The Conditions of Racial Violence in American Cities: A Developmental Synthesis*

JOEL A. LIESKE
University of Cincinnati

This article analyzes the social and political conditions associated with the incidence of racial violence in a sample of 119 American cities. Data on the incidence of racial disorders are drawn from newspaper accounts compiled by the Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence during the period 1967–1969. A total of 334 disorders are analyzed.

Two alternative hypotheses are examined. The first assumes that the causes of the black urban riots are rooted largely in the disorganized environment of socially marginal individuals. The second attempts to locate the outbreak of rioting primarily within a closed and unresponsive political system. Paradoxically, the results tend to provide empirical support for both theoretical perspectives. At the same time, the data suggest the need to reformulate and revise conventional interpretations of the black urban riots. This is done by synthesizing and testing a developmental model which implies a curvilinear relationship between the incidence of racial violence on the one hand, and black political development on the other.

Despite a burgeoning literature, a behavioral enigma still shrouds the black urban riots of the latter 1960s. Why, for example, was the incidence of rioting apparently most severe where black social conditions had shown the greatest signs of improvement (Ford and Moore, 1970; Spilerman, 1970)? And why did rioting break out on a mass scale when the local political environment itself appeared to hold out the promise of even greater racial progress following earlier civil rights triumphs (Rainwater and Yancey, 1967, p. 193)? While nearly a decade has elapsed since the peak of racial unrest in the nation's cities, no empirical study has come forward which convincingly explains these paradoxes.

Instead, several recent studies purport to show that most socioeconomic and political conditions of the central city have little to do with the reported incidence of racial strife, once controls are introduced for the nonwhite population size and region (Spilerman, 1970; Jiobu, 1971; Morgan and Clark, 1973). The prevailing interpretation of this result suggests that ghetto violence can best be viewed as a collective response to national forces which cut across political jurisdictions and supersede local black grievances. These allegedly include, but are not limited to, rising black expectations,

broken presidential promises, vacillating federal action and the suggestive impact of the national news networks, particularly television (Spilerman, 1970, p. 645).

This analysis will present new evidence which challenges this interpretation. In particular, it will be shown that local conditions revolving around the economic well-being of blacks, social marginality and institutional closure exerted substantial effects on the propensity of urban blacks to riot independently of the nonwhite population size. I will reinterpret these conditions within a developmental context. In addition, I will present data which demonstrate why a separate statistical control for region may tend to obscure the effects of these conditions. My immediate objective is to develop an empirical theory of racial violence which is consistent with reported data. My ultimate goal is to contribute to the continuing quest for a behavioral theory of social and political violence.

The results and discussion will be presented in three main sections. The first develops a theoretical model to explain the outbreak of black urban riots in terms of two contending perspectives—social marginality and institutional closure. The second section tests the adequacy of the model by correlation and regression analysis. In this section, data are presented which document the independent effects of institutional closure over and above those explained by economic and social conditions. The final section is a theoretical exploration and behavioral synthesis of the results. Here, I formulate and test a developmental model which implies a curvilinear relationship between the incidence of black urban riots and black political development.

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Methodology

Data on racial violence and community characteristics were gathered for a simple random sample of 119 American cities for 1967–1969. The sample of cities was drawn from a universe of 207 SMSA cities as of the 1960 census. Most cities are greater than 50,000 population and all have 1,000 or more black households. Most can be classified as meeting "critical mass" standards of population size.[1]

Racial violence data were obtained from the Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence. The Lemberg (1968) data consist of coded and uncoded newspaper reports that were collected, synthesized and collated by the Center in tabular and scenario form.[2] I gathered data on the socioeconomic and institutional characteristics of central cities from a variety of sources, including *The 1960 Census of the Population– Selected States* (1961), *The 1967 City and County Data Book* (1967), *The Municipal Yearbook* (1967, 1970), *The 1967 Elementary and Secondary Education Directory* (1969), *Uniform Crime Reports, 1966* (1967) and Taeuber and Taeuber's *Negroes in Cities* (1965).

Using the Lemberg Center's definition (1968, p. 2), I have defined a racial disorder as a "race-related incident involving crowd behavior, characterized by either damage to persons or property and/or defiance of civil authority." Crowd behavior refers to the activities of four or more people acting in concert.

Defiance of civil authority includes verbal derision (i.e., chanting, cursing or taunting government officials), disobedience of civil authority, and physical attacks upon such authorities or property. Though the participants are usually black, they may be black or white, while the targets selected for attack may be persons or property.[3] Using this definition, I identified a total of 334 community disorders for the sample of 119 cities from 1967–1969.

Disorder Propensity. Past studies of comparative urban strife have tended to employ the absolute frequency of disorders as their primary measure of disorder propensity (Downes, 1968; Spilerman, 1970; Morgan and Clark, 1973).[4] Regrettably, there appear to be two methodological problems with this measure as a dependent variable. First, the absolute frequency distribution is highly skewed and peaked. Although 4 of 119 cities in the sample experienced more than ten racial disorders from 1967–1969, most witnessed far fewer. Twenty-six cities, in fact, experienced no disorders at all, while the bulk (approximately 54 percent) experienced from one to three disorders. Second, the absolute frequency is highly correlated with the logarithms of the total (.60) and nonwhite (.57) population sizes. Generally, larger cities experience more disorders because

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[1] Joe Feagin and Harlan Hahn (1973, p. 122) have aptly defined the "critical mass" as the "minimum ghetto size necessary for generating and sustaining a riot."

[2] The chief problems in using the Lemberg data center on the inherent biases of news reporting and the reluctance of local officials to admit the outbreak of racial strife. Newspapers are notoriously fickle about what is or is not printed. Politically, it is unpopular and embarrassing for local officials and the press to admit that a riot occurred in their city. Therefore, relying solely on journalistic accounts and statements by city officials may at times be misleading, and verification may not always be possible because of a lack of official cooperation. While the Lemberg collection system was by no means foolproof or infallible, in that trained clippers can err and newspapers can fail to report racial disorders consistently, the Lemberg data appear to represent the most accurate data base available on the black urban riots of the late 1960s (Feagin and Hahn, 1973, pp. 101–08). I am indebted to Ms. Terry Ann Knopf for supplying these data.

