

# The Violence in America

*Americans from time to time murder their presidents, run amok in the streets, shoot down leaders, and riot on campuses and in ghettos. Is violence a peculiarly American manifestation? In any case, why do Americans occasionally abandon other methods and resort to force? Here are some thoughts on the subject.*

By JOSEPH L. MYLER

WASHINGTON (UPI)—In this country, "We honor violence." We have "a deep faith in the efficacy of force."

"We may have to take the law into our own hands" is a familiar American phrase.

As long as we are engaged in violence abroad, "We cannot hope to be free of violence at home."

Continued from Page 1

(but) we are still teaching our boys in high school that they are deficient in manliness unless they learn to hurt other people and enjoy doing it . . .

"We celebrate our brutality—and then we wonder why the young men of the ghettos react with violence against the forces that oppress them."

Kelly wrote that the phrase, "We may have to take the law into our own hands," has been

used "by those who justify the brutal methods of vigilantes, by people buying guns to protect their homes from riots, and by men who have threatened our presidents."

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What in the world is wrong? In an attempt to explain student rebellions, another writer in the Center Magazine, Michael Novak, said "the wealthiest civilization in history gives top priority to making war and making ready for war."

Novak, a teacher of theology at Stanford University, said this "system of priorities is irrational beyond belief." But student protests have yet to shoot presidents or candidates for the presidency.

So how do you explain such things as the Lee Harvey Oswald gunning of President Kennedy, the Texas Tower massacre, the Richard Speck murder of eight nurses in Chicago, the case of the Boston strangler?

American ideas of national sovereignty and the power of law involve one way or another, "the use of force, for good or ill."

But are outbursts of violence "peculiarly American—or merely human?"

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According to Dr. Milton Greenblatt, commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health and professor of psychiatry in the Tufts University School of Medicine, mental illness or emotional disturbance was an "important factor" in all of these crimes of violence.

How many Americans are suffering from mental illness? In a recent discussion at Tufts, Greenblatt gave the answer: 19 million, about 1 in 10.

Is there no hope for a sane future? In the Center Magazine symposium Kelly had this to say:

"There are signs that television broadcasts of bloody

a symposium on "Violence and the Home of the Brave."

The symposium articles, published in the May issue of the Center Magazine, were written before the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis on April 4 and before the shooting of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy in Los Angeles June 5.

The articles were contributed by Hallock Hoffman, chairman of the board of Pacifica Foundation, which distributes subscription radio programs; Dr. Stringfellow Barr, historian and former president of St. John's College, Annapolis; Frank K. Kelly, former Kansas City newspaperman and

"Whether any nation of continental size, populated by a restless collection of minorities, can exist without explosions of violence now appears to be very doubtful," Kelly said.

"The officials who hold office are the handiest victims," he continued, "because Americans think of their politicians as whipping-boys who have to take the blame when things go wrong."

It was Pike who saw a rela-

one-time staff director of the Senate Democratic policy committee; Episcopal Bishop James A. Pike, and Dr. John Wilkinson, a Ph.D. in both physics and philosophy who formerly taught at the University of Chicago and the University of California.

The Center, founded and financed by the Fund for the Republic, Inc., is headed by Robert M. Hutchins, former president of the University of Chicago.

American violence has taken many forms—the hanging of witches in Salem, the murder of presidents, the Vietnam War, the ghetto riots. But Barr, surveying the record of violence elsewhere, concluded that Americans go berserk no more often than others. He cited among other instances, the Hindu-Muslim slaughters of the late 1940s.

Hoffman, coordinator of studies at the center, agreed that "It is not clear that Americans are substantially more violent than other peoples." But he went on to say that:

"In this country we honor violence. We also honor the enterprises associated with violence. Since 1900, Americans have killed more fellow Americans with guns, here at home, than have been killed in all the wars America has fought during the same period.

"Yet, any suggestion that gun sales should be controlled—or even that gun sales should be registered—is met with outraged resistance . . .

"Our best teachers and greatest leaders have been telling us for thousands of years to give up violence . . .

Continued on Page A, Col. 3

fighting in Vietnam and the scenes of destruction in the ghettos may have convinced millions of Americans, particularly young people, that violence is a self-defeating and futile way to relieve frustration."

Hoffman feared that "only a fool would find reason for thinking we are going to change our ways in time" to avert "global murder-suicide."

But, he said, it is just possible that we could bring this to pass.

"To do so," Hoffman said, "we have only to stop honoring violence—the use of force as the ultimate reason—and begin to honor and cultivate cooperation and love.

"We might even learn to enjoy it."

"And," he added, "it could be good for the children."