

# The Ground Noise and the Static:

*A Chronicle of the Battle of Saint Paul, RNC 2008*

By James K & Mike GW  
(NYC Indymedia)

'Please, please, my friends, my dear friends, please, please don't be diverted by the ground noise and the static'—John McCain, on being interrupted just before he can accept the GOP's nomination, 9/4/08

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Part 1:

PRELUDE: WELCOME TO SAINT PAUL.

August 28-31 2008. Countdown to the Republican National Convention.

The View from the Fortress Xcel:

The Xcel Energy Center, also known as 'The X,' sits comfortably within the No Go Zone—a security perimeter spanning 28 blocks of the city of Saint Paul. Politicians and their best subjects are to be secured within Fortress Xcel, heart of Fortress America, behind double rows of black steel fence.

The fence, built on a foundation of fear, rising 10 feet into the air, is a movable fence. It goes wherever Power and Property must face the people.

This fence is only the latest in a long line of fences and walls—The Border fence. The picket fence. The Berlin Wall. The Wall Street. The plantation wall. The prison wall.

Here, the enemy of the state becomes the people. Here, the enemy of the people becomes the state.

Over the fence, hanging from the convention center, the image of an elephant dancing.

Facing the elephant, Fox News reports to America, fair and balanced, from within a fenced-in security compound of its own.

This is what you saw on your TV screen. This is what we saw, with our eyes, in the streets.

The View from Indymedia:

RAIDS, REPRESSION, RESILIENCE

Thursday, August 28.

Daylight.

Members and supporters of The Poor Peoples Economic Human Rights Campaign haul mattresses, couches, tarps, and tents into 'Bushville,' a tent city modeled after the Hoovervilles of the great depression. This tent city, being built on Harriet Island, overlooking the Mississippi River in Saint Paul, is to be a home for the poor and homeless arriving in the Twin Cities to protest the Republican National Convention.

Nightfall.

Police arrive to dismantle the camp and kick out those intending to stay the night in Bushville. The officers are able to push all but two protesters from the camp. Cheri Honkala, organizer with the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign, and supporter Tim Dowlin of Philadelphia refuse to leave and are arrested.

Cheri Honkala, who had been sitting with an American flag across her lap, states, 'It's a sad day when you have this much money spent on police officers, and the poor only have their voice, and we can't allow that to be taken from us.'

'It was a good exercise for us,' says Senior Commander Joe Neuberger of the Saint Paul Police.

Friday, August 29.

The mid-day sun approaches dusk, and the task of fortifying the Xcel Energy Center from protesters has begun. By nightfall, interlocking steel fences will zigzag maze like for blocks around the perimeter of the Convention Space, denying access to all those without explicit invitation.

Night.

Ramsey County Sheriff's Department and Saint Paul Police officers, armed with a search warrant, kick in the door of the RNC Welcoming Center, a former theater in St. Paul now used as a convergence space for those protesting the RNC. Forced to the floor by shouts and drawn guns, the 50 people inside are ordered to lay face down on the ground. They are handcuffed, photographed, and searched. Laptops and political literature are confiscated.

Among those detained is a five-year old boy named Gabe. He asks his mother these questions: 'Mommy, why did they break in the door? Mommy, what did we do wrong?'

The RNC Convergence Center is closed on police orders. No one is permitted to enter the premises.

Nonetheless, 'hundreds of people in Minneapolis and St. Paul have opened their homes to thousands of protesters, Locals and newcomers have taken time off work and from their lives to cook meals, provide medical care, legal support, and transportation...This is work that we will continue to do for the rest of our lives.'

Saturday, August 30.

Morning.

Four homes are raided. Five members of the RNC Welcoming Committee are arrested. The justification:

'Suspicion of conspiracy to riot, conspiracy to commit civil disorder, and conspiracy to damage property.'

The five members of the RNC Welcoming Committee will be taken to Ramsey County Jail and held through the Convention.

In the coming days, this will become business as usual. More houses and offices will be raided. I-Witness Video, an organization of journalists that has documented police brutality, will be visited 3 times, relocated and accused of holding hostages.

Afternoon.

With the Convergence Center shuttered, organizers rally the troops, assembled on a hill in Powderhorn Park, with stories, speeches and free food. It is here that the crowd is informed that, thanks to the pressure put on the city by local and visiting activists, the doors of the RNC welcoming space are to be reopened.

Evening.

In the doorway of the newly reopened RNC Welcoming Space, a press conference—featuring a cross-section of activists and families of arrestees—is being held to denounce the 'terrorist-like' actions of the Ramsey County Sheriff's Department and other law enforcement officials. The forces of law and order, they say, are executing raids on people's homes, silencing free speech by confiscating cameras and media materials, and exercising excessive displays of force.

Sunday, August 31.

Morning.

'We Remember,' say the Veterans For Peace, as they march on the Xcel Center reading out the names of US soldiers and Iraqi civilians killed in the war. 9 will be arrested for breaching the security perimeter.

Across town, riot police are deployed to defend the Mall of America from workers.

Afternoon.

Starbucks workers and their supporters, converge for a rally at the light rail station. The crowd comes to stand in solidarity with Starbucks workers in their fight to organize a union, the Starbucks Workers Union (SWU), with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and to escort Erik Forman—fired for organizing at his workplace—back to work at the Mall of America.

Upon arriving by train, Forman and his fellow workers are met by riot police, called in to protect the Mall of America. The riot police announce that anyone exiting the train will be arrested and charged with trespassing. They force the train to turn around. Forman will be late for his first day back to work.

Happy Labor Day—from the Mall of America.

MEANWHILE, 1200 MILES DOWN THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER, the people of New Orleans and beyond look up into the menacing eye of Hurricane Gustav, now bound for the Gulf Coast on the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina.

