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Joseph Boskin

Violence in the Ghettos

A CONSENSUS OF ATTITUDES

CONSENSUS: *Agreement in opinion; the collective unanimous opinion of a number of persons . . . Also consensus of opinion, authority, testimony, etc. (Oxford English Dictionary, Volume II, 1933).*

WRITING ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY in the South in the 1830's, Alexis de Tocqueville, in his inimical incisive manner, observed:

I am obliged to confess that I do not regard the abolition of slavery as a means of warding off the struggle of the two races. . . . The Negroes may long remain slaves without complaining; but if they are once raised to the level of freemen, they will soon revolt at being deprived of almost all of their civil rights; and as they cannot become the equals of the whites, they will speedily show themselves as enemies.¹

The revolt of the inner-city Negro in the 1960's reflects the failure of American society effectively to cope with the gap between the Negroes' racial environment and the ideals of American democracy. To have developed a series of programs which would narrow the discrepancies between reality and ideal, however, would have necessitated an understanding of the meaning of black ghetto life. In retrospect, it is clear that the lack of a basic comprehension on the part of the Caucasian with Negro life contributed heavily to the mass violence in the urban areas. Indeed, it continues to be a factor in the growing polarization of the two racial groups, despite the best intentions of various individuals and organizations to prevent it.

Perhaps the readiest indication of the Caucasian's blind spot has been his inability to grasp the message of the mass rioting and to deal with it in any terms but that of Negro lawlessness or primitiveness. Former Los Angeles Chief of Police William H. Parker, a representative spokesman for his counterparts, likened the Negroes of the Watts Riots to "monkeys in a zoo."²

Criticism of the riots was also voiced by some elements of the Negro community. While not using such prejudicial phrases, they argued that the riots would increase white backlash and undercut the Civil Rights Movement, with the result that white-black relations would revert to the pre-World War II period. Ignored by both groups is the fact that violence has been an expression of anger as well as of hope.

The riots reveal a commonality of purpose among their participants, active and inactive. The opening riots of 1964-65 may have been more spontaneous in that they had no antecedents; yet the riots of 1966-67 were remarkably alike in their causes, developments, and adherents. Several discernible patterns lead to the hypothesis that there existed among Negroes an antagonism to their environment which produced a consensus for violence. The continuity of behavior of the various riots, the focus of discontent, the modes of antagonism, the directive force, the composition of the rioters, and the milieu of the ghetto converged to create a commonality of purpose among Negroes.

The basis of this consensus for violence, the perspective of ghetto life which escapes the grasp of the Caucasian, can be summed up in the analogy of the ghetto as a colonial region. This analogy is the theme of several works. Kenneth Clark in *Dark Ghetto* maintains that the Negro urban community is similar in status and in problems to that of a colony:

The dark ghettos are social, political, educational, and—above all—economic colonies. Their inhabitants are subject peoples, victims of the greed, cruelty, insensitivity, guilt, and fear of their masters.³

The analogy is extended in *Black Power* written by Stokely Carmichael, who is associated with the contemporary usage of the phrase, and by Charles V. Hamilton, a sociologist. They argue that the "black people in this country form a colony, and it is not in the interest of the colonial power to liberate them."⁴ Recognizing that the

analogy departs from a strict definition of colonialism, nevertheless Carmichael and Hamilton maintain that—

It is the objective relationship which counts, not rhetoric (such as constitutions articulating equal rights) or geography Black people in the United States have a colonial relationship to the larger society, a relationship characterized by institutional racism.⁵

The basic failures of the Western powers in the developing nations both in Africa and in Asia can also apply to the ghetto. Fred R. Von de Mehden outlines three important areas of neglect: 1) the paternalistic attitude of the colonial powers which "did not foster self-reliance in the native population," 2) the failure of the colonial power to provide adequate education and training for members of the native population to assume positions that had been filled by European citizens, and 3) economic policies of the colonial power which exploited the natural and human resources of the colony.⁶

Colonialism produces certain psychological affects which can be observed in the behavior of natives of colonial regions and of Negroes in the ghettos. The impairment of self-worth is a direct consequence of overlordship. The relationship of the ruling group to the under-advantaged is pervasively demeaning on all levels. Lucien W. Pye thus explains the colonial peoples' "disturbing doubts about the worth of self":

