

University of Delaware  
Disaster Research Center

PRELIMINARY PAPER #1b

PATTERNS OF LOOTING AND  
PROPERTY NORMS: CONFLICT AND  
CONSENSUS IN  
COMMUNITY EMERGENCIES

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1968

Patterns of Looting and Property Norms:  
Conflict and Consensus in Community Emergencies\*

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\* Paper presented at the 1968 Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association at Boston, Massachusetts.

Since 1964, there have been at least 300 separate civil disturbances in the urban ghettos of American society. At a very minimum, looting has occurred in 150 of these events. Looters have perhaps struck more than 7,500 different stores, buildings and other places. The dollar cost of the loot taken, while very difficult to estimate because it is impossible to distinguish from losses stemming from arson and burning, has probably been over \$50 million. Thousands of persons have been arrested for looting and directly related activities.<sup>1</sup>

The dramatic nature of the phenomena involved in these figures might be almost enough in itself to draw sociological attention. There are also certain practical problems involved in controlling the behavior that could warrant the study of looting on such a massive scale. Measures of social control, particularly formal ones such as law enforcement, are of necessity based on some conception of the social phenomena involved. That is, there cannot be an attempt to control behavior without making some assumptions about the nature of that behavior. It obviously follows that if wrong assumptions are made, the measures used may be totally inappropriate to bringing the behavior under control -- in fact, the actions taken may serve to sustain rather than to reduce the behavior.

However, our interest in looting goes beyond solely a concern with control aspects. There is a more important question of how such behavior is to be theoretically approached. We believe looting is incorrectly viewed and analyzed and thus basically misunderstood. A rather different perception of this phenomena is required than is currently held by many social scientists as well as most laymen.

In this paper we shall attempt to do three things: (1) to contrast two rather different perspectives on massive looting behavior in community emergencies; (2) to note differences in patterns of looting in conflict and in consensus situations (i. e., between civil disturbances and natural disasters); and (3) to advance an explanation of looting in terms of changes in certain crucial group norms, particularly those pertaining to property, at times of major crises.

We shall depict some of the more easily observable characteristics of looting behavior in the last several years, and try to suggest that they can not be too easily understood in terms of being primarily symptoms of more basic individual conditions or simply a failure of persons to incorporate or maintain surrounding societal values. What is involved, from our point of view, is normative group behavior which is far more instrumental than expressive in form. We shall attempt to document this not only by looking at civil disorders but also at the pattern that looting behavior assumes in another kind of major community emergency, i. e., natural disasters. The most parsimonious common explanation for the looting behavior in the two situations is that the usual group norms which govern property in both instances change. Because one type of these community emergencies is a consensus and the other type is a conflict situation, the resulting pattern of looting behavior is different, but nevertheless the major explanatory factor is to be found in group not in individual characteristics.

In what follows, it should be made clear we are not attempting to analyze or to account for all phases of the civil disturbances that have wracked urban American society since 1964. On the contrary, if we have learned anything

from our studies of these situations,<sup>2</sup> it is that the behaviors and participants involved are far more heterogeneous than is implied in a statement that "violence" broke out in this ghetto or that the Negroes in a particular community "rioted." Sniping and looting, arson and vandalism and other behaviors are not the same kinds of acts; different participants take part in these activities, the action takes place at different locations and at different time periods of the disturbances.<sup>3</sup> To treat such varying activities separated in time and space and undertaken by different persons and groups as only one kind of phenomena is to blur vital empirical as well as analytical distinctions, and to make homogeneous that which is not. Our focus in this paper is almost exclusively on massive looting behavior.

#### The Individual and Expressive Perspectives on Looting

It is our thesis that the looting behavior seen in recent ghetto disturbances in American cities -- as well as that in natural disasters -- is incorrectly visualized by most people, governmental and other organizational officials who have to deal with the problems as well as many academicians. Their knowledge about purely factual matters is often grossly inaccurate. But to us, perhaps more important is what we consider their basically invalid overall perspective on the phenomena.

