The distinguished career and many achievements of our award winner, Herb Kelman, are well known to this audience and need not be recounted in detail, pleasant as that would be. If I were to select some of his outstanding contributions to research and theory, I would call attention to his model of social influence (with its specifications of antecedent conditions and differential outcomes), his research on response restriction which anticipated some aspects of the dissonance doctrine, his work on the effects of intercultural exchange, or his volume on international behavior. In his research, Dr. Kelman has been equally at home in the experimental laboratory and the field. If we followed his example we would have one, rather than two social psychologies.

If I were to remind you of his role as a social actionist, I would mention that he was a key figure in the antiwar movement and in the civil rights struggle. Moreover, he played this role long before it became popular among social scientists—in fact when social support was so minimal one had to glance in the mirror from time to time to find if he himself were still there.

Social psychology has had no more vigorous exponent of the democratic ethic since the death of Kurt Lewin. And Dr. Kelman has not only been energetic in this endeavor but has also developed the democratic doctrine in its application to basic ethical issues. This is, in fact, what makes Herb Kelman such an unusual social psychologist. We have had many fine researchers and even a few theoreticians, we have had a number of effective social actionists, and we even have had those who divided their time between research and action. But Herb Kelman is in the pattern of Kurt Lewin in that he integrates the two roles. He
utilizes theoretical analysis and research methods in his social action approach. The result of his work is both a better social world and a better social psychology. His contributions remind us of the old Socratic dictum that virtue is wisdom and wisdom virtue.

It is no surprise, then, that Herb Kelman has been one of SPSSI's most active and creative members, participating in its committee work, its programs and publications, and serving as its President in 1964-1965. Most organizations, in addition to the many specialized complementary functions, need a few members who in their personalities reflect the total pattern of the objectives and practices of the organization. Herb Kelman has been such a member, and to many of us Herb and SPSSI are inseparable.
Violence without Moral Restraint: Reflections on the Dehumanization of Victims and Victorizers

Herbert C. Kelman

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The paper identifies a class of violent acts that can best be described as sanctioned massacres. The special features of sanctioned massacres are that they occur in the context of a genocidal policy, and that they are directed at groups that have not themselves threatened or engaged in hostile actions against the perpetrators of the violence. The psychological environment in which such massacres occur lacks the conditions normally perceived as providing some degree of moral justification for violence. In searching for a psychological explanation of mass violence under these conditions, it is instructive to focus on factors reducing the strength of restraining forces against violence.

Three interrelated processes are discussed in detail: (a) processes of authorization, which define the situation as one in which standard moral principles do not apply and the individual is absolved of responsibility to make personal moral choices; (b) processes of routinization, which so organize the action that there is no opportunity for raising moral questions and making moral decisions; and (c) processes of dehumanization which deprive both victim and victimizer of identity and community. The paper concludes with suggestions for corrective efforts that might help to prevent sanctioned massacres by counteracting the systemic and attitudinal supports for the processes described.

I hope I will be forgiven if I begin this address with some personal remarks, both about the award that I have just received and about the topic that I have chosen as the focus for my address. Needless to say, I feel a great sense of satisfaction—as well as humility—as I receive this award. What this award represents to me, however, is more than recognition for my work as an

1 This paper was prepared while the author was a Visiting Fellow at the Battelle Seattle Research Center. I am very grateful to Rose Kelman and Donald Warwick for their comments on the paper.
action-oriented social psychologist and a research-oriented social activist. It represents a confirmation of the core of my being, for the effort to further, as the award states, "the development and integration of psychological research and social action" has been at the center of my activities and my self-definition from the very beginning of my professional career. These are the concerns that originally propelled me into social psychology and that have guided my various endeavors ever since. I do not take this award as evidence that I have always succeeded in what I have been trying to do. But I do take it as a recognition by my colleagues that I have honestly tried. This is as meaningful a validation as I could possibly ask for and certainly more than I could have envisioned when I started traveling this road more than a quarter of a century ago.

There are three special features of the award that add to the personal meaning it has for me: that it comes from SPSSI, that it honors Kurt Lewin, and that it is presented by Daniel Katz.

