7-1-1965

Changing Patterns of Racial Violence in the United States

Allen D. Grimshaw

CHANGING PATTERNS OF RACIAL VIOLENCE
IN THE UNITED STATES

*Allen D. Grimshaw**

Racial difficulties, including violence, are very much in the news these days. Harlem and Selma have been receiving as much attention in the press as Hanoi and Saigon. Since Americans have all had experience, either direct or more remote, with problems of race, there is some tendency to believe that we know the dimensions of this domestic difficulty and could find solutions except for the obstinacy of certain people. Who is perceived as obstinate depends, of course, on where one stands. Where one stands depends, in turn, on one's personal history and degree of awareness of the complexity of detail historically and in contemporary developments. Too many concerned people have tended to look upon the history of race relations in this country as the simple unfolding of a drama moving toward its inevitable conclusion in today's conflict — too many people see all of today's events as being part of one massive struggle, with clearly defined issues and homogeneous opposing parties. These oversimplified views do little to increase prospects for viable solutions.

The frame of reference provided for this discussion was restricted to violence in Northern metropolitan areas and student disturbances, all in 1964. It will be obvious from the first paragraph that it will be violated in this paper (1) by taking a longitudinal look at social violence, and (2) by focusing, primarily, on Negro-white violence. While many readers will already be familiar with the historical review presented in the first section[1] and much of the detail on differential patterns of participation reviewed in the second, the notion of the race problem as monolithic seems sufficiently widespread to warrant recapitulation of some important facts. The emphasis in the first two sections will be on the complexity of this set of intergroup relations, but there will also be an attempt to demonstrate that patterns of racial conflict have their parallels in other cross-group relationships. A third and final section includes more subjective speculation about possible developments in these conflict patterns, including the possibility of a shift from racial to class membership in recruitment to conflict groups.

I

Violence is social when it is directed against individuals or their property solely or primarily because of their membership in social categories. Thus if a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant in the United States or a West African in Britain or a Hindi speaker in the Dravidian-speaking areas of South India is assaulted because he is an Anglo-Saxon Protestant or a West African or a Hindi

* Associate Professor of Sociology, College of Arts and Sciences, Graduate School, Indiana University; A.B., A.M., University of Missouri; Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania.
1 The first section is largely based upon materials previously published in other periodicals. For documentation of events up until about 1948, see Grimshaw, *Lawlessness and Violence in America and Their Special Manifestations in Changing Negro-White Relationships,* 44 J. NEGRO HISTORY 52 (1959).

speaker, this is social violence. If, on the other hand, he is the random victim of armed robbery because he happens to be in the right place at the right time, or if his home or place of business is vandalized, there is violence, but not social violence. No country with distinguishable social groups can claim a record without at least occasional, or historic, instances of social violence. In some countries during some periods, such violence has been almost endemic.

The history of social violence in the United States is varied and colorful. Race, creed, color and place of national origin have all, at one time or another, served as bases for social categorization and social violence. Orientals, Africans and American Indians have all been the victims of massive group assault. Catholics, Mormons and Jews, as well as a variety of Protestant sects, have at some time been the focus of systematic campaigns of discrimination and, occasionally, of social violence. Loyalists in the American Revolution and Copperheads in the Civil War were frequently deprived of civil liberties including safety of life and limb. Economic strife has erupted into violence countless times during the brief history of the United States, particularly in the last one hundred years. No major industry accepted unionization without a struggle, but in some, such as the railroads and the mines, the struggle assumed the character of class warfare.

America has been, then, a land of lawlessness and violence. Spontaneous brawls between servicemen of different branches are remembered by people who lived through World War II. Violence between schoolboys from different schools or young gang members fighting over "turf" are a part of the American scene today. The gangster warfare of the Thirties is celebrated in movies and in television series; famous blood feuds are remembered in folk and popular songs. Our tradition of lawlessness includes, on one hand, a generalized contempt of parking regulations and an apparent admiration of gangster heroes and, on the other, an excessive zeal in the administration of "vigilante justice," "lynch law" and "six-shooter law" on the frontier.

Racial disturbances and teenage gang "wars" are colorful and dramatic manifestations of conflict. But violent disturbances of a racial character or among delinquents, which have a high visibility, have claimed and continue to claim fewer lives than many other varieties of violence, individual or social. There are more criminal homicides in some American metropolises every year than there have been deaths from all the urban race riots of the twentieth century combined. A few famous feuds, and some major labor disputes, have rolled up casualty lists which compare in length with the most spectacular interracial disorders. Juvenile violence, although an important problem, probably receives disproportionate attention because of the random and sporadic pattern it takes and because victims have increasingly been people from the middle class.