[3] In principle, there is no definitional bias toward the reporting of incidents which primarily involve blacks or personal attacks. However, the definition is subject to the criticism that "race-relatedness" is not defined. Hence, the reporting of "race-related" violence may vary over time because of changing definitional standards. This definition may also set an artificially low limit on the number of participants which are necessary for a disorder to be counted. This latter bias toward over-reporting may, on the other hand, compensate somewhat for the under-reporting of riots by the press.

[4] Although this measure tends to treat each incident of violence as if it were equal to every other incident, it does not seem unduly restrictive given that: (1) reported incidents of community violence are far more accurate and reliable than indicators of their scope and severity, such as length, number of participants, human casualties and estimated property damage; (2) these latter intensity measures are more likely to be influenced by the particular nature and character of the police response in each city; and (3) the absolute frequency and four selected intensity measures— length, number of participants, casualties and property damage—can be reduced for all practical purposes to a single principal component (65 percent explained variance) which loads uniformly high on each. Thus, little information appears to be gained by inclusion of additional intensity measures in the analysis.

they have more potential riot participants and thus more numerous frictional encounters between blacks and whites, the police, and other city officials.

To define a measure of disorder propensity which is approximately normally distributed, I applied a logarithmic transformation of the form $\log (1 + F_i)$ to the data, where F_i is the total number of disorders which occurred in each city from 1967–1969. Since 26 cities in the sample did not report any community disorders, the unitary constant was added to establish a zero base point and to preclude negative logarithmic values. To adjust for the confounding effects of population size, residual differences, $\Delta\log(1 + F_i)$, were computed for each city in the sample by taking the difference between this log transformed measure, $\log (1 + F_i)$, and its regression estimate, $\widehat{\log(1 + F_i)}$, on the logarithm of the nonwhite population size, P_i.[5] Quantitatively:

$$\Delta\log(1 + F_i) = \log(1 + F_i) - \widehat{\log(1 + F_i)}$$

where

$$\widehat{\log(1 + F_i)} = a + b \log P_i.$$

1. A Theoretical Model of Disorder Propensity

A systematic review of the literature on the black urban riots suggests that many extant interpretations are based on two broad, contending perspectives: (1) social marginality and (2) institutional closure (Feagin and Hahn,

[5]An analysis of the residual differences reveals conformity to the usual assumptions of regression analysis, namely, independence of error terms, zero mean, constant variance and normality (Draper and Smith, 1966, pp. 86–103).
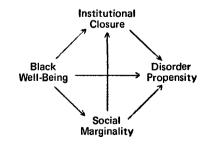
Figure 1. A Theoretical Model of Disorder Propensity

1973). The first tends to view riot participants as social deviants and rioting as an act of collective criminality. The second, by contrast, tends to see rioters as political dissidents and riots as acts of political rebellion.

The hypothesized joint effects of social marginality and institutional closure on the disorder propensity are diagrammed in Figure 1. Since class variables are generally uniform predictors of community stability and political influence, each factor is assumed to vary as a function of black well-being. The direct path from social marginality to institutional closure is premised on the assumption that conditions of social disorganization tend to further retard the political participation of urban blacks and hence reduce their access to municipal institutions. The purpose of this section is to develop the key assumptions undergirding marginality and closure theory.

Social Marginality. The theory of social marginality seems critical to a number of popular, official and academic interpretations (Feagin and Hahn, 1973). These range from the "wild youngsters" and "riff-raff" explanations to rather sophisticated theories of collective violence, such as structural strain, alienation, frustration-aggression, relative and absolute deprivation, and the revolution of rising expectations. While the former tend to emphasize riot participation by the more youthful, criminal elements of society, the latter are generally imbedded in social-psychological perspectives and look more to racial injustices and the alleged grievances of riot participants.

Notwithstanding these differences, each theory tends to assume that riot participants are socially marginal individuals who vent their frustrations, perceived deprivations and thwarted aspirations in aggressive riot behavior (Feagin and Hahn, 1973, pp. 6–24). Violence thus becomes an acceptable recourse for marginal individuals because of their ostracism from the economic and social mainstreams of urban society. It is seen as a feasible tactic because of their relative immunity from conventional norms and sanctions.

The social roots of marginal (read deviant) behavior are generally presumed to reside in the social instability and pathological conditions which have emerged in black ghettos because of family breakdown, juvenile delinquency and crime. These conditions have been interpreted as stemming ultimately from the long-term disorganizing effects of American slavery, racial discrimination and black migration. More immediately, marginality theory has tended to

emphasize the disorganizing effects of high unemployment and low family income (Moynihan, 1965; Goldman, 1969).[6]

Institutional Closure. In contrast to marginality theory, the perspective of institutional closure is founded on a political, as opposed to a social, set of assumptions (Silver, 1968; Skolnik, 1969; Nieburg, 1969; Fogelson, 1971; Feagin and Hahn, 1973). Hence, closure theory attributes most urban rioting to the institutional injustices of a flawed society rather than the flawed character of marginal individuals. Given this perspective, the act of rioting is seen to constitute a primitive demand by powerless blacks for greater material rewards and for greater control over the political institutions which govern and regulate their lives. This resort to violence is allegedly justified first, by their social and economic deprivation; second, by their residential segregation in ghettos; third, by their systematic exclusion from the primary labor market; and lastly, by their political subjugation to an institutionalized neocolonialism (Long, 1971).

Finally, a perspective of institutional closure tends to interpret recent urban rioting in the context of the continuing black struggle for civil rights and racial parity. In this context, riots are viewed as but one more act in a political drama between intransigent power-holding groups and powerless blacks. Though admittedly diffuse and understandably disorganized, riots are alleged to represent inchoate attempts by ghetto blacks to achieve social and political objectives they had not been able to achieve through nonviolent protest and the conventional channels of pluralist politics. Ghetto rioting, in effect, becomes the pursuit of politics by violent means.[7]

[6]In the empirical riot literature, the presumed bases for a social marginality interpretation tend to focus on the predominantly economic patterns of vandalism observed in most disorders; the youth, low-class background and acquisitive motivations of many self-reported rioters; and their past criminal records (Rossi and Berk, 1970; Berk and Aldrich, 1972; Caplan and Paige, 1968; Fogelson and Hill, 1968).

