

Caroline Schiavo  
Professor Philip Muehlenbeck  
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## Riots, Then and Now

The massive migration of blacks in the 1960s to northern urban cities resulted in riots, prejudice, racism, and poverty. Due to a lack of education, limited job opportunities, unskilled labor, and poor housing options, blacks in the cities of Newark, Detroit, and Baltimore were oppressed with a persistent feeling of helplessness and marginalization. This led to economic downturn, racial divide and profiling, despair, and civil disobedience across the country. The Civil Rights movement involving Martin Luther King and *Brown vs the Board of Education* in the 1950s gave rise to the heightened anger blacks endured. Tension caused riots in Detroit, Newark, and Baltimore. The Vietnam War helped to radicalize blacks and integrate them; however, back at home racism perpetuated. The Civil Rights movement helped to spur President LBJ's War on Poverty initiating programs like Economic Opportunity Act and VISTA. Ironically, there appears to be a retrogression with racial profiling emerging in the 2015 with the death of Baltimore's Freddie Gray, Ferguson's Michael Brown, and many other deaths that have started the Black Lives Matter movement.

Forty-eight years later, the riots that occurred in Newark appeared to symbolize progressive racial integration, but Americans believe today massive civil disobedience is more relevant than ever. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of July 1967, John Smith, a black cab driver in Newark was beaten by white police officers, then imprisoned (Mazzola, 2016a). The commencement of the five-day Newark riots killed twenty-six protestors, but led to the eventual imprisonment of the corrupt mayor and election of the first black mayor, educational contract strikes by teachers, and the end to violation of civil rights (Albright, 2016; Mazzola, 2016a; Mazzola, 2016b). This stood as an opportunity to change the housing and employment decline and decrease crime rates in this

urbanized city of New Jersey. Comparing these racial tensions to the current, “In fact, they [academics] argue, should Newark's riots and the nearly 50-year fallout the city continues to struggle with in its aftermath not serve as a cautionary tale, we may be headed for a replay of what was arguably the decade of greatest violent upheaval in American history....it can't stay the way it is now,” unless America reverses the social advances that have been made that today widely accept diversity and desegregation (Mazzola, 2016a).

In 1967, the police use of excessive force, lack of communication, and mixed race relations within the black community caused a commission on the effects of the riot to consider reforms such as the decentralization of the education system to ensure black children have the same access to education as their white counterparts; a lack of education barred black workers from rising to managerial status employment in Newark (Bigart, 1968, p. 1-2). Poverty persisted as blacks lacked an education. As the black population grew, the white population diminished and white-flight to the suburbs of New Jersey occurred not only by residents, but due to Newark's lack of industrialization and discrimination, numerous General Electric plants and breweries that created a hustling local community vanished (Herman, 2014, p. 40). However, as Jim Crow Laws dissipated and the post war era improved, blacks continued to move from the South to the North to attempt employment with skills garnered during World War II. Millions of blacks moved to Newark during the 60s, but the unemployment rate of forty percent was a sign that problems existed prior to the riots whereby “schools were not adequately preparing students to take part in the post-industrial economy, reinforced perception” of the black community's continual inequality among employers. (Herman, 2013, p. 43). Furthermore, in Newark, landlords were attempting to scam blacks out of fair housing options even with the Civil Rights Act of 1968 dictating fair housing; landlords turned single family houses into multiple dwellings

and raised rents as demand grew due to the lack of rent control policies, forcing black residents to public housing options labeling Newark's projects as The Brick City (Herman, 2013, p. 48). This led to discriminatory housing practices, such as the concept of "red-lined" districts with tenements in central and south wards along with an increase of interest and mortgage rates for all minority groups (Herman, 2013, p. 51). Many of these tenements were dilapidated and in disrepair, leaving blacks with no options. The tensions in Newark were a microcosm of the racial profiling and black angst in urban cities at the time and blacks felt disenfranchised with no recourse, being deprived of equal rights.

