



COP CITY WILL NEVER BE BUILT.

**STATEMENTS AND ACCOUNTS
FROM THE 5TH WEEK OF ACTION
TO DEFEND WEELAUNEE FOREST
AND STOP COP CITY
MARCH 4TH-11TH 2023**

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Blackbird Publishing is a small anarchist publisher that sends lit into prisons, by request. Our catalog primarily features works by folks who are currently or formerly incarcerated, concerning the struggle against prisons, capitalism, white supremacy, and the state. We offer this free resource as one small tool in the struggle for freedom.

All of these statements and accounts were previously available online; we present them here not as an attempt at a comprehensive “narrative” on this week of action, but to provide an imperfect snapshot to those inside who have been eagerly seeking more information on this struggle. This is not a statue, but rather anger and joy in motion.

We send our love and solidarity to the thousands who rage against cop cities everywhere. May every bulldozer burn, every joyful heart find courage, and every seed take root.

-March 2023-

***For more accounts, news, updates,
and ways to show solidarity:***

defendtheatlantaforest.org

communitymovementbuilders.org

scenes.noblogs.org

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Thursday night as marchers passed.

Last week, a number of Black faith and community leaders also attended a city council meeting and voiced opposition to Cop City during public comment. This included Jones, who told the council members, “I really want to understand how it is you ask people to vote for you and then ignore their voices?”

“We don’t want Cop City,” continued Jones, who lives less than a mile from the forest. “I have five Black children ... I like breathing clean air ... I want to drink clean water ... I don’t want Black Hawk helicopters landing around the corner from my house. I don’t. My neighbors don’t. My granny don’t. She’s been in her house for 50 years.”

The police response to last Sunday’s vandalism at the “Cop City” construction site – which included families with children running through the public park woods as the night grew dark, while police threatened to shoot whoever was in earshot, as well as the unprecedented state domestic terrorism charges – also kept some Black community members opposed to the project away from the march.

Gerald Griggs, state director of the NAACP, the nation’s oldest civil rights organization, was on a bus ride from Selma, Alabama, last Sunday, coming home to Georgia, when images of burning construction equipment and police swarming the forest flashed across his phone. He had gone with about 150 NAACP members to participate in an annual ceremony commemorating “Bloody Sunday” – the day in 1965 when marchers, including Georgia Congressman John Lewis, who died in 2020 – were met by horrific police violence.

Griggs said he was planning to help gather people for the march on Thursday, but decided not to, in concert with national NAACP leadership, out of concern for the safety of his members at the hands of potential police overreach. “We support the underlying message – that the center should not be built,” Griggs, who is a criminal and civil rights attorney, told the Guardian. “We know the training center will have a disproportionate impact on our community, in Atlanta and across Georgia.

“The eyes of the world are on Georgia,” Griggs said. “And certain powers want to convey the message, ‘This is about law and order.’”

(Partial) Timeline for March 4-11 Week of Action

March 4th – A large crowd of hundreds marches from Gresham Park to the Weelaunee People’s Park, reoccupying the “legal” side of the forest, including the park itself, which had been partly bulldozed. A weekend music festival begins that night, with over a thousand people attending and a wide array of bands playing, from noise and experimental to techno, hip hop, and hardcore punk.

March 5th – A group of 300 or more protesters march from the RC Field, through the forest, and onto an area occupied by police and construction equipment at the area known as “North Gate.” Police are pushed out with rocks while erosion fencing, porta potties, heavy equipment, and trailers were destroyed. Later on APD raids a music festival associated with the week of action, detaining over 30 people and ultimately charging 23 with “domestic terrorism.

March 8th – Family, friends, and comrades of the 23 folks arrested on domestic terrorism charges on the 5th hold a demo outside of the DeKalb County Jail where they are being held. Protesters project “Stop Cop City!” in huge letters on the jail wall, while those inside lit objects from inside.

March 9th – Over 500 people, led by the Community Movement Builders, march on the Atlanta Police Foundation’s HQ in midtown Atlanta.

March 10th – The Weelaunee Food Autonomy Festival begins, setting the stage for a weekend of workshops in the forest, where people plant and restore native species and explore the connections between native and black liberation, food autonomy, and the struggle against Cop City.