It is possible, for purposes of convenience in discussion, to delineate roughly seven or eight major periods in race relations in this country, each of them with a characteristic pattern of Negro-white conflict. During the first period, that of *slave insurrections and resistance* (1640-1861), the racial status of the Negro was being gradually defined. At the beginning of this period the status of the Negro was similar to that of the white indentured servant. Such interracial

violence as occurred was interpreted less in racial than in class or social terms, particularly in terms of the master-servant relationship. By the end of this period, however, racial definitions of the situation had been accepted by both groups. Just as the dominant group characterized all Negroes in a derogatory manner, so Negroes would have exterminated whites of all social classes had the occasional rebellions been more successful. The period of *Civil War and Reconstruction* (1861-1877) produced the bloodiest case of interracial violence in American history, the so-called "Draft Riots" of 1863. Several thousand persons apparently died in these disturbances in New York. At least one causal factor was a fear of competition from black labor which flourished among unskilled, lower-class whites. The postwar period saw the beginnings of "night-riding" activity; repressive activity against Negroes (and some whites) was an attempt to bring some coherence into a disrupted accommodative structure. By the end of this period the relationship between whites and Negroes had been clearly defined as an interracial one and any interclass aspects were clearly secondary. Henceforward, particularly in the South but with increasing frequency in the North, disputes between whites and Negroes were interpreted as interracial disputes no matter what may have been the initiating incident.

The next period, that of the *Second Reconstruction and the beginnings of the Great Migration,* lasted from 1878 to the start of World War I in 1914. The withdrawal of federal troops after the Compromise of 1877 was not followed by an immediate wave of savage repression and reprisal against Negroes in the South. For a decade it even seemed that the lines of struggle in the South might be drawn along class rather than racial lines.[2] There was labor violence in the North, and a tenuous alliance existed between Negroes and poor whites during the acme of Populist power in the South. Emancipation and military defeat, "Black Republicanism" and the Freedman's Bureau, and the First Reconstruction with its schoolmarms and its scalawags had completely disrupted the ante-bellum pattern of accommodation between the two races in the South. The Second Reconstruction, with its Jim Crow legislation, its night-riders and lynching "bees" to enforce racial etiquette, was an attempt to re-establish that earlier pattern. The last decade of the nineteenth and the first of the twentieth century were peak decades for lynchings: there were riots in 1896 in Wilmington, North Carolina, and in 1906 in Atlanta over Negro political activity; in 1908, Springfield, Illinois was the scene of the first major racial clash in the North.[3]

In the years 1915-1929 it became clear that the Negro problem was no longer a regional one. Labelled as the period of *World War I and postwar boom and racial readjustment,* these years were characterized by an increasing incidence of major outbreaks of interracial violence in Northern urban areas with their growing concentrations of Negro population. During this period the nation experienced a wide variety of types of racial violence including (a) lynch-

---

2   See Frazier, *Theoretical Structure of Sociology and Sociological Research,* 4 BRITISH J. SOCIOLOGY 293 (1953); WOODWARD, THE STRANGE CAREER OF JIM CROW (rev. ed. 1957).

3   The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, an organization whose role in shaping events of the subsequent half century has perhaps been slighted in the pages following, was established as a direct response to the Atlanta and Springfield riots.

ing, (b) mutiny and insurrection, (c) individual interracial assaults and homicides and racially based arson and bombings, (d) "Southern style" race riots and (e) "Northern style" riots.[4] This crescendo in racial social violence was, at least in part, a consequence of the nationwide reaction of whites to a new militance in the Negro's assault upon the accommodative structure. This new militance was a result partly of the not unsubstantial gains of the Negro in moving North during the war and partly of the much publicized treatment of Negro soldiers overseas. Large numbers of whites shared in a determination to "put these uppity niggers back in their place," and violence occurred at widely scattered points throughout the country.

Reported violence declined sharply in the *interwar and depression* period (1930-1941). Lynchings declined in number, if not in barbarity. Whites as well as Negroes were victimized. The so-called Harlem "riot" of 1935 resulted in large part from class factors, adumbrating a pattern which has become increasingly salient in recent years. During these years there was a gradual growth of extremist political movements (including varieties of Black Nationalism) which played, and play, a still incompletely assessed role in the coming struggles.

Events of *World War II and immediate postwar years* (1942-1947) were sharp and dramatic. The bloodiest disturbance was the Detroit riot of 1943, a Northern-style riot similar to that of Chicago in 1919. Equally publicized was further violence in Harlem, again showing strong overtones of class. Disturbances occurred in other urban centers, and violence occurred in many smaller cities with the return of Negro veterans. Intimately related to all these patterns of violence was a much increased militance shown by the Negro press and by a number of Negro organizations and movements.[5] Perhaps most important in terms of long-range consequences was the burgeoning utilization of political, economic and legal coercion in the assault upon the pattern of interracial accommodation. Results of the interaction of all these factors have become obvious in the accelerating changes of the last twenty years.