As to the latter, two aspects stand out. First, looting is essentially thought of, in some guise or other, as a form of expressive behavior. Second, the explanation for looting behavior is sought in the psychological makeup or characteristics of the individual.

This is sometimes stated in a very explicit fashion. For example, Wilson very recently took the position that:

The Negro riots are in fact expressive acts -- that is, actions which are either intrinsically satisfying ("play") or satisfying because they give expression to a state of mind.<sup>4</sup>

Public officials and police use rather different language, but often the general idea is roughly equivalent. They frequently see looting as an expression of criminal tendencies, as opportunistic stealing by persons already inclined in such a direction and who use civil strife as a cover for their normal personal proclivities.

As far as the public at large is concerned, while it recognizes that the police generally have no expertise in dealing with psychic states, they are seen as having the responsibility for preventing at least this outward manifestation of deviancy. Thus, the recent Campbell and Schuman survey found that about one-third of the white population sampled regarded the disturbances as criminal in character and felt that tougher police measures were the prime answer to the problem (another third of the sample thought that perhaps some real grievances were involved, but still supported repressive police measures).<sup>5</sup> In essence, the matter is defined as one of law enforcement. In general, this means the application of formal control measures of a repressive nature. Looting is to be treated in such a way so that individuals prone in such a direction will hesitate to give overt expression to their attitudes and tendencies. If the police cannot do anything about the covert conditions responsible, it is assumed that they can at least suppress the overt symptom.

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Although the basic theme is the same, the perspective on looting as deviant behavior takes variant forms depending upon the sophistication of the explainer. At the simpler end of a continuum are explanations that rest on the notion that behind the civilized facade of man lurks a savage animal that can spring loose especially under stress circumstances. Looting, from this viewpoint, represents a breakdown of the "cultural veneer" that overlays human behavior. This conception also fits in well with widely held racial notions about Negroes. However, least this be thought of as only the special perspective of racially bigoted policemen in civil disorder situations, let us quote from a current social psychology text in its discussion of different kinds of community emergencies.

Under unusual conditions, the socialization process may be more or less reversed, so that individuals are "disassimilated" from the social system. For example, under conditions of catastrophe, war, or natural disasters ... the effects of socialization and social control appear to be generally undone ... Frequently, in times of natural disaster such as fires, floods, or hurricanes, mobs of plunderers raid the broken shopwindows, scooping up displayed goods.<sup>6</sup>

In a later passing reference to the disturbances in Watts, California, these same authors note "that many ordinarily law-abiding citizens took part because of their inability to resist the seductive pressures of mob action" and relate this to "the temporary suspension of organized social controls that normally inhibit impulsive eruptions of hostile feelings."<sup>7</sup> In short, given the opportunity the baser part of man will come to the fore.

However, this Jekyll and Hyde conception of behavior, apart from being



challengeable on more general grounds, is not empirically supported. It is true that natural disaster contexts present extensive opportunities for widespread looting. However, as we shall note later, the potentials for extensive deviant behavior of this kind are never realized in such emergency situations.

A somewhat more complex but related explanation of looting behavior is one that was popular several decades ago to explain war between nations as well as individual violence. This is the familiar frustration-aggression hypothesis,<sup>8</sup> Recent versions of this formulation as developed by Berkowitz<sup>9</sup> and Gurr<sup>10</sup> have discarded some of the simpler notions in the earlier statements, but the basic model remains the same. Insofar as looting is concerned, it is seen as an expression of object focused aggression that comes to the fore as a result of long lasting frustrations among ghetto dwellers. The looter deviates from the norms because he has reached the limits of his endurance and thus strikes out blindly giving vent to his normally suppressed rage. Since the frustration-aggression notion has slowly permeated much popular thinking, it is not surprising to see it applied to this aspect of current civil disturbances. However, unlike the previous explanation which seems to be most popular among lawmen, this explanation of looting appears to be more prevalent among community officials and political figures.

The most recent frustration-aggression formulations are probably useful in providing an understanding of certain aspects of individual human behavior. However, they do not appear to be the most powerful explanations of current mass civil disturbances.<sup>11</sup> The black man, in many ways, has never been better off in American society. More specifically, as we shall discuss later,

ghetto dwellers at the very bottom of the social scale seemingly do not consist anywhere near a majority of the looters. If arrest figures can be taken seriously the vast majority of persons who loot are employed. The most downtrodden do not stand out as much as the frustration-aggression formulation would suggest.

The most sophisticated approach looking at looting as deviant behavior talks of the alienation of the ghetto inhabitant. This concept seems to have become an all purpose word and in most usages would seem to include practically everyone in the population, thus making it impossible to use as a variable to explain anything. However, one very recent study concretely deals with the concept of alienation in analyzing the behavior of participants in the Watts disturbance.<sup>12</sup> It is treated as perceived isolation from the larger society giving such persons a feeling of being unable to control events in that system, and consequently increasing their readiness to engage in extreme behavior.<sup>13</sup> If this is valid, presumably looting would most likely be undertaken by the most alienated of the ghetto dwellers.

The theoretical argument might be made that the really alienated would not act in an instrumental fashion at all -- and it is the thesis of this paper that looting should be viewed as instrumental behavior. At a more empirical level there are some observations that also raise questions about the explanatory value of the concept of alienation in accounting for massive looting. As will be indicated later, looters do not appear to see themselves as particularly isolated, and objectively they have many social ties. Thus, those arrested for all reasons are typically employed, married, and long time residents of their cities. And

one study has shown that militant black youths, who clearly form the core in civil disturbances, were more willing than older Negroes to use legal means to attain their racial goals.<sup>14</sup> This is hardly an indication of alienation.

All of the preceding explanations of looting rest basically on the notion of shallow, incomplete or faulty socialization. Given the opportunity, the animal in man comes forth. Given enough stress, the frustrated creature strikes out. Given a feeling of isolation and powerlessness, violent extreme actions are undertaken. In this logic, looters of course are seen as deviating from accepted patterns, behaving as fully socialized human beings would not behave.

This is one general perspective on looting. It is quite congenial to the individualistic and nominalistic view of social reality that prevails in American society. It also fits in well with the idea that no major structural changes are necessary if deviants can be taught to change their outward behavior. Whether it is police chiefs, politicians or social scientists talking, in this approach the "evil" of looting is seen as rooted in man and not in his social conditions.

#### The Group and Instrumental Perspective on Looting

As already indicated, another perspective on massive looting is possible. It is to think of looting in urban areas as instrumental behavior of a particular segment of American society, i. e., as a sub-cultural pattern that becomes manifest under certain appropriate circumstances and no different in this respect from other normative behavior. There are two aspects to this it should be stressed. Looting in this formulation is viewed as a characteristic of a group, not actions of individuals. It is additionally visualized as instrumental behavior not expressive acts.

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 a new norm or expectation. 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 group behavior. 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 beyond law enforcement, although the actions of the police are not irrelevant to what will occur in certain kinds of community emergencies.

Looting is instrumental behavior in that the objective, however vague and amorphous it may be to the participants, is to communicate a message from the ghetto areas to the larger society. The explanation for the massive looting and the pattern it takes is to be sought in the fact that it is a group protest about certain aspects of interracial relationships in American society. Looting in civil disturbances is likely to continue unless basic changes are initiated in parts of the social system.

Many black people are quite explicit about this with regard to the ghetto disorders in general. In the Campbell and Schuman survey, a consistent majority of from 51 to 60 percent of all Negro respondents, varying somewhat with age, interpreted the urban disturbances as protest activities.<sup>15</sup> As Boesel

notes, "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."<sup>16</sup> This is similar to our more restricted theme. Massive looting is a form of violent group protest, and not merely individualistic, expressive acts. The protest is focused on existing property rights in American society. To appreciate this fully however requires an examination of the pattern that looting takes in community emergencies. To this we now turn.

