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# Why is Collective Violence Collective?\*

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*A theory of collective violence must explain both why it is collective and why it is violent. Whereas my earlier work addresses the question of why collective violence is violent, here I apply and extend Donald Black's theory of partisanship to the question of why violence collectivizes. I propose in general that the collectivization of violence is a direct function of strong partisanship. Strong partisanship arises when third parties (1) support one side against the other and (2) are solidary among themselves. Such support occurs when third parties are socially close to one side and remote from the other and when one side has more social status than the other. Third parties are solidary when they are intimate, culturally homogeneous, and interdependent. I focus in particular on lynching: Lynching is a joint function of strong partisanship toward the alleged victim and weak partisanship toward the alleged offender. Unequal strong partisanship appears in both classic lynchings (of outsiders) and communal lynchings (of insiders) across societies and history. Where partisanship is weak or strong on both sides, lynching is unlikely to occur. Evidence includes patterns of lynching in various tribal societies, the American South, imperial China, and medieval Europe.*

The ultimate goal of a theory of collective violence is to predict and explain when and how it occurs from one case of conflict to another.<sup>1</sup> Such a theory must solve two separate problems: Why conflicts are handled by violence (rather than by other modes of conflict management) and why conflicts are handled collectively (rather than by individuals on their own). My earlier theory of unilateral collective violence addresses the first question: Why is collective violence violent? Here I address the second question: Why is collective violence collective?

## THE PURE SOCIOLOGY OF COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE

Guided by Donald Black's pure sociology, my theory entirely excludes subjective or psychological factors—such as the perceptions, meanings, feelings, and intentions of the participants. It also entirely lacks teleology, the explanation of human behavior as a means to an end—what Black terms “the superparadigm of sociology” (1995:861). Accordingly, my theory does not assume, assert, or imply that collective violence expresses particular motives, preferences, needs, functions, purposes, or interests.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Here conflict refers to a clash over right and wrong rather than to a clash of interests arising from competition for scarce resources (see Black 1998:xiii–xxi).

<sup>2</sup>Unobservable psychological and teleological elements limit the testability and generality of sociological theory (see Black 1995, 2000a, 2000b).

Pure sociology predicts and explains social life with its geometry—its location and direction in a multidimensional social space (see generally Black 1995, 1998, 2000a, 2000b). For example, social action between different levels of social status spans a distance in vertical space: The greater the difference in social status, the greater the vertical distance. Social action may also have an upward, downward, or lateral direction in vertical space. The horizontal dimension of social space pertains to such matters as relational distance (the degree of intimacy between those involved) and radial distance (their degree of social integration).<sup>3</sup> The cultural dimension includes its own distances as well (such as differences in language, religion, and art). Social space similarly has corporate and normative dimensions pertaining to group life and social control (for more details, see generally Black 1976). Moreover, pure sociology regards what is normally viewed as the behavior of persons or groups as the behavior of social life itself, including, for instance, the behavior of law, medicine, and science (see, e.g., Black 1976, 1995: 852–58). Every kind of social life varies with the multidimensional shape of social space where it occurs—its geometry. We therefore ask: What social structures attract particular kinds and quantities of social life, such as particular amounts of law, particular styles of art, or particular forms of sport? In the following pages I examine the social geometry of collective violence.

Collective violence is social control—a process by which people define or respond to deviant behavior (Black 1976:2, 1984:1).<sup>4</sup> My earlier theoretical work applies and extends Black's general theory of social control to the likelihood and severity of unilateral collective violence—lynching, rioting, vigilantism, and terrorism (Senechal de la Roche 1996, 1997). I particularly draw on Black's essay "The Elementary Forms of Conflict Management" (1990), which develops the following theme: The form and quantity of social control (whether law, vengeance, avoidance, or something else) depend on the social location and direction of a conflict (see also Black 1976, 1984, 1989, 1995, 1998). Each conflict has its own social structure, measured by the multidimensional social location in which it occurs. Whether a conflict arises between adversaries who are equal or unequal in social status, for example, culturally similar or different, and intimates or strangers partly determines how it is handled. My earlier work contains formulations such as the following: *Collective violence varies directly with relational distance* (Senechal de la Roche 1996:106). This means that collective violence will be greater—more likely and more severe—when the parties are, say, strangers than when they are neighbors or acquaintances. Also relevant is whether they are culturally distant, unequal, and functionally independent.<sup>5</sup> Conflicts across greater distances along these dimensions attract more collective violence (Senechal de la Roche 1996:108–15).

But my earlier theory explains only why collective violence is violent, not why it is collective (see also Turner and Killian 1987:7; McPhail 1991, 1994). If stranger A offends stranger B, for instance, why does B not handle the conflict himself, without a group? Why does some violence collectivize while other violence does not?

<sup>3</sup>Relational distance—"the degree to which [people] participate in one another's lives"—is measurable, for example, by the nature and number of ties between people, the frequency and scope of contact between them, and the age of their relationship (Black 1976:40–48).

<sup>4</sup>Collective violence is a form of self-help, a species of social control in which a grievance is handled by unilateral aggression (Black 1990:43–44; Senechal de la Roche 1996:99–101). I exclude collective violence that is entirely predatory (such as that which accompanies raiding or looting) or recreational (such as property destruction committed to celebrate a sports victory) (see Senechal de la Roche 1997:66, n. 7).

<sup>5</sup>Functional interdependence refers to the degree to which people cooperate with one another (see also Black 1990:47).

## PARTISANSHIP AND COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE

In his essay "Taking Sides" (1998), Black provides a theory of partisanship relevant to the question of why conflict collectivizes. His "principle of social gravitation" predicts and explains when conflicts attract partisanship—third parties who takes sides—and how much: "*Partisanship is a joint function of the social closeness and superiority of one side and the social remoteness and inferiority of the other*" (Black 1998:127). This principle implies, for example, that a third party is more likely to take the side of his or her intimate in a conflict with a stranger than the side of a stranger in a conflict with his or her intimate.<sup>6</sup> It also implies that third parties equidistant from both sides—in the middle—will be neutral rather than partisan. Those equally *close* to the adversaries may mediate or otherwise dampen the dispute in a nonpartisan manner, while those equally *far* from the adversaries are more likely to respond with indifference and inaction. The principle of social gravitation addresses not only the relational and cultural distance of the parties but also their social stature: Those of higher status attract more partisanship than those of lower status. A high-status adversary in conflict with a social inferior will therefore attract more partisanship than a low-status adversary in conflict with a social superior. And the more partisans each side attracts, the greater becomes its social stature—which in turn attracts still more partisans "in the manner of a bandwagon" (Black 1998:127; cf. Granovetter 1978; Oberschall 1993:14–15).