Once again, in spite of a mandatory evacuation order, many of New Orleans' Black, Brown, and poor people will be left behind as the white and the wealthy head for the hills.

President Bush announces that he will not be making it to Saint Paul, after all. Even John McCain's appearance is up in the air. Day 1 of the Convention will be rescheduled from 7 hours to 2½ hours.

Some wonder why the Republican Party is suddenly concerned with the people of New Orleans.

Others note that the decision comes on the eve of what some fear will be the most disruptive protests the USA has seen in many years.

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Part 2:

THE BATTLE FOR THE STREETS.

Monday, September 1. Day 1 of the Republican National Convention.

Gallery 1:

<http://nyc.indymedia.org/en/2008/09/99581.html>

Prelude to September 1: A Page from a Warrior Journalist's Journal

...The battle is joined. Today is the day. A day of reckoning. A day beckoning to all of us. Inviting us to light a spark within the empire. To gather sparks together and see if this fire is combustible. See if we can send a signal, through the smoke, to a watching world. See if we can open a crack in history.

Today we are riding the public bus into Saint Paul with our comrades on the way to the barricades.

Today, this time, this place demands the transcendence of fear.

Demands courage, cunning, creativity.

Today, we can be shot, gassed, beaten, concussed, cuffed, chained, locked up and locked down.

But today we will be free.

-Written on the morning of September 1, 2008

'The scope of an active campaign, from comms to media, to blockades, to bikes, to scouts, to medics, to kitchens, to propaganda to beyond. All coordinated. All singing at pitch. Together. Swarming and unpredictable. Leaderless and self-determined. Collective and diverse. Battle.'

-Written on the morning of September 1, 2008

'Show me what a Police State looks like...'

'WELCOME TO SAINT PAUL,' reads the flashy red banner across from the Fortress fence.

In the hours leading up to High Noon, as the delegates to the RNC prepare for the day's festivities, the riot police are lining up, readying their weaponry, getting into military formation.

On display today, in order of appearance: Extended batons, pepper spray, tasers, tear gas guns, automatic rifles, and guns firing 'less lethal' projectiles-beanbag pellets, rubber bullets, concussion grenades.

Other troopers parade along the perimeter, by car or by horseback, leaving fumes and trails of horseshit in their wake.

Today's RNC has been deemed a National Special Security Event. Today, public order will be kept by 3,700 police from across Minnesota, with the help of thousands more from over 30 agencies-FBI, Secret Service, Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the US Military, among others. 1,200 National Guard will be on call, in case things get out of control.

Americans have paid \$50 million for the elephants' security. \$34 million for more police on the beat. \$3.4 million for spy-in-the-sky CCTV cameras. \$3 million for chemical weapons, a taser for every officer.

On top of that \$50 million, the Republican National Committee has

bought a \$10 million insurance policy from the Saint Paul police, pledging to spend its own money to stop any civil rights lawsuits.

'VICTORY OVER TERRORISM.' A handful of patriots show up early with the mass-produced signs. There are more signs than there are people to hold them. The police stand aside as the patriots walk right up to the fence. Together, they wait for the Enemy.

The people, now known as enemy, assemble by the tens of thousands before the State Capitol.

They are here today, says Jess Sundin of Minneapolis, speaking for the Coalition to March on the RNC, 'because we refused to be scared away. Because what we are marching for is too important to be silenced. Because this is the only way we can answer the Republican agenda, and demand an end to policies that wage war, deepen poverty, and fuel racism.'

Snapshots.

A diversity of dissent is on display here.

Here, the red and black flags of the anti-capitalist bloc wave beside the massive puppets of Code Pink. The red and black flags say SOLIDARITY. STOP THE RAIDS. DIRECT ACTION AGAINST CAPITALISM. The pink puppets say I MISS AMERICA. I MISS JUSTICE. MAKE OUT NOT WAR. Here, on the Capitol steps, black banners are unfurled with the names of the war dead.

Here, the voices of the Immigrant Rights Contingent echo beside those of the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign. MONEY FOR HUMAN NEEDS NOT FOR WAR, say the signs raised high.

Here, across the lawn, a merry band of youth, mobile sound system on hand, prepare to Funk the War.

Here, the music is heard by all, from Iraq veterans holding flags upside down to students and teachers fighting for free education to families demanding health care for all.

Here, giant hands implore, STOP THE WAR! Here, a sculpture shows DEMOCRACY on ice.

Here lies a son of America, his casket and boots guarded by a father clutching a folded stars and stripes.

Here, this sign says, In Memory of My Son. And this one, Justice for My Daughter.

In a moment they will all be marching together to the Xcel Energy Center in peaceful protest against the Republican National Convention and its agenda.

'Massive anti-war march successful despite police repression. Protest organizers estimate 30,000 joined the rally and march'-Coalition to March on the RNC and Stop the War, September 1

'...An otherwise peaceful throng estimated at 10,000 people...far fewer than the 50,000 some had predicted -- chanting and peacefully waving signs'-Minneapolis Star-Tribune, September 1

'...Almost 5,000 protesters marched peacefully outside the site of the convention'-CNN, September 1

But wait. There is more to come.

'SEIZE, SWARM, and STAY.'

The RNC Welcoming Committee, an anarchist/anti-authoritarian organizing body that has been preparing for the 2008 Republican National Convention protests in St. Paul, Minnesota, has issued the following call:

'The RNC Welcoming Committee calls for anyone and everyone who cares about a better world than the politicians claim to offer to 'Swarm, Seize, and Stay,' on September 1st. Our goal for Day One is to blockade Downtown St. Paul.'

By blockading Downtown Saint Paul, they hope to deny Republican delegates entrance into the Xcel Energy Center—and effectively shut down the RNC.

