



TOMPKINS SQUARE RIOT MEMORIES

What follows are personal accounts from various people who were present on that fateful night in Tompkins Square on August 6, 1988. They observed and experienced firsthand the bloodlust of the marauding cops invading our neighborhood from all over the city. Twenty years later, these memories are still fresh in the minds of those who were there, as though it all happened just yesterday....

Paul DeRienzo: I was with a crowd that was pushed onto East Ninth Street by police. A large number of undercover officers wearing helmets were on the street, while other cops were running up and down the sidewalks. One officer chased me or was running blindly in my direction as I yelled "I'm PRESS," while holding up my official police press pass that I received from [radio station] WBAI, where I was working as a reporter. The cop continued to run after me in a rage, running directly into me. We tangled; both rolled onto the sidewalk, I yelled that I was with the media, showed my press pass, while the officer climbed up off the street holding his leg, which was obviously in great pain. I jumped up, tried to watch my back so I wouldn't be hit from behind by a police officer, and then I was able to leave the area.

Jerry the Peddler: Things started getting tense, and by midnight, all hell was breaking loose. All up and down Avenue A, people were dodging horses and nightsticks while yelling at the kops: "It's our fucking park." Around 2:00, I was chased down St. Mark's to First Avenue. I ducked into what was then the St. Mark's Bar and Grill and had a quick beer. Fifteen minutes later, I was back on the street, heading toward



Avenue A. Two kops, one on foot and the other on horseback, were standing in the middle of the street. The one on foot was pointing straight at me, so I turned around and headed back toward First Avenue. The kop on horseback came galloping up beside me and I started thinking it would be easier to get by the kop on foot. The pork on the horse came riding up on the sidewalk behind me and kicked me square in the back, yelling "Whose fucking park?" I fell to the ground, gasping for breath and yelled back "OUR

fucking park!"

Chris Flash: For much of the night, I was running from and dodging waves of vicious out-of-control cops who were attacking anybody in their sights. It didn't matter if they were curfew protestors, bystanders, or even yuppies out for a night on the town. Cops would surge west on St. Mark's Place and south on Avenue A, as folks ran for their lives. Those who didn't run, rationalizing that they hadn't done anything, were set upon and beaten. When the surges would recede back



toward the park, we would follow them back. During one surge, my buddy Bobby Apocalypse, who was bartending at the International Bar on First Avenue, hid me out in the bathroom. I hadn't done anything wrong, but I wasn't going to try to reason with them. On St. Mark's, as I headed back to Avenue A, I saw cops on horseback at full gallop beating a running man with their clubs, as though they were playing polo. At one point, cops lined up in formation along Avenue A. A police helicopter descended above them and blew their hats off, causing them to scurry around like Keystone Kops as they retrieved them. This was met with howls of laughter by protestors and bystanders alike.

