

Prison Riots: A Hand To Fire
Akil Brown

Recently, the prison yard I reside on exploded in a riot. A spontaneous eruption of violence which stemmed from overt fouling during a basketball game. What started briefly between two individuals immediately grew to five which just as quickly turned to a hundred. I watched as body after body descended upon each other like a wave at a baseball game gone wrong.

I was separated from the chaos by a chainlink fence that split the yard in half. Watching as at least 50 correctional officers yelled cease and desist orders to no avail. Not the least bit surprised as the individuals on my side of the yard leaped to their feet. For a moment we all stared at the disturbance. Watching, with morbid fascination, the dark mass of men collectively standing off and viciously attacking one another through the dirt storms kicked up through the shuffling of feet and swirling smoke from smoke bomb canisters containing tear gas. Realizing that the melee wasn't at an end, the men on my side of the yard merged. Bloods and Crips struck one another. Rehashing a never ending tango trying to beat the day lights out of anyone near who didn't favor their color, lingo, or association. Our side of the riot only lasted a minute before shots were fired; providing a real cause to "eat dirt."

As the smoke cleared, carrying with it coughs, sneezes, tears and the moans of the wounded, I had a reoccurring thought: I love this shit! I love it like a hand loves to be held in fire against its will. Which is to really say, I hate it. Just like the hand hates the blister inducing feel of fire on its flesh and would do whatever it takes henceforth to avoid that excruciating sensation. I hate prison, it's riots and end results. That is why I love it, not 'it' in particular but the lessons I endure and learn along the way.

I learned that whatever highs that I got from breaking the law to live 'the life' before incarceration are not worth the adversities faced in prison.

The end result of a riot (with the exception of those seriously injured) is usually worst than the riot itself. When the lingering remnants of the pepper spray and tear gas burns your eyes and makes it nearly impossible to breathe. When the aches and pain from multiple blows to your face and body set in and when officers dive knees first on your neck, back, and ankles. All the while pressing their weight on you a moment too long while chanting the familiar, "stop resisting," although your as still as can be if not for the movements they cause of your body from pulling you here to there. The absolute worst is the ankles crossed, arms contorted behind your back- shoulders be damn-, wrist swollen and on fire from too tight handcuffs. All while you lie face down on dead grass and dirt filled with biting spiders, fire ants, strange looking bugs unidentifiable to an inner city kid.

And for the fourth time after the third hour has passed, I think of home. I think of freedom. Of doing whatever necessary to protect that right. Of simply how I love situations like this because they remind me of how much I hate prison and how I never want to be in a situation similar to this again. Situations that reinforce the lesson learned mentality I've developed. Likening myself as a hand to fire.