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THE ROCHESTER RIOTS
A CRISIS IN CIVIL RIGHTS
JUVENILE DELINQUENCY, OR "CITYATRICS"?

by

McKelvey

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The Rochester Riots

A Crisis in Civil Rights

Juvenile Delinquency, or "Cityatics"?

by Blake McKelvey

"It can't happen in Rochester," declared a resident of suburban Brighton when discussing the rioting in Harlem and Brooklyn last summer. There may have been a few articulate Rochesterians, chiefly inhabitants of the central wards, who would not have subscribed to that opinion in mid-July, and some others who would not have admitted it, but the vast majority firmly believed that this philanthropic community was doing as much as any city in America to meet the needs and aspirations of its 30,000 Negroes. Many citizens, even in the suburbs, were deeply concerned over the corroding effects of prejudice still evident in the community, but since all official spokesmen and most institutional leaders deplored discrimination, it was confidently hoped that continued education would eventually eradicate the malady. The possibility of a riot seemed unthinkable.

There was, as I will try to show, much justification for this confidence. And yet it did happen in Rochester. This emerging metropolis, in which only three years before the Human Relations Commission had proclaimed, as its slogan for 1961, "Rochester Means Equality," was the scene of perhaps the worst riots of this "Hot Summer of Negro Uprisings."

Why, everybody asks, why Rochester?

I am not sure that I have the answer. But I can tell you

why everybody or nearly everybody in Rochester asks it. And perhaps imbedded in that explanation are a few clues to the first question and a few hints for other self-respecting cities eager to avoid a similar outburst. And if rioting could break out in Rochester, and since then in Philadelphia, another improbable place, it may have broader implications that at first appeared.

Rochester is a confident and prosperous community. It has the lowest ratio of unemployment in the state and one of the lowest among all cities in America. It is the home of a distinguished university and has other cultural institutions of merit. It is a proud city, too proud to be blatant about its accomplishments. But not too proud to be concerned about its deficiencies. In fact, its pride springs chiefly from a realization that its distinction is not based on natural advantages but has resulted from a determined effort over many decades to surmount serious deficiencies.

Since the success of that protracted struggle and the lessons it taught have contributed, in my opinion, both to the city's ebullient self-confidence and to its present difficulties, we will look briefly at its history.

Community Background

Rochester had its birth in 1812 as a milltown at the falls of the Genesee, a north-flowing river that emptied ten miles beyond into Lake Ontario. The state-built Erie Canal, opened to Albany on the east in 1823 and completed to Buffalo on the west two years later, crossed the Genesee at Rochester and gave the town its first big boom, making it for two decades the leading flour-milling center in America.

That geographic advantage disappeared, however, as the wheat fields moved west and as newer and larger mills sprang up there, dwarfing those on the Genesee.

Fortunately the canal had brought an inrush of newcomers from abroad, many of whom stopped off at Rochester to ply their trades. Some discovered that the huge lake to the north, if little used for commerce, was a great temperature stabilizer and enabled them to develop prosperous nurseries that became the largest in America and transformed the "Flour City" into the "Flower City." Other newcomers established the clothing, shoe and woodworking industries and introduced a variety of technological specialties. Despite some misgivings, Rochester learned to appreciate its successive waves of newcomers and experienced a rebirth of vitality based on their skills. Yet the prosperity of the city's cosmopolitan upsurge was blasted by the depression of the mid-nineties.

It was in those dark years that Rochester learned its second great lesson. In the midst of many failures, a few firms prospered, notably several with choice patents, such as Eastman and Bausch & Lomb, and, in competitive fields, those that produced quality products. Leaders emerged who saw that to prosper Rochester needed better schools and a technological institute to upgrade the skills of its workers and compensate for deficiencies in its natural resources. To attract and hold talent, it needed more recreational and cultural facilities. And to insure that all would be able to contribute to the common good, it needed welfare agencies that would assist the handicapped in overcoming their difficulties.

Greatly simplified, these were the basic tenets underlying Rochester's newly acquired distinction in the Twentieth Century. In industry, it required technological proficiency; in the civic field, superior services; on the domestic level, contentment and tranquility. Business and professional men, civic and social leaders organized to participate in the common efforts. Ethnic societies vied in the performance of community functions and sought to bring the latest arrivals from their homelands into productive employment and full citizenship. Two national journals published simultaneous articles in 1910 under the title, "Do It For Rochester," and its citizens acquired the not always agreeable status of residents of a marked city.

Despite many ups and downs, Rochester has maintained its high standards for over a half a century. The vicissitudes of two great wars and a protracted depression confirmed its reliance on technological specialties and strengthened its determination to maintain the institutions and activities that contributed to this end. Conscious of the merits of its goals, it may at times have appeared self-righteous; happy in the extent of its accomplishments, it had a tendency to become complacent and sometimes seemed deaf when critics called attention to new deficiencies. Thus, while its volunteer welfare agencies and Community Chest long maintained distinction nationally, the city was slow to recognize the emergence of a slum area in the old immigrant district. Once a deficiency was exposed, however, many in Rochester have had the character to admit it, as in the case of bad housing, and the will to overcome it.

Ethnic Antecedents

This brings us to the antecedents of the present crisis. As an industrial city on the country's northern border, with active east-west rather than north-south communication lines, Rochester from the beginning attracted migrants from the east and abroad, rather than from the south. A small contingent of Negroes, who arrived with the pioneers, comprised three per cent of the population in 1834 when the city was incorporated, but fell to 0.3 per cent of the total as newcomers from Ireland, Germany, Britain, Poland, Italy, and other parts of Europe crowded in during succeeding decades.

Nestled for the most part on the western fringe of the old Third Ward, for many years Rochester's choice residential district, the Negroes early established the Zion A.M.E. Church and, with the support of white friends, periodically revived the memory of Frederick Douglass, the distinguished Negro editor and statesman who had made his home in Rochester from 1847 until 1867. After his departure, some of the more permanent Negro residents formed a Douglass Club and a political organization, but they felt little need for the diverse institutional activity that characterized most immigrant groups, six of which considerably outnumbered the Negroes well into the 1940's. Over the years, Negro families found residence in almost every ward and in most of the surrounding towns, but the Third Ward, where over a fourth of them lived, became the focal center of their activities. Several stores and other establishments operated by Negroes had Clarissa Street addresses, and three of the four churches established as their numbers increased to 3,262 by 1940 (1 per cent of the city's total) likewise located nearby.