March 11th – Early in the morning, Atlanta police raid the Lakewood Environmental Arts Foundation, detaining 22 people who were camping there, and arresting one on a traffic violation.

“The Amount of Solidarity is Incredible Here”: Voices on the Frontlines of the Fight to Stop Cop City

by *itsgoingdown.org*

“A massive victory,” is how one participant, “Jean,” who spoke to It’s Going Down in a recent interview, described this weekend’s mobilization against “Cop City” in Atlanta. The movement is currently at a high-point, following an outpouring of support and rage over the brutal murder of Manuel “Tortuguita” Teran, an anarchist and forest defender, who was shot and killed by law enforcement during a raid on tree-sits and protest encampments on January 18th. Statements of solidarity and support have come in from across the Left and the environmental movement, spanning from the Sierra Club and 350.org, to grassroots collectives and organizations all over the US and the world.

This weekend also shows that the movement has staying power. For over two years, the autonomous and decentralized struggle to defend the Weelaunee forest has fought to oppose the construction of a massive corporate backed, 85 acre police counter-insurgency training facility, as well as a contested land grab by Ryan Milsap of Blackhall Studios, the company behind such films as *Venom* and the *Jumanji* reboots. Groups such as Community Movement Builders, which organizes in “working-class and poor Black communities” and local environmental coalitions have been at the the forefront of this battle, which has been marked by everything from marches organized by local school children to targeted property destruction claimed via anonymous communiques on websites like Scenes from the Atlanta Forest.

As one forest defender described on a recent podcast:

People used to like to use this term: diversity of tactics, and we’ve gone a step further, we’ve created something that actually mimics the forest itself, this is an ecosystem of tactics. So it’s not a bunch of things working against or in-spite of each other, its several tactics working in conjunction and in relation to each other. Everything from the Muskogee

elsewhere, marched on Thursday night through intermittent rain from the King Center in Sweet Auburn – the birthplace of Martin Luther King Jr – to the midtown office tower. Chants included “Stop Cop City” and “Viva Tortuguita”.

The march came on the heels of an increasing number of public pronouncements in recent weeks by Atlanta-area, Black faith and community leaders and students at historically Black colleges, in opposition to the project. Their concerns include increasing police militarization and abuse of force, as well as the loss of part of a forest that was originally included in 2017 plans to create what would have been the city’s largest park, in an area where longstanding, majority-Black neighborhoods have been overlooked for decades. These same neighborhoods were completely left out of the planning and decision-making process behind “Cop City”.

The march also came after more than 100 activists drawn to the forest for a “Week of Action” had crossed from the public park during a music festival last Sunday, over to the training center construction site, where they set bulldozers and other equipment on fire. Police then entered the public park side, eventually arresting 23 people and charging them with “domestic terrorism” – indicating evidence on arrest records such as “muddy shoes”.

In this context, Black organizers and participants at Thursday’s march wanted to ensure that nothing would allow the dozens of police officers from various agencies following marchers on foot and in marked and unmarked vehicles to behave similarly and crack down on them. “We didn’t want to put a spotlight on our people – to subject them to further police repression,” said the Rev Keyanna Jones, an Atlanta native who was at the march. Organizers in reflective vests ensured that marchers remained on city sidewalks and constantly monitored protester and police behavior alike.

Other recent events elevating Black voices included a meeting on the project at HBCU Morehouse College – Dr King’s alma mater – where students called Mayor Dickens, who is also Black, a “sellout”. Dickens voted yes on the project as a member of the Atlanta city council, before he was elected mayor in 2022. A machine projected a huge image of Dickens along with the word “sellout” on the side of a midtown building on

Atlanta's Black community raises its voice against 'Cop City' police base

From The Guardian

Kamau Franklin stood in midtown Atlanta on a recent chilly, drizzly night, held a microphone and addressed a crowd that had peacefully marched a mile to the headquarters of the Atlanta Police Foundation – the organization behind the \$90m police and fire department training center known as “Cop City”. “[Atlanta] Mayor Andre Dickens – is this enough Black folks for you?” he began, with several dozen Atlanta police department officers standing behind him, most with riot helmets and some with long guns, guarding the entrance to the 50-story building. “Mayor Andre Dickens – do we have enough people from Atlanta here for you?” he continued.

