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# Why Fuck the Police

CrimethInc.

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January 11, 2006

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# Contents

How to Fuck the Police . . . . .	9
On the Streets . . . . .	9
Organizing a Copwatch Program . . . . .	9
Get a Group Together . . . . .	9
How to Copwatch . . . . .	11
Copwatching Alone . . . . .	16
In Private and Community Spaces . . . . .	17
Handling a Police Raid . . . . .	17
Account . . . . .	22

In the end, they didn't use violence or arrests; they just hoped to scare us and reveal our supposedly violent machinations to the public.

The phone tree, however, paid off. The local media as well as a slam poetry group showed up immediately, along with about fifty of our friends. In conjunction with the drumming and the constant flash of still cameras, the slam poets created an atmosphere of festive defiance and creatively informed the media and curious passers-by about just how fucked up this situation was. While normally hostile to radicals, the local corporate media could not resist covering the obvious foolishness of the police, who wandered about the property en masse with bomb-sniffing dogs while obviously earnest and non-violent activists explained how the events of the evening were—can you believe it?—causing them to “lose faith in this society.”

Thanks to the thoroughness of our preparations, we were able to upstage law enforcement prior to the main event of the protests themselves; this coup gave us much-needed attention and credibility. Additionally, afterwards we were able to succeed in suing the city for tens of thousands of dollars. This enabled us to fund many new subversive projects, which the forces of order are even less equipped to deal with in the aftermath of their ill-thought-out raid.

rights. In a move that later proved to be of some importance, we painted the door with some “house rules,” including bans on weapons, animal products, and substances. This has since been used in both the media and in legal decisions as a further embarrassment to the police. We also prepared a press release, leaving only a few blank spaces for the details of the expected raid, and left it with an uninvolved family member in case the raid was accompanied by numerous arrests.

Busy as we were with organizing against the meetings, we were still able to keep our space open for concerts and other events. Two nights before the planned protests began, the police arrived during one of these shows, an apolitical folk performance. The raid caused quite a bit of alarm for the artists and visitors! At that time, some of us were leaving to work on the pirate ship puppets—described as “anarchist body armor” in police reports to the media—that we were planning to use for street theater. As we were loading the ships into a pickup truck, we noticed that police vehicles were assembling at every nearby intersection and decided to attempt to leave. As soon as we began driving, we were pulled over for the most minute of traffic violations. We called back to the space, where police were already knocking on the door. We set in motion our well-planned phone tree, calling our lawyers, leaving reports on answering machines, and informing scores of friends that we were in trouble. It turned out that the police had used supposed fire code violations to get into the house, because it is standard practice in our city for housing inspectors to be “protected” by police. Each cop and each inspector were followed everywhere by comrades from our ranks who documented everything. The police went through our book selection, our kitchen, our desks, our basement, our storage areas, even our bathroom, not to mention the personal belongings of those living upstairs. They searched our whole house and the squatted house next door. They towed our cars, on the ridiculous pretension that they were parked three inches too far from the curb!

Criticism of opposition to the police usually falls into one of five categories. The first common argument is that the police, as our fellow workers, are also exploited members of the proletariat, and should therefore be our allies. Unfortunately, there is a vast gap between “should” and “is.” The police exist to enforce the will of the powerful; anyone who has not had a bad experience with them is likely either privileged or submissive. Today’s police officers, at least in North America, know exactly what they’re getting into when they join the force; people in uniform don’t just get cats out of trees in this country. Yes, most take the job because of what they feel to be economic necessity, but needing a paycheck is no excuse for obeying orders to evict families, harass young men of color, or pepper spray demonstrators; those whose consciences can be bought are everyone else’s enemies, not potential allies.

This argument could be more persuasive if it was couched in strategic terms, rather than Marxist abstractions: for example, “Every revolution succeeds at the moment the armed forces refuse to make war on their fellows; therefore we should focus on seducing the police to our side of the barricades.” But again, the police are not just any workers; they are the ones who have most deliberately chosen to base their livelihoods and value systems upon the prevailing order, and thus are the least likely to be sympathetic to those who struggle against hierarchy. This being the case, it makes sense to focus on opposing the police as such, not on seeking solidarity with them. So long as they serve their masters, they cannot be our allies; by publicly deriding the police as an institution, we encourage individual police officers to seek other employment, so we can find common cause with them.