The war and the post war years have brought a sudden and radical change to this situation. Migrant workers, trucked north to harvest the fruit and vegetables of neighboring towns on the Ontario shores, wintered in increasing numbers in Rochester and eventually acquired homes and jobs there. Other Negroes, migrating from cities of the east and the middle west, which had received large contingents in the wake of the First World War, likewise drifted into Rochester as word of its favorable employment situation spread. By 1950 they had swollen the total of the city's non-white population to 7,845, and a decade later it reached 23,586 - a sixfold increase in two decades, exceeded only by the Italian migration in the early 1900's.

Community Responses

Unaware of the proportions of this influx, many Rochesterians nevertheless became concerned over the plight of these newcomers. Most of the first wave found lodgement in the blighted district north of the tracks - the old immigrant section, which for decades had harbored fresh arrivals from abroad, many of the last of whom were now ready to move to the suburbs. Crowded into deteriorating structures, amidst strange and often unfriendly neighbors equally baffled by the struggle for survival, some Negroes resorted to violence to improve their lot. Three murders on one block in one week finally alerted the city and prompted it to launch its first public housing project with the hope of providing more satisfactory quarters than those now partially exposed by the glaring light of crime.

Unfortunately the site first chosen for the new project - a spacious tract on the outskirts owned by the city - happened to adjoin

a settlement of one of Rochester's immigrant groups. Proud of their success in surmounting many hardships, most of these people, now full-fledged citizens by birth or adoption, protested the location of "slum-dwellers" or "Niggers" in their neighborhood. Other citizens, fearing that the new housing, if built on the outskirts, would supply only temporary relief in the congested area, urged that the slums be demolished and replaced with modern public housing. That prospect had intrigued many cities and, whatever its wisdom, that course was adopted. Only one voice, that of forthright Rabbi Philip Bernstein, protested the affront to Negroes imbedded in that decision.

Yet the location of Rochester's Hanover Houses, as the new project was named, had some real merits. Set down in the midst of a spreading slum, officials who visited it could not fail to see the wretched character of its surroundings. And although many citizens wished to forget the problem, the fortunate presence^{nearby} of the Baden Street settlement, one of the city's most alert agencies, sufficed to dispel complacency.

A mounting influx of Negroes from the south and from other cities was transforming that Seventh Ward area. The older Negro community in the Third Ward watched these developments with consternation. Dances at the Montgomery Neighborhood Center on Clarissa Street were occasionally disrupted by invading youths from across the city; even church and welfare leaders had difficulty maintaining harmony and cooperation. Soon a Negro leader in the more populous Seventh Ward captured control of the N.A.A.C.P. by branding his predecessors as "Uncle Toms." But as the tempo of in-migration speeded up, the "Nephews"

themselves became "Uncles" in a rapid succession of highly vocal insurrections that further undermined stability.

Contributing to that instability was the slow progress of the city's first urban development program. Hopefully launched in 1953 to eradicate the slums that now surrounded Hanover Houses, the Chatham Gardens project only reached completion a full decade later. Because of the delay, Rochester met the challenge of finding shelter for the displaced families with greater success than most cities, yet as these migrants sought new homes - in competition with the continued influx of Negroes and, in the 1950's, with the Puerto Ricans as well - they crowded into every available nook on the outer fringe of the central business district. Newcomers soon outnumbered the oldtimers in the Third Ward. Together they would outnumber the whites by 1960 in each of the six census tracts bordering the business core.

Negro children multiplied even more rapidly. They increased so spectacularly that the percentage of Negroes who were 21 and over dropped from 70.2 in 1940 to 52.4 in 1960. The median age of Negroes in Rochester dropped in the '50's from 28.1 to 22.0, while that of the whites rose from 34.7 to 35.8. What alarmed many teachers, however, was the turnover of pupils; thus at School No. 3, over 90 per cent Negro, 40 per cent of the registrants of September 1955 had moved away and were replaced by newcomers before the next February. The urgent need for a new school to relieve congestion in that district was recognized and the construction of a new No. 2 was commenced, but how could one teach a moving column of youngsters, troubled educators asked, when less than half attended throughout the year!

Rochester was reluctantly becoming aware of some disturbing aspect of its situation. A series of probing articles in the Times-Union in June 1960 contributed to this awakening. The "New Negro," Desmond Stone and Jack Garmond declared, does not want "help" or "better treatment," but "equality." An influx of middle-class professionals and scientists had brought a sudden growth in N.A.A.C.P. membership and new tension to all its deliberations. Although the Council of Social Agencies had campaigned for several years for the establishment of a local office of the State Commission Against Discrimination (SCAD), the community's traditional opposition to outside regulation prompted the creation, instead, of the Monroe County Human Relations Committee in 1960. Soon renamed a Commission by legislative act, it had authority to press for increased opportunities for Negro employment, to promote training programs, to provide consulting services to employers and union leaders and counseling services to Negro workers and job seekers. The staff, however, was handicapped from the start by the hostility of those who saw the Commission as a device to escape enforcement of the law. Stung by the charge that it had no teeth, the Commission urged that the city invite the state to open a SCAD office in Rochester; its early establishment assured legal backing for the Commission's recommendations but failed to eradicate suspicion in some quarters.

Meanwhile the Rochester Area Council of Churches reactivated its Commission on Race and Religion by naming Mrs. Harper Sibley as chairman. A gracious host for many years to visiting Negroes and to representatives of other unpopular minorities, Mrs. Sibley's zeal for the cause had great

persuasive power. A Women's Human Relations Council, formed in the early fifties by representatives of forty organizations, drafted a pledge to welcome Negroes as neighbors, which it circulated in many churches and synagogues, securing thousands of signatures. Negro and white clergymen and choirs occasionally exchanged places in gestures of good will. A few Negroes, increasingly resentful of any patronizing tone dismissed these measures as hypocritical and protested further when Rochester received the first World Brotherhood Award in 1958, but that protest was not considered timely.

