

THE LOS ANGELES REBELLION OF 1965

The mid-August turbulence in Los Angeles was a rebellion and not simply a riot or a large-scale outbreak of "hoodlumism", as police claim. The tactics the rebels used were probably the only ones available and perhaps the best means, despite the cost, to force their rulers to deal with the problems of ghetto life. The rebels failed to keep control of the Watts area, inevitably, but they needed only disciplined organization and direction to bring off a revolutionary uprising.

Extensive and at times systematic property destruction is what made it a rebellion, in contrast to the defensive bursts of fury last year in Harlem, Rochester, Boston, Philadelphia and other ghetto cities. "Mere criminals and hoodlums" would not have gone to the trouble to burn more than \$200 million worth of property but would have stopped at taking merchandise and smashing windows and throwing rocks at police.

The rebels who burned stores must have realized they had nothing to lose by their destruction, for these stores are necessary to the profit-takers who rob the citizens of Watts and every other ghetto by demanding extra-high prices for spoiled meat, who willingly stock their shelves with the most expensive line of flour or peanut butter, who sell a box of cereal half full of air, who drain the thin pockets of the unemployed and underpaid and then leave in a fine car for the suburbs.

Why not burn a grocery store, or burn the pawnshop where you hocked a fifty-dollar TV set for five dollars to pay the grocer? The grocer may hire Negroes and be courteous, but the burning of his store will result in inconvenience at worst and--who knows?--something better may replace it.

The point is that property damage is a rational response to the everyday economics of ghetto life, for now many of the greedy shopkeepers are bankrupt, and the people they have cheated now have some of the goods they have paid for in the past through inflated prices on other goods.

This is the poor tax which people must pay who live from hand to mouth, who can't drive across town for a better price, who don't have the organization to boycott effectively, who must buy on time on any terms, who must rent a house or apartment at any price because they have no credit. It's expensive to be poor, in a country owned by those who have money.

The Los Angeles Rebellion was a rational response to the systematic oppression with which the rulers of this country control poor people. Cynical oppression imprisons poor people from the outside from every direction, and they must accept it or rebel. They are offered a system of education which is irrelevant and unpleasant. Textbooks hammer away at the lessons that George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington were the only good Negroes (and there must be thousands of Negro schools named after them), that it was right for settlers to wipe out the Indian and steal his land, that it was right for the North to permit

Southern aristocrats to re-enslave Negroes because they had made such a "mess" of Reconstruction legislatures, that it was right for American troops to invade Latin America and the Philippines, that America is a democracy. Literature classes contain a nauseating diet of middle class fantasies and classical drudgeries. Why not Richard Wright?

The lesson is clear: white is right and might makes right. It is no wonder that, after several years of such tripe, most ghetto youth leave school never again to read books, never to get the skills which they would need for the good jobs they wouldn't get anyway.

Many of the "looters", according to one dispatch, were maids tired of working for \$1.25 an hour. Their husbands, of course, would be laborers for the same insulting wage. The choice in areas like Watts is between semi-slavery and the street. And in Watts over one-third of the labor force can't find a job. Massive unemployment, of course, is a great advantage to greedy employers, who can always find someone in Watts desperate enough to work for \$1.25 an hour.

The absentee landlords who own most housing in Watts have a direct interest in a housing shortage, for they can jack up prices as long as California's real estate gang can keep Negroes from moving into white areas. There is no housing discrimination in Los Angeles, as we all know, but it happens that 98% of the people in the Watts area are black. The same politicians have an interest in bottling up their victims so that they won't infiltrate "good" neighborhoods with their well-founded lack of confidence in anything the power structure has to offer.

Another side of the economic rape of ghettos like Watts is the social values that scream out from television sets, radios, newspapers, and billboards. Advertisers say quite plainly in a variety of clever ways that you aren't a good guy unless you drive a flashy car and use expensive deodorants and soap and clothes and car wax and lawn mowers that are the scum of a sick society. Profiteers cash in on this billion-dollar brainwashing job by selling on time such junk for "easy terms" which amount to a fantastic interest-gouge. "Looting" is the inevitable result.