The second argument is that the police can win any confrontation, so we shouldn’t invest ourselves in strategies that

involve confronting them<sup>1</sup>. It may seem that, with all their guns and armor and equipment, the police are invincible, but this is an illusion. They are limited by all sorts of invisible constraints—bureaucracy, public opinion, their own need to avoid inconvenient escalation. This is why a motley crowd armed only with the tear gas canisters shot at them can hold off a larger, more organized, better equipped force; contests between social unrest and military might are not played out according to the rules of military engagement.

Those who have studied the police, who can predict what they are prepared for and what they can and cannot do, can usually outsmart and outmaneuver them. Such small victories can be inspiring for those who chafe under the heel of police repression, as well as instrumental in accomplishing concrete goals. In the collective unconscious of our society, the police are the ultimate bastion of reality, the force that ensures that things stay the way they are; to fight them and win, however temporarily, is to show that reality is negotiable.

The third argument is that the police are a mere distraction from the real enemy, not worth our wrath or attention. Alas, state power is not just the politicians; they would be powerless without the millions who do their bidding. When we contest their control, we are also contesting the submission of their flunkies, and we are sure sooner or later to come up against those of the latter who insist on submitting. That being said, it's true that the police are no more integral to hierarchy than the oppressive dynamics in our own communities; they are simply the external manifestation, on a larger scale, of the same phenomena. If we are to contest hierarchy everywhere, rather than specializing in combating certain forms of it while leav-

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<sup>1</sup> Some people are thrilled when the Zapatistas or others far away in space, time, and culture confront and defeat their oppressors, and gladly use the photographs from those engagements to illustrate their publications, but oppose doing anything of the sort here in the heart of the beast, where the powers that would destroy the Zapatistas and others are most deeply rooted.

would go ahead as planned, with a festive street march and demonstrations outside the hotel where the politicians were meeting.

As the dates for the actions approached, we saw a steady increase in police traffic around our collective space, which was serving as a meeting and organizing point for the demonstrations. On multiple occasions, we experienced the unique pleasure of visits from undercover cops. Keeping tabs on liberal organizers we knew maintained ties with the police, we received additional clues that we were facing impending state repression, which was likely to take the form of a raid on our space.

We met as a collective and resolved to act preemptively in order to minimize any possible harm we would suffer and, if possible, humiliate and expose the police. We started by compiling a phone tree of our friends and supporters in the community, as well as a list of local media contacts. Drawing on the precedents established by the numerous police invasions of autonomous spaces that summer, we took a number of precautions, such as removing items that had justified earlier absurd charges against revolutionaries: for example, we removed all kitchen knives and Vitamin C pills, since cooking utensils and supplements had been considered weapons and drugs in other raids. We also cleaned the space and planted new flowers around the house, hoping this would make the police look even more ridiculous should they choose intrude on our space. We stockpiled photo and video cameras, tape recorders, note pads, and other recording devices, and spread them throughout the house, both openly and covertly. We made sure that at least one of the collective members was downstairs at all times, and that our door was always locked—though this was particularly difficult, with so many people coming in and out. People who could not risk arrest stayed at other locations.

Everyone who spent time in the space was briefed on the situation and developed an understanding of the collective's

pled by a raid. Keep important materials elsewhere, make sure that all the people in pivotal organizing positions are never in the space all at once, see to it that there are other spaces to which activities can be shifted. Establish a place to get back together after the raid or ways to reestablish contact with one another and make sure that everyone is accounted for.

When bringing suit against the city over a raid, work out the local chain of command and sue as high in the hierarchy as you can. Those who hold power will attempt to portray any misconduct as the anomalous incompetence of individual underlings; your job is to show that the raid was orchestrated from on high and that the people at the top of the pyramid are to blame, if not the system itself. Get the best lawyer you can—the American Civil Liberties Union is generally a better resource than the National Lawyers’ Guild when it comes to violations of 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment rights regarding search and seizure and 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment rights regarding freedom of speech. If you don’t own the space that was raided, make sure you have the cooperation of the landlords: emphasize that they too can get something out of the proceedings. Keep the media informed throughout the affair, and keep the pressure on.

