

The 43 Who Died

An Investigation into How and Why Detroit's Riot Victims Were Slain

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IN THE SPACED eight silent days and bullet-broken nights 43 persons died or were fatally wounded on the streets of Detroit. They are explained as victims of riot, the casualties of modern civil war.

Now, it is difficult to arrive at more satisfactory explanations. It is tempting indeed to conclude that only the riot itself can be blamed for creating the situations in which it was particularly easy to die.

Thirty-one hours after the riot began, something more than 1,000 armed men were assigned or had access to a single 30- by 28-block area on the near West Side, a concentration of firepower paralleled only by a major military invasion force.

HUNDREDS of regular Army paratroopers were stationed on the East Side. In the latter City, city and state police and National Guardsmen patrolled in scout cars, jeeps, military command jeeps, trucks, personnel carriers and taxis. The armament ranged from service revolvers and M-1 rifles to personally owned sporting arms, short-barreled repeating shotguns, machine and machine guns up to .50 caliber.

Numbers alone made it inevitable that confrontations would occur; that incidents would erupt; that fatalities would be made and that ultimately, someone would die. There were too many guns and too many people to be otherwise.

Now the central questions are simple, though the answers are not:

• How many of the 43 deaths were necessary?

• How many could have been prevented?

The answers are individual, based on more than five weeks of independent investigation by a team of Free Press reporters assigned to examine every riotous second death.

THE CONCLUSION reached in that investigation is inescapable: A majority of the riot victims need not have died. Their deaths could have been—and should have been—prevented.

Fate's selection of those who would die followed no pattern and the victims do not fit easily into categories and classifications. Among them were the most famous, a famous-and-famously-gifted actor, a prominent politician, and the most pitiful, a drunken sailor who died trying to save another's life. Equally various were the ways in which they died.

EIGHTEEN of the 43 riot victims were shot and killed by Detroit police, and of that number, 11 have been identified as innocents, the victims of what now seems to be tragic accidents.

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Two more persons, both rioters, were shot and killed by rioters. A warrant decision was pending in two of those cases and a warrant decision is pending in the third. And two rioters died when fire swept the store from which they were fleeing.

Two victims, one a woman, the other a civilian, were killed by electric power lines.

Five deaths remain. They are a 19-year-old killed accidentally by an Army paratrooper; a 22-year-old white woman shot by an unknown gunman; a Detroit fireman killed by other a hidden sniper or a stray National Guard bullet; a policeman shot as a fellow officer struggled with a prisoner; and the third victim of the Algiers Motel slayings, whose assassin is not known.

The Return to Normalcy

Hindsight is easy. The fire has gone out and the streets are quiet and in the midst of normalcy, the temptation is latent that logic and order and common sense should have prevailed throughout the riot over-whelming, but impossible to tolerate.

No one who drove those quiet streets at midnight, when the fires still burned and the shadows hung and moved in vacant doorways, when frightened voices cried "Halt" into the silence and footprints crunched on broken glass, will contend that men should have behaved rationally in those awful hours.

With that qualification accepted and understood, here are the general conclusions of the five-week investigation into the riot deaths:

• **Both** the number of snipers active in the riot area and the danger that snipers presented were vastly overstated. Only one sniper is among the riot victims and only three of the victims may possibly have been killed by snipers, two of them doubtful. In all, some 21 persons were arrested and charged with sniping; none of these cases has gone to trial.

• **In** the 43 deaths, criminal intent may possibly be an element in only seven—the three Algiers Motel deaths, three killings by civilians and one, that of William Dalton, still unresolved. Free Press investigators found no evidence of substance or premeditated killing in the cases remaining.

• **In** retrospect, the performance of Michigan State and police officers were generally restrained and impressive. The fact that 1,000 city policemen were out for at least five days in the midst of chaos without more

boothed is significant. There are individual incidents of poor judgment. It is true, and several reputable Michigan news officers may have fired too soon, though they acted legally.

NON-MAJOR criminal observations must be made. Both city and Army authorities acted to try to keep the death toll at a minimum, though they did so in different ways. In both cases, their efforts were not successful and permitted unnecessary death.

At 11:20 Monday night, within hours after the National Guard had come under Federal control, Lt. General John A. Sigmund, commanding officer, issued a general order commanding all troops under his control to stand order and fire only on the command of an officer.

Throckmorton's regular Army troops showed that order; only one person was killed in paratrooper territory in the five days that followed.

The National Guard did not obey, in many cases because the order was improperly disseminated and was made clear to the men on the street. As a result, the Guard was involved in a total of eleven deaths in which other innocent people died.

Military discipline and attention to Throckmorton's order could have saved those deaths.

The Shooting of Looters

Within the Detroit Police Department authorities now say that there were no standing orders on whether looting should be tolerated or not. But both civilians and police officers had the firm and distinct impression that looting was a crime.

