

+ + +

Riot Police – *A contingent of anonymous thugs, usually imported from the suburbs, who wield “non-lethal” weapons designed to spread terror and make us feel powerless in our own neighborhoods.*

Black Bloc – *(see above)*

+ + +

We who have been brave enough to confront the police, the banks, the mayor, and the city council must now have the courage to disassociate unreservedly from the Black Bloc and all other violent groups. This is not merely an issue of public relations or community outreach (although those concerns are real, and have been articulated by others associated with Occupy and the general strike). This is about ethics and common decency. We have a right to set the parameters of *our* society, and insist upon a way of life commensurate with our values. We are trying to build a new world, so we’d damn well better start thinking about what kind of world we want it to be. It is hard to imagine that this militia of masked children resembles in any way the society that the 99% is striving for.

No matter what kinds of empty academic arguments they try to put forth, the Black Bloc is violent. When the police throw “non-lethal” flash-bang grenades at unarmed citizens, the threat is clear: we are to remember that “real” violence is an imminent possibility, and that the bullets are not far behind. Likewise, when the Black Bloc smashes up storefronts, hurls rocks and M80s, sets fires downtown, and assaults unarmed citizens who attempt to put those fires out, the threat is clear: they intend to destroy anything that can be deemed contrary to their narrow understanding of the world. Aggressive destruction of property (to be clear: spraypaint does not fall into this category) *is* violent, not because property is equivalent to people, but because the destructive act is designed to make people afraid of the potentiality of “real” violence by similar means. It is not dissimilar to the abusive husband who punches the wall next to his wife’s head, signaling an undeniably violent intention while falling just short (this time) of “real” personal violence.

Let’s acknowledge that the vast majority of Black Bloc folks are *not* agent provocateurs. Yes, there *are* undercover cops in our midst, as video evidence has shown, and it is well-known that police have posed as Black Bloc to discredit past demonstrations (again, see Youtube videos from Montreal, Seattle, etc.). It’s not hard to imagine that some of the rock-throwing imbeciles in Oakland this past week have been police agents. But the presence of myopic, valueless, self-aggrandizing, fascistic Black Bloc thugs is a very real problem which we must address. Experience has shown that we cannot trust the police to maintain peace and civility in our streets, and so we must do it ourselves. To blame the entirety, or even the majority, of the violence of November 2nd on provocateur bogeymen is unhelpful because it disempowers us to confront a concrete threat that we have a moral and practical obligation to address. (Besides, if the Black Bloc *were* police infiltrators, wouldn’t that be a pretty good reason to denounce them? You can’t have it both ways.)

Besides behaving nonviolently, the easiest way to disassociate yourself from the Black Bloc is to have the courage to show your face. Yes, it is true we live in a surveillance state. Police and private industry have set up cameras in every corner of our society. Helicopters appear at the slightest whiff of popular dissent and shine their spotlights on us. Every day it gets a little bit harder to feel like a real human being, and not a number in a database or an avatar on a computer screen. But don’t let anyone tell you that facelessness is a solution to these problems. Don’t get it twisted: black bandanas, balaclavas, and those ridiculous Guy Fawkes masks are *uniforms like any other*. They are ways of convincing you to abdicate selfhood and submit to a brainless collectivism that would have you accept unconscionable behavior in the name of “solidarity.” Truth is, solidarity means *nothing* if it is unconditional; that is what the campaign against blind patriotism and subservience is supposed to be about. We thoughtful, compassionate people must be rigorous in evaluating who we choose to associate with, and fearless in cutting ties with those whose methods are unacceptable to us. **You are a human being, so act like one. Show me your face.**

In closing, a gentle suggestion (which hopefully will not be seen as an attempt to replace one uniform with another). **The next time you demonstrate, occupy, protest, or speak out – wear color.** Any color you like, anywhere on your body. If you like to wear black, then maybe you can tie a pink or green or yellow bandana around your arm. Let’s make it clear from our dress and our humane behavior that we stand in solidarity with rational, compassionate, progressive ideals — not with a bunch of costumed clowns who think these historic demonstrations are an excuse to stage childish reenactments of scenes from movies and comic books.

The world is watching. Let’s make sure it sees who we really are.