## Account

As we were organizing a convergence against a particularly ridiculous meeting of politicians, it became evident that our city’s Red Squad had its eyes on us. We continued our work, though we realized that, under the circumstances, we lacked the numbers to go forward with our original plans of turning the city into our playground. We narrowed our focus and message, deciding our best bet would be to embrace the image of pacifist peace activists: this would give us an advantage should the defenders of Power attempt a smear campaign against us. Having established this strategy, we decided that the weekend

ing others unchallenged, we have to be prepared to take it on both in the streets and in our own bedrooms; we can’t expect to win on one front without fighting on the other. We shouldn’t fetishize confrontations with uniformed foes, we shouldn’t forget the power imbalances in our own ranks—but neither should we be content merely to manage the details of our own oppression in a non-hierarchical manner<sup>2</sup>.

The fourth and most despicable argument is that we need police. According to this line of thinking, even if we can aspire to live in a society without police in the distant future, we need them today, for people are not ready to live with each other in peace without armed enforcers. As if the social imbalances and submissiveness maintained by the violence of the police are peace! Opponents of the police need not even answer this charge, however. It’s not as if a police-free society is suddenly going to appear overnight, for good or for ill, just because someone spray paints “Fuck the Police” on a wall—if only it was so easy! The protracted struggle it is going to take to free our communities of police repression will probably go on as long as it takes us to learn to coexist peacefully; indeed, no community incapable of sorting out its own conflicts can expect to triumph against a more powerful occupying force. In the meantime, anti-police sentiments should be seen as objections to one of the most advanced and egregious forms of conflict between human beings, not arguments that without police there would be no conflict at all; and those who argue that the police sometimes do good things bear the burden of proving that those same good things could not be accomplished at least as well by other means.

The final and most nuanced objection to militant resistance against police oppression is the pacifist critique of violence it-

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<sup>2</sup> Just as there is a sort of person who would rather physically fight external enemies than acknowledge his own shortcomings, there is another sort who prefers the comparatively safe project of critiquing his comrades to the risky business of confronting the armed enforcers of social inequality.

self. According to this account, violence is inherently a form of domination, and thus inconsistent with opposition to domination; those who engage in violence play the same game as their oppressors, thereby losing from the outset. Others hold that violence enforces unequal power dynamics in some cases, while in other cases it contests them—that is to say, there is such a thing as self-defense. For those whose value system is still descended from Christianity, keeping one’s hands clean of immoral behavior is the top priority, at whatever cost; for the rest of us, who desire to be free of superstitious prohibitions, the most important thing is what will work, in a given context, to make the world a better place. Sometimes—to name an obvious example, in the struggle against Nazi Germany—this may include violence.

To make this clear: yes, cops are people too, and deserve the same respect due all living things. The point is not that they deserve to suffer, or that we have to bring them to justice—that’s Christian morality again, dealing in currencies of superstition and resentment. The point is that, in purely pragmatic terms, in order that others not have to suffer, it may be necessary to interrupt, by militant and confrontational means, the injustices perpetrated by police officers. It can be empowering for those who have spent their lives under the heel of oppression to contemplate finally settling the score with their oppressors; however, a real liberation struggle does not focus on exacting revenge, but rather on solving problems so that all might have better lives. Therefore, while it may even sometimes be necessary to set police on fire, this should not be done out of a spirit of vengeful self-righteousness, but from a place of careful thought and compassion—if not for the police themselves, then for all those who would otherwise suffer at their hands.

One could make the argument that encouraging people to struggle against the police does more to publicize disapproval of them than to cause actual assaults. One could even argue that it thereby does a service not only for those who suffer po-

coverage in the alternative press. Plan in advance what spin you want to give the story, so the police play into your hands. Compose a press release ahead of time and have it ready to go out.

If you fear a police raid is possible or imminent, keep a video camera charged and equipped with a blank tape, ready for use in documenting police conduct. You can also hide secret cameras on the premises; these may prove especially important if the police break their own laws in the course of invading your space. Get every single badge number and license plate, and record every movement and action of each individual police officer; in court, it will be very much to your advantage if you can prove that, for example, a police officer who claims he remained outside during the raid was actually upstairs knocking over bookshelves and breaking things. Your camera people should be levelheaded; even if things are heating up, it may be more important in the long run for them to record events as they unfold, calmly and consistently, than to get involved.

Once you’ve got documentation, keep track of it. Don’t edit or adjust it in any way. Be able to prove that your footage has been in your “line of possession” from the time you recorded it to the time it appears in court; this means you should be able to document everywhere it has been, and show that it has been in the care of good, law-abiding citizens the whole time—and as few of these as possible. To this end, it can be wise to leave your material with someone’s conservative parents or responsible sister-in-law; this can also be a way to make sure it is not seized in a secondary raid. Keep an organized journal, with times and dates and signatures, detailing all your observations from the time you first begin to fear a raid might take place. After one occurs, compile written narratives, with signatures, from all witnesses and participants, while the events are still fresh in everyone’s minds.

