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## A Study of the Causes of Racial Friction as Represented in the Detroit, Beaumont, and Harlem Outbreaks

Evelyn B. Knight

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A STUDY  
OF  
THE CAUSES OF RACIAL FRICTION *40*  
AS REPRESENTED  
IN THE DETROIT, BEAUMONT, AND HARLEM OUTBREAKS

BY  
EVELYN B. KNIGHT  
B.S. FARMINGTON STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE, 1937

A PAPER  
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
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DIVISION OF GRADUATE STUDY  
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ORONO  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  | Page |
|--|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGMENT   | 11   |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS  | 111  |
| I INTRODUCTION   | 1    |
| II BASES OF AMERICAN RACIAL PREJUDICES   | 3    |
| A. The Psychology of Prejudice   | 3    |
| B. How Prejudices are Formed   | 8    |
| III THE CAUSES OF RACIAL FRICTION AS REPRESENTED<br>IN THE DETROIT, BEAUMONT, AND HARLEM OUTBREAKS | 23   |
| 1) The Rumor Situation   | 24   |
| 2) Incidents of Friction   | 27   |
| 3) Demagogic Groups  | 32   |
| 4) Delinquency and Crime   | 35   |
| 5) Police Attitudes  | 38   |
| 6) Congestion in Housing and Transportation<br>Facilities  | 38   |
| 7) Employment Conditions   | 40   |
| IV CONCLUSION  | 42   |
| BIOGRAPHY OF THE WRITER  | 45   |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY   | 46   |

# I

## INTRODUCTION

This study has to do with the causes of racial friction as represented in the Detroit, Beaumont and Harlem outbreaks occurring in 1943. It will be pointed out that the incidental causes of such riots are symptoms leading to the exploratory job of finding the disease of "scapegoatism". A survey of literature on the problem will bring about some understanding of the importance of racial prejudices and their relation to an international understanding. The opinions of experts in such fields as anthropology, economics, sociology, and psychology will be analyzed in an effort to determine how such friction may be eliminated in order to preserve American Democracy. Conclusions will be drawn from such sources in an attempt to prevent further infringement upon the rights of "all the people" by means of recognizing the symptoms resulting in friction.

## The Importance of International Understanding

"People who think they know the worst about The Bomb have some grisly surprises in store... An improved bomb, one thousand times as powerful as the 'Model T' used at Nagasaki, might atomize an area of three or four hundred square miles (roughly the area of New York City)... Radio-active products, carried on the reliable westerly winds of the upper atmosphere, might do a better job... 'If the activity liberated at Bikini were multiplied by a factor of a hundred thousand or a million, and if it were to be released off our Pacific Coast, the whole of the United States might be endangered... (This) is much more than a fantastic possibility.' Gas masks? Useless. Deep underground shelters with efficient air filters might save a few people. But when the wind had passed, the survivors would doubtless find that all animals and plants had died with the unsheltered humans." (1)

This is an extremely dangerous world we are living in, and it will become increasingly so as atomic research continues. Americans must be realistic and realize that a better and more lasting understanding between all nations is not only important but also so vital to our own safety that it may seem trite to reiterate the fact.

(1) Time magazine, February 24, 1947, p. 96.

## II

### BASES OF AMERICAN RACIAL PREJUDICES

This section is an explanation of what prejudice is, how it is formed, and the psychological bases of American racial biases.

#### A. The Psychology of Prejudice

"A prejudice is an opinion or emotional feeling which isn't based on fact or on reason. It is an attitude in a closed mind." (2) "Prejudice... means a premature or biased opinion... a hasty judgment or an opinion formed without due examination." (3) "Prejudice is not new. It is as old as the races of man. It is communicable, contagious, deadly social disease." (4) Prejudices are attitudes, mental or neural states of readiness; perhaps attitudinal behavior might be a more accurate term to describe them. An attitude of prejudice may range from one of mild dislike to active hostility or hate, and these attitudes are learned depending on social conditioning.

- (2) Governor's Committee for Racial and Religious Understanding, Scrapbook for Teachers, Boston, Massachusetts: Committee of Catholics, Protestants and Jews, 1946, p. 11.
- (3) S.H. Britt, Social Psychology of Modern Life, New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1941, p. 176.
- (4) Governor's Committee for Racial and Religious Understanding, op. cit., p. 9.

One individual's prejudice is no great danger, but the culmination of the covert feelings of hostility of many people may eventually result in overt behavior which could damage not only American racial relations but also international understanding as well. Gordon Allport mentions these dangers of prejudice: (5)

"Our mixed population provided fertile soil for prejudiced scapegoating; and the strains and irritations of wartime, combined with the confusion of thought that occurs in times like these, augment the difficulty... Our peril today lies in the fact that our pet prejudices combined with our tendency to fix the blame for our woes upon others, may break over into irrational, degenerative scapegoating, destructive of our chances to win a victory for democracy and a lasting peace of equality and opportunity for all men."

The Scrapbook for Teachers lists these six dangers of prejudice: (6)

- 1) "Prejudice is contagious. History has taught us that when we discriminate against one segment of the people, we set a pattern that may be used against other groups...

(5) Ibid., p. 9.

(6) Ibid., p. 12.