[7]The presumed empirical bases for a politics of violence perspective tend to center on: (1) the results of surveys which indicate strong criticism and dissatisfaction among blacks, particularly young militants, regarding existing economic arrangements and local governmental institutions (Caplan and Paige, 1968; Campbell and Schuman, 1968; Tomlinson, 1969; Caplan, 1970); (2) the symbolic nature of many riot targets, particularly the police and police property, as

2. Results

History reveals that the absolutely downtrodden seldom revolt or resort to violence (Davies, 1969; Huntington, 1968). Though scholarly interpretations tend to vary, there appears to be a general consensus on the underlying social logic of political rebellion. Based on a "needs" logic, "slaves" rarely rebel because they are too preoccupied with satisfying basic human needs (Maslow, 1954; Bay, 1965). In general, their immediate concerns about physical survival and security are deemed to far outweigh their sense of personal oppression, loss of self-esteem or recognition of thwarted opportunities.

Following history and this logic, it is not surprising that urban racial violence has been found to be generally greater where the quality of life for blacks is less oppressive (Ford and Moore, 1970; Spilerman, 1970). Table 1 presents the results of this study for eight selected indicators of black well-being. These are grouped along two conceptual dimensions: (1)

well as the disruptive and rebellious types of riot behavior reported in the press; and (3) the events and circumstances which precede and follow the outbreak of racial violence, especially the prior frictional interaction between police and ghetto residents, the escalation of violence following protest rallies and demonstrations over the actions of local authorities, and the overtly political reactions of local authorities to the riots themselves (Feagin and Hahn, 1973, pp. 31–54).

Table 1. Correlations of Disorder Propensity and Selected Indicators of Black Well-Being

	Disorder Propensity
Absolute Well-Being	
Percent NW high school education	.05
Percent NW males crafts-foremen	.05
Percent NW families poor[a]	−.31***
Percent NW housing costs[b]	−.26**
Relative Well-Being	
Educational inequality[c]	−.21*
Occupational inequality[c]	−.27**
Personal income inequality[c]	−.39***
Family income inequality[c]	−.35***

[a]Families making less than $3,000 annual income.

[b]Ratio of median housing rental to median non-white family income.

[c]Gini index.

*p < .05
**p < .01
***p < .001

the respective class position of urban blacks and (2) their social status relative to whites.

The results, as expected, provide additional confirmation of the well-being hypothesis, namely, that racial strife is more likely to occur in cities where economic conditions are better for blacks, both absolutely and relatively, when compared with whites. But the conditions which appear to be most instrumental are those which revolve primarily around the financial situation of black families. Cities with high proportions of black families above the poverty threshold are significantly more likely to experience racial violence than cities where large segments of the black community still live below the poverty line.[8]

Social Marginality. This study analyzes two dimensions of social marginality. These are the

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[8]The poverty threshold used in this analysis is a national average which is based on the 1960 census definition of subsistence poverty. Hence, it is not wholly satisfactory for cross-urban analysis. A more rigorous operationalization would adjust this measure for variations in the consumer price index across the sample of cities and over the period, 1960–1967. In the absence of these data, however, I decided to proceed with the 1960 figure.

extent of breakdown in the black family structure and the degree of social disorganization in the black community. Table 2 presents the correlations between the disorder propensity and 14 selected indicators. The results show that a number of marginality indicators are significantly related to the incidence of racial strife in the predicted direction, even when controlled for a key indicator of black well-being–the proportion of nonwhite families who are poor (see Figure 1). Thus, racial violence is more likely to occur in cities where nonwhite family structures are disintegrating, as reflected in higher divorce and separation rates and higher illegitimacy rates, than where such rates are lower. Other conditions of social disorganization which appear to increase a city's disorder-proneness are demographic dislocations and changes in the size of the nonwhite population, nonwhite residential mobility, nonwhite male transiency and the overall social control problem. The exacerbating effects of the latter two conditions appear to be borne out by the results for the nonwhite male to female age inequality index and the police density.

The age inequality index[9] was specifically

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[9]This measure is a Gini index and takes on values

Table 2. Correlations of Disorder Propensity and Selected Indicators of Social Marginality

	Disorder Propensity	
	r_0	r_1
Family Breakdown		
Percent NW women divorced or separated	.25**	.28***
Percent NW one-parent homes	.01	.29***
Percent NW children in one-parent homes	−.04	.10
NW birth rate[a]	.19*	.10
NW fertility ratio[a]	.15	.08
NW illegitimacy rate[b]	.37**	.47***
NW male-female age inequality[c]	.20*	.06
NW male-female job inequality[c]	−.11	−.05
Community Disorganization		
Percent NW population change	.16*	.12
Percent NW change in residence	.24**	−.11
NW high school dropout rate	.00	−.06
Robbery density	.13	.07
Auto theft density	.09	.01
Police density	.23**	.20*

r_0 Simple Pearson product-moment correlation.
r_1 Partialled for the proportion of nonwhite families who are poor.
[a]Data for 31 cities were not available.
[b]Data for 59 cities were not available.
[c]Gini index.
[d]Percent of all nonwhites, age 14 to 17, who are not enrolled in high school.
   *p < .05
  **p < .01
***p < .001

included to measure the reported under-enumeration of black males in the 1960 census (Bergman and Gray, 1974). A value of zero indicates *total residential stability* in the black community. Equal proportions of black males and females are to be found in each age-specific category. Values greater than zero indicate that the reported proportion of black males was less than the reported proportion of black females in selected age categories. Discounting the slightly greater mortality of males in higher age categories, this indicator appears to reflect the greater residential transiency of ghetto youths and young adults, two age groups which contributed perhaps the bulk of riot participants in most cities (Kerner, 1968, pp. 128—29; Caplan and Paige, 1968). The positive correlation of this measure with the disorder propensity thus implies that conditions of social disorganization among black males measurably increased the likelihood of racial violence.

