

Christina Berzaman
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NWCU LAW SCHOOL ESSAY CONTEST

Liberty and the Law

“Where liberty dwells, there is my country.” Benjamin Franklin

In the United States, the concept of liberty is like oxygen and its citizens prefer to breathe deeply. There is a strong history, tradition and birthright of U.S. citizens protesting perceived governmental transgressions of liberty. Sometimes protest is expressed unlawfully, and there is significant precedent in colonial history of U.S. citizens participating in civil disobedience and unlawful assembly as a means of exacting civil rights, which was instrumental in securing the rights and liberties we enjoy today. Accordingly, modern citizens have acted out in similar ways as the colonists for comparable reasons, and if modern rebellion can be examined in the context of historical colonial revolt and in light of what the colonials had to endure and accomplish to secure liberty for America, it may provide for increased understanding and revelations regarding modern complaints, thus improving the ability to democratically resolve such modern complaints.

Colonial history includes American citizens participating in unlawful, violent revolts and rebellions as means of demanding liberty, expressing dissatisfaction with the government, and seeking reformation of conduct of those in power. The colonial rebels were acting instinctually and because of what they understood to be their rights as Englishmen; their act of emigrating to the New World was an example of rebellion against oppressive authority. The angry mob is a natural result of free speech finding its purpose after others hear it and agree with the message. The mob is the manifestation of what social psychologists hypothesize as the “social proof” where a crowd will become increasingly influential to non-crowd members as more people join the crowd. There is statistical evidence supporting the theory that the crowd is smarter than any individual; if a crowd is diverse and large enough, the crowd has the ability to arrive at more

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accurate decisions. As the group acts *“collectively to make decisions affecting matters of general interest, that ‘group’s decisions will, over time, be intellectually [superior] to the isolated individual, no matter how smart or well-informed he is.”*¹ The history of rebellions is consistent with these findings. There are a number of incidents of unlawful assembly in colonial and modern times that resulted in reformation of the law. Modernly, U.S. citizens are willing to assemble, protest, and even serve time in jail for the opportunity to disturb the peace in the course of protesting a social wrong. This is a demonstration that U.S. citizens are acutely aware of their right and power to effect change in their government, the essential component of self-government and liberty.

Violence and destruction of property are collateral damage to our proclivity to rebel without restraint, potentially including tragic losses of life and destruction of property. The fact we witness the same unlawful behavior and the same loss of life and destruction of property in modern civil protests as there was in our colonial history precludes the hope the angry mobs that destroy, maim or kill are receding. It seems likely violence is an incontrovertible element of human nature. Our collective inclination to protest and rebel with abandon, and our tendency towards destruction and mayhem when we compose an angry mob are like the earthquakes of California: we know the “big one” will happen; the best action we can take to mitigate potential damage is to anticipate and prepare.

An alarming number of the people in the first colonies that migrated to the New World between 1607 and 1623 paid the price of liberty with their lives. Out of five thousand people

¹ Surowiecki, James (2004) *The Wisdom of the Crowds*. New York: Random House, Inc.

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who traveled to Virginia from England, close to four thousand died from starvation waiting for slow ships of supplies from England.² When the first successful settlements began in Jamestown, Virginia, liberty meant turning a profit for the British company that sponsored their passage to the New World, working at an artisan trade, farming under very harsh circumstances or perishing. The colonial population in the New World was continually challenged in their pursuit of liberty.³ There was competitive friction between the colonies due to endless economic struggles, agricultural resource disparities across the land, religious bigotry, arguments over political jurisdictions and boundaries, racism and intolerance, and class struggles between the elite and the middle class. Wealthy English investors and the British companies funded the first successful colonies of Jamestown, and there was constant pressure on the colonists to become profit centers.⁴ The colonists received intermittent food, supplies from England but these shipments sometimes failed to arrive for months, and there were many instances of long periods of starvation.⁵ At one point, there was a lack of supplies at the same time as a drought (“The Starving Time”). The colonists were forced to dismantle their communities in paradoxical acts of self-destruction: they ate whatever they could in order to stay alive—all the livestock, horses, dogs, rats, snakes, tree roots, leather book covers—including committing acts of murder and cannibalism.⁶

² Andrews, Charles M. (2001), *The Colonial Period of American History*. Simon Publications.

