

PSYCHOLOGY

# Would You Join A Riotous Lynching Mob?

## The Chances Are One in Ten That You Would But Fake Kidnaping Shows You Are Not Likely to Be Indifferent

**F**AKING a kidnaping in order to study mob behavior—this is the timely scientific feat staged recently by three psychologists from the University of Iowa.

What they discovered about a peaceful crowd when it is roused by a harrowing report of local crime was announced before the Midwestern Psychological Association. The psychologists who engineered the test are Prof. N. C. Meier, G. Mennenga, and H. J. Stoltz.

The average man of education is not likely to join a mob, angry and indignant as he may feel. This was the most striking revelation in the experiment. Only about one man in ten made ready to leap into action on hearing that a mob was gathering for vengeance at the police station.

The fake kidnaping was tried out on several assemblages of college students. The man who rushed in with the kidnaping news and the rumor of a mob gathering for quick justice was a realistic actor, and practically every one was deceived, Prof. Meier said.

The type of personality that you are is no guide to your behavior in such circumstances, it appears from this experiment. Although personality traits in every degree were included in the students, no trait could be discovered to link with disposition to take part in mob action, or to avoid it, Prof. Meier found.

Over 200 students recorded on scientific forms, given out to them when the excitement was at its height, just what line of action they were about to take. The alternatives were: active part, minor part, spectator role, deter mob, or not to join.

From study of the experiment, the psychologist reported these probabilities of what a crowd will do, at least an educated crowd:

Even though provocation is strong, two persons in ten would try to stop mob violence.

One in ten will participate.

Three in ten would go along as spectators.

Four in ten would stay away.

The likelihood of a suspect's guilt would draw a larger percentage of people to mob violence than a situation where guilt was doubtful. With absolute certainty of confession by a suspect, one person in three would be likely to go with a mob.

Tests of the students, to see whether

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### NUCLEUS AND COSMOS

an address by

**Dr. H. A. Barton**

Director of the American Institute of Physics

Wednesday, May 23, at 3:30 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, over Stations of the Columbia Broadcasting System. Each week a prominent scientist speaks over the Columbia System under the auspices of Science Service.

neurotic tendencies affected their attitude towards mob violence, revealed nothing significant.

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