First, an award from SPSSI has special significance because SPSSI has been my professional and indeed my spiritual home ever since I joined it (at the suggestion of Daniel Katz) during my senior year at Brooklyn College. I am proud that SPSSI, despite its creeping respectability, has kept the faith throughout the years. It has continued to remain alive and responsive to new issues as these have been arising at an accelerating rate; it has continued to serve as a consistent voice for social responsibility within the profession; it has adapted to change while remaining true to its basic values. SPSSI, for me, is the reference group whose approval really counts.

Second, Kurt Lewin's work and orientation to social psychology have had a strong appeal for me and have been a source of inspiration ever since I first came across his writings. My only face-to-face contact with Lewin was toward the end of my undergraduate years, when I heard him lecture at Brooklyn College on his group decision experiments. I remember having some misgivings about the manipulative aspects of group decision procedures, but the research—with its focus on ways of producing change and its combination of theoretical concerns with action implications—clearly spoke to my preoccupations. Despite my general ignorance about social psychology, the one thing that I was quite certain about when I went to consult Daniel Katz about applications for graduate school was that I wanted to study under Lewin. I did apply to the Research Center for Group Dynamics at MIT, which Lewin had founded in 1945, but within a few weeks after I had submitted my application—in February of 1947—Lewin died and the Group Dynamics program decided not to accept new students. I began my graduate work instead at Yale, but never abandoned my interest in the Lewinian tradition. I read extensively in Lewinian theory, applied both to personality research and to social psychology. I arranged to spend the summer of 1948 at Bethel, which at that time was largely staffed by students and associates of Kurt Lewin. During the summer of 1949, I obtained (again with the help of Daniel Katz) a research assistantship at the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center. While there, I spent a fair amount of time at the Research Center for Group Dynamics, which had since moved to the University of Michigan, and I had the opportunity to become acquainted with perhaps half a dozen of the last group of Lewin's students who were then completing their doctoral research or doing post-doctoral work at the Center. At Yale I had acquired a reputation as a Lewinian. At Michigan, however, I was known as a Hullian—among other reasons because of a thesis proposal I developed that summer which was based on a Hullian analysis of group decision processes (a proposal, incidentally, that was never put into action). I have not become a full-fledged Lewinian; I claim it is because I never acquired the knack of drawing a professional-looking life space diagram. But I have always felt a kinship with Lewinians—both theoretically and personally—and in many important respects I see my work as continuing within the Lewinian tradition. This then is another reason why the Lewin Award has a special personal meaning to me.

Third, to receive this award from the hands of Daniel Katz adds an extra dimension of meaning to the occasion. I have already alluded several times to his role in guiding and encouraging me at the beginnings of my career. He was Chairman of the Psychology Department at Brooklyn College when I did my undergraduate work there and I took a course in advanced social psychology from him which greatly influenced my decision to enter the field. He made me aware of the possibility of a social psychology that spoke to the kinds of social issues with which I was concerned. He has remained a friend and a role model throughout. In the 60s I was privileged to be closely associated with him at the University of Michigan as colleague and collaborator and benefited from his unmatched insights into what I see as the central task
of social psychology: investigation of the links between individual behavior and the functioning of social systems. Presentation of the Lewin Award by Daniel Katz is not only a special honor for me, but it contributes a sense of unity and completeness to the occasion, an almost aesthetic quality of good fit.

The Problem of Violence

As I have tried to show, the personal meaning that the Lewin Award has for me can be traced back to the period of 1946-47, when I first began to think of social psychology as a possible vocation. It seems especially appropriate, therefore, to devote my address to a concern that goes back to that same period—a concern with the problem of violence, especially mass violence of an organized and institutionalized nature. It was to a large extent in pursuit of this problem that I had turned to social psychology, hoping that psychological and sociological analysis could help us understand the sources of mass violence and suggest the means of changing both the institutional patterns and the personal dispositions that make such violence possible. In the fall of 1946, I wrote a term paper for my personality course, entitled "Towards an Explanation of Nazi Aggression." The present address is in a very real sense an updated attempt to raise some of the same questions. Unfortunately, there is a new set of experiences on which the present analysis can draw that was not available in 1946: the experiences of My Lai and of United States action in Indochina more generally.

