The Game of Black & White at Hunters Point

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Policemen and blacks in San Francisco's Hunters Point district prove that a little knowledge is a dangerous stereotype

Hunters Point is a depressed and isolated district in the southeastern section of San Francisco. It is adjacent to the Hunters Point naval shipyard where some of the residents work. Generally, though, unemployment is widespread. There are still people living in shanty dwellings erected as "temporary" housing during World War II. Housing in general is inadequate or substandard, and the whole district is defined by the City Housing Authority as an official low-income area. Many, if not most, of the residents draw some form of public assistance. Nearly all of them are black. Less notorious than Oakland, on the other side of the Bay, the district is usually ignored until some act of violence or a crusading newspaperman brings it to public attention. Casual violence is certainly prevalent; so are prostitution and narcotics-dealing. It is a true ghetto, despised and neglected as far as possible by the rest of the city. Its votes have been taken for granted by the Democrats, ignored by the Republicans. It is poorly serviced: garbage collection is irregular; public transport is inadequate. Hunters Pointers are clearly an outcast community in San Francisco.

In September 1966 rioting broke out there after a black teen-ager named Matthew Johnson had been shot dead by a white policeman while running away from a car that he and two friends had abandoned. The policeman (also named Johnson) suspected the car to be stolen and had failed to get the boy to stop. The disturbance which followed lasted for five days. I was doing participant field work in the area both before and after these events; Hunters Point is, I think, one of the few communities involved in the series of urban disturbances of the sixties to have engaged the attentions of such a researcher at such a time. While I cannot propose solutions, I hope I can help to clarify the complex interaction out of which such disturbances grow, and particularly to show some of the ways in which urban blacks and whites perceive themselves and each other and how these perceptions determine relations between them.

Social scientists have described at length the personal and social disorders among black Americans and have attributed them to centuries of subjugation by whites. Demands made of them both before and since the abolition of slavery have created, through the enforced absence of the male, a matrifocal family structure. Because of this, it is held, black males have strong but unconscious feelings of

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ineffectuality and castration, while women have to cope with fears of desertion by their men. These fears are realistic enough in Hunters Point, where 50 to 80 percent of families have no resident male. The women protect themselves by showing aggressive independence, and the men, attacked as potential nonproviders and deserters, often defend themselves—and open the way to welfare grants for their children—by actually abandoning their families. Moreover, these insecurities are intensified by internalized self-contempt. Blacks despise themselves because for years they have been despised by whites. The black American situation is a vicious cycle. Bad education is caused both by a realistic indifference to scholarly achievement and by expectations that blacks will fail—expectations built into the school system and the minds of its personnel, many of whom are poor teachers and nearly all of whom are white. Bad education (and lack of motivation) itself contributes to a low income level. Since white domination has forced acceptance of the consumer ethic on blacks, they are further frustrated by not having access to the material goods which validate that ethic.

Individuals growing up against such a background face continual evidence of their infantile status in white eyes but have no certain status of their own to grasp as an alternative. Many therefore take an image of themselves which derives in part from their own defensive psychological needs and in part from the fantasies of whites: the image of the hypersexual, hyperaggressive "Bad Nigger." In this way they can support themselves against recognizing how passive they are—"I'm a *bad* motherfucker." Alternatively, they may repress emotion—"Man, I don't feel nothing"—or show covert and overt concerns about sexual potency. These stances all help to buttress their precarious image of themselves. The blacks of Hunters Point have menial jobs in a white world. They see the police, the guardians of that world, as "enemies." Such internal organization that exists is dominated by middle-aged matriarchs. The young can be expected to respond to all this in several ways. Passivity, bravado and explosive reaction are three stages of response, but elements of all three can be seen in any one. Passivity can be a revolt, bravado gives only the form of manliness, and explosive violence is rarely organized. In the case of Hunters Point, the violence included the first two elements as well.

Social Control and the Police

The Hunters Point resident police are Housing Authority police. They do not belong to the San Francisco Police Department, and being essentially private police, they are theoretically limited in what laws they may enforce and where. They have the same right of arrest as any private citizen. Though their captain is a municipal police force inspector assigned to the Potrero Hill Station, San Francisco police rarely entered Hunters Point before the riot.

