

Looters and Burners

To Shoot or Not to Shoot Is the Question

When newspaper and television pictures showed police dogs attacking Negroes in Birmingham in 1963, the nation was so outraged that Congress passed a far-ranging civil rights bill. In the last two weeks the media have been full of pictures from Washington and Chicago in which police apparently stood by while looters brazenly cleaned out entire blocks of stores.

The reaction in some quarters was a different sort of outrage than Bull Connor's dogs evoked. Mayor Richard J. Daley of Chicago condemned his police force's policy of restraint and ordered police to shoot arsonists and looters (although he advised the police to use disabling chemicals on children and shoot looters only to maim or cripple). His mail, he said later, was running 10 to 1 in favor of his stand.

this year because they knew that Negroes in such cities as Washington were heavily armed and might well shoot back.

A fourth reason for restraint was indicated by Attorney General Clark, who said that riots grew out of people "manifesting their frustration, their belief that they really may have no stake in this country."

Thus the outlook is for continued restraint, despite Mayor Daley and chambers of com-

In New York, 100 Negroes and Puerto Ricans who own small businesses damaged by disorders accused police of "appeasing" rioters and not providing property owners with sufficient protection. Many politicians and property owners joined the chorus in favor of "law and order."

Despite the outcry, most law enforcement officers, led by Attorney General Ramsey Clark and public officials, including New York's Mayor John V. Lindsay, insisted that caution in the face of civil disorders was both the most moral and effective strategy. The essence of this strategy, as Mr. Clark put it, is for the police to realize their own limitations. If they tried to quell a volatile crowd with insufficient manpower, for example, they

would probably exacerbate the situation. In addition, the strategy stresses the use of tear gas, strictly enforced curfews, mass arrests, and as little shooting as possible. In Washington, where Federal officials directed the situation, more than 6,000 arrests were made (with liberal bail terms), and only 15 shots were fired—fewer than a single National Guardsman fired into a public housing project during one nervous moment in Newark last summer.

Policy of Restraint
The slaughter of last summer (43 dead in Detroit, 23 in Newark) and the rumors that both sides were arming for full-scale war led Mr. Clark, during the winter, to urge law enforcement officers to adopt a policy of re-

straint. The President's Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders advocated a similar policy which rests on three reasons.

The first is a moral reason: Human life should be recognized as having the highest value, and looting cannot justify the use of deadly force. As Mayor Lindsay put it: "We happen to think that protection of life, particularly innocent life, is more important than protecting property or anything else."

This view runs counter to one of the nation's hardest beliefs—the sanctity of private property. "Shoot all looters" is as much a part of American folklore as "they went thataway."

But the rights of private property, once considered so basic in a largely agrarian society, imbued with the myths of *laissez-faire* and rugged individualism,

and long-term aid in the form of low-cost loans. The Kerner Commission also suggested creating financial inducements for insurance companies to issue policies in ghetto areas, which are now hard to get.

Political Slogan
"Crime in the streets" will probably lose little of its enormous impact as a political slogan. But some cities are beginning to realize that the most effective

have been steadily losing ground to the right of life and the pursuit of happiness.

The second reason for restraint is that shooting looters or arsonists endangers many innocent people in densely crowded ghettos. Many of the victims last summer were bystanders, not troublemakers.

Police Wary
Third, advocates of caution are convinced that their policy actually results in less property damage. Practically every major disturbance before this year was ignited by a confrontation between police and ghetto residents. Rough handling of crowds and indiscriminate shooting only inflame a situation that patience might cool down.

Police were particularly wary

way to handle riots is to get at their roots—decrepit housing, mass unemployment, inferior schools. "We cannot go back to business as usual in City Hall," said City Manager John L. Taylor of Kansas City. "We've got to be concerned with civil disturbances and what causes them."

—STEVEN V. ROBERTS