'Swarm Seize, Stay (3S) means:

1. Move into/around Downtown St. Paul via swarms of varying sizes...
2. Seize space through both hard and soft, fixed and mobile, blockading methods.
3. Stay engaged with the situation in downtown St. Paul as long as necessary. Regroup. Reinforce.'

The RNC-WC has divided Saint Paul into 7 sectors, so that organizing bodies throughout the country can coordinate their actions and blockade as many access points as possible.

Major entrance/travel points in each Sector, from highway on-ramps, to busy intersections, to hotel shuttle bus loading spaces, are claimed by the affinity groups.

THEY SHALL NOT PASS:  
High Noon at the Blockades

Gallery 2:

<http://nyc.indymedia.org/en/2008/09/99603.html>

They appear just after Noon. They appear as if out of nowhere. First in Sector 1. Then in Sector 5. Then in just about every other sector.

Here, affinity groups are moving into position with chains, locks, 'sleeping dragons.' Here, another affinity group is pulling out barricades to be strewn across the streets. Here, another is preparing to lock arms and blockade buses packed with convention delegates, staff, police.

Downtown, a dance party is breaking out in the streets. 'Bulls on Parade' is pounding out of a mobile sound system carted by hand into the middle of the road.

The War is being funky. The youthful rabble is being roused. The dance dance revolution is being wrought. United in a moving mass behind the booming bass beating hip-hop and punk and funk, hundreds of youth are breaking away, no, boogeying away, busting a move away-out of the permitted rally, onto Wabasha Avenue, winding their way towards the Xcel Center.

The people of Saint Paul look on from their windows and balconies. A family waves. Another joins in the singing.

The men from the government are watching it all on closed-circuit television. Others are watching it from street corners, rooftops, helicopters—or from inside the action.

The stormtroopers are ready for their big debut. The chemical weapons are coming out. The gas masks are coming on. They move in to break the blockades. The pepper spray is filling the air, eyes, and lungs.

But the blockades are holding, moving, holding, moving. FREEDOM OR DEATH, some say. DIRECT ACTION FOR DIRECT DEMOCRACY, say others.

Now a car full of delegates is surrounded. Now a whole bus is halted. Somewhere, delegations from Alabama and Connecticut are trapped on their buses, shaking in their newly shined shoes.

Standing in their path are the rebel children of another America. Most are armed with nothing more than their bodies as they go into battle. Now they are linking arms. Now they are sitting down in the street. Now they are chaining themselves together.

They call themselves Unconventional Action and Bash Back! They call themselves POG and the Northeast Anarchist Network. They call themselves the Midwest Cluster, the Bay Area Cluster, the Gray Coast Cluster. Some even call themselves the ever-popular Black Bloc.

Now they are converging with Funk the War into an ad hoc bloc, swarming through the streets and crashing through downtown, blocking cops and delegates alike as they go. Now SDS splits away—but most of the protesters stay.

Now a young man runs behind police lines, jumps on the hood of a squad car, runs back into the crowd.

Now the bloc is improvising barricades out of dumpsters, street signs, road closures, vandalized squad cars, police pens turned against the police, newspaper bins filled with the latest headlines...

The latest headline from Fox 9 News: 'At every turn, the peaceful protesters were overshadowed by the anarchists, who left a trail of vandalism in their wake, without cause or ideology, leaving police to wonder, 'What's still to come?''

Meanwhile, the other media is moving other messages through the streets, the mobs, the internets.

Every minute, Twitter alerts are going out from scouts on the ground. Every minute, Indymedia dispatches are coming in from the field, following the story—a story of many stories, each with its own telling—through the eyes of the people living it, fighting it, seeing it and writing it.

WITH OUR OWN EYES.

Our eyes see unarmored bodies linked arm in arm against advancing riot clad police lines.

Our eyes see the I-94 on-ramp into downtown Saint Paul blocked by protesters linked together with lockboxes.

Our eyes see a car driven into the center of a busy intersection and screech to a stop, diagonally blocking traffic from both directions.

Our eyes see the police attempting to remove the protesters who have

barricaded themselves inside it.  
Our eyes see horses used as weapons by mounted police; the horses' massive bodies are smashed into protesters.  
Our eyes see resistance in the shape of street-roving dance parties.  
Our eyes see police destroy the sound system that had provided the day with music. The volume had apparently been too loud.  
Our eyes see Seeds of Peace wheel food and refreshment through the streets for those in need.  
Our eyes see fists in the air.  
Our eyes see police-gloved fingers on the triggers of rubber bullet assault rifles.  
Our mouths taste the nauseous bite of mace. Of pepper spray. Of tear gas.  
Our ears echo with the boom of concussion grenades.  
Our hearts swell with the refusal to disperse.  
Our eyes see.

Through the tear gas, our eyes see.

BRINGING THE TROOPS HOME:

Battle Rages, Repression Reigns for Nine Hours through Downtown Saint Paul

Gallery 3:

<http://nyc.indymedia.org/en/2008/09/99625.html>

'Bring the Troops Home Now!' The sounds of the antiwar march echo in the distance, penned in and divided from all 'unlawful' protesters by lines of riot police.

And the troops are home, it seems, as the Minnesota National Guard is called in to back up overrun police units. Hundreds of uniformed Guard, some just back from Iraq and Afghanistan, roll into town down Kellogg Avenue in blue buses and green military trucks. Fanning out across the street, they don riot gear and gas masks and shields. They wield their batons and their guns and they prepare for war.

The forces of order advance on the dancing masses in three rows: First riot police, dressed as stormtroopers, banging on their shields—MOVE! BACK! MOVE! BACK! Behind them, the National Guard. Behind the National Guard, the Cossacks on their horses.

