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URBAN LIFE AND VIOLENCE:
ECOLOGICAL FACTORS

by

Claude S. Fischer

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Nowhere is violence a more terrifying threat than in the urban centers of America. Citizens of the large cities bar their doors and windows, exchange accounts of neighborhood muggings in the jocular terms of gallows humor, complain bitterly about the lack of police protection, forego nights on the town -- and, for some places, days as well -- vote overwhelmingly for "law and order" candidates, and speak constantly of their dream of escaping the city to safety. Is this threat real? If so, why?

In the preceding chapters, we examined the ways in which violence may result from the personality structure of the individual and from the social structure of society. In this chapter, we shall examine the ways in which the physical structure of the individual's environment may determine the chances of violent behavior.

We are intuitively familiar with the influence that the shape and content of physical space has on many of our actions. For instance, there are many acts which we will perform only behind closed doors -- an isolated, encircled space. Sometimes we may feel free to engage in a personal conversation at a large party, but will cease speaking when so many guests arrive as to result in a circle of people pressing in upon us. And, we will often schedule our use of various routes or facilities (e.g., freeways, stores) as a function of the number of people who are

likely to be in that place at a given time. Considerations of the environment such as these -- the shape of the physical space, the number and distribution of persons within it -- will determine whether certain behaviors, perhaps violent ones, are performed.

These are called "ecological" factors because they involve the interrelationship of population and space. "Ecology," as the term has been used in regard to plant and animal life generally refers to the processes by which those organisms adapt to each other in a given area. The field of "human ecology" is similar. It has been defined by one of its founders as "the study of the spatial and temporal relations of human beings as affected by the selective, distributive and accomodative forces of the environment. [It] is fundamentally interested in the effect of *position*... upon human institutions and behavior."[1]

In this chapter, we shall examine the ecological approach to violence by narrowing in on one critically important problem: the violence of urban life. The question we shall address is: Why do American cities seem to suffer more violence than do small towns and rural places? It is ecology which defines the city -- the concentration of large numbers of people in a limited space -- and thereby makes it an ideal subject for ecological analysis. At the end of the chapter, after examining in detail different explanations for urban violence, we shall turn to a discussion of how the architectural design of physical space may encourage or discourage violent acts.

Urban Violence: Individual and Collective

Cities and conflict have been intertwined in at least the American imagination for centuries.[2] One renowned expert on the

development of cities has written that the city made violence so normal that "[T]hroughout the greater part of history, enslavement, forced labor and destruction have accompanied -- and penalized -- the growth of urban civilization."[3] In popular opinion, the city has traditionally been the place where the innocent rural youth was morally corrupted and physically assaulted. In America of the 1960s and 1970s, this image has been reinforced by newspaper stories on "crime in the streets" and television films of hostile groups fighting battles at city intersections.

The issue which must be dealt with before proceeding to explanations of this phenomenon is that of whether these images are indeed accurate. Are cities disproportionately the sites of individual, criminal violence? And, are they disproportionately the sites of violent group conflict?

Table 1 presents the rates of violent crimes recorded in America in 1970 for each of nine categories of size of city. The statistics strongly confirm the popular impression: the greater the number of people in a city, the higher its rate of violent crime. In fact, the 26 cities with populations over 500,000 accounted for over half the violent crimes in the nation even though they encompassed less than 20% of the population. Since the facts show that the chances of being a victim of violent crime are greatest in our largest cities, it is understandable that urban residents are preoccupied with safety and public order.[4]

Yet, before we proceed to attribute this violence to the nature of urban life, we should be careful to confirm that such criminality is actually generally an urban pheonomenon and not just uniquely so in contemporary America. One way to check on

TABLE 1

Rates of Violent Crime

by Size of City, 1970*

Size of City	Offenses known to Police (per 100,000 inhabitants) Total Violent Crime	Criminal Homicide**	Forcible Rape	Aggravated Assault
Over 1,000,000	1,205	18	38	370
500,000-1,000,000	950	18	49	348
250,000-500,000	617	15	30	252
100,000-250,000	450	10	24	218
50,000-100,000	274	5	15	143
25,000-50,000	214	4	11	117
10,000-25,000	159	3	9	105
Under 10,000	141	3	7	108
Rural	102	6	10	74
TOTAL	389	8	20	169

*from Uniform Crime Reports, 1970 (Table 8)

**excluding manslaughter by negligence

this is to see whether criminal violence is greater in the cities than in the countryside of other nations and other historical periods.

If we look to foreign experience, we find that <u>crime</u> is generally greater in cities, but that this relationship is weak or nonexistent for violent crimes. (It is mostly true for property crimes.)[5] Furthermore, in historical perspective, the image of the city of violence becomes even less distinct. In some historical periods cities were indeed cesspools of murder and mayhem. In other periods, however, cities were rather tranquil.[6] And, one careful study of Massachusetts criminal statistics of the 19th Century actually concluded that urbanization had a "settling" influence and reduced disorder.[7] In fact, there is evidence to suggest that in most places and times (for example, the old American South), violence was a <u>rural</u> rather than an urban tradition.[8]

Since violent crime is not always associated with the concentration of people, we will have to take that into account in attributing today's urban violence to the ecological nature of city life. In any case, it is safe to say that, at least in modern America, criminal violence is more a part of city life than of rural life.

We turn now to collective violence. Television in the 1960s vividly brought home to Americans group conflict in our large cities. Most major American communities were at one time or another reddened by the glare of ghetto fires and the spilt blood of participants in political confrontations: black rioters, white policemen, college students, and, often, bystanders. Cities seem always to have been the scenes of brutal political battle, from the 1770

Boston Massacre to the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention, from Paris at the fall of the Bastille in 1789 to Paris during the May 1968 student-worker uprisings.

While it is the case that American cities have a long and weighty record of bloody conflicts,[9] how accurate is our impression that collective violence is especially _urban_ in character? Historians caution against accepting such conclusions too facilely. In the broad scope of Western history, it has been the rural areas that have provided continuous violent turmoil -- food-price riots by farmers, peasant take-overs of absentee landlords' properties, marauding Robin Hood-like bands, revolts against national authority.[10]

While a historical perspective shadows our image of group conflict as an urban phenomenon, it does not resolve the question of whether such violence is in fact disproportionately city-based. It is not as easy to check this assumption with statistics as it was with violent crime. However, there is some evidence which indicates that inter-group conflict may indeed be greater in cities. One study of collective violence in France from 1830 to 1960 showed that the rate of reported disturbances and the proportion of people involved and injured in them was highly associated with the degree of urbanization in the administrative departments of France.[11]

Even if we take as our assumption that the rates of urban group conflict are greater than the rates of rural conflict, we must still recognize other cautions before we assume that collective violence is an ecological phenomenon -- that is, due to the inherent ecological characteristics of the city. We would first have to rule out at least two factors:

(1) Large cities are usually the centers of political power. As a consequence, many battles may be fought there by groups vying for that power and not because of the pressures of urban life. An example is the civil rights marches which gathered blacks from the rural South to march on capital cities such as Montgomery and Atlanta.[12]

(2) More conflict may arise in cities simply because they have larger numbers of concerned people, thereby increasing the probability that conflict could break out *randomly*. A study of black riots in the 1960s suggests that the chance a city had to suffer a major disturbance was simply a function of the number of blacks in the city -- not, we may presume, because urban life in some way increased the pressure for violence.[13]

While keeping in mind these sorts of doubts and qualifications, we shall take as given the relationship between urban life and both individual and collective violence. By what principles might we explain such an association?

