

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
DISASTER RESEARCH CENTER

PRELIMINARY PAPER

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ORGANIZATIONS AS VICTIMS IN AMERICAN MASS
RACIAL DISTURBANCES: A REEXAMINATION

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The research in this paper was supported in part by PHS Grant 5 R01 MH-15399-04 from the Center for Studies of Mental Health and Social Problems, Applied Research Branch, National Institutes of Mental Health. Presented at the First International Symposium on Victimology in Jerusalem, Israel, September 2-6, 1973.

Several years ago we suggested looking at the notion of organizations as victims and illustrated it in the massive racial civil disturbances in the United States from 1964 through 1969 (Dynes and Quarantell, 1970). This paper updates and extends that earlier preliminary version in a number of ways. We include a wider range of data, pay more attention to the differences among the various disturbances as well as the range of the illegal activity undertaken in them, and generally attempt a more systematic theoretical examination of organizational victimology on a mass scale.

Our overall position is that selectivity of organizations as victims in disturbances is to be accounted for by certain kinds of collective definitions of the situation held by participants. These definitions are partly created in the context of a disturbance, and partly draw upon pre-disturbance definitions. The definitions while not dependent upon the intrinsic characteristics of organizations are related to such social organizational variables as class, status and power.

The Literature

As Reckless points out, while there are crimes without victims, "most crimes have something to do with an object outside the perpetrator" (1973:91). The object can be persons or physical items of some kind. Criminology as such is primarily concerned with the study of such behavior on the part of perpetrators.

However, by far the largest concern in the field, as manifest in research and writings, is with the behavior of perpetrators or doers against other individuals or their personal property. The evidence on this activity is that at least in the United States, there is victim differentiation. Thus, the yearly reports of the United States Uniform Crime Statistics and the National Opinion Research Center survey for the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice clearly show that income, race, age and sex are factors influencing the probability of being a personal victim (Ennis, 1967).

Various explanations have been advanced to account for such differentiation and selectivity. One minor but persistent theme in the literature on criminology is the importance of the relationship between the offender and the victim. In fact, Von Hentig states that: "In a sense, the victim shapes and molds the criminal . . . it is not a totally unilateral form of relationship. The work upon each other profoundly and continuously, even before the moment of disaster. To know one we must be acquainted with the complementary partner" (1948:384-385). This particular theme has been most notably advanced in attempts to account for certain types of personalized crimes, such as criminal homicide, forcible rape and aggravated assault. Thus, Quinney notes that "because of the presence of interaction between persons in a situation of violence, the victim is a crucial agent in the action that is taken. Victims in other words, tend to precipitate their own victimization" (1970:250). As many as a fourth of all homicides (Wolfgang, 1958), three-quarters of the aggravated assaults (Pittman and Handy, 1964), and a majority of rapes (Amir, 1967) have in some studies of American crime been labeled as being victim precipitated, with the victim making a direct, immediate and positive contribution to a criminal act of which he or she is the object.

In the literature there is much less attention paid to situations where organizations rather than persons as such are victims of crime. Even the frequency and amount of such non-personal illegal activity in America is largely unknown. As a report of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice states: "It is very difficult to discover the exact extent to which businesses and organizations are the victims of crime. . . . Few attempts are made to keep systematic records or report such crimes to any central place" (1967:41-43). There is little evidence but some speculation that "some businesses, like some people, are more likely than others to be victimized by crime" (1967:83).

Thus, it is supposed that there is considerable crime against organizations and it is guessed that there is differentiation in organizational victimology, but little is actually known.

In view of what has just been said, it is not surprising that an interactional view and an attempt to focus on the victim has only infrequently been applied when an organization rather than a person has been the victim. Most work using this kind of framework, such as by Schaffer (1968), focuses exclusively on personal crimes. Very few studies have attempted to take specific aspects of organizations into account in trying to understand the victim-offender relationship.

However, there are some exceptions in the literature. For instance, Cameron (1964) in her study of shoplifting alludes to certain crime-facilitating characteristics of organizations, such as the spread of self-service. In a more systematic study, Camp (1967) suggests that both banks and bank robbers define their confrontation situations as ones in which each, for different reasons, believes they have nothing to lose by committing a bank robbery or being its victim. The banks expect formal agencies of social control to assume prime responsibility in preventing robberies, while bank robbers perceive such control groups as quite directly ineffectual, and thus banks become likely and easy victims. Smigel (1955) using a somewhat different approach examined the relationship of the size of the organization as related to public attitudes towards stealing. He found, using an all-white sample, that lower class persons were less disapproving of stealing than were higher status individuals, and that the size of the organization appeared to make a difference in these attitudes. In general, there was more approval of stealing from large than from small businesses. Attitudes towards pilfering and thievery from different size governmental units was somewhat mitigated by conceptions of loyalty and patriotism. Horning (1973) in a study of factory workers found that they made a threefold classification of

property: personal, corporate and property of uncertain ownership. Pilfering was condoned only for those items in the last category which were inexpensive, small in size, plentiful and intended for personal and not commercial use by the factory worker thief.