Franklin, founder of an Atlanta-based non-profit organization, Community Movement Builders, helped organize the event, the largest Black-led protest against Cop City as part of ongoing opposition in its second year that has now sparked national and international headlines.

The optics of Black voices being added to the public conversation around Cop City is especially important in Atlanta, where nearly half the population is Black, and which is often referred to with terms such as “the birthplace of the civil rights movement” and “the Black Mecca”.

The training center, planned for 85 acres in the South River Forest south-east of the city, has drawn increasing attention particularly since 18 January, when police shot and killed Manuel Paez Terán, or “Tortugueta”, an activist who was camping in Intrenchment Creek Park, a part of the forest that is separated from the “Cop City” site by the creek that is its namesake.

Police said Paez Terán shot first, but there is no body cam or other video of the shooting. The park side is under threat from Ryan Millsap, a former film studio owner, but remains public while the developer's plans are the subject of a local environmental group's lawsuit.

About 400 Black, Latino, Native and white people, from Atlanta and

stomp dance to marches of preschoolers to leafleting the community old-school style, to windows being smashed, to people building tree-houses in the forest and refusing to move. [It's] punk shows and dance parties and religious services and garden planting...and a lot of these things are difficult for some people to understand why they matter; why they're connected to each other, but its important to understand that we have to reach every aspect of human society.

According to folks on the ground, over 1,000 people answered the call to take part in the most recent “week of action” which kicked off this Saturday, marking the largest number of supporters which has ever mobilized, as things began in the early morning on Saturday, March 4th. Around 10:30 AM, protesters gathered at Gresham Park, listening to various speakers, ranging from local organizers with Community Movement Builders to clergy, before marching nearly two miles through the forest to Weelaunee People's Park, the site of some of the movement's first public gatherings, and the remnants of a gazebo and paved trails which were destroyed by workers, hired by Ryan Millsap.

After arriving at Weelaunee People's Park, the crowd then began setting up tents to camp in, communal kitchens, and a sound-stage for a two-day music festival featuring a plethora of musical acts spanning a wide variety of genres. Over 1,000 people soon filled the space, enjoying literature tables and food, while volunteers, forest defenders, and festival participants worked to cook, set up sanitation, and created all sorts of communal infrastructure. “It was an incredible project of social reproduction,” Jean stated, complete with “full kitchens, hand washing, bathrooms, food, and multiple kitchen stations.”

The Atlanta Community Press Collective describes here the initial mobilization which began on Saturday morning:

By 10:30am on Saturday, the beginning of the week of action, about 50 activists arrived [and] began gathering near the playground at Gresham Park. The mood was festive. Families arrived with children running straight for the playground...By 11:00am, the scheduled start time, the crowd grew to over 200. Passenger vans shuttled participants from a nearby church to alleviate parking concerns of previous weeks of action.

At 11:30am a powder-paint covered Matthew Johnson, Interim Execu-

tive Director of Beloved Commune formally kicked the the rally off acknowledging the variety of individuals, tactics, and beliefs of those gathered. "There are many things we do not agree on," Johnson began, "but we all came here to what?" he continued. "TO STOP COP CITY," the crowd yelled in response.

After about an hour of speeches, one last group chant, "we have nothing to lose but our chains" announced the start of the march to from Gresham Park to Weelaunee People's Park. Over the course of the two-mile walk, the group's energy remained charged. The diverse crowd chanted slogans like, "if you build it, we will burn it" in unison as drummers kept up a relentless beat, pushing the march forward.

With no police in sight, the group finally arrived in the parking lot of Weelaunee People's Park, and the jubilant mood returned in earnest. The group gathered one final time around a speaker who led all those gathered in a combination chant and promise, "I will defend this land."

