



VANCOUVER RIOTS

THOUGHTS ON WATCHING MY CITY BURN

BY HAPPY KRETER

I T STARTED EARLY YESTERDAY.

Certainly earlier than the media knew, and seemingly earlier than the Vancouver Police Department knew. Hours before the game, a friend of mine posted on his Facebook page “Lots of bridge and tunnel people flooding downtown. Police better be ready if the Canucks lose.” Well, it seemed like the only people that were ready for the violence that broke out following the Boston Bruins victory were the rioters themselves.

All day, people were talking, tweeting, and facebooking about the potential for riots. In 1994, Vancouver rioted following the Canucks trip to the Stanley Cup Finals. 17 years later, it happened again. Watching it all again, I can’t say I was surprised by the rioters. But I’m left wondering why the authorities were taken so off guard.

As for “bridge and tunnel” people, it’s a term borrowed from New York, but applies in exactly the same way to Vancouver. People who live in areas surrounding the city have to enter into Vancouver itself via a series of bridges or through our big tunnel. There is an apparent divide between the culture of Vancouver and its suburbs.

Many of my friends and I grew up in the suburbs, but now live in Vancouver. We’d encountered enough small-town types growing up out there to recognize that they have a propensity for ignorance and violence that seems unmatched in the city itself. The sentiment around Vancouver today, in the aftermath of a riot that eclipses the severity of ’94, is that the majority of these rioters were not Vancouverites.

That’s not to say that everyone from Vancouver’s suburbs is ignorant and violent, nor is it to say that everyone living in Vancouver is more enlightened than people in the surrounding areas. Far from it. Let’s be clear, I myself am from the suburbs. But the fact remains, transit into the city was jam packed all day.

The feeling around the city was and remains that people were going to riot whether the Canucks won or lost. This wasn’t about hockey.

I was at the game last night at Rogers Arena. Following the Bruins’ win, immediately word started to spread that hospitals were going into crisis mode, cars were burning, and people were looting stores and attacking each other.



SHUTTERSTOCK

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When leaving the rink, I had to plan my route from the stadium to my car carefully. I was walking alone through a city engulfed in violence.

Thankfully, things weren't too bad where I was. The real violence was all in the downtown core of Vancouver, a few blocks away from Rogers Arena.

I hopped on a SkyTrain bursting with passengers leaving downtown, and headed one stop east, to where I park my car every time I go to a Canucks game. On the train, people were generally in a good mood, even singing the national anthem. I did, however, see one teenager still trying to flush his eyes after having been pepper sprayed, and another young man with a makeshift bandage wrapped around a bloody hand.

But this is the thing – look at pictures of the riots. You don't see angry people. You see people reveling in the destruction they're causing. These people weren't upset about a hockey game, they were looking to smash things in the name of chaos and what they call fun.

I made it to my car without incident and drove home around the downtown area, which was blocked off by police. Helicopters populated the sky as smoke rose from the heart of my city. I felt terrible.

I went home and sat with a loved one watching live news coverage of our city being trashed. It wasn't shocking. I'd seen it before, and with all the talk leading up to the night, it seemed inevitable.

So why was the VPD so unprepared? When the first car was tipped over and lit on fire, where were they to demonstrate that the behavior was intolerable?

On the flipside, there are some positive stories emerging of citizens forming walls to



oppose the rioters. I can't help but feel like these are stories of Vancouverites protecting their city from invaders. Perhaps as more details come to light my suspicion about the people causing the most damage will be corroborated.

There's also a growing Facebook campaign to rat out the rioters. Pictures are being posted, and both the page and the VPD are urging people to come forward. Vancouverites are embarrassed, sickened, and angry at the rioters.

People also organized on Facebook to recruit volunteers to clean up the city. That effort is going on today. A healing process for a city buried in shame.

Whatever positive stories exist, the bottom line is that a typically progressive, open-minded city showed its dark underside last night. I hope justice is done where the rioters are concerned, but I've learned not to have too much faith in that process. So we're left with a bevy of questions about last night, the foremost being “Why wasn't the riot prevented?” Now all we can do is clean up, move on, and wait for answers. The damage to our city will be repaired sure enough, but it'll take a little longer for our self-esteem to recover. Mending broken windows is one thing; mending broken hearts is another. ☺



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