The Housing Authority police actually seem to function as a buffer between Hunters Point residents and adequate police protection. Indeed, the residents complain bitterly, not of the brutality of the racially integrated Housing Authority police, but of their refusal to give meaningful police protection. The tenants point out that the main job of the police seems to be to let people into their houses (after they have inadvertently locked themselves out) for a five dollar fee.

- Them kids come into the halls shootin' them craps and turnin' over the fire extinguishers, and you call the cops and they tell you, "Don't worry they's just kids." I used to walk from the bus stop in 1946, and up to 1950, but I haven't for a long time now; sometimes they come and grab your purse and they insult you and throw things. The cops, they never come when you call.
- I called them when these boys throwed rocks through my window. That policeman, he say, "What do you expect me to do about it?"
- They don't care, you know they don't, long as no one gets killed, they don't even interfere in fights. They just drives by like they don't see nothin'.

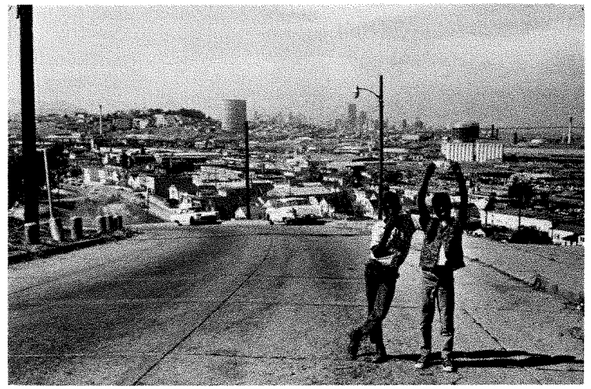
Moreover, these police have a "bad attitude" toward the tenants. In the tenants' terms, this means "looking down on" them, verbally abusing them and in general making their distaste for the tenants obvious. This "bad attitude," the tenants feel, merely reflects the attitude of the city and the Housing Authority.

The inspector in charge of the Hunters Point police, the liaison to the Potrero Hill Station, admits that the Housing Authority police rarely request help from the Potrero Hill Station except in cases of extreme emergencies such as murder (which he claims is no more frequent here than in the rest of the city, although there is a real reluctance on the part of the Housing Authority police to discuss crime rates in Hunters Point). The inspector says it is a quiet place with nice folks and "just like any other middle-class area of the city."

After delivering himself of these opinions he went on to reminisce about the good old days when there was a lot more fighting in the city.

> Everybody used to fight a lot then; there was a lot of fight clubs. Everybody knew how to box and you could have some real good fights on Saturday night. We didn't care as much about fighting then as we do now, people I guess just get more nervous about simple little fights than we used to. It used to be lots of fun. People shouldn't get so upset by a little fighting nowadays, but I guess things have changed a lot. It's the same with all this talk about Bay pollution. Heck, we used to swim right near the sewer outlets; if you'd see a big one coming [a piece of human excrement] you'd just yell and duck.

The inspector was, of course, suggesting that although the general opinion of Hunters Point is that it's a dangerous place with a great deal of fighting, it is no different from the fighting he remembers as a boy in the Irish Mission district. More importantly, his suggestion that there was no particular problem of any type in Hunters Point showed that he wanted to relieve the Hunters Point police, as well



as the city police, of their responsibilities, but apparently also to reduce racist attitudes which he obviously felt originated in white beliefs about those "dangerous Negroes."

The patrolmen themselves have a somewhat different attitude.

> I been here 12 years and I could tell you some hair-raising stories about these people. Some of 'em—not all mind you 'cause there's some good ones—but some of 'em are no better'n animals. Yeah, you could find a lot of trouble if you go looking for it, but I don't. No, sir, I don't go looking for trouble—let 'em knock their own heads together.

But both positions have the same result: a tendency to lessen police activity within Hunters Point.

