

A. ISOLATION, POWERLESSNESS, AND VIOLENCE: A STUDY OF ATTITUDES AND PARTICIPATION IN THE WATTS RIOT

Since the summer of 1965, it is no longer possible to describe the Negroes' drive for new rights as a completely non-violent protest. Urban ghettos have burst at the seams. Angry shouts from the most frustrated and deprived segments of the Negro community now demand that we recognize violence as an important facet of the Negro revolution.

In attempts to understand the increase in violence, much has been said about unemployment, police brutality, poor schools, and inadequate housing as contributing factors.¹ However, there are few sociological studies concerning the characteristics of the participants or potential participants in racial violence.² Little can be said about which minority individuals are likely to view violence as a justifiable means of correcting racial injustices. It is the purpose of this paper to identify such individuals—specifically, to identify those Negroes who were willing to use violence as a method during a period shortly after the Watts riot.

A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Studies dealing with political extremism and radical protest have often described the participants in such action as being isolated or weakly tied to the institutions of the community.³ Kerr and Siegel (1954) demonstrated this

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1. See, e.g., report of the Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots (1965).

2. One of the very few studies of the potential participants in race violence was conducted by Kenneth B. Clark, shortly after the Harlem riot of 1943 (see Clark, 1944; Humphrey, 1943).

3. See, e.g., Kornhauser (1959); Lipset (1960); Kerr and Siegel (1954).

relationship with their finding that wildcat strikes are more common among isolated occupational groups, such as mining, maritime, and lumbering. These isolated groups are believed to have a weak commitment to public pressures and the democratic norms of the community. Thus, when grievances are felt intensely and the bonds to the institutions of the community are weak, there is likely to be an explosion of discontent (the strike) rather than use of negotiation or other normative channels of expression.

More recently, mass society theory has articulated this relationship between isolation and extremism (Kornhauser, 1959; Bramson, 1961). The mass society approach sees current structural processes—such as the decline in kinship, the increase in mobility, and the rise of huge bureaucracies—as detaching many individuals from sources of control meaning, and personal satisfaction. Those who are most isolated from centers of power are believed to be more vulnerable to authoritarian outlooks and more available for volatile mass movements. Indeed, Kornhauser instructs us that the whole political stability of a society is somewhat dependent upon its citizens being tied meaningfully to the institutions of the community (Kornhauser, 1959). He suggests that participation in secondary organizations—such as unions and business groups—serves to mediate between the individual and the nation, tying the individual to the democratic norms of the society.

The relationship between structural isolation and extremism is further accentuated by the personal alienation of the individual. Isolated people are far more likely than non-isolated people to feel cut off from the larger society and to feel an inability to control events in the society.⁴ This subjective alienation may heighten the individual's readiness to engage in extreme behavior. For example, Horton and Thompson find that perceived powerlessness is related to protest voting (Horton & Thompson, 1962; Thompson & Horton, 1960). Those with feelings of political powerlessness were more likely to be dissatisfied with their position in society and to hold resentful attitudes toward community leaders. The study suggests that the discontent of the powerless group was converted to action through the vote—a vote of “no” on a local bond issue being a form of negativism in which the individual strikes out at community powers. This interpretation of alienation as a force for protest is consistent with the original Marxian view of the concept in which alienation leads to radical attack upon the existing social structure (Fromm, 1962).

In summary, there are two related approaches commonly used to explain participation in extreme political behavior. The first deals with the degree to which the individual is structurally isolated or tied to community institutions. The second approach deals with the individual's awareness and

4. E.g., Neal and Seeman found that isolated workers (non-participants in unions) were more likely to feel powerless to effect outcomes in the society than the participants in unions (Neal and Seeman, 1964).

evaluation of his isolated condition—for example, his feeling a lack of control over critical matters or his feeling of discontent due to a marginal position in society. Following this orientation, this research employs the concepts of racial isolation, perceived powerlessness, and racial dissatisfaction as theoretical tools for explaining the participation of Negroes in violence.

STUDY DESIGN AND HYPOTHESES

In the following discussion, the three independent variables of this study (isolation, powerlessness, and dissatisfaction) are discussed separately and jointly, as predictors of violence participation.

Racial Isolation

Ralph Ellison has referred to the Negro in this country as the “invisible man” (Ellison, 1952). Although this is a descriptive characterization, sociological studies have attempted to conceptualize more precisely the isolation of the American Negro. For example, those studying attitudes of prejudice often view racial isolation as lack of free and easy contact on an intimate and equal status basis.⁵ Though the interracial contact may be frequent, it often involves such wide status differentials that it does not facilitate candid communication, nor is it likely to give the minority person a feeling that he has some stake in the system. In this paper, intimate white contact is viewed as a mediating set of relationships that binds the ethnic individual to majority-group values—essentially conservative values that favor working through democratic channels rather than violently attacking the social system. Accordingly, it is reasoned that Negroes who are more racially isolated (by low degrees of intimate contact with whites) will have fewer channels of communication to air their grievances and will feel little commitment to the leaders and institutions of the community. This group, which is blocked from meaningful white communication, should be more willing to use violent protest than the groups with greater involvement in white society.

Powerlessness and Racial Dissatisfaction

In contrast to structural isolation, powerlessness and racial dissatisfaction are the subjective components of our theoretical scheme. A feeling of powerlessness is one form of alienation. It is defined in this research as a low

5. Many studies have brought forth the finding that equal status contact between majority and minority members is associated with tolerance and favorable attitudes. For the most recent evidence of the equal status proposition, see Williams (1964). For an earlier study, see Deutsch and Collins (1951).

expectancy of control over events.⁶ This attitude is seen as an appropriate variable for Negroes living in segregated ghettos; that is, groups which are blocked from full participation in the society are more likely to feel powerless in that society. Powerlessness is also a variable that seems to have a logical relationship to violent protest. Briefly, it is reasoned that Negroes who feel powerless to change their position or to control crucial decisions that affect them will be more willing to use violent means to get their rights than those who feel some control or efficacy within the social system. For the Negro facing extreme discrimination barriers, an attitude of powerlessness is simply a comment on the society, namely, a belief that all channels for social redress are closed.

