videocameras. Th e local Anarchist People of Color (APOC) group went through a stint of holding educational forums. In the aftermath of the Arissa debacle, APOC released a statement critiquing both racist behavior and white guilt within the Portland milieu, mentioning Arissa by name. Th e response of Craig Rosebraugh, posted in a public forum, climaxed with the statement: "[. . .] we are no longer prepared to sit back while we are being slandered publicly. For those of you who continue to spread misinformation about the Arissa organization or any of its members, including myself, we are prepared to take legal action against you."

On August 24th, Jason Sery offered his resignation from the Portland Police. He had been kindly offered a fulltime position with his local church and the Southwest Bible School. Th is was convenient for police leaders, who could guess the consequences if Sery ever returned to active duty.

Most Portland anti-authoritarians have failed spectacularly in drawing any lessons from their activity following the Perez murder. Anarchists in

Portland traditionally alternate between publicizing short-lived collectives during moments of enthusiasm, and reverting back to permaculture skills and Pabst Blue Ribbon for the rest of the year.