The seeds of such doubts were, of course, planted by the mechanics of colonialism, which inescapably cast one people in the role of superior and the other in the role of inferior. Moreover, the master peoples usually drove their point home with permanent effect by employing either consciously or unconsciously all the thousand and one techniques and tricks by which most elites throughout time have sought to demonstrate their natural rights of mastership and to unnerve and demoralize the common people.⁷

Racism, and its prime form of expression, segregation, has produced the identical psychological heritage of Negro self-abnegation. "Human beings who are forced to live under ghetto conditions," observes Kenneth Clark, "and whose daily experience tells them that almost nowhere in society are they respected and granted the ordinary dignity and courtesy accorded to others will, as a matter of course, begin to doubt their own worth."⁸

A second manifestation of the racially underprivileged is a sense of alienation. Denied the possibility of assimilating into Causacian society either through the occupational door or the split-level, middle-income door; forced to attend substandard, segregated schools; ignored in the history books of the country in which they had worked and lived; associated with the slave, inferior positions of the past; referred to in demeaning terms as "nigger," "boy," or "jungle-bunnies"; and simply ignored, the Negro has been the rejected man of American society. Cast out of English colonial society in the seventeenth century, the Negro has remained the outsider. It was to be expected that his feelings of rejection would produce not only self-doubt but hatred of the oppressor. A Negro youth in Detroit expressed these dual feelings during the summer of the riot:

You know what I learned in school, man? I learned about Paul Revere, who was white, and Christopher Columbus, who was white, and Cleopatra—they said she was white, too. And oh yes, don't forget Little Black Sambo! The Irish had a culture, everybody had a culture, but they told us the black man's culture was picking more cotton than the white man. That won't do. If it's only a jungle culture, then let's have a jungle culture. I may be flat-nosed, kinky-haired, black as sin and big-assed, but I'm a man, and I can knock your block loose.⁹

Frustration, hatred and the urge to retaliate have long been recognized as a smoldering constant in subjugated groups—Negro American or native. Evidence of aggression by individuals and groups in the Old South is abundant; similarly, evidence of retaliation by native groups is equally abundant. However, the basic question as to why the riots occurred in the cities in the 1960's is crucial to an understanding of the ambience of violence. Significantly, in the period following World War II, many African nations gained their independence from colonial control. The concept of self-determination bore the logical fruit of seeds planted by the American Revolution. The connection between the two events could be seen on the scribbled quotations from the Declaration of Independence and Gettysburg Address on Batavian buildings, penned by nationalistic Indonesians against the Dutch.¹⁰

Whereas the postwar period signalled the protest of colonial peoples against the ruling countries, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's heralded the protest of Negroes against the hier-

archy in the American South. It is significant that the actions of an unknown seamstress, Rosa Parks, who refused to move to the back of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, triggered the massive protest against the Jim Crow regulations in that city.

The actions of the four North Carolina Agricultural College students who devised and initiated the sit-in protest at the Kresge department store in Greensboro in 1960 were reflective of the changed consciousness which had occurred in the young Negro. Moreover, the rapidity with which the Civil Rights Movement developed, the creativity of its techniques, the acceptance of verbal and physical assault and jailings, the revitalization of CORE and the establishment of SNCC as prime civil rights organizations, all point to the growing consensus for action and the tough-mindedness of the Negro.

The convergent result in both the emerging nations and in the Negro, whether in the urban ghetto or rural hamlet, has been the attempt to recreate a positive, historical image of Self. The victim of subjugation can rarely escape from the self-conception of inferiority without first building a new image of himself that offers self-respect and dignity. "Each national group . . . has reacted strongly and, to some extent, defensively to charges of inferiority. Each has demanded a sense of dignity and a feeling of worth."¹¹ Thus the Negro American and the peoples of formerly colonial territories have begun to reexamine their past heritage and to develop techniques of creating self-worth. It is extremely interesting to note that the title of one of the important works in this area by Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism*, is subtitled "A Search for Identity in America,"¹² and Pye's study *Politics, Personality, and Nation Building* is subheaded "Burma's Search for Identity."