The pattern of events has changed so rapidly in the years since 1948 that it seems specious to attempt to isolate and label specific periods. The range of institutional areas under assault has broadened to include every aspect of social life. Similarly, a vastly increased variety of modes of attack upon the accommodative structure has been used by Negroes in their quest for equal rights as citizens. And, as partial successes have been attained, aspirations and demands have themselves increased in magnitude.[6] As a consequence of all these changes, there have been both quantitative and qualitative changes in interpretation of and attitudes about the "Negro revolution." The issue of civil rights and equal

---

4   See Grimshaw, *supra* note 1; Grimshaw, *Three Major Cases of Colour Violence in the United States*, 5 RACE 76 (1963).

5   For example, the March on Washington Committee and its successor organization, the March on Washington Movement, included Negroes and Negro organizations from across the whole spectrum of militancy. See the excellent study of these organizations in GARFINKEL, WHEN NEGROES MARCH (1959).

6   See Grimshaw, *Negro-White Relations in the Urban North: Two Areas of High Conflict Potential*, 3 J. INTERGROUP RELATIONS 146 (1962); Grimshaw, *Urban Racial Violence in the United States: Changing Ecological Considerations*, 66 AMERICAN J. SOCIOLOGY 109 (1960) (concluding section); Grimshaw, *Factors Contributing to Colour Violence in the United States and Great Britain*, 3 RACE 3 (1962) (concluding section).

opportunities has, in the minds of most Americans, replaced all other problems as the major domestic policy concern. At the same time, there have been subtle changes in the ideological dialogue over these rights — there has been a sharp decrease in the use of sacred themes of "protection of white womanhood" and the like, even among the most unreconstructed Southern white opponents to desegregation. Even Governor Wallace now insists that "all" Americans should have the right to vote — concern is expressed, however, about states' rights, constitutional issues, individual freedoms (of whites) and control of communist subversion. Finally, and the importance of this fact must not be underestimated, there have been demonstrable changes in the posture and behavior of external agencies of constraint. Local police forces and the federal government have both increasingly supported the minority position — however flagrant the activities of some local law enforcement officers may be, however slowly the majesty of federal power may move.[7]

While any attempt to classify events of recent years meets with tremendous obstacles, some sense of chronology can perhaps be retained. At the beginning of this period there was a combination of legal and political activity directed toward fairly limited goals. Incidents occurred which, had it not been for the presence of better police controls than existed in the past, might have erupted into large-scale racial social violence. In the North, these incidents tended to cluster into two categories: (1) those related to Negro invasion of white residential areas and (2) those over use of public facilities, particularly recreational facilities. Near riots, now receding in memory in the face of more recent and more spectacular events, occurred over the use of swimming facilities in St. Louis, Youngstown and Washington. A litany of place names — Cicero, Trumbull Park, Levittown — marked the course of change in housing occupancy patterns.

The decade of the fifties saw a renewed and increased vigor in the use of the courts, particularly in the area of school desegregation, and in the South as well as in the North.[8] Eruptions of violence occurred in Southern communities where court orders to integrate were greeted by organized resistance by sectors of the white community. It was a new era, with federal troops and Citizen's Councils, expanding militance and exotic attempts to stem the tide (whatever happened to John Kaspar?).

The most dramatic change in the pattern of intergroup relations has been the introduction of various techniques of direct action. The Congress on Racial Equality had sponsored some "sit-ins" in the 1940's, the first direct action occurring in 1942. The real impetus to direct action came, however, from the successful bus boycott in Montgomery in 1955. In this decade such activity has crescendoed, with a proliferation of organizations, e.g., the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, etc.,

---

7   For a study of the importance of law enforcement agencies, see Grimshaw, *Relationships Among Prejudice, Discrimination, Social Tension and Social Violence*, 2 J. INTERGROUP RELATIONS 302 (1961). For a study of actual behavior of such agencies see Grimshaw, *Actions of the Police and the Military in American Race Riots*, 24 PHYLON 271 (1963). For a study of the philosophies of preventative action, see Grimshaw, *Police Agencies and the Prevention of Racial Violence*, 54 J. CRIM. L., C. & P.S. 110 (1963).

8   These events have been chronicled in great detail in the *Southern School News* and *Race Relations Law Reporter*.

participating in a growing variety of direct action — "freedom rides," "sit-ins," "kneel-ins," "wade-ins," "prayer vigils" and currently culminating in the massive demonstrations in Selma (whoever heard of Selma?) and the march to Montgomery.[9] Each of these new techniques of direct action has elicited counter-techniques from the white segregation establishment. An initial response was one of kidnapping and summary "execution" or of sudden assault in a fashion reminiscent of Northern gang warfare of the thirties or of post-Civil War team activities. Similarly, there have been and continue to be widespread attempts at terrorization through arson and bombings. With increasing involvement, an interesting shift occurred with Southern areas appealing for judicial protection through injunction. Finally, we have the erratic pattern of direct counteraction by local law enforcement officers (or even state troopers) as in Selma, alternating with pleas for peaceful civic behavior (by governors) and protection for demonstrators from these same law enforcement agencies. Response behavior by the white resistance has become disorganized, almost to the point where it is random, with continual inability to stem the tide of change. This lack of pattern will continue, and further violence can be expected.