Our second attitude measure, racial dissatisfaction, is defined as the degree to which the individual feels that he is being treated badly because of his race. It is a kind of racial alienation in the sense that the individual perceives his position in society to be illegitimate, due to racial discrimination. The Watts violence represented an extreme expression of frustration and discontent. We would expect those highly dissatisfied with their treatment as Negroes to be the participants in such violence. Thus, the “highs” in racial dissatisfaction should be more willing to use violence than the “lows” in this attitude. In comparing our two forms of subjective alienation (powerlessness and racial dissatisfaction), it is important to note that, although we expect some correlation between the two attitudes (a certain amount of resentment and dissatisfaction should accompany the feeling of powerlessness), we propose to show that they make an independent contribution to violence.

UNIFICATION OF PREDICTIVE VARIABLES

We believe that the fullest understanding of violence can be brought to bear by use of a social-psychological design in which the structural variable (racial isolation) is joined with the subjective attitudes of the individual (powerlessness and dissatisfaction).

In this design, we attempt to specify the conditions under which isolation has its strongest effect upon violence. It is reasoned that racial isolation should be most important for determining participation in violence (a) when individuals feel powerless to shape their destiny under existing conditions or (b) when individuals are highly dissatisfied with their racial treatment. Each of the attitudes is seen as a connecting bridge of logic between racial isolation and violence.

For the first case (that of powerlessness), we are stating that a weak attachment to the majority group and its norms should lead to a radical

6. This definition of subjective powerlessness is taken from the conceptualization proposed by Seeman (1959).

break from law and order when individuals perceive they cannot effect events important to them; that is, they cannot change their racial position through activity within institutional channels. Violence, in this instance, becomes an alternative pathway of expression and gain. Conversely, racial isolation should have much less effect upon violence when persons feel some control in the system.

For the second case (racial dissatisfaction), we believe isolation should have a far greater effect upon violence when dissatisfaction over racial treatment is intense. Isolation from the society then becomes critical to violence in the sense that the dissatisfied person feels little commitment to the legal order and is more likely to use extreme methods as an outlet for his grievances. Statistically speaking, we expect an interaction effect between isolation and powerlessness, and between isolation and dissatisfaction, in the prediction of violence.⁷

METHODS

Our hypotheses call for measures of intimate white contact, perceived powerlessness, and perceived racial dissatisfaction as independent variables, and willingness to use violence as a dependent variable. The measurement of these variables, and also the sampling techniques, are discussed at this time.

Social Contact

The type of social contact to be measured had to be of an intimate and equal status nature, a kind of contact that would facilitate easy communication between the races. First, each Negro respondent was asked if he had current contact with white people in a series of situations: on the job, in his neighborhood, in organizations to which he belongs, and in other situations (such as shopping). After this general survey of white contacts, the respondent was asked, "Have you ever done anything social with these white people, like going to the movies together or visiting in each other's homes?" (Williams, 1964). The responses formed a simple dichotomous variable: "high" contact scores for those who had done something social (61 per cent of the sample) and "low" contact scores for those who had had little or no social contact (39 per cent).⁸

7. In contrast to the mass society perspective, in which structural isolation is viewed as a cause of subjective alienation, we are viewing the two as imperfectly correlated. For example, many Negroes with contact (non-isolates) may still feel powerless due to racial discrimination barriers. We are thus stressing the partial independence of objective and subjective alienation and feel it necessary to consider both variables for the best prediction of violence.

8. As a further indication that this measure was tapping amore intimate form of interracial contact, it can be noted that 88 per cent of those reporting social contact with whites claimed at least one "good friend" ("to whom you can say what you really think") or "close friend" ("to whom you can talk over confidential matters"). Only 10 per cent of those lacking social contact claimed such friendships with white people.

Powerlessness

Following the conceptualization of Melvin Seeman, powerlessness is defined as a low expectancy of control over events (Seeman, 1959). Twelve forced-choice items were used to tap this attitude.⁹ The majority of items dealt with expectations of control over the political system. The following is an example:

- The world is run by the few people in power, and there is not much the little guy can do about it.
- The average citizen can have an influence on government decisions.

After testing the scale items for reliability,¹⁰ the distribution of scores was dichotomized at the median.

Racial Dissatisfaction

The attitude of racial dissatisfaction is defined as the degree to which the individual feels he is being treated badly because of his race. A five-item scale was developed to measure this attitude. The questions asked the Negro respondent to compare his treatment (in such areas as housing, work, and general treatment in the community) with various reference groups, such as the southern Negro or the white. Each of the five questions allows a reply on one of three levels: no dissatisfaction, mild dissatisfaction, and intense dissatisfaction. Typical of the items is the following: "If you compare your opportunities and the treatment you get from whites in Los Angeles with Negroes living in the South, would you say you are much better off—a little better off—or treated about the same as the southern Negro—?" After a reliability check of the items, replies to the dissatisfaction measure were dichotomized into high and low groups.¹¹ The cut was made conceptually, rather than at the median, yielding 99 "highs" and 213 "lows" in dissatisfaction.¹²

Violence Willingness

The dependent variable of the study is willingness to use violence. Violence is defined in the context of the Watts riot as the willingness to use

9. The powerlessness scale was developed by Shephard Liverant, Julian B. Rotter, and Melvin Seeman (see Rotter, 1966).

10. Using the Kuder-Richardson test for reliability, a coefficient of .77 was obtained for the twelve items.

11. Kuder-Richardson coefficient of .84.

12. With a cut at the median, a good many people ($N = 59$) who were mildly dissatisfied on all five items would have been placed in the "high" category. It was decided that a more accurate description of the "high" category would require the person to express maximum dissatisfaction on at least one of the five items and mild dissatisfaction on the other four.

direct aggression against the groups that are believed to be discriminating, such as the police and white merchants. The question used to capture this outlook is, "Would you be willing to use violence to get Negro rights?" With data gathered so shortly after the Watts violence, it was felt that the question would be clearly understood by respondents.¹³ At the time of data collection, buildings were still smoldering; violence in the form of looting, burning, and destruction was not a remote possibility, but a tangible reality. The violence-prone group numbered eighty-three.