³ Osgood, Herbert L. (1907) *The American Colonies in the Seventeenth Century, Volume Four*. New York: The MacMillan Company.

⁴ Willison, George F. (1945) *Saints and Strangers*. Reynal & Hitchcock, New York: Kingsport Press, Inc., Kingsport, Tenn.

⁵ Brebner, John B. (1933) *The Explorers of North America 1492-1806*. London: Adams & Charles Black.

⁶ "Jamestown Colony" *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2008). [Internet] *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Available from: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/300134/Jamestown-Colony>.

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During the 1960s, there were numerous large-scale riots in urban cities across the United States that occurred in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. Two riots in particular, the Rodney King Riot in 1992 (“*Rodney King*”) and the Watts Riot in 1965 (“*Watts*”) (collectively, the “L.A. riots”), are considered for their similarities to the colonial rebellions and as representative of an extreme modern day protest. *Watts* and *Rodney King* were each a result of racial tension sparked by incidents that occurred in regard to routine traffic stops between black male citizens, and a highway patrol officer in *Watts* and white police officers in *Rodney King*. These two incidents arguably represented citizens’ frustration with government authority figures and are comparable to the colonial struggle with British oppression. The modern riots provoked behavior that was no worse than the behavior of the colonials who were laboring under similar economic and social pressures. Colonial citizens murdered virtually everyone who got in their way as they settled in the New World: Native American Indians, French, Spanish, Canadians, other colonials, even their own family members.⁷ The L.A. riots mark two shocking and violent episodes in U.S. history, and many observers today are unable to justify the acts committed during L.A. riots due to their criminal nature, the massive destruction of property and brutal attacks waged by the rioters on each other and other citizens. However, the L.A. riots and the horrific acts committed by the L.A. rioters against police officers, fire fighters, innocent bystanders and private property are not outside of the precedent set by the colonials. In their struggle to survive the harsh elements of the New World, the colonists waged acts of crime

⁷ Bridenbaugh, Carl (1980) *Jamestown 1544-1699*. New York: Oxford University Press.

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against each other, and perpetrated an unconscionable, unrelenting genocide of the Native American Indians.

The Native American Indians (“Indians”), French and Spaniards were already occupying the New World when the colonists arrived, representing more obstacles for the British Empire in establishing the American colonies.⁸ Between the first settlement in Jamestown through the late 1700s the colonists were slowly pushing their settlements in all directions west, north and south, and land speculators were displacing and decimating the Indian populations.⁹ The Indians were generally peaceful which made them especially vulnerable to aggressive, armed whites coveting the land and continually encroaching on their territories. The colonials waged wars against them, signed treaties with them, and there were spans of intermittent peace. While there were some instances where the whites co-existed with the Indians this was the rare exception. Language barriers, cultural bigotry and ruthless desire for the land by the whites established untenable alliances, and the white-Indian relationship was a “powder keg” waiting to explode.¹⁰ The same expression “powder keg” was used to describe the pent-up frustrations in the predominately-black neighborhoods in Watts prior to the riot of 1965.¹¹ A similar description is found in the 1965 Governor’s Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, “Violence in the City: An End or a Beginning?” A passage in this research paper depicting the conditions faced by the citizens of

⁸ Kulikoff, Allan (2000) *From British Peasants to Colonial American Farmers*. Longleaf Services.

⁹ Sale, Kirkpatrick (1990) *The Conquest of Paradise*. New York: Knopf.

¹⁰ Merrell, James (2001) *Into the Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier*. New York: W.W. Norton.

¹¹ Mars, Shaun Michael (2008), “Frye, Marquette (1944-1986)” [Internet], University of Washington, WA, Available from: <http://blackpast.org>; Szymanski, Michael (1990) “Burned, Baby, Burned: The Final Days of Marquette Frye,” *Los Angeles Magazine*; “144 Hours in August 1965,” *The McCone Report*, <http://www.usc.edu/libraries/archives/cityinstress/mccone/part4.html>.

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L.A. riots is comparable to the life of the colonists: isolated geographically, unprepared for productive life in their communities, lack of law and order coincident with a despondent population:

“These riots were each a symptom of a sickness in the center of our cities.

In almost every major city, Negroes pressing ever more densely into the central city and occupying areas from which Caucasians have moved in their flight to the suburbs have developed an isolated existence with a feeling of separation from the community as a whole.