In a recent compendium and partial review of the literature, Smigel and Ross examine crimes against bureaucracies, that is, large, impersonal and formal rule-structured corporate or governmental organizations who "are the popular victims of many contemporary property crimes" (1970:4). They attribute the vulnerability of such groups to their unpopularity and to the opportunities provided by bureaucratic procedures. Unpopularity is seen as stemming from the downplaying of personal relationships by bureaucracies, the conflict of interests between bureaucrats and their clients, and the inefficiency that results from stressing organizational means rather than ends. Opportunities are seen as related to the fact that most crimes against bureaucracies are unobtrusive or have low visibility. This latter matter combined with unpopularity of victims, results in very low public stigmatization of the perpetrators of such crime. This in turn is not unrelated to the fact that most persons who steal from bureaucracies lack criminal records and criminal self-conceptions and "are able to regard their conduct as not inappropriate, given their conception of the nature of the victim" (Smigel and Ross, 1970:10).

As random, unsystematic and based on weak empirical data as the above statements are, they constitute the core of theoretical discussions about organizational victimology in the literature. Our own research is aimed at contributing to this currently scanty body of knowledge. We have looked at a major category of events, i.e., the recent massive racial disturbances in the United States, and asked if the same patterns and explanations advanced about victims in the literature also held in these situations.¹ Our three major questions were: who were the victims, were they differentially attacked and if so, could an explanation be found in the offender-victim social relationship?

The Nature of the Mass Civil Disturbances

The number of separate massive civil disturbances that can be said to have occurred in American urban ghettos from 1964 through 1969 depends upon the definition used for identification. We used two major criteria. First, we limited our analysis only to disturbances that involved mass activities by black people in the streets and excluded events confined within buildings such as is typical of many school and college disorders. This limitation was used so as to exclude situations less likely to have community-wide ramifications and those which would be less likely to potentially involve a wide range of illegal acts. The other major identifying criterion was the deployment of extra police forces in the community. As in other extreme stress situations such as natural disasters (see Quarantelli and Dynes, 1970), this kind of action is usually a clear indicator that the event is beyond the normal range of everyday emergencies.

A total of 325 events met our two criteria and involved around 300 different communities.² Vandalism, looting, arson and sniping occurred in most of these disturbances. At a minimum, 227 of these events were marked by arson. Vandalism took place in 212 of these situations, and looting in around 150 of them. Sniping was less frequent, with only 51 communities reporting it in the context of a mass disturbance. The order of frequency here is not inconsistent with that found by the Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence using much broader criteria than we did in identifying black racial disturbances from 1967 through 1969 (Baskin et al., 1971), but our data do not agree with Fogelson's assertion that arson was less widespread than looting (1970:150),³ or that "looting happened in just about all the riots" (1970:147).

Overall total costs and specific losses to particular communities were not insignificant although perspective requires noting that the American racial disturbance casualty figures pale considerably when compared with the nearly 800 deaths

occurring in Northern Ireland over a shorter time span, or the annual number of those who die in Indian riots (e.g., in only one week-long 1969 disorder in Ahmedabad, over 1,000 persons were reported killed). In the events we examined, more than 185 persons were killed and at least 8,500 injured. Apart from substantial indirect losses in commercial trade, tourist business and delayed production of goods, the dollar costs in direct property damage alone was in the millions. One partial study for the years 1965-1967 alone estimated 210 million dollars in property damage and 504 million dollars in economic losses (Downes, 1971:507). This is probably a very conservative figure for the McCone report stated that the damage to 997 stores in Watts alone amounted to around 40 million dollars (1965).

While these figures are impressive insofar as the American scene is concerned, it is not this that interests us. Neither is it the fact that according to American legal codes, arson, vandalism, looting and sniping are all criminal offenses. Other impressive figures (say for the widespread student disturbances that surfaced in the later 1960s) could be cited. In just one single disorder on the Ohio State University campus, for instance, more than 260 police officers sustained some injuries, more than 150 persons were treated in hospitals for gunshot wounds or tear gas effects, over 900 people were eventually arrested, and costs to the police department alone amounted to over one quarter of a million dollars (Dynes, Quarantelli and Ross, 1972). Likewise, arson, vandalism, looting and sniping did not surface for the first time in American society; similar illegal acts pocket the history of labor-management relations in the United States. One historical survey notes hundreds of such incidents in recounting more than 160 interventions of state and federal troops in labor disputes that resulted in more than 700 dead and several thousand seriously injured (Taft and Rossi, 1969:380)

Rather what is of major interest to us is that the conflict that started to surface in American cities in the early 1960s was different in many ways from

racial disorders of the past. It is for this reason we have deliberately spoken of civil disturbances rather than riots. We specifically use this terminology to distinguish the recent conflicts from the earlier, one might almost say classic, prototype riot confrontations between collectivities of white and blacks, as in East St. Louis in 1917 (Rudwick, 1964), in Chicago in 1919 (Chicago Commission, 1922), or Detroit in 1943 (Lee and Humphry, 1943). In these situations, groups of whites fought groups of blacks, with the initiative usually being undertaken by the whites. What started to happen in the early 1960s was the emergence of a different form of civil disturbance.

