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Delinquency in the Negro Community

By EARL R. MOSES

IN large urban centers of population Negroes generally contribute a disproportionate share of delinquency and crime in relation to their percentage of the total population. But the fact that Negroes contribute an abnormal percentage of delinquents and criminals to the total such cases should not be confused with the question: Are Negroes more criminally inclined than other racial or nationality groups?

In most popular discussions of delinquency and crime there is a tendency to cite the abnormal number of Negro delinquents and criminals, and then proceed to generalizations regarding inherent racial characteristics. In such popular discussions two rather distinct viewpoints are prevalent. There are those who hasten to take a defense attitude and dismiss the citation of an increase in delinquency and crime with the statement, "I don't believe it." Others, citing figures to fortify their position, point to the prevalence of delinquency and crime as a natural expectancy from the Negro group.

Criminal statistics have been so consistently unfavorable to Negroes as to build up a tradition from which common assumptions have had their birth. Various theories have been set forth to explain the prevalence of delinquency and crime among Negroes. Some explain Negro criminality as being the result of heredity; others explain it on a basis of environment; a combination of heredity and environment offers a satisfactory explanation to others; while to still others a satisfactory explanation is offered on a basis of defective mentality, feeble-mindedness, illiteracy, or racial degeneracy.

Statistical data generally can lead to no other conclusion than the disproportionate share of delinquency and crime contributed by Negroes. But untenable conclusions may be given birth on the basis of crude statistics, or observational and experience data. This discussion, however, does not propose to deal with the issues involved in the explanatory viewpoints mentioned above. Neither shall an attempt be made to refute statements relative to

a racial penchant for delinquency and crime. A thorough-going analysis of the issues and the presentation of an array of factual data are too involved to be adequately treated in the limits of this discussion.

Instead, it is proposed to penetrate beyond crude statistics for Chicago as a whole. Considerable light should be thrown on the problem of delinquency by making an approach in terms of poor or high-class neighborhoods, or by types of areas as reflecting differences in community organization. In this approach the distribution of delinquents is especially significant in relation to the character of community life. Moreover, a discussion of delinquency among Negroes in Chicago is similarly true, in

The current depression has unquestionably increased the amount of Delinquency among Negro children in urban communities. Earl R. Moses, Director of Research, Chicago Urban League, writes of the conditions in Chicago.

—The Editor.

large outline, of the problem in all large centers of population—especially those above the Mason and Dixon line.

The fact is accepted without reservations that in proportion to their relative percentage in the total population, Negroes contribute a disproportionate share of crime and delinquency in Chicago. Nevertheless, the problem of juvenile delinquency is not a problem of race but is more intimately bound up with community patterns of behavior and disorganized conditions within the community. Moreover, delinquency and crime are not evenly distributed throughout the Negro community but vary by areas.

Juvenile delinquency among Negroes in Chicago is increasing in startling proportions. The increase in delinquency is at a much faster rate than the growth in the Negro population. In the past three decades the proportion of Negroes to the total population increased from 1.8 per cent in 1900 to 6.9 per cent in 1930, while the proportion of Negro male delinquents increased from 3.5 per cent (for a six-year period, 1900-1906) to 21.3 per cent in 1930. Since 1900, then, the Negro population slightly more than trebled, while the proportion of Negro male delinquents increased approximately seven-fold. Crime among Negro male adults, in contrast, has increased in the same span of years only three-fold, increasing from 7.8 per

cent in 1900 to 21.7 per cent in 1930 of the total male arrests. This wide difference in the proportionate increases in delinquency and crime among Negroes makes it imperative that attention should be focused on the problem of juvenile delinquency. Why? Because the most startling increase in delinquency has taken place in the years following the heavy migration of Negroes into Chicago. If the confusion and disorganization arising out of the migration means an ever-growing increase in delinquency among Negroes it will also mean an increase later in adult crime. Moreover, some attribute the increase in delinquency to the transplantation of delinquents from the South. The explanation of the increase, however, is to be found largely in community situations conducive to delinquency.

THE "BLACK BELT" IN CHICAGO

Whenever mention is made of Chicago's Negro population there immediately rises in one's mind an area south of the Loop (the central business district) in which live the majority of this racial group. The area is popularly known as the "Black Belt." This connotation of a Negro area tends to create a stereotype picture of a homogeneous area of the city, just as Negroes are popularly conceived to be a homogeneous group. The Black Belt, to outsiders, is conceived of as a homogeneous area because it is popularly thought of as a place almost exclusively inhabited by a definite racial group. It is conceived to be a homogeneous area just as "Chinatown," "Jewtown," and other names are applied to specific areas to denote the character of the population and the assumed homogeneity of such area.

Is the Black Belt a homogeneous area? Are Negro communities in general homogeneous areas? To the close and accurate observer and student, the popular conception of the homogeneity of the Black Belt is not true. To such individuals the Black Belt is an area not only of wide differences but marked extremes. It may be set forth, then, that the characteristics of Negro areas vary from community to community. Moreover, within the Black Belt there are widely different social, economic, and occupational groupings. The Black Belt, therefore, is not a homogeneous area. Indeed, it is not only an area of contrasts but also an area of marked extremes.