My interest in the problem of violence—which, as I said, was an important factor in my vocational choice—was then and continues to be now an interest in the study of war and peace, of nationalism and militarism, of nonviolent approaches to social change and conflict resolution. But within this broader context the questions raised by the Nazi Holocaust aimed at the systematic destruction of the Jewish people have confronted me most profoundly and persistently. They have special meaning for me because, as a Jew, brought up in Vienna, who managed to get out of Nazi Austria a year after the Anschluss and then to get out of Belgium a few weeks before the Nazi invasion, and who lost countless relatives and childhood friends to the gas chambers and the execution squads, I am only a step removed from the category of Holocaust "survivor," although I would not presume to arrogate to myself the authority of true survivor—those who survived the Holocaust in death camps or in hiding within Nazi territory.

The attempts at genocide, of which the Holocaust is the most extreme and grotesque but by no means the only recent manifestation, represent a profound challenge to our thinking about human nature and human society—from both a moral and a sociopsychological point of view. Indeed, I would argue, it is the most profound challenge of our century, but one with which we have barely begun to grapple. Explanations that remain entirely at the psychological level of analysis or invoke a single overarching psychological principle are less than helpful. Social-psychological or psychohistorical perspectives, however, as several diverse writings have demonstrated (Arendt, 1963; Sanford, Comstock, & Associates, 1971; Kren & Rappoport, 1972; Lifton, 1973), can contribute some of the pieces to what is necessarily a multi-faceted quest for understanding, and can throw some light on the question of "how such things are possible." I see my own reflections as a modest and incomplete contribution to such an effort. I do not pretend that I have any answers; all I hope is to develop some of the terms within which questions can be formulated.

Characteristics of Sanctioned Massacres

My focus is on a class of violent acts that can be described as sanctioned massacres. I am speaking of indiscriminate, ruthless, and often systematic mass violence, carried out by military or paramilitary personnel while engaged in officially sanctioned campaigns, and directed at defenseless and resisting civilians, including old men, women, and children. Though occurring in the course of officially sanctioned activities, the massacres themselves may or may not be specifically sanctioned. The larger context is usually, though not necessarily, an international or civil war, a revolutionary or secessionist struggle, a colonial or ethnic conflict, a change or consolidation of political power. The Nazi atrocities against the Jews and the US atrocities against the Indochinese peoples are prime examples of the kind of mass violence I have in mind, but numerous other cases would clearly fit the description. Within American history, My Lai had its precursors in the Philippine War around the turn of the century (Schirmer, 1971), not to speak of the Indian massacres. Elsewhere in the world, one recalls the massacres and deportations of Armenians, the liquidation of the kulaks and the great purges in the Soviet Union, and more recent, the massacres in Indonesia and Bangladesh,
in Biafra and Burundi, in South Africa and Mozambique.

There are other types of violence directed against defenseless civilians that would probably fit my definition of sanctioned massacres even though they are qualitatively different in various ways from the prototypes I have cited. These might include bombing attacks specifically aimed at civilian targets (such as the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in World War II, or much of US bombing in the countries of Indochina), or various acts of terrorism (such as those that have repeatedly been carried out by both Catholic and Protestant groups in Northern Ireland, by Palestinian guerrillas in planes and airports around the world, or by both sides in South Vietnam), or violent suppression of peaceful protests. On the other hand, there are various kinds of violence that have much in common with sanctioned massacres but that do not quite fit the definition I am using—such as lynching mobs or “issueless” riots (see Marx, 1972). In any event, the question of what should be included or excluded is relatively immaterial, since my purpose is not to develop a typology of violent actions but to set some boundaries to the phenomenon with which I am concerned.

