



**HURT
BABY
HURT**

William Walter Scott, III

Hurt, Baby, Hurt

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WILLIAM WALTER SCOTT, III

University of Michigan Press
Ann Arbor

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A dedication to my father for painting
a way for perseverance in our community

“When you think of the long and gloomy history of man, you will find far more and far more hideous crimes have been committed in the name of obedience than in the name of rebellion.”

C. P. SNOW

ADDRESS TO THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE NEW YORK,
DECEMBER 28, 1960

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The Prophet

*I'm the prophet
they call me the prophet because I have the ability to
create cohesion*

(Yeah that's what I said: cohesion)

Didn't you know prophets had cohesion?

Oh yeah!

prophets got cohesion

*Now cohesion goes into everything you do:
including philosophizin', and did you also know:*

"The Prophet Knows"

*Now I lived in a neighborhood
where there is a bunch of hustlers, gamers,
& booty tamers . . . They rebelled one July and went to jail (busted!)*

Yah

Yah

Yah

& now that they're out of the joint

(Stipufyin'!) Many of them came out speaking like Socrates

Malcolm X

LeRoi Jones

& some even came out talkin' like Joe Louis

But there's one thing they all said:

"Now I IS A PROPHET

AND I AIN'T GOING TO JAIL ANYMORE."

You see what I mean;

*all these cats get themselves together & that's why they're called prophets and all
this put together is . . . COHESION*

Foreword

by Austin McCoy

What is it like to start a rebellion? William Walter Scott III is one of the few Black Americans who can answer this question and live to write about it. In his 1970 memoir *Hurt, Baby, Hurt*, Scott gives readers a first-hand account of the five days in July 1967 that shattered Detroit's and the US's sense of racial progress. In the years following the uprising, Scott detailed his experiences growing up in and around Twelfth Street, the epicenter of the unrest. *Hurt, Baby, Hurt* is an emotional personal history challenging many long-held assumptions about being Black in America at a time of radical change. Scott details a life of trauma and pain stemming from threats of structural racism; familial, community, and state violence; and economic precarity. Yet, like other coming-of-age stories written by Black Americans like Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, *Hurt, Baby, Hurt* also documents a journey toward racial consciousness and self-actualization that takes readers from slavery and emancipation to Twelfth Street to mental health centers to freedom amid the rebellion and its aftermath.

Many scholars of Detroit's history have claimed the road to rebellion was paved long before 1967. Detroit, like many northern US cities in the 20th century, was ethnically and racially segregated along class lines. White Americans defended these racial and class boundaries violently in the decades preceding the 1960s. In 1925, a white mob tried to attack physician Ossian Sweet after he purchased a house for his family in a predominately white working-class neighborhood. A jury failed to convict Sweet and ten others of murder after someone fired shots from Sweet's house, killing one man in the crowd.¹ In 1943, racial tensions boiled over and spilled out into the open as white and Black Americans fought in the streets in what became known as the Detroit Race Riot.

Meanwhile, William Walter Scott III's father, William Walter Scott II, and Black workers in local auto plants, had to contend with racial discrimination in hiring, as illustrated by Thomas Sugrue in his pivotal book, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*. If they were able to acquire a job in one of the many factories, they often were the last hired, first fired, and had to perform the "meanest and dirtiest jobs."²

And as many Black Americans struggled to gain employment in the city's auto plants, many more had to contend with police harassment and state violence. The "Big Four" exemplified how the Detroit Police Department terrorized Black residents. The Big Four was a unit of four notorious police officers who routinely harassed Black folks in the Twelfth Street area. The Big Four were at the center of what scholar Herb Boyd called a "small riot" on Kercheval Avenue in 1966 as some Black youths resisted harassment, leading to a "commotion" where people threw objects, including Molotov cocktails, at the offending officers.³ Even Scott detailed his run-in with the Big Four in the year preceding the rebellion. The Big Four, according to Scott, "consisted of three plainclothes detectives and one uniformed driver who rode around in a marked police limousine busting prostitutes, dope pushers, and just plain fucking with people."⁴

For some Detroit residents, however, Jerome Cavanagh's election in 1961 appeared to signal that change was on the horizon. Cavanagh appeared as the model mayor for the model city. The new mayor addressed the city's financial deficit in one year. He acquired over \$230 million in federal money for the city between July 1962 and August 1967. Cavanagh governed as an integrationist, either appointing Black Detroiters to key positions in city government or selecting white officials that the city's Black population favored. The mayor even fought poverty before President Johnson declared war on it in 1964. The Cavanagh administration concentrated on addressing the problem of structural unemployment in the early 1960s. Cavanagh commissioned a study and established youth programs such as the Special Youth Employment Project to address unemployment. These programs, alongside others concentrating on redevelopment, comprised what the Cavanagh administration later called the Total Action against Poverty (TAP).⁵ However, despite the national attention that Cavanagh's handling of race relations and poverty attracted, conditions for African American residents of Detroit continued

to deteriorate from years of capital flight, residential and job discrimination, and racial violence.⁶

By the 1960s, Black Detroiters had organized and built a robust political culture. In a city with a rich history of radical and labor politics, Black Detroiters were at the fore of articulating fundamental critiques of racism and capitalism embedded in the US system. Malcolm X delivered his famed “Message to the Grassroots” in the same year as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. first gave his “I Have a Dream” speech at a rally. Two weeks after King’s address in Detroit, Detroit police shot and killed sex worker Cynthia Scott, sparking a campaign for justice and accountability for those officers. Detroiters like Reverend Albert Cleage, autoworker James Boggs, and philosopher Grace Lee Boggs, organized Black folks in organizations such as Group on Advanced Leadership (GOAL).

These socioeconomic and political conditions in the 1960s set the stage for rebellion in Detroit. The nation’s long, hot summer had come into full swing by the summer of 1967. Police encounters with Black Americans in Newark and Detroit sparked uprisings a week apart. In the early hours of the morning of July 23, Detroit police officers raided Scott’s father’s establishment, the United Community and Civic League (UCCL) located at the corner of Clairmont and Twelfth Street. The UCCL operated as a political organization and as a “blind pig.” In the July 23 raid, the police tried arresting all 85 patrons, which sparked the ire of those who gathered outside of the club.⁷ Scuffles between police and patrons ensued. Then Scott grabbed a bottle and threw it at one of the officers, aiming at his head but missing and landing near his feet. Then more people started throwing objects at the police. The rebellion was on. The fight between the police and Black patrons spurred the most destructive uprising in US history. Forty-three people died and more than 7,000 people were arrested. The city suffered at least \$40 million in property damage.⁸

The Detroit rebellion reorganized local politics. In the wake of the uprising, members of Detroit’s civic and business communities formed a coalition—the New Detroit Committee—to address the conditions that gave rise to the city’s revolt. The rebellion also galvanized an already politicized Black population. According to local activists James and Grace Lee Boggs, collective violence represented the “birth of a nation” in Detroit, where Black residents sought to control Twelfth Street’s reconstruction and take control over the city’s institutions. According

to Boggs, Black Detroiters who participated in the rebellion, like Scott, “demonstrated . . . that the black brothers and sisters in the street have the power to destroy the urban centers of these United States, and that if their needs and aspirations are not satisfied in any rebuilding the whole thing will be burned down again.”⁹ Detroiters like Rev. Cleage organized the City-Wide Citizens Action Committee (CCAC) and the Federation for Self-Determination. Soon after, a cohort of young Black working-class Detroiters took this same spirit into the factories. They formed the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM), spreading like wildfire throughout town. They began advocating for greater Black control of union activities and sought to organize a Black-led working-class revolution in the US.

The Newark and Detroit uprisings provoked President Lyndon Johnson and other national political and business leaders to seek explanations for the urban crisis at a time when civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. scrutinized the War on Poverty.¹⁰ On July 29, President Johnson called a meeting to organize a probe of the causes of the civil disorders. The commission of public leaders charged with examining the wave of riots consisted of civil rights leaders and a bipartisan group of legislators, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP) Roy Wilkins, New York City Mayor John Lindsay, and the chairman of the newly formed group, Illinois Governor Otto Kerner. Johnson charged the commission with investigating the nation’s riots without regard to the Administration’s views on urban affairs. “Let your search be free,” Johnson insisted.¹¹ The Kerner Commission, as observers eventually dubbed it, undertook a massive study of the history of racism and inner-city conditions that contributed to the rebellion.

While the members of the Kerner Commission took Johnson’s call for a free search for answers at his word, the President was not happy with its conclusions. Grounded in research of riots in multiple cities but centering on Detroit and Newark, the Commission issued a stinging rebuke of structural racism: “Our Nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.”¹² As Jelani Cobb notes, the Commission placed the ultimate cause of the anti-racist rebellions onto white America. “The so-called Negro problem was, in fact, a white problem,” Cobb asserts about the report’s conclusion.¹³ The Kerner Report argued for a “a decidedly liberal course of action” in developing government

programs to address structural unemployment, housing, education segregation, and policing in the US. Unhappy with the findings, Johnson defunded the Commission and shelved the report.¹⁴ While Congress passed a federal housing bill in 1968, the federal government, as well as state governments, would focus more on militarizing local and state police forces and training them in riot prevention, building prisons, and engaging in counterintelligence programs designed to prevent the next uprising. From here, the US prison population, especially among Black Americans, began its steady climb, sowing the seeds for what historians and advocates call mass incarceration.

The 1967 rebellion has often been a political fault line in Detroit and US history. Rather than serve as a warning to US society, political leaders and many white Americans responded by evading its lesson in the hope that this nation's legitimacy would remain unscathed. As Scott Kurashige explains in his book, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion: How the U.S. Political Crisis Began in Detroit*, a nostalgic history of pre-1967 Detroit emerged in the aftermath, emphasizing a mythic city organized around the "arsenal of democracy." Many often juxtaposed this idyllic understanding of Detroit's history with the narrative of racial conflict and economic turbulence of the Coleman Young years, the 1990s, and the financial crises of the 2000s and early 2010s until Mike Duggan's election in 2014. Again, though, Scott's *Hurt, Baby, Hurt* reminds readers that a tranquil pre-1967 rebellion in Detroit never existed. It also serves as a warning for future readers as police violence and structural racism continue to upend Black, Brown, and low-income families. Detroiters who participated in the Detroit Will Breathe movement that arose amid the 2020 racial justice protests against the police killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd understood the lessons about state violence and racism that Scott conveyed in his memoir.

William Walter Scott III's *Hurt, Baby, Hurt* inverts the famous "Burn Baby Burn" slogan from the 1965 Watts Rebellion (famously uttered by Black militant activist H. Rap Brown). As his memoir recounts his role in starting the 1967 rebellion, the title refers to all the trauma, pain, and precarity he, his family, and many Black Detroiters living on and around Twelfth Street endured. Scott III learned about living under the threat of violence

from within as his father often meted out emotional and physical punishment. And, for Scott, dealing with his father's anger led to him developing a distrust of other Black men: "So, for years on top of years, the terror I felt toward my father haunted me into fear of every black man that resembled him. I was convinced that every black adult male was my father," he wrote.¹⁵

However, one of *Hurt, Baby, Hurt*'s strengths is Scott's ability to illustrate the complexities of his family and the Twelfth Street community. Scott acknowledges the roles that racism, employment discrimination, and economic precarity played in his father's behavior. As labor historians and scholars have argued, the work lives of working class and unemployed men and interpersonal violence are intricately and tragically linked. Men tend to bring home the stressors of work, racism, or not being able to find employment and, unfortunately, take out their anger on their partners and children. This anger often feeds into the family's collective stress around its precarity in an economic system based upon the "American Dream," or the belief in upward economic mobility. Scott's text reminds readers that Black Americans have always had to deal with the real possibility of downward mobility.

While many historians continue to produce histories of racial inequality, state violence, and urban rioting in the US, rightfully focusing on how local institutions, public policy, and capitalism create the conditions for collective revolt, Scott offers readers an interior history of the 1967 rebellion. Scott takes readers within as he examines his responses to his experiences dealing with trauma, the threat of violence, and racism. He acknowledges how his low self-esteem and struggles with mental health and learning constructed his negative self-perception. Scott refers to himself as "the ugliest creature related to man." And his sense of ugliness was connected to his Blackness as he detailed his physical features. Scott's reference to his ugliness and Blackness immediately recalls the doll tests the NAACP administered to Black children to prove the psychological damage inflicted by Jim Crow's "separate but equal" education. Consequently, Scott spent many of his young years running from his Blackness.

But *Hurt, Baby, Hurt* is also a coming-of-age story about a young Black man seeking personal healing toward forging an anti-racist and pro-Black consciousness. Scott viewed his internalized anti-Blackness as the result of the physical and emotional bullying he suffered at his father's and oth-

ers' hands. Yet, Scott tried avoiding the issue of his racial identity as he worked through trauma with the Boys Republic psychiatrist. Scott recalls how Dr. Tom Maxwell finally encouraged Scott to rethink his relationship to his Blackness in their final meeting. Scott's discussion of the role that therapy played for him as an emotionally struggling Black person was ahead of its time as more Black Americans now tend to view seeing a therapist as acceptable, if not necessary, to maintaining one's health. But *Hurt, Baby, Hurt* reminds readers that therapy alone cannot radicalize society. People still need to engage in collective political acts.

It is not a coincidence that Scott came into political consciousness in the years leading up to and after the 1967 rebellion. Changes in politics and culture necessitated personal and community transformation. Malcolm X left the Nation of Islam in 1963 and began preaching about the need for Black Americans to organize themselves around Black nationalist principles. He preached about a global revolution that connected all Black folks in the African Diaspora. The civil rights movement, led by an array of activists and organizations like Ella Baker, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Fannie Lou Hamer, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, scored crucial legislative and policy victories in local and national politics. Younger generations discarded the term "Negro" in favor of "Black" amid the urban rebellions of the decade and the Black Power Movement. Black urban youth rebelled against respectability politics—they wore "Afros" and dashikis, adopted the Black Panther Party uniform of leather jackets and Black berets, and refused to participate in the moral suasion made popular by leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. They criticized liberal integration. Instead, they demanded power and the ability to control local institutions like education, government, and the police. They identified more with the anticolonialism and anti-capitalism of Frantz Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah, Mao, and Ho Chi Minh.

Scott's depiction of his participation in the 1967 rebellion reads more like an example of Fanon's arguments about anticolonial violence as a cleansing force for the oppressed than a mere diversion from nonviolent civil disobedience. After recounting how he and a group of Black Detroiters confronted the police officers who barged into his father's club in the early hours of July 23, Scott writes,

“For the first time in our lives we felt free. Most important, we were right in what we did to the law. I felt powerful and good inside for being part of those who finally fought back regardless of fear . . . which was almost what could be called the unification of the rebellious spirit of man; a fearless spirit ordained for complete liberation of the self, combined with and supported by a community at large. Guess one could say it was like fighting and gaining your citizenship, after having given it away to obedience of the law—police law—which was a one-man judge and assassin that ruled black people.”¹⁶

Here, Scott taps into a visceral masculine political tradition of revolting against oppression that goes back to the Age of Revolutions in America, Haiti, and France. While Black Americans in the 1960s were not colonized in the traditional sense of the term, many Black activists, writers, and citizens often saw their oppressive conditions as part of the same system of US global hegemony. Racism confined Black Americans to specific neighborhoods, and the police represented an outside occupying force.

Most anti-racist, Black-led rebellions often start with Black Americans resisting the police. The uprising spreads as Black, and often, many non-Black folks begin to target institutions they believe have exploited them. Many observers of civil disturbances deny this revolt pattern and condemn all its participants’ actions as lawlessness. There is no room for legitimate revolt as long as the state maintains a monopoly over collective violence. However, if one were to ask Scott and Black participants in uprisings, from Watts in 1965 to the massive 2020 protests inspired by the police killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, they would tell you that the resistance to police, the looting of goods, and the burning of buildings were not wholly senseless, they were meant to send a message to an intransigent power structure. In his passage, Scott tells readers he’s not participating in a mere riot but a rebellion to rescue his citizenship rights and personhood from an economic and political system that seeks to rob him and others who look like him of his dignity every day.

We should read William Walter Scott III’s *Hurt, Baby, Hurt* alongside other coming-of-age stories authored by Black Americans. It follows the familiar from slavery to freedom narrative in African American history. However, Scott places many inconvenient truths on the table for readers to consider—highlighting intra-racial tensions, familial trauma, and

violence, the need for mental health care, the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and the looming presence of death in Black life. Scott's story resists easy political categorization and fits well within our contemporary culture, featuring popular depictions of urban life, complete with moral ambiguity and few satisfying resolutions like *The Wire*, *Snowfall*, or *Atlanta*. Most importantly, however, *Hurt, Baby, Hurt* underscores the role that political violence has and continues to play in US and Black history. Many Americans believe nonviolence is the only moral route toward personal and collective awakening and political change. Yet, it was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who, while not endorsing rioting as a tactic, acknowledged uprisings as canaries in the coal mine when he said that riots were the "language of the unheard." Scott's testimony in *Hurt, Baby, Hurt* brings these collective songs of sorrow and rage at systemic racism to a distinct pitch.

Notes

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1

Hurt Baby Hurt

I was born (by chance) on February 6, 1947, in Detroit, Michigan. My name is William Walter Scott, III (who needs credentials with a name like that). I am the son of my father: William Walter Scott Jr., who is the son of the original William Walter Scott, Sr., rest his slaving ass.

The way I heard the shit it's somewhat of a famous name that belonged to a Scotch dude by the name of Sir Walter Scott. Before anyone gets us two mixed up, let me set you cats straight. Sir Walter and me are not related in any way whatever. Besides, he's dead; I think I am still living. Also, Sir Walter was about seven shades lighter. I'm black as thunder. Now, I'll tell you how I got my name—a little family history.

You see, my father was born in the south some sixty two years ago where his father lived as a choice slave; a young buck. The story goes that when Old Abe freed the slaves my grandfather met the grandy and married her. And they had three children, all boys, by the time grandfather moved his family up north. Well, they settled in Detroit where two more children were born, both boys too. Among the five boys, my father, the second boy to be born was named after his father; William Walter Scott, Sr. So, after my father met my mother they too had five children but not all boys. To them were born three boys and two girls, and the first was a girl, my sister, and the second a boy, that's me: William Walter Scott III.

This might be a bit confusing and, if it is, let me tell you about the great granddad, my father's father's father. Now we're talking about the great granddad who was a slave most of his life and who was known just by the name, William Walter, period. It's still not understood where great granddad got his first or middle name, but we know that the last name, Scott, was bought by William Walter for two dollars and fifty cents from some southern cracker long time back.

Although he never used the name himself, you might think great

granddad passed the surname right on down. No. William Walter was of the belief that you just didn't give such value away without getting something in return from the son. One day William Walter said to granddad,

"Tell you what, son, if you can put up something against the two dollars and fifty cents I paid for this here surname, I shoot craps with you and winner take all."

Granddad wanted that name bad enough to bet his freedom, if and when he got it, against his father's two fifty name. So, as the story goes, granddad won the name from his father in a crap game and who knows what my name would be if granddad hadn't won maybe "Snow White."

But, what do you really say to people, man, when they ask you who you are, besides your name? Like can anybody really answer that question? And if I expect people to understand who I am or what I am in life to some degree I gotta tell them something about me. To try to get people from that point on to conceptualize me (the person they are reading about) is an enormous task, especially when one's not writing about himself entirely but a generation of men with different experiences that directed them all however to the same end: "violence." So, when I'm asked who I am, I can only reply—a multi complex individual whose name happened to be a bit unbelievable in certain colonies of America and, for this, I had to defend its origin—and myself. Sometimes, I think I should leave this country and go to England and get the "Sir" part added to the name before I pass it along. Then maybe my son might have a better chance because others more than likely will address him as "Sir," which should help him to get a positive image of himself. No, the key isn't in the name alone, but he's going to need everything, including the kitchen sink and the toilet stool.

To get knighted might be difficult these days because I haven't done anything worthwhile for England yet and who knows if America will respect my knighthood anyway. But anything is worth one try. I can see it now as it might happen:

"Rise, Sir William Walter Scott III, Prince of Soul, and be seated among the knights of the round table, for teaching me, the Queen of England, how to boo-go-loo in the House of Lords."

"I thank you, Queenie, for your recognition."

2

Child Be Born

I was fourteen when my mother died during a Labor Day week-end. I had come home for a visit from Boys Republic, the second of the institutions for emotionally disturbed children where I spent several years beginning at the age of ten. And before, none of us kids really got to know our mother because for many years before my leaving home she was in and out of the hospital with heart trouble. She had worn a hole in her heart that called for continued hospitalization and operation.

The telephone rang early that summer morning just as the sun was coming up. My father answered. I couldn't hear what he was saying too clearly but I heard him hurry from the dining room to his bedroom which I could see from the back bedroom where I lay awake between my two brothers as they slept. We slept on a king size mattress on the bedroom floor because the bedframe had given way some time before.

Seconds later I heard my father come into my sister's bedroom where the two girls slept.

"Wilma, Wilma," he called out to my sister who was the oldest. Wilma was a hard and heavy sleeper; for as long as I remember when you tried to wake her she'd fight in her sleep.

Her "what" came through loud and I heard my father say,

"Wilma, get up and wait by the phone for me to call you back, it's your mother,

I've got to get down to the hospital now."

I could hear Wilma's footsteps behind my father's all the way to the front door; the door slammed and only hers remained.

I couldn't figure out what was happening to my mother at the hospi-

tal. I had been to see her the day before and she was fine. But a horrid feeling came over me that picked me up from the mattress. I slipped into my street pants so I could go ask my sister what was the matter with mama. I walked through my sister's room where little Charlotte was still asleep. She was the youngest. Wilma was sitting at the dining room table, staring at the phone.

"Why did daddy go to the hospital?"

"Mama is worse."

"What that mean, Wilma?"

Her pretty face pleaded with my question as she replied,

"I don't know, I don't know. We'll have to wait for daddy to call back."

The phone rang. I looked on as Wilma answered. I knew it was my father but I couldn't hear what he said to her. I waited until she placed the phone on the receiver. Then she screamed at me,

"Mama is dead, mama is dead, mama is . . ."

Her head went down into her hands.

From that moment I felt as if the life had been taken out of me even past the point of belief in my mother's death, although I knew it was true.

Wilma cried on and on as I stood without movement or thought.

I couldn't cry. I wouldn't believe. I couldn't believe; my mother was the only protection and comfort I knew; she couldn't leave me now. And she didn't.

I could feel her alive, in my soul; her warmth ran through my body. I could feel her protective love; it was there.

I had to pull myself and Wilma together before she cried herself right into disbelief of mama's eternal presence. I walked over and touched my sister's short black hair,

"Wilma, please don't cry, please, we got to help the others because they younger."

She kept crying. I couldn't let her get to me because if I'd started there would have been no end in sight; I knew what my mother meant to me.

Wilma looked up with teary eyes and said,

"Who gonna tell Reggie, Tyrone and Charlotte about mama? You got to tell 'em cause I can't, Billy."

I knew I had to tell them. Somehow I knew it wasn't fair or right to wait for my father to come back to tell them. I can't explain why but it had to be done. I said to my sister, as I walked toward the bedrooms,

“I’ll tell the rest of them.” Between the dining room and the bedrooms I fought back the tears; I didn’t wake little Charlotte because she was only eight and I thought her much closer to my father than anyone of us, so he’d be the better person to tell her. When I got back to our bedroom, Reggie was asleep on the outer edge of the mattress and Ty slept closer to the wall. I bent down and woke them both. They looked up at me with sleepy eyes that I’d never seen before. I think they knew.

Because I was a ward of the court and my guardianship was in the hands of an institution I had to get permission to stay home until my mother was buried, which was in a week.

This week was one of almost total silence. My father was perhaps the most restrained; he had reasons to be out of his mind with worry. He had no money to pay for my mother’s funeral. His insurance policy had not been renewed when it was discovered my mother had heart trouble, so the expenses were entirely on his shoulders. I don’t know where he got the money but he did it. My guess would be that he went out and hustled every penny that was out in the streets.

All that week my father had asked relatives to help him with the funeral expenses but strangely they couldn’t find a dime, which didn’t please him at all. All of us kids understood what was going on and didn’t like it either. Our mother was a dedicated person when it came to helping others and she helped many of her relatives; they didn’t seem to recall it when their dollars were needed to give her a last farewell. This bit ended the relative-family thing. Right up to this very day.

Let them rot in hell.



But when I go back as far as I can remember, before my mother even became sick I can’t reflect on anything that was good; only trouble and fear; fear of everything around me except my mother. The one person in the world of whom I was frightened the most was my father.

The only thing I remember about him was his anger.

He didn’t mess around talking and reasoning with the child mind. What he said he meant and if you didn’t heed his warning, you got an asskicking. Matter of fact, the more I think about it, those ass beatings seemed to be the only time he existed for me. I used to go out of my way so I didn’t have to see him. But on the other hand, it was somewhat easy

to keep out of his way because back then (1952) he worked in the auto factory during the day and at night he would come home and sleep.

During these days we even owned our house on the east side of Detroit and for this I know my mother and father worked hard.