A second measure of violence asked the person if he had ever used violent methods to get Negro rights.¹⁴ Only sixteen respondents of the 312 reported (or admitted) that they had participated in actual violence. As a result of this very small number the item is used as an indicator of trends but is not employed as a basic dependent variable of the study.

SAMPLE

The sample was composed of 312 Negro males who were heads of the household and between the ages of eighteen and sixty-five. The subjects responded to an interview schedule administered by Negro interviewers. They were chosen by random methods and were interviewed in their own homes or apartments. Both employed and unemployed respondents were included in the sample, although the former were emphasized in the sampling procedure (269 employed in contrast to 43 unemployed). The sample was drawn from three major areas of Los Angeles: a relatively middle-class and integrated area (known as the "Crenshaw" district) and the predominantly lower-class and highly segregated communities of "South Central" and "Watts." The sample could be classified as "disproportional stratified" because the proportion of subjects drawn from each of the three areas does not correspond to the actual distribution of Negroes in Los Angeles. For example, it was decided that an approximate fifty-fifty split between middle- and lower-class respondents would be desirable for later analysis. This meant, however, that Crenshaw (middle-class) Negroes were considerably overrepresented, since their characteristics are not typical of the Los Angeles Negro community as a whole, and the majority of Los Angeles Negroes do not reside in this, or any similar, area.

13. As an indication that the question was interpreted in the context of participation in violence of the Watts variety, it can be noted that our question was correlated with approval of the Watts riot ($\phi = .62$).

14. The question, "Have you ever participated in violent action for Negro rights?" was purposely worded in general terms to avoid accusing the respondent of illegal behavior during the Watts violence. However, racial violence in the United States was somewhat rare at that time, so it is likely that most of the sixteen respondents were referring to participation in the Watts violence.

RESULTS

We have predicted a greater willingness to use violent methods for three groups: the isolated, the powerless, and the dissatisfied. The data presented in Table 1 confirm these expectations. For all three cases, the percentage differences are statistically significant at better than the .001 level.

The empirical evidence supports our contention that Negroes who are more disengaged from the society, in the structural (isolation) and subjective (powerlessness and racial dissatisfaction) senses, are more likely to view violence as necessary for racial justice than those more firmly tied to the society.

It is one thing to establish a relationship based on action willingness and quite another thing to study actual behavior. Unfortunately, only sixteen of the 312 respondents (5 percent) admitted participation in violent action for Negro rights. This small number did, however, provide some basis for testing our hypotheses. Of the sixteen who participated in violent action, eleven were isolates while only five had social contact. More impressive is the fact that fifteen of the sixteen "violents" scored high in powerlessness, and thirteen of the sixteen felt high degrees of dissatisfaction. Even with a small number, these are definite relationships, encouraging an interpretation that those who are willing to use violence and those who reported actual violent behavior display the same tendency toward powerlessness, racial dissatisfaction, and isolation.

The next task is to explore the interrelationships among our predictive variables. For example, we have argued that powerlessness has a specific meaning to violence (a low expectancy of changing conditions within the institutional framework) that should be more than a generalized disaffection; that is, we expected our measures of powerlessness and racial dissatisfaction to have somewhat unique effects upon violence.

TABLE 1
Percentage Willing to Use Violence, by Social Contact,
Powerlessness, and Racial Dissatisfaction

Variables	Not willing (%)	Willing (%)	Total (%)
Social contact ^a			
High	83	17	100 (N = 192)
Low	56	44	100 (N = 110)
Powerlessness ^b			
High	59	41	100 (N = 145)
Low	84	16	100 (N = 160)
Racial dissatisfaction ^c			
High	52	48	100 (N = 98)
Low	83	17	100 (N = 212)

$a\chi^2 = 24.93, P < .001.$

$b\chi^2 = 22.59, P < .001.$

$c\chi^2 = 30.88, P < .001.$

Note: In this table and the tables that follow, there are often less than 312 cases due to missing data for one or more variables.

TABLE 2
Percentage Willing to Use Violence, by Social Contact Controlling for Powerlessness and Racial Dissatisfaction

	Percentage Willing to Use Violence			
	Low powerlessness (%)	High powerlessness (%)	Low dissatisfaction (%)	High dissatisfaction (%)
Low contact ...	23 (N = 31)	53 (N = 78)	23 (N = 47)	59 (N = 63)
High contact ..	13 (N = 123)	26 (N = 66)	15 (N = 158)	26 (N = 34)
χ^2	$p < .20$	$p < .01$	$p < .20$	$p < .01$

Note: The interaction χ^2 between powerlessness and contact: $P < .05$. The interaction χ^2 between dissatisfaction and contact: $P < .01$.

The data indicated an interaction effect (interaction $\chi^2 = 7.85$; $P < .01$)¹⁵ between the two attitudes. The feeling of powerlessness is a more relevant determiner of violence for the highly dissatisfied or angry Negro. Similarly, racial dissatisfaction is far more important to violence for those who feel powerless. In sum, the data suggest that the powerless Negro is likely to use violence when his feelings of powerlessness are accompanied by intense dissatisfaction with his position. It can be noted, however, that, even among those who were relatively satisfied with racial conditions, powerlessness had some effect upon violence (a 13 per cent difference, $\chi^2 = 5.41$; $P = .02$). Presumably, a low expectancy of exerting control has a somewhat unique effect upon violence.

As a second way of noting an interrelationship between our predictive variables, we turn to the more crucial test of the isolation-extremism perspective in which the effect of racial isolation upon violence is controlled by powerlessness and dissatisfaction.¹⁶ It will be recalled that we expected the isolated people (with a lower commitment to democratic norms and organized channels) to be more violence-prone when these isolated individuals perceive they cannot shape their destiny within the institutional framework (high powerlessness) or when they perceive differential treatment as Negroes and, as a result, are dissatisfied. It is under these subjective states of mind that a weak attachment to the majority group would seem to be most important to extremism. Table 2, addressed to these predictions, shows our hypotheses to be strongly supported in both cases.

