

# “Get the big stuff”

Peter Werbe

1967

“The chickens are coming home to roost”

—Malcolm X, Nov. 22, 1963

Malcolm was right, of course, and the chickens have come home so many ways since that grim day four years ago. Vietnam, Malcolm’s own death, riots across the country and now the biggest chicken of them all—the Detroit riot.

Detroit always does things up in a big way.

The destruction, looting, killing, and violence have been chronicled to such an extent that no repetition is necessary here.

This newspaper has concentrated its observations on the hippie, new left, and avant garde community it serves.

The geographical center of that community—the Warren Forest area near Wayne University—was relatively untouched by the holocaust.

The *Fifth Estate* office at Warren and John Lodge was unharmed as were the adjacent offices of the Artists’ Workshop, Trans-Love, Energies, and the Detroit Committee to End the War in Vietnam. Our newspaper office sported a “soul brother” sign and two large banners were hung from Trans-Love reading “Peace on Earth” and “Burn, Baby, Burn.”

Hippie and political residents of the Warren Forest area reacted to the situation just like their poorer neighbors—they took whatever wasn’t nailed down.

They joined the Negroes and Southern whites in cleaning out the stores on Trumbull and Forest, which now lie in ashes, the Krogers on Second and Prentis and other stores. Looters came back laden with goodies, swapping stories of harrowing experiences with the guardsmen and bartering goods that they had in excess. The mayor was certainly right about the “carnival atmosphere.” Everything was FREE.

Kae Halonen, a resident of W. Hancock, described the scene as that of integrated looting. “There was complete cooperation between the races in their common endeavor,” she said. “There were children carrying toys they never would have been able to afford.”

Detroit’s Communications Company, which distributes leaflets in the area put out a broadside that advertised “Detroit’s Summer Plunder Festival” and advised residents to “Get the Big Stuff” and “Loot—it’s the American Way.” One hippie was reported to have unlocked an abandoned gas station and was pumping free gasoline to anyone who came along.

When asked if looting was not contrary to the hippie philosophy of love, John Sinclair, head of Trans-Love and *Fifth Estate* staffer replied, “We told the merchants before the riot they should give everything away, but they wouldn’t listen.

“It’s a little out of hand, but it’s beautiful,” said one hippie. “It looks like Rome burning,” said another as he observed the city in flames from a rooftop.

Wayne University was untouched by the rioting as was Mixed Media bookstore on Cass Ave. Also unscathed was all of Plum Street, which had protection from the Outlaws Motorcycle Club:

Residents of Prentis, near WSU, report severe abuse at the hands of the Detroit Police the second night of the riot.

Eric Glatz of 669 Prentis told of how police and national guardsmen entered his apartment and struck him several times. An eye witness report of other brutality appears elsewhere in this issue.

The *Fifth Estate* welcomes other first-hand reports of the riot, including illegal experiences. Anonymity of the writer is of course assured.

As I sat typing this story two carloads of Detroit cops in full battle gear pulled up to several citizens peacefully sitting in front of 633 Prentis. As they leaped from their cars they shouted, "Don't you know there is curfew on?" It was 10:15 p.m..

"Stand up and touch your toes!" yelled one cop at those stranded in front of the building.

The cops searched their victims and in the process kicked one to the ground. There was no problem in the neighborhood, but that's how it always is on Prentis.

H. Rapp Brown, chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, who was arrested July 26 (veinte-seis de julio) for inciting to riot, said, "We (Negroes) built this country and we're going to burn it down."

And it looks like they will if Detroit is an example.

The toll is 38 dead; injuries in the thousands; 1,500 fires; almost 2,000 looted stores; 15,000 troops in the city; over 3,100 arrests; and about a billion dollars in property damage. All set records. That's a hell of a chicken.

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