Black also briefly mentions how various patterns of partisanship give rise to various modes of conflict management, including negotiation, brawling, feuding, avoidance, and gossip. Particularly relevant for present purposes is his discussion of the highest degree of support adversaries can receive: "strong partisanship."<sup>7</sup> Black focuses primarily on conflicts where both sides enjoy strong partisanship—"every third party close to one adversary and distant from the other" (1998:131; see Figure 1). He notes as well that "the social distances among and between [the] third parties themselves also contribute to the gravitational field and may indirectly draw them to one or both sides" (1998:126). The strongest partisanship for both sides thus occurs when both conditions are present: "Maximal partisanship arises from a severe polarization of all the parties with knowledge of a conflict: Two clusters of close people, each distant from the other" (1998:126). Although Black comments on the association between strong partisanship and feuding, rioting, and warfare, he offers no further elaboration of the relationship between strong partisanship and collective violence (see also Cooney 1998:67–83).

Building on Black's initial insights, I suggest that strong partisanship is a necessary condition for the collectivization of violence of all kinds, unilateral as well as bilateral: *The collectivization of violence is a direct function of strong partisanship.* Strong partisanship occurs when (1) third parties *support one side* against the other and (2) are *solidary* among themselves. *In turn, partisan support occurs when third parties are socially close to one side and remote from the other and when at least one adversary has high*

<sup>6</sup>Black focuses on relational closeness but also mentions cultural closeness as another element (1998:126). A third party is more likely to take the side of a culturally close person in a conflict with a culturally distant person than the side of a culturally distant person in a conflict with someone culturally closer. Even when third parties are strangers to both adversaries, their cultural closeness to one and cultural distance from the other predict they will become the former's partisans. This pattern is associated, for example, with the collectivization of ethnic, racial, and religious violence.

Black also predicts that conflicts between intimates such as spouses attract less partisanship than those between strangers: "Third-party intervention varies directly with relational distance" (1995:834–36). For an overview of various aspects of the theory of social control, see Black (1998) and Senechal de la Roche (1995).

<sup>7</sup>For a typology of partisan roles according to the degree of support, see Black and Baumgartner (1983).

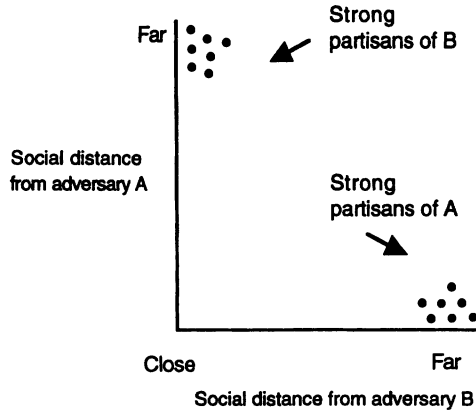


Figure 1. Strong Partisanship (from Black 1998:132)

*status. Solidarity among the third parties on each side increases with their intimacy, cultural homogeneity, and interdependence.*<sup>8</sup>

For the sake of clarity and brevity, here I specifically examine the collectivization of lynching—a form of violence in which an informal group punishes an individual (see Senechal de la Roche 1996:102–05).<sup>9</sup> Although most of the scholarly literature on lynching pertains to the American South in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, collective violence of this kind has occurred widely across societies and history. It appears, for example, in many tribal societies of Australia, Africa, Asia, and the Americas; ancient Greece and Rome; imperial China; and Europe from at least the early Middle Ages onward (Senechal de la Roche 1997:51–52). And lynching everywhere arises with a distinctive pattern of partisanship. Unlike the bilateral distribution of partisanship that characterizes, say, feuding or warfare (Figure 1), the pattern of partisanship conducive to lynching is radically unequal. The offended party normally attracts considerable partisanship, while the alleged offender attracts little or none: *Lynching is a joint function of strong partisanship toward the alleged victim and weak partisanship toward the alleged offender.* The social geometry of each conflict explains whether the pattern of partisanship is strong and unequal and thereby explains the collectivization of violence in each case (see Figure 2).

<sup>8</sup>Black defines solidarity as relational closeness and cultural homogeneity (1998:156–57, n. 10). Here I add functional interdependence to form a three-dimensional concept of solidarity. However, a more inclusive multi-dimensional definition of solidarity would also incorporate other forms of closeness in social space, such as equality and functional closeness. (Functional distance refers to “a difference in activity, such as a difference between occupations or daily responsibilities” [Black 2000b:348]).

Because a purely sociological concept of solidarity excludes any subjective element, it differs from virtually all previous definitions (but see Markovsky 1998). It excludes shared beliefs, perceptions, or emotions (e.g., Smelser 1963:101–09; Gurr 1970; Shibutani 1986:323–28, 433–44; Scheff 1994:105–24), including shared social identity among the members of a group (e.g., Tilly 1978; Oberschall 1993; Tarrow 1994; Gould 1993, 1995; see also Calhoun 1991; Markovsky and Lawler 1994; Markovsky and Chaffee 1995; Goldstone and Useem 1999:994, 998, 1015–16). Finally, it excludes considerations of whether actors regard themselves as having shared interests or shared problems (e.g., Tilly et al. 1975; Olzak 1992; Oberschall 1993) or whether they have a “willingness to sacrifice narrow self-interest for collective interests” (Gould 1999:359). Apart from their psychological nature, all such alternatives are difficult to measure.

<sup>9</sup>I specifically refer to physical punishment of an alleged wrongdoer, which might range in severity from a mild beating to a killing involving severe and prolonged torture. Although the term lynching often invokes an image of an execution by hanging, here I refer to any and all means of inflicting pain or death, from nonlethal hitting, striking with objects, or mutilation, to lethal beatings, burnings, stonings, shootings, or other means of killing.