Crime and Underpolicing

What constitutes a crime in Hunters Point? The police do not regard the kind of boisterous behavior frequently complained about by tenants (noisy parties, gambling in halls and stairways and the like) as a police matter. They feel that "this is not an upper-class neighborhood," a judgment based on the common sense observation that behavior is different in this neighborhood than it is in some others, and that it would only harass the population unnecessarily (and make police work harder) to police it strictly. Sophisticated as this view may be, it implies to many residents a paternalistic and racist attitude. Some tenants are infuriated that more or less illegal disturbances are thought to be tolerable since the people in Hunters Point "don't know no better." Yet at the same time, many of the same people are just as infuriated by attempts to enforce middle-class morality because they are aware of the racial and cultural prejudices that underlie such attempts.

Another reason why police are less active in Hunters Point than in other areas is that they cannot apply the common "on the beat" technique of harassing "suspicious-looking" people and people who are known to have criminal records or to associate with criminals. Clothing and appearance indicate only too well the "suspiciousness" of most of the young people in Hunters Point, while the criterion of prior criminality is meaningless since a large percentage of them have some record and many others do not only because of police leniency or luck. Verbal aggression and insulting gestures are so common that there is no official response to these either, though naturally they intensify hostility between police and tenants. In other parts of town automatic suspicion falls on young, male and poor blacks who seem sullen and aggressive. In Hunters Point so many fit this description that no one stands out.

This leaves the police with only their spies, or their own memories, to determine who should be watched. But in a neighborhood where police spies are despised even more than in most, and where black solidarity is gradually growing, few reliable informants exist. The Housing Authority police are often also frustrated in their attempts to solve the crimes that do occur. The most common complaints that can be acted on are of thefts and personal assaults, with thefts being far more common. But since theft is so common, disposal apparently so easy and the culprits so unlikely to be caught, the police characteristically do not try; in many cases (according to the residents) they do not even respond to reports. Moreover, most police, whether Housing Authority or city, correctly perceive the police-tenant relationship as a racial one and dread a massive incident that might arise as a result of some chance encounter, which is exactly what occurred. To avoid such encounters they involve themselves in the community as police only when no other alternative seems possible.

All these factors have resulted in observable underpolicing in Hunters Point. But as a result of this very inactivity, police behavior may on occasion swing to the other extreme. Frustration and recognition of their own reduced importance may lead to periodic outbursts of excessive police brutality. Only so often can police fail to catch teen-age thieves who escape them on foot before they lose control.

But the Hunters Point residents' response to underpolicing is still a key factor in the climate that preceded the riot. They assume, often correctly, that police think of them merely as "animals" and don't care what they do to each other so long as they stay "on the Hill." They also feel that police do not become involved because they are afraid of the power and manliness of Hunters Point males. This is an attractive view because it corresponds with the "superspade" image, and it is partly correct in that many policemen do have such a fear. Indeed, in Hunters Point both groups are partly accurate in interpreting the attitudes of each other. This leads not to greater tolerance but to more and more unbearable tensions, which seem to need periodic release in outbursts of aggression on both sides.

The infamous Watts riots came before the Hunters Point riot, and Hunters Point residents commented at length on the Los Angeles situation. It was seen as a powerful expression of Negro strength, though in fact nearly all the victims of the riot were Negro. "We really showed them gray bastards" seems incongruous in the face of the fact that very little violence was directed against "grays" (Caucasians), with the exception of absent shop-owners. Negro rioters in

Watts did not leave Watts to attack whites. They simply did what Negroes have traditionally done and turned the violence as much on themselves as on others. This is an even clearer pattern in San Francisco.

The police, however, aware of the hostility towards them, are concerned about symbolic as well as real aggression. If it is true that frustration and prejudice combine to create explosive acts by police, they are able to do so even more among Negro males, and not all such aggressiveness is symbolic. While "being a man" is extremely important to the young Negro male, and his friends confirm him continuously as a "man," the police have a tendency not to treat him at all like a man. He is called "punk," "nigger bastard" and a variety of other obscene and degrading expressions. These threats hit too close to home for many teen-age Negro males. Many arrests and charges of "resisting arrest" or "assaulting an officer" originate from unbearable tongue-lashings by police which humiliate and emasculate young Negro males.