A forerunner of what was to come was provided in the disturbances in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant in New York City and Rochester and Philadelphia in 1964. For several days, large numbers of blacks, generally avoiding attacking whites, looted and burned more than 800 stores, and assaulted the police at a total cost of nearly 500 injured and over 1,000 arrested as the result of the mobilization of massive police forces and the National Guard. But it was the outbreak in 1965 in Watts, Los Angeles, with its 34 dead, over a thousand injured, nearly 4,000 arrested and the activation of 13,900 National Guardsmen that marked a clear turning point and a movement away from the traditional racial riots of the past. Watts initiated a pattern that escalated and then dwindled over a five year period. Manifest most clearly in Cleveland and San Francisco in 1966, in Detroit and Newark in 1967, in Chicago, Pittsburgh and Washington in 1968, the pattern took the form of massive police and military activity in the face of widespread arson, vandalism, looting and sometimes sniping by blacks. Very seldom was there any actual confrontation of groups of blacks and whites, except as it was evident in police action. What occurred in this kind of conflict was not a direct clash between two groups, but the attack of one group against the symbols or representatives of the larger society.⁴

Not all the disturbances took the same form. What happened in Watts and Detroit, for instance, was not identical to what occurred in Akron (see Lively, 1969) or Milwaukee (see Flaming, 1968), insofar as type of precipitating incidents was concerned, duration of the event, degree of leadership, explicitness of demands, involvement of counterrioters and/or a number of other factors that could be mentioned. Thus, on the basis of such differences, various writers (e.g., Janowitz, 1968; Goldberg, 1971 ; and Mattick, 1968) have developed a typology of disturbances. Nevertheless, when all is said and done, despite these differences, all the events we are considering did involve collectivities of blacks engaging in acts of arson, vandalism, looting and sniping directed not at other people, but primarily at certain property and certain representatives of the larger American society. Heterogeneity in leadership patterns or incident differences in initiators of actions and the like, do not preclude roughly common and similar lines of disturbance behavior or social consequences of them.

Of course in these disturbances, there was a considerable range in the scope of involvement of participants. That is, different numbers of ghetto inhabitants participated in the various criminal acts. Clearly sniping involved by far the fewest people, seemingly undertaken in all instances by only a literal handful of men. Arson and particularly vandalism were undertaken by far more persons, mostly young men and male adolescents. Looting was clearly the most inclusive behavior, engaging both men and women, and as films of some of the events showed, practically the whole age range possible from pre-teenagers to senior citizens. Differential participation in the disturbances seems an undeniable fact.

Nevertheless, the events we are talking about were mass civil disturbances insofar as magnitude was concerned. This is true in counting; whether one uses absolute or relative figures, or whether one uses measures of only very active participants or totals everyone present including those who were but street

spectators at scenes of disorder. The disturbances were not the handiwork of a few isolated individuals or a small adolescent gang or two. The analyses by Fogelson and Hill indicate that in what were the major disturbances as much as a fifth of the total ghetto population probably actively participated in the various illegal behaviors (1968:217-244). This means that even in the smallest cities where disturbances occurred hundreds of people were involved, and in the larger cities such as Los Angeles the figure during Watts may have reached 50,000 (Fogelson, 1971:184), and in Washington, 20,000 (Gilbert, 1968:224). Without question, the numbers of the involved varied from one event to another and the proportions of the participants engaged in different illegal acts almost certainly ranged considerably from one disturbance to another, but overall, each incident we are considering was the action of a mass aggregate of persons if not massive collectivities.

Furthermore, the more active elements in the disturbances had the indirect support of many more. Caplan recently reviewed ten major survey studies on attitudes expressed by blacks regarding disturbances and found that "about one third to one half of the ghetto residents surveyed express support for riots" (1970:60). While attitudinal expressions are not always translated into overt behaviors, such studies do indicate that a significant portion of black communities did not perceive disturbance activities as aberrant behavior on the part of a few deviants.

For most purposes, therefore, it seems useful to think of the disturbances as massive assaults. The property and symbolic objects that were the victims of attack were directly attacked by many, who had the indirect support of far more persons. Differential participation in the disturbances can be granted while still insisting that what occurred represented a mass and collective attack. And what was directly victimized was not other people -- neither black or white -- but selected kinds of property and certain symbolic objects. All of the widespread offenses common to the disturbances had an organization as victim. This is most

obvious in the three offenses involving property -- vandalism, looting and arson, but we will additionally try to show that it was true of sniping also, since in most instances, the victim was "chosen" because he somehow represented an organization.

Objects of Differential Attack

Not only were organizations rather than persons the prime object of attack, but there was even further selectivity in terms of what types of organizations were attacked. To understand this degree of selectivity of victims, it is necessary to clarify two widespread but mistaken views about the disturbances which are relatively common among the "lay" public, but also prevail in some academic circles, although in the latter case they are usually disguised in more sophisticated language. These misconceptions have to be cleared up here for otherwise they would imply that a consideration of the "victim" is irrelevant to understanding such behavior. That is, acceptance of these views would suggest that the criminal behavior is almost independent of the perceived characteristics of the object attacked.

First, there is much emphasis in the discussion of criminal activities during such disturbances on the fact that the offenses occur in a context in which social control mechanisms are weak or inoperative. Much is made of the supposed difficulties in deploying enough police and extra-community law enforcement agencies including the National Guard. The assumption seems to be that given temporary difficulties in traditional social control agencies, certain kinds of criminal offenses are predictable, if not expectable. Thus, the report of one task force of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence states that in disturbances the police are unable to mobilize quickly and "pending the arrival of sufficient forces, the inadequate number of policemen available cannot stop the rioting and arrest looters and others who are violating the law" (Campbell,

Sahid and Stang, 1970:311). In brief, illegal behavior will occur if police organizations can not operate in their usual manner.