- 2) Prejudice makes all of us poorer. We can't have an enlightened democracy with minority groups living in ignorance. We can't have a prosperous democracy with minority groups so poor that they can't afford to buy the goods America produces...
- 3) Prejudice robs us of minority talents... We are all poorer in America today because discrimination prevents members of some minorities from rising to their greatest possible achievements, thus lessening their potential contributions to the general wealth and welfare of America...
- 4) Prejudice makes impossible any real solution of economic, social or personal difficulties...
- 5) Prejudice means disunity, and disunity plays into the hands of the enemies of democracy...
- 6) Prejudice endangers world peace... Three-quarters of the people of the world are what we call 'colored'. These people naturally look to our treatment of our American Negroes to see what we mean when we speak of democracy... How we treat minorities is, therefore, more than a matter of mere domestic concern." (7)

The more active or hostile a prejudice the more it tends to lead towards scapegoating which has been defined

(7) Ibid., p. 12-13.

as a

"phenomenon wherein some of the aggressive energies of a person or group are focused upon another individual, group, or object; the amount of aggression and blame being either partly or wholly unwarranted..."  
(8)

Some explanatory vocabulary relative to the subject follows:

a) **Predilection:** refers to the simple preference of an individual for one culture, one language, as opposed to another. These are inevitable and natural, but they may be the first step toward scapegoating when they turn into more active biases such as

b) **Prejudice:** which is a rigid, inflexible, exaggerated predilection. A prejudice is an attitude in a closed mind. All Americans, to some Negroes, are loud-mouthed spendthrifts. This stereotyped judgment is fixed. Prejudice, if kept to oneself, does no social harm but if expressed, it may lead to

c) **Discrimination:** which differs from scapegoating only in the amount of violence or expressed aggression. Discrimination is an act of expulsion prompted by prejudice and is generally based not on an individual's intrinsic qualities, but on a "label"

(8) Ibid., p. 9.

branding that individual as a member of a discredited group. It means separating forcibly and unjustly from our vocation, our neighborhood, our country, a person against whom we are prejudiced. This may lead to

d) Scapegoating: which is the full-fledged persecution of those against whom we discriminate. The victim is abused verbally and physically. He usually cannot fight back, for we see to it that we vent our anger only on minority groups which are weaker than ourselves.

"As long as human beings have choices to make, they will make them on the basis of some inclination. Predilections are one basis for such choice, normal enough and to some extent inevitable. Unjust generalizations on the basis of these predilections lead to the formation of prejudices, which, if controlled, lead to discrimination. Finally, if conditions are ripe - if frustration, ignorance, and propaganda combine in proper proportions - discrimination breaks over into scapegoating." (9)

(9) Ibid., p. 10.

## B. How Prejudices are Formed

Ready-made attitudes are probably the biggest source of prejudice.

"For the child perhaps the most important source of his own attitudes is observation of the way people, especially those that count, act toward the objects of his environment... parents... teachers... nurses... contemporaries... Conforming means acting as other people act, thus securing one's chance of becoming a member of the in-group, and not an object of contempt and derision ... Much of the child's impression about people and attitudes toward them are not consciously learned, but picked up in a casual manner from schools and the surrounding culture..."  
(10)

Britt writes that "we get our prejudices largely through our own direct personal experiences." (11)  
An American is, for example, cheated by an unscrupulous Negro, and from then on has no more use for the race. In childhood the influence of our associates is very great, and children constantly acquire prejudices in the family, the schoolroom, the church, the play group, the gang, and the club. Many of our attitudes towards

(10) Ibid., p. 10, 11.

(11) Britt, op. cit., p. 177.

nationality groups develop in the school situation, and teachers are often responsible for fostering prejudices which have a lasting effect on students. A very excellent short story in The New Yorker illustrates this only too well. The teacher of a professor's daughter was presenting a project on tolerance. The teacher had been talking about Protestantism and how Baptists sometimes marry Presbyterians; she then had the pupils raise their hands to show what denomination they were.

"Then," said Elinor (the professor's daughter is explaining what happened in class), "she asked if there were any Jews in the room."

"The Jews have a proud heritage," said Professor Potter quickly.

"I know," said Elinor, "that's what Miss Whetstone said."

"Were there any Jewish children?" asked Mrs. Potter gently. She looked distressed.

"Nobody raised their hands," said Elinor, "but there was this little Greek girl."

"Yes?" said Professor Potter.

"Well," said Elinor, "she's real dark, you know, so Miss Whetstone looked at her hard, as if she were asking if she wasn't a Jew."

"Good God!" said Professor Potter softly.

"The Greek girl got red and didn't say anything," said Elinor, "and then Miss Whetstone fixed her funny eye on her and said no one should be ashamed to own it if they were Jewish, because the Jews have a proud heritage."

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Potter. "What did the poor child do?"

"She finally said, 'I'm not Jewish, Ma'am, I'm a Greek,'" Elinor replied cheerfully...