After spending the night in the forest, on the second day the music festival continued, while an autonomous group of around 200 forest defenders converged on where the construction site for "Cop City" was based. There, marchers according to Unicorn Riot:

[A] march of several hundred opponents of the project (generally known as 'forest defenders') took over a police surveillance outpost along a power line clearing near Intrenchment Creek. The crowd set off fireworks and threw other projectiles over the barbed wire fence of the outpost, causing the police to retreat.

Barricades of tires and other debris were set up at the outpost entrance and two UTVs, a Front End Loader, office trailer, and mobile surveillance tower were destroyed and set on fire. Several port-a-potties were tipped and barbed wire fences bent, twisted and rendered insecure.

Police have made repeated statements to the press about the throwing of "Molotov cocktails," in an effort to paint a picture of human life being threatened, however the only violence against human beings reported was later in the evening at the hands of the police. In fact, as the New York Times reporter on the ground at the demonstration wrote of the targeted property destruction, "As vehicles were set ablaze, law enforcement officers looked on and initially did not intervene." Video of the

the music festival. I wish I had not been separated from the people who had saved me, the anonymous people in masks who were throwing stones and helping people who had fallen to the ground in a panic. Next time, I will try harder to stay with the crowd. Next time, I will stick with the rock throwers, or, if I am given the chance, the dancers, the mothers, the DJs.

Jail Vigil 3/8 Reportback

Posted anonymously on March 10, 2023 to scenes.noblogs.org

Supporters, family members, and beloved community members of the 23 young people charged with domestic terrorism at the South River Festival gathered outside of the DeKalb County Jail last night (3/8) to protest their unjust incarceration. Parents gave speeches to their children locked inside, calling them heros and promising to fight for them until they are free. Protestors chanted the names of all those arrested, sung freedom songs, and reassured each other they would keep fighting against these unjust charges. Other inmates shouted from their cells, describing the brown water, cold food, broken toilets, and other deplorable conditions at DeKalb County Jail. Burning rags were thrown from windows as inmates joined the protest in solidarity. Despite the grim circumstances, the crowd of supporters was fired up, passionate, and creative.

Cop City Will Never Be Built!

Free Them All!

was arrested for taking part in this action, despite what media reports and police press conferences might lead you to believe.

An hour later, the police attacked Weelaunee People's Park. They attacked a music festival taking place as a part of the week of action. The agencies responsible for the attack on the festival were the Georgia State Patrol, the FBI, the GBI, APD, Sandy Springs PD, and the Department of Natural Resources. The festival was at least one mile from the location of the sabotage. The festival was attended by over 1,000 people the day before, and hundreds were still pouring into the area for the second day.

After police attacked some concert-goers, multiple small groups worked to repel them from the parking lot area. In the distance, I could still hear the sounds of fireworks exploding. I had been saved by someone who was shooting fireworks at the police on the bicycle path. The State Patrol fired tear gas at us. They were shooting us with pepper balls. All around me, random people were de-arresting one another, throwing stones, and running into the woods. I do not know who they were. I do not know their identity, their language, their ethnicity, their gender. I cannot judge them by any of those. I cannot know if we were friends, if we would be friends. I do not know if they are the kind of people I would spend time with. I can only judge them by their actions. In that sense, they were heroes. Many, many people escaped arrest or helped others to escape.

Around 7:30pm, I was belly-down, hiding beneath the brush. I was dripping with sweat, covered in scratches. A drone hovered above me. A helicopter circled above the drone. I could hear search dogs across the river in the Prison Farm.

I thought I was going to be captured. I did not panic, but I was close to it. And then I heard the music. It was quiet where I was, but I heard it. It made me cry. I was scared, and I was grateful, and I was inspired.

The music festival had not been cancelled. I didn't know it at the time, but the bands did not stop playing, even when police pointed rifles at them, even when they brought an armored truck into the RC field. When police approached the festival, still over 100 people, they all linked arms. They demanded to be allowed to leave. They won.

I spent almost two hours trying to escape the forest. I wish I had been at

engagement also shows police fleeing the area and attempting to close a fence behind them.

These actions destroyed recent progress made on the Cop City project and its infrastructure, setting back development which has already been marked by construction delays, lawsuits, protests, and companies dropping out.