In the forefront of the Negro American struggle to develop a positive identity have been the nationalist movements, the most widely publicized being the [Black] Muslims. This latter movement has been limited to the lower socioeconomic classes and has thus far achieved relatively little influence or support from the urban Negro. Several other organizations have emerged to unite in giving voice to the cry of "Black Power." Imprecise and controversial in its meaning, yet explicit in its implications, "Black Power" expresses the spirit of the young contemporary Negro. The furor created by its usage appears to stem from the word "black." Had Stokely Carmichael called for "Negro Power" during the Meredith March, few objections would have been heard.

That this would appear to be the situation is indicated by the antecedents of the phrase. Lerone Bennett, Jr., in his book *Before the Mayflower*¹³ and in his *Ebony* magazine series, "Black Power," used it without notice. Loren Miller, at the time of his vice presidency of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, made reference to a vital aspect of the concept of black power when he wrote in a widely read article: "To liberals a fond farewell, with thanks for services rendered, until you are ready to re-enlist as foot soldiers and subordinates in a Negro-led, Negro-officered army under the banner of Freedom Now."¹⁴ This statement was reprinted and distributed by the NAACP in 1962. In recent years, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell and Floyd McKissick of the Congress of Racial Equality have made frequent use of the term. There was little reaction either to the phrase or to its antecedents until Stokely Carmichael extolled it passionately to rally a group of protest marchers and sharecroppers in the Meredith March in Mississippi.

The word "black" however, evokes many psychological images to Caucasians, images which frequently connote fearful consequences. More, it suggests a usurpation of power and possession. In the context of the relationship between the colonist or settler and the colonized people this fear has considerable validity. Franz Fanon in his powerful book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, describes the unspoken tension which exists between the two groups:

The look that the native turns on the settler's town is a look of lust, a look of envy; it expresses his dreams of possession—all manner of possession: to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife if possible. The colonized man is an envious man. And this the settler knows very well; when their glances meet he ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive "They want to take our place." It is true, for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place.¹⁵

Despite the absence of a concise definition of "Black Power" in American society,¹⁶ its message is a powerful assertion of self-pride and self-belief. This feeling has been enhanced by the phrase "black is beautiful." Both phrases reject the centuries of denial of dignity.

The accent on the word "black" also derives from another aspect of the alienation of the Negro in the contemporary period, namely, the failure of society to narrow the gap between expectations and ful-

fillment. Contrast of white and Negro levels of living is extremely important. Exclaimed a young Negro to writer Budd Schulberg in the Watts Happening Coffee Shop after the riot:

Drive out of Watts, go north and west and its beginning to look like the El Dorado those Conquistadores were always hunting for. You've conquered it, baby. Groovy. You've got it made. Some night on the roof of our rotten falling down buildings we can actually see your lights shining in the distance. So near and yet so far. We want to reach out and grab it and punch it on the nose.¹⁷

The inclination to draw comparisons with those Negroes who have "succeeded" adds further frustration. A Detroit Negro schoolteacher observed after the riot of 1967: "The cat on 12th Street can look a hundred yards away and see another black cat living in an eight-room house with a 1967 Pontiac and a motorboat on Lake Michigan." Quickly, however, he returned to the different socioeconomic levels between Negroes and Caucasians:

. . . General Motors itself is only a few blocks away. I've seen kids from my school walk over to the showroom and sit down in a new model Cadillac, sort of snuggle their little rear ends into the soft leather, slide their hand over the slick plastic steering wheel and say, 'Man, I feel that.' It's all so far away, and the frustrations just eat them up.¹⁸

Contrast between the hopeful objectives of the poverty programs and their actual accomplishment is another aspect of the dashed expectations. "To raise the level of expectations without providing corresponding opportunity is psychologically devastating," said George Henderson, a Negro assistant to the superintendent of the Detroit public schools.¹⁹ The parallel between the lives of subject peoples and the colonial authorities can be made here as well. Setting themselves apart from the natives, living in noticeably larger houses and estates, travelling in automobiles, the colonials created such an insufferable contrast as to cause rioting natives in many African nations to destroy houses and estates in the turbulent period of the 1950's and 1960's.