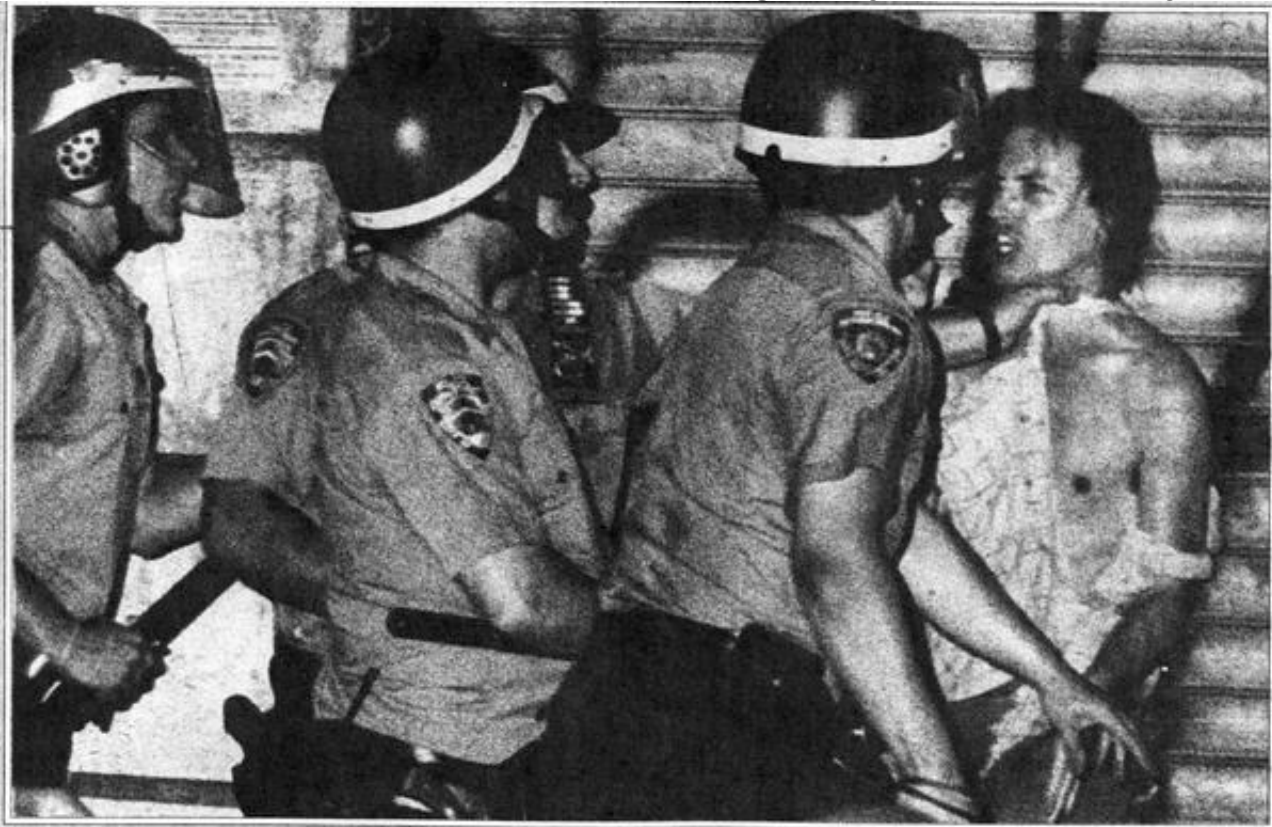


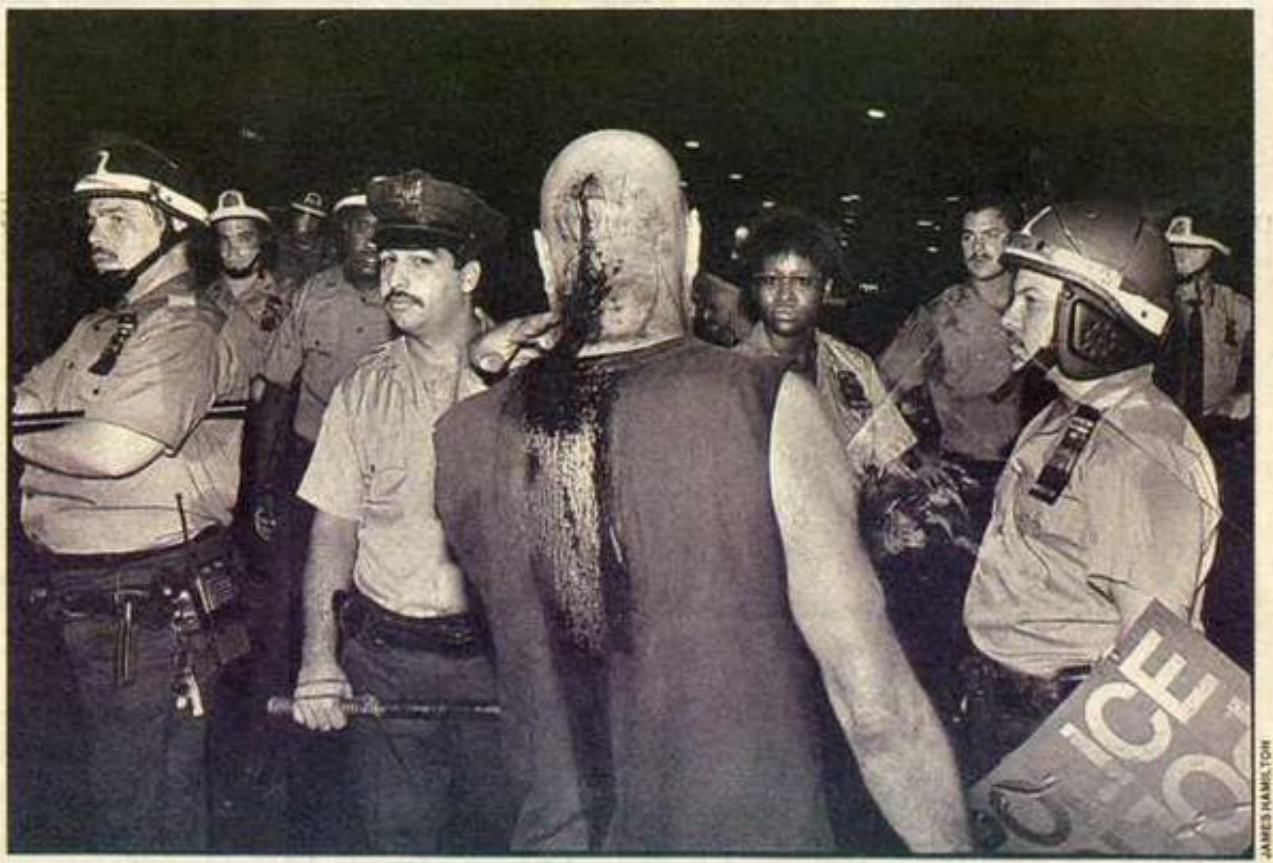
Photo by David A. Cantor

Later, during another surge south on Avenue A, cops chasing people to the corner of Fourth Street were forced to retreat when residents of a tall apartment house tossed bottles at them from the windows above. As 6:00am approached, we were dog tired, but maintained our confrontation against the cops at Sixth and A, as they slowly withdrew. By 6:00, they were completely gone. From there, we all ran into the park, feeling victorious, though I realized that by holding us off until 6:00, when the park was official open for the day, the cops could claim victory. Despite our exhaustion, the anger level was still high. A few dozen people ran through the park, to the Christodora House on Avenue B. The lobby was raided and occupied by the crowd. A large potted plant in the lobby was removed and thrown into the street as people took over Avenue B, chanting and cheering. Suddenly, the cry went out to "Save the tree!" and it was quickly replanted

inside the park.