The Detroit riots began in an illegal after-hours 'bling pig' drinking club where many working-class residents gathered to celebrate the heroism of two black servicemen returning from the Vietnam. A police raid on this establishment on Clairmount and 12<sup>th</sup> was being conducted at three in the morning, but instead of rounding up a few people the police clean-up crew smashed into the bar, arresting 82 black customers and shoving them into police wagons (Herman, 2013, p. 15-18). This resulted in an onslaught of looting, fires, deaths, thousands of arrests, and mobilization of the National Guard, military, and police. Detroit resident Roosevelt Hurt oversaw customers upset about being kicked from the blind pig, the "only place they had to go...decided to do something", which started with vandalism of Jack's Esquire store (Herman, 2013, p. 17). At the time, unemployment among black men was double that of whites and affordable housing was restricted to ethnically segregated areas in the south side of Detroit. These economic, social, and housing challenges resulted in gentrification, urban renewal, and the policies of law enforcement. The automobile industry specifically the "Big Three" employed numerous immigrants and blacks with little educational skills to work on the manufacturing line with a fair salary. "When the car business was good life was good, but when the car business

was bad”, unemployment increased and blacks often with little seniority, were often the first ones to be laid-off (Herman, 2013, p. 44). In the postwar period in Detroit, many manufacturing and automobile plants were closed or moved to the suburbs, mirroring a lack of industrialization that occurred in Newark. Many white workers left for jobs in the suburbs, replicating the pattern in Newark and nationwide. Although there was progress with housing and low-wage employment, blacks continued to suffer from police profiling and brutality, and racism was ubiquitous, impacting the nationwide unrest and trivialization of blacks, inflaming and exacerbating the turmoil that followed with the Baltimore riots.

These riots in East Baltimore on the night of April 6<sup>th</sup> 1968, changed the principles of black race relations. What started with the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., two days earlier in Tennessee, led to four days of unrest in Baltimore, starting with a young black teenager throwing a brick into a store at the intersection of Gay and Eden Street, and ended with six deaths, hundreds of casualties, and thousands of arrests. Looting, fires, and property were damaged; smaller liquor, grocery, and appliance stores were the sources of the riots that over 10,000 National Guard troops sought to suppress, but companies recovered and over 12 million dollars in repair and insurance claims were completed and those without, developed debt. The immediate reaction by Governor Spiro T. Agnew and other government leaders’ response was deemed overly harsh, reprimanding and excoriating non-violent and moderate Civil Rights leaders for not taking responsibility for the riots. The impact of his sermon left black leaders discontent, the black community angry, and white residents disconnected as they lived in a segregated area and were unaware of the extent of the racial divide.

Barbara and Hunter Alfriend, a white couple with five children, recall feeling sympathy for the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and JFK, but were unaffected by the assassination of

Martin Luther King. They discuss how the six o'clock curfew was not strictly implemented by Governor Agnew. Hunter recalls an 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne division unit lining up on their block, John Street to seek out rooftop snipers, ““Hey look, this is a very quiet neighborhood and we’re not having any problems... delighted you’re here. But if you see anybody don’t shoot ‘em, its probably one of our friends”” (B. & H. Alfriend, personal communication, December 8, 2006). Sadly, these diverse contrasting reactions of political assassinations by the white couple reveals their middle-class values, “white privilege”, oblivious to the struggles of inner city blacks that lived on the peripheral of their home; they sent their children to private schools and worked in predominantly white careers. Although they realized that integration was inevitable and ‘gradual’ (B. & H. Alfriend, personal communication, December 8, 2006). While blockbusting, the concept of attempting to move in or out of an area dominated by a specific race has decreased, this principle is still applicable to the 2015 Baltimore riots; these neighborhoods continue to be breeding segregation and enabling dependency on the system, classifying and leveling individuals based on ethnicities and socio-economic levels, attempting to create a cycle of urban renewal and affordable housing, but often resulting in displaced low-income housing. Access and equity for housing and jobs continues to be a struggle for many blacks, causing upheaval and resentment, being sidelined with minimal options, leading to civil discord.