Thus the colonial heritage of subjugation and the Negroes' history of ghetto experience are comparable in that each produced a desperate need to alter individual and group identity and to make the potentials

of "mother country" their own as well. In one case this driving need led to nationalistic upheavals, in the other case to the explosion of urban riots.

ONE OF THE MOST CONTINUING SOURCES OF ABUSE for subjugated communities is the police authority. The most visible symbol representing white authority in the ghetto—the equivalent of the colonial official—is undoubtedly the policeman. The colonial voice:

It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of pure force. The intermediary does not lighten the oppression, nor seek to hide the domination; he shows them up and puts them into practice with the clear conscience of an upholder of the peace; yet the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native.²⁰

The ghetto voice:

We live in a police state atmosphere down here. . . . From where we see it the police are just down here to keep us in our place, to keep us from getting out of the concentration camp without barbwire we call Watts.²¹

Almost every analysis of contemporary riots places heavy emphasis on the attitude, role and actions of the police either as an initiating factor in causing the riot or in its subsequent development. This assessment, moreover, applies to race riots of the previous period. In practically every instance of Caucasian-Negro confrontations, white policemen have been an integral part of the cause of the race riot and/or have participated in attacking Negroes and their property. In several of the race riots—Chicago and Washington, D.C. in 1919—police actually ignored white rioters and jailed Negroes.

The widespread bitterness of Negroes towards the police is amply evidenced in their statements and demeanor. The incessant chant of a group of young Negroes as they picketed Philadelphia's Girard College for its "white orphans only" policy is instructive of their attitude:

Jingle bells,
Shot gun shells,
Freedom all the way;
Oh, what fun
It is to blow
A bluecoat man away.²²

How could it have been otherwise? The institutions of law enforcement reflect societal mores and customs. They are neither so structured as to bring about a reconstruction of divergent segments of society, nor are they intended to be involved with other reform instigations. The statement is constantly made by police officials that their functions are basically limited to the "maintenance of law and order." To expect that law enforcement officials would be more empathetic towards minority groups when the national norm implicitly endorsed discrimination would clearly be an impossibility.

The actions of the Los Angeles Police Department after the Watts Riot illustrate what had been the sluggish tempo of police authority response. It is instructive that eleven months after the Watts Riot—the most severe racial outburst in the twentieth century at the time—the Los Angeles Police Commission finally invited Negro community and organizational leaders to a special session, "the first of a series of meetings geared to creating better communications between ethnic groups and the Police Department."²³

The intensity of Negro feelings towards the police is couched in the phrase "police brutality." Even the conservative report of the Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots took cognizance of the antagonisms:

The bitter criticism we have heard evidences a deep and long standing schism between a substantial portion of the Negro community and the Police Department. 'Police brutality' has been the recurring charge. One witness after another has recounted instances in which, in their opinion, the police have used excessive force or have been disrespectful and abusive in their language or manner.²⁴

Nevertheless, despite such statements by the Commission as "The reasons for the feeling that law enforcement officers are the enemy of the Negro are manifold" and "The fact that this charge [police brutality] is repeatedly made must not go unnoticed," the Report made no attempt to ascertain the degree or nature of the charges' validity.²⁵ Rather, the Report ignored the issue and instead emphasized the need for greater respect of the law: ". . . there is real danger that persistent criticism will reduce and perhaps destroy the effectiveness of law enforcement."²⁶ Although recognizing the consensus of Negro feelings towards the police, the Commission thus called only for its own consensus of law and order.

THE EXPLOSION IN THE BLACK GHETTOS, like the uprisings of the nationalistic groups in the colonial regions, was the observable expression of a consonance of feeling which developed as a consequence of historical and ecological forces. There has been yet another influence, external to the immediate experience of the urban Negro but supportive of his protest. Massive protest movements on almost all levels of American society have been one of the main characteristics of the decade of the 1960's. Protest groups have been active in secular and nonsecular universities and colleges; in high schools via "underground" newspapers; in the middle classes by such groups as the hippies; in the organizations of other ethnic groups such as Mexican-American and Japanese-American; in the rise of "outsider" newspapers such as the *Free Press* and political journals such as *Ramparts*; in the rise of the New Left; in the anti-Vietnam and anti-Draft Movements. The protest of the contemporary period has been synonymous with the younger generation whose energy has been given to action rather than to ideology. The riots of the Negro, therefore, and to a lesser extent the Puerto Rican, are in keeping with the protest of the present. They have become, however, a protest of violence.