Police-resident relationships, then, are predictably unpredictable and unsatisfactory. The residents see police action as racially oppressive and police inaction as stemming from indifference or fear. These views are correct enough to receive support from each new confrontation. In this situation the police cannot be expected to enforce general social sanctions so that the community accepts them.

Community Control

Public opinion as an alternative form of social control in Hunters Point is as ineffectual as the police. It mainly affects those younger than teen-age and over 50. Teen-agers, older teen-agers and people in their twenties—that is, those most likely to be involved in gambling, heavy drinking, fighting and theft—are least likely to be affected. This is true for several reasons. First, Hunters Point is not truly a community in the sense that its residents consciously try to identify with their neighbors. It is merely a place to live —or more accurately to sleep. Especially for young men and women, since they spend little time there, it does not represent "home" in any secure sense. Young men and women spend as much time as possible on Third Street at the foot of the Hill in the record shops, hamburger stands, bars and other amusement places that fill the street. Many try to spend most of their time in the Fillmore (another predominantly Negro district in San Francisco) or downtown. In Hunters Point itself there is nothing to do. Outside of playgrounds for children there are no organized amusement centers on the Hill.

Young males especially can afford to ignore the complaints of middle-aged women, since it is one of the few ways in which they can exhibit independence and superiority over females. Older blacks in general rightly see in the behavior of the young a reversal of the American Protestant tradition to which they themselves belong. While there was by the summer of 1967 little of the distinctive visual characteristics of black self-awareness, such as the "natural" hair style, the new standards were those of cool detachment, involving occasional drug use on the one hand, and rowdy male exhibitionism on the other.

The final major sanctioning agency in Hunters Point is the Housing Authority, but its main power, that of simply removing tenants (sometimes arbitrarily), is rapidly being reduced. In the absence of any other effective form of social control, then, what sanctions exist have come to correspond to the standards of the young, who are increasingly aware of the conflct between black and white, and are the more inclined to believe that what hurts a white man is justifiable on that account alone.

The Riot: 128 Hours

The police report of the incident is in the form of a very well organized pamphlet entitled *128 Hours,* the total length of the disturbance. This pamphlet details from the official police point of view the chronology of events during the disturbance. The report implies that the situation was handled by the San Francisco police in an orderly and dignified fashion and that at no time was the situation inadequately understood by the police, who exhibited a general aura of competence. This report is at variance with some of the descriptions by individual police officers (none of whom can be named at this time for fear of prejudicing their positions) and is also at variance with the implications of the public press and the reportage of individuals who were present and/or arrested. Clearly these were not necessarily objective. Yet the police have an obvious vested interest as well. It is certain, however, that the police action did *not* result in any deaths after that of Matthew Johnson.

Johnson was shot on Tuesday, 27 September, in a lot off Navy Road, which runs through Hunters Point. A large crowd of people immediately gathered there. This crowd broke up in about two hours (4:00 P.M.). But, fearing Watts-style violence, the police tried to use so-called community leaders (black members of the city's Human Rights Commission) and confronted them with 70 or so black youths at a meeting in the Economic Opportunity Center on Third Street, just outside the Hunters Point housing site itself. Predictably, the Negro middle-class "community leaders" had absolutely no impact on the local young men except to incense them further. The latter cared only that Officer Johnson be punished for "murder." This was understandable, but apparently not to the police.

The young men, consciously aware of their own economic deprivation, unconsciously responding to their precarious self-image and emboldened by the action of Negroes in Watts, were making every attempt to assert themselves in the face of this traditionally feared element of the white community (the police). They had also learned to despise successful middle-class Negroes as "Uncle Toms." Success in the white world is de facto evidence of "Tomming" to these young men.

The police now turned to the head of Youth for Service, supposedly an organization of ex-gang youths who operated as a liaison between the police and the fighting gangs. This too, of course, was doomed to failure as the police had been misled by their belief that the Youth for Service leader controlled anything at all; gangs no longer existed in Hunters Point as a focus of any fighting activity or organizational strength.