A lone, masked woman steps forward, crosses a painted line on the road, steps up to the mounted police. She starts dancing. Others join in getting down to the beat emanating from the boombox.

Chemical weapons are again deployed against those who resist—and those who did not know resistance until today. Clouds of tear gas waft over everyone. Journalists, spectators, delegates, everyone.

Amid exploding canisters of gas, silly string is deployed against the riot police. Arms are linked. Hands clasp each other tight. Bodies burning, coughing, shaking, still moving together to the same beat.

Elsewhere, protesters are forced to lie face down, hands bound, on the pavement of a parking lot.

Elsewhere, a woman lifts up a fresh picked daisy to the riot police. In return for her gift, she is pepper sprayed point blank in the eyes. She, like many others, is crying uncontrollably.

Elsewhere, the Anti-Capitalist Bloc, which brought up the rear of the peace march, is chased by riot police firing more tear gas, 'less



lethal' bullets, smoke bombs, concussion grenades.

'Hard to tell what that was but it blew up. Wow. Holy shit. That is a freaking grenade. Oh my god. That just blew up on these kids'—so reports a journalist from The Uptake before she is arrested along with the kids.

Sunset.

Across the Mississippi River, 10,000 workers and youth come out for SEIU's Take Back Labor Day Festival, featuring Mos Def and Tom Morello, almost cancelled thanks to RNC security plans.

Scores of youth who came out to hear a free concert are swept up in the mass arrest along the way.

The massive group of protesters that had defied police orders to disperse from Kellogg Avenue have now been pushed two miles across the bridge, along the riverside, and into Upper Landing Park by the advancing authorities.

There, pinned against a wall of National Guard and riot police, and with the Coast Guard stationed behind them on the Mississippi River, the protesters have no choice but to face arrest.

As the sun goes down on the streets of downtown Saint Paul, a report arrives that the women of Code Pink have been surrounded by riot police. They, too, are refusing to disperse.

And as the sun goes down on the streets of downtown Saint Paul, the National Guard goes on a parade.

#### THE BATTLE OF THE STORY

Journalists who seek to tell these stories—journalists from Democracy Now, The Uptake, even the Associated Press—will be rounded up and charged with felony riot, unlawful assembly, or 'interference with a peace officer.'

Secret Service agents will later approach Goodman and Kouddous of Democracy Now and take their press badges from them, informing them, 'You won't be needing these.'

Most directly in the line of fire are the warrior journalists of the Independent Media.

The only journalists who are sure to be spared are the journalists embedded with the police force, according to the Saint Paul Chief of Police.

Among them is Fox 9 News: 'First Day Wraps Up Early, All the Action on the Outside,' Fox reports tonight. 'Police used pepper spray and rubber bullets to subdue violent and vandalizing protesters.'

And WCCO CBS News: 'It was really the action outside that claimed the news coverage, where self-proclaimed anarchists disrupted an otherwise peaceful march. Protesters would not back down, as police in riot gear moved in.'

Says riot victim Sheriff Bob Fletcher on the Nightly News: 'You know, we've been pushed, but we're not broken.'

According to reliable sources, neither are the 285 protesters and others who have been rounded up and arrested today in the streets of the Occupied Twin Cities—or the thousands of others determined to march for their lives tomorrow.

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Part 3:

MARCHING FOR OUR LIVES.

Tuesday, September 2. Day 2 of the Republican National Convention.

Gallery 1:

<http://nyc.indymedia.org/en/2008/09/99688.html>

Gallery 2:

<http://nyc.indymedia.org/en/2008/09/99712.html>

Today, America's invisible poor and their allies—Black people, White people, Latino people, Asian people, First Nations peoples—plan to march on the Republican National Convention, a March for Our Lives, under the banner of the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC).

'PPEHRC calls for you to join us as we fill the streets of St. Paul, Minnesota in a powerful, peaceful demonstration for the right to health care, housing and all economic human rights.

...We will march because as poverty, hunger, unemployment and homelessness grow throughout this country, political leaders from both major parties have abandoned us. We cannot afford to be silent. We cannot afford to be disappeared from the public eye and the political debates as our families suffer...'

Early in the day, the Seven Council Fires (Oceti Sakowin) of the Dakota Oyate people reclaim Coldwater Spring, a sacred part of the tribe's homeland B'Dote. Once property of the Bureau of Mines, now surrounded by Highway 55, the sacred spring flows on, and with it, the resistance of the Dakota people here. The land reclamation comes with ceremonies celebrating the turning of summer to fall.

The Dakota people are surrounded by the Department of Homeland Security, Hennepin County Sheriff's Department and riot police from other agencies. Unbowed, they will hold their ground for four days.

Across town in downtown Saint Paul, the police are spoiling for another fight. They stand guard at landmarks, hotels, banks, big businesses, luxury condos. Mears Park, site of the PPEHRC rally, is encircled by battalions of riot police, mounted police, bike police, SWAT Teams, FBI and ICE agents.

The Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign is filled with those who face down police violence every day. These people are undeterred.

Today, the poor will be heard. They raise their voices, lift their fists, carry handmade signs, stand proudly beside families, friends, co-workers, warriors.

They hail from communities in struggle across this country—from Minneapolis down to New Orleans, from Philadelphia to Cleveland and out to Portland.

They are here from groups like the Kensington Welfare Rights Union,

the Coalition to Protect Public Housing, Women in Transition, the Hip Hop Congress, the Rural Coalition, the American Indian Movement. Allies are here, too, from the Anti-Capitalist Bloc and Industrial Workers of the World.

Snapshots.

Here are mothers and fathers and babies sleeping in strollers. Here, again, is the spirit of a son in his casket. Here are youth contingents from schools and projects in matching March for Our Lives Tees.