We shall examine three types of ecological analyses. One argues that the physical crush of people has a direct impact on the biological and psychological functioning of men, driving some to violence. Another argues that the concentration of population sets into motion sociological and psychological processes which weaken the social cohesion of the community and thereby remove the restraints to violence. A third argues that neither of these models is accurate, but rather that cities mean the accumulation of certain types of people and the accentuation within them of the non-ecological causes of violence which we discussed in earlier chapters.

Violence and Crowding

The city is by definition a place of high population density -- of crowds -- and it is reasonable to begin the search for an explanation of urban violence with this fact. Perhaps the constant assault on the human senses of other people deranges individuals to violence, or perhaps fights for 'elbow room' are the inevitable results of having a lot of people in a little space. Consider this as an analogy:

> FOCUS: THE BEHAVIORAL SINK (Adapted from John B. Calhoun, "Population Density and Social Pathology," in Leonard J. Duhl (ed.), The Urban Condition, New York: Simon and Schuster, pp. 33-43.)
>
> Life in the city has often been compared to a rat race. John Calhoun, a psychologist at the National Institute of Mental Health, created a real rat race in his laboratory. Intrigued by the effects of overpopulation, Calhoun conducted several experiments with tame Norweigian rats to see how they behaved when allowed to multiply to a point of high population density. Furthermore, he arranged ramps and food troughs in these cages so that large numbers of rats would be packed together into a small area.
>
> Within this environment, Calhoun observed intense viciousness and destructiveness. Fierce and frenzied fighting broke out regularly as rats competed for control of the pen. Having seized control, a rat ruthlessly pursued any other male who tried to enter his territory. His victim, paralyzed with fright, never dared to fight back. Occasionally the dominantrat went berserk, pouncing upon females and juveniles and maliciously attacking the tails of other animals. The ruling rat held sway only until the eruption of another furious battle, at which time another rat would seize control.
>
> There were other instances of abnormal behavior in the teeming pens. A number of passive and disoriented males withdrew permanently from the others, and almost none of the females could complete their pregnancies or care for their litters. Moreover, homosexuality and cannibalism were routine.
>
> In this way, the stress of living under crowded conditions made savage beasts of domesticated rats and intensified many types of pathological behavior -- a situation Calhoun termed a "behavioral sink."

Parallels with human behavior are disturbingly plain. While Calhoun's rats fought over their territory, humans seem also to exhibit forms of territorial behavior: farmers stand with shotguns beside 'no trespassing' signs; juvenile gangs conduct "wars" over "turfs"; and we all employ the pointed use of elbows to protect our small corners of buses or subways. Can we therefore find one source of human conflict to be the violation of personal space?

Both serious researchers and popular writers have argued that way. One anthropologist has written that, "[T]he implosion of the world population into cities everywhere is creating a series of destructive behavioral sinks more lethal than the hydorogen-bomb."[14, 15]

The search for evidence for or against this interpretation begins with studies of the animal world. Conflict and violence there often involve the issue of physical space. In many species, if one member intrudes upon another's area, a ritualized form of battle will result, with intruder and defender attacking back and forth until, in most cases, the original border is re-established -- usually without any physical harm being inflicted. Investigators have hypothesized that this "territorial instinct" serves the function of spreading out the species members such that each will have sufficient resources to survive.[16]

But, what happens if the animals cannot space themselves out sufficiently and they become crowded? In many cases, physiological changes which reflect stress occur, such as a growth in the adrenal glands. Many of these changes in turn help to slow down population growth.[17] And, if the population pressure continues to

increase, pathologies such as lemmings marching to the sea or "behavioral sinks" may occur.

From these cases of animal behavior derives one theory of urban violence -- that it is a "natural" response to "unnatural" densities in our cities. (Sometimes this analogy can be carried to extravagant lengths, as by the biologist who argued that dictatorships were a result of overcrowding.[18] Actually, dictatorships are more common in less urbanized nations.[19])

This theory is not, of course, without its critics, scientists who argue that these analogies from animal behavior to man are essentially invalid.

For one, they claim that territorial behavior is not universal among animals and is especially unusual among man's closest kin, the apes. Secondly, in these studies it is often unclear whether fighting occurs because of problems of crowding or because of problems of too few resources. Thirdly, territorial behavior in many animals occurs only at specific times and situations, thereby casting doubt on how "instinctive" it really is. Most importantly, these social scientists argue that man differs from animals precisely in that his behavior is largely learned and not instinctual. With his ability to learn, man adapts to many vastly different conditions. The density of urban life would be another condition which man the maleable could adapt to -- without stress or violence.[19b]

Other considerations also cast doubt on the animal analogy. Little if any evidence has been presented of physiological reactions to crowding in comparisons of urban and rural people. Also, we do know that people of different cultures use space and react to density in different ways (e.g. North versus South Americans); and we know

that crowding means different things at different times (e.g. at parties versus in bedrooms).[20] Therefore, can territoriality really be a simple, species-wide instinct? Finally, while territorial instincts may arise among animals so as to maximize resources, its existence would not serve the same function for human beings. It is largely by gathering together that man has multiplied his resources many-fold from those found naturally in the world. Cooperation, trade, industry, specialization have all come with the aggregation of people into tribes, nations and cities.

Instead of depending on analogies from animal behavior, perhaps one can find studies on human beings which will provide evidence for the crowding theory. Studies have been made of actual cases of extreme crowding (such as prisoner of war camps and bomb shelters). Tensions do arise, personal relationships become strained, and people often come to occupy pieces of territory and defend them as their own.[21] The picture is reminiscent of the familiar World War II submarine movie. However, the striking fact is that what is more likely to occur than aggression or violence is withdrawal and passivity. People retreat into a corner and stay there. Furthermore, because of the very fact that it took an extreme situation to create the density, it is difficult to know to what factor any strange behavior should be attributed -- the density or the extremity. Finally, since these situations do not usually last very long, we do not know how people might eventually come to adapt to them.

Experimental social psychologists have begun conducting controlled laboratory studies to get at some of these problems, but it is too soon to draw firm conclusions. In one study, crowded

students in the laboratory were found to be more irritated and to express more negative feelings than did less crowded students.[22] In another study, a constant number of undergraduates were placed in rooms of different sizes. In this case, no particular differences were found in the different groups' abilities to work on an assortment of tasks.[23]

If we step out of the laboratory into the 'real world,' it seems clear that overcrowding is related to pathology, including violence. It is those buildings where people are packed a few to a room that seem to harbor deviance, disorganization and violence -- and evidence in support of the crowding theory.[24]

While overcrowding within homes is related to various social and psychological ills, does it <u>cause</u> those ills? It must always be kept in mind that people who have no choice but to live in cramped quarters are also disadvantaged in other ways: poverty, extreme youth or old age, social and physical handicaps of various sorts (not the least of which is racial discrimination). If these factors were ruled out, what could one then say about the effects of crowded quarters?

Research on this issue suggests that overcrowding in housing may contribute to disease[25] and make life less comfortable, private and enjoyable, but there is little evidence that overcrowding <u>per se</u> generates violence or even hostility (except perhaps under special culturally-determined circumstances, such as living closely with non-relatives).[26] Two investigators in the area of housing have concluded:

> There is no body of convincing evidence that crowding in a dwelling unit contributes materially to mental

> disorder or to emotional instability. Nor is there evidence as yet that crowding interferes with a promotive style of life; that because of crowding, family roles and rituals cannot satisfactorily be carried out; or that the development of infants and children is severely impaired.[27]

Even were we to establish detrimental effects of crowded living quarters which might lead to violence, we would have to be careful about using such facts to explain urban violence. There is a tendency to think 'city' and think 'tenament' with it. Yet, the fact is that the numbers of persons per household and the average number of persons per room tend to be less the larger a city is![28] Though there may be thousands of people living beyond a city-dweller's walls, within his apartment or home, he has at least as much space on the average as does his country cousin.