If you’re in the middle of organizing an action or campaign from the space that may be raided, make sure it won’t be crip-

routinely confiscate such standard household items as paint thinner and PVC pipe and claim the possessors were using them to make bombs. Such ludicrous charges will not generally stand up in court, but they can enable the police to denounce your group to the public; they can also paralyze individuals, preventing them from participating in serious actions until their court cases are finished.

Knives, spray paint, gasoline, anarchist literature, bottles of urine, and other similarly dangerous articles will all be needless liabilities when the police show up, unless you're actually planning to fight them off with the stuff. Be conscious of what can be seen even when your doors are shut and locked; the police can use items "in plain view" to look further, even without a warrant. In extreme cases, the courts have declared it permissible for the police to enter a home to investigate further after seeing something suspicious through a window. Be careful to follow the very letter of the law: police who can find nothing else to use against you may ticket you for parking more than ten inches from the curb, for example.

Have a phone tree in place, to be activated in the case of a raid: there should be a couple numbers you can call to reach people who can instantly call others, and so on, until a large number of people have been informed. It is important that there is always at least one person off-site who knows what to do if he or she is the only person not arrested.

Don't leave phone lists or similar information accessible to the police; there's no sense in doing their intelligence work for them. If those informed by the phone tree converge immediately upon the space being raided, this will force the police to restrain themselves, and show them and the community at large that this is an issue many take seriously; in a best case scenario, this can even transform the raid into a positive, community-building event. Have local media ready to come: don't miss the chance to have the local alternative or pirate radio station report live from your raid, or to get sympathetic

lice oppression, but also for the families of police officers and even for the officers themselves—for not only do police officers have a disproportionately high rate of domestic violence and child abuse, they also get killed, commit suicide, and become addicts with disproportionate frequency. Anything that demoralizes police officers and delegitimizes their authority, thus encouraging them to quit their posts, is in their best interest as well as the interest of their loved ones and society at large.

## **How to Fuck the Police**

### **On the Streets**

#### **Organizing a Copwatch Program**

Copwatch groups seek to contest or at least limit police repression by directly monitoring police officers. Copwatch volunteers patrol the streets, observing police and recording their interactions with civilians. They often concentrate on areas of high police activity or to which known trouble-making cops are assigned. Copwatch groups also advise people of their rights and listen to their stories, and otherwise endeavor to undermine and thwart the police state.

Most radicals, not to mention many others, realize that the idea of policing itself needs to be completely rethought. In the meantime, people have to be protected from the brutality they face daily at the hands of the police.

#### **Get a Group Together**

Form a group. Put out calls for one everywhere, even on the bulletin boards of church groups and local grocers, not just in the activist community. Approach your neighbors—the best neighborhood watch includes a copwatch.

Educate people in your community and other communities, especially targeted ones, about their legal rights, and about how to carry out a copwatch. Hold classes everywhere in your city, at accessible places and times. These can be formal events, or informal teach-ins outside a movie theater or between performers at a show.

Hold regular, accessible, well-advertised meetings—don't depend on the internet for all or even most of your communications. Many of those who need copwatch most are unlikely to have easy or regular computer access. Decide as a group what your goals are and how you will go about achieving them.

Find hotspots where police repression frequently takes place. Look for them in the police blotter in your local paper, or ask around in neighborhoods, or approach lawyers who do a lot of street work and request advice.

Establish patrols, and have them report on their observations on a regular basis. Your group will be more effective if it is well organized.

For a variety of reasons, it makes the most sense for people to do copwatch patrols in their own neighborhoods. If it is important that you patrol another neighborhood, make an effort to become familiar with it: get to know locals, and make sure you understand local issues and context. Canvas from door to door if necessary, introducing yourself and your group and announcing your intentions and motivations. Be open to input from locals; they are the ones who will experience the bulk of the repercussions from everything that happens in their neighborhood. Come through on your commitments: don't just show up out of nowhere doing a copwatch program for a little while and then disappear, stick around until locals know who you are and that they can count on you.