The extent of participation in the violence, overt and attitudinal, has been the subject of considerable controversy. From the very first riot of the contemporary period—the third Harlem outburst in thirty years—certain individuals and groups have insisted, *a priori*, that the riots were caused by a small minority within the minority. Extreme political groups have consistently maintained that a cadre of trained and purposeful men organized a portion of the Negro community and directed them into violent actions. George Allen, a Los Angeles journalist, in a pamphlet written for the John Birch Society organ, *American Opinion*, held that the Watts Riot was the result of a conspiracy

The board of revolutionary strategy which planned, engineered, and instigated the Watts Rebellion was composed of some forty to fifty Negroes sent by the Communists into the Los Angeles area from all over the United States This small revolutionary group, which is referred to in Watts and by law enforcement personnel simply as 'The Organization,' has three common denominators among its members: high intelligence, hatred of 'The Man' (Caucasians), and a disciplined commitment to the interests of the International Communist Conspiracy.²⁷

A year before the Cleveland explosion, the highly conservative periodical *Human Events* published a story in which the author, a Negro newspaperman, attempted to link the techniques of extremist political groups, civil rights leaders, and the Watts Riot. Utilizing "traditional techniques of spontaneous disorder, well-known to communists, Nazis and other political perverts," wrote George S. Schuyler, "the self-appointed leaders of the Negro revolution have for years recklessly incited Negroes into mass action. . . ." ²⁸

Political officials, in several instances, have made similar insinuations. Los Angeles Mayor Samuel Yorty circuitously cited subversive elements as a cause of the Watts Riot. Blaming the California State Highway Patrol for their actions in the arrest which triggered the riot, and Sargeant Shriver of the Office of Economic Opportunity for holding up the city's antipoverty program, Yorty also attacked the "communists for agitating over police brutality." ²⁹ "It's the 'Big Lie' technique," he maintained. "The cry of police brutality has been shouted in cities all over the world by communists." ³⁰ Shortly after the Cleveland civil disturbances of 1966, the head of the subversive squad of the Cleveland Police Department stated that he accepted the conclusion of a special county grand jury that the riot was "organized, precipitated, and exploited by . . . trained and disciplined professionals." ³¹

As the riots increased in number and intensity in 1967, similar accusations were heard from political quarters. Former President Dwight D. Eisenhower expressed a judgment which reflected the feelings of many persons. "It does look like there must be some kind of pattern," he declared. "A lot of people think there is definitely a national plan." ³² Governor Ronald Reagan of California made a similar statement: "I believe there is a plan for the riots; it would be pretty naive to believe these riots are just spontaneous." ³³ Senator Strom Thurmond, in consistent fashion, blamed the riots on "Communism, false compassion, civil disobedience, court decisions and criminal instinct." ³⁴ The House Committee on Un-American Activities took up the cudgel of investigation. A preliminary staff study disclosed that extremists helped to foment disorders and that communists circulated hate propaganda in riot areas.

The contention that contemporary riots were initiated or stimulated and directed by only a small segment of the urban Negro population was affirmed by civil rights leaders. Deeply concerned for the future

of the Civil Rights Movement and troubled by the probability that white backlash would be heightened by the association made between violence and the Negro, statements were issued absolving the bulk of urban Negroes from the riotous activities. "We are confident," read a statement from Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, Whitney Young of the Urban League, Dr. Martin Luther King of SCLC, and A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters after the Detroit Riot of 1967, "that the overwhelming majority of the Negro community joins us in opposition to violence in the streets."³⁵