In summation, it is just too simple to say that bringing people together in cities must mean that they will lash out at each other. A few more reflections help confirm this conclusion from the data. Consider Hong Kong where the density of population is over 150 times that of the United States[29] and far greater than that of American cities: there, the homicide rate is one-sixth that of the United States! In other ways as well Hong Kong is hardly a behavioral sink.[30] This is so because, first, "crowding" is a culturally-defined fact, not a biological one, and density is interpreted more liberally by Chinese. And, secondly, rules of behavior exist for handling densities without stress.[31] The point is that social and cultural factors are just overwhelmingly more important than this sort of ecological variable.[32]

Consider the increase in violent crime in the last few decades. While the rate of violence has increased in our cities, it has done so at the same time that densities have been decreasing!

Our cities have been getting larger, but, with suburbanization, less dense.[33] And, it should be noted that, while the population size of a city correlates highly with its violent crime rate, the density of a city does not.[34]

Consider the New York City subway at rush hour. In spite of the fact that everyone's territorial space is being outrageously violated, willful violence is relatively rare, at a rate lower than that for a partially deserted Manhattan street corner at night, or, for that matter, for the homes of the commuters.

Finally, consider the crowd, say in Times Square on New Year's Eve. It seems to epitomize the city. Yet, the fact is that urbanites spend relatively little of their life-time in such crowds. Unless he or she uses mass transit, the employed city-dweller will ride to work in a firmly-enclosed space, spend eight hours with relatively few co-workers, return home in his moving territory, and remain there in his ever-increasing domicile space.[35] The housewife will encounter crowds even less often. The point is that the city-dweller is not often in the equivalent of "teeming pens."

Even with these serious doubts, we cannot dismiss the crowding theory. (More research is definitely called for.) Obviously, if people had to live at rush hour densities constantly, <u>something</u> drastic would happen. The question is whether the current densities of cities physiologically generate violence and conflict.

More critical. however, is the possibility that the concentration of people may change the ways in which a society is structured and the ways in which people relate to each other. These are sociological effects of crowding and it is to them that we now turn.

The Urban Way of Life

It is a commonplace to hear cities described in the following terms: frenetic, unfriendly, even hostile, inhuman and depersonalizing, concrete 'jungles,' as well as rat races. These images of urban life are not new. Western culture has been deeply marked by a horror of city life.[36]

The first century A.D. poet, Juvenal, wrote in "Against the City of Rome," that the Eternal City had no place for the honest man, that rights and privileges were expropriated by the immorally-spawned wealthy, and that crime in the end erased all gains. He drew this ageless picture:

> Somebody gives me a shove with an elbow, or a two-by-four
> scantling,
> One clunks my head with a beam, another wacks down
> with a beer keg.
> Mud is thick on my shins, I am trampled by
> somebody's big feet.[37]

Two thousand years later, one can easily imagine a similar portrait of most major metropolises.

Yet, paradoxically, our culture has also been infused with another image of cities: as places of free individuals from different worlds who mixed in creative exchanges, where civilization and culture grew and thrived, where even the gods chose to dwell.

These contradictory images of the city have stimulated sociologists to attempt to describe what is unique about urban life and urban man and the source of that uniqueness. Studies have been conducted on the growth of cities, their physical shapes, on the character of neighborhoods and the character of people within them. Much of the early research pointed toward an understanding of urban life based on the ecology of cities, that large numbers

in a small area create a population of lonely individuals torn and confused by the many pulls and pressures of urban life. The best explanation of this theory was presented by Louis Wirth.

FOCUS: THE ANOMIC URBANITE (Adapted from Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," American Journal of Sociology 44 (July 1938), 3-24.)

In the first third of the 20th century, a group of sociologists under the leadership of a former journalist, Robert Park, conducted a large number of important studies of urban life in Chicago. A great deal of this work centered on the social disorganization -- delinquency, poverty, transiency, family breakdown -- which they found in that rapidly-growing metropolis. To a certain extent, this image of Chicago in turmoil formed their image of urban life in general.

One of the leading members of this "Chicago School," Louis Wirth, sought to explain why cities and their residents seemed to exhibit such patterns, patterns best termed as 'anomic' -- a condition of a people who are without strong social bonds among them and whose norms (rules of behavior) and values carry little moral force (see Chapter 3).

As Wirth saw it, this urban condition resulted inevitably from the essential nature of the city -- a "relatively large, dense and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals."

Dense heterogeneity means that many different types of people must somehow adapt to living in constant contact and competition. A primary form of adaptation is specialization. There is a physical specialization of space in the form of segregation: different sorts of neighborhoods ("natural areas") develop -- industrial, residential, commercial. Different ethnic areas develop -- little Italys, Black Belts. There is also a differentiation of functions: highly-specialized jobs, services and businesses develop as the best way of maximizing production.

On the individual level, people must adapt to being constantly in the company of great numbers of other personalities who exhibit different opinions, appearances and habits. The basic manner of adapting is to establish distance from other people. One comes to know other people only in 'segmental' and 'impersonalized' ways. For example, an urbanite knows a store clerk only in his or her role as clerk -- not as parent, neighbor, Presbyterian, citizen. The same is true with fellow bus passengers, workers or the neighborhood police. An urbanite's relationships with his fellow city-dwellers is in this manner 'superficial' and 'transitory' -- the better to avoid entanglements and potential conflict. This is inevitable, for how can one possibly relate to so many people in a

> personal way? Intimacy disappears and people can coolly exploit each other.
>
> Similarly, with the great specialization resulting from density, an individual's own identity is fractured: his job is one place, one world; his home another place and world; leisure-time yet a third; friends perhaps a fourth. He is constantly moving from one world to another.
>
> In such a social environment of interpersonal estrangement and personal fragmentation, means must be found to regulate interactions between people. Formal institutions become more important than personal ties: courts and police instead of community pressure; employment agencies in the place of personal contacts; dating services instead of family matchmakers; credit-card businesses instead of personal trust; mass production instead of individual service.
>
> The attitudes which accompany such a formal society are rationality, sophistication and a blasé perspective. The city-dweller must tolerate differences; he must detach his personality from the onrush of the events which surround him. One result is that these detached urbanites can use each other as objects in the most rationally profitable way.
>
> Such a rational and depersonalized life helps keep multitudes of people in some sort of order and cities running. But, a price is paid: anomie. In an estranged environment, where men do not look out for each other, the regulation of people's behavior can at best be haphazard. Where tolerance and rationality about differences are esteemed, fundamental norms and values become questioned, lose their moral power and are violated. Where man is alone in the crowd, there is no social support or guidance to help him maintain his personality. Where rules rather than social ties maintain order, there is no 'sense of community' and that order is a precarious one.
>
> This delicate urban social structure, therefore, constantly shows symptoms of anomie: social disorganization, the breakdown of family and kinship ties, crime and irrational violence.

We have here an analysis which begins, as did the crowding theory, with population concentration. However, instead of assuming that it operates directly on human behavior, this theory argues that concentration results in types of societies and relationships which release the restraints to violence. The way in which this occurs is two-fold, a sociological process and a social psychological one.

On the sociological level, population aggregation sets into motion economic processes of competition and specialization which result in a _differentiated_ social structure. In smaller communities, a few basic social units perform a varied number of functions. Kin -- the most important group -- often work together, are neighbors, are sources of economic assistance, and train children. In large communities, this is specialized: the family is a different group than the work group, neighbors are not related, government adopts welfare functions and specialized schools train the young.

