The night of May 7, after a chase that began in Watts and ended some 50 blocks farther north, two Los Angeles policemen, Caucasians, succeeded in halting a car driven by Leonard Deadwyler, a Negro. With him were his pregnant wife and a friend. The younger cop (who'd once had a complaint brought against him for rousting some Negro kids around in a more than usually abusive way) went over and stuck his head and gun in the car window to talk to Deadwyler. A moment later there was a shot; the young Negro fell sideways in the seat, and died. The last thing he said, according to the other cop, was, "She's going to have a baby."

The coroner's inquest went on for the better part of two weeks, one cop claiming the car had lurched suddenly, causing his service revolver to go off by accident; Deadwyler's widow claiming it was cold-blooded murder and that the car had never moved. The verdict, to no one's surprise, cleared the cop of all criminal responsibility. It had been an accident. The D.A. announced immediately that he thought so too, and that as far as he was concerned the case was closed.

But as far as Watts is concerned, it's still very much open. Preachers in the community are urging calm-or, as others are putting it: "Make any big trouble, baby, The Man just going to come back in and shoot you, like last time." Snipers are sniping but so far not hitting much of anything. Occasional fire bombs are being lobbed at cars with white faces inside, or into empty sports models that look as if they might be white property. There have been a few fires of mysterious origin. A Negro Teen Post- part of the L.A. poverty war's keep-them-out-of-the-streets effort - has had all its windows busted, the young lady in charge expressing the wish next morning that she could talk with the malefactors, involve them, see if they couldn't work out the problem together. In the back of everybody's head, of course, is the same question: Will there be a repeat of last August's riot?

An even more interesting question is: Why is everybody worrying about another riot--haven't things in Watts improved any since the last one? A lot of white folks are wondering. Unhappily, the answer is no. The neighborhood may be seething with social workers, data collectors, VISTA volunteers and other assorted members of the humanitarian establishment, all of whose intentions are the purest in the world. But somehow nothing much has changed. There are still the poor, the defeated, the criminal, the desperate, all hanging in there with what must seem a terrible vitality.

The killing of Leonard Deadwyler has once again brought it all into sharp focus; brought back long-standing pain, reminded everybody of how very often the cop does approach you with his revolver ready, so that nothing he does with it can then really be accidental, of how, especially at night, everything can suddenly reduce to a matter of reflexes: your life trembling in the crook of a cop's finger because it is dark, and Watts, and the history of this place and these times makes it impossible for the cop to come on any different, or for you to hate him any less. Both of you are caught in something neither of you wants, and yet night after night, with casualties or without, these traditional scenes continue to be played out all over the South central part of this city.

Whatever else may be wrong in a political way--like the inadequacy of Great Depression techniques applied to a scene that has long outgrown them; like an old-fashioned grafter's glee among the city fathers over the vast amounts of poverty-war bread that Uncle is now making available to them--lying much closer to the heart of L.A.'s racial sickness is the coexistence of two very different cultures: one white and one black.

While the white culture is concerned with various forms of systematized folly--the economy of the area in fact depending on it--the black culture is stuck pretty much with basic realities like disease, like failure,
violence and death, which the whites have mostly chosen--and can afford--to ignore. The two cultures do not
understand each other, though white values are displayed without let-up on black people's TV screens, and
though the panoramic sense of black impoverishment is hard to miss from atop the Harbor Freeway, which so
many whites must drive at least twice every working day. Somehow it occurs to very few of them to leave at
the Imperial Highway exit for a change, go east instead of west only a few blocks, and take a look at Watts. A
quick look. The simplest kind of beginning. But Watts is country which lies, psychologically, uncounted
miles further than most whites seem at present willing to travel.

On the surface anyway, the Deadwyler affair hasn't made it look any different, though underneath the mood
in Watts is about what you might expect. Feelings range from a reflexive, angry, driving need to hit back
somehow, to an anxious worry that the slaying is just one more bad grievance, one more bill that will fall due
some warm evening this summer. Yet in the daytime's brilliance and heat, it is hard to believe there is any
mystery to Watts. Everything seems so out in the open, all of it is real, no plastic faces, not transistors, no
hidden Muzak, or Disneyfied landscaping, or smiling little chicks to show you around. Not in Raceriotland.
Only a few historic landmarks, like the police substation, one command post for the white forces last August,
pigeons now thick and cooing up on its red-tiled roof. Or, on down the street, vacant lots, still looking charred
around the edges, winking with emptied Tokay, port and sherry pints, some of the bottles peeking out of
paper bags, others busted.

