

# Baby, You Better Believe

**PROTEST AND PREJUDICE.** A Study of Belief in the Black Community. By Gary T. Marx. Foreword by Bayard Rustin. 228 pp. New York: Harper & Row. \$8.95.

**PRELUDE TO RIOT.** A View of Urban America From the Bottom. By Paul Jacobs. 298 pp. New York: Random House. \$5.95.

By MARTIN DUBERMAN

**I**n his foreword to Gary T. Marx's study of Negro attitudes, Bayard Rustin comments that Marx "tells it like it is." One thing is certain: he tells it in a way that sharply challenges certain popular stereotypes of Negro thought.

By using a carefully constructed questionnaire, by sampling a variety of geographical regions, social and economic strata, and by analyzing the resulting data with an admirable blend of precision and sophistication, Marx has come up with some surprising conclusions. Among the more eye-opening are these: there is less anti-Semitism in the Negro community than in the country as a whole; civil-rights militancy is greatest among those Negroes who hold stable, high-status jobs, who are socially mobile and who are well educated—the protest movement, in other words, is the product of relative affluence, not despair; civil-rights "victories" do not turn good radicals into pacified liberals, but rather make those radicals still more radical; only a tiny minority of the black population sanctions violence, and even fewer sympathize with the Muslim program of separation.

There is no doubt that Marx's study is an eminent example of opinion research, one carried through with estimable honesty and sensitivity. What is of doubt is whether his findings, completed over a year ago, remain applicable. The interviews on which Marx based his study were conducted in late 1964, and he finished his analysis of them in the fall of 1966. During that two-year period, a number of significant events occurred: Watts, the shooting of Meredith in Mississippi, the death of Malcolm X, the birth of Black Power. Despite these upheavals, Marx believes, and I think he is right, that, as late as the fall of 1966, no major shift had taken place in the attitude of the Negro community. Anger did increase and so did the appeal of separatism and violence, but the increase was sensationalized by the press out of all proportion to its magnitude. The dominant Negro mood continued overwhelmingly to favor integration, to be loyal to the United

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States and optimistic about the prospect of achieving social change within it, to disapprove of riots and of virulent anti-white and anti-Semitic sentiments.

The question which then arises is whether a significant shift in Negro attitudes has taken place in the past year—that is, since Marx's book went to press. At present the Negro mood seems to me too mercurial, and our techniques for measuring it too uncertain, for anyone to pronounce on the matter with confidence. One problem (and this may have been only a little less true of the 1964-66 period) is that any given individual in the black population probably contains within himself a variety of conflicting emotions. He may feel friendly toward a Jewish civil-rights worker and fury toward a Jewish grocery-store owner; pleased that his salary has gone up and outraged that he continues to be paid less than his white counterpart; proud to be an American but also proud of the new African states where blacks fully control their own destinies.

Poll that individual on Monday, and he will answer your questions according to whichever sentiments happen to be currently, and transiently, dominant (and also, of course, according to how he perceives the man asking him the questions). Poll him again on Wednesday, and his responses might be the exact reverse of those given two days before. This ambivalence is clearly revealed in a survey just released by Fortune.

Three out of four Negroes interviewed felt their condition was better than it had been in recent years; at the same time almost half were angrier than they had been a few years ago, with only about 1 in 10 less angry. It seems apparent, therefore, that in the year since Marx's book went to press, the Negro community has become both more hopeful and more wrought-up. This comes as no paradox or surprise, for we have long known that "rising expectations" increase rather than lessen militancy.

Another trend, less familiar, and only hinted at by Marx for the 1964-66 period, has, I believe, recently quickened in an alarming way. I refer to the increasing alienation of the 16-to-25-age group in the black population. The recent Fortune study, for example, shows that nearly twice as many Negroes from that age group reject integration as a primary objective as do their elders. To the Fortune survey I would add a few additional bits of evidence.