Frank Morales: I saw that night revolt showcased on the streets all over. Graffiti, rebellious ornamentalism, flyers, and silk-screen posters were everywhere. A sight for sore eyes, Our squatter symbol, a circle with a lightning arrow shot through it, over the words "Gentrification is Genocide," "Seize the Land," everywhere. So too, Missing Foundation's upside down martini glass, "The Party's Over," "1988=1933," "Your House is Mine." Also nihilism with an attitude, like Nick Zedd's "Police State," and the plain truth of the Rivington School, a circle with arrows pointing in opposite directions. Scratched on a walls, "Free the Park, Saturday August 6 Midnight, Be There or Bury Your Neighborhood." I took heart when I saw some young well attired punk girls, in from the Island, out after a night of partying, bar hopping and the like. Unaware of what was transpiring, they instinctively jump into the fray with a giggling and sweet rendition of "This Land is Our Land," sung in the face of tone deaf aggressors on 9th Street, one of the girls skipping boldly Alice in Wonderland across the war zone. And I could hear, under-laying that, an equally inspired, quiet, soulful, "We Shall Overcome," being sung by some black men a few doors down. What a telling scene I thought, imagining Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly, digging it all, who lived together on 10th Street, looking out their window blessing this moment of beauty and the blues, and love under fire. The violence that the police were wreaking that night had people clinging to each other. Frantic to get back inside local eateries and such seeking protection, inside a familiar bodega, a frightened crowd of instantly bonded comrades. Like a tornado about to hit, we had to put our collective shoulders to the task, slamming Alcatraz door shut, keeping out the marauding cops, who are now rabidly rapping with their nightsticks on the window grate, clearly grimacing inches away with threatening ugly funny cop faces, giddy frightened patrons on the other side looking out, who were not into being beaten, shutting them out of the bar, successfully, celebrating, and the bar-keep howls: Drinks on the house!





John Penley: I watched NY Times photographer Angel Franco getting hit by a cop on a horse at the Seventh + A entrance to the park. He showed the cop his press pass while he was trying to take his picture and the cop hit him with his club and broke his finger. I saw cops going after a waitress inside the 7A Café. The female manager intervened and they dragged her out into the street by her hair. I don't know what else happened, because I was running. My ex-wife was working at the Chameleon on Sixth Street. The bar became a hospital ward for people being beaten by cops – the window guards were pulled down as injured people kept coming by for help. When the cops came, she wouldn't let them in.

Ned: It was one day after I'd just gotten fired from my job. I went down to the park as usual, knowing that there was crazy shit going to happen. There were about 250 cops, for a guess, about half on horseback on Avenue A. The park was full of people, some with signs and stuff. At the time, the park was supposed to close, cops on foot in riot gear attempted to force us out. I, among others, opted to pelt them with stuff. A girl I knew (who died 2 years