There was reason for that impression. Police officers made no secret of the fact that they were pleased with their handling of the Rioters' looting in the summer of 1966. The tactics used in that situation included no shooting unless a person was in the line of fire.

LOOTING was rampant Sunday and there was no shooting. The impression in the Negro community was that looting was a crime.

As Commissioner Ray Grzanka recalls it now, no order to shoot looting rioters could be shot was ever given. Officers were to stop their discretion, nothing more. The order that apparently changed the tide came from Superintendent Eugene C. Sawyer, in response to a question on looting during a press conference. Sawyer gave permission for officers to return fire. The word quickly spread through the department and in the next several days, looting increased.

The legal basis for shooting a looter is found in state law which permits officers to fire at fleeing looters after an order to halt is disregarded. Technically, most of those who were killed clearly had that category, though some did not leave with a feeling that the shot would take 50 yards of goods from a grocery store and run out to be reported to a pay waltz file.

Nevertheless, the question of whether looters will be shot is a matter of public policy. No decision was ever made and announced publicly; as a result, the value of the law as a deterrent was minimal. Many looters certainly thought they were safe; many more would have stayed home had they known that death might be the result.

The Investigation Goes On

The official investigating agency for the riot deaths is the Detroit Homicide Bureau, which reports in turn to Wayne County Prosecutor William Cavanaugh, who rules each case.

With minor exceptions, the Homicide Bureau is thorough in complete and competent reports on every death. In a few cases, the investigations have been nothing short of inspired. In a few others, a reluctance to go ahead on cases involving fellow officers is understandable if not excusable.

IT IS NOT Cavanaugh's job to decide whether officers showed good judgment or had, or to decide whether the deaths were necessary. Unless he finds evidence of criminal intent, Cavanaugh cannot act.

In most of the cases Cavanaugh has reviewed so far, he has found no such evidence and where police officers are involved, he used the same standard of law over the involved. He used the same standard of law over the involved. He used the same standard of law over the involved.

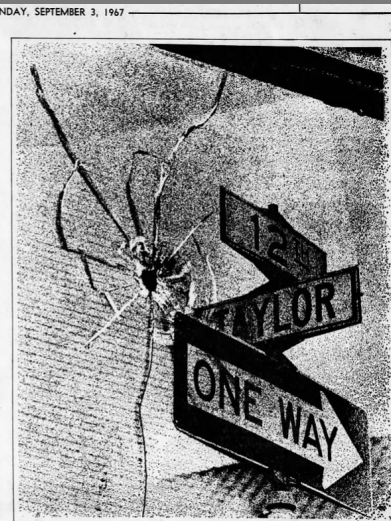
What that law says is simply that we cannot expect police officers to know exactly what the situation is in fact before they act. They must act as the situation appears to them at the moment and make the best judgment they can.

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THE REPORT which follows is based on independent evidence and witnesses. It is as accurate as an honest report for the facts can make it. Even now, it is impossible to arrive at complete explanations, firm conclusions or satisfactory judgments. The best that can be done is to report what is known and to suggest the probabilities that logic requires.

One conclusion must be repeated. A majority of the deaths reported here appear to be unnecessary. They are, however, situations that may be in part of what we have paid for eight days of insanity.



Free Press Photo by IKA ROSENBERG

1. Walter Grzanka
The first known victim of Detroit's riot was Walter Grzanka, 42, shot seconds after midnight, July 24, by an angry, three-man mob who shot Grzanka coming through the broken door of a hotel grocery store. Twenty-five minutes later, at the age of 47, the riot began. Grzanka was the first person to be shot and his wife of 15 years, Josephine, was shot in the back of the head. Grzanka was shot in the back of the head. Grzanka was shot in the back of the head. Grzanka was shot in the back of the head.

2. Sheren George
The death of Sheren George, a young 23-year-old Detroit resident, may never be solved. Her death occurred on the second known victim of the riot when a mob ripped into her door as she was riding in her car at 11:30 p.m. on July 24, the first night of the riot.

The Investigation Team
On the fourth day of what was to become the nation's deadliest contemporary terrorism, the Free Press began an investigation into the riot deaths of each person killed or fatally injured in the riot. For five weeks a team of Free Press reporters, editors, and photographers, including William Cavanaugh, National Guardsman, and others, worked to uncover the truth about the riot. The investigation was a joint effort between the Free Press and the Michigan State Police. The investigation was a joint effort between the Free Press and the Michigan State Police.



Barbara Hanson, William Norris, Gene Goltz

William Cavanaugh, Wayne County Prosecutor, and other members of the investigation team. The investigation was a joint effort between the Free Press and the Michigan State Police. The investigation was a joint effort between the Free Press and the Michigan State Police.

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