A kid could come along in his bare feet and step on this glass--not that you'd ever know. These kids are so
tough you can pull slivers of it out of them and never get a whimper. It's part of their landscape, both the real
and the emotional one: busted glass, busted crockery, nails, tin cans, all kinds of scrap and waste.
Traditionally Watts. An Italian immigrant named Simon Rodia spent 30 years gathering some of it up and
converting a little piece of the neighborhood along 107th Street into the famous Watts Towers, perhaps his
own dream of how things should have been: a fantasy of fountains, boats, tall openwork spires, encrusted
with a dazzling mosaic of Watts debris. Next to the Towers, along the old Pacific Electric tracks, kids are
busy every day busting more bottles on the steel rails. But Simon Rodia is dead and now the junk just
accumulates.

A few blocks away, other kids are out playing on the hot blacktop of the school playground. Brothers and
sisters too young yet for school have it better--wherever they are they have yards, trees, hoses, hiding places.
Not the crowded, shadeless tenement living of any Harlem; just the same one- or two-story urban sprawl as
all over the rest of L.A. giving you some piece of grass at least to expand into when you don't especially feel
like being inside.

In the business part of town there is a different idea of refuge. Pool halls and bars, warm and dark inside, are
crowded; many domino, dice and whist games in progress. Outside, men stand around a beer cooler listening
to a ball game on the radio; others lean or hunker against the sides of buildings--low, faded stucco boxes that
remind you oddly, of certain streets in Mexico. Women go by, to and from what shopping there is. It is easy
to see how crowds, after all, can form quickly in these streets, around the least seed of a disturbance or
accident. For the moment, it all only waits in the sun.

Overhead, big jets now and then come vacuum-cleanering in to land; the wind is westerly, and Watts lies
under the approaches to L.A. International. The jets hang what seems only a couple of hundred feet up in the
air; through the smog they show up more white than silver, highlighted by the sun, hardly solid; only the
ghosts, or possibilities, of airplanes.

From here, much of the white culture that surrounds Watts--and in a curious way, besieges it--looks like those
jets: a little unreal, a little less than substantial. For Los Angeles, more than any other city, belongs to the
mass media. What is known around the nation as the L.A. Scene exists chiefly as images on a screen or TV
tube, as four-color magazine photos, as old radio jokes, as new songs that survive only a matter of weeks. It is
basically a white Scene, and illusion is everywhere in it, from the giant aerospace firms that flourish or
retrench at the whims of Robert McNamara, to the "action" everybody mills along the Strip on weekends
looking for, unaware that they and their search which will end, usually, unfulfilled, are the only action in
town.

Watts lies impacted in the heart of this white fantasy. It is, by contrast, a pocket of bitter reality. The only
illusion Watts ever allowed itself was to believe for a long time in the white version of what a Negro was
supposed to be. But with the Muslim and civil-rights movements that went too.

Since the August rioting, there has been little building here, little buying. Lots whose buildings were burned
off them are still waiting vacant and littered with garbage, occupied only by a parked car or two, or kids
fooling around after school, or winos sharing a pint in the early morning. The other day, on one of them, there
were ground-breaking festivities, attended by a county supervisor, pretty high-school girls, decked in ribbons,
a white store owner and his wife, who in the true Watts spirit busted a bottle of champagne over a rock--all
because the man had decided to stay and rebuild his $200,000 market, the first such major rebuilding since
the riot.

Watts people themselves talk about another kind of aura, vaguely evil; complain that Negroes living in better
neighborhoods like to come in under the freeway as to a red-light district, looking for some girl, some game,
maybe some connection. Narcotics is said to be a rare bust in Watts these day, although the narco people
cruise the area earnestly, on the lookout for dope fiends, dope rings, dope peddlers. But the poverty of Watts
makes it more likely that if you have pot or a little something else to spare you will want to turn a friend on,
not sell it. Tomorrow, or when he can, your friend will return the favor.