Another strange happening is in process; I can hardly recall my sisters and brothers then or even today.

If somewhere along the line I don't mention more about my family and you wonder why, the only thing I can say is you got the message. If I want to speak truthfully about my family I can't say much more than: except for certain isolated events, even considering our instability as a family, we were much too vague with one another; ask me why, I don't really know. But it was as if I'd walked around all my young life dead to the world beyond myself . . . so I didn't communicate very often with the family and I would suspect my reasoning was along these lines: the less I spoke the less I could be criticized by anyone; guess I didn't like myself as a child very much . . . It seemed that every time I felt like coming out of myself and making an attempt to function with others, I would not be seen or heard. This made known to me a child's hurt: rejection.

Any time someone did something to me because I didn't do something exactly the way they wanted me to, their reaction meant rejection. They didn't want to have anything to do with a dumb kid that didn't know how to do the simple things that other kids get praised for. They start to compare you with other kids; you begin to feel worthless, like you're not as good as other children.

Probably the most vivid individuals in my mind that stand out as contributors to my lack of selfworth were teachers in elementary school. And at home it was probably my father.

I couldn't understand his anger everytime I looked up into his distorted face with fear that he was going to strike me for doing something or anything which irritated him. When pops got mad at you he looked just like the devil with a halo around his head and the pitchfork, to be sure, was already in flight. It didn't help any that he was four stories bigger than I was; I was so small I used to come up to his knees and this made him more the demon I visualized.

I know this may not be a good description of my old man but for a long time this was the only way I was able to describe him, because like I think it matters to really give a person just due; you gotta talk and look

and be with the whole person. And in my old man's case as a small kid I only saw the physical man striking out. And that's like standing in front of a steam roller when it starts to move. I would take two baby steps and my daddy wouldn't even move. He'd reach over and knuckle you down tight before you could take the third step to get out of his way. And then he'd take two steps and roll over you like a steam roller does cement. So, for years on top of years, the terror I felt toward my father haunted me into fear of every black man that resembled him. I was convinced that every black adult male was my father. And to me this meant every one of them had to be mean angry men that wouldn't hesitate if they felt like hitting me up side the head.

On the days I was away from home I was usually in school with other children who demonstrated an intelligence to learn and I seemed to have none. You know, if it came to spelling or reading or writing which we usually had to do out loud (you know how kids do that in school) I just couldn't learn, I just couldn't remember. Anyway, I was what most folks call the black sheep of the family: dull and strange. The only person I communicated with was my mother when she wasn't in the hospital. It seemed that each time my mother went to the hospital, the more I withdrew into myself. And to clinch the whole thing, I was also the ugliest thing you've ever seen in your life. Man, I was so ugly when the other kids saw me, including my brothers and sisters, they would take one look at me and sorta shake their heads without a nice word except, "you sho is ugly" and they walked away stunned as if they'd seen the boogey man in person. I thought I was pretty ugly, too! I sorta looked like a Ubangi-lipped, shanty-town pickininny. In short, I was the ugliest creature related to man: an ape. So, I couldn't shun the customary public ridicule; due to one with my distinctive features: called a few childish names. Not only was I called names but I got beat almost every day after school by select classmates, the traditional bullies. Back in those elementary school days I don't think that I could have stopped my own shadow from frightening me to death; a punk kid who wore big blackrimmed glasses. For me to get beaten at least three times a day never came unexpectedly. If my father didn't beat me, some teacher would, or one of my classmates. Now, I didn't go around bothering people. I just wouldn't say anything or fight back. I hated going to school after awhile . . . when I sat in that classroom I was out of touch with everything and feared most teachers. I am eight

years old . . . in an art class . . . She's an elderly woman teacher; she speaks to me . . . "William, what color is this ruler, we learned this color before, remember?" . . . ALL the other kids are looking at me . . . I don't know, I forgot again . . . what's that color . . . answer her, say something, you got to say something . . . say any color: "White." She is disappointed with me . . . she doesn't like me, she wants to hurt me . . . "William, you know that's not right. . . why are you so dumb . . . all the other kids know what color this is. Class, let's tell William what color this ruler is: "Tan" . . . why can't I be like the rest of the class? . . . She has another color in her hand now. . . . Please, don't let her ask me again . . . "William, now, what color is this? . . . "I don't know" . . . She screams at me, "Why can't you learn, you make me so angry!" . . . I crawl into myself.

I slowly began to feel deeply inferior to the other children. And it didn't get any better as I grew older. It even became worse when my father was laid off from the factory and couldn't find other work. And my mother couldn't work with her heart condition. Life just became hard, even for children.

There were no Christmases or Easter Sundays when you got new clothes to wear. Things kept going this way. And it wasn't long before my mother and father decided to sell the house. And ever since then we moved from one place to another. A lot of times when we moved it was just my father and us kids because my mother was in the hospital. We finally settled on the west side of town, usually some place in the immediate Twelfth Street area.

Moving from one street to another. And I ain't lying either. One side of Seward, other side of Seward, one side of Euclid, and then the other; Woodrow Wilson, and then right on Twelfth Street. When we moved to Seward, I was ten years old and had been moved from the public school system into "special education." I was thought to be mentally retarded—useless motherfucker.

I didn't have any friends as I remember, outside of my brothers and sisters; we played together once in awhile. Otherwise, I would always go on long walks by myself and wander through alleys finding junk; full-time garbage picker. On several occasions, Reggie, the next oldest boy to me, and I would spend the day looking for still usable stuff that people threw away. Most of the junk we found wasn't really of much use to us. It was the excitement of finding something worthwhile. Our biggest joy

came whenever we found a toy of any kind to play with because at best we could use the enjoyment. Alley picking sorta took a back seat after awhile as we moved into the area of mischief. Somehow Reggie and I managed to involve the police. This is the only time I think I really interacted with Reggie because when we got into trouble, more than not, it was together. All the things we got into I hardly remember but whatever it was my father would beat the hell out of us because he didn't want this kind of behavior from his children.

My father's basic opinion about us getting into trouble with the law was centered in the fact there were enough problems without us creating more. Our mother was in the hospital; he had to work, and my oldest sister wasn't able to look after us, so he expected us kids to act maturely; don't cause no trouble. But we continued to do playful little things like stealing bikes . . . and little things like shoplifting from downtown department stores. Our favorite pastime was an open store market that we copped fruit from when the man had his back turned. Almost every other day Reggie and I tiptoed under his fruit stands and then reached up and over to grab our heart's delight. I loved bananas. After some time we got caught and that ended our good thing because the man built a fence around the stands. All in all, we got busted copping something every other time if I had to give an average. I don't know why we did these things or at least I don't know why I did them . . . I just followed my younger brother; he was the brains of the outfit. I was too dumb to lead. Well, anyway, we did enough little things to end up in juvenile court, at which time Reggie and I were given a caseworker from some place called the Catholic Social Services. That's when I met this cat named Mr. Ross.

He was a white man who always came out to talk to me about what I was doing in school and stuff. Mr. Ross didn't talk to Reggie very much because he wouldn't sit still to listen. Reggie hated to be trapped in a corner and made to do something and when he got mad you knew about it. Man, he had a temper. I guess Mr. Ross was probably scared of him in a way because we were both from the same family but yet so different. The only difference that I could see between the two of us was that Reggie showed his anger and I didn't. Mr. Ross never talked to my father about us, but always to my mother.

I didn't see my father much, especially around that time, because he had turned hustler. Numbers and things, trying to make a living. He

swore that factory work almost killed him and he wasn't ever going back to anything like that again. So he did the only other thing he knew how to do—hustle. (I understand, now, that he'd been a hustler before this.)

Although my mother knew she had a bad heart and shouldn't have been working when we first lived on Seward, she worked for my uncle in his record shop and TV repair. But she kept the books straight and did all the accounting and waited on customers. Pretty much light work. I don't know what the arrangement was on that. I never did understand. I never was much into that relative thing.

It was at this time that Mr. Ross, the social worker, felt, and recommended to my mother that Reggie and I needed to leave home to get away from some of the family problems. The only family problem in my head was with my father. I hated him and feared each day that I had to see the cat. I don't think the others felt as strongly as I did but they too were afraid of my father, with the exception of my mother. My sisters and brothers seemed to be able to get on with him in spite of their fear, but I couldn't because I was convinced that he hated me . . . I guess his lack of kindness and understanding or affection toward me were the main things that got me to hating him. Or was it him I hated?

So, the family problems that Mr. Ross saw must have been his own, observed from an objective point of view. I was bewildered by his term, "family problem." It was also people problems; I feared people in general because they too could hurt me. Anyway, Mr. Ross suggested to my mother that Reggie was a discipline problem and should be sent to a military school and I to an institution for the emotionally disturbed child because, in other words, I was fucked up. Out of my tree.

Here I was, ten years old, and in the second grade. And would have taken over twenty years to catch up to my peers and shit. My mother was very concerned about me and, knowing of my strange or quiet ways, agreed with the social worker because he was a trained professional: pig. Then I was placed in the Hawthorne Center in Northville, Michigan, about forty miles from Detroit. And Reggie went to some military school in Detroit. . . . You know, to this very day, my brother Reggie and I have not been able to communicate with each other on any level and, considering he stayed away from home longer than I did, this didn't help us any towards being the companions we once had been in crime.

This Hawthorne Center place was like another world. It wasn't like the

big city streets—cars, smoggy atmosphere, junkies, nasty old buildings, winos and old beat-up prostitutes standing on the corner. I mean, Hawthorne Center had clean, modern buildings like I'd never seen in my life, let alone live in one. I fell in love with the place.

Maybe not so much the physical buildings as I did with the safe atmosphere . . . There was really nothing to fear at the center and when you wanted to be alone all you had to do was go into your room. The people were nice and loving; it was a dream come true. The one thing I learned first off here was to hate violence that I knew so well back home. It wasn't just the violence of my father but the violence of anger being expressed by anyone towards me or anybody. I never was a violent person anyway; I'd sooner run away from fights at the risk of looking like a coward than fight . . . I couldn't see how come people had to fight with one another and when I was home there was more fighting than anything else . . . I couldn't wait to go back home and tell people what I'd found at the center: people got along without fighting. I really found a home at the center (I missed home a little). It was similar to a prep school; I mean, it had its own school, they had a field we could play in and organized games. I had my own room and my very own, real, live, walkin', talkin', psychiatrist whose name was Dr. Pathfinder.

And from my very first meeting with this guy we disagreed with each other like some fool's upset stomach. Dr. Pathfinder would always let me talk for a little while and then he'd bust in and put in his two cents' worth, usually something like,

"Now, I know you better than you think I do. And the sooner you start telling me the truth about yourself, the sooner you'll be out of here."

My whole life took on a new meaning. I felt like a mental case.

What this cat did not understand is that I grew up in my head, with myself and by myself, a precocious child. The more I think about it, Dr. Pathfinder was more in need of a psychiatrist than I was. Because he constantly asked a lot of questions and got answers that seemed to cause him to go into fits of anger. So, like that was my cue to just be cool with this man.

I stayed at Hawthorne Center almost three years. During that time I sort of tolerated Dr. Pathfinder. I went home once in awhile but, outside of that, we didn't communicate at all which was our way, not to write letters or phone.

Something that didn't strike me at the time was that I was among eighty other kids, all of whom were white except me and one girl. This didn't bother me at the time because I had no concept of race.

When my stay was up, this is when I was informed by Mr. Pathfinder (if it's worth mentioning his name) that I was not going back home due to the fact that (1) he didn't think I was ready to go back into society and (2) I had been made a ward of the court. Which simply meant that the court became my parents because my parents couldn't afford the expense of the special institutionalization that I "needed so badly."

In 1960 I left Hawthorne Center and went to Boys' Republic in Farmington, Michigan, another institution designed specifically for emotionally disturbed boys.

3

Don't Paint Me Black

BLACK ODYSSEY

My Black soul . . .

went on an odyssey to

hip me: "You are what you see . . .

So, don't change me; just be!"

When I got to Boys' Republic, I found pretty much the same things that were at Hawthorne Center, except here there were more black guys like myself, which bothered me because I would no longer get the special individual attention I received at the center. I didn't want that many guys who looked like me around since being the only black person at Hawthorne had resulted in me receiving attention that somehow I instinctively knew that I would have a hard time experiencing at Boys' Republic where my blackness was not unique. It was at Boys' Republic that I discovered that there were negative consequences to being black. While at Hawthorne Center I was only aware of the negative consequences of being an emotionally disturbed child.

I'll try to explain this in the best way anyone can to have you understand because some things can't be understood—with feeling—by anyone who isn't black. To be an emotionally disturbed child means that an individual is almost completely unable to distinguish the difference between his emotions like love, hate, fear, and perhaps the worst of all is not knowing how he feels toward himself. Usually, this is what makes his life so confusing and painful, because he can't decide how he feels toward himself and, as a result, the basis for forming a real sense of self is not at

his command. Therefore, in most cases, he withdraws his confused self (because he is frightened by it) from the outer world and readily takes on the behavior of what appears to him to be a somewhat stable person; he becomes the only true actor. Well, try taking the concept of race, and mix and tangle it all into the pattern described above. I don't mean white racial consciousness either. But try, if you are white to lose yourself into being emotionally disturbed about your self; then your skin color becomes another hang-up, because somewhere along the line someone's attitude or something told you white is an inferior complexion.

Now figure out who you are as an individual person, or are you anyone . . . Can you be anything other than a "white body" to those people who see only the color of your body and not the person within; you don't exist to them or to yourself. Maybe this won't suffice, and if it doesn't, think about it for awhile. So, what we got if a child is black and disturbed is a case of total insanity because he has all the problems of an everyday child and then the added dynamics of blackness which can hardly ever be distinguished from the personality and his body . . . and, I think, people want to be recognized as individuals, not one of the many bad, no good, black bodies. Somehow at an early age, all poor black kids learn this and the only way one can be different is to act or live with or around the pure white people then you're able to form some self-image and maybe not hate yourself so much; individuality.

My need for individuality began as a need to be recognized as an individual child but developed into a want to be a white child; they were good and I bad. And when I was at Hawthorne, I felt like an individual person because I had gotten admitted to the pure race with acceptance of all my black faults. So when I saw the other black guys at Boys' Republic, they only reminded me of who I was and the hate I had for myself.

And I wasn't willing to let anybody who looked just like me take any of the individuality away which I had acquired by pretending to be white and no longer black. Naturally, I developed a dislike for this place and wanted to return to Hawthorne Center. But my attempts were useless.

So I stayed and accepted the fact that I was to remain there. Here, too, I was given my own private psychologist, Mr. Tom Maxwell. He being a Black man caused me some anxiety which I had to learn how to live with. Mr. Maxwell and myself met in regular sessions where I would constantly talk to cover up my nervousness and also to direct the conversation away

from the subject of race and my blackness—which I successfully did for the two and one-half years I was there.

I felt myself making improvements in school. It was almost something that couldn't be helped because we went to school year-around, every day. Also, the teachers didn't beat you over the head if you wanted to do something else during class . . . Like I think the one thing that helped me to really love going to school was the freedom we had to learn a subject our way. There wasn't just one set way to be taught or learn.

My favorite class was History. I was thrilled every time I learned something new about how things were way back when. And this was a real turning point in my life: I could learn and remember.

I loved school now because each day I went there was something new to learn and I wanted to know about everything.

Out of all the teachers there, only one stands firm in my mind. My history teacher, Stash. We didn't use first or last names; everybody had a nickname (mine was pussy head). Stash and I at first meeting didn't get on at all (who knows why) but, after a few private talks with him, I knew I could trust in this man. I would go and talk to him about anything and he listened. Stash helped me work out some of the mixed-up feelings I had towards my father. Then there were those days when I wanted to be alone and Stash would break the school rules to let me leave the class so I could be by myself. During school hours we couldn't go back to the cottages (as our living quarters were called) so I would go out into the woods and have a ball. My favorite spot was in a clearing of pine trees where I reigned as musical tree conductor.

In the center of the pine grove I would stand and conduct the swaying pine trees until my heart became so light with joy that I cried at the beautiful sound my trees made for me. I never told anybody about the trees except Stash and he didn't think me crazy. In his words, "You are beginning to love nature."

Well, Stash left the school for a better job elsewhere and how I cried. And I guess I withdrew into myself a little because he had gone.

I managed not to think about the racial conflict I was having during my stay, which I thought no one knew about anyway. Because the values that are so accepted by the majority of the American society, most of us guys were indoctrinated and acquired them through living and learning in the proper setting: institutions.

We were constantly reminded of how one should live his life in a decent manner so as to be accepted by others. To assure acceptance, one needed values, some of which were: respect your elders, obey the law without question, refrain from stealing, lying, cheating and other such vices. Never involve yourself in bad company; immoral people, don't copulate until marriage, respect women, and always work hard at anything you do because nothing is worth having otherwise; earn success—the American way. Finally, keep a clean mouth; no cussing, and go to church every Sunday. I believed all these things without question, especially the going to church part. You know, I really believed in God and what the preacher man said about him even when I was pretty young. My mother was a religious person and she used to tell us kids about God and his powers over evil and that we needed to be good children so that we could go to heaven. I liked the sound of this heaven place from the very beginning and thought I should go there one day if I were a good person. So almost every Sunday I spent at the Republic, I went to church and afterwards worked toward being a religiously moral person because this too made me different from the other black cats there; they didn't believe and my belief meant to me that I was a better person.

Then Mr. Maxwell called me to his office one day to tell me that he felt I was ready to leave the Republic because he thought I had gone as far as I could go there.

I was happy to go because I was tired of places like Hawthorne Center and Boys' Republic. But I wasn't too particular about going home. My mother had died the same year (1963) and my oldest sister had gotten pregnant when she was thirteen and was now married.

Reggie, the next oldest boy, was away from home in a similar institution. That only left Tyrone and Charlotte, the two youngest, at home with my father.

I was really scared to death to go back home to a family I did not know. I was sixteen when I left Boys' Republic to go to a foster home.

Before I left, Mr. Maxwell and I had our last session when he told me the one thing I hadn't figured out about myself. He said,

"The one problem you're still going to have to work out for yourself is your dislike for yourself as a Negro."

"What do you mean by that, man?" I asked.

"No, you tell me. You have got to work it out for yourself. Because it

won't do you any good if I tell you. You have got to tell yourself," declared Mr. Maxwell.

"Aw, come on, you know my problems came from me not getting along with my father and people beating on me."

I began to shake inside like an old junkie with a monkey on his back when Mr. Maxwell replied,

"Sure, some of what you said might have been true, but not all of it, not any more."

"How you know it's not true any more? You only takin' a guess. I know what's true about me better than you and I still feel the same about my father. I hate him," I said nervously.

"You don't know it but you stopped hating your father a long time ago and matter of fact I have reason to believe you never did hate him."

"You just go ahead and tell me why all that's true," I said.

"No, I am not going to tell you why because you know and if you think about some of the things you told me it won't be hard to figure out. For instance, remember the nightmare you had one night about your father you told me about. The one where your father was president and he had a habit of walking around unprotected in the White House garden and you would watch him from the other side of the yard because you felt so much hate for him that you stayed away out of his sight. And one night he was out walking when you again were watching him but this night you had caught sight of a white man in a building across the way who was going to assassinate your father and you thought that would be the best thing that could happen to him. But the moment before this man shot or could shoot, you broke out in tears, screaming at the man not to shoot your father and you woke up yelling over and over again, 'Mister, please don't shoot my father,' so when you tell about how much your father is responsible for your behavior I find it rather difficult to believe. And when I say you don't like yourself as a Negro I mean you don't like the way white people treat Negroes and you want to be something different so you can't get mistreated as an individual," Mr. Maxwell concluded.

I remembered the dream well because afterwards the hate I once felt for my father had gone. Stash used to try on many occasions to convince me that I really didn't hate my father because I felt him, along with others, the cause of my unhappiness. But I couldn't believe Mr. Maxwell knew and I most certainly didn't want him to know he was right. There-

fore, I denied what he said as not being the truth and my dream was just a dream, nothing more.

I couldn't say any more to him and left his office, dismissing the whole talk from my mind.

This is when I met Mr. Farley from the juvenile court who was to take me to my new foster home. Mr. Farley and I got along pretty well. For some reason I could really talk to him. I guess because he was a pretty good listener. Mr. Farley was black, but he didn't make me so nervous. I respected his recognition of me as an individual and his willingness to really understand.

Farley drove me into the east side of Detroit to a Mr. and Mrs. Kane's home, where I was greeted very warmly by two elderly Negro people. So Mr. Farley left me in their care and told me that he was available to talk to me when I needed it.

From the very beginning I noticed that Mr. Kane didn't talk very much. He was a quiet, gentle man in his early fifties. Mrs. Kane did all the talking. She talked too much for me. She took me into the house, showed me where I was to sleep, and introduced me to the other two foster children that were there, Joey and Gary.

This was during the summer of 1963 and the first time in six years that I'd gone to a public school. I entered Eastern High School's summer session and I settled into my new situation with a fair amount of ease. I wasn't a very talkative person around the Kanes or Joey and Gary. For the most part, I loved school, and the people I met there that summer, which kept me away from the home pretty much. This was perhaps a good arrangement in that there was very little freedom when at the Kane home; it really had no value. Because Mrs. Kane didn't allow Joe, Gary or myself into the house other than for sleep, breakfast, lunch, dinner, and to use the bathroom. Her restrictions bothered me no end but I got used to it quick. Because when I realized one day how irrational Mrs. Kane was, I preferred to keep my distance. She jumped at the chance to punish Joey or Gary any time Mrs. Kane had probable cause. This woman could just be having to look at her miserable self in the mirror, not liking what was there and she decided that someone else had to be responsible for her ugliness; the total person—a bitch.

She never had but one opportunity to punish me which was the last,

and up to this point, she on several occasions punished Gary and Joey for things worthless to the human ear. It seemed like she'd just find something; maybe they didn't brush their teeth or comb their hair; she'd just find something which gave her reason first to curse them out in the foulest tone I ever heard in my life; then she would administer the usual punishment, which was sitting on the front porch for two, three or four weeks.

Man, when you were on that front porch you couldn't even go to the bathroom without asking. And the times when Joey and Gary were being punished she would praise my ability to stay out of trouble. Mrs. Kane called me a "nice" boy who minded his own business and went about his way. And that I did because I didn't want that woman yelling at me. Well, she was laying for me; she was determined to punish me too.

It happened one day after I came home from school for lunch. I walked in the house and washed my hands and sat down at the table with Joey and Gary as Mrs. Kane prepared lunch; then she turned to me and said, "Scott, you been playing with yourself. Ain't you?"

I just looked up in shock; there was no way in the world I could answer that question.

She continued,

"Cause I washed your underwear and I saw a stain on them. I ain't no fool, I know what it is. Now, you tell me, haven't you been doin' that?"

I felt embarrassed and totally unable to answer her question but I managed to get a "no" out. Because I knew how the stain got there. It was hard for me to tell her that I'd been playing with this chick I knew and I must of blew my load in my underwear. There was a minute of silence as Joey and Gary looked on and she began to scream,

"Well, if you ain't been messing with yourself, you been out there playing with those nasty-ass girls."

(As I recall Pat was a very clean and nice girl; what a bod!)

At this point I just shut up all together. Then came her last decree.

"You nasty-ass black nigger. My husband and me don't even do that." (Her husband probably couldn't do it anymore, anyway.)

"You just sit there and lie and deny it. I ain't no damn fool. You walk around here and think you smart but you ain't like your gangster ass father down there on Twelfth Street."

She became madder by the minute to the point that she hit me across the head with a broom handle. I ducked and knew this was as far as I was gonna go. (How she knew about my father I will never know.)

She said,

“When you come to my table again, you wash your hands. Ain’t no tellin’ what you been doin’. I mean you wash ’em six times and startin’ today when you come home from school, you keep your ass on that front porch for the next two weeks.”

Then she turned, mumbling to herself, and I sat there with tears in my eyes. I guess the feeling was probably hurt and indignation.

And I knew I couldn’t stay there no longer. So we finished lunch when Mrs. Kane told Joey and Gary to leave the table and me to go out and burn the trash.

I put it in a trash basket and lit a match to it. As the flames rose, my ass was gone—down the alley—two blocks until I got to a phone booth and called my father and told him what had happened and that I wanted to come home.

My father told me to come straight home.

I caught a bus homeward. I was going back home, a place I’d never forgotten, but to the home I didn’t really know.

4

Ain't Got No Head That Belongs

ETHNIC POEM

*if he could'a
he'd done it different*

*young Black souls
& soulful Black militants
and revolutionary jiveass
niggers & niggers & Negros
& Ace coon boons . . .*

*(if you don't
learn to love
your fathers)*

When I got home my father wasn't home and my youngest brother, Tyrone, who was thirteen, answered the door. The little cat was really glad to see his big brother. It was a certain look on his face, instant respect because the brother he was telling all his friends about had come home to stay. Tyrone and I got along from the beginning; he was a mild sort of little hard-working guy and whatever he had—if he had anything—he didn't mind sharing. So I had a great deal of respect for him, too.