It must have been difficult for newly arrived Negroes to avoid cynicism in the midst of house hunting. A 1957 study of recent Negro penetration of white residential areas in the Rochester district tabulated the experiences of 57 families, only 16 of whom had met with active hostility, yet the resistance was apparently sufficient to steer most newcomers into the less salubrious areas. As the concentration in the two blighted areas increased, forthright champions of equality at the university and in various churches endeavored to assist middle-class Negroes in finding more suitable homes. Coordinated by the N.A.A.C.P., these groups prepared lists of home owners willing to sell to Negroes. Publicity for those who won a favorable reception in their new neighborhoods did not, however, diminish the resentment of those who experienced too many rebuffs to persist. Rochester, some critics charged, was granted ^{token} token rather than substantive integration.

Yet many conscientious white citizens, advocates of equal opportunities for Negroes, as well as for all other residents, had a sense of progress in the latter direction. Great pains were taken to achieve an

even balance between the races in Chatham Gardens, which was designed to symbolize the community's endorsement of integration. The opening of School No. 2, adjoining the No. 3 district on the west, and the rapid construction of another new school across the city to serve Chatham Gardens and Hanover Houses supplied attractive modern facilities for many culturally deprived children in mixed areas. Able teachers were assigned to these schools and encouraged to apply new techniques to hold the interest of their pupils. The principal at No. 14 School in another heavily non-white district initiated a revision of the social studies program to bring the contributions Negroes have made to American life more clearly into view. That experiment won public approval and inspired the Museum of Arts and Sciences to stage an exhibit of local Negro contributions. The exhibit opened with a reception honoring the increased number of Negroes in the professions in Rochester and featuring a playlet by a mixed class from No. 14 School.

If the sponsors of most of these programs had the middle-class Negro in mind, others were equally concerned about unskilled workers and youths who had not yet found their places. With many other cities Rochester suffered an increase in juvenile delinquency and faced a growing roster of unemployed teenagers, chiefly school dropouts. Neither of these problems was exclusively Negro, however, and the programs devised to meet them were not segregated. Nevertheless when the new City-County Youth Board appointed an executive director in August 1961, he promptly voiced concern for the underprivileged youths in the Negro areas and gave support to three of the city's five settlement houses as they developed recreational and group-work programs

to meet the needs of Negroes in their neighborhoods.

These measures all bespoke a will on the part of many Rochesterians to extend the privileges of equal citizenship to Negroes in the community. To demonstrate their fair-mindedness and, of course, to attract support, both political parties named Negroes to elective or appointive offices. When the Democrats carried the city in 1961 - an unexpected overturn - Mrs. Constance Mitchell and Maxwell Walters became^{the} first Negro supervisors of the Third and Seventh Wards, respectively.

Although her seat was with the minority on the county board, Mrs. Mitchell became an articulate spokesman for Negroes throughout the community. Many of her admirers, both white and black, hoped that she would be able to supply effective leadership - yet they could not agree on what they meant by that term. Most whites wanted her to lead an orderly and progressive movement of Negroes to better their lot; many blacks wanted her to launch an unrestrained attack on all discriminatory practices. It would have been a hard decision, but circumstances did not permit a clear choice.

A Forewarning of Trouble

The mounting temper of Negro protest throughout the country had its effect in Rochester as well. Rumblings of discontent among the unemployed, in a city of relatively full employment, focussed attention on the fact that many of them were Negroes. The explanation, that they lacked skills useful to a technological city, prompted some to move away, but others more than filled their places, and the feeling of unrest mounted. Often the police were calledⁱⁿ to quell a disturbance in the Negro

districts, and the crime ratios, particularly in the Seventh Ward, continued to climb. Yet the press had agreed to restrict its mention of the race or color of offenders to those cases where it would assist in an arrest, and the public was not alarmed.

A series of loosely related incidents shattered the community's apathy. The trouble started in August 1962 when Rufus Fairwell, a 28-year old Negro, suffered two fractured vertebrae in a struggle with two policemen who attempted to arrest him as he closed the service station at which he was employed. Alleging that Fairwell had refused to identify himself and then had resisted arrest, the officers had taken him forcibly to headquarters, where as Fairwell claimed he was further beaten and maltreated. Popular indignation mounted when the grand jury cleared both Fairwell and the two policemen of assault charges. A United Action Committee, representing various portions of the Negro community and such mixed groups as the N.A.A.C.P., the Human Relations Commission, the Catholic Interracial Council, and the Federation of Churches, appealed for an investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice and raised a Rufus Fairwell fund to finance the case.

While the situation was under review, a second case developed when the police, called to investigate a report of firearms at a Black Muslim gathering in January, became engaged in a scuffle with several Negroes who refused to permit them to interrupt a religious meeting. The police brought charges of riot and third-degree assault against those who resisted arrest, but Malcolm X, the national leader of the sect, used the incident to advantage in gaining publicity for his cause, which challenged other leaders in the local Negro community.

The crisis deepened when, three weeks later, A.C. White, a Negro charged with drunken driving, resisted arrest and suffered a fractured arm among other injuries that took him to the hospital. Amid a rising clamor, Chief of Police William M. Lombard suspended the four policemen involved in the arrest of White, pending further investigation; two weeks later, after reading the report, Lombard reinstated the men with full pay. That action brought vigorous protests from many directions and drew out hundreds of excited citizens, white and black, for turbulent mass meetings.

It was at this point that a small group, calling itself the Integrated Non-Violence Committee, secured a pledge from City Manager Porter Homer that an impartial committee of citizens would be permitted to review the findings of the White investigation. After some debate the City Council passed an ordinance creating a Police Advisory Board, similar to the pioneer body of that sort in Philadelphia. Although A.C. White preferred and later withdrew civil charges against the police, and the court proceedings continued in the Fairwell and Black Muslim cases, thus removing them from the Advisory Board's jurisdiction, the City Manager's prompt action in appointing the Board brought a welcome relaxation of tension.