The police density was included as an indirect measure of the "order maintenance" role of the police, since studies of police behavior suggest that the bulk of all police work in large cities is devoted to this activity (Wilson, 1968). The positive correlation between the disorder propensity and the police density may indicate that racial strife is more likely to occur in cities with documented histories of community discord.[10] While this result may also be construed as supporting a criminality thesis of rioting, the null results for the robbery and auto theft densities do not appear to corroborate this latter interpretation.

between 0 and 1. Gini indices were calculated by numerical quadrature integration from the formula:

$$\text{Gini index} = \frac{\sum\limits_{i=1}^{N} [X_i - f(X_i)] \, [X_i - X_{i-1}]}{.5}$$

where X_i is the cumulative distribution of one variable, $f(X_i)$ is the cumulative distribution of the second, and N is the total number of cases (Russett, 1965, pp. 117—21).

[10]An alternative explanation consistent with this finding is that police surveillance and harassment precipitated many disorders (Fogelson, 1971; Nieburg, 1969). However, this interpretation is not fully supported by the data since higher police densities appear to be primarily reflective of higher levels of reported property crime, rather than an excess of law enforcement zeal. For example, the observed correlations between the police density and the robbery and auto theft densities were respectively .47 and .44.

Institutional Closure. Following Eisinger's (1973) study of urban protests, I conceptualized institutional closure in terms of a city's political opportunity structure. Here, I assumed that black riot participation is conditioned and shaped by the extent to which (1) the formal political structure is open to black political participation, (2) government agencies and institutions are responsive to black needs and grievances, and (3) blacks are formally represented in the social and institutional life of the central city.

The objective of this section is to test whether closed and unresponsive political systems are more or less conducive to the outbreak of black rioting. Two hypotheses are considered—one based on simple deprivation assumptions, the second on the more complex assumptions of cultural contact-conflict (Armor, 1972, 1973; Pettigrew et al., 1973). The deprivation hypothesis assumes that violence will be greatest in those cities where the institutional structure is manifestly the most closed. The cultural contact-conflict hypothesis, by contrast, allows for a combination of results. That is, violence may be higher or lower depending on the economic and social condition of blacks, the perceived racial salience of an issue, and the opportunities for aggressive behavior.

The results are reported and discussed for each level of institutional closure. To assess the independent effects of selected indicators, I have controlled these results for reported levels of black well-being and social marginality, as reflected, respectively, in the proportion of nonwhite families with incomes below the poverty level and the proportion of nonwhite women who are divorced or separated (see Figure 1).

The first set of results in Table 3 reports the relationship between reform governmental structures and the propensity of urban disorders. A burgeoning school of revisionist scholars has contended that reform structures—manager-council government, at-large aldermanic districts, and non-partisan elections—are less responsive and accountable to racial minorities than nonreform structures (Lee, 1960; Banfield and Wilson, 1963; Hays, 1964; Lineberry and Fowler, 1967; Hawley, 1973). Thus, an appointed manager who serves at the pleasure of the city council and performs for the praise of his professional peers is deemed less responsive and accountable than a directly elected mayor whose margin of victory may depend quite crucially on the support of minority voters. In like manner, at-large districts are considered to offer residentially concentrated minorities few-

er opportunities for representation and political access to council members and candidates than ward districts (Lineberry and Fowler, 1967, p. 715). Finally, the institution of nonpartisan elections is seen to handicap minority group candidates by undermining the grassroots base of political parties, reducing the turnout of low-income and poorly educated voters who rely on partisan voting cues, and encouraging a politics of personality, style and candidate image over one of issues (Lee, 1960, pp. 49–69).

Some research suggests that the closure effects of reform institutions may be cumulative in nature. The more a city is dominated by reform institutions, the less responsive its officials are to minority needs and grievances. Thus, Lineberry and Fowler (1967, p. 716) have used a linear model to explain the lower expenditure and taxation patterns of reform governments and their allegedly reduced responsiveness to the social needs and political cleavages which divide the central city. Eisinger (1973, p. 23) on the other hand, has recently advanced a curvilinear model to explain the effects of reform structures on urban protests. His data tend to support the contention that protest is most likely to occur where formal political structures reflect a mixture of open and closed characteristics.

The data reported here, however, suggest that racial disorders do not appear to be a response by urban blacks to closed formal governmental arrangements, either in their individual or cumulative forms. Although disorders are more likely to occur in cities having unreformed political structures, particularly those with mayor-council forms of government, the observed relationships do not seem to reflect the impact of formal structure so much

as they do population characteristics. That is, cities with unreformed structures may appear more disorder-prone because they have higher proportions of black families with incomes above the poverty level and greater social disorganization in the black community.

Formal political structures, of course, provide only crude indications of the political and policy biases which may work to the disadvantage of racial minorities. More direct measures, perhaps, are to be found in the institutional processes and policy outputs which are specifically intended to deal with the grievances and needs of minority groups. To measure the responsiveness of local governments, I selected two types of policy outputs. One was the implementation of institutional mechanisms attuned to minority grievances. Because discriminatory police practices were ranked by most ghetto residents as their number one grievance in a survey of riot cities conducted by the Kerner Commission (1968, pp. 143–50), I selected three indicators of police responsiveness. These were whether a city had set up a citizen's complaint board, empowered it with investigatory authority, and implemented a police-community relations program. The first two indicators may serve as measures of official willingness to hear and take action on specific grievances filed against the conduct of police personnel. The latter may represent the extent to which local officials are concerned about the mode or style of law enforcement in the black community (Wilson, 1969).

The second type of policy response dealt with the financial commitment of urban officials to the social needs of disadvantaged citizens. Here I selected three additional indicators to measure the relative proportion of all expenditures allocated toward the vital areas of

Table 3. Correlations of Disorder Propensity and Governmental Form

Governmental Form	Disorder Propensity	
	r_0	r_1
Manager-council government	−.15*	−.08
At-large districts	−.06	−.02
Nonpartisan elections	−.08	−.04
Reform index[a]: linear model	−.16*	.08
quadratic model (R)	.21	.13

r_0 Simple Pearson product-moment correlation.
r_1 Partialled for the proportion of nonwhite families who are poor and the proportion of nonwhite women who are divorced or separated.