As the social structure is more diversified, so are the interests and activities of individuals. People working in different places with different groups become more and more dissimilar; their opinions and behaviors diverge. Simultaneously, each individual's time is diversified, spent in different places among different people through the course of the day. Thus, the community is differentiated, people differ from each other, and even individuals' personalities are subdivided.

The critical question sociologists have posed is: how can social order be maintained in this kind of community? In a small community, there is order and stability because people are very much alike -- they have the same interests, believe in the same values and rules. This situation has been termed "mechanical solidarity," by the classic French sociologist, Emile Durkheim. In a large community, chaos, lawlessness, and _anomie_ are serious threats because people are very different; they do not have the same interests and do not agree on values. Furthermore, the social unity and the many personal ties which made the small community

cohesive are gone in the large one, so that the restraints of social opinion and pressure have been lifted.

The basic way in which such communities maintain order is through "organic solidarity," cooperation which results because people who do different things depend on each other for the products and services they cannot produce. This "solidarity" is maintained by formal rules and procedures -- in the marketplace, in the courtroom, in government bureaucracy.

However, organic, formal solidarity is not as effective as solidarity based on personal ties, and so some degree of anomie inevitably results. People are left alone, unsupported and unrestrained, in a society of exploitation, competition and alienation. Disorder, suicide, deviance are some of the results. Violence is another.

This is the sociological chain of events which Wirth described. The social psychological process is somewhat different, though related. The argument here is based on the work of a German sociologist, Georg Simmel, who sought to understand the "mental life" in a metropolis. It seemed to him that the immense and varied amounts of events which occur in the city would be so great that a resident would in self-defense have to adapt in certain ways and inevitably be changed in others. He would have to become blasé and indifferent or else be swamped. Even then, he could not avoid becoming sophisticated, rational and irritated.[38]

A modern variant of the Simmel theory has been recently presented by a resident of New York.

FOCUS: URBAN OVERLOAD (Adapted from Stanley Milgram, "The experience of living in cities," Science, 167:3924 (1970), 1461-1468)

Stanley Milgram, a social psychologist at the City University of New York, has observed behavior in midtown Manhattan from the vantage-point of an office overlooking 42nd Street. From his daily observations, he concluded that the typical city resident is distrusting and rude in his encounters with others and lacks the cheerful helpfulness of his rural counsins. Blasé and uninvolved, the urbanite may not respond even in a critical emergency.

What accounts for the "nightmare quality" of cities -- the pushing, the shoving and the uncaring, impersonal stares?

Milgram attempted to answer these questions by analyzing the psychological impact of "large numbers, high density, and heterogeneity of the population" on the behavior and attitudes of urban residents. Crucial to his explanation is the concept of overload. Overload is the result of too many stimuli impinging upon the individual at one time (as in overloading a circuit by trying to draw too much current on it). His mind cannot process them all, nor has he the time or energy to respond to each, and, so is forced to make selections from among them. Not only must the urban resident contend with many physical stimuli -- lights, noise, signs, traffic, etc. -- he also faces an overload of personal encounters. As a result, he must curtail his "moral and social involvement" with other people.

Milgram considers many aspects of urban behavior to be essential adaptations to this problem of overload. The harried, impersonal manner of the supermarket clerk towards customers -- so different from the casual manner of the country store proprietor -- can be explained in this way. The supermarket clerk must serve more people, and so can devote less time to each one. In this way, his indifference is an adaptation to the overload of customers.

Another effect is that city-dwellers are less likely to do favors for strangers. Milgram's graduate students found in one study that a larger percentage of small town residents permitted a stranger in need to use their telephone than did Manhattan residents. Overload requires that urban residents guard themselves against the entreaties of others. If they were to yield to pleas in a place like New York, they would have little time to do anything else.

Overload explains Milgram's observation that city people are impolite. There is simply no time to interact with or care about everyone, so that, to function at all, one interacts with as few people as possible, and, then, only the most personally important.

These adaptations to overload help account for bystanders' refusals to aid people in distress, as in the infamous case of Katherine Genovese, a woman who was murdered in front of 38 passive witnesses.

Besides blocking inputs, the city-dweller handles the overload problem by devoting less time to each input he does process (being 'transitory' and 'superficial'),

establishing priorities among inputs (like helping "one's own" first), and shifting many of the demands to other parties (e.g. dog-walking services).

In the end, Milgram suggests that "the contrasts between city and rural behavior probably reflect the responses of similar people to very different situations, rather than intrinsic differences between rural personalities and city personalities." Under the impact of the city, we can all be passive bystanders. Though Milgram does not spell it out, violence can be read as one of the outcomes of this process. There is no fellowship to moderate competition and hostility; people do not care enough to restrain others from committing violence; and, the general estrangement reinforces anomie.

The theory which we have just outlined to explain how urban ecology can lead to conflict and violence jibes with the oft-heard view that the frenetic pace of cities, the coldness of their people, their massive incomprehensibility render life there hostile and dangerous. What has social science research to indicate about whether this view of urban life is accurate?

First, we turn to the psychological argument that population concentration leads to psychic overload, strain and stress, irritability and estrangement. One way we might measure such mental strain is by finding out the degree to which people suffer from stress-related health problems such as tension, inability to sleep and so on. If the theory is correct, these psychosomatic symptoms should show up more often in urban than in rural people. Sociologist Alex Inkeles did just that as part of a large study of modernization in Argentina, Chile, India, Israel, Nigeria and East Pakistan (Bangla Desh). He found no real differences in stress between people who stayed in rural villages and those who moved to live in the city.[39]

We might also look at the degree to which people suffer psychiatric problems. In the United States at least, urban residents are more likely to undergo psychiatric treatment. However, these statistics are misleading because people in cities are more likely to know of and be able to find psychiatric care, while rural persons are unable to or are more likely to follow the "hide-crazy-Uncle-Charlie-in-the-attic" approach. All in all, it is not clear whether city dwellers are more or less mentally stressed than are rural persons.[40]

What of the estrangement that is supposed to be an adaptation to overload? For a long time, the sociological picture of the city-dweller was that he was indeed personally isolated. But, more recent research appears to demonstrate that people in cities have just as many social ties as do non-city-dwellers. Very few urban persons are without close friends and family.[41]

One study compared male residents of Nashville, Tennessee, with similar men in the rural hinterland of the city. The researchers were interested in the question of how much time these men spent with other people and how much of that contact was "primary" -- with family or close friends. Interviewers asked the men to recount exactly how they had spent the previous day. From these "time budgets" it was clear that the city men spent at least as much, if not more, time in primary contacts as did rural (farm and non-farm) men of the same social class.[42]

More data needs to be gathered, but at this time, it is difficult to support the view that city-dwellers are more alone than are non-city-dwellers.

Let us consider the issue of helping people in need. In the last Focus, we reported studies conducted by Milgram's students indicating that city people were less likely to help others than were small-town people. Research on this phenomenon of "pro-social behavior" is relatively new and not fully consistent.[43] For example, in another study, this one conducted on New York City's Lexington Avenue subway run, experimenters faked a collapse as the train was between stations. They sometimes acted as if they were sick, other times as if they were drunk. The researchers wanted to see if and when New Yorkers (that most famous breed of city-dweller) would help. To their amazement, <u>in virtually every case</u>, people rushed to help![44]

In this psychological analysis, the life of the urban resident is supposed to be filled with irritation, anxiety, and, generally, melancholy or despair. Is it?