Here are kids with Mexican flags tied around their faces, eyeing the ICE agents. Here is a rainbow kite flying the message that 'No One Is Illegal.'

Here, surrounding the stage, are cardboard signs bearing bold messages printed by hand in black marker:  
WHO SUFFERS? WHO GAINS?  
WHAT DO YOU SHARE WITH THE POOR?  
HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT. HEALTHCARE NOW.  
CHILDREN SLEEP IN THE STREETS OF THE USA.  
BILLIONS 4 THE WAR. NOTHING FOR THE POOR.  
I AM HUMAN. I AM POOR.

And here is a banner spraypainted red, black, and green, followed by its own, anarchist contingent:  
NO WAR BUT THE CLASS WAR. EAT THE RICH. FEED THE POOR.

From the stage, which has been denied a sound system, Cheri Honkala speaks against those who would attempt to divide and conquer this march: 'And I don't give a damn if you're an anarchist, if you're a Democrat or if you're a Republican, or whatever your political ideas are. All I know is I'm going to march today with people that have a similar vision of a different kind of world for us to live in.'

Says Clyde Bellecourt, traditional name Thunder Before the Storm, a founder of the American Indian Movement: 'The caretakers of this earth are still here.'

'We're fired up and we're not going to take it anymore!' shout the Chicago youth.

'As I look out here I see beauty and power,' shares Shamako Noble of the Hip Hop Congress. 'I see a people able to determine the fate of their country.'

Aztec dancers ascend the stage, dressed in face paint and feathers. An incense smoke billows across the crowd. A dance begins. When finished, the dancers speak to the crowd:

'We bring this medicine to you. This is the medicine of the indigenous people of Mexico. All of us have a love of the human being, a desire for a better life.'

As the Poor Peoples Economic Human Rights Rally echoes in the center of Mears Park, the police assemble at the south corner of the square. Suddenly an officer grabs an Indymedia reporter and pulls her from the park into the street. He arrests her, seemingly without cause. Hundreds of protesters, noticing the commotion, swarm around the police, shouting, GIVE HER BACK! GIVE HER BACK!

Panicked the police spray chemical weapons into the crowd. Two more protesters are arrested. One is pinned between two mounted police officers and knocked to the ground, the other is forced face first into the street and tased.

THIS IS WHAT A POLICE STATE LOOKS LIKE, the crowd wails.

The March for Our Lives begins despite the police repression.

1,2,3,4, STOP THE WAR ON THE POOR!

The March for Our Lives stretches across the streets and traffic bridges for blocks upon blocks. Thousands of poor people and their allies are set to march on Fortress Xcel.

Families are at the frontlines: Mothers and fathers pushing children, children pushing grandparents and handicapped people. Behind them comes a teeming crowd of those forgotten, unseen, unheard at the political conventions—until now.

'We are the unemployed, the working poor, the downsized, the homeless, the victims of welfare reform and NAFTA, the cast-asides of the new economy; we are social workers, religious leaders, labor leaders, artists, lawyers, and other people of conscience; we are young and old...PPEHRC is building a movement that unites the poor across color lines.'

THE PEOPLE, UNITED, WILL NEVER BE DEFEATED!

Along the entire march route—Mears Park to the State Capitol all the way to the fence at the Xcel—Saint Paul's Finest line the streets in full riot gear, standing shoulder to shoulder, baton to raised baton.

Young kids who know the police all too well look right up at them, question them, talk back to them. An old man holding a sign that states 'Housing is a Human Right' approaches a line of riot police. 'Join us,' he says. 'Why don't you join us?' The police issue an uneasy silence.

The March for Our Lives winds its way off the permitted route, across I-94 and down the streets of Northeast Saint Paul. There it is: The Ramsey County Jail. The march comes to a halt. A moment of silence is observed for all prisoners in the Jail.

The enforcers guard the jail with guns and dogs behind 10-foot-high fences. National Guardsmen stand in formation behind the riot police, or watch from the rooftops through binoculars and rifle sights.

Willie J.R. Fleming steps from the march to stand before a line of riot police. He turns his back to them. He raises his fist into the air.

'Put your fist in the air for our brothers and sisters incarcerated.' he says.

Fists reach into the sky.

POVERTY HAS GOT TO GO!

Five thousand voices echo through tunnels, under bridges, and back to

each other.

Next stop: A children's hospital, where poor children of Minnesota have been denied decent medical care.

The march holds near the hospital. Rosa Clemente speaks to the crowd: 'Make a choice: Are we the parties that don't represent us, or are we with the people?'

Interlude:  
BULLS ON PARADE

Rage Against the Machine, set to play a show for some young people on the lawn of the State Capitol, is physically barred from playing music. State Troopers and security teams block their way to the stage.

So instead, Zach de la Rocha screams some lyrics acapella through a bullhorn, leading the crowd in rowdy song and mass movement:

Wow-wow-chicka-wow-wow-chicka-chicka-chicka.  
Wow-wow-chicka-wow-wow-chicka-chicka-chicka. COME WIT' IT NOW!

Weapons not food, not homes, not shoes  
Not need, just feed the war cannibal animal...  
While arms warehouses fill as quick as the cells  
Rally round tha family, pockets full of shells!

'Are they afraid of us?' asks de la Rocha of the crowd, after the concert has been shut down. 'No - they're not afraid of four musicians. They're afraid of you!'

A thousand more voices, a thousand more fists, a thousand more middle fingers flipped to the Man...

Back at the March for Our Lives:

The March swells with young concertgoers who are moved to spill out of the lawn and into the streets, as their music is silenced and the crowd fills in with chants and songs. They are all in it together now, all on their way to the same destination, all heading for the gates of the Fortress Xcel.

