

Thirty-five years later, Jews join in recalling a time of turmoil for Detroiters.

were almost a model of housing integration," he said. "I used to take out-of-town visitors through these neighborhoods to show them what I thought was possible in terms of racial harmony. Unfortunately, this turned out to be an illusion."

A published poet, Tell wrote about his experience: *With the daylight, when the fever and the fire both had cooled when the whirlybirds were hangared and the tanks again garaged some looked around with shame at what they'd wrought upon their own while others, without bluster or apology, hugged their grateful patients and went home.*

[Read the full poem online at www.detroitjewishnews.com]

Such was Tell's introduction to the Detroit riots, which started at 3 a.m. on July 23, 1967, when police raided a blind pig (an illegal after-hours bar) in a building on 12th Street and Clairmount — once the temporary home of Congregation Shaarey Zedek in the 1930s. A mob filled the street, a fire started, police arrived in too few numbers and the riots were on.

Setting For Disaster

Economic conditions, racism and police brutality are some reasons given for the tumult.

Detroit City Council President Marianne Mahaffey, then a social worker and teacher at Wayne State University, said racism and police brutality were major causes of the riots.

Mahaffey recalled a high-powered meeting with state Sen. Coleman Young, the future Detroit mayor. He ticked off the reasons for the riots: racism, high unemployment, housing restrictions, expensive and inadequate housing and mistreatment by an all-white police force.

Sidney Bolkosky, an author and history professor at

the University of Michigan-Dearborn, said he thought a root cause of the event was disappointed expectations.

Congress passed civil-rights legislation in 1964 and, with the election of Mayor Jerome Cavanagh, a Democrat and Kennedy-esque, pro-civil rights liberal, "there were all kinds of hopes the situation would change in Detroit," Bolkosky said. "But it was too soon for anything to realistically happen."

Bolkosky believes the riots should have come as no surprise, given events in other cities at that time. Inner-city unrest began in Rochester, N.Y., in 1964, followed in 1965 in Los Angeles' Watts district and in 1967 in Newark, N.J. By 1967, he said, you had to be nearly oblivious not to see the imposed segregation and the discrimination that were rampant in Detroit.

Bolkosky agrees that discriminatory police action added fuel to the fire. "The mayor was on his way to changing that, but not soon enough," he said.

Some Detroiters were feeling desperate. "The people were fed up with the shooting and killing of blacks by the police, who were able to walk away from

it [without being brought to justice]. The police were like an occupying army," said David Hamilton, 60, of Detroit, an African American businessman.

"Coupled with the heat, and the specific circumstances of that one night — the crowd, the behavior of the police — it all came together and exploded," Bolkosky said. "[The police] had no idea what they were walking into when they raided that blind pig."

According to the Rev. Nicholas Hood Jr., 79, a Detroit City Council member from 1965-1993, the riots were economic based. The looting was not black versus white, he said. Black businesses also were hurt.

Hamilton had one of them, losing his hair salon at 12th and Euclid streets to the riots.

Remembering the old neighborhood, "everybody knew everybody, from [Grand] Boulevard to Clairmount," Hamilton said. "We still had Jews in



Marianne Mahaffey



Viola Palmer

African American Viola Palmer, 61, of Ann Arbor was a 26-year-old single mother working as a bank teller when the riots disrupted her life.

"I was cooped up in my apartment near Dexter for three days with my baby. We couldn't get out," she said. "I was too frightened to go out."

She remembers looking out the window and seeing the National Guard stationed in a big red brick building on the corner.

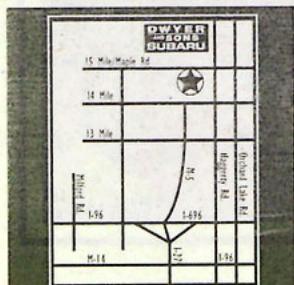
"I saw them ducking behind cars with rifles cocked, and realized this is really serious," she said.

"It changed my whole perception of the city. It became more segregated and, for me, I understood I needed to have some direction in my life. I had to get back in school," she said. "It made you look at life and how you were going to live it."

Palmer became a teacher and eventually head of the English Department at Cass Technical High School in Detroit. She sent her daughter to Catholic school.

"I felt abandoned by the Jewish community in the following years and into the 1970s," she said. "The neighborhood emptied and moved."

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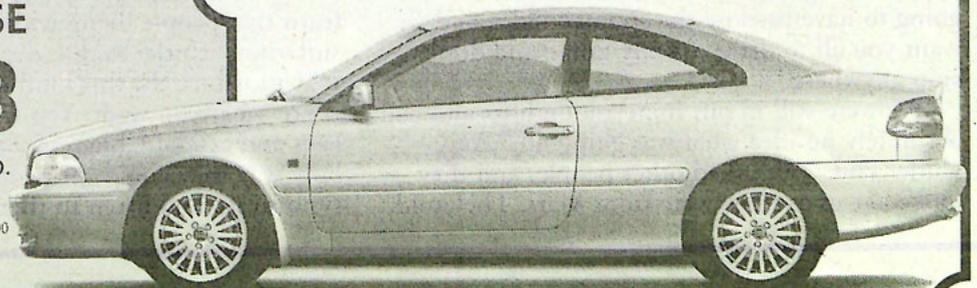
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