A third tactical error was made in bringing Mayor John Shelley of San Francisco to address the crowd at Third Street near the Bayview Community Center. He indicated that Officer Johnson had been suspended pending an investigation of the incident. But the individuals who by this time were thinking in terms of "making their own little Watts" cared very little for the appearance of the mayor, who showed that he felt this one incident was central to the riot and that he was incapable of understanding the basic roots of discontent and its meaning in Hunters Point. Additionally, Mayor Shelley and other civic leaders, standing on the dignity of their offices, could not understand that their refusal to be "moved by violence" was interpreted as indifference and hate by the residents. As one of the rioters said some days later,

> Shit man, that the first time the white motherfucker ever come down here to Hunters Point. Fuck man, we should riot every week, that get something out of that motherfucker.

In fact, the desire to move "the man" by violence, which would also negate personal feelings of inadequacy, was a core element of the situation.

Even more tragically, the Negro middle-class leadership failed to see that their presence could do no good and that they were not leaders of Hunters Point at all. They did not understand what the dispute was about, and they had no power to change the social situation. They expressed the view: "If they only realized what is being done for them and what we're all trying to do, they wouldn't riot." It was apparent that these "leaders" did not see that the "what was being done for them" was itself part of the package of frustrations leading to the disturbance.

The most eminent "Negro political leader" in the city, and the only one on the Board of Supervisors of the city, a man with a past record of leadership in the NAACP and as a defense lawyer in civil rights cases in the city, went with the mayor to Hunters Point to address the rioters and to try to calm them. If anything, he was greeted with greater antagonism than the mayor.

Rocks were thrown at the entourage, some of them narrowly missing both the mayor and the Negro supervisor, and the latter was completely unable to make himself heard. As one Hunters Pointer later put it,

> That cocksucker forget he's black, but when we put them fuckers on the run, they sure let him know at City Hall right away. Sheeit, man, who the fuck he think he's foolin?

The Hunters Pointers felt that they saw the situation more realistically than the supervisor who was "fooling" himself into believing that he was actually accepted as an equal.

After a night of sporadic rioting, the "community leaders" (self-selected as well as those selected by the police and mayor) were unable to handle the situation. The police gave them a time limit on Wednesday afternoon. If at the end of an hour and a half they were still unable to control the situation, there would be police action in force to do so. These community leaders, many of whom were part of the matriarchal structure, as well as ministerial and poverty workers who were not part of it, were completely unable to control the situation. *There was nothing that they were empowered to offer the rioters in return for their stopping the riot which was even half as great as the reward for rioting itself.* Vague promises could not compensate for abandoning the sense of power which the riot gave its participants.

The police now called on the National Guard and other units of the Highway Patrol. At about 5:44 P.M. there was an incident which insured that the riot would not be brought under control quickly. Interestingly, the police report notes this incident in passing in the narrative section, and in the official police log of activities it is not noted at all, although it is the one incident all police officers involved in the riot and all Hunters Point residents recall. Police, in response, as they alleged, to gunfire being directed toward them from the Bayview Community Center, began to open fire on it. After riddling this frame building with every caliber of gun available, the police entered only to find several cowed and huddled children of pre-teen age and no evidence of any shooting or weapons in the building. The police did not kill any of the rioters, but the community now felt they wanted to and that they could expect no mercy. In fact, as well as overtly expressed anti-black attitudes, the police did engage in at least some willful property damage. Numerous bullet holes on a building 100 feet away from the community center indicate that it was gratuitously used as a target by police marksmen. Officers' reports confirm that some of their colleagues competed to see who could hit the gutterspout on top of the building. According to the reports, "Have you got your nigger today?" was a typical question, even though there seems to have been rather little shooting at people per se.

But not only was there some intentional shooting at unnecessary objects because of sport, some shooting occurred as a result of panic which struck the police officers (according to reports from individual police officers themselves). Just prior to the shooting, an officer was hit by a rock on his forehead. A small cut was opened, and the rumor was quickly passed, "They got one of our guys," and an unnamed sergeant gave the order to fire at the Bayview Community Center. Many officers did so in panic.

This panic shows the extent to which white people in San Francisco have sterotyped notions of a Negro threat that far exceeds the evidence. These notions, which result in part from the projection of hatred onto Negroes and guilt over mistreatment of Negroes, has continued in full force even among police, who should actually be the more aware of the fact that Negro aggressiveness is almost always directed against other Negroes.