"Tomorrow she's going to ask us what class we belong to," said Elinor. "I wonder what class Greeks are. Randy Adams says his family is noble." (12)

It may be well to note that prejudices are sometimes fostered by our out-of-date history texts, particularly those dealing with the Revolutionary War and the impression children get of England as a big, bad Goliath and America as an innocent, brave, young David; certainly many modern American historians would agree that our texts do foster prejudices, and various authors have pointed out that our high school and college texts do promote chauvinism. Prejudices also grow up where vivid, traumatic experiences are involved, where the other side of the picture is not shown, and particularly where those who hold prejudiced

(12) F.G. Patton, "The Educated Classes", The New Yorker, March 1, 1947, p. 31.

views are individuals of considerable prestige. An example of this would be Bilbo, who has considerable prestige among certain classes in his native state; also the Hearst press, which is often violently anglophobic. It is thus not surprising to find boys and girls growing up believing that other groups, peoples, etc., the out-groups, those who worship differently or speak another language or have darker skin color are not only different but also inferior. There are probably no natural prejudices. Prejudices and biases exist because of previous conditioning, and these are largely dependent on the beliefs, modes and culture of the group one lives in. We learn to question all those who differ from us, and to think that by this token they are inferior. It is the old idea of the in-group versus the out-group.

Prejudices may also be built up purposefully by the technique of the conditioned response. A good example is the use of the bad stimulus word "Red" or "Communist", and then the pairing of this with Jew or any other group until finally the unconditioned stimulus, Jew, produces the original response of dislike. The conditioned response is established through constant repetition. But it is true, of course, that in every culture children are taught that their own group is superior to all others. It was true,

not only of Germany and Japan, but of democratic countries such as England, America, and France. It seems characteristic of man all over the world to think his own country and habits superior to those of other groups of people.

Some of the mechanisms involved as suggested by S.H. Britt (13) in the formation of attitudes apply also to the formation of prejudices. The examples are all taken from college students. The social psychology of attitudes is very complex, and these mechanisms often operate together; other factors may also be involved.

a) Generalization of conditioned responses: a conditioned response is established and then other similar stimuli now produce the response. Example: A Scottish war bride relates that she first saw a group of Americans drunk and disorderly in the streets of Glasgow. From then on she disliked them all because she pictured them as drunkards.

b) Differentiation: one stimulus stands for a whole group of stimuli and thus differentiates them from closely similar ones. Example: An American ex-serviceman told this story: One day he was refused admittance into a railway compartment by an upper-class Englishman with a

(13) Britt, op. cit., p. 81.



pronounced accent; a British soldier came along and took the American to his compartment. From then on he loathed all upper-class English if they had a strong accent.

c) Traumatic experience: a lasting impression made by a vivid, dramatic experience. A Scottish war bride has an anti-Negro prejudice much stronger than that of many Southerners. She explained that one day she and her grandfather were walking down the street in town and they saw a Negro. Her grandfather immediately said in a very strong emotional tone that the fellow she saw was a Negro, and that they were all right if kept in their places. Due to her grandfather's emotion, she was frightened and has now a strong anti-Negro bias.

d) Acceptance of ready-made attitudes: the example as given in c) above could be used here if the little girl had felt no fright or emotion and had merely adopted her grandfather's attitudes. The writer was questioning an ex-serviceman and trying to discover his reasons for his anti-Negro bias; it finally developed that he already disliked them before he ever went in service. Since he had lived in Maine, (where there are comparatively few colored people), before going to a Southern training post, he had probably accepted attitudes of associates.

These mechanisms often or usually underlie the formation of stereotypes. Klineburg writes that

"racial prejudice is a generalized set of stereotypes of a high degree of consistency which include emotional responses to race names, a belief in typical characteristics associated with race names, and an evaluation of such typical traits." (14)

A stereotype is based on the false belief that people can be classified into a number of simple, distinct types, that every person can be pigeonholed into a particular category. This, of course, is impossible to do; a knowledge of individual difference would tell us that. If one examines any large number of cases for a given characteristic, one usually finds that what appears to be two types are generally the extreme ends of a normal probability curve. The American stereotype of the Negro as an ignorant and stupid being would be one of these extreme ends of a curve. Yet we still cling to our pictures of the Negro and our other stereotypes. In fact, most people resent any attack on their fixed images of others; we have adapted ourselves to a certain environment in terms of what we feel to be true and any invasion of beliefs makes us uneasy. And because of our psychological set, because of our present attitudes based on our particular experiences, we see the whole world around us and interpret it in ways most

(14) O. Klineburg, Social Psychology, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940, p. 352.

satisfactory to us. The American with fixed stereotypes of the Negro finds exactly what he expected to find. The danger of stereotyping is that it lends itself so readily to malicious propaganda. If one knows that individuals are Negrophobes, how easy it is for a politician or other propagandist to influence him.

We have already seen how most prejudices are formed; however, nationalistic prejudices are a special kind based on a particular type of attitude - loyalty to the nation and state. Modern nations act as if their own nation were supreme in power and virtue over all other nations, and the State demands and receives the highest loyalty. It is the largest of all in-groups and in its efforts to maintain supremacy or its illusion, it is engaged in an eternal struggle for power. Thus a loyal citizenry is absolutely necessary for the success and continued life of a nation. Actually the modern state contains within itself many of the characteristics of a region, i.e., nationalism. To insure devotion and loyalty, much time is spent in conditioning the people in their attitudes and feelings of superiority over other nations. Most all people think their attitudes and feelings are superior over other nations. Most all people think their own culture superior to that of other nations. Pre-war Germany and Japan are

good examples of this extreme type of nationalism, although America has hundreds of patriots' societies devoted primarily to patriotic ideals. Ichheiser defines two types of nationalism: (15)

1) conscious nationalism, where the national group professes in an open and vociferous way certain values and ideals and rejects more or less aggressively values, aims, and ideals of other nations.