Progress in Integration

The police were not the only citizens placed on the spot or under review by the new intensity of Negro protest. Churches, schools, social agencies, employers, and labor unions - all faced a critical re-examination either by themselves or by outsiders. Several hopeful new responses to the problem resulted.

Almost the first action of the new Youth Board was to launch a program of counseling for dropouts designed to steer them back to school or into training courses. It opened a job-counseling center in Main Street in April 1962 and established a trainee program that soon enrolled 60 youths, most of them Negroes with employment problems. An outreach program, started by the Y.M.C.A. two years before, maintained a street worker who endeavored to draw the unemployed youths into constructive programs. Realizing that these efforts were only a beginning, the Youth Board invited a number of civic leaders and social workers to attend a special workshop in September 1963. Held at Syracuse, in order to assure an uninterrupted discussion of Rochester's problems, the workshop recommended an extension of Rochester's counseling services in co-operation with existing settlements and a speedy provision of the training facilities called for under the Manpower Development Training Act (MDTA) of 1962.

These recommendations soon brought results. Montgomery Center, which had recently opened a modern new building, product of a city-wide drive, made its facilities available for job counseling interviews and engaged a new worker to seek out applicants and to develop other contacts in the field in order to broaden the center's effectiveness. The Board of Education and the State Employment Service cooperated in the opening of the job-training center in the old City Hall Annex. After a careful survey of the city's job needs, the new program, supported by MDTA funds, prepared to offer instruction in 27 categories of jobs to some 3,000 trainees during the next year.

In similar fashion the Human Relations Commission and the

Rochester Housing Authority prepared to attack the housing problem of Negro slum dwellers. The Commission compiled a list of houses available for sale or lease to Negroes and investigated complaints of discriminatory practices. After a probing study of the housing needs of Negroes in the city, it collaborated with the Housing Authority in a drive to promote the repair and upgrading of dilapidated but sound houses and applauded the Authority's plan for the acquisition of scattered units of public housing for low-income families. The Authority acquired a site on the southern edge of the Third Ward for the Kennedy Towers project to house senior citizens in high-rise apartments and large families in two-story buildings. It proposed here, as at Chatham Gardens, to promote the goal of an integrated community.

Troubled by the mounting clamor against discrimination, a group of public-spirited industrialists, including the presidents of some major companies, held a number of informal conferences over a period of several months with Negro leaders and other civil-rights spokesmen in an endeavor to promote harmony and mutual understanding. Although the group formulated no specific programs, several of its members re-examined the employment practices of their firms and endeavored to assure Negroes of equitable treatment. Since most of the available jobs would call for special skills, the group re-emphasized the need for training programs, both in the plants and in the schools. Its deliberations helped to create a favorable climate for civil-rights action.

Some civil-rights leaders maintained that it was the unions

rather than management that blocked Negroes from industrial jobs. Many labor unions denied the charge, pointing to the Negro's lack of the essential skills. Tiring of the senseless exchange of charges, several leaders of both groups finally agreed to meet in a Civil-Rights Seminar sponsored by the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations and held in the Board Room of the Rochester Public Library. There in ten weekly sessions, a dozen leaders of the city's A.F.L.-C.I.O. Council and several representatives of the coordinating committee of local civil-rights groups explored together the problems and opportunities of members of various unions. Although, again, no concrete proposals emerged, the sessions engendered a more co-operative approach to the problems involved.

The Youth Board enlisted the support of varied church groups in another constructive program happily entitled, "Accent on Understanding." Under this plan a number of Negro and white families agreed to an exchange of one or more of their children who spent several days and nights in the homes of their brother or sister hosts and then entertained them in their own homes. Parents as well as children acquired new perspectives from this experiment, and warm new contacts within the larger metropolitan community.

Perhaps the most dramatic move in this field was that made by the Board of Education when, in September 1963, it released a tentative proposal for the reduction of defacto segregation. The plan, submitted to the New York State Commissioner of Education in response to his request for local action in this field, won praise as the most forthright of any received by that office. It described.

the existing situation, in which seven (out of 43) elementary schools had non-white enrollments in excess of 50 per cent, three of them in excess of 90 per cent, and announced plans for a voluntary open enrollment scheme, which would permit the transfer of selected pupils from the schools showing a marked predominance of non-whites to those showing a marked deficiency. The plan outlined further steps to be taken in the years ahead, including the adaption of the Princeton plan for the consolidation of some districts and the establishment of new junior high schools in locations that would promote integration. It suggested other possible approaches to the problem and gave assurance that the public schools were actively seeking to extend the best educational facilities possible to every child.

Unfortunately the release of these plans and the subsequent announcement that the parents of 1,586 children had applied for transfer brought an outburst of protests from some citizens. Although, because of insufficient room in the 16 schools designated to receive them, only 482 Negro pupils were finally included in the transfer plan, parents in two districts, dominated by an ethnic group that had only recently surmounted hostile and discriminatory practices, instituted legal suits to safeguard their schools from the invasion. Shocked by the open display of bigotry, both local editors and many clergymen as well as educators spoke out strongly in the Board's defense and disparaged the affront to the Negro.

Of course that affront was only the last of many that were not soon to be forgotten. Among the numerous agencies engaged in the campaign against discrimination, those that enrolled many Negroes tended

now to become more exclusively non-white. The local chapter of the N.A.A.C.P. and the newly established CORE became more militant and relegated their white members to the back seats. Some Negroes who attracted favor from the white community - a Junior Chamber award, for example, lost stature among their fellows. Only in the fields of the arts, sports, and politics, where distinction had to be won competitively, was public honor held without a loss of status in the Negro community - as William Wardfield, the Rochester-born baritone, Walter Dukes and Luke Easter on the playing field, and Mrs. Mitchell in politics, demonstrated.