At one point, masses of white youth overrun the families of many races heading up the front of the march. Police provocateurs intermingle in and out of the protest.

The armies of the night begin closing in on the marchers from both sides of the downtown street.

Then a team of young organizers moves into action. Hands held in a human chain around the parameters of the march, they go on to keep the families safe from the police and their agents.

An older woman starts singing this song to the tune of an old spiritual, each line met with a response:

This is a rich man's war (No war on the poor!)  
What is a poor man fighting for? (No war on the poor!)

And a young boy starts singing this song:  
Well I went down to the rich man's house  
And I took back what he stole from me

Took back my dignity  
Took back my humanity...

Nightfall.

The sun has gone down, but the lights of downtown Saint Paul still illuminate the March For Our Lives. The march, which has now grown by the thousands, moves as close to the doorstep of the Xcel Energy Center as is possible.

Cheri Honkala, of the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign, climbs atop the shoulders of a fellow marcher and faces the massive crowd. She holds a bullhorn and informs the crowd that the PPEHRC is going to issue a citizens' arrest to the Republican National Convention for crimes against humanity. However before she does this she insists that the crowd raise their right hand and repeat after her:

'I promise to...do nothing violent because this is a non-violent movement.'

She informs them that there are babies and wheel chairs at the front of the march, and people who could easily be hurt if things turn violent.

All acknowledge her words and repeat them.

They cheer as she climbs down from the shoulders of her comrade, and marches to the towering fences surrounding the Xcel. She addresses the riot guard behind. She asks permission to enter:

'I am non-violent, I just want to practice my first amendment right. I can't do that behind a cage.'

THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING, THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING!

The riot police deny her entry. The letter of citizen's arrest is placed on the ground, wrapped in an American flag, at the foot of the towering fences.

As the crowd disperses, white men wearing shiny shoes and brand new bandanas across their faces approach the riot police and begin taunting them. Wary of police provocateurs members of the crowd plead for peace.

The police issue a warning of dispersal.

They open fire. Gas canisters hiss. Concussion grenades explode. Many in the crowd panic and run.

Now the people, who were just moments before marching peacefully in The March for Our Lives are running for their lives. They are chased through darkened streets by armies of the night.

Tonight, the soldiers are out for blood. Tonight, the streets are on fire. Once more, tonight, clouds of tear gas are wafting through Saint Paul, curling high into the evening sky above the Xcel.

As Laura Bush introduces the President's speech by satellite, Channel 13 reports, 'the Xcel Energy Center is locked down because of protesters outside.' No one is allowed in or out of the Fortress.

Fox News reports: 'A group of about 4,000 protesters are trying to break down the security fences at 5th and 7th, near the northwest entrance to the Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul.' Fox reports: 'Protesters exploded three homemade bombs near police. Officers responded with tear gas and smoke bombs.'

As it turns out, no evidence could be found of protesters 'trying to break down the security fences.' As it also happens, the anarchists' 'homemade bombs' turned out to be grenades thrown by police.

This fact will be verified by all media except Fox.

Says George Bush to the nation tonight: 'If the Hanoi Hilton could not break John McCain's resolve to do what is best for his country, you can be sure the angry Left never will.'

The angry Left replies: If George Bush could not break the angry Left's resolve to do what is best for this country, you can be sure John McCain and his police never will.

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#### Part 4: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK.

Wednesday, September 3. Day 3 of the Republican National Convention.

Breaking: Eight alleged 'leaders' of the anarchist/anti-authoritarian RNC Welcoming Committee are formally charged with 'Conspiracy to Riot in Furtherance of Terrorism'—the first criminal use of the Minnesota version of the USA PATRIOT Act. They have been held as political prisoners within Ramsey County Jail since being rounded up in armed raids leading up to the Convention.

Their names: Monica Bicking, Eryn Trimmer, Luce Guillen Givins, Erik Oseland, Nathanael Secor, Robert Czernik, Garrett Fitzgerald, and Max Spector.

Their crime: Organizing with the RNC Welcoming Committee, allegedly an 'organized criminal enterprise who have conspired with affinity groups throughout the United States to come to Saint Paul, MN and utilize criminal activities to disrupt and stop the RNC.'

Their maximum sentence: Up to 7 ½ years in prison under the 'terrorism enhancement' charge.

The only evidence against them: The testimony of unnamed Undercover Investigators and 'Confidential Reliable Informants' who have infiltrated the RNC WC for over a year.

The last use of such charges in Minnesota was in 1918, when organizers with the Industrial Workers of the World on the Iron Range were charged with 'criminal syndicalism' for organizing unions.

The National Lawyers Guild and the Friends of the RNC 8 mobilize to support the defendants in their fight for freedom.

Says NLG lawyer Jordan Kushner as he comes out of the courtroom: 'This is a political prosecution in its purest form, because no one is actually accused of physically doing anything that would be violent...They're being prosecuted specifically for their political activities and what they advocated.'

The RNC WC calls an emergency press conference, together with the National Lawyers Guild and the PPEHRC, where it 'unmasks' before the media.

The world hears from an older woman named Betsy Raasch-Gilman, a member of the WC:

'There are no terrorists up here. There are no terrorists in the Ramsey County Jail. There are terrorists in the Xcel Center. There are terrorists in the White House. And that's why we organized these protests.'

And the world hears from Willie Fleming of the Poor People's Campaign and the Hip Hop Congress:

'We, like most Americans, are against terrorism. Be it Al Qaeda—or the police...who, for the last couple of days, have employed terrorist tactics, inflicting fear into nonviolent Americans seeking to protest...So I have a question for you, the American public: What is violence? Is there a difference between violence and civil disobedience?'

Who, then, are the terrorists at the RNC?

