

When one dispassionately regards this profile of the rioter one cannot help agree with one Kerner Commission critic who said: "They seem to blame everybody but the people who did it." This masochistic group guilt for white racism pervades every facet of the Report's reasoning.

The Kerner Report states that the origin of a riot is not a simple precipitating incident as much as months of incidents and even more decades of deprivation. Actually we have witnessed riots progress from a flash-point incident, i.e., alleged police brutality in Watts, to a rationalization. "We're rioting for what's-'is-name," one looter told a Washington reporter during the violence following the death of Dr. Martin Luther King.

The Kerner Report neglected to credit the multiplicity of inflammatory statements such as Rap Brown's "Violence is as American as cherry pie," (which are widely and cheerfully disseminated by the media), that have created an aura of belief that rioting is the inalienable right of the ghetto resident. Rather than the pronouncements of the self-appointed black racist, the Kerner Report cites the precedent in violence as "created by white terrorism directed against non-violent protest." If this were true, why wouldn't riots occur in communities renowned for white terrorism rather than the most liberal, progressive communities of North and South?

An even more logical explanation, not surprisingly unemphasized by the Kerner Commission, is the influence of "some protest groups engaging in civil disobedience who turn their backs on non-violence, go beyond the constitutionally protected rights of petition and free assembly, and resort to violence to attempt to compel alteration of laws and policies with which they disagree."

If one wants to pinpoint one indirect precipitating cause, it would be this. It is not the centuries of racism and deprivation that have built to an explosive crescendo but the fact that lawbreaking has become a socially acceptable and occasionally stylish form of dissent. Were Negro slum dwellers any happier about their life in 1938 than in 1968? I doubt it; yet, in 1938 they would not have rioted — not because the climate was less explosive, but because the climate was less permissive.

It was the orderly demonstration of civil disobedience praised and participated in by our nation's civic, spiritual and intellectual leaders that gave impetus to civil disorder.