

Life And Property

Charles H. King, Jr.

Editor's Note: The following article was written by Dr. Charles King, who, while on vacation, served as a consultant to the City of Elyria, Ohio, during last week's racial crisis. King is the President of Urban Crisis Inc, an Atlanta Consulting firm. A regular contributing writer for the Voice, he has won numerous national awards for his ongoing interpretations of black-white dynamics and urban problems.

Daryl Maxwell, age 18, black, is dead. So is the spathy of the city in which he was slain.

Elyria, Ohio, a snug neat town of 60,000, 13 percent black, was enveloped in the throes of riots and disorders for three days, beginning August 12, the day my son Carl, culminated the stage at Baldwin Wallace College, Berea, Ohio. It was that latter event that brought me to Ohio, not the riot. Elyria is 15 miles from Berea.

The play, "Noah's Animals," was a bad one, the

reviewers panned it, so did I. But I was with my son, age 18, black and alive. As we enjoyed each other, I was struck by the fact that day, Friday, was the day that Daryl Maxwell was to be laid away. I drove to Elyria.

Too late, the funeral was over. There was no sign of violence or tension, violence and disorder are evening happenings, the town, the blacks, the police... all up tight. The Highway patrol camped outside of the city perimeters, available if needed to move in to assist the 75 man police department of Elyria. They, to the man, including, the one

black, on the force, were praying for rain. The rains had come that morning, and left I suddenly found myself in front of the Police station. On sheer impulse I entered and asked for the chief.

Maurice C. Flood, Chief of Police, Elyria, is deeply sensitive and troubled.

Sensitive because he understands black frustrations, troubled because little had been done prior to the disorder to quell them. Strapped by lack of trained manpower and money needed to modernize his command. "We have no

lines of communication into the black community," he stated, "and the blacks we do communicate with are not respected by the young blacks."

The night before, Leonard P. Reichlin, Mayor, attended a meeting of angry black youths, to answer their questions, listen to their grievances, and to assure them that a prompt investigation, including black citizens, would look into the facts behind the killing, Daryl Maxwell. He was shouted down. Led by Walter Maxwell the older brother of the slain youth, they left the meeting breathing fire.

"I understand," the mayor told me, "they had to let off tension, many of their grievances had not been met, and we have to work like hell to get things done." They asked about Atlanta, and I was struck by an

amazing fact. The Chief of Police and the Mayor of Elyria, two deeply sensitive men sitting on the razor's edge of a volcano, viewed Atlanta as the model for action. Without resorting to Atlanta's internal quicksand, I assured them with the new sensitivity of police daily functions, the guns had been holstered. "Would you relate some of these things to my men at the 6 p.m. lineup?" the scholarly Chief inquired. I assented. It was 4:30.

What does a black man say to an all white police department, with white mayor and Police Chief standing by? How could I explain to them that virtually all riots begin with an overreaction of a police officer upon an angry black. That when one black man dies a senseless death that bullet strikes us all. This blacks between the ages of 18 and 24, are 65 percent unemployed, high school dropouts or knockouts. How do you explain to white policemen that the angry, undisciplined black views the police badge as the enemy,

resents being called "boy" and in a showdown doesn't care whether he lives or dies.

How do you explain to a white policeman that when blacks are stacked up like cordwood in ghettos that it turns men into rates, pimps and thieves? Daryl Maxwell's father had been killed in a violent argument, and his mother's second husband had been shot to death. Now Walter Maxwell, the surviving son was hell-bent on leading the rebellion, even before his brother's body was cold. That Elyria's slum removal was actually "black removal" without replacement? That 35 percent of black families had no men as head of household and 80 percent of all felonies were committed by blacks who were 95 percent high school dropouts, and 65 percent unemployed?

Is it possible to convey the extent of contained hostility and frustration that builds up in blacks who exist under these conditions? The policeman then becomes the one white institution that

confronts blacks at those moments. How the policeman responds, must depend upon his understanding, at this strategic moment as to whether that black lives or dies. The police response must be one of logic and reason, not an emotional trigger jerk to wipe away the concerned man, turned animistic by society's failures, to correct.

It was now 6 p.m., facing white policemen, weary from double duty, apprehension, with thinly disguised hostility, I said those things, and more.

"The gun," I concluded, "should only be used to protect lives, yours, someone else's but not property. The property can be recovered, but not the life."

That was Friday, August 15th. I don't know what ultimately will happen in Elyria. By this time, violence again might have erupted. But I doubt it, for my last memory of that city was the enthusiastic applause of those white policemen, who went out that night with a growing awareness that the eyes of the

nation were upon them...and their response to crisis.

Back in the office of the Chief, with the Mayor, Leo Bullocks, Elyria's only black Councilman joined us. He invited me back to talk to black youth. "Give them the same facts...they must understand that the problem will never be solved in the streets." I contested.

That night, after witnessing the second bad performance of "Noah's Animals," I sat once again with my son, age 18, black. He needed \$35.00, without a moment's hesitate, I gave it to him.

11:30 now, alone in my hotel room I suddenly knew why Daryl Maxwell had died. It was not only the bullet from the gun that killed him. Five years earlier his father had died from a bullet. 3 years later his stepfather was wiped out by a bullet. When they rolled Daryl over, shot while fleeing from a bar he had burglarized, clutched in his hands were a batch of cancelled lottery tickets and a box of cough drops.