

Letters to the Editor

Editor, The Collegiate Challenge
Dear Sir:

Having just returned from the Inter-Racial Soul Search in 15-8, I feel impelled to make some comments concerning the meeting and my feelings about Obi's budget.

I was not surprised to find that white students at TCC have the same attitudes their parents have. After all, they have had essentially the same education. The questions they asked were the same questions my friends ask me. "Why don't they work for a peaceful settlement of their problems? Why don't they want to be part of our society? Why should they get special privileges?" The most revealing question that expresses the fear that one senses in the angry reactions of too many Americans today is, "If you don't get what you want, will you riot?" It seems to me that the fear thus revealed may very well be a manifestation of a rigidly suppressed sense of guilt among white Americans today.

It is worth reiterating, for the sake of those who were not there, the answers that Mr. Walton, Mr. Douglas, and Mr. Canada, with varying degrees of patience gave over and over again. The fact is, and it is difficult to understand how people can fail to see this, that white society has not allowed blacks to be part of, as we whites say, "our" society. My white readers may not remember the referendum on the Tacoma Open Housing Ordinance. I'll bet my black

I see no reason to disbelieve these gentlemen. Does one form a public organization if one intends to riot? Does such an organization list its officers for the convenience of those forces charged with the suppression of riots?

No, riots do not come about because of the organization of groups like Obi. The anatomy of riots is a very complex one, but there are two elements that would seem to be connected with them. One is that a man has fewer scruples about destroying something that he has no personal interest in. If he is paying exorbitant rent to an absentee landlord for miserable housing, if he is cheated by the grocer, the furniture store, the automobile leader, and the loan company, then he may not mind burning his neighborhood down. The second element is that white society seems very deaf to reasonable requests by blacks. A riot is, to some extent, a way of saying "Listen!"

Finally, there is something I would like to say to white society. That message is that we owe a debt to the black man in America. The least part of the debt is that part which can be expressed in dollars and cents. The black man was exploited in slavery; he has been exploited ever since the Emancipation Proclamation. We have not really begun to pay that debt, and it is a debt we will have to pay one way or another. The \$5,850 is one way of making an installment payment on that debt, and

extra-legal murders, and deaths from malnutrition and the diseases of malnutrition. We must also consider, in reckoning up this blood debt, those deaths which white society is less obviously responsible for, the deaths that stem from the symptoms of frustration; alcohol, drugs and those moments of murderous violence that are characteristic of life in the ghetto.

I said earlier that white society would have to pay that debt one way or another. The easiest part of this payment is in money. The rest of the payment will be made in one of two ways: we can take a good look at ourselves, with the help of organizations like Obi and then work to achieve a society in which there is real equality of opportunity with all that phrase implies in the way of reparations for damage done in the past. Once again, that is the easy way.

Since I am white, I can speak of the other alternative without its sounding like a threat, as it inevitably does when a black man says it. The other alternative is to pay the debt in kind; the money debt, by the burning of property owned by whites, in or out of the ghetto, and the blood debt by the shedding of the blood of white men. If you think that I am being melodramatic, then you had better listen to what really militant black men are saying. If you think that it can be prevented by mere force, then you had better take a look at what is happening in Viet Nam.

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sake of those who were not there, the answers that Mr. Walton, Mr. Douglas, and Mr. Canada, with varying degrees of patience gave over and over again. The fact is, and it is difficult to understand how people can fail to see this, that white society has not allowed blacks to be part of, as we whites say, "our" society. My white readers may not remember the referendum on the Tacoma Open Housing Ordinance. I'll bet my black readers do. Our society rejected them about three to one. The fact is, also, that to be a white in our society is a privilege which completely overshadows any privilege that our society has yet given to a black. The fact is, furthermore, that they have worked for a peaceful solution to the problem. Medgar Evers worked for a solution through the vote, Doctor Martin Luther King worked for a solution through the appeal to the conscience of Christian white Americans.

The last question, about rioting, seemed to suggest a refusal to look at the world as it is, as it was right there at that moment in that room here on the TCC campus. Mr. Canada had pointed out earlier that one of the purposes of Obi was to educate the white community. Mr. Hall had pointed out that his poem about Obi was not a "threatening poem." The title simply says that Obi did not intend to turn the other cheek, and this statement should not have occasioned the frightened comment that it did in a society that most decidedly does not live by that Christian counsel. And, finally, Mr. Canada had revealed that the response planned by "individuals" in case of a refusal to restore the cut in the Obi budget was a sit-in, a most passive, peaceful form of protest.



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The other part of the debt is a grimmer one. It is a blood debt of monstrous proportions. It began when blacks were killed in Africa by slave traders, it grew when blacks died in the holds of slave ships, it grew on the plantations of the South, and it did not stop with the so called "end of slavery." It has grown ever since in lynchings, in legal and

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To mention these alternatives is not to endorse them. I do not want to see property destroyed, and I do not want to see men killed, white or black. I would like to see a society in which all men would live in peace. But that is a remote possibility if white men do not understand that this is their problem, and that the solution of this problem is long overdue.

Sincerely yours,
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