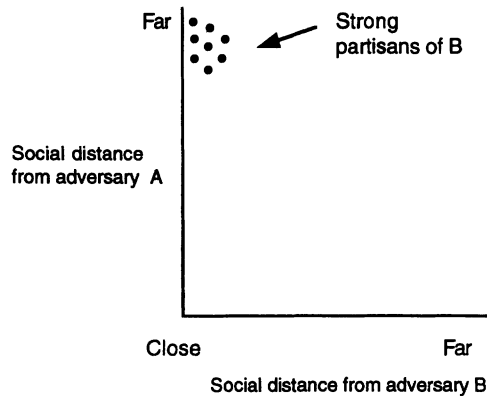


Figure 2. Partisanship Structure of Classic Lynching

## SUPPORT AND LYNCHING

Two major scenarios of lynching appear across societies and history: The *classic lynching* and the *communal lynching*. In the first, members of an established group or community punish an outsider or a newcomer. In the second, members of such a group or community punish an insider. The former typically occurs after a single instance of wrongdoing, whereas the latter typically occurs after a series of offenses by the same individual over a period of time. Despite their different origins, however, both classic and communal lynchings ultimately arise in the same location and direction in social space.

### *Classic Lynchings*

The classic lynching commonly follows an accusation against a lower-status individual who is relationally distant (and possibly culturally distant) from a higher-status victim and various third parties with knowledge of the alleged victimization. Third parties quickly gravitate to the victim's side, while few or none take the side of the alleged offender. The partisans lynch the lone individual they judge to be guilty.

In tribal societies, for example, "partisanship arises almost automatically from blood, marital, and residential relationships" (Black 1998:128), and a classic lynching sometimes results. Among the Ifugao of the northern Philippines, for instance, an outsider without local ties caught in a deviant act faces swift and severe punishment by the relatives and neighbors of his victim: "If the culprit be of a foreign village [and is] found *in delicto*, he is almost sure to be killed in cases of theft or the more serious crimes" (Barton [1919] 1969:59, 69, 78, punctuation edited). An outsider who commits a less serious offense is fined, but if the fine is not paid quickly he might still be attacked and killed. In disputes between fellow villagers, however, supporters of the alleged offender normally equalize partisanship and prevent a lynching. Or cross-cutting ties create a pattern of nonpartisanship that prevents a lynching as well. In conflicts between kin, for example, relatives close to both sides are drawn to both and are therefore "caught in the middle." The usual result is mediation or even complete toleration: "Kinship is so strong a mitigating circumstance as often to excuse [the] crime altogether" (ibid.:60). A man who offends his brother is completely immune: "A family cannot proceed against itself" (ibid.:8). Even when more distant relatives, such as cousins or uncles, commit serious crimes against one another, mutual kinship equalizes or neutralizes support for each side and ultimately encourages a

peaceful settlement (*ibid.*:85). A lynching is unthinkable. A similar pattern occurs among the Munda and Oraon tribes of eastern India, where outsiders might be lynched for theft or attempted theft but not fellow villagers (Saran 1974:121–22).

Unequal support contributes to lynchings in more developed societies as well. In mid-eighteenth-century China, for instance, people regarded as sorcerers were occasionally lynched. These alleged evildoers were said to travel about the eastern provinces clipping pieces of hair or clothing from individuals in order to “steal their souls”—believed fatal for the victim. The social location of the typical soul stealer was ideal for a lynching: The vast majority were “wanderers . . . strangers, people without roots, people of obscure origins and uncertain purpose, people lacking in social connections” (Kuhn 1990:102–04). They were also poor—“mostly wandering monks and beggars” (*ibid.*). Moreover, in each case the beggar allegedly tried to steal the soul of an established member of a small, tightly knit community. Partisanship was highly unequal: The alleged victim’s kin and neighbors quickly captured, beat, and sometimes killed the lone offender (*ibid.*:5, 7, 21–22, 126, 161).

In late nineteenth-century China (and undoubtedly in other periods of the same society), a theft from fields or gardens by an outsider from another village sometimes led to a lynching. Usually the alleged offender received a severe beating, but if he was believed to be a repeat offender, the locals might stab or beat him to death or possibly bury or burn him alive (Smith 1894:211; 1899:163, 165). If the alleged offender was a member of the village and prosperous by local standards, however, he attracted less hostility and at most faced a fine (*ibid.*:163, 165). If he was a relative such as a cousin, an uncle, or a grandfather of the aggrieved farmer, “That,” said one missionary, “complicate[d] matters very much” (*ibid.*:163). It did so because such close ties to the offender or the offender’s intimates equalized or neutralized support and undermined the social structure conducive to lynching. Even the victim was probably inclined to be lenient.

The American South had many classic lynchings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the same pattern prevailed: “Outsiders were most likely to be the victims of lynching” (Waldrep 1992:179–80; see also Raper 1933; Wright 1990). It was not the case—as many modern scholars assume—that any black who offended a white was in danger of being lynched. The likelihood of a lynching depended on who offended whom—especially the degree of intimacy between the alleged offender and victim and the social status of each (Senechal de la Roche 1997). It also depended on unequal partisanship.

Recall that victims with close ties to third parties and high status attract partisanship against alleged offenders who lack close ties and social status. Such was the structure of the largest and most severe lynchings in the South. Those lynched by “mass mobs” (from fifty to several thousand people) typically were blacks of lower status accused of assaulting or killing their employers or police officers—prominent victims with close ties to many citizens (Brundage 1993:17–38, 76). These lynchings sometimes involved torture of the alleged wrongdoer as well as mutilation of his corpse.<sup>10</sup>

Lynchings with fewer participants might occur as well, such as those committed covertly by “private mobs” of four or five partisans of the victim (Brundage 1993:28–33). In these cases the alleged offender again typically was a low-status black with few ties, but the victim was usually a low-status white who drew partisans only from a small

<sup>10</sup>In lynchings of blacks accused of killing whites in Georgia from 1880 to 1930, all the victims (where information was available) were white employers or relatives of employers of the alleged offender (Brundage 1993:73, 270–80). In the Edgefield district of South Carolina—the area of the state with the greatest number of lynchings—many “incidents began when a black was accused of killing or assaulting a white man, usually a landlord or overseer” (Butterfield 1995:57). Killings of police also likely accounted for a substantial number. For example, in Georgia, of lynchings precipitated by alleged “violent attacks” (where the status of the victims is known), over half were committed against police officers (Brundage 1993:76, 81–82).

circle of his or her relatives, friends, and neighbors. Since those in the larger community were distant from both the black alleged offender and the white victim, they tended to respond with indifference, if not criticism and condemnation of the lynchers (*ibid.*: 31–32). The larger community was also likely to react with indifference to assaults and homicides between local blacks (Ayers 1984:231). But if a black homicide victim had close ties to whites—particularly high-status whites—these might become his partisans and even avenge his death by lynching the alleged killer (see, e.g., Wright 1990:98–99; Oshinsky 1996:132).

Although less frequent (and less well known) than interracial lynchings in the South, intraracial lynchings also occurred under conditions of unequal partisanship (Brundage 1993:86–102; Beck and Tolnay 1997).<sup>11</sup> When whites lynched whites, the offender's social isolation and inferiority were often apparent. Many of the alleged offenders were recent arrivals to the community, "without relations or long-time friends, [with] few allies in the face of mob violence" (Brundage 1993:91). Many were also drunks, criminals, or drug users who lacked respectability (*ibid.*:90). When such a low-status outsider killed a higher-status White with many local ties, retribution was often swift and lethal.<sup>12</sup> A similar pattern occurred in the frontier towns of the American West: Killings among and between transient "gunslingers" and "rowdies" did not result in lynchings, but the residents reacted quickly and violently if one of these "roughs" or "bad men" killed a respectable member of their own community (McGrath 1984:79, 84–85, 255).

Most killings among southern whites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries lacked the structure conducive to lynching. In the remote mountain region near the Kentucky-Tennessee border, for instance, most killings occurred between equals who were relatives, friends, acquaintances, or neighbors in the same community. Local third parties generally were close to both the killer and the victim, and partisanship was therefore largely equal or absent. Collective violence did not result, and the third parties sometimes even refused to bring killers to the attention of the authorities (Montell 1986). The same applied to most white killings of fellow whites in Georgia and Virginia, where "white murderers routinely escaped punishment or public censure" (Brundage 1993:88).

If a white victim of a killing was, say, a complete stranger in a community, a lynching was highly unlikely regardless of whether the alleged offender was black or white. Again the reason was the absence of unequal partisanship. Consider, for example, a 1903 incident in Christian County, Kentucky: One evening a white stranger went into a saloon, bought a bottle of whiskey, and flashed a big roll of money. A few days later his mutilated body was found in some nearby woods, his money gone: "His face and ears had been cut off. His skull had been crushed. His throat was slashed, his stomach gashed, and his genitalia hacked away" (Waldrep 1992:168). The authorities arrested a local black who confessed to the crime and named eight local black accomplices who were also jailed. All were poor. Given conventional wisdom about the causes of lynching in the South, one would expect whites to rally quickly to avenge an offense of this severity. But no lynching was attempted before or during the long trial of the nine men. Some of the accused blacks even received support from local whites who lobbied on their behalf (*ibid.*:178–79). Ultimately the authorities hanged the suspect who confessed and gave lesser sentences to the remaining eight. And my theory explains why no lynching occurred: Because the white victim was a com-

<sup>11</sup> Between 1880 and 1930 in 10 southern states, a little more than 10 percent of all lynchings involved whites lynching whites, and another 5 percent involved blacks lynching blacks (Beck and Tolnay 1997:141).

<sup>12</sup> Respectability (or normative status) declines when someone is subject to social control (Black 1976:111). Just as more legal severity is likely to be applied to an individual of low respectability (such as someone with a criminal record) (*ibid.*:111–17), so an alleged offender with lower respectability is more likely to be lynched (Senechal de la Roche 1997:73, n. 70).

plete stranger, despite his grisly fate he attracted no strong support from the local whites. The alleged offenders, though black, were local residents with their own partisans.<sup>13</sup> The result was predictable: No unequal partisanship, no lynching.

Compare the social structure of another case three years later in the same part of Kentucky: A newly arrived black drifter was accused of raping a respectable, middle-class white woman known by nearly everyone in her small town. The conditions for unequal partisanship were excellent: “Thousands of angry whites, howling for . . . blood, surged through” town (Waldrep 1992:175).<sup>14</sup> In sum, the classic lynching in the South normally followed the alleged victimization of a white with many friends and considerable social stature by a poor and marginal black “with no white to vouch for [him],” with “no reputation in the neighborhood,” and “without even other blacks to aid [him]” (Ayers 1992:157). Every lynching is a case of partisanship for the victim and its absence for the alleged offender.

### *Communal Lynchings*

Unlike the classic lynching of an outsider, a communal lynching punishes an insider—someone well known in a community. Communal lynchings typically occur in settings both intimate and egalitarian, such as bands of hunter-gatherers or small villages of sedentary tribes. Like classic lynchings, however, they arise from unequal partisanship—support for the aggrieved and little or no support for the alleged offender. Since strong partisanship is more likely to occur when the alleged offender is socially distant and inferior, it might seem sociologically impossible in a small group of intimate equals. But it is not: People may directly or indirectly distance themselves relationally, vertically, and otherwise, thereby creating the conditions for their own lynching.

**Recidivists.** A person may marginalize himself in his own community with repeated acts of wrongdoing—recidivism. While his fellows might ignore, excuse, or only mildly rebuke a wrongful act or two, repeat offenses may eventually achieve for the recidivist what one anthropologist calls the “status of the finally intolerable” (Ralph M. Linton, quoted without further citation in Llewellyn and Hoebel 1941:49; see also Moore 1972:90–91; Boehm 1985). The social location of the repeat offender gradually recedes and declines along a number of dimensions: As others begin to shun him or as he withdraws from those who are scornful, the recidivist becomes ever more relationally distant from everyone. As he increasingly attracts gossip, ridicule, or other social control, his respectability declines. His integration in the community narrows, and his interdependence with others—the extent to which they cooperate in economic or other activities—diminishes as well.<sup>15</sup> Ultimately the recidivist is so distant and inferior that he has no support and his deviant conduct

<sup>13</sup>Blacks with close ties to white employers and neighbors were less vulnerable to lynchings than those who lacked such ties. “One unfailing rule of life” among Alabama blacks was that “they should get for themselves a protecting white family.” As one said, “We have mighty good white folks friends, and ef you have white folks for your friends, dey can’t do you no harm” (Johnson 1934:27; see also Ayers 1992:157–58; Brundage 1993:63–64, 83–84).