At the Deadwyler inquest, much was made of the dead man's high blood alcohol content, as if his being
drunk made it somehow all right for the police to shoot him. But alcohol is a natural part of the Watts style; as
natural as LSD is around Hollywood. The white kid digs hallucination simply because he is conditioned to
believe so much in escape, escape as an integral part of life, because the white L.A. Scene makes accessible
to him so many different forms of it. But a Watts kid, brought up in a pocket of reality, looks perhaps not so
much for escape as just for some calm, some relaxation. And beer or wine is good enough for that. Especially
good at the end of a bad day.

Like after you have driven, say, down to Torrance or Long Beach or wherever it is they're hiring because they
don't seem to be in Watts, not even in the miles of heavy industry that sprawl along Alameda Street, that gray
and murderous arterial which lies at the eastern boundary of Watts looking like the edge of the world.

So you groove instead down the freeway, maybe wondering when some cop is going to stop you because the
old piece of a car you're driving, which you bought for $20 or $30 you picked up somehow, makes a lot of
noise or burns some oil. Catching you mobile widens The Man's horizons; gives him more things he can get
you on. Like "excessive smoking" is a great favorite with him.

If you do get to where you were going without encountering a cop, you may spend your day looking at the
white faces of personnel men, their uniform glance of suspicion, their automatic smiles, and listening to
polite put-downs. "I decided once to ask," a kid says, "one time they told me I didn't meet their requirements.
So I said: 'Well, what are you looking for? I mean, how can I train, what things do I have to learn so I can
meet your requirements?' Know what he said? 'We are not obligated to tell you what our requirements are.'"

He isn't. That right there is the hell and headache: he doesn't have to do anything he doesn't want to do
because he is The Man. Or he was. A lot of kids these days are more apt to be calling him the little man--
meaning not so much any member of the power structure as just your average white L.A. taxpayer, registered
voter, property owner, employed, stable, mortgaged and the rest.
The little man bugs these kids more than The Man ever bugged their parents. It is the little man who is standing on their feet and in their way; he's all over the place, and there is not much they can do to change him or the way he feels about them. A Watts kid knows more of what goes on inside white heads than possibly whites do themselves. Knows how often the little man has looked at him and thought, "Bad credit risk"--or "Poor learner," or "Sexual threat," or "Welfare chisler" without knowing a thing about him personally.

The natural, normal thing to want to do is hit the little man. But what after all, has he done? Mild, respectable, possibly smiling, he has called you no names, shown no weapons. Only told you perhaps that the job was filled, the house rented.

With a cop it may get more dangerous, but at least it's honest. You understand each other. Both of you silently admitting that all the cop really has going for him is his gun. "There was a time," they'll tell you, "you'd say, 'Take off the badge baby, and let's settle it.' I mean, he wouldn't, but you'd say it. But since August, man, the way I feel, hell with the badge--just take off that gun."

The cop does not take off the gun; the hassle stays verbal. But this means that, besides protecting and serving the little man, the cop also functions as his effigy.

If he does not get emotional and say something like "boy" or "nigger," you then have the option of cooling it or else--again this is more frequent since last August--calling him the name he expects to be called, though it is understood you are not commenting in any literal way on what goes on between him and his mother. It is a ritual exchange, like the dirty dozens.

Usually--as in the Deadwyler incident--it's the younger cop of the pair who's more troublesome. Most Watts kids are hip to what's going on in this rookie's head--the things he feels he has to prove--as much as to the elements of the ritual. Before the cop can say, "Let's see your I.D.," you learn to take it out politely and say, "You want to see my I.D.?" Naturally it will bug the cop more the further ahead of him you can stay. It is flirting with disaster, but it's the cop who has the gun, so you do what you can.

You must anticipate always how the talk is going to go. It's something you pick up quite young, same as you learn the different species of cop: the Black and White (named for the color scheme of their automobiles), who are L.A. city police and in general the least flexible; the L.A. county sheriff's department, who style themselves more of an elite, try to maintain a certain distance from the public, and are less apt to harass you unless you seem worthy; the Compton city cops, who travel only one to a car and come on very tough, like leaning four of you at a time against the wall and shaking you all down; the juvies, who ride in unmarked Plymouths and are cruising all over the place soon as the sun goes down, pulling up alongside you with pleasantry like, "Which one's buying the wine tonight?" or, "Who are you guys planning to rob this time?" They are kidding, of course, trying to be pals. But Watts kids, like most, do not like being put in with winos, or dangerous drivers or thieves, or in any bag considered criminal or evil. Whatever the cop's motives, it looks like mean and deliberate ignorance.