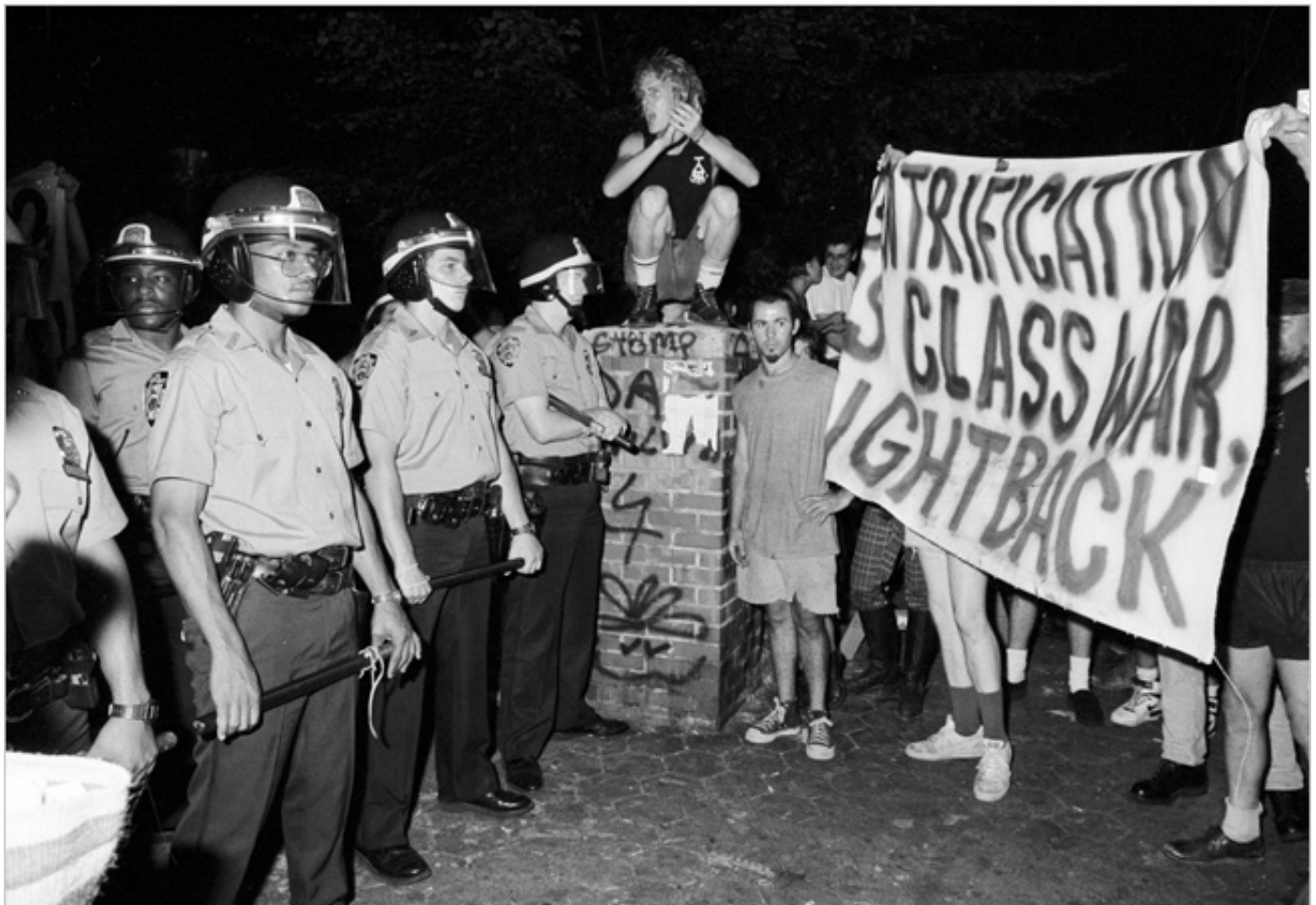


later) gave me a 40
ouncer. I clipped one in
the face mask of his
riot gear. A woman cop
shouted that I had hit a
cop and to get me. I
turned around and ran



Photo by John Penley
Injured person is helped late Saturday night at Tompkins Square Park.

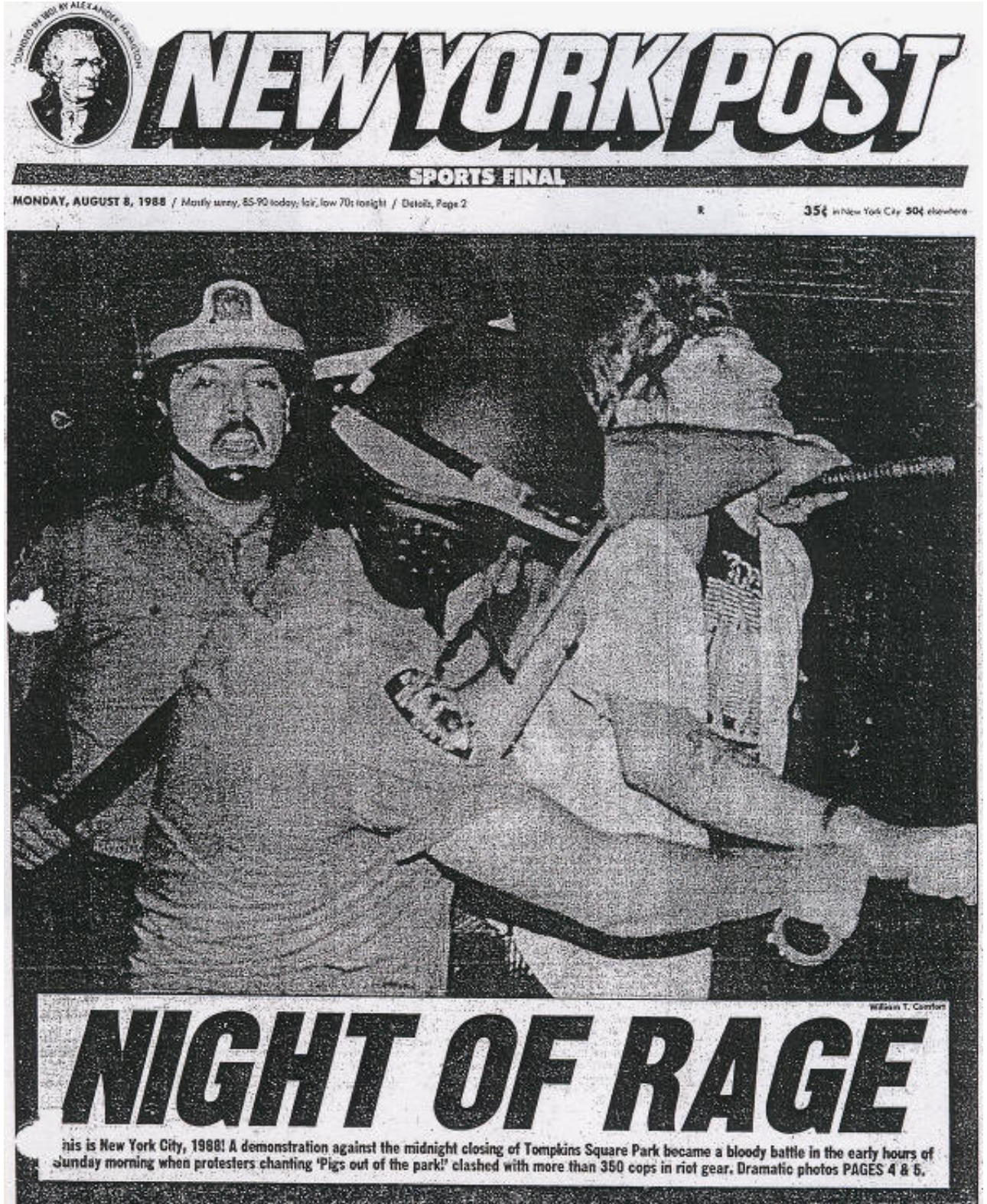
like hell to Avenue A. About halfway across, they choked me out and brought me down. "I can't breathe," I said. "It's a bitch, ain't it?" came the reply. They put me in a van with others, chained us together at the ankle, and took us to the Ninth precinct. As the night wore on, I was surprised at the number of people that were brought into the cell with broken knees, arms, legs, etc. At some point during the night, we were brought down to central booking, processed, then brought to a holding cell with 13 or so other cell mates. About 33 hours after being arrested, I went before the judge with a court appointed attorney. A court date was set. I was apprehensive, since I was charged with felony assault of a police officer. Weeks went by and it got harder to sleep through the night. As the date got closer, the ACLU appointed Bob Sullivan to my case. Thanks to his able defense, we plea bargained down to disorderly conduct. What a relief. I didn't get to sue like others did, but really I wouldn't have had a case anyway. I'm 41 now. I still look back on that time as the most intense time ever. So much has changed since then. The Lower East side will never be the same.