Many have moved to the city only in the last generation and are totally unprepared to meet the conditions of modern city life. At the core of the cities where they cluster, law and order have only tenuous hold; the conditions of life itself are often marginal; idleness leads to despair and finally, mass violence supplies a momentary relief from the malaise.”

Ironically, there was violence and brutality between fellow colonials among the religiously devout. Some of the colonials fled England because of religious persecution and it surfaced again in the New World as religion-on-religion attacks. In 1660-1689 in Maryland, religious bigotry erupted between Catholics and Protestants. Catholic proprietors, the Calverts who landed in Baltimore to establish a Catholic refuge, controlled Maryland.¹² However, most of the people attracted to this settlement were Anglican Protestants who had conflicts with the Catholics. The Puritans who settled in Virginia waged attacks on the Catholic settlers of

¹² Tate, Thad W., Ammerman, David L., eds. (1979) *The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century: Essays on American-Anglo Society*. W.W. Norton & Company.

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Maryland. The Catholic Calverts exercised bigotry against the Jesuits having them recalled to England. Eventually, the Anglicans took over Maryland, the Anglicans stripped the Catholics of their rights to hold public office and laws were passed prohibiting Mass or other Catholic religious sacred rituals.¹³ When the colonial religious groups attacked each other, they betrayed the teachings of their respective faiths, and by generating the same intolerance and persecution from which they originally fled England, they rendered their emigration to the New World meaningless. Similarly, the L.A. riots focused destruction inward, burning and looting their neighborhood and thus betraying their community.

In the mid-1600s, the English mercantilists who sponsored the colonial settlements wanted their colonies to remain dependent on the British import shipping trade and passed the Navigation Acts that forbid foreign ships from trading directly with the colonies thus restricting the colonies' economic potential. These Acts included export restrictions of the most valuable, marketable goods the colonials produced (tobacco, sugar and cotton) which could only be shipped to England or an English colony limiting the colonies' ability to transact on their own. The colonists mostly ignored the Navigation Acts, bribing customs officers, exploiting legal loopholes, smuggling and openly violating the laws.¹⁴ Notwithstanding the illegal efforts to work around the restrictions of the Acts, the repudiation of the Navigation Acts was one of the first signs of colonial self-government. They began to rely more on their local form of

¹³ Borden, Morton, Graham Otis L., (1978) *The American Profile*. Heath and Company.

¹⁴ Ubbelohde, Carl (1975) *The American Colonies and the British Empire, 1607-1763*. AHM Pub. Corp.

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government, the assemblies, as a way to officially resist parliamentary rule, and one of the first acts of rebellion that inspired the American Revolution.¹⁵

Colonial society in the 1700s offered people liberty in that there was economic opportunity and social mobility for skilled labor (white men only) and the chance to be part of a class struggle to climb from a lower to a higher class.¹⁶ The majority of colonists were middle class who were seeking a better life in the New World. However, in American colonies, the established social stratification was in conflict with social mobility, and there is an example of a middle class rebellion in a Virginia colony that led to political reform and new legislation. In the late 1600s Virginia Governor Sir Berkeley took advantage of his office and ruled in non-democratic ways. He collected poll taxes without consent, for 14 years he would not allow elections in the House of Burgesses (the first elected assembly in the New World by the Virginia Colony in 1619), Berkeley’s circle of friends occupied important posts and personally profited from their private association, and rumors of Berkeley awarding himself fur trading monopolies. Grievances against Berkeley manifested into a power struggle between the Berkeley elites and wealthy tobacco planters who were not part of Berkeley’s circle. There were also demands of Governor Berkeley for more aggressive offense against the Indians that Berkeley was unwilling to provide. In defiance of Berkeley, over 300 settlers rallied behind Nathaniel Bacon on a volunteer expedition to seek out and kill Indians. They returned after killing 150 Indians, Berkeley was ousted from office, the volunteers overtook Berkeley’s mansion, burned the town to the ground, and resolved to resist all royal militia. Following Berkeley’s overthrow, the

¹⁵ Craven, Wesley Frank. (1968) *The Colonies in Transition, 1660-1713*. New York: Harper and Row.

