

# Debunking NPR's Bizarre 'In Defense of Looting' Interview

Most listeners tune into NPR to catch up on the news on their commute home in the afternoon. But, increasingly, the state-run media outlet's audience is instead being treated to far-left political arguments – sympathetically aired and left unchallenged.

On August 27, the public radio station aired an [interview](#) with the author of the book *In Defense of Looting*, Vicky Osterweil, on the popular *Code Switch* podcast and published it on NPR.org. Journalist Natalie Escobar opened the ostensibly objective interview by dismissively citing “hand-wringing” about the ongoing violent unrest, rioting, and looting. The havoc has destroyed thousands of businesses and left [at least 15 people dead](#).

*In the midst of protests and uprisings, there is often a loud call to denounce riots and looting. But in her new book, author Vicky Osterweil argues that looting is a strategic resistance tactic that has been used for centuries to fight injustice.* <https://t.co/HbT5WUQfdG>

– NPR's *Code Switch* (@NPRCodeSwitch) [August 27, 2020](#)

In the [controversial interview](#), which quickly went viral, Osterweil attempts to recast property crime as nonviolent and morally good.

“When I use the word looting, I mean the mass expropriation of property, mass shoplifting during a moment of upheaval or riot,” Osterweil [says](#). “That’s the thing I’m defending. I’m not defending any situation in which property is stolen by force. It’s not a home invasion, either. It’s about a certain

kind of action that's taken during protests and riots."

"[Looting is] taking those things that would otherwise be commodified and controlled and sharing them for free," she [continues](#). "[Looting] demonstrate[s] that without police and without state oppression, we can have things for free."

Contempt for looting, meanwhile, is driven by "anti-Blackness and contempt for poor people who want to live a better life," Osterweil [claims](#).

Before going any further, it's worth pointing out the glaring holes in these arguments so far.

For one, Osterweil's definition of looting is inconsistent. She defines looting as "not any situation in which property is stolen by force." But then she also says it is "the mass expropriation of property, mass shoplifting during a moment of upheaval or riot." By definition, the mass "expropriation of property" during a riot is stealing property by force.

When a mob tears through a mall, shatters windows, fills their pockets, and lights the place on fire, they are using force to take what they want in violation of others' rights. This is obviously done with force.

After all, what happens if people do not allow the mob to take their property?

They end up like David Dorn, a former police officer who was [shot and killed](#) by rioters while trying to protect a pawn shop from looting. Or, they end up like one elderly business owner who was [caught on camera](#) trying to protect his store and beaten to a pulp by rioters for his troubles.

If looting wasn't done by force, people would simply tell the mob "sorry, you can't do that." It's the threat of force and use of violence that allows the mob to proceed anyway.

*Elderly man defending store during Kenosha riots has jaw*

broken <https://t.co/HUHKBpCiug> [pic.twitter.com/wA85Vvg3Gm](https://pic.twitter.com/wA85Vvg3Gm)

– New York Post (@nypost) [August 27, 2020](#)

Moreover, despite Osterweil's protestations, looting in no way demonstrates that we can have things for "free." Everything that is taken through looting imposes costs onto others.

The stolen property by no means comes "free": shop owners pay for it in their lost livelihoods, untold hours spent repairing their businesses, and in many cases, [the destruction of their dreams](#) when their stores are never able to reopen. Meanwhile, [the community bears costs](#) in the form of higher insurance rates, reduced economic opportunity, and the destruction of the grocery stores, pharmacies, and other institutions they rely on.

[The inescapable reality of scarcity](#) means there is no such thing as "free" loot.

As far as the opposition to looting being driven by "anti-blackness," this is a false smear. In fact, rioters are [destroying many minority-owned businesses](#). And many of the most prominent voices to speak out against the destruction are African Americans themselves, such as the parents of Jacob Blake, the man whose shooting by police prompted the latest rioting in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

"If Jacob knew what was going on as far as that goes, the violence and destruction, he would be very displeased," [his mother said](#). "Please don't burn up property and cause havoc and tear your own homes down in my son's name. You shouldn't do it."

*Jacob Blake's mom on violence in Kenosha: "My family and I are very hurt. And quite frankly disgusted. And as his mother, please don't burn up property and cause havoc and tear your own homes down in my son's name. You shouldn't do*

*it. ... it's just not acceptable."* [pic.twitter.com/T00Fg5M0vj](https://pic.twitter.com/T00Fg5M0vj)

– Tom Elliott (@tomselliott) [August 26, 2020](#)

Yet Osterweil's real ideological message – which NPR is uncritically promoting through its massive, taxpayer-backed platform – is the Marxist argument that property destruction is nonviolent because property rights are invalid. (Unfortunately, Osterweil is [by no means the only left-wing voice making this argument](#).)

"In terms of potential crimes that people can commit against the state, it's basically nonviolent," Osterweil [offers in the interview](#). "It's just property. It's not actually hurting any people."

Wrong on every count. Attacks on property [are themselves aggressive forms of violence](#). (As opposed to, say, self-defense).

But *why* should we consider property destruction violence?

For one, the widespread destruction of property inevitably involves endangering human life. Because of the inevitable tendency of force to escalate into more force, it's impossible to loot or riot without endangering people.

Consider the fact that, at minimum, [15 people were killed](#) during the initial months of rioting after George Floyd's death, and that [more have died in the unrest since](#). Or, just remember how Minneapolis police [discover a torched corpse in a burned-down pawnshop](#) days after arsonists and rioters had come through that neighborhood. Osterweil might have believed these looters were "just destroying property"; in reality, they allegedly murdered someone.

*"Fifteen people have died since the protests, riots and looting began, including a former police captain, an officer*

*of the DHS and a peaceful protester who was just trying to get home. Like Floyd, many of them are minorities themselves."*<https://t.co/sZq8e0P9T2>

– Brad Polumbo 🇺🇸 🇺🇸 (@brad\_polumbo) [June 5, 2020](#)

*A charred body was found in the wreckage of a Minneapolis pawnshop nearly two months after the building was burned down during the Black Lives Matter riots.* <https://t.co/5cCdA18Hjz>

– Andy Ngô (@MrAndyNgo) [July 21, 2020](#)

But even when looting entails no direct physical harm to any person, [it is still violence](#). Why? Well, an attack on someone's *livelihood* is still an attack on their life. A small business owner relies on their property to pay for food on their family's table. To pay for their child's healthcare. To put a roof over their head.

This is why famed economist and political theorist Murray Rothbard insisted that [property rights are human rights](#):

*"Much is heard these days of the distinction between human rights and property rights, and many who claim to champion the one turn with scorn upon any defender of the other. They fail to see that property rights, far from being in conflict, are in fact the most basic of all human rights.*

*The human right of every man to his own life implies the right to find and transform resources: to produce that which sustains and advances life. That product is a man's property. That is why property rights are foremost among human rights and why any loss of one endangers the others."*

No matter how much propaganda state-run media publishes or how desperately leftist authors attempt to argue otherwise, the

truth is clear. When rioters destroy livelihoods in a fit of political rage, it is violent, destructive, and wrong.

—


*This article was originally published on FEE.org. Read the [original article](#).* 

Image Credit:

Wikimedia Commons-Brett Weinstein, CC BY-SA 2.0