

THE CALIFORNIA POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND IMPARTIAL STATEWIDE SURVEY OF PUBLIC OPINION
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**MOST WHITES BLAME LAWLESSNESS AND
OUTSIDE AGITATORS FOR WATTS RACE RIOT.
NEGROES CITE UNEMPLOYMENT AND SLUM
CONDITIONS**

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by Mervin D. Field

Widely different opinions are held by whites and Negroes on the causes of the rioting which seared the Watts area of Los Angeles last August.

In view of the white Californians, the chief causes were lack of respect for law and order and the urgings of outside agitators. Unemployment and bad living conditions are less often seen as main causes. Alleged police mistreatment of Negroes was not a significant cause, in the opinion of most whites. Nor, they feel was the white community's failure to listen to Negro complaints or Negro resentment over segregation a principal cause of the riots.

Negroes, on the other hand, most often see the causes as being widespread unemployment and bad living conditions. Significantly, also relatively few Negroes endorse the view that the rioting was caused by police mistreatment, by segregation resentment, or by failure of the white community to listen to Negroes.

Cross-Section Poll

These are some of the findings of the California Poll's latest survey of statewide public opinion. A sampling of 1260 adults representing all parts of the state and people of all races and walks of life was interviewed during the first week of November. Trained interviewers visited the cross section of people in their homes and asked them a series of questions to obtain an unbiased picture of public reaction to the Watts riots.

In the sampling proportionate representation was given to all parts of the state. Thus, the opinions obtained by this poll express the views of people in the Northern part of the state as well as those in Los Angeles and other parts of the South. The views of rich and poor, Democrats and Republicans, Negroes and whites, men and women, young and old, are also included as well as equally weighted opinions of people with all shades of sentiment about the racial problem. Ninety-three Negroes were interviewed, representing seven percent of the sample. This is approximately the proportion of the Negro population to the state total.

(MORE)

The California Poll was founded in 1946 as a medium for promoting public opinion research. The California Poll is completely independent of all political parties and candidates. Its sole purpose is to report public opinion accurately and objectively. Most of the financial support for the Poll comes from newspapers and television stations that have exclusive rights within the city of publication. The Poll utilizes accepted scientific sampling and questioning procedures in obtaining the data reported in its releases. Representative samples of adults are interviewed at periodic intervals on election issues and other socially important questions of the day. Proportionate numbers of people of both sexes, from all parts of the state, from different sized communities, and of all age, economic, political, and occupation groups are included in the samples. Major surveys are made with samples of 1,200 or more respondents. Interim surveys sometimes are made with smaller samples but not less than 600 interviews.

Widespread Awareness

The first finding of the Poll's interviewers was that virtually everyone interviewed in all parts of the state had heard or read something about the riots. This is not surprising, since they received widespread press, TV and radio coverage, and they have provided widespread discussion of causes and solutions. A commission of prominent citizens, headed by John McCone, former head of the CIA, was appointed to make an investigation of the riots and will soon be delivering its report.

For the Poll's next question, the cross-section of people was shown a card on which were listed most of the major things that have been advanced as causes of the riots. Each person was asked to specify which one or two causes were felt to be the most important ones behind the riots.

Whites were prone to blame lawlessness and outside agitators, but Negroes rated these very low as causes and focussed most of their blame for the riots on unemployment and bad living conditions. Police mistreatment was named by 13 percent, while about one in ten Negroes attributed the riots to teenage delinquents, to segregation resentment, or to refusal of the white community to listen to Negroes. Very few named outside agitators as the chief cause, or blamed unfair practices by merchants and landlords.

	<u>Most important causes of riots</u>	
	<u>Whites</u>	<u>Negroes</u>
Lack of respect for law and order . . .	36%	16%
Outside agitators	28	7
Widespread unemployment	22	47
Bad living conditions	15	32
Resentment because of segregation . . .	11	10
Teenage delinquents	7	10
Refusal of white community to listen to Negro complaints	5	9
Mistreatment of Negroes by police . .	3	13
Unfair practices by local merchants and landlords	1	7
Other things (lack of education, no skills, not qualified for jobs, etc.) . .	9	3
No opinion	3	2

(Columns add to more than 100% because more than one cause was cited by many respondents)

It is significant that opinion as to the causes of the race riots was uniform throughout the state: There was no significant difference between causes named by Northern Californians and those given by people in Southern California.

Tomorrow the California Poll will describe in more detail the personal attitudes of Californians toward the racial problems revealed by the Watts riots and their opinions as to some possible solutions.