

THE FINGER POINTERS

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After the death of President Kennedy in the fall of 1963, the Liberal Left indulged in an orgy of breast beating and called on the nation to examine its conscience. They condemned the "hatreds and fanaticisms that had eaten into the bloodstream of American life." These, they said, created "a climate of violence" which led directly to the assassination. Their exhortations and accusations particularly seemed to single out the conservative element along with their favorite whipping boys, the extremists of the Right. The Liberals did not hesitate to point the finger of blame, even after the assassin turned out to be a Communist-linked extremist of their own left-leaning ideology.

Although the Liberals had a lot to say about the six days of rioting, destruction and death in Los Angeles, they did not see fit to call for another purge of national conscience. Nor did they deplore any "climate of violence" which might have predisposed to rioting. This time their lamentations and rationalizations dealt in clichés of poverty, educational deprivation, frustrations, heat and humidity. It was a case of "spontaneous combustion," according to one sage. The villains on the right, however, were not entirely overlooked, as on more than one occasion it was brought out that the disturbing rise of California conservatism had resulted in the rejection by vote of a housing code proposition, which, in turn, had fanned the fires of resentment against the white community.

The Liberals at least are consistent in that they never attach the blame for any disorder onto themselves. It is unthinkable, naturally, that any of these calamities could ever be attributed to the efforts of the social Utopians whose plans have been foisted on this nation for the past thirty-five years. Everything that goes wrong is due, they say, to the fact that the rest of us have not been socially conscious enough. The nation's vast expenditures and Herculean efforts to reduce poverty, provide education, alleviate misery and furnish security to its underprivileged citizens have not been nearly sufficient. Even now the Liberal solution to the present social unrest is that we must do more.

As a youngster barely into the early teens, we spent three full summers in Los Angeles, living in a section of what is now conveniently termed the Watts "ghetto." We made briefer summer visits there also in 1936, 1938 and 1947. The USC campus, the Coliseum, Vernon and Vermont Avenues, frequently mentioned in news dispatches of the rioting, were as familiar to us in the late twenties as our own home neighborhood is now. Two or three times each week we rode the ugly, yellow "E" car from the corner of Santa Barbara and Western into downtown Los Angeles and back, and daily we roamed the

area on foot alone or in company with our aunt's pet Airedale. Our cousin Joe, a property man at Paramount and United Artists by day, had a Santa Rosa Dairy milk route three nights a week, and we used to ride the truck with him from midnight to dawn, scurrying back and forth down dark alleys and driveways to deposit milk bottles on the doorsteps of Watts customers.

The "ghetto" was a relatively new area of Los Angeles at that time, hardly any of it dating back much beyond 1920. It consisted of modern streets and avenues lined with businesses, open drive-in markets, ice cream shops, filling stations, apartments, apartment courts and miniature golf extravaganzas, all in the flamboyant Southern California style. There were blocks upon blocks of wide, all-paved streets and sidewalks, neatly kept front lawns with underground sprinkler systems and row upon row of trim, one-story California bungalows, each with its one- or two-car garage and seventy-five-foot square back yard with gardens and fruit trees. The rows of houses backed up to a central block service alley through which garbage could be collected without putting the unsightly cans out on the street in front. Each home, also, by city ordinance, had its own backyard incinerator for the burning of paper and trash. It was a sociologist's (and there were few dignified by the term in those days) dream.

In this oppressive slum lived the average family, the clothing salesmen, the small businessmen, the linotype operators, the clerks, the school teachers, the young lawyers and doctors, the filling station operators and the secretaries. It was truly a classless society, and even during those Depression years, a hopeful and happy one. If people were lucky enough to hit it rich, they moved to Pasadena, or up off Wiltshire, or to Beverly Hills where the society was still classless but had more money.

Way over toward Central Avenue, most of the area was inhabited by white families, but even then, scattered throughout and living in identical bungalows were occasional colored families. The schools were open to all. There was no segregation, and if there was any discrimination, it was directed more against the poor Mexican element than against the Negro who had already begun to find that migration to the West opened the doors of opportunity.

