

EDITORIAL 7-27-67

We watched the orange glow in the sky from an attic window and knew Sunday night it was not the reflected glow of neon signs and traffic; Detroit was burning. Unbidden, the chant we learned as a child popped into mind: "Scotland's burning, Scotland's burning, Fire, Fire, pour on water..." and we thought of all the thousands of years leaping tongues of flame have illuminated men's violent faces and spelled out man's inhumanity to his fellow man. How many lives, how many plodding years before the waters of peace and brotherhood can reach our restless, hate-filled society?

The TV screen alternated with scenes of destruction and the taut, weary faces of Michigan's leaders. Outside in our quiet suburb, another world. Gentle splashing sounds from the neighbor's hose, watering the new Marion blue lawn; the slam of a screen door as families drift out into the yards and porches to try and beat the stifling humidity; laughter and calls from a returning family of vacationers.

At the Police station, as in many other suburbs, additional officers have appeared to beef up patrols "just in case" and city officials have arrived for consultation. Firemen and volunteers are standing by should an emergency arise requiring their services, here or in some neighboring community. The five radios never stop; the telephone jangles incessantly as stranded Detroiters seek information on how to get home or to check rumors they have just heard. We remember the last time, June 1943. The policemen putting on their helmets were overseas or toddlers. The city fathers suddenly look incredibly young and we feel very old. Only three of us present remember Detroit in 1943: the snipers, the animal-like mobs; the island of quiet at Wayne State University; the rings of soldiers, sailors and marines who stood around the old city hall, the line the mob did not cross where hunted humans ran for safety; the sweep of troops down the street and the rumble, rumble, rumble of the military vehicles on the pavement the eerie quiet that marked the end of violence; the sweltering heat; the rumors and the terror.

Monday we hear the rumors again: Ferndale is burning; Oak Park is in flames. In Berkley, children play in the pools; a dog rolls lazily on the grass, too hot to indicate interest in the neighbor's teasing kitten. Men unable to get to work are puttering in the yards and washing cars. The radios clamor at the police station as new drivers come to seek their licenses and citizens request permission to park cars on the street... "my brother-in-law, my mother, my sister can not get home to Detroit. Yes, I guess a week will be enough." Mayor and administration decide to join fellow suburban cities in a curfew, to ask the stores to close. Another world.

For twenty four years Detroit and its suburbs have attempted, a step at a time, too slowly perhaps, but trying to build bridges of understanding. Have they failed? Some of the callers we talked to Monday are bitter and disillusioned, is there an answer to blind and unreasoning hate? Is our civilization destroying itself? Are both communities, Negro and white doomed to eternal warfare?

We do not think so. For complex problems, there are only complex answers. Laws are not an automatic solution; violence is no answer at all. Man's history and the history of all his communities is the same but in spite of the old cliché that history teaches us nothing, it does teach us in the long haul our fumbling, often blind attempts are a slow, long climb toward ultimate freedom, order and compassion for all mankind. Out of the debris of hate and destruction, men with heart and intelligence of all faiths and ethnic background have built anew.

The leaping flames will die away again; order will be restored. It is up to all of us, beginning with ourselves, to build anew in the metropolitan area, not only better physical objects, but a firm, intelligent, compassionate understanding of others which will make the Detroit area a light to the nation.