Baltimore and the Vietnam War, unsettled times. It may seem easy to compare the life of white, Tom Carney, an Irish Catholic teenager to that of Robert Birt, a black teenager from the Latrobe projects, but their socio-economic classes yield vast perspectives, impacting the underlying turmoil contributing to the riots. Tom lived in the Pig Town factory district, where he attended church and St. Jerome’s school with only Irish Catholics. He remembers his neighborhood as “a very ethnically controlled community, and you tried to date, meet, greet, on

this same level that you were asked to do by your heritage” with little interaction with other non-Catholics (T. Carney, personal communication, December 5, 2006). He learned to observe the behaviors of family and friends while socializing and street-life to be wary of his associations. As Tom describes, Maryland returned to a conservative setting with further police presence under Governor Agnew’s election strategy, causing blacks to demand equality and civil rights, creating fear among whites. This fear originated through demonstrations after the death of Martin Luther King Jr., the Kennedy assassinations, and the ongoing war in Vietnam. The shattering of the white father appeared as drafting for Vietnam increased. Vietnam was one of numerous changes that affected Tom Carney’s life and his wife, Alison’s forever. On the war front, Vietnam was the first military integrated units, providing black men an opportunity to evade the poor economic conditions at home; Vietnam was their ticket out of slums. Serving in this “war on democracy”, black soldiers were content that “after years of discrimination, they viewed fighting in the war as an opportunity to prove their worth to their country” (Gallager, 2014). They were led to believe that if they served their time in Vietnam, that they would return to a more democratized America with opportunities for jobs, housing, and education. However, upon return blacks were no closer to being on equal ground with whites. The feeling of disillusionment and displacement was divisive and racial discrimination continued, leading to the Civil Rights Movement.

The Civil Rights movement overcame various challenges such as a housing and voting discrimination. The Open Housing Law of 1968 banned discrimination of housing. The Congressional approval of the 1965 Voting Rights Act guaranteed all citizens the right to vote replacing state and local government authority with federal autonomy. Tom Carney understood the placement of such an act, but pointed to the “Southern Caucus in the Senate as block, and

everyone's nerves were raw and their fears were high", following policies regarding minorities and their voice in politics (T. Carney, personal communication, December 5, 2006). Robert Birt, on the other hand, lived in East Baltimore discusses his enjoyment in becoming a philosopher through reading King's books. Being in predominately black neighborhood where King visited, Birt and other children learned to stay clear of white areas where they were catcalled. His friends understood the principle of the marches in Selma and Birmingham, but did not believe in the non-violence program developed by King and other Civil Rights leaders, as Baltimore's racial tensions were not as extreme as the deep south. Robert's memory of the 4<sup>th</sup> of April in 1968 on King's passing is as unforgettable in modern times to those of us who witnessed 9/11; it was the point of radicalization and deciding who holds self-autonomy. There was a sentiment that people were concerned about the riots and the shooting by the National Guard enough to attack federal officials. Although unstated, it was understood by the black community that the National Guard was known for defending "white property and to enforce white law" (R. Birt, personal communication, July 7, 2007). During the riots, the Black Panther Party was viewed similarly, demanding economic and racial justice for blacks, which resulted in immense white flight. In a sense, businesses were going through a transition identifying with cultural symbols of black nationalism, closing burned down businesses, and the flight of white owned businesses; this exhibits further gentrification with businesses wary to make capital investments in unstable black communities that were deemed less important, affecting black and white Baltimore residents with declining services, remaining at the periphery of white American society.

The opinion of government officials Mayor Thomas D'Alesandro, Marvin Mandel, and William Donald Schaefer were essential to the riots and the rebirth of Baltimore; their voice and reactions to the riots set reaction for residents. In 1968, Baltimore Mayor Thomas D'Alesandro