Charlotte wasn't in the house then but it wasn't long before she came in to learn that I was home, home for good. She was pleased. Although she was very much like me, you could never tell what she was thinking because she never did talk much. Matter of fact, none of us did. We just sort of happily co-existed.

When I left Mrs. Kane's I didn't have a chance to get my clothes and I had to go back and get them; but before I could, I had to wait and talk to my father and Mr. Farley, the court worker.

Later on that day my father came in from hustling, which was booking numbers. And on the weekends he would also gamble to make money, and, at best, to provide a place for us kids to stay, and food.

When my father first came in I was a little nervous and fearful of what he thought of my actions, because I really don't think he was ready to have me home, although he only had the youngest two children still with him. My coming home presented still more financial problems. But he and I accepted this and felt it would work out.

From the first day, he expressed the need for me to be the man of the house since he had constantly to be in the street to make coin. He also urged me to get an education so that I wouldn't have to live the way we were. And his point was well taken because the best he could afford was a shabby three-room apartment—and I mean it was three rooms, too, located on Woodrow Wilson one block from Twelfth Street.

So all three of us kids slept in the living room which had a foldaway couch that my brother and I slept on. Charlotte had her own summer foldaway cot. This set-up was quite different from what I was used to and it took some getting used to. But I accepted the discomfort because it was home and I wanted to be free.

The next day I finally called Mr. Farley and he already knew of my choice to leave the Kanes' home. He thought me wise for what I'd done and agreed to take me back to get my belongings after he had talked to my father to see that I'd be released from the court's custody.

It wasn't long after that that Mrs. Kane lost her license to be a foster parent. I was satisfied.

For the remainder of the summer I had to ride a bus to finish out that semester at summer school, which I did successfully. Things went along well at home between myself and my father and Tyrone and Charlotte.

I think the biggest problem I faced in returning home was that of being completely removed from my surroundings and then suddenly coming back with completely different values. Like the values I acquired away from home were almost in exact opposition to the way my people lived. Killing, beating, stealing, and a whole list of other values were an everyday part of life there. I was turned off by most of this immediately because I had a better way of life. Those that count were going to be able to respect me someday as a person with good moral character . . .

My values were considered by most people there rather strange and

“proper.” I always kept myself nice and neat, spoke very properly, and, to top it off, I believed in the Lord and the American flag. For this somebody was always teasing me and calling me names like “Proper” and “Whitey,” which I didn’t like very much although I thought that I was better than most because I stood out from the crowd as a decent individual, I thought. I didn’t have processed hair, a rag hanging from my head or dirty clothes and, most of all, I had the “proper thoughts.”

In September, 1963, I entered Northern High School where I encountered some attitudes that angered me. There were conflicts with teachers and my school counselor that, for the first year, seemed never-ending.

From the start I didn’t care for this school and I wanted to leave. The reason was because it was an all-black school and any time there is an all-black school, people just don’t care, man, they just don’t care whether you learn or not. So like I tried to get transferred out to what they call an open school. An open school is one where you can come from any school district; it had black kids as well as white kids. You know white kids are going to get a good education; they can’t help it; so if the white kids are going to get a good education, I was going to get one too. Like I really wanted to learn something.

I became really disgusted with the whole Northern High school in about a month. The teachers expected you to know everything, and they just couldn’t give help where you needed it. They didn’t know how.

The whole high school scene was vague; no one ever really taught you anything and I think a lot of kids wanted to learn but didn’t get instruction in how to learn so, you know, you just accepted getting by; do the teacher’s thing. So I got tired of that shit; just going to school and wasting my time.

Soon afterwards I put in a request to be transferred to an open school.

There was something between my counselor and the principal. I still don’t know what happened. You had to get a transfer form filled out and signed by your counselor and then by the principal. I went to my counselor and told him I wanted a transfer; he said o.k. but tell the principal the school counselor from Boys’ Republic had suggested I stay where I was. Whatever the hell reason I’ll never know.

I went to the principal’s office to give him the slip so he could sign it and, just as he was signing it, in walks my school counselor, yelling

“He can’t have a transfer.”

I turned and said,

“Why not? You said all I had to do was get this signed by the principal.”

And the counselor said,

“Yes, but you didn’t tell him what I said.”

“Yes, I did.”

My counselor turned to the principal and said,

“He lied. Because I told him to tell you that the school he came from recommended he not be transferred.”

The principal just looked back at me.

“I’m not lying, Mr. Carty,” I said. “Because if you remember I did tell you that.”

He looked at me like I was lying,

“You can’t have a transfer; go back to your class.”

I got pissed off and walked out of school.

But I came back the next day, cooled down a little bit, and went to my counselor. He looked up,

“Oh, so you decided to come back.”

“Yeah, am I going to get kicked out for walking out yesterday?”

“You think you should?”

“I haven’t got anything to say about it, you proved that yesterday.”

“Come on.” He took me down to the principal’s office and told him something like,

“Here, Mr. Carty, you’d better handle him because I’m not sure whether he wants to go to school here or not.”

Mr. Carty gave me his principal-student talk, sent me home, and told me not to come back unless I brought my father.

For a while there I didn’t think my father was going to come because he expected me to take care of my own affairs. During the week he usually didn’t have time to do domestic things like that and if you asked him he got pissed.

So here I was, mad as hell at the whole deal and here’s the key, like I knew my father wasn’t going to see my side of it; he was going to be mad at me because I walked out of school. I shouldn’t have done that because it caused him trouble and that sorta cancelled my whole fight and I had to resign myself to doing what I was told, regardless of what I thought. Like on so many occasions, once again I didn’t set the standards for myself, somebody else set them for me.

My father came to school anyway. He was mad, man, that he had to go. We went into the principal's office. He didn't say a word; just agreed with the man and told me not to cause any trouble. He just agreed with the man. I could have done that shit myself.

So like I just skipped it. I didn't look toward my father when I had a gripe any more after this.

I stayed at Northern and made the best of it. I was beginning to get involved in things; like I was in the band which was probably one of the poorest ragtime bands you'd ever hear. I was supposed to be a drummer, refined, you know, I was supposed to be able to read music by now. Well, in my opinion, I sounded more like an alley cat beating on trash cans because the teacher never took time to teach us how to read music, so we made the best of it and tried to do what we could. I'm still pretty mad about that in a way because I really love music and wanted to learn everything I could about it and the guy who was supposed to teach me didn't give a fuck, he wasn't interested, he was a lazy man, he didn't even try, the cracker. So some day I'm going to learn how to do it right. A good musician, on my own time, some time within the next twenty years.

Oh yeah, one of the things that probably helped me to want to finish school was my participation in sports because it gave me a different view of life and the things I could do. I'm sorry I didn't get into it until too late, my senior year, when I got onto the track team, practically by accident.

One day I walked into the gym and saw the members of the track team sitting on the bleachers. One of the guys was trying to jump over this bar with a pole. And you know this guy kept missing and the guys kept laughing at him and I didn't know many of these guys; I didn't know too many people anyway because I really stayed to myself. I stood there and watched as I thought,

"It sure would be sorta cool to get these guys interested in me."

I did what only a fool would do. I yelled out to them,

"I know how to get over that bar with that pole."

I had never done it before in my life. They razzed me on and said,

"Come on over and try it man."

I knew damn well I didn't know how to do it but I kept telling myself I could, I could. I took the pole and did the exact thing I saw the other guy do, run down the gym floor, stick the pole in this box and hop over. It wasn't as easy as I thought. The first try I almost broke my neck. These

cats just laughed and I kept trying and they kept laughing. I just couldn't get over that bar. Well, when I saw they were getting pretty tired and were getting ready to leave, I tried it one more time with everything in me. And I went sailing over the cross-bar.

They all crowded around me, man.

"You're going to be our next pole vaulter."

And I became the next pole vaulter. An All-City Champion and that kind of bag.

I worked hard and came to all the practices and would stay afterwards after everybody was gone, practicing. I guess because it was my senior year I didn't have much choice but to do the best I could anyway.

The last season for any sport was football. (I'd be graduating at the end of the year.) The coach of the football team asked me to come out for football.

"To be a pole vaulter, you've got to have a lot of guts, and to play football, you've got to have lots of guts too," he told me.

So I played football and I was mean, I was really mean like I played to kill. I did well. I didn't get hurt or anything like that and I earned a letter in football. So like I mean just doing these things made the rest of the school tolerable. So in ways I felt like I could take care of myself, like an individual that could work with people as a team and stand out as a person who didn't have to submerge himself into the total groupy thing. You could walk into it and walk out of it and be yourself.

There were other things; in my senior year I almost quit school again. I was taking college prep courses and my counselor assigned vocational courses to me my last semester and when I got the schedule I was boiling over like a volcano. I was superpissed. Because there goes that shit again with somebody suddenly telling me all black kids are dumb.

I remember I was walking through the corridor, going over to the gym as I read the schedule. I made an about-face and charged down the hallway like a mad rhinoceros going to stomp hell out of the counselor. When I got to his office, he was cool and calm as ever, just sitting there. I put my brakes on in front of his desk blowing in and out and trying to keep my temper so I could talk in a rational manner. I asked him,

"Why did you give me these vocational courses? Man, I don't want to know about cooking, sewing, bench mechanics. Why're they teaching me those things around here? I've learned them on my own time already.

Anyway, why did you give me these classes? If I'm in college prep I can't graduate with these courses."

"Well, I don't think you can do so well if you stay in college prep, that is, if you want to graduate on time because I don't really believe you're going to be able to get through the courses you have to take in the twelfth grade, like physics, chemistry, economics. So I felt that if I changed your classes, you'd be able to graduate."

I said, "Man, look, ever since I came here you people been telling me what's best for me; when you going to learn that only I can say what's best for me and I'm going to be honest with myself because I care enough about me to be honest. So I'm telling you that if you don't change this back to college prep, I'm quitting school today."

Reluctantly he said,

"O.K., suit yourself, but don't say I didn't tell you when you don't graduate on time."

"Don't worry, I'll graduate, but don't hold your breath."

So I left his office and went about my business. And he gave me a new class schedule the next day.

Sure the uncool things that happened to me in high school are somewhat everyday occurrences of many folks; my experiences weren't unique. So why repeat such dull-ass shit of "THIS WAS MY LIFE AT AN INNER CITY HIGH SCHOOL"? Well, because I wanted only to say that no student at Northern High could have been an unique individual, academically speaking. The administrative heads were all white and a good percentage of the counselors and teachers were white except for a few middle-class negroes here and there. So we had all these professional people who were the only unique people in the whole entire school: a nigger-making factory. Yah, a nigger factory. Every student was on their assembly belt,

"Pass the next nigger, please, they can't learn nothin' anyhow and we got to pass them so there won't be an over-abundance of twenty-one year olds still on a third grade level in high school and if we keep them around here too long they might just figure out why learning is difficult."

The factory produced this model of nigger until change-over came in the middle sixties. I had already been put on the market; I graduated. I was out of school for about six months when the new models came out; the students walked out of that factory, all of them, out into the streets. This

was an unheard-of thing; kids walking out of a public school. I guess they decided that it was about time for this Northern nigger factory to form a union for fair educational wages like most of the other public schools in the city. The students started a freedom school in some nearby church so that they could make a model changeover. This was the first time in any city that students had walked out of school to demand a better education and a new administrative head. It came as a shock to Detroit, headlines all over the place.

“STUDENTS AT NORTHERN OUST CARTY, SCHOOL PRINCIPAL”

This is about all I remember but when the school started up again I know there was a whole new administration: black.

During all the time up to my entrance into high school and until graduation, my brother, Tyrone, had been in and out of juvenile, usually for shoplifting or breaking into places with a sledgehammer.

At first my father was upset over Tyrone’s plight; and I was disturbed because he was one of my favorite people. He was a good person and I really didn’t want to see him travel the same route I had. So each time he came out of juvenile, I made it my business to try to talk with him and stay with him as much as I could. But it did no good, because every time I turned around he was back in juvenile.

Tyrone came back home for short times off and on but he couldn’t stay out of trouble. Also, we moved from Woodrow Wilson to Twelfth and Euclid. My father had gotten one of these apartments over a storefront facing Twelfth. It was a nice place because we had three bedrooms, living room, dining room and kitchen. This new place we painted, fixed up, got new furniture and everything. Life was sort of cool for a while there until my father and I started having “lack of communication” problems. He was convinced that when I was away from home “those people” turned me against him and everything I was a part of, because my ideals were unrealistic in the sense that he was not a man of means and could never provide for me those luxuries that were appreciated by the rich. I really don’t recall but I did feel that I wasn’t a part of the people around Twelfth, because they seemed so much like heathens to me and everything was dirty and people didn’t seem to care about themselves. And I most defi-

nately disagreed with the things that people did that were illegal. Therefore I really didn't go too much for my old man's occupation. So I stayed away from Twelfth as much as I could and out of the house.

I joined church groups and crossed the tracks to meet my "proper" friends, the middle-class black folk; and this tension between my father and me continued throughout my stay in high school and beyond. But during this time a slow process of transition had begun from a poor proper black child to a realistic one.

If you're getting bored like hell, the feeling's mutual, but just cool your jets and wait for a while. I've sorta got to talk about the conflict between me and my old man.

Like during this time there were lots of undercurrents that forced me to put my foot down and say the hell with what other people say. I've got to start thinking for myself. That was the gist of it.

Trouble with me was when I got angry for any reason it wasn't because something got done to me but I was trying to do something for "some of everybody else"; please the masses. Take religion for instance. My father didn't believe in religion or anything that had to do with it, including God, so because I believed in it I sorta thought he was flipped out. Disciple of the Devil. Immoral creature he was. And if I submitted to his way of life I'd be a hypocrite in the eyes of the church-going Episcopalians I knew who had good backgrounds, no visible deviants or misfits (like associating with the shady crew out on Twelfth Street) or respectable, high-faluting hustlers.

I mean I became my old man's conscience and when I disapproved of anything he had done or said (not that I'd ever tell him to his face) I guess he gathered from my attitude or heard from somebody that his son disapproved of his way of life. Particularly in the case of Scott versus Scott; the defendant, Tyrone Scott, the accused, my father. Attorney at-family-law better known as supporter of good family organization (watching too many white folks) William Walter Scott III.

Now I was defending the client, Tyrone Scott, from fatherly neglect. The case was called because of the defendant's obvious involvement in crime, jailbird to his heart. Now let me point out this: my client was a juvenile, constantly in everyday hustle and bustle of committing a crime, which demanded attention of the accused to involve himself in the fatherly responsibility of the child. Now because the father held the phi-

losophy that he had instructed his children to stay out of trouble with the law, therefore not creating any situations that might interfere with his everyday activities, like making that bread, he therefore assigned my office to the case. I was to take the responsibility of helping my young client through his difficulties, which at one time I did not mind. But like all independent attorneys, I felt that I had the burden of too much responsibility. It limited my time and associations with other important clients, namely, my female constituency. Bull shit. Look, I dug my women.

It's o.k. to work from 8 to 5 but damn when you get to working twenty-four hours a day, pretty soon you want some time off for yourself and when you can't get it, it makes the situation a little tense and you're liable to speak up and indicate this in various ways. For instance, like never being in the house, never being in the home and as I recall, this was the way this case had infringed on my personal rights as a young growing attorney.

So this matter was brought before the accused, my father, and his immediate attention was asked to be given to this matter. Some grave consequences resulted.

I began to tell him of my attempts at following his instructions on previous occasions to free my young client from the clutches of penal institutionalization. I began my opening argument quite emotionally:

“Daddy, I can't go down there and see about Tyrone because they don't want me, they want YOU down there. Like you said, they'll let him out if somebody comes to see about him.”

Thus ended my argument.

The accused came back with a fiery explanation of what appeared to be obvious child neglect in the eyes of his attorney son.

He began,

“Just let his ass stay down there. I got no time to be running back and forth every time Tyrone goes out there and does something wrong. Then they call me, talking about ‘Will you please come get your son?’ I'm not going to drive myself crazy, running down to that court every time he gets in trouble. I've done it a hundred times and every time I go down there those people want me to stay there all day, waiting for them to decide what they're going to do with him and it ends up they want to keep him, they want me to come back again. Shit. I gotta be out there to

make some money. Every time I go down there I don't make no money and I know we gotta eat."

Thus ends the accused's argument and thus ends our communication. As attorney for the defendant, I resigned.

As flipped out as all that may sound, I actually felt like the attorney for my brother and one sister, Charlotte. You know man I really got into a hassle with my father over Charlotte because like when he would go out, no one would be home to watch her. Reggie was still away from home, Wilma was away too, and you KNOW my client was away from home. Like my father wanted me to stay in the house all of the time and watch Charlotte. I knew that if there was anybody who could take care of herself, it was Charlotte. I mean she was tough-minded; just a tough chick altogether. At the ripe old age of thirteen, she grew up quick. You just didn't talk to Charlotte; she usually had her mind made up about most things; stubborn like my old man. When I refused to stay in the house and watch her, in my own nonverbal way, the old man got a little more pissed at me. I knew it too.

Well I just couldn't stay in the house so I had to come up with a good alibi. I really got involved in my after-school activities and the church scene. My father's opinion of all that was:

"Why hang around with people who don't do nothing for you? In the final analysis, I'm the one who's going to do for you."

I didn't see things that way because all along I'd been doing for myself. It was on rare occasions that I asked him to give me anything. I worked at little summer jobs and got it myself. Like I don't think I was too dependent on him. For one thing, I didn't want to be because my father didn't want us to be dependent on him; he wanted us to look out for ourselves. I didn't too much like that philosophy, because in the select group I was hanging out with, the parents took care of kids until they were able to take care of themselves. I felt cheated. I wanted my old man to do the same. When he didn't, it was all the more reason to look at him in a critical light.

Look, I don't think I knew what I was doing. Like who was I then? I don't know. But what I do know, it wasn't the me I am now. I guess I was like a lizard who changes colors every time he sees a threat coming when he's lying out in that wide open desert, nowhere to run, nowhere to hide,

not knowing really what to believe. That was me. I wasn't an individual personality but a host of personalities. I was the librarian, the technician, the priest, social worker, school teacher, and sometimes, a weird cat. Basically, what I'm trying to say is, I was fucked up.

That is, until I got introduced to the man. (It wasn't anything but a little taste of culture shock like Smokey Bear telling me I can't set a forest fire.)

I was arrested in June of 1965 by two policemen in a patrol car who stopped me for no apparent reason.

Earlier that afternoon I had attended a meeting in Grace Church on Twelfth and Virginia Park (still in that church crusade bag). Getting home was only a matter of crossing Twelfth from the church. I finished my business and then left to go home—I remember this day very clearly—It was such a pretty day when I got outside—The streets were not crowded with people—There was hardly any traffic moving on Twelfth Street, which was unusual. I went home the same way I came. When I was in the middle of Twelfth Street I saw a car coming toward me—I stopped and waved the car past. Instead, the driver of the car suggested I cross before he continued on—I thanked him, starting to complete my journey home. As I got halfway in the doorway leading upstairs to my house, someone called out,

“Hey you, come here.”

I turned to see who it was—the police. They were talking to me. They were right in front of the house, parked, by the time I had turned completely around.

“Come here,” this cop said, as he pointed to me.

“You mean me?” I asked as I pointed to myself.

“Yeah, you,” said the cop, as he motioned me over to the car. I couldn't figure out what they wanted me for; I hadn't done anything. I walked over to the police car and looked down at the cop who had called me over to the car.

“Yes, officer,” I said.

“Where do you live?”

I pointed at the house, “Right there—in 8342.”

He read the address aloud, writing it in a little black notebook, looking up after he had written down the address.

“What is your name?” demanded the cop.

"William Scott," I said hesitantly.

He began to write that down, too. The whole thing seemed a little odd. Not understanding why they stopped me, I started asking them questions too.

"Officer, would you mind telling me what this is all about?"

He gave no answer to my question.

"How old are you?" he asked.

At this moment I felt very much out of control of the situation. I attempted to bring things into focus.

"Officer, I don't think I have to answer any more of your questions until you tell me what this is all about."

Suddenly he opened the car door, jumped out, grabbed me by my arm.

"You don't ask the questions around here. We do. Who do you think you are anyway?" he screamed at me.

"I have got as much right in asking you questions when you don't tell me why I was stopped," I screamed back at him.

Then he threw me up against the police car.

"Don't you get smart with me, you smart ass."

He opened the car door.

"Get in." He pushed me, taking my clip board and cigarettes.

I landed in the back seat, angrier than hell about this cat's actions.

"Who do you think you are fooling with, anyway, boy?" yelled the cop.

The driver of the car didn't say a word; he just sat there watching. The cop had my clip board and was looking through my papers.

The cop turned to face me.

"Now, how old are you?"

"Seventeen."

"What are you doing with these cigarettes if you are only seventeen?"

"I like to smoke, that's why."

What a stupid issue to have to justify.

"Well, you're not getting them back," said the cop thievishly, throwing my clip board at me. We were still parked in the front of my house.

Then he asked,

"Do you know a Tyrone Scott?"

"That's my brother."

Everybody knew that Tyrone was then in Boys' Training School.

"Have you seen him lately?"

“No, I haven’t seen him. He’s up at Boys’ Training School in Lansing.”

“We have a report to pick him up for running away from there yesterday.”

So that was his game.

“Anyway, what does my brother have to do with picking me up?” I demanded.

“We are going to take you downtown and lock you up for suspicion—you are such a smart bastard.”

“Suspicion of what?” I asked.

“Running away from Boys’ Training School, that’s what.”

“You know that won’t work. I’d get out five minutes after you put me there. You’re looking for my brother, not me.”

“We can still hold you for twenty-four hours.”

“Yeah, you try locking me up on that phony bullshit—I’ll have you in court for false arrest.”

“We’ll see about that,” he said.

He then told the cop at the wheel to drive further down Twelfth. We had no more words. I was boiling angry at his arrogance. They drove down Twelfth until someone called to the cop that had pushed me into the car. They pulled over to the curb at Blaine Street, four blocks from my house. He got out of the car to speak with somebody. The cop driving turned around to face me.

“The reason we stopped you in the first place when you crossed Twelfth, you were interfering with traffic,” he said calmly.

“You mean that’s all I was stopped for. Why didn’t you tell me that when I asked?”

“You didn’t give us a chance.”

“This should have been told to me from the beginning. I had the right to know immediately.”

“Nevertheless, you stopped a passing car when you crossed Twelfth,” he said.

“The man’s car slowed down to let me cross,” I said. “He didn’t have to slow down because I wasn’t out in the street far enough to be in his way, and for that matter he motioned me to cross in front of him,” I explained.

“That doesn’t matter, he slowed down for you to cross, you had to be out in the street, which is interfering with traffic,” he emphasized.

There was no use in arguing about it with him anymore. It was

quite clear that if a hundred people had witnessed what I described, he wouldn't change his mind. The other cop returned.

"I guess you know why we stopped you now."

"Yeah," it was finally conveyed to me, affirming his question.

"You see how unnecessary it was to get upset over a few questions which were only related to a minor traffic violation and almost resulted in something bigger."

"I will have to give you a ticket before we let you go."

He began writing out a traffic ticket.

"Like I told the officer there, if you'd told me what I was stopped for, this wouldn't have happened."

"Well, maybe that's true. We have a job to do and this must be done our way, not yours."

At this point, he turned and gave me a ten-dollar ticket. Then they let me out of that police car.

There was a litter basket on the curb in front of their car. I tore the traffic ticket up into little pieces and put them in it and left to go home . . . (maybe papa was right?) . . .

I was really pissed because these cops gave me such a hassle over such bull shit. But, they hadn't done it for racial reasons. I was the good guy; I was a civilized negro. And sometimes good guys get mistaken for black ones; it was just one of those things. Yeah.

How was I to know then that cops are the keepers of the status quo, Mr. and Mrs. America, and of cultural racism. Oh shit, and you've taken over the moon too.

You know, as much as I didn't want to admit it to myself, right then I knew what Mr. Maxwell told me was true: I really didn't like being negro at all. I would always get nervous and frightened whenever I was in the company of everyday folks on Twelfth. The best I can figure out is this: I didn't want people to see that I had this thing about being black and didn't want them to see the contempt I held for them because in them I saw myself; and I didn't like what I saw, and I wanted to change it. The only way I could change it was to act different; rather proper, dear.

Then I think there was another thing too; it's like I said about the violence kick. I was really frightened about that. There was a Twelfth Street temperament, a violence, fight and hurt other people, and I wasn't too particular about getting hurt. I was a scared ass.

But I was even more frightened by the fact that I didn't want to hurt anybody, didn't want to be forced into a situation where I would have to think about hurting anybody. I just wanted to be left alone, that's all.

It's always been this way in black communities. People never sit down and talk out their problems. They fight and kill each other. Like the police who patrolled our area didn't make a hell of a lot of effort to prevent anybody from being hurt by somebody else. As nearly as I can figure, as long as black folks are doing it to black folks, it was saving the police the trouble of putting a bullet through their head someday or locking them up in the deepest dungeon they could find for a hundred and fifty years. But if a black cat performs some violence on a white cat, damn if the United States Army doesn't come down on you. Needless to say, at the time, I thought otherwise: "we don't condone violence."

I think one of the biggest undercurrents getting to me about those inconsistencies came from my involvement in church groups. But how could it?

