

Celebration, Politics, Selective Looting and Riots: A Micro Level Study of the Bulls Riot of 1992 in Chicago*

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In the aftermath of the Bulls riot of 1992, which started as a celebration of a basketball victory but turned into a night of looting and rioting in Chicago's black ghettos, local and national newspapers asked: was it just a celebration? Was it an expression of pent-up anger and frustration? Had Korean and Arab merchants been targeted? The sociological literature on riots contains a great deal of analysis of city level data, but few micro level studies that analyze who are the victims and perpetrators of the violence and destruction associated with riots. I argue in this paper that the Bulls riot of 1992 was political as well as celebratory, responding in part to massive welfare cuts in Illinois and to the televised drama of the Los Angeles riot of 1992. A store by store analysis of ghetto merchants reveals that despite the political undertones, the extensive nature of the riot, and a history of organized boycotts against Korean stores, there was no targeting of merchants based on race or ethnicity. Some implications for the political and racial nature of riots are discussed.

On Wednesday afternoon, April 29 1992, five Los Angeles police officers were acquitted for beating black motorist Rodney King. The riots that followed in Los Angeles were, by some measures, the most severe in the nation's history. Anger over the acquittals sparked demonstrations, protests, and in some cases riots and curfews in other cities. On Friday, May 1, Korean shopkeepers in Chicago's black ghettos closed their stores early, because rumors were circulating that there could be looting, and that they would be the targets. Korean shopkeepers in the ghetto reported being told by residents that 'they'd be back,' and that 'everything in here should be free now,' but the weekend passed uneventfully (Copeland and Johnson 1992). When Chicago passed through the tense period of the Rodney King affair without any serious disturbances of the peace, Chicago's elites took to self-congratulation. Newspaper editorials and news analysis asserted that the lack of public demonstrations was evidence that police brutality and social injustice were less of a problem in Chicago than in other large American cities (Kass 1992a).

Earlier in April, the largest welfare cut in Illinois history went into effect. Sixty thousand unemployed male Chicagoans lost benefits from a program called Transitional Assistance, which had paid unemployed males up to \$165 per month plus Medicaid health benefits. These cuts had been enacted in the state legislative session in 1991, against the angry opposition of a chorus of Chicago black leaders who threatened that a 'welfare riot' could ensue if the cuts went into effect (Kass 1992b), and the mayor of Chicago declared that he was 'bracing for a crisis' (Davis 1992). When the cuts did go into effect on April 1, Chicago's leading black newspaper displayed righteous indignation on page one (Strausberg 1992), while Chicago's mainstream white newspapers buried the story in the back of their local sections.

On Sunday night, June 14, 1992, against the backdrop of the L.A. riots and the welfare

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cuts, the Chicago Bulls basketball team won the National Basketball Association championship for the second year in a row. Celebrations began all over the city as people took to the streets. The most recognized single incident (because of live television coverage) was the drunken celebration at a strip of downtown bars on Division street, where mostly white revelers overturned two taxicabs and broke one store window: it looked like a melee on television, but the damage was reassuringly minor. Outside the downtown area, in the South Side and West Side black ghettos of Chicago, however, the night took a different turn: hundreds of stores were looted, more than 1,000 people arrested, and 90 police officers injured. Of the 347 stores looted citywide that night, 291 were in the heart of the South and West Side ghettos, and the rest were scattered across the city. Data from court records show that 98 percent of those arrested for felony looting that night were black,¹ despite the fact that the entire city was celebrating, and heavy police deployments were in downtown areas where the celebrants were mostly non-black. The number of arrestees and extent of property damage easily place the Bulls riot of 1992 into Spilerman's (1976) category of most severe riots, although the apolitical nature of the precipitating incident (a basketball game) naturally raises questions about whether the Bulls riots are comparable to riots whose precipitating event is more clearly political or provocative.

Stationed at intersections in the South and West Sides, the Chicago police reported facing barrages of bricks and bottles. At one South Side store, after a worker drove off looters with a gun, the looters returned and burned the store to the ground. A few other stores were burned, and the looting went on for hours, but by the early morning hours of Monday the 15th, the streets were calm and quiet. Chicago's newspapers and media in general were unprepared for the extent of the looting that took place in the ghetto during the 1992 Bulls riots. The Bulls had won the championship the previous year, and that victory had been celebrated citywide with no additional police deployments and only scattered looting.

The commodity riot (Janowitz 1968) was and is an important staple in the repertoire of contention of Chicago's ghetto residents (this repertoire is not exclusive to Chicago, of course). Janowitz distinguishes the commodity riot, wherein people take to the streets and confront the police and storekeepers, looting, burning, then retreating, from the communal riot² wherein groups of citizens confront each other at the borders of their neighborhoods. The notion of a repertoire of contention suggests that people in different historical circumstances are familiar with different kinds of rituals of collective action. The seventeenth-century French had the charivari; eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French and English peasants had the food riot; American colonists in the eighteenth-century were familiar with tarring and feathering, mock trials and boycotts; nineteenth-century Parisians knew how to put up barricades. Ghetto residents in American cities post-1965 know about commodity riots. To say that the commodity riot is part of the repertoire of contestation means that it is ritualized, that everyone involved has seen or heard about such events. The repertoire of contestation represents the forms into which different kinds of demands, grievances, and celebrations are poured; it is as much a set of constraints as it is a range of possibilities. Note that rioting, as a regular and ritualized activity, is not a recent phenomenon in American cities: in cities in the American North, in the early and mid-nineteenth-century, rioting was as much a part of civilian life as voting or working and in those cases, in general, all the rioters were white (Ignatiev 1995).

Because people are largely constrained to work within the repertoires of contention they know, these repertoires have to be malleable to different needs. The Bulls riot, involved much

1. The Chicago Police Department's annual report for 1992, 69 percent of Chicago's 7,446 arrested burglars in that year were black, so blacks were a much higher percentage (98) of looters in the Bulls riots than in the general burglary statistics (looting is a form of burglary in the Illinois penal code).

2. St. Louis in 1917 and Chicago in 1919 are examples of communal riots. Hirsch (1983) describes a series of 1950s communal riots in Chicago in which white neighborhoods rioted against black families that were trying to move into the area. The great majority of riots in American cities after 1964 have been commodity riots, including: Watts, most riots of 1967 and 1968, Miami in 1980, L.A. in 1992, and so on.

pure and apolitical celebration, but also shows of force in the streets, confrontations with the police, scores being settled, and much looting and destruction. It was rebellious (and hence political, or at least pre-political [Hobsbawm 1963]) as well as celebratory. McPhail (1994) distinguishes between ‘celebration riots’, and ‘protest riots’ among other types, although he notes that these categories may not always be clear. Indeed, categorizing riots without any micro level data to rely on is a risky endeavor. The Bulls won five championships between 1991 and 1997, with ostensibly identical precipitating incidents in each case, yet the destructiveness of the various disturbances varied by more than an order of magnitude.