These notions are linked to a second view that the baser tendencies of human beings will surface when external social control is absent or weak. In the context of mass disturbances, it is supposed that the thin veneer of human qualities is ripped off, and man is revealed as a rapacious animal. Assertions are made that this same kind of anti-social behavior will manifest itself in other extreme social situations such as natural disaster emergencies (See Banfield, 1968; Mattick, 1968:28 and Oberschall, 1968). In short, not too deep down, human beings are predatory and aggressive creatures, with Mr. Hydes replacing Dr. Jekylls when the opportunities present themselves.

Given such assumptions about man's inherent criminality and the necessity of external social control, the illegal behavior seen in mass disturbances can easily be viewed as random in expression and irrational in form. Thus, Mattick in discussing one type of disturbance⁵ talks of "the 'irrational' riot of an 'irresponsible' group" who have "no real causes" but "false motives" and "is irrational because it has no real, or no legitimate objectives" (1968:26-27). Such views are particularly likely to be confirmed by the destruction of property through vandalism or arson. Crimes involving direct and personal gain are to many people somewhat understandable, but not sheer destruction. However, even looting seems meaningless to many persons for it is assumed to be undertaken with little discrimination as to object of attack, a belief reinforced in the American racial disturbances by the tendency of mass media reports and pictures to depict the unusual if not the bizarre (thus, accounts and views of looters taking dozens of clothing hangers or setting fire to garbage cans). Sporadic, isolated and random sniping appears even more bewildering.

If the two viewpoints just discussed were valid, they would make consideration of the organization as victim irrelevant. However, neither view has much validity. The absence or weakness of the police in a given situation does not directly or even often lead to illegal or criminal behavior. Fogelson summarizes the existing evidence very well when he noted: "according to the extensive historical and sociological literature on European and American disorders, neither looting nor arson, and not even assault, is an automatic consequence of the breakdown of public order. There are . . . many instances of rioting without looting, arson, and assault" (1970:142). Similarly, there is little evidence that the socialization process merely gilds a fragile and easily discarded human facade upon a brute beast (Stone and Farberman, 1970), and even less support for the notion that in other kinds of extreme stress situations such as natural disasters, that plundering or other anti-social behaviors come to the fore (see Quarantelli and Dynes, 1972).

Perhaps of even greater importance is that it can be shown that not only were organizations the victim of attack in the disturbances being discussed, but that there was additional discrimination in what kinds of organizations were victimized. There was a selective pattern operative. There was discrimination in selection of objects for attack, whether this was by way of vandalism, looting, arson or sniping.

The pattern of damage in the mass disturbances clearly centered on small, retail business establishments. Industry-wide insurance figures for the Newark outbreak show, for example, that over two-thirds of the damage reports (with over 100 reports each) were for liquor stores and bars, clothing and small department shops, groceries, multiple-occupant commercial buildings, cleaners and furniture stores. In contrast, dwellings -- either apartment or family houses -- made up only about 2.5 percent of all buildings damaged or destroyed in some way. Institutional and public properties, such as schools and churches, constituted less than one-fourth of one percent of the full total. In Detroit, the same type of

retail stores made up more than 55 percent of the damaged property; dwellings of all kinds less than 10 percent and there is evidence that most of these were affected indirectly as a result of attacks upon commercial properties. Not even one-half of one percent of all buildings damaged were public or institutional in nature. Of the 600 buildings burned in Watts over 95 percent were retail outlets. Another study of the five most heavily hit precincts during disorders in Boston, Washington and Chicago found that "only 14 of the 111 businesses damaged or looted during the civil disorders were not retail or service businesses" (Aldrich and Reiss, 1970:191). This pattern was consistent even in smaller scale disturbances. Thus, it was almost exclusively retail or service stores that were looted out of 85 in Kansas City, 46 in Trenton and 50 in Richmond (Professional Standards Division, 1968:3.19). Elsewhere the pattern was the same.

Participants in disturbances did not burn their own homes or those of their neighbors. They generally also did not set fire to any kind of residential dwellings. The one major exception in all disturbances where a number of homes burned was in Detroit where the fire department (quite contrary to the desires of their officers in the field, and only under explicit order from higher authorities) had to, under protest, withdraw their equipment permitting fires set in commercial buildings to engulf nearby residences housing 274 families. Arsonists, as well as looters, vandals and snipers were not indiscriminate in their attacks: some categories of objects were clearly more victims than others.

Furthermore, with the exception of police and fire departments (which we shall discuss shortly) almost all other local public agencies seemed immune to attack. Public buildings or facilities are notably absent in damage statistics or reports. Part of this could be explained by their relative absence within ghetto areas, but schools, welfare offices, health clinics, post offices, anti-poverty headquarters, and so on do exist, but did not become victims.

One elementary school was burned during a disturbance in Cambridge, Maryland but the source of the arson is unknown and neighborhood blacks helped man the fire lines and provided armed guards for fire fighters in the situation.

This last example, a not totally atypical one, does highlight the mixed response fire department personnel, equipment and facilities drew from participants in disturbances. In many instances, fire departments were objects of direct attention. Thus, from 1966 to 1967 harassment of firemen occurred in 67 out of 101 major disturbances. It is our impression that in the vast majority of these cases, the harassments tended to be primarily verbal in nature or a failure of spectators to stay or remove themselves out of the way of firemen doing their tasks, as is the norm under usual circumstances. In other instances, the attacks were more serious, and went beyond pelting firemen and equipment with stones, bricks and bottles. During the Newark disturbance, 33 separate incidents of sniper shootings at fire stations or apparatus were recorded. That even this may have been more harassment than attack is indicated by observations made in the Cleveland disturbance where some black groups made a determined effort to discourage fire fighters from extinguishing some of the 531 fires. A report on this incident notes, however, "They used rifle fire, barricades and cut hose lines with machetes to intimidate rather than harm" (O'Hagan, 1968:24). Nevertheless, one review on fire fighting during civil disturbances written in 1968 observes that: "deaths and injuries of fire fighters during these incidents exceed those experienced by the police" (O'Hagan 1968:34).⁶ On the other hand, there are many instances of ghetto inhabitants going out of their way to assist firemen, to help them at their tasks, sometimes providing them armed protection, and often warning or alerting them to fires that had just been or were going to be set.

In contrast to this mixed pattern of attack and support of firemen, the police were clearly more often the victim of direct attack. They were most often the

objects of assault ranging from being showered with missiles, bricks, stones and Molotov cocktails to having their equipment (and in a few cases their police stations) or persons bodily attacked. The nature and frequency of this activity is well captured in most accounts and films by newsmen and needs little additional documentation, although it perhaps should be noted that 38 percent of all injuries in 164 pre-1968 disorders studied by the Kerner Commission, were sustained by law officers (Kerner, 1967:164). For example, 44 police officers were injured in Milwaukee (Flaming, 1968). The police were also the prime focus of the most serious, but also by far the most infrequent criminal offense, sniping. Some reports of sniping were, of course, simply descriptions of random shooting by uneasy security forces in the disturbance areas. In some cases, at least, "snipers" have turned out to be policemen shooting at one another (a kind of event which recently reoccured in a New Orleans motel shootout when for hours after the sole sniper had been killed, police exchanged shots and wounded one another). Furthermore, in instances where sniping did occur, it is not clear whether it was not more often directed towards organizational equipment rather than personnel. Police cars often appear to have been the usual targets, but of course personnel will frequently be near this kind of equipment.

This is not to imply that public officers have never been targets. Four firemen suffered gunshot wounds during the Watts disturbance although all survived. Both a policeman and a fireman were killed in Newark with their deaths attributed to snipers. Of the 38 people that died from gunshot wounds in Detroit, five were thought to have been victims of snipers including one fireman. However, what is important about the very low loss of life from snipers in the American ghetto disturbances is that it suggests that such shootings as did occur were probably symbolic rather than instrumental in intent. This is supported by the observation that there were only two casualties from 152 different sniping incidents, many

involving more than one shot, in Newark (Report for Action, 1968: 136). The almost insignificant casualty rates can hardly be attributed to poor marksmanship as Boskin (1969) and others have noted.

Overall, the picture is clear insofar as victimization in the disturbances we studied was concerned. Organizations rather than persons as such were the victims.⁷ But there was a selective factor as to which type of organizations were victimized. Certain kinds of businesses and certain kinds of public agencies were singled out far beyond random chance.

Explanations of Differential Attacks

To the extent that a selective pattern of victimization has been noted in the disturbances, explanations for it have not been lacking in accounts provided by scholars and researchers, not to mention the popular press, ghetto residents, the police and those arrested in the events. The academic analyses have generally tended to give different explanations for the looting as over against how they try to account for other kinds of illegal acts. For example, looting is often linked to some kind of economic exploitation; whereas arson, assault and sniping, treated almost always separately from looting, are frequently related to some form of psychological oppression. Most analyses too tend to combine "objective" factors as seen by the researcher with "subjective" factors as reported by participants. Thus, in what in many ways is by far one of the better analyses available, Berk and Aldrich (1972) examine selection of targets on the basis of five possibilities: as objects of retaliation, familiarity with the store, the attractiveness of merchandise, proximity to the disorder sites and as symbols of white society. In addition, there is a strong tendency to attempt to correlate pre-disturbance attributes of individuals, especially attitudes, to activities during the disorders. Most of the empirical studies, as McPhail (1971) has noted, assume it is possible to go from certain pre-disturbance states of individuals to behavioral outcomes

in disturbances, without having to take into account the processes by which behaviors are built and developed.

Obviously implied in our remarks is a questioning of the full validity of the explanations advanced to the extent that they do not explicitly treat attacks upon victims as a generic class of phenomena, fail to use consistently the participant's point of view of perceptions, and do not in some way address themselves to the fact that mass civil disturbances and actions within them are, if a priority of sociological classification has to be applied, instances of collective behavior. We suggest a better analysis might develop by relating the generic phenomena of attacks to social organizational dimensions as these are perceived by participants interacting during the development or careers of disturbances. Before detailing this, some further remarks need to be made about other current explanations.

Many of the attempts to account for looting and its selectivity have the underlying theme of direct retaliation for economic exploitation or the notion that "the poor pay more" (Caplovitz, 1963). For instance, it is frequently asserted that supermarket chains charge higher prices in ghetto located outlets. Certain commercial enterprises it is said demand exorbitant rates for credit or do not grant it at all to inner city residents. The objective fact of white ownership of ghetto stores has also been frequently singled out as a major factor in the selective attacks during disturbances. More rarely, attempts have been made to make a case in terms of impersonal economic exploitation by gigantic corporate structures.⁸

All these explanations might seem to explain particular cases of assault, but there is considerable evidence which contradicts each as a general explanation for the selectivity. Some studies have not found any differential pricing in chain supermarkets or even neighborhood stores in ghetto areas (Marion et al., 1969)

Certain types of businesses depending very heavily on credit operations, such as used car dealers, were almost never attacked in the disturbances. Despite "soul brother" signs in some cases, enough black owners and managers were victimized to raise questions about the importance of white ownership as a major general variable in the selective attacks (e.g., 38 percent of 555 business establishments that sustained damage or loss in Washington, D.C. had black managers and were managed by persons different from owners.). Many industrial concerns, branch plants and facilities of large corporations were available for assault in many disturbance areas, but were left completely untouched.

A few attempts have been made to account for looting in almost "economic man" terms. Thus, Oberschall states that looting "needs no complex explanation beyond the simple desire to obtain" consumer goods on the part of those lacking them "when the opportunity to do so involves a low risk of apprehension by the police" (1973:330). Apart from the point noted before that the historical evidence clearly indicates that the absence of social control agencies does not automatically generate illegal acts, such an explanation fails to square with easily made field observations. For example, one of the authors observed during the Watts disturbance that a very large, discount outlet of a national chain, with huge and unprotected glass windows stood untouched across the street from a number of iron-barricaded, small shops (some locally owned) that had all been attacked en masse, looted and burned. In a situation of equivalent opportunity for attack, less accessible and less lucrative targets were struck, an observation other researchers have made elsewhere also.

The rarer attempts to account for attacks on the police have almost taken it for a self-evident fact that they should be victims in the disturbances. In some ways the arguments implicitly advanced roughly parallel the themes of economic exploitation discussed earlier except the emphasis in this connection is on

political oppression. It is frequently said that the police and other formal social control agencies are the prejudiced representatives of the politically dominant white sectors of American society and are resented as such. It is claimed that policemen abuse their power in routine ghetto patrolling and mistreat black citizens in far worse ways than they do their white counterparts. Verified cases of unnecessary use of force in ordinary incidents in the ghetto also have been cited as a major factor in the initiation of disturbances leading to attacks upon the police (thus, the Kerner report states that "some 40 percent of the prior incidents involved allegedly abusive or discriminatory police action" (1968: 120)). In more radical statements, it is asserted that the police are an "army of occupation" backed up by other social control agencies ruthlessly maintaining power in colonial enclaves or the black ghettos, or as Blauner puts it "the police are the most crucial institution maintaining the colonized status of Black Americans" and "protecting the interests of outside exploitation and maintaining domination over the ghetto by the central metropolitan power structure" (1969: 399).⁹

Some of these explanations may be relevant to particular incidents, but again they do not seem to provide a general explanation for the selectivity involved. While it is true that most American blacks are negative to current police practices and behaviors, they do not reject the notion of policing as such (Fogelson, 1971:53) and in fact want more and better police presence in their neighborhoods. There is some evidence that when social class factors are taken into account, blacks are no more mistreated than white citizens in contacts with law enforcement agencies (Reiss, 1971). Incidents of police behavior quite similar to those taken as "precipitating events" for the disturbances have occurred often enough without generating disorders so as to lead to considerable suspicion that the actions as such are primarily responsible for attacks upon the police. Taking the

disturbances as a whole, the police more often than not, were ignored rather than assaulted. Also, while firemen sometimes came under attack, more obvious authority figures, National Guardsmen, were only very rarely victimized. In the two disturbances Federal troops were used, they were almost totally ignored.

There are a number of attempts to account for assault against the police in almost pure frustration-aggression terms. It is a viewpoint derived from participants. That is, participants in most of the urban racial disturbances in recent years have indicated that they were responding to police brutality. More generally assumed is that ghetto blacks have almost total, barely contained and unqualified hostility towards the police and any other governmental or political authority figures of white society. But in this approach little attention is directed to explaining why such attitudes should lead to direct assaults, and exactly what there is about disturbances that should change what is normally latent hostility into open attack. In terms of opportunities in disturbances, there was a rather high degree of selectivity as to when, where, and what policemen were victimized plus the fact already alluded to that in a number of cases, black counterrioters did try to help the police in clearing areas and calming the population (Anderson, Dynes and Quarantelli, in press). As discussed earlier, police and police equipment were without doubt the victims of attack and more than any other category of potential objects of attention; but ideological rhetoric to the contrary, there was not an across-the-board, constant, continuous and indiscriminate assault upon the social control agencies involved -- if anything avoidance of them was a far more characteristic pattern of the bulk of the black participants in the disturbances

Class, Status and Power Aspects

It seems rather clear that the selection of organizations as victim cannot be easily understood by assuming that simple "objective" characteristics are the

basis for discrimination. Other factors are more influential than whether the victims do or do not actually have certain "objectionable" features. Far more important is how organizations, especially classes of them, are perceived and come to be perceived in the course of a disturbance. In essence, what is involved is that certain social organizational dimensions get involved during a disturbance in what is perhaps best described as a collective definitional process.

Max Weber (1946), a long time ago pointed out the importance of class, status and power in social relationships and as part of the social structure of most social situations. He indicated (and subsequent research has supported him) that these variables are seldom perfectly correlated in given situations. We would suggest that within the American ghetto community, these dimensions are perhaps more closely correlated than is usually the case. Ghetto residents, while far better off than their ancestors in the past and substantially more wealthy than their current counterparts in African, Asian and Latin American communities, are clearly low in the possession of economic goods relative to other Americans. Their social prestige and their political power is equally minimal, relatively speaking. Thus, in sociological terms, there is low status consistency.

One occasional reaction to this low status consistency is what is sometimes manifested in mass disturbances. However, while low status consistency may be a fact of life of most ghetto dwellers, in itself it is neither an explanation of disturbances nor of the selective attacks on victims within them. If it were an explanation, the black areas should be in constant turmoil and all possible targets signifying low status should be victims of attack, but obviously this is not the case. What is important rather are the dimensions involved, as they come to be collectively defined before as well as during disturbances. What is crucial is not the "objective" situation, but how the dimensions of class, status and power are perceived or defined. We suggest that it is variations in such definitions

that account for the selectivity of attacks on organizational victims in disturbances.

In another context, we said that looting in civil disturbances could best be understood as temporary collective redefinition of property rights within the ghetto areas (Quarantelli and Dynes, 1968). The problem can be approached this way of property is conceived of as normative definitions of the right to use community resources, rather than as material objects. Widespread looting in mass disturbances is a manifestation of an extensive albeit temporary socially supported reversal of traditional definitions of property. Established procedures are rejected, including the usual mechanisms of distribution and pricing.

Such a process of collective definitions and redefinitions is not operative solely at times of disturbances. It is always going on, particularly among dissatisfied groups such as those found in American ghetto areas. Ghetto blacks particularly come to perceive their low economic status in the course of their contacts with certain types of retail stores. Such stores are for most ghetto inhabitants where economic realities become apparent. It is there that the limits of the weekly pay check and its inelasticity becomes obvious. Such stores likewise highlight the range of goods potentially available within the larger society which could be obtained only if property rights were differently defined. Certainly, as surveys show, whatever the actual facts might be, many blacks believe they are overcharged or given inferior or spoiled goods in neighborhood ghetto stores (Campbell and Schuman, 1968). Thus, because of this definitional process retail stores are especially vulnerable to being negatively defined.

A similar analysis could but will not be made of how the police also come to be negatively viewed in terms of their everyday operations in the ghetto. The development of a collective definition, for example, of "police brutality" can be buttressed by experience. However, such experiences are neither necessary

nor essential. As many surveys show, most blacks believe they are mistreated by policemen. Thus, police-black interactions are seen as symbolizing the low political standing of blacks.

Retail stores and the police, of course, are in many ways the key points of contact between the ghetto and larger white society. For a number of ghetto blacks, in fact, the two types of organizations involved are not only where they have the most direct interaction with dominant white society but more important, they are social situations which many of the blacks perceive as illustrating their low status consistency. Furthermore, the three dimensions of income, status and power can combine and recombine in a number of ways. Retail stores symbolize not only lack of economic resources but a despised style of life. Perceived police activity not only reflects absence of political power but also a lowly way of life. Fire departments, especially since they tend to have almost exclusively white personnel, also symbolize to a degree black inability to exercise power and to have access to higher income positions.

Nevertheless, all this would still not explain why the major organizational victims in disturbances are retail stores and the local police, with minor attention being paid to firemen. Such pre-disturbance definitions as discussed merely raise the probability that such kinds of targets would become victimized in the emergent situation that characterizes a disturbance. As Berk (1972:113-118) has noted, it is a major research error in much collective behavior analysis to assume a direct link between antecedent conditions and consequences without closely examining the behavioral processes in between.

A disturbance is a collective behavior situation with constantly emergent norms and relationships (see Weller and Quarantelli, 1973). That is, there is the continuous surfacing of new definitions and social relationships in the situation. Since new definitions are rooted in old social structures, it is not

surprising that with a pre-disturbance perception of retail stores and the police as symbols of low status consistency, participants in disturbances are likely to attack those symbols. Turner, in talking of the development of collective behavior in general, notes that "the rumor process serves to bring symbols into selective salience and to reconstitute their meanings in relation to shared requirements for action" (1964:407). We are essentially saying the same thing with respect to what leads up to certain objects becoming the focus of attack in the disturbances we are considering. In the course of interacting with others in the disturbances, the participants partly falling back on old definitions of symbolic indicators of low status, see as salient certain types of organizations which considerably raises the probability they will be attacked.

Thus, reaction to the lowly economic position is partly revealed in looting, which in one sense at least, is seen as temporarily redistributing wealth. The perceived low prestige in the ghetto style of life can partially be seen as being reacted to in the smoke of the arsonist. The ghetto style of life has such low values in this connection that there can be little loss. Perceived political powerlessness is responded to by attacks on the symbols of power which are around the ghetto area such as police and fire personnel. There is an old saying that possession is nine-tenths of the law, but ghetto residents as a whole have neither possession nor the law. The disturbances reflect this, and retail stores and the police are the victims, less because of actual discriminatory or repressive behavior on their parts, but more because ghetto residents see them as symbolizing their low status consistency.

Of course, which particular stores and what specific police are attacked (a problem we are not addressing in this paper) are determined by many other factors. McPhail (1971) generally discussing collective behavior in disturbances, suggests that the line of action that is likely to develop in any given situation is

dependent on such circumstances as availability of people and objects of interaction, the course of the mobilization of any new emergent group, and the specific interactional patterns that will occur. If this is so in a disturbance some "innocent" victims might be selected. Given a strong negative definition of a grocery chain and its reinforcement during the interaction in a disturbance, many outlets of such a company may be attacked. But conversely, certain stores might be "saved" from destruction by a positive general definition. Something of this kind could explain the fact that in the 1968 disturbances in Washington, for instance, many outlets of one supermarket chain were attacked while practically none of the stores of another company in the same neighborhood were touched.