### Two Patterns of Looting

There are two types of community emergencies. Some crises reflect community consensus, others mirror conflict. The best example of these two are natural disasters in the instance of the former, and civil disturbances in the case of the latter.

Contrary to the image presented in many news accounts as well as fictional stories of emergencies, there is not total social chaos and anarchy in such situations. The behavior in both instances shows definite patterns being neither random nor idiosyncratic for each specific case. Furthermore, while there is a pattern to the behavior, it differs in the two kinds of situations. This is as true of looting behavior as it is of some other emergency behaviors.<sup>17</sup>

There are at least seven major differences in the looting that occurs in civil disorders and in natural disasters. Briefly described they are as follows:

1. In civil disorders looting is very widespread whereas in natural disasters actual looting incidents as over against reports of them are very rare.<sup>18</sup>

In the disturbances in the urban ghettos looting behavior is widespread in at least three senses. One, it occurs in all major disorders and many of the less serious ones. Two, looters come from all segments of the population, females as well as males, oldsters as well as adolescents, middle class as well as lower class persons, and so on. Third, if we extrapolate from tentative figures from some more general studies made by other researchers, in at least the major disturbances it seems possible that as much as a fifth of the total ghetto residents may participate in the activity.<sup>19</sup> This contrasts sharply with natural disaster situations. In those, looting often does not occur at all, and in the infrequent cases where it does occur, is apparently undertaken by a handful of individuals in the general population.

2. One of the most striking aspects about the looting in civil disturbances is its collective character. This is dramatically portrayed in many television and movie films of such incidents. Looters often work together in pairs, as family units or small groups. This is a marked contrast to natural disasters where such looting as occurs is seemingly carried out by solitary individuals. In the civil disturbances, 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 extreme instances where they are handed goods by looters coming out of stores.

3. The public nature of the looting behavior in civil disorders is also striking. It is not a private act as it is in natural disasters. Goods are taken openly and in full view of others, bystanders as well as co-participants. In natural disasters, such looting as occurs is very covert and secret with care

being taken not to be observed by others. The open dashing into stores or the carrying of stolen goods through the streets in broad daylight as is common in the urban disturbances, just does not occur in the wake of such catastrophes as hurricanes and earthquakes.

4. Another major difference between looting in civil disorders and natural disasters is the selective as over against the situational nature of the looting that occurs in the former compared with the latter situation. Press reports to the contrary, ghetto dwellers have been far from indiscriminate in their looting. Grocery, furniture, apparel and liquor stores have been the prime object of attack. In Newark they made up 49 percent of those attacked; in Watts they made up a majority.<sup>20</sup> Many other kinds of establishments such as plants, offices, schools and private residences have been generally ignored. (In some localities, Detroit being a notable example, some of the latter have been damaged as a result of being in or near burned commercial quarters, but they have not been the object of looters). In contrast to this focus on commercial enterprises in civil disorders, in natural disasters such early looting as there is, often seems to focus on personal effects and goods. It likewise appears to depend on the opportunity presented by the availability of discarded clothing of victims, open doors into residences, spilled items on sidewalks from store-fronts and the like. In other words, the looting in natural disasters seems highly influenced by situational factors that present themselves to looters rather than any conscious selection and choice of places to loot as is the case in civil disturbances. (However, even in natural disasters, there are far more situational opportunities for looting that could be taken advantage of, but which are not. )



5. Looting in civil disorders is almost always if not exclusively undertaken by local residents, whereas in natural disasters it appears to be engaged in by "outsiders." It is the local ghetto dweller who participates in urban civil disturbances. Arrest records for all offenses show that those involved almost exclusively reside in the city experiencing the disorder.<sup>21</sup> There is in fact reason to suspect, when the high percentage of women who engage in massive looting are taken into account, that the great majority of looters are from the local neighborhoods around the places looted. In natural disasters instead, especially after the first few hours, such looting as there is, in general, is undertaken by non-local persons who venture into the impacted community. Sometimes they are part of the security forces often sent in from outside the area to prevent such behavior.<sup>22</sup>

