

## Perspectives on Violence

Ted Robert Gurr

*Why Men Rebel*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1970. Pp. xi + 421. \$12.50.

Paul Bullock (Ed.)

*Watts: The Aftermath; An Inside View of the Ghetto, by the People of Watts*. New York: Grove Press, 1969. Pp. 285. \$6.95.

Allen D. Grimshaw (Ed.)

*Racial Violence in the United States*. Chicago; Aldine, 1969. Pp. xviii + 553. \$12.75.

James F. Kirkham, Sheldon G. Levy, and William J. Crotty

*Assassination and Political Violence. Vol. 8. A Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence*. Washington, D. C.: US Government Printing Office, 1969. Pp. xxviii + 580. \$2.50 paper.

Reviewed by GARY T. MARX

Ted Robert Gurr, author of the first book, is a New York University PhD and Professor of Political Science at Northwestern University. The book reviewed here received the Woodrow Wilson Award (1970) from the American Political Science Association. Paul Bullock, editor of the second book, is Research Economist at the UCLA Institute of Industrial Relations. He is the author also of *Hard-Core Unemployment and Poverty* in Los Angeles. Allen D. Grimshaw, editor of the third book, is Professor of Sociology at Indiana University. A University of Pennsylvania PhD, he is the author of many articles on social conflict and racial violence. Grimshaw was a consultant to the Kerner Commission. James F. Kirkham, first of the authors of the last book, is an attorney in private practice in San Francisco. He obtained his LLB from the University of California, Berkeley. Sheldon G. Levy, Associate Professor of Psychology at Wayne State University, is the author of *Inferential Statistics* in the Behavioral Sciences. William J. Crotty is Associate Professor of Political Science at Northwestern University. He has collaborated to write five books in the area of political science.

The reviewer, Gary T. Marx, is Lecturer at Harvard University. A University of California, Berkeley PhD, he taught there and spent 1970-1971 in France and England as a Guggenheim Fellow studying the police and social movements. He is author of *Protest and Prejudice* and editor of *Racial Conflict: Tension and Change in American Society*. Marx served on the staff of the Kerner Commission. His article on riots appears in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

IN spite of its rather grandiose *Reader's Digest* title, which promises far more than social science can currently offer, given the diversity of things to be explained and variation in the contexts where violence emerges, Ted Gurr has produced a major piece of work with which anyone doing systematic research on political violence must come to grips. Its significance lies not in its wealth of new data or interpretations but in its systematic integration of materials from various disciplines, methodologies, countries, and time periods into hypotheses about the source, magnitude, and form of political violence. It is a thoughtful and erudite work, bringing some coherence and order to an area

badly in need of these. However, this is sometimes at the cost of a very high level of generality, offering some hypotheses that border on truisms and circularity, ignoring contradictory evidence and some crucial variables, and encouraging the uncritical reader in psychological reductionism. Its careful presentation of testable propositions and suggestions for operationalizing variables will stimulate research, and although it does not make for lively reading, it is useful as a teaching device in summarizing much work done on political violence.

Propositions are offered which deal with three basic questions: What are the psychological and social sources of the potential for collective violence? What determines the extent to which that potential is focused on the political system? What social conditions affect the magnitude and form of violence when it occurs? Gurr differentiates a "potential for collective violence," which is based on the extent and intensity of shared discontents, from the "potential for political violence," which is a function of the degree to which such discontents are focused on the political system. This is conditioned by factors such as the extent of cultural sanctions regarding overt aggression, the extent and degree of past political violence, the presence of symbolic appeals justifying violence, the legitimacy of the political system, and its responses to feelings of deprivation. Whether and in what form politicized discontent is actually expressed is influenced by patterns of coercive control and institutional support within a political community.

Discontent emerges when value expectations exceed value capabilities. When this occurs, men become frustrated, and "men who are frustrated have an innate disposition to do violence to its source in proportion to the intensity of their frustration." Thus the causal link between conditions of the social structure generating discontent and political violence lies in frustration-aggression, an idea which, we are told, is "analogous to the law of gravity."

Such an approach focuses attention away from crucial questions of a social process and system nature and encourages one to move too readily from ob-

served behavior to presumed motives. Discussions of frustration and aggression, even if preceded by a consideration of social conditions conducive to these, tell us little about the struggle for power and interaction among competing social groups which is so crucial to the occurrence, magnitude, and consequences of political violence. Nor do they tell us anything about the synchronization of discontent among separate groups (such as the peasantry and parts of the urban working and middle classes) which have been so crucial to many of the major revolutions.