When they are polled, city-dwellers express preferences for life in small towns and the countryside.[45] In one survey, two-thirds of American urbanites wanted to be out of the city within the coming decade.[46] Yet, when attempts are made to measure some general sense of alienation or unhappiness, researchers have generally failed to find consistent urban-rural differences.[47] In fact, the data show, if anything, <u>less</u> malaise in cities.[48]

For example, in the late 1950's Hadley Cantril conducted a massive international survey in 14 countries. In part of the survey people rated themselves on their general situation in life and their hopes for the future. The persistent finding was that urban residents rated themselves higher than did non-urban people.[49]

We have examined some of the predictions of the social psychological part of Wirth's explanation for the conflict and violence of cities. The research which has been done -- though far from conclusive, makes it difficult to accept. What about the sociological side of the theory?

Population size, density and heterogeneity presumably lead to various forms of differentiation and specialization. It is true that, historically, cities and occupational specialization developed concurrently.[50] It is only when sufficient numbers of customers are present that specialization becomes economical. (Who could survive selling Persian rugs in a hamlet of 500?) And, specialization is greater the larger the size of the city -- even in regard to the number of religious denominations present.[51]

In this diversified community, Wirth argued, people's interactions and associations are 'formal' and 'secondary' rather than informal and primary (e.g., the department store clerk rather than the country store proprietor); and, organizations exist in place of small groups and families (e.g., police control in place of neighborhood control). Research here is not very supportive. For one, it seems that family and kinship ties persist strongly in cities. This is a finding which has been repeated around the world (as in the examples on pp. 25-26). Furthermore, it doesn't appear that urban residents are such joiners of formal organizations, after all.[52] Finally, the formal sorts of institutions said to be pre-eminant in cities turn out not to be all that impersonal.

One case involves social control and police. Presumably, in small towns, control of disorders and quarrels is more often handled by personal contacts (e.g., neighbors stepping in),

while in cities it is more often handled bureaucratically, with official rules and regulations. Nevertheless, in one study of the way city police actually work, researchers found that, in regard to juveniles, police usually decided what to do with an apprehended youth on the basis of what the complainant -- usually a neighbor -- wished -- a sort of 'community control.'[53]

The critical point in Wirth's analysis is that the urban neighborhood is 'anomic' -- there is no real community of moral order and social cohesion. In this weakened social body, violence flourishes. Are urban neighborhoods anomic? We introduce two important case studies:

FOCUS: BOSTON'S WEST ENDERS (Adapted from Herbert J. Gans, The Urban Villagers, New York: Free Press, 1962)

In 1958, sociologist Herbert Gans moved into the West End district of Boston. This area, since demolished in an urban renewal project, was a predominantly Italian working-class neighborhood. To an outsider strolling by, the area appeared to be a rapidly-deteriorating slum. Yet, though its physical features were poor, Gans found its social life to be rich.

He encountered an urban neighborhood where personal relationships flourished in an atmosphere of solidarity. Get-togethers among friends, he found, were "the vital center of West End life...the end for which other everyday activities [were] a means."

These friends, many of them neighbors, gathered often during the week to talk, exchange gossip, and just enjoy each others' company. They might also go out together, inviting single people to join them, because the unmarried were 'alone.' The West Enders "[did] not like to be alone....[It brought] discomfort and ultimately fear."

Family ties were also close. Grandmothers assisted in the raising of grandchildren and single persons often lived with their relatives. Moreover, kin were always relied upon for advice and assistance.

Central to the nature of this way of life was the assumption that all relationships between people were to be personal ones. Thus, for example, they expected that a policeman would relate to them in terms of the customs and values of the neighborhood, and not in terms of official police rules. They distrusted businessmen who were interested in making profits rather than in making friends.

Such an orientation affected the West Enders' relations to their friends as well as the outside world. People were judged by their conformity and loyalty to group standards -- by their fidelity to the expected behaviors of husbands, wives, West Enders, etc. In the End, they were expected to defer their own wishes to those of their peer group.

Thus, Gans found the West End -- a deteriorated community in the heart of a metropolis -- a neighborhood of close ties and familiarity, where everyone knew 'something' about everyone else, so that it was as though they all knew each other, and where life was essentially a group life.

Meanwhile, three thousand miles away.......

FOCUS: LONDON'S EAST ENDERS (Adapted from Michael Young and Peter Willmott, Family and Kinship in East London, Baltimore: Penguin, 1957)

In 1955, Michael Young and Peter Willmott conducted a study of the crowded East London tenement district named Bethnal Green.

Much as Gans did, they found that family ties were close and everyone seemed to know everyone else. A spirit of warmth and familiarity pervaded the area. Most people had lived in the borough a long time and shared a background of school or gang or pub with their neighbors. Relatives were apt to live close by. A man had only to "stand at his front door to find someone out of his past who [was] also in his present."

Family relationships were particularly enduring. Brothers and sisters kept in close touch with each other and with their mothers long after they had grown up and established families of their own. Single people rarely lived by themselves, and made their homes with either their parents or a married sister or brother. Relatives provided a link with the larger community. A person was friends with his brother's friends and was likely to be acquainted with his uncle's neighbors.

Those who lived on the same street -- known as a 'turning' -- enjoyed a special feeling of community. Each turning made up a sort of village, with its own meeting places, shops, pubs, and occasional parties.

Thus, the Bethnal Greener was surrounded "not only by his own relatives and their acquaintances, but also by his acquaintances and their relatives." This communal nature made the East End a place where "familiarity [bred] content."

To some extent, these studies are limited in their relevance because they deal with working class communities. The patterns in

middle class areas are somewhat different. Nevertheless, the basic point has been echoed by studies from around the world. Ethnographers have found urban neighborhoods that were real "communities" with a moral order. Often that morality differed from that of other neighborhoods or of the wider society. But a community with unusual values is no less a community *with* values and, if those values have influence, cannot be described as anomic. At the same time, researchers have found rural (peasant) communities that seemed anomic -- or, at least, fraught with hostility and suspicion. These have been described, for example, in France, Italy and Mexico.[54]

Yet, even if it does not seem that cities are particularly anomic, there remains a problem: Cities *are* especially characterized by *deviance*. As we saw earlier, this is true in terms of crime rates. (For example, in 1970, the burglary rate in cities of over a million was four times the rate in rural areas.)[55] Beyond that, cities are the scenes of a more general sort of deviance -- that is, of behaviors which tend to clash with norms and values widely-accepted and long-held by the mainstream of the society.

Divorce, illegitimacy, alcoholism, and radical politics all tend to be more frequent in large cities than small towns.[56] Similarly, in terms of beliefs and values, city-dwellers tend to be less traditional. They are more likely to tolerate pre-marital sex, favor easing marijuana laws (as well as smoke marijuana) and to be skeptical of religion, among a number of issues.[57] This is, of course, not a hard-and-fast rule, for sometimes rural

persons are more deviant.[58] But, in general, rates of deviance increase with community size.

When we speak of deviance in this sense, no negative moral evaluation is implied. Changes, very often ones for the better, begin with new -- 'deviant' -- behavior. In this sense, cities are also places of deviance in the form of innovations,[59] and of new life-styles.[60] City-dwellers also deviate from the average in terms of being better-educated, more informed and less prejudiced than non-city-dwellers.[61] Deviance cuts two ways (just as conflict does, we shall see in Chapter 7).

