

chance—if their test scores were lower, it was because the tests were biased against them. So what looked like preferential treatment was really just fair treatment.

The final defense was that “everyone we take can do the work”—that is, above a certain threshold of qualifications, everyone could perform about the same. But in practice, the difference in ability between the average black and the average white was often too large to ignore. Face-saving strategies were quietly adopted. In universities, black students who would have failed if they had been white were given passing grades, and doctoral dissertations that would have been rejected were accepted. In businesses, blacks with skills that ordinarily would not have passed muster were shunted into slots where their deficiencies would not be so obvious. All of this was *sub rosa*, not to be discussed publicly, not to be complained about. But everybody knew.

Meanwhile, the 1980s were witnessing the arrival of new waves of Asian immigrants, and another kind of racial discrepancy made its appearance. At the high-school commencement ceremonies, often the valedictorian’s speech would be made in halting English by the son or daughter of a Vietnamese farmer who had arrived penniless just a few years earlier. Korean grocery stores became as ubiquitous a feature of the American urban landscape as Irish saloons or Jewish delicatessens had once been. This gave rise to more double-speak. The rhetoric had always proclaimed that affirmative action was needed to help minorities who were disadvantaged by the white majority. But Asians refused to exhibit the symptoms of disadvantage. The result, *mirabile dictu*, was that Asians somehow were dropped from the ranks of minorities. By the end of the 1980s, they had after all become subject to quotas: ceilings—of the same variety that Jews had had to face early in this century—to avoid having “too many” Asians in freshman classes.

Once again, superimposing these developments on the aftermath of the Rodney King verdict leads naturally to certain expectations. American black leaders are replaying the response to the riots of the 1960s that received so much acceptance then among whites: The

rioting and looting are a deplorable but understandable reaction to years of abuse and neglect by the government. But whites watching these scenes are not the whites of the 1960s, and the claims that blacks must receive more assistance will be received with little sympathy. Some of this reaction among whites is mean-spirited and racist in the old sense. But most is not. It is not racism—not racism in the old sense, at any rate—to conclude that blacks have in truth been given a number of advantages for more than twenty years. It is not the old style of racism to conclude that the present problems of the black community owe more to black behavior than to white oppression. And it is above all not the old style of racism to look at the unaided achievements of poor Asian immigrants—and the unaided achievements of poor West Indian immigrants, poor Nigerian immigrants, poor Ethiopian immigrants—and ask, “If they can do it, why can’t American blacks?” It is a legitimate question, requiring more than glib answers about the legacy of slavery.

But the question is rarely asked—in public. And that is why I began by saying that the Rodney King verdict opens such a dangerous period in American race relations. Those relations have been spiraling downward for many years now without yet provoking American white leaders to confront the sources of the antagonism. There are a few brave exceptions—Senator Bill Bradley has recently grasped the nettle—but certainly none among this year’s crop of presidential aspirants, including George Bush. There remains a powerful reticence among whites to ask tough questions of blacks. It is the most tenacious survivor of the old racism: condescension. It should not have to be up to blacks to break this impasse, but I think that’s what it may come to. Only when blacks can say at one and the same time that the King verdict was outrageous and that, nonetheless, it’s time for blacks and whites to start telling each other publicly what they say among themselves privately, are we likely to see the opening of a dialogue and a hope for reconciliation. The much more likely outcome is that the pieties will continue, and the antagonism deepen. □

HOW TO HOLD A RIOT

EUGENE H. METHVIN

ON MAY 12 Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl F. Gates, clad in flak jacket and aided by two hundred FBI agents and cops, personally arrested one of three gang members accused of the televised beating of white truckdriver Reginald Denny.

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Gates was only about three hundred hours late.

Los Angeles was still burying its dead (58 and counting), nursing the 226 critically wounded (including Denny), clearing rubble from 3,700 fires, and trying to help thousands whose jobs were destroyed in the holocaust. As always after such social hurricanes, the debate rages: Why? Whose fault was it? What are the causes—proximate causes and “root causes”? How can

we prevent recurrences? The causology of riots is not simple, and like the nine blind Hindus debating the shape of the elephant, people with different vantage points dispute furiously. Most black spokesmen yell "racism." White House Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater blamed LBJ's "Great Society." I'll nominate as my prime scapegoat Daryl Gates, and will prove it to you anon. But first, some basics.

Riots are analogous to avalanches in the Alps. A gentle breeze, a cracking limb, or a zestful yodel shakes loose a tiny handful of snow. Within minutes a thunderous avalanche may bury an entire town. What follows bears no relation in magnitude to the tiny triggering event. We could argue that the heavy winter snowfalls months before "caused" the avalanche. Or we could trace the cause back to the earth's movement around the sun, or whatever force gave our planet a tilted axis, or even to the Big Bang that launched the universe. (And what came before that?)

