

**cineamusings: Musings about contemporary popular film
from an anarchist's perspective.**



It's true — once I began to study anarchism and apply some of its relevant ideas to my life, watching movies became a little less fun. What I mean is, it became more difficult to lose myself in the fiction, identify with the heroes, or simply escape without constantly feeling like something was off. Films, like any artwork, can be seen as reflections of their own time; as a result there's a lot I feel uncomfortable with. Films that perpetuate racist, sexist, and colonial ideas are far from rare, and it's often blatant. Hollywood is also a money making machine itself. Even films that venture to explore unconventional or rebellious themes are ultimately connected to the capitalistic spirit of destruction and profit. 1

Despite all of this, there is still something undeniably beautiful and strong about how moving images can tell a story and influence us as a result. Sometimes a really subversive film will slide through the cracks and suddenly an enormous amount of people are watching and talking about it; the potential for change is amazing. Of course, I don't think there's a lot those, but even the mediocre and bad movies can be just as instructive for these purposes. Analyzing its reflection, ugly as it may be, is the first step in understanding and eventually dismantling the mess we're in today.

Anarchism can be many things: anti-capitalist, anti-fascist, anti-colonial, pro-autonomy, pro-mutual aid and direct democracy... but it's also none of these ideas specifically. It can be messy, violent, loving, and constructive all at the same time. My definition of anarchism doesn't have to match with yours; I think this is part of its essence and why I became attracted to it in the first place. Above all, it's too broad a concept to define easily, and it's not my intent to do so here anyway.

Finally, these words shouldn't be read as a substantial analysis — unfortunately I'm only able to scratch the surface. There are many issues at play that I regret to omit; the feminist perspective, an international context, as well as more technical details about the films and production process to name just a few. Over the course of these zines, my aim is to sketch a rough contour, through popular films, of the many aspects I find meaningful to my life when I talk about anarchism.

Blackkkklansman

The story of Ron Stallworth, a black police officer in Colorado who proposes



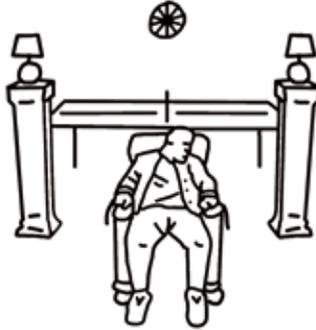
to infiltrate the local Ku Klux Klan chapter.

2018, directed by Spike Lee, written by Charlie Wachtel, David Rabinowitz, Kevin Willmott, Spike Lee

U.S. OPENING WEEKEND: \$10,845,330

Get Out

A horror film in which the black protagonist, Chris Washington, has to survive



a weekend at his white girlfriend's family home.

U.S. OPENING WEEKEND: \$33,377,060

2017, written and directed by Jordan Peele

The Hate U Give

A YA film starring Starr, a high-school student balancing the white high school she attends, the black neighbor-



hood she lives in, and witnessing the shooting of her best friend by a white police officer.

2018, directed by George Tillman Jr., written by Audrey Wells, Angie Thomas

U.S. OPENING WEEKEND: \$512,035

the films in this zine:

Sorry to Bother You

A short synopsis is difficult here... but in a sentence, it's about a poor telemarketer who gets seduced into the world of big



finance while society teeters on the brink of some sort of apocalyptic class war/revolution.

U.S. OPENING WEEKEND: \$727,266

2018, written and directed by Boots Riley

And...



Black Lives Matter is a political and activist movement created around 2013 in the wake of the high profile killings (and acquittals of killers) of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, and Michael Brown. While it is currently an established organization with chapters around the country a few significant things to note is that the movement was started and sustained by a young generation with no clear leaders. They have clashed with politicians on both sides while also creating a new narrative independent of the older civil-rights generation one. When I refer to the movement here I'm more interested in the broader aspects as opposed to the distinct one that exists here: i.e. <https://blacklivesmatter.com/>. There are many spokespeople for BLM that continue to call for non-violence and deny they harbor anti-police sentiments. Thankfully, as many images from the ground show, I don't think they speak for the entire movement.

cinemusings #1: Police, Authority, and Black Lives Matter in America

The word anarchy is derived from two ancient Greek words that roughly translate to the absence of authority (or government). Authority obviously has many facets; in this writing I'm mostly interested in the U.S. police forces and correlations with recent developments in the Black Lives Matter movement.

...the threat of that man with the stick permeates our world at every moment; most of us have given up even thinking of crossing the innumerable lines and barriers he creates, just so we don't have to remind ourselves of his existence. If you see a hungry woman standing several yards away from a huge pile of food — a daily occurrence for most of us who live in cities — there is a reason you can't just take some and give it to her. A man with a big stick will come and very likely hit you... This is why violence has always been the favored recourse of the stupid: it is the one form of stupidity to which it is almost impossible to come up with an intelligent response. It is also of course the basis of the state.