The first is from a black teacher in Harlem. Returning there recently after completing his undergraduate work at Notre Dame, he was surprised to find, he said, that "9 out of every 10 youngsters in Harlem are now black nationalists." The same opinion is held by a 25-year-old white man I know who has been living and working in central Harlem for the past three years. He, too, insists that "nationalism" has captured the young and that for them the goal of inte-

gration is "dead, stone-dead." He adds that "nationalism" comes in a variety of brands, ranging from a positive identification with Afro-American history and culture, to the more racist varieties that call for separation from the "white devils" and the establishment of an independent black state.

The loyalties of the youthful nationalists in the ghetto are divided, in uncertain proportions, between a bewildering host of competing organizations and ideologies, the best known of which are those of Elijah Muhammed (apparently the largest), of Malcolm X and his heirs, of the Yoruba Temple, and of the movement known as the "five-percenters." In the ghetto, as elsewhere, a profound generation gap exists, and those who under-sample youthful opinion fail to gauge the extent of current disillusionment. It is not clear if it is the racist brand of nationalism that has captured a majority of the ghetto young, but apparently it has captured a considerable minority; and a determined minority can set the tone and establish the options which their fellows, however reluctantly or apathetically, will accept.

One large explanation for the increasing cynicism and hostility of the ghetto young is provided by Paul Jacobs's report of what life is like for the minority poor in Los Angeles. The book's full title, "Prelude to Riot: A View of Urban America From the Bottom," may sound grandiose, given the limited scope of the study. But I think Jacobs is right in believing that the patterns he has uncovered in Los Angeles hold, despite minor variations, for all American cities.

Jacobs is especially interested in the way minorities are treated by the governmental institutions that constantly impinge on their lives: the police department, the welfare bureau, the public employment services, the housing administration, the schools and the health services. Ironically, these institutions (the police department and the schools excepted) were created by the larger society to serve the needs of the poor. In practice, as Jacobs's investigations make abundantly clear, they provide minimum service and maximum manipulation, bias and humiliation. We have known this, of course, for some time. Indeed one of the sources of our national paralysis in dealing with the problems of the cities may be the numbness which has followed the constant reiteration of what is wrong and why.

Jacobs manages to pierce that numbness, to make the suffering concrete, the indignities fresh. He does so because of his skill as an investigator and reporter. By exposing himself to some of the actual experiences that the minority poor undergo, and by reading widely in documentary sources, he has combined the immedi-

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# WE WANT BLACK POWER



Cover of pamphlet in circulation in Detroit last summer.

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# Believe

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acy of a personal account with the verisimilitude of an objective survey. Moreover, though concentrating on a single city, he has been shrewd enough not to bury us in detail. He shifts briskly from topic to topic—and this rapid change of subject, along with the lucidity of his prose, fixes the attention. Only in his brief conclusion does he falter; in those final few pages, as he moves from describing what is wrong to suggesting possible solutions, his generalizations turn vapid and his prose soggy.

Yet we should not expect Jacobs to provide “answers” when our society as a whole has failed to grapple with the ills of the ghetto. That failure is not grounded on the sudden eclipse of human ingenuity or on the inadequacy of material resources. It rests, very simply, on the majority’s lack of interest.

This, indeed is one of the explicit themes of Jacobs’s book: our urban institutions are, in their corruption, their racist assumptions, their disdain for the poor, an accurate mirror of the society that created and perpetuates them. Our institutional model is becoming paramilitary. The well-being of the organization takes precedence over the well-being of the people it was meant to serve. Order and efficiency become ends not means, and individuals needs are irritably viewed as impediments to the smooth functioning of the system.

Jacobs believes that under the accumulated weight of such treatment, the ghetto masses (he does not specifically differentiate between old and young) are now far angrier than they were when Gary Marx polled and analyzed them. From 1964-66 the minority poor could have hoped, realistically, that the country had begun to mobilize its resources against poverty. Now, with the American majority ever more immunized against suffering (in Vietnam no less than in the ghettos), that comforting hope can no longer be sustained.

If, as a result, the ghetto masses — and especially the rightfully impatient young—are not notably more alienated in 1968 than in 1964, we can only wonder why not. Gary Marx’s warning in the very last sentence of his book — “the continued failure to obtain meaningful integration or significant changes in the life situation of the average Negro may well relegate the findings reported here to a brief episode in a long historical struggle” — already begins to take on the stature of prophecy.

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