The essential basis of the argument was that no more than three to five percent of the Negro community participated in the violence.³⁶ This general figure is supported by two studies. The Report of the California Governor's Commission, directed by the former head of the Central Intelligence Agency, John A. McCone, concluded that whereas the Negro population of Los Angeles County numbered more than 650,000, about two-thirds of whom lived in the riot area, "Observers estimate that only about two percent were involved in the disorder."³⁷ The Commission proceeded to judge the effect of this minority action, lending weight to its previous statement: "Nevertheless, this violent fraction, however minor, has given the face of community relations in Los Angeles a sinister cast."³⁸ The figure of two percent cited in the Commission's final report was an increase of one percent over Chairman McCone's original assessment culled from testimony. "Now we have testimony before this commission that probably less than 1 percent of the 600,000 Negroes of the L.A. community were involved in this riot. . . ."³⁹ Another study underscores the smallness of Negro participation in the riots. The National Institute of Mental Health assigned a staff of forty researchers to screen a sampling of 400 arrest cases, police officers, and others directly affected by the rioting in Detroit in 1967. The survey was directed by Dr. Elliott Luby, assistant director of the Lafayette Clinic, and Robert Mendelsohn, staff clinical psychologist at the clinic. Dr. Luby estimated that "Only 5 percent of our Negro population actively participated in the riot. We are interested in determining whether they differ significantly in terms of age, job stability, family history, and employability from other Detroit Negroes."⁴⁰

The findings of these studies have been dramatically challenged by the Los Angeles Riot Study (LARS) undertaken by members of the Institute on Government and Public Affairs, University of California, Los Angeles. The number of Negroes in the curfew zone who claimed

to have participated was approximately eleven times that of the McCone Commission Report. To the direct question, "We are not interested in the details of what you actually did, but just generally, would you say that you were: very active, somewhat active, or not at all active?", 4 percent reported being "very active" and 18 percent "somewhat active," making a total of 22 percent.⁴¹ When those indicating activity were asked, "What percent of the people in the area participated?" the mean estimate of the respondents was 20 percent. After refining the data the authors of the report estimated that up to 15 percent of the Negro adult population were active during the riot. In addition, the study demonstrated that 31 percent of the Negro adult population were active spectators of the disturbance and "formed a permissive, if not actively supportive, audience for the rioting."⁴²

An earlier report which dealt with the arrests made during the Watts Riot can be extrapolated in a similar manner. The California Bureau of Criminal Statistics, Department of Justice, conducted a survey of all persons arrested and subsequently charged. In its introduction to its report, the Bureau reported that it had received the full cooperation of all local agencies involved in the processing of riot arrests and that it received additional data from the district attorney, the lower courts, the superior courts, and the Los Angeles Probation Department. In dispassionate tones—in contrast to news media and McCone's Commission Report—the arrest report noted that of the felony charges brought against the 4,060 persons (3,504 adults and 556 juveniles) the majority were dissimilar to types of felony charges more commonly associated with urban area crime:

The relatively minor types of offenses for which the great majority of riot participants were convicted would seem to indicate that this group of individuals was not the same type of persons usually booked on similar felony charges. A review of their prior criminal history fails to show a record as serious as that generally present in many of the nonriot felony bookings usually handled in urban areas by the police and the courts.⁴³

Equally important was the finding that although most of the rioters were originally arrested on the charge of burglary, the great majority were convicted of trespassing. "These case dispositions have also suggested," the report concluded, "that there was little before the court in

the form of evidence or positive proof of specific criminal activity."⁴⁴ It would appear, therefore, that persons not normally associated with criminal activities were involved in the riot; that is, they either took advantage of the situation to loot or to retaliate against the police or businessman. When the respondents were queried as to the possible consequences of the riot, 58 percent indicated that they felt that favorable results would follow. In sum, well over 50 percent of the inhabitants of Watts and the surrounding communities were not critical of the violent events of 1965 and its anticipated favorable effects.