It is important not to overstate the importance of the precipitating incident when studying ghetto riots because the political grievances of black ghetto residents have roots that are more than one day old. As the Kerner Commission noted, riots spring from a long-standing reservoir of grievances (National Advisory Commission 1968). The Watts and Detroit riots were precipitated by incidents that were, in themselves, quite unexceptional. The L.A. riots of 1992 were precipitated by the acquittal of the policemen who beat Rodney King, but as Jacobs (1996) notes, the L.A.P.D. had lost or settled more than 300 police brutality lawsuits in the previous five years alone. While both the white media and the black media expressed outrage over the videotape of the beating of Rodney King and the acquittal of the officers, the white media viewed the events as an ugly aberration, while the black media viewed the events as part of a long-standing, intolerable tradition.

News stories in Chicago’s leading newspapers, the *Sun-Times* and the *Tribune*, contained considerable speculation about whether the 1992 Bulls riot was a manifestation of ethnic conflict between Blacks and Koreans. The leading black newspaper, the *Defender*, decried what they saw as racially targeted looting (*Defender* 1992). The *New York Times* judged the 1992 Bulls riot was a release of ‘pent up anger’ (Terry 1992), while the editorial boards of the *Sun-Times* and the *Tribune* declared that nothing political or racial had taken place, and that the riot was just a celebration (*Chicago Sun-Times* 1992; *Chicago Tribune* 1992). The news media, in other words, offered every possible permutation of political and racial explanations.

Although the Bulls riot of 1992 was influenced, at least in scope, by political forces and grievances, the looters in the Bulls riots did *not* target stores owned by the main outsider ethnic groups, Koreans and Arab-Americans. My empirical analysis, which uses store level data for all the stores in the areas of significant looting, shows that the looters selectively targeted one particular kind of store, those that sell food and liquor, without regard for the ethnicity of the store owner.

Riots and Selective Looting

The issue of selective or ethnically targeted looting pervades an extensive literature on riots, but previous treatments have generally lacked the requisite data on the ownership and type of stores (both looted and non-looted) throughout the riot areas needed to confirm that patterns of damage and destruction are due to residents’ and looters’ targeting of certain ethnic groups. The lack of empirical evidence has not deterred speculation in the literature, however, because riots represent an opportunity to draw inferences about the real nature of poor peoples’ grievances based on concrete actions. This general interest has been enhanced by the influence of the new social history, which has sought specifically to promote the crowd or the mob as an expression of poor people’s grievances, and as a factor in historical change (Hobsbawm 1963; Thompson 1971; Rudé 1964; Piven and Cloward 1993).

Greenberg (1992), for instance, describes the Harlem riot of 1935 as targeting only those white-owned stores that had been targets of an earlier, failed boycott (to attempt to force store owners to hire blacks), but offers no hard data to back up her claims. Allport (1954), in contrast, summarized the Harlem riots as non-racial pandemonium, but he also offers no data to support his claims.

Describing the Miami riot of 1980, which was precipitated by a series of incidents remarkably similar to L.A.'s crisis of 1992,³ Portes and Stepick write: "All kinds of businesses were hit, including manufacturing plants where no consumer goods were to be found. White-, Cuban-, and black-owned businesses were torched indiscriminately" (1993:48). Their analysis may well be right, but they offer no supporting evidence. Rainwater (1967) claims that black-owned stores were largely spared in the Detroit riot of 1967, based solely on the "Soul-Brother" signs in the windows of stores that were undamaged while all the stores around were looted or burned. On the other hand, he notes that one cannot count the "Soul Brother" signs in stores that have been burned or vandalized, and furthermore one ought not to expect the ghetto residents to be without hostility for "the more prosperous and respectable Negroes" who own stores in the ghetto (30). (Drake and Cayton [1993] also note the ambivalence of black consumers toward black ghetto businesses.)

Tierney (1994) presents a breakdown (by ethnicity of store owner and by type of store) of the stores damaged in the 1992 Los Angeles riot, and she concludes that Korean businesses were selectively targeted, and this targeting represented a collective action on the part of the black residents of South Central Los Angeles. The problem is that Tierney cannot truly address the question of selectivity (as she acknowledges) because she does not have equivalent data on the stores that were *not* damaged.

Regarding the riots of the summer of 1967, the Kerner Commission wrote: 'White owned businesses are widely believed to have been damaged much more frequently than those owned by Negroes' (National Advisory Commission, 1968:116). Berk and Aldrich (1972), whose imaginative and provocative empirical study was based on two separate surveys of store owners in different cities in 1966 and 1968, were more equivocal; their results showed that white owned stores were only slightly more likely to be looted than other stores, controlling for other store attributes.⁴ Quarantelli and Dynes (1970) argued, based on illustrative examples, that ghetto looters were indeed highly selective, but that this selective action was directed against merchants based on their store policies and attitudes towards blacks, rather than their race. Berk and Aldrich operationalized store owner attitudes and policies a number of different ways, and did not find a consistent pattern of selective looting based on these variables.

The classic empirical studies of riots in the U.S. by Lieberman and Silverman (1965), and Spilerman (1970, 1971, 1976) use the city as the unit of analysis, rather than micro level data on individual targets or individual rioters. These studies attempt to find which city-level characteristics predict whether a city would have a riot. While these city-level analyses have made important contributions to our knowledge of riots, their lack of micro-level data means that they cannot directly inform an investigation of target selection, which is a micro-level process.⁵

It is also important to note that the niche of ghetto merchant in American cities has undergone ecological succession. In the 1960s, most merchants were white (in Chicago, Italians and Jews were prominent), but in the 1970s these groups began to be replaced by more recent immigrants (in Chicago, mainly Arabs and Koreans). The niche of merchant in Amer-

3. The Miami riots were sparked by the acquittal of white police officers who chased and killed a black insurance agent named Arthur McDuffie. A Miami judge had moved the trial to Tampa. After three hours of deliberation, the all-white jury acquitted the four white police officers of all charges.

4. Berk and Aldrich present the results of what appears to be a series of OLS regressions, with a dichotomous response variable (looted vs. non-looted). Current practice generally calls for non-OLS techniques, such as logistic or probit regression, to analyze such data. In their OLS regression results, Berk and Aldrich found that white ownership of a store had a positive, significant effect on that store's likelihood of being looted, but the nonsignificant zero order correlation between store owner race and looting made them doubt whether a race effect really existed.

5. Other classics from an earlier generation of riot studies include the work of Sears and his colleagues (Sears and Tomlinson 1968; Sears and McConohay 1973), based on interviews with participants and observers of the 1965 riot in Watts, Los Angeles. These pathbreaking studies established that those who participated in the Watts riot were a fairly representative sample of neighborhood residents, as opposed to just the 'riffraff.' While Sears and his colleagues were concerned with the political goals and targets of the rioters, they did not study the rioters' physical targets, so these studies also cannot directly inform an inquiry into riot target selection.

ica's inner cities is usually occupied by first-generation immigrants whose children, primarily due to greater aspirations, are unwilling to inherit the business (Abelmann and Lie 1995; Bonacich and Modell 1980; Jo 1992). This merchant niche undergoes ecological succession as new waves of immigrants arrive. While many authors assumed that ghetto rioters, driven by the political grievances of the 1960s, would see white merchants as symbols of the (unjust) white power structure (despite the fact that the only empirical study, Berk and Aldrich, found only marginal evidence of this), this assumption may be less tenable now that the merchants themselves are non-white.

