

Something Wrong In 'Paradise West'

THE LOS ANGELES RIOTS

(This is the first of a series of exclusives, interpretive articles dealing with the riots in Los Angeles. The writer, A.S. "Doc" Young, has lived in that city for many years and is well known, there and nationally, as a writer whose work has been featured in newspapers, magazines, books, and the Hollywood motion picture industry. —Editor's Note.)

BY A. S. "DOC" YOUNG

Last week, the City of Angels.

Today, a hell on earth where tension reigns, where racial hatreds abound and suspicion is more common than sunny days.

This is Los Angeles, fastest-growing of the nation's giant cities, much boasted No. 1 Metropolis of the West, a huge, mostly-horizontal city that covers 486 square miles, a melting pot populated principally by Caucasians, Mexicans, Negroes, and Japanese. Approximately 13 per cent of the city's population is Negro. Most of these people are newcomers — as are a predominant number of Caucasians

The largest singular segment of the Caucasian population is said to stem from Iowa. That is, excluding the Mexican-Americans, who are — technically, or legally — regarded as being Caucasian but who are isolated from the main body of this group and are, perhaps, more segregated or discriminated against than Negroes.

The total Los Angeles city population is close to three million. The Greater Los Angeles population is somewhat more than six million. More than 600,000 Negroes live in the Greater Los Angeles area, which embraces such suburban area, which embraces such suburban and the San Fernando Valley.

The riots, now headlined around the world, started when a white patrolman, Lee Minikus, sought to arrest a 21-year-old Negro, Marquette Frye, on a drunk-driving charge at 116th Street and Avalon Boulevard.

According to Minikus, he had followed Frye's car for several blocks. When he halted the car, he found that Marquette Frye was accompanied by his 22-year-old brother, Ronald. Minikus said he gave Marquette Frye a sobriety test and that the suspect failed to pass it.

"Being alone," Minikus said, "and as a routine measure, I then called for a back-up officer and transportation for the suspect. It was about 8 p.m. Some 20 or 30 persons were standing about, observing. Everything was peaceful until the boy's mother, Mrs. Rena Frye, 49, arrived."

According to the officer, when Mrs. Frye arrived, she first berated Marquette Frye for getting into trouble, angering him. Thus angered, Marquette Frye allegedly turned on the cop and caused a disturbance. At this time, according to



AN UNIDENTIFIED Los Angeles Negro is hustled into a police car after his arrest at scene of riots. Catalyst of violence and destruction was an attempted drunk driving arrest. — UPI PHOTO.

Minikus, Mrs. Frye took sides with her son and a melee developed, attracting more people, setting off cries of "police brutality."

With this isolated spark, the riots were ignited.

The resulting conflagration spread through the Watts area and other areas like a wind-blown brush fire. A hard-core of 300 Negroes, their average age being 18 years, according to a political leader with whom I have talked, took over the area, wrecking, looting, and beating. It has been said that, at one time, as many as 7,000 persons, not including police and other law enforcement personnel, were involved in the riots that lasted several days.

Police and the rioters engaged in numerous clashes. Both whites and Negroes suffered beatings, death, and destruction of property, the latter ranging upwards of \$100,000,000 in damages.

The riots caught Negro leaders and city officials alike off-guard. Just a few days earlier, the well-informed Los Angeles Sentinel columnist, Stanley Robertson, had warned of possible trouble but had observed: "We here in Los Angeles have had, generally, probably the best race relations record of any city in the country. . . ."

Watts is a so-called black belt. Upwards of 98 per cent of its people are Negroes. It is an area which is generally regarded as poor, yet Watts does not compare, in slum terms, to the worse of Chicago or New York's Harlem. For one thing, though many Watts homes are of the "poor type" and are over-crowded, though the economic status of much of the area is low, there is space, there are parks in which to play, there are swimming pools.

Jordan High School, located in the heart of Watts, produced Stan Sanders, the recent Rhodes Scholar. Its recent principal is one of the city's outstanding educators. In Los Angeles, though there are problems, education is available for all who want it — the marginal student being able to enroll in a number of junior colleges if not qualified immediately on graduation from

high school in a four-year college, such as the state-supported University of California at Los Angeles or Los Angeles State College or the privately-endowed University of Southern California.

Businesses in Watts are principally small shops, owned by Negroes, Caucasians, Jews, Orientals, and Mexicans; super-markets, many of them chain-operated; and larger stores, almost wholly owned by Caucasians and Jews. It is interesting to note that in many reports about the Los Angeles riots, the looting of liquor stores was mentioned.

If the Watts area is over-populated with anything, it is over-populated with liquor stores. Most all of the predominantly-Negro sections of Los Angeles are over-populated with liquor stores, only a small number of them owned or operated by Negroes. If there is anything that evidences a low regard for Negroes in Los Angeles on the part of city and state officials, it is the dual standards administered in the granting of permits for liquor stores. I once counted 58 liquor dispensaries in a 50-block expanse of a thoroughfare which runs from downtown southward, through Watts, and further south.

Without entering into any area of consideration which involves the "justification" of or the condemnation of the Los Angeles riots, this should be noted:

The people of Watts are a rejected lot.

They are rejected by Negroes as well as Caucasians.

Ambitious newcomers in Los Angeles seek to move out of Watts as soon and as fast as possible. People look down their noses on Watts. Negroes who live on the "West Side" of Los Angeles would as soon take up residence in Hell as live in Watts.

When the riots started, Hell is what Watts turned out to be.

(TOMORROW: What the Los Angeles riots were like).