

The Return of the Public Execution

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The videoed executions of Philando Castille, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, and the many, many other heroes whose lives were ended by State violence and class war have resurrected an old ghost of capital punishment in the developed Western World: Public Executions.

In Michel Foucault's book *Discipline and Punish*, he argues that the discontinuation of public executions in Capitalist Western Society was much more sinister than when they were actually performing public executions. He argues this because the reasons this discontinuation of public violence was put forth was not because we had become a much more humane and civilized society, but instead had simply put the barbarity of state violence in places it could not be seen by the public, behind the metal doors of prisons. This is a problem for Foucault for 2 reasons. 1. It allows the enforcers of the State to hide their violent functions and roles behind a veneer of humanity. 2. In the past when someone was publicly executed by the state, it often united and incited rebellion among the people because its true face had been shown. But with the invention of the more 'humane' methods of capital punishment, this call of rebellion against tyranny has up until this point really been put on hold. It was not until the invention of the video camera and its mass distribution that the civilized makeup our society wears started to smear.

Everyone in America knew the policing of minorities was barbaric, but because its evidence was hidden in graphs and public relation firms no one wanted to acknowledge it. But with the execution of Mike Brown and the endless streams of videos of police killings, a reawakening in class-consciousness occurred. A universality to oppose tyranny struck the hearts of not only the communities affected by the deaths of the victims but across the world. The barbarity that was hidden for so long came rushing out of our phones and computers, and soon the truth of the nature of the police and the state was well known by all. With the ability for everyone to have a video camera, a resurrection of the spectacle of public executions has returned.

But unlike the public executions in the past, the ones that occur today are not great spectacles to show state power. They are private intimate affairs of violence that cannot be justified. They are executions that show the inadequacy of the discipline and punishment for the enforcers that break the laws they are 'sworn to protect.' They have no script like a show trial to prove one's guilt. What we see is a private execution made public by our technology and people who still retain their humanity. They are extrajudicial executions not meant to enter white working class consciousness. They are an inversion of what they are meant to be, because the executions although occurring in public spaces are not meant to reach out beyond the people who witnessed the events. But when they do, a new public spectacle of injustice is created, and the divisions that make certain classes of people blind to the barbarianism of the state are torn down.

This is unlike the sham judicial executions brought on by the death penalty, which instead of tearing down the divisions through a public spectacle, are used to enforce them. When someone is served

the death penalty; the intention of the state is to justify and prove a person's guilt to the entire population. The execution that has been prescribed is dated, planned out, and on public record. But when the state flexes its instruments of violence it does not do it in a spectacle to show its power to its citizens. Instead, it occurs in a small-bricked room where only a small group of witnesses are allowed to watch. When the execution is over, no one but that small group can ever know the barbarity that occurred. The execution thus changes its nature from public into private, and the execution remains out of the minds of the majority of the population.

This is how law enforcement continues to justify itself. It does not attempt to show its power through the great bravado of the public execution. It does so by ensuring that its violence is hidden from the minds that will one day rise in a unified class-consciousness. But now that the truth that was hidden has now been revealed, the possibility of going back to the way things once were must become an impossibility. The veneer of humanity our state once proudly wore is now constantly being questioned on a mass level, and it is up to us to push this questioning until the state can no longer hide behind 'civility.' Because it cannot be allowed to continue to justify the 2 million plus prisoners it keeps behind its metal doors. It cannot be allowed to continue its private executions. Its contradiction just cannot be allowed to persist. So to the executioners, judges, and powers that be, I say this, "go ahead and make your move, we are watching."