— David Graeber (Fragments of an Anarchist's anthropology)

4

The reason I want to quote Graeber at length here is because he mentions two points that I think are important to understand from an anarchist's perspective: one being our general reluctance to think about the reasons why authority exists in the first place, and two, the connection authority has to violence and the functioning of the State. The relationship is not always obvious, on a superficial level most people believe forms of authority like police exist for our benefit.

Truthfully, I believe the only possible way to confront police systems and authority in a meaningful way is to work towards the entire abolishment of their existence. This is significantly different from trying to reform police systems, separate "good" and "bad" cops, or simply trying to ignore their continued existence. Whether this is done through gradual steps or violent confrontations is not for me to say. But for these purposes, let's imagine that the ultimate goal is to eventually live in a world where the need for big men with sticks to keep you in line is absolutely unnecessary.

Unfortunately this proposal still strikes many as odd and unrealistic. Supporters of the police will almost always complain that if the police ceased to be, chaos and madness would reign as people would devolve into mindless violent animals. Personally, I would say this is rather pessimistic because it presumes that people would rather live in a violent mess than just find ways to coexist happily. It also presumes that the role of police in society today is to protect it from itself. Its real purpose, of course, is to protect the interests of a certain class.

We cannot consider the police, without considering prison, without considering war, without considering colonialism, without considering terror, without considering poverty, without considering weapons, violence and the rest of it.

— Fahim Alam, *Strike!* magazine, issue 7.

I also think viewing the elimination of police as an end to itself is dangerous; the complex and intricate system that it insulates and perpetuates must be part of the conversation. We cannot imagine a world sans-police but with the rest of familiar landscape in place (e.g. the judicial system, elections, capitalism), we have to imagine a complete reorganization of our society as we know it. This doesn't mean we have to have the answers of what that society might look like either, but at the very least we must aim for drastic change.

However, despite general apprehension in the public, abolition movements are not exactly non-existent either. Organizations like Critical Resistance (<http://criticalresistance.org>) have been operating towards this goal for the last 20 years by focusing on dismantling what has come to be known as the Prison Industrial Complex. And today the abolition movement is growing visibly thanks in large part to the scale and diversity Black Lives Matter has spawned. (e.g., recent movements like Assata's Daughters (<http://www.assatasdaughters.org>.) The complete eradication of systems of authority is a goal shared by many today.

But it's an uphill battle. Perhaps one of the biggest obstacles the abolitionists face are the moderates and politicians associating themselves with the Black Lives Matter movement that would prefer reform and electoral change over any sort of radical elimination. It's within this frustrating predicament that I believe a strong stance rooted in anarchism aiming towards the complete abolition of police, prisons and all forms of authority is a helpful guide.

An interesting place to begin analyzing this situation comes from Spike Lee's 2018 film, *Blackkklansman*. Lee's film is based on the "true" story of Ron Stallworth and it's unapologetically pro-Stallworth. He's the infallible hero of this action(-comedy?) and as an audience, we're never really invited to question his motives or morals. This is not a bad thing in itself, movies always exaggerate to some degree or another. But the sin Lee commits here is that at the end, he hasn't made a film with a powerful anti-racist message, or even just a harmless feel good one; he's made an undeniably pro-police film.

I mean this in the sense that: (1) Ron Stallworth is the hero, his actions depicted as noble. (2) Aside from a racist cop (who gets fired anyway) there is never a substantial critique brought against the practices of the police themselves. (3) It's ultimately the police, their tactics and system that lead to a successful operation for the plot.

Brushing aside practical questions about the plot, I think Spike hinged his message on a more symbolic moment in the film; i.e., the climatic final phone call between Stallworth and David Duke where Stallworth reveals he's black. It's a nice comedic moment¹ but as a meaningful gesture that relates to the racist world we inhabit today it's woefully impotent.

To get there, I first defer to Boots Riley, an activist, musician, and film director (of which I will later talk about) who publicly called out Spike on these very subjects. While I would like to quote his response to *Blackkkklansman* in full,² a few excerpts will suffice:

First, Blackkkklansman is not a true story. A story not being "true" is not necessarily a problem for me—I have no interest in telling them myself at this time—but this is being pushed as a true story and it is precisely its untrue elements that make a cop a hero against racism. When I voiced some criticism before, a few people said "but it's a true story!" It's not.

It's a made up story in which the false parts of it try to make a cop the protagonist in the fight against racist oppression. It's being put while Black Lives Matter is a discussion, and this is not coincidental. There is a viewpoint behind it.

Here is what we know:

The real Ron Stallworth infiltrated a Black radical organization for 3 years (not for one event like the movie portrays) where he did what all papers from the FBI's Counter Intelligence Program (Cointelpro) that were found through the freedom of information act tell us he did—sabotage a Black radical organization whose intent had to do with at the very least fighting racist oppression. Cointelpro papers show us that these police infiltrators of radical organizations worked to try to disrupt the organizations through things like instigating infighting, acting crazy to make the organizations look bad, getting physical altercations happening, and setting them up to be murdered by police or others. Ron Stallworth was part of the cointelpro. Cointelpro's objectives were to destroy radical organizations, especially Black radical organizations.