Somewhat bewildered by this unexpected rejection of their friendly overtures, few of the Negro's white friends saw it as a measure of the depth of his humiliation or comprehended the intensity of his reaction to all forms of patronage. It was easier for white citizens to recognize and support the Negro's claim to equal rights than it was to understand his mounting resentment against the indignities that faced him on all sides.

But if white Rochesterians, confident of their tolerance and humanity, were unprepared for the rioting that started on a hot Friday night in July, most of the city's Negroes were equally astonished and unprepared.

A few of the troubled leaders had warned of mounting tension, but the community seemed ready to undertake nearly all the programs they asked. It more than doubled the Youth Board's budget and increased the staff on the Human Relations Commission. Its SCAD office was processing all complaints promptly, and the Police Advisory Board, receiving few

cases of physical brutality, was also investigating and making informal recommendations on those involving harrassment or other indignities. Baden Street Settlement organized a new Neighborhood Development Department and employed caseworkers to consider the problems of individual residents and field and case workers to help build a sense of community spirit. Montgomery Center, in launching a new program of neighborhood organization, engaged Mrs. Mitchell as its director and enlisted volunteers for home visitations designed to welcome newcomers in the area and to acquaint them with the center's activities.

Other social agencies serving the blighted districts redoubled their efforts. The city opened a new playground in the Seventh Ward and pressed the preparation of plans for the redevelopment of the old Third Ward area. Its Department of Urban Renewal and Economic Development opened a branch office in that district and invited residents to attend group meetings or just to drop in and consult representatives on the staff. The Department of Public Works announced a special clean-up program and revised the schedule of its weekly pickup trucks to meet the special needs of the congested districts. Even the police displayed a readiness to cooperate with the Advisory Board and with representatives of Negro Groups, and scheduled a course at the Police Academy to improve the attitude as well as the effectiveness of the officers assigned to mixed areas. They hastened to grant the application of the Mothers' Improvement Association for a street-dance permit on the evening of July 24 when temperatures in the upper 80's assured a good turnout from the congested homes in that Joseph Avenue district.

Although no one expected an outbreak in Rochester, the press that day had carried several articles on the riots in Harlem and Brooklyn. The Democrat sent Earl Caldwell, a young Negro recently added to its staff, to New York to study and report on racial problems there; Editor Clif Carpenter hastily drafted an editorial for the next morning's paper in which he endorsed Mayor Wagner's remark that "Law and order are the Negro's best friend" but warned that "the Civil Rights Act alone will not be a magic cure-all." A banner headline on the first page of the Democrat, "Negro Mobs Riot Here," greeted surprised householders the next morning, July 25, and transformed Rochester from its quiet post on the sidelines to the turbulent center of the civil-rights stage.

The Rochester Riots

The incident that precipitated the first riot was a commonplace one, and the police who responded to a call to remove a drunken man from the street dance at 11:30 P.M. anticipated no trouble. When a number of young Negroes intervened to prevent the arrest, one of the policemen radioed for reinforcements. The crowd became more disorderly during the delay and, although some Negroes tried to pacify the growing throng, others started throwing bottles and rocks. When fifteen cars and some 35 officers converged on the area, they arrested six youths who appeared to be leading the disturbance. Unfortunately the reinforcements included one or more K-9 Corps teams, and when the crowd, which had begun to disperse, saw one of the police dogs leap from its cage, indignation flared. A rumor that the police dog bit a Negro child (later denied) spread rapidly, and soon the sound of breaking glass down the street rekindled excitement and transformed the crowd into a mob of looters, which quickly spread throughout the Seventh Ward area.

Police Chief Lombard hastened to the scene at 1 A.M. Hoping that a conciliatory attitude would quiet the disturbance, he called his men back and advanced alone to reason with the mob, urging them to go home. But it was too late for reason to prevail, and the Chief, whose car was overturned and set afire, escaped serious injury only with the aid of some friendly Negroes. Other efforts to pacify the mob proved equally futile. Neither Father Gabre K. Michael, a priest in the flowing robes of the Ethiopian Church, nor Mrs. Mildred Johnson, who long operated a free employment agency in the area for her fellow Negroes, could command attention. Supervisor Walters toured the area in a sound truck urging the crowds to go home, but neither his pleas nor those of Mrs. Mitchell, who hastened over from the west side, proved effective.

Repeated calls for reinforcements brought a total of some 250 officers onto the scene as the night wore on. They included most of the city's available policemen and contingents from suburban Brighton and Greece as well as sheriff's deputies. Warned not to use their guns, except in self-defense, the police found themselves unable to control the racing throngs, who pillaged the stores lining Joseph Avenue, formerly a Jewish district with many of its old merchants still in business, and spread into neighboring streets. Fire fighters, called to the scene in a precautionary move, were restrained from using their hoses for fear of aggravating the situation, but when two threatening crowds of Negroes and whites began to converge near the railroad station, they were dispersed by a stream of water and the use of tear gas. Despite the arrest of a hundred looters, the rioting continued unabated until dawn, when an ominous quiet finally settled over the devastated

area.

While most Rochesterians discussed the shocking news of the riots in the privacy of their homes on Saturday morning and speculated on the truth or falsity of innumerable rumors - of hoodlum gangs, of outside agitators, of a white backlash - Mayor Frank Lamb and City Manager Porter Homer met with other officials to lay plans for the weekend. Chief Lombard and Sheriff Albert Skinner had already sent a request to Albany for State Police assistance and the first contingent had begun to arrive that morning. To prevent another night of violence, City Manager Homer announced a curfew to start at 8:00 that evening and continue until 7:00 the next morning and on subsequent nights until further notice. The curfew, applied to the entire city, banned all street traffic and sought to prevent an influx of new trouble makers, the movement of cars, and the congestion of crowds. At the city's request, the state liquor authority ordered all bars and liquor stores closed for the duration; the transit company suspended operations during the curfew hours.

