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Center
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Retrieved on March 1st 2026 from itsgoingdown.org

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Brooklyn Center

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The following are a few brief notes stemming from reflections on the week of unrest in Brooklyn Center. When Daunte Wright, a young Black man, was killed during a traffic stop by an officer from the inner-ring Minneapolis suburb, protests broke out immediately. Multiple squad cars were damaged by the crowd that had assembled, before clashes moved to the Brooklyn Center Police station, which continued to see combat daily for almost a week straight. These notes, written in the immediate aftermath of the flare up, are intended to help illuminate some of the contours of the conflict in Brooklyn Center, and provide insight into contemporary struggle in the United States more broadly.

1. If this week has proven anything, it is that there are people who know what to do.

When it became clear that the immediate protests over Daunte's murder on Sunday were spilling over into riots, looting began in

Brooklyn Center, then Minneapolis, followed by Saint Paul. The first store looted that night was not in the immediate vicinity of the crowd but two miles away at a Wal-Mart. Around a hundred buildings would be damaged in the night's destruction.

This decentralized looting was notably less widespread the following night. With more preparations, a state of emergency declared, and the National Guard mobilized, the state was better able to project force throughout the metro area and discourage people from taking action. The news attempted to downplay the amount of looting and vandalism that occurred Monday night, while highlighting the arrests police made in order to make this projection of force seem successful.

A very similar sequence occurred in late August of last year. After word of a police shooting in downtown Minneapolis spread, clashes quickly broke out, and many stores in downtown and around the city were looted. The state quickly mobilized to stomp it out the following night, and were able to claim success, with much less looting occurring that night.

That this continues to happen appears to be plain evidence that there are a significant number of people for whom counter-insurgency is not effective, and who make good judgments on what actions and risks to take. Moral arguments about non-violence and property damage appear to fall on deaf ears. Presumably, given the following day of force projection from the state, many of these people decide to quit while they are ahead, and not attempt to face down the state when the latter is more prepared.

2. Mass force projection from the state in the form of a National Guard occupation of the metropolis will almost certainly become the new normal.

Governor Walz has proven more than willing to summon the State Patrol and National Guard, as well as impose curfews, for any protest or potential protest that could possibly spill over into something riotous. The immediate reaction to the August 26th night of looting, as well as the decision to mobilize the National Guard before a protest had even been called in response to Derek Chauvin being released on bail in October demonstrates this with clarity.

Minnesota's Operation Safety Net is the preemptive preparation of these agencies and resources to prepare for the trial of Derek Chauvin. Minneapolis was already partially occupied by the National Guard when Daunte Wright was killed. The entire sequence of events responding to his murder have occurred on Operation Safety Net's watch.

This massive mobilization is designed to be terrifying and overwhelming. The fear induced by it produces a limit for revolt going forward in Minneapolis and must be overcome if this limit is to be surpassed. The front-liners who clashed for almost an entire week at the Brooklyn Center Police station demonstrate this courage and show that it is still possible to resist no matter how many officers and weaponry is deployed.

3. The George Floyd uprising succeeded because of its combination of motion and inertia.

The May 2020 uprising was both static and mobile simultaneously. It was anchored in extended days-long clashes in front of the 3rd and then 5th precincts. Yet at the same time, decentralized looting—both on foot and more often by car—and various related protests spread all over the metropolis. The former clashes kept a significant portion of police resources tied up protecting their own precincts, which drastically hindered their capacity to respond to what was going on elsewhere.

After the first two nights in Brooklyn Center, there have only been static clashes with no accompanying motion, allowing the state to concentrate all of its resources in one place with ease. To be successful, future rebellions will need to continue to reintroduce motion, scrambling the ability of the state to crush popular unrest.

4. The revolt in Brooklyn Center, like all revolts, has limits.

When limits are reached in a revolt, they must be answered by creativity and ingenuity, not by doubling down on what isn't working any more. When crowd numbers dwindle, the call goes out to protest twice as hard the next day. If a tactic is losing steam, the time has come to search for new ones.

Above all, this week of conflict in Brooklyn Center has given many people indispensable experiences and allowed for a massive leap forward for their combative and organizing skills. The frontliners who emerged around the country following last summer's unrest have now had ample opportunity for their practical skills to catch up to their material preparations.