15. The χ^2 interaction test is somewhat analogous to the interaction test in the analysis of variance. A total χ^2 is first computed from the two partial tables in which all three variables are operating. Second, χ^2 values are obtained by cross-tabulating each possible pair of variables (e.g., χ^2_{AB} , χ^2_{AC} , and χ^2_{BC}). These three separate χ^2 values are then summed and subtracted from the total χ^2 . The residual, or what is left after subtraction, is the interaction χ^2 . It can be viewed as the joint or special effect that comes when predictive variables are operating simultaneously. For a further description of this measure, see DuBois and Gold, (1962).

16. The independent variables are moderately intercorrelated. For isolation and powerlessness, the ϕ correlation is .36, $P < .001$; for isolation and dissatisfaction, the ϕ is .40, $P < .001$; for powerlessness and dissatisfaction, the ϕ is .33, $P < .001$.

TABLE 3
Percentage Willing to Use Violence, by the Combined Effect of Social Contact, Powerlessness, and Racial Dissatisfaction

	Not willing (%)	Willing (%)	Total (%)
Ideal-type alienated (low contact, high powerlessness, and high dissatisfaction)	35	65	100 (N = 51)
Middles in alienation	76	24	100 (N = 14)
Ideal-type non-alienated (high contact, low powerlessness, and low dissatisfaction)	88	12	100 (N = 10)

Note: $\chi^2 = 49.37$; $P < .001$ (2 d.f.).

Among the powerless and the dissatisfied, racial isolation has a strong effect upon violence commitment. Conversely, the data show that isolation is much less relevant to violence for those with feelings of control in the system and for the more satisfied (in both cases, significant only at the .20 level).

The fact that isolation (as a cause of violence) produces such a small percentage difference for the less alienated subjects calls for a further word of discussion. Apparently, isolation is not only a stronger predictor of violence for the people who feel powerless and dissatisfied, but is *only* a clear and significant determiner of violence for these subjectively alienated persons. For the relatively satisfied and control-oriented groups, the fact of being isolated is not very important in determining violence. This would suggest that a weak normative bond to the majority group (isolation) is not in itself sufficient to explain the participation of the oppressed minority person in violence and that it is the interaction between isolation and feelings of powerlessness (or racial dissatisfaction) that is crucial for predicting violence.

A final attempt at unification involves the cumulative effect of all three of our predictive variables upon violence. Since it was noted that each of the three predictive variables has some effect upon violence (either independently or for specific subgroups), it seemed logical that the combined effect of the three would produce a high violence propensity. Conceptually, a combination of these variables could be seen as ideal types of the alienated and non-alienated Negro. Accordingly, Table 3 arranges the data into these ideal-type combinations.

The group at the top of the table represents the one most detached from society—individuals who are isolated and high in attitudes of powerlessness and dissatisfaction. The group at the bottom of the table is the most involved in the society; these people have intimate white contact, feelings of control, and greater satisfaction with racial conditions. The middle group is made up of those with different combinations of high and low detachment. Note the dramatic difference in willingness to use violence between the "ideal-type

17. The .05 level is considered significant in this analysis.

alienated group (65 percent willing) and the group most bound to society (only 12 percent willing). The “middles” in alienation display a score in violence between these extremes.

SPURIOUSNESS

It is possible that the relationship between our predictive variables and violence is due to an intercorrelation with other relevant variables. For example, social class should be related both to violence and to our isolation-alienation measures. In addition, we could expect a greater propensity toward violence in geographical areas where an extreme breakdown of legal controls occurred, such as the South Central and Watts areas (in contrast to the Crenshaw area, where no rioting took place). In such segregated ghettos, violence may have been defined by the inhabitants as a legitimate expression, given their intolerable living conditions, a group definition that could override any effects of isolation or alienation upon violence. In short, it seems essential to control our isolation-alienation variables by an index of social class and by ghetto area.¹⁸

Because of the rather small violent group, it is necessary to examine our predictive variables separately in this analysis of controls. Table 4 presents the original relationship between each of the independent variables and violence, controlled by two areas of residence: the South Central Watts area, at the heart of the curfew zone (where violence occurred), and the Crenshaw area, on the periphery (or outside) of the curfew zone (where violent action

was rare). In addition, Table 4 includes a control for education as a measure of social class.¹⁹

When the ghetto residence of the respondent is held constant, it appears that our independent variables are important in their own right. Education (social class), however, proved to be a more powerful control variable. Among the college educated, only isolation persists as a predictor of violence; powerlessness and racial dissatisfaction virtually drop out. Yet each variable has a very strong effect upon violence among the high school (lower-class) group. In other words, we do not have an instance of spuriousness, where predictive variables are explained away in both partials, but another set of interaction effects—attitudes of powerlessness and dissatisfaction are predictors of violence only among lower-class respondents. These results may be interpreted in several ways. Persons higher in the class structure may have a considerable amount to lose, in terms of occupational prestige and acceptance in white society, by endorsing extreme methods. The college educated (middle class) may be unwilling to risk their position, regardless of feelings of powerlessness and dissatisfaction. These results may further indicate that middle-class norms favoring diplomacy and the use of democratic channels (as opposed to direct aggression) are overriding any tendency toward violence.²⁰ An extension of this interpretation is that middle-class Negroes may be activists, but non-violent activists, in the civil rights movement. Thus, class norms may be contouring resentment into more organized forms of protest.

CONCLUSIONS

In an attempt to locate the Negro participant in violence, we find that isolated Negroes and Negroes with intense feelings of powerlessness and dissatisfaction are more prone to violent action than those who are less alienated. In addition, isolation has its strongest effect upon violence when individuals feel powerless to control events in the society or when racial dissatisfaction is intensely felt. For those with higher expectations of control or with greater satisfaction regarding racial treatment, isolation has a much smaller and non-significant effect (though in the predicted direction) upon violence. That is, a weak tie with the majority group, per se, appeared insufficient to explain wide-scale participation in extreme action. This study indicates that it is the interaction between a weak bond and a feeling of powerlessness (or dissatisfaction) that is crucial to violent participation.