2) unconscious nationalism, where the group does not formulate or pronounce in any articulate way its particular nationalistic ideas and beliefs, yet the members of the group are so involved in sets of nationally prejudiced concepts that, without being aware of it, they see and judge everything from their own national point of view.

The conscious type is inclined to consider the "foreign" as something which is wrong because it is different. The unconscious form is far more dangerous as it sees everything through its national spectacles, but, not knowing this fact or possibly denying it, the members live in the naive belief that they see things objectively

(15) G. Ichheiser, "Some Psychological Obstacles to an Understanding Between Nations", Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 1941, Vol. V, p. 36.

"as they are" and as they should be seen by every reasonable person. To this type, others are not merely "un-American" but un-human, or at least, unreasonable.

Nationalistic prejudices often cut across all others; for example, a strong anti-British feeling is often found in all sorts of heterogeneous groups in America. All the factors previously mentioned under formation of prejudice apply here; yet there are certain other items which should be specifically mentioned. The following could be considered the psychological bases of nationalistic prejudice:

1) Difference in appearance: It is a common practice to look down on people whose appearance is different.

2) Distrust and fear of the strange: Americans often laughed at the Negroes' religion because they were more used to their own.

3) Separation or isolation: A Vermont man who recently returned from a trip to the deep South was appalled at the anti-Negro feeling there and the customs so different from the North.

4) Ignorance: A young teacher in South Boston, after she got to know them, came to like the Negroes.

5) Traumatic personal experience: A well-educated

colored nurse became prejudiced against all older American Army colonels because one tried to seduce her.

6) Economic and social competition: Whenever competition for jobs is keen, prejudice arises among the people competing. Wherever there is strong competition between the Negroes and White people, there is usually a sharp rise in bias.

7) Difference in culture: Non-material culture traits are harder to assimilate than material ones. A British war bride reports that she will scream if another American asks her how much she paid for something.

8) Stereotyping: An excellent example of this was reported today by a British war bride. A widely-circulated story describing all Americans in England during the war as "over-dressed, over-paid, over-sexed, and over here!"

9) Propaganda devices: Many anti-British slogans have circulated in America, such as, "Britain will fight to the last American", "pulling England's chestnuts out of the fire", "imperialistic British", etc.

10) Jingoism: All nations have superpatriots who deliberately stir up antagonisms against others. Hearst, Colonel McCormick, "Cissie" Patterson, "Poison Pen" O'Donnell, are typical examples.

11) Nationalistic indoctrination in social

institutions: Children are conditioned to patriotic attitudes almost before they can speak, and in our educational system considerable emphasis is placed on the superiority of the white races, especially Americans. Our one-sided historical presentation is another example. The writer once tried the experiment of teaching the Revolutionary War entirely from the British point of view; students were amazed that anything could be said for the British.

There are other factors which have had influence in molding nationality prejudices. One of these is the modern newspaper which, over a period of years, impresses on the readers all the symbols, maxims, and stereotypes of America. How anti-British would the mid-West be without the influence of its press anglophobes? Political cartoons are also very effective for stereotyping as are the movies and radio programs.

Ichheiser lists three chief psychological difficulties to mutual understanding between nations which may help to explain American prejudices: (16)

a) The first difficulty is that every nation has a tendency to regard its own habits, ways, patterns of

(16) Ibid., p. 41.

thought as a kind of norm which unconsciously underlies the consideration and judgment of everything foreign. The suggested settlement of any international dispute is one that corresponds to our interests and wishes; the desires of the other party are neither reasonable nor proper. The average Englishman or American is ignorant of the fact that he holds certain opinions only because he is of a certain nationality and has grown up in a certain social environment. This tendency to consider one's own as the norm is very deeply rooted in human nature. It is sometimes called ethnocentrism and it is very hard to eliminate; the only thing one can do is to neutralize its action by recognizing that it exists, by making our unconscious prejudices conscious.

b) The second psychological obstacle concerns the fact that man is equipped with both good and bad qualities, and most people are unwilling to admit to themselves their bad qualities; they conceal them, invent all sorts of rationalizations and use fictitious motives. We hide behind moral phraseology the real motives of our actions when these actions are contrasted with our moral standards. A good example of this is the present Greek crisis. We accuse the English of that horrible thing - Imperialism; what rationalization will we use if and when we take over



Greece? Few nations ever admit the real basis of the conflicts between them. It is a fact that all modern nations follow power politics, but, because they conceal these motives, realistic discussion and settlement are impossible since the sources of conflict are taboo. Remember the scream Russia put up when Acheson accused her of being aggressive and expansionistic!

c) The third difficulty concerns the image or reflection of the other personality which forms the basis of all relationships between people. But this image is distorted, full of illusions because it is a result of emotions and prejudices as much as of experience, and this is exactly the state of affairs we find among nations. The image of the other nation is always stereotyped, simplified, and distorted as the conception is only partly the product of factual, rational experience.

The conceptions which form the bases of Anglo-American prejudices may, however, have originated through more or less factual or rational experiences during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 as LaPiere suggests:

"Conflicts give rise to and are accompanied by antagonistic attitudes, prejudices on the part of one group toward the other. These prejudices tend to be folk versions, or stereotypes, of the characteristics of the members of the other group. And

these stereotypes serve to precipitate on an attitudinal level ethnic group conflicts that began as an actual opposition of interests." (17)

- (17) R.T. LaPiere, Social Psychology, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1942, p. 435.