Gurr's scheme tends to ignore the importance of official definitions and media treatment in giving us our ideas about the occurrence of violent events. With criteria that are not as clear as they might be, Gurr differentiates between "turmoil," "conspiracy," and "internal war." Some of his most original hypotheses relate to the correlates of these types of violence. One, of course, doesn't need a weatherman to tell when a society is torn asunder by civil war. But a category such as turmoil ("violent political strikes, riots, political clashes, and localized rebellions") is very much conditioned by official labels and behavior.

The meaning and "occurrence" of violence must be seen to lie partly in a process of social interaction and definition. We are as much in need of a theory of labelling, explaining how various subgroups (government, the media, segments of the public, even academics) come to define certain kinds of behavior and groups as violent, as we are of a theory explaining the behavior. This is all the more true given the self-fulfilling effects that can flow from such definitions. To explain why the original Black Panthers in Oakland became involved in political violence, while other similar groups in that city did not, one must look not so much at the personalities of the Panthers as to how the government came to define them as a threat, and their subsequent labelling and treatment as a dangerous revolutionary group. Governments through expansion of their control forces, increased surveillance, agents provocateurs, the passage of laws increasing the kinds of protest activities seen as illegal (such as the US anti-riot bill or France's *anti-casseur* bill) and

discretionary law enforcement may play a crucial role in increasing the 'violent' events of certain groups.

What to those in power may be minority violence, to the group in question may simply be self-defense. What to the media may be a civil rights riot simply because blacks are involved, to the participants may be a brawl or traditional school rivalry. To use media reports as a data base, as Gurr and others do, is thus a technique open to question unless other issues are attended to.

A theory of political violence should ideally have room for both violence as protest and violence as repression. Yet Gurr's focus on the frustration of those rebelling overlooks the fact that a sizeable proportion of twentieth century internal political violence has been carried out by those in positions of authority. The occurrence of violence among demonstrators at mass protest meetings, for example, is often almost an epiphenomenon, owing far more to the nature of the official response than to the degree of frustration brought to the demonstration.

Even looking only to the psychological level, I think little is to be gained by dredging up worn-out frustration-aggression theories which, once appropriately qualified (as they must be, given the research cited even by Gurr), permit us to say little more than that frustration may lead to aggression expressed through political violence. The link between individual frustration and group political violence is far from linear. The decision to use (or to stop using) violence may well be a tactical one; and the person doing it need not experience frustration-aggression, as these are usually understood from studies of animals and children at summer camps.

In moving too uncritically from observed behavior to presumed motives, one may fail to see that some of what may appear to be violence generated by political frustration is occasionally something else. Some violence, whether engaged in by oppressed or by oppressors, is ritualized and expressive or simply personally instrumental. In some Asian countries, depending on who is paying, an individual can be seen rioting for different sides, even on the same day. A part of the fire-bombing by black youths

during American riots was initiated by merchants themselves for insurance purposes, and some instances of organized crime burning out non-cooperating stores were also present. Agents provocateurs may sometimes play an important role in political violence, as the American labor struggles, Tommy the Traveler among New York students, and rumored CIA-sponsored upheavals in various countries would seem to suggest. This is certainly not to deny the overwhelming importance of protest sentiment in political violence. However adequate understanding of violent events requires consideration of those led to violence as a result of felt deprivation, of those whose motivation lies elsewhere, and of the interaction between types of participants at different stages in a movement's development.

Two conclusions which Gurr draws from his data have important policy and value implications. They are (a) repression doesn't work, and (b) violence would disappear if only governments would meet men's aspirations. Here I think he errs in trying to justify, in the name of science, the liberal values which most of us hold. With respect to repression, the historical record unfortunately reveals too many examples to the contrary. The consequences of repressive strategies are highly diverse and conditioned by numerous variables. The ugly truth is that sometimes repression does 'work.' Elsewhere in his book Gurr even offers hypotheses specifying conditions under which repression is likely to be most successful. Gurr's argument that public order can only be maintained when means are provided for men to work towards the attainment of their aspirations is correct, but it ducks the question of the extent to which scarcity of resources and ideological incompatibilities generate conflicts, as well as the tendency for aspirations to rise. Making it possible for blacks to obtain their aspirations may mean a decline in their political violence, only to be matched by an increase in political violence on the part of threatened whites. The granting of deserved rights to Catholics in Northern Ireland has led to increased violence from Protestants. The strongest grounds for arguing against repression and in favor of meeting the aspirations

of deprived groups are moral and not necessarily in terms of the inefficacy of repression or the disappearance of disorder.

The usefulness of Gurr's work to a researcher will depend upon the questions and methods that he is concerned with. What gives it its interest and power is his ability to draw out from a vast literature the multidimensional properties of a number of key variables (too often treated as uni-dimensional), and the presentation in a logical and testable fashion of their determinants and likely effects on several forms of political violence.

