

# From the Other Side of the Tracks

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The revolutionary process takes many decades to fulfill itself. The generation which finally assumes power gives the appearance of having started a revolution in a short period of time. That is not so. The generation which wins power is only completing work begun decades before.

The 1960s has been a decade of rapid change. Each succeeding year has seen a heightening of consciousness and while problems exist in great abundance, these problems will be overcome if the organization, understanding, will and discipline exists to do the necessary work to see that they are overcome. Each succeeding year of the 60's has also seen an intensification of the actual struggle itself. The early willingness to suffer arrest and go to jail has given way to an attitude of "catch me if you can," not to mention the increasing willingness of people to fight back when attacked.

One of the most important changes in consciousness has been the acceptance of the concept of self-defense. When Robert Williams organized self-defense units in Monroe, N.C., he eventually had to leave the country to save his life. Malcolm X brought the concept to a mass audience and was eventually killed. The Panthers have made the concept manifest on a mass level and are suffering intense harassment. But today, there are no debates over the rightness of defending one's self and one's community.

The next step in the evolution of the revolutionary process will be the move from self-defense to aggressive action. This has occurred in a few isolated instances, particularly on college campuses on the West Coast and a few black campuses, where buildings have been set afire and heavily damaged. This type of activity will, in all likelihood, increase in coming months.

The black community has settled down to a quiet state of low-key warfare. In New York and various communities in New Jersey there have been numerous attacks on police stations in the past few months. Though most of them have been unsuccessful, the mere fact that the attempts are being made is significant. The black movement has reached a point where it is unnecessary to discuss the necessity of "the gun" any longer. People know what needs to be done and are going about and doing it.

One city in the country which has settled down to a state of constant war is East St. Louis. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch of Jan. 16 reports that since August 1968, there have been more than 50 sniping incidents in East St. Louis. Three people have been killed in these incidents—an 18-year-old white boy and two white men shot in an after-hours tavern by a sniper from a bridge. The effect of "The Sniper" (there is probably more than one) on the economic life of the city has been profound. Because whites are now afraid even to drive through East St. Louis, sales tax revenues from the city to the state declined by \$30,000 in the third quarter, which ended Oct. 31. The mayor's office estimates that overall, the sniper has cost the city \$200,000 in sales taxes, merchants license collections and overtime pay for policemen. There is no estimate of how much revenue the city will lose by businesses leaving the area.

To the black community, “The Sniper” has become a hero. He is known to shoot only at whites or at blacks who are known enemies of the community. He is also known to be bold, able to strike at high noon or after midnight with equal impunity.

The number of fires in the East St. Louis-St. Louis area have also increased. These fires seem generally to be directed against white businesses known to be cruelly exploitative in the community. Firemen now carry rifles as part of their standard equipment, which gives an indication of just how serious the situation has become. Police have been totally ineffective in dealing with “The Sniper” or those who are sabotaging the businesses.

What is happening in East St. Louis points up once again the advantages of medium-sized cities. In the large cities of the East and West, the police have tremendous sophistication and are much more difficult to combat. In the medium-sized cities of the South and Mid-west, this is not true to the same extent. The military parallel of this is the Vietnam war, where the National Liberation Front has concentrated on small and medium-sized cities, leaving Saigon, Danang and other large cities for the last. And in fact the same practice prevailed in the revolutionary wars in China and Cuba. This is not to say that the large cities should be ignored. They cannot be. But the risks are higher, the preparation needed much greater, and unless the action taken is a large one, the returns from the action might be smaller than if the action were taken in a smaller city.

On the surface it may appear that the black movement is in a state of disarray. While this may be partially true of some groups, the black movement has never been isolated from the black community. In an unorganized sense, the community has been the military wing of the movement, while known groups have been the political wing. Some theoreticians of the white radical movement considered the black rebellions of 1965–68 to be non-revolutionary in content because they were aimed at property, which thereby made them “consumer oriented.”

This kind of analysis points up once again how at variance the black and white radical movements are. Having been glutted by a consumer-oriented society, it is natural that young whites fight against it. Having been on the outside, it is natural that blacks would seek to acquire. What the white radical theoreticians overlook is the way in which blacks have done their acquiring and the subsequent destruction of property that inevitably comes after the acquisitions have been made. The black rebellions also served as “on-the-job” training for what is now developing in East St. Louis, and no doubt other cities around the country.

If East St. Louis is any indication, the revolutionary process has entered another stage. At present, it is harassing action. Undoubtedly, it will be followed by terrorist action in the white community, and eventually all-out guerrilla warfare. It is to be hoped that the white radical movement will be able to relate effectively to what is developing in the black community.

# fifth Estate

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