When the cops are particularly brutal or kill someone, raise a ruckus about it. Put pressure on them and keep it on. Approach the survivors and follow their lead as to how to handle things. Offer to organize protests or benefit events, screenprint

how to conduct themselves, and what their role will be in your response. Make sure everyone is comfortable with the decisions made and understands each other's needs.

Sometimes a police raid will come as a surprise. Other times, especially if they are planning a raid on a larger scale, such as at an infoshop, activist house, or convergence space during a mass mobilization, you may be able to see it coming. Stay aware: if they are escalating their surveillance of your building or your activities, this may culminate in a raid. This surveillance may take the form of infiltration by undercover agents, who may be easy to recognize as such—on account of poor acting, suspicious questions, or suddenly getting involved right before an action—or very difficult to detect.

If you are involved in any kind of activity that demands security, your collective should decide ahead of time how careful to be in working with others who desire to get involved in your group and in actions you plan. Do you need to have a vouching system to protect against loose-lipped liberals and undercover cops? Or do you want to work with large numbers of people to such an extent that it makes more sense to leave things wide open? Some collectives decide not to take on last-minute stragglers right before an action: police infiltrators usually show up late, because there isn't enough funding to put them in earlier.

If you are on good terms with groups that are in dialogue with the authorities, they may be able to tip you off when a raid is nigh; likewise, locals familiar with the workings of the local police force might be able to provide useful insights. For a serious raid, the police will establish a staging area a couple blocks from the location, which may give away their plans at the last minute if nothing else has.

In preparing for a potential raid, be conscious of what you have on the premises and what can be found nearby in dumpsters and adjacent lots. Make sure nobody has any illegal drugs or paraphernalia, recognizably stolen items, or other material which authorities could use against you. Police officers will

cept making things worse for you and those you care about. If you have a lawyer, upon interrogation—whether formal or informal, whether by federal agents or local officers—simply present your lawyer’s card and state, “You can speak with my lawyer.” If you don’t have a lawyer, assert and maintain that you will seek legal counsel before answering questions.

If the police say they have a warrant, ask to see it but do not at that point resist the search. A warrant is simply a piece of paper signed by a judge; it should have an address and some terms of the search. It is not valid without a judge’s signature. In most cases, the police cannot enter your residence legally without a warrant. To get a warrant, they must have probable cause and a judge must sign his or her name validating this; judges can be sneaky, but they also don’t want any heat to come back on them. This is why we often don’t see warrants used in activist raids: there simply isn’t the probable cause. If they can’t get a warrant, the police may try to use other pretexts to get in: fire code violations, health violations, looking for people who have warrants out for their arrest. Educate yourself on local laws and municipal code. If the police come by when there is someone inside who has a warrant, it may be best for that person to go outside so the police cannot use this as a justification for entering the building.

If your space may be raided, decide in advance how you will handle this. Except in a few specific cases—for example, if you are engaged in a political squatting action with widespread community support, and you intend to resist eviction by militant means—it will make the most sense to cooperate carefully with the police, and then take revenge later by legal or extra-legal means. Determine with everyone involved what image you will try to project—“nonviolent peace activists suffering unjust police harassment,” for example—and maintain it from the beginning of the process through the follow-up media and court campaigns. Hold discussions in advance, so everyone who may be affected by a police raid knows what to expect,

shirts, or play media liaison for them. If they’re into it, hold demonstrations, spray paint the names of the victims and murderers everywhere, smash out the windows of the offending police station.

Agitate for laws and regulations that enforce stricter controls on police. Try to get the worst police officers fired. If your community has a Citizen Review Board, make an effort to give it teeth. Police review boards should be elected by district, not appointed. They must be empowered to impose punishments and fire officers.

People from communities that are terrorized will often be understandably afraid to stand up for themselves. A copwatch program can be the first step towards solidarity with each other.

## **How to Copwatch**

To copwatch effectively, all you need is your eyes and ears, and some means of recording incidents. A small notebook and pen or pencil are the most useful and least conspicuous. A camera or video camera can also be useful, as can a cell phone or an audio recording device.

Copwatching is generally safest and easiest if you make sure to follow the letter of the law. There should be no drugs, alcohol, or illegal weapons on your person or in your system. Be careful not to jaywalk. This author has friends who have done a perfect copwatch, then jaywalked almost immediately after leaving the scene, receiving a \$50 ticket for their efforts. If you are driving, make sure that you and all of your passengers have on seat belts. Resist unnecessary horn honking or loud music as you drive away—violations of noise pollution laws and ordinances can be used as excuses to detain and arrest you. If you are not following the very letter of the law, you may end up doing more harm than good and could get yourself arrested. Don’t give them any excuse to bust you.