In the daytime, and especially with any kind of crowd, the cop's surface style has changed some since last August. "Time was," you'll hear, "man used to go right in, very mean, pick maybe one kid out of the crowd he figured was the troublemaker, try to bust him down in front of everybody. But now the people start yelling back, how they don't want no more of that, all of a sudden The Man gets very meek."

Still, however much a cop may seem to be following the order of the day read to him every morning about being courteous to everybody, his behavior with a crowd will really depend as it always has on how many of his own he can muster, and how fast. For his Mayor, Sam Yorty, is a great believer in the virtues of Overwhelming Force as a solution to racial difficulties. This approach has not gained much favor in Watts. In
fact, the Mayor of Los Angeles appears to many Negroes to be the very incarnation of the little man: looking out for no one but himself, speaking always out of expediency, and never, never to be trusted.

The Economic and Youth Opportunities Agency (E.Y.O.A.) is a joint city-county "umbrella agency" (the state used to be represented, but has dropped out) for many projects scattered around the poorer parts of L.A., and seems to be Sam Yorty's native element, if not indeed the flower of his consciousness. Bizarre, confused, ever in flux, strangely ineffective, E.Y.O.A. hardly sees a day go by without somebody resigning, or being fired, or making an accusation, or answering one--all of it confirming the Watts Negroes' already sad estimate of the little man. The Negro attitude toward E.Y.O.A. is one of clear mistrust, though degrees of suspicion vary, form the housewife wanting only to be left in peace and quiet, who hoped that maybe The Man is lying less than usual this time, to the young, active disciple of Malcolm X who dismisses it all with a contemptuous shrug.

"But why?" asked one white lady volunteer. "There are so many agencies now that you can go to, that can help you, if you'll only file your complaint."

"They don't help you." This particular kid had been put down trying to get a job with one of the larger defense contractors.

"Maybe not before. But it's different now."

"Now," the kid sighed, "now. See people been hearing that 'now' for a long time, and I'm just tired of The Man telling you, 'Now it's OK, now we mean what we say.'"

In Watts, apparently, where no one can afford the luxury of illusion, there is little reason to believe that now will be any different, any better than last time.

It is perhaps a measure of the people's indifference that only 2 per cent of the poor in Los Angeles turned out to elect representatives to the E.Y.O.A. "poverty board." For a hopeless minority on the board (7 out of 23), nobody saw much point in voting.

Meantime, the outposts of the establishment drowse in the bright summery smog: secretaries chat the afternoons plaintively away about machines that will not accept the cards they have punched for them; white volunteers sit filing, doodling, talking on the phones, doing any kind of busy-work, wondering where the "clients" are; inspirational mottoes like SMILE decorate the beaverboard office walls along with flow charts to illustrate the proper disposition of "cases," and with clippings from the slick magazines about "What Is Emotional Maturity?"

Items like smiling and Emotional Maturity are in fact very big with the well-adjusted, middle-class professionals, Negro and white, who man the mimeographs and computers of the poverty war here. Gladly, they seem to be smiling themselves out of any meaningful communication with their poor. Besides a 19th-century faith that tried and true approaches--sound counseling, good intentions, perhaps even compassion--will set Watts straight, they are also burdened with the personal attitudes they bring to work with them. Their reflexes--especially about conformity, about failure, about violence--are predictable.

"We had a hell of a time with this one girl," a Youth Training and Employment Project counselor recalls. "You should have seen those hairdos of hers--piled all the way up to here. And the screwy outfits she'd come in with, you just wouldn't believe. We had to take her aside and explain to her that employers just don't go for that sort of thing. That she'd be up against a lot of very smooth-looking chicks, heels and stockings, conservative hair and clothes. We finally got her to come around."

The same goes for boys who like to wear Malcolm hats, or Afro haircuts. The idea the counselors push
evidently is to look as much as possible like a white applicant. Which is to say, like a Negro job counselor or social worker. This has not been received with much enthusiasm among the kids it is designed to help out, and is one reason business is slow around the various projects.

There is a similar difficulty among the warriors about failure. They are in a socio-economic bag, along with the vast majority of white Angelenos, who seem more terrified of failure than of death. It is difficult to see where any of them have experienced significant defeat, or loss. If they have, it seems to have been long rationalized away as something else.