Selective Looting and Ethnic Conflict

The connection between selective looting and ethnic conflict is fairly straightforward. If rioters target stores owned by particular outsider ethnic groups, net of other factors, then a riot must be considered a case of ethnic conflict between the two groups. This follows from Olzak and Shanahan's careful, narrow definition of ethnic conflict involving: "an attack on group members . . . based solely on the ethnic or racial identity of the group" (1996:933). On the other hand, if rioters loot stores without regard to the ethnicity of the store owner, the riot ought not to be considered a case of ethnic conflict. The mere fact that one side of the conflict is mostly one ethnic group, and the other side is mostly another does not mean that there is anything inherently *ethnic* about the conflict and it would be illogical to identify it as an ethnic conflict.

Olzak and Shanahan (1996) claim that *all* 204 riots in their sample (which covers most of the sizable riots in the U.S. from 1954 to 1993) are, in fact, race riots—riots in which black residents target other groups based solely on their ethnicity. However, this conclusion is questionable, because they use a city level data set expanded from Spilerman's (1970, 1971, 1976) work, rather than micro data. They infer or assume that blacks selectively target other ethnic groups during riots.

The relationship of ethnicity to social structure and class categories which offer other bases for conflict between ghetto merchants and ghetto residents (the exchange of goods for money, the extension of credit, the extraction of profit from economically marginal communities, etc.) is far from theoretically resolved (Comaroff 1987; Wilson 1981; Wallerstein 1979). Comaroff argues that ethnicity is socially constructed from historically situated class and power relations, but becomes a real and independent force that influences the very social factors that created it. This argument is circular not in its logic but in its implication for how ethnicity and structure interrelate; more to the point, it helps clarify why structural and ethnic factors are so hard to disentangle, both theoretically and empirically. The broad theoretical issues of ethnicity versus class as competing explanations are relevant here because the micro level analysis of looting behavior provides one, albeit imperfect, way to study which dimensions of conflict or tension are most salient to actors who made concrete choices by picking one target over another.

The Bulls Riots

From 1991 to 1997, the Chicago Bulls won five NBA championships, each was followed by one night of celebration in the streets of Chicago (June 12, 1991; June 14, 1992; June 20, 1993; June 16, 1996; June 13, 1997). Some of these celebrations turned into citywide riots, but others did not. By far the most rioting occurred in 1992; subsequent years saw a steady, precipitous decline in felony arrests from 329 in 1992, to 173 the next year, and then declining still further to a mere 12 felony arrests in 1997 (see Table 1).

Table 1 • Summary Police Statistics for the Five Bulls Riots

Year	Arrests		Stores Damaged	Number of CPD Officers Deployed Night of Championship	Number of People at Official Downtown Post-Victory Rally
	Total	Felony			
1991	115	NA	NA	1200	500,000
1992	1060	329	347	2300	40,000
1993	682	173	177	5000	150,000
1996	650	36	NA	6000	250,000
1997	NA	12	38	6000	225,000

Source: Newspaper reports of CPD Data, and CPD summaries from FOI #93-905. Sources include *Chicago Sun-Times*, 1992 (June 16):14, 1996 (June 18):4, 1997a (June 15):2, 1997b (June 17):2; *Chicago Tribune*, 1991 (June 15)I:22, 1992 (June 17)I:1;II:1, 1993a (June 22)II:1, 1993b (June 23)I:1, 1996 (June 19)I:1.

Quite apart from the rioting and looting, the intensity of each championship celebration can be roughly gauged by the number of people who attended the official rally in Chicago’s Grant Park a few days after the victory, where the program was the same each year.⁶ As Table 1 shows, the years of greatest celebration were not the years of the most rioting and looting; on the contrary, 1992 had by far the largest riot and the smallest celebration. The first basketball championship in 1991 was certainly the one most celebrated (the first time is always the most memorable); 1996 was probably the second-most celebrated season because Michael Jordan came out of retirement to lead the Bulls to a league record 72-win regular season. (Jordan, the Bulls’ most recognizable star, retired from basketball after the 1993 championship and returned to the game late in the 1994–95 season.) Yet the two most celebrated victories, 1991 and 1996, inspired negligible levels of rioting and looting. This implies that the intensity of the Bulls riots had little or nothing to do with basketball-related jubilation.

The long-term social indicators and the precipitating events of the five Bulls riots are as similar as can be (even the weather was the same⁷), providing something close to a naturally occurring experiment. In this case, we seek to explain or understand why the 1992 Bulls riot was roughly twice as intense (in terms of stores looted and people arrested—See Table 1) as the 1993 Bulls riot, and many times more intense than the disturbances that followed the other Bulls championships. Clearly, the difference cannot be explained in terms of differences in poverty rates, number of black policemen, black political representation, housing density, or any other social indicator.

The absence or presence of special CPD deployments does not correlate well with the extent of the rioting. For the first Bulls championship, the CPD made no special arrangements and had only their ordinary complement of about 1,200 officers on duty. In 1992, the CPD was prepared for trouble and had 2,300 uniformed officers deployed, including teams of officers and vehicles in potential trouble spots throughout the city. After the extensive damage that occurred in 1992, the CPD prepared for 1993 with 5,000 uniformed officers, more than

6. The Grant Park rallies consisted of a few musical numbers, short speeches from Michael Jordan and other star players, and a chance for the crowd to boo the mayor and the team owners. The crowd estimates are those given in the newspapers. Crowd size estimates are always part guesswork, but all observers seem to have agreed that the first rally (1991) was the largest, and the second (1992) the smallest.

7. According to newspaper weather reports, the Bulls riots 1991 and 1992 took place in typical early summer Chicago weather: temperatures high in the 80s, low in the 50s, with no precipitation. On the day of the Bulls riot of 1993 there was some precipitation in the morning, but skies were clear in the evening when the riot took place, and temperatures were once again between a high in the 80s and a low of 60 degrees. On the day of the 1996 Bulls riot, the weather was once again sunny with high temperatures in the 80s and lows in the 60s. The conditions in 1997 were just a bit cooler: high of 77, low of 55 with clear skies.

four times the usual force, and these levels were increased to about 6,000 for 1996 and 1997. Despite the lack of special riot suppression efforts by the CPD, the 1991 championship was a relatively quiet affair. Despite the presence of an extra 1,000 officers in 1992, there was rampant rioting and looting in the ghettos.

My argument is that the Bulls riot of 1992 was partly a response to long-standing political grievances. There were many celebrating fans, of course, but the looting, destruction, and rioting of 1992 were not part of the normal pattern of celebration. The videotaped beating of Rodney King, and the live television coverage of the subsequent riot led to outbreaks of discontent across the U.S.: “In San Francisco, a curfew was declared for the first time since the 1906 earthquake; in Las Vegas, uprisings occurred four weekends in a row; in Seattle, Atlanta and other cities around the country [there were disturbances]” (Abelmann and Lie 1995:2). The unprecedented videotaping of Rodney King’s beating, and the acquittal of the policemen who seemed to have been caught red-handed, offered incontrovertible evidence for age-old black grievances about the unreliability of justice in the U.S., grievances that are as relevant to Chicago as Los Angeles (cf. Ogletree et al. 1995). Not only did the officers’ acquittal in L.A. add to levels of grievance and anger among blacks across the U.S., but the live television coverage of the L.A. riots must have demonstrated the importance and power of the commodity riot as a piece of ghetto residents’ repertoire of contention. These lessons obviously were not lost on the Bulls rioters. Even the lenient sentence of an L.A. Korean shopkeeper, handed down a few days after the L.A. riot—a relatively minor part of the L.A. saga—seems to have caused a ripple in Chicago: two Korean stores in Chicago were firebombed two days later.