Two other sets of events have drawn national and worldwide attention. These are the internal struggle going on within the Black Nationalist movement and the explosions of violence which occurred in the summer of 1964 in Northern urban areas. These events require the addition of new dimensions to the analysis of Negro-white relations and do not easily fit into the chronology outlined above. There is not sufficient space here to discuss the internal struggle, but the violence of 1964 will serve as a fulcrum for discussion of new directions in violence in the concluding section. At this point, however, it may be worthwhile to state some generalizations based on the chronological discussion just completed.

With the exception of a brief period after the Civil War, the pattern of American Negro-white relationships, especially in the American South, has closely approximated the classic accommodative pattern of superordination-subordination, with the whites a continually dominant group. The most savage oppression, whether expressed in rural lynchings and pogroms or in urban race riots, has taken place when the Negro has refused to accept a subordinate status. The most intense conflict has resulted when the subordinate minority group has attempted to disrupt the accommodative pattern or when the superordinate group has defined the situation as one in which such an attempt is being made. Conflict in Negro-white relationships in the United States has been conflict generated by the breakdown of an essentially unstable accommodative pattern, essentially unstable because the subordinated group has refused to accept its status and has had sufficient power to challenge it.

At a recent panel on violence, a speaker talked about violence as a "mystery," and attacked the problem of the "moral foundations" of violence. Violence is not a mystery to the sociologist. It is simply one of several modes of conflict resolution. The choice of this rather than other modes need not be a mystery; reasons are to be found within the structural arrangements of society

---

9   The NAACP has not been explicitly mentioned here but has had a major role in all of these events.

itself. For the same reason, sociological explications of social violence need not be predicated on any grasp of moral meanings, though questions of responsibility and guilt are of interest to the citizen and the philosopher of ethics.

Sociologist Georg Simmel, generally considered to be the first "formal sociologist," insisted that it was possible to examine certain "forms" of social interaction (or social processes) and to discuss these in the abstract, without reference to specific content. Thus, said Simmel, we can study that particular variety of accommodative relationship which we identify as the pattern of super-ordination-subordination. In this relationship, whether actual incumbents are priest and parishioner, master and slave, officer and enlisted man or psychiatrist and patient, there will be an asymmetry in interaction. Guidance, advice, directives and commands flow in one direction; deference, obedience and compliance flow in the other. From the sociological perspective, it is expected that similar patterns can be discerned in the process of social conflict and its particular sub-type, social violence.

From this point of view there is no need to argue whether or not violence is consciously selected as instrumental. Most social violence, possibly excluding wars of conquest and similar adventures, is probably reactive rather than consciously instrumental. Social violence in the United States has seldom resulted from a conscious decision to follow a policy of violence.[10] Such violence has been, rather, a response of dominant groups to either real or perceived assaults upon the accommodative structure, the *status quo*. This has been true for Negro-white relationships throughout American history, though actual expressions of violence have varied. A similar interpretation holds for other varieties of social violence, ethnic, religious or labor-management in this country, and seems applicable, moreover, to patterns of social violence which have occurred else-where, *e.g.*, Hindu-Muslim violence in India.[11]

No claim is made that social violence can be explained by a simple stimulus-response formula, with assault on the accommodative structure as stimulus and social violence as response. In the real world of Negro-white relations there is a complex interaction of prejudice, discrimination, social tension and social violence. There is no simple and direct relationship with an increase in social tension automatically increasing the probability of social violence. Agencies of external constraint (the judiciary, local police, federal troops) intervene to reduce the likelihood of violence in some cases — and to increase it in others. In an increasingly complex society the activities of agencies in possession of monopolies of the legal use of force can be crucial factors in determination of the occurrence or nonoccurrence of violence — Selma provides a type case.

II

Many readers already know the history reviewed above, although perhaps fewer are familiar with analysis of social violence from the perspective of attacks

---

10 There have, of course, been instances where sectors of one or the other community have adopted such a policy, or where leadership has appeared to give tacit approval by failure to publicly disavow violence.