But the practical Swiss don't go back that far. They have studied the chain to discover where they can most expediently interrupt the process to minimize damage.

We have such specialists for riots. They are called cops. When family, church, and school fail, they are civilization's last line of defense. But sometimes they do not do their jobs, and we need to understand why.

Look at the chronology in Los Angeles on April 29:

1 P.M.: The court notifies the LAPD that the verdict will be announced in two hours.

3:15 P.M.: The acquittals are broadcast live on TV.

4 P.M.: Hundreds of police are released at the end of the eight-hour day shift.

5:25 P.M.: The first report of trouble: juveniles throwing beer cans at cars, at the intersection of Florence and Normandie. More than a dozen police cruisers, with 25 officers, converge. After twenty minutes of skirmishing with a growing mob, Lieutenant Mike Moulin, the field commander, orders everybody out. As the last two cruisers depart the intersection, sirens blaring, the mob beats a *New York Times* photographer who was left behind. Hispanic and white motorists are dragged from their cars and beaten.

6:46 P.M.: Nearly six hours after the LAPD was alerted, Reginald Denny pulls his 18-wheeler into the intersection. Five rioters surround him, yank him out of the cab, beat him savagely. One throws a brick, hitting him a glancing blow in the head. As he attempts to rise, another runs up from behind and clobbers him in the head with a ball-peen hammer. He falls inert.

A TV helicopter overhead broadcasts the whole scene live to millions. A reporter cries, "Where's the police?" Four Good Samaritans who live nearby, all black, leave their homes, drive to the scene, and rescue Denny, who has suffered critical brain damage. In the 77th Street police station cops mill and watch in horror on portable television sets. "Every single blue suit here wanted to go in and save that guy," Officer Robert Frutos, a six-year-veteran, told the *New York Times*. But their commanders refuse to send

them in. The televised scene advertises police inaction and commencement of the moral holiday.

About this time another TV crew broadcasts live a few blacks looting a liquor store. "This drink's on the LAPD," a woman yells at the crew as she walks off with a fifth of Chivas Regal. At a command post a mile away Lieutenant Moulin and as many as two hundred other police officers wait as their superiors give contradictory commands.

8:15 P.M.: At Vermont and Vernon a 42-year-old man emerges from a corner supermarket with milk he has just bought for his two children. Nearby, looters empty a Korean flea market. Gunfire erupts. The father falls, bleeding, and dies in a friend's arms. His last words: "Tell my kids I love them, and tell my wife I said goodbye." Across the street an 18-year-old county-government employee guides two elderly women to a bus stop and tells them to board the first bus "and keep your heads down." A bullet hits him in the forehead, killing him instantly. These were apparently the first two deaths, 7 hours and 15 minutes after the LAPD was notified of the verdicts. Both victims were black.

Three of the cops who were pulled from the riot flash-point talked anonymously to *Washington Post* reporter Lou Cannon and a colleague. One said: "We thought we were beating a tactical retreat and would return in force. We didn't know we were abandoning the community." Sergeant John Gambill, a motorcycle officer with long experience in the neighborhood, said: "We could have crushed it with a show of force." One cop wept as he told the *Post* what happened: "We weren't allowed to do our job. It's demoralizing to cops to be depicted as cowards, when our leaders wouldn't send us in."

In the 1965 Watts rioting, in which 34 died, the LAPD cordoned off the riot zone and left it to the burners and looters. "That decision may well have been the major cause of the Watts riot," District Attorney Evelle Younger declared in 1969. "Looking back now, all law enforcement in our community is in general agreement that it was a mistake not to apply massive but restrained force . . . immediately." Ironically, the civilian Police Commission probing the new disaster has uncovered a memo that Daryl Gates, an inspector at the time, wrote in 1965 indicating that he and another inspector made the fatal pullout decision.

Reporters dissecting the police inaction this time have found that Chief Gates assured the mayor and others he was ready for any eventuality. But the police high command seems to have made no special preparation at all.

Faces in the Crowd

I ATTENDED my first riot exactly forty years ago this spring, a "panty raid" at the University of Georgia. As a fledgling journalist and campus newspaper photographer, I was in the middle. Since then I have ventured into or done inquests on scores of

riots from Tokyo to Washington, and written a fat book on the topic.

In that first riot I saw the first of three faces in the crowd that tell the whole story.