¹⁶ Main, Jackson T. (1965) *The Social Structure of Revolutionary America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

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House of Burgesses aligned with Bacon, passed “Bacon’s Laws” which reformed rules of political offices and stepped up the military pursuit of Indians, a “legally sanctioned genocide”.¹⁷ The revolt that resulted in deposing Berkeley was similar to the *Watts* riot in that the people protested against undemocratic system of favoritism and economic monopoly. In 1965, Governor Edmund Brown ordered a government study, The McCone Commission, to address police reform and develop job and social programs, the report was plagued with “errors and misconceptions” that reflected general bias and ignorance swirling in the U.S. about urban neighborhoods. Another opinion was the *Watts* riot was a protest of racial inequality that was becoming entrenched as social and economic inequality. In 1965; civil rights activist Bayard Rustin wrote in his analysis of the *Watts* riot, “*Last summer's riots were not race riots; they were outbursts of class aggression in a society where class and color definitions are converging disastrously.*”¹⁸ As we know now, the *Rodney King* riot was the angry mob’s response to allegations of police brutality, and more specifically, the acquittal of the police officers accused of police brutality. Unlike *Watts*, the *Rodney King* riot was not necessarily concerned with widespread social problems facing one race or even one neighborhood; it did generate public awareness and referendum for more scrutiny and reforms of the Los Angeles Police Department.¹⁹

¹⁷ Washburn, Wilcomb E. (1957) *The Governor and the Rebel: A History of Bacon’s Rebellion*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

¹⁸ Rustin, Bayard (1971) *From Protest To Politics: The Future Of The Civil Rights Movement*, Reprinted from *Down the Line*, the collected writings of Bayard Rustin. Quadrangle Books.

¹⁹ Cable News Network (2001) “Rodney King Reluctant Symbol of Police Brutality Beating.” [Internet] Available from: <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/LAW/03/02/beat.anniversary.king.02/>. [sic].

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In 1689 Leisler’s Rebellion was an example of another uprising by the common people revolting against the elite and aristocrats in Albany, and throughout the next century there would be a series of colonial protests unequivocally rejecting the Crown’s attempts to curtail colonial rights. The Leisler Rebellion resulted from disputes over regional fur trading monopoly in New York restricted to Albany merchants and to which Leisler was excluded. Leisler was the captain of a local militia and he led a local group of colonists to stage a coup that sparked a grass roots revolution in 1689. The band of rebels forced the unpopular governor to flee the city and organized a provisional government. Rebel Leisler established an ad hoc government, effectively governed the city, collected revenue and kept the town safe from attacks from the Indians and French. However, English troops stormed the city and he was arrested, tried for treason and hanged.²⁰ The L.A. riots were comparable to the revolt of Leisler if viewed using the perspective they were attempting to “reclaim” the city. *“The reason Watts residents destroyed their own community was because they didn't really "own" it, felt like prisoners in it, and wished to ‘take it back,’ but this line of reasoning didn't make sense to most observers.”*²¹

By the mid-1700s the colonies had established local assemblies that established laws independent of the Crown of England and resisted Britain in the courts. Due to the break out of the war with France, the British did not immediately punish the defiant colonists because the royal governors needed the colonials to fight the French in America.²² However, colonial discontent had been growing throughout the war years and became more evident in the years to

²⁰ Hawke, David (1966) *The Colonial Experience*. Norton Brothers Company.

²¹ Glaser, Mitch (2005), *Paradox Unbound Blog: The Watts Riots: 40 Years Later*, [Internet], Los Angeles, CA, Available from: <http://mitchglaser.com>

²² Kennedy, Paul (1987) *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. New York: Random House.

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come. The Albany Plan in 1754 was a conference of colonial leaders, which would have established a plan of union between the king and colonial assemblies, however none of the colonies accepted this plan because they were not willing to surrender their tax sovereignty and no one was willing to grant Britain control. The Loudoun’s Embargo was a reaction by Britain to illegal smuggling of goods and supplies to the French where colonial shipments to the French West Indies were intercepted and the Virginia and Pennsylvania colonies continued to violate the Embargo law. In 1761, Massachusetts mounted a legal challenge to the writs arguing they are contrary to British constitution and natural law. Massachusetts did not prevail, despite an argument that was logically sound. This legal effort provided inspiration for rebellion against parliamentary supremacy for the next decade.²³ In the late 1750s there had been a drought that caused a tobacco shortage. The Anglican clergy was paid according to the price of tobacco and the shortage caused an increase in price, and the planters refused to pay anything more than a fraction of the current price and the Virginia legislature passed an act sanctioning this price structure. The king censured the Act and the clergy in Virginia sued to recover back wages. In 1763, Patrick Henry defended the parish against the clergy and the jury awarded the parson one penny in damages. Henry’s argument became popular among colonists that spoke out against the king for supporting the clergy and encouraged colonial disobedience.²⁴