After the Cop City construction site was damaged and set on fire, the group of protesters left the area, while law enforcement then slowly began to amass at Weelaunee People's Park where the music festival was taking place, over a mile away. "Tina," who was at the music festival throughout the day spoke to It's Going Down in a recent interview, stating that hundreds of people were at the music festival, largely from the local Atlanta area. "It was going really well, [then] cops lined up on the road, they came in opposite of the music festival. They would bring in a couple cars; this lasted a few hours."

In video coverage from Unicorn Riot, police can be seen walking into the festival-area with high powered automatic weapons and in videos posted to Twitter, people at the music festival, some with dogs and small children, are seen running from the police. "Cops were picking off random music festival attendees," reported Jean, who also stated police were heard screaming, "We're gonna fucking kill you motherfucker."

"They came out in full force, [but] the crowd stayed together," Jean stated, as police deployed pepper-balls and tasers on concert goers and rolled out a Bearcat unit along with an LRAD, a machine which uses a painful sound cannon against large crowds.

In the face of this violence, according to Tina, the several hundred people still at the festival self-organized to get people rides out of the park and shuttle them to safety. When police threatened mass arrest, people locked arms and chanted that they had children there and demanded to be released, to which police finally relented, allowing people to leave the area in groups. According to the Atlanta Community Press Collective, at least 35 people were arrested late Sunday, with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation reporting that 23 currently are being charged with "domestic terrorism."

Jean was quick to note that the main force on the ground was the Georgia State Patrol (GSP), the same agency which is behind the murder of Tortuguita, is locally referred to as “cowboys,” and is known for being largely white. Last year, Georgia “agreed to pay a \$4.8 million legal settlement to the family of a Black man who was fatally shot by a state trooper trying to pull him over for a broken tail light.”

Ironically, a police statement released late Sunday claimed (correctly) that those at the music festival were, “peaceful,” yet this did not stop them from brutalizing a crowd filled with families and even young children. The statement read, “A group of violent agitators used the cover of a peaceful protest of the proposed Atlanta Public Safety Training Center to conduct a coordinated attack on construction equipment...” If this is so, then why did police knowingly threaten hundreds of “peaceful” people with arrest and even possible violent death?

Where does the movement go from here?

Already, like clockwork Marjorie Taylor Greene, fresh from CPAC, where speakers called for the literal “eradication” of transgender people, is tweeting about “ANTIFA” and “Communists,” while the police are again trotting out civil-rights era tropes of “outside agitators.” But people like Jean don’t buy that these attacks will stick like perhaps they once did. “The amount of solidarity is incredible here, the outside agitator tropes are not flying in the forest struggle. From church groups to pre-schools to HBCUs, everyone is enthusiastically embracing that this is not a “local struggle” and are asking people around the country to contribute,” Jean stated. “Along with the action [in Downtown Atlanta] on January 21st, this is a show of emergent movement strength: the numbers, people showing up from around the country, the strong local showing of Atlantans, the ability of a group to cohere and take action...”

What happens next in the forest remains to be seen. When emerging movements are attacked by police they often grow, as they did when cops in New York mass arrested Occupy Wall Street protesters on a bridge in Brooklyn or attempted to brutalize Water Protectors at Standing Rock with attack dogs. As Jean argued, “The sort of absolute lack of discipline on the state’s side is horrible for us, but also incredibly advantageous in the long run.”

Staring at the photos of smoke billowing from the husks of burned out

—————
Post script:

The Molotov cocktails seemed to differ from a classic recipe. This simple tool seemed to be only a small amount of flammable material, such as rubbing alcohol with dish soap added as a thickener, and a small firecracker taped to the side. Made in this way, forest defenders do not depend on the ground to break the bottle, as they would with a typical glass bottle. In the future, maybe this is helpful information for anyone fighting in the forest, desert, or places without a hard surface beneath their feet.

Report-Back from March to Stop Cop City in Atlanta Forest

*Originally posted on Abolition Media
March 5, 2023*

I attended a march to stop Cop City. Rarely have I felt so safe in a crowd. Between 300-400 people in masks, hoodies, with shields and banners, chanted in unison “we are unstoppable, another world is possible” and “viva, viva, tortuguita.”