Allen: Some of the events from that night are perfectly clear, but admittedly some are a bit blurry. Not only has twenty years past (shit!), but I was doing the Mad Dog/Vodka shuffle that night. That's one pint of awful cheap wine and one pint of awful cheap vodka. The end result is... a riot, I guess. I was actually crashing in the park a lot those days. I had lost my job and my apartment, and was crashing either on friends' sofas or floors, or in the park. Back then, there were so many punks, skinheads, metal heads, drunks,

junkies, hard luck homeless, etc...in the park at night that it was actually extremely safe to sleep there. Everybody knew everybody else, and no one fucked with you if you were cool. There sincerely was a code of sorts, an honor amongst thieves kind of thing. The day of the riots, everyone knew that mayor Koch had decided to impose a 12:00 curfew on the park, which at the time was pretty much a slap in the face of the entire community. What people nowadays don't realize, is back then, people really didn't have a problem with what the park was all about. Yeah, there were people living in handmade tents, and crashing on benches, and it wasn't all pretty, but there was an amazing sense of community in the neighborhood back then, and the community policed ourselves to a degree. In other words, don't rip off the neighborhood businesses and they'll look out for you when you're broke.

Anyway, as the minutes ticked down towards midnight, more and more cops started showing up, and more and more protesters started showing up. A bunch of us decided that we'd stay in the park after curfew and see what



happened. 12:00 - Shit, they were serious! They came into the park with riot gear and

night sticks and we all ran like hell getting out of there. Still, somehow, it didn't seem real. We all ran across Avenue A and lined up on the west side of the street. Meanwhile, an army of cops in riot gear and on horses surrounded the park across the street from us. That was the big stand off. That's also when a tremendous amount of media footage was shot, including an unfortunate shot of me banging my (empty) vodka bottle against a street sign while everyone chanted "Pigs out of the park", and "Whose fucking park?...Our fucking park"! By then, the helicopters had been called in and I remember one almost landing on the top of the Alcatraz (a bar that was on St. Mark's and A at the time). I have to admit thinking that this was the coolest thing in the world at the time. I mean, shit, this was it! War! Us against them! Youth run amok! Fuck the pigs! Punk fucking rock!!! Then something crazy happened. The cops actually charged us! One minute we were screaming, chanting, yelling, and then...boom. Everyone ran like hell. It was at that point that point that my sad, revolutionary (and drunk) ass made a terrible decision.

As the intelligent, sober mass of protesters retreated west on Saint Mark's, I cleverly ran directly to a pay phone, where I figured that I could disguise my pathetic, bottle banging, "Kill the pigs" chanting self as an innocent payphone patron. The fact that it was three feet away from where the cops had been looking at me for the last two hours did not occur to me at the time. I remember literally saying "Hey Mom" in the receiver at the time, knowing that this would make my disguise perfect. The cops would simply run right by me and beat up everyone else. Imagine my surprise when I saw that massive wall of blue run towards me, and that one cop in the lead swing his stick not one, not two, but three times over his head, and then up like nunchucks. The fourth swing went right between my legs and up and into my balls. Naturally, I went down, and after that there were at least six other cops kicking me and beating the hell out of me with their sticks. I don't know how I finally got up but I did. That's when all the news footage was shot of me getting thrown down the street without my shirt on (my shirt got ripped off in the beating). I remember at that point running into an old friend and telling her to get the fuck out. They meant business. We made it over to 7th street where it seemed a bit safer. That's when a whole crew of cops (by then we had noticed that they were covering their badge numbers with tape) ran down the street in a pack. I swear to God that as they made their way down the street, I saw them bust out the windows of every single parked car on the block. They were also yelling "NYPD Rules" and shit like that. In addition, I remember seeing cops shove their nightsticks in to the spokes of passing bicyclists, and also beat and shove innocent people coming out of bars. it was an ugly, ugly night.

I remember running into a guy named Spider (R.I.P.) at the Gem Spa and some people taking pictures of us. They ended up in The SHADOW years ago. I eventually found my girlfriend that night and she took me to Saint Vincent's, where I was treated for a dislocated shoulder, lacerations, bruises, etc... I also remember that cops visited me that night in the hospital to "Get my statement". That was scary as shit, but the doctor was really cool, and I remember him yelling at them - "You did this to him, get out of here!" Cool doctor.