Civil rights leaders, white and black, clergymen, social workers, and other conscientious citizens met in hastily called conferences throughout the day and sent earnest messages to the mayor and other officials, pleading for a conciliatory policy. Mayor Lamb, ready to consider responsible action, became somewhat annoyed by the flood of conflicting "demands" from groups that claimed no control or influence over the rioters. A restoration of law and order was the first requirement, he declared, before new policies could be considered. Chief Lombard's comment, that "It was a hot night and they erupted," indicated

a willingness to dismiss the riot as an unfortunate incident for which no one was responsible, but neither he nor the other officials felt certain that the trouble had subsided. Indeed, tension mounted as each passing hour brought additional reports of the damages suffered and a graver view of the fury of the rioters. Numerous white families opened their homes to the children of their Negro friends.

The eruption of new and still more violent rioting on Saturday night answered several questions but raised many new ones. The spontaneous character of the first outbreak could not explain its spread twenty hours later in the old Third Ward and into other parts of the city. Angry groups of malcontents boldly seized the lead there, and reckless gangs assembled an arsenal of Molotov fire bombs on the upper floor of the Hanover Houses from which they pelted the police and firemen in the streets below. While the curfew checked the flow of traffic and effectively kept most whites out of the troubled areas, it failed to restrain the marauding bands of Negro youths who again shattered store windows and assisted by adults looted the contents of many establishments on South Plymouth, Clarissa, and Jefferson streets in the Third Ward and in other mixed business districts. Again only the stores of white merchants were attacked, though not all of these were looted since the Negro friends of some of these merchants now stood boldly on guard.

Again neither the pleas of Negro leaders nor those of their civil-rights friends had any effect. By midnight some 550 police officers were patrolling the streets, 200 from the exhausted ranks of the city police, another 50 from Monroe and neighboring county forces, but the great majority, state troopers who had been arriving in increasing numbers

during the day. A show of force by a column of deputies marching along Clarissa, Joseph, and several other streets served to drive residents indoors for a time, but it failed to check the occasional descent of a bottle or brick from an upper window. Violence flared at many points, resulting eventually in four deaths - three of them caused by the flaming crash of a helicopter in which the county director of civil defense (who later died of injuries suffered in the crash) was attempting to follow the course of the riot.

Now thoroughly alarmed by the extent and vicious character of the riots, the police abandoned some of their earlier restraints. They attempted to drive bottle throwers (some filled with gasoline) from the upper floors of Hanover Houses with tear gas and by dousing them with high-pressure streams of water, injuring some innocent inhabitants in the process. They rounded up another 200 rioters and some 600 more as curfew violators. And as the rioting continued into the early hours of Sunday morning, the city called in desperation for a mobilization of the National Guard to assist the exhausted police officers.

Sunday was a grim day in Rochester as 1,500 helmeted militiamen moved in and established headquarters. City officials prepared to deal more harshly with all rioters, or hoodlums, as they were now angrily described. Accounts of the injuries suffered by 35 policemen, and by other 300 persons treated in area hospitals, strengthened the public's resolve to bring the rioting to an end. Even Mrs. Sibley besieged by many advocates of long-range reforms, finally issued a statement in which she declared that "disregard for law and order ... is absolutely

intolerable" and must be halted before new advances can be made in correcting "the injustices and inequalities that exist for Negroes in Rochester."

While support for a firm stand for law and order predominated some citizens urged that it can be accompanied by a frank recognition of the community's responsibility for earlier injustices towards Negroes. A group of clergymen meeting at the Colgate-Rochester Divinity School formulated a statement admonishing Christians to "Judge not that ye not be judged" and urged all citizens to humbly accept their own share of guilt for the uprising. Rev. Arthur L. Whittaker of Mt. Olivet Baptist Church in the Third Ward warned that while "violence cannot be condoned, it must be understood;" Mrs. Mitchell in a statement broadcast repeatedly that evening pleaded that all white Rochesterians would now listen and comprehend the Negro uprising as an unreasoned but deeply felt protest against the indignities suffered by Negroes in this city and throughout America.

Confined to their homes for the third night of curfew, many citizens pondered and debated the causes and character of the riots. Some could agree with one Negro who, when asked, "What are you people going to do about it?" replied indignantly that the problem was not one for "you people" but for all Americans to solve. Many citizens sympathized with the dilemmas of merchants in the devastated areas who were debating whether to rebuild or to flee to a suburban plaza; their decisions would affect the course of trade in the expanding metropolis, but more to the point, it would influence future efforts to integrate these districts. Reports of the removal of several white families from

their Chatham Garden apartments posed an immediate threat to that objective. Was the battle for civil rights, some asked, destined to defeat its goals?

Fortunately Rochester enjoyed a night of relative quiet on Sunday. One contingent of 12 trucks loaded with armed guardsmen moved slowly through the earlier battle areas in a show of force that evening, but otherwise these men were held in reserve, while the city and state police patrolled the streets. Few signs of trouble appeared as most residents even in the congested Negro districts kept to their porches or indoors. Suburbanites were able the next morning to move freely into town for the first active business day since the outbreak of the riots, and most Rochesterians were reassured by the normal appearance of the central business district. Those who drove slowly along the several devastated streets saw dejected merchants busy installing sheets of plywood in show windows not already boarded up, while the Negro and white residents hastened quietly about their business. Most of the children reported promptly to board the day-camp buses that left Montgomery and Baden Street settlements for the parks that day, and the directors of these and other agencies assembled for hastily called luncheon meetings to consider the need for remedial action.

The Aftermath

As tension eased on Monday, city officials lifted the curfew but announced their determination to maintain law and order by all necessary means. Convinced that the display of force on Sunday night had been the major factor in restoring peace, the city kept all units on the alert throughout the week. Meanwhile civic leaders, both

official and private, endeavored to sift the causes and assess the effects of the riots and to determine the community's future course.