11 See Lambert, Hindu-Muslim Riots, 1951 (unpublished dissertation in University of Pennsylvania Library).

upon the *status quo*. More readers, even if simply through following current events in the mass media, will be aware that new patterns of intergroup relations and new modes of attempting to induce change are reflected in changing characteristics of participants. Some people, however, seem to have the view that participation patterns are pretty much the same now as they always have been, and that participants in racial conflict comprise criminal elements (Negro), good but gullible colored people, "bad niggers" (including those corrupted by Communists), "Reds" and good, Christian white men, upholders of the social order. As has been suggested, this oversimplification leads to difficulties in attempting to understand the phenomena of violence under consideration.

Although evidence is scanty for events prior to the twentieth century, there is considerable information on the socioeconomic characteristics of participants in the violent behavior of the period since the beginning of World War I. The most thoroughly documented material is that on characteristics of victims and offenders in the Detroit race riot of 1943, but there are journalistic and quasi-scholarly accounts of lynchings and of other urban racial disturbances. Few people who have written on race riots have failed to express strong opinions about the characteristics of rioters. While there is divergence of opinion in these reports, ranging from publications of action agencies such as the NAACP or the careful study of the Chicago Commission on Race Relations to the most journalistic news articles or to militant pamphlets prepared by left-wing organizations, there is also considerable agreement. Almost all of the literature on race riots notes the greater participation of some categories of individuals than others. Categories frequently mentioned, other than the police, include criminals, youth (including organized gangs), women, servicemen (in wartime riots) and in some cases a variety of bourgeois elements. Other writers have claimed a heavy participation by agitators of the extreme right or left.

Criminal activity may have been great in urban race riots, but such participation is probably a consequence of the fact that rioting has been concentrated in the same areas of the city where criminal elements are ecologically centered. Organized criminal activity has not been a concommitant of interracial violence. While criminals are surely drawn to situations where formal controls have broken down, it is doubtful on the basis of available data whether any riot in this country has ever been started by criminals for the express purpose of gaining cover for criminal behavior. Characterization of all rioters as criminals or hoodlums is inaccurate. It is true, however, that criminals are more likely than others to be among those picked up during riots.[12]

The youth of many race rioters has been noted in most studies, professional or journalistic, of Northern riots. In the South the "bourbon" lynching, with its sacred overtones, was a serious business in which adult male members of the white community participated as a "social duty"; younger people frequently were spectators and even participants in less austere ceremonials. In the Detroit

---

12 This happens in other types of disturbances as well. During a "panty-raid" at the University of Missouri in 1951, staff from the office of the Dean of Men stood quietly on staircases and at doors, letting all students go by except those who had previously found their way into the Dean's office for disciplinary action. These "prior record" students were the ones picked up and detained.

riot of 1943 over a quarter of all those arrested were in the age group 17-20.[13] While there are many reports of youths and even preadolescents being encouraged to participate in riotous behavior by older, nonparticipating adults, there is evidence that many young people in such disturbances have been caught up in a spirit of "carnival." The intensity of this carnival spirit is exemplified in the killing of Moses Kiska, an elderly Negro, in the Detroit riot. Four white teenage boys killed this man, unknown to them, because ". . . other people were fighting and killing and we felt like it too."[14] Clark presented a case study of a Negro youth, a participant in 1943 Harlem disturbance, who utilized the general confusion to "have a holiday" and also to express pent-up agressions against all manifestations of authority.[15] It is unsafe to generalize from the meager data available, but there seems to have been, in riotous disturbances, a general crumbling of inhibitions in which youth expressed ordinarily repressed behavior patterns.

Limitations of space prevent the discussion of participation of all other special categories of people in racial violence. Suffice it to say that there are two possible, though not contradictory, interpretations. One is that certain types of participants mentioned have particularly high visibility, which is further enhanced because their presence and participation is not expected. The other is that there are particular gains for such participants, *e.g.*, women, normally required to play a more passive role, used the situations of normlessness prevalent in periods of interracial violence to express inhibited aggressive impulses. In actuality, the facts of the case probably lie somewhere between the two alternative explanations.

Assertions have been made, and continue to be made, that subversive agitators of the extreme right or extreme left have played a major role in incitement to violence. There is no documentation for any such claims. Indeed, the Mayor's Commission on Conditions in Harlem, in its report on the 1935 disturbance, concluded in reference to claims blaming the Communists, "the Communists . . . deserve more credit than any other element in Harlem for preventing a physical conflict between whites and blacks."[16]

The Communists, on the other hand, made accusations that World War II riots were "Axis-inspired," and there are people in Detroit today who noted activity of the KKK and other native Fascist groups in the city immediately preceding that riot. There is no evidence, however, that agitators ever did any more than perhaps to encourage violence that had already started. It must be concluded for these riots, as the FBI has concluded about the 1964 disturbances, that allegations of organized leadership by Communists or rightists remain unproved.