Things have changed a lot down here since then, and I honestly believe that the NYPD is one of them. I think that they are smarter and cooler than they were back then and should get some props for that. Other changes in this neighborhood are not so positive. The developers have turned this beautiful old neighborhood into a shell of what it once was. A once thriving, revolutionary mecca has been transformed into Anytown, U.S.A. That's why memories are so important.

Clayton Patterson: I made a 3 hour and 33 minute video tape of out of control and violent police wilding against the defenseless Lower East Side residents, the tape that classified the night as a "Police Riot." If one sees that tape today, a viewer will be completely shocked at the lack of authority the ranking officers had over the lower ranking cops. The police were clearly out of control. The police claimed that they were responding to local residents requesting a park curfew. This was a lie. Police commanders had made a previous agreement with the park homeless and drug addicts about where they could stay in the park that night. The police agenda on this night was to kick the ass of those anarchists who had forced them to retreat the week before. Another blatant example of the curfew lie was the fact that the police did not spent the night closing and guarding the park, but were often several blocks from the park. Most of my night was spent on Sixth Street and Avenue A.

My videotape of the riot got 6 cops criminally indicted, the captain was removed from the precinct, a chief was retired, some cops were fired, and many innocent injured civilians used my tape to sue the city. I did not sue, but this night of police rioting has taken me on a 20 year and counting journey through the inside of police precincts, through court systems, both civil and criminal, the police trial unit at 1 Police Plaza, and the state and federal justice system. I have been followed, videotaped, photographed, had teeth knocked out, been arrested 14 times, all compliments of NYPD. All because of documenting police actions on NYC streets. As this anniversary date was approaching, I was arrested documenting what was a minor fire on Ludlow Street. There was no frozen zone, no police-line, people were allowed to walk through, kids were hanging out, businesses were opening -- there was not even a fire, just a little smoke. It is totally bizarre, especially since the anniversary of the Police Riot is coming up. It would be a little ridiculous and funny if it was not so sinister.

Paul Garrin: Saturday night on August 6, 1988 was hot and humid. Fortunately, that night, I was booked at Broadway Video to do special effects and editing on my video work entitled "Free Society." Just after midnight, the technician and I started work on image processing of various riot scenes that I had collected over time by recording the TV news. Just as our session was getting up to speed, the power suddenly went off and all the media equipment and computers in the entire place went dark. The excessive power demand that night caused a brownout in Midtown. There was no engineering staff on duty to safely bring systems back up, so I took a taxi back to my apartment on Seventh Street, just off Avenue B.

As I got out of the taxi, I looked up Seventh Street and saw flashing lights, a helicopter hovering just above the rooftops, and police on horseback riding on Avenue A. I had no idea what was going on, but with the sight of all the police vehicles and riot cops on the street, I thought it would be a good chance to get some fresh material for Free Society. I went back to my apartment to pick up a new Sony video 8 camera that I borrowed from my friend. I walked to the corner of Avenue A, but there were cops all over the corner blocking the view and preventing me from seeing or turning the corner. I took some shots of the cops standing around, and caught some mounted police riding their horses South on Avenue A.

A police helicopter was hovering just above what was then Leshko's Coffee Shop at Seventh and A. I took some footage as it hung there, almost touching the rooftops, kicking up dust and debris on the street. I had a feeling that there was more going on around the corner, so I doubled back around Avenue B and up Sixth Street to Avenue A, where I came upon the front line of riot cops with helmets and shields that spanned east to west across Avenue A. I started the tape rolling and panned the lineup of riot cops and some apparent police brass among them. There was the occasional sound of glass

breaking as bottles hit the street not far from the police. Suddenly, a herd of cops broke formation and chased people up Sixth Street toward First Avenue, nightsticks flailing into bodies and darkness. I didn't feel very safe at that moment and I scoped out a van parked on Avenue A, just by the Con Edison substation, for cover. As the confrontation escalated, I climbed to the roof of the van to get above the fray and to secure a better vantage point for my camera. Again, the cops broke ranks and began pushing people with their nightsticks and chasing them down the avenue. I was following the action as much as I could, when I heard two thumps against the metal body of the van--then noticed that the van was surrounded by cops shouting "GET DOWN" at me, swinging their nightsticks at my legs and at the legs of two other photographers perched next to me. The cops were shouting at me to get down, and at the same time were swinging their nightsticks trying to hit me--an irreconcilable situation. I continued to roll tape as I danced to avoid the blows of the nightsticks, and shouted "I'M GETTING DOWN! JUST GIVE ME A CHANCE...". As I sat down on the roof and started to come down, one cop lunged at me out of the darkness and grabbed me by my shirt, swung me around, and slammed me against the brick wall at the substation, as my camera rolled on. He screamed at me "PUT YOUR FUCKING HANDS TO YOURSELF OR I'LL CRACK YOUR FUCKIN' SKULL!!! YOU GOT ME?" I answered: "Yeah, I got you!" as I hit the ground and felt him kicking me. Then he yelled: "NOW GET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE!!!!" and then he stomped on the video camera. I was dazed, the camera hit me in the face as the cop assaulted me, and cut me above my eye...I realized that the cop said to get the fuck out of there, and not that I was under arrest, so after ascertaining that the camera and tape were actually intact, I took his advice and got the fuck out of there. I went to a bodega and got some band aids and put one on the cut above my right eye, and got back out on the street to shoot some more footage. I could see in the distance the cops beating a man with nightsticks as he lay on the street next to a parked car. After the cops beat the guy, they ran away. When I came closer, there was a guy standing on the sidewalk covered in blood, that gushed from a clear opening in his head. People rushed to help him and tried to stop the bleeding with a t-shirt or whatever was on hand. Finally, paramedics came and took the bloodied man to the hospital. Fires were burning in the streets. The cops retreated. Fire trucks raced up the avenue, sirens blaring. People wandered in all directions in the smoke haze and heat, dazed and outraged by what had been going down throughout the night.