But by now the police were in no position to make discriminations between "good" Negroes and "bad" Negroes. Some Negro police officers, especially those in plain clothes, even after being identified, were mistreated and manhandled as well as attacked with derogatory racial epithets, as were (from their own reports) any number of otherwise inoffensive Negro middle-class types whose sin lay in the fact that they were the wrong color at the wrong time (one Negro informant was arrested and subsequently dismissed from his job although he was never convicted).

The Police Community Relations Unit, the very arm of the police force which was supposed to deal with minority groups, and whose head (since resigned) has an excellent reputation even among some of the most incorrigible criminals in the Hunters Point area, was not called into the area. Apart from the officer permanently attached to the area from the Community Relations Unit, no officer from this unit was assigned, according to members of the unit. Some officers on the force, both in and out of the unit, believe that this is because of racism in the department, or more mildly, a distrust of "soft tactics" when dealing with rioters.

However, the police undoubtedly considered the residents as riotous and dangerous long before they had become so, and this perception determined the actions of the police and finally the actions of the rioters. The police tend unconsciously to reinforce a Negro's fantasy image of himself as aggressive or dangerous in everyday encounters. In a riot, this will happen faster and more intensely. Moreover, in a riot there are no easy techniques of identification of friend or foe for the police to use except skin color, which becomes the sole criterion. Black skin equals rioter, white skin equals friend, so that there is even less chance to form a more sophisticated perception.

The next four days saw the riot continue with a decreasing incidence of violence and then finally peter out. A few fires were set, some windows broken; there was some looting along Third Street, but primarily the riot consisted of large numbers of "uncontrolled" Negroes moving along the streets. The damage, compared with riots in comparably sized cities, was minimal (several hundred thousand dollars), as were the casualties (ten civilians reported as victims of gunshot wounds with no serious casualties for the police or other antiriot personnel).

Perhaps the best indication of how passive the Negro response was in Hunters Point and how unreasonable the massive fears of whites is that there were less than half a dozen assaults recorded by Negroes against whites in the course of five days of rioting. Far more violent acts than throwing bricks from a distance at police officers, breaking store windows and sporadic looting are possible in a large metropolitan area with a significant Negro population. There must have been some restraining factor other than the police at work. We suggest it was the internalized fear of whites, so difficult to break down, coupled with a "holiday mood." The riots were as much attempts to strengthen self-image as direct expressions of hatred and dissatisfaction with whites.

The police's reaction is an interesting one. Until the beginning of the sixties, the police had dealt with Negro youths from Hunters Point by isolating them in Hunters Point. As one officer described his customary way of dealing with Negroes out of bounds, "Get back up on the Hill where you belong nigger. If I see your black ass down here again, I'll shoot it off." At the outbreak of the riots, though they were more or less city-wide, the same tactic was used. Negroes, no matter who they were or why they were in the Third Street area, were either arrested or pushed physically back up the Hill.

Even "moderate responsible" Negro adults feared that Negroes were being herded into Hunters Point so that they could be bombarded by naval vessels in the Bay. The fear was increased when an aircraft carrier in the Bay was seen passing Hunters Point. Panic, fear and a sense of total isolation from the United States as a social system typified the feelings of many residents.

> When I was a boy in the army, I mean, man they was bringing in 90 millimeter recoilless rifles against us. I was scared. Man, that was what we was trained to use against the enemy. And that's what I was now—the enemy. I was just waiting for that carrier to send over planes and bomb us like they do in Vietnam.

However, there was some positive response as well. By Thursday the police report notes that youth peace patrols had been formed by some of the young men in Hunters Point, among them the few truly effective community leaders, who were aided as best they could be by the severely hampered Police Community Relations Unit supposedly attached to the Hunters Point area.

In spite of official approval for this group, many police officers saw those of their colleagues who supported it as "coddlers" who were trying to legitimize illegitimate Negro youth organizations (lumping together in their minds the nonexistent "bopping gangs," the poverty workers and other political activists). If blacks were automatically enemies, then to allow groups of them to do what the police could not do was bound to antagonize the more prejudiced members of the force.