Says the state to the people: 'You're either with us or you're with the terrorists.'  
Therefore, to stand against the state is to stand for terrorism.

Say the people in the streets: To stand against the state is to stand against terrorism.

RAGE VS. THE MACHINE  
Night of Wednesday, September 3.

Rage Against the Machine is finally allowed to play a show in the Twin Cities. They make their appearance in the orange jumpsuits of the Guantanamo detainee.

As the show closes, thousands of Rage fans, with a smattering of protesters and Veterans against the War, are spilling out of Minneapolis' Target Center and into the streets.

At the same time, delegates are making their way back to their hotels from Governor Mitt Romney's vice presidential acceptance speech at the Xcel Center.

Palin has stated that her job is 'sort of like a community organizer — except that you have actual responsibilities.' Community organizers nationwide are not amused.

WHOSE STREETS? OUR STREETS!

A group of 200 Ragers against the Machine, most of them local youth, spontaneously take over the intersection of First Avenue and Seventh Street. Traffic is stopped. Riot police are called in to downtown Minneapolis. They come by foot, bicycle, horseback.

Delegates watch through the windows of their taxis, charter buses and private cars.



'Those guys, again?' wonders a worried delegate from Texas.

In what has become routine in these Twin Cities, the stormtroopers drive the youth down Seventh Street. At least 102 people will be surrounded, corralled, forced to sit with their hands on their heads and to wait to be carried away by city bus to the County Jail.

Says James Gilligan of Iraq Veterans Against the War to the Pioneer Press: 'The level of intensity I've seen from police officers, it's not even on this planet. These guys are treating civilians like you would Iraqis.'

The troops are coming home now. So is the War.

NO PEACE FOR THE WARMAKERS, NO JUSTICE FOR THE PEACEMAKERS  
Thursday, September 4. Final day of the Republican National Convention.

Early in the day, lawyers for demonstrators show up outside Mayor Coleman's office and ask to speak to officials about the civil rights of their clients. The lawyers are confronted by eight police in riot gear and escorted out of the building.

This afternoon, thousands of Twin Cities youth walk out of their high schools and colleges in a citywide student strike against the Republican Convention, organized by Youth Against War and Racism. They march to a Peace Island Picnic at Harriet Island, where they put politicians and Big Oilmen on trial for war crimes, then on to the State Capitol, where the Anti-War Committee has a permit to rally and march.

The watchwords of the day: No Peace for the Warmakers.

Across downtown Saint Paul, businesses and government buildings start closing their doors at 3 pm. The president of the Greater St. Paul Building Owners & Managers Association tells members, 'There may be streets closed that may make it difficult to leave.' He compares the coming protest to a 'tornado or severe weather.'

As the last speaker stops speaking at 4:50pm, and the people prepare to march downtown, a police officer issues a proclamation by megaphone: 'Your permit will expire at 5 pm. At that point, you don't have a right to march.'

The protesters, many of them high school-age youth, try to march to the convention center. Some sit down in an intersection—WHOSE WAR? THEIR WAR. WHOSE STREETS? OUR STREETS. Others attempt to cross the bridges across I-94 leading into downtown Saint Paul.

The armies of the night return, hundreds of them in a show of force, all in riot gear and gas masks, some on horses and some on top of snowplows and dump trucks called in to block the way forward.

Darkness falls. The protesters regroup on the Capitol grounds. Then the pepper spray comes out. Then the tear gas. Now-familiar explosions fill the streets. A familiar stench fills the air. Concussion grenades and smoke bombs are hurled at the crowd as 'peace officers' push the peace marchers back.

Inside the Convention Center, John McCain has ascended the stage.

Some of the Enemy have made it inside the Fortress. They make good on

the pledge to crash the spectacle. Just before John McCain can accept his presidential nomination, the 'war hero' is confronted from across the Xcel by an Iraq Veteran Against the War, a young man by the name of Adam Kokesh.

YOU CAN'T WIN AN OCCUPATION—reads his sign. MCCAIN VOTES AGAINST VETS—reads the flipside. Security gets to him and rips away the sign, but not before McCain—and the whole world—can see them. Kokesh lifts up both his hands in a peace sign.

USA! USA! USA!

The crowd goes wild, attacks the protester, attempts to drown out dissent with an old standard. But there is more to come—the Iraq War veteran's protest will be followed by two more disruptions, anti-war, pro-choice, from the women of Code Pink.

Outside the Convention Center, the police are opening fire on peaceful protesters. They are herding hundreds onto the Marion Street Bridge. They will be arresting 396 people tonight—more than any other mass arrest, at least since the last Republican National Convention in New York City.

Even the mainstream media takes notice, after 19 of their own are rounded up and arrested on the bridge.

Says Minnesota Public Radio reporter Michael Caputo: 'The police had their version of events...They said protesters not only moved forward, but they hurled rocks, chunks of blacktop, fireworks, plastic bottles, fecal matter. That's not what I saw from where I stood...I saw no rocks. No fireworks. No bottles or bags filled with feces. The way I saw it, the police fired the first shot, and I never heard a warning.'

Says Fox News Editor John P. Wise, who is arrested tonight with everyone else on Marion Street Bridge: 'What I saw was just another peaceful protest that only grew troublesome when officers tried to prevent the marchers from crossing a bridge to the side of town that runs into the Xcel Center.'

Now, out on the bridge, the police are making an announcement on behalf of the Republican Party:

'Sit down, put your hands on your heads, and shut your mouths.'

Inside, John McCain pleads with the crowd: 'Please, please, my friends, my dear friends, please, please don't be diverted by the ground noise and the static.'

Yet the ground noise and the static—the ground noise of the voices from below, the static interruption of the signal from without—have become the story of the day, the story of four days in September.

