

The Root of the Trouble

Charges that Communists and other radical fringe groups have helped incite the Harlem riots are now supported by high city officials. These charges should be fully and carefully investigated; and presumably this is one of the reasons why the F.B.I. has been called in. It would not be in the least surprising if many left-wing groups, including local Communists, had endeavored to spread the disorders, to exacerbate the rioting, to incite to violence. All this would be quite in keeping with Communist philosophy, especially among the Stalinist-Chinese activists of today.

But to attribute the disturbances solely or even principally to the machinations of a handful of left-wing extremists would be a grave error. It would be gross over-simplification of a dreadfully complex problem. There are many aspects to this problem—historical, sociological, economic, emotional; and a great many people have contributed to it by acts of commission or omission throughout the decades.

The most immediate aspect is the widespread distrust in which the Police Department is held by a large part of the Negro community. We share Mayor Wagner's faith in Police Commissioner Murphy and in the overwhelming majority of men and women who make up the Police Department. But the aura of hatred for them that prevails in some sections of this city must be dispelled if they are to do their duty properly. And it is a matter of the utmost urgency that any misfits or brutalitarians that may persist within the force be weeded out.

In his broadcast last night Mayor Wagner took some steps to allay the resentment of the Negro community against the police but gave no ground to the widespread demand for a civilian review board to hear cases of alleged brutality. We repeat our previously expressed view that the addition of outside civilians to the department's present review board is highly desirable.

The deepest reason for the rioting is, of course, the horrible ghetto condition that prevails in Harlem and the Bedford-Stuyvesant area—the stinking tenements, the lack of good schools, the inadequate recreational facilities, the shortage of job opportunities—that condemn thousands of human beings to life on a near-animal level. The Negro sections of this city are emotionally sick today, and with good reason. They need compassion and understanding help in this crisis, for which every one of us is responsible.