Newspaper Coverage of the Bulls Riot of 1992

The editorials of the *Sun-Times* and the *Tribune* attributed the looting in 1992 purely to fans’ (apolitical) jubilation (*Chicago Sun-Times* 1992; *Chicago Tribune* 1992). However, this theory fails to explain why the damage in 1991 was comparatively small. One reason the editorial boards were so sure that the Bulls riots were just a case of rowdy fans was that they failed to cover the extent of the looting and damage in the ghetto. A comparison of Figures 1 and 2 shows that the newspapers considerably underestimated the extent of the 1992 Bulls riot. In part, the limited 1992 coverage reflects the relatively minor 1991 damage; the newspapers were not prepared for anything different. A full treatment of how local elites view or frame events, such as riots, that may damage the locale’s reputation or sense of order is beyond the scope of this work, but clearly local elites may not always be the most reliable judges of the level of discontent among the more disadvantaged local citizens.

The Kerner Commission noted that out-of-town reporters were “likely to be less sensitive about preserving the ‘image’ of the local community” (National Advisory Commission 1968: 380). Olzak and Shanahan (1996) note that the national press, in particular the *New York Times*, may be a more reliable source on riots than the local press. The *Times*’ coverage of the 1992 Bulls riot was a far cry from the editorial position of the main Chicago newspapers, and much closer to my view that the Bulls rioters were responding, in part, to a reservoir of political, economic, and racial grievances. The *Times*’ headline was: “Basketball Title Brings Chicago Night of Looting: Victory Seen as Chance to Vent Pent-up Anger” (Terry 1992). Yet the *Times* had only one story on the Bulls riot of 1992 (and hardly any mention of the disturbances in the other years), and this one article had no hard data about the extent of the riot.

Reading all the local and national newspaper coverage of the 1992 Bulls riot, what emerges is a highly contradictory, mostly misleading picture. The initial coverage of the 1992 Bulls riot in the *Sun-Times* and *Tribune* was strikingly incomplete, as the maps demonstrate. Two weeks after the riot, the *Sun-Times* had a small story which noted that more than 300 stores had been looted in the riot (O’Connor 1992). The 1993 Bulls riot, which was smaller than 1992 but still large enough to exceed the criteria for Spilerman’s (1976) category for the

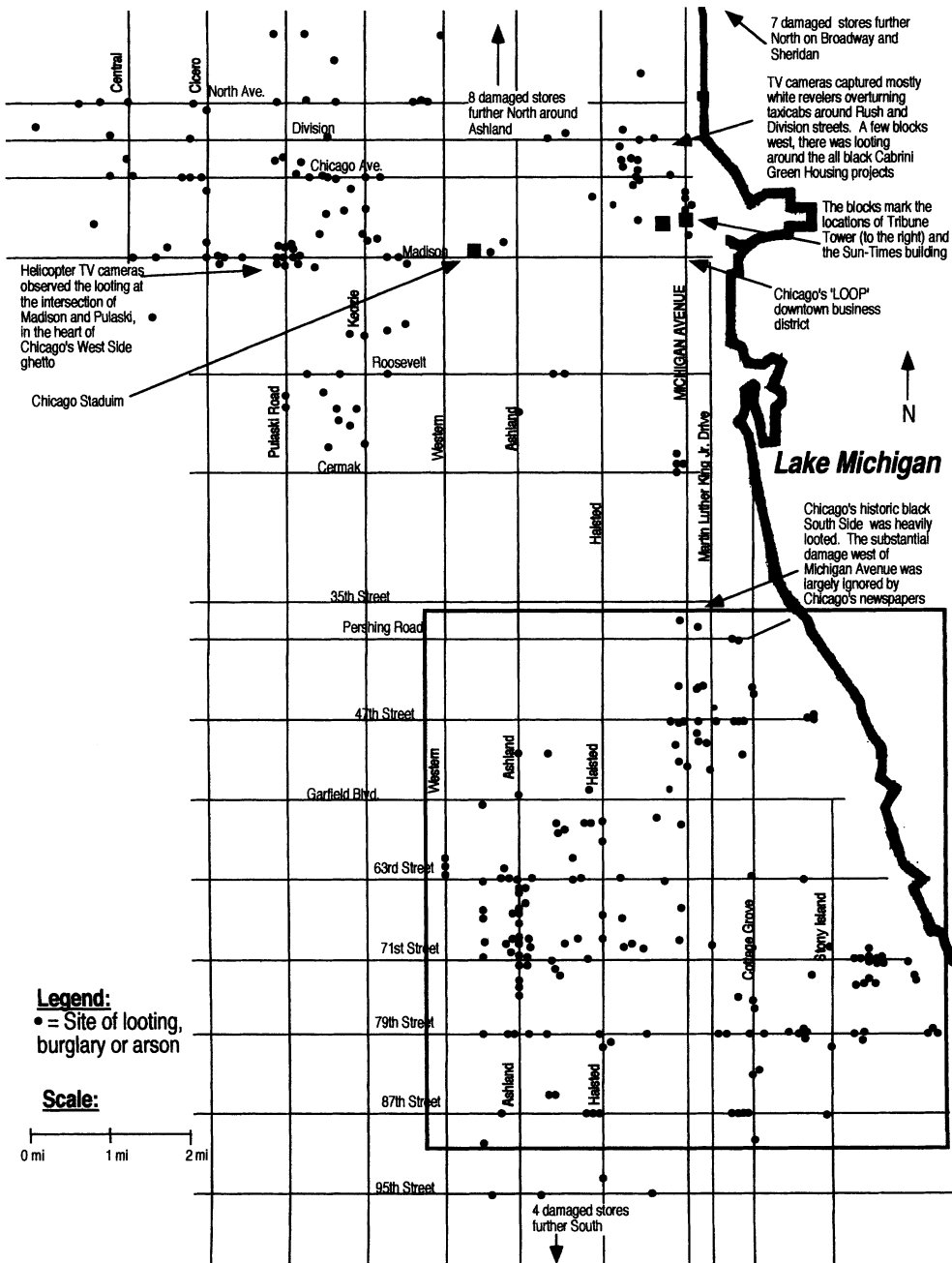


Figure 1 • Chicago on the night of the Chicago Bulls basketball championship, June 14, 1992. Source: Chicago Police Department data, obtained through Chicago's Freedom of Information Act.

