

Fear of Change Held Link in Violence Wave

By JACK WARDLAW

A gloomy, frightening picture of a sick and violent society was painted today by a variety of New Orleans experts on human behavior in the wake of the shooting of U.S. Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

Philosophers, sociologists, clergymen, historians, jurists and psychologists joined in linking the latest eruption of violence with the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King in an overall pattern of collapsing moral values and disintegration of authority.

SHOOTINGS, riots, violent demonstrations and a casual view of human life were traced to a deep sense of

MASS SCHEDULED

Archbishop Philip M. Hannan will celebrate a Mass, asking for divine help in the recovery of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy at 8 p. m. today in St. Louis Cathedral.

alienation and frustration. The experts had no prescription for a quick or easy cure.

Author Walker Percy summed up the disturbing

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view by observing that people will say the same thing about the RFK shooting that they did about the King and JFK assassinations—"It's the work of a madman."

PERCY SAID, "It might well be that Sen. Kennedy was shot by a madman but it's more than that. There's more going on in this country than that."

"I can't explain it and I don't think any one can. It's appalling. It's frightening."

The experts saw the trouble growing from many roots—glorification of violence in the mass media and in Vietnam; the effect on most of our population of growing up in the World War II-Cold War-Korea-Vietnam atmosphere; the lack of challenge that comes with prosperity, a general breakdown in authority.

Almost on the eve of Father's Day, the Rev. Herbert Polinard of the St. Charles Ave. Christian Church placed much of the blame for the authority gap on the American father.

Absent for military service while his children are very young and later making a living, the father provides "no strong leadership and sense of security in the home."

THIS LACK makes strong leadership "both feared and hated" as the children grow older and when such leadership appears it may be defied in violent protests or eliminated by shooting, he said.

The ultimate authority symbol, God, "has come in for his share of death lately," the Rev. Mr. Polinard pointed out.

The result will be "hard to cure," he said, but the first move must be to "restore God to his place and the father to his."

Commenting in the same vein was Dr. Warren Breed, head of the sociology department at Newcomb College, who saw the Kennedy shooting as not so much a "heritage of killing" from World War II but as a "hatred of change."

"I THINK it's a fear and hatred of those who'd change our institutions," in this case as well as the JFK and King shootings, he said.

"I think these things are contagious; one such act suggests similar action to others. There are millions of irresponsible nuts."

Dr. Paul H. Richards, pastor of the Parkway Presbyterian Church, attributed the violence to "a deep sense of alienation." He said people are acting "more and more on the basis of ideology," which can screen out anything that does not agree with it and lead to actions that would not be possible otherwise.

"People who have power can use it to keep people down" and those without power can turn to violence in return, Dr. Richards said.

Dr. Gene L. Usdin, psychiatrist and teacher, said, "There is too much acceptance of violence and destruction."

"Such acts are necessarily the products of sick or deranged minds. They are attention-seeking acts . . . the acts of men with feelings of grandiosity, omnipotency, coupled with desires for martyrdom."

CITING THE Vietnam war, Dr. Usdin said, "We don't give much thought to it unless it's our son involved" but it tends to create a "disrespect for life and death."

The war, he said, "has torn us apart enough to make us question some of our ethical standards, to criticize them."

Rabbi Leo A. Bergman of Touro Synagogue said, "The lightness with which we hold human life in this country . . . demands a public period of atonement and demands recognition that violence has become the sin of our time."

"WE HAVE made human life so cheap that it is held in contempt. . . . The violence of today is a heritage of the immediate war that is going on in Vietnam . . . it is the heritage of the fear and restlessness and the threat implicit in our times."

"The cowardice of our politicians to enforce even laws against interstate arms sales shows how little courage we have in the face of lobby power."

"To kill those with whom we disagree because of our disagreement means a widespread sickness pervades our land. The right of disagreement is fundamental and basic to democracy. When assassination becomes our means of settling differences, then we have entered the worst form of dictatorship."