Face #1. As the student mob milled about the quadrangle of girls' dorms, I sneaked off into the bushes to load more film for my vintage 4 x 5 press camera. Hidden in the shadows of my makeshift darkroom, I saw a student come around the corner, look furtively about, and hurl a rock at a window. To me, his act was an inconceivable conundrum. What was it deep in his soul that impelled a privileged young WASP collegian to do such a thing?

Face #2. In Newark's 1967 riot, a psychologist saw a 12-year-old boy watching looters with shopping carts empty a store. The boy stood, shifting uneasily. The man put a hand on his shoulder: "What's the matter, son?"

"It's crazy. I don't see no sense in it!" the boy exploded.

The psychologist threw out a shrewd guess, naming a parochial school with strict moral training. "Do you go to St. —?"

Wide-eyed, the boy replied, "Yes, sir. How did you know?"

Face #3. As the smoke still choked Los Angeles, a black teacher screamed at *Washington Post* reporter Donna Britt over suggestions that the schools had somehow failed. "Teachers can't fix these kids all by themselves!" the teacher, Larrie Pennington, declared.

She's right. For whatever reasons, American families have delivered vast numbers of children teachers cannot fix to our streets. Consider what you would face if you were the police chief in charge of the Rose Bowl on New Year's Day with an ordinary crowd of 100,000 Americans of all ages. If we project onto that crowd the 1990 U.S. arrest rates, we will find 5,806 people who will be arrested within the year for felonies, 1,203 for serious crimes, 290 of them for violent crimes. We will have 10 murderers, 8 arsonists, 16 rapists, 70 robbers, 176 burglars, and 195 who will commit aggravated assault. Experts tell us one to two thousand will be pure

psychopathic personalities, with little empathy for anybody and little control over their violent impulses. With such a population, we would do well to take precautions!

South-Central Los Angeles presents more volatility than the average Pasadena Tournament of Roses. The L.A. County Sheriff's Department had 100,500 names entered in its computer file on gangs late last year. And 775 of the year's more than 1,900 homicides were gang-related, the preponderance of them in the riot zone.

About 15 per cent of youngsters seem congenitally resistant to "aversive learning." That is the psychologists' \$3 word for learning the "thou shalt nots" on which all civilization rests. Mothers of criminal psychopaths, the most extreme form of anti-social personalities, uniformly make some variant of the retrospective observation, "I could not seem to teach him the meaning of the word 'no.'"

Clearly, civilization's first lines of defense against savagery—family, church, and school—had failed with the WASP collegian in 1952, and succeeded with the black youngster in Newark in 1967. He had internal controls that prevented him from joining the carnival of looting. Society's interest must be in supporting those families, schools, and churches that still try to inculcate these controls. But when these break down, the police must step in.

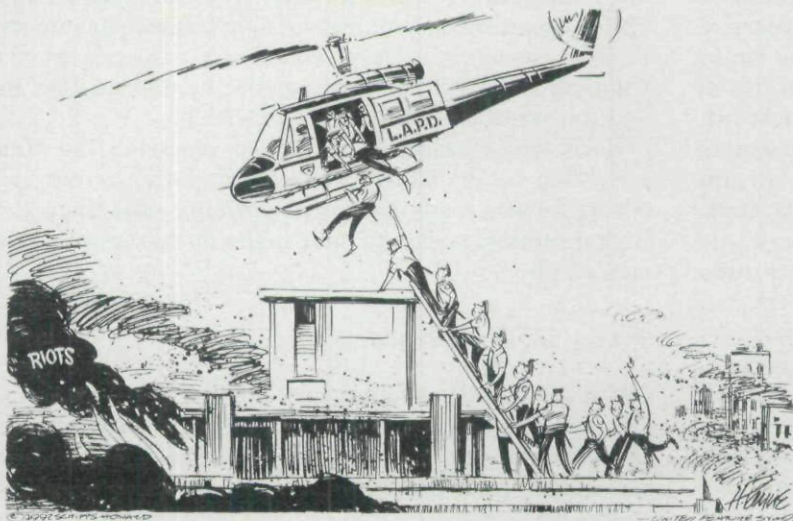
Rules for Riots

POLICE SHOULD be well drilled in a wide array of riot-control techniques. A handful of professionals can suppress large mobs. Even untrained cops under good leaders can give a good account, saving lives and preventing much destruction. But cops and the public must accept the rule: "When the looting starts, the shooting starts." It can be done with restraint and precision, but it clears the carnival-goers and lets SWAT teams deal with the hard-core fire-setters and terrorists. Consider two cases:

Newark, 1967. This riot began with two hundred demonstrators bombarding a police station with rocks and bottles. Police who tried to disperse them retreated inside, bloodied, where a second-in-command did not know what to do. The mayor, fearful of "provoking" his city's volatile blacks, had forbidden riot training in anticipation of a "long hot summer."