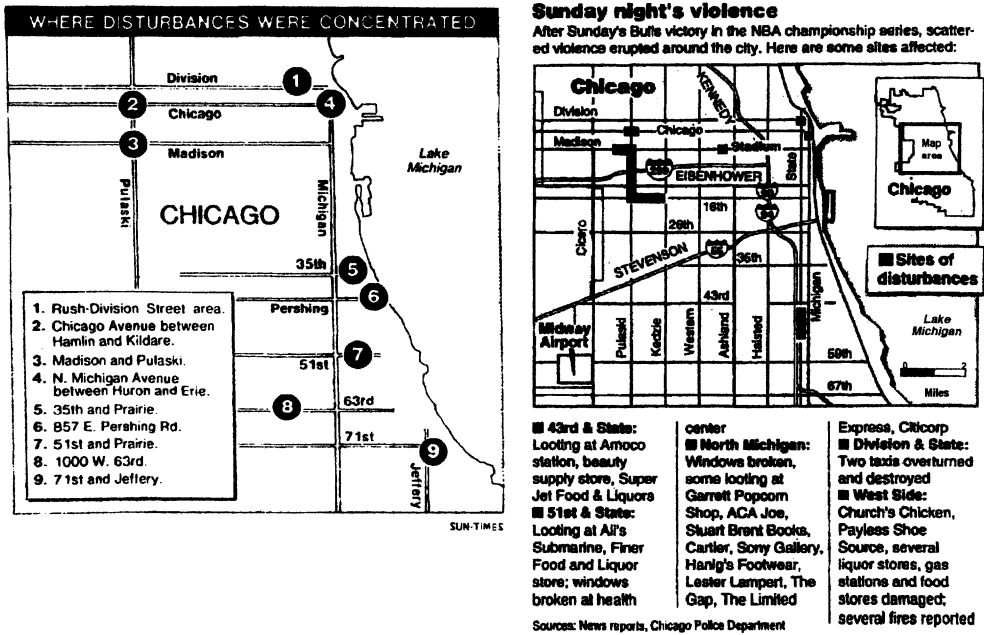


Figure 2 • Chicago Sun-Times (left) and Chicago Tribune maps of looting from the 1992 Bulls Riot. Reprinted with Permission. Compare to Figure 1.

most severe riots, went virtually unreported outside Chicago and was barely mentioned by the Chicago papers. Hirsch's (1983) rich history of housing segregation in Chicago also describes a series of dramatic riots in which white communities attacked black families that tried to integrate their neighborhoods; these riots were intentionally ignored by the *Tribune* and the rest of the white media. This suggests that newspaper reports for all but the largest, most infamous (and hence thoroughly reported) riots ought to be viewed with a critical eye. Riots are complex, heterogeneous events, and inferences about the political and racial nature of riots require careful study of micro-level data; newspapers alone do not suffice.

Data and Methods

I address the question of target selection during the 1992 Bulls riot, with data from seven sources: (a) CPD reports on the Bulls riots (1992 in particular), which includes addresses of 347 looted or damaged stores; (b) a special report generated by the Illinois Department of Employment Security which lists the number of businesses by type by ZIP code for 1992; (c) a moderately well-maintained list of all Arab-owned stores in Chicago assembled by a group of Arab-American merchants; (d) a summary by Arab merchants of their stores that were damaged in the 1992 Bulls riots; (e) a similar summary of 1992 Bulls damage prepared by Korean merchants; (f) a well-maintained list of Korean merchants in Chicago provided by the Korean American Community Service; and (g) a phone survey of all of the stores damaged in the 1992 Bulls riots whose owners' ethnicities could not be determined from the other lists.

The multiplicity of sources, some of which overlap, allows for considerable confidence because there are checks for internal consistency. The data set distinguishes between three

ethnic classifications for merchants: 1) Arabs, 2) Koreans, and 3) others (including blacks). The first two groups represent the main non-black merchant groups in the ghetto, while the third group is dominated by black merchants. One weakness in this retail store data set is the lack of information on black businesses, which forces me to aggregate black and white owners. This is not a serious problem because most white store owners sold their businesses and abandoned the Chicago ghettos in the late 1960s. According to Yoon (1991), the ecological succession of Korean merchants replacing white merchants started in the early 1970s, when the Koreans came into the ghetto to sell wigs (cf. Abelmann and Lie 1995; Bonacich and Modell 1980; and Jo 1992).⁸ Korean and Arab merchants bought their ghetto stores in this period from two earlier groups of white middleman merchants, the Italians and the Jews (Blackstone 1981; Yoon 1991).

RESULTS

Table 2 presents the full typology of all 1,767 stores located in the 12 ZIP code area of heavy looting in the 1992 Bulls riot, by owner ethnicity and by type of store.⁹ The associated looting rate for each type of store is obtained by dividing the number of looted stores into the total number of stores of the same type. Thus, for example, we note that 13 percent of the 1,767 stores in the sample area were looted or damaged in the Bulls riot of 1992. The last column contains the total for each ethnic group, aggregating all store types together. Arab-owned stores were looted at a 25 percent rate, almost twice the overall rate. It seems obvious at first that Arabs and Koreans were selectively targeted; a full 25 percent of all Arab stores were looted, as against 15 percent for Korean stores, and nine percent for stores owned by blacks and others. This, however, would be a highly misleading and superficial inference. Different ethnic groups tend to own different kinds of businesses in the ghetto; these have different appeal for looters. Blacks, for instance, own the majority of ghetto restaurants in Chicago. These range from small soul food establishments, to black-owned franchises of national restaurant chains. Restaurants are a poor target for looters, especially when closed (as most would have been during the Bulls riots, which took place late on a Sunday night). Arabs, on the other hand, own the bulk of the ghetto grocery and liquor stores; these stores have shelves full of goods that residents can use and probably need. The point is that store owner ethnicity covaries with other class and structural factors such as type of business and position in the ghetto economy (although the correlation between ethnicity and type of store is not so great

8. The demand for wigs in the black ghettos had been outstripping the supply, and it turned out that imported Korean hair was just what blacks wanted in their wigs: dark, thick, straight hair. In 1967, a Japanese manufacturer patented a process for making synthetic hair, and Korean companies bought the production rights and started shipping synthetic wigs to the U.S., for sale in black neighborhoods. Yoon (1991) reports that many successful Korean businessmen first made their fortune in the wig trade. When the demand for wigs began to shrink, Korean merchants shifted to clothes, jewelry, and general merchandise, much of it also imported directly from Korea.

9. The geographic area used in Table 2 and Table 3 includes the 12 Chicago ZIP codes (listed at the bottom of Table 2) which experienced the heaviest looting (10 or more incidents) during the 1992 Bulls riot. One of these ZIP codes (60610) includes part of Chicago's wealthy Gold Coast as well as the impoverished Cabrini Green housing projects. The other 11 ZIP codes define areas that are either entirely part of Chicago's black ghettos, or very nearly so. I also analyzed the data using all the ZIP codes in Chicago, weighting the data from each ZIP code by the ZIP code looting rate; this analysis again yielded no selection effect against Arab and Korean shopkeepers. See footnote 12 below for a brief discussion of the empirical analysis with and without ZIP code 60610.

