

# The Coat Puller

John Sinclair

1968

*Editor's note:* Brother Sinclair's Coatpuller column is re-printed here exactly as it appeared in this paper one year ago. It was written at the height of the July Rebellion and contains one of the best impressionistic sketches of that week.

You know that it would be untrue

You know that I would be a liar

If I was to say to you

"Girl, we can't get much higher"—

Come on baby light my fire

Come on baby light my fire

Gonna set the night on

FI-YUR

—"Light My Fire," The Doors

"Light My Fire" rises through the radio ranks for weeks and, when it hits number one on the stations, the people respond and burn the city down. Or play Archie Shepp's FIRE MUSIC album as background music for the Detroit purification: the scope and feeling of the people's mood is there; an elegy for Malcolm X.

The television people are scared and stand frowning in doorways, sit clenching their teeth in front of their sets, as the news makes its way through the burning city—the police can't hold them, the STATE police can't hold them, the Michigan National Guard can't hold them, "bring in the Federal Troops, we gotta stop them crazy niggers before they tear the whole city apart and carry it back to their living rooms piece by piece."

Soldiers in battle green and tommyguns hold down the banks and furniture stores where there's still furniture, gun shops, troops massed at the Woodward Hudson's entrances to keep the plastic castle safe from lawless, pillaging looting criminals the governor and the President of the U-nited States call them on TV, and still the fires burn, the stores fall, the people set the night on fire.

You can watch it on TV if you like, a new taste of instant reality for the folks back home—but the bad guys are throwing rocks at the good guys' cameras and it gets kinda scary out there for us good folk, doesn't it? Still it's weird to turn on the set and watch your own city burn down, shots and sounds of the rioting alternated with "The Guiding Light" and the early morning golf lesson just like the world was carrying on business as usual, except there's news

every hour now and the reporters for once don't have to make it all up, they've got something more real than they can handle screaming at them and calling their names.

No, baby, it's not a "race riot," or anything as simple as that. People just got tired of being hassled by police and cheated by businessmen and got out their equalizers and went to town. The mode of the music changed and the walls of the city shook and fell. Yes they did. Oh it was Robin Hood Day in merry olde Detroit, the first annual city-wide all-free fire sale, and the people without got their hands on the goodies.

While families climbed through A&P windows and picked the stores clean, carting home the groceries they'd been paying their lives for all these years. Free furniture and color TVs, guitars and leather coats, shoes and clothes and liquor. And when their energies turned from smashing the stores they would go for the police, and not, you'll notice, their neighbors. The dirty, rotten hated police who came to bring a "law and order" made for the owners and bosses and bigshots to protect their precious property. Just now someone tells me, "If there was any hatred, it came from the cops—the people weren't hostile at all."

The people just wanted what was theirs all along. They'd been waiting long enough, and it was time now to do it. On a lovely hot Sunday morning they saw the hated po-lice dragging off 80 people from a blind pig, and they'd had enough. This country is built on a powderkeg of plunder and greed, and the fuse burned down, that's all. The people watched the Man's TV and knew it was a lie—THEY didn't live like that, and there was no way in hell the Man could make them believe his lies any more. Their frustration and desperation mounted until they couldn't get no higher, they were invisible now, got no secrets to conceal. When you ain't got nothin', you got nothin' to lose. A white boy said that. And the stores came down.

As of this writing over 2000 people have been arrested and jailed, with bonds starting at \$10,000 and going up. That means NO ONE gets out until trial. The jails are full—the City, the County, the House of Correction, those arraigned were taken to Jackson Prison to be held for trial, those who just came in were held in empty DSR buses until the jails had room for them. The system was breaking down. The President got up on TV with R. Strange MacNamara weeping over his shoulder and whined for "law and order." Riots broke out in other cities all over the country. The television programs began to look stupider and less human than usual next to the reality news reports every hour. The reality news had stars and extras the folks back home had never been allowed to see. And these new stars were all "criminals," thousands of them sit rotting in jail until they're allowed their lawful "day in court."

The people ruled the city for a minute, and may still be ruling when this is printed. The hypocrisy of "democratic capitalism" stood exposed, naked and ugly. The troops protected the owners' possessions and shot the people down in the streets for money. Sing it, shout it, scream it down—the news is out, people, you own the town.

# fifth Estate

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