

... 2 Years Later

Reflections On Violence ...

The Detroit riot took place exactly two years ago. What has happened to Detroit since the tragic and wrenching events of 1967?

And what has happened to the suburbs?

There have been two years to heal the wounds and to change the profile of race relations. There has been some progress and a few setbacks. Conservatism and militancy have both gained.

The Observer Newspapers sent reporters and photographers to cover the riot. Since then, they have covered the breaking news on the racial relations front. They have taken a deep and abiding interest in the cause of law and order WITH justice.

In this special editorial page, Observer staff members assess the gains and review the losses of the past two years -- with the hope that such an effort will contribute to understanding among men of all races.

By PHILIP H. POWER
Publisher

Two years is a long time. A very long time.

Particularly since a riot.

Two years ago we who live in the suburbs watched Detroit burning. Two years ago we heard rumors bred on fear and hate -- and believed them. Two years ago we learned that years of discrimination and frustration lead to hatred and violence. And two years ago we realized that the suburbs, whether we liked it or not, were deeply involved.

That was two years ago. What is happening now, two years later, in the same suburbs? Has the riot and the passage of time changed anything, either in fact or attitude, in the suburbs so long described as a "white noose" around Detroit's neck?

On the surface, very little of a concrete nature. Beneath that, perhaps the faint stirring of a new attitude.

THE FIRST days and months after the riot were impressive. People collected and distributed food and clothing to families made homeless by fire. Small groups would gather and say that they could see people trying to understand why such a terrible thing had happened. Human relations groups reported increased membership and sharpened interest.

The city of Plymouth passed

an open housing ordinance in a public referendum, to the astonishment of most observers. The Livonia City Council overrode Mayor Harvey Moelke's veto to pass a similar ordinance, and then a campaign to put the matter on the ballot failed through lack of public interest.

Some people in Plymouth organized a widely representative conference to discuss violence and what could be done to prevent it.

A group in Farmington, patterning itself after the New Detroit Committee, formed to work against racism. Meetings of concerned people took place in Westland and Redford Township.

BUT WHAT remains after all this activity?

Not much.

In Plymouth and Livonia, cities with locally-passed open housing ordinances, there has been no influx of Negro families wishing to buy homes. There has not even been much testing of local Realtors to see if they are abiding by the local anti state laws.

The Plymouth conference was held, but nothing more than a list of proposals and a lot of good talk came from it. The Farmington group reportedly met for several months and then petered out.

Individuals and small groups have continued good work, but this has been on a small scale.

After so much activity, so little real result. Why?

Perhaps it's that the spur of fear no longer is so sharp. Late last spring, and again this year, people talked for a while about "doing something." Perhaps they were doing so because they suddenly realized the long hot summer was just a few months away.

And now, with the hot summer on us, calm appears to reign in Detroit. And in the suburbs, it's pretty much business as usual.

While such a reaction may be understandable, that doesn't make it any better. For suburban inaction and indifference will help breed another riot just as surely as a police crack-down or increased black unemployment.

ON THE positive side, it's possible to detect a small shifting of suburban attitudes toward black people and their aspirations.

People who two years ago would have been violent about a Negro -- any kind of Negro -- moving into their neighborhoods are now saying that it would be all right with them, provided the family were nice and good neighbors.

That's a small shift in attitude. Small, but perceptible.

It's important, too, because it suggests a start in the suburbs to look on blacks as people rather than stereotyped symbols. And if we ever are to solve our racial problem, it will be through regarding people as people rather than symbols.

SO, TWO years after the Detroit riot the reaction in the suburbs is mixed. Little of a concrete nature, but the beginnings of a significant change in attitude.

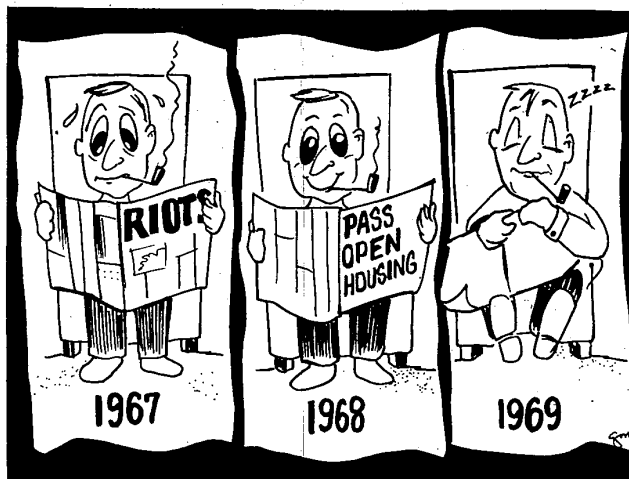
Two years ago, just after the riot, we wrote:

"As far as people living out here in Observerland seem to be concerned, the riots are fundamentally Detroit's own problem. Well, let's get one thing straight."