Thus, we arrive at a paradox. The Wirthian theory predicts that cities should suffer more deviance, including its violent forms, than should small communities -- and, that is true. However, the mechanisms by which it is supposed to occur -- via stress, isolation, breakdown of the family, anomie, etc. -- are, as far as we now know, not disproportionately present in cities.
Wirth's theory is one of the most comprehensive and stimulating in urban sociology, and is a source of continuing research. But, for our purposes, we should explore yet a third explanation of the relationship between city life and violence.

The Many Urban Cultures

Perhaps the explanation of urban violence and conflict lies not in the physiological effects of crowding, nor in the sociological effects of size, but in the types of cultural groups found in the cities.

Because of the specialized opportunities available there, cities tend to have varied kinds of people. Cities have historically

been the recipients of migrant groups from various areas of their hinterlands, leading to large concentrations of people with different traditions and customs. Paris, for example, draws migrants from the Flemish North, the Germanic East, the fiercely Catholic West, Arab North Africa, and the rebellious Southern coast, to mention just a few French cultural regions. Moscow has drawn Westernized persons from the Polish areas, Moslems from the South, Asiatics from the Steppes, Jews from small shtetls, among many other ethnicities.

At the same time, minority groups, particularly in the United States, are found to be concentrated in cities -- Catholics, Jews, Negroes (outside the South), Puerto Ricans, etc. And, in contrast to the American conception of the "Melting Pot," these communities persist as meaningful entitites for a long time.[62] Even it and when ethnic distinctiveness fades, it does not lead to a common, mass society, but to new groupings based on different criteria: occupation, income, life-style, family status, etc. And, these are cultural groups, as well, with their own values and customs.

In addition to ethnic and common-interest groups, cities have historically had specialized communities of other sorts: single men working to send money to families remaining in the villages, transients from small communities whose ties there have been broken, the highly educated (who may provide some sort of 'deviance' in the realm of ideas), the power-holders of the society, and so on.

Wirth and his colleagues recognized this diversity of subcultures and argued that the juxtaposition of groups with

different beliefs and values meant that all and any norms were weakened (the development of a 'relativistic' perspective). How could one expect any values to persist (much less achieve consensus) in a city which put together, for example, the traditionalism of Appalachian whites, the fervent religiousity of older Black migrants (and the fervent militancy of their children), the boisterous skepticism of Irish Catholics, the sophisticated agnosticisms of university types, the flagrant counter-values of the artistic community, and so on?

The assumption in this section differs from Wirth's. It is that the varied ethnic, religious, professional and common-interest groups concentrated in the city do maintain their own values -- and that it is these values which determine human behavior in the city (including violent behavior).

Herbert Gans, whose study of Boston's West End we examined earlier, has argued essentially along these lines in an article entitled, "Urbanism and Suburbanism as Ways of Life: A Re-Evaluation of Definitions."[63] Gans argues that Wirth was incorrect in his ecological determinism -- the idea that the place determined the type of people and their behavior. He argued that, on the contrary, within the same place there were different sorts of people. For example, in the inner city, there are to be found "cosmopolitans" (professionals, intellectuals), the childless (both young couples and old people), the 'ethnic villagers' (lower class but not anomic), the 'deprived' (the very poor and handicapped), and the 'trapped' (other people who were unable to move out). Gans argues that it is characteristics such as

these -- class, ethnicity, period in the life-cycle, occupation -- that essentially determine behavior (including the behavior of picking a place to live), and it is not place of residence that determines behavior.

Another student of urban life, Oscar Lewis, agreed with this analysis.

FOCUS: THE PEASANT IN MEXICO CITY (Adapted from Oscar Lewis, "Further Observations on the folk-urban continuum and urbanization with special reference to Mexico City," in P. H. Hauser and L. Schnore (eds.), The Study of Urbanization, New York: Wiley, pp. 491-503)

The late Oscar Lewis, anthropologist and ethnographer, studied the lives of poor people in cities and villages throughout the world by tape-recording accounts of their life stories. From his observations he came to disagree sharply with the folk-urban anthropological theory which argues that[64] urban and rural living patterns are profoundly different.

Lewis conducted research in Mexico City and the surrounding countryside. Though other anthropologists have reported changes in culture as one travels from primitive villages toward cities,[65] Lewis reported no sweeping behavioral or attitudinal changes in the peasants he studied who had actually moved to the city from the village. Instead, their life-style remained essentially the same and they adjusted to urban living quite easily. Lewis was especially impressed that family structure and family life remained stable and secure and that kinship ties actually increased in the city.

Lewis did not find the anonymity and impersonality among the urban peasants which the folk-urban theory would have predicted. Nor did he find any conspicuous differences in diet, dress, or in outlook between the city and the countryside. Those who moved to the city became even more intensely Catholic than they had been before and continued to use village remedies and herbs. Furthermore, Lewis notes that "the belief in sorcery and spiritualism [and] the celebration of the Day of the Dead" were just as much a part of life in the city as they were of life in the country.

Lewis' response to the folk-urban theory was to argue that "the city is not the proper unit of comparison or discussion for the study of social life because the variables of number, density, and heterogeneity...are not the crucial determinants of social life or personality." On the contrary, Lewis contended, urban social life is not a mass phenomenon.

> Rather, it is the values and traditions of small groups such as families and churches which determine a person's perspective. Thus, through his Catholicism, his neighborhood and family ties, a Mexican peasant, even in the big city, in a certain sense always remained a peasant.

The crux of the Gans-Lewis analysis is that ecological issues are of little importance in explaining urban behavior. What counts is the social characteristics of the groups which make their homes in the city, and, in an anthropological vein, the values of those groups are of paramount importance.

What implications does this view have for explaining urban violence? This theory directs our attention to the nature of the groups in the city. Historically, one prominent part of the urban population has been the communities of refugees from rural poverty. As all people do, the rural poor bring with them the culture, customs and values of their homes and pass these on to their city-born descendants. In some cases, these cultures merge well with the demands of the new environment; in other cases, there may be harder experiences of adjustment.[66] And, in certain instances, the traditions brought to the city are heavily laced with violence (e.g., peasants from Southern Europe; rural Southerners in the United States).[67]

What happens in a city which is unique to city life -- that is, due to its ecological nature -- is that these groups are gathered in unusually large and concentrated numbers. Cultural traditions (in spite of, or, perhaps, partly because of, being under attack in a new place, as immigrant traditions were in America) are prolonged and intensified in these 'ethnic villages.'

Part of the explanation being presented here for the high urban rates of individual violence is the migration to and

concentration in American cities (partly as historical accidents) of groups which carry with them a tradition of violence. The most notable is that of poor Southern, especially black, migrants to the Northern cities. The other component of the explanation is that population size encourages the development of another, the major, "subculture of violence" -- the criminal community.

Criminal communities flourish in cities, first, because there is a concentration of types of people who contribute to crime. There are, for example, the rich. Without them, burglary and robbery would be far less attractive as occupational specializations. Another market for illegal acts are single men who purchase the services of prostitutes. Similarly, there must be a sizeable set of potential drug purchasers (young, 'alienated' men; life-style experimenters; 'bohemians') before pushers will risk handling drugs. In short, crime, like other businesses, requires a 'market' of customers or victims for it to flourish (in the same way that exotic restaurants require a sufficiently large number of gourmets in an area before they are feasible). The greater the concentration of certain types of people, the larger are certain 'markets,' the more occupational specialization in the field of crime.

This criminal economic sector soon develops a second level -- an attached service industry. (After all, criminals are also a market.) Thus, fences arise to handle stolen goods; mobsters to organize and 'police' the business; 'bag men' and corrupt politicians to provide anti-law insurance, and so on.

Criminal communities are in some ways similar to other urban communities in that they have customs, rules and values.