I mean they were like any other church groups; the kids would get together and they'd have little parties. And among the parties and other social functions like retreats where people would bring their basketfuls of niceties.

The church I went to had an all-black congregation. Excuse me, let me point out here, a black, middle-class, professional congregation. You know, the holier-than-thou jet-set. All the black people who had made it. Good backgrounds, good homes, good cars. And they had "credit." I can't say they were all in things like the stock markets, owned lots of property here and there, or were in business. They sure talked like they did. I never figured out how, with all that credit and steady white-collar employment, they didn't own a piece of Dow-Jones.

Life doesn't change, or an individual's way of life doesn't change in one day. But I had to make a change because I couldn't go on denying my whole existence as black on black. I wanted to live before I died. In this whole transitory stage, I secretly began to watch my father.

He didn't know I was watching him. He turned out to be my guiding light because I couldn't find anything inside those middle-class folks, or want to be like them when I finally figured out that they were all as scared-ass, self-hating people as I was. And I couldn't be in that bag.

I couldn't be in that bag because like when they came to church I saw then they didn't come to pray. They came to wallow in their own self-hatred. I mean they were different from the usual church-going hypocrite. More screwed-up. You know it seemed they were coming to church to ask God to forgive them for being black.

Almost all the times I went to church I'd sit there and watch the people force themselves to listen to the reverend father preach his shit.

"Remember it's more blessed to give than to receive; pass the collection plate please and renounce your sins. Help the needy, help the poor (help yourselves). You may be black, but the Lord don't care as long as you pay up."

I mean like when the plate was passed up and down through the aisles that was the only time you felt you were in communion with God and church and other people:

"Rejoice, rejoice, ye pure in heart, I put more money in than you this week. And everyone saw me too. I'm saved, I'm saved. I gave. I paid this Sunday like the others for the freedom of my body . . . and my soul."

There were times when I felt so ashamed of myself for ever feeling the way I did toward myself and the other black people there. I wanted to tell those other church dwellers,

"If you're going to hell, you're going, you're going, money won't change it."

Compared to the life we were all living, self-deceptive that is, we all needed to go to hell. Right from church.

I stopped going to church and started to work with myself. Like if I had a need to pray, from that day to this, I just sort of look up in the sky and say man you know me and you know who I am and I'm in a little trouble down here and I need a helping hand. Amen. And I believe that and so I let it go and let the Lord handle it from up there and I deal with it from down here.

So the Lord's good for something if you take him out of that crazy status-symbol church-going race. Besides, for all I know, God doesn't exist.

Meanwhile, back at the crib, as I said, I began to watch my old man. I mean, I began to look at the cat and see that he was farther ahead than anyone I'd met in my entire life and he was the one person I wouldn't

listen to. Talk about all the things that go into a moral person. He was it. He really believed in honesty and people respecting themselves. I guess he was the most courageous and bold man I ever saw in my life.

Although you didn't get in dialogues with him, he sort of lectured you. You heard and respected all his words although you might not have gone right out and done them. I mean when a son sort of refuses to accept his father as a knowledgeable person and does all those other things and listens to the advice of others instead of trusting the word of his father, it's a long road back from repairing the damage, especially if you have come to know his basic truths. And I don't think he ever knew I really got plugged in to him, tuned in, turned on, and convinced. In time. It took some time.

5

The Pimp and the Undertaker

As time went on, I became less critical of Twelfth Street and its people. And this was probably because I was, or I kept myself as, an outsider looking into something I knew nothing about other than my moral disapproval. There was a definite stupidity on my part concerning the black people on the street. As fate would have it, in due course, my stupidity was at its day's end.

It was a warm, quiet morning. Most of Detroit was asleep except Twelfth Street which has more bars and whorehouses than any other street in the city and which has its best business after midnight.

Nightclubs and bars were full of loud, laughing people—young women standing on corners, in doorways of various buildings, hanging out of windows yelling to men passing on foot or in cars,

“Want a girl, honey?”

People came from everywhere to enjoy things that rarely existed anywhere else in the city. There were a number of white men who came down on weekends just to get themselves some “fine colored pussy,” as they put it. This is where a lot of prostitutes' business came from a lot of the time, although the prostitutes managed to get business from old and young black men, too.

The summer before the riot, I had for the first time in my life bought a prostitute.

It was one of those summer nights in mid-June. I had come home from work one Friday evening to find a note left by my sister saying she and her family had gone down south for the weekend.

At the time, I lived with my married sister and her family in a four-room apartment near Twelfth Street. Naturally, I felt a little lonely there by myself and wanted to do something or be with someone on Friday

night. I wasn't able to keep in contact with the friends I'd known in high school who used to be my companions on Friday nights after school. We had graduated together and ran around for a few months until slowly we began to go our different ways and I had some wild fantasy of earning money by working in order to enter college at the earliest date possible. My sister's family became the friends I needed between work and school.

The fact still remained: I was home by myself when the thought came across my mind to go out and see what it would be like to buy a prostitute.

There were a lot of stories I'd heard about the things prostitutes did for their buyers, like they could give the best sexual satisfaction for a few dollars which your girl friend or wife would never supply—this uninhibited satisfaction ranged from blow jobs to sodomy . . . For me, just the conventional way was as far as I cared to venture, because if I had attempted any of the other extremes the prostitute could have pimped me for extra profit over and above the cost of living. I knew the last thing any man shows a prostitute is that he doesn't know what he's doing or she'll take everything he owns, giving little in return.

It's like the pimp who puts the naive women on the corner to turn tricks for him in the first place: he runs across some young girl who is desperate for love or money and the pimp then volunteers to teach her how to gain these things in a short period; she believes him; he takes her under his wing like the undertaker does in preparing a body to be buried. The more time the undertaker puts into making someone's beloved (after death) look as if he were still among the living, the better price he commands. Then, like when the prostitute's life has ended, the body is put into an eight hundred dollar casket (only really worth half that value) and taken to its final resting place where the last rites are administered by the preacher man over the one that was so good in life, but the Lord has taken him away to live the Life Eternal, until the "living good" and "dead" are resurrected . . .

Resurrected, to do what? Serve God or boogalooing to the "Rock of Ages" for eternity? Bullshit! The pimp and the undertaker are the gods: one of life, the other death. To life and death, allegiance is given by those who lack understanding; to do so, the prostitute and bereaved are taken into servitude, and remain, until they too become the victims of life and all that remains is the acceptance of death. When the naive weak prostitute and the bereaved learn to control themselves and their lives,

the pimp and undertaker are no longer needed or worshipped; the weak become the pimp and the undertaker as a result.

Anyway, that Friday I'd gotten paid for my work as a duplicator operator at one of the downtown insurance companies, which gave me more than enough money to buy a prostitute.

"What's a few bucks?" I said to myself.

I knew the price was somewhere around five dollars a nut. I still had to talk myself into going out for a prostitute, because of other things I'd heard about their attitudes towards men. For example, I heard, it was unsafe to carry more than five bucks when buying; sometimes the prostitute would pick your pocket or pull a knife and take her fee and any other funds the buyer had on him; but for the most part they only did this to the young and inexperienced . . . that meant me.

Nevertheless, after thinking about it for awhile, I decided to buy myself some nooker, regardless of the dangers.

It took a few minutes to change from my work clothes into something more relaxing and to leave all my money on the kitchen table, except the five I needed. Outside on Seward, after leaving the apartment, I walked toward Twelfth to be propositioned by a girl. They always asked you first . . . this makes the ordeal easier for someone young, unsure, and shy like myself.

The night had that sense of excitement ever present on Twelfth; that made one adventurous for involvement in the events occurring all around. It didn't take me long before I felt this excitement and involvement just from watching the people around me, which meant my very presence had also become an intricate part too. My eagerness for involvement sharpened all my senses equal to those of a superradar beam, and it didn't take me long to spot this one finely shaped woman standing in a doorway with stairs that led to an upstairs apartment.

She was so well proportioned that my eyes popped at the sight of her as I felt the hard mountain Rock of Gibraltar come crashing down between my legs in fury. The firm beauty of her lustrous body and face made me shake inside . . . Never had I seen such a sex-provoking object in all my days. She was a natural-born stone fox in all her glory. I figured if I had to be taken, she would be the prostitute to do it, and with my permission.

To have her I didn't care too much if she'd pulled twenty knives on me

and demanded the silver fillings that were in my mouth. I would have even given this prostitute the gums to boot. I purposely walked in front of her when she asked,

“Want a girl, honey?”

I stopped and turned to face her.

“It’s possible,” I replied calmly but scared to death inside.

This woman was a pro with much experience and I knew it . . . Therefore it was necessary that I act smooth, regardless of my desire for her. She probably could have easily made me feel like a fool if I’d shown her I didn’t know what to say or do next.

“What’s the price, honey?”

“Five and one for the room,” said the prostitute, very business-like.

That totalled six dollars. I’d brought only five with me.

“I got only five on me. Will that be all right?” I asked childishly.

“Look, if you ain’t got the one for the room, forget it . . . Can’t do business that way,” she said.

There was no getting around six and this whore meant it.

“I’ll have to get some more cash then . . . I’ll be back,” I said.

She just looked at me rather strangely as I walked away. To walk back home wasn’t appealing at the time, but, from the pricing of a few more women on the corner, it was apparent that if I was going to get anywhere, six dollars was the cost for all the prostitutes. Homeward I went, determined to have a prostitute, for that extra dollar to buy or bargain.

I was back on Twelfth now, with the required amount in search of any women that just looked good.

I felt sort of stupid from the first encounter; it was my wish to approach the next prostitute correctly without any slip-ups this trip around.

I noticed a seemingly gentle-looking woman standing on Twelfth near Blaine who appeared kind enough not to scare hell out of me if I’d made a mistake in approaching her. While I passed directly in front of her she asked, kindly,

“Want to do some business, honey?”

This time without hesitation, I responded,

“Sure, honey,” as I turned to face her . . .

“Five, and one for the room,” she said weakly.

“All right,” I said.

“Forgive me if I look sort of hard, but I got a headache,” she said. “I been out here all night and I’m tired.”

Then the prostitute turned to lead me to an apartment over a storefront of some

kind.

“Yeah, you don’t look so well; maybe you’ll be able to go in pretty soon,” I responded.

We walked from Twelfth into the storefront apartment building’s dimly lit hallway to climb a flight of old wooden stairs.

“Shit, it’ll be a long time before I can quit . . . that man of mine will beat my ass if I don’t get all the money I can tonight . . . I’m getting sick of this shit and him too, the dirty bastard,” the prostitute exclaimed bitterly as she pulled herself up the stairs on the handrail.

“Why don’t you tell him to go to hell and quit?” I asked.

“Hell, if I do, he’ll kill me then,” she replied . . .

I asked no more questions after her last statement because I began to feel the prostitute’s bitterness was directed at me too.

Now at the top of the stairs, the weak prostitute knocked at a thin hollow wooden door until it was opened by a dark, short, ugly middle-aged man in a T-shirt that covered his potbelly as it protruded outward then down.

“One,” she said, as we walked past him into and through a dimly-lit living room (with little or no furniture in it) to the bedroom which had a bed sheet that barred the entrance.

The inside appeared to be a normal everyday bedroom without any special innovations such as one would suspect. I reached into my pocket and gave the prostitute her money. She took the money from my hand and counted it out onto a night table next to the large bed that occupied half of the small bedroom. It dawned on me that I didn’t know what to do with my prostitute next. Questions shot through my mind, searching for answers that were not there.

“Should I take off my clothes, or maybe I should just unzip my fly?”

I concluded the only answers to these questions would be to let her lead me.

The prostitute got on the bed and pulled up her dress and underneath was a girdle which she also raised too . . . It was one of those without a bottom. Her display answered my questions of what to do next.

I zipped my pants down as she laid there with her thighs far apart, in the manner only a prostitute could master, and awaited my arrival stoically. On top of her, I felt as if I'd fallen into a slippery cave which had no end due to wear. The prostitute moved her body up and down in quick rapid motions to complete the act which lasted no more than five minutes.

I got up from the bed saying nothing; nor did she. The prostitute made no effort to recover from her sprawled position as I stood re-adjusting my clothes; and then I turned to leave alone, down the wooden stairs into the street toward home.

On the way home I had extreme feelings of guilt and sorrow for the prostitute I'd left lying back there on the large bed with little else to look forward to outside of being fucked! She was such a gentle woman, not like the first prostitute I'd encountered, who was all business. Maybe my prostitute wasn't a beauty queen, but she needed someone to listen to her troubles for a change, and care. I did care, because she treated me humanely, even in her bitter state, and not just as a buyer; although we spoke little to one another.

I wished it possible to have taken this prostitute off the street; she deserved a better life, or at least a choice of one.

"Maybe she's too weak for anything else? I could make her strong if she was under my wing for awhile, I know I could," I thought as the summer air blew triumphantly in recognition of my despair while I wandered down the loud streets.

When I got home, the big excitement of screwing a prostitute had passed and turned into disgust. There was no difference between them and other women, except that prostitutes sold their bodies, making sex easy to obtain with no strings attached. The time spent was not worth the money in any respect; it was a matter of her moving rapidly up and down, making ejaculation come immediately after entrance into the cave of fire and pussy juice.

Thus the prostitute has earned her fee, and anything beyond this was overtime. The sexual thing wasn't much different from masturbation. Why pay money to have someone beat your meat when it can be done by yourself? There was no emotional relationship on my part with the woman I bought. She was just a means of masturbation which said little for the sexual act. Realizing some of these simple truths for myself,

never did I want to buy any more women or sex. Also, I understood that because these women sold their bodies didn't necessarily mean they were no good. This was their way of making a living and, if prostitution made life possible for them, they are justified in preserving their existence (hopefully) as human beings.

O.K. . . . So you're down on prostitution. Now, dig this . . . As long as it is all right to go to church and we sanction or say it's all right to praise God, well, then, I think it's all right for prostitutes to praise pimps and men to praise prostitutes . . . While we're at praising "GODS." Now, just suppose what you would do or be if somebody snatched your God away from you and made it illegal to praise him. . . . Then who would be the pimp, prostitute, and undertaker?

6

I Goes to College

NIGFUS RIGS (FOR A STRUNG-OUT NIGGER IN ACADEME)

Nigfus Rigs, defying; fucking with death again. He been gone so long that Rigs don' know difference b'tween the living & dead. Twenty years after his birth & became dangerous to himself. Quite aware of what others might do, but never to consider (before this late date) what heavy damage he brung his self.

It just happened to Nigfus Rigs, one day here, digging: the relate (bullshit) to people thing (& he'd tell 'em what they wanted to hear)

right on!

Stepped from his doorway & not into ghetto streets he knew so well-forward into an organic sea to be ship-wrecked & washed ashore . . . left on his knees, pleading with it to take him in.

March 1966

I left my father's home after graduation from high school in January, 1966. Not that I really wanted to, I wasn't none too eager to go out and fight that world at nineteen. But me and my old man just couldn't get along, because I wanted to go to college and he wanted me to work to help him with the family instead, which wasn't a bad idea considering the fact that my high school counselor had told me that I wasn't college material and to give up the thought of going to college. That even made me more determined to go. I guess I had to prove to myself that I could accomplish what I thought possible of myself other than those things that other people claimed I was capable of doing. An even greater reason for going to college was my father's constant nagging about getting an education so I wouldn't have to work like him just to make a buck. He used to always tell me about how it was in his day. So he said when he was coming up there just wasn't no opportunity for no Negroes then. And the best kind of job that he could get—if anything—was sweepin' floors and that I better go on and get as much education as I could 'cause I was gonna need it. So it was hard for me really to understand why he got so mad at me when I said I wanted to go to college. And we both knew the only way I was going was by me putting myself through. So like about two weeks after I graduated I got a job as a stock boy in a clothing warehouse downtown, earning fifty-two dollars a week, total. And I was saving my money, every cent of it, this is what was left after expenses like food, transportation, and clothes, so that I could enter school in September. I had applied to Highland Park Community College and just assumed that I was going to be accepted and went on and worked my ass off until I received word. During this time all us kids were home with the exception of my sister, Wilma, and I was the only one working. So I guess my father thought I was the only able one to assist him with the family expenses, but I disagreed. Because I figured after I'd gotten enough education, I would then be of more help to him. Without thinking I really got pissed off at his proposal that I contribute ten dollars a week because I needed every cent I could get. Ten dollars a week was just too much money. I told him that and he said I could just leave his house. And like a reactionary fool, I split without the faintest idea where I was going. I packed all my stuff and got it outside. The only other place I knew to go

was my sister's and she only lived a few blocks away. My sister, who was not on too good of terms with my father anyway, figured I needed help because she wanted to see me go to school. So I went to live with my sister. I helped with her expenses as much as I could—in exchange I slept on the couch. Her husband didn't seem to mind too much, because I was somebody else to talk to. Eddie worked at this supermarket as a butcher and didn't make too much bread so it was sorta cool for him that I was around to complain to. Like my sister didn't work 'cause she had to take care of the kids, but she wanted to awfully bad because I know she really wanted to get out of that three room dilapidated apartment. So I guess you could say we humored each other as a means of forgetting the misery. I was working hard every day putting my money into a checking account I'd opened when in February I got a notice of rejection from Highland Park Community College. And that shook my whole foundation—I was ready to give the shit up when I heard about this new college that was opening up and it needed students. It was a place called Michigan Lutheran College on Woodward and West Grand Boulevard. The whole college consisted of one building but when I went to see the place to make application, it was really a nice place. About two weeks after I'd applied I was accepted; finally. Michigan Lutheran was weeks away from starting its next school quarter, which began in March. Well, I'd saved enough money—I thought—to make it to the summer when I would get another job. So I began school in March keeping my job for some weeks after and attending classes at night from 6:00 to 12:00, when I'd come home and study for about four hours each night. I enjoyed my classes which were English, music lit, and American history—like I said I wanted to learn. This higher level education demonstrated to me just how little I knew. Man, I couldn't read, I couldn't write, and to top it off, I couldn't spell. When I realized these things, the more determination I had to learn how to do them so that I could make it through college. So I quit my job and worked with myself in my weak subjects from 8:00 in the morning to 5:00 at night in the public library. Then around 6:00 off to classes I went. And I continued to do this through that whole first quarter. When it ended in May I got myself a temporary job until the next quarter began a week later. And this one was over by the beginning of July 1966—Well, I'd made it through college all right for the time being. So I went right back to work—this time as a duplicator operator. It was sort of nice to work

without having to go to school directly afterward. In the evenings I began to spend more time talking to my sister and thinking about how I felt toward myself and the things around me. Sometimes my brothers would come over and we'd go out and mess around on the streets. Especially on Twelfth, it was like a Hollywood strip—there was a little bit of everything going on. My brothers didn't seem to be bothered by all the shady looking characters that hung out on the corners. The way I interpreted it was these cats were just standing around obviously doin' nothin' with their lives but joyriding and pumpin' that God damn dope in their arms, and I don't mean to say everyone of these cats were takin' dope, but when I was hanging around with my brothers, more people I got to know did. I'd swear Tyrone and Reggie knew almost every cat on Twelfth Street—Twelfth Street was like a jungle or an unsolvable maze; it was hard to predict what was going to happen next—I mean one night somebody might get shot or cut up and next night everybody on the street could be happy and cool; plain drunk. Although some things never changed, these you could expect to see: the hustlers, pimps, prostitutes and cops. It seemed the longer you hung out on Twelfth Street, the more it appealed to your need for excitement. But this too had one downfall; the cops, usually the big four—the big four consisted of three plain clothes detectives and one uniformed driver who rode around in a marked police limosine busting prostitutes, dope pushers, and just plain fucking with people—one night my brothers and I had gone into one of the stores on Twelfth to buy some potato chips and pop—And when we came out of the store, up drives the police. It was the big four—The two detectives jumped out of their car and told us to stop. Then they asked our names and some proof of I.D. We didn't know what was going on so we all produced some thing which had our names written on it and the two cops looked our "I.D." over in a brief glance, then they began to search us—my brothers had gotten used to this almost everyday occurrence and didn't too much care one way or another but I did. I couldn't ever get used to the humiliation. And when this cop reached into my jacket, taking from it my check book, then asked who did it belong to, I knew that I wasn't supposed to have one, why? Nothing resulted from this shakedown and we were freed to go on our way. We started walking down the street when one of the cops called after us, "Tyrone Scott, wait a minute, come here." Tyrone turned, went back as Reggie and I stood waiting. I didn't know what the cop

wanted him for and I couldn't have cared; they had delayed us long enough. . . . "Ty, come on, let's go, they ain't got nothin' else to say to you, let's go!" I yelled. Tyrone looked at me and said, "I am coming, wait." "Come on, now, Ty, come on, will you?" The cop who was talking to him eyed me. "Who do you think you are, his father or something, I am talking to him now and you are going to wait till I'm finished too." I didn't have the chance to answer his question as to who I was because Reggie had already begun, "I'll tell you who he is, and who we are, we're brothers and you got our other brother and we want him back, that's what." The cop looked at Ty and said, "Now, who you going to listen to, me or them? They are just going to cause trouble for you." Tyrone had been in so much trouble with the law that they could bully him into saying anything, "Billy, y'll wait, will you, I'll be there in a minute," Ty said. "Come on, Reggie, we'll just have to go get him," I replied. By this time some people had gathered to see what was happening. We walked back and grabbed Ty by the arms when the cop said, "He ain't going nowhere, I haven't finished with him yet." "You a damn lie, mister, you is finished cause he coming with us," I said. Just then the other two cops appeared next to this cat's side. "Come back here with him, now, before all of you get your smart asses thrown in jail." I let loose of Ty's arm and turned, "Look, man, why don't you take your goddamn ass away from here and leave us alone, we wasn't and ain't bothering you so go head and leave us alone." "Who are you talking to like that, you filthy-mouth bastard, can't you see there is women standing around, and you are using language like that, you better get out of here before we do lock you up." The other cops just stood watching nervously because they saw the people gathering and they don't take kindly to "police." "Look here, Mr. Motherfucker, you ain't gonna do shit to me, tell you what you can do, you can kiss my black ass and go to fuck!" "Why you . . ." The cop said as he started towards me when one of the other cops grabbed him by the arm and said, "Just leave the crazy son of a bitch alone, we'll catch him out here some other time and take his ass in an alley and shoot him cause he asking for it; they oughta lock nuts like him up, come on, forget him; he ain't worth the time of day." The cop said, "O.K., we'll shoot his ass one of these days." I was madder than a fying fuck when I said, "When you shoot me, man, you better make sure you kill me cause if you leave just one ounce of life in me, your soul gon' belong to the lord and your ass to me and they gon'

send you home to your combat-boot-wearing mamma in a cigar box when I'm through with you." I was completely out of my head, now, screaming at the top of my lungs, "And when you come looking to shoot my ass, remember the name is Scott, William Walter Scott III, that's my name, Scoott . . ." Reggie and Ty then took hold of my arms and drug me down Twelfth and I yelled all the way home . . . As for the cops they split when my brothers got me moving along towards home. Later, Ty told me why the cops had called him back; they wanted to know about one of his friends whom the cops suspected of doing something unlawful; and that could have been pitching pennies in their book. Afterwards, I thought about the whole ordeal; maybe I over-reacted. But because of little incidents like this I was able to know my brothers as they were on their turf and how I wasn't too far away from becoming a part of Twelfth Street myself . . . in time. And so, if your bag was hanging out on Twelfth Street, anything could happen to you, man. After the summer of 1966 had ended—I went right back to Michigan Lutheran. For the most part this is all I did the rest of the year. It wasn't an easy year at all because I had to starve myself near to death just to finish the year out. I expected no more help from my sister or brother-in-law other than they let me have a place to sleep—life for them was not too easy either. When the fall quarter of 1967 came, I had to quit school to work since there was no way I could pay the tuition fees; my cash went one way and I the other. And my faith in education went with the cash. Just like most things in this country if you don't have the bread you ain't and can't get shit. For almost four months I searched the city for some kind of work, which turned up as impossible even to us educated people . . . No, I didn't starve. My sister and brother-in-law shared with me what little they had, if they had anything. There is one thing I can say about my sister Wilma. If nothing else, she believed in me like no one else before . . . I guess that's why I never found myself completely without some place to live. She was so helpful in those days—each morning, day after day, when I would leave looking for work. We had this joke that kept me looking for a long time because on some of those days I didn't care if I'd died after walking the city from employment office to employment office with no results. The joke was something like, "Well, sis, it's about time that I get off to work . . . the girls at the office are expecting me early today."

Wilma would then say, "Oh, yes, Billy, it's eight o'clock you'd better

hurry . . . By the way which car are you using today? The busmobile or the footmobile?"

"Probably, the cheapest of the two, you do know how prices is ah risen these days."

We would laugh and off I went to work; looking for work.