Just who were the rioters, many asked. A tabulation of arrests revealed that a total of 976 had been taken into custody, 792 of them Negroes, 153 whites, and 31 Puerto Ricans; 85 were women, 14 of them white. The courts quickly released 659 on suspended sentences, but remanded the cases of 317 for grand-jury action on riot or felony charges. The prisoners ranged in age from 15 to 70, with the largest group, 188, in the 25 to 29 age bracket; only 166 were listed as teenagers, and they comprised the major part of the 243 who declared themselves unemployed. A closer study of 374 arrested during the height of the riots revealed that only 35 per cent had been residents of Rochester for ten years or more, a few as many as twenty years; 18 per cent had come to Rochester within the year.

Although these details failed to shed much light on the causes of the riots, they directed public attention to the human factors involved. The hasty release of the majority under suspended sentences relieved the serious congestion that prevailed in the jail and the county penitentiary during the weekend of the crisis; a reduction in the amount of bail required permitted some 50 others to secure a temporary release. To assure fair treatment to those still confined, the Monroe County Bar Association announced an offer by 37 of its members to give free legal advice to anyone who requested it.

As property owners in the riot areas assessed their losses, several announced plans to sue for a full recovery from the city. Alarmed at the prospect of meeting claims for damages, variously estimated at

between \$700,000 and \$3,000,000 on some 204 pillaged stores, the city learned that its insurance agent, who had covered it up to \$50,000 for riot losses, intended to apply that limit to the total rather than to each claim for damages. Facing the prospect of lengthy legal battles, with uncertain liabilities to be added to the increased costs for police services and the charges for the National Guard units, Rochester officials nevertheless seized the occasion to announce without scarcely a murmur of protest the long-debated salary increases sought by the police and extended the same benefits to the firemen whose conduct during the riots had been equally steadfast. While adopting a somewhat sterner tone towards potential rioters, the city thus displayed a determination to maintain high standards within the public services as the best means of assuring them to the public.

Fortunately Rochester was in a healthy state economically, well able to absorb severe blows. Its employment for July reached an all-time high of 285,600 in the county, with only 7,400 listed as unemployed. Industrial wages likewise hit a new peak that month, and several local firms, including both Eastman and Xerox, released glowing reports and exciting new plans for expansion. There was no doubt of the city's vitality, or of its capacity to bear the unexpected burdens, and the forthrightness of its leaders in seeking a solution for its recent troubles demonstrated that confidence.

But first it was necessary to determine the nature of its problem - the cause of the riots. Were they an eruption of juvenile spirits on a hot night, aggravated by the prevailing hostility of

of Negroes to police restraints and specifically to the use of police dogs? That theory might have explained the outbreak on Friday night, if it had stopped there. But did the existence of rival local groups, jealous of their reputation among volatile teenagers account for the outbreak of riots the next evening in the Third Ward, or did the spread of violence there and its renewal in a more vicious form in the Seventh Ward reflect activity in Rochester of outside agitators? Had the rapid influx of unskilled Negroes, many of whom were unable to find jobs to support their numerous children, supplied tinder for the flames, and had the failure of the old established Negro and community institutions to reach the newcomers left them beyond restraint?

A masterly series of articles by Desmond Stone in the Times-Union probed deeply into these and other causes of the riots. Some were clearly beyond the city's control, notably the rumored presence of outside instigators, which the F.B.I. promptly undertook to investigate, but Stone's analysis pointed up several fields in which a responsible community could take action. First was the obligation to hear and make a generous response to non-violent protests if future outbreaks were to be avoided. Second was the challenge to absorb a flood of newcomers whose numbers seemed destined to increase as the years progressed. Third was the startling fact, uncovered by a Bureau of Municipal Research study, that the income gap between Negro and white families in Rochester was spreading, rather than narrowing as in other New York State cities, despite the opening of many new jobs. And if this trend

reflected the sudden influx of young and unskilled workers, it also emphasized Stone's fourth major point, that the city's educational facilities would have to be put to a fuller use. Fifth in order but not in importance was the development and recognition of Negro leaders, men and women able to cooperate in appealing to and raising the aspirations of young Negroes of all ranks. Last in Stone's series, but first in the minds of many Negroes, was their suspicion of the police, a racial heritage, product of a century of oppression and a still longer period of enslavement.

These sobering articles helped to restore the city's balance and directed its attention to some old deficiencies that now appeared more serious. Many Rochesterians could recognize that the aging city's delay in eradicating the ring of decay that surrounded its business core, plus the defacto segregation there of a mushrooming Negro population, had provided contributing causes, which could hopefully be eliminated. And, if little could be done about the influx of newcomers, institutionally minded Rochesterians could at least do much to hasten their adjustment to the community. Perhaps self-respecting citizens as well as police officers could learn to address their fellow citizens, even if colored, as Sir or Mister rather than Boy or You People.

Accordingly, in the weeks that followed the riots, Rochesterians moved on several levels to attack the problems violence had exposed. Although some alert journalists had recorded and published a few unhappy remarks made by distraught

officials in the midst of the crisis, and had matched them against other extreme statements by Negro and civil-rights leaders, most citizens managed to come through the ordeal with fairly even tempers and displayed a cordial desire to cooperate in eradicating the ugly blotch on the community's record.

Indeed, instead of deep hostilities predicted during the riots, the riots served to bring Negroes and whites together as never before. Many merchants determined to remodel and reopen their pillaged stores; some of the white families in Chatham Gardens and other mixed areas announced their intention to renew their leases. Responsible Negro leaders hailed these developments as a move towards the restoration of the commercial and residential values of their districts and as assurance of continued integration. A group of civic and business leaders seized the occasion to publicize the creation of a revolving fund to promote the purchase and improvement of homes and other properties by Negroes in all parts of the city, assuring them an opportunity to borrow at reasonable interest rates. The Rochester Convention Bureau successfully concluded its negotiations to bring the national convention of Negro Elks to Rochester in 1967 and hastily announced its triumph over rival bids from Chicago and New York.

All social agencies concerned with the problem endeavored to strengthen their programs. The Human Relations Commission submitted a revised budget tripling its request for funds from the county in order to open and staff two district offices in the blighted districts and to expand its research activities. The Police Advisory Board

prepared to tackle a heavy schedule of hearings necessitated by the numerous cases growing out of the riots. Representatives of the local office of the State Labor Department's Division of Employment attended several neighborhood meetings in Negro areas and seized every opportunity to publicize the character of the training programs and to encourage a registration for jobs. The city released a report on the number of actions it had taken during the previous six months against absentee landlords in slum areas who had neglected to keep their properties in repair, and the council appropriated additional funds to press the attack on delinquent slumlords in the future.