[a]This index ranges from a value of 0 for forms of government combining mayor-council government, ward districts and partisan elections to a value of 7 for their reform counterparts.

*p < .05
**p < .01
***p < .001

health, education and welfare. The correlations between these six indicators of governmental responsiveness and the disorder propensity are tabulated in Table 4.

The lack of formal grievance mechanisms against alleged police misconduct and brutality has long been a key issue among urban blacks. Nevertheless, neither the existence of a citizen's complaint board nor the power of citizen investigation is significantly related to the incidence of racial violence. Black rioting during the latter 1960s also appears to be unrelated to the existence of a police-community relations program.

The alleged inadequacy of health, education and welfare services is another issue which has been emphasized in riot commission reports (Kerner, 1968, pp. 251–77). Because of data limitations, only crude tests of the hypothesized relations between the distribution of these services and the incidence of racial strife were possible in this analysis. The relative proportion of the city budget allocated for a given service does not adequately reflect either its quality or distribution among different urban groups. Moreover, it should be remembered that education and welfare service levels are largely dictated by decisions made at the state, county and district levels of government. For these reasons, the results reported here should be weighed with some caution. Notwithstanding, it seems reasonable to infer that racial disorders were not a response by urban blacks to financial allocations in the city budget for human services. In fact, the data show that rioting was most likely to occur in cities where welfare expenditures were proportionally higher, even in the presence of statistical controls for standard indicators of welfare need.

A third dimension of closure theory focuses on the extent to which urban blacks experience institutional discrimination. One persisting form has been the exclusion of blacks from public service positions. Studies of ethnic assimilation suggest that minority groups frequently obtain elective positions before any other kind and usually have their greatest proportional representation in them (Meyers, 1951). By comparison, municipal employee positions are generally much more difficult to acquire because of continuing institutional barriers and prejudices against the acceptance and inclusion of minority groups and long-standing biases in the distribution of patronage. Consequently, blacks are generally underrepresented on city bureaucracies in proportion to their population size, despite pressures by civil rights leaders on local authorities.

Since the inception of the civil rights movement, two institutions which have come under increasing criticism for their exclusionary hiring practices are the police department and the public school system. The emphasis on these two institutions may be understandable, since police officers and teachers are among the most important and visible representatives of political and institutional authority. Because most urban disorders constitute a defiance of civil authority, both police officers and teachers frequently find themselves in the first line of defense. In addition, these two institutions exert perhaps the greatest control over the daily activities of urban blacks, particularly young males who constitute the majority of riot participants.

Three other forms of institutional discrimination which appear to have high racial salience are residential segregation, school segregation

Table 4. Correlations of Disorder Propensity and Governmental Responsiveness

	Disorder Propensity	
Governmental Responsiveness	r_0	r_1
Citizen's complaint board	.04	−.04
Citizen's investigatory power	−.07	−.11
Community relations program	.11	.03
Percent educational expenditures[a]	−.12	.09
Percent welfare expenditures[b]	.25*	.25*
Percent health expenditures	.03	.10

r_0 Simple Pearson product-moment correlation.
r_1 Partialled for the proportion of nonwhite families who are poor and the proportion of nonwhite women who are divorced or separated.

[a]Data for 87 cities were not available because education is funded by separate school districts.

[b]Data for 65 cities were not available because welfare is funded by the county level of government.

*p < .05
**p < .01
***p < .001

and job discrimination. These conditions have also been linked to a variety of social and political problems peculiar to the black condition, namely, the systematic exclusion of blacks from the primary labor market (Doeringer and Piore, 1975), their progressive educational failure in the schools (Coleman et al., 1966; Jencks et al., 1972), and ultimately, their exclusion from positions of political power and authority (Matthews and Prothro, 1966; Keech, 1968; Bachrach and Baratz, 1970).

Table 5 presents the correlations between the disorder propensity and six indicators of institutional discrimination. The minority representation ratios were included to measure the extent of black representation on the police force and public school faculties. I computed each ratio by dividing the proportion of police officers or teachers who are nonwhite by the proportion of the total population or students in the school system who are nonwhite. Ratios less than one indicate that blacks are underrepresented. Ratios greater than or equal to one indicate that blacks have more than their proportional share of positions or are perfectly represented. For the two segregation variables, a value of zero indicates that the proportion of blacks living in each census tract and the proportion of black students attending each of the city's public schools are equal to their citywide concentrations.[11] A value of one indicates the total segregation of the races.

· [11]Gini indices of residential segregation were obtained from Taeuber and Taeuber's *Negroes in Cities*

The results appear to provide greater support for the cultural contact-conflict hypothesis than the deprivation hypothesis. While the deprivation hypothesis correctly predicts that the disorder propensity will be positively correlated with the unemployment ratio and negatively correlated with the minority teachers ratio, it is unable to explain why the disorder propensity is also negatively correlated with the index of school segregation. By contrast, the cultural conflict hypothesis is able to account for the behavioral impact of all three indicators consistently. Thus, racial violence may be more likely to occur in cities with high unemployment ratios because unemployment is an issue with high racial (cultural) salience (Campbell and Schuman, 1968; Feldstein, 1973). Violence may be less likely in cities where schools are more racially segregated because racial separation provides fewer opportunities for interracial (cultural) conflict. Conversely, violence may be more likely to occur in racially changing cities

(1965). Gini indices of school segregation were computed from data published in the 1967 *Elementary and Secondary Education Directory* (1969). To compute the school segregation indices, I first enumerated all of the public high schools within each city and then ranked them according to the respective proportion of nonwhite students within each school—that is, from high to low nonwhite concentrations. Next, I computed the cumulative distribution functions for white and nonwhite students. Finally, school segregation indices were computed by numerical quadrature integration from the formula given in n. 9.