<sup>14</sup>What ultimately happened was, in effect, a legal lynching: The local court gave the suspect a four-minute trial followed immediately by a hanging. A crowd of 10,000 was barely kept at bay by the militia during the proceedings (Waldrep 1992:175–76, 178).

<sup>15</sup>On the relevance of functional independence and its place in a model of self-help, see Black (1990:44–47; 1995:855, n. 130). Functional independence between the principals was also a characteristic of the social structure of classic lynchings in the American South (Senechal de la Roche 1997:55–56).

becomes "intolerable." Even his own family may turn against him. The result may be a lynching.<sup>16</sup>

Among the Mehinaku of central Brazil, for instance, one thief stole repeatedly from numerous individuals, including close relatives. His status dwindled as villagers gossiped that he was a witch. At the same time he began to avoid others, gradually increasing his social isolation. Eventually a small group of villagers ambushed and killed him, evidently with no protest by his kin (Gregor 1977:216). Among the Carib of British Guiana, the lynching prospect "may repeatedly pilfer from others' fields; he may trouble the women, be lazy, show himself ungenerous, constantly pick quarrels, or make himself obnoxious in other ways" (Gillin 1934:343). Not only does such a person's respectability decline, but he becomes increasingly distant from virtually everyone: "He and his family are social outcasts: They are not invited to drinking parties; he will be unable to borrow anything; he will get no help in hunting, fishing, field cutting . . . his household will be excluded from the water-hole and bathing place" (ibid.:343). And if his misconduct continues as his support declines, he may be beaten or killed (ibid.).

Lynchings of such offenders as repeat liars, thieves, sorcerers, and killers occur among diverse peoples, including Australian Aborigines (Meggitt 1965:259), Eskimos (Hoebel 1967:90), North and South American Indians (Hoebel 1967:141-42), and the !Kung San of Botswana (Lee 1979:392). In many tribes of East Africa, those who distance themselves through chronic thievery may face what one writer calls an "African lynching" (Lindblom 1920:179). Among the Akamba of Kenya, for example, "The thief was shot with poisoned arrows, or hung up in a tree . . . 'as a punishment and a warning to others'" (ibid.:159). Various groups also beat or kill individuals who commit repeated sexual offenses such as adultery, incest, rape, or bestiality (see, e.g., Gillin 1934:336, n. 5; Pospisil 1964:74; Edgerton 1972:166; Harner 1972:174-77; Saran 1974:119). Among the Cheyenne Indians of the North American Plains, the husband of a woman who repeatedly commits adultery may arrange to have her gang-raped (Llewellyn and Hoebel 1941:202-09). The Mundurucú Indians of Brazil may use the same punishment against a promiscuous woman (Murphy 1960:109). Women in some tribal societies likewise band together to punish male offenders who repeatedly victimize women. Among the Kiowa of the North American Plains, for example, women have been known to seize a repeat rapist, pin him to the ground, and shame him by "lift[ing] up their skirts" and "squatt[ing] on his face" (Richardson 1940:35). Among the Pokot of Kenya, if a man mistreats his wife, she may rally other women of her village to tie him to a tree, beat him with sticks and whips, and possibly urinate and defecate on him (Edgerton 1972:166).

Lynchings of insiders also once occurred in the small but less egalitarian agricultural communities of Europe and the United States (and may still occur today). Recidivists might face a charivari, a ritualized form of collective punishment ranging in severity from public ridicule and nocturnal noisemaking to riding on rails, ducking in water, tarring and feathering, and flogging. Offenders included peeping Toms, adulterers, wife-beaters, husbands who refused to support their wives, and wives who nagged or beat their husbands

<sup>16</sup> A smaller proportion of tribal lynchings occurs more quickly, particularly those that follow a violation of a taboo. Among the Walbiri Aborigines of north-central Australia, for instance, a woman who trespassed on men's sacred ritual activities "in the old days . . . would have been killed; nowadays the men are likely to thrash her with boomerangs and perhaps rape her" (Meggitt 1965:53). Any outsider who sees or meddles with sacred objects might be stabbed to death (ibid.:229). Men of the Mehinaku of Brazil punish any woman with gang rape who hears them playing their sacred pipes (Gregor 1977:314). Among the Mundurucú of Brazil, a woman receives the same punishment for viewing the men's sacred trumpets (Murphy 1960:108-09). Even the Mbuti pygmies of the Congo—notable for their nonviolent way of life—claim that in the "old days," men who fell asleep during sacred ceremonies might be speared to death (Turnbull 1962:110-11). In all these cases, the violation threatens the entire group with the danger of supernatural retribution such as famine or disease.

(Davis 1975:107–23; Wyatt-Brown 1982:447–53; Ingram 1984:79–113; see also Bohstedt 1983:8–10). In Victorian England, social inferiors with a history of misadventures in their community were especially vulnerable: “While not all wife-beaters might be punished, those who had already committed other aggravating acts, or who had antagonized influential neighbours, would be the most likely victims” (Hammerton 1991:26). In the American South, too, recidivists with few supporters might achieve the status of the “finally intolerable” and be lynched by relatives, friends, and neighbors of their victims (see Brundage 1993:20–22, 88–91). And, as noted earlier, southern lynchings were not necessarily interracial. Blacks sometimes lynched black recidivists, and whites sometimes lynched white recidivists. In one case, for instance, a black man accused of repeatedly engaging in incest with his daughter was “abducted by a black mob and ‘carved to pieces with knives’” (Beck and Tolnay 1997:142; see also Brundage 1993:22, 30; Tolnay and Beck 1995:97–98).

