

An Analogy For Understanding Violent Protest In Baltimore

by Anna Davey - Wednesday, April 29, 2015

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Let's say you live in an apartment building, and the only way to buy groceries was to order them and have them delivered to your apartment.

Everyone is told "To place your order, simply call this toll free number, state your name, address, and what you want to purchase." The cost of the groceries is automatically withdrawn from your bank account, and then the groceries are delivered.

For the people living in apartments ending in the numbers 1-3, this is exactly what happens, almost 100% of the time. On the very rare occasions the groceries don't arrive, the customer service department at the grocery delivery service is tremendously apologetic, and goes out of its way to make amends.

For people living in apartments ending in the numbers 4-6, they figure out that if they want their groceries delivered, not only do they have to call the toll-free number and place their order, they also have to make sure they're standing outside the building when the delivery arrives and carry the food up to their apartment themselves. And maybe, sometimes, the food just doesn't arrive because the delivery service forgets about them, and they have a hungry day. Complaining to customer service usually gets them a half-hearted apology and maybe, on a good day, a \$5 credit toward their next order.

For people living in apartments ending in the numbers 7-9, they learn that it's not enough to call and place their order. They have to dial a secret number that is never publicized and is often changing, compliment the person taking their order in exactly the right way (without ever being sure what will be appropriate from one day to the next), sing the first two verses of "Happy Together," pay double for their groceries, and wait all day in precisely the spot the delivery truck will come to a stop at, and have their groceries thrown, unbagged, onto the ground in front of them. If the delivery van shows up at all, because it often doesn't. In fact, it doesn't bother to deliver the groceries so often, people in apartments 7-9 are starving to death. There's no point in calling customer service because they'll be blamed for their complaint, no matter what it is.

For people living in apartments ending in the number 0, they don't even bother ordering groceries. They have such good relationships with the owners of the grocery delivery service that they know food is going to show up and be hand-delivered to their door without them having to do anything. There's no such thing as a missed delivery, and if they have a problem with their order, they call the owners of the grocery delivery service personally, who will often fire the delivery driver that day as punishment.

Now, if some of the people living in apartments ending in the numbers 7-9 woke up one morning and said "You know, my parents lived in this building, and my grandparents, and my great-grandparents, and people have been starving here for a long time. I can't take this anymore," and then went outside and hijacked a delivery van and drove it straight through the doors of the grocery warehouse, would anybody be surprised?