

Watts, 1966 – Remembering When

Yes, the call was
For violence
And it filled the
Air, it seemed,
Everywhere.

No, nothing was gained
That felt no fire
Before the first trace
Of sun broke over
The morning dawn.

It was a ship only fools
Chose to ride, and the
Hopes of those angry black
Braves crowded the skies
And the seas and the land.



The start of the burning in Watts 1966 – photo from Life Aug. 1966

For Watts, amid all the
Shouting and cursing
And foot stamping and
Screaming, the sight
Of routed white colonialists

Was heady wine. Perhaps, when
I sat to watch the images
Weaving against the walls, I
Saw myself reflected in the
Wildness of their oaths and stares.

Oaths, that laid torch to a cross
On this, the yard of my mutilated brain.
My mind burned with the ache
To get away...escape the
Bestricken, howling rabble.

I wanted a place to sit and
There ponder...a spot away
From them and the black women
Who shouted "Rape" and the
Old men slobbering their words

And sad stories with their
Magnificently wine-twisted mouths.
I had thought to sink into
A daydream, singing a quiet
Song to and with myself.

...to look across the streets
Torn by the rioting and now
Mocked by an apathetic white merchantry
And wonder if the hate within
My soul would ever leave.



*One of the many "firefights" that occurred between police and snipers
During the Watts Rebellion – picture from Life, August 1966.*

Oh...bright, young guns poured,
Spilled out onto the streets

To raise a din of noise that echoed
From Central Avenue to Alameda
To Imperial Highway to Manchester Avenue.

A din of sound that called people,
Who rose, it seemed, from the
Very manholes that gutted the streets
...streets, a patchwork quilt
Of incensed cesspools civilized

Man has named “ghettoes.”
But still, the fervor of revolution
Inflamed the air. Air,
Draped as though a pregnant cloud
Above the tiny heads of black children

Playing in the streets with their lives.
A fire hydrant, overturned and now
Spewing water as if it were a whale in
The midst of miscarriage 50 feet high
While buses honked impatiently

And the hustler’s hawklike stare commanded
A visitor’s noting.
Pity, Sorrow, Love, each fought
Silent savage battles throughout
The night for lost souls



*Police applying infamous “chokehold” which has since been banned
on rioter during Watts uprising – picture from Life, August 1966.*

That wandered drunkenly in the alleys
Or sat, composed, on milk crates
In front of the liquor stores –
Speaking of filth and Mighty Whitey
And the bloodlust that has impregnated

Even the little bastard child sitting
On a porch, confused by the chaos.

Brofeydur: the white man has indeed
Created a nightmare, and that Hell
Will not have Watts surprises none

But the mayor. On, on come the all-seeing
Eyes of the television cameras
Controlled by the probing, insensitive
Hand of the detached reporter who
Purports to relate the news to millions

While there, in the eye of madness,
He quakes in his boots and wonders
When his turn to be beaten shall come.
(Left bleeding like a brutalized rag doll
That has outlived its usefulness and

A child's curiosity.) Relating the news
While the reality perpetuates itself.
Strutting down the streets
Come the Young Ones,
With jazz playing from FM radios
And marijuana tucked away
In a jacket,

Talking 'bout the Man and
The trial of Deadwyler
And the coming of the end
Of the fire that burned
Too short too long ago

And yet gave something new,
A man named Fear,
To the world as it looked on
In palsied horror at
This, the child of the
Hydrogen Bomb.

Watts, a womb from whence
Has been spawned Molotov
Cocktails and shotguns, but most
Of all, a lack of care:
For care has been exposed

As fraudulent and so deserving
Of no due other than that

Accorded burnt newspaper wafting
Away in blackened wisps
While mothers hang out their clothes

And talk on telephones of the
Danger and their children
And the nightmare that has descended
...and how Hopelessness,
Helplessness, is their

Young One's due.
The man named Fear has inherited half an acre,
And He's angry.



Clockwise starting upper left, Bobby Seale, Co-Founder of Original Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, Huey P. Newton, Panther Co-Founder, Fred Hampton, Sr. of Chicago branch of Panther Party And Eldridge Cleaver, BPP Minister of Information and author as Panthers came to be Party that filled void in aftermath of the Urban rebellions of the 1960s.

Johnie Scott
July 1966
Watts, California