6. In natural disaster, acts which are defined as looting are condemned very severely. In civil disturbances instead, both during and after the event there is little local community sanction for such behavior. In fact, while the disturbances are going on, and looting is at its peak, there is actually strong local social support for the activity. The so-called "carnival spirit" observed in the major civil disturbances, rather than being a manifestation of anarchy is actually an indication of the open collective support of a local nature for looting. Even after the disturbances are over, as the Campbell and Schuman survey showed, they are justified by most blacks even though not exactly recommended.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, looting is considered a very serious crime in natural disasters, spoken of in highly condemnatory tones by residents of the area, and is never seen as justifiable behavior.



To summarize: looting in civil disorders is widespread, collective and public being undertaken by local people who are selective in their activity and who receive community support for their actions. In contrast, looting in natural disasters is very limited, individual and private being engaged in by outsiders to the community taking advantage of certain situations they find themselves in but who are strongly condemned for their actions.

### Emergent Property Norms

In order to explain the looting pattern in the two kinds of community emergencies just considered, it is necessary to consider the nature of property. The very term itself, looting, has military roots. It implies the taking of property by force or violence in situations where owners are incapable of protecting their goods and possessions.

However, property has reference not to any concrete thing or material object, but to a right. In fact, "property may involve no material object at all but may be merely an idea that has been patented."<sup>24</sup> Thus, "property consists of the rights held by an individual ... to certain valuable things, whether material or immaterial."<sup>25</sup>

But if we talk of rights we are talking of shared expectations about what can or cannot be done with request to something. Property can therefore be viewed as a set of cultural norms that regulate the relation of persons to items with economic value. As Kingsley Davis has observed, property is a kind of social relationship. "It consists of the rights and duties of one person or group (the owner) as against all other persons and groups with respect to some scarce

good. It is thus exclusive, for it sets off what is mine from thine; but it is also social, being rooted in custom and protected by law."<sup>26</sup> In effect, property is a shared understanding about who can do what with the valued resources within a community.

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 community. It is these expectations which change in both kinds of community emergencies we are talking about.

In natural disasters, in American society at least, there quickly develops a consensus that all private property rights are temporarily suspended for the common good. In one way, all goods become "community property" and can be used as needed for the general welfare. Thus, warehouses can be broken into without the owner's permission to obtain generators necessary to keep hospitals functioning, and the act is seen as legitimate if undertaken for this purpose even though in a strict sense the participants might agree that it was technically an act of burglary. However, the parties involved, the local legal authorities and the general public in the area at the time of the emergency do not define such actions as looting and would react very negatively to attempts to impose such a definition.

On the other hand, there is very powerful social pressure against the use of goods for purely personal use while major community emergency needs exist. In a way, the individual who uses anything for himself alone is seen as taking from the common store. The new norm as to property is that the affected group, as long as it has emergency needs, has priority.

It is this community expectation or consensus that develops which explains the characteristic pattern of looting in natural disasters outlined earlier. Thus, it is understandable why such looting as occurs is typically undertaken by someone from outside the impacted area. Such persons not having undergone the experience are not part of the new although temporary community consensus regarding property.

In civil disturbances, there is also a redefinition of property rights. The looting undertaken is likewise a temporary manifestation of a new group norm. The existing right to use of available resources becomes problematical. If property is thought of as the shared understanding of who can do what with the valued resources within a community, in current civil disorders we see a breakdown in that understanding. What was previously taken for granted and widely shared, becomes a matter of dispute among one group in the general population.

Viewed in this way much of the pattern of looting in civil disturbances discussed earlier also makes sense. At the height of such situations, plundering becomes the normative, the socially accepted thing to do. Far from being deviant, it becomes the conforming behavior in the situation. As in natural disasters, the legal right does not change, but there is local 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.

