By David Scotts

The first taste of campus violence came to many at MIT last spring, when Cambridge Police in riot gear and students paraded back and forth across Kresge Plaza with tear gas and jeers. While trashing and police brutality have become clichés across the country in the last decade, it was an awakening for more than a few, who had never before realized the institute's fragile tranquillity could be so upset. However, the real nature of this is revealed by an examination of the slightly more remote past, which reveals the far-from-sublimated tenacities of violence in the Tech Yard of the fifties and early sixties.

The reasons were different, of course, but the behaviorism was so strikingly similar to the antiwar demonstrations of today as to suggest a ranker cyclical, slipsian analysis of student revolts and energies. The banner headline of the March 5, 1957 issue of the Tech reads, "STUDENT RIOTS ROCK CAMPUS!" and the following story tells how students waved protest signs, lit bonfires, heckled police and firefighters, "threw missiles," marched down Memorial Drive, and blocked traffic "with sheets of flame."

Eventually, twenty-three unarmed students were arrested; one picture shows a pair of dour rioters gazing soulfully from a jail cell, both sporting close-cropped hair and one even wearing a coat and tie.

And what was the cause of this rampand violence? The Tech explains that the disturbances stemmed from two sources: "the long-term Baker House negro grievances, and the dormitory rate increