THAT'S NOT MY CITY
An Analysis of a Civil Disturbance in Curacao

by

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The meaning of collective violence is often apparent only in retrospect. Interpretations of incidents can more often be understood as a justification for actions taken by various observers in their roles as participants. Written history is more likely to record an "official" position while, on the other hand, revolutionary literature will provide a quite different ex post facto view. Such conflicting views do not necessarily imply that any single interpretation is adequate. It is possible, however, aided by a socio-historical understanding of past events, to look at contemporary situations and to place them in a context which is less dependent upon the justifications of participants.

Recent events in the United States, particularly in the cities and on the campuses, have prompted social scientists to give more attention to understanding the dynamics involved in collective violence. A literature is beginning to emerge. In studying such events, there are many methodological and theoretical problems. Most standard social science methods are not easily adapted to the demands made on the observation and interpretation of events which have both a long historical causal nexus as well as a short dramatic violent culmination.

Given these difficulties, there are certain advantages in seeking a setting which provides the opportunity for the study of collective violence outside the American or Western European context but still in a situation which is sufficiently similar to make comparisons possible. Such an opportunity presented itself in May 1969 in Curacao, the largest of the six islands in the Netherlands Antilles. One of the local papers can provide the initial
introduction to the actual event.

The capital of the Dutch Antilles, Willemstad, on the last day of May 1969, looks like a city struck by disaster. A tidal wave of violence has flooded the city yesterday and it seems many lives were lost and many injured. There has been damage of many millions due to fires and looting on a large scale. Trade has suffered heavy loss and it may be assumed that many people lost their livelihood in a few hours time.

In less than 24 hours, the leaden mask of an unconcerned and carefree life has been ripped off a large part of Curacao in the Caribbean Sea. From behind this mask came the ugly face which was lined with suppressed racial sentiments. The view which the world had was one which revealed itself in arson and looting. The myth of the carefree life of the Antillian people was destroyed abruptly in the burning ruins of buildings.

Curacao located 35 miles north of Venezuela and 42 miles east of Aruba is 38 miles long by 2½ to 7 miles wide. It is the largest and most populous of the Netherlands Antilles; a group of six islands -- Aruba, Curacao, Bonaire, St. Martin, Saba and St. Eustatuis. The N.A. is an autonomous part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The population is around 135,000 persons, of whom over 65,000 live in Willemstad, the capital located on the south shore. As a research site, Curacao offered certain advantages. It has a very complex racial and religious structure. It has considerable industrialization, in addition to its tourist trade. Being an island, the boundaries of its social system are somewhat delimited and the history of the society is known. In addition, the outbreak of violence on the island was somewhat of a "surprise" since Curacao had a reputation as being, compared to other Caribbean countries, better off economically and its race relations were seen as relatively tranquil. This reputation was known in other Caribbean countries and was a matter of pride in Curacao. Elements of this background need to be understood to put the incident in context.
Background

Curacao's complex history encompasses invasion, colonization, slavery, recruitment of an industrial labor force, as well as streams of different racial and religious groups. This history has lead to the development of what Hoetink has called a "segmented society." An abbreviated form of this development can only be sketched here as a background to understanding the event. In particular, dimensions of class, status, and power which were important to the development of the stratification system will be emphasized.

From the viewpoint of the West, the island was discovered and initially settled by the Spanish in the 1500's. When the Dutch invaded Curacao in 1634, few of the original population, Indians, remained. Most had followed the Spanish to the South America continent. The Dutch, unlike the Spanish, maintained rather distant interpersonal relationships with the remaining Indians, although extra-legal sexual relationships did, of course, occur.

In the following decades, two new population groups were added to the island -- Sephardic Jews and Negroes. Under the West India Company and directorship of Peter Stuyvesant, Curacao became an important trade port in the Caribbean. At about the time that the slave trade began, the Directors of the West India Company became involved in a contract with Spain for the regular delivery of Negro slaves to Spanish colonies. Consequently, Curacao became an important slave depot. The climatic conditions on the island not being conducive to agriculture, did not allow the development of a widespread plantation slavery system as it did in many other Caribbean islands.

Around 1656, a large number of Sephardic Jews came to the island, both from the Netherlands and from Brazil. Most of them were Portuguese,
originally banished from their own country by the Inquisition. The directors of the company ruled that they could become citizens. While they initially came with a license to found an agricultural colony, the Jews soon became involved in the trade of the island. Because of their linguistic skills with Latin languages and their prior knowledge of the area, these Jews eventually replaced the Protestant merchants. The differences in origin, language, and religion led to a separation between the Dutch Protestants and the Jews. This separation was reinforced since the two groups lived in different parts of Willemstad, separated by water. The separation was also maintained by intramarrriage.

In the first century and a half after Dutch capture, two classes did develop among the Protestants. A local aristocracy evolved from the higher civil servants, military personnel, and prosperous merchants. The local status symbol -- the acquisition of a plantation, a country house -- was a mark of belonging to the aristocracy. Since these plantations were not economically productive, given the climate and soil conditions, they functioned primarily as a symbol of conspicuous consumption. A lower class of white Protestants also developed composed of those in the retail trades and crafts as well as the captains of the sailing vessels so necessary to the trade of the island. Among the aristocratic Protestants in particular, a close identification was claimed to the Netherlands and to Amsterdam in particular. This was evidenced by the fact that many of the shutters on the houses were painted red and black in the colors of the city of Amsterdam. Curacao was seen as the Caribbean extension of the Netherlands.

For 130 years, starting in 1648, slaves were imported to Curacao but the majority of them were eventually sold to surrounding countries. The long trip across the Atlantic and its consequences for health of the slaves required
some "storage" facilities on the island. Two slave camps were built where as many as 15,000 slaves were located at one time. During the period of contract with Spain, 4,000 slaves had to be supplied a year. The peak years were from 1685-1713 but, in subsequent years, the number declined to perhaps 500-600 a year in 1750. The majority of slaves came from what now constitutes Ghana and the area surrounding it. The last slave ship docked in 1778; the slave trade was forbidden in 1818 and, in 1863, slavery was abolished.

Some slaves were retained, of course, in Curacao. Except for two minor uprisings in 1750 and 1795, the last spill-over from slave uprisings in Haiti, master-slave relations were relatively tranquil. Many of the slaves were house slaves on the plantation since the plantations had little field work. In 1863, there was the collective emancipation of about 6,000-7,000 slaves. Without other economic alternatives, most of them continued to work for their ex-masters in order to be able to build a house on his land. Survival was impossible without continued dependence upon their former masters.

The social distance between white and black which was rooted in slavery was also reinforced by religious differences. The Protestant aristocracy was almost uniformly Dutch Reformed, again symbolic of its ties to the mother country. Rather than encourage the assimilation of large numbers of blacks to this faith, they allowed Catholic missionaries to come to the island with the implicit responsibility of "Christianizing" the Blacks.

Even though a superordinate-subordinate relationship existed between white and black, the long and continued contact between the two groups led, in time, to the creation of an intermediate colored group, separate from the other two groups. While the colored were not accepted by the whites, the colored felt themselves more privileged than the Negroes. Many whites,
particularly Jews, acknowledged their illegitimate offsprings by protecting them. These status differentials were taken into account, in time, in administrative and military classifications. The colored category was a heterogeneous one, both physically and culturally. Some looked toward the Netherlands, while others identified themselves with South America, speaking Spanish and seeking marriage partners there. In these and in many other ways, they sought to minimize their identification with the blacks.

In summary, the basic structure of Curacao toward the end of the nineteenth century consisted of: (1) An upper status group of white, Dutch Protestants emphasizing family origins, contact with the mother country, Calvinism, governmental position, and the superiority of that which was white and European. (2) Parallel to this Dutch status group was the upper status of the Sephardic Jews. They had gained economic wealth but they continued to speak Portuguese and Spanish, remained in their synagogues, and emphasized their own version of "culture." Their marginal position is indicated by the fact that for a time in the mid-1700s, they constituted the majority of whites on the island, but for 150 years they were treated officially as a "Portuguese Nation." About the same time as the slaves were emancipated, public offices were opened to Jews (and to Catholics). In return, the Jews began to use the Dutch language in their synagogues.

In contrast to the bifurcated upper segment was the black underclass. Its tenuous economic position as a consequence of the long history of slavery changed little with emancipation except for the removal of objective legal barriers. While the blacks were perhaps compensated psychologically by their conversion to Catholicism, this too tended to reinforce their inferior position.
In between were the lower Protestants, their unambiguous ancestry making them superior to the colored. Both the colored and the lower Protestants were not accepted by the upper class, particularly the Dutch Protestants, and they did not identify "down." They were often forced into an identification with pseudo-Dutchness or with South America. In 1914, there were about 4,000 whites (including about 1,000 Jews) and about 26,000 Negroes and colored.

Another chapter has to be added concerning the economic development of Curacao. During the nineteenth century, people in Curacao lived by trade and the shipping connected with it. Neither agriculture nor domestic industries were particularly important. The economic structure changed rapidly in 1915, when Shell decided to establish a large refinery in Curacao. In order to ship and to process the crude oil found in and around Lake Maracaibo, Venezuela, climatic, economic, and political reasons suggested Curacao as the logical location. This decision led to increased prosperity and great population growth through immigration. By 1918, the plant was put in operation and it continued to expand. A second period of expansion started in 1935 and continued to its peak period in 1952 when about 11,000 workers were employed. During the initial period, inhabitants of Surinam, the West Indies and Madeira were employed as contract laborers. Many came from other islands in the Antilles. Dutchmen came from the Netherlands as civil servants, technicians, and as independent professionals. Eastern European and Askenazian Jews, Lebanese, Chinese, East Indians came in to the retail trades.

In addition to the influx of migrants, the economic impact of refinery affected the traditional segments of Curacao somewhat differentially. The Jews, mainly merchants, benefited from the economic renewal. On the other hand, the influence of the refinery was not particularly favorable to the
high Protestants. New civil servants, coming from Europe, some with "modern" technical and professional skills, moved into expanded and sometimes superior governmental positions. This influx led to internal criticism of the colonial government in the Netherlands and strengthened the in-group feeling among the Protestants on Curacao. The term landskind, or native, came to be used as a mark of differentiation. This in-group feeling produced a partial rapprochement between the higher and lower Protestants and among the more privileged among the colored. The colored, having had access to better educational opportunities, tended to benefit from the impact of the refinery since it increased their employment opportunities in both government and in the private sector. In their reaction to the new migrants, the traditional white element found that while they had in the past seen Curacao as a mere extension of the Netherlands, it and they had been transformed into something different and new. This newly recognized identity was expressed in a number of ways -- a greater emphasis on Papiamento, the native language, increased pressure toward political independence, a greater emphasis on an Antillian identity, etc.

The impact of the refinery on the blacks was not in the direction of enhancing their subordinate position. While jobs were available, the blacks lacked many of the technical skills now necessary in the new technology and others were brought into these jobs which required greater skill and training. The subordinate position of the blacks was thus continued and their lack of skills could be used as a continued justification for their inferior position.

The impact of the building of the refinery was, of course, important in other ways. The large number of employees of Shell required housing so a number of Shell housing estates, such as Julianadorp and Bullenbaai, were
built. In addition to housing, Shell also had to make other provisions, since rural Curacao of the twenties offered few amenities. There was not enough water and tankers used to bring river water out of the Thames and Seine on their return trips to Europe. This water was used for gardens so that other better quality water could be used in other ways. Shell also made provisions for health care, education, and recreation. In addition, the company had to concern itself about the supply of food and other commodities as well as setting up subsidiary industries, such as docking facilities. In effect, the circumstances necessitated the development of and perhaps more accurately the continuation of a paternalistic system. Over time, the development of many of these amenities was transferred to others. Most of the housing estates were sold to the occupants of the individual houses. Subsidiary industries were detached. Innovations of more modern industrial systems were introduced, such as unionization. Since 1956, the workers in the industry have been represented by the Petroleum Workers Federation.

The impact of Shell—a world-wide industry, on the comparatively small island was important in still other ways. Curacao had survived on subsidies from the "motherland" in its past, but the economic impact of the refinery allowed the island to provide economic support to the "motherland" during World War II. This financial independence tended to encourage pressure for political independence. Changes in industrial technology, however, have tended to reduce the employment impact. While in 1952 almost 11,000 were employed, the automation of the industry means that now the same amount of work is being done by a fewer number of employees. Shell Curacao now has about 4,000 employees. Given the population increases due to earlier employment needs and the declining importance of Shell as a source
of employment, relatively high rates of unemployment have occurred in recent years. Attempts to encourage other types of economic enterprises are restricted by the inherent limitations of the island's natural resources, since almost everything has to be imported to the island. Economic development in recent years has concentrated on the tourist trade in building hotels, casinos, etc. and to a certain extent on industries which are dependent on raw materials which are inexpensive to import and which require relatively unskilled workers, such as the production of electronic equipment. While these new "industries" require high capital investments, which are encouraged by development incentives by the government, they do not add impressively to opportunities for employment, particularly at the more highly paying jobs.

Increased financial independence and world-wide movements toward political independence in former colonial territories led to local movements to modify the ties with the Government of the Netherlands. After World War II, negotiations between the Netherlands Antilles and the Netherlands led to an abolition of colonial status and in 1954 a statute was adopted in which both countries declared themselves willing to continue their cooperation on the basis of free consent. While, by consent, foreign and military affairs are in the hands of the Netherlands government, the Antilles is, like Surinam, an autonomous part of that government. The Antillian parliament, called the States, is elected by universal male and female suffrage and has the power of making laws. Executive power is in the hands of the Governor and the Council of Ministers. The Governor is appointed by and represents the Queen of the Netherlands. The Council of Ministers are accountable for their administrative acts to the States. While the Netherlands Antilles is autonomous in its entirety, the island parts are also autonomous. Aruba,
Bonaire, Curacao, and the Windward Islands each form an autonomous island territory, with its own island council. The executive heads in each of these island territories function as Lt. Governors. The seat of the Antillian Government is in Willemstad.

The Incident

The civil disturbance in Curacao had its immediate roots in a labor dispute between Werkspoor Caribbean (WESCAR) and the Curacao Federation of Construction Workers (C.F.W.) WESCAR is a construction company which handled much of the refinery construction for Shell Curacao Ltd. On May 5, 1959, some 400 WESCAR employees went on strike and demonstrated peacefully near the main gate of the Shell Refinery, known locally as Post V. The strike ended on May 5 with a tentative agreement between the two parties. On May 26, union leaders, feeling that the temporary agreement had not led to a binding contract, called a meeting at which the union decided to call for a strike of WESCAR employees the following day, May 27. After the members went out on strike, they began to receive support from other unions. The agreement which the C.F.W. was seeking was similar to a contract which had been negotiated earlier for Shell employees. On May 26, during the lunch hour, a number of Shell employees and contractor's employees demonstrated at Post V in support of the WESCAR strike. The next day, on Thursday morning, May 29, a sympathy strike was continued at Post V by about 800 persons working for contractors at Shell sites. The various activities were peaceful.

On the same day, the C.F.W. received a notice from the board at WESCAR that they considered the strike contrary to their earlier agreement and therefore illegal and that all employees must start back to work the next
day, May 30 or be considered discharged as of May 27. Later that day, the time to report was extended to Monday, June 2.

In the afternoon, about 30 or 40 strikers, including several union leaders, marched to Fort Amsterdam, the actual and symbolic location of the Antillian Government. There, they held a demonstration and their spokesmen were heard by a mediator from the Social and Economic Department.

At 7:30 p.m., a meeting was held at Casa Sindical by the Petroleum Workers Federation of Curacao (P.W.F.C.). This meeting was attended not only by the members of the P.W.F.C. but by a large number of strikers from NESCAR and from other construction companies. The large number of persons attempting to attend the meeting resulted in the crowd spilling out of the building and onto the sidewalks, blocking pedestrian traffic. At the meeting, it was decided to call a 24-hour sympathy strike of all employees of Shell Curacao. The decision to strike was made at about 2:30 p.m. and was to take effect at 11:30 that same evening. After the meeting, a large portion of the crowd, estimated to be around 1,000, left by cars to go to the various gates of Shell to inform workers who would be reporting to work on late shifts about the union's decision to strike. Many of the workers on the job at Shell left upon hearing the decision to strike without waiting for their replacement. Shell began to call in supervisory personnel to take over operations and some of them were harassed by strikers at the gates. Shell claimed that the union contract required at least 24 hours prior notice of a strike vote in order to make the necessary arrangements to minimize the dangers of shutting the refinery down.

While a portion of the crowd from the union meeting had gone to the Shell gates, the number of persons remaining in front of Casa Sindical grew
again and the crowd started harassing passers-by and stopping cars. Particular attention seemed to be given to cars which contained or were suspected to contain "European Dutchmen."

By about midnight, about 1,000 men were gathered at Post V. There harassment of supervisory Shell personnel occurred, especially European Dutchmen, and some temporary road barriers were destroyed. The crowd, however, began to dissolve about 2:30 a.m. and the rest of the night was relatively quiet.

Starting at about 7:00 a.m. on May 30, the crowd of strikers and others who came to join them grew rapidly and by 7:30, it was estimated that there were between three and four thousand men at Post V. At about 8:15 a.m., a union leader of the dock workers arrived and announced that the dockworkers had also gone out on strike in sympathy for the C.F.W. He and other union leaders including the head of the C.F.W. made speeches to the crowd. While the chairman of the C.F.W. appealed to the strikers to keep politics out of the issue, the chairman of the dock workers union criticized the actions of the present government suggesting that the government was concerned with its own interests. He specifically mentioned the anticipated appointment of a member of the party in power to Governor. He also mentioned the lack of governmental intervention in cases where employees were discharged at the Mining Company Curacao Ltd., and at the Holiday Inn. He also criticized Texas Instruments and the Holiday Inn Hotel as companies which did not want to recognize unions. He called for the strikers to march to the Fort and to overthrow the government. Later, he was quoted as saying, "If we don't succeed without force, then we have to use force. I will lead, but if I get killed, then I want the struggle to continue. ... But I will lead, and I want you to follow me. The people
is the government. The present government is no good and we will replace it."\(^5\)

\(^5\) *Amigoe di Curacao*, page 1, Saturday, May 31, 1969.

About 9:00 a.m., a truck belonging to a Dutchman was stopped and overturned. It had gasoline drums loaded on it and the gas was set afire burning the truck. Other cars were harassed since the crowd spilled over on the main roads near the gates. The crowd had by this time grown to about 5,000 as it moved out toward the center of Willemstad.

A comment is necessary to explain the ecology of Willemstad. The capital is located on the southern shore. A canal-like inlet called St. Anna's Bay bisects the city, dividing it into what are called Punda and Ortabunda. Curacao's famed pontoon bridge connects the two areas. The bridge opens about twenty times a day to let ships enter or leave. St. Anna's Bay is the route of access to a larger bay called Schottegat. The Shell Refinery is located on the farther side of Schottegat, almost directly opposite the inlet separating the two parts of the city. To go from Post V to Willemstad means there are only two choices, around to the Punda and around to the Ortabunda. While they are somewhat equidistant, the route to the Punda is a better access route through the built up portions of the periphery of the city. Ft. Amsterdam is also located on the Punda side.

As the crowd moved down toward the Punda, cars were pushed aside and turned over. A pickup truck owned by a Portuguese was set on fire. A large supermarket in the Rio Canario area was looted as was a fruitstore-carryout owned by a Portuguese. At both stores, a large quantity of liquor was taken and consumed by some of the marchers on the way. (It had been reported earlier that many of the persons at Post V during the night had been drinking.)
A large bus was stopped on a major traffic circle and its windows shattered. With this initial damage, word soon reached the city of the potential danger and the traffic was mostly forewarned to avoid the route that the marchers had taken. The Chief of Police also warned merchants in the city to close their shops for the time being.

As the marchers moved down the road, the windows in several large commercial buildings were smashed including an electrical and air conditioning contractor and a soft drink bottling plant. The windows in Texas Instruments were broken and some of the marchers went into the factory and threatened the workers, who were primarily female. The company stopped production as a result of this. Other cars were damaged and set on fire.

At about this time, the police made their first attempt to stop the march. The small number of police were soon surrounded, however, and attempts were made to "run down" the police with some of the cars which were in the march. It should be mentioned here that several of the union leaders were leading the march riding in a jeep. A second line of defense for the police was set up at Berg Altena, a hill which overlooks the bay. At this point there were about sixty policemen. The police officer in charge talked to the labor leaders who were leading the march. The chairman of the dock workers union reported that as he turned back to talk to the crowd, standing in the jeep, he was shot in the back. The police reported that they were being heavily stoned and threatened by the marchers at the time. The confrontation escalated. A car was turned over and burned on the hill. Two fire engines had been sent in to support the police. One of these trucks was set on fire and was pushed in the direction of the police lines. The person at the steering wheel was shot and killed. He was later identified
as a WESCAR employee. The pitched battle continued — most of the police were injured by rocks and three police cars and another firetruck were damaged. A Red Cross ambulance which had been sent into the area was also stoned.

When the union leader was shot, he was taken immediately to the hospital by the other union leaders who had been with him. Some of the marchers also followed to the hospital. During the next several hours, there were a number of rumors that he was dead. Because of the nature of his injury, he had to spend several hours in the operating room. Afterwards, several of the union leaders were allowed to see him to assure them he was alive.

With the shooting of the union leader and the fact that most of the leadership of the march had gone to the hospital with him, the bulk of the crowd moved quickly into the business district on the Punda side, spreading out through the streets, breaking windows and looting. The crowd broke up into smaller groups moving down the narrow streets where retail stores were located. Some of them moved across the pontoon bridge to the Ortabunda where shops were also looted. About noon, the first fire was set on the Ortabunda at a combination retail and manufacturing clothing shop and the fire soon spread to other buildings in the area, including the old Hotel Americano and the Bishop Manse. Later, an old theatre which was used as storage for goods including considerable quantities of liquor was looted and burned. Back on the Punda, a number of fires were set in stores which had already been looted. The structures which contained the shops, were, in some instances, several hundred years old and the compactness of the business district made access for firefighting equipment difficult. In addition, of course, some fire fighting equipment had been
destroyed earlier in the day. Boats, including the ferries used when the pontoon bridge was open, were used to fight fires in those buildings near the waterfront and one boat was borrowed from Shell, although the company could not release too much equipment as they needed it to maintain fire readiness in and around the refinery. The fires in the Herrenstreet were under control at about midnight and those in the vicinity of Brion Square at about 4:00 a.m. on June 1. This ended the danger of the fires spreading to other parts of the city.

Security forces were bolstered in the downtown area and a curfew was enforced Friday night in order to more effectively fight the fires. The curfew stayed in effect over the weekend and the exhausted security forces were supplemented in a few days by some 300 Marines flown over from the Netherlands. In the next weeks, there was an accounting as to the economic and social costs of the thirtieth of May in Willemstad. The results of the fires and other aspects of the disturbances were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property Damage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burned out businesses</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other buildings burned</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage and looting</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage only</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cars destroyed by fire</td>
<td>30</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Damage</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deaths</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injuries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Officers</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>57</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arrests</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Estimates of the dollar damage ranged from 35 to 40 million dollars. These were not the only costs, however.
At 4:30 on the afternoon of May 30, the chairman of C.F.W. announced by radio that the unions had reached an agreement with WESCAR for a one year period and that the union had been able to obtain equal wages for equal work on Shell sites. He also announced a message from the P.W.F.C. indicating that the strike in Shell was over. In addition, at about the same time, an ultimatum was issued by seven Curacao Unions saying that "the central government has used weapons in order to stop the desires of the workers" and "demanded the immediate resignation of the government within 48 hours." "If the government did not resign, a general strike would be called."

On June 4, The Antilles Legislative Council voted 14-6 to dissolve the government and to set new elections on Sept. 5, 1970

**Analysis and Interpretation**

The aftermath of any civil disturbance is filled with recriminations and attempts to assess blame. This was true in Curacao where it was common to talk of certain aspects assumed to be turning points. On the one hand, some would focus on the labor leaders tacit (or some said open) encouragement of certain violent acts, their irresponsibility and their lack of control. Others focused on the vacillation of police policy and the critical wounding of the labor leader. Others focused on the reluctance and rigidity of WESCAR to provide equivalent wages or the supposed reluctance of the government to "allow" WESCAR to sign a contract for higher wages. Others speculated on the role of outside agitators, ranging in type from Venezuelan revolutionaries, the SDS, the Black Power Movement, to the influence of Castro and the consequences of an education of the young in the Netherlands. For all of these "what if" questions, there are no accurate answers for they pose, for the most
part, conditions which did not exist and project behavior which did not happen. It is more useful to attempt to explain what did happen than to attempt to speculate what could have happened.

There are certain facts which can provide the beginnings of an interpretation. In Curacao, a labor dispute erupted into a disturbance which had both political and racial overtones. The disturbance resulted in extremely high damage to private property but relatively low personal injury. Its outbreak was relatively sudden and, to a large extent, unexpected.

It is perhaps best to start with some initial comments on the various social movements which have characterized the West for these can be used as the basis to indicate both similarities and differences to the situation in Curacao.

Every major social movement is aimed at changing certain norms in a society. Perhaps those which have the greatest significance are those which take the form of developing a new sense of what is just and what is unjust in a society. The problem toward which awareness is directed may be one of long standing but what changes and differs is that what was once considered a misfortune now becomes an injustice. The difference between a sense of misfortune and a sense of injustice can be seen in the difference between petition and demand. The victims of a misfortune can petition those in power to help them but the victims of an injustice demand that their petition be granted. It is also the difference between what one means when they speak of an act of charity as compared to what people have a right to expect. As Turner has suggested:

A significant social movement becomes possible when there is a revision in the manner in which a substantial group
of people look at some misfortune, seeing it no longer as a misfortune warranting charitable consideration but as an injustice which is intolerable in society. A movement becomes possible when a group of people cease to petition the good will of others for relief of their misery and demand as their right that others ensure the correction of their condition.

If one looks at the history of Western Europe, there have been eras in which the concerns in various societies have been dominated by a particular sense of injustice. Two major eras can be delimited. In the liberal humanitarian era, exemplified by the American and French revolutions, people demanded the right to participate in ruling themselves. There was the insistence that people should no longer merely petition their rulers but that society should be structured in such a way that all people can be heard and participate in governing themselves. This was the new right. It was at the time a radical idea, particularly for those in power. The socialist movement later retained the symbolism of freedom and participation but insisted on the right of people to demand the essential material needs of life. This was also a new idea. Even to many of the early liberal humanitarians, preoccupied by political rights, poverty was considered a misfortune, not an injustice. This was changed when various movements, ranging from the more radical communist and socialist movements in Western Europe to the New Deal in the United States, pushed for the idea that a society is obligated to provide for material wants.

Turner suggests that in the West, a new revision is now in progress with a new object of indignation. Today, for the first time in history, the idea is being put forth that people have a right to personal worth. Again, it is an old theme, Biblical and otherwise, that a man who does not feel worthy and cannot find his "identity" is to be pitied. But to suggest that this is an
injustice is new and that society needs to guarantee a sense of personal worth for every person is now considered radical. This may have been seen as desirable in the past but it has hardly been considered a right. In many contemporary social movements, however, the key complaint is alienation and this theme is particularly strong among the young, involved in student movements, in rather affluent societies. Political rights to participate are assumed; economic rights for material support are assumed; now man has not been provided a sense of personal worth and this too must be guaranteed.

Before we go on, let us make a preliminary application of some of the previous ideas to Curacao. In Western Europe and in the United States, these eras have been spread out over several hundred years, and, of course, have been solved in different ways -- various forms of political democracies and in different variations of the welfare state. In these countries, a primary focus of injustice today centers on the problems of identity, particularly among the young. In Curacao, these eras have been telescoped in time. The island's close ties with Western European countries and with the United States have provided a continuous channel of various ideas concerning injustice from all over the world. Liberal humanitarian ideas have existed on the island for a long time, as reflected in the abolition of slavery, but one could argue that the final acceptance of this new norm did not occur until the change in colonial status and the development of Curacao as an autonomous part of the Kingdom of Netherlands in 1954. A major focus in Curacao now, of course, is on the theme of economic injustice. There are also elements of the third era, still somewhat embryonic in Western Europe, and even more so in Curacao, in New Left and Hippie themes. The important point here is that of these three themes of injustice none tended to appear close together and to combine in a particularly explosive fashion in Curacao.
A second element which provides a background of understanding for the events in Curacao lies in the evolution of trade unions in developing countries. There is a tendency to assume that labor relations development will follow a path identical to that found in older industrial nations. In many developing countries, many industrial employers, particularly those that utilize a high proportion of unskilled labor, are not concerned with the development of a fixed identifiable group of workers. They are more interested in the availability of an easily accessible pool of workers which can be drawn on when the need arises. (This results in those in the labor force attempting to keep links to more traditional occupational activities, e.g. part-time farming, as a form of social security.) When such a labor supply is easily available, the employer is free, within certain legal limits, to establish work relationships which he deems necessary. Where you have a high proportion of unskilled workers, costly supervision is likely to be at a minimum and is often turned over to foreman -- often giving him authority to discharge and recruit. This frequently makes job tenure throughout the system more insecure and discipline erratic and imprecise.

Given this tenuousness, in situations of underemployment, changes in job context, rules, regulations etc. are often seen by workers as being extremely threatening. The development of trade unions to attempt to cope with these problems from the worker's point of view often is slow. Employers can easily find substitutes for troublesome employees. Usually the traditional backgrounds from which unskilled workers come offer little experience in the development and maintenance of a voluntary organization such as a union. In addition, workers in developing countries have an added disability which
was not present in the older industrial societies. The structure of the industrial enterprise in developing countries often requires the use of the industrial union form. In developed countries, in the early stages, many of the industrial enterprises depended on relatively skilled workers and these craftsmen found it relatively easy to create permanent unions. As large scale industry developed, the craft unions were able to provide the experience and cadre of personnel to organize industrial unions. In developing countries, there is no substantial basis for the development of craft unions and worker organization must logically be of the industrial type. An industrial union is faced with more sophisticated tasks of organization than are craft unions. Yet the work force in these countries is less well prepared to undertake these organizational tasks. It has few potential leaders within its own ranks. Illiteracy is more widespread. There is no indigenous craft union tradition on which to draw. Much of the skilled labor is likely to be drawn from outside the country.

Too, most underdeveloped countries have colonial backgrounds and the struggle for independence is part of the context within which working class unrest occurs. Nationalism often becomes linked to the working class movement. The unsatisfactory conditions of the work force in the modern sector become identified with the colonial and underdeveloped status of the society. If the employers are "foreign," the problem becomes directly associated with the evils of exploitation.

In this context, middle class nationalists often identify the effort to organize workers with the more general process of economic improvement. They also see the issue in a broader context and see that workers' organizations offer concentrated political power which can be used in other ways. Workers, typically frustrated by their limited power, often respond to broader appeals
of nationalism but nationalist issues tend to blur the bread and butter objectives of the employees. In other words, middle class nationalist leadership tends to sharpen labor protest but does not necessarily make it more effective in any direct confrontation with individual employees. In such a context, working class protest tends to be very disruptive.

To the existing government, such disruptions seem to threaten the very fabric of society. At the same time, individual trade unions are too weak to impose effective collective bargaining relationships with the employers. Faced with the failure of the development of an effective voluntary industrial relations system, the state often feels it must intervene.

Governments are not unaware of the pattern of events in the more developed societies -- that worker discontent arises from a weak bargaining position. Most governmental actions, however, have as an objective the creation in the minds of the worker of a sense of loyalty to the state. In doing this the state often finds it necessary to intervene substantially and to attempt to provide the work-welfare conditions which in Western countries have developed through trade unions bargaining collectively with their employees. So the state tends to interpose itself between the workers and the employers. While this may not be the intent, the long run effect of such interposition is to inhibit the growth and development of trade unions because the state offers more powerful alternative for the workers' desires. In a democratic system, the party in power, seeking to remain there, tends to make use of administrative devices to tie the unions and the labor movement to itself to guarantee its own maintenance in office.

But it is not only the political significance of a modern work force that leads to governmental involvement. Almost invariably, a new state is
committed to a program of economic development. Sharp and extended conflict between workers and employers can be disruptive to economic development. By being in the middle, however, the state is caught in an interesting dilemma -- what may be politically expedient for the worker may be catastrophic for the course of economic development. But only governments in power can face this dilemma.

Much of what has been said about the development of industrial relations in developing countries fits Curacao and were basic to the labor difficulties which led to the disturbance. In Curacao's pattern of industrial development, the domination of one industry tended to preclude the development of a strong craft union tradition. Skilled workers were brought into the island who were different culturally and often racially from the unskilled workers and therefore did not provide learning and organizational skills to create a viable union structure. Consequently, the union picture is fragmented and diffuse. Among the dockworkers and construction workers, several unions compete for allegiance and often loyalty to a union is achieved by the actions of charismatic (and therefore disruptive) leadership. The fact that several prominent labor leaders are from outside the island is both symbolic of the lack of indigenous organizational leadership and a hindrance to its future development.

The continuity of Shell from the colonial period and its dominance gives continued credence to the charges of colonialism, and the attempt to attract other foreign investment, and the economic inducements which are necessary, add support to the claim.

Of course, in the dispute, union leaders used nationalist symbols in an attempt to gain support for their economic claims. The fact that several of
the labor leaders affected Castro-type uniforms and were dramatic figures riding in their jeep provided symbols which could hardly be missed. In the speech of the labor leaders quoted earlier, nationalist themes were present. During and after the disturbance, there were accusations of influence by various nationalist groups as well as indications of verbal sympathy and support from them.

The government was placed in a dilemma which could not be easily resolved. The party in power had had some support from labor in the 1956 elections when they came to power with a narrow majority. The Democratic Party could not afford to lose this support but, on the other hand, neither could it let its efforts in attracting new industrial development, which was a longer range solution to economic problems, be threatened by "excessive" wage increases. Nor could they risk long and disruptive labor disputes.

The focus of the march -- Ft. Amsterdam -- indicated where the unions felt the locus of final economic power and decision making to be. Union leaders wondered aloud why the government did not "tell" WESCAR to settle the strike. What was an economic issue was quickly transformed into a political issue and the fact that the government was forced to resign indicated the political potential of the unions as well as the close relationship between economic and political injustice in the eyes of many of the workers.

Let us turn now to one final consideration concerning the nature of the violence which was associated with the disturbance, looking at its pattern and its possible explanation in the context of Curacao's segmented society. Violence is most often seen as being inherently irrational and beyond
understanding, but when one looks at looting, particularly as a result of the experience of American ghetto riots, there is a pattern there which can also be applied to what happened in Curacao. The most parsimonious explanation for looting behavior is that in certain emergency situations, the norms which govern property change rapidly. This is particularly true in a situation where you have an economically deprived underclass.

First, several comments about the nature of looting found in American cities in recent years are in order. In civil disturbances in the U.S., looting has been quite widespread, occurring in all major disorders and in many lesser ones. Looters tend to come from all segments of the population not just the "criminal" element. Looting, contrary to some impressions, is not done by "outsiders". One of the more striking aspects about looting is its collective character. Looters often work in pairs, family units, or small groups. The collective nature of the act sometimes reaches the point where the availability of potential loot is called to the attention of bystanders, or in some instance, spectators are handed goods by looters coming out of stores. Looting in the U.S. has been selective -- grocery, furniture, apparel, and liquor stores have been the prime objects of attack. The public character of looting is also striking. Goods are taken openly and in full view of others -- bystanders, co-participants, and often even security forces. In addition, there is, during the course of the looting, little sanction of such behavior; instead there is strong local social support for the activity. The so-called carnival spirit observed, rather than being a manifestation of anarchy, is actually an indication of the degree of open collective support for such activity. Most of these same manifestations were observed in Curacao.
In order to attempt to explain these manifestations, it is necessary to examine the nature of property. In this we may be misled by the term *looting*. In the military context from which it was derived, *looting* implies the taking of goods and possessions. However, property has reference not to any concrete thing or material object, but to a right. "Property consists of the rights held by an individual...to certain valuable things, whether material or immaterial." But if we talk of rights we are talking of shared expectations about what can or cannot be done with respect to something. Property can therefore be viewed as a set of cultural norms that regulate the relation of persons to items with economic value. In effect, property is a shared understanding about who can do what with the valued resources within a society.

Normally, these understandings or expectations are widely shared and accepted. There are all kinds of norms, the legal ones in particular, which specify the legitimate forms of use, control, and disposal of economically valued resources within a society. It is these expectations which change in disturbances such as occurred in Curacao.

In these civil disturbances, there is a redefinition of property rights. The looting undertaken is a temporary or perhaps almost momentary manifestation of a new group norm. The "current" right to use of available resources becomes problematical. If property is seen as the shared understanding of who can do what with the valued resources within a community, in civil disorders we see a breakdown in that understanding. What was previously taken for granted and widely shared, becomes a matter of dispute among certain segments of the general population.
Viewed in this way much of the pattern of looting in civil disturbances makes sense. At the height of such situations, plundering becomes the normative, the socially accepted thing to do as was evident when the march entered the heart of the city. Far from being deviant, it becomes the conforming behavior in the situation. The legal right does not change, but there is sub-group consensus on the massive use and appropriation of certain public and private goods, be these police cars or items on grocery store shelves. In many ways, a new property norm has emerged among the "rioters", in their case the black underclass.

As most sociologists have argued, social behavior is always guided by norms, traditional or emergent. Looting then does not constitute actions in the absence of norms. Even situations of civil disorder are not that unstructured. The observed cases of looters continuing to pay attention to traffic lights should be seen as more than humorous anecdotes; they are simple indications of the continuous operations of traditional norms even in situations that seem highly confused. The parties involved in massive looting are simply acting on the basis of new, emergent norms with regard to some categories of property. They are not behaving in a situation devoid of social structuring.

If looting is seen as a form of normative group behavior, it lends itself quite readily to interpretations in instrumental terms. It can be visualized as communicating a message from the underclass to the larger society. In other words, in this instance massive looting can be seen as a form of group protest about certain relationships in Curacao society. The looters themselves may or may not have been conscious of such a message, but
the motives of actors need not necessarily correspond to the functions of their actions. Looting can have a communication function and in a way serve as a kind of primitive political protest mechanism.

This would not be a new pattern in history. Subordinate groups in the past have developed subcultural traditions of violent protest with regard to property. This has been well documented by European historians who have analyzed many instances where groups of workers and shopkeepers -- incidentally, not the unemployed or criminal elements -- in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in different communities protested in the streets to communicate discontent about their economic positions in their societies.

As Hobsbawm has noted of the "pre-industrial city mob," its actions were partly guided by the expectation of achieving something by its disruptive actions. Groups who undertake such activities are not necessarily incorrect in this assumption. Instructive in this respect was the behavior of the Luddites, the so-called "machine breakers" who as recent historical analysis shows, were far less indiscriminate in their destructive acts than is generally supposed. Perhaps more important, it has been said of their behavior that "collective bargaining by rioting was at least as effective as any other means of bringing trade union pressure, and probably more effective than any other means available before the era of national trade unions." In other words, the recurrent violent behavior of the Luddites and similar groups was instrumental in bringing about a change in their relative socio-economic position in the society.

Many scholars are also beginning to interpret civil disorders in similar terms. Paige observes that "rioting can profitably be considered a form of disorganized political protest engaged in by those who have become
highly distructful of existing political institutions."^11 Boesel has said that in American society "when violence erupts in the ghetto, it ordinarily constitutes a violent protest without ideology which focuses on certain key institutional points of contact between the ghetto and white society -- such as the police and the stores -- without developing a comprehensive collective rationality."^12 This is similar to our more delimited theme. Massive looting can be interpreted as a form of violent group protest, and not merely individualistic expressive acts. The protest is focused on existing property rights in a segmented society such as Curacao.

Furthermore, if looting is seen not as expressive reactions on the part of individuals but as instrumental behavior by a group, it suggests thinking of it not as absolute deviation from existing norms, but as relative conformity to new norms or expectations. If that is the case, social control by the larger society can only be achieved by creating new institutional patterns that will be the functional equivalent in the group of the existing pattern of looting. In other words, instead of thinking about the repression of unsocialized or aggressive impulses of individuals, it is necessary to think of the institutionalization of new social structures. The problem viewed in this way thus becomes one of bringing about social change rather than suppressing deviant behavior. The issue therefore is one that goes far beyond law enforcement, although the actions of the police are not irrelevant to what will occur in certain kinds of community emergencies.

Many persons, scholars, political figures, and otherwise, have failed to note or to accept the view of looting as normative behavior and its interpretation in instrumental terms. It is common for officials to note,
for example, that the looting in a disturbance is highly selective, but to attribute this to advance planning and preparation. The conspiracy theory of history is of course an ancient one, and is a particular favorite of public authorities. It is certainly not peculiar to any society. Jones and Molnar in a wide ranging examination of civil disorders in a variety of places and at different historical times note:

Those in power have usually assumed that the rioters had no worthwhile aspirations and could be motivated to activity only by the promise of reward from outside agitators or conspirators. Until the deeper aspirations of the poor began to be investigated their periodic rebellions and riots were often attributed to the manipulation of a political opponent or a "hidden hand." This attitude has been so popular in history that it has been shared by all authority, regardless of whether the governing elite was aristocratic, middle class, conservative, liberal, or revolutionary. 13

Along with playing up the conspiracy theory, there is also a tendency to downplay the massive nature of the disturbances or their acceptability among the underclass. Thus, the mistaken position is taken that only a tiny fraction of people participate. As earlier indicated also, another general reaction is to attribute the disorders to malcontents or individuals without ties to the social system. There seems to be an unwillingness to face up to the fact that looters, for example, are not persons without jobs. In particular there is a great reluctance to believe that if there is a protest involved, it is by a group with any sense of power or hope of achievement
through street tactics. Yet the evidence is that there is a "genuine protest temper" among the participants in disturbances. Rimlinger discussing the development of European trade unionism notes that this temper demands that those involved "be convinced of the righteousness not only of their demands but also of the novel means proposed to enforce them." Substantial numbers of people in Curacao seem convinced about both aspects.

The inability or unwillingness to see massive looting as a normative group protest undoubtedly stems from many factors, some of which have already been implied. There is one additional element, however, which should be noted for it seems to affect both social scientists and laymen in their approaches to looting in urban disturbances. This is their difficulty in accepting violence as something more than incidental in social behavior. To conceive of "the situation largely as an issue in deviant behavior" minimizes the possible use of mass violence in many situations as a tactical tool for affecting social change. The phenomena instead must be recognized as normative group behavior focused on property rights and as such interpretable as an attempt to alter intergroup relationships within the society. Coser has noted that:

The often violent forms of rebellion of the laboring poor, the destructiveness of the city mobs, and other forms of popular disturbances which mark English social history from the 1760's to the middle of the nineteenth century, helped to educate the governing elite of England, Whig and Tory alike, to the recognition that they could ignore the plight of the poor only at their own peril. These social movements constituted
among other things an effective signaling device which sensitized the upper classes to the need for social reconstruction in defense of a social edifice over which they wished to continue to have over-all command. 16

Moving back more directly to Curacao, what is of special interest is the unique pattern of looting and burning as well as the low rates of personal violence. The results would seem to indicate that the looting and burning were manifestations of changed definitions of property rights, but also that the low incidence of personal violence was, in large part, a consequence of the rather close interpersonal relationships which did exist on the island even in spite of class, racial, and religious differences. What happened and also what did not happen are equally instructive. For example, the first store set on fire was one in which efforts to unionize had not been successful and the store and its owners had a reputation of buying most of their inventory outside the island. The owners were relative newcomers to the island; more specifically they were not among the old families, but had become economically successful in a very short period of time. The fact that this store had been the focus of attention in a radical newspaper a short time before the disturbance was seen by officials as conspiracy, but it more likely indicates the widespread definition of "exploitation" which the store had. The fact that fires were reset in this store after having been initially put out underscores its symbolic importance. Also the one factory to which the marchers went to harass the workers was a recently established one, American owned. It had recently discharged workers and it had been the target of union complaints. Too, the
first car burned on Friday morning belonged to a Dutchman who some years before had been accused of killing a black boy. The fact that the courts had dealt with him "leniently" was a matter of common knowledge and complaint among the black community.

It is equally important to understand what did not happen. In spite of the massive burning, it is important to note that, with some minor exceptions on the Ortabunda, no residences were burned. Neither were public buildings. It would seem that at least some damage would have resulted at Fort Amsterdam since this was the intended culmination of the march. Even given the security there, this would not be sufficient to explain the lack of attention. Too, the marchers just prior to their confrontation at Berg Altena filed past the Curacao Red Cross building without incident. (Although a Red Cross Ambulance was stoned, when it entered the site of the confrontation at Berg Altena just as police cars and fire trucks were destroyed during this time period.) A short time later, after the critical incident, the majority of the "mob" passed the post office without creating significant damage. Nor were the ships from Venezuela which bring fresh produce to the island touched although they were on the line of march.

The age and sex of the marchers provide an additional insight into the pattern and nature of the goods looted. While we have indicated that the extent of participation in looting was probably much greater than is usually assumed, the predominant make up of the marchers in Curacao were young males. Consequently, women's apparel store were relatively untouched but men's clothing, shoes, liquor, and electronic equipment were favorite targets of the looters. These are symbols of the good life which had been denied in the past, but now were "ours", at least momentarily.
The interesting pattern continues when one looks at the pattern of personal violence. The disturbance was widely interpreted in the press and on the island as being a black-white confrontation. This interpretation is true only to the extent that the white was seen as an oppressor and as an outsider. The segmented society of Curacao, a white upper class and a black underclass, did of course, provide some basis for black-white confrontation. But the whites who suffered the most were those who were considered outsiders and exploiters. Whites who had been on the island a long time and, more importantly, were seen to identify with the island as a citizen, rather than as a visiting colonial, were seldom harmed. In the relatively small population of the island, these insiders versus the outsiders were generally known. In a mass situation, accurate identification becomes difficult and mis-identification can and did happen. "Correct" identification was often quickly achieved if the white could speak Papiamento. Two examples will provide support for this contention. After the initial escalation at Post V, a young white newspaper reporter was turned on by the crowd, but they were diverted by his ability to handle the language. Also, during the initial stages of the march, a car was stopped and the driver, a young Dutch woman, was asked to get out. As she got out indignantly, she started swearing in Papiamento. At this, the crowd, which had been threatening her minutes before, broke out in laughter and someone quickly said "let her go, she's one of us."

The inside-outside dimension rather than the black-white dimension is further illustrated by the fact that much of the economic loss of the merchants was suffered by Askenazian Jews who were newcomers rather than
Sephardic Jews who are long term residents. Another dimension is seen in the many stories of blacks leading white tourists back to their hotels to protect them from mistaken harassment.

It is also important to add that, while a large number of vehicles were burned, no drivers were injured. They may have been harassed and they were obviously indignant but the separation of person and property is seen very vividly here. In addition, it is very likely that if more shop owners had not closed their shops and gone home that fewer of the shops would have been looted. The interpersonal relationships would have acted as a deterrent to much casual looting.

What is suggested by this is that the reputation of good race relations in Curacao, in spite of the enormity of the property damage, had a basis in fact and had an extremely important mediating effect of the nature and extent of personal injuries. The "attack" was primarily in terms of the definitions of property. The interpersonal ties which did exist tended to transcend the divisiveness of race and class and in the long run did provide a degree of cohesion which prevented even greater explosiveness.

The primary message of the events of May 30 in Curacao was an outgrowth of the long history of the close identification of blackness, lower class position, and lack of power which combined in the segmented working class. It is perhaps best illustrated by a final incident. Late on Friday, a person was leaving Willemstad and, as he stood looking back at the smoke and the flames throughout the city, he said to a young black "Look at your City." The young black replied "That's not my City."