

Crime and Jews

The Jews of San Francisco are much less often the direct victims of violent crime than are, say, their black fellow-citizens. This is not because they are Jews but because they are white and relatively middle class. The President's Commission on Law Enforcement has clearly documented the fact that, low-income and non-white groups are disproportionately victimized by crimes of violence, i.e.; murder, manslaughter, rape, robbery, and assault.

In one city, for example, a black man is six times more likely to be the victim of a violent crime than is a white man; a black woman is eight times more likely to be a victim of violent crime than is a white woman. In San Francisco, the clues are about the same. In the police district in which San Francisco Jews still have the largest concentration, there occurs less than 5 per cent of the city's violent crime. In a police district which has a comparably-sized low-income population there occurs over 20 per cent of the city's violent crime. Attitude polls show - no wonder - that the greatest level of anxiety about crime exists among black women, the next greatest among black men, followed by white women and then white men.

It is further true that the annual rate of criminal offenses involving either violence or the threat of violence is about 1 for every 500 persons; and therefore is much less than that for middle-class whites. This is minute compared to the total accidental injuries which occur each year calling for medical attention. It is estimated that as many as 20 thousand Americans die unnecessarily each year as a result of improper emergency care, and there

is not the same kind of public concern about that.

But nevertheless, it is appropriate for middle class whites and blacks to be highly exercised about crime. It is not just that their rate of victimization is still intolerably high. But there is another factor involved, besides the danger of being the direct victim of violent crime. Violent crime - wherever it occurs, to whomever it occurs - is a sign of the breakdown of social order. It is a sign that people can no longer normally be expected to behave decently or lawfully towards each other. Such a breakdown is a special source of anxiety for Jews - not only because of their central religious concern with moral law, but because in modern history they have always eventually become the particular political victims of such breakdowns in social order.

Remedies? Of course, there needs to be attention to the social problems which spawn crime in the ghettos of disprivilege today, as they did in the Jewish, Irish and Italian ghettos of New York a half century ago. But today, contempt for the law is scarcely a ghetto exclusive. There needs to be support for strict, effective and just enforcement of the law on every front; including resistance to sloppy scofflaw tendencies which attempt to put bank-bombings or drug traffic in a more favorable category than murder or rape.

The Jews of San Francisco may suffer less as direct victims of crimes than many other population groups, but, whether they are in or out of the city, their stake in curbing crime and the ideology of crime is at least as great as any other group's.

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