**Witches.** In many agricultural societies of the past, an individual might be lynched as a witch. Normally this happens after an illness, a death, or another misfortune is attributed to witchcraft. Black suggests that those most likely to be named as witches are poorly integrated in their communities, perhaps isolates, and also those who are moderately distant from their accusers—neither intimates nor strangers (1976:56–59). Here self-marginalization is again relevant, whether from repeated misconduct or voluntary withdrawal from the community. In this sense, many witches are not innocent. They provoke their own lynchings by moving into the distant and inferior social spaces commonly inhabited by witches. When a member of the community with higher status and many supporters suffers a misfortune, his partisans may suspect witchcraft by an isolated and unrespectable individual who has no such support. Consider the conduct that distanced prospective witches from their fellows among the Azande of Sudan:

Men whose habits are dirty, such as those who defecate in the gardens of others and urinate in public, or who eat without washing their hands, and eat bad food . . . unmannerly persons who enter into a man’s hut without first asking his permission, who cannot disguise their greed in the presence of food or beer, who make offensive remarks to their wives and neighbors, and fling insults and curses after them. (Evans-Pritchard 1937:112, punctuation edited)

Witches typically have no supporters. Thus eccentrics—“unusual persons who go their own way despite the objections of neighbours and kin”—are especially vulnerable to accusations and lynchings (Beidelman 1963:74; see also Buxton 1963:104–05; Crawford 1967:107, 280). Among the Nyoro of Uganda, for instance, “a person who is habitually surly, who builds his house in the bush far away from other people, who neither invites others to eat with him nor accepts invitations from neighbours to share their food or drink, is likely sooner or later to be accused of sorcery by someone whom he has offended” (Beattie 1963:54).<sup>17</sup> The Mehinaku Indians of central Brazil, who live in unpartitioned multi-family dwellings, say that “to build a barrier and hide behind it away from one’s fellows is the mark of an undesirable man . . . at worst a witch” (Gregor 1977:239; see also Mayer 1970:47). Among the Lugbara of Uganda, “a man who eats alone or sits alone a great deal is thought to be a witch” (Middleton 1963:263, 1965:81–82). Among sub-

<sup>17</sup> Many East African tribes (and anthropologists) distinguish between witchcraft and sorcery: Witchcraft derives from an innate trait that one cannot control, while sorcery can be performed by anyone (Evans-Pritchard 1937; Middleton and Winter 1963:2–4, 8–10; Macfarlane 1970:41–44). Witchcraft is therefore more dangerous to the community and is more likely to result in capital punishment. The Nyoro mentioned above, however, often lynch sorcerers (Beattie 1963:29–30).

Saharan Africans in general: “The witch is the woman who fails to give tokens of goodwill to her neighbours: She is reserved, uncommunicative or stingy, a withholder of gifts, or of hospitality, yet greedy for the good things that other people have” (Mayer 1970:62). Because of her lack of respectability and her relational distance from her fellows, she stands alone if accused of witchcraft. On the other hand, those who cultivate friendliness, good manners, hospitality, and generosity are likely to attract supporters and are correspondingly unlikely to be accused of witchcraft (Beattie 1963:52–53; Crawford 1967:248; see also Gluckman [1956] 1969:86). Having partisans of high status is especially valuable. Among the Tlingit of northwestern North America, for instance, a person accused of witchcraft who had supporters such as rich and powerful kinsmen would usually escape execution (Emmons [1927] 1991:404).

Some individuals lack supporters through no fault of their own but are nonetheless still vulnerable to witchcraft accusations. Agricultural tribes with exogamous marriage (outside the locality) routinely incorporate socially distant spouses—usually women—able to muster few if any partisans. Women who marry into patrilocal (where wives move to their husbands’ kin groups) Gisu villages in Uganda, for example, are “always, to some extent, strangers in their married homes” (La Fontaine 1963:206; see also LeVine 1959:966, 1963:254; Crawford 1967:61). If such a woman marginalizes herself even further through, say, conflicts with her husband’s kin, after an illness or a death she may be accused of witchcraft. Lynching may follow.<sup>18</sup> So-called clients (lower-status individuals dependent on patronage from wealthy members of a tribe) also lack partisans and are similarly vulnerable to witchcraft accusation and lynching, especially if they are migrants from elsewhere (Buxton 1963:106–08; Baxter 1972:165). The Zuni Indians of southwestern North America suspect many individuals of witchcraft, but lynch “only the poor ones, who have not enough friends to protect them” (Harring 1994:270).

While those without partisans are most vulnerable to witchcraft accusations, a lynching occurs only when their accuser is supported by partisans. Partisanship is unequal. Among the Lugbara of Uganda, both men and women may be witches, but all known executions of witches have involved women from another clan accused by their husband’s relatives (Middleton 1963:266). When such a wife accuses one of her husband’s relatives of witchcraft, however, she has few if any supporters, and no lynching occurs (see, e.g., LeVine 1963:247, 254; Crawford 1967:151–52). In many polygynous societies in Africa, witchcraft accusations are frequent between jealous co-wives. Because both parties lack local partisans, however, a lynching rarely occurs (La Fontaine 1963:208; Crawford 1967:148). Witchcraft accusations made by or on behalf of marginalized individuals who suffer misfortunes also tend to fail for want of partisans. When one young Gisu man died, for example, “the rapid and excessive swelling of the corpse indicated that he had been killed by sorcery.” But since he himself was a recidivist without partisans, no one sought to find the witch who had killed him: “He was a thief and a worthless character, and it was generally said that he had got his deserts” (La Fontaine 1963:194). Finally, a lynching is unlikely when a witchcraft accusation is made between close parties such as blood relatives, for instance, brothers or mothers and their offspring. Since these individuals share the same pool of potential supporters, third parties close to both—typically common relatives—usually intervene as nonpartisans to defuse the conflict (see, e.g., LeVine 1963:247; Middleton 1963:266; Crawford 1967:76).

<sup>18</sup>A woman who marries into a patrilocal community enjoys increased security if she avoids conflict over a period of years. Such security also increases if she raises a large number of healthy children, especially males, who not only link her more closely with her husband’s clan but are strong supporters in their own right (e.g., La Fontaine 1963:206).

## SOLIDARITY AND LYNCHING

Recall that support for one side against the other is only part of the structure of strong partisanship conducive to the collectivization of violence. The other is solidarity: The partisans of the aggrieved must be close among themselves. The highest degree of solidarity simultaneously includes such forms of closeness as relational intimacy, cultural homogeneity, and functional interdependence.