"They aren't."

"They are as much our problem out here as they are for people living within the city limits of Detroit."

They still are.



... And In Suburbia

Is It Understanding Or Lip Service?

By EMORY DANIELS
Farmington

Generally speaking, the Farmington Area is a liberal community which speaks in favor of advancement of human rights and dignity for all races. But listen closely and that voice amounts to lip service and not much more.

There are residents who talk about "putting niggers in their place" but this is a minority view in Farmington. Most of the community is white-collar, well-educated, highly literate, employed in the professions, and basically liberal.

Many of these engineers, chemists, draftsman, industrial salesmen, and professors commute daily to Detroit via expressway. They identify with Detroit because that's where the dollar comes from. They agree the black man's lot in the inner city must be improved or there may be another riot, but they look to New Detroit for action.

THE CRY for equality is vocal, but again, mostly lip service. It is one thing to be vocal about better conditions in the inner city, but quite another to seek equality in the suburbs.

The average Farmington resident, despite his liberalism, would have qualms about a Negro moving next door. Some would object only because he's Negro. Others would say "okay, if he's a good Negro." The Negro could move next door as long as he's a black engineer, chemist or professor.

The strongest prejudice in Farmington is class bias rather than racial. There are those willing to accept Negroes who wear white-collars, but not a black man who works on the assembly line.

If you listen to the lip service you get the feeling Farmington would welcome an Uncle Tom but not Old Black Joe.

By DENNIS PAJOT
Redford

On matters of racial tension, Redford Township appears to contain two streams of attitude, neither able to dominate. The "anti-undesirables" attitude prevails on the surface in most affairs, moderated somewhat by educated prudents. Frequent and definite showings of "empathy desire" occur in many influential spots, however.

The conservative history of the township seems to be the deciding factor between these two attitudes. Even those who profess great liberalism seem reluctant to broadcast it.

An illustration is the outcome of a proposal for a township human relations commission. Instead of formally adopting a commission with broad duties, ignoring the proposal, Supervisor Aldrick Bellaire, a moderate Republican, appointed a supervisor's "move in" committee.

It has had nothing to do. Contrasts are heavy gauge wire screening on doors and windows of the police department, some residents openly caustic

about "undesirable" transients on one hand -- and a Presbyterian church group of teenagers who tutor in an inner city school and another Redford Township church which this year erected a cornerstone with the inscription: "A House of Prayer for All Peoples."

By DAN McCOSH
Garden City

The results of the 1967 disturbance are difficult to see in Garden City, but the city is one of the suburbs now taking, and taking advantage of, the flight of fearful whites from Detroit.

The list of teachers waiting for a job in Garden City Schools is swollen with applicants leaving the Detroit system, and school officials feel "tensions" in Detroit are directly responsible for the phenomenon.

The city has made no noticeable moves toward relating with Detroit or its problems, civic as well as racial.

Historically the city was built as an "escape" for the working man from the urban environment, one of the first "dormitory suburbs," and now with most of the available land taken up, the city seems intent on conserving its way of life, which most of the town values, and is unwilling to take on anyone else's problems, which could "cost," either socially or economically.

By LEONARD POGER
Westland

Two organizations were active in the Westland community in the past two years to establish a human relations program and help eliminate some of the conditions that caused the 1967 riots in Detroit.

The Wayne-Westland Human Relations Council has been active in holding a series of public meetings to discuss the nature of prejudice, Negro history, and other racial topics.

The meetings attracted from 200 to 300 persons for each session.

In addition, the council's members opened their homes to the poverty-march participants last year as the group was making its way to Washington, D.C., to urge congress to take action about poverty in America.

A second group, Suburban Action Now, was formed last year specifically to encourage integrated housing in the community. Despite numerous public programs, very few of which were well attended, there has been no noticeable movement of Negro families into the community.

At least two Negro families have moved into the Holiday Park townhouse complex in the Wayne-Joy area.

Despite a liberally-orientated city council, there has been no public comment on establishing an open housing ordinance or creating a local human relations commission.

Westland boasts a subdivision of 500 homes in the extreme south end of the city which is comprised mostly of middle-income Negro families.