It is a well known fact that the Negro population of Chicago is largely concentrated on the South Side, extending from Sixteenth Street on the North to Sixty-ninth Street on the

South, and from Wentworth Avenue on the West to Cottage Grove Avenue on the East. This area extends approximately six miles in length and varies from a mile to mile-and-a-half in width. While the majority of the Negro population live within this area others live in territory adjacent to the boundaries outlined. There are, in addition, satellite communities of Negroes scattered in other sections of the city. The satellite communities nearest to the Loop are the settlement in the Near North Side community, the settlement along Lake Street in the Near West Side community, and the settlement that centers around Maxwell Street, in the old Ghetto. A definite Negro community exists in Evanston, a suburb of Chicago immediately to the North. On the southern extreme of Chicago exists another small but definite Negro community known as Morgan Park. Other satellite communities on the South Side are Englewood, Lilydale, Roseland, and South Chicago.

It was indicated above that Negro areas are not homogeneous communities. Indeed three major types of areas may be differentiated in Chicago, namely, Areas of Disorganization, Areas in Transition, and Organized Negro Communities.

An area of disorganization may be described as an area characterized more or less by a nondescript and unstable population, an area of deteriorated physical condition, encroaching business, high degree mobility, etc. In such an area life is free. There are no censors of behavior. A common body of tradition and stabilizing community institutions are negligible.

Organized communities are characterized by more or less common traditions, relatively stable population, comparative absence of pathological social conditions. Home ownership is rather common. There is a general lack of evidence of physical deterioration, and always the presence of stabilizing community institutions. In such communities individual behavior is greatly restrained.

The area in transition is an area in flux, where changes are rapid. Life tends to become free; disorder and confusion compete with order and organization. More enterprising members of the area seek to escape encroaching vice, disorder, and physical deterioration by moving into an organized community.

There is considerable variation in the character and role of organized Negro communities. The (West) Woodlawn community represents

the ascendant organized Negro community in Chicago. The prevalence of home ownership and high level occupational classes in this community has been set forth by Dr. E. Franklin Frazier. Morgan Park, by way of contrast, had its inception primarily in the need of Negroes to be located near their work in the semi-exclusive white residences farther west. With the growth and expansion of Chicago's Negro population other Negroes joined this colony in an attempt to escape the high rents and congestion of the Black Belt. Here, too, home ownership was generally more easily acquired than, for example, in Woodlawn, Lilydale and Roseland, which tho different in origin, are similar in character to Morgan Park. But in South Chicago there is a Negro community based largely on proximity to work in the steel mills. On the other hand, the Negro inhabitants of Englewood are those whose initiative enabled them to escape from the Black Belt. A Negro resident of this community described it as "just like a big country town."

The foregoing materials indicate that Negro areas, and the Black Belt in particular, do not correspond to the popular impression that they are homogeneous. Does there exist, then, a relationship between the distribution of Negro delinquents in Chicago and the types of Negro areas set forth above?

Delinquency among Negroes is not evenly distributed but varies by mile zone units* and also by types of areas. An approach to delinquency in terms of these units of measurement will reveal fundamental differences in the character of Negro areas. Moreover, there are not only differences but marked extremes in these areas.

Negro delinquents are primarily concentrated in Negro areas nearest to the Loop. The extent of delinquency in these areas is uniformly high and shows comparatively little difference. Shaw states in general terms the process operating in these areas. He writes:

"In each case (referring, by inference, to racial or nationality population influx into Chicago) the process has been the same. The most recent immigrants enter and secure a footing by invading the areas of lowest rank in the deteriorated areas adjacent to the Loop and the large industrial centers.

*E. Franklin Frazier, "Occupational Classes Among Negroes in Cities," *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XXXV, No. 5, March 1930.

*The mile zone unit classification was originated and used by E. Franklin Frazier in his study *The Negro Family in Chicago*.

In time another group enters and displaces the population ahead of it and pushes it out into what may be called areas of second settlement."*

The growth, concentration and expansion of areas of Negro delinquency correspond to the process outlined in the quotation above.

An analysis of the places of residence of Negro male delinquents shows that the distribution at the beginning of the century formed the nucleus of the present areas of Negro delinquency. A qualifying statement, however, must be added. Areas of Negro delinquency, in response to the expansion of business, have been pushed steadily outward from the Loop.

With the influx of migrants from the South there was a rapid expansion of the areas in which Negroes lived. The concentration of the Negro population and of Negro delinquents was much the same as was indicated for the beginning of the century, except that there was a decided tendency for a higher degree of concentration in addition to expansion. For the most part the area in which Negroes lived was an expansion of the South Side "Black Belt."