### III

#### THE CAUSES OF RACIAL FRICTION

##### AS REPRESENTED

##### IN THE DETROIT, BEAUMONT, AND HARLEM OUTBREAKS

A race riot is a symptom comparable with that of a headache. It is not an isolated problem but must be considered as a danger signal.

"A race riot, similarly, is part of something much bigger. It is like the small part of an iceberg that juts above the water line. Some eight-ninths of the block floats beneath the ocean surface and offers a much greater hazard to shipping than the part that can be seen." (18)

Dr. Alfred McClung Lee has suggested a means of predicting race riots and the same list will serve as a guide in the research of the present study. (19) The danger spots are: 1) the rumor situation, 2) incidents of friction, 3) demagogic groups, 4) delinquency and crime, 5) police attitudes, 6) congestion

(18) A.M. Lee, "Race Riots Aren't Necessary", Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 107, 1945, p. 7.

(19) Ibid., p. 8.

in housing and transportation facilities, and

7) employment conditions.

1) The Rumor Situation

Rumors are an artificial creation used as a means to justify the actions of many human activities. In Detroit, for example, there was a critical stage of affairs for months before the actual riot took place.

"Among the whites, the rumor was that Negroes had raped a white woman on the bridge leading to Belle Isle Park, where a Negro-white brawl had broken out. Among the Negroes, the rumor was that whites had killed a colored woman and her baby at the same park." (20)

A few weeks later:

"a pogrom laid waste the Negro section of Beaumont, Texas, because of a rape charge, later discredited." (21)

In Beaumont it was also rumored that

- (20) E.A. Gray, Jr., "Race Riots Can Be Prevented", Reprinted from Harper's Magazine, December, 1945, p. 4.
- (21) S.A. Brown, "Count Us In", B. Moon, editor, Primer for White Folks, New York: Doubleday, 1945, p. 375.

"race riots were coming. The whites were told that the date set for the 'revolution' was June 19, a Negro holiday commemorating the emancipation proclamation." (22)

In Harlem the following rumor was circulating:

"A white cop shot a colored soldier in the back and killed him." (23)

Many rumors were directed against Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. She is hated by many prejudiced people because of her outspoken liberal attitude on the race question, and has been blamed for inciting the Negroes to demand equal rights.

Throughout the defense production period of World War II such rumors as the following were prevalent in factories and communities:

" 'The Union is throwing out white workers and giving their jobs to blacks. We got to teach them our trades, so they can grab our places' ...

'We don't mind letting Negroes get

(22) S. Menefee, Assignment, U.S.A., New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, Inc., 1945, p. 157.

(23) Gray, op. cit., p. 5.

better jobs and more pay. But we don't want to work with them. Let them work on separate assembly lines.' ...

'Whites and Negroes don't mix. It's against human nature.' ...

'Negroes may be all right now, but when the war is over, they'll undercut our wage rates and take away our jobs.' ...

'Nearly all Negroes have syphilis. Diseased blood runs out of their fingers onto machines where they work, and you catch syphilis if you handle the same machines.' ..." (24)

Such rumors increase and circulate more rapidly as the climax of a riot approaches. Tension becomes greater as the fear of life and property becomes more intense, and violence results in mob action.

The origin of rumors may be obscure; however, the press is frequently to blame. In an effort to be sensational the glaring headlines are apt to increase the state of frustration.

During the war native Fascists and Axis propagandists were said to have been the underlying factors in creating false rumors. It is also considered probable that the white superiority complex, an inner psychological corrosion at work in the American character, should share

(24) Menefee, op. cit., p. 151.

a part of the responsibility.

Add to these rumors the insults and humiliations of segregation, the poverty and lack of medical care reflected in the Negro death rate (as compared with the white death rate), and the attitude of the reactionary Southerners - and Northerners whose attitudes reflect blame of the occurrence of race riots on the breakdown of segregation and the increased mingling of Negroes and whites. The fusion of these elements is bound to bring about disaster.

## 2) Incidents of Friction

Detroit in pre-Civil War days was a small town haven for escaped Negro slaves fleeing to Canada. The population in 1910 increased to nearly 1,000,000 in the next ten years; to 1,568,662 by 1930, and to 1,623,452 in the 1940 census. War production caused an increase to an estimated 2,500,000. It is no wonder that sociological changes could not keep pace with the scientific and technological progress.

The lure of work and high wages brought mixed nationalities and races together, along with southerners steeped in native prejudices.

The black population increased from 8,000 in 1925 to 85,000 in the next fifteen years, and to 150,000 by the influx of war workers. Some of these Negroes turned

arrogant with more money and freedom; some of them resented the fact that they had sons and brothers fighting a war for freedom when there was such evidence of discrimination at home.

"There have been a number of incidents where Negro soldiers have clashed with Southern police and civilians with some fatalities on both sides. In spring, 1942, there was a clash in the North; in trying to move into a government defense housing project built for them in Detroit, Negroes were set upon by white civilians and police." (25)

On Sunday, June 20, 1943, the incident which "touched off" these explosives was a common fist fight between a white man and a colored man, thus precipitating a race riot in Detroit. In reviewing the results of one of the worst riots in recent United States history, it is interesting to note here the discrepancy in the reports:

"Twenty-five Negroes and nine white persons were killed in the riot." (26)

"Thirty-four dead (twenty-five Negroes); three hundred forty badly hurt, \$2,000,000 property loss." (27)

(25) G. Myrdal, An American Dilemma, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944, Vol. I, p. 568.