Let me stop here and explain something about myself before going on any further. As long as I remember never did I let go of my right to question myself about who I was as a person . . . Although I might not have done anything about some of the things I didn't like about myself, I did let go in myself the freedom to question the attitudes and feelings which I felt troublesome about. I'm so happy I didn't spend my time lying to myself about who I was and even the more reason for joy, I wanted to be me; the me, people never know about each other because spirits can't be given to another who won't give to himself. I gave to myself the day I realized with complete understanding that something was wrong because there should have been a job for me somewhere in that entire city . . . But then there were no jobs for a lot of people on the streets. Wait a minute now, after all I was doing the American thing by trying to pull myself up by my boot straps; I was educating myself; there should have been some kind of work. I guess 1967 in Detroit was a bad year for economic opportunity, but it was the year that I really began to get myself together like never before; self-realization. I had just finished submitting a job application at one of the many downtown employment offices and was on my way back to my sister's home, when something came to me like the ring of a bell which caused me to ask myself one question, "Tell me something, Bill, why is it that you don't see any of these white cats walking around looking for a job, not to mention that they are on their lunch breaks, well dressed, and carefree as anybody would want to be?" This was the day I decided to reject anything that was white. I could no longer tell myself it was going to work out and I had also to get to work on my racist feelings towards my own world; Black. There was nothing in the white world that had been meant for me . . . nothing. I wasn't even supposed to be out there in the first place. And going to college wasn't going to change the way white people mistreated and murdered Black people in any way possible. I could now understand why my father had given up on working in the white conventional world and turned to his world instead. Why in hell should any Black person have to kill himself

to make a buck. I wasn't going to keep hurting myself by not accepting the fact that I was Black and being Black meant I had to live Black . . . No more hating myself because I was Black. I wanted to be me but before I could I had to learn to like me as I was and who I was . . . Until I did this I could never go back out into the white man's world as William Walter Scott III; self-hating black nigger beast.

I became a street person because there was nothing cooler than joining in with the community thing; unemployment and despair. I mean I didn't look forward to anything outside of just hanging out on Twelfth Street talking to people and digging the happenings, nothing else. I didn't care anymore about getting away from the people I'd once thought to be really undesirable. And I knew when I walked down the street almost all those cats there at one time or some way had copped out of the white man conventional dog-eat-dog world . . .

Well, about June of 1967 my sister and Eddie had to move (evicted) from Seward for not paying their rent. Now to tell why they didn't pay their rent, I couldn't say, except that Eddie lost his job. But upon telling the employer about his rent situation he was reinstated, but they moved away. I didn't want to move with them because for sure when I was down and out, pounding the sidewalks, I made myself a part of everything that should have been me; Twelfth Street became my home.

I went back home to live with my father and my brothers and sister. He still had his way of lecturing you but this time I really listened with respect for the man because like it or not, his way of life was mine too. I also came home to a job; working for my father at the club.

7

The Club

We called our joint the club instead of “United Community League for Civic Action,” which was formed as a political organization in 1964 by my father and his brother in an effort to involve Black people in the political (American they tell me) process.

I think my father and uncle understood the need for community political power so that the Black people of our community would have a voice in government they could trust after years of “give me a little and there’ll be some kick-back” from politicians who would have denounced their mothers to get elected. Not only did my father and uncle see this kind of organization as a stepping stone to community power and control but also as a means of channeling campaign funds into a black-established political base which could provide some community income also, if nothing else. So my uncle, the only college graduate in the family, and my father, the Ph.D. of street hustling, with an intimate knowledge of the common black man, combined their talents to form an unrecognized but powerful (first) black political bloc ever in the history of the Twelfth Street area.

The thing I remembered it did, people came out and worked in the polls, they got interested, like people crawled out from under rocks, it was a good thing, it was a new thing, they were finally doing their own thing. But these were the people who didn’t have any power.

But the people who did have the power also came running. They knew they could manipulate this situation too. So it just turned out really to be just one more thing that the politicians could manipulate, and that shit, the kind of thing they can pass off on the people, garbage. But at the time it seemed good. But like the rest of the United States, it got coopted.

Their original planning involved acquiring a charter from the sov-

foreign state for legitimate enfranchisement to organize. Second, they found and rented a building on Twelfth Street over a printing company for headquarters. From this point everything seemed to fall in place. I mean, my father and uncle got out there in the street and informed people of what they wanted to do; they also wrote up and distributed literature explaining the organization and its objective. And within several weeks, the first community political (black) caucus met for internal organization. As to be expected, my uncle was elected president and my father vice-president of the organization. It was set up like most American political structures with the secretary and treasurer on down.

When wind of the new political organization got to the politicians, they came running with money in hand for campaign workers and Black political support. After all, the old promising game had about run its course and what better way to get those votes than to come in peace with the cash, never really having to discard the political trash; fucked again.

Right then my father and uncle decided the American (?) political process wasn't going to work (for them) and decided to make the club relevant to their lives which was an honest alternative, considering they were then doing what they really knew about.

The white man is a vicious parasite, he ain't going to get off any of his power or money, he's so damn scared we're just going to take everything. That's how my father summed it up after all that hard work and time, and from what I remember of the beginning, the organization worked with good success and some profit of sorts. The whole key? They weren't running candidates of their own, or didn't you know that, they were running the candidates handed to them that is who came on their own. How does that sound, a white man elected for a district that's all black? That's a bunch of bullshit if I ever heard it. The whole objective was to elect somebody to represent your community, somebody who lives there, who knows about it, who can help them get what they really need, like some government support. Like that was it; that's the only political activity I can remember, who needs political activity, sounds more like genocide to me, the way democracy is defined for blacks. Like if you don't know what I mean, maybe you'd better find out.

I must admit, at the time I couldn't have cared less what happened to it because I was still in high school and had no desire to understand the nature of my father's new venture. Even more important, my father and

I weren't communicating any better than the mealy-mouthed politicians and my father.

What happened was, as I remember, the politicians' campaign funds stopped coming in on non-election years, so my father, and uncle, probably the sole survivors of the organization, would give parties every week from Thursday to Sunday nights for community black folk simply to keep the place open and for making a living of sorts. Keeping the club open meant the same thing as keeping a political organization alive; if it didn't elect anyone who could do anything for Twelfth Street, or listen to what was going on down there, at least it was a place where people kept on going and felt successful (like any good precinct organization should). At last, the club was serving its purpose: the people on Twelfth Street, and doing it in the only way that made any sense. And my father again made it relevant like at home: if you can't get any outside influence to change things, let's get something going on the inside, influence, so we can tolerate it, stay on the inside.

Like I associate this with rationality; it was a rational decision, to keep the club open. Like, why don't you do things the rational way, the American way. Vote! That's what white folks tell you, trust in the founders of America, if you believe in that your voice won't go unheard!

So, most of the summer, I worked for my father as a door man. The political organization had become an after-hours club.

My job was to sit by the door all night and unlock it to let people in I knew; no cops. It was like one of those places rich white folks have out in the open in their community; the one we couldn't go to for entertainment.

All night I'd sit and unlock the door for people to come in and go out. Man, those long nights almost killed me; four nights in a row. But it was worth it because of the feeling I developed toward my people. I began to care about what happened to them, as well as to myself. Like I think this made the whole difference in my life because people have got to care about each other if they are going to live together without hurting themselves. And for the most part this is all they knew . . . when people hurt and don't have any way to stop it, and the only people they're around is each other, then they're going to direct their anger at whoever and what-

ever is present or near by at the time. Usually, the wrong people . . . never the cop, or the white, and negro store owners who cheated us out of every cent we had. No, not them, the keepers of the poor.

Anyway, I can say this much for the club because of the way it was run (on a house percentage basis); people had a chance to get some extra money through gambling and this had to be better odds compared to spending it in the stores around there.

I guess sitting up all night for twenty-five dollars wasn't my way of life and, anyway, it seemed that the city had opened up the door to employment again. I found a new job in the auto factory around summer's end. Maybe I wanted to try going back to school because I was still young; life wasn't over yet; one more time, I decided.

In two weeks I earned enough money to buy my first "cheap" car; status symbol. My father didn't like my final choice of work but he understood because he didn't want me working all my life in an after-hours joint.

Eddie, my brother-in-law, began to work for him in my place. Because I got out of the club scene, and in that factory, I was just like another member of the club, I was no longer on the inside so to speak. I was doing my thing, getting money to go back to school.

But at the same time, it became my only night club too and I went and enjoyed myself.

It was safer up there than on the streets for one thing. When people came, they knew they had to leave that rowdiness shit outside. You can do something, you know, without feeling that somebody was going to do something to you.

People were frustrated, they were tired, tired of police, tired of fighting and killings. It just got to their heads. It was just too much. So they danced. In the club.

There's a community feeling, that's no shit; if a lot of the community is depressed, it spreads, nobody has to tell it to you, you know, just how much can you take, you've got to get away from it some way. So they danced.

And now I was going to the club too. It would be one time I could go up there now without having to work all night. I would enjoy myself.

As I was coming down Twelfth Street and approaching the club, I noticed a bunch of shining lights, cars stopping, turning off on the side

streets. I got closer and had to park my car because I couldn't go any farther through the congested traffic. I parked my car on Twelfth about a block away from Clairmont. Then as I got closer, I saw a crowd of people standing on one side of the street across from the club where a paddy-wagon was parked in front.

"The club! Those Goddamn peckerwoods (police and whites who constantly peck at the wood, the Negro) are going to raid the club again."

They had raided us once before early that same summer by slipping two policemen (Negro) into the place without membership cards. When we were raided before my brother-in-law was working on the front door that night too, and I was upstairs walking the floor to assist people or to help keep order in the place.

Everyone was dancing, laughing, having a good time in the main hall.

The dim atmosphere, loud music, talking, and dancing made the club a family gathering each time we congregated. The whole affair was a brotherhood, composed of people who cared about happiness and the sharing of their mirth. Everyone was dancing, laughing, having a nitty-gritty-funky good time, when I came into the main hall of the club to see the gang circled around Chuck and Maxine as they danced . . .

"She burning, she burning you, Chuck . . . You better sit down, man," some cat yelled from the back of the crowd that had gathered to see Maxine, who was built to order, competing with Chuck, the funny man. I didn't know either of them very well, but I knew enough about Maxine's ability to put any cat down. Chuck was the court jester; he kept us laughing to the point of finally popping his favorite punch line:

"Let me get this dollar, man. She ain't got me, yet. . . I got some more to get her with," Chuck screamed over the soulful music, blurring from the jukebox against the wall.

The club was trembling from the clapping of hands and the stomping of feet in rhythmic syncopation to the intoxicating music of Mr. James Brown; as we looked on, the two circled, trying to outdance one another, until some cat yelled out to Chuck,

"Hey, man, move over and let me get down with her."

Chuck retired to let another try outdancing the undefeatable Maxine.

From the sidelines came cries of,

"Get down, get down with her, man," directed to the newcomer.

It was of little help.

Maxine could really shake her thing beyond conception, hips and all. The only defense a cat could employ was to try getting right up against Maxine's uninhibited body and to slow her rapid movements down but it was like having your joint smashed in the door. Soon after, the crowd gave up urging the newcomer to outdance Maxine, and began to dance again themselves.

I left the dance hall and walked into the gambling room to see who was winning that night. This room was always filled with thick cigar and cigarette smoke from nervous gamblers and spectators who watched the crap game in envy. The crap table was surrounded by gamblers with dollar bills half clenched in their fists, leaning on the rail of the converted billiard table.

"Shooting twenty."

"I got you, nigger, shoot up."

Butch was accepting the bet of another dice shooter.

The bet was placed with the stickman, sitting between the two gamblers on the other side of the table.

"Huh!" Butch's opponent exclaimed during the shaking and rolling of the dice.

"Seven come eleven, poppa needs a new pair of shoes."

"Craps, snake eyes, pay the man," said the stickman as he cupped the dice.

"Shoot another twenty, Butch, you ain't nothin' but a lucky ass nigger."

"That's o.k. with me, baby, as long as I win, you can call it voodoo, if you like," Butch laughed as his opponent rolled the dice again, only to lose another twenty.

Butch had an uncanny knack for shooting and winning at the dice table that no one could match. Sure, he lost once in a while, but it was few nights I'd seen him leave broke, like, for instance, Chuck. Chuck would bum a dollar or two at a time, and no sooner was it in his hand than he would be at the dice table to double his money, which rarely happened. And then to top it off, someone would have to give Chuck bus fare home at the evening's end. I'll never forget the night I was first made aware of Butch and his gambling talents. I was sitting in the club office one night when the telephone rang; I answered to hear an old, stern woman's voice come through the earpiece.

"Hello," I said.

“Hello, this Butch’s mother, is he up there?”

“I don’t know, but I’ll go see,” I said, putting the phone down on the desk.

I went into the dance hall first and called out for Butch by name, but no one answered. So I went to the gambling room and called out his name,

“Is there somebody in here named Butch?”

“Yeah, what you want?” said this very light-skinned, slender, good-looking, neatly dressed cat, as he walked toward me.

“Your mother wants you on the phone.”

“My mother! Shit, she wants me to come home tonight early . . . Look, man, tell her I ain’t here, O.K.?” Butch said.

“O.K., man, she’s your mother.”

I went back into the office to deliver the message.

“Hello, miss.”

“Yes,” said the lady.

“Butch isn’t here.”

“Are you sure, because when he left home, that’s where he said he’d be.”

“I looked all around and he wasn’t.”

“O.K., thank you,” Butch’s mother said when she hung up the phone.

I didn’t think much about it at the time and continued to sit. An hour later, the downstairs door bell rang; we kept the door locked to keep just anyone from walking in off the street, including police. Eddie, my brother-in-law, unlocked the door and up came, of all people, Butch’s mother.

Apparently she’d been there before because she knew which way to go to find her son. As she passed me, I turned to follow her to the gambling room where she asked for Butch.

“Butch, come here now!”

Butch was at the table ready to roll the dice when he turned to see his mother standing in the doorway.

“Momma, what you doing here? I told you I was coming home early tonight.”

No one paid too much attention to the minor interruption of the dice game, but looked on in amusement to see a mother scold her once baby

boy who was now a fully grown man. Butch put the dice on the table before approaching her.

“You know, what the doctor told me about staying home alone, without someone there to watch over me and you the only one I got,” she pleaded.

“O.K., momma, just wait until I finish my roll, cause I got to give them a chance to win their money back.”

“You been winning, son?” his mother asked interestedly.

“Yeah, momma, I always win something, you know that.”

“Well, if you winning, son, you take your time and I’ll wait for you at the bar until you finish.” She pushed him back towards the table as we laughed at the expression on Butch’s face.

Every time I saw Butch at the table afterwards I thought about the night his mother came to get him. Butch was winning again tonight too. The packed smoky room of gamblers created a most exciting tension. The dice were passed to someone other than Butch’s sucker who was betting the twenty dollar bills a shoot.

As the dice were being readied to be rolled by a cat at the other end of the table and as I was inside watching, this cat came from nowhere and jumped on the dice table and grabbed for the money in the bag in front of the stickman. Everyone moved back from the table wondering what was wrong with the guy. The stickman stood fast and watched, because he knew the cat couldn’t get away if he robbing the place. Then the intruder reached for a gun at his side. When he failed to get it out, he threw a police badge onto the table from his shirt pocket.

As soon as we saw the badge, everyone turned to go out of the room into the main hall; not scared left, but cool left.

We were all in the hall when this same cat came in and told everybody it was a raid and to stay where we were. The other peckerwood nigger cop who had also got in had gone down the stairs to lock the door so no one could get out. Realizing we were going to be busted for selling liquor without a license and gambling, we all began to dance to the jukebox music that was still playing like the cops weren’t even there.

One of the cops went over to the telephone, probably calling for the wagon. The other stood behind the bar, stopping anyone else from drinking.

Ten minutes later while we were dancing and enjoying ourselves, one of the cops pulled the plug out of the jukebox and cut it off.

Then, from the doorway, came a group of uniformed peckerwood cops congratulating the two negro cops for a job well done.

Then they told everyone to line up, “boys” in one line and “girls” in the other. We were searched and then told to go back and sit down.

Someone in our group said,

“You nigger cops can’t do nothing without those peckerwoods.”

Then everybody began talking about how the peckerwoods use the Negroes to Uncle Tom for them and that they were stupid to do something against their soul brothers.

I had always heard about black people who would sell their own kind to get ahead. Never had I been in a situation of this kind where one could actually see how the peckerwoods use Negroes to do their dirtywork. This made me mad as hell, because they knew that running a joint was one of the few ways black people could make a living.

I climbed up on a table and stood facing the peckerwoods,

“Whitey, go home. Why don’t you go get some whites?”

Everyone joined in until, for some reason, the white police left.

I got down off the table and this peckerwood nigger cop came over to me,

“If you don’t shut your mouth I’m going to beat your ass,” he said.

Not saying anything to his threat, I replied,

“I’ll have your peckerwood niggerish ass in court, too.” Because I was a “college” student and knew what the law was for police hitting people unjustifiably.

I sat there smugly until he went away.

We were told a short time later to line up at the door again, “boys” first. Then we were to be taken out to the police wagon to go downtown. We were in this line and walking to the head of the stairs when we were told to stop until we were told to go down.

I took a cigarette out of my pocket and was lighting it when this high yellow peckerwood nigger cop said,

“Who told you to smoke?”

“What do you mean, who told me to smoke?” I asked.

“I didn’t tell you to smoke, did I?”

“You didn’t tell me not to smoke, did you?”

“Just put the cigarette out,” he said.

“Look, man, I don’t even know who you are, I haven’t seen no badge, but you’re going to tell me when I can smoke and when I can’t?” I said, knowing very well that he was a cop. But legally he is supposed to show his badge.

“You sound like you want to kick my ass or something,” he said.

What did an ass-kicking have to do with it?

“You must think I am a fool or something to fuck with you while you got your shit [gun] on you.”

“I’ll take it off,” he said.

“Can I smoke or not, man?” I asked.

“Come here,” he ordered.

“I’m not coming anywhere. I’m going out of here with the rest of these people.”

He and a uniformed white policeman who was standing at the bottom of the stairs grabbed me, put me in the room used for an office, and told me to sit there and shut my mouth until I was told to move. They left.

I sat there and listened to the other people going down the stairs. I knew if I didn’t go out of there with the others—to be the last to leave—would only mean one thing: I had an ass-kicking coming.

Knowing this, I got up and went to the door, hoping to see the officer in charge. I met the same peckerwood nigger at the door.

“Who told you to get up?” he asked.

“I want to see the officer in charge.”

“Sit down,” he said, pushing me into a chair against the wall.

“I want to . . .”

“Shut up before I beat your ass,” he said and left the room.

I kept thinking I had to get out of there before all the people left . . . nothing could happen to me in the presence of witnesses.

Fear had gotten the best of me. I knew that I could end up dead. It was time to Uncle Tom my way out before the deal came down. Again I lit another cigarette.

The cop came back.

“Who told you to smoke?”

“Nobody,” I said and put the cigarette out on the floor.

“You’re just a smart bastard.”

Then he grabbed me up from the chair and hit me on the side of my head.

Scared to death, I said,

“O.K., I’ll be quiet, but stop hitting me, please.”

He pushed me back into the chair.

“Sit there until I tell you to move,” he said, and left.

I sat there, thinking how I had begged him not to hit me after all that standing up for my rights. It made my stomach turn in disgust. He wanted me to beg him for my manhood, which only he could give and take away.

I wanted to fight back and hold my stand . . . The cop was wrong for hitting me . . . If I’d made an attempt to attack him physically it would have been understandable. But this motherfucker was out to demonstrate how bad he was. The only thing that made this bastard such a tough cop was his gun and the “law.”

At that moment in life, to continue living was much more appealing to me than my pride and dignity. So I kept cool. But after taking shit like that for awhile from that kind of cop you get this real rotten feeling inside like a ton of cowardice (that only weak men possess) that haunts you for months.

I didn’t care for that kind of image every time my face appeared in a mirror . . . not for the rest of my life. From that day forth I swore never would another man do this to me again without my fighting back . . . hopefully to kill him if need be.

About an hour later I, too, was taken down to the police station. I was let go with the others who were also arrested, the charge: being in a place of illegal occupation.

Now they were back again.

8

The Emancipation

ORAL WEST (NEGOTIATE)

*Western (civilized) man
copulating with words
(climax) sperm: bullshit*

bullshit

*bullshit
(werds)*

ORAL EAST (SETTLEMENT)

*Kill all caucasians . . .
& negroid (negroes) too
White man's heaven
Black man's hell*

Ah . . . So

(ah . . . so)

*Honorable
Chinks*

*take
over
soon
(smiling)
(now [niggers] now!)*

Sunday mornings are always hectic around Twelfth because people go out to have a good time on Saturdays at the bars, which all close at the same 2 a.m. hour; this puts many people on the street at the same time. This was the situation that Sunday morning.

I had just got close enough after parking my car and crossing the street to see this honkey cop swing a sledge hammer into the plate glass door of the club.

At this point the crowd became uneasy at the display of arrogance; the police seemed to have lawful right to destroy what they pleased (even you, if they pleased).

There was nothing I could do but join in the crowd. The first thing you learn about cops is, don't question their motives or you'll be locked up for being a smart nigger. Nevertheless, I wanted to know what the hell they were doing, breaking in the front door like gangbusters. They didn't have a search warrant; they didn't even have a plant in the place like before. If they did, there would have been no need in breaking the window to get inside because the police officer that had got upstairs would have (after making a purchase) let himself be known and put everyone under arrest, then got the key to the downstairs door to let in his blue-eyed pecker-wood soul-brothers (Goddamn fools).

There was a loud crash of glass; then like dogcatchers catching dogs, the cops charged inside and up the stairs. Naturally, we couldn't see what was going on upstairs, but on the street we could. There were cops standing around and in front of paddywagons and scout cars facing the crowd with nightsticks in hand. Then some people in the crowd began to yell.

"Go home, whitey. Why don't you go fuck with white people?"

Inherently hating cops, I walked across the street to the other side, about fifty feet from the door. I had a feeling that the people would support me.

"Hey, you Goddamn white motherfuckers, why don't you get your asses out of here?"

Two of them were standing at the door and turned,

"You better get away from here before you get hurt."

I didn't care right then if they killed me.

"If you put your Goddamn hands on me, I'll kick your asses."

They began to walk toward me. All the time the people in the crowd were watching them. They were close enough to reach me with their nightsticks when the people began to yell.

"You better not put your hands on him."

The crowd began coming toward them from across the street and, seeing this, the cops backed away fast.

Calmly and coldly I walked back across the street like the King of America.

The crowd now was really fired up; there was a constant name-calling session between the coppers and individuals in the crowd. Then, from the doorway of the club, you could see them leading people out into the waiting paddywagon. Each minute people became more and more angry, wanting to do something. It seemed as if people were coming out peacefully.

Then from the open windows above, you could hear people yelling, "Get your hands off me! I can walk without your help."

From the street you could see the police pushing people down the stairs for no apparent reason.

I became angry, or, rather, we became fighting mad at the sight of this, so we began to yell,

"You don't have to treat them that way. They can walk. Let them walk . . . you white sons-of-bitches."

We started walking toward them, still screaming at the top of our lungs. For that moment, they stopped bringing people down.

With this, they lined up in the middle of the street, facing off the crowd with nightsticks ready.

"If you stay where you are, no one will get hurt," commanded one of the cops.

"We didn't want anybody hurt."

(If we too had guns, somebody would have got killed . . . them).

It was very hard to move back for many of us, but we did. At every backward step, the hatred for them increased beyond comprehension, knowing we would like nothing better than to stand up to them and tell them they were wrong in what they were doing.

Everyone felt helpless. You get used to not insisting upon your own rights. In their eyes you have none.

After everyone had gotten back on the sidewalk, they continued loading people into the wagon. Apparently the honkey cops hadn't expected that many people upstairs because they had to take one group out at a time, then go down to the police station, and return for a new load.

Now the crowd had grown twice its beginning size until there were people on both sides of the street crowded around.

The cops stayed close together, not even attempting to disperse the crowd for fear of provoking a "riot."

I heard one of them call for support on his car radio (if they didn't want to start a riot, why in the hell did they make such a big scene to begin with? Arrogant fuckers!) When I get started, it is hard for me to stop until I get the anger out of me.

So I got on this car and began to preach to the crowd,

“Are we going to let these peckerwood motherfuckers come down here any time they want and mess us around?”

The crowd became excitedly angry, responding,

“Hell, no!”

I felt strong like I never had before in my life. At this moment the paddywagon returned for more people. I got down off the car and back into the crowd.

We stood and watched them bring more people out. From the doorway came this cat I knew and this cop had his arm behind his back, twisting it, again for no reason (isn't everybody deserving of the due process of law?)

He was yelling,

“Get your Goddamn motherfucking hands off me. I can walk!”

The cop pushed him forward. He broke loose, fighting his way to the middle of the street.

“Get him!” the peckerwood cop screamed.

At least three cops encircled him and threw him to the ground. He was fighting, head up. The crowd began to scream,

“Fight him, brother!”

The cops had him down . . . one of them raised his nightstick to hit him when the crowds on both sides of the street merged in support,

“You better not hit him,” we said.

The cop looked around,

“All right. Get up and walk to the wagon,” he said to the cat.

He stood up, walked over and got into the wagon. The crowd cheered for him.