What followed was a series of attempts to collect revenue from the colonists to cover the national British war debt, the colonials responding with public exhibitions of defiance. The

²³ Rogers, Alan (1974) *Empire and Liberty: American Resistance to British Authority 1755-1763*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

²⁴ Rossiter, Clinton L. (1952) *Seedtime of the Republic: The Origins of the American Tradition of Political Liberty*. New York: Harcourt Brace.

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Sugar Act increased import duties and the colonials responded by smuggling and those caught would be subject to the Crown’s corrupt admiralty court system which treated the Americans as second-class citizens, a complaint shared by the people of Watts. The *Watts* riot was a manifestation of similar sentiments of being treated as second-class citizens and economic frustrations such as sub-standard housing and lack of opportunity for jobs, both factors preventing social and economic mobility. In the 1960s, the neighborhood of Watts was composed of mostly white-owned businesses offering sub-par, low quality products including food, and government housing projects that had replaced slums with little or no improvement. There was overt housing discrimination sanctioned by real estate companies. This created economic barriers and tended to prevent the citizens of Watts from leaving the slums and public housing: The California Association of Realtors responded to the Rumford Fair Housing Act by placing Proposition 14 on the 1964 state ballot, which stated that the State could not "deny, limit or abridge" the "right" of a person to sell or rent his or her property to anyone he or she chooses.²⁵ Proposition 14 passed with a two-thirds majority, frustrating efforts of those who were trying to move out of places like Watts; over crowded housing, only 34% of the homes were owner-occupied and rents were so excessively priced the people of Watts, like the colonials, had nowhere else to go. The passage of Prop 14 legally sanctioned this trend and housing discrimination.²⁶ The housing discrimination experienced by the people of Watts and

²⁵ Nicolaidis, Becky M. (2002), *My Blue Heaven, The Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965*. University of Chicago Press.

²⁶ Hutchinson, Earl Ofari, (2005) *The Hutchinson Political Report, The Watts Riots – 40 Years After the Flames*, [Internet], Los Angeles, CA, Available from: <http://earlofarihutchinson.blogspot.com>

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the economic "colonization" by property owners and retailers from outside the community was similar to what the colonials faced by imperial rule.²⁷

The Stamp Act required payment of taxes on just about everything colonials used and needed. The Sons of Liberty in Boston burned the Crown's admiralty court records and groups of rebels ransacked the mansions of both Lieutenant Governors in Boston and New York, and in Charleston an angry mob persisted in its protest until the governor repealed the Act. The Stamp Act was socially irresponsible in that it affected nearly all the economic classes of colonists, and it was regressive in that it hurt the poorer colonists the worst. The colonial acts of rebellion against the oppressive measures to raise revenue for the Crown were not unlike the economic situation in the modern urban neighborhoods that rioted in 1965. The urban dwellers in L.A. were mostly poor and vulnerable to regressive economics. The looting and arson in the L.A. riots were of a much larger scale than that occurred in the colonial mobs at the city officials' homes, but if viewed in historical context a fire in the geographically smaller colonial towns would present eminent threat to the entire village in the way large areas of Watts burned in the *Watts* riots.

In 1773, a radical mob of colonists, disguised as Indians, protested the proposed East India Company monopoly on tea, and the citizens threw the tea into the harbor. The Boston Tea Party was so shocking and appalling to the Parliament it reacted by imposing the Coercive Acts which were a series of measures designed to punish all of the colonies for the loss of tea at Boston and discourage further protests. The Massachusetts colonists responded with yet more

²⁷ Glaser, Mitch (2005), Paradox Unbound Blog: The Watts Riots: 40 Years Later, [Internet], Los Angeles, CA, Available from: <http://mitchglaser.com>

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open rebellions including drafting public transcripts encouraging independence, and 5,000 armed citizens attending British-run court proceedings, which before the armed citizens showed up, intended to further restrict colonial rebellion. Today the average American would probably view the Boston Tea Party as comical or an amusing aspect of American History, notwithstanding in the short term it brought more repression and economic hardship on the colonists. In the long term the colonial protests of the Coercive Acts included very effective boycotts of British goods that inspired the Continental Congress of Philadelphia, America’s first national government that assumed the power of legislation and deemed to speak for all of the colonies, two significant steps towards the formation of the nation. The long term results of the L.A. riots are still undetermined but the short term results were tragic and devastating.