He explained his experience of trying to establish race relations prior to the riots that started on Gay Street. He speculated that Baltimore was not the riot origins; pre-existing poor living and working conditions, unequal educational opportunities, and sub-par housing contributed to the chaotic March on Washington, following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, therefore Baltimore was targeted as a new location to vent discontentment (T. D'Alesandro, personal communication, May 2007). While Mayor D'Alesandro fielded his policies and dealt with the riots to aid his run for Governor, his current competitor Governor Agnew was nominated to serve as Nixon's VP. This meant Mayor D'Alesandro would be challenged by the Democratic Incumbent Speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates, the new acting Governor Marvin Mandel, so his support and campaign money dwindled. In the meantime, Agnew's insistence for "a declaration of war with the black community" started by black militant groups and white communities clashing, outside of Baltimore (T. D'Alesandro, personal communication, May 2007; M. Mandel, personal communication, July 12, 2007). General George M. Geston from the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment Armory post was considered a loyal supporter of Governor Agnew implementing protocols by assisting with federalizing the National Guard and arresting those out in public after curfew (Csicsek, 2011, p. 72). Schaefer explains that Mayor D'Alesandro was lenient in penalizing blacks during the riots due to his likeness for the black community, gentle demeanor, and conscious attitude empathizing with blacks mourning the loss of King; this is in direct contrast to Governor Agnew's tough facade during the riots that won him the VP nomination, only later to resign in disgrace due to charges of political corruption and tax evasion (W. Schaefer, personal communication, 2007). Unfortunately, lack of community and civic leaders in Baltimore during the 1960s left much work to be completed to enforce equality. In 2014 and 2015, parallels to Baltimore in the 1960s were strikingly evident with the deaths of Freddie Gray



in Baltimore and Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO. Riots broke out in Baltimore in 2015, over 2,000 National Guard troops were dispatched to the city and again, pre-existing conditions of urban blight, poor economic conditions, and renewed tensions between police and blacks were the root of the problem; the death of innocent black men was a catapult to come knocking on the doors of residents in Baltimore, reminding them that equality is for all Americans and that Civil Rights are Equal Rights.

President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty and Civil Rights oriented programs sought to raise economic standards of minorities, but through its anti-poverty stance, unintentionally affected the Baltimore, Detroit, and Newark riots and formed relations with the NAACP and National Urban League. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 established job training and created Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) through coordination of the newly minted Office of Economic Opportunity. The Newark Community Union Project (NCUP) was one of the protest groups debating joining Newark's War on Poverty Branch. The NCUP easily expanded their beliefs under the anti-poverty umbrella NGO, the New Community Corporation (NCC) due to its autonomous nature (Potorti, 2011, p. 226-245). Therefore, they gained the 'institutional legitimacy' which was previously lacking. As a city, which had accepted the unanimous decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, a decade earlier, ending the legal segregation in public schools, Baltimore also realized the potential of the anti-poverty cause. Similarly, Baltimore's Neighborhood Design Center was a community-based volunteer organization that needed to expand to hire paid staff. With the support of the American Institution of Architects, they partnered with President LBJ's VISTA program which prided itself on assisting "in the development of relevant two-way communication between the community and the professionals [by translating] the needs and demands of the ghetto resident

into design programs that have real significance to him [or her]” (Potorti, 2011, p. 231). By receiving support from VISTA, the Neighborhood Design Center unofficially established themselves with the New Left party. Sadly, President Nixon’s repealing of the Office of Economic Opportunity Act and dismantling of the War on Poverty and LBJ’s Great Society program meant poverty and unemployment rates were increasing (Potorti, 2011 p. 240). This 1964 initiative from LBJ marked its 50th anniversary in 2014, where he proclaimed, ““This administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty in America.”” “[Despite] over \$22 trillion on anti-poverty program”, since then, progress against poverty, “as measured by the government, has been minimal” (Rector & Sheffield, 2014). This illustrates that although progress has been made, additional efforts need to be implemented to continue this work.

Many historians believe that police and law enforcement should study the riots of the 1960s in Newark, Detroit, and Baltimore, the policies of the Civil Rights movement, and the effect of President LBJ’s War on Poverty to prevent future riots, like that in Baltimore in 2015 regarding the deaths of Freddie Gray and Ferguson’s Michael Brown. Systemic racism and oppression have long plagued America before and after the Baltimore 1968 Riots; until society is ready to admit that white privilege and race prejudice exists in most communities, long term solutions will not be attainable. Access and equity is necessary for fairness to trump inequality; affirmative action is not enough to drive minorities to gain educational equity. Mentoring needs to begin at the earliest stages of human development, as advocacy for minority children is often absent. Perhaps, a strong civic leader could emerge from among the political ranks to influence and change the status quo of racism to prevent civil discord and provide harmony to celebrate America’s diversity.

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