It happened that from the doorway came my sister and father, the peckerwoods still pushing from behind. I lost control of myself and ran right next to the paddywagon door screaming,

“Oh God! Don't push my sister and father like that, you Goddamn animals!”

Before I knew it they too were out of sight in the paddywagon. It really

hurt to watch those inhuman bastards misuse the black women, the way they were pushing, kicking and twisting their arms, which only said one thing to all of us—they didn't consider black women, women.

At this moment I moved back into the crowd, then slipped out into the alley to get a bottle or brick to throw at the cops. (I wanted the pleasure of hitting one in the head, maybe kill him). After finding a bottle, I came back around the corner and got into the crowd on their side of the street. I found out that most of the people I knew were there.

"Let me in the middle of you. I want to bust one of those cops in the head with this bottle," I said.

They surrounded me gladly.

There was this sergeant standing in front of the door, about ten feet away. I aimed for his head, but apparently missed because I heard the bottle hit the ground at his feet (shit!). Everyone started to run for the larger crowd on the other side of the street when the bottle broke. The cops ran after us with their nightsticks but when we reached the side of the larger crowd, they backed off.

We yelled and screamed at them for not being able to catch us. The last paddywagon was ready to pull out when, from off this building directly across from the club, bottles came flying at the cops. They ducked behind their cars with guns pointed at the building. They stayed there, shining lights on the building until the bottles stopped.

Something happened that even amazed me.

After they had got everyone out of the club and, as they were leaving the scene, bottles, bricks, and sticks came from everywhere, smashing the windows and denting the bodies of the police cars.

I hurried to get me a brick to throw too.

The police began a scramble for their cars (they were no longer police but scared, disorganized men) to get the hell away from the bottles and bricks they had deserved for years. They got out of there so fast they almost had an accident and raced away to fade out of view.

Behind them the street became filled with black people and with a unified cry of Victory that rang through the streets.

For the first time in our lives we felt free. Most important, we were right in what we did to the law.

I felt powerful and good inside for being a part of those who finally fought back regardless of fear . . . Within the aggregation of people this

night there was a certain unique madness that had taken possession of everyone's body and soul which was almost what could be called the unification of the rebellious spirit of man; a fearless spirit ordained for complete liberation of the self, combined with and supported by a community at large. Guess one could say it was like fighting and gaining your citizenship, after having given it away to obedience of the law—police law—which was a one-man judge and assassin that ruled black people . . .

Slowly the crowd dispersed and I went across Twelfth Street to the club.

9

Get Some Loot and Scoot

“Hey, Scotty,” a close friend (who I had known in high school) called out as he was coming down the street just when I was entering the club.

“What’s the deal, man?”

“The old man got busted again by those Goddam peckerwoods.”

“Yeah, I was throwing bottles, too,” he said.

“Man, come on, let’s see if we can find something to put over the door and lock this place up.” (My key would no longer work anyway; they tore the lock up.)

We walked upstairs.

“Goddam, Scott, look at this place. They fucked it up!”

All I could do was look.

Everything was broken, from jukebox to wine bottles. They had nailed boards across the doors which led to the main hall, and left only one opening out of three doorways.

“Why did they do this? They didn’t have to do this.”

I was really hurt by this because I knew that a lot of hard work had been put into that place, making it clean. We walked into the office; everything was smashed. Even the little typewriter I used to type papers for school. It was the only real thing that was mine and that I enjoyed.

“Why did they have to smash my typewriter, man? You know, man, all that wasn’t necessary.”

Frank said,

“Come on, man, if they got the right, so do we.”

We left the club and ran down the street toward Clairmont. There were a few people standing on the corner. I crossed the street and stopped in front of this drug store, looking around, wanting to do something.

“Hey, let’s tear this motherfucker down!” I screamed to the people standing on the corner.

They just sort of stood there and looked at me, not moving. I grabbed this litter basket in front of me and threw it through the window of the drug store. (I had to destroy something.) An alarm began to ring. Everybody began to run. Frank and I ran back to the club. Just inside the door stood my brother-in-law, Eddie.

“Didn’t you get arrested with everybody else?”

“I jumped out the window. I was on the door when they asked me to let them in, so I had a chance to get out before they broke the window.”

“Well, Eddie, did they have a warrant?”

“Hell, no! If I didn’t move out of the way at the time, that plate glass would’ve hit me. They just busted in like they owned the place or something.”

“Is there any more beer upstairs?” I asked. “I’ll go see.”

“O.K., you and Frank meet on the corner with all the beer you two can find.”

I went back out, the alarm still ringing.

A small crowd had gathered again. Frank and Eddie came running down the street with two cases of beer and set them at my feet. Eddie went across the street and into the broken drug store window. After a few minutes he came back with a camera from the store.

I began to yell,

“Are we going to let those mother-fucking peckerwoods come down here and do what they want to do? Let’s do what we want to. Let’s tear Twelfth up!”

I kept talking.

People slowly began to enter the drug store to take what they wanted.

“I got some free beer for those who want it.”

“Just remember where it came from!”

People began to come from everywhere, grabbing beer; before I knew it, the clothing store next to the drug store had been broken into. Things became very hectic. It was impossible to tell if you were coming or going. The police weren’t going to show up again because they were scared and most people knew it.

I wasn’t even thinking about looting at the time it all started. My interest was to strike out at something that was more powerful and more legit-

imate than me; at the time this was the white store owners. After the beer was gone, I joined in the looting, grabbing what I could, running down the street, back to the club, with my arms full of clothes and various other things. Looting didn't have any meaning for me, it was just a way to remain involved with my people. During the whole melee in the streets, I was constantly involved in some aspect of all the events, ranging from breaking windows to the playing of traffic cop on a litter box.

I had pulled a litter box into the middle of Twelfth and Clairmont with intentions of standing on it to declare our victory, officially, like the Statue of Liberty. I stood on the rectangular metal-constructed litter box in full glory until the wild idea came across my mind to direct the traffic through our neighborhood. I went crazy. You should have seen me.

I was out in the street, gay as hell (soulfully inspired) by just going through all the antics of the traffic cop. I felt like the traffic cop. I'd actually been transformed into the world of police authority with powerful automobiles at my beck and command. It was a free day for everybody to do and be what he wanted, regardless of the world and its laws. I was grooving on the graceful movements of the traffic cop really looking good, and I felt good, when a city bus came to end my dynasty. There, coming down Twelfth (heading straight for me) was a city bus and the driver paid little attention to my waving him around me from the litter box, dead in the middle of the street. I waved and yelled for the driver to go around me, but he kept coming toward me.

"Hey, man, wait a minute . . . Can't you see I'm the traffic cop?" I screamed at the nearing bus; but it kept coming.

I am glad that I wasn't completely out of my senses, because just as I jumped off the litter box, the bus hit it and pushed the box to one side of the street.

I'd jumped to the left side of Twelfth to watch the bus speed away and then I crossed back over to the other side, when some cats spoke to me.

"Hey, man, you done enough. You better go on home, brother."

"Nah, man, I ain't finished yet," I answered, and was off in a trance doing something else. But they were right about enough; enough of playing traffic cop.

After this incident with the bus, other events took form shortly.

A group of us (people I didn't know) were stopping cars by getting in front of them to weed out white folks that might have come down

Twelfth on their way home. One car we stopped had a group of young white cats from some community college near Detroit who were out that night for a good time and on their way home.

I went up to the car door, and the young driver lowered his window.

“Hey, man, what’s happening?” I said sarcastically.

“Say, man, looks like you people are having a hot time here,” said the young white cat, jubilantly.

“Yeah, man, we having a riot, want to join us?” we laughed.

The cats that were with me didn’t think it funny and wanted to kick all the white cats’ asses.

I stood out and jived with the young cats for a while, then told them to split before they got hurt. (I really didn’t want to hurt anybody physically.)

As the white cats were driving off someone threw a brick through their back car window. I’ve always wondered if one of the cats with me did it, or was it me? But I was so involved, I couldn’t remember.

From here I walked back to the club to find a car parked in front with two white women in it. Their car had stalled and the woman driving worked frantically at the ignition to start the motor, because I think she knew there was something to fear that night. I went over and knocked on her window as she rolled it down.

“Lady, what in the hell are you doing down here?”

The woman looked into my face with great fear without a word, still working to start her car. Just at this moment, the motor roared and the woman raced away. I was sort of glad she’d gotten her car started before someone else saw her because they wouldn’t have even bothered to ask the white woman anything before punishment.

I went upstairs to the club to check on my loot and was immediately returning to the street when some cat stopped me to give praise.

“Hey, man, I am so glad you started this thing,” said some young diddy-bopper as he passed me.

At the time I mumbled something in response and continued to walk. Then lightning struck, hurling me back into a world of cold reality resulting from an honest approval.

Yes, I had started a riot, although it was going to happen some other time. Nevertheless, I had made it possible for cats to get those material things they desired when there was a larger human fight on hand. I got sick to my stomach, but soon got over that feeling because I knew it was

out of anger toward those things a human being should battle against that I did what I'd done.

All right. Maybe most people were just out for the looting alone and they didn't all have to agree with my interpretation of why one should or should not riot, but the rioters and looters did have one common interest: lack of respect for the law, the law that had abused them and their right to live.

Shortly after the traffic had resumed, it was stopped again. The police finally started to detour cars around Twelfth at West Grand Boulevard and other streets until the dead street took the appearance of a movie prop.

The looting began about 3:30 a.m. and ended about 8 o'clock that morning.

We stayed out looting all night; when daybreak came, the streets were cleared. Everybody had gone. There were just a few women out picking things up off the streets and carrying them away. The riot was over. I was tired and so was my brother-in-law. Frank had apparently left after getting his loot. So Eddie and I got our loot together and took it home.

After getting the loot home, I drove downtown to see when my sister and father would be released. They were going in front of the judge at 12:00 noon. I returned home and found my two brothers still asleep.

Eddie and I sat and talked about what had happened and went through our loot. Twelfth Street seemed to be back to normal like nothing had happened. People in the neighborhoods didn't even know what had taken place during the night. But at exactly 9 o'clock Sunday morning the cops showed up again on Twelfth with riot guns and helmets. Apparently someone had set a store on fire at Clairmont and Twelfth. As the fire engine came racing down Twelfth toward Clairmont I left the house to follow it and see what was going on. When I got down there, the police were lined up in the middle of Twelfth as the firemen put out the fire. Again, people had crowded around to see what they were doing there.

The fire engines left. But the cops stayed.

When people tried to cross the street or walk toward Clairmont, the cops would point their shotguns at them and yell

"Get back!"

Naturally, the people moved back, with those guns aimed at their

heads. These people became angry as hell when this happened, not understanding why. What the cops didn't know is that those people had no idea what effect this was going to have on the people standing around. They did not know that it was going to make the people angrier than hell. To the knowledge of the people, they had done no wrong, so why were these cops putting shotguns in their faces? A few people's tempers blew; there were some violent conversations between some people and the cops. While this tension was building, more people were coming outside, onto Twelfth.

I knew what was going to happen then. I decided to go home and sleep instead of going through that all over again.

In a matter of minutes I was back home, and sleeping.

10

The House Burns

A few hours later my brother, Tyrone, came into the bedroom and woke me.

“Man, the house is on fire,” he said.

Still half asleep, I didn’t quite understand what he’d said.

“What did you say?” I looked up at him in disbelief.

“The house is on fire, get up!” he yelled down at me.

I jumped out of bed and followed him to the living room. The house was full of smoke but I couldn’t see any fire. Apparently my father had got out of jail during the time I’d gone to sleep. He and my two brothers were taking furniture, clothes and anything movable out of the house.

“Where is the fire?” I yelled to my father.

“It’s down on the corner house, but it will spread here soon.”

“Did someone call the Fire Department?” I asked.

“No, they couldn’t get here in time anyway. Come on and help us save what we can. Get your clothes on,” he said.

“First let me try calling the Fire Department. Maybe they can put the fire out before it spreads.” I dialed the operator and asked to be connected with the Fire Department quickly. Seconds later a voice answered:

“Detroit Fire Department.”

“Would you please send a fire truck to 8342 Twelfth . . . our house is on fire,” I said.

“We’ll try, but there are many fires all over the city . . . we will send one soon as possible.”

“All right, thank you.”

I hung the phone up and hurried to get dressed. I had a feeling the Fire Department wasn’t going to get there in time. . . . To sit there and burn

with the house in my underwear wasn't exactly my idea of devotion to home.

When dressed, I started gathering articles in reach, taking them outside and across the street to put with the rest of our things. After several trips back and forth, the fire had finally spread to our house; we couldn't go back in then so we sat there and watched the house burn. There was nothing we could do.

Suddenly from nowhere the Fire Department appeared. Our hopes were that they would put the fire out before it destroyed the whole house. On the corner there was a fire hydrant which made it very easy to connect their fire hoses quickly. In minutes, water covered the front of the burning house and put out the flames.

The fire was out; at least it looked that way. Just as the firemen were ready to leave, it started up again. The fire chief then said,

"Let it burn . . . we haven't time for a second try."

So they let it burn.

I didn't feel too badly about his decision; it was something that just happened. We accepted it as a fact of life and began to plan our next move.

We weren't the only ones out of house and home. The whole block was burned out and the rest, like ourselves, looked on with a concerned apathy . . . ready to move elsewhere.

Everything was so confusing that we couldn't pay much attention to all the incidents going on around us. Nevertheless, as we were standing there, from across the street came this old man, apparently out of one of the burning buildings. He was dragging a couch in the street from his flaming home.

Then came those goddam peckerwoods marching down the street like they were in the army or something. They were lined across the street in two lines.

This old man had grabbed his worldly belongings out of the burning house across the street . . . he wasn't rioting or looting. The riot was further down Twelfth. The cops had blocked the street off before the riot came that far. The cops that were coming down Twelfth from the side that had not been blocked off took the butts of their shotguns and busted this old man's head wide open. As he fell to the ground the cops said to him,

"Get out of the way."

The man was dragging his furniture, or what he had left out of the burning house. He couldn't move any faster than his old legs would carry him. Because he didn't and couldn't obey the order of the peckerwoods to "jump," they weren't going to take nothing . . . "disobedience" from a "nigger." They didn't have any real reason to bust that man's head open. The cops could have walked around him because the real threat to them was blocks away. If somebody had shot one of those cops I wouldn't have blamed him. I got pretty emotional over seeing them hit the old man and started to scream at them.

"Why did you do that, you crazy motherfuckers? You didn't have to hit that man."

My father told me to shut up.

"Leave those crazy people alone. Can't you see that's what they want . . . a good excuse to shoot you or something?"

I knew he was right and calmed myself before doing something stupid . . . like getting killed.

"We've got to get this stuff out of here," my father said to me.

He sent my brothers to get a friend of his who had a car to help move our belongings. Minutes later we were loading our things in the trunk of my father's friend's car.

After we had finished, my father told us he was going to stay with a friend for the time being. There wouldn't be enough room for all four of us there. We agreed I'd stay with a friend of mine until my father found another place to live.

I left thinking I'd see them the next day.

It was two weeks before I saw any of them again.

I Got Busted

Monday morning, July 24, 1967

Monday morning, July 24, I left my temporary home to get a newspaper at the news stand, wanting to know if the papers carried a factual report of how the riot had started and why. It was important that I see the morning papers, because if anyone identified me from the night before, the busters would be looking for me. The paperboy had made no deliveries that morning to any of the neighborhood homes; no stores were open in the neighborhood; they had gone out of business the night before, so to speak.

The peckerwoods' papers have a funny way of interpreting anything that happens in a Negro community, being careful in its wording for the general public—which doesn't include us darkies—to read: "Those niggers is at it again." However, this time such a foolish interpretation would only make it clear to many Negroes that the peckerwoods' actions were still sanctioned by the power structure (that being the whole damn peckerwood population). This kind of write-up would only indicate to us that it was legally open season on niggers. We had gotten out of our place as far as they were concerned (it's about time), and we needed to be shown our place. Naturally, I knew something of this sort might be written; still I hoped that maybe these people would understand the stupid act their police had pulled off the night before and would publicly apologize to the whole Negro community. Their apology would have given us a sense of being human with the right to be angry at the oppressive system which has exploited the Negro, without adding that bit that we had no right to destroy "their" city. (That's why we did it.)

Reading the paper that morning would have given me some kind of idea where we stood with the peckerwood cops. I knew if they didn't get

the message the night before, we had better get ready for a long, hot, violent day. I did not want to walk out on the streets later on and get my black skin beaten or blown off me by one of those God damn fools.

The nearest newsstand was located on two main streets in Detroit where there are many stores of various kinds, on Grand River at West Grand Boulevard.

The atmosphere seemed to be normal for that time in the morning—sun shining, making the whole world look peaceful and beautiful. Approaching the area where the two main streets crossed one another, I noticed a change in the general atmosphere. After walking on until I reached the corner of Grand River, all at once a new city appeared; one with all the indications of a deserted town: buildings burned to the ground; broken, empty store windows, streets littered with various items from paper to shoes; this spectacle gave me the feeling of being in a strange city.

After stopping to view this, I urged myself to walk over to the newspaper stand—to find there were no papers. I turned around to get back home and noticed some people standing farther down the street at a bus stop, probably going to work. They looked as if they had been waiting a long time for a bus and confused as to whether or not a bus was going to come. These were the only people I had seen that whole morning, so I walked toward them to find out exactly what was going on. Upon approaching them, I noticed this strange way about them as if they were saying “What and where are we?”

An old man dressed like a factory worker was standing next to the front of a building that had the windows broken out. He held a brown paper bag in his hand that appeared to be his lunch. I greeted him,

“How long have you been waiting for the bus?”

“An hour or so,” he said.

“That is odd, the Grand River bus runs every ten minutes or so,” I remarked.

We both sort of shrugged our shoulders and let the conversation go at that. The other people standing near the curb seemed to have come to the same answer to what had happened to the bus. They didn’t know either. However, there was some traffic; not the kind which indicated that people were racing to work as they normally did.

I realized that there were no newspapers to be found; and standing

there at the bus stop only bewildered me more, only indicated that by standing out there I could find out nothing; so I turned around and knew that going back to my temporary home was the only thing I could do until later that day; by giving the man more time, I'd find out what the deal was one way or another.

I walked back down Grand River toward the Boulevard. There on the corner stood a group of young boys talking and pointing at a drug store. The windows had been broken the night before; probably the place had not yet been looted. At the sight of all this I thought it strange that the riot had spread from Twelfth Street to Grand River within twenty-four hours, Twelfth being a good mile away. The Boulevard-Grand River area not being what one would call a ghetto section, there had been no legitimate reason to riot. However, it is a lower middle-class Negro section.

The group of boys standing on the corner seemed to be looking for something or someone. Then about three of them moved quickly toward the broken drugstore window and entered to fade out of view.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, came a fleet of police cars, circling the block. The boys on the corner started to run, at seeing the approaching cars, yelling to the others who had gone into the broken drug store window.

“Here comes the man.”

They ran past me and the others at the bus stop, going toward the opposite end of the street. The police cars came to a screeching stop—shotguns pointed out of their windows.

A command of “Stop!” came from the police cars, “or we’ll shoot.”

The running boys stopped dead in their tracks with police coming from everywhere their cars could be seen, pointing their guns until they got right upon the boys, telling them to raise their hands, then get on the ground, laying face down.

Digging this, I didn't have to read the papers to know it was time to get the hell away from there . . . they had set those God damn stupid fools free again to stop the rioters . . . anything black moving. When a peckerwood cop gets in that position, it's open season on coons—like a deer hunt.

I quickened my step to get away from there. One of the boys who had gone into the drugstore jumped out of the window as I passed. Before he could gain his footing, there was a net of police there to point those shot-

guns right down into his face—and in mine—telling us to get our hands over our heads.

Then one of them asked me if anyone else was in the store.

“I wouldn’t know,” I said.

“You just came out of there. Why don’t you know?”

“I most certainly did not.” (Thinking, “You God damn fool!”)

“Boy, don’t get smart with me or I’ll blow your fucking ass off.”

“I’m not getting smart with you, officer.” (You son-of-a-bitch.) He pushed me against the wall with his shotgun, saying,

“You’re one of those smart niggers!” (Thank you.)

Then he told me to get on the ground with my face down.

Yes, I got down. That shotgun convinced me not to demand my rights. That’s the kind white folks give you, to get your head blown off when demanding them. (Thank you, but please don’t give me any more rights.)

One cop turned to the other and asked him if anyone else was in the store.

“Yeah,” he said.

“Get on the ground and shut your mouth,” the cop said to us.

One of the cops stood guard over us, pointing his shotgun at our heads. (They must be jealous of our woolly heads.) Several others went up to the broken store window yelling,

“Come out or we’ll blow your asses off!”

That did it—from the store emerged two figures with their hands up, yelling,

“Don’t shoot, we’re coming out.”

The police backed away from the window with their guns pointed at the boys as they came out, telling them also to get on the ground, face down.

It was best just to go along with them, not questioning anything they did until protection came from an outside source—maybe a lawyer when I would be given my telephone call at the police station; alternatives would be a minister or a gun.

I was laying there on the ground mad enough to kill one of those peckerwoods when we were told to get up with our hands behind our backs. I rose to see that they had a number of people standing against walls, including the ones waiting for a bus. We were told to step forward two at

a time, then handcuffs were put on us and we were pushed from behind into a waiting police car.

Police cars were lined up from one end of the block to the other, waiting to take all of us to the police station.

In the car the door slammed behind the entrance of a policeman who told the driver to proceed. Then he turned to me,

“What’s your name?”

“William Walter Scott III,” I said.

“Boy, don’t lie to me! Now, what’s your name? If you’re lying to me, I’m going to shoot your ass,” he said. Then he took out a little black book and began writing my name down and asking where I lived.

I told him I had lived on Twelfth and Euclid and that my house had burned down the day before.

“What you doing up here?” he asked. “Where are you living now?”

“Over at a friend’s house and I just came out to get a newspaper.”

“You’re a cock-sucking liar! You came out here to loot.”

“Officer, I’m not lying. It’s the truth.”

He raised his hand as if to hit me,

“Shut up, you lying nigger!” he said.

I knew very well if he asked me any more questions I had better be careful in answering them. He was trying to get me to say something smart so he could have an excuse to beat in my head. Being careful not to give him what he wanted, I decided to answer him in a short and apologetic way if any more questions were asked.

Then he asked the cop driving,

“What should I charge him with?”

“Charge them both with breaking and entering,” the driver said.

I wanted to get those handcuffs off my hands and kick both of their peckerwood asses until they turned black and said, “Mister, please.”

They just sat there casual as anybody, passing out sentences, not even having the least bit of evidence that I had done anything. What bothered me even more was the fact that I could be convicted of the charge only by their words.

How was I going to prove my innocence without a witness—outside of the police?

12

The Garage

It was not long before we were at the police station. There, we drove into this big parking lot with six-foot walls around all four sides of it. The police were together in a half circle, giggling and laughing, twiddling their guns. You know, like the cowboy movies. Facing this garage was an army tank with its gun trained on the door. The cops yanked us out of the car, then put us in the garage with all these other people.

Get this. In this garage there was grease all over the floor and water from a hose that had been put on top of a sewer so that we could have something to drink. Apparently they did use the garage to park their police cars in during peace times. With the water, grease and so many people in there, it was almost impossible to lay down.

The women arrested were kept inside the police station's cells . . . men in the outside garage.

I tell you, the garage was about the size of a ping-pong room. There were close to two hundred people packed together in it and they had an army tank outside the big roll-up doors which were at each end with the guns pointing into that garage, so there we were, between two sets of mounted guns. That was stupid . . . what did they need those tanks for? We weren't going anywhere with the police there.

At first I thought I'd get out because they didn't have anything on me then and I knew I'd done nothing to get arrested for. But I got fooled . . . did I get fooled.

Everyone that came into jail had cuts on their heads or something wrong with them where the police had beat them, and I mean all the people they locked up. The police had jabbed them in the back with their guns and busted people in the head with nightsticks. Man, one guy was in there for three days and he had a busted jaw. Three days . . . and he

couldn't talk. His mouth was busted and they knew it. They would say when he reminded them,

"Yeah, we'll get you to the hospital."

They didn't care if the man died.

Most people sat around talking and trying to find out what was going on. I just sat there for a few hours when this cop came in, calling me out of the garage. He took me to this room where they were going to interrogate me. He was real nice, let me tell you. He was so nice that he tried to get me to confess a crime I didn't commit. The cop even tried to use simple psychology on me.

He said, "You're in bad trouble."

"For what? What did I do? What's the charge against me?"

"Breaking and entering."

"Man, what did I break into?"

"Didn't you break into that drugstore?" he demanded.

"Hell, no, man, I was just standing on the corner."

When he couldn't get me to confess, he began playing up to me.

"You're more intelligent than most Negroes I've spoken with today . . . I think you should tell me what you've done. I can help you."

That man didn't want to help me; he wanted to send me to jail. Even if I had done something, there was no way he would find out.

He was sitting next to me at a table. He reached over and said,

"Empty your pockets and take off your jewelry."

I had a new I.D. bracelet on my wrist. He watched when I took it off and picked it up.

"You stole this bracelet."

Then he called this other cop from the teletype on the other side of the room and said,

"Hey, Sam, this I.D. bracelet was taken out of someone's store. We got a report about it."