By HANK TEUTSCH
Plymouth

The City of Plymouth adopted an Open Housing Ordinance on April 29, 1968 as perhaps more of a token gesture to the black community than as a positive statement of how it feels about the racial problems confronting the suburbs and the inner city. And, if there has been any change in the attitude of the "average" Plymouth resident to his black brother, then it has not been expressed publicly and openly.

After the ghetto revolt in 1967, Plymouth, like other suburbs, began to fortify itself against a riot within its borders. The police force is still undergoing training in riot control and massive arrest tactics with an elaborate plan for an "emergency."

The groups who supported the Open Housing Ordinance did so in the background and have remained in the background. There has been comparatively little leadership shown to attempt to lead the city away from repressive social attitudes toward a positive and healthy attitude toward race relations.

While the heat is off, the liberals are willing to make hesitating but weak statements of concern, but it appears certain that if a long hot summer were to arrive once again the city would crawl inside itself and gird its defensive loins.

It is still not a place where the average black family can live a comfortable unobtrusive life. The family would not be run out of town on a rail, but it would be avoided and snickered at.

By MARTHA MAHAN
Livonia

Livonia remains ambivalent in racial relations two years after the riot in Detroit.

The city adopted an open housing ordinance despite challenges by organized groups. The public and private human relations organizations have taken on new life.

Scores of Livonians were ready to open their homes to the "Poor People's March" delegates before a police-citizen incident at Cobo Hall convinced the marchers to stay inside the city of Detroit.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL split in Livonia is crucial to the point. There is an energetic and growing group of liberals dedicated to finding racial peace. There is also a strong and vocal group of conservatives dedicated to the status quo.

The right and the left in politics are more visible in Livonia than in most other cities.

Aroused parents fought the Board of Education to a standstill on a proposed "shared learning" program of exchanging classes with intercity schools.

Mayor Harvey W. Moelke proposed and the police department conducted a gun training school for housewives. The fear that gripped Livonia during the riot still exists.

Tragedy Burns On In Human Hearts

By DON HOENSHIELL

Two years ago Detroit was burning and there was fear and hate in the human fires. The city counted its dead and assessed its losses and shrieked in agony. But the tragedy of Detroit in the summer of 1967 survives under the scars.

Twelfth Street has been rebuilt in part. New Detroit Inc. has replaced the hastily-assembled New Detroit Committee. Some practical things have been done, but the relationship between the need and the fulfillment remains far-fetched.

The city, had very little to do with poverty or the desire for economic betterment.

IT STARTED AFTER a police raid on an after-hours drinking joint. The weather was boiling, even at 4 a.m. Police were jostled and stoned. Crowds filled the street and looting began.

Some critics have said since there were too few policemen on duty early in the morning on a week end. Some said police could have handled the trouble quickly but for a go-slow policy by the top brass.

As a spectacle, the riot was sensational. Firemen were shot at and stoned while trying to save part of the city. National Guardsmen rode shotgun on the backs of fire trucks. There were 43 counted dead. Wild speculation fixes a figure far higher. Overwhelmed, police watched looters carrying away new television sets and cases of liquor.

More than 3,000 were arrested and when local jails became overcrowded, others were locked up in a Belle Isle bathhouse and still others were taken to Jackson State Prison and to the Federal prison at Milan.

Former President Johnson went for the jugular of Former

Gov. Romney. He said Romney had delayed in calling in the National Guard, thus allowing the riot to get out of control. Romney was running hard for the Republican nomination for the presidency. Johnson sent in the 101st Airborne to work the city's east side.

IN THE SUBURBS, police in many cities were given special riot armaments. Mayors proclaimed curfews from 9 p.m. to 5:30 a.m. Housewives were arming.

THE TRAGEDY of Detroit was its cause.

It was a riot of the middle class, the group emerging in the economy as a powerful factor, people who could afford better than they had. They were blacks, largely, who -- after the almost accidental start of the riot -- used it as a showcase to the world that they were not to be denied respect and dignity.

Man goes about reaching his goals in ways that apparently negate his own being. How does one achieve respect and dignity by rioting and burning and looting? The two years since the riot have shown that something was accomplished and the something is better than the nothing middle class blacks could see on the horizon.

So something has been done. There is a black supermarket, blacks are taking a greater part in community life and now have greater respect among men. Some call it fear and nobody calls it love. To those who never had any, this new posture of recognition -- as arrogant and abusive as it sometimes appears -- means that blacks now feel better about themselves than they did.

There is a black candidate for mayor in Detroit and more black candidates for the city council. There is a new growth of freedom.

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Don Hoenshell, Editor