It is reasonable to ask whether the ZIP code is too large a geographical unit to be appropriate for this analysis. The dependent variable in the logistic regression is the likelihood that an individual store will be looted, but the geographic boundaries of the entire sample follows ZIP code boundaries. Because the choice of which store (if any) to loot is probably made on a smaller scale than the ZIP code, a nonhomogeneous distribution of stores within each ZIP code may cause the analysis to miss some important details. ZIP code was chosen as the geographical boundary for a practical reason: it is the smallest unit for which precise annual store data (via the Illinois Department of Employment Security) are available.

Table 2 • Looting in the 1992 Bulls Riot: Total Number of Stores, Number of Looted Stores, and Resulting Looting Incidence Rate by Ethnicity of Store Owner and Type of Store

Ethnicity of Store Owner	Type of Retail Store by Standard Industrial Classification															
	Food and Liquor Stores SIC: 54 + 592		Auto Dealers and Gas Stations SIC: 55		Apparell and Accessory Stores SIC: 56		Home Furnishings and Equipment SIC: 57		Restaurants and Bars SIC: 58		Drug Stores SIC: 591		Misc. Retail Other + General Merch. SIC: 59 + 53		RETAIL TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Arab-Owned	88		3		0		2		7		0		3		103	
looted total	325	27	16	19	5	0	9	22	38	18	0	0	15	20	406	25
Korean-Owned	0		0		13		0		0		0		4		17	
looted total	1	0	0	0	83	16	1	0	1	0	0	0	29	14	115	15
Black-, White-, and Other-Owned	40		10		9		9		19		7		22		116	
looted total	165	24	143	7	71	13	89	10	519	4	88	8	169	13	1244	9
All Owners Total	128		13		22		11		26		7		29		36	
looted total	491	26	159	8	159	14	99	11	558	5	88	8	213	14	1767	13

Sources: see text.

Area is comprised of the 12 Chicago ZIP codes that each had at least 10 incidents of looting during the 1992 Bulls riots: 60609, 60610, 60612, 60619, 60620, 60621, 60624, 60636, 60644, 60649, 60651, 60653. Most of the neighborhoods that fall within the 12 zip code area are ghetto neighborhoods.

that the two factors cannot be statistically separated). In other words, the difference in the looting rate experienced by Arab, Korean, and black-owned stores is essentially determined by the kind of stores the different groups tend to own.

Twenty six out of 558 bars and restaurants were looted, yielding a rate of five percent. For grocery and liquor stores the looting rate was 26 percent, with very little variation by ethnicity of store owner. Arabs happen to own most ghetto food and liquor stores,¹⁰ and those were the type of stores most favored by the looters. The key point is that Arab-owned grocery and liquor stores¹¹ were not targeted significantly more than the non-Arab grocery and liquor stores. Within the category of each type of store, ethnicity does not seem to have influenced the likelihood that a store would be looted.

Table 3 presents the results a logistic regression analyzing the effect of the different types of stores and ethnicities of store owners on the probability of a store being looted, using the data from Table 2.¹² The analysis reinforces what is readily apparent from close scrutiny of Table 2: the primary determinant of looting is the type of store, *not* the ethnicity of the store owner. Among the store types, grocery and liquor stores were selectively targeted for looting, while restaurants and bars were selectively avoided and both effects were significant at the 0.001 level. The high level of selectivity by type of store is an indication that the Bulls riot of 1992 did not follow a randomly destructive pattern.

The negligible effect of the store owner's ethnicity on which stores were looted (holding type of store constant) is a surprising and interesting result. Table 3 shows that Arab or Korean ownership did not significantly effect the likelihood of a store being looted in the 1992 Bulls riot. Taken together, the three store ownership categories have a barely significant effect (at the 0.1 level) on the overall scaled deviance of the model. This is surprising because the apparent tensions between black residents and Arab and Korean merchants in Chicago's ghettos have been and continue to be very high. Furthermore, a high percentage of the arrested Bulls looters lived in close proximity to the store in which they were arrested,¹³ suggesting that the ethnicities of the store owners would have been known to many of the looters. Much of the literature on urban riots in the U.S., especially those articles that view riots as collective action, assumes that the collective nature of the riots expresses itself in selective looting of the non-black or outsider group merchants, including the National Advisory Commission (1968), Rainwater (1967), Greenberg (1992), Tierney (1994), and Olzak and Shanahan (1996) which is

10. Because middle-man minority groups (Bonacich, 1973) engage in particular kinds of businesses in the ghetto that are different from their business patterns in other communities, studies that describe the business activities of a minority group in a city, or in an SMSA do not capture the ghetto business patterns. For instance, Logan, et al. (1994) describes the Koreans of Chicago as heavily represented in manufacturing, hospitals, food stores, restaurants, and social services. As Table 2 shows, Korean businesses in the black ghettos of Chicago consist almost entirely of stores that sell apparel and accessories (such as beauty supplies or wigs) and general merchandise stores. (cf. Choi 1992; Yoon 1991). Table 2 also shows that the Arab owned businesses in Chicago's ghettos are mostly food and liquor stores, a sector of the ghetto economy which the Arabs in fact dominate.

11. Grocery and liquor stores have different codes in the Department of Commerce's Standard Industrial Classification Guide (1987), but I aggregate them together throughout this paper because the two types of stores are indistinguishable in the ghetto: almost all food stores sell some liquor, and almost all liquor stores sell some food.

12. The results in table 3 are obtained using SPSS Logistic Regression command. Analysis of the same data using STATA's Logit command yielded slightly different results, pushing the ethnic categories into the area of statistical significance. This seeming lack of robustness is due to the inclusion of ZIP code 60610 in the data. ZIP code 60610 had ten looted stores in the area of the Cabrini Green housing projects, and also contains about 250 retail stores in Chicago's fashionable Gold Coast, an area that has an entirely different ethnic retail ecology from the ghetto. When this ZIP code is excluded from the data, both STATA and SPSS converge on results that show that the store-type factors are significant, and the store owner ethnicities are not significant predictors of the odds that a store will be looted. The data with ZIP code 60610 excluded are available from the author.

13. An analysis of arrest reports available from the author shows that in the 1992 and 1993 Bulls riot, 36 percent of the arrestees lived within 5 blocks of their place of arrest, and an additional 21 percent lived a distance of six to ten blocks away.

TABLE 3 • Effects of Store Type and Ethnicity of Store Owner on the Probability of a Store Being Looted in the 1992 Bulls Riots, for Retail Stores in the 12 Most Looted Zip Codes

	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Chi-Square</i>
Store Type Factors:			
Food and Liquor Stores	0.84***		
Auto Dealers/Gas Stations	-0.293		
Apparel and Accesories	0.244		
Home Furnishings/Equipment	0.05		
Restaurants and Bars	-0.878***		
Drug Stores	-0.273		
Overall Effect of Store Type		6	49.63***
Race/Ethnicity Factors:			
Arab Ownership	0.23		
Korean Ownership	-0.033		
Overall Effect of Owner Ethnicity		2	5.018 [†]
Constant	-1.978***		
Minus 2 Log Likelihood	1277.6		
Model Chi-Square		8	115.4***
Number of Cases	1767		

Notes:

The two omitted categories are: 1) Store Type: General Merchandise and Miscellaneous, 2) Ethnicity: Black, White, and Other.