*Tribal Solidarity*

Consider tribal violence. In patrilocal societies male relatives tend to form highly solidary clusters (sometimes known as “fraternal interest groups”) that display an “implacable bellicosity towards external enemies” (Thoden van Velzen and van Wetering 1960:171, 180). Violence readily collectivizes: “There is a danger of any individual deed of aggression leading to group conflict” (ibid.). Matrilocal societies (where husbands move to their wives’ kin groups) usually lack such solidary groups of males and therefore have more individualized violence (ibid.:192). So do isolated nuclear families. Among the Tarahumara Indians of northern Mexico, for instance, who live as self-sufficient families in scattered, isolated *rancherías* and who have little solidarity across the tribe, conflict is highly individualized (Fried 1953:288): “Collective aggression does not occur, and group conspiracies are virtually unknown” (Pastron 1974:391).

Still less solidary are mobile bands of hunter-gatherers, whose membership is typically too fluid to consolidate for collective violence—even against killers. Among the Cheyenne of the North American Plains and the Walbiri Aborigines of north-central Australia, for example—both hunter-gatherers—lynching is rare and mild in severity when it does occur. Homicide remains largely an individual rather than a group affair (Thoden van Velzen and van Wetering 1960:177–79). Often the killer is allowed to flee into exile, and after several years may be able to rejoin his band without fear of revenge (Llewellyn and Hoebel 1941:133, 137; Meggitt 1965:58).<sup>19</sup>

But in some instances solidarity is present in hunter-gatherer societies and leads to the collectivization of violence. Although the Cheyenne and Crow Indians of the North American Plains are similar in culture and way of life, for instance, the Crow have highly solidary groups of matrilineal kinsmen (related to their mother’s lineage) capable of mobilizing quickly to avenge wrongs, while the Cheyenne do not (Thoden van Velzen and van Wetering 1960:177–79). And the Crow are far more likely to lynch their offenders (ibid.). Most of the occasional Cheyenne lynchings—such as gang rapes of adulterous women or the beating of horse thieves—involve their one moderately solidary group: The so-called soldier society charged with enforcing order during communal hunts and other collective actions (Llewellyn and Hoebel 1941:6–7, 107, 202). Lynchings among Australian Aborigines are likewise more frequent in bands containing solidary groups of male kin than in those whose males are largely unrelated (e.g., Warner 1937:155, 161–62; Hart and Pilling 1960:83–87; Hiatt 1965:123–24).

*Posttribal Solidarity*

As the self-sufficient nuclear family replaces extended kinship groups in the evolution of posttribal societies, the solidarity needed for lynchings declines. For example, witchcraft

<sup>19</sup>Hunter-gatherers frequently handle conflicts with avoidance of various kinds, such as moving their shelters farther apart within a camp or leaving entirely to form another band (Baumgartner 1988:11, 63, 132–34; Black 1990:49–53; see, e.g., Turnbull 1962:68,132; Lee 1979:367, 372, 397; Knauff 1991:402–03).

accusations persist among some urban Africans in the twentieth century and beyond, but the relative absence of solidarity outside the nuclear family renders most witches safe from lynching (e.g., Gluckman [1956] 1969:101–02; Beidelman 1963:70–73; Crawford 1967:91, 169, 259). Solidarity has nevertheless facilitated the occurrence of collective violence in posttribal societies in other parts of the world. In medieval England, for example, the frequency of collective violence reflected the degree of solidarity from one setting to another. Killings by groups occurred at a higher rate in stable villages where relational ties were strong and extensive: “One man’s or one woman’s quarrel easily became his kinsman’s, his friends’, and his neighbors’ quarrel also” (Given 1977:43, punctuation edited).<sup>20</sup> In a time of banditry, strangers in tightly knit communities were open to suspicion and particularly vulnerable to classic lynchings: “For . . . an outsider to behave in the least exceptionally was often to invite retaliation from a frightened community” (ibid.:131). But lynching was less frequent in newly settled areas where scattered homesteads and migrants without strong networks of kinfolk “impeded the formation of group ties of all sorts” (ibid.:157). Medieval English towns and cities likewise had fewer solidary groups of kin and neighbors, and therefore had less collective violence than stable villages (ibid.:175–79).

Lynching in the American South also varied with solidarity across localities. From the Civil War onward, the vast majority of lynchings of blacks occurred where whites had many close ties to one another—in rural communities and small towns: “If a black stranger did something peculiar, the small town and rural South in particular could explode on impact” (Whitfield 1988:12; see also Ayers 1984:250–55, 260–61). In cities whites were far less solidary, and lynchings were rare (e.g., Raper 1933:28–29; Wright 1990:72, 229–30). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the most urbanized southern states such as Virginia and Maryland had lower rates of lynching than the least urbanized states such as Georgia and Mississippi (Raper 1933:6, 28–29; McMillen 1990:224–53; Brundage 1993). And the most urbanized regions in each state had the lowest rates of all (Brundage 1993:141, 152–53). As the South continued to urbanize, solidarity among whites increasingly declined, and opposition to the practice of lynching grew. Before the 1920s, “the entire white community was openly supportive. Policemen were often actively involved, [and] ministers were silent” (Whitfield 1988:131). But by the 1920s and 1930s, businessmen, journalists, and church groups had largely turned against the lynchings (Brundage 1993:211, 222–24, 238–42, 246–48; see also McGovern 1982:143–44; Ayers 1984:272–73; Whitfield 1988:132–42). Communities were seldom close enough to lynch anyone.<sup>21</sup>

Yet lynchings occasionally involve numerous unacquainted people who briefly gather together in large crowds. Many participants are strangers to the individual whose alleged victimization prompted their involvement in the crowd. How, then, does a lynching occur? Black mentions a relevant phenomenon in bilateral conflicts: “Partisans frequently recruit their own intimates to their side, even when these individuals have no direct ties to the one who benefits. Each side may thereby accumulate a chain of partisans from various social locations, each linked to one or more of the others” (Black 1998:129; cf. Granovetter 1978:1428–30). *Chain partisanship* thus entails clusters of partisans linked together who

<sup>20</sup>The majority of these killings seem to have been moralistic responses to insult or injury (see generally Given 1977). Even so, an unknown proportion occurred during bilateral violence in the form of brawling, and at least 1 of 10—and possibly as many as 1 of 4—was committed by groups of thieves and bandits.