**I**N marked contrast to the rather formal social scientific style of Gurr, Paul Bullock attempts to give some sense of the human meaning of the conditions and experiences which can inspire political as well as traditional violence, by offering an edited version of taped interviews with young Watts residents. Still we learn little about violence, as such, from this book. "The people of Watts" (as defined by a non-random sample of people Bullock knows) report a range of opinions and experiences. Many of the basic themes characterizing black communities in the late 1960's are presented, such as an emphasis on equality rather than integration, the need to develop pride and organization in the face of severe internal and external problems, the search for status, generational conflict, and ambivalence toward whites and violence. Unrelated chapters cover topics such as "police," "pot and pills," and "welfare," and consist of an introductory statement by Bullock, followed by the stringing together of excerpts from his interviews. Strwn throughout its several hundred pages is an occasional marvellous bit of candor, humor, or insight, but for those familiar with research and personal accounts of race and poverty, these hardly seem worth the time taken to find them.

**A**LLEN GRIMSHAW hopes to introduce readers to "the history of racial violence in this country and to some of the more central scholarly attempts to understand that violence." With his wide knowledge

of the historical and social science literature, he succeeds in doing this, though one would have hoped for more in the way of integration and synthesis, more attention to the consequences of violence, and more comparisons to the phenomenon elsewhere in the world, and to violence involving social categorizations other than race. Is there anything distinctive about American racial violence, and why does racial violence seem to have a more bloody and macabre potential than that involving questions of social class or political belief?

The volume offers some little-known historical accounts and some classic essays and research. An historical section is followed by sections on "patterns in American racial violence," "causation: some theoretical and empirical notions," and "the changing meaning of 'racial' violence." Efforts at explanation vary, from Sterba's "penis envy" interpretation of assaults by whites on black-owned automobiles during the 1943 Detroit riot, to more sociological (and no doubt to many readers more plausible) approaches focusing on the breakdown of "an unstable accommodative pattern" involving white dominance and black subordination. From the latter perspective, violence (by whites as well as blacks) has emerged primarily when blacks come to question the status quo. The occurrence of violence by communal groups is shown to be greatly conditioned by the willingness and ability of authorities to control it and the nature of their response. In a concluding essay, Grimshaw raises some important questions about guilt and responsibility for racial violence.

**A**SSASSINATION AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE is one of a series of task force reports prepared for the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. It is a compilation of diverse materials on assassination and a vaguely defined "political violence." These materials vary greatly in quality, freshness, method, and style. They lack integration and a conclusion, and they overlap somewhat with other task force reports of the same and other commissions. Of most interest to social scientists is the cross-national data on as-

sassinations, based on the work of Leiden and the Feierabends, and a survey by Levy on attitudes toward political violence.

Data from over 80 countries suggests that a higher level of assassination (and the general political unrest with which it tends to be associated) is most likely to be present in societies characterized by "a low level of modernity, high systemic frustration, a high rate of socio-economic change, a high level of need for achievement, moderate levels of coerciveness of political regime, a high level of external aggression, a high level of minority hostility, a high level of homicide and a low level of suicide [p. 167]." The United States as a developed society with a high frequency of assassination (though not of other intense forms of political violence) is something of a deviant case here. The volume is useful as a factual source book on assassinations involving government officials, and it offers a needed historical and international perspective, though much of it is analytically fairly weak. More attention might usefully have been given to assassination efforts directed at non-governmental figures and to a consideration of the contrast to nonpolitical homicides. In a period where the distinction between 'protest' and 'crime' is increasingly blurred, this latter issue is important.

**T**HESE volumes offer plausible retrospective interpretations, careful descriptions, and general propositions of a probabilistic nature. As such, they contribute to our knowledge and understanding. Yet in reading over 2,000 pages of materials on violence written by those presumably desirous of seeing a more just and less violent world (factors which in the short run may be incompatible), one is sadly struck by the fact that rather little is (or perhaps can be) inferred from all this social science material about specific policies in concrete situations which might help obtain these ends.

The crudity of our measures and the diversity and complexity of situations where violent political conflict is present, make non-platitudinous policy sug-

gestions difficult. It is neither possible nor desirable to do away with intergroup conflict. Yet certain things can be said about reducing politically inspired violence in American society, beyond the importance of a more equitable distribution of power and income and provision for the pluralistic inclusion of excluded groups. Among these are greater restraint in the use of official violence,

impartial law enforcement, meaningful channels for the redress of grievances and strengthening of the right to dissent, making the instruments of physical violence more scarce through stringent weapons-control legislation, and opposition of rhetoric (whether the 'bums' of the Nixon administration or the 'pigs' of some segments of the Left) which serve to dehumanize opponents.