

WRITING

SUMMARIES

Exercise. In a paragraph of around 100 words, summarise the four incidents of violence and the author's theory about how they were possible.

Violence

Four instances of violence come to my mind. One I read about in the newspapers; another I witnessed; in a third I was on the receiving end; in the fourth, the most brutal of them all, I was a perpetrator.

The first took place an hour's drive from my home in Atlanta, Georgia, when a mob in Athens, screaming epithets and hurling rocks, attacked the dormitory occupied by the first Negro girl to enter the University of Georgia.

The second I saw years ago as I walked through a slum area of the Lower East Side of New York: a little old Jew with a beard, pulling his pushcart, was arguing with a Negro who was demanding payment for his work. The bearded man said he didn't have the money and the Negro said he needed it and the argument grew, and the Negro picked up a stick of wood and hit the old man on the side of the head. The old man continued pushing the cart down the street, blood running down his face, and the Negro walked away.

In the third instance, I took my wife and two-year-old daughter to a concert given in an outdoor area near the town of Peekskill, New York. The concert artist was Paul Robeson. As he sang under the open sky to an audience of thousands, a shouting, angry crowd gathered around the field. When the concert was over and we drove off the grounds, the cars moving in a long slow line, we saw the sides of the road filled with cursing, jeering men and women. Then the rocks began to fly. My wife was pregnant at the time. She ducked and pushed our daughter down near the floor of our car. All four side windows and the rear window were smashed by rocks. Sitting in the back seat was a young woman, a stranger, to whom we had given a lift. A flying rock fractured her skull. There were dozens of casualties that day.

The fourth incident occurred in World War II when I was a bombardier with the Eighth Air Force in Europe. The war was almost over. German territory was shrinking, and the Air Force was running out of targets. In France, long since reoccupied by our troops, there was still a tiny pocket of Nazi soldiers in a protected encampment near the city of Bordeaux. Someone in the higher echelons decided, though the end of the war was obviously weeks away, that this area should be bombed. Hundreds of Flying Fortresses went. In each bomb bay there were twenty-four one-hundred-pound fire-bombs, containing a new type of jellied gasoline. We set the whole area aflame and obliterated the encampment. Nearby was the ancient town of Royan; that, too, was almost totally destroyed. The Norden bombsight was not that accurate.

These four instances of violence possess something in common. None of them could have been committed by any animal other than man. The reason for this does not lie alone in man's superior ability to manipulate his environment. It lies in his ability to conceptualise his hatreds. A beast commits violence against specific things for immediate and visible purposes. It needs to eat. It needs a mate. It needs to defend its life. Man has these biological needs plus many more which are culturally created. Man will do violence not only against a specific something which gets in the way of one of his needs; he will do violence against a symbol which stands for, or which he believes stands for, that which prevents him from satisfying his needs. (Guilt by association is high-level thinking.)

With symbolic violence, the object of attack is deprived of its particularity. Only in this way can man overcome what I believe is his natural spontaneous feeling of oneness with other human beings. He must, by the substitution of symbol for reality, destroy in his consciousness the humanness of that being. To the angry crowds outside the dormitory in Athens, Georgia, their target was not Charlayne Hunter, an extremely attractive and intelligent young woman, sitting, brave and afraid, in her room. She was a 'dirty nigger' - a symbol abstracted from life. To the

Negro who committed violence on the streets of New York, this was not a pathetic old Jewish immigrant, forced in the last years of his life to peddle vegetables from a pushcart, but a dehumanised symbol of the historic white exploiter who used the Negro's labour and refused to pay him a just wage. To the screaming rock-throwers of Peekskill who fractured the skull of a young woman returning from a concert, the people in the car they attacked were not a family on an outing; in this car were people who had gone to hear a black-skinned communistic singer and who therefore were all congealed into a symbol representing nigger-loving communism. And as I set my interval meter and toggled of my bombs over the city of Royan, I was not setting fire to people's homes, crushing and burning individual men, women and newborn babies. We were at war, we always dropped bombs on the enemy, and down there was the enemy.

(From an article by Howard Zinn in *Violence in America*)

<http://www.uefap.co.uk/writing/exercise/report/viole2.htm>

Suggested answer:

The author describes four occurrences of violence. Firstly, white Americans attacked a girl students' dormitory. Secondly, a black man hit a Jew who could not pay him what he owed. He then shows how white Americans attacked people who had been to a concert given by a black left-wing singer. Finally, he describes his own participation in a bombing raid on a German camp and a French city. In each case, the violence was not carried out because the victims were hated as individuals. They were seen as representatives of a hated class —negroes, communists, white exploiters, or 'the enemy' —who prevented the aggressors from living as they wanted to.