The consensus of attitudes among Negroes relative to the objects of their attacks in the many riots was equally evident. In essence, the attack was considered as a justifiable retaliation. Statements to this effect were made during and after the riot: "We're men now". . . . "We won't take any more from Whitey". . . . "It's finally happened. They can't get away with everything." Once the retaliation began, frustrations and anger welled to the surface and were transformed into a released joy. A cleaning woman during the Harlem Riot of 1964 declared:

I clean the white man's dirt all the time. I'd work for four families and some I don't care for and some I like. And Saturday I worked for some I like. And when I got home and later when the trouble began, something happened to me. I went on the roof to see what was going on. I don't know what it was, but hearing the guns I felt like something was crawling in me, like the whole damn world was no good, and the little kids and the big ones and all of us was going to get killed because we don't know what to do. And I see the cops are white and I was crying. Dear God, I am crying! And I took this pop bottle and it was empty and I threw it down on the cops, and I was crying and laughing.⁴⁵

Attitudinal studies among Negroes in the Watts area further substantiate the argument that the degree of accord was substantial among its residents. The LARS study on Negro attitudes regarding the events in Watts indicated that "support for the riot was far more extensive than the public has been led to believe."⁴⁶ Moreover, if the ambivalent or neutral respondents are combined with those who were favorable to what happened in Watts, a substantial number of the community (45 percent) were not unhappy with the violence.

Of significance in understanding the meaning attributed to the event by the respondents were the answers to the questions, "What word or terms would you use in talking about it?" "Did it have a purpose or goal?" "Was it a Negro protest?" "Why were they attacked?" Thirty-eight percent of the Negro sample thought that the violence should be referred to as a "revolt, revolution, insurrection"; 46 percent thought the term "riot" was more appropriate. More than half of the Negroes questioned felt that the riot had a purpose; 62 percent considered the riot a Negro protest; and 64 percent thought the attack was deserved.⁴⁷

The areas of restraint which appear to be characteristic of Negro rioting become dramatically important. In the first place, the rioters carefully distinguished between institutions within their communities deleterious to their lives and those which afforded needed services. With few exceptions, Negroes did not attack libraries, schools, hospitals, medical facilities or other civic buildings. Targets of destruction were the small and large business establishments believed to exploit and discriminate. Untouched were those businesses owned or operated by Negroes and protected by signs: "Blood-Owned," "Blood Brother," "Soul Blood," "Soul Brother," "Negro Owned," or as in the case of the spared Chinese laundry in Harlem, "Me Colored Too." The impression broadcast by the mass media was one of wholesale, indiscriminate fire-bombing and looting. Many stores were destroyed, however, not because of direct attack on the part of Negroes but because of their refusal to permit fire equipment into the area.

Secondly, the number of police, firemen and other Caucasians killed or wounded by sniper's bullets during the riot period was minimal. In the Watts Riot, for example, not a single white person was reported to have been killed by sniper fire. The number of civic officials and others hit by bullets from rioters in the other riots was extremely small, indicating that Negroes distinguished between various types of persons.

Related to the small number of injuries from shooting was a third characteristic of restraint. Unlike the race riots before 1964, in which Caucasians generally invaded Negro neighborhoods and caused personal and property damage, Negroes during the recent riots remained essentially *within* their communities. Few forays into Caucasian districts were noted at any time during the period of the riots, despite the fact that automobile mobility makes a white middle-class area

readily accessible. The purpose was to violate or destroy the vestiges of white society, its oppressive institutions, and its visible signs of authority within the Negro community, and to signify Negro antagonism as a symbol of retaliation.

Thus the rioters signalled the significance of the riots. "This is where our calender starts." . . . "We made whitey sit up and take notice." Exclaimed a young Negro man at a youth symposium in the Negro district of Oakland, California: "Many Negroes would rather die than live under conditions as they are now. For these people, riots present the only chance of ever achieving equality."⁴⁸ As an unemployed youth at a street-corner meeting in Watts after the riot told Bayard Rustin, "We won." Rustin asked dubiously: "How have you won? Homes have been destroyed, Negroes are lying dead in the streets, the stores from which you buy food and clothes are destroyed, and people are bringing you relief." The reply was assertive: "We won because we made the world pay attention to us. The police chief never came before; the mayor always stayed uptown. We made them come."⁴⁹