The kinds of fluid social situations and the selective foci involved in the disturbances we have been discussing certainly seem best explained in terms of a collective definitional process. If there is one thing that mass disturbances were, it is that they were the acts of collectivities rather than individuals. These acts furthermore, were for the most part public rather than private; it was notorious that looting, for instance, was not done secretly and furtively, but openly and in public view. Finally, instead of the criminal acts being sanctioned as they would normally be, the illegal actions of participants generally had substantial social support of other local ghetto residents.

However, collective definitions and redefinitions may change quickly. This is especially likely to occur when other, higher values come into the picture. This can be seen in the two following examples known to the authors. In one, firemen were attempting to put out fires in a cluster of small stores. They were being harassed by what is often described as an "angry" crowd, when a wall of a building collapsed, burying two firemen. Immediately members of that crowd started to help the firemen rescue their co-workers. What moments before had been objects of attack now became human beings needing "our" help.

In another disturbance, units of a fire department battling a major store conflagration were being subjected to verbal abuse and threats by the nearby ghetto dwellers. Wind conditions changed suddenly, raising the possibility that the fire would spread into the next block, which consisted primarily of private homes. While the fire officials on the scene wanted to continue their activities, police officers forced them to withdraw from the area. The residents of the threatened homes pleaded with the firemen to stay and offered armed protection to any units that would remain.

Such rapid transformations from harassers and hecklers to helpers and protectors shows the volatility of the definitions that develop. Thus, a redefinition of property, for instance, setting the stage for vandalism or looting can come about very rapidly in a collective context. In the same fashion, there can be very quick redefinitions sometimes back to earlier conceptions whether about people or things. Any static kind of analyses trying to relate pre-disturbance attributes or conditions to behavior in disturbances can not handle well such drastic shifts in behavior. Any assumptions of a generalized belief (a la Smelser, 1963) or fixed common motives (a la Gurr, 1970) shared by all or most participants seem equally inadequate in an explanatory scheme. A situational rather than a dispositional kind of analysis would seem to be far more appropriate.

Conclusion

We have examined who the victims were in the American urban racial disturbances of the 1960s, what different types of victims were attacked, and if the offender-victim social relationship could account for the behavior. The literature on victims is relatively scanty but did offer the clue that certain aspects of organizations might raise the probability of their being attacked. An analysis of our own data and studies conducted by others indicate that organizations were overwhelmingly the victims in the disturbances, but that certain types of

organizations were very disproportionately singled out for attack. Various explanations advanced to account for such selectivity seem to be inadequate to account for the phenomena generally. We suggested that a starting point for a general explanation might be the social organizational variables of class, status and power. Ghetto blacks see themselves as ranking low on all three dimensions and perceive their interactions with certain kinds of organizations as symbolizing this fact. These perceptions of certain organizations rest not on any intrinsic characteristics of the organizations but how such entities are defined in pre-disturbance times, and if such definitions are reinforced during periods of disorders. During the latter kinds of situations, there is the emergence of collective behavior which is particularly manifested in a public and socially supported definitional process which can shift very quickly. Selectivity of organizational victims in disturbances therefore is to be accounted for by variations in the definitions, which are partly dependent on perceived patterns of exchanges between blacks and organizations operating in the ghetto. Our analysis here does not, and was not intended to account for the disturbances or why specific objects were attacked, but it does give some meaning to the available data on the selection of certain types of organizations as victims in mass disturbances.¹⁰

FOOTNOTES

1. Unless otherwise documented, all examples used are drawn from and all figures cited are computed from unpublished data in the files of the Disaster Research Center at The Ohio State University.
2. That the criteria used to identify disturbances are crucial is suggested by the following observation. The Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence lists 1,816 disturbances from 1967 through 1969 (Baskin et al., 1971), whereas the U.S. Senate committee dealing with disturbances lists only 173 for 1965 through the first seven months of 1968. Even using the criteria of the presence of arson, firebombing, looting and/or sniping, the Lemberg Center lists 701 disturbances for the same three year time period.
3. Although Fogelson uses Newark as an example of a disturbance without arson (1970:150), an official study of the disturbance indicates that while many of the more than 250 fire alarms were false, at least 13 cases of very serious blazes occurred (Report for Action, 1968).
4. In the disturbances there were occasional attacks by blacks against whites, especially passing motorists and inquisitive reporters. But such attacks stand out because of their rarity did not occur in most disturbances, and never involved clashes between groups made up of different racial categories.
5. It would be incorrect to imply Mattick generally views all disturbances as irrational. He does not, but the type cited is one that he does use in his analysis.
6. In the Watts disturbance, for example, 136 firemen were injured compared with 90 policemen.
7. While a substantial number of the injured in the disturbances were white persons, practically all those killed were black ghetto residents. For example, only two of the 26 persons that died in Newark were white. In Watts but three of the 34 dead were white. Thirty-three out of the 43 killed in Detroit were black. Three out of four that died in Milwaukee were black. This loss of life among participants in disturbances rather than by personnel of social control agencies has been well demonstrated to be the usual historical pattern in most societies (Rude, 1971).
8. For a discussion of many of the views noted in this paragraph see the Kerner report (1968).
9. A number of the views alluded to in this paragraph are discussed in Skolnick (1968).
10. For organizations as actors in disturbances see the American Behavioral Scientist issue on Urban Civil Disturbances: Organizational Change and Group Emergence, edited by Dynes and Quarantelli (1973).

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