As most sociologists have argued, social behavior is always guided by norms, traditional or emergent.<sup>27</sup> Looting 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 norms even in situations that seem highly confused. The parties involved in massive looting are simply acting on the basis of new, emergent norms in the ghetto group with regard to some categories of property. They are not behaving in a situation devoid of social structuring.

The selective nature of the looting particularly reflects the group nature of the behavior. As already indicated, there is considerable discrimination in the stores and places selected for attack. One chain store in Washington, D. C., had 19 of its 50 stores looted while supermarkets of other companies located in the same neighborhoods were left untouched. Obviously, such massive action is not a matter of individual but of collective definition of "good" and "bad" stores from the viewpoint of ghetto dwellers.

In natural disasters, the widespread consensus that develops acts as a very powerful taboo towards the initial use of goods other than for the community welfare. Actions by the police in support of such a norm are welcomed and ruthlessness towards looting is highly approved in the community. Thus, law enforcement with regard to this aspect of property rights is relatively simple in such community emergencies.

However, a civil disturbance is a conflict rather than consensus situation. It generally involves the actions of one group in opposition to the larger community. The collective nature of the behavior would in itself create difficulties in law enforcement.

But the problems of formal social control in current civil disturbances have been intensified by another factor. In the earlier disorders of several years ago, the looting pattern described before had not been fully developed. However, the ghetto response now shows signs of having become partly institutionalized, i. e., it seems to be the immediate behavioral response if a disturbance grows beyond a very minimal point. Massive looting can start surprisingly early in a community disorder as it did in many ghettos in the very widespread disturbances that occurred after the King assassination. There are also several indirect signs of the possible institutionalization of the behavior. After the disorders are over, there seems to be far less returning or turning in of looted goods by repentant looters than was the case several years ago. Furthermore, in current ghetto disturbances there are almost no reports of looters destroying the goods they have taken. Yet, in the earlier disorders, for example, in Plainfield, New Jersey in 1964 and Watts in 1965, some of the liquor taken was destroyed rather than consumed.<sup>28</sup>

The semi-institutionalization of looting behavior as a group response pattern under certain circumstances has been facilitated by a number of factors. For one, the police have generally been both unwilling and unable, for a variety of complex factors that can not be discussed here, to stop attempts at massive looting. This of course contributes to recidivism.<sup>29</sup> Probably, however, the mass communication system has been more important in this respect by providing role models and even a degree of legitimation. As Janowitz has noted, television in particular, has served to teach ghetto dwellers all around the country, the details of the disturbances, how people

participate in them, and the tactics to be used and gratifications to be obtained in looting goods.<sup>30</sup> The overall definition of the situation and its general acceptance has also been reinforced by some radio and television stations, who at the height of disturbances, repeatedly point out that the police are standing by while looting is pursued with impunity.<sup>31</sup>

However, it is a vast oversimplification to attribute the partial institutionalization of massive looting simply to lack of police action and/or the accounts presented by mass media agencies. Subordinate groups in the past have developed subcultural traditions of violent protest with regard to property rights, in the absence of these two factors. This has been well documented, for example, by a number of European historians who have analyzed many instances where groups of workers and shopkeepers -- incidentally, not the unemployed or criminal elements -- in the 18th and 19th centuries in different communities protested in the streets to communicate discontent about their economic positions in their societies.<sup>32</sup>

As Hobsbawm has noted of the "pre-industrial city mob," it acted the way it did because it expected to achieve something by its disruptive actions.<sup>33</sup> 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." As recent historical analysis shows, they were far from 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."<sup>34</sup> In other words, the recurrent violent behavior of the Luddites and similar groups was instrumental in bringing about a change in their relative economic position in the society. Could anything similar be said of the looting behavior that seems to have established itself in American ghettos over the last few years? Certainly there has been increasing recognition that the civil disturbances as a whole are more than a matter of breakdown of law and order. In just about its last act, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders took the position that the ghetto disorders are a form of social protest engaged in by non-criminal elements and justified as such by a majority of black people.<sup>35</sup>