Table 5. Correlations of Disorder Propensity and Institutional Discrimination

Institutional Discrimination	Disorder Propensity	
	r_0	r_1
Minority police ratio[a]	−.13	−.08
Minority teachers ratio	−.40***	−.24**
Unemployment ratio[b]	.29***	.18*
Unemployment differential[c]	.17*	.09
School segregation[d]	−.33***	−.24**
Residential segregation[d]	−.26	−.20

r_0 Simple Pearson product-moment correlation.
r_1 Partialled for the proportion of nonwhite families who are poor and the proportion of nonwhite women who are divorced or separated.
[a]Data for 40 cities were not available.
[b]Ratio of the nonwhite to total unemployment rates.
[c]Difference between the nonwhite and white unemployment rates.
[d]Gini index.
 *p < .05
 **p < .01
 ***p < .001

where the proportion of black faculty lags behind the proportion of black students, because the interracial contact of white teachers and black students provides more opportunities for racial (cultural) conflict (Armor, 1972).

Finally, it is within a perspective of cultural contact-conflict that the positive correlation observed earlier between the disorder propensity and welfare expenditures may best be interpreted. That is, welfare benefits and services may enhance the opportunities for racial (cultural) violence by "liberating" black clients from the social norms and organizational restraints of gainful employment.

To conclude this section, Table 6 presents the results of a stepwise regression analysis for selected indicators of black well-being, social marginality and institutional closure. The data show that the political environment of blacks influenced the incidence of racial violence independently of economic and social conditions. Collectively, the variable indicators explain over 43 percent of the variation in the disorder propensity. These results appear to differ with several studies which find that recent urban riots had little to do with the black social and political condition (Spilerman, 1970; Jiobu, 1971; Morgan and Clark, 1973).

3. A Developmental Synthesis

The results of this analysis support the conclusion that the likelihood of urban racial violence is significantly related to the social condition of urban blacks, the degree of social disorganization within the black community and the extent to which a city's institutional structure is open or closed. The overall configuration of the conditions which predict racial violence appear to parallel the general contours found for protest behavior (Eisinger, 1973, p. 26). That is, violence seems most likely to occur in cities with a mixture of open and closed characteristics.

Table 6. Cumulative Explained Variance in Disorder Propensity

Variable Indicators[a]	Cumulative Variance
Black Well-Being	21%
Social Marginality	32%
Institutional Closure	43%

[a]The stepwise analysis only employed those indicators for which there were complete data. The reported results thus apply to eight indicators of black well-being, eleven indicators of social marginality and twelve indicators of institutional closure.

Thus, racial violence is significantly greater in cities which allocate larger proportions of the total budget for welfare services, where the social status of blacks approaches that of whites, and where blacks are less racially segregated. These conditions are characteristic of opportunity structures which, if not generically open, certainly appear more responsive and receptive to black needs and aspirations than not. At the same time, the results suggest that racial disorders are more likely to occur where certain features of a city's opportunity structure are manifestly closed. Consistent with closure theory, the likelihood of racial disorders was observed to be measurably greater in cities which failed to recruit black teachers in proportion to the concentration of black students within the school system. Racial strife was also greater in cities with high reported levels of social disorganization and job discrimination.

How are these two sets of seemingly incongruent relationships to be explained? And what is the true character of urban racial violence? Is it the inevitable flotsam and debris of an urban society which has run aground on the shoals of social disorganization and the acquisitive behavior of "riff-raff" elements? Or does it represent, instead, outbursts of righteous indignation by politically powerless rebels against the more visible and salient forms of institutional and social oppression?

The results of this study and their seemingly paradoxical implications certainly afford fertile ground for continuing debate between these two contending schools. Nonetheless, the results are not necessarily inconsistent, nor do they foreclose rational interpretation. One point of departure for this task is classic development theory. Figure 2 presents a developmental model of disorder propensity which is premised on the assumption that the nation's cities can be ranked on a scale of black political development, ranging from a low of social lethargy and quiescence to a high of active participation and involvement in the political process (Huntington, 1968; Eyestone and Eulau, 1968; Winham, 1970; Sharkansky, 1975). Black political developmental itself is assumed to vary primarily as a function of black economic development (Lerner, 1958; Dahrendorf, 1959; Apter, 1965; Huntington, 1968).

The model depicts the disorder propensity as a curvilinear function of black social class. This has been done to conform with the relationship observed between civil violence and social class at the cross-national level (Alker and Russett, 1964, pp. 306–07; Fierabend et al., 1967, pp. 654–57; Midlarsky and Tanter, 1967, p. 215;

Huntington, 1968, pp. 39–53), to integrate the results of this study into the model, and to emphasize major transitional stages of black political development. Each stage is assumed to become ascendant or modal when blacks as a group attain specified levels of material well-being. These are denoted in the diagram as thresholds of developmental mobilization.

The threshold of economic mobilization is assumed to separate black apathy and social quiescence from collective social violence.[12] In the United States, this demarcation may correspond to the difference in the black condition between southern and northern cities. While black living standards are surely more affluent in the North, as measured by a number of class indicators, this improvement in well-being may have been achieved at the expense of significant social costs (Olson, 1963, p. 532). The severing of kinship and cultural ties, the social dislocations of migration, and the economic strains of life in a new urban environment have all been advanced to explain the higher incidence of family breakdown and community disorganization among northern, as opposed to southern blacks (Moynihan, 1965). As urban historians like Zane Miller (1973, pp. 45–51) have suggested, the parallels between the socially debilitating consequences of modernization between southern blacks and European ethnic whites 100 years earlier are, indeed, striking. Both migratory waves to northern cities were products of economic mobilization and development. Both culminated in unprecedented levels of social disorganization, ethnic unrest and civil violence.

[12]The term, *social violence,* is used to connote all forms of crime and civil violence in which the targets selected for attack are neither political nor institutional in character.

The threshold of social mobilization, by comparison, may demarcate the division between Maslow's (1954) lower-order (more fundamental) needs of survival and security and the higher-order needs of self-esteem and self-actualization (Huntington, 1968, pp. 32–39, 47–59). Levels of black well-being which fall below the social threshold but above the economic threshold are assumed to be more conducive to social violence. Levels which fall above the social threshold but below the political threshold may be more likely to activate blacks in collective political violence and protest demonstrations.