Cointelpro papers also show us that when White Supremacist organizations were infiltrated by the FBI and the cops, it was not to disrupt them. They weren't disrupted. It was to use them to threaten and/or physically attack radical organizations. There was no directive to stop the rise of White Supremacist organizations. The directive was to stop radical organizations. The White Supremacists were infiltrated to be more effective tools of repression by the state. In some cases, it was the undercover cops who came up with plans and literally pulled the trigger on assassinations. This happened in church bombings of Civil Rights movement associated Black churches in Birmingham, the assassination of Civil Rights

1. Though I would argue it was already done with much more power and thoughtfulness by Dave Chappelle's black, white supremacist, Clayton Bigsby.

2. The full thing is on Boots' Twitter, but it's kind of hard to read so here it is on Slate: <https://slate.com/culture/2018/08/boots-riley-vs-spike-lee-the-sorry-to-bother-you-director-tweeted-a-blistering-critique-of-blackkkklansman.html>

organizer from Detroit in Selma, the Greensboro Massacre of Communist Workers Party members in 1979, and more. The events of the film all take place in 1979 and after.

Boots' historical context helps to re-frame *Blackkklansman's* plot as essentially untrue and in many ways, manipulative. Spike obviously set out to make a Black Hero, the hero that confronts white supremacy. But doing so while being employed (happily I should add, his zest for wanting to be a police officer so badly is puzzling to say the least) by literally the largest, most violent and oppressive organization that's specifically designed to work against black people is frustratingly preposterous.

Was Ron Stallworth simply unaware of what police and FBI forces were actually doing? Perhaps he had no interest in radical black organizations and the work they were trying to do? I suppose it's also possible he felt his Colorado Springs police gang was special somehow, and subsequently had no qualms about being a cop. Or maybe he was the most subversive cop, playing by all the rules to navigate the bureaucracy to eventually undermine the system. If that's so, he completely forgot about the second part. Even Frank Serpico tried to change the corrupt system he was part of!

Actually, *Serpico* is a nice contrast to bring up. Sidney Lumet's 1973 film has held up well because it doesn't treat the police institution as ambivalent or somehow exempt from critique, it's inherently corrupt and evil. And if you forgot, the movie doesn't end with Al Pacino receiving the recognition he deserves or changing the system, he leaves New York, defeated for Europe.

Again from Boots:

At the end, the radical girlfriend says she's not down with him being a cop, then Stallworth—the guy who we've been following and made to care about and who is falsely shown to have risked his life to fight racism—says that he's for the liberation of his people at the same time as being a cop. All the fake stuff we just showed him go through argues his point for him. And then they hear something and go, guns drawn, to investigate. They go down the hall together with the signature Spike Lee dolly—the one that tells us it's him, the one that took Malcolm down the street, the one that took Dap across campus yelling "Wake Up!" They go forward into the future, side by side, in symmetrical composition, to fight the burning cross of racist terror. This is the penultimate shot before the film goes to news coverage of current White Supremacist attacks. Awww hayull no.

Look—we deal with racism not just from physical terror or attitudes of racist people, but in pay scale, housing, health care, and other material quality of life issues. But to the extent that people of color deal with actual physical attacks and terrorizing due to racism and racist doctrines—we deal with it mostly from the police on a day to day basis. And not just from White cops. From Black cops too. So for Spike to come out with a movie where a story points are fabricated in order to make Black cop and his counterparts look like allies in the fight against racism is really disappointing, to put it very mildly.

SKAB & DON'T PASS



...there is a neoliberal push coming down from both the Democrats and Republican political elites to casualize and deskill teaching, while increasingly substituting technology for teacher expertise. By casualize teaching, I mean turn teaching into a profession that requires less training and less knowledge, so that teachers are more easily replaceable... The strike is a continuation of the class struggle momentum that has been building over the past year through the teachers strikes across the US and Puerto Rico, the UC workers strike, the hotel workers strike, and all the other workers struggles that happened in 2018 and are still happening. I think that it will mean more workers, in all different kinds of jobs, will feel inspiration that they too can stand up and fight. Especially because teachers are so connected to our communities, the strike has directly touched a huge number of working families across LA.

<https://salvopaper.org/articles/teacher-strike>

I think, despite the above criticism, in Spike's eyes, he believes the film is part of the fight against racism. That especially, in 2018, *Blackkkklansman* is somehow a powerful anti white-supremacy film. This misguided direction from Spike (from his own words: "... I'm never going to say all police are corrupt, that all police hate people of color, I'm not going to say that. I mean, we need police.") is saddening, to say the least, especially for fans who have looked to his previous works for inspiration.

The aforementioned dolly shots (Malcolm X and School Daze respectively) can be brushed off as mere cinematic flourishes — and they are, to an extent, but more importantly they're also a signature. A mark belonging to a filmmaker that has undoubtedly played a huge part in shaping certain aspects of black consciousness in America. As Boots rightly implies, including Ron Stallworth as part of this canon feels both disturbing and anti-progressive.