DR. CHARLES DEW of the Louisiana State University history department in Baton Rouge expressed a similar fear.

"We're at a very dangerous point in our national history. This climate of violence has brought us to a point similar to Germany's prior to the rise of Adolph Hitler. I don't think such a thing could happen here but we must accelerate our plans for social change to relieve many of the problems confronting our society."

"We live in an age of great social change and history has shown that each age of significant social change is accompanied by violence attached to the social revolution."

DEW SAID the civil rights gains have been made at the price of blood sacrifices and cited the frustration that has resulted from the Vietnam war.

The Rev. George H. Wilson, executive secretary of the Greater New Orleans Federation of Churches, said the

RFK shooting and prior acts of violence "should shock all of us into the consciousness that the very foundations of our country are in danger of being crumbled."

"When violence and killing are substituted for free elections and due process of law, our American way of life is near annihilation . . . It is hoped that this last tragedy will awaken all of America to the need of using the ballot instead of bullets, conciliation instead of contest and good will instead of hatred."

"Unless we can learn this, our country may well be headed toward a tightly controlled police state which will make other dictatorships look benign."

LOUISIANA ATTORNEY GENERAL Jack P. F. Gremlion said the shooting was "encouraged by a breakdown in law and order . . ."

"The general public has just got an attitude it can get away with breaking the law."

Dr. Kenneth G. Phifer, pastor of the St. Charles Ave. Presbyterian Church, said:

"WE HAVE a history of violence in America. We exalt it, glorify it. This terrible kind of reaction to disagreement is the fault of all of us to some extent. We refuse to control the sale of guns even though every other civilized country does it. We allow our men in public life to be constantly exposed to some unbalanced person who can pay a few dollars for a rifle or a pistol. Television and movie heroes are heroes of violence."

"I think the Vietnam war has far more influence on the violence and unrest felt today than does a heritage from World War II. The present war comes right into our living rooms and we see people die every evening while we're eating supper or having a drink. We can sit with a martini in our hands and see the body count on television and be totally unmoved by it. Stop and think what a horrible thing a body count is—yet we respond with a little feeling as if the bodies were sacks of flour."

"I ALSO THINK that fear of change contributes to the hatred which runs so deep. The rapidly moving world in which we live scares us all. We need to examine our attitudes to see whether we

are willing to respond with reason to the course of events in this country or continue to think with our blood instead of our brains."

Norman Francis, vice president of Xavier University, warned that "violence has become an accepted part of the American scene."

"THERE IS a new movement of open disagreement with persons in positions of authority—of violent disagreement. There's a feeling among some, 'If you don't like something, strike it down.'"

Francis said, "I have no doubt the Vietnam war and the sight of death in the streets . . . have inspired a disregard for life. The war is being fought in our living rooms in front of our children."

"It frightens me and I'm just afraid that it's not over yet."

ARCHBISHOP Philip M. Hannan said, "One act of violence — an assassination—creates a climate with certain disturbed personalities that makes it easier for another

assassination to happen."

The archbishop added, "The openness of Sen. Kennedy makes him an easy target for such people. His outgoing personality enables such people to take advantage of him."

"He is a completely devoted public servant, conscious of the family tradition of service who carried out his convictions regardless of any danger to his personal life. I pray God that he recovers completely and that God's grace and consolation be with his wife and all the members of his family."

DR. HENRY L. Mason, head of the political science department at Tulane University, said assassinations are "becoming more of a habit than I'd like it to be."

"These killings and shootings reflect somebody's strangely alienated mind. They are an attempt to get a place in society . . . I see no halt to it. It is getting so easy to assassinate people."

Bishop Coadjutor Iveson B. Noland of the Episcopal Church said, "The reason we are having these killings is that mankind is estranged from God. They will go on until man acknowledges the sovereignty of God. In short, we must learn to answer to a Higher Authority."

Dr. Homer L. Hitt, chancellor of Louisiana State University in New Orleans said