Calmly, we approached the southern power line cut in the Old Atlanta Prison Farm. We marched toward the police, located on the far northern gate. Along the way, many people ripped up countless meters of silt fencing, the first phase of “pre-construction” carried out for Cop City. This work was conducted by Brent Scarborough Company on behalf of Brasfield & Gorrie. When we reached the police, they scattered. The crowd destroyed all of their equipment with ease and confidence, including their operations trailer, their floodlights, their vehicles. This act of mass collective sabotage was done methodically and without anxiety. Some individuals were heroically repelling police who approached the gate, which gave the rest of us the space we needed to take the time we needed to accomplish our goals.

The crowd left the area together after completing the sabotage. Nobody

The Forest Fights Back – March 5th Action Report

Posted Anonymously to scenes.noblogs.org on March 7, 2023

On March 5th, around 5:30pm, just over 300 people marched to the North Gate, located on Key Road. This is the site of ongoing “erosion control” by Brent Scarborough Company, a subcontractor of Brasfield & Gorrie. In this area, police have staged around-the-clock for over a month, spending \$41,500 per day to protect the area from protestors. They have used vehicle headlights and two large floodlights to illuminate the tree line surrounding the powerline cut.

The 300 of us damaged the silt fencing on both the east and west sides of the cut. Using box cutters as well as our hands and feet, we destroyed a high percentage of the work done by the Police Foundation contractors in the past month. That work needs to be re-done in order to meet the standards set by law (a standard we do not know much about, as that is not our primary concern).

We easily pushed police away from the area around the North Gate using just stones and some fireworks. Some people closed the gate while others lobbed stones, fireworks, and Molotov cocktails at officers on the other side, in order to prevent them from rushing in and harming us. Meanwhile, the two floodlights were destroyed. Two UTVs were destroyed. A piece of heavy machinery used to disturb the earth was destroyed. A trailer used as a make-shift office, provided to the Police Foundation by United Rentals, was destroyed. All of the porta potties were overturned. The security gate built inside of this zone, which is affixed with barbed wire at the top, was damaged and partially torn down.

Because of this action, most or all of the work conducted since the murder of Tortuguita was undone. Those assembled used shields to defend against possible police munitions, but there were none. The group dispersed into the woods without a trace. None of us were arrested or detained.

Rest in peace, Tort.

Cop City will never be built.

police cars in the Atlanta forest, its hard not to compare them to the images of youth standing triumphantly in front of the burning third precinct in Minneapolis back in 2020, only days after George Floyd’s murder. While it is unclear where things will go from here, if the state was planning on isolating forest defenders and attempting to scare the wider public from getting involved by slapping people with trumped up charges, then perhaps they should consider defunding their “training” facility and re-investing in a new PR firm, because the fight to stop Cop City isn’t going anywhere.

An Historic Direct Action in a Forest Outside Atlanta

By Unicorn Riot March 18, 2023

DeKalb County, GA – In broad daylight Sunday, March 5, a group of about three hundred masked people wearing mostly camouflage and black clothing stormed the main police security outpost within the Weelaunee Forest at the proposed construction site of the ‘Cop City’ project. Demonstrators tore up silt fencing, and set an office trailer, two UTVs, a mobile surveillance tower, and a front end loader afire as police ran for cover. The group hurled rocks and fireworks at the retreating police, who repositioned to a smaller outpost across Key Road SE and worked furiously to close a gate behind them to establish a barrier between themselves and the advancing group.

The moment marked an historic turn in both the environmental and police abolitionist movements, as those seeking a climate-adaptive world without police went on the offensive. An action involving this level of mass participation in coordinated sabotage in defense of both the earth and disenfranchised communities is unprecedented in the modern environmental movement in the U.S.

Although urban uprisings against police violence have become a visible

part of the modern anti-police movement since at least the Oscar Grant riots in Oakland, California in 2009, these events typically occur shortly after the police kill someone or after the officers responsible go unpunished. In preventing the construction of a police training facility, where cops from across the country will train in urban warfare tactics, the movement in Atlanta doesn't wait for the police to harm communities, but instead proactively targets the origin of mass production of law enforcement officers and the replication of militarized techniques.