Dolly shots from left to right: *Malcolm X* (1992), *School Daze* (1988), *Blackkkklansman* (2018).

9

Finally, his decision to end the film with real footage of Charlottesville (and David Duke) suggests that subtlety was the last thing he was aiming for. I find a lot of problems with this.

First of all, the Charlottesville incident needs some context, especially for those who are unfamiliar. On August 11 and 12, 2017 various white nationalist groups organized a "Unite the Right" rally under the guise of unifying the white nationalist movement and opposing the removal of a confederate statue in Charlottesville, Virginia. It wasn't the first of its kind and it's far from the last; but a big reason it reached the amount of national media attention it did was because a white nationalist drove his car into a crowd of counter-protestors injuring about 20 people and killing a young white woman.³

If there's any silver lining to take away from Unite the Right it's that the counter protest, anti-fascist, and Black Lives Matter groups are far from passive or willing to accept non-violence as a response. However, Lee's incorporation of Charlottesville into his ending seems to imply some sort of

3. I don't mention her race to take anything away from her or what she believed in, I simply want to remind us that were she not a young, white woman, the resulting reactions and conversations would simply be different.

clear connection with the film — at best, it's forced, at worst, he's appropriating a political situation for his own means. Conflating anti-fascist demonstrations and the story of Ron Stallworth is unfair and disingenuous, a sort of lazy move to appear political but lack any substance.

Additionally, David Duke (the real one) himself is pictured in the closing images, alive and well, giving a speech and doing whatever it is that white nationalists do. If Stallworth's phone call had any tangible affect on his life it's certainly lost on us. David Duke, of course, went on to be elected to the House of Representatives in Louisiana in 1989.

It's no secret that the modern police force in the United States descended from early slave patrols in the 1800's. As society we like to believe in the myth of progress and that we're continually moving towards a better future. This is not necessarily the truth. The racism and bigotry is hard to erase, and as a tool for the rich and powerful, the police has simply grown stronger as it aims to infiltrate and destroy as much of our public and private life as they can.

Ron Stallworth and the police are the winners in *Blackkklansman*. The same police that murdered Michael Brown and countless others⁴ with impunity. The same police that stood by and did nothing as white supremacists attacked counter-demonstrators in Charlottesville. The same police that, with enough effort and organization, can also one day cease to exist.

"What do you think of the police?"

"I liked their third album..."

— Key & Peele sketch, "Alien Imposters"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWO1pkHgrBM>

Jordan Peele was a producer on *Blackkklansman*. This doesn't necessarily mean a lot, but it helps connect the next film I will talk about. Peele's directorial debut was the fantastic *Get Out*. Like Kubrick's *The Shining*, I think *Get Out* works best as a literal interpretation of the word horror (and the cinematic genre sharing the name). In the case of Chris, this horror was specifically a lobotomy-esque surgery — generally, the horror was just existing as a black person in a (liberal) white environment.

But the appearance (or to be precise, non appearance) of police in the final scene hint at a powerful message about cops in our society and our expectations about them. After escaping the horror house but ultimately being unable to choke and kill Rose, we believe Chris is free. But as in a typical horror film ending, there's a twist — a police car arrives, flashing its lights and sounding the siren. Rose and Chris are in the foreground, and you can already see the gears turning. Rose, injured and on the ground, raises an arm and cries for help. Chris rises and puts his hands in the air.

4. 995 in 2018 according to this data: https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/national/police-shootings-2018/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.b66e70943fc8 (which I would say puts it low).

These two actions symbolize a lot about the image society tends to conjure about violence when a black man and a white woman are involved. The stories have been repeated for generations; the black man is undoubtedly the aggressor, an animal of sorts, and the woman a helpless victim. But as an audience in this scene, we're guilty of this conception as well. We can imagine how the scene will play out; Rose will play the victim card while no one will believe Chris and he will ultimately be put in jail or worse.



Excerpt from the book *Scottsboro Alabama*, 1935.
<https://archive.org/details/scottsboroalabam00khan>

But Peele's master stroke here is to give us a happy ending instead. The real twist turns out the police car was actually an airport security one driven by the one friend who had supported Chris throughout the plot. And thanks to his TSA authority, the situation was "fucking handled".

The irony at play (besides the TSA doing something useful) says a lot. Indeed, a sadder ending, in which the real police do arrive would have made another powerful statement. (Peele actually almost went with this.⁵) His decision to make Chris survive and "win" is both meaningful and inspiring. There's a clue in here about how we feel about police and they about us, and about the potential of positive imagination. Sometimes, we need stories where the good guy simply wins.

7. We want an immediate end to *police brutality* and *murder* of Black people... We believe we can end police brutality in our Black community by organizing Black *self defense* groups that are dedicated to defending our Black community from racist police oppression and brutality. The Second Amendment of the Constitution of the United States gives a right to bear arms. We therefore believe that all Black people should arm themselves for *self defense*.