However, this is an untypical public position in American society. Illustrative of the more general societal reaction is that taken by the Mayor's Special Task Force in Pittsburgh in its examination of the disorders in the city after the King assassination. It correctly notes, for example, that the looting was highly selective, but attributes this to advance planning and preparation.<sup>36</sup>

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 American 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.<sup>37</sup>

Along with playing up the conspiracy theory, there is also a tendency to downplay the massive nature of the disturbances or their acceptability among ghetto dwellers. Thus, the position is taken that only a tiny minority of black people participate, a point we have already discussed. As earlier indicated also, another general reaction is to attribute the disorders to a handful of 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, generally 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 such tactics as massive looting. Yet the evidence is that there is a "genuine protest temper" among the participants in disturbances. Rimlinger talking of 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."<sup>38</sup> Substantial numbers of black people in American urban areas 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 in the prior discussions. 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 Negro problem largely as an issue in deviant behavior" minimizes the function of mass violence in many situations as a primary tool for affecting social change.<sup>39</sup>

It has been frequently observed that almost all theoretical models in American sociology have consistently underemphasized social conflict and its relation to social change.<sup>40</sup> The so-called consensus and equilibrium frameworks generally used by sociologists have led them to focus attention on social order. It is an easy step with such an orientation to see collective violence as a deviant if not pathological phenomena and essentially as not intrinsic to the basic character of social structures and processes. But as we have tried to suggest, any approach to the massive looting in current ghetto disturbances with such a conception seems to be rather unrealistic. The phenomena instead must be recognized as normative and instrumental group behavior focused on property rights and as such an attempt to alter intergroup relationships in American 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.<sup>41</sup>

Will American society read the massive looting in the urban disturbances for the similar protest message that it is and will it respond accordingly in an appropriate adaptive manner? We believe that we have documented the question involved.<sup>42</sup> The answer will have to come from elsewhere.

## FOOTNOTES

1. The figures have been compiled from a variety of sources and in most cases probably represent minimum rather than maximum totals. Among the primary sources used were unpublished figures compiled by a number of insurance companies and associations, records kept by the Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence at Brandeis University and the Ohio State University Disaster Research Center, as well as several Congressional committees.
2. The Ohio State University Disaster Research Center up to 1965 concentrated its research on natural disasters but since that time has also conducted field studies of civil disturbances. Up to the present, 62 community emergencies have been studied. For a discussion of the early work of the Center see Russell R. Dynes, J. Eugene Haas, and E. L. Quarantelli, "Administrative, Methodological and Theoretical Problems of Disaster Research," Indian Sociological Bulletin, 4 (July, 1967), 215-227.
3. See William Anderson, Russell Dynes and E. L. Quarantelli, "Organization as Victim in Civil Disturbance," Paper presented at the 1968 annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems.
4. This is quoted from James Q. Wilson, a professor of government at Harvard in an article in the May 19, 1968 issue of the New York Times Magazine entitled, "Why We Are Having a Wave of Violence."
5. See Angus Campbell and Howard Schuman, "Racial Attitudes in Fifteen American Cities" in Supplementary Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1968).
6. John W. McDavida and Herbert Harari, Social Psychology: Individuals, Group, Societies (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 120-121, 388.
7. Ibid., pp. 390-391.
8. See for example, John Dollard et. al., Frustration and Aggression (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1939).
9. Leonard Berkowitz, "The Study of Urban Violence: Some Implications of Laboratory Studies of Frustration and Aggression," The American Behavioral Scientist, 2 (March-April, 1968), 14-17.
10. Ted Gurr, "Psychological Factors in Civil Violence," World Politics, 20 (January, 1968), 245-278.