It should also be pointed out that the different examples of violence that clearly fall within my definition are by no means entirely equivalent to one another. They may vary on a number of important dimensions. For example, the context of counterinsurgency warfare waged by a high-technology society against low-technology societies, as in the case of US actions in Indochina, provides a unique set of atrocity-producing conditions (see Falk, 1972; also Lifton, 1973, p. 41), in contrast to those situations in which there are no differences in level of technology or in which such differences are less marked. Another important distinction is between massacres that are part of a deliberate policy aimed to exterminate a category of people, and those that are inevitably by-products of a policy which is not aimed at extermination but which contemplates and plans the destruction of vast population groups as a means toward other ends, such as counterinsurgency or consolidation of power. Probably the most extreme example of the former type of situation is the Nazis’ “final solution” for European Jewry, in which a policy aimed at exterminating millions of people was consciously articulated and executed (see Levinson, 1973), in which such extermination was an end in itself, and in which the extermination was accomplished on a mass-production basis through the literal establishment of a well-organized, efficient death industry. United States policies in Indochina exemplify the second type of situation. Though I feel that there is overwhelming evidence that the United States has committed monstrous war crimes and crimes against humanity in Indochina (Sheehan, 1971; Browning & Forman, 1972) in pursuit of a policy that considered the Vietnamese population entirely expendable, the evidence does not suggest that extermination has been the conscious purpose of the policy. These various differences may have important moral as well as sociopsychological implications. For present purposes, however, I do not intend to dwell on such differences, but to discuss at a much more general level the common features shared by the entire class of sanctioned massacres.

The question for the social psychologist is: What are the conditions under which normal people become capable of planning, ordering, committing, or condoning acts of mass violence of this kind? Before attempting to answer this question, we must examine the special characteristics of this class of violent acts, as compared to other kinds of violence, particularly other kinds of organized violence (recognizing throughout that there are continuities between the different forms of organized violence and that no sharp line can be drawn between them). Two special features characterize this class of violence, relating to its context and its target.

The context of violence. The sanctioned massacres that we are dealing with here occur in the context of an overall policy that is genocidal in character, in the sense that it is designed to destroy all or part of a category of people defined in ethnic, national, racial, religious, or other terms. In line with the distinctions that I have already drawn, such a policy may be deliberately aimed at the systematic extermination of a population group as an end in itself, as was the case with the Nazi destruction of European Jewry. Alternatively, the policy may be aimed at an objective other than extermination—such as the pacification of the rural population of South Vietnam, as in the case of US policy in Indochina—but may include the deliberate decimation of large segments of a population as an acceptable means to that end. I am not qualified to judge whether US actions in Vietnam constitute genocide in the legal terms of the UN Convention on Genocide, but they can be said to have at least a genocidal dimension. Central to US strategy in South Vietnam were such actions as unrestricted air and artillery bombardments of peasant hamlets, search-and-destroy missions by ground troops, crop denial programs, and mass deportation of rural populations. These
actions (and similar actions in Laos and Cambodia) have been clearly and deliberately aimed at civilian populations, and have resulted in the death, injury, and uprooting of large numbers of that population and in the destruction of their countryside, their source of livelihood, and their social structure. These consequences have been known to the policy makers and indeed intended as part of their pacification effort; the actions were designed to clear the countryside in order to bring the rural population under control and to deprive the guerrillas of their base of operation. Thus, while extermination of the civilian population was not the end of the policy, the physical destruction of large numbers of the population and the destruction of their way of life were regarded as acceptable means. Massacres of the kind that occurred in My Lai were not deliberately planned, but they took place in an atmosphere that made it quite clear that the civilian population was expendable and that actions resulting in the indiscriminate killing of civilians were central to the strategy of the war.

The target of violence. A second feature of the class of violence under discussion is that it is directed at groups that have not themselves threatened or engaged in hostile actions toward the perpetrators of the violence. Usually, the targets of massacres belong to groups that are physically weaker than their victimizers (although massacres are often directed at minorities that may be economically more advanced than the masses of the population within which they live). By definition, the victims of this class of violence are defenseless civilians, including old men, women, and children. There are, of course, historical and situational reasons why a particular group becomes a suitable target for massacres. In this sense, it can perhaps be said that the victims provoke the violence by what they are. It cannot, however, be said, in any objectively meaningful sense, that they provoke the violence against them by what they have done. They are not being murdered because they have harmed, oppressed, or threatened their attackers. Rather, their selection as targets for massacre at a particular time can ultimately be traced to their relationship to the pursuit of larger policies. They may be targeted because their elimination is seen as a useful tool or because their continued existence is seen as an irritating obstacle in the execution of policy.

The genocidal context of this class of violence and the fact that it is directed at a target that did not provoke the violence through its own actions has some definite implications for the psychological environment within which sanctioned massacres occur. It is an environment that seems almost totally devoid of those conditions that people usually see as providing at least some degree of moral justification for violence. Neither the reason for the violence nor its purpose is of the kind that people would normally consider justifiable.