— Excerpt from Black Panther Party's 1967 Ten point Program

5. <https://www.thewrap.com/jordan-peelee-get-out-director-why-ending-changed/>

It's kinda hard to be optimistic
When your homie's lyin' dead on the pavement twisted
Y'all don't hear me though, I'm tryin' hard to make amends
But I'm losin' all my motherfuckin' friends
Damn! They should've shot me when I was born
Now I'm trapped in the motherfuckin' storm

— 2pac, How Long Will They Mourn Me?

The Hate U Give, directed by George Tillman Jr., was also released in 2018. The film is a melodramatic Young Adult drama and its intended audience is obvious. Despite some of the clichés (dangerous hood vs. nice neighborhood), stereotypes (gangster villains, code switching at high school and home) and overly-conspicuous (i.e. tear jerker) moral messages, the film is also effective and touching in a way. It's about a simple story after all, one that's synonymous with police in the U.S., that is, the killing of an innocent black person by a cop and the lack of consequences on the authorities that follow. However, the final act, specifically with how it resolves the police issue is disappointing and in many ways contradicts and weakens the stronger elements of the film.

In the opening scene of the film, a father calmly and sternly gives his children the Talk — what to do in the inevitable situation when they find themselves confronted by a police officer. On the table in front of the father is a copy of the Black Panther Party's ten point program; he encourages his children to memorize it and at a later point forces them to recite the lines. Unfortunately, that's the extent of Panther ideology present in the film.

The story focuses on the daughter named Starr, a black high school student who splits her time between the white, upper class peers she goes to school with and the black friends and neighborhood she grew up with. Near the beginning she witnesses a childhood friend shot and murdered by a white police officer after a traffic stop — it turns out this is the second time she had to witness the death of a close friend by violence. The remaining film follows Starr as she struggles between distancing herself from the situation and joining the rising protest and activist movement.

The story plays out pretty close to reality, i.e. after a publicized trial, the grand jury declines to indict the white officer. This is not especially good or bad for the film, what I find fault with is how Starr's story concludes after this fact.

In a pivotal moment during one of the final protests in the film, Starr takes a megaphone and addresses the crowd for the first time: "We are all witnesses to this injustice... this ain't about how Khalil died, it's about how he lived! Khalil lived!"

The first time I watched this film my heart was pounding in the lead up to this speech. But the speech itself was disheartening, to say the least. No one denies the fact that Khalil lived, but the reason why people are protesting and rioting in the streets is not because he lived, but because he was murdered. So yes, it is very much about how he died.

It may seem like an innocent detail to get fussed about, but the language here is really important. Many people who oppose the movement have concluded that BLM is built on a false premise — their reasoning that by specifically highlighting black lives, they push other people, (i.e., white) out of the focus. Their response is that the language should read: All Lives Matter. This can be neatly deconstructed with a metaphor I heard once.

Imagine a group of people are sitting around a dinner table. They are all starving. A plate of food is brought out and passed from person to person. As the plate circles the table it is continuously passed over the one black person. After a while the black person says, “I’m hungry!” “Black people are hungry!”.

The white person replies, “We are all hungry, white people are hungry too,” while continuing to pass food over the black person and eat.



Red over image to zoom in

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Mike Hunt

★ ★ ★ ★ ☆ Never be ashamed of your race or heritage
August 31, 2016

Great shirt , great logo !!! Every white person on the planet should stand up for their race. WHITE AND PROUD !!!!!

19 people found this helpful

Jlynn G.

★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆ So because it says, White Lives Matter its offensive ...
February 5, 2016

So because it says, White Lives Matter its offensive and racist! Yet Black Lives Matter shirts are ok....L.O.L. Just because were proud to be white doesn't mean we're racist.

42 people found this helpful

Shirt for sale on Amazon and typical comments.

There is logic to the statements “we are all hungry” or “all lives matter”. It’s similar to political propaganda statements like “support our troops”. No one denies the truth of the sentences, but at the same time the words distract us from what the important issues that need to be talked about and made public are. In this case, it’s the fact that black people are killed by the authorities at a disproportionately higher rate than any other ethnicity and there is little to nothing being done to address this fact.

To me, “Khalil lived” feels like one of these empty statements. And the reason it resonates badly is because of how the film concludes. The protests in the film dissolve into riots (portrayed rather negatively) and a climatic stand off between the gangster antagonist and Starr’s youngest brother ends with the police eventually apprehending said gangster and incarcerating him. Yes, the same police that murdered Khalil. In the epilogue her father plants a tree and laughs in the sunny lawn as the (uncle) cop watches from the porch and smiles. Starr goes to Khalil’s home and puts one of his mementos in her treasured Nike⁶ box and in voice over, it’s implied Starr

6. The amount of Nike placement in this film is also conspicuously awkward, by the way.

will “light up the darkness”, and most likely continue to be involved with politics and activism.

