

The Ethnoviolence Factor

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Prejudice and Violence

As many as one out of four ethnic minority persons may be attacked this year because of their race, religion or national origin. Two of those victims of ethnoviolence will be attacked again. Almost all of those victimized will experience deep, vivid emotional responses which will persist and will create serious problems of identity.

Even though reporting systems are inadequate, even though there have been no solid social science studies, the accumulating evidence is fairly conclusive. Verbal abuse, physical assault, and attacks on people's homes seem to be commonplace. Here is some of the evidence: A survey conducted by the Maryland Governor's Task Force on Violence and Extremism

indicates that 13% of the state's adult population in 1985 experienced harassment, threat, or physical attack because of their ethnic identity.

In studies of the Jewish populations of six cities including Washington D.C., Baltimore, St. Louis, and Kansas City, conducted by the Center for Modern Jewish Studies, at Brandeis University, 20% of the Jews reported being victimized by anti-Jewish acts during the prior 12 months.

In a survey of 41 police agencies around the country, 70% of their executive officers report that racial and religious violence is a serious problem in their city. Two-thirds reported that vandalizing property was the most common offense, while 44% reported assault

incidents and 25% reported arson incidents. The study was conducted by the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives.

In the nationwide pilot study of victims of ethnoviolence conducted by the National Institute Against Prejudice and Violence in 1985-86, physical assault was the most frequently reported act followed by verbal harassment. These two categories together accounted for 48% of the experienced of respondents. Incidents experienced by victims also included acts of vandalism, arson, bombing, mail and telephone threats, and racist graffiti.

A second major finding of that study concerned the frequency of ethnoviolent victimization: two out of three persons had been victimized more than once in what was a series of related incidents.

Given this level of activity, why hasn't the issue received much attention? There are a number of social myths and practices in reporting about the state of intergroup relations that result in the public perception that violence and conflict are no longer common.

First, the development of a substantial Black middle class has led many people to generalize about Black "process." On the basis of that premise, people can easily reject the idea that

there is any serious level of Black-White violence. Present violence can be rationalized as reflecting the pathologies of the Black underclass.

Second, the relatively high level of interethnic contact, especially in work and public settings, provide a frame which makes it difficult for most dominant group members to even think about intense conflict. Besides, most Americans do hold to myths of harmony and "brotherhood."

Third, the ordinary occurrence of ethnoviolence is an everyday event. It lacks the spectacle of the "hook" that the news media demand. What does get reported, then, are the dramatic incidents -- a murder, a house firebombed, a gang fight. The result is that people read about these incidents, perceive them as relatively rare spectacles and conclude that ethnoviolence is another occasional pathology of urban life. After all, how many of us have personally witnessed an ethnic gang fight or a rally of white supremacists?

Fourth, very few of the minority human rights agencies or right-wing group monitoring agencies have the resources to conduct systematic data-gathering on incidents of violence. The result is that their own reports are substantial understatements.

Fifth, the study of race relations and minority groups

has never been of dominant intellectual interest. Perhaps, more than most social science topics, its study has been of faddish concern or otherwise limited to specialists.

Finally, we need to understand that an amazingly large number of people who have been victims of a violent crime do not report the event of any agency that might enumerate it, let alone provide help. Between 40 and 50 per cent of people, depending on the nature of the incident, do not report major violent personal crimes to the police. We can assume that the same is true for ethnoviolence.

The immigrant of the 1980s is entering a society in which the work force is growing at a slower rate than the population. Unemployment is high, and the occupational structure is undergoing considerable change. The new immigrant has also arrived at a time when violence and media depictions of violence are more pervasive than in the periods of earlier mass immigration.

The combination of these pathologies overlaid on a social heritage of prejudice, involving the older ethnic groups as well, increases the probability of intergroup

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The ethnic minority population is shifting. The foreignborn population has virtually doubled since 1970, and this decade may be the second largest period of immigration in American

conflict. Our advantage today is that we have a knowledge of history, the experience of sociology, and the capacity to intervene. It remains to be seen whether we use that advantage.

Tour Agency Announces Black Travel Magazine

Finesse Tours has announced Finesse, a quarterly magazine that focuses on the Black leisure market. The debut issue is scheduled for distribution in March, 1987.

The predominantly Black Finesse Tours currently has 5,000 members nationwide, but expects to increase that number tenfold by the end of 1987 with the launching of Finesse magazine.

"It's entirely feasible," says Finesse Tours president, Earl Smith, "because the concept is so new and exciting. No other publication will provide the opportunity for Black people to read in-dept articles about other Blacks enjoying and exploring the world around them and gaining a better

perspective of themselves as a people." Smith will serve as a editor of the magazine's premiere issue.

Although the primary focus of the magazine will be on travel, says Smith, Finesse basically is a lifestyle magazine, covering everything from gourmet cooking to state-of-the-art leisure products and services.

"We will also report on Black expatriates and artists living in foreign countries," he says, "and discuss the impact that their ideas and artistry are having on a particular country or region."

Smith says a regular feature of the magazine will be what he terms the "Black cuisine."



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