19. For this sample, education was believed to be superior to other indexes of class. It is an index that is freer (than either occupation or income) from the societal restrictions and discrimination that Negroes face. Also it was discovered that Negro occupations in the more deprived ghetto areas were not comparable to the same occupations listed in standardized scales, such as the North-Hatt or Bogue scales.
20. For a discussion of class norms, see Lipset (1960).

TABLE 4

Percentage Willing to Use Violence by Contact, Powerlessness, and Racial Dissatisfaction, Controlling for Two Geographical Areas and Education

Independent variables	Neighborhood		Education	
	South Central Watts	Crenshaw	Low (high school or less)	High (some college)
Low contact	53 ^b (N = 62)	33 ^b (N = 45)	52 ^b (N = 77)	24 ^a (N = 33)
High contact	27 (N = 83)	10 (N = 109)	26 (N = 86)	10 (N = 105)
Low powerlessness	22 ^b (N = 73)	11 ^a (N = 88)	19 ^b (N = 67)	14 (N = 93)
High powerlessness	55 (N = 77)	25 (N = 68)	51 (N = 100)	18 (N = 45)
Low dissatisfaction	26 ^b (N = 81)	12 ^b (N = 130)	22 ^b (N = 96)	12 (N = 114)
High dissatisfaction	53 (N = 68)	39 (N = 28)	59 (N = 73)	17 (N = 24)

^a*p* < .05.
^b*p* < .01.

Note: Interaction χ^2 between contact and neighborhood: *P* is not significant. Interaction χ^2 between powerlessness and neighborhood; *P* < .02. Interaction χ^2 between dissatisfaction and neighborhood; *P* is not significant. Interaction χ^2 between contact and education: *P* is not significant. Interaction χ^2 between powerlessness and education: *P* < .02. Interaction χ^2 between dissatisfaction and education: .05 < *P* < .10.

18. Age was also considered as a control variable but was dropped when it was discovered that age was not correlated with violence or the independent variables. The *r*'s ranged from .04 to .09.

Viewed another way, the combined or tandem effect of all three predictive variables produces an important profile of the most violence-prone individuals. Negroes who are isolated, who feel powerless, and who voice a strong disaffection because of discrimination appear to be an extremely volatile group, with 65 percent of this stratum willing to use violence (as contrasted to only 12 percent of the "combined lows" in alienation).

Ghetto area and education were introduced as controls. Each independent variable (taken separately) retained some significant effect upon violence in two geographical areas (dealing with proximity to the Watts violence) and among the less educated respondents. Powerlessness and dissatisfaction, however, had no effect upon violence among the college educated. Several interpretations of this finding were explored.

Applying our findings to the context of the Negro revolt of the last fifteen years, we note an important distinction between the non-violent civil rights activists and the violence-prone group introduced in this study. Suggestive (but non-conclusive) evidence indicates that the participants in organized civil rights protests are more likely to be middle class in origin, to hold considerable optimism for equal rights, and to have greater communication with the majority—this represents a group with "rising expectations" for full equality (Searles & Williams, 1962; Ransford, 1966; Gore & Rotter, 1963). In contrast, this study located a very different population—one whose members are intensely dissatisfied, feel powerless to change their position, and have minimum commitment to the larger society. These Negroes have lost faith in the leaders and institutions of the community and presumably have little hope for improvement through organized protest. For them, violence is a means of communicating with white society; anger can be expressed, control exerted—if only for a brief period.

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Personal Journal

B. ON "ISOLATION, POWERLESSNESS, AND VIOLENCE"

During the summer of 1965, I was beginning to gather data for my doctoral dissertation, "Negro Participation in Civil Rights Activity," at UCLA. I was interested in the new forms of militant protest, such as sit-ins and demonstrations, which, at that time, seemed outside of the mainstream of politics. It appeared that, for the first time, black Americans were building up an independent power base and coercing the white majority into concessions by means of economic boycotts and demonstrations that called attention to discriminating institutions. I was eager to find out who these more militant civil rights activists were, the people who were picketing and even willing to go to jail. I was interested in the most militant behavior that existed at that time.

I felt there must be certain personal characteristics and certain struc-

Source: Prepared especially for this volume.

tural circumstances that would be conducive to militant outlooks and behavior. In studying protest potential, I became increasingly interested in the concept of alienation. Melvin Seeman was the one person in the department who had written extensively on this concept. Seeman also had the reputation for being a very fair guy, a real human being, and easy to work with in spite of unyielding high standards. I asked him to be the chairman of my committee. He and I worked out two kinds of theoretical perspectives to apply to my dissertation interests: powerlessness and peripherality. It seemed that if power was a key variable, those who felt more control over their own lives and social institutions would be the activists in a kind of militant civil rights thrust. It also seemed that militant activists would be those who were freer from the dominant society's controls, that is, freer from constraints and white reprisals that would channel their behavior into more traditional tracks. This second approach was labeled the peripheral perspective.

For a pretest, I hired a black interviewer who was recommended by a fellow graduate student. He and I began interviewing in South-Central Los Angeles and discovered very quickly that blacks were much more willing to agree with a black interviewer on items such as "Sometimes I hate white people" and "Would you be willing to . . . (do these militant things) . . . ?" This difference in responses to two key variables, hostility and militance, was further accentuated by many of the residents' reactions to a white man in their neighborhood. I frequently had residents question my activity. Some were fearful: "Anything wrong, Officer?" Others accused me of being a plainclothesman or member of the vice squad. It became obvious that my presence in South Central Los Angeles meant just one thing—I was an agent of the system, either a social worker or a cop. I certainly got a feel of the separation that exists between blacks and whites in our society.