The most widely accepted justification for violence is that it occurred for reasons of self-defense against attack or the threat of attack. When this reason is extended to the international level, it may refer not only to threats to the physical existence of a nation, but also to threats to its basic values or its vital national interests. Similarly, violence—both at the interpersonal and at the intergroup level—is often seen as morally justified when it occurs in response to oppression or other forms of strong provocation. There is even a tradition that justifies violence in the face of symbolic harm, as evidenced by leniency toward the perpetrators of crimes of passion. In all of these cases, the violence is provoked by actions that cause harm or threaten harm to the perpetrator of the violence, and it is directed at the source of this provocation. Violence under these conditions—particularly organized violence in the form of warfare—is not seen as morally acceptable by everyone and at all times. People may disagree in principle about the precise point at which they would draw the line between justifiable and unjustifiable reasons for violence; in any given case, they may disagree about the justification for violence because of differences in their assessment of the nature of the provocation and the probable consequences of the response. Nevertheless, most people would agree that violence in self-defense or in response to oppression and other forms of strong provocation is at least within the realm of moral discourse; even those who consider violence unjustifiable under such conditions—in general or in any given case—would acknowledge that there is room for legitimate disagreement among moral people on this score. By contrast, violence of the kind that I have described as sanctioned massacres is entirely outside of the realm of moral discourse, in that it does not occur in response to those conditions that are normally accepted as partial or complete justification for violence.

Moral justification for violence depends not only on its reasons but also on its purposes. Again, self-defense presents the purest case. If a violent response clearly blocks an act of aggression, if by taking the life of an attacker you save your own life or the lives of other potential victims, then most people would regard it as morally justifiable. As one moves away from this rather
clearcut case, particularly into the area of organized violence, the issues become much more complicated and moral consensus more difficult to attain. Nevertheless, moral justification for violence usually depends on the extent to which it is seen as serving a defensive purpose, even though that term may be given a rather broad definition. Thus the use of violence by police or troops in the control of riots or the suppression of rebellions is often considered justified even though it may lead to the killing of some innocent bystanders, but only to the extent to which it is necessary to contain the rioters or rebels. Indiscriminate or purely punitive violence would generally be considered unacceptable in this case. In the case of warfare, these considerations are written into international law. Although the rules of warfare are quite permissive even with regard to the killing of civilians, they do impose some definite limits. The degree and kind of violence used must be justified by considerations of "military necessity" (i.e., as steps required for the purpose of defeating the enemy) and the targeting of civilian populations is prohibited outright. In short, the moral justification for violence depends on the extent to which it is related to the purpose of stopping aggression or neutralizing a threat toward one's self or his group. Once again, sanctioned massacres—which are designed to destroy entire segments of a population—occur in the absence of a condition that is normally considered to provide some degree of moral justification for violence.

Whether or not the conditions for moral justification are totally absent in a given case may be subject to different interpretations. In the case of US actions in Vietnam, for example, it may be argued that the killing of civilians in My Lai and elsewhere did involve a legitimate element of self-defense, since women and children were known to help the guerrillas, hiding hand grenades under their clothes. Similarly, it may be argued that air and artillery bombardments against peasant hamlets had a legitimate military purpose, in that guerrillas often used these hamlets as their bases of operation. Even if one grants these possibilities, however, and puts aside the question of what US troops were doing in Vietnam in the first place, it seems clear that the destructiveness of the response was far out of proportion to the conditions that might have justified it. The quantitative relationship between provocation and response and that between ends and means each have an important bearing on the moral evaluation of the action.

I have been saying that the class of violence under discussion here differs from other types of violence in that the conditions that usually provide moral justification for violent acts are absent. This is not to say, however, that those who participate—actively or passively—in these violent acts regard them as unjustified. They may either find various justifications for them or—for various reasons to which I shall return later—fail to see the need for justification (Ball-Rokeach, 1972; Hallie, 1971). The important point is that the conditions that most people, including the perpetrators of the violence themselves, would normally regard as crucial for the moral justification of violent actions are absent in these situations. Moreover, the absence of these conditions is quite apparent to most outside observers, who are not themselves caught up in the machinery of the sanctioned massacres. These objective circumstances set the framework within which psychological analysis must proceed.