Hungry people, as some troop commanders in Los Angeles admitted during the rebellion, are the most dangerous. The same commanders sealed off the area so tightly that residents could not get to food stores. Normally, it is necessary to give people enough bread to keep them under control, but only on the condition that those who receive welfare admit that they are no good. Cake, of course, is for their betters.

The mass media of this country operate the most carefully designed weapon of oppression. The purpose is never to let poor people realize how they are exploited and why, but rather to play up the "leaders" who have shown that they will support the power structure and to shout about the crumbs that poor people get to keep them under control. In the case of Los Angeles, newspapers have played up the opinions of such people as Dick Gregory, Martin Luther King (from Puerto Rico while Gov. Brown was in Greece), Roy Wilkins, all of whom "deplored" the rebellion and approved

of the National Guard's invasion of Watts to "restore law and order". Television networks devoted an extra half hour of time when things looked bad, but the next week they found hour upon hour for details of what the astronauts ate for breakfast on the big day and what time they got up in the morning and the words their president spoke to them in his cracker accent. The message is clear: this country places astronomical publicity stunts (which feed missile-makers billions of dollars) ahead of the welfare of millions of broken ghetto people.

The cruelest oppression of all, perhaps, is political. Nowadays, Lyndon's game is to talk good enough to fool the liberal "friends of poor people", but not good enough so that the oppressed will get cocky. The War on Poverty, for example, amounts to a billion-dollar bribe to buy off economic liberals, social workers, moderate civil rights groups and sociologists in this country, who are out of their infinite wisdom and good intentions supposed to solve the popular problem of poverty for the poor--at \$8,000 to \$26,000 a year. Operation Headstart is even crueler--it is a device to start the brainwashing process of education even earlier than kindergarten. Johnson's "food stamp program" is the most laughable, for it in effect gives people who qualify a 30% discount on overpriced food, while reimbursing grocers who marked up their prices in the first place. Meanwhile, midwestern storage bins hold billions of dollars worth of "surplus" food which must go to India or rot so prices won't fall.

The prison is almost foolproof.

"Law and order" is the battlecry with which the rulers of Watts have moved 15,000 heavily armed troops into the area and isolated the rebels there from the outside world. This is the excuse they used to kill 30 black people, to injure about 1500 and to arrest 4000 more, while suffering light casualties. "Law and order" in this case as always means that Negroes can be killed and arrested with little excuse. According to several dispatches from Watts, all but five of the 205 police stationed in the area before the rebellion were white. One white officer who was suspended for a year some time ago for "conduct unbecoming an officer" described the Watts precinct this way: "I was offended by an air of self-satisfaction that I observed among other white officers in that division. I think it's a crime that in a country as rich as ours, poverty like that has to exist. I saw a Negro woman give birth to a baby on a sidewalk at night in the rain while trying to walk to a charity hospital." How many officers have been suspended, let alone prosecuted, for killing a Negro?

The Los Angeles police, incidentally, are not purely racists. Only a few days before the rebellion began they were clubbing strikers at the Harvey Aluminum plant in nearby Torrance. For the most part, however, their badges amount to hunting licenses. It's always open season on Negroes, since according to Chief of Police Parker "we're on top and they're on the bottom." Where else?

The power structure of Los Angeles and of the nation as a whole has so stressed the need for "law and order" that they have by now equated it with oppression, so that the only way for rebels to end that oppression is to destroy such law and order. Chief Parker refused during the rebellion to talk with "anyone speaking for the looters

and rioters... (saying) if you think I'm going to go down there and negotiate with a bunch of hoodlums--No!" Instead of attempting to find out what the rebellion was all about; he and Governor Brown and President Johnson and their puppets (King, Wilkins and that great saver of souls Billy Graham) endorsed any police action Parker and the National Guard decided was necessary. This in the end included using machine-guns which the Guard commander had claimed he didn't have.