We then hired a team of black interviewers. (My interviews were eliminated from the sample.) The four interviewers were young (18-26) and of varied socioeconomic backgrounds. Three held white-collar jobs: a high school teacher, a real estate agent, and a graduate student/part-time engineer. One of these middle-class persons grew up in the South-Central ghetto and was able to establish very good rapport with lower class respondents. The fourth interviewer was a student, also from a lower-class background. In an attempt to establish social class rapport, the two persons from lower-class backgrounds interviewed in the lower- and working-class South-Central and Watts area. Two interview training sessions were held. We discussed wording of items (changing those that were difficult to understand or that might be offensive), and practiced interviewing one another.

After examining about 85 interviews, it was clear that there was a very militant mood; about one-third of the respondents said they would be willing to use violence to get Negro rights. This seemed like an incredibly high proportion to me. I wondered if my questions were worded correctly to convey the meaning that I intended. Also, responses seemed to indicate far

more hostility toward whites and willingness to participate in organized demonstrations (even with the threat of jail) than I or anyone else might have predicted. Prior to 1965, urban ghettos had been fairly quiet, except for demonstrations in the South. In fact, I had originally hoped that my dissertation research might uncover some clues as to why Los Angeles had been so quiet. Why so few demonstrations? Was Los Angeles so much better off? Then the Watts Riot broke! Son of a bitch! The whole South-Central area exploded into flames, sirens, and looting. After the first day and night of rioting, things appeared to be subsiding and I drove back to the sample area. Ahead of me on the road I saw some young black men jumping up and down on a car. I pulled a fast U turn and returned to the West side.

After a few panicky days it seemed to me that the study was not ruined but had to be changed, that is, extended. Militance, as I had originally conceived it—a kind of programmed, organized demonstration—had to be expanded to include the raw anger of riot violence. The whole study, then, took on an air of excitement. We felt as if we had a chance to gather historical data, since we were in the field so fast in the aftermath of a riot and were studying both civil rights militance and riot violence. I had some rough hunches that the original theory, dealing with powerlessness and involvement with the white majority group (the peripherality framework), was not lost, and those variables would probably have a great deal to do with the violent activist or the person who said he would be willing to use violence. So we added to the interview schedule some questions like "What were your reactions to the riot?" and "What do you think caused the riot?" These were open-ended questions because I didn't know what people were going to say, and I felt I might lose some valuable responses if the schedule were entirely structured. There were also some questions concerning "How well do you think you're represented by leaders in this area?" I held onto the question that was actually on the interview before the riot: "Would you be willing to use violence to get Negro rights?" So, with a slight addendum to the interview, we returned to the field immediately after the area quieted down and the National Guardsmen let us back in.

The study really became remarkable. Here were a group of trained interviewers, familiar with an interview schedule, used to gaining rapport with the respondents, going into the immediate aftermath of a riot three to six months before any other studies were approaching the field. For these reasons, the McCone Commission (which had been appointed to investigate the causes of the riot) offered to purchase the results of my findings and, to speed up the coding and card punching, they made available to me \$1,000, some members of their staff, and free computer time.

Even with all the excitement and the great time and financial boost from McCone Commission resources, the riot aftermath bothered me a little. Of course it bothered me personally: I don't like to see people killed, and I was very angered by the mayor and police chief's explanation of outside agitators

and communists as the sole cause of the riot. Such comments made me more eager to get an accurate pulse reading of the people. The riot aftermath was also bothersome to me as a researcher, yet I was intrigued by it. I expected people, in some cases, to express themselves more freely in the aftermath; there might be a lot of suppressed rage that would be openly expressed. On the other hand, people might be frightened in general and more fearful that interviewers were really the police in disguise. In fact, one of the interviewers said that he often had to drink with the respondents to indicate that he was one of the community and not a plainclothesman. In sum, there were pluses and minuses to conducting the research in the aftermath of the riot: It promised the spontaneous, raw expression of emotion that survey research often misses, but also held the disadvantage of people being afraid.

The aftermath of the riot could also have polarized the types of respondents, so that those who were eager to speak in a more militant vein would be especially likely to agree to be interviewed, whereas those who were extremely fearful and viewed this outbreak as the worst possible disaster might be unlikely to do so. It is possible that I oversampled the most militant, though at the time I remember thinking that everyone seemed to appreciate the opportunity to express his opinion. Even now when I'm troubled by the current critique of surveys as being new ways to exploit black people and the charge that academics are engaging in intellectual colonialism and are raping the minds of minority people for no results or results that only feed the status quo, I am reminded that this was not the attitude of the black respondents in the summer of 1965. People seemed glad to have a chance to be interviewed. They seemed to have an image of UCLA as an objective, impersonal institution with researchers who had no vested interests in the data turning out in a particular way. They had hopes that a true pulse reading of the black people in this community might be felt. Prior to the riot, many politicians had been insensitive—they had never visited Watts and certainly had never asked opinions of the residents. Many respondents seemed delighted that their complaints were being recorded and might be heard at last. (I'm sorry to say that the McCone Commission report let them down. Disillusionment with the mayor and other elected officials never hit the press, and problems with the police were considerably watered down.) In sum, the special after-riot climate was difficult to assess, but the advantages of interviewing during that time seemed to outweigh the disadvantages.

The study, then, was not abandoned but was extended or expanded to include not only civil rights militance but also riot violence. Of course I had some thoughts about the two being quite different. It seemed to me that the civil rights militance that I knew from CORE meetings, for example, involved groups of people with a fairly high degree of education, people who were engaging in programmed, organized activity such as "I'll meet you tomorrow at 8 a.m. and we'll picket this store and then move on to city hall." It was a highly disciplined movement. I felt that Watts, however, would be

representative of more spontaneous, at most semiorganized activity—though there was *some* order to the whole thing, such as first destroying stores that sold rancid meat. I was curious about how peripherality and powerlessness would actually work with the two kinds of militance. Watts was the first major riot, and it introduced violence as a new mode of expression. I found I was challenged by this turn of events and looked forward to a dissertation that would be really meaningful and not just a painful required exercise.