As things quieted down, I went to a nearby pay phone and started calling the local TV news stations. I got through to CBS and NBC, but both night desk operators were skeptical, especially since I shot with a home camcorder and not professional TV gear. I said: "Where the hell are you guys? The cops are going wild in the streets beating the crap out of people and there are no news cameras anywhere to record this. I just got my ass kicked for no reason, but I did record it on video. Besides my own beating, I have people bleeding, and cops seemingly out of control." I was asked "What did you shoot it on?" I said: "On video 8." He said "We can't air that! it's not broadcast spec!" I told him, "Look, send your crew with your beta cam and I'll dub you the tape directly." I guess speaking tv speak worked, and he said that a crew and a reporter would come out in the morning.

At around 8:00am, CBS and NBC crews were outside my building. I connected both teams to my video playback and they copied the footage as we watched it on the tv monitor in my living room. When the reporters interviewed me on camera, I asked that they not show my face and not use my name, as I was afraid of repercussions by the police. The reporter said "Aww come on, show your face. You have a black eye--it's GOOD TELEVISION!" I said ok, no silhouette, but please don't use my full name! They agreed, and the interview continued. That night, the report was the top story on every local channel, highlighted by the point-of-view shot of my own beating by the cops. Besides breaking the story and contradicting the official police story that "nothing

happened," my video tape also exposed the attempted cover up--many, if not most, of the cops who rioted either covered their badges with black tape, or in some cases completely removed their badges in order to avoid identification. A shot of a cop with a covered badge from my video made the front page of the NY Post. Mayor Ed Koch and Police Commissioner Benjamin Ward stuttered in front of the news cameras as they tried to explain away the obvious police criminality captured on my videotape.

Feeling that my identity was protected, I went on with my life, and back to work on my video. When I got home the next night, I played back my answering machine, which had recorded death threats, apparently left by police. I called the mayor's office at 3am to report the death threats, but the cop that answered the phone--a sergeant--refused to get a message to Mayor Koch. Not knowing who else to call, knowing that it wouldn't work to call the cops on the cops, I called the FBI. I called the local news, who ate it up. Every channel's crew was knocking at my door to get the story and take a shot of the threats playing back on my answering machine.

At this point, my identity was public and there was no turning back, so I decided to go full-on high profile. I made lots of duplicates of the video on to VHS tapes and made the rounds the next day to the U.S. Attorney's office, the District Attorney's office, led by high-powered legal counsel Gerald Walpin (the D.A. almost dropped to her knees when Walpin walked with me through the door into her office.) I made sure that everybody had a free copy of my video tape--not only was it a major news story, it was also evidence. I arranged a supervised copy of the original tape with the D.A.'s office, and they accepted that--the original tape never left my hands and there was never a question or demand for it beyond the supervised dub from the original that was entered into evidence. I wanted everybody to have a copy of it and wanted everyone to see what my camera recorded that night.

The power of the video to scoop the mainstream media and contradict the official lies became evident, and the event became known as the Tompkins Square Police Riot. From that moment on, the local news began soliciting home video--instead of scoffing at it. The face of news gathering was forever changed, as was the aesthetics of television, for better or worse, with "reality" shows, such as COPS and America's Funniest Home Videos.

The euphoria of scooping the media and heralding the truth was intoxicating for a time, and it felt like what I called "Reverse Big Brother--not the state watching the people, but the people watching the state." I knew that video served as a tool, a weapon, and a witness. The Tompkins Square Riot video inspired many to pick up their cameras and record what would have otherwise been unseen. The video revolution swept across the airwaves and across the world, as communism fell in the Eastern bloc, and as the cops armed themselves with cameras and media. The riot became a media riot, and escalated to a media war. Then, I advised: "Use your camera intelligently." Today, with internet and a shakeup in the media distribution system, that same advice applies: "Use your media intelligently." The Tompkins Square Riot video was the spark that ignited the camcorder revolution, and it was the first wave leading up to the internet media revolution of today, 20 years later.

"Red Alert": We were at a restaurant on Tenth Street and Avenue A. I'm pretty sure it was called Pharmacy. The four of us girls had all graduated from SVA (School of Visual Arts). We were hanging out, eating, drinking, all that. There was Big Lisa and her baby, Little Lisa, Zoey, and me: Red Alert, all 23 - 25 years old, except for Big Lisa who was 30. Lisa had got married out of college and had a baby boy in Sept. of 1986. In fact, we had to have an early-ish night so Big Lisa could put the baby to bed. We got the stroller and were coming out of Pharmacy and there's panic all over the place! People were streaming down the streets, running from Tompkins Square Park, and screaming, "Run, Run!" We