(26) Brown, op. cit., p. 421.

(27) Survey Graphic, January 1947, p. 53.



"Thirty-five dead, seven hundred injured, thirteen hundred arrested, a \$1,000,000 worth of property damage. War production dropped forty per cent." (28)

"...at least twenty-three dead, over seven hundred injured, over six hundred jailed." (29)

"Thirty-four dead, twenty-five of them Negroes. Eight hundred injured, most of them Negroes. Over eighteen hundred persons arrested, more than twelve hundred of them Negroes. One million two hundred fifty thousand man hours of work lost in Detroit's war industries." (30)

An observer testified that the Detroit riot was a development of organized leadership, possibly that of the Klansmen:

"The whites," he said, "had a car loaded with bricks and iron bars on Woodward Avenue, and were going to it for supplies. Their leaders were directing them as they pulled Negroes from passing cars and beat them." (31)

The dead cannot be brought back, but it is believed that such bloody destruction of human beings can be avoided.

(28) Newsweek, July 5, 1943, p. 35.

(29) Time, June 28, 1943, p. 19.

(30) Menefee, op. cit., p. 150.

(31) Ibid., p. 157.

Two incidents closely preceded the riot in Beaumont:

"A Negro attacked an eighteen year old white girl. Police shot him, and he died in the hospital before a hastily-formed lynch mob could get him. Then, on June 15, a young woman reported that she had been attacked in her home by a Negro. A medical examination indicated that her report was not true. But the story had gone around, and the damage was done." (32)

On June 16, 1943, the whole town was in a turmoil. Only two people were killed, a white carpenter and a colored worker. Approximately fifty Negroes were injured and half as many white people. Although the results were less bloody than the Detroit riot, the war effort suffered in that the Pennsylvania shipyards were closed for several days. And over a thousand Negro workers, who were badly needed because of the labor-shortage in that area, left Beaumont for other parts of the country.

It is presumed that the riot was caused by saboteurs in the shipyards according to some legal authorities; however, there was no proof of the same.

Those incidents which precipitated the Harlem riot of 1943 are exemplified by the following:

(32) Ibid., p. 157.

"The immediate cause of the outbreak in Harlem on August 1, 1943, was an altercation between a white policeman and a Negro military policeman in the lobby of a Harlem hotel, during which the colored soldier struck the white officer and the latter wounded the Negro." (33)

The argument was said to be over the arrest of a Negro woman. The false rumor spread that the Negro soldier had been killed. A crowd quickly gathered and the rioting began.

Again there is a discrepancy in the resulting number of deaths, according to the press:

"...at least five persons were killed, several hundred were injured, stores were looted, and property damaged to the extent of several million dollars."  
(34)

Another report concluded that

"Six were killed, hundreds injured... in the largest Negro section in the North." (35)

Other incidents of racial friction which contributed

- (33) W.M. Shuyler, editor, The American Year Book, A Record of Events and Progress Year 1943, New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1944, p. 553.
- (34) Ibid., p. 553.
- (35) Editor, "War and Revolution", The New Republic, August 9, 1943, Vol. CIX, No. 1517, p. 180.

to these riots include the racial segregation otherwise referred to as "Jim Crow".

"Jim Crow has the force if not the dignity of law in the southern states where a 'separate but equal' myth fences the Negro in and shuts him out.

"Between birth and death colored persons find that the law decrees that they shall be separated from white persons on all forms of transportation, in hotels or inns, eating places, at places of recreation or amusement, on the tax books, as voters, in their homes, and in many occupations." (36)

### 3) Demagogic Groups

A fear of "black domination" followed the reconstruction period in the southern states. Demagogues encouraged the spirit of intolerance and ingrained prejudices with the purpose of restoring white supremacy. Almost immediately after World War I the Klu Klux Klan proceeded to rise in power and there followed a period of violence and intimidation. The riots of 1919 gave them the opportunity to move out more boldly into the open because they could see greater acceptance for their views, and disrespect for law, order, and public morals became more prevalent.

(36) Survey Graphic, op. cit., p. 39.

By 1926 efforts to disfranchise the Negro without technically violating the Fifteenth Amendment were showing successful progress. Other demagogic groups were spreading anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic, and anti-Negro rumors with a purpose. The rapid development is best expressed in the following editorial:

"The Klu Klux Klan took on new life in Detroit. It signed up thousands of members, streamlined its organization, used the Communist boring tactics and heavily infiltrated the United Automobile Workers. The Southern Society, loyal to a similar ideology, built up its first great following there - and a fat war chest for American fascism. Frank Norris, the hell-shouting, Negro-hating Texas preacher, opened a tabernacle in this fertile city and it prospered; he built up one of the biggest 'congregations' in Detroit and began to commute back to Texas by airplane. Gerald L.K. Smith, once a Louisiana preacher, who fled with other political stooges when Huey Long was killed, at length found a spiritual home again in Detroit." (37)

There were said to be eighteen thousand Klansmen or former Klansmen in Detroit's war factories, although investigations could find no evidence that the riots themselves were started by subversive elements. (38)

(37) The New Republic, op. cit., p. 10.