Precinct commander Captain Charles Zizza, rushing home from an Atlantic City vacation, turned onto the main shopping street two hours after the trouble began. He saw "masses of people, must've been ten thousand over ten blocks, smashing windows, looting, singing, shouting, setting fires." And not a policeman in sight.

At his police station, Zizza found chaos. He yelled: "What the f--- are all these cops doing in here? Why aren't they out on the street?" It took nearly an hour, but Zizza got his men



organized. Some, anticipating trouble, had stored personal shotguns in their lockers. A man with the military habit of command, Zizza ordered out every available shotgun, took a dozen officers to the main street, and marched them in a picket line, driving looters before them without firing a shot. By midnight he had cleared a good part of the avenue, made several arrests, and begun receiving sniper fire from rooftops. Looters simply shifted to other sections. But the police were mobilizing and fighting.

Newark's killing and burning never reached the scale of Watts in 1965. Newark counted 23 dead. Nine days later Detroit tried the pullback strategy and 43 died. As in Watts 1965 and L.A. 1992, most were black bystanders, wholly innocent, or looters caught up and burned in the fires after police inaction advertised the carnival.

Panama, 1964. Two thousand rioters, whipped by Castro-trained agitators, stormed toward American homes in the Canal Zone. A police sergeant and eight men, following their training in riot drills, fired their

service revolvers in unison, by command, into the pavement in front of the rioters. Such fire normally ricochets low, into the legs of the crowd, but may hit higher. The crowd backed off; one rioter was killed. A mile away another horde 1,500 strong stormed the Zone. Police fired two volleys over their heads. At each volley the crowd fell back, without apparent casualties. On the third round, when the sergeant gave the standard preparatory command, "Ready on the firing line," the crowd broke and ran. Meanwhile, new supplies of tear gas arrived and police were able to hold until troops relieved them.

Napoleon cowed Paris mobs with "a whiff of grape-shot." A historian later said, "If the commander of the Bastille had not been an imbecile, the Revolution never would have happened."

Americans have a right to expect their police and mayors to read history. Then the debate over "root causes" can proceed, and we can listen to our Robespierres in peace. □

GUILT AND GASOLINE

LORRIN ANDERSON

ANNA QUINDLEN helped us sort it out, in the *New York Times*, inviting us in for another flagellation party: "Let's be honest, white folks," the jurors "walked into that room with a baggage most of us carry, the baggage of stereotypes and ignorance and pure estrangement from African-Americans." (When Anna Quindlen says "us" she means "you.") Anthony Lewis picks up the whip: "Black professors are taken in as suspects because of the color of their skin." (Professors "taken in"? For no reason? Name a few, Tony?) And the word comes down from the *Times* itself, trenchant, judicious: "Injustice is one thing; what's worse is a systematic lack of justice, of protection. America consigns great numbers of young black men to lawless lives . . ."

America consigns. As the *Times* sees it, that is, young black men are somewhat less human than the rest of us—no moral capacity of their own, no ability to choose or reject criminal behavior. "Consigned" by an implacable society, those young black men, to deal drugs, rip chains, mug old ladies, torch buildings, loot, assail stray white truckdrivers.

Young men tempted to criminality may not spend a lot of time reading editorials in the *New York Times*. They don't have to. The melody is ubiquitous, strummed constantly by the black establishment, white guilt-peddlers, and—most potently of all—by television. The medium has become the message in ways McLuhan never imagined.

Not that there wasn't reasoned comment and straightforward reporting. Ted Koppel, notably, did a

consistently even-handed job on *Nightline*, going so far as to let a juror talk about her rationale without dismissing her summarily as a racist cop-lover. A spokesman for the L.A. police union got his say. The *Today* show devoted half an hour to a dissection of the King beating tape, letting a defense attorney make the case for the cops and the jury. Reporters in the field, and some of the anchors, often simply told us what was happening, without adding their own sociological interpretation of why it was happening.

The panels were sometimes intelligent and occasionally even balanced. But the choice of participants tended to run from the center leftward to lunacy. One of the most original analyses came from a Los Angeles gang veteran named Fred Williams (identified as a "community activist"), who said on *Today* that the Crips and the Bloods, despairing of any help from George Bush, "took it on themselves to burn down their buildings and rebuild them themselves." Nobody blinked an eye. On *Donahue*, the only real debate, on one all-black panel, was over a former Black Panther's suggestion that it would be immoral to accept tax money to rebuild Los Angeles, federal dollars being tainted by racism and capitalism. (Nobody seemed to disagree about the taint, but there was a clear consensus in favor of taking the money.) Pat Buchanan played the *Today* show—as a clay pigeon to be shot down.

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