Copwatching is best done with two or three others—you are less likely to be arrested in a group. One cool-headed person can take the role of speaking to officers, getting their names, ranks, badge numbers, district designations, squad car numbers, license numbers, and general descriptions, thus making them aware of your being there as observers. The others should hang back, recording every detail of the encounter, being careful not to interfere, provoke, or draw attention. If you have the numbers, one person can pose as an individual onlooker with no connection to the rest of the group. Decide on your roles before the encounter, if possible.

Presumably, you are there to defuse the situation, not escalate it. Don't goad the police into arresting people as a way of getting back at you because of your attitude. Reign in the hostility you feel towards them—be polite but firm. Remember, police are dangerous. Walk, don't run, and avoid quick or sudden movements around them.

At the same time, don't be so easily intimidated that you cannot accomplish your task. Police officers who feel threatened by your concern about the victims of their repression may well threaten you, shouting "Move on!" and puffing themselves up like territorial frogs. In the course of your interactions with them, you'll develop a sense of what to expect from them and an instinct for exactly how seriously to take their threats.

Carry cards detailing legal rights, flyers with information about local copwatch programs, and other information with you to give to people subject to arrest or harassment. Inform people about their rights, and of any numbers, local services, or internet sites by means of which they can contact a lawyer or learn how and where to file a complaint. Citizen complaint review boards are often virtually useless as a way of dealing with police brutality, but they can be useful for documenting incidents. Be aware of local laws and limitations—for example, in some cities, in order to be able to file a lawsuit against the city, you must send a letter to the mayor announcing your

risk. If you have been convicted of felonies, have a lengthy arrest record, or are not a citizen, you should probably not copwatch alone unless the circumstances are really exceptional. Be less assertive in engaging the police or the individual being detained or arrested than you would be if you were in a group. Police officers are much more likely to arrest or assault you if there are no other witnesses present.

Be especially careful to obey the letter of the law. If possible, remain at least twenty feet from the incident that you are watching; try to phone someone and let him or her know what's happening. As always, take complete notes and, if possible, photos, audio, or videotape of the incident. If you take photos, make sure that they are taken at the last possible moment, to ensure the safety of you and your camera. Be especially careful leaving the area.

## **In Private and Community Spaces**

### **Handling a Police Raid**

If police knock on your door, do not invite them inside; step outside and close the door before speaking to them, locking it behind you if need be. If there are other people in the house, make them aware that the police are present. Don't address other people in the house by name; let them decide how they want to identify themselves. After saying clearly "I do not consent to this search," stand aside and maintain silence. Do not answer any questions.

If you are arrested or detained in the course of a raid, do not resist unless it is absolutely imperative that you escape and there is a high likelihood that you will be able to do so; instead, calmly ask on what basis you are being held. Don't volunteer any information or answer any questions except when you are asked to identify yourself. No matter what they tell you, speaking to the police can never accomplish anything ex-

Be prepared to follow through on your work. If you couldn't get an arrestee's name and you feel that the situation was bad enough to warrant further investigation or that the abuse will continue after the arrest, go to the station to which he or she has been taken. Loudly and firmly ask what condition the arrestee is in and demand to know the charges he or she has received; explain what you saw during the arrest, and ask to make a complaint against the officers. This makes the police aware that people are concerned and will follow through; it may stop a back room beating.

Be careful leaving the area after a copwatch. Police have been known to follow, ticket, target, or beat copwatchers a few blocks from the site at which they were observed. Don't let down your guard.

Report on what you have seen to your group, to whatever citizen review boards your area has, however ineffective, and to your community at large. Talk to city council members about police conduct, and show them your evidence. Tell them you want hearings and policy changes. Get your information to the National Lawyers Guild and or the ACLU. Tell community and church groups. Write up reports and spread them through local independent media outlets, both websites and papers.

If your copwatch group is ready, you could establish a copwatch hotline, a phone number people can call to report the activities of police officers; you could even have a response team ready to follow up calls. You could also start your own local copwatch paper or website, reporting on your observations, the conduct of local police, and the struggle in your community to survive and thwart police repression.