To back up a little, I should mention how the mode of sampling changed when the riot began. I had to think fast. First, I decided I did not want to mix the preriot and postriot samples. That is, Watts was such a profound explosion that many responses could have changed between the two time periods. Beginning a postriot sample with limited funds, I was under much more constraint to plan my sampling strategy carefully. That is, the riot forced me to define strategic areas for sampling: the lower-working-class, highly segregated South-Central Watts area, and the middle-class, integrated Crenshaw area. I decided about half of all the respondents should come from South-Central Watts so I could tap the pile-up of frustrations due to police treatment, consumer exploitation, government neglect, and so on which presumably led to the riot. Because I had the civil rights militance idea in mind, because I was very interested in variables dealing with contact and integration, and because I wanted to see how concepts like powerlessness varied from low to high, I thought that the integrated, middle-class Crenshaw area would be a very good contrast group. What I left out was a fairly sizable upper-working-class area in between these extremes.

Second, I had money for just about 300 interviews (the actual total was 312 after the riot), and I wanted 150 from South-Central Watts and 150 from the Crenshaw area. This meant that if I continued to choose random blocks from the entire black sector of L.A., I would not have enough middle-class blacks to look at as a separate group. So I oversampled from the Crenshaw area. I assigned two interviewers to South-Central Watts and two to the Crenshaw area, and they were pulling equal amounts of interviews. Yet, in fact, half of all blacks in L.A. do not live in the Crenshaw section (or in comparable middle-class areas). Thus I got what you would call a disproportional stratified random sample. I was stratifying by area and oversampling from Crenshaw to give me the case base I needed to test hypotheses. This means of course, that I can generalize to the two areas taken separately but I cannot put the two areas together and generalize to the entire black community without weighting down the Crenshaw sector.

I found I had to make another sampling concession. Ideally, I thought I could carve out a large section on an aerial map, such as South-Central Watts, and then pick random blocks from this area. Next I would go to the actual block to be sure it was not a vacant lot and number the total dwellings or house units on that block. Finally, I would randomly choose households to be interviewed from the mapped blocks. But as I was climbing up trees and

over fences, I found that my ideal goal was impossible. Many of the old houses had units in back (with addresses such as 653½, 653¼), and some garages had been converted to homes. It was taking too many hours to map out even a few blocks. So I retreated somewhat from the ideal pattern and used a technique whereby each corner of the block was given a random choice (two coins were flipped: heads-heads—you proceed from the NE corner, heads-tails—SE corner, etc.). In effect, I was still picking random blocks from a universe total area. Once having reached the randomly chosen block, the interviewer was to start from a randomly picked corner and proceed to at least eight units in that block. After eight, he was to switch to another block. This was not allowing every single person an equal probability of getting into the sample. A person could pick up eight interviews in the first eight dwellings and the remaining three-fourths of the block's residents would not be given the same opportunity of getting into the sample. So it was a retreat from the ideal of representativeness, but it was one of those practical decisions that seemed necessary.

There were other problems, too. Toward the end I had a feeling of sloppiness. There were a couple of suspicious interviews in which there was a change from pencil to ink, as if the interviewer had filled in missing items at a later date. There were some interviews with different handwritings. I heard through a graduate student that one of the interviewers had, on one occasion, passed out some of the interviews to friends or to a group of people. If interviewing was a group activity, respondents could have influenced one another. I was really disappointed to learn that the person I had worked with at first, the man who was so careful at the beginning, was the very person I felt was showing sloppiness toward the end. It was one of those famous dissertation nightmares. I removed all of his interviews at one point, which cut the sample size down to about 175, to see if the main relationships still held. They did, but I finally eliminated the most questionable interviews anyway. Everything worked out all right, except that I felt I never regained the same rapport with the interviewer after I had confronted him with my doubts.

There seemed to be genuine interest in the study on the part of the interviewers, especially at first. Right after the riot they seemed to be even more enthusiastic about gathering the first data on what was bound to become an historical event, and one so personally close to them. However, interviewing is exhausting work, and all the interviewers became tired and slightly less thorough (missing a few items) toward the last of the data gathering period. Yet all this present talk about black interviewers feeling they are oppressing their own people, taking their time for something that ultimately will do the black community not much good, was a later ideological stand that developed around 1967. The interviewers with whom I worked seemed as curious as I was to hear peoples' explanations about this event. After several hundred opinions, however, even the most curious person becomes satiated and bored. I think this may be a problem to watch

for in any large study.

Other similar personnel problems cropped up at coding time. With the \$1,000 from the McCone Commission study, I was able to hire eight to ten people for the tedious, exacting job of sifting and resifting through every interview, sorting responses into appropriate categories (according to my master code book) and marking the correct column on IBM code sheets. Even though I hired fellow UCLA graduate students, some who were personal friends of mine and all conscientious workers from whom I expected utmost care and interest, a certain amount of goofing (similar to the interviewers') developed as they too became tired. Because of the McCone Commission's deadline, the coding sessions were very intense, and normal problems were probably exaggerated. Toward the end of this phase there was a detectable loss in accuracy, especially in the case of open-ended responses. I found wide variations among coders' interpretations. My wife and I had to recode all the open-ended responses and, with the help of a friend or two, we checked and corrected all the others.

Once fieldwork and coding had been completed (and a brief summary report was handed to the McCone Commission) the next big job was my own analysis and writing of the dissertation. I had never done any work with the computer but felt that my multivariate analysis needed more than just the counter-sorter other students had been able to get by with. One of the graduate students familiar with the computer gave me a few quick lessons to get my data going. Even learning how to call out a "canned program" was a nightmare at first, but I finally caught on and even began to enjoy it. When I was able to see what the computer could do with my data, I became so engaged that I often spent 10 to 12 hours a day at the computer center. Because I had such a fragile set of factors that I was pulling together for the first time, and I had to concentrate so hard, many times I went down to the basement of the UCLA Med Center at midnight when there were very few people and all the machines were available. In actuality, I got all of my analyses completed in four or five weeks, which is considered fairly good time. I have to say that among the best advice my chairman gave me was to "get dirty in your data." Even now I do my own computer work, wrestle with that data until it is so familiar to me I am able to see all sorts of relationships that otherwise would very likely remain buried.