In the last analysis it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that persons who

---

13   Rushton, Dowling, Olander & Witherspoon, Report of the Committee to Investigate the Riot Occurring on June 21, 1943, exhibit 24 (mimeo).
14   LEE & HUMPHREY, RACE RIOT 43 (1943).
15   Clark & Barker, *The Zoot Effect in Personality: A Race Riot Participant,* 40 J. ABNORMAL & SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY 143 (1945).
16   Report of the Mayor's Commission on Conditions in Harlem, New York Amsterdam News, July 18, 1936.

participated in the large-scale urban violence of the past were drawn largely from the areas where rioting was concentrated and that their social, psychological and demographic characteristics reflect those of populations resident in those areas. Older persons were somewhat more likely to stay indoors and not to participate. Women may have generally followed role prescriptions, but some women did participate and their participation drew the attention of observers. If there were more persons characterized by unemployment, low education, low intelligence, possible psychiatric defects, prior criminal records and other indicators of social debility participating and being apprehended in riots, it was because those individuals lived largely in those areas.

During the last few years sharply different patterns have emerged in the composition of groups participating in the broad arena of the civil rights struggle. As suggested above, there are now three distinguishable sets of events involving disaffection of different sectors of the Negro minority.

Anyone who has followed events of the voter registration drive in the mass media cannot fail to realize that recruits in that effort vary sharply in their characteristics from those involved in any earlier attempts to change the traditional pattern of superordination-subordination. From the time of the bus boycott in 1955 and the earliest "sit-ins," events in the South have had a strong religious flavor. Both the SCLC and the SNCC have made religious appeals throughout their campaigns. This may explain why in the South they have been successful in uniting lower-class Negroes who had previously been either terrified or apathetic and an increasingly discontented, articulate and deeply religious middle class. In many ways Martin Luther King's particular mixture of Gandhian nonviolence and Christian theology has had the potency of fundamental revivalism.

But this is a fundamental revivalism which has attracted a heterogeneous following. While clergymen and religious leaders of many faiths have been involved in events of the drive, particularly in the spring of 1965, we are witnessing the interesting spectacle of mass involvement of nonbelievers in a civil rights crusade explicitly organized around religious as well as political premises. The "civil rightsniks" are familiar with the solidarity gospel because of fairly long involvement in the movement. It is doubtful, however, whether they or the much more sedate middle-class students and academic types are typically religious. Statistics are not, of course, available, but there is something incongruous about Jews, Catholics, Protestants, atheists and agnostics joining in common ceremony before an "altar" on the statehouse steps in a political move to achieve a secular goal.

There will be a continuing debate over the tactical wisdom of the March on Montgomery. There will be speculation over the motivations of some participants — there may well be elements of "liberal catharsis," "bandwagon psychology," or even of the carnival atmosphere mentioned above in the discussion of violence. It seems, however, that the very heterogeneity of participants and the apparent incongruities of events have served to confuse and disorganize segregationist resistance. Whites from Alabama did participate in the March. Violence was not met with violence, although after the first bloody Sunday

there were restrained threats. It is difficult to find any real analog to this mass social movement. Violence there will be — but racial social violence on a large scale in urban areas will not become endemic in the South.

Limitations of space prevent any full discussion of the other two groups. It may be noted, however, that both are, in contrast to that in Selma, solely Negro and almost totally lower class or, in the case of some sectors of the Black Nationalists, lower-middle class. In the concluding section an attempt will be made to gain some perspective on the events of the "long hot summer" of 1964 and of characteristics of participants in those disorders.

<p style="text-align:center">III</p>

Without denying that events of last summer in Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Rochester, Chicago and New Jersey represent manifestations of a deep social unrest in the largest American minority, it can be said that they did not represent outbreaks of major racial violence. Nor, for that matter, did they represent the aspirations and modes of attaining goals defined as acceptable by the bulk of that minority. The incidents labelled as race riots which occurred in urban areas in the northern United States in the summer of 1964 were neither race riots in the proper usage of that term, nor were they part of the main stream of civil rights agitation which has been going on in this country since the 1954 Supreme Court decision on school desegregation.

There were two main themes in the discussion of the events of last summer. One of them, predictably, had strong political overtones, and was directed to an analysis of the so-called "white backlash," sometimes with a certain smug satisfaction and with apparent hopes that this phenomenon could be used politically in the attempt to change the party in power. Among those holding this general orientation were analysts who claimed to find in the disturbances sinister evidence of Communist conspiracy, widespread dope addiction and crime, a failure of sincere attempts to meet Negro "demands" through such palliatives as the then new Civil Rights Act — a palliative, as often as not, rejected by these experts when it was under discussion. These people admitted, albeit with some reluctance, the fact that the Negro has been denied full citizenship. They insisted, however, that the minority must be satisfied with gradual gains as they were conceded by the majority, that civil disobedience could under no circumstances be tolerated, even if in a righteous cause, and they recommended harsh repression as a technique of control.

