

Off Center

Sol Plafkin

1967

It couldn't happen in Detroit!

That was the proud proclamation of our city's leaders all summer long until that fateful morning of July 23. Detroit had supposedly been the nation's leader among big cities in making civil rights progress.

That is, Detroit was tops in fake tokenism and self-deception. There was bragging that so many Black people here were in positions of prominence and relative wealth. But, obviously, these successful people only represented an infinitesimally small portion of the Black community—and even many of these middle-class oriented people, who still feel the brutal whip of discrimination, were quietly hoping for the summer revolt which finally exploded on one of the first hot Saturday nights in a relatively cool summer.

A definite vote of “no confidence” was registered by the people of Detroit in the city's present leadership. They should all resign—especially the following:

- 1) Councilman Nicholas Hood—who had to leave his home in the ghetto for fear of retaliation by Black terrorists who were disgusted with his City Hall “Yes-ism” and inability to communicate the simmering tensions of his own community to the white power structure.
- 2) Richard Marks-Director of the Commission of Community Relations for Detroit—whose “tension analysis expert” failed to foresee the uprising and who insisted that everything was “honky-dory” in Detroit.
- 3) Conrad Mallett—the Mayor's executive assistant who revealed that he had planted informers in the Black Militant movement, stupidly thinking that a race riot needed to be provoked by some formal organization!
- 4) Philip Rutledge—head of the so-called “antipoverty” program whose main approach to ghetto problems was makeshift summer jobs and more baseball games.
- 5) Norman Drachler, Superintendent of Schools, and Mary Ellen Riordan, President of the Detroit Federation of Teachers, who are both greatly responsible for the constantly worsening “miseducation” of Detroit's youth and making it harder for them to compete for decent jobs in an increasingly technological age.
- 6) Police Commissioner Ray Girardin, whose storm troopers' past antics were the main cause of the riot and whose gendarmes had a vicious “field day” of unrestricted brutality during a period of virtual martial law.
- 7) Councilman Mel Ravitz—who only talks to “proper Negroes” and has desperately fought against a “district system” of electing councilmen that would give the Black community adequate representation and a true opportunity to air their grievances in a non-violent manner.

8) Executive Judge of the Recorder's Court, Vincent Brennan, who issued orders that no prisoner was to be released on bail even if he had the bond money.

9) Damon Keith, co-chairman of the State Civil Rights Commission, who kept on telling everyone that his own Black people were happy and whose agency failed to deal swiftly and expeditiously with the daily pattern of police brutality and indignity which beset the ghetto.

10) Robert Knox, Director of the Housing Commission—whose practices of Urban Renewal ("Negro Removal") led to the displacement of tens of thousands of citizens from their homes and forced them to be packed into the narrowly-segregated portions of our city.

11) Russ Leach, President of the Wayne County AFL-CIO, who fought so diligently last year against the election of George Crockett to the Recorder's Court when he was the obvious choice of the Black community. (Crockett, of course, together with his Black brother, Judge Elvin Davenport, proved to be most reasonable and humane in the setting of bonds and handling of prisoners during the hysteria which engulfed the white community during Riot Week.)

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A word of apology to Rep. John Conyers, Jr., who himself is a "riot refugee" from his burnt-out office. I erred when I said that he had agreed to appear on Lou Gordon's TV show and then reneged. But, still, his refusal to appear and present his position in opposition to the "flag-burning" bill and to condemn the general insanity which has gripped the U.S. House of Representatives is still no less excusable—even if his co-panelist was to be Dick Durant.

By the way, it's interesting to note that all the attacks on me for my constructive criticism of Conyers have come from Whites.

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