Of course the Youth Board and the directors of both Baden Street and Montgomery settlements were deeply concerned over the riots. Each held lengthy conferences to determine the most effective measures for remedial action. The Montgomery Center, for example, scheduled a board meeting at which Mrs. Mitchell introduced a score of young men who had participated in the riots and who attended at her invitation to present their grievances in person. There in a four-day session they supplied a moving if sometimes distorted documentation of the frustrations suffered by young and unskilled Negro job hunters, of the indignities encountered by Negro house hunters, of the mistreatment (they put it more strongly) Negroes received from the police, of the overcharging Negroes encountered because of high rentals and other forms of discrimination, and of the lack of facilities for recreation in the congested areas.

Among those who attended that meeting and other Negro

gatherings in the weeks that followed were a half-dozen "freedom riders" from the south. Followers of Martin Luther King, they had come north that day to try to persuade the Negroes of Rochester that rioting would destroy the gains for civil rights won by non-violent methods in the south. With an eloquence born of experience, they appealed for a reliance on non-violent techniques; they warned the whites of Rochester that Negroes throughout the land had human limitations as well as human aspirations, but predicted that a fair recognition of their rights would assure their acceptance of the responsibilities of citizens.

Although no organized action, official or voluntary, could fully answer the basic Negro objective - for recognition and respect as men and women - these meetings did gratify the Negro's secondary desire to make his grievances heard. And by treating the participants of the riots as men with grievances, rather than as hoodlums, these meetings helped to transform potential juvenile delinquents into civil-rights advocates. Police Chief Lombard saw the merit of the approach, and granted a hearing to representatives to two Negro gangs who sought the release of some of their ^{imprisoned} members as rioters. Although the young men received no concessions, other than the recognition as young men with the right to be heard, their attitudes began to change. With the encouragement of Mrs. Mitchell and others, the leaders of four gangs of Negro youths met and declared a truce and mapped a program for the improvement of both east- and west-side districts.

Both the N.A.A.C.P. and CORE, disturbed by their impotency during the riots, endeavored to establish new channels of communication

With the great mass of Negroes who seldom attended meetings or joined societies or churches. The N.A.A.C.P. opened a new office in the Third Ward and CORE maintained one in the Seventh; both, staffed by volunteers, endeavored to reach and serve the people near their homes.

Two encouraging developments also marked the middle-class Negro's response to the riots. If a major cause was the great mass of unemployed and disgruntled teenagers, then some of their elders had a responsibility to supply leadership, Mrs. Johnson declared. A gathering of Negro adults at Baden Street Settlement resulted in the organization of a Big Brother and Big Sister movement with 40 men and 25 women volunteers to become the counselors, each of one teenager lacking a father or a mother to guide them. The movement, which represented a move by Negroes to care for their own young people, as other ethnic groups had done in earlier decades, was loudly applauded, but the task promised to be a long and tedious one. Another group formed a Voter Registration Committee and launched a program to register an additional 10,000 Negroes in Monroe County. It, too, faced difficulties in the more congested blocks where many Negroes maintained an instable residence, insufficient to meet the registration requirements. Yet each of these efforts demonstrated an increasing sense of neighborhood responsibility among the Negroes of Rochester and gave promises for the future.

A healthy acceptance of responsibility on all sides was in line with Rochester's traditional approach. When 15 leading industrialists denied that their firms practiced discrimination in hiring, they also agreed to institute an internal check to confirm it. But in a technological city whose industrial expansion would inevitably bring increased automation

new opportunities for employment would have to be sought in clerical and trade fields as well. A small union, charged before the riots with a refusal to admit Negroes to its ranks, hastened now to grant membership to two of them. The enrollment of 125 non-whites in the MDTA program, more than a third of the total registrants in the courses under way in September, demonstrated a restoration in the young Negro's morale.

Yet the job was only begun. The continued resistance in some neighborhoods to the admittance of a few Negro children transferred from predominately non-white schools, and the continued spread of the ring of blight because of the prejudice that held most Negroes within its confines, gave sober warning of the grave problems that still had to be met. Admonitions to Protestants by the Commission on Race and Religion, to Catholics by Bishop James E. Kearney, who called for prayers for "the just recognition of the dignity of every individual," and to the Jews by Rabbis Bernstein and Carp were earnest and solemn, but the translation of high principles and good intentions into everyday practice depended on the uncertain response of the public.

The Board of Education held steadfast to its open enrollment plan as a long-term contribution to the public's enlightenment. And if a complete redevelopment of the blighted districts as wholesome integrated neighborhoods offered the best solution, that indeed was the proclaimed goal of the city's urban redevelopment division. Its achievement, however, would require not only much federal assistance but also a full measure of cooperation among Negroes and whites throughout the broader community, including a welcome to Negro householders in all wards and suburbs. Even that would be tokenism without the opening of opportunities for

qualified Negro job hunters in all factories, trades, and professions, as well as all branches of civil employment. And this in turn called for improved training facilities and, last but not least, a renewed resolve among Negroes to use them.

These are large and visionary goals, but to Rochester, accustomed to transforming deficiencies into advantages, they should not seem impossible. If it can convert its riots, as Desmond Stone suggested, from a community scar into a community spur, it may enlist enough cooperative energies in behalf of civil rights to resolve these related problems. All American cities have slum areas where the triple maladies of segregation, urban decay, and juvenile delinquency pose a serious threat. These are the basic characteristics of a stage in urban growth that calls for the development of a new approach, which, if I may coin a word, can be termed cityiatrics. By linking the civil rights movement to the objective study and substantive goals of cityiatrics, Rochester may yet release energies for widespread urban redevelopment. This is a challenge worthy of the best efforts of both Negroes and whites and one that will engender mutual respect.



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