There’s a lot wrong with this picture, I think mainly the fact that no substantial change, other than the removal of the character King (which in itself, implies a whole different set of dangerous ideologies like perpetuating the stereotype of black on black violence) occurred. Yes, because it’s a YA movie, Starr definitely grows, “comes of age”, and undergoes some important self discovery. But Khalil also died. So he was murdered, his murderer got away unscathed, protests occurred, and then... life continues as normal.

But what about the police? What about the seemingly ineffectiveness of political organizing to indict a police officer? What about the connections and bursts of creativity, destruction, and joy that occur during riots? What about the next boy that will be murdered by the same cops? It doesn’t take an anarchist to be tempted to ask these questions.

By the way, the aforementioned uncle cop played by Common is also strange, in some ways it parallels the “noble” Ron Stallworth. In the film he serves as two things, mainly as a bit of friction with Starr’s father and later becoming a safe haven when things get bad with the gangsters. At one point, he also tries to explain what things are like from a cop’s perspective and potential reasons they may shoot somebody. This scene is cringe-worthy to say the least.

I was hopeful the film could be more critical of a character like this, but unfortunately this isn’t the case. He’s humanized, there to remind viewers that “some cops are good”. (He’s also shown living in the biggest and grandest house.) But do we really need to hear what a cop’s perspective on the matter might be? We hear the benefit-of-the-doubt-cop-perspective narrative endlessly on T.V. and in the news. Why add it to a story that has much more potential in just focusing on the other side?

The film, like the book, is very marketed to a young audience. Kids who may be able to identify with Starr, perhaps even share some of the same experiences. At the least, I think a film like this needs some sort of clear message, or at least point in a progressive direction, and not just give us the happy ending that retains the status quo.

P.S.

Symbolically, I also feel disappointed with Starr’s white boyfriend in the film, Chris. His existence as a character to me is baffling, other than perhaps an attempt add a dash of political correctness by saying, hey, white people, some of you are okay too! Starr and Chris have one meaningful conversation when he tells her he doesn’t see color and she replies, quite beautifully, that then he’s not seeing her.

“Black, white, nobody gives a shit. We’re all the same.”

“But we’re not.”

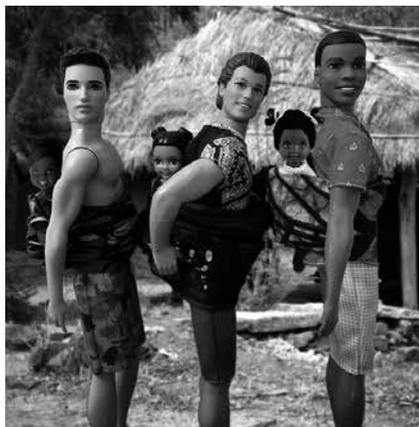
“I don’t see color. I see people for who they are. The exact same way I see you.”

“If you don’t see my blackness then you don’t see me!”

This scene ends oddly. Chris replies “I see you” and hugs Starr. Starr’s face seems to be ambivalent. As an audience we’re not sure — does Chris understand that professing to be colorblind is in its own way, racist? Does Starr realize that he doesn’t realize?

The film ends with Starr happily dating Chris again. This, coupled with a few scenes earlier where Chris provides help during the protest strikes me as uncomfortably close to a white-savior theme, the last thing a story like this should ever need to come near.

I get that love may be off limits for a lot of critique. But the high school romance feels unnecessary. The *Hate U Give* is about death, injustice, and reality. Realities like the fact that the cop that shot and killed Kahlil was white. When trying to stake a clear message on this front, the character Chris is a smokescreen — at best, a distraction that seems to aim towards some tendency to an idea of Liberal Political Correctness.



<https://www.instagram.com/barbiesavior/>

Blackklansman and *The Hate U Give* give the police a large and obvious role to play in the plots of their respective stories. Sometimes, a critique can be stronger when the subject is not so literal, or even when it’s conspicuously absent.

To make this point, I turn to the 2018 film Boots Riley made called *Sorry to Bother You*. *STBY* is a lot of things, but first and foremost, I think it’s provocative and fun. There are many themes going on here I would like to write about one day; race, class, bureaucracy, the culture of technology and technocrats, art and activism, etc... For the sake of this writing however, I will focus on how Boots portrayed police in his film.

Actually, the police aren’t really visually present for much of the film. I don’t think Boots is interesting in criticizing the police directly. He realizes they are tools of a much bigger system that is much harder to portray; basically, capitalism and the holders of wealth. When the police (or special security force as I believe they’re once referred to) do appear they

are nameless, faceless perpetrators of violence and repression.⁷ Their role in the film is to escort the scabs and highest-paid employees to work as the other employees form a union, strike, and try to block the entrance.