[†] P < 0.1 ***P < 0.001

probably the most extreme example: they argue that there have been hundreds of race riots in the U.S. since 1954. Hobsbawm (1963) also views hostility to foreigners as a constant factor in urban mob action. Yet, as Tables 2 and 3 show, stores owned by Arabs and Koreans did not face higher risk of looting than other stores of the same type in the 1992 Bulls riot.¹⁴

If the different ethnicities of business owners in Chicago's ghettos were completely segregated instead of only moderately segregated, that is if Arabs owned all the grocery stores and nothing but grocery stores, then we would indeed be unable to distinguish ethnicity effects from the effects of store type on the likelihood of a store to be looted. Because this data set has a large number of observations (1,767), and because the business segregation is not complete, there are enough observations in the cells "off the main diagonal" to allow drawing a statistically significant distinction between the independent effects of ethnicity and store type.¹⁵

14. There is evidence, however, from a report prepared for the Mayor of Chicago by a coalition of merchants' groups following the 1992 Bulls riots, that among the stores that were looted, the Arab and Korean stores tended to suffer greater losses than other (mostly black) stores. It is possible that race and ethnicity were not a factor in which stores would be damaged, but were a major factor in determining which stores would be severely damaged (this is the conclusion that Tierney 1994 reaches for the L.A. riot). It is also possible that the Arab and Korean merchants simply had more to lose, because their businesses were more highly capitalized. This second interpretation is more consistent with the data because the damage to Arab and Korean stores was higher at all levels of the distribution. The results, therefore, are consistent with (although they do not prove) an interpretation of the Bulls riots as neutral to the ethnicities of the store owners, but as having a disparate impact on the Arabs and Koreans because they owned certain kinds of stores (particularly Arabs who owned grocery and liquor stores) and because the Arabs and Koreans owned more successful stores, that had more to lose.

15. This point may be difficult to visualize, so I offer a brief supplementary argument to help illustrate the point. From column one of Table 2, we note that out of 325 Arab-owned grocery and liquor stores, 27 percent were looted, while out of 165 grocery stores owned by blacks and others, 24 percent were looted. The similarity in rates is what we would expect if ethnicity of store owner had no effect once type of store was controlled. Among auto dealers and gas stations (column two) the Arab rate seems higher than the black rate, but since there are only 16 such stores owned by

Signs of Ethnic Tension in the Ghetto

What makes the absence of ethnic targeting interesting are numerous signs of what is generally interpreted as ethnic antagonism between merchants and residents in Chicago's ghettos. Jo (1992) notes (for the U.S. in general) that disagreements between Korean merchants and black ghetto residents over merchandise, or prices, or return policies, can flare quickly into shouting matches of racial epithets. In my own interviews with ghetto merchants in Chicago, I have observed such charged confrontations.

Racial tensions in the U.S. were highly charged in the aftermath of the 1992 events in Los Angeles. The news media generally assumed that the L.A. riots of 1992 were in part an ethnic conflict between ghetto blacks and Korean store owners, and even though there is no firm evidence of this (Tierney 1994; Abelman and Lie 1995), this general belief, transmitted via televised images and interpretations, may have increased tensions between Korean merchants and black ghetto residents in places like Chicago. Famous inter-ethnic incidents from around the country have resonance in Chicago, as elsewhere. L.A. Korean shopkeeper Soon Ja Du, for example, shot a 15 year old black girl named Latasha Harlins in the head at point blank range in a confrontation over a quart of orange juice, an incident captured on the store's security video camera and seen around the country. Soon Ja Du received five years probation for voluntary manslaughter just a few days after the L.A. riots of 1992 subsided; two Korean stores in Chicago were firebombed two days later.¹⁶

For Korean merchants the key event in Chicago prior to the Bulls riots was the June 1990 boycott of Korean stores in the South Side community of Roseland, organized by black Alderman Robert Shaw. The Roseland boycott focused on traditional points of tension for black residents: Korean business owners tended to employ family members rather than hire from the community, and the stores did not offer the kind of return policies found at larger downtown stores. The Roseland boycott was settled when the 42 Korean businessmen involved made a \$6300 (\$150 per store) contribution to a local development group with ties to the alderman (Choi n.d.). Seven Roseland stores reported damage in the 1992 Bulls riots, but none was Korean-owned. The 1990 boycott of Korean stores by black residents led by a black politician certainly qualifies as ethnic conflict (or more particularly, ethnic protest) by Olzak's (1992) definition. Yet, during the Bulls riot of 1992, when the residents of Roseland had the opportunity to take matters into their own hands, they chose not to target Korean stores, which is all the more remarkable because local black leadership had expressly singled out Korean merchants for organized action.

While editorials of the *Sun-Times* and *Tribune* denied that there was anything racial or political about the 1992 Bulls riot *Chicago Defender's* editorial assumed there *had* been racial targeting, asking: "How much sense does it make to destroy a store just because it is owned by a certain racial Group?" News coverage in the aftermath of the riots also entertained considerable

Arabs, the actual difference amounts to a difference of only one or two stores (that is, three out of 16 were looted when we might have expected to find only one or two based on the looting rate of the black owned stores).

A skeptical reader is encouraged to apply simple chi-square tests to cells in a column whose expected number of looted stores is at least five (cf. Rice 1995:242), using the black- (and other-) owned stores to generate the expected values in each column. For instance: among the grocery and liquor stores, the black owned stores were looted at a rate of 24 percent. This means that we expect 78 of the Arab-owned grocery stores to have been looted (24% of 325 = 78). The chi-square statistic is $((88 - 78)^2)/78 = 1.28$ on 1 degree of freedom—which is well within the range of random variation. When the same chi-square tests are applied across rows, especially across the row of black- (and other-) owned stores, which has substantial numbers in all categories, it is easy to demonstrate that the differences in looting rates due to type of store are far greater than the differences due to owner ethnicity (when store type is held constant).

16. In an interesting twist, the person charged with firebombing the Korean stores in Chicago was Fred Hampton, Jr., son of the Black Panther leader killed by police in Chicago in 1969. After his arrest, "Free Fred Hampton, Jr." graffiti started appearing in the ghetto, and one poster declared that he "didn't do it but he should'a."

speculation about whether Korean merchants had been targeted: “Some said it was the economy. Some said it was the tension between Koreans and blacks. And some—no many—said it was just an opportunity. Nobody blamed it on the Bulls championship” (Hayner 1992:17).

The Politics of Riots

How can a riot that started with a celebration over a basketball game be considered political in any way? Piven and Cloward (1977; [1971] 1993) have argued that the most essential and perhaps the most powerful political tool poor people have is their ability to disrupt. Recall that in the debate over the massive welfare cuts in Illinois, advocates for the poor threatened that riots would ensue if the cuts were enacted; this threat was something of a political asset to those opposing cuts (although not sufficient to block the cuts).