FOCUS: THE COMMUNITY OF PROSTITUTES (Reprinted from L. Oelsner, "The world of the city prostitute is a tough and lonely one," New York Times, August 9, 1971, pp. 31, 33)

....Prostitutes, in fact, associate almost entirely with other prostitues, pimps, and as Dee [a Black streetwalker] puts it, "people in the business, junkies, conmen, people like that."

They have their own favorite spots -- several bars in the Times Square area, a couple more elegant establishments uptown for the "mackmen" -- the 15 or 20 pimps here who have as many as 15 girls working for them, some as prostitutes, some as shoplifters.

They have their own after-hours bottle clubs, too, and they have decades-old traditions about where to go on a big night out -- girl after girl lists the Copacabana as her favorite nightspot.

The biggest night is a championship fight. At the Ali-Frazier fight, Dee was in white satin and feathers. And, even bigger, because it means a whole weekend out of town, is the Kentucky Derby.

They have their own favorite drugs, too -- not as much heroin, but cocaine, a strong stimulant that some pimps believe -- wishfully -- to be an aphrodisiac.

But the girls do not go out for fun very often. Mostly, they spend their free hours at home, pacing with bare feet over the wall-to-wall carpeting that each has installed "to cut down on the noise."

"The worst thing about this life," says Michelle [a 'debutante-looking' member of a 'stable' of call girls] , getting up to turn off her television as a visitor arrives, "is the loneliness."

The girls also suffer under the knowledge they are doing something most people say is immoral. To cope with it, they have developed their own set of mores, and their own vocabulary.

They call themselves "working girls," or, if they are call girls, "courtesans." Their customers are "tricks" and "johns" and "dates." Their work is a "business," or even, to someone like Jackie [a high-class madame], a "social service."

Little Bit [a petite, college Junior, Jewish streetwalker] will no longer take her dates to flea-bag hotels because when she tried it once, she says, "it made me feel like a whore." Rosie [a policeman's daughter, a streetwalker] will not have an abortion, she says, because "I am a Catholic."

By the prostitutes' code prostitution is moral, while, as Dee phrases it, "what's immoral is giving it away free, sleeping around with anyone." Policemen who lie are also considered as immoral.

Pimps beating girls who hold out money is considered bad, but understandable; hookers beating other hookers, something that the girls say is increasing, is considered

> bad and unforgiveable. Little Bit was robbed by a hooker a few weeks ago. The other girls on her block have not let the responsible girl work their area since.
>
> As for prostitutes robbing their johns, no prostitute will admit to an outsider that she has done such a thing. Those are "tough" girls, they say (they are not really prostitutes, the explanation usually goes), they're crooks posing as prostitutes.

These sorts of criminal communities are particularly prone to violence. For example, during a series of police roundups in Midtown Manhattan, 22% of the prostitutes were found to have been previously arrested for violent crimes.[68] In a study of murders in Philadelphia, it was discovered that over half of the male murder victims had criminal records, most of them for physical offenses.[69]

Two points should be established in more detail: that criminal subcultures are an ecological phenomenon, in that their rise is dependent on the concentration of population; and that much of personal violence can be attributed to cultural milieus.

With regard to the first point, let us underline the group nature of crime. Not only do prostitues have a cultural milieu which supports them, so do other criminal ways of life. Youth crime, for example, occurs almost always in a group.[70] Some studies suggest that delinquency is due less to the personal characteristics of the boys involved and more to their local culture. Lower-class neighborhoods which stress values such as toughness and shrewdness above middle-class values of respectability tend to generate crime.[71] Within the community, these 'deviant' values are accepted and defended no matter the opinion of the wider society.[72]

The importance of the group nature of urban crime is underlined by the evidence that American rural crime tends to be performed by loners and urban crime more often by groups.

In the countryside, there simply are not sufficient numbers to create a criminal society.[73] (There are exceptions, of course, like the Sicilian Mafia.)

In this sense, criminal communities can be considered partly ecological in origin. What evidence is there for the point that individual violence can be traced to such subcultures?

To begin with, in most cases of murder, the victims knew their assailants fairly well. (This is true also for rape and aggravated assault.)[74] Thus, both parties are usually of the same cultural group. Secondly, murders are usually committed upon a general background of criminality and/or violence -- on the part of both murderer and murderee.[75] Finally, a large proportion of murders turn out to have been precipitated by the victim.[76] The following is an indicative story:

> A husband accused his wife of giving money to another man, and while she was making breakfast, he attacked her with a milk bottle, then a brick, and finally a piece of concrete block. Having had a butcher knife in hand, she stabbed him during the fight.[77]

(All this contrasts with the popular "crime in the streets" image of anonymous assault.)

There is also evidence of major cultural differences between groups in the frequency of fatal violence. As noted earlier, even such crowded cities as Hong Kong and Tokyo have much lower homicide rates than American small towns. The American South has long had a high rate of murder. And, studies suggest that people from the South carry this tradition to their new Northern homes where they and their descendants seem to contribute a disproportionate share of the violence.[78]

To restate the argument: There collect in cities particular communities -- such as the deprived, the professionally deviant, the life-style innovators, the susceptible (the wealthy, the elderly, etc.) -- in such numbers that a criminal, violence-prone, community arises. Together with the presence of traditionally violence-prone ethnic groups, this subculture generates the individual violence which marks American cities.

This subculture interpretation is open to criticism. There is evidence, for example, that lower-class persons (the most frequent enactors of violence) have basically the same values as do middle-class persons.[79] However, the problem comes when lower-class persons attempt to achieve these goals and are frustrated by society's blocks and their own handicaps. One result of this interference can be violent crime.[80] The question arises as to why some groups respond to this blockage by violence and others by other ways (other forms of 'anomie' -- see Chapter 3). Again, the idea that there are <u>cultural</u> determinants of this choice seems persuasive.

This subcultural theory would also help explain the predeliction cities have for intergroup conflict. Quite simply, cities are unique in that they are where very different groups can come into occasional contact with each other -- both positive and negative contact. The rural ancestors of a Chicago black and Polish-American white who are fighting over housing were thousands of miles apart -- neither in conflict with, nor aware of -- each other. Similarly, the descendants of Mexican peasants can now confront Anglos of the streets of Los Angeles daily, instead of only in battles across the Rio Grande.

In rural places, the homogeneity of values and life-styles reduces the likelihood of disagreement among organized groups. In the city, because there are many different and distinct sub-cultures, conflict is more probable.

The concentration of these groups in large numbers probably also contributes to the intensity of group conflict (and, thereby, violence). Whereas minorities in a small town may be intimidated, in large cities, their numbers (though it may still be a small percentage) may encourage more boldness -- and, so, more conflict.

We have presented three explanations of the association between urbanism and violence: that it is a natural, almost automatic, response to overcrowding; that it is due to the sociological and psychological ramifications of population size; that it is due to the concentration of particular sub-populations. We cannot draw a final conclusion here, for the evidence is far from complete, and more theories need to be considered. What is critical is that we be aware of the prerequisites for understanding the data, facts about the occurrence of violence, and theories of human behavior which can explain them.

Neighborhood Differences

Any city-dweller knows that there are neighborhoods in which he can walk comfortably and other neighborhoods in which he risks violence. Especially among youth, there are 'turfs' set aside for certain groups, usually according to ethnic criteria.[81] For a member of another group to trespass is to risk battle. Whites take chances on Chicago's South Side, as do blacks in some of the city's suburbs.