Hence, the continued economic progress of blacks during the 1960s (Wattenberg and Scammon, 1973) may have been the needed social catalyst which ignited the civil rights movement and fueled the conflagration of the cities. In political terms, the black urban riots and the civil rights movement have been interpreted as attempts to eliminate the racial barriers of discrimination and segregation, the former through the politics of violence, the latter through the politics of nonviolent protest (Silver, 1968; Skolnik, 1969; Nieburg, 1969; Fogelson, 1971; Feagin and Hahn, 1973). In developmental terms, they may be viewed as social mobilizations of self-conscious blacks who sought to secure equal social status with whites and equal opportunities for social advancement. Under conditions of social mobilization, ghetto blacks may be more likely to develop needs for self-esteem and self-actualization, to reject old racial stereotypes and symbols of racial subservience, to translate their social freedom into militant attitudes, and to participate in collective violence and protest. Political violence, like protest, is a strategy of the politically powerless (Lipsky, 1968). It may most often be employed when blacks acquire the aspirations for social justice, but lack or are denied the organiza-
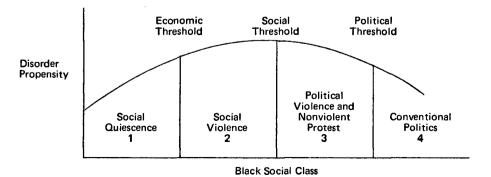

Figure 2. A Developmental Model of Disorder Propensity

tional resources and political access for achieving it.

The threshold of political mobilization denotes that point of development when urban blacks begin to acquire on a much broader scale the benefits of active involvement in the political process. At this stage their increasingly middle-class social status is much more supportive of voting and other forms of political participation. Second, their increased voting power and the political candidacy of middle-class black "ethnics" on the ballot assures them greater representation on the councils of city government (Wolfinger, 1965; Pomper, 1966), greater representation in municipal agencies (Meyers, 1951, pp. 143–44), and a real measure of political power (Rustin, 1966), as reflected, for example, in their ability to elect black mayors (Hadden et al., 1968) and alter the structural biases of existing urban institutions (Stinchcombe, 1968).

In sum, the model implies that violence may be least where life is a constant battle to satisfy basic physical needs or where affluence and an open political structure facilitate black political participation and the institutional resolution of black grievances. Violence may be greatest where blacks suffer the dislocations of social disorganization and where their demands for social and political change are thwarted by a lack of political resources or a closed institutional structure. This region of collective social and political violence is depicted in Figure 2 as lying between the thresholds of economic and political mobilization. To adopt Daniel Lerner's (1958) terminology, the curvilinear model assumes that racial violence is greatest among "transitional" urban blacks, least among their "traditional" and "modernized" counterparts.

The results of this study, at least, lend credence to a developmental interpretation of the black urban riots.[13] Consistent with the logic of economic mobilization, the incidence of racial strife was found to increase with higher levels of family breakdown and social disorganization in the black community. Consistent with the logic of social mobilization, racial violence was also found to increase as

urban blacks progressed above the poverty level in income, approached whites in social status, and came into increasing cultural conflict with whites in the community and the schools. Finally, consistent with the logic of political mobilization, violence was observed to decrease as blacks gained access to employment opportunities in the public and private labor markets.

While these results support a developmental explanation, the ultimate test of any model is its empirical fit with the data. To test the model in Figure 2, I factor analyzed three measures of education, occupational status and income among urban blacks to obtain a generalized measure of black social class. These are: (1) the proportion of nonwhites who had received at least a high-school education, (2) the proportion of nonwhite males who were employed at the crafts-foreman level or higher, and (3) the proportion of nonwhite families with annual incomes above the poverty level. The results of a principal component analysis revealed that a single weighted average explained over 72 percent of the total variation in the three measures. Then I fitted a quadratic function of this generalized class measure to data on the disorder propensity by means of regression analysis. The computed regression coefficients and corresponding significance levels are tabulated in Table 7. A scattergram of the regression curve and the data is plotted in Figure 3.

The results of this analysis conform to the predicted curvilinear relationship between the disorder propensity and black social class. Racial violence first increases with improving black well-being and then declines in a convex parabolic fashion. Moreover, both the quadratic and linear coefficients are statistically significant. This implies that the curvilinear model provides a better fit to the data than a simple linear model.[14]

Although these results provide additional support for a developmental interpretation, I decided to pursue the test of this paradigm one step further. Table 8 presents a breakdown of six developmental indicators and the mean disorder propensity[15] by four rank levels of black social class. The developmental indicators

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[13]Since the data are cross-sectional, it is implicitly assumed here that the developmental process is essentially invariant across time, namely, that cities with high levels of black political development may be temporally treated as posterior representatives of cities with low levels of black political development. While the assumption of an invariant developmental process is basic to the modernity literature, it may not always be justified (Marquette, 1974).

[14]Although a curvilinear model provides the best fit to the factor-analyzed measure of black social class, it does not improve the fit for each of the three selected indicators.

[15]The mean disorder propensity was computed on the basis of the regression coefficients tabulated in Table 7 and the factor scores of black social class.

Table 7. Curvilinear Regression Analysis of Black Social Class

Independent Variables	Regression Coefficient	Significance
(Black Social Class)^2	−.0186	$p < .05$
Black Social Class	.0755	$p < .05$
Constant	.0869	
	R = .25	

were selected for their presumed relevance to mobilization theory. The social ranks were computed by dividing the black social class variable at the value which maximizes the curvilinear function and then subdividing both interval segments at the midpoints between this value and the minimum and maximum values.[16]

In terms of the developmental profile, F_1 represents the grouping of 42 cities in the sample which may be classified as "socially quiescent." Similarly, F_2, F_3 and F_4 represent

[16]These selected cutting points may not necessarily be optimal, since it is difficult to discriminate among the four hypothesized stages of black development on the basis of class considerations alone.

the respective subsamples of 58, 13 and 6 cities which fall into the more developed stages of "social violence," "political violence and protest," and "conventional politics." The three successive cutpoints between these divisions represent the hypothesized thresholds of economic, social and political mobilization.