didn't know what the hell was going on and we started running down Avenue A. The police starting chasing us down Avenue A and we didn't know why. Everyone was freaking out and by the time we made it to Avenue A and Seventh Street, we had abandoned the stroller. Zoey, Big Lisa's sister, had been carrying the baby and running with him because there was just no way to run with that thing. We made it to the SYP Deli. We called it "Steal Your Paycheck" Deli cause it was fucking expensive. It was right by King Tut's Wah Wah Hut, now Niagra, and the pizza shop. So, there's this cop outside SYP, swinging his nightstick at anything that was moving. ANYTHING. He swung it at Zoey's head, as she was running with the baby. We found out later it glanced Zoey in the back of the head and she had a bump, but she managed to avoid a serious blow. What kind of cop tries to hit a woman in the head?! A woman with a baby ??? I have never been in a war before, but I remember thinking right then that this is what it must be like. If you're not wearing the uniform, it doesn't matter who you are: you are a target. Nobody had a chance, and there was no time to react. We somehow made it to Sidewalk Café on Sixth and A, one of our hangouts. Zoey and the baby weren't hurt. Everyone was shaken. One of the Lisas had lost a shoe. A man let us in the bar and said, "No one leaves here until this is over." Beers appeared. Big Lisa was really freaking out and saying, "My baby could have died." We couldn't understand why the cops were out to get four young women, and one with a baby, no less. We were little New Wave nerds who liked dancing to Talking Heads, and to Ministry's first album at places like The Pyramid and The Mission. We weren't cool and never hung out with anyone famous or anything like that. And none of what just happened to us made sense. We hid out at Sidewalk, but somehow, eventually, made it back to Big Lisa's on Fourth Street. But time stood still that night. It was fucking crazy.

Roger Manning: Although I was at almost every other major event at that time, I missed the August 6, 1988 Police Riot by 2 hours. I was at the smaller first police riot exactly one week prior that apparently set the stage for August 6. It was the first demonstration against the park curfew and took the form of a festive sit-in until the cops got violent and all hell broke loose. Saw my first firsthand police violence - a kid laying face down on the ground with three pigs beating the hell out of him. While getting shoved out of the park, I tried to write down badge numbers, but they'd covered them up. The pigs had no way to restore order on the now packed Avenue A other than let us back into the park. That night, due to sheer numbers, we WON! One my favorite NYC images to this day is that of gleeful citizens jumping over the fence and joyously swinging in the (now forbidden to adults) playground in THEIR park.

Bill Weinberg: The word was going around that the cops would enforce the curfew that night, so I bicycled in from Park Slope, where I was living at the time. It was really hot, and the sweat was coming off me in sheets as I pumped over the Brooklyn Bridge in the late afternoon. Everyone in the park seemed to assume the shit was going to hit the fan. I got a plate of pirogies at the Kiev. While I was eating, Allen Ginsburg walked in with this fresh-faced farm kid who looked like he just got off the bus from Kansas and was obviously completely in awe of him. They happened to sit at the table next to me. From their conversation, it was clear that they were going over to the park to check out the action after dinner, as I was.

Back in the park, tension was building steadily from sunset, with the anarchists beating on drums and rallying their troops, the cops occupying Avenue A and rallying theirs. You could feel that something was going to explode. I had a sense that at 1am, the cops would move into the park to evict, and that would be the spark. But, just before 1:00, the anarchists marched out into Avenue A to confront the cops. I felt they should've waited, and started backing down the avenue, to be at the fringe of the crowd, ready to make a run for it. I don't have a clear recollection of whether bottles were thrown or nightsticks

were swung first. But all of a sudden, the tension burst and the explosion arrived. The crowd burst outwards in every direction as the police attacked, bottles were flying and the businesses along Avenue A were hurriedly shuttered. I retreated to Second Avenue, swept along with a wave that surged west up Seventh Street. I walked up a block and the clock on the bank at St. Mark's and Second said exactly 1am.

There were refugees surging up St. Marks towards me. I walked up to Ninth Street, hoping for better access. It was relatively quiet. But I got no further than First Avenue when I saw a police van and several cops on foot, nightsticks in the air, chasing a young wiry black guy dressed only in cut-off shorts who was tearing up the asphalt for all he was worth. The van overtook him and swerved south--AGAINST THE TRAFFIC--cutting him off. The cops were on top of him in seconds, flailing him savagely with their nightsticks, not stopping even after he'd fallen to the ground. He curled up in a ball and did his best to ward off the blows, but I could tell he was getting totally fucked up. I felt ashamed and helpless for just observing, but there was no-one there to back me up, or even to witness...

I retreated to Second Avenue, and headed south again, trying another street for approach. So it went with me for hours. I confess I didn't make it back to Avenue A again, but caught glimpses of the battle raging there as I approached from the side-streets, then retreated, generally swept along with westbound waves driven towards me by police charges. At one point, I think on Sixth Street, there was a helicopter overhead, its blades turning the street into a whirlwind of dust. At around 4am, I bicycled home. The battles were still raging. I got home just before dawn--dazed, exhausted and grateful to be in one piece. The next day, I went out and bought all the papers. Horrible photos of what I had witnessed the previous night--and much worse that I hadn't--were splashed everywhere. One account mentioned that among the arrested was a young house guest of Allen Ginsburg's from Kansas.

[Were you present at the police riot of August 6, 1988? If so, we'd like to hear from you -- what stands out foremost in your mind, what you experienced, what you witnessed. Please send us your story, and any photos you can share with us: <theSHADOW@MediaFilter.org> -- use "TSP RIOT" as your subject]