(38) Ibid., p. 10.

Hate movements have long been present in American life and have disrupted our political, social, economic, and religious life. Thurman Arnold, in his "The Folklore of Capitalism", says that

"...the more idealistic men wax in defending an institution, the more one should suspect that that institution has become separated from the needs of reality and is serving narrow, anti-social ends; and the more our institutions are divorced from the needs of reality, the more urgently will men, responding to the desire to meet the needs of reality, devise sub rosa, almost lawless, or criminal methods to service the victims of injustice." (39)

Sometimes the prejudice flares up in Washington by means of demagogues who protest that they act in the interests of the Negro. Senator Bilbo, Congressman Rankin, Eugene Talmadge, as so many other die-hards, interpret Negro aspirations to democracy as incendiarism. These men are heirs to the prejudice against Negroes and have not learned the cost to American democracy.

"The nightly haul of the police wagons in a colored slum fills the morning police courts with every kind of delinquent,

- (39) R. Wright, "Psychiatry Goes to Harlem", Twice a Year, A Book of Literature, The Arts, and Civil Liberties, Double No. 14-15, Fall-Winter, 1946-1947, p. 349.

demoralized, unlucky humanity. The highest statistics on crime, delinquency, vice, and broken families come from the worst slums, inhabited by the most recent migrants. And every night, especially Saturday nights, the emergency wards of hospitals... admit and release a steady stream of victims. Cuttings, fights, and holdups keep the prowl cars going all night long. Though such observable facts are often used against Negroes as a race, sociologists to a man read them as social diseases, the inevitable by-products of the segregated slums." (40)

Here educational deprivation develops along with economic deprivation, and economic deprivation is frequently the cause of family disintegration and groups of slum-shocked people who are most often susceptible prey for the demagogues.

#### 4) Delinquency and Crime

Most of the Negroes remaining in the South are still suffering from the exploitation of labor, educational deprivation, segregation, and other effects of prejudices rooted in the minds of the people. He also finds himself relegated to inadequate, neglected districts in the North because of social pressures and municipal action.

(40) W.E. Stegner, and the editors of Look, One Nation, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1945, p. 242.

The poor economic status of minority groups tends toward development of slum areas where delinquency and crime prevail. The Swedish scientist, Gunnar Myrdal, author of An American Dilemma, discusses the situation most satisfactorily:

"Explanations in terms of environment tax the imagination heavily. It is difficult for the ordinary white man in America to envisage clearly how such factors as malnutrition, bad housing, lack of schooling deform the soul and body of a people. The ordinary white man cannot be expected to be aware of such subtle influences as the denial of outlets for ambition, social disparagement, cultural isolation, and early conditioning of the Negro child's mind to the caste situation, as factors molding the Negro's personality and behavior." (41)

The war aggravated the general trend toward family disorganization and, as a result, the children often suffered personality disorganization. This is revealed in police court records as a result of frictions between members of different racial, religious, and cultural groups. Typical is the following example:

Higher standards of requirements for entrance and in-service training for police officers has been accepted

(41) Myrdal, op. cit., p. 340.



in some communities, but it is a long-term goal. The police in turn should be capable in the handling of riots and in the day-to-day problems of helping Negroes and whites to get along together. They have the Negroes' fear and mistrust to overcome, as well as an understanding of the underlying causes to acquire. To summarize:

"The touchstone to successful police relations with minority groups lies in professionalizing police work. A really effective police officer will approach all situations with a detached point of view and an understanding of the social forces that create police problems. Such a policeman will give equal consideration to all individuals as a matter of course, regardless of their racial, cultural, or religious affiliations."  
(42)

(42) T. Sellin, editor, The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Philadelphia: 1946, p. 89.

### 5) Police Attitudes

The attitude of the police is unquestionably a strong factor in the racial prejudice of a community. There are many instances of preventive measures taken by the police wherein riots have been prevented. On the other hand, police have been known to be hostile to Negroes and antagonized them because of personal bias. As the president of the National Urban League pointed out in a 1943 report of the Detroit race riot:

"From all except official accounts, the police behaved with deplorable stupidity and callousness." (43)

Force is often necessary, but police administrators must make it clear to every man in his department that there should be equal protection and fair treatment.

### 6) Congestion in Housing and Transportation Facilities

Reference has already been made to the housing problems of minorities, and it is true that "Jim Crow" means of transportation have incited friction in many communities. Restrictive covenants, or agreements, are made by property owners not to sell or rent their property

(43) Gray, op. cit., p. 3.

to colored people. In some defense production areas Negroes are prevented from entering the very houses which were built for them.

White people frequently look at the black ghettos and believe that the vice, delinquency, illegitimacy, and disease is an indication of the inferiority of the Negroes and then tighten their restrictions upon them. If he is fortunate enough to be able to afford a better environment, the average colored man will usually find himself and his family socially excluded from the community of his choice.

Segregation as a supposed means of social order has shown itself a source of social chaos. Segregation on railroads, street cars, and in places of public accommodation is disastrous, principally in the South; segregation in the schools permits growth of prejudices and limits educational possibilities; but residential segregation is perhaps the most powerful means of keeping the Negro from rising above the caste system.