More commonly, there are dangerous neighborhoods.and safe ones in terms of crime rates. Sociologists have found that these neighborhoods tend to have physical deterioration, overcrowding and have industry in the area -- the image of the slum. Furthermore, the violence-ridden neighborhoods tend to be the same ones no matter which ethnic group inhabits it. The same American neighborhoods have been crime-ridden when inhabited by Irish, Jews, Italians, or Negroes.[82]

This seems to argue for some sort of ecological determinism: physical space causes behavior. But, the paradox is that, though the groups which suffered this atmosphere of violence differed in color, language and religion, at the time they inhabited these neighborhoods they were similar in other ways. Crime-ridden neighborhoods are disproportionately inhabited by persons of low income, broken families, single and unemployed men, and transients.[83] These are characteristics understood to contribute to crime.

What seems to occur is that certain neighborhoods attract particular populations. The most important factor is probably cost of housing.[84] Tenements are all that poor people can afford under present circumstances. Thus: the overcrowding of slums. These deteriorated areas, undesirable for those persons who have the means to live elsewhere, become havens as well for classes of people who 'fall out' of society: the transient, the socially or mentally ill, the professional criminal.[85] As populations with these violence-prone characteristics -- of whatever group or race -- gather in an area, the forces toward violence acclerate and dangerous neighborhoods develop and persist.

The history of public housing in America is a tragic illustration of the error of assuming that physical characteristics heavily determine crime and social problems in some simple, bad housing-bad behavior manner. Well-intentioned planners saw the correlation of physical deterioration and violence, concluded that the first caused the second, and set about correcting the problem. The results were high-rise apartment buildings which were physically better than the torn-down tenements. But, crime and violence did not abate. It has become clear that a physical location does not alleviate a family's deeper problems -- poverty, unemployment, discrimination and other handicaps.[86]

And, as we shall see, the very design of public housing has often exacerbated the problem of violence.

Urban Design and Violence

Ecological factors may not have the simple effects which have been attributed to them, but there remains the inescapable fact with which we began this chapter: that people operate within a physical space. And, it is inevitable that the character and shape of that space will influence behavior. This should be particularly true of specific acts of violence -- not because the nature of the space motivates or drives people to violence, but, rather, because it may determine whether or not someone will be able to commit the act.[87]

The simplest example is the wall. The history of most of the world's cities can be read in the remains of the walls designed to protect their residents from violence, both by armies and individual miscreants. The use of walls to isolate a

physical space from potential attackers occurs within cities as well. Courtyards were effectively walled in against intruders in medieval cities as are many new luxury residential complexes in today's American cities -- complete with gate, doorman and closed-circuit television.

The design and layout of streets also has an important effect. Narrow, winding, out-of-the-way streets seem to invite violence. The layout of a city can have an especially important impact on the nature and flow of group violence. The streets of Paris were redesigned during the era of Napoleon III in the form of wide boulevards partly to make easier the movement of troops into the frequently riotous working-class districts of the city. The layout of streets will help determine how fast crowds can gather and in what directions they can be dispersed. (In this regard, it was noted during the disruptive period at Berkeley in the mid-1960's that one contributing factor to the conflict may have been the fact that the target -- the administration building -- was located immediately across from the main traffic lanes and gathering-place of students.)

One specific form of interpersonal conflict strongly affected by the shape of physical space is panic. When space is constricted such that safety can be reached only by one or a few channels, a rush may occur which can lead to fighting which exacerbates the danger.[88]

One of the most critical factors in the design of space which affects violence is the degree to which it allows particular points to be seen and traversed by <u>people</u>. The greatest safety

lies in the presence of others. It is ironic -- theories of overcrowding notwithstanding -- that, as we mentioned above, a person is far safer from serious acts of violence in a New York subway at rush hour than he would be on a sparsley-populated street.

In case after case, the major protective factor is other people. Where people are not around in sufficient numbers, violence is an ever-present threat: lonely streets, back alleys, elevators, parking structures. Public housing has suffered in this regard because the mammoth apartment structures it has built include miles of 'streets' inside buildings, hidden from public view or patrol. These halls, along with hidden stairwells, have become scenes of mugging, rape, and drug addiction. The poor residents then suffer more from the exploitation of the violent few than they did in the smaller though shoddier tenements. However, where the design creates small corridors which can be considered their own personal territory by a few residents, the crime rate is much lower.[89]

It is the factor of safety in numbers that also explains the importance of lighting as a crime-deterrent. Street lights widen tremendously the range of people who can see and thereby "protect" an area. Repeatedly, the introduction of lighting has helped reduce crime.

The factor of people as a deterrent to violence has been stressed forcefully by one of the major writers on designing the urban environment, Jane Jacobs.

FOCUS: FOR SAFE AND CROWDED STREETS (Adapted from Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, New York: Vintage, 1961: Chapter 1)

New York's Greenwich Village exemplifies the urban ideal, contended Jane Jacobs, sociologist and urban planner, in the early 1960's. She argued that busy and well-populated streets which buzz with activity make the area safe and the people secure. But, most city streets do not provide much security. In fact, the deserted avenues of most cities are "custom-made for crime."

This crime should not be blamed on the poor or minority groups. The North End of Boston has been known as a slum, yet the director of the local settlement house claimed that there had not been a "single case" of rape, mugging, or child molestation in the previous three decades. He explained that the few times in these thirty years that such attacks were attempted, they had been intercepted by passers-by, by residents observing from windows, or by shopkeepers. Indeed, the profusion of shoppers and businessmen and residents with a clear view of the street provided the North End with ample protection.

Jacobs contrasts this poverty-stricken environment with the "lovely, quiet residential" neighborhood of a friend for whom "the only disturbing sound at night is the occasional scream of someone being mugged."

Constant surveillance guards against such muggings, Jacobs argues, and the basic requirement for such watchfulness is a large number of stores and restaurants and other 'public places' along the city streets. Such an arrangement draws many people to the area, and the numerous people provide protection for each other. Nor does it matter that no one knows anyone else. Jacobs tells of one incident in her neighborhood (the Village) which illustrated this point. A man had fallen through a plate glass window, and a woman sitting nearby "snatched the dime from the hand of a stranger who was waiting [for a bus] with his 15¢ fare ready, and raced into a phone booth [to call the hospital]. The stranger raced after her to offer her the nickel, too." Jacobs remarks that no one had ever seen this stranger before the accident, nor has anyone seen him since.

Thus, the safest and best protected city is the one with busy and crowded streets. Quiet and uniformity are not only not as interesting, Jacobs maintains, but they also make the people in the area easy prey for muggers, rapists and criminals of all sorts. A city that functions well has a "complex order...comparable to an intricate ballet [which] ...never repeats itself from place to place, and in any one place is always replete with new improvisations."

One can question whether Jacbos' ideas are practical. Considering the many square miles needed to house our urban population and the economic factors in business location (such as economies of scale served by concentration), it may be impossible to build complete cities of Greenwich Villages. Similarly, the recent rise in crime in the Village (Newsweek, August 16, 1971:70) raises again the greater importance of non-ecological variables. Nevertheless, Jacobs has pointed out how the construction of the urban space can affect the likelihood of acts of violence.

In this discussion of design and violence, we have largely focused on deliberate acts of criminal violence by strangers -- the sort of violence which has attracted the attention of the American public. Yet, this type represents but a small portion of the serious incidents of violence occurring daily in our cities. Most violent behaviors are performed by people whom the victim has willingly allowed to occupy the same space as himself or herself -- a spouse, another relative, a friend.

Until we can understand the forces which lead even intimates to commit violence against each other, shaping our physical space to discourage mayhem can at best stem the flow of but a minor part of the blood currently being shed in our cities.

FOOTNOTES

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