

The Empire Strikes Back: Racial Violence on the Rise

On December 12, 1986, Michael Griffith, Cedric Sandiford and Timothy Grimes walked into a pizza parlor in Howard Beach in Queens, N.Y., to get help after their car broke down on the highway. As they were leaving they were cornered by approximately twelve baseball bat-wielding white youths who beat them while yelling racial epithets. One of the victims, Michael Griffith, was chased onto the highway where he was hit and killed by an oncoming car. The driver, who was later identified by Sandiford as a member of the gang which attacked the three men, failed to stop. He later returned to the scene claiming that he thought he had hit a tire or an animal. (Griffith had been thrown up onto the windshield of the car in the collision).

Literally adding insult to injury, when Sandiford was found by highway patrolmen walking along the side of the highway severely bruised and in a daze, he was made to stand spread-eagle against the patrol car, frisked, and forced to sit in the patrol car for three hours before receiving medical treatment. The police refused to believe Sandiford's identification of Dominick Blum, the driver who hit Griffith, and Blum was released without being charged with a crime.

The Howard Beach attack was not an isolated incident. Over the past year racial assaults have increased tremendously:

December 19, 1986: The day before the Howard Beach attack and within the same police precinct, two Puerto Ricans, Rafael Gonzalez and Jorge Torres, were beaten by a gang of whites.

January 27, 1987: In Manhattan Chinatown, the Wong family was beaten by several police officers. The police had been sent to investigate charges that the Wong's were illegally using a cable telephone company's phone line, a charge which has yet to be proven. When the Wong's refused to open the door, the police broke it down and dragged them out of their apartment. Mrs. Wong, who was seven months pregnant, was struck in the face with a pair of handcuffs, for which she needed twelve stitches. The incident is being protested by the Coalition of Asian-Americans Against Racial Violence.

December 13, 1986: Jimmy Lee Bruce, a Black man, was killed in Ellenville, N.Y., by an off-duty police officer who used a chokehold to subdue the 20-year-old. Bruce was allegedly involved in a disturbance in a cinema where the officer was working as a security guard.

September 3, 1986: A 26-year-old Black man, Robert Wright, was beaten by whites in Toledo, Ohio. Wright was reportedly sodomized with a lead pipe and an effort was made to castrate him.

July 1986: A Black teenager was shot to death in Lake County, Illinois, by a man who allegedly shouted "Klan, Klan, Klan" as he fired.

June 1, 1986: 17-year-old Gary Moy was beaten and stabbed in Brooklyn by two youths who shouted, "These Chinks don't belong in this neighborhood."

May 28, 1986: In Coney Island, Brooklyn, N.Y., Samuel "Buzzy" Spencer was forced by an oncoming automobile to ride his bicycle into the curb. He was then attacked by six young whites with baseball bats. He was stabbed three times in the back and died.

March 1986: Charles Pyo, a Korean, was beaten in Brooklyn, N.Y., by police shouting racial slurs.

February 1986: Two masked and armed whites attempted to throw Randy Bowman, a Black student leader at the University of Texas, from an eighth-floor dormitory window. Bowman has been a leader of the anti-apartheid divestment campaign on campus.

January 1986: A known Klansman and six others, armed with baseball bats, attacked a group of Latinos at a bowling alley in Cedartown, Georgia. Their primary target was 16-year-old Carlos Guzman, who they claimed dated white women.

Contrary to popular belief, violence against Blacks and other minorities occurs most frequently outside the South, according to a report released by Klanwatch. Most attacks are conducted by independent persons who are not members of the Klan or any organized group. In 1985 and 1986, there were 45 reported arson attempts, cross burnings and firebombings at the homes of Blacks and other minorities who had moved into previously all-white neighborhoods. Klanwatch points out, however, that these figures represent only a small fraction of the incidents of racial violence because there is no centralized system of reporting racially-motivated attacks.

Physical assaults on racial minorities has mobilized significant numbers of minority activists. A new wave of young activists in the Black community have mounted protests and marches against racial violence, and a growing awareness of racially-motivated assaults have mobilized the Asian and Latino communities as well. As sociologist Hardy Frye of the University of California at Santa Cruz has noted: "There are very few communities of color where police brutality is not already an issue. Add to that the recent activities protesting racial violence, and we have the beginnings of a new wave of resistance forming in minority communities."



Photo by Richard J. Brown

Militiamen from the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua.

Report From Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua

by Dr. Mildred McClain-Coleman,
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In March eight African Americans traveled to the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua where a strong and independent minority of Afro-Nicaraguans and African-Indian Nicaraguans live and work. The following is a statement made by members of this delegation upon their return.

Our delegation travelled to the Atlantic Coast villages of Bluefields, Pearl Lagoon Town, La Fe (Faith City), Orinoco and Marshall Point. In each of these Black communities we saw [militia] men, women and children everywhere armed and ready for battle. We were there with common people like ourselves who did not understand why a country as powerful and rich as the United States wanted to destroy them.

Even though the spirit of the people was positive, the effect of the war on them was evident everywhere. Families have broken up because of the war. Children have been left with one or no parents. Many suffer from gunshot wounds. Medical attention is scarce. But the vision of a free Nicaragua is still there under all the tears, pain, sorrow and fear.

We were told that some joined the contras because they were promised a lifestyle like people in America. The U.S. has bought Nicaraguans to

fight other Nicaraguans.

It is crucial that Black people and other Third World people become more involved in what is happening in Nicaragua. The aid to the contras must be stopped. Black people in the U.S. are not speaking out because of a lack of understanding of what is at stake in Nicaragua. Our Black Caucus is not doing enough. The people of the Atlantic Coast asked us to bring back this message: "We are Black people of Nicaragua. We are Afro-Nicaraguans and we are praying that our brothers and sisters in North America will do all they can to end this war against our children. We want to raise our children in peace."

The Black Delegation which has recently returned from Nicaragua is calling on all freedom loving people to work to end U.S. aggression against Nicaragua. We are asking that Black people get more involved in local and national work regarding Nicaragua. We feel and have seen with our own eyes that the present U.S. policy is an affront not just to Black people but to all people who love God and justice.

If you want to know more about the Atlantic Coast or get involved, contact Richard J. Brown, (503) 289-0707.