There is little opportunity for any minority to get out from under "scapegoatism" for it involves almost every aspect of minority tension. It encourages adult and juvenile delinquency, invites and nurtures political corruption, and fosters group antagonisms. It is socially and economically an expense to democracy.

## 7) Employment Conditions

"The employment field, the other crucial problem area in race relations, focuses attention squarely on the anxiety we feel in the face of pressing economic security." (44)

Because of the discrimination chargeable to both management and labor, Negroes were almost pushed out of industry until, in 1933, nearly half of all Northern Negro families were on relief. Not until the formation of the Fair Employment Practices Committee in June, 1941, were Negroes enabled to work in many war plants.

"In 1944 thirty-one unions, twenty in the AFL, eleven among the independent brotherhoods, either excluded Negroes from membership or shunted them off into Jim Crow locals without effective power. Even in the CIO unions, whose constitutions specifically condemn discrimination because of race, color, or creed, there are wildcat outbursts from white workmen afraid of colored competition or affected by race propaganda..."

"When the FEPC in 1941 examined Los Angeles employment practices, it found that in one manufacturing company with thirty-three thousand workers only ten were Negroes... During the third quarter of 1941, when placement in war jobs was at its peak, the United States

(44) Governor's Committee for Racial and Religious Understanding, op. cit., p. 34.

Employment Service reported that only three per cent of the workers placed in twenty selected war industries were Negroes."

"The war situation has improved both the quantity and quality of Negro jobs. But the moment the pressure of war is off, unless unions modify their seniority rules, and industries are able to maintain full employment, Negroes, being the last hired, will be the first fired..." (45)

There is evidence that cities are doing much to prevent the disaster by passing anti-discrimination laws, but from the writer's personal experience, extra-legal devices are being employed at the present time in order to avoid hiring Negroes simply because of prejudice.

(45) Stegner, op. cit., p. 224-225.

## IV

### CONCLUSION

This discussion provides further understanding of the factors closely related to the race riots themselves, and it can be seen that friction is not of necessity caused by a single factor but is a combination of factors consisting of the many more immediate causes of racial prejudice.

The symptoms as discussed here are those of long standing, and the occasional eruptions in the form of riots are indicative of the need of a long-term program to promote better understanding between all races, colors, and creeds.

The rumor situation very frequently develops incidents of friction; demagogic groups encourage both and are promoted by the same; delinquency and crime are developed through economic deprivation which is so well exemplified in congested housing areas and transportation provides an opportunity for more incidents of friction; employment conditions of the worst kind are an economic and social detriment to all races. It is quite evident that not one but all these factors are involved in the vicious cycle of racial prejudice.

The following two points seem to the writer to be the most important ones suggested by the preceding discussion of Negro-American prejudices:

- 1) the wide extent of the prejudice is probably explained through the acceptance of ready-made attitudes, and
- 2) the elimination of prejudice could best be accomplished through a more secure socio-economic order.

Otto Klineburg's discussion of racial prejudice is such an excellent one that the writer would like to summarize this section by quoting his conclusions:

"The type of conflict referred to as race prejudice is found between groups which differ from one another in various ways; it is not limited to distinct races. The explanation in terms of a natural antipathy must be rejected, primarily because an awareness of difference may be absent in those individuals who have not learned from others that the differences are to be taken seriously, and also because in-groups are frequently formed independently of physical characteristics. The notion of a native aggressiveness which finds an outlet in group hostility may be accounted for on this basis."

"Personal experiences may explain prejudice in some cases. More frequently, the attitudes of hostility against certain groups are taken over ready-made from the social environment... It seems certain that in a large number of instances the

nature of one's experiences with members of another group will be determined by the pre-existing attitude, rather than the attitude being determined by the experiences."

"The reasons given for hostility against a particular group are commonly rationalizations... Many examples of this mechanism are available, including the assumption of the Negro incapacity to do skilled labor, the White Man's Burden... These rationalizations may be employed in order to justify economic exploitation, to find a scapegoat for one's misfortunes, to reestablish feelings of self-importance, in some cases also because there is something to be gained from it."

"For this reason, prejudice may be completely eliminated only in a socio-economic system in which one person's success or security is not dependent upon another's failure. At the same time, the variations in the degree of prejudice found between different individuals in the same society, as well as the same economic structure, indicate that education and training may reduce the amount of group hostility, even though they cannot succeed in eliminating it completely." (46)



## BIOGRAPHY OF THE WRITER

Evelyn Bertha Knight was born in Auburn, Maine, on August 10, 1913. Two years after the completion of high school in Westbrook, Maine, in 1931, she entered Farmington State Normal School located in Farmington, Maine, from which she was graduated in June, 1937, with a degree of Bachelor of Science. In September of that year she began teaching home economics in Machias, Maine. After two years she accepted a position teaching the same subject in Pennell Institute located in Gray, Maine. She remained there until June, 1941, and in September of the same year was appointed to a similar position in Sanford High School. In September, 1946, she was employed in the Personnel Department of the Hotel Statler, in Boston, Massachusetts. At the present time she plans to resume teaching in the Home Economics Department of the Vernon L. Davey Junior High School in East Orange, New Jersey.

In July, 1938, she enrolled for graduate work in Education at the University of Maine and has attended sessions there for seven years, completing her paper for the Master of Education degree in August, 1947.

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