Immediately after the riot, many residents of Hunters Point clearly hoped that the incidents of that fall would lead to greater solidarity among the different community groups and that many of the young men who had distinguished themselves in peace-making activities would gain prestige and power in the community.

The Aftermath

Not only did this not happen, the opposite occurred. Even greater community disintegration resulted. The general belief that "nobody cares" and "it's too late to do anything" became widespread. Because they used military weapons and troops, the authorities were perceived by the residents as making full-scale war. Even "Uncle Toms," notorious for their pro-white attitude, have openly begun to state that they see whites as racists. Some residents have consequently formulated grandiose plans of "war" against white society or purchased small arms "to take some of them with us." Others who see these plans as deluded have simply given up hope and withdrawn.

The blatant and exclusive use by the police of the color criterion to decide whether or not to "rough you up" makes it very difficult for Negroes to continue communicating with whites in Hunters Point. Very few community organizations are still functioning. Even the long-existing Bayview Community Center now counts many pessimistic and cynical "time-servers" among its staff, and there is general feeling that it will soon close.

Very few people in Hunters Point now discuss the riots. Teen-agers and young adult males now believe more strongly that they are seen as truly dangerous. This desperately-wanted recognition has failed to remedy the causes of the feelings of inadequacy for which it compensates.

The white community has a fiction of its own for coping with this problem. Immediately after the riots, a consortium of local business leaders offered 2,000 jobs for Hunters Point youths, to try to alleviate the severe unemployment problem. The jobs were to be channeled through the Youth Opportunity Center. These promises of steady full-time or part-time work were made in October of 1966. By June 1967, 19 of these jobs had actually materialized.

As one of the staff at the Youth Opportunity Center indicated,

> It is no longer possible to get the kids here to be enthusiastic about going for jobs—or waiting for all those jobs to come through. They just don't believe it will happen. They are right! After the first big rush of kids coming here for jobs after the riots, when no jobs happened, they just stopped coming. It's just as well; we don't have anything for them.

Probably the clearest aspect of the riot is that both black and white were and still are unable to see how deep are the disorders underlying this almost impotent attempt at self-assertion. Seriously in doubt of their own worth, and anyway denied the means of expressing it, young Negro men

(and some women) in Hunters Point, without plan or forethought, drifted into an inept and inadequate revolt. At the same time, frightened beyond reason, perhaps through guilt, and certainly through their own paranoid projections and inadequate understanding of Hunters Point residents, the whites (police) underreacted, reacted wrongly, and finally overreacted to this confrontation.