### **Copwatching Alone**

Don't copwatch alone if there are other options. You should not ignore those in exceptional danger just because you are alone, but be aware that lone copwatching entails taking extra

intention to sue the district within six months of the incident in question. In such a case, you should emphasize to people who have suffered police brutality that they should keep their options open: "You don't have to follow through with it, but you should secure your right to sue if the incident was severe enough for you even to think about doing so."

When observing police officers' interactions with civilians, try to get as much information as you can. Make note of the day, time, and exact location of the incident; the officer's name, badge number, district, and physical description; where arrestees are being taken; the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of any witnesses; and vehicle or license numbers for any police vehicles involved in the incident. Use cameras or other recording devices to document the event from beginning to end. Take down complete descriptions of police actions and any resulting injuries. If there are injuries of any sort, even preexisting ones, be sure to detail what medical attention was or was not offered by the police—people have been let go by officers after copwatch members observed them being denied medical attention, even though the injuries had been not caused by the police.

If you feel it is warranted, you can call 911 and report that someone is being injured. Wait until the end of your statement to note that it is the police doing so, but don't leave that out, and stick to the facts. As all 911 calls are recorded and are relatively hard for the justice system to "lose," they can provide useful documentation for legal proceedings. You can also call a friend's or your own answering machine and record what is happening as it happens, assuming the tape is long enough. The sound quality may not be as good as an on-site recording device would provide, but the police cannot confiscate the tape; this method can be particularly useful if everyone present is getting arrested. If you get arrested and the police don't take your cell phone immediately, call a talk show or progressive radio station from the back of the police vehicle.

If you witness someone else being arrested, try to give the arrestee a way to contact you, and vice versa. This is not to say you should give your name or get their name in front of police. Give your name and contact information only if you are comfortable with the police getting it, unless there is another way.

If you are comfortable doing an assertive copwatch, introduce yourself when you approach the scene and explain that you are there doing a copwatch. Ask police why they are detaining or arresting people, but don't ask arrestees for their names directly, as they might not wish the police to have it. If arrestees say their names and addresses to the police loud enough for you to hear, write them down. If the justification for the stop seems to be vague, ask officers to name the section of the law they are enforcing. Officers will lie and make mistakes—if you know the code do better or have a copy of it with you, speak up. Don't approach or speak to the arrestee directly while he or she is being detained; if you do, you risk being arrested. Sometimes you'll have to do just that, but know what you're getting into.

If a detainee is let go or ticketed, make use of the opportunity to give your flyers and rights cards to them. If a detainee is arrested, you can fold a card in half and ask the officer to give it to him or her—fat chance, but miracles happen. You can't speak to an arrestee directly without risking trouble, but you can loudly talk about what rights people have with the police or a bystander or your compatriot. These include the right to remain silent, the right to speak to an attorney, the right to refuse a search of your person, personal items, or car.

Stick around until the police have moved on. The Rodney King beating began with what seemed to be a routine traffic stop.

Make use of every opportunity to have educational conversations. Speak to onlookers about their rights, about what citizens can do about police brutality, about community alterna-

tives to policing. When answering questions about legal matters, don't be afraid to say, "I don't know." This is always better than giving out wrong information.

Collect statements from other witnesses if you can. Many will not want to get involved. Try to persuade and educate them otherwise, and get statements from them even when you can't get their names.

Keep the information you have gathered from your copwatching. If your copwatch group does not keep records, keep track of it yourself. It can be useful to submit copies of your records to government agencies, so they will have them documented and on file. Do not edit any videotapes you shoot, as this can render them useless as evidence in court.

If possible, carry with you the text of the laws most commonly used to justify harassment. In addition to being familiar with and ready to cite local laws, it can help to learn local police regulations, though it is often difficult to obtain copies of these. During your encounters with police, be forceful rather than tentative, but remain polite.

In extreme cases, police will smash or confiscate and "lose" your equipment to keep you from having evidence against them. If it seems like this might happen, a member of your group should swiftly leave the area with the evidence that has been gathered so far.

Be prepared to be arrested. Though copwatch is not illegal, police will trump up charges. Carry ID and at least \$50 if you want to be able to get out of jail swiftly and easily.

Know what you will and will not do in extreme situations. Consider in advance what risks you are willing to take and what charges you are prepared to receive in order to intervene if someone is being beaten, injured, or killed by the police. Decide this ahead of time and talk about it within your group, so all of you know what to expect from one another. If you copwatch in some areas, you will eventually find yourself in this situation.