In the three decades that have elapsed since the beginning of the century the areas of Negro delinquency have greatly expanded. Also, the proportion of Negro delinquents to the Negro population has greatly increased. Of the 1,816 individual male delinquents brought before the Juvenile Court of Cook County (Illinois) during the fiscal year of 1929, ten to seventeen years of age, 403 were Negroes or 22.2 per cent of the total male delinquents brought into court. The distribution of the places of residence of Negro male delinquents for this year shows not only a high degree of concentration in certain areas but also a marked indication of movement outward from the Loop.

Classified on a basis of first offenders and recidivists Negro male delinquents in 1929 subdivided into 271 and 132 cases respectively. The distribution of these delinquents by mile zones and communities is shown in Table I. Wide differences in the percentages by zones may be observed in this table. While there are some fluctuations in the percentages of delinquency in the zones, the areas nearest to the Loop in general show higher percentages than those farther out. Moreover, when compared to other zones the West Woodlawn community shows a negligible amount of delinquency.

Variations in the percentages of delinquency

*Shaw, et al., *Delinquency Areas*, p. 203.

in the mile unit areas have just been indicated. Still wider and more significant variations, however, may be observed when the distribution of Negro male delinquents, for 1929, is considered in relation to types of Negro areas. In this connection, it may be noted that areas of disorganization, located nearest to the Loop, have a much higher area percentage of delinquency than areas farther out. The northern area of the Black Belt has an area rate of 6.5 per cent, Maxwell Street 6.7 per cent, and the Near North Side 6.0 per cent. Areas in transition come next in order in percentages of delinquency.

TABLE I.

Distribution of Negro Male Delinquents, 1929, Classified by Mile Zones and Communities, with Per Cent of Negro Male Delinquents to the Negro Male Juvenile Population in Each Area.

Zones and Communities	First Offenders	Recidivists	Total	Per Cent*
(Areas of Disorganization)				
Black Belt Mile Zone 1	3	2	5	10.2
	2	17	7	24
Area I	3	28	21	49
Near North Side		6	10	16
Maxwell Street Area		43	12	55
				6.7
(Areas in Transition)				
Black Belt Mile Zone 4	60	37	97	5.3
	5	44	19	63
Area II	6	26	8	34
Lake Street Area		26	3	29
				4.7
(Organized Communities)				
West Woodlawn		3	0	3
Outlying Districts		15	13	28
				0.8
				**
Totals	271	132	403	

The central area of the Black Belt, and the Lake Street area have 4.8 and 4.7 per cent, respectively, of delinquency. Organized Negro communities have a negligible amount of delinquency or no delinquency whatsoever. West Woodlawn, with a percentage of 0.8, has the highest valid organized Negro community per cent of delinquency. Englewood and Morgan Park, other organized Negro communities, have delinquency percentages of 1.5 and 2.7 respectively. But the small Negro population, ten to sixteen years of age, and the negligible number of delinquents more or less vitiate the validity of these percentages. In contrast to these organized Negro communities, Lilydale, Roseland, and South Chicago are totally free from delinquency. This does not mean that these communities are totally free from the quasi-delinquent behavior. Instead, it means that delinquent behavior is

*Per Cent of the Negro male population, ten to sixteen years of age.

**No percentage computed. Population data for all areas not available.

not serious enough to justify the filing of delinquent petitions in the Juvenile Court.

The foregoing data reveals rather striking differences in the per cent of delinquency in different types of Negro areas. But even more striking is the fact that similar types of areas have almost identical percentages of delinquency.

Data relating to the geographic distribution of Negro female delinquents will be summarily set forth due to limited space. The distribution of Negro female delinquents classified by mile zone units and by communities reveal that, as with Negro males, there are differences in the per cent delinquency in radical expansion outward from the Loop. Moreover, the combining of zonal percentages reveal types of areas previously discussed. Areas of disorganization have an average of 3.7 per cent of delinquency. Areas in transition have an average of 1.1 per cent, while organized Negro communities have an average of 0.9 per cent. Even so, the latter percentage does not take into account the organized Negro communities of Roseland, Lilydale, Morgan Park, and South Chicago, where there are no female delinquents.

What has been set forth relative to the distribution of delinquency among Negroes is similarly true for delinquency among whites. The similarity is especially evident in several significant patterns of delinquency. More specifically, there is a similarity in the pattern of geographic distribution; in the zonal rates of delinquency; and in the type of area characterized by delinquency. In short, patterns of delinquency among Negroes show a similarity to the patterns of delinquency in non-Negro areas.

It is true that most of the delinquent Negro boys in Chicago are migrants from the South. Nevertheless, the mere fact of being a migrant does not offer an explanation of delinquent behavior. In 1929 the average Negro boy became delinquent after living in Chicago upwards of five years. The mean average of length of residence in Chicago for Negro delinquent boys in that year was eight years, nine months.

Since Negro boys do not become delinquent immediately upon arrival it indicates the influence of community patterns of behavior in the development of delinquent careers. Delinquency, then, is not a problem of race but is more intimately bound up with settlement in areas of deterioration where delinquent patterns of behavior prevail and where crime, prostitution, and vice are rampant. Out of this situation the Negro delinquent emerges.