11. The concept of "relative deprivation," while an improvement on the original formulation of frustration - aggression, still operates with the same basic model of man.
12. H. Edward Raneford, "Isolation, powerlessness and violence: A Study of attitudes and participation in the Watts riot," American Journal of Sociology, 73 (March, 1968), 581-591.
13. Ibid., p. 582.
14. Campbell and Schuman, op. cit.
15. Ibid.
16. David Boesel, "Negro youth and ghetto riots," paper presented at the 1968 annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, p. 12.
17. See George Warheit, "The Impact of Major Emergencies on the Functional Integration of Four American Communities," Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1968.
18. For a discussion of this see Russell R. Dynes and E. L. Quarantelli, "What Looting in Civil Disturbances Really Means," Trans-action, 5 (May, 1968), 9-14.
19. Robert Fogelson and Robert Hall, "Who riots? A study of participation in the 1967 riots" in Supplementary Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1968).
20. These were computed from unpublished data available to the Disaster Research Center.
21. Fogelson and Hall, op. cit.
22. Dynes and Quarantelli, op. cit., p. 11.
23. Campbell and Schuman, op. cit.
24. Alvin and Helen Gouldner, Modern Sociology (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), p. 218.
25. Ibid.
26. Kingsley Davis, Human Society (New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 452.

27. For general discussions of this see Ralph Turner, "Collective Behavior" in Robert E. Faris (ed.), Handbook of Modern Sociology (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964); Dennis Brissett, "Collective behavior: The sense of a rubric" American Journal of Sociology, 74 (July, 1968), 70-78; and E. L. Quarantelli and Russell R. Dynes, "Group behavior under stress: A required convergence of organizational and collective behavior perspectives" Sociology and Social Research, 52 (July, 1968), 416-429.
28. Boesel, op. cit. and Boyard Rustin, "The Watts 'Manifesto' and the McCone Report," Commentary, March, 1966.
29. Camp in his study of recidivism of bank robbers notes that they learn early in their career that it is easy to rob a bank and that they can always go back. See George M. Camp, "Nothing to Lose: A Study of Bank Robbers In America," Ph. D. dissertation, Yale University, 1967, p. 126. The same principle would seem to be operative in the case of looters.
30. Morris Janowitz, Social Control of Escalated Riots (Chicago: University of Chicago Center for Policy Study, 1968), pp. 32-33.
31. "Survey," Columbia Journalism Review, 7 (Summer, 1968), p. 6.
32. See George Rude, The Crowd in History (New York: Wiley, 1964) and his The Crowd in the French Revolution (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962) and Eric Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels (New York: Norton, 1959). See also, Allan Silver, "The Demand for Order in Civil Society: A Review of Some Themes in the History of Urban Crime, Police, and Riot," in David Bordua (ed.), The Police: Six Sociological Essays (New York: Wiley, 1967), pp. 1-24.
33. Hobsbawm, Ibid.
34. Eric Hobsbawm, Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labor (New York: Basic Books, 1964), p. 21.
35. See Fogelson and Hall, op. cit., and also Peter Rossi et al., "Between Black and White: The Faces of American Institutions in the Ghetto" in Supplementary Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1968).
36. "Progress report" of the Mayor's Special Task Force, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1968 which discusses the April 5-12 disturbances in the city. Similarly, when looting developed in St. Petersburg, Florida on August 17, 1968, the police said the behavior was the result of a "planned program of harassment," Columbus Dispatch, August 17, 1968, p. 1

37. Adrian Jones and Andrew Molnar, Combating Subversively Manipulated Civil Disturbances (Washington: Center for Research in Social Systems, 1966), p. 14.
38. Gaston Rimilinger, "The legitimation of protest: A comparative study in labor history," Comparative Studies in Society and History, 2 (April, 1960), p. 343.
39. Irving Horowitz, "Black sociology" Trans-action, 4 (September, 1967), p. 8.
40. Wilbert E. Moore, Social Change (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1963); Ralf Dahrendorf, Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1959; and Harry Eckstein (ed.), Internal War (New York: Free Press, 1964).
41. Lewis A. Coser, "Some social functions of violence," Annals American Academy of Political and Social Science, 364 (March 1966), pp. 14-15.
42. See also E. L. Quarantelli and Russell R. Dynes, "Looting in Civil Disorders: An Index of Social Change," The American Behavioral Scientist, 2 (March-April, 1968), 7-10.