

What We Need to Teach

By Amitai Etzioni

MORE AND bloodier riots may be expected in American cities over the next several years. Violence and casualties will mount because the sociological dynamite is being readied and sooner or later somebody will ignite it. The so-called Great Society programs are funded at a level which suffices to kindle many aspirations but not to satisfy any. As the years pass, growing numbers of Negroes are becoming frustrated to a point of being willing to advocate, engage in, or at least tolerate violence against the community. Large-scale white counter-violence has not occurred, though the increase in counter-demonstrations and minor scuffles in lower-class neighborhoods—such as those in Chicago—suggests that it is not far away. Yet despite all this, there has been little advancement in analysis of what is to be done.

The liberal interpretation of the riots is simple: Violence is to be condemned, but one must remember Negroes have been oppressed for generations. The war on poverty is being neglected while scores of bil-

lions are being poured into the Vietnamese war. If these funds were shifted from the foreign to the domestic front, an unjust war would be ended and a just one would finally be launched.

The theory is probably valid as far as it goes. In other historical periods, when deprived groups rose and their needs were finally attended to, violence subsided (e.g., workers' riots were quite common in British cities before World War I). This theory does not go to the roots of the matter, however, because it fails to state under what conditions the community would be willing to stop spending untold billions in Vietnam and begin spending them in American slums.

It should be clear that for the welfare programs to be effective, they require much larger funding than has been attempted until now. The option of investing heavily in both the foreign and the domestic "wars," in effect, does not exist. Perhaps more important, if we accept the community's actions as reflecting its preferences, then we must recognize that it not only "pre-

fers" Vietnam over Newark but the use of police over welfare agencies.

The community, of course, is composed of groups that differ significantly in their values and interests. For our purpose here, it may be divided simply into conservatives and liberals. The first draws most heavily from the white working class, the "old" middle class, and upper-class people; the second from ethnic minorities, the "new" middle class, and some working-class people. While liberals tend to see the riots as a signal that more needs to be done for the Negro, conservatives tend to favor more police. Since early 1966, stepped-up Negro militancy has been thinning the liberal ranks and strengthening the conservatives.

The crux of the matter, therefore, is that without the support of some conservatives for a multi-billion dollar shift from the Vietnamese war to substantial welfare, this is very unlikely to take place and more riots, resort to police measures, and interracial tensions will ensue. (In the end, the shift will still have to be made—or the

bloodshed and disorder will reach a level threatening the very fabric of the society.)

How can the conservatives, and thus the community, be persuaded to endorse a change in priorities? This, it is said, is a function of political leadership, and the polls show that a majority of the American people generally support the President's actions. But it is false to assume that consequently the President is free to pursue whatever policies he favors. His support is high precisely because Presidents usually do not venture too far from what the community seems willing to accept. For example, when Hoover's policies during the Depression diverged too far from the community's position, he was not re-elected. The same holds true for governors and mayors.

It follows that political leaders will not go far enough to meet the country's present challenge without political support sufficient for the move, and ultimately for the transformation of America. This points up the need to launch a long overdue educational effort among conservatives. Many of them, for instance, still believe that most people on relief are able-bodied, lazy men. The fact that most welfare recipients actually are children, mothers and persons unable to work comes as a surprise to them, as does its implications. Information of this kind must be brought into the conservatives' homes.

In a report on the preliminary findings of a survey of racial attitudes in six Northern cities, Brandeis University's Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence observes: ". . . the attitude of whites seems to be based on ignorance of or indifference to the factual basis of Negro resentment and bitterness. Whites have simply not known, or have not fully realized, how much bitterness and frustration exists in the ghetto. . . ."

And the report, which was released two months ago, concludes:

"If white populations generally had a fuller appreciation of the just grievances and overwhelming problems of Negroes in the ghetto, they would give stronger support to their city governments to promote change and to correct the circumstances which give rise to the strong feelings of resentment now characteristic of ghetto populations."

Washington cannot be expected to lead such a campaign. When a particular endeavor has even an indirect political aim, as an educational program to accept societal change clearly has, direct Federal involvement becomes abhorrent to the majority of United States legislators and citizens. Moreover, a government which lacks the political base to set up a substantial welfare program could hardly launch the requisite educational program, since that would require the same political base.

THE WAY out of this situation, I think, can be provided by the foundations. Indeed, the private foundations should see in the education of conservatives a natural mission. Instead of trying to finance one more small-scale welfare program—and substituting for or supplementing national, state and local efforts—they ought to concentrate their resources in this area where the government scarcely dares to tread. Their intermediate position between the universities (containing the outspoken supporters as well as experts on welfare liberalism) and the business community (containing a fair share of the conservative leadership) makes the foundations particularly suitable agents for the campaign. Although few Goldwaterites are likely to be swayed, if a meaningful segment of the moderate conservatives can be brought to recognize the importance of a substantial Federal involvement in the transformation of the cities, the political base for the change could develop.

The substance of the message to

be conveyed must include not only the need for correcting injustice to Negro Americans, renovating the cities where most Americans live, and preventing more riots; it must also make clear to those opposing change that *they* are most likely to be among the first beneficiaries of it. "Old" middle-class shopowners and other small businessmen stand to gain from a rise in the income of lower-class Negroes and other members of the poor. Lower-class whites are the ones who will share with Negro Americans the advantages of any massive welfare program, whether it is guaranteed annual income or improvement in the quality of public education.

The conservative press, radio and television stations (especially programs carried locally) argue daily against the liberal welfare conception. Without a major counter-campaign it is difficult to see where the support for a fundamental change will come. Whatever the likely success of mobilizing other groups (the urban poor, farm hands) and employing other means (say, confrontation, which the Left favors), the understanding of conservatives is necessary to insure a broad, democratic political base.

Finally, the notion that the Negro militants must also be exposed to an "education" is not without reason. But just as now there is a vicious circle that leads to greater polarization—with militant Negroes activating conservative opposition (while alienating liberals) and reducing the political base for social reforms, which in turn, increases Negro militancy—so, once the white community becomes more change-minded, Negro frustration and militancy will subside (although not their demands for reform). One may argue that the Negro militants must make the first concession, but they could prove harder to deal with than most conservatives—and after all, it is their people who have been forced to make concessions for over 100 years.