In order to provide some insight into Sunday's action, Unicorn Riot interviewed one anonymous participant about what it felt like, the motivations and strategies grounding it, and the future of the movement.

Unicorn Riot: What was your experience of the action on Sunday, March 5?

Anonymous Participant: I have never seen anything like it in this country. Aside from acts of mass, "spontaneous" rebellion such as riots or uprisings, this was the most serious act of direct action I have ever witnessed a crowd perform. It was hundreds of people in masks, many holding shields. Most wore camo or all-black. The crowd was tight but not in a formation. It wasn't regimented. This wasn't a military assault, it was only a march. The sun was up. The weather was warm. The music festival crowd cheered and applauded us as we passed them. I felt safe. I felt calm. The energy was not vengeful or menacing. It was serious, it was bold, but it was light. I really felt like I was with a group of people who want to make the world a better, freer, safer, place. We were chanting "we are unstoppable, another world is possible." At the time, I really could feel that that was true. When we were close to the [proposed] construction site, we had a police [helicopter] hovering over us, we could see police inside of a fencing staring down at us and we paused. The people holding shields moved to the front. Everyone chanted and called out for those who had rocks or projectiles to move behind the shields. You have to understand, people had different objectives, different tools, dispositions etc. And not everyone wanted to be up front, to hold a shield, to throw objects. Some people were there as medics, or even to just hold space, to be present and supportive in a more unstructured way or an unplanned way I could say. When we approached the gate finally, it was not chaos, but it was something like it. Our crowd unleashed a wild burst of energy. It was incredible and I will never forget it. It was rhythmic

we cry tears of joy
 in knowing that a new world has arrived.
 Fate says to our rebel warrior,
 "A great and deadly firestorm is coming."
 Our rebel warrior says to Fate,
 "I AM the firestorm."
 Children, elders, loved ones,
 everyone struggling to be free,
 I urge you, I implore you,
 I beg you- be the firestorm.
 Be the firestorm.

Smoke and Fire

*Written In Support of the Heroic Cop City Rebels
By Anarchist Prisoner Sean Swain*

The world stares in paralyzed bewilderment
unable to discern the meaning of a powerful message
written in the medium of smoke and fire...
no one can seem to grasp it
such messages written in smoke and fire
so often etched upon the bodies and lives
of the powerless
composed by police and soldiers
presidents and corporate executives...
this language of smoke and fire seems foreign
when uttered by the rabble, the forgotten,
the invisible,
those struggling to be free.
What a strange occurrence
this language of power so eloquently sung
by the powerless.
Those in power burned the past
put blazing torches to the world of the First Peoples
to drive them to their doom
Those in power burn the future
doused in gasoline
But today, the world watches, unblinking,
our faces painted orange by the beautiful conflagration
staring back from the screens,
and we witness an idol of the powerful turned to ashes
We see the death machine,
so confident and glorious just yesterday,
smolder as it begins to grind to a sad, belching, blackened halt.
Not all of us are deaf to the rebel warriors' declarations
We hear their song of smoke and fire
as clearly as those in power can hear it
and while the powerful cry tears of rage and indignation,
the rabble, the forgotten, the invisible,
those struggling to be free—

almost. We devastated all of their work. The silt fencing, the vehicles, the trailer. Everything.

UR: What do you see as the goal and the broader strategy that the action fit into?

Anonymous Participant: I think that at this moment, defense of the land could form a serious and coherent strategy. I was someone who was uncertain about this before. I am not sure of the viability of permanent mass encampments after Tortuguita's killing. Maybe I am wrong. In any case, I think that this marks a new possible way forward. Direct negation of the deforestation process. It's not about destruction and mayhem. It's about taking care of the world we want to build together. We have to be able to address the work they are doing when they do it. There are a lot of ways to do that. I do not care which way works, but in order to find the winning forms we will have to try many things. I think people want to work together with as many people as possible, but they also want to be effective. This demonstration allowed for both of those things to happen. I also think many people were fighting in memory of Tortuguita. "Viva viva Tortuguita" was a popular and recurring chant of the crowd.

UR: How do you see this action as fitting into the broader environmental movement in the U.S. and around the world?