Driving Forces toward Violence

In searching for a psychological explanation of mass violence under conditions lacking the usual kinds of moral justification for violence, the first inclination is to look for forces that might impel people toward such murderous acts. Can we identify in these massacre situations psychological forces so powerful that they outweigh the moral restraints that would normally inhibit unjustifiable violence?

One approach would be to look for psychological dispositions within those who perpetrate these acts. This approach, however, does not offer a satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon, although it may tell us something about the types of individuals who are most readily recruited for participation in such massacres. Any explanation that has recourse to the presence of strong sadistic impulses is obviously inadequate. There is no evidence to support the notion that the majority of those who participate in these killings, in one or another way, are sadistically inclined. Speaking, for example, of the men who participated in the Nazi slaughters, Arendt (1963) points out that they "were not sadists or killers by nature; on the contrary, a systematic effort was made to weed out all those who derived physical pleasure from what they did [p. 93]." To be sure, some of the commanders and guards of concentration camps could clearly be described as sadists, but what has to be explained is the existence of concentration camps in which these individuals could give play to their sadistic fantasies. These opportunities were provided with the participation of large numbers of individuals to whom the label of sadist could
not be applied. Moreover, it should also be noted that much of the sadistic behavior observed in massacre situations can be understood most readily as a consequence of participation in mass violence with its dehumanizing impact, rather than as a motivating force for it.

A more sophisticated type of dispositional approach would be one that seeks to identify certain characterological themes that are dominant within a given culture. An early example of such an approach is Fromm's (1941) analysis of the appeals of Nazism in terms of the prevalence of sadomasochistic strivings, particularly among the German lower middle class. Such an approach may be very helpful in explaining the recruitment of participants in sanctioned massacres in a given society, the specific form that these massacres take, and the ideological support for them. It would be important to explore whether similar kinds of characterological dispositions can be identified in the very wide range of cultural contexts in which sanctioned massacres have occurred. However general such dispositions turn out to be, it seems most likely that they represent states of readiness to participate in sanctioned massacres when the opportunity arises, rather than major motivating forces in their own right. Similarly, high levels of frustration within a population are probably facilitators rather than instigators of sanctioned massacres, since there does not seem to be a clear relationship between the societal level of frustration and the occurrence of such violence. Such a view would be consistent with much of the recent thinking on the relationship between frustration and aggression (see, for example, Bandura, 1973).

Another approach to identifying psychological forces directing people toward violence that are so powerful that they outweigh the moral restraints that would normally inhibit such violence is to examine the relationship between the perpetrators and the targets of the violence. Could the class of violence under discussion here be traced to an inordinate intensity of hatred toward those against whom the violence is directed? The evidence does not seem to support such an interpretation. Indications are that many of the men who actively participated in the extermination of European Jews, such as Adolf Eichmann (see Arendt, 1963), did not feel any passionate hatred against Jews. One of the striking characteristics of the Nazi program, in fact, is the passionless, businesslike way in which it was carried out. There is certainly no reason to believe that those who planned and executed American policy in Vietnam felt a profound hatred against the Vietnamese population. There is no question, in both cases, that the perpetrators of the violence had considerable contempt for their victims, but the desire to injure and annihilate them was not uniformly high.

Because of the incongruity between the actions and the accompanying emotions in this class of mass violence, I originally referred to it as violence without hostility. The more I thought about it, however, the more I realized that this was a misleading designation, because hatred and rage do play a significant role in sanctioned massacres. Typically, there is a long history of profound hatred against the groups targeted for violence, which helps to establish them as suitable victims. This would hold true for the Jews in Christian Europe, for the Chinese in Southeast Asia, and for the Ibos in Northern Nigeria. There is no such history in the relationship between Americans and Vietnamese, but attitudes toward the Vietnamese were readily assimilated to a racist orientation that has deep roots in American history. Hostility also plays an important part at the point at which the killings are actually carried out, even if the official planning and the bureaucratic preparations that ultimately lead to this point are carried out in a passionless and businesslike atmosphere. For example, Lifton's (1973) descriptions of My Lai, based on eyewitness reports, suggest that the killings were accompanied by generalized rage and by expressions of anger and revenge toward the victims. Lifton points out, incidentally, that he encountered conflicting descriptions about the kind of emotion Americans demonstrated at My Lai. Some recollections had them gunning down the Vietnamese with "no expression on . . . [their] faces . . . very businesslike," with "breaks" for cigarettes or refreshments. Yet others described the men as having become "wild" or "crazy" in their killing, raping, and destroying [1973, p. 51].