<sup>21</sup>In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, southern police in small towns and rural communities were socially close to local white residents. When a local white was allegedly victimized by a black, the police might therefore act as the white’s partisans. Some authorities even facilitated lynchings by turning suspects over to would-be avengers. In Georgia between 1900 and 1914, 38 percent of those lynched were taken from jails, and another 25 percent were taken from law officers elsewhere (Brundage 1993:240, see also 180). As the South became more urbanized and socially atomized, however, the police gradually became less solidary with local white citizens and began to take forcible measures against lynchings (ibid.:181–82, 239–42).

may nonetheless be distant from those they support. A partisan might recruit friends or relatives with little or no connection to the alleged victim, and they in turn might recruit their own friends and neighbors, most of whom are unrelated to the original partisan and the party he supports. For this reason, violent crowds typically “converge in small groups of family, friends, or acquaintances” (McPhail 1991:91–92; see also Oberschall 1993:13). Solidarity exists primarily within each small group rather than among everyone involved. But a lynching may still occur.

Chains of partisans sometimes even extend beyond the geographical boundaries of the community where the conflict arises. In Maryville, Missouri, in 1931, for example, townspeople recruited others from surrounding rural areas to participate in the lynching of a black man accused of the attempted rape and murder of a local white schoolteacher: “Friends and acquaintances used telegraph and telephone to summon additional participants and spectators, who arrived on trains or in automobiles to aid those already on hand to mete out community justice” (Pfeifer 1993:25–26; see also Raper 1933:417). Those who drove to the lynching no doubt had recruited still others from among their own friends and neighbors, and Maryville residents understandably reported seeing many strangers in the crowd (Raper 1933:417; Pfeifer 1993:26).<sup>22</sup>

### *Urban Solidarity*

As the Western world urbanized and atomized, lynching declined. But pockets of solidary partisans have persisted, and lynching has not entirely disappeared. From the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, for example, crafts and occupations often formed close-knit groups in European cities, and these groups were sometimes violent (Davis 1975:109–23; Ingram 1984:95, 104; Hammerton 1991; Davis 1994; Gould 1995:98, 105–07). In American cities as well, youth groups, street gangs, and athletic and fraternal clubs with shared ethnicities, occupations, and neighborhoods also had enough solidarity for the collectivization of violence (e.g., Johnson 1979:78–89; Laurie 1980:58–66, 124–26, 151–58; Gilje 1987:123–42, 260–64). Gangs and youth groups of other kinds still oversee their neighborhoods and mete out physical punishment to outsiders whose behavior they deem unacceptable or suspicious (Jankowski 1991:184–85; Chin 1996:168–70). In one New York City neighborhood in the 1970s, for example, Italian-American youths served as “a proxy police force” and were known to attack and beat black strangers suspected of wrongdoing (Rieder 1985:178–79; see also Levin and McDevitt 1993:79–83). In the same area, however, Jewish youths may have been equally partisan against outsiders, but they had no such solidarity and virtually never engaged in collective violence (Rieder 1985:184). In one Philadelphia neighborhood, solidary black gangs similarly provide surveillance and defense of their territories: “Members of these units police the streets, harassing outsiders and strangers” (Anderson 1990:39). Those deemed suspicious may be assaulted, and anyone who offends the gangs may be attacked as well (ibid.:39, see also 174–75). Youth groups thus still engage in classic lynchings.

Urban street gangs also have communal lynchings, such as when a gang member is beaten by fellow gang members for violating gang rules, disobeying a leader’s orders, disloyalty, betrayal, or cowardice (e.g., Jankowski 1991:160–61; Chin 1996:174–75). They might likewise beat a member who loses respectability by committing repeated deviant acts outside the gang, such as stealing from the residents of their territory (Jankowski

<sup>22</sup>Several case studies of riots and lynchings offer brief glimpses of chain partisanship. See, for example, Senechal de la Roche (1990, chap. 3); Capeci and Wilkerson (1991, chap. 3); Capeci (1998:118–20), and Akers (1999).

1991:207–08). When local residents take offense at a gang's behavior, however, their lack of solidarity typically undermines their ability to use collective violence against the offenders.<sup>23</sup> Partisans without solidarity are largely harmless.

## SUMMARY

Collective conflict is not inherently violent, and violent conflict is not inherently collective. In fact, most collective conflict is nonviolent, and most violence is individual rather than collective. A theory of collective violence such as lynching or rioting must therefore explain both why it is violent and why it is collective. My earlier theoretical work addresses why collective social control is violent: When the adversaries are relationally distant, culturally distant, functionally independent, and so on (Senechal de la Roche 1996). Here I address why such violence is collective: *The collectivization of violence is a direct function of strong partisanship*. Strong partisanship arises (1) when third parties *support one side* against the other and (2) when these partisans are *solidary* among themselves. *Support occurs when third parties are close to one side and distant from the other and when one side has higher status. Solidarity occurs when third parties are intimate, homogeneous, and interdependent*. If a conflict has a different structure—one, say, in which the third parties are equidistant from the principals or when the partisans lack solidarity—it is less likely to collectivize. In the foregoing pages I focus specifically on lynching, a phenomenon in which partisanship is both strong and radically unequal between the two sides of a conflict: *Lynching is a joint function of strong partisanship toward the alleged victim and weak partisanship toward the alleged offender*. Classic lynchings of outsiders (such as those accused of crime in the American South) as well as communal lynchings of insiders (such as those accused of witchcraft in tribal villages) share this structure. I am presently unaware of any cases of lynching that lack strong and unequal partisanship.

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<sup>23</sup>From the 1970s to the 1990s, collective violence in prisons sharply increased, much of it traceable to the "reality that gangs that exist outside of prison have simply reproduced themselves inside the institution" (Jankowski 1991:274; see also Shakur 1994:206–11, 283–92). The solidarity among some prisoners contributes to both classic and communal lynchings and, less frequently, to riots in prisons (e.g., Useem and Kimball 1991:59–77; Levin and McDevitt 1993:208–09; Ralph et al. 1996:135–36).

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