Their motto was — and is — "no negotiation while disturbances continue." In this they demonstrate one of the major fallacies of their position, an assumption that those with whom they negotiate had the power to control the Negro rioters who were involved in the disturbances. They see the civil rights protest movement, indeed, the Negro community as a whole, as a monolithic, organized antiwhite conspiracy. In this view they err in two matters of substance. In the first place, even within the "respectable" civil rights movement there is no monolithic hierarchy of control. There is schism and disagreement on both tactics and long-range strategy among the leaders of the middle-class movement, men like King and Wilkins and Farmer. Nor are the organizations which these

men lead monolithic. Both Wilkins and Farmer, for example, have had difficulty in retaining control of more militant leaders of local organizations. In any event, these leaders were agreed in condemnation of disturbances such as those in Harlem last summer as being tactically in error. To a certain extent they were swept up in the concern about the "backlash," while some of their subordinates have the attitude that "backlash" or no, the only way to gain full rights is to keep pressing.

The other error of substance is the assumption that the disturbances were indeed a part of the fabric of the larger civil rights struggle. In point of fact, this was not and will not be the case. The Negroes who engaged in riotous behavior, antipolice activity and looting are not the same Negroes as those who have peacefully picketed and who have gone into the South to participate in voter drives — or who marched on Washington. They are the lower-class apathetics, the new style indifferents, who have been outside the movement, skeptical of any success in dealing with "the man," or with the society itself. These people are not students and the respectable middle classes. They are the permanently dispossessed, the urban Negro poor, unemployed or underemployed, people on relief, people with little to live for and with little expectation of any improvement in their life chances — whatever the success or failure of the larger "Negro Revolution."[17] What we saw last summer was not race warfare but a phenomenon of class expression, the Negro undersociety expressing its hatred of a class system which makes it permanently deprived. Expressions about civil rights are only tags which the more sophisticated among this unorganized mass have learned to use, hoping to acquire some facade of reasonableness in their protest — if not of acceptability. It is no accident that most of the violence which took place was directed against property or against the police, representatives of the class system and of property. When actual interracial clashes occurred in these disturbances it was usually because whites appeared in these areas or because whites have, themselves, been representatives of the propertied classes (*e.g.,* in the case of shopkeepers).

The second major theme is a more continuing one which appeared before the drastic events of last summer. This has been the continuing examination and re-examination, by participants in and friends of the general movement toward full equality, of the short and long term goals of the "Negro Revolution" and of the most efficient manner in which to move towards these goals. Over the last decade, civil rights activity has been concentrated primarily in four areas. These have been education, housing, the franchise and the use of public facilities. Through the same period there has been continuing but less organized activity in the areas of employment and of relations with law enforcement agencies. Events of last summer underlined again the question of priorities of goals, and of different priorities for different sectors of the Negro community.

---

17   Over half of the Negroes twenty-four years of age in the United States are school dropouts, as contrasted to about one-fourth of all whites—a figure itself alarming. One-fourth of all teenage youths in the labor market (and some no longer actively seek work) are without jobs. While Negro family income has improved, it remains only slightly more than half that of white families.

Throughout the post-World War II period, up until last summer, the most dramatic events in the civil rights contest occurred in the areas of housing, education and access to public facilities. The long drawn out struggle in Chicago over a mixed occupancy pattern in Trumbull Park, the confrontation of federalized troops with militant segregationists in Little Rock, the looks of hatred on the faces of the mothers of white schoolchildren threatened with integration, the "sit-ins," "wade-ins" and "pray-ins" — these activities have been colorful and newsworthy. With the exception of the struggle over public facilities and of this year's voter registration drive, however, they actually involved relatively small numbers of Negroes. Most of the Negroes who have been involved in these areas, moreover, have been middle-class Negroes and college students, and they have had the active support and participation of whites with the same kinds of backgrounds in their activities (again, the voter registration drive presents an entirely different picture).

If those involved in such activities were of middle-class status, the immediate rewards of such activities were, equally, of interest primarily to that group. Only a small proportion of American Negroes in the North or South have sufficient financial resources to exploit new housing opportunities. Even fewer, perhaps, can afford to patronize the luxury hotels and fine restaurants which have sometimes been the focus of the struggle over facilities. While many Negroes want better educational facilities for their children, many are essentially indifferent as to whether this takes place under conditions of token integration. They are more concerned with the quality of education than with its setting. Lower-class Negroes, moreover, are generally less likely to find themselves in the position of being embarrassed by denial of other kinds of public facilities such as libraries, parks and golf courses, simply because like lower-class white Americans, they do not ordinarily make use of them. Activities of the postwar years, in other words, have frequently been those of middle-class Negroes *for* middle-class Negroes. This is not to deny that those participating in such activities have had broader concerns over abstract principles of equal justice. It is merely to note that the goals of the movement have not been such, until most recently, as to inspire the participation of the less privileged sectors of the minority community.