Sam looked at it and said,

"Yeah."

(You must be a damn fool, Sam, how can you identify an I.D. bracelet from any other if there's no name on it?)

The cop said, "We're going to use this as evidence against you."

I guess he expected me to be convinced they had something to keep

me in jail on, and then I would confess to make it easy on myself. It didn't work. I just sat and looked at the cop like he was crazy. Then he did a strange thing which not even I expected.

"What religion are you?" he asked reverently, leaning forward . . .

"Catholic," I said because it was the first to come into my mind.

"Do you go to church often?"

"Pretty often," I replied.

From the tone of his voice I gathered the more I impressed him of my faith in God and church, he would think I was beholding to the Lord and let me go home . . . I geared myself to lay it on convincingly.

"Did you go to church last Sunday?" he asked.

"Yes," knowing damn well I hadn't seen the inside of a church for four months.

Then he asked me about some "Holy Sunday" and did I go that day to Church. . . . I thought about answering this one because if he'd asked me anymore about this "Holy Sunday," I couldn't even have told him what time of year or month it falls.

"No, I couldn't go that Sunday," I said, displaying guilt and remorsefulness for his benefit.

"You couldn't go," he grunted, apparently quite disturbed,

"And you call yourself a Christian?"

To this I could say nothing.

"No, no, I can't let you go," he said as if I had committed a crime against God himself in negligence of that "Holy Sunday." I still don't know by what name it's called.

"You come in here and lie and then try to pass yourself off as a Christian. . . . No, you're going right back in with the rest of those lying pack of thieves."

Then he turned,

"Sam, get him out of here, I don't care what you do with him, but get him out," he said, obviously disgusted with me. (You know, the funniest thing, I did feel guilty for not going to church on that "Holy Sunday.")

Then I was taken back to the garage and there I was, talking with the rest of the clan again.

What did we talk about? What we always talked about: when they were going to call our name; some talk about the judge and how much

time they were going to get. That's what we talk about when we're in jail. You're too depressed to talk about anything else, and to be worried about when you will get out was enough to scare hell into a person.

Considering the cops many times forget you're even there . . . that's always a fear.

We sat there for hours on end. Some of us talked about other things and scrounged for cigarette butts, passing smokes around. Then about—I guess it must have been ten o'clock at night because it was dark outside—this old fool—an old drunk man, he got up and was going to walk out of the garage. I thought that was silly. Nevertheless, he walked out of the garage. Suddenly the cops slammed those doors down and all of a sudden we heard this shooting outside. I jumped in the corner with the rest of the people. We were never so scared in all our lives. That was the first time we had actually heard any gun shooting close to us during the whole riot. We thought the old man got killed, but he didn't. When they threw him back in there, I mean literally threw him back, the old man had gunshot wounds all across his chest and back. Afterwards they raised up the front garage door and there came those peckerwoods with their guns and bayonets. They beat everyone in sight until we were all packed in a corner of the garage. They didn't have to do that; that was unnecessary. Sometimes I wonder how stupid can anybody be? Now who is going to be fool enough to break out with all those tanks out there and that artillery? The cops must think us some dumb people.

They don't consider us human. We are animals to them; we have to be tamed, our spirits must be broken. That's the way they must feel or they wouldn't have done that. Otherwise, they would have treated us like human beings. I tell you how I felt after the shooting that night. I started praying to God. I started praying to the Lord to help me. He's the only one I had to rely on, man. I couldn't call for help anywhere. They wouldn't let us make a telephone call.

All night I prayed.

13

Exodus to a City Bus

Tuesday came and Tuesday went with little change. As each hour passed, time became unimportant. Most people in that garage were too concerned about staying alive and well.

On Wednesday, some events did occur worth remembering.

We were sitting in the garage, watching the police bring people in part of the day. They brought people in handcuffed, beating them on the head and kicking them. One particular incident aroused everybody in the garage.

A girl was brought in by a big state policeman. He was a rotten son of a bitch with a gun. He kicked her in the butt because she waved at us. Look, I tell you right here now. I don't give a damn what color a woman is, I don't care, you respect her as a woman. I don't want to see that again. If I see a peckerwood kick a Black woman again, I'll kill him, so help me God, I'll kill him.

I think all of us felt that way.

We yelled out to him,

“Hey, what are you doing?”

He snickered at us as if to say,

“Shut up, niggers.”

We could do nothing to the bastard but hope for a violent revenge when the tables would be turned in the near future. I just sat there with the rest of my black brothers, helplessly outraged, praying and feeling infinitely lost.

Later that afternoon, the police got a city bus and told us that we were going to be taken downtown for a court arraignment; one of those luxuries that comes with justice.

The cops formed two lines on both sides of the front door of the garage

and stood facing us with their guns pointed in readiness for hunting wild game: woolly heads.

Then they told us to run in a straight line into the bus. The seats of the bus were filled within seconds. It wasn't long before many more buses came to be filled for the journey downtown. None of the buses left the police yard after loading their cargo but, instead, they moved elsewhere to park alongside another bus.

Here in this parking lot we sat without food on these buses under a hot, scorching sun that caused the interior of the bus to boil. Once inside the bus, the cops wouldn't let us open the windows for air. They wouldn't even open a door for ventilation. The peckerwoods were scared to death some nigger was going to try getting away. With all those guns pointed in our faces? So there we sat with the National Guard and police guarding the bus. Some of those All-American young punks would constantly raise their tommyguns and point them at the bus windows to say, "Niggers meet your maker."

These gun-slinging maniacs outside the bus were hoping that we would attempt a "bus-break" or something of the sort to give them cause for trigger happiness (their faces reminded me of someone anticipating orgasm).

Later on, many hours had passed; time seems endless under these conditions. The cops brought us some water in a metal bucket. I thought that was real humane of them (this country takes care of its niggers; I mean, keeping us alive). The water tasted old and moldy as if it had been taken from an elephant's asshole.

Everyone was allowed one cup of water. An armed soldier brought the water inside the bus. He sat the water bucket down in the one center aisle up at the front of the bus. And then the soldier stood over the bucket with his gun pointed at us as he spoke.

"All right, we've got some water here. Now, I want you to come up, one at a time. There's some cups here. If you don't do it right, all right, no more water."

So we began from the front seats by ones and twos and stood up and inched our way through that damned soaking hot bus and, one at a time, we bowed in front of him, like God's little children, and scooped up a cup of water.

Then we went back to our seats and drank the water out of the paper cups. The only way we could get any water in the cups was to dip our hands into the bucket. After you got through dipping a few times, the water was so dirty there wasn't much sense in drinking it anyway. But we drank it regardless, because the thirst was hell.

Sitting there on the bus, I almost passed out. Probably from hunger and the heat. I had a tough time just trying to keep myself together . . . it was hard. Because it was so easy, so easy to let go and die. It was like you didn't exist; your mind didn't exist; your body didn't exist. You were taken out of reality. You could not believe you were there and you couldn't believe you felt that way. It was like a lid of pressure; you know, that presses you to unconsciousness, that makes you want to go to sleep, to die, or to go home again.

And that's what you were fighting, because you had to stay alive.

Later on in the day they brought us some sandwiches in a box.

It was still Wednesday, the third day.

They gave us sandwiches. And that was all we got. The only thing that did . . . was to antagonize us and make us want more. One bologna sandwich at that point wasn't anything. It was like taking a bloody piece of meat and holding it over a bunch of crocodiles.

But you couldn't get more. And that was the depressing thing, man. We could see life around us outside the bus—birds flying around us, men walking on the street, and you knew that one time you were that free too. Except for being on that bus and having those windows between us and then we were right outside . . . free . . . still on the street . . . almost . . . but like in some army compound. I mean you could just touch freedom . . . they gave us a little bit to make us want more . . . to dehumanize us . . . that was the process. And it hurt.

We stayed on the bus until late that afternoon. That damned sun was just going down when we got to our second home.

Guess what we did for a bathroom or toilet all that time? We had to go outside the bus . . . and the National Guard would let us out one at a time . . . we stood up to take a leak on the side of the bus facing the highway.

There was one woman on the bus with us. She had to go to the bathroom too. They could have walked her back and let that woman use the

bathroom in the police station. No, man. They took her outside and told her,

“Go like the rest of them. We’ll turn our heads.”

But God damn, the whole city can look on.

That was really inhuman. What’s wrong with that kind of people? Sick or something? It wouldn’t have hurt one of those cats to walk that woman back to the bathroom. She stayed there with us. And she didn’t go to the bathroom . . . I overheard her talking to a fellow who was seated in back of me.

“All those bastard dogs . . . low-down dirty dogs . . . last night they were going around to all the cells feeling, grabbing and tearing the clothes off us women . . . trying to get somethin’ for nothin’, you know what I mean,” she said in conclusion. Apparently they both left it at that, because I didn’t hear another word.

Later that evening the cops got all the buses together in a little caravan and we went downtown to the Thirteenth Precinct . . . or was that the First Precinct? I never could get it straight

Oh man. The cops had a reception for us that was out of sight.

It was sort of cool, from the doorway halfway down the block you could see them from the bus, with shotguns. It was like Nero waiting for the gladiators.

One old cop on the bus stood up and said,

“Look, don’t nobody try to run because we’ll shoot you. And when you leave here, you put your hands on each other’s belt and you run in a line, and I mean fast, and don’t stop for anything.”

Man, look. I didn’t do nothing, see. And the cat didn’t have no reason to be doing all that to me. Why couldn’t I just walk in. No, they had to make us act like criminals or something. Hardened criminals. I bet’cha what. I’m a hardened criminal now. I know I could kill one of those motherfuckers.

Then they just ran us all up in there into the precinct station. We had to run through the precinct . . . this is it, boy. They ran us down to another garage big enough this time for the whole damn family. We were still holding onto each other’s belts and every time we passed this one cop at the door, he jabbed everybody in the back with the butt of his shotgun.

There we were, one big, happy family. The peckerwoods thought they were dealing with the masses. But they were dealing with individuals. Like if you're fat, you don't squeeze somebody into a small spot, and if you're tall, you don't squeeze a person into a short space. But they treated them all the same. They had old men in there. They had sick men. They had men sick physically. And psychologically. They had young people that shouldn't have been in there at all, living like animals.

14

Animals in a Cage

GOING TO THE ZOO

*Hey man
what's your bag
you walking around with a
needle in your head
you complaining
you screaming
and yelling
how conditions are so bad
What the hell!
we're children of Abraham
Now I'll tell you
what you've gotta do
you gotta look at it just like
you're in the zoo*

July 26 to August 1

The same conditions existed as in the other garage . . . water running through the place so we could drink but it was wetting up the floor most of the time. When we used the lavatory, we had to use one of the corners. We selected the corners by each individual's needs. If you were standing near any corner and had to take a leak or shit, it was all right. That got pretty bad; living in your own shit . . .

Perhaps the only different but good thing about this garage was that it was almost the size of half a city block. We were directly underneath

the downtown precinct building's basement garage. Here there was more than enough room to lie down and to move about somewhat freely. People here didn't talk much or socialize quite so openly as before when we were in the smaller police garage.

Everyone drifted off; some went into corners to find places for themselves; others laid down on the floor to be alone to try maybe to get some sleep. I slept too the first day there. As the outdoor temperatures went down during the night, that concrete floor got ice cold in the garage until my body jerked in convulsion to finally awaken me. I arose from the ice block shivering to see several other people sitting up, avoiding sleep, for body warmth. I knew from the atmosphere around me that the hour was early. The upright and sleeping bodies on the floor reminded me of the cold rock grave stones in some horrid cemetery as the morning air stumbled to condemn the dead.

Repeated chills ran up and down my spine as I waited for daybreak. It wasn't long before most of the bodies were up and about in hopes that the day would give them freedom to return home. As the noon hour was nearing, the peckerwoods pushed more and more people into the garage, creating congestion. While sitting there on the floor in my own world to forget the situation, I noticed this cat lying about four feet away from me, who looked like Butch.

"Is that Butch?" I kept asking myself, standing to see.

"No, that couldn't be him, because Butch always keeps himself sugar sharp in or out of jail," I concluded.

This guy was one of the raggedyist persons I'd ever seen. He wore a black short sleeve shirt and a pair of old, baggy gray work pants with some Hush-Puppy shoes that looked like garbage can lids.

"I know that's not Butch, not with that dirty bent-rim derby hat on his head, not to cover that crop of old, faded processed hair," I thought and seated myself again. Although I was sure this cat wasn't Butch, his resemblance kept my attention for an hour or more before I decided just to go ask him to be certain.

Standing, looking down over the cat who had his forearm covering his eyes, I asked,

"Butch, is that you?"

He removed his arm to see who asked the question and followed with a loud,

“Hey, nigger, what you doing here?”

He jumped to his feet and extended his hand for a play. Slapping his hand in acknowledgment, I returned the greeting with a cry of,

“Nigger, I scoped you out for an hour before and still wasn’t sure it was you.” We laughed.

“Yeah, man, it’s me . . . I been in here since yesterday.”

“Me too,” I said.

“Is Sport out of jail yet?” Butch asked.

“Yeah, man. He got out that Sunday afternoon. Weren’t you up at the place when it got busted?”

“Yeah, I was in jail with your father and the rest of them, but I got out before he did and I ain’t seen him since . . . I ain’t seen nobody from up there,” Butch added.

“Butch, I know the man got you in here for outright looting, knowing you,” I said as we sat down on the floor.

“Dig, man, let me tell you how I got busted,” as he continued to speak.

“Now, the motherfuckers didn’t actually catch me in the act doing shit, but I was rolling one of those safes out of a pawnshop . . . see I wasn’t doing nothin’ but rolling it some place where it was going to be safe from those looters.”

We laughed at this, hard.

“Check this out, man; when I was pushing the safe down Twelfth, out jumped the stickman from nowhere and busted me,” he said.

“Nigger, you crazy to be going down the street rolling away somebody’s safe,” I said jokingly.

“Shit, as long as I had my hands on it, it wasn’t somebody else’s . . . that bad boy was mine,” Butch replied.

We sat and talked about how I got busted, the riot, the looting, and the who-did-its and done-its for hours.

Butch did tell me how that first fire got started in the shoe store on Twelfth that Sunday morning.

“Me and this other dude was in the shoe store taking our time picking out shoes and my man was doing some shit in the back . . . I guess he was looking for his shoe size, ’cause he had to light a match to read the boxes . . . I had got mine and was ready to split, when I saw the police outside the store walking around. The cat was still looking at boxes as I yelled

back to tell him. The nigger got so scared, man, he drops the lit match out of his hand onto some paper and shit, putting the place on fire inside. . . . We had to get out of there then, police or no police. . . . So, I tells him that we got to leave the shit there and try to get the fuck out of the store without gettin busted. . . . Then we jump out the broken window running like hell. . . . The police yelled to us to stop or they were going to bust a cap in our ass. . . . I was just turning the corner and you know, when you get a corner ain't no stopping. . . . I was gone. . . . The dude that was with me stopped; he got busted," Butch said, ending his recollection.

All I could say was,

"That's how that shit got started," knowing that was the first fire that set off a chain of them all over the city.

This was just about the end of any long conversations we had that day and others to follow. Not that we weren't friends; after awhile there wasn't really anything to talk about in our present situation. I remember his last question before he laid down to sleep:

"When are we going to get some God damn food? I'm hungry about now anyway."

"I don't know, man."

I continued to sit.

When the time came that they fed us again, after we had half-starved to death, they opened the door,

"Get back!" an armed cop commanded as he threw two boxes of sandwiches into the garage and then slammed the door quickly.

You know what that caused, don't you?

People were in there . . . three, maybe four days, who hadn't eaten. There was no need in throwing food like that to us. They could have found an orderly way to give everybody something to eat. Like hungry animals, everybody ran for those boxes to be the first eating.

That was it. Some people still didn't eat for three or four days more . . . because those who got to the sandwiches first took handfuls at a time.

I was sitting near the door from the beginning and was the first to see the boxes. Therefore I too got a handful and ran to a corner to eat. . . . I sat, drooling at the mouth; the thought of so much food and it was all mine . . .

"Hey, man, give me one of those sandwiches. . . . I only got one and

here you are with a whole motherfuckin' handful" commanded an unrecognizable voice hovering over me. Anger rushed through my body which refused to obey the request. I sat and stared at my intruder.

"Man, you ain't going to be like that with me, are you?" Butch said.

"Yes, it's Butch," I thought to myself. I only knew Butch from the club and right then and there, he was the only friend I had in the whole wide world. . . . I gave him a sandwich from my clenched fist . . . we ate. Nevertheless, I was angry at Butch for asking me and not someone else for a sandwich . . .

There was little concern for others then. It couldn't be helped. We were forced to live like animals. . . . One was dirty enough to be an animal too. Here I learned to think like an animal and to feel like one. All I could do was act on instinct . . . that's all. I saw food . . . I reacted and ran for it, fought for it just like anybody would in our condition. . . . The hell with your fellow man was the word there.

"Wait a minute!" somebody said.

"We are all in the same boat. Let's don't let those people turn us into animals."

That was true enough. The cops wanted to see us fight among ourselves. Leaders were appointed to organize the group in hope that we could prevent any more riots over things like food.

I was one of the three leaders in the delegation chosen to speak with the sadistic police.

Before we finally got any response or cooperation from the cops, it was when we formed what they called a "nigger" session.

We all sat down on the floor and sang "We Shall Overcome" and spoke politely to them, asking for an inch of human decency . . . it was almost like asking daddy for a nickel.

They finally decided to take our sick out and come in and clean up the floors. But before they would even come in the garage, we had to move back against the back walls. Right away we formed this little committee to get everybody in the order the cops wanted. It was like negotiating in a concentration camp for war prisoners.

They finally came in to take the sick out and clean up the mess on the floors. The cops pointed their guns through the garage windows, then they marched their battalion in, backing everybody closer to the walls. We were all backed up against the walls . . . you know, like Hitler did the

Jews, then the Germans came in the concentration camp and shot hell out of them.

This was the kind of feeling one got when the cops entered the garage. One of the cops stood in front and said,

“Bring the sick out and sit them here,” as he pointed to his feet.

“Now get back, get back!” he screamed to those who had put the sick at his feet.

Then a few cops picked them up and carried the sick out with the door slamming as they all left.

The only thing that ran across my mind at that moment was,

“They had their guns aimed at us, man, and to think we were locked up!”

That was sick. . . . What could we have done?

The cops already had guns pointed through the windows . . . we saw them. There was no need for those guns. If anything, there was need for a little kindness. Yeah, the peckerwoods gave us some kind of assistance . . . they gave us a roll of toilet paper.

Oh, I must say they did find another way to feed people. We lined up against the bars and they gave us sandwiches through them. Everybody got one sandwich each day . . . a rat couldn't live on that, not once a day. If you could beat someone out of their place in the line to get a second sandwich, all the power to you. Because that's exactly what many of us did.

On the third day (Saturday), Mayor Cavanaugh came into the police garage on the other side of the bars. When we saw him, everybody ran to the bars . . . we called out to him:

“Cavanaugh, tell us what's happening out there.”

We were being kept there without word, or anything. Also we wanted to know who the hell we were and why everything was such a big secret.

The one white man in the whole city that I thought understood black people, ignored us and got in his little Mustang and drove off. If I'd had a brick, I would have knocked his God damn brains out. I wanted to know what was happening to me and nobody in authority would tell me. I just didn't know . . . I was lost.

It wasn't long that day before we were moved again.

The cops came back in the same manner as before, and lined us up against the walls. They told us to put our hands over our heads and get

into groups of threes, then moved us upstairs to these smaller separate cells. The same business with the guns occurred. . . . Pushing, poking in the back. . . . I looked for Butch before leaving the garage (to go upstairs) but he was nowhere to be found. . . . Where was Butch?

The cells had about a hundred people in them, but they were no bigger than a 12 by 8 room.

There were all kinds of things going on in that cell with so many people there. No one could sleep because there was little room to lay down; if you did, it was probably on somebody else. It was horrible . . . all of us crowded together like that . . . people smoking . . . it was just like a dungeon. You had to force yourself to live like that if you wanted to survive.

We started joking around after a while, cracking jokes and just getting along, being united in ourselves, so to speak. That was the only way we could have gotten along . . .

Although it was almost impossible for anyone to move his big toe without stepping on someone, I found a place to lie my first day in the cell.

There were these two long benches lined against the walls which at least permitted a number of people to sit down. I guess at first no one realized the benches were far enough away from the wall so that a person could lie under them evenly without protruding. It was difficult, but I managed to get myself underneath one of the benches in the cell's top left corner. That night I slept there, boxed in by the legs of seated and standing people. It was about one o'clock the next day when I was awakened by loud talking and a cigarette-smoke-filled cell that burned my eyes.

On the other side of the cell came loud cries followed by pleading from a small group, deeply involved in a dice game.

"All right, niggers, let's get it on . . . who goin' fade me a dollar?" yelled one dice shooter.

"I got you, man, shoot up," another answered. . . .

I decided to get up to watch the game for entertainment, at best (I didn't shoot dice).

"Come on six, got to get these niggers' money for bail," someone said who was bent to the floor.

Moving closer to get a better view of the happenings, I saw, of all peo-

ple, shooting dice in jail . . . Butch. He had just lost the dice as I tapped him from behind, calling his name.

He turned.

“Butch, you is at it again, nigger, you don’t never quit . . . do you?” I said jubilantly.

“Man, where you been? I looked for you when we was coming up here, but I didn’t see you . . . I figured they’d put you in a different cell,” he replied.

“No, man, we probably missed each other when they was moving us up here last night,” I said.

“Yeah, man, that’s probably what happened,” Butch concluded . . .

“Nigger, I know you started this dice game . . . and matter fact you brung the dice.”

“Man, I can’t help it if people like to gamble, can I, and if they got some money to lose, I’m goin’ gamble with them . . . cause I know if I can get all the money I can get together now before I go to court, I’ll be able to pay my way out of this motherfucker,” Butch explained as he turned to shoot the dice again.

Butch was too busy with his dice game for conversation so I stepped back to watch for a while longer before leaving to sleep again.

The guys that take care of the jail, who are called turnkeys, would walk past the cells and we would ask for our one phone call constantly. They said the city was under martial law and that we no longer had any constitutional rights.

Yeah. One of the “officials” in power gave us that bit of information. It turned out later they had told a damn lie. The city was never under martial law. At the time we assumed they were telling the truth.

There we lived for exactly three days in those Godforsaken cells, until we went to court. . . .

Here again I lost Butch, but this time never to see him again, in or out of jail. . . . They say he won everybody’s money.

15

Your Honor

Here Come the Judge:

Order in the court room

Judge won't speak: All

you niggers get in your seats . . .

Monday, August 1, lost time

The day had come for a legal court examination of our crimes. This is when we went in front of “Your Honor” and that “Blind Bitch of Justice” to be judged under the law. We were called from the cells by our names for the first time since we’d been in there. . . . Again the cops had us form a single file line, up against the wall, with our hands over head immediately as we walked out of the cell into the corridor where we stood until told to move.

There most certainly was something very relieving about just being outside that cell at last . . . maybe it was the rushing fresh air blowing through the cell block corridor that breathed new life into everything in its path which created cause for hope of freedom; from those goddamned nasty funky germ filled cells.

When we were all out of the occupied cells along the jail house corridor the cops took us down on an elevator in sets of eight to another cell on the second floor (we had been on the fourth) where we waited until called into court. No one knew what to expect when we got into court but the worst and it wasn’t long before we soon found out.

It was night-time when we entered the gloomy court room. There were very few people present outside the administrators of the law; and maybe, one or two lawyers and about five bail-bondsmen (the night of the vultures).

Just as we were inside the court room some loud-mouth honkey cat, on the opposite side across from us (as we stood lined up in front of a long bench on which we were to be seated) yelled, “The Honorable, whatever the hell his name was, presiding.”

And then from the judges’ chambers came a short bald-headed little race car of a man dressed in black, which clashed with his natural dull-ass white face. He jumped up on his bench and the proceedings began.

We were run through the legal procedures rapidly. What you call legal, you know, the due process of law: the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury. We didn’t get any due process of law; we got railroaded.

The judge had a folder that he read from; a list of almost identical charges against most of us arrested. He systematically called our names aloud individually, indicating it was your turn next to come before the honorable bench. The judge ran through the names in this rapid manner:

“So-and-So, you are charged with carrying a concealed weapon. . . . How do you plead?”

In one of the first cases heard that night this guy was picked up on his way home from work; he worked at a super market as a stock boy. Well, he was stopped and searched for no reason by the cops and on his person they found an easel-knife (a two-inch blade that, when not in use, can be retracted into a protective handle) that this guy uses at work to cut boxes open with; it was his tool necessary for work. (Why not arrest salesmen for driving their company’s car because they just might intentionally run over some innocent person in the street, but if no one sees him purposely use his car this way, then call it “accident.”) As the guy told the judge upon entering a plea of “not guilty.” The judge said, “\$3000 bond” and sent him on.