Because of the crudeness of the selected mobilization indicators and the difficulty in selecting suitable cutpoints, the results of Table 8 should not be expected to delineate a pure modernity profile. Notwithstanding these limitations, the data provide surprising support for the model's developmental assumptions. Thus, as the model predicts, regional location and conditions of social disorganization appear to demarcate those cities in the sample which have experienced the socially destabilizing effects of black economic mobilization from those which have not. For example, 74 percent of the cities which fall into the economically underdeveloped stage (F_1) are southern. This compares with 81 percent in the economically mobilized stage (F_2) which are northern. Similarly, the data predictably show that the disintegration of the nonwhite family structure is the most advanced in the economically mobilized stage.

The two tabulated indicators of social mobilization were selected on the assumptions
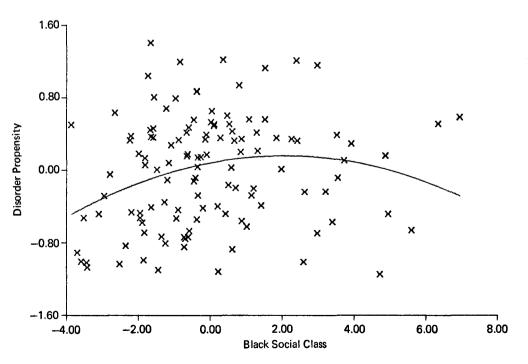

Figure 3. Scattergram of Disorder Propensity and Black Social Class

that: (1) the threshold of social mobilization may be approximated by the subsistence definition of poverty,[17] and (2) school desegregation is more likely to occur under conditions of social mobilization. Consistent with this interpretation, the data show that the highest levels of reported racial strife are to be found in cities where substantial majorities of the black community have crossed the poverty threshold. At this point of development ($F_2 - F_3$), the greater social mobilization of the black community may also be reflected in the sharply declining levels of racial segregation in the schools.

As indicators of political mobilization, the relative representation of blacks on the police force and the unemployment differential may leave something to be desired. This is because both measures also reflect the greater employability of blacks by virtue of their increasingly middle-class social status. In the absence of more appropriate indicators, however, they may serve as indirect measures of black success in eliminating the vestiges of racial discrimination in the public and private job markets. If this assumption is made, then it would appear that urban blacks make their greatest employment gains under conditions of full economic development. It is also at this juncture ($F_3 - F_4$) where racial violence appears to lose much of its strength and potency as a vehicle for expressing black discontent.

Up to this point, the results of this study have been presented for a national sample of 119 cities. No separate breakdown has been made in the analysis for northern and southern

[17]See n. 8.

cities. As noted earlier, however, several recent studies in the sociological literature have attempted to show that most socioeconomic and political conditions of the central city have little to do with the reported incidence of racial strife once controls are introduced for the nonwhite population size and region (Spilerman, 1970; Jiobu, 1971; Morgan and Clark, 1973). Although the findings of this study have been shown to hold in the face of a statistical control for the nonwhite population size, might different results obtain if an additional control were added for regional location?

To check this possibility, I made a regional breakdown of the correlations between the disorder propensity and representative predictors of racial violence for which there were complete data. The results are presented in Table 9. In addition, I have displayed the correlates of a dichotomized regional variable (South = 0; North = 1) in order to show the variation in these riot predictors with regional location. As can be seen, most of the disorder propensity correlates are statistically nonsignificant. Contrary to the conclusions of the sociological literature, however, this result does not imply that socioeconomic and political conditions of the central city had little to do with the outbreak of the black urban riots. As the data in Table 8 have already demonstrated, regional location is not a trivial indicator. Rather, it appears to be an important predictor of black political development. That is, it distinguishes cities where black communities are in an arrested stage of economic development from those cities where blacks have made substantial progress. And as the regional correlates in Table 9 confirm, region is also a

Table 8. Breakdown of Developmental Thresholds, by Black Social Class

Thresholds of Mobilization	Black Social Class			
	F_1	F_2	F_3	F_4
Economic:				
Region	.26	.81	.85	1.00
Percent NW women divorced or separated	16.8	17.6	16.0	11.7
Social:				
Percent NW families poor	51.0	34.8	25.2	18.5
School segregation	.68	.55	.47	.35
Political:				
Minority police ratio[a]	.36	.75	(2.33)	
Unemployment differential	4.4	5.6	3.0	2.2
Mean disorder propensity	−.16	.09	.14	−.08
N	42	58	13	6

[a]Due to missing data, the cell sizes for F_1, F_2 and the grouped stage, (F_3, F_4), are respectively 30, 38 and 11.

crucial indicator (74 percent explained variance) of the social and political conditions which predispose northern cities toward greater racial violence than southern cities. Hence, it would appear that the sociological literature has begged an important theoretical issue; i.e., the empirical significance of region. By introducing atheoretical statistical controls for regional location, sociologists may also have largely obscured the developmental implications of their data.

To conclude, the findings of this study provide a strong basis for rejecting the premise that the recent black urban riots had little to do with the social and political environment of central cities. While they do not support a progressive deprivation thesis, they are consistent with a developmental interpretation. Hence, collective racial violence appears to be a form of social and political activity which marks the upward social ascent of urban blacks. At the same time, it may also be an indicator that their collective climb for social and political equality will be long and difficult.

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Table 9. Regional Breakdown of Results for Selected Indicators of Black Well-Being, Social Marginality and Institutional Closure

Variable Indicators	Region	Disorder Propensity South	North
Percent NW families poor	−.73***	−.09	.16
Personal income inequality	−.73***	.09	−.15
Percent NW women divorced or separated	.17*	.12	.23*
Police density	.23*	.19	.13
Minority teachers ratio	−.73***	.01	−.13
School segregation	−.54***	−.25*	−.04
R^2	74%	20%	13%
N	119	44	75

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