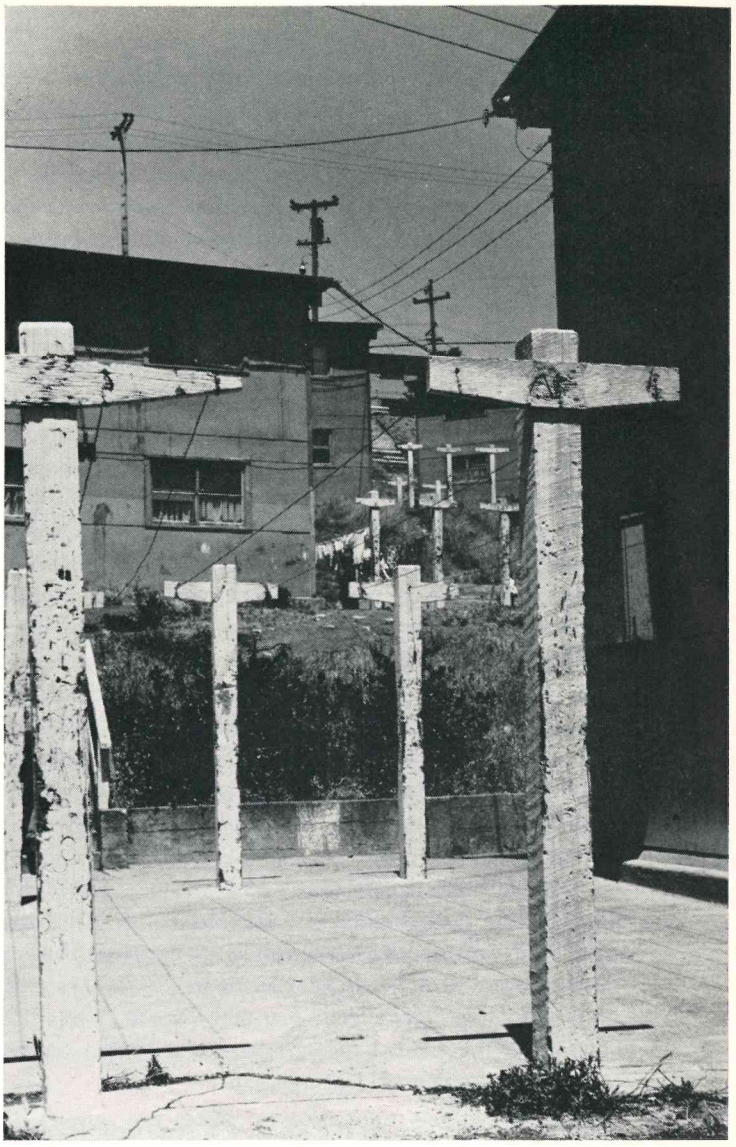
Yet, there is something about the Hunters Point riots and white reaction to them that suggests that the United States had already institutionalized some method of handling these perceptions and misperceptions in symbolic form. Whites, on the whole, feel city-burnings to be too expensive to tolerate; Negroes generally seem to feel the danger of police reaction to be too dangerous to tolerate. Thus, both groups have compromised upon the "black militant aggressor" scenario as a substitute. In this scenario, young powerless Negroes are permitted the secondary rewards that riots give them. Permitted and indeed encouraged by whites to mouth revolutionary shibboleths, they are also allowed the *form* but not the *substance* of real manhood, independent thought and revolutionary political action. Meanwhile, more quiescent Negroes are given the opportunity of either decrying this "violence" and supporting their own passive role or of saying "I told you so" and thus at a distance identifying with the militants and safely, though vicariously, "bugging whites."

Sympathetic whites are permitted the luxury of indulging bravado militants while avoiding any dramatic structural changes that would give substance to the form of black power. Unsympathetic whites are permitted anger, fear and their own traditional paranoid concerns over "dangerous Negroes" and can view with alarm this formal rather than substantive militance.

Thus, the American game of black and white is played out. The perceptions and misperceptions of both races tend to stabilize race separation. Leakage out of this system is available only to a few "white" Negroes. Whites will fully integrate only nondangerous non-Negro Negroes.

A clear illustration of this is the increasingly prevalent belief among both black and white leaders that "separation" must precede "real integration." Black power separatism in this context is a "good thing," since only in "separation" can the black self-image improve. In fact, of course, Negroes and whites have *always* been separated in the United States. This "new" notion is surely no more than an attempt to formalize in the North what has always been true in the South. Until large numbers of Negroes began to live in the North, northerners could avoid dealing with their own racist feelings. Now, rather than face this racism openly and attempt to understand the cultural differences and psychological attitudes upon which this racism is based, whites are retreating from the problem by fostering separatism.

This, of course, fits the unconscious needs of some Negroes. Unable to "get into the game," except as white



Negroes, many have taken on an outspoken "dangerous Negro" image. This helps overcome those feelings of inadequacy we have discussed. In this way, in an era of what appears to be very dynamic change in race relations in the United States, the status quo is actually maintained.

Hunters Point was early in the series of summer riots in the United States. The ones which followed became fiercer, partly because black youths felt that they had to do something "real bad to whitey" in order to feel more powerful, and partly because the white response came increasingly to be based on the "law and order" myth. If this chain reaction were to continue, then social catastrophe would certainly result. It would become plausible to predict full race war and concentration camps. But at any rate, the expected explosion in the cities in the summer of 1969 did not occur; and while militant blacks will no doubt develop more sophisticated techniques of action, it is likely that in the foreseeable future such action will remain symbolic. But if whites sustain their misperceptions and react without being aware of *what* black actions symbolize, then Americans can expect the worst.