It really didn’t make that much difference to the judge whether or for whatever reason this guy had the easel-knife because, more importantly, everyone before him had to be a looter or a rioter first and above anything else; the same punishment to everyone that night. It went this way, too, through the entire proceedings:

“Next, So-and-So, you are charged with entering without breaking (the standard charge), \$2000 bond” and the judge sent him on too (I wonder where they thought we were going to get that kind of money for bail).

While the judge was carrying out the due process of law, he didn’t

even look up at you . . . you didn't have a chance to explain your being there or anything of the sort. . . . And if you had explained, it wouldn't have made any difference. These crackers intended to lock us up again anyway.

The prosecuting attorney had apparently got together with those other high-ranking middle-class crackers and come up with some vague bullshit concoction of criminal offenses so that they could charge everybody with something, anything, no matter what anyone did, if nothing. But just charge us with something to keep us in jail as long as possible, until the prosecutor had time to find the most severe penalty ever written in "The Book" for our resemblance to those black folk who were out there in the streets rioting; fucking with the man.

The best thing anybody could have done was to shut their mouths and let the people do with us as they pleased . . . That's all one could do. . . . It was fixed before we came in there and you had better face it . . . I finally did. . . . When the judge said I was charged with "entering without breaking," setting bond at \$3000, and my trial date for August 8 without lifting his head to look at who he was passing judgment on . . . it's a hell of a thing to be in front of such an unmerciful motherfucker (and I don't mean incest either). Because I know when a black face goes before most judges, they break their necks to send a nigger away for life; rid the society of those misfit colored people. And when this judge didn't have respect enough for me as a human being to look me in the eye when he passed me along like a cow in a herd of cattle, I wanted to jump up on that bench and slap shit out of his balding head. Even more, because I wanted a chance to explain what happened that got me arrested and to tell him I had a job that summer and that it was the first break I'd had in a long time. . . . I didn't get a chance to say it or anything in my defense.

That was the thing that really got to me when I didn't have a chance to say, "Look I got a job and if I'm not there it won't be mine."

He didn't care if you were the President's daughter, they weren't going to let us out. Tell those people and they say, "Sorry, regulation."

We left the courtroom, went out into the hallway, where handcuffs were placed on us. A cop came and put his hand on me as he said,

"You run and I'm gonna blow you down to hell."

I don't know where he thought I was going . . . I was too confused to run anywhere.

However, they all were telling that to everybody. I'll be damned, they took us outside and packed everybody on buses again. There were about twenty buses parked outside the precinct building. This is where they were putting all those people who left the court. They were storing us on buses instead of letting people go home. I was sick; just sick. . . . I mean, the buses were right out in a public square with all the old whites walking past us smiling. Imagine being locked up on a bus with all those soldiers guarding us and the police cracking their vile jokes at you.

We sat on those buses for . . . I can't really say how many days. I just don't know . . . I can't remember. But we sat and sat. Oh! That was the nightmare . . . to live in such confinement, watching the outside world moving.

And we knew if one of us stepped off that bus we were dead asses.

Patient or Prisoner

I got sick from something after about two days on those buses.

My head and stomach hurt with such unbearable pain that I could hardly move a muscle in the body in which I lived. I continued to sit in pain for several moments when one of the national guardsmen came into the bus to give us some water; I told him of my sickness and asked him to get the police sergeant so that I could go to the hospital directly across the street from where the buses were parked. (Detroit General Hospital is probably one of the worst city-operated hospitals in the nation, simply because this hospital hasn't the vital medical facilities and staff necessary really to save or give life to the poor black and white people who have to come there for treatment.)

Nevertheless, as far as I was concerned it was a hospital and I needed some kind of medical attention. Without hesitation, the Guardsman said he would go see the sergeant in charge about taking me to the hospital. If I'd asked any other of those peckerwoods they probably would have said, "Don't tell me your problems," but this Guardsman happened to be a nice guy and acted towards me as if I was still a "citizen." Better yet, he had not let his power take control of him, like so many law enforcement agents who are busy playing the police movie character role of "Sergeant Joe Friday" . . . You know how the movies are—shoot 'ems out with the crooks' solving murder cases; just real life excitement and adventure, etc. But what happened to the policeman/cop that helps children and the little old ladies across the big city streets? I won't even attempt to answer the above worn-out cliches; let the Lord and the artist deal with them. Because it seems to me the average white cat can't make his humanitarian idealistic shit truly work; that is, past the bullshit stage, which has

prevented implementation of humanity among men for the last nineteen hundred years. All is not lost! The cat still has his money, honey. . . . Hell no! Don't mess with the white cat's money because if you do (you darkey) he'll put so much humanism on your ass you'll wonder where heaven is. . . . Can't you dig it?

For every dollar you have cost him he will order one pound of humanism:

"Give me three hundred dollars worth of law and order, please."

But the policeman to whom the white cat places his order corrects him, "You mean three hundred dollars worth of humanism, don't you?"

And the white cat is quick to reply,

"Yes, that is what I mean but whatever, you just go get me my money's worth or I'll get your badge number."

Oh yeah! Youngblood the cop is out there today spreading humanism with the assistance of his magic billy club . . . forever cracking your head so that he can insert some good will, no' Humanism . . . law and order . . . humanism . . . law and order . . . fuck it all. When he comes again brother you just take a raincheck; save that humanism.

Enough of this bullshit truth. There is one thing for certain about many enforcers of the Law these days: they have concealed their human compassion and emotions (if these people had any to begin with) behind a uniform and gun to become the most dangerous and murderous machines for sick societal and egotistical reasons; like the cop using his authority as an outlet for personal frustrations . . . it's sort of tragic that there are so few concerned "human" cops anymore . . . don't you think?

Or don't you know anything about cops? . . . your protectors.



An hour or so had passed before the guardsman (who had gone to get the police sergeant so that I could go to the hospital) came back onto the bus to tell me that the sergeant said I could not leave the bus and that he didn't have any men to spare to take care of anybody's mama's boy, and I just would have to wait.

Unexplainable outrage and anger surged through my body when I'd heard the sergeant's reply to my request for medical attention denied. The guardsman stood there before me watching my anger swell, with that look in his eyes that said,

“I don’t know what to do . . . I wish I could help you but I can’t . . . sorry.”

I understood his eyes and felt even greater sorrow than the guardsman could ever have felt for me because he was in a situation far exceeding his personal experience to cope willfully with himself and my medical demands; which was a decision he hadn’t the power to make: a monkey in the middle.

Nevertheless, I was too sick to accept the sergeant’s “no” when I told the guardsman to go back and tell the peckerwood pig this:

“If he don’t come get me now, I’m coming off this bus and you’ll have to kill me.”

I didn’t care any more at this point. . . . I didn’t care if they killed me. I would have let him kill me or I was going to kill him, but I was going to the hospital, one way or another.

This time (like a little boy) the guardsman ran and got the sergeant. By the time the sergeant came, I was almost unconscious.

I only recall falling into these two soldiers’ arms or something like that. They grabbed my arms and I remembered them dragging me down the street. Then I came to and walked for a little bit but suddenly blanked out again. I could hear them in the distance, somewhere, yelling,

“Come on, get up!”

I was on the sidewalk. The soldiers got me to the hospital and threw me on this metal rollaway cart. Some guy lifted me up and jerked off my shirt.

He asked the soldiers,

“Is he a patient or prisoner?”

“A prisoner,” they said.

All of a sudden, two sets of handcuffs tied me to the cart. One went on my leg and the other on my arm. I was sick already but it turned into agony . . . those handcuffs began to cut my skin. A doctor came to examine me; after I told him what was bothering me, he gave me some medicine for the pain. He wanted me to take some neurological test because the doctor thought I might have had a brain concussion that was pressuring one of my nerves. However, the hospital only gives this kind of test once a week (on Wednesdays) during the day and it was a Wednesday night I’d come in. The doctor said he would make an appointment for me but right then he wanted me to rest before I went back.

I laid there in the hospital and fell asleep for the first time in days. A few hours later I woke up to find those handcuffs really cutting away at my foot and arm. I was in pain from them badly. I just had to have the one taken off my hand for sure so I could turn over; you know, and relax or something. No, it was the one on my foot I wanted off, that one had to go, because it was impossible to turn over or anything. Maybe I was a prisoner to the peckerwood cops and needed to be shackled down but I also was a human being in pain . . . somebody or anybody around could see that because I'm sure not even my controllable facial expressions hid my pain from the human eye. . . . It was unbearable.

I called this cop from the hallway as he was patrolling the area. I asked him,

“Would you please take that thing off my foot? Can't you see it's cutting my leg?”

You know what he said to me?

He said,

“Sorry, regulations.”

I wanted to kill his ass . . . his regulations. I was supposed to be a citizen . . . is that what they call it? I ain't no citizen. I'm a man without a country. I'm a black man in America, and that's all.

If anybody tells me something different, I'll kick his ass. It's as simple as that.

Don't give me that shit about this is my country too or that line about your laws for the protection of the innocent; it's the biggest pile of bullshit I've ever believed in all my born black ass days . . . that shit is for you crackers. Don't expect me to conform with your sick fads or ill-made laws . . . I want no part of the shit: fuck the American dream! Understand this, whitey, no man or country will ever physically displace me again without my permission to do so. I'm not going to do anything until you give (?) me what is given to every other kind of man—respect and protection of the law. Right now you aren't doing either.

Ten Dollars a Head

Lost Time . . . Lost Time . . .

It wasn't long before they took me back that night from the hospital . . . to the hoosegow.

I got back on the bus when they decided to ship us out to Belle Isle which is a public beach on the shores of the Detroit River. In nine or ten days we had been moved around at least five times. After a while it became difficult to keep track of the many places we had been.

Once out there, the cops treated us fair . . . we were left alone. But it was just like a concentration camp. They had converted the men's locker room into a big living area with army cots lined in rows from one wall to another until there was nothing but these things in sight.

We had to go outside into the large courtyard with the ten foot walls around it where we ate, rain or shine. On the walls, day and night, armed soldiers patrolled the area. From that first day on, I stayed sick and the medicine kept me asleep continuously. I can't really remember much about Belle Isle except for the last day I was there when a national guardsman and I had a few heated words. I had run out of medicine and needed to be taken back downtown for more. It just so happened that I was supposed to go back for my appointment at the hospital . . . it was Wednesday again. I was sitting on an army cot (awaiting sick call) next to the wired cage that encased the doorway where a guardsman sat with rifle in hand. He was tilted back in a folding chair chewing some gum and playing with his gun endlessly.

"Click, click, click," as he repeatedly pulled the rifle bolt forward and back. Sick call was at 3:30 p.m. every day for those who needed medical attention, and I'd been waiting for about thirty minutes when the clicking of that gun finally got on my nerves, bad. I spoke to the guardsman . . .

“Man, do you have to sit there clicking that thing?” I turned and asked, looking up from the cot. The guardsman stopped to look at me in return.

“If it bothers you, move,” he said, arrogantly.

“I can’t move, I’m waiting for sick call,” I pleaded.

“You think I care what you’re waiting for? If the clicking bothers you, move!”

It was obvious this young guardsman wanted me to notice how bad he could get so that I had better beware of him, but I was too sedated from that medicine to be fearful.

“Man, if you don’t stop clicking that God damn thing, I’ll be in that cage kicking your ass,” I said, now standing.

“Look, boy, if you know what’s good for you, you’d better shut up and sit down before you get hurt,” he responded, now on the edge of the once-tilted chair.

“Well, you God damn young punk, you know, you can’t and won’t do shit to me, with your jive time ass. . . . The best thing you can do is sit your ass on back down, before you find out what’s good for you.” . . . I must have been feeling my oats or something crazy like that to be mouthing off so fearlessly.

“I’m warning you, you better be quiet,” said the guardsman, nervously. I decided not to even waste words on the blow-hearted bastard. . . .

“Fuck you, man,” I said, as I began to sit down, forgetting the stupid cat.

Just at that moment a big, black husky sheriff’s deputy (who had the final say-so over the National Guardsmen) came through the doorway inside the cage. When the guardsman turned to him, the deputy asked,

“Who is that using that kind of language?”

Everybody near the cage (beside myself) had moved away to look on in wonderment.

“It was me,” I said angrily.

“You, come on out of there,” the deputy motioned. I knew better than to go on the other side of that cage so he could take me in one of those back rooms and half kill my ass.

“I ain’t coming out.”

“Don’t give me a hard time, boy . . . come on out,” he said, opening the cage door.

I had a choice of getting my ass kicked in front of my inmates or by

myself . . . I didn't like the choices at all. And there wouldn't have been any choices if I'd procrastinated any longer. I couldn't hold out any longer and decided to do like the deputy asked. When I got to the entrance, he stepped aside to let me pass. At this point I stopped in fear of not wanting to expose my back to bodily harm.

"Come on," he said again.

Before I could think or move any further, someone appeared in the second doorway leading to the inside of the cage.

"You can come out, son, it's all right. . . . I am from the Civil Rights Commission. Nothing will happen to you while I am here," said the coolest little dark-skinned man I'd seen in my life. He was dressed in bright green slacks, white shirt with a green tie that hung from his neck in majesty.

The resemblance of this small but beautiful man to Martin Luther King reinforced his bold and stern radiant character and captivated everyone in sight.

Meanwhile the deputy and guardsman stood quietly in confirmation of the intruding mediator. Trusting the word of my bold knight from the Civil Rights Commission, I came out and into a side room that had many desks and chairs lined against the walls . . . and stood.

The deputy followed me back as the small dark man stood fast there at the door. Then he spoke to me.

"Now, don't you give him any more trouble, and do like he ask," as he pointed toward the deputy.

"O.K.," was all I could say out of thanks and respect for this wondrous small man who saved me from an ass kicking.

The little man then walked back to speak with the young guardsman.

"Sit down," the deputy ordered. I sat.

He asked my name, then looked for it on a list of names attached to a clip board that he'd taken from a desk top.

"I see you had an appointment today at Receiving Hospital," he said calmly..

"Yeah," I said.

The deputy looked at his watch for the exact time.

"It's 4 o'clock now; by the time we get somebody to take you back, it'll be too late, but I'm going to send you back because I don't want you out here with your kind of talk anyway," (I didn't love him either) he concluded.

I was told to stay put until someone could take me back to the county jail, and to get some more medicine. Forty-five minutes later, a deputy took me back to the county jail; then we went upstairs to the clinic.

The jail clinic was a small one-room place, but it was clean. The sheriff's deputy brought me in and told the orderly on duty I needed some more pills to last me until my court date. Before the orderly got the medicine, he sat there talking with the deputy. Dig what they were talking about. I thought it was really sadistic.

The orderly said to him,

"Yeah, I heard you shot four of them in the riot. . . . How much the county paying you?"

The deputy said,

"Ten dollars a head."

Then they began to giggle about it right in front of me. I knew all he could have shot was black folk. He didn't shoot any whiteys . . . and they were sitting there giggling about it. . . . Ten dollars a head.

Is that what they do, man? You mean the county is paying for shooting people? Ten dollars a head. That's good, I like that. But they don't have to pay me anything for some cop's head. I'm going to kill them for free and I can't wait to start. Afterwards the deputy took me downstairs and put me in a cell. I didn't go back out to Belle Isle again. I can't remember all the details but I know I slept the time away.

They moved us back and forth so many times and places you didn't know where in the hell you were going next. They weren't telling people what to expect the next hour.

I stayed in the county jail for a few days until my court date came . . . August 8.

When the turnkey called my name for court, I hopped out of that cell like a "Supercolored Man"; on my way out at least I was praying to God that I would finally get out of jail.

18

FREEDOM

*We are all blind until we see
that in the human plan
nothing is worth making
unless it makes the man.*

*Why build our cities glorious
If man unbuilt goes;
In vain we build the world unless
The builder also grows*

UNKNOWN

Tuesday, August 8

I was taken downstairs to the bullpen . . . awaiting trial. A court-appointed lawyer came in to tell me that I had nothing to worry about and that the judge was going to let me go home. Then he asked how I got picked up on such a bullshit charge without any evidence against me. . . . I told him how it happened from the very beginning. He left saying,

“I’ll see you in court shortly.”

If I had been busted when breaking the law the day before being arrested it wouldn’t have bothered me for the two weeks spent in jail. . . . It would have been my pleasure to accept my punishment because at least I did what I had to do for myself. I was bitter as hell with the worst kind of hatred in my heart. . . . The kind that kills.

I was called out into the courtroom. It was very quiet. There weren’t many people in the court. I walked to the front of the judge’s bench and looked in his eyes.

“You have suffered enough. I suspend your case. . . . You may go home,” he said.

That’s all he said. He told me to go home.

I turned without a word and left his courtroom.

The sun was at its full brilliance as I ran down the court building steps into the streets like a wild animal just set free.

Freedom was never so dear as I skipped and ran down the streets in search of home.

Home was where my father had gone after the house burned. I knew where he went that Sunday afternoon of the riot. He didn’t move far away from where we used to live. There would be little trouble in finding my way from downtown.

There was bitterness and hatred in my soul toward those and anybody associated with them . . . white bastards . . . for subjecting me to inhuman treatment while I was in jail. Every white face I passed on my way home I wanted to smash into little pieces; just kill them without mercy.

It was obvious underneath they knew how we were being treated and nothing could please them more than to see us suffer. I kept repeating over and over to myself:

“You white son-of-a-bitch. I dare you to put your hands on me. I’ll kill you, I’ll kill you.”

I passed them looking straight into their eyes. If it had happened that one of them by chance did do something to me before I got home I don’t think I’d have done anything but run away from them. The cops had broken my rebellious spirit. There was no more fight in me. The little boy in me had been reborn and I was out on my first adventure away from home. There was no doubt that the boy in me had come out in its full flavor. I was scared to be overtly bitter toward those people who liked to see me suffer and beg. They might lock me up again and never let me live my life in peace. I didn’t want any more trouble; I stopped thinking about killing one of them in fear that somebody might see me looking aggressive and call a cop.

I put a smile on my face as I walked for as long as it took me to catch a bus home. When the bus got to Twelfth and Seward I decided to get off and walk down to Clairmont which was about seven blocks away. This would give me a chance to look at the neighborhood and the damage. On Twelfth Street going toward Euclid I noticed boarded-up store windows and half-burned-down buildings.

The atmosphere had changed. It wasn't the same Twelfth I once knew. There were no people hanging around or out the windows. All the whores and hustlers were gone. The whole situation on Twelfth had changed. I knew this was no longer my home. Sure, everybody used to live in their own separate houses, but Twelfth Street was like one big house for most people.

Where else could anybody go and find all the excitement in the world just outside his door? That's what made it possible for people to live there. There was always something happening on the street. It all boils down to a challenge to compete for survival any way one could. And if you won, the reward was great.

The difference between going to work eight hours a day and hustling is that nobody controls you but yourself. There is freedom to do as you please. This is important to most people because when others tell you what to do, your life is not your own.

For a man to feel like a man he has got to control his life . . . otherwise he is and always will be a boy. In a way every day was a fight for your existence when you were on Twelfth Street.

The further I walked down Twelfth the more I became aware of the destruction around me, which made me feel less of a man for being a part of it. . . . A man doesn't destroy his home; he protects it at all cost. This I hadn't done; I let another man come and force me to destroy my own. This put me at his mercy. . . .

I became a boy once more. He could control me completely.

When I got where my father was living for the time being, very little was left of me. My mind had gone on its own way leaving the body to carry on human functions.

My father was glad to see me alive; he was living at the house of a friend of his. We talked for a while about what happened and how I got locked up.

I was dirty and tired and didn't feel like telling him the whole story of what had happened. Then he suggested that I go and stay with my married sister until the heat cooled down. Apparently the cops were just waiting for a chance to bust my father if he broke any laws. They wanted to get back at him for operating his joint without paying them off and providing the spark that started the riot.

I agreed to go because I had to get away from Twelfth. It was so ugly now. The memory of what had occurred in jail came back again and again.

But before I left, pops gave me one of his famous lectures on how he viewed the riot.

“All the people have had their revolutions, and we’re the last. The Negro group is the last. It’s something that’s got to come; they can’t stop it. It’s something that every group has gone through. So now it gets down to the Negro; when his revolution comes, it won’t be no surprise to the people I know. We just happen to be the last group, that’s all.

“But now the white man wants to think it’s something new. It’s never new. It’s coming. When people get sick and oppressed, when you have been turned down on everything you’ve tried to do, then on top of that, you’ve got this police thing, they’re gonna riot. And just because nine men, or twelve men, or however many in a body of legislators get together and they create a law that maybe you don’t believe in, they can’t make you believe in it just because they made that law. If you’re honest, you can’t see how you’re gonna live . . . subject to that law.

“Like for instance a lot of people live together without ever getting married. They don’t go to no preacher or priest . . . and they may live together twenty or thirty years. And then some people have a big church wedding, and in six weeks they wind up getting a divorce . . . so just because a man say it’s legal and you must be married in order to live together, that don’t mean you’re man and wife. You know whether that’s your wife or not. Just because she bears your name, that don’t make her your wife.

“So this is the same thing, it’s the logical thing. I’m not speaking of legalizing rape and . . . all that. But I’m talking about laws that are gonna help the ordinary black people not get oppressed because they black . . . and all these people that I know here, they’s just ordinary. And they’re all right. But our leaders . . . our so-called representatives . . . they don’t do no good for anybody. They don’t ever push the things through. You know, just like . . . Now there’s something you can see it right in the paper. They give nine million for police artillery . . . that’s just to control and contain the Negro . . . why couldn’t they take that nine million and put it in the slums?

“There’s the whole thing in a nut shell.”

I left for my sister's apartment on Davidson and Twelfth Street. My sister came to the door when I knocked. She looked surprised for a moment as if to say,

"Who are you?" Then she said, "Billy, it's you."

I walked in and closed the door, "Who did you think it was?"

"Your hair is so long and your clothes are dirty as hell. Did you just get out of jail today?"

"Yeah."

"We figured that's where you were because we didn't hear from you."

"Dig, sis, I came over to stay with you until I get myself together, okay?"

"You know I don't care," she said.

We talked for a few hours and then I went to sleep.

It was on Tuesday that I had gotten out of jail and I had some time to rest my body and mind. Both were fairly weak from living like an animal for the past two weeks.

The next Monday morning I would go back to the factory where I was working before the riot to see about my job. Now all I wanted to do was rest.

There were a lot of people locked up on general principles during the riot. Most or a lot had jobs. Employers did say they would reinstate those that were mistakenly picked up and kept away from work. When I got to my job again at the factory, I was told that I no longer had a job because I hadn't shown up for work for a week. . . .

Even after telling them what had happened and that I hadn't been convicted, they still would not listen. Then they asked me to leave the premises.

As I walked away, the bitterness and hatred that was inside me was beginning to boil out again for those white fuckers. There was nothing that could be done. I didn't have a leg to stand on. It was their factory and I was doing their work. I felt like never doing anything again for the rest of my life but stand on a street corner. The last hope I had was gone. . . . Everything I owned had been burned in the house, but there was some money saved in the bank that I was going to use to go back to college that next term. The last thing I wanted to do was to use it to get by until I got another job. The summer was almost over. Where could I get enough

money in a matter of weeks for school if I used what I'd saved for the next couple of weeks?

I became less and less concerned with going to school. I took the money out of the bank and bought some new clothes to wear. I wanted to forget what had happened and leave everything around me. It made me so bitter inside that I began to hate all whites and especially cops. They had everything.

Even me.

The thought of killing and blowing up police stations constantly crossed my mind. I could just imagine the joy I'd get out of doing it, too. The fact that I would murder people didn't bother me one bit; they had put me through something I would remember for the rest of my life. It got so bad that every cop car that passed I yelled

"You God damn bastards!" and didn't care if they arrested me.

I was determined that never would I go to jail again for anything. I was half crazy from the hatred in me; it became necessary that I stay indoors. Everything outside depressed me to the point of maybe killing someone.

One day about four weeks later, after just sitting around rotting inside, I decided to leave Detroit and start all over again . . . to forget about the bitterness and pain. I wanted to go some place where no one knew me or reminded me of what I had left behind.

After telling my sister about what I wanted to do, Wilma said she thought it would be the best thing for me. I had an idea where I wanted to go. I wanted to finish college. In acquiring a degree I felt my life would at best be considered human; a tool with which to fight against this society.

Some people I knew from Michigan Lutheran College now lived in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where I would be welcome until I found a place to stay and also time to get my mind back together.

I could go to school there, maybe.

I packed what little there was that belonged to me (I didn't have my car anymore; the police towed it off to the pound while I was in jail and I didn't have the money to get it out, so I left it) and with bag in hand, a red athletic bag, which contained two shirts, a pair of brown dress slacks, and, in my pocket, ten dollars to my name . . . I, without a second thought, bid my sister good-bye, and left for the downtown bus terminal. Once there, immediately paying my fare (\$1.80) and, shortly thereafter, I got

on a Greyhound bus going to Ann Arbor, Michigan, . . . never to return,
until . . . ?

*“I’m the prophet
they call me the prophet
because I have the ability to
create cohesion. . . .*

*Now I lived in a neighborhood
where there is a bunch of
hustlers, gamers,
& booty tamers. . . . They rebelled one July
and went to jail (busted!)
yah
yah
yah”*

—FROM THE PROPHECY