You are likely to hear from them wisdom on the order of: "Life has a way of surprising us, simply as a function of time. Even if all you do is stand on the street corner and wait." Watts is full of street corners where people stand, as they have been, some of them, for 20 or 30 years, without Surprise One ever having come along. Yet the poverty warriors must believe in this form of semimiracle, because their world and their scene cannot accept the possibility that there may be, after all, no surprise. But it is something Watts has always known.

As for violence, in a pocket of reality such as Watts, violence is never far from you: because you are a man, because you have been put down, because for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Somehow, sometime. Yet to these innocent, optimistic child-bureaucrats, violence is an evil and an illness, possibly because it threatens property and status they cannot help cherishing.

They remember last August's riot as an outburst, a seizure. Yet what, from the realistic viewpoint of Watts, was so abnormal? "Man's got his foot on your neck," said one guy who was there, "sooner or later you going to stop asking him to take it off." The violence it took to get that foot to ease up even the little it did was no surprise. Many had predicted it. Once it got going, its basic objective--to beat the Black and White police--seemed a reasonable one, and was gained the minute The Man had to send troops in. Everybody seems to have known it. There is hardly a person in Watts now who finds it painful to talk about, or who regrets that it happened--unless he lost somebody.

But in the white culture outside, in that creepy world full of precardiac Mustang drivers who scream insults at one another only when the windows are up; of large corporations where Niceguymanship is the standing order regardless of whose executive back one may be endeavoring to stab; of an enormous priest caste of shrinks who counsel moderation and compromise as the answer to all forms of hassle; among so much well-behaved unreality, it is next to impossible to understand how Watts may truly feel about violence. In terms of strict reality, violence may be a means to getting money, for example, no more dishonest than collecting exorbitant carrying charges from a customer on relief, as white merchants here still do. Far from a sickness, violence may be an attempt to communicate, or to be who you really are.

"Sure I did two stretches," a kid says, "both times for fighting, but I didn't deserve either one. First time, the cat was bigger than I was; next time, it was two against one, and I was the one." But he was busted all the same, perhaps because Whitby, who knows how to get everything he wants, no longer has fisticuffs available as a technique, and sees no reason why everybody shouldn't go the Niceguy route. If you are thinking maybe there is a virility hang-up in here, too, that putting a Negro into a correctional institution for fighting is also some kind of neutering operation, well, you might have something there, who knows?

It is, after all, in white L.A.'s interest to cool Watts any way it can--to put the area under a siege of persuasion: to coax the Negro poor into taking on certain white values. Give them a little property, and they will be less tolerant of arson; get them to go in hock for a car or color TV, and they'll be more likely to hold down a steady job. Some see it for what it is--this come-on, this false welcome, this attempt to transmogrify the reality of Watts into the unreality of Los Angeles. Some don't.
Watts is tough: has been able to resist the unreal. If there is any drift away from reality, it is by way of mythmaking. As this summer warms them up, last August's riot is being remembered less as chaos and more as art. Some talk now of a balletic quality to it, a coordinated and graceful drawing of cops away from the center of the action, a scattering of The Man's power, either with real incidents or false alarms.

Others remember it in terms of music: through much of the rioting seemed to run, they say, a remarkable empathy, or whatever it is that jazz musicians feel on certain nights: everybody knowing what to do and when to do it without needing a word or a signal: "You could go up to anybody, the cats could be in the middle of burning down a store or something, but they'd tell you, explain very calm, just what they were doing, what they were going to do next. And that's what they'd do; man, nobody had to give orders."

Restructuring of the riot goes on in other ways. All Easter week this year, in the spirit of the season, there was a "Renaissance of the Arts," a kind of festival in memory of Simon Rodia, held at Markham Junior High, in the heart of Watts.

Along with theatrical and symphonic events, the festival also featured a roomful of sculptures fashioned entirely from found objects--found, symbolically enough, and in the Simon Rodia tradition, among the wreckage the rioting had left. Exploiting textures of charred wood, twisted metal, fused glass, many of the works were fine, honest rebirths.

In one corner was this old, busted, hollow TV set with a rabbit-ears antenna on top. Inside, where its picture tube should have been, gaping out with scorched wiring threaded like electronic ivy among its crevices and sockets, was a human skull. The name of the piece was "The Late, Late, Late Show."

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