In short, sanctioned massacres certainly involve a considerable amount of hostility toward the victims, traceable both to historical relationships and to situational dynamics. Hostility toward the target, however, does not seem to be the instigator of the violent actions. Historical relationships provide a reservoir of hostility that can be drawn upon to mobilize, feed, and justify the violent actions, but they do not cause these actions in the immediate case. The expressions of anger in the situation itself can more properly be viewed as outcomes rather than causes of the violence. They serve to provide the perpetrators with an explanation and rationalization for their violent actions and appropriate labels for their emotional state. They also help to reinforce, maintain,
and intensify the violence. But they are not the initial instigators. Hostility toward the target, both historically rooted and situationally induced, contributes heavily to the violence, but it does so largely by dehumanizing the victims—a point to which I shall return in some detail—rather than by creating powerful forces that motivate violence against these victims.

The implication of my argument so far is that the occurrence of sanctioned massacres cannot be adequately explained by the existence of psychological forces—whether these be characterological dispositions to engage in murderous violence or profound hostility against the target—so powerful that they must find expression in violent acts unhampered by moral restraints. The major instigators for this class of violence derive from the policy process, rather than from impulses toward violence as such. The question that really calls for psychological analysis is why so many people are willing to formulate, participate in, and condone policies that call for the mass killings of defenseless victims. In seeking answers to this question, I submit, we can learn more by looking, not at the motives for violence, but at the conditions under which the usual moral inhibitions against violence become weakened.

To put it in Lewinian terms, we need to focus not so much on factors increasing the strength of driving forces toward violence, as on factors reducing the strength of restraining forces against violence. It is to the weakening of such restraining forces that I shall address the remainder of my remarks.

**The Loss of Restraint**

I would like to discuss three interrelated processes that lead to the weakening of moral restraints against violence: authorization, routinization, and dehumanization. Through processes of authorization, the situation becomes so defined that standard moral principles do not apply and the individual is absolved of responsibility to make personal moral choices. Through processes of routinization, the action becomes so organized that there is no opportunity for raising moral questions and making moral decisions. Through processes of dehumanization, the actor's attitudes toward the target and toward himself become so structured that it is neither necessary nor possible for him to view the relationship in moral terms.

**Authorization**

Sanctioned massacres by definition occur in the context of an authority situation. The structure of an authority situation is such that, at least for many of the participants, the moral principles that generally govern human relationships do not apply. Thus when acts of violence are explicitly ordered, implicitly encouraged, tacitly approved, or at least permitted by legitimate authorities, people's readiness to commit or condone them is considerably enhanced. The fact that such acts are authorized seems to carry automatic justification for them. Behaviorally, authorization obviates the necessity of making judgments or choices. Not only do normal moral principles become inoperative, but—particularly when the actions are explicitly ordered—a different kind of morality, linked to the duty to obey superior orders, tends to take over.

An individual in an authority situation characteristically feels obligated to obey the orders of the authorities, whether or not these correspond with his personal preferences. He sees himself as having no choice as long as he accepts the legitimacy of the orders and of the authorities who give them. Individuals differ considerably in the degree to which the conditions under which they are prepared to challenge the legitimacy of an order on the grounds that the order itself is illegal, or that those giving it have overstepped their authority, or that it stems from a policy that violates fundamental societal values. Regardless of such individual differences, however, the basic structure of a situation of legitimate authority requires the individual to respond in terms of authoritative demands rather than personal preferences; he can disobey only by challenging the legitimacy of the authority. Often people obey without question even though the behavior they engage in may entail great personal sacrifice or great harm to others.