What will happen in the future in Los Angeles and other ghettos? Perhaps the most logical solution to the issues raised in the rebellion would be for the authorities of Los Angeles and the state of California to declare the Watts area a separate, incorporated city, and cede government and ownership of the area to its residents. But of course that will never happen, for property rights are sacred and poor people must not be allowed to govern themselves. Whites will continue to enter and rule the area, now that they have reconquered it by invasion.

What will happen? Judging from experience, and from some small indications so far, a few predictions can be made. Gov. Brown has announced that he will appoint a "blue-ribbon committee" of "distinguished Californians" to "study means of preventing a recurrence of the uprising." "Blue-ribbon committees" are a familiar tool of politicians who find themselves in a tricky spot. (As this is being written, Brown has just appointed super-spy John McCone, former head of the Central Intelligence Agency, that world-wide bunch of assassins and subversionaries. Be sure that McCone will advise L.A. authorities in the latest methods of the modern police state.) To the people of the ghetto, the liberal Mr. Brown's announcement must come as no surprise, for their rulers always have some trick to avoid letting them speak for themselves.

Brown's commission will undoubtedly recommend such reforms as increasing the police force, more extensive and efficient patrolling and "tougher" policies to encourage police brutality. Perhaps they will make the happy discovery that Chicago have already got what they need--a computer-run system for dispatching police cars. The computer has been fed data on past crimes, their locations and times of occurrence, and it indicates on this basis where crimes are most likely to occur. (Imagine how it would feel to be picked up by police for suspicion that you might try to repeat someone else's crime. Impossible?) The committee will probably decide (with the eager help of Chief Parker, Gov. Brown and other experts) that California should also have some strict legislation controlling the sale and possession of guns.

While the commission is making its "dispassionate study" of the problem, distinguished reactionaries like Strom Thurmond, Barry Goldwater, California Senator George Murphy (who once said that Mexicans were better suited to agricultural work than were Americans because they were built closer to the ground); columnists William White, Evans and Novak, Allen and Scott, and Holmes Alexander will find "Communists" under every rock. And numerous lights of wisdom posing as liberals will follow Lyndon's lead in "reminding" Negroes and civil righters that "non-violence is the only way" to get freedom. Liberals will talk ad nauseam about the problems of the "underprivileged",

and Lyndon will pick the right moment to call a conference and appoint another blue-ribbon committee on "urban Problems", to keep the liberals happy.

Local officials will perhaps find some pliant local people (probably middle class) and set them up in positions of "influence" through their control of the mass media. These people, like the Mississippi Negro moderates Charles Evers and Aaron Henry, will be called the spokesmen of the community, and their opinion will be taken as gospel by liberal "friends." Police have already found their chance to wipe out the local Black Muslims. Wednesday, August 17, they raided the Muslim mosque (one cop said he "thought he saw a gun poking out of one mosque window, although police could not find any weapons in the building), and arrested 52 men, charging them with assault with intent to commit murder and conspiracy to commit murder. With this single action they have proved once more what militants have said about police brutality and frame-ups and at the same time eliminated one source of militant criticism.

Politicians will probably find some safe civil rights group and encourage them to set up a project of voter registration and job-seeking and house-hunting (so middle class Negroes can move out.) The program could be financed by a "liberal" foundation. Its purpose would be the beautification of oppression. Lyndon will undoubtedly pour more dough into Los Angeles through his War on Poverty, and he may tell the Army to try harder to recruit ghetto youth for his colonial war in Vietnam. The danger of course is that these youth might then return to Watts and use what they learn about guerrilla tactics on the Hitlers of Los Angeles. All in all, it looks like more of the same in a brighter package, a new and more escape-proof prison.

--John Perdeu
Atlanta, Georgia
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