**WALTER CRONKITE – IMAGE #6 – 1967 Race Riots**

In the middle of the 1960’s, the successes of the Civil Rights movement began to fragment. On August 111965, less than a week after the passage of the voting rights act. Watts, a predominately black and poor community in Los Angeles, exploded in a frenzy of riots and looting. When the uprising ended, 34 people were dead, almost 4000 rioters were in jail, and property damage exceeded 35 million dollars.

Liberal commentators were both stumped and surprised because the riots occurred in the wake of the greatest legislative victories for black Americans since reconstruction. Moreover, the National Urban League had rated Los Angeles as the most prosperous and desirable city for African and American residents in the United States. But events did not stand still to await white Liberal comprehension. 1967 went down in American history as one of the nations most notorious “Long, Hot Summers”.

Two years after the infamous 1965 riots in Watts, racial tension erupted again in violence as 125 cities, including Cincinnati, Cleveland, Washington D.C. and Detroit experienced riots in 1967. Among the most well known and destructive of those uprisings was the one which occurred in Newark, New Jersey. This violence cannot be blamed on a heat wave, but the uncomfortable weather that summer undoubtedly played a part in amplifying the already high-pitched tensions in Newark.

Housing segregation, which had begun when African American’s started moving to that city in 1870, had concentrated Newark’s black community into one of the nations poorest ghettos. In 1967, Newark had the countries highest percentage of substandard housing as well as the second highest rates of crime and infant mortality. Although deteriorated housing, high unemployment, inferior schools, a corrupt municipal government and a lack of political power set the scene for the violence in 1967.

Two issues that summer had particularly elevated racial tension in Newark. One involved the Mayors selection for the position of secretary for the school board, a matter that nearly caused a fight between blacks and whites at a June meeting. The other was the plans of the city to construct the New Jersey College of Medicine and Dentistry on a 50 acre plot in the central ward that the African American community thought that should be used for housing. The Newark riot of 1967 was sparked by a display of Police brutality, John Smith, and African American cab driver for the Safety Cab Company was arrested on Wednesday July 12th when he drove his taxi around a Police car and double parked on 15th Avenue. According to a Police report later released to the press, the Police claim that smith was charged with tailgating and driving in the wrong direction on a one-way street. He was also charged with using offensive language and physical assault.

A witness who had seen Smith’s arrest, called members of the Congress of Racial Equality Corps, the United Freedom Party, the Newark Community Freedom Project, These civil rights leaders were given permission to see Smith in his 4th precinct holding cell. After noticing his injuries inflicted by the Police, they demanded that he be transported to a hospital. Their demands were granted, as Smith was moved to Beth Israel hospital in Newark.

Around 8 p.m., black Newark cab drivers began to circulate on their radios the report of Smith’s arrest. Word spread down 17th Avenue, west of the precinct police station where Smith had been held. Residents in this predominately black city recalled a long history of similar events with the Newark police. The riots began as a crowd of about two hundred gathered on the streets facing the 4th Precinct stationhouse to protest the arrest of the cab driver with chants of police brutality. At 11 p.m. on of the Civil rights leaders informed the Police that a peaceful protest would be organized across the street from the precinct.

A Police officer handed the leader a bullhorn to address the crowd. Bob Curvin, a member of Corps, was joined by Timothy Still, the president of a poverty program and by Oliver Lofton, an administrator of the Newark Legal Services Project. Although the three speakers urged a non-violent protest march, an unidentified local resident took the bullhorn and advocated violence. Angry young men from the neighborhood began to pick up bricks and bottles and rocks, as well as search for gasoline. Shortly thereafter, these objects were thrown at the precinct windows. Eventually however, the crowd was dispersed for a while.

A few minutes after midnight, Molotov cocktails were thrown at the precinct. The a group of twenty-five people on 17th Avenue caroused through the city. Smashing windows, mostly of Liquor stores, throwing merchandise in the streets and pulling fire alarms. The looting drew larger crowds. Newark was now engulfed in rioting.

Despite the violence, on Thursday morning July13th, Mayor Hugh Addonizio, announced that the activities on Wednesday night had been isolated incidents, and were not of riot proportions. At 6p.m. Thursday night, a large group of youths gathered on the street where traffic had been blocked. Word spread along 17th Avenue that people would again begin demonstrating against the precinct.

Human Rights Commissioner James Street, arrived and told the crowds to disperse. They refused and rioting commenced for a second night. After midnight Thursday, looting spread throughout the major commercial district in the ghetto in Newark. Groups of young adults smashed windows while chanting “Black Power!”

At the same time looting increased, the Police were given clearance to use firearms to defend themselves. At 2:20 a.m. on Friday, July 14th, Mayor Addonizio asked governor Richard J. Hughes to send in the National Guard to help restore order. Fires sprang up all over the city. A few minutes before 4 a.m. a looter was shot while trying to flee from two Police officers. By early Friday morning, five people had been killed, and 425 people were put in jail, hundreds were wounded.

By mid-afternoon on that same day more than three thousand National Guardsmen arrived along with 500 state troopers. They formed convoys and moved throughout the city. They opened fire on rioters. Black business owners started writing “Soul Bro” on their storefronts in the hope of preventing looting. Despite the presence of National Guardsmen and State troopers, rioting continued for three more days. The rioting left 26 people dead, mostly African Americans, including a 10 year-old boy named Edward Moss. Over 750 people were injured. Over a thousand were jailed. Property damage exceeded 10 Million dollars.

The Newark riot of 1967, the worst civil disorder in New Jersey history ended on July 17th. In retrospect, it was predictable that the civil rights movement would focus on the plight of urban blacks. By the mid 1960’s, 70% of the black population in the United States resided in metropolitan areas. Most of them lived in Central City Ghettos that had been bypassed by the prosperity of the post World War II period. It seemed clear, again in retrospect that the non-violent tactics that had worked in the South, would not work in the Northern cities.

In the north, the problems were defacto segregation resulting from residential patterns, not de jure segregation, amenable to changes in law. Northern white ethnic groups also did not have the cultural heritage that southern whites shared with blacks. A special commission on civil disorders noted that unlike earlier race riots, the urban upheavals of the 1960’s were initiated by black’s themselves. Earlier riots had been started by whites, which had the provoked black counter attacks. Now blacks undertook violence and destruction on themselves in an effort to destroy what they could not stomach, and with civil rights legislation, seemed unable to change.