An important corollary of the basic structure of the authority situation is that the individual does not see himself as personally responsible for the consequences of his action. Again, there are individual differences, depending on one's capacity and readiness to evaluate the legitimacy of orders received. Insofar as the person sees himself, however, as having had no choice in the action, he does not feel personally responsible for it. He was not a personal agent but merely an extension of the authority. Thus when his action causes harm to others, he can feel relatively free of guilt. A similar mechanism operates when a person engages in antisocial behavior that was not ordered by the authorities but tacitly encouraged and approved by them, even if only by making it quite clear that such behavior will not be punished. In this situation, behavior that was formerly illegitimate is legitimized by the authorities' acquiescence.
In the My Lai massacre, it is likely that the structure of the authority situation contributed to the massive violence in the two ways just described, that is, by conveying both the message that acts of violence against Vietnamese villagers were required and the message that such acts, even if not ordered, were permitted by the authorities in charge. The actions at My Lai, represented at least in some respects, responses to explicit or implicit orders. Everyone agrees that Lt. Calley, the officer in immediate charge of the operation, ordered his men to shoot all of the inhabitants of the village. Whether Calley himself had been ordered by his superiors to “waste” the whole area, as he claimed, is a matter of controversy. Even if we assume, however, that he was not explicitly ordered to wipe out the village, he had reason to believe that such actions were expected by his superior officers. Indeed the very nature of the war conveyed this expectation: The principal measure of military success was the “body count”—the number of enemy soldiers killed—and any Vietnamese killed by the US military was commonly defined as a “Viet Cong.” Thus it was not totally bizarre for Calley to believe that what he was doing at My Lai was to increase his body count, as any good officer was expected to do.

Even to the extent that the actions at My Lai occurred spontaneously, without reference to superior orders, those committing them had ample reason to assume that such actions would not be punished and might even be tacitly approved by the military authorities. Actions similar to those at My Lai, though perhaps not on the same scale, were not uncommon in Vietnam, and the authorities had quite clearly shown a permissive attitude toward them. Not only had they failed to punish such acts in most cases, but the very strategies and tactics that they themselves consistently devised were based on the proposition that the civilian population of South Vietnam—regardless of whether it involved “hostile” or “friendly” elements—was totally expendable. Such policies as search-and-destroy missions, the establishment of free-shooting zones, the use of anti-personnel weapons, the bombing of entire villages if they were suspected of harboring guerrillas, the forced migration of masses of the rural population, and the defoliation of vast forest areas helped to legitimize acts of massive violence of the kind that occurred at My Lai.

The events at My Lai suggest an orientation to authority based on unquestioning obedience to superior orders no matter how destructive the actions called for by these orders. Such obedience is specifically fostered in the course of military training and reinforced by the structure of the military authority situation. It also reflects, however, an ideological orientation that may be widespread in general populations. It seems that such an ideology—similar to though obviously rooted in different historical experiences and probably differing in many nuances from that suggested for Nazi Germany—is accepted by large numbers of Americans. In a national survey of public reactions to the Calley trial (Kelman & Lawrence, 1972), conducted a few weeks after the conviction of Lt. Calley had been announced, we asked respondents what they thought they would do if they were soldiers in Vietnam and were ordered by their superior officers to shoot all inhabitants of a village suspected of aiding the enemy, including old men, women, and children. Fifty-one percent of our sample said that they would follow orders and shoot; 33% said that they would refuse to shoot. We cannot infer, of course, from their responses to a hypothetical question what these individuals would actually do if they found themselves in the situation described. Our data do suggest, however, that they are prepared, in principle, to engage in mass violence if faced with authoritative orders to do so. They are certainly prepared to condone such actions; they regard obedience to orders under these circumstances—even if that means shooting unarmed civilians—as the normatively expected, the required, indeed the right and moral thing for the good citizen to do. In short, the cognitive and ideological grounding for mass violence in an authority situation seems to be present in large segments of the US population (and very probably of other populations as well; see, for example, Mann, 1973).

From the pattern of their responses to a variety of questions, we can gain some understanding of the differences between those who say they would follow orders and shoot in the hypothetical situation and those who say they would refuse to shoot (Kelman, 1973). Those who say they would shoot seem to feel, by and large, that the individual has no choice in the face of authoritative orders; he has neither the responsibility nor the right to question such orders. They make a sharp separation between authority situations and interpersonal situations in daily life. The moral norms that apply in the latter are, in their view, irrelevant in the former. Within authority situations, they feel unable to differentiate between circumstances under which it would be right and those under which it would be wrong to obey superior orders. Those who say they would refuse to shoot would generally agree that legitimate orders must be obeyed, but their view of the
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