By the late twenties, the Southern Californians were already enjoying the good life of easy credit, two-car families, outboard motors, boats and trailers. It was a life that did not spread to the tradition-bound East until almost three decades later. They pioneered the principles of mass learning and permissive schooling that bastardized education to include vocational courses and social adjustment.

As a 14-year-old still undergoing the rigors of a four-year formalized curriculum that included only Latin, French, English, Algebra and History, we can remember being impressed by the worldly sophistication and knowledge ability of our slightly older cousins. Life was informal and pleasant. They were at ease in sport clothes or dressed up in blue coats and long white flannels, while we were stodgily outfitted in white shirts, ties and dark suits with knickers. It was pretty damned mortifying.

Long before the lemming-like hordes of Eastern prep schoolers and collegians flocked to Fort Lauderdale, Bermuda and Nassau, the "kids" of Southern California were descending in droves on Balboa, Laguna and Catalina for weekends and holidays. They were already automobile crazy and were, for the most part, unchaperoned. They played and indulged in a sexual looseness that might even now raise the eyebrows of today's sophisticated Eastern youngsters who picket for later dormitory visiting hours and clamor about the necessity of "establishing meaningful relationships with members of the opposite sex." The terminology in Southern California then, at least, was a little more honest, the girls who indulged were "good sports" and a piece of . . . was not camouflaged in verbiage.

With this as a background and also, for contrast, a four-month stint that we put in living in the heart of Manhattan's upper East Side doing home deliveries in the tenements off Lexington Avenue, upper Broadway, and in the lower Bronx and Harlem, it is hard for us to swallow the Liberal designation of the Watts neighborhood as a "ghetto." (By similar standards 75% of Atlanta could be so labeled.) It is just as hard to believe that the summer climate of Los Angeles is hot, humid and oppressive. (Have you ever spent a summer in New Orleans, South Georgia, Washington, D.C., or on E. 103rd St. between Lexington and Park?) Or that the crowding and congestion in the Watts area were factors that led to the rioting. (The population density of the Watts "ghetto" is reported to be less than thirty persons per acre compared to two thousand per acre in the New York slums.) What would be easier to believe; however, is that this one city of the country, which has been the most liberal, the most classless, the most unsegregated, the most progressive, the most forward-looking, and the most socially enlightened of all cities, according to any standards of Liberal thinking, must represent the inescapable and logical end of all Utopias.

For over thirty years now, under the direction of our social engineers, the rest of the country has been consciously or unconsciously imitating the patterns, customs and moral standards of life in the Los Angeles area. If there can be such a thing as a controlled experiment in social, urban living, Los Angeles has given the rest of the country an

accurate preview of what can be expected in other urban areas if we but continue to follow its example. And in their calls for urban redevelopment, more living space, more programs and more money to subsidize the unfortunates and underprivileged, the wailing ivory tower theorists and planners would have us do just that. A remarkable statistic to come out of the recent rioting was that over 60% of the Watts area inhabitants were already on government relief; with another ten years of help from the Liberals, this could probably be raised to 80%.

The sad fact is that "ghettos" are created by the sorry, slovenly, irresponsible, and indigent people who inhabit them. The sorry people, in turn, these days, have been created by the Liberal planners, the sociologists, the bleeding hearts, the do-gooders, the paternalistic bureaucrats, and the vote-and-power-hungry politicians who subsidize them and relieve them of responsibility.

The only solution to this growing problem—they have helped to create by their own misguided efforts—that the social planners can come up with is that we should do more of the same things that have been done for the last thirty-five years, and on a grander, more expanded scale. When the inevitable day of reckoning comes and our society falls apart, the Liberals will undoubtedly point the finger again and say, "The rest of you are to blame. You did not do enough."

Just for the record, and while we still have a finger left to point, we would like to aim it once directly at the Liberal dreamers and say: "This mess is yours. You have already done too much."

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