

## **Inner City Blues** *Reflections on a Dark Night in Denver*

By Gregory O'Toole from *Short Stories & Black Tea Prose*

The celebration Tuesday night, in light of my new-found, rediscovered freedom, was a smashing success, harrowing and drinking around lower downtown Denver until the bars closed and the busses stopped running. We started at a pub called *Sing-Sing*, with dueling piano compositions that were simply piped out to their audience at a much, much too high level. So we left, and, later, sitting atop the *Soiled Dove*, we could see clear to Kansas, where we talked about some runaround Brazilian tramp someone knew, and the ups and downs of Denver's towns.

The evening went sour fast, though, when I was nearly home and ran into a mob forming three blocks from my place. A white police officer had allegedly shot a black man for pulling a gun first. Whatever the truth was here, the angry crowd on the corner only sought revenge. Granted, it was about 1:00 am as I was passing through the area, walking the greasy shadows of 16th street (because it's safer than Colfax, I rationalized), and these people were maybe boozed up themselves (or whatever it is the Colfax Ave. crowd does that late at night), but the rising level of racial slurs and judgment against the white cops and white people in general emerging from the itchy sidewalk multitude made me a bit uneasy, so I got out of there quick.

When the only other white guy in the crowd, a trashy, strung-out looking specimen, asked me "*What are you doing out this late?*" and then offered to sell me "*whatever I needed*", I bolted. One spark in the wrong direction would have set off a Watts scene on East Colfax, and I and the drug dealer would have instantaneously morphed into public enemy number one, never standing a chance.

Honestly though, I think would that situation actually have occurred, with the amount of adrenaline that would have ushered forth inside of me, I would easily have halved my 1985 Elizabeth Blackwell Elementary School record in the 50 yard dash, and probably sprinted all the way to Washington park, leaving each of those limping weirdoes in the dust. It didn't help that, as I was arriving near the

new apartment, I heard some more "kill whitey" screams from speeding, passing cars. I don't think the outcries were directed at me necessarily, but I wasn't going to hang around to investigate.

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I heard that the man who was shot was rushed to the ER, then pronounced dead, so, unless someone walked by in the wake of fire, no citizen likely saw the leaking, twitching body. He probably didn't lay there for long.

I don't know any more than what the news says about this guy, but apparently he has an extensive history of jail, robbery, running drugs, etc. What else is his family going to say about him after he's been killed, other than that he was "a good guy"? These people don't have much if they've lived their entire lives off of a street with any semblance to Denver's infamous East Colfax, that's an American socio-economic fact. And it seems to me that as soon as they (or anyone, for that matter) get a camera on them, or someone pays any attention to them, they start taking out their grief, suddenly turning any issue into a racial one, blabbering on, making hugely obtuse statements to the media like "the police murdered my boy." It's not that I don't have empathy for anyone who's had a family member violently killed, but there is a larger issue at hand here. So, two things:

1. That's the crap the American media loves to run, and they will, over and over again, every time.
2. What if *your* (31-year-old) "child" was high as a kite, robbing innocent people at gunpoint in their own block, and actually did (I never read anything that confirmed a gun in the victim's hand) pull it on a cop? Jesus, I'd shoot him, too, and I wouldn't go for the leg to wound him, either.

As far as I'm concerned, people that cause other people to have to worry about their own safety (not to mention the safety of their loved ones) when walking around in their own neighborhood should be put away. That guy had a

choice, starting a long time ago, to create or not to create that long rap sheet. Harshly put, he lost at the game he chose to make his own.

Needless to say, I won't be going out toward Colfax and downtown after the sun gets low in the sky anymore, especially alone, especially on foot. Especially not after writing this.

As *Destructo Dave* put it wisely not too long ago when discussing the downtown scene, "*I keep forgetting how much this city sucks.*"

I just can't seem to get a break with housing in Denver. I'm not sure what to do just yet. Now I have this lease that goes until the end of September. It seems fairly safe immediately surrounding and just south of my building, but I'll probably dig a safety tunnel from the laundry room in the basement to the Irish Snug on the corner and wait out the melee, like Al Capone.

I don't know, it should be an interesting East Colfax summer, though, I remember when I lived in Wicker and around Humbolt Park in Chicago where, in the summer, no longer holed up due to the cold Midwest winter, the whores and gangs and freaks came out to play, to sew their seeds on the public market. As always, it was great fun for all those involved.