The cops, clad in stereotypical riot gear with shields and batons, form a line and power their way through the courageous union workers trying to block their path. The workers are not just knocked down, Boots goes out of his way to show us the deliberate and personal violence performed as they are beaten like inanimate objects. The cops (the visible ones through the masks are all white by the way) seem to do this with a sadistic sense of pleasure. As viewers this ultra-violence almost comes across as a sick joke. Cinematically it's between a bloody Tarantino action piece and the Rodney King video. Cassius eventually initiates a plan to fight back against the cops and hold the line. Initially successful, reinforcements for the police arrive and they are once again indiscriminately beaten. The chaos and panic that follows as the protesters try to escape reads more like a piece of citizen journalism than fiction.

However, the last time we see the police the tables have turned. No match for the equisapiens,⁸ their expensive weapons and machines are destroyed and they're reduced to...

16



If it's hard to see, this is a horse person picking up and punching a cop repeatedly in the face.

7. There's no need for any humanization via Common here.

8. i.e., horse people. Really. Just watch the movie.

What's special and powerful about this scene is that it demonstrates a couple things I'd like to elaborate on from an anarchist perspective:

1: The police are not invincible. Behind all the weapons and technology is a fragile organism we all understand much better; a human being. Despite how hard they may try to convince us otherwise, defeating them, physically or systematically is not impossible.

2: The myth of non-violence. History likes to rewrite and bury certain activists under the gravestone marked non-violence. Violence, when coming from below, is never tolerated by the State. However, when it comes from above, on a daily level, it is called the law. Just as violence is a tool for the oppressors, it can and must be used by those who oppose them.

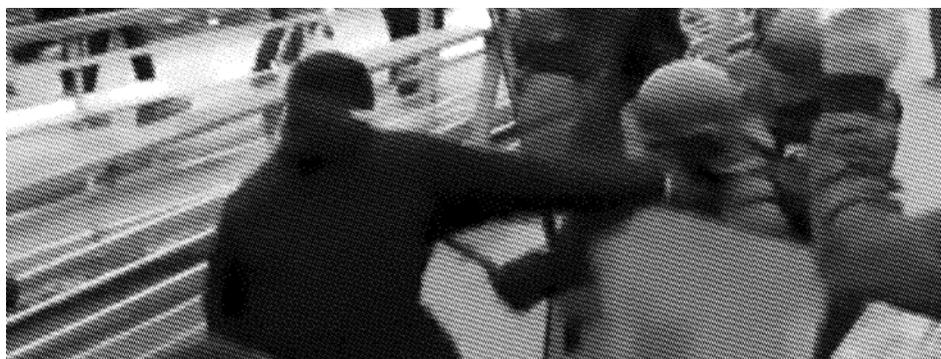
3: The importance of action. By being passive and doing nothing, or worse, in Cash's case, working for the enemy, he was unable to do anything meaningful. When Cash finally decided action was needed, he realized change would not happen through politics or "writing to your senator", but with direct, physical acts. Only from there are the police and WorryFree CEO able to be confronted.



Boots is a self proclaimed communist⁹ — I'm not sure how far he would stand on the issue of abolition or the dissolution of the State in general, but no matter what, I think he's managed to make an incredibly powerful film that embodies many anarchist ideas with regards to police and authority. I think part of this is due to the fact he was able to retain a lot of control as opposed to relying on traditional studio production systems (in contrast, look at all the recent films of Spike Lee). And I think another part is also, like many artists, a simple, genuine and authentic urge to share an idea through art.

In this case, he's made an image, and as we're all aware, images are extremely powerful in this day and age. The context of *STBY* gives us reason to root for and believe in the equisapiens. They are after all, exploited, just like the rest of us. And an image of a cop being beaten by a horse person is comical, but more importantly, it's empowering.

9. https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/8xp39v/boots-riley-talks-about-a-socialist-alternative-for-society





Another empowering image.¹⁰

19

10. In early January 2019 as the yellow vest movement in France continued to challenge the state and authority, a former boxer named Christophe Dettinger was filmed attacking and punching riot police in Paris. Angered that he and his wife were tear gassed, and armed with nothing but his fists, he advances on a group of cops and forces them to retreat as one tries in vain to protect himself with his shield. Though he has since turned himself in, the images are surreal and amazing. It's hard not to admire the courage and strength in that moment, and it's equally hard not to realize how tenuous the police really are. If plastic shields and batons are no match for one pair bare hands, imagine what a determined group of people can accomplish.

There are numerous videos of this incident on YouTube; photographs are harder to find. The photo above, which I personally find equally powerful, seems to have been bought for exclusive use by TRT World, a Turkey(?) based media company. If anyone knows of a non-watermarked image, please let me know.

And as always, in moments like this, the true absurdness of the State comes to light. For example, in demonstrating expert use of the oxymoron, his former coach had this to say, "What shocked me the most and I think for you it's the same thing, it's to see him hitting the *poor policeman* when he's on the ground..." Yet, despite these attempts by the media to victimize the police, most of us watching knew there was something much more significant and revealing at play, something that resonates in the fist punching through a cop's helmet; **people have power**.

As for Christophe, he had this to say: "I have the people's anger inside me. I see all these presidents, ministers and the State stuffing themselves, being incapable of leading by example. It's always us, the little ones, who pay. French people, I'm with you wholeheartedly. We need to keep fighting peacefully."

