

Psychologist Says Pressures of Big-City Life Are

By DAVID BURNHAM

Americans are being transformed into potential assassins by the powerful social pressures of big-city living, according to a unified theory on violence and vandalism advanced by a Stanford University research psychologist.

The theory, and its pessimistic estimate of the harmful impact of the modern city on the human psyche, was developed by Dr. Philip G. Zimbardo, a 36-year-old New Yorker who was

recently appointed a professor of psychology at the Palo Alto, Calif., institution.

The theory is based on a series of laboratory experiments about anonymity and aggression and field studies on vandalism among middle-class white citizens conducted during the last few years by Dr. Zimbardo. It was presented last month at the highly respected Nebraska Symposium on Motivation at the University of Nebraska.

To establish the boundaries of his violent world, Dr. Zimbardo pointed to the sharp increase

in murder during the last few years, the estimated total of 40,000 American youngsters who each year are beaten and tortured by their parents or their brothers and sisters, the 230 violent urban outbreaks of the last five years and the assassinations of Medgar Evers, Malcolm X., the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., President John F. Kennedy and his brother, Senator Robert F. Kennedy.

He further noted that in 1967 vandals in New York City smashed 202,712 school windows and 360,000 pay tele-

phones and did \$750,000 worth of damage in the parks and \$100,000 worth of damage to the transit system.

"What we are observing all around us, then, is a sudden change in the restraints which normally control the expression of our drives, impulses and emotions," Dr. Zimbardo wrote.

Recognizing the limitations of laboratory experiments, Dr. Zimbardo and a colleague conducted a field study on vandalism among middle-class whites in the Bronx and Palo Alto.

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In both cities, cars were left across the street from a university campus with raised hood and without license plates. Hidden observers with cameras were placed nearby.

In the smaller city of Palo Alto, the car was left untouched for more than a week. Within three days in the Bronx, as a result of 23 separate attacks, the car was reduced to "a battered useless hulk of metal."

Discussing the vandalism in the Bronx, Dr. Zimbardo said the attacks were "almost always

observed by one or more passerby, who occasionally stopped to chat with looters."

"Most of the destruction was done in daylight hours, not at night as we had anticipated," he continued. "The adults were all well dressed, clean-cut whites who would under other circumstances be mistaken for mature responsible citizens demanding more law and order."

On the basis of these experiments and a broad range of historical, psychological, anthropological and psychiatric observations of others, Dr. Zim-

bardo suggested that many of the old restraints in American life, imposed by such institutions as the large family, were being dissolved by a process he called "deindividuation."

This process, which he said caused highly emotional intensive behavior and a reduction in the response to social norms, resulted from such factors as the growing anonymity of city life and the diffusion of individual responsibility for social acts.

During a recent interview, Dr. Zimbardo suggested that the

sheer size of many American cities, the feeling of powerlessness in the face of big institutions, the widespread renting of apartments rather than the owning of houses and the immense mobility of Americans—whether a corporation executive or a Mississippi farmer—were among the factors that appeared to be leading toward a weakening of controls based on self-evaluation.

"Conditions which foster deindividuation," he said, "make each of us a potential assassin."