Rioting is probably the oldest kind of poor people’s collective action, and much recent work on social movements focuses on finding order in poor peoples’ actions that seemed disorderly and chaotic to local elites of the day. Tilly writes: “We discover order created by the rooting of collective action in the routines and organization of everyday social life, and by its involvement in a continuous process of signaling, negotiation, and struggle with other parties whose interests the collective action touches” (1986:4). Consider the classic studies of food riots in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, exploring the political and cultural traditions behind seizures of food and grain by peasant mobs (Thompson 1971; L. Tilly 1971). The Bulls riot of 1992 did not follow the particular forms of these earlier food riots; the historical context of twentieth-century ghettos is considerably different from that of the eighteenth-century English town or manor, and specific repertoires of contention are therefore different; yet the Bulls riot of 1992 was in part a food riot. The looters demonstrated a clear preference for grocery stores. Davis (1992) categorized the L.A. riot of 1992 as a food riot (more specifically, as a ‘postmodern food riot’), and the Bulls riot of 1992 lends itself to the same interpretation. Residents who owe money to merchants or who are simply unable to afford food to feed their families can recover a part of what they believe is their due; analogous to the particular form of food riot known as *taxation populaire* (L. Tilly 1971). Through the disorder of the riot, targeting grocery stores emerges from the data as a fundamental underlying source of order.

McPhail (1994) is right to note that not all riots arise from rage and despair. The downtown revelers who poured out of bars and became rowdy, dancing on and overturning two taxicabs moments after the Bulls victory in 1992, probably ought to be considered celebrants rather than rioters. Yet a spirit of celebration and euphoria has also been observed among participants in some of the most violent riots in U.S. history. The tendency to classify riots by their precipitating event, rather than their long-term underlying causes, is understandable mainly because precipitating events are usually singular and accessible while underlying causes may be multiple and opaque.

Aside from the 1968 riots that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., most riots from the 1960s were precipitated by events that were in themselves minor and unimportant. The massive Watts riot of 1965 was precipitated by a traffic arrest: When the police tow truck came for the arrested driver’s vehicle; there was some pushing and shoving between the police and the crowd; someone spit at the officers, who made two more arrests (Conot 1967). These events angered the crowd, but this hardly explains how large sections of an enormous city could have been plunged into days of rioting. L.A.’s 1992 crisis was as much about black’s perceptions of a long-standing history of mistreatment as about the televised beating of Rodney King (Jacobs 1996). Precipitating incidents are not unimportant, and in exceptional cases they can be very important, although they are rarely the whole story. New York City had a major riot in the summer of 1977 that started with a power blackout; the riot was not ‘about’ electricity or darkness. Explanations for a crowd’s motivations that rely exclusively on the last

relevant incident necessarily view the crowd as spasmodic, apolitical, and ahistorical. The 'irrational crowd' was a staple of sociological research in the past, but a generation of work starting in the 1960s has brought the crowd and the urban mob back into our understanding of history and politics. This, along with the otherwise inexplicable size of the 1992 Bulls riot and the inherent political nature of large scale ghetto riots, is the basis for my argument that the Bulls riot of 1992 was more than an unproblematic and apolitical celebration.

Riots and Race

There is an unfortunate tendency in both academia and the mass media to conflate politics and race. The editorial boards of the *Sun-Times* and the *Tribune* were eager to deny that there was a racial or ethnic subtext to the Bulls riots. The newspapers' editorial boards came to the right conclusion about racial targeting in the riots, but for the wrong reasons. The editorial boards had very incomplete data on the riots, their conclusion was based, not on an analysis of the data, but rather on the supposition that the 1992 Bulls riot had been an apolitical celebration, that the riots were not racial *because* they were supposedly apolitical. I argue that the 1992 Bulls riots were indeed partly political, in the limited and chaotic sense that a riot can be political, but that the political grievance and frustration expressed during the riot did not express itself as an attack on Koreans and Arabs. Collective action against Korean or Arab merchants is a very narrow, particular kind of racial or ethnic conflict that is not necessarily implicated in the racial undercurrent of blacks' historical and political grievances with the police, the courts, and white American society.

While the Bulls riots clearly started as a celebration, much more was involved than simple sports euphoria: (a) the concentration of the looting in ghetto areas; (b) the recent prior history of boycotts against Korean-owned stores in the ghetto; (c) the magnitude of the 1992 Bulls riots compared with the celebrations of other victories; (d) the proximity in time to the massive L.A. riots of 1992; (e) the way the L.A. riots were interpreted as an ethnic or racial conflict between Koreans and blacks, and (f) the recently enacted welfare cut in Illinois. In spite of this political context, there is no evidence that rioters expressed their grievances by targeting Korean- and Arab-owned stores.

One interpretation of this contradiction is that there was nothing collective about the 1992 Bulls riot, that the wide-spread looting was simply the aggregation of individual decisions to take advantage of celebratory chaos; this is the discourse of opportunistic criminality. In this view, looters wouldn't care who owned a store because their actions would be motivated only by the calculus of potential gain, access, and opportunity. Still, the 1992 Bulls riot seems to owe part of its considerable size to the L.A. riots that set off riots and disturbances in other U.S. cities. The fact that this riot was by far the largest of the five Bulls riots, indicates that more than purely opportunistic criminality was involved. Also, the looters in the Bulls riots demonstrated a clear preference for grocery and liquor stores, where the potential loot from an armful of merchandise can hardly have been worth the substantial risk of a felony burglary prosecution, which hundreds of arrestees ultimately faced.

Marxist theory offers another potential answer to the seeming paradox of no ethnic targeting in the Bulls riots, despite the apparent presence of ethnic antagonism between blacks and Koreans in the ghetto. In classical Marxism the ethnic antagonism is epiphenomenal, and it would therefore be completely unsurprising to discover that ghetto residents acted against the merchants as a class rather than against particular ethnic groups of merchants (cf. Marx 1978; Wallerstein 1979). Even though the daily conflict between ghetto merchants and residents might seem to be about race or ethnicity in the many instances where racial epithets are invoked, Marxist and neo-Marxist theories argue that the ethnic identities and prejudices are created by class relations and are therefore not important in their own right.

I don't intend to suggest that there is no such thing as a real race riot, or a true ethnic conflict. The riots in Saint Louis in 1917 and in Chicago in 1919 were violent clashes between white and black residents and fully deserve the race riot label (cf. Janowitz 1968). But, the vast majority of more recent urban riots have not been classic race riots, but commodity riots where ghetto residents clash with merchants and police rather than with neighboring resident groups (Janowitz 1968).

I have argued here that the 1992 Bulls riot was political because some of the rioters were responding, not only to the basketball victory, but also to a reservoir of grievances. But, the Bulls riot of 1992 was not a case of ethnic conflict between the black ghetto residents and the non-black (mostly Korean and Arab) merchants, because non-black merchants were not selectively targeted. Riots, in other words, can be political without being about race in the narrow sense that is usually implied or inferred. The Bulls riot of 1992 is only one case—other riots could have different political and racial dimensions. Perhaps riots steeped more in political grievances and collective anger may have more racially selective looting, but this result would have to be demonstrated empirically. It is important not to assume that black grievances against the police, the courts, and the economy are necessarily expressed as collective action against whatever non-black ethnic groups happen to be physically accessible to ghetto residents. This caution is especially important now that the ghetto merchant niche has undergone ecological succession and has been taken over by groups that are, for the most part, neither black nor white.

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