DISPATCHES FROM THE RAMSEY COUNTY JAIL

'And I will wash their pepper from your face and go with you to jail  
And if you don't make it through this fight, I swear I'll tell your tale  
And I will stay with you in the prison cell in solidarity  
And I will not leave that cursed room 'til you walk out with me'  
—Old song penned by Brad Will, sung by detainees at the RNC

818 people have been arrested over the course of these four days in

September.

Hundreds are hit with felony charges. Hundreds are held beyond the 36-hour legal limit as they refuse to give their names to authorities in solidarity with all the people in jail.

Name? Jane Doe.

Name? John Doe.

Name? Jesse Sparkles.

Who is Jesse Sparkles?

We are all Jesse Sparkles.

Two minors practicing jail solidarity are charged with contempt of court and hit with a 30-day jail sentence without trial. Others are being locked up indefinitely, some in solitary confinement.

ICE agents question other prisoners, including a minor named Jane Doe, threatening her with deportation. Where were you born?'-he demands. I'm going to remain silent and uphold my Fifth Amendment rights-she replies. Alright, then you're going to go to federal prison-he informs her.

The prisoners continue their resistance inside their holding cells, chanting demands, singing songs, two dozen of them even going on hunger strike demanding medical attention for those who need it.

Reports of torture, beatings, tasings, harassment, and systematic denial of medical treatment are filtering out of Ramsey County Jail:

'Male beaten over the head with baton and then tased for at least 15 min for participating in singing 'Solidarity Forever' with other cellmates after being singled out and told to shut up.

At least one report of a person being anally raped with a baton.

Many reports of people clubbed and repeatedly peppersprayed in their cells.

At least a couple reports of people being kicked repeatedly in the face.

Excessive use of pain compliance maneuvers and pressure points on just about everyone.

Water denied to most for at least 24 hrs.

Many, many reports of full body 1st and 2nd degree burns from pepperspray being denied decontamination/medical treatment.

Male hand split apart by either tear gas canister or concussion grenade explosion denied medical for at least 36 hours.'

-All reports from Coldsnap Legal Collective and Indymedia

'My name is Elliot Hughes...six or seven officers came into my cell...grabbed me by the head, slammed my head on the ground...They put a bag over my head that had a gag on it. And they used pain compliance tactics on me for about an hour and a half. They separated my jaw as hard as they could...I was screaming for god and like screaming for mercy, crying, asking them why they were doing this...'

'I think we did a great job, to be honest with you,' Ramsey County Sheriff Bob Fletcher tells the media, when confronted with allegations

of abuse. 'We haven't received one complaint of the 750 arrests.'

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Part 5:

SEPTEMBER 5: LOOKING BACKWARD—AND FORWARD

'We must see the threats to peace and liberty in our time clearly—and face them'

—John McCain in his acceptance speech at the Fortress Xcel

Letter from Saint Paul:

'Thank you to the thousands of people who courageously faced 10 ton buses, concussion grenades, tear gas, pepper spray, batons, charging horses, gas masks, rubber bullets, and all of the tools of repression and intimidation that were used yesterday to repress the public in this supposed democracy. Your direct actions stand in stark contrast to the conventioners inside the Xcel Energy Center, passively dragging the party line and the rest of this world down with it. We are inspired by the extraordinary people who stopped buses, blocked highway ramps, and breached concrete barriers to reclaim the streets and recapture the space of downtown Saint Paul.'

—RNC Welcoming Committee

For four days in September, in the Twin Cities of Minnesota, thousands of dissidents—across generations, across geographies, across lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, legal status—came together to shut down the Republican National Convention and the system it stands for.

They came to raise voices, too long unheard, demanding housing, land, employment, food, education, autonomy, democracy, liberty, justice, peace.

We are here, said these voices. We will be heard.

The RNC, though disrupted, delayed, inconvenienced, was not stopped.

Today, the spectacle of American politics, though crashed, has seemingly returned in all its glory.

The tear gas has cleared.

The streets are empty, swept clean of protesters and debris.

The jails are filled to capacity. The police are back on the beat, beating down the usual suspects, the poor, Black, Brown and indigenous youth.

All is quiet on the Midwestern front. All is well in the USA—or is it?

What, really, was accomplished?

For four days in September, the people felt their power, together, in the streets.

And Power, under siege, exposed the violence inherent within it.

The mask of the rebel came up to cover the rebel's face in the street, while among the rebels themselves, the masks came off, the divisions dissolved.

The mask of Power was lifted, uncovering Power's ugly face for all the world to see: The face of riot police, chemical weapons, concussion grenades, 'less lethal' bullets, mass arrests, beatings, torture.

The mask of the mainstream media was unable to mask the tear gas truth.

...Was a spark lit within the empire? Was this fire combustible?

Was a signal sent, through the smoke, to a watching world?

Has this fire been extinguished?

Have the raids, the arrests, the charges of terrorism--has the state, once again, silenced the voices of dissent in the USA?

The corporate media would have us believe the voices of John McCain, Sarah Palin, George Bush, Sheriff Bob Fletcher have prevailed over the 'ground noise and the static.'

We, of Indymedia, have heard other voices, from below.

The voices of the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign, saying, We shall not be moved.

The voices of the RNC Welcoming Committee, saying, We will not be terrorized.

The voices rising from deep inside the Ramsey County Jail, saying, We will not be silenced.

The voices of the people of the Twin Cities, saying, We will not live in a police state.

These are voices heard, and echoed, on street corners, at dinner tables, in workplaces and classrooms and communities across the United States.

These are voices echoing voices of rebellion throughout the history of this land, rising up against a history of violence.

These are voices echoed in and echoing the struggles of people around the world.

It did not begin here. It will not end here. But for four days in September, it happened here.

The rest of this story is yet to be written.