Colonial America was a racist society, especially where the Native American Indians were concerned (“Indians”). If the Indians followed the colonial example, they should have been protesting and rioting non-stop for the past couple of centuries. Historians have used “holocaust” or an “invasion” against the Indians to describe the emigration of colonial settlers to the New World.²⁸ The colonial settlers in their desperation for land were willing to dispatch anyone who got in their way, including the people who were already occupying the land, such as the Indians, French and Spaniards.²⁹ There is undisputable evidence white settlers disregarded the rights of the Indians, black slaves, women and any other emigrants who landed in the New World of a different ethnicity or religious persuasion. The hypocritical intolerance displayed by

²⁸ Vaughan, Alden T. (1979) *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620-1675*. New York: Norton.

²⁹ Kulikoff, Allan (2000) *From British Peasants to Colonial American Farmers*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

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the colonists in their quest for liberty is present in the L.A. riots. In both colonial and modern eras there were communities of people acting collectively who were being guided by an internal moral compass, and yet their actions inflicted injustice on others. During both *Watts* and *Rodney King* there were innocent bystanders brutally attacked, and neighborhood store owners who were killed and whose businesses were destroyed.

The colonials broke colonial constitutional law in order to achieve liberty and independence. History reveals the collective decision to revolt and break the law is sometimes necessary in order for society to reach beyond the current limitations imposed by the law. In the L.A. riots the citizens were grasping for a way to “shock the government into change; to organize people to replace the holders of power . . .”³⁰ It took nearly 200 years of boycotts, revolts and rebellions for the colonial settlers to form a unified entity that asserted itself against the Crown. The culmination of the nearly 200 years of colonial rebellion against Britain was the American Revolution, which was a very long, difficult, blood bath that dragged on for years and which few Americans today would renounce. Similarly, the L.A. riots included thousands of otherwise law-abiding people who rebelled for a few days and perpetrated violent, criminal acts that are incomprehensible to many Americans. It is difficult to say how the modern rebellions will affect the U.S. in the next 200 years. Innocent people were murdered with guns that were looted from stores, firefighters were attacked with bricks and gun fire as they approached burning buildings, and over \$100 million of private property was destroyed. Immediately after the L.A. riots, the incidents represented huge financial burdens for the neighborhood. There was a lingering

³⁰ Zinn, Howard (1968), *Disobedience and Democracy: Nine Fallacies on Law and Order*. New York: Random House.

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debilitating effect on the area which made life even harder for its residents: The community's reputation diminished making it difficult to attract new investment money.

Today there are laws prohibiting 5,000 armed citizens from showing up at court hearings, looting businesses or roaming neighborhood streets preying on other citizens. The colonists rebelled on behalf of the welfare of all of the colonists; the people of the L.A. riots were acting contrary to the welfare of their fellow citizens. The colonist rebellions were influential in the writing of the Constitution, and although the writers were an elite group of rich white men who were mostly concerned with the rights and protection of private property, the document provides modern citizens with the coercive authority of a paternalistic federal government without the autocratic monarchy the colonies struggled to escape. Americans are allowed to act with self-interest, but not at the cost of the rest of society; this is an argument against the justification for the L.A. riots and when examined in light of the colonial experience, the L.A. riots appear criminal and self-indulgent. Liberty is the balance between the needs of the individual and the needs of that individual's society: if liberty is oxygen for the human body, then one needs to know that too much oxygen will damage the human body at cellular and molecular levels, and too little oxygen will not preserve life. Comparing the L.A. riots to the colonial rebellions is not abdication of the law and not offering an excuse for the L.A. riots.

On the face of it, the colonial station in life was much more difficult than that of the people in L.A., but only the people of L.A. can provide definitive authority on that. The L.A. rioters revolted in similarly violent and unlawful ways as the colonists and these two societies shared similar economic and social conditions, therefore a comparison should provide a better

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understanding of both. Comparing the colonials with the modern rioters is an objective look at modern problems in the context of our history as it informs and influences modern behavior, and how the meaning of liberty has evolved for all Americans today.