Anonymous Participant: Acts of sabotage have a long history within environmental movements, within anti-colonial movements, all kinds of struggles. Specifically, I think that large-scale land reclamations in places throughout Latin America are a powerful example for movements in the US to study. I think that the US environmental movement has adapted itself to strategies that work well for small groups. Essentially, they have embraced somewhat specialized, training-intensive, forms of resistance. That has allowed people to do a lot of things. But I think that this other format of action, of unspecialized resistance, may have a better horizon to it. It's an open question. We will see what works. But I think all movements have a lot to learn from the tactics employed during the George Floyd 2020 rebellion, and people should be thinking about that in specific and applicable terms. And innovating on that, even. It's not good enough to nostalgize events, or to compare movements across contexts. We have to be creative. We have to keep an open and light spirit about things. Maybe in a few months I [will] say "OK, actually we made a

mistake in March. It seems like we should have done X or Y." Actions can only be really judged by the effects they have in the world, by what they make possible. We have to finally move away from fetishistic or moralistic forms of action. We cannot dedicate our politics to tactics.

UR: Do you think an action like this has precedent within the environmental movement?

Anonymous Participant: It certainly does. For one thing, Indigenous people have been engaged in actions like this for a long time. It depends on how we understand an 'environmental movement,' I suppose. In the current framework of 'Souvelements de la terre' in France, acts of mass sabotage have devastated large job sites repeatedly. It's hard to discuss because, of course, anti-colonial struggles often relate themselves to their landbase. And certainly actions like this, and far beyond, are regular features within some of those movements. But in the US, no. I don't believe something quite like this has ever occurred. Maybe I am wrong.

UR: How do you interpret the police response to the action?

Anonymous Participant: I think the Governor must have called in a panic. The police came into the forest an hour later, and a mile away on the total opposite end of the area. They attacked a music festival. Random people. And they were just kind of going nuts. I think it was a symbolic intervention. A serious attack, no doubt. But chiefly symbolic. The current administration has to prove to the ruling class, to all of the corporate interests and investors working within the Atlanta Committee for Progress, that they have a handle on the situation. They have to prove to Delta, to The Woodruff Foundation, to Bank of America, etc that they can suppress the resistance. The charges against these poor concert-goers are completely specious. They are supposed to make people scared, perhaps. Or to make people blame the movement, to disidentify with direct action. But I think it's having the opposite effect. If anything, people are beginning to see the need for more serious self-defense. We are seeing that the ruling class is not afraid to unleash fascism to defend itself. A few days after the protest, a group of people, a small group, were passing out fliers about the movement downtown. Riot police arrived and made dispersal orders. We are no longer living in a democratic society, for what that's worth. Not for the moment. That could change, of course. But if this is the case, if the Mayor is willing to throw everything out the window, to jeop-

ardize his entire government in order to hold onto this project, [then] the situation will escalate to historic proportions. Soon, nobody will be able to stop what is developing.

UR: The police have circulated zoomed-in video allegedly showing people fleeing the site of the action and changing clothes. They claim (without concrete evidence) that all those arrested participated in the direct action. How do you respond to that?

Anonymous Participant: It's kind of funny footage. They want this to be like their smoking gun. Anyway, they have to prove that these are the people that committed criminal acts, and that they arrested those people. They haven't done that. During the initial bond hearing, the prosecutor argued in court that everyone at the festival was guilty because they chanted "Stop Cop City." This is what we are actually dealing with. Unabashed suppression of free speech. Some people changed out of their clothing. So what? I heard people walking around telling concert goers to take off any camo or black clothes if they didn't want to be blamed. Personally, I saw a friend of mine wearing a balaclava ironically or like just for fashion. He had shorts and a t-shirt on, he didn't go to the protest it was just like a fun fashion statement. I told him to take it off. Maybe there is footage of him! This is the level of "proof" they are rolling out for cable TV. It's a sign of their desperation that they are actually attempting to legitimize collective punishment.

Editor's Note: Unicorn Riot wants to make clear that this interview is only one participant's perspective, and it is not meant as a comprehensive report about March 5, 2023, but a glimpse into at least one person's experience.