The riots were an emotionally liberating and identifying event in the lives of contemporary Negroes. Many commentators have noted the "carnival" atmosphere, the unrestrained joy on the faces of the Negroes participating in the event. Similar to the cry of Black Power, the riots have

forged a new sense of identity. The riots welded them together, and now they feel capable of serving a new fate, not just passively enduring their present existence. Perhaps every national and racial identity derives from the fact—or at least the legend—of aggressive rising. Is not every revolution a sudden and abrupt break with the past and the potential beginning of a new tradition?⁵⁰

The thirty-one riots which raged in the cities from 1964 to 1967 must be viewed within the context of a consensus on the part of Negroes to gain dignity, status and power within American society in a manner similar to the attempts of the newly emerging black nations. Further, the riots can be said to have been an integral aspect of the protest of the 1960's. Although having become protests of retaliative violence, they represent an expression of the civil rights and other Negro movements. The ultimate objective of these movements is to introduce revolutionary change within the framework of the American

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social and political structure. Alexis de Tocqueville noted over a century ago:

If ever America undergoes great revolutions, they will be brought about by the presence of the black race on the soil of the United States; that is to say, they will owe their origin, not to the equality, but to the inequality of condition.⁵¹

NOTES

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, I* (New York: Vintage Books, 1945), p. 394.
2. *Newsweek*, Vol. LXVI, No. 9 (August 30, 1965), p. 5.
3. Kenneth Clark, *Dark Ghetto* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 11.
4. Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 5.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
6. Fred R. Von de Mehden, *Politics of the Developing Nations* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), pp. 22-26.
7. Lucien W. Pye, *Politics, Personality, and Nation Building* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 9.
8. Clark, *Dark Ghetto*, pp. 63-64.
9. J. Anthony Lukas, "Postscript on Detroit: 'Whitey Hasn't Got the Message,'" *The New York Times Magazine* (August 27, 1967), p. 56.
10. Carl Degler, *Out of Our Past* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 104.
11. Thomas F. Pettigrew, *A Profile of the Negro American* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1964), p. xii.
12. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1962), p. 17.
13. Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before The Mayflower* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., n.d.).
14. "Farewell to Liberals: A Negro View," *The Nation*, Vol. 195, No. 12 (October 20, 1962), p. 238.
15. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of The Earth* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1963), p. 32.
16. For a fuller explanation of the phrase, see Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power*; and John Johnson, "A Symposium: Black Power, Its Measure and Meaning," *Negro Digest*, XVI, (1966).
17. Budd Schulberg, "Watts Riots—End or Beginning?" *Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1966, *Opinion*, p. 3.
18. Lukas, "Postscript on Detroit," *New York Times Magazine*, p. 41.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
20. Fanon, *Wretched*, p. 31.
21. Schulberg, *Los Angeles Times*, p. 3.
22. *Time*, Vol. 88, No. 24 (December 9, 1966), p. 57.
23. *Los Angeles Times*, June 1, 1966, Sec. 2, p. 8.
24. *Violence in the City—An End or a Beginning?* (Los Angeles: State of California, 1965), p. 27.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
27. George Allen, "The Plan: To Burn Los Angeles," *American Opinion*, n.d., (Belmont, Massachusetts), p. 1. His ideas were subsequently expanded in *Communist Revolution in the Streets* (Boston: Western Island, 1967).
28. "Civil Rights Leaders Should Blame Themselves for Riots," *Human Events*, August 28, 1965, p. 6.
29. *Newsweek*, Vol. LXVI, No. 9 (August 30, 1967), p. 14.
30. *New York Times*, August 18, 1965, p. 20.
31. John Allan Long, "After the Midwest Riots," *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 10, 1966, p. 11.
32. *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 1967, p. 18.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Time*, Vol. 90, No. 6 (August 11, 1967), p. 11.
35. *Newsweek*, Vol. 70, No. 8 (August 7, 1967), p. 25.
36. *Los Angeles Times*, July 30, 1967; *Time*, Vol. 90, No. 6 (August 11, 1967), p. 12.
37. *Violence in the City*, p. 1.
38. *Ibid.*
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40. Elliott Luby, "Is Mass Violence an Epidemic Disease?" *Medical World News*, Vol. 8, No. 35 (September 1, 1967), p. 40.
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51. De Tocqueville, *Democracy*, II, 270.