After the computer work came the painstaking chapters, reporting the findings, smoothing the theory. Obviously, the whole dissertation story had a happy ending—I did get through. For six months after completion, however, I was so tired of the study I couldn't even look at it, let alone think about publishing. Very gradually my interest picked up. Converting what I considered some of the most important messages from my dissertation into article form is another, briefer tale. Basically, the two main theories, powerlessness and peripherality, remained the same. I saw them as two good representatives of the basic theoretical traditions available to me at the time.

First was a Marxian orientation in which powerlessness fit beautifully. Political protest was seen as a rational response on the part of those (in my case, working- and lower-class blacks) who lacked social access to power. The other major tradition was that of an order model in which participants in deviant action (like violence) are seen as those who often have weakest ties to the majority group. I borrowed from this tradition with the peripherality-isolation framework. I was interested in a structural or behavioral measure that would indicate the degree to which the person was isolated from or engaged with white society in terms of its norms and its values and the constraints that white society could place on the person. In the dissertation, ghetto residence was used as the measure of isolation. However, the ghetto stood for so many things besides amount of contact and involvement in white society (poor schools, police harassment, consumer exploitation, etc.) it seemed to me that contact with whites on an equalitarian basis was a cleaner, more direct measure of a weak normative bond with white society. I reasoned that the black person who lacked equalitarian contact with whites, who saw whites only as employers, social workers, and agents of the system above him, was likely to be more distrustful of white society and was less likely to feel constraint to abide by the white man's system of law and order.

Let me mention two things that have led to unhappy misinterpretations of the isolation variable. A person "isolated" by my measure was not necessarily separated from the black community; he could have been highly involved in black organizations or friendships. That is, I was not talking about persons isolated from all primary group contacts (as some have implied). Secondly, I made no value judgments about the psychological health of the "isolated" person. Such a person is just as likely to have ego strengths as one with white social contact. I was not talking about "misfits," as some have suggested. In order to prevent such misinterpretations, these two points might have been made more clear in the published article.

The powerlessness scale was transplanted from the dissertation to the article without any major changes. However, at the time I was writing the article there was developing, for the first time, a distinction between personal and social powerlessness. In the planning stages of the dissertation I had a rough hunch that powerlessness in the ghetto was not so much a function of fate and luck and chance (individual powerlessness) but rather that it was probably a realistic response on the part of the ghetto residents to tangible barriers and blocked mobility. For this reason, I used Seeman's Swedish scale, which incorporated mainly social- or societal-type items ("The world is run by the few people in power, and there's not much the little guy can do about it") rather than other previous scales that had about 50-50 or even a preponderance of the more individual fate-luck-chance items ("Most of the unhappy things in my life have been due to bad luck"). I regret that I did not make it crystal clear in the article that my scale leaned heavily toward social powerlessness.

In addition to powerlessness, there was another attitudinal variable: feelings of deprivation due to racial discrimination. There were, then, two attitudinal variables (perceived powerlessness and feelings of unjust deprivation) and one structural or behavioral variable (degree of equalitarian contact with whites). I anticipated that combinations of two of these variables and even interaction of all three would produce the greatest propensity to use violence. For a long time, I had thought interaction effects were extremely interesting. We often overlinearize social action with our two variable relationships (the higher the *X*, the higher the *Y*, etc.), when in fact many social occurrences are a result of three, four, ten variables interacting dynamically, feeding on each other, producing more than the sum of their parts. Yet so often, statistical interaction has been viewed only as a residue after linear effects are accounted for. I was seeking a level of explanation beyond this. For example, I attempted to explain *why* isolation might only predict violence when combined with feelings of discrimination or feelings of political powerlessness.

If I were doing the article again I would make many changes. For example, I would stretch out my variables from the crude low/high dichotomies to a more sensitive breakdown such as quartiles. I would place much more emphasis on strength of association rather than statistical significance.

Also in retrospect, I would have included at least one more riot measure besides just "Would you be willing to use violence . . . ?" I had another measure of riot reaction, but there were about 75 people who did not answer the question in terms of the coding categories that I had developed (approval of the riot, mixed feelings, disapproval of the riot): To eliminate the 75 would have dropped the case base so low that I would not have been able to do the same analysis. However, the study would have had a much stronger riot context if I had used additional dependent variables that *were* measured, such as: "What was your reaction to the recent riot in Los Angeles?", "What do you think caused the riot?", and an action ideology question that asked respondents to choose among four action strategies to liberate black people (from negotiation to violence). The problem was that inclusion of all of these items would have made the article so complex that I could not have held on to the same distortion-free theory. Instead, the research would have splintered in many directions and would have been difficult to wrap into as neat a package. My demand for order and integration in my own writing and my interest in interaction effects among variables forced me to make a choice: a "together" piece with one dependent variable and clear theoretical linkage or a much looser and more descriptive analysis with a number of riot questions. I decided on the former.

In summary, I feel that conducting social research by way of survey interview techniques can be a very challenging, rewarding, but often frustrating experience. No matter how well the study is planned, there are

bound to be unanticipated problems, tough decisions to be made, and compromises along the way. One has to live with the knowledge that there is a degree of error at every step. If the study is carried out with reasonable care, survey research (with interviews) has advantages over other techniques. For example, one can assess the unique significance (and combined effects) of particular variables—variables that may be especially important as a test of a theory or a contribution to policy. Additionally, survey results can be generalized to larger populations with a known degree of accuracy. However, I'm becoming more and more convinced that, at best, survey research illuminates a piece of reality through one prism. Ideally, the topic under investigation should be studied with a combination of methodologies. In particular, the survey method usually falls short in uncovering process and change, deeper meanings, and social patterns *between* groups and individuals. There is a real need to round out survey techniques with more qualitative methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and case studies.