Epilogue¹¹ (Some thoughts about Abolition)

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the young “Socialist Democratic superstar” fought her way to election victory (New York House representative) by partly promising to “Abolish ICE”. The ICE (Immigrations and Customs Enforcement), like the DHS (Department of Homeland Security), are, of course, essentially specialized police forces. In the era of Trump their practices have been both empowered and thrust into the spotlight as immigration from the southern border has become an important election topic.

So in early 2019 Ocasio-Cortez, along with the rest of the Democratic caucus, voted to... continue to fund the DHS and ICE at current levels. And if polls mean anything to you, a June 2018 survey puts 70% of Americans as opposed to the idea of abolishing the organization.

If these two facts can tell us anything it’s that the fight for abolition is far from easy, or, in the current political system, realistically feasible at all. Abolishing the ICE is indeed a “radical” thing to say; but if one follows this logic to its conclusion one would also have to talk about abolishing detention centers, prisons, and indeed, the police. Uttering these words though, for any and every politician in the U.S. today would be certain career suicide.

There is an allure towards politicians and elections; it’s a spectacle that is itself one of America’s greatest entertainment pastimes. Sometimes politicians will join the race under the guise of challenging the status quo, their “outsider” position suddenly a reason for voters to get interested and involved. It’s this fetishization that led to Ocasio-Cortez’s win, to the strength of Bernie Sander’s campaign, and to Donald Trump’s election. If there’s one thing an anarchist stance has to offer for value here it may be that *you can’t change the system by playing the game*. The most immediate and meaningful change happens when we implement our actions at local levels, where we have the ability to actually see the effects on our lives and our neighbors.

But if the situation described above sounds pessimistic it’s far from hopeless. The Abolish/Occupy-ICE hashtags led to real, physical actions that disrupted the system. From Philadelphia to Portland and in between, large occupying strategies (initiated independently from politics, of course) were implemented at ICE offices; marches and protests brought together broad groups on the Left and made national headlines, little children admonished ICE agents as they scurried to and from work. Many of these actions were far from perfect, especially from an anarchist’s point of view, but the strength and locality of these simultaneous gestures proves that

11. For reference and further reading, follow these links:

<https://itsgoingdown.org/abolishing-ice-by-funding-it/>

<http://libcom.org/news/socialist-case-ins-04072018>

<https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2018/07/01/poll-3-in-4-swing-voters-oppose-democrat-plan-to-abolish-ice/>

<https://radicaleducationdepartment.com/zines/>

there's something tangible worth fighting for beyond putting faith in and waiting for electoral change.

At risk of digressing further (I realize we're far from films at this point) I'd like to end with a statement by All Out Atlanta (July 2018):



Occupation at Atlanta City Detention Center.

In the last week, many people put their bodies on the line and occupied the Atlanta City Detention Center as a part of a nationwide movement against the criminalization of undocumented peoples and in support of the right to free movement. The 3 day occupation was raided by police and brutally repressed...

The past week has been tremendously insightful for us in Atlanta. For many, the occupation at the Atlanta City Detention Center was the only joyous moment in a year of constant distress. On the one hand, the occupation was a brief interruption of the devastating state of affairs in this country, characterized by authoritarian leaders, the rise of racism, dire poverty and now, concentration camps for immigrants. On the other hand, the occupation was a continuation. A continuation of something that swept the nation last year as tens of thousands of people took to the streets after the deadly "Unite the Right" demonstration in Charlottesville. The movement to abolish ICE is the culmination of a 9 year long cycle of autonomous movements that consists of university occupations, Occupy Wall Street, NoDAPL, Black Lives Matter and the many smaller movements organized by everyday people against wage theft, gentrification, and ecological ruin.

We are unphased by the violent police eviction of our occupation. We were willing to throw everything on the line and risk losing the encampment. Revolutionary movements don't rely on camps to grow, and occupations are just brief confrontations in a long-term struggle for freedom. As the occupations of ICE facilities spread, it is evident that the vast majority of Americans are ready for something much more radical than the collaborationist rhetoric offered up by the Democrats, who in preparing for the upcoming midterms will pay lip service to the #AbolishICE movement to try and make significant gains.

The task of revolutionaries is to make the continuation of capitalism seem undesirable, short-sighted, and frivolous. We are the realistic ones, the ones who know nothing good can come from the electoral spectacle. Revolution isn't something that just falls from the sky. In the coming years, we will have to fight with everything we have. We will continue to put everything on the line, we have no choice. All Out Atlanta organizes outside of a framework of electoral politics so that we can include undocumented people, felons, and youth in our movement. We should never make compromises in our struggle to abolish borders, prisons and all forms of tyranny. Yet we must also pause and take a moment to recognize our strength and praise the courage of the well-known revolutionary movement sweeping the continent

We have begun/ We will continue,

All Out Atlanta

GET ON PLAYING



22



The GAME

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B

