

Editorial

Thank God for Louis Lomax.

Fifth Estate Collective

1967

Powerlessness and the lack of control which black people are allowed over their own community was not a major cause of the Detroit rebellion, Mr. Lomax tells us.

Nor was the cause the culture of violence which the United States has perfected; a culture which would make it UnAmerican for black people *not* to use violence as a means to effect social change.

Nor did it have anything to do with the fact that we live in a society which through the 1,600 advertising messages perceived by each person every day, creates desires which it then provides for black people and many whites, NO legitimate, socially approved means whatever to gratify.

Indeed the rebellion did not even have anything to do with the usual syndrome of bad housing, bad schools, unemployment, low income and poor health care.

The *Detroit News*, by serializing a short story by Mr. Lomax, well known Negro prostitute, has set our minds at ease.

According to Mr. Lomax, the whole uprising was organized by an itinerant magazine salesman peddling *Ebony* and Black Power on Euclid along with some help from three white revolutionaries and "the strangest Black Power amalgam in America today," including Rev. Albert Cleage, Milton Henry, Richard Henry, Ed Vaughn, and "John Boggs and his Chinese wife Grace Lee Boggs" (sic).

Mr. Lomax's series is, of course, preposterous. It relies entirely on distortion; perverse logic; misstatements, fabrications and omissions of fact; false inferences; innuendo; loaded language and bad writing. It represents a new level, even for the *News*, irresponsible journalism.

We, however, have an alternative explanation to that offered by Mr. Lomax.

If there was any *one* thing, which caused the Detroit Rebellion, it was police brutality. And if there was one thing which prolonged the uprising once it started it was police brutality. And if there is one thing which will be the cause of the next uprising—probably to take place before summer in this ugly city ends—it will be police brutality.

Most white people do not believe there is any such thing as police brutality. They have never seen it nor have they experienced it. And as Robert Tindal of the NAACP said at a meeting recently, "Some people have to get beat over the head themselves before they can believe that anyone else was beat."

Indeed, according to a recent Gallup poll, most white people (99% to be exact) do not believe that Negroes are mistreated in this so-called society or that they live any differently from anyone else.

Those who do admit that police brutality exists believe that it is the exception; that only a few rotten apples spoil the group.

They are wrong. The Detroit Police Department is the epitome of systematic, institutionalized racism. Twenty-four years after the race riot of 1943 when the department had 143 Negro policemen, it has today only 200 Negro officers on a force which is over 4,300 in a city where 35% of the citizens are black. It is the unbiased, the non-prejudiced and the non-sadist who is the exception in the Detroit Police Department.

The police mentality is police brutality. It goes with the badge and the gun. Especially the gun. A gun is a particularly good thing to have and a shot gun is even better if you are sexually insecure about your virility as compared to the “natives”. you are supposed to be guarding.

The job of a policeman in the ghetto in Detroit is to enforce order and protect the property of the white people who don't pay him. There is no law in the ghetto. Only order. It is the order of Auschwitz. It is the “law” of sadism, white supremacy and brutality.

It was police brutality when the police murdered three men in the Algiers Motel.

It was police brutality when a policeman ordered William Dalton to run and then shot him in the back.

It was police brutality which killed John Leroy and blinded Charles Dunson when the car in which they were driving was shot up—apparently for target practice.

It was police brutality when a police officer named Roy St. Onge shot and killed his fellow officer Jerome Olshove while trying to club a prisoner over the head with his shotgun.

It was police brutality when two cops stood in the middle of Seyburn Street at 9:30 on the night of July 26 and played a game of tic-tac-toe on the stomach of Moses Wedlow with the points of their bayonets.

It was police brutality when Negro Recorder's Court Judge Elvin Davenport was arrested two years ago and taken to the police station because he was in Lafayette Park at 2:00 a.m. and a rookie cop didn't know he was a judge and mistook him for a nigger in a white neighborhood late at night.

As if there were not enough evidence, we need not confine ourselves to police mentality in the ghetto. They will even as Patrolmen John Bryant found out kill each other over a minor traffic accident.

The list from the last three weeks, or the last three years, could go on. And on. The question is will the behavior which has characterized the department in the past go on? And on.

Will the city return to normal? The signs are that it will. As CORE chairman Clyde Cleveland said recently, “Apparently they haven't gotten the message.”

The “New Detroit” needs a new police department. It should be mostly black and it should be controlled by the people it is supposed to protect. They should decide who is hired and who is fired. At the very least the police should be given periodic lie detector tests to determine their “bigotry level.”

The Joseph L. Hudson Committee and others would do well to address themselves to this question as their first priority.

— F.H.J.

fifth Estate

Fifth Estate Collective
Editorial
Thank God for Louis Lomax.
1967

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/36-august-15-31-1967/editorial>
Fifth Estate #36, August 15-31, 1967

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net