



RIOTS REVEAL LONDON'S TWO DISPARATE WORLDS

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LONDON - You really don't have to look very far for the reasons for London's rioting, looting and generally thuggish frenzy of violence, located mostly in poorer, peripheral communities. The lives of most rioters are so far removed from those of the country's leaders it's like they occupy different planets.

Think about this: To cope with the violence, London's Mayor Boris Johnson interrupted his family vacation in North America. Prime Minister David Cameron returned from his vacation in a (shared) ten thousand pounds a week villa in Italy where he was reportedly taking tennis lessons with a coach flown out from Britain.

Home Secretary Theresa May cut short her vacation in Switzerland.

Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg returned from his vacation in France.

I was wondering as I watched, from a safe distance, a mob of young men, running, looting and throwing bottles, when the last time was that one of them had a vacation. Probably never. I thought, this is their vacation. It's a break from their routine of hanging around street-corners. It's fun, for them. They were laughing as police chased them.

Don't get me wrong; they should arrest every last person who broke the law and terrified innocent residents. But is it really surprising that under-educated, jobless youths go on the rampage, faced with the inconceivable gap between the rich and the poor and their sense of utter hopelessness and disenfranchisement?

They feel they deserve a slice of the cake too. Their sense of entitlement is this: We are entitled to steal what we can.

Violence and lawlessness spread across London as the capital's most senior police officer urged the public to clear the streets in affected communities. Property and vehicles have been set on fire in several areas, some burning out of control.

As the young and poor loot, burn and destroy, how about this: It was reported this week that 106 Bond Street, one of London's most prestigious shopping addresses, was sold for 28.5 million pounds (around \$47 million). Cash. To the son of an entrepreneur. Mind-bogglingly, there were 22 other cash buyers bidding for the property.

It was also reported this week that an average-wage earner who wants to buy a London house would have to save his/her entire salary for 31 years.

A jobless youth in Peckham or Hackney may as well live on Mars for all his chances of legally obtaining a flatscreen TV or a laptop computer. So egged on by their buddies, jazzed up by the screaming mob, they're having a ball. Carpe diem. Seize the moment, and grab what you can.

Anger. Hopelessness. A complete lack of social values. All this is true. But the word on the street does not mention any of the above. The word that spread among youth and children as young as eight is much simpler: Go to the shops, grab what you can, while you can.

But where are the parents? As youngsters aged 8 to 18 and older go home with their stolen booty, what are their parents saying? So far there isn't one report of goods being returned to their rightful owners.





A final thought. One reporter pointed out that in Clapham where the shopping area had been picked clean, the only shop left unlooted and untouched was the book shop.