Lower-class Negro concerns, and events of 1964 again can serve as evidence, have been with the more mundane matters of economic subsistence and decent living conditions, even within the ghetto, and of everyday relations with law enforcement agencies. In the South these questions have been inextricably tied to the problem of the franchise. It is in the context of the right to vote that the genuine racial violence of last summer occurred, as in the slaying of the three young civil rights workers in Philadelphia, Mississippi (and more recently, death over Selma). In the North, even with the franchise, Negroes have still found themselves to be economically an underclass and to receive different treatment from the police.

The question which has been raised in this second theme, then, is over the redefinition of goals.

Two sets of facts, examined simultaneously, explain the urban disturbances

of last summer. The first is, as suggested immediately above, dissensus over goals sought by Negro leadership and by sectors of the community which were involved in the rioting. This dissensus, moreover, has occurred in a period characterized by a growing prosperity for some Negroes, and an increasingly high standard of living in which the Negro underclass has not shared. Concurrent with these increasingly marked disparities the lower-class Negroes, who have been generally apathetic and who have not participated in organized activity, have seen that the minority does have power, however that power may have been utilized. What they have not seen is that much of that power has been generated through disciplined activity. Moreover, while they share a vague sense of pride because Negroes have been successful in reaching goals in spite of the resistance of whites, they are not in sympathy with many of the goals that have been defined by the Negro leadership, a group itself representative of many of the values of a class system which has brought *them* no satisfactions. The rioting was a result, then, of deep-seated frustration, a sense of potential power and a lack of organization and direction.

The Negro rioting in the summer of 1964 was aimless and unorganized. There were few mobs. Rather there were clusters of atomistic individuals and small groups. While there was property damage and looting, the looting was hardly systematic and goal-directed. The highly sporadic nature of the disturbances makes untenable any explanation which seeks for evidence of a sinister Communist conspiracy. It is doubtless true that extremists of all hues tried to profit from the disturbances, but to give them credit for their inception is to vastly overrate their power and to grossly misperceive the amount of organization in the disturbances.

There are almost twenty million Negroes in the United States. Taking all of the Northern urban disturbances together, it is doubtful whether there were ten thousand active participants. There were much larger numbers of spectators, some of whom doubtlessly were at least partially in sympathy, although many others were concerned about the effects of such activity on the larger course of the civil rights movement. It is true, moreover, that many of the active participants were active only in the sense of a kind of cathartic expression of the carnival, and that they had no ideological motives in mind, either consciously or unconsciously. The magnitude of the disturbances has been much exaggerated.

Even if it is true, however, that press reports have been exaggerated, the riots were symptomatic of a basic problem in American society, perhaps even more basic than that of race relations. Michael Harrington in his report on poverty in America, *The Other America,* estimated that some forty million Americans are permanently underprivileged, hungry and without prospects.[18] If middle-class Negroes continue to be increasingly successful in the pursuit of *their* goals, estrangement by class, already marked, can be expected to grow within the Negro minority. If this is the case, we must expect a gradual shift from social definitions by race to social definitions which emphasize class membership. The extremes of wealth and poverty are being reduced in neither the

18 HARRINGTON, THE OTHER AMERICA: POVERTY IN THE UNITED STATES (1964).

white nor the Negro communities. Years to come may reveal some interesting changes in group alignments.

It can be safely said that the middle-class leadership of neither the white nor the Negro community espouses social violence as a mode of resolving inter-racial conflicts. Leaders and middle-class people of both groups, generally, are too self-consciously concerned over America's world image to let this be the case. In addition, Negro middle-class leaders share the common values of the middle class, including patterns of socialization which emphasize the control of aggression. There will be occasional outbursts of racial violence in which both groups are involved, but the great discipline of the Negro middle classes in events of the last decade suggests that violence will be a consequence of police activity or inactivity rather than a consequence of policy decisions by the "respectable middle classes."

Events of last summer were dramatic. With all the excitement, however, the "racial blood-bath" which had been predicted, whether with relish or dismay, never materialized. There were isolated cases of murder, and these can be expected to continue in the years immediately ahead. There has been continual harassment of electoral registration workers — it would have been a surprise if this had not occurred. There have been racially defined incidents in cities in the North and South, and these can be expected to continue for some years. But the important fact is that the disturbances which occurred last summer were not confrontations of whites and Negroes with large-scale violence in mind, as has been the case in the major riots of the twentieth century in Chicago, Detroit, East St. Louis and so on. The disturbances which occurred were, rather, frustrated uprisings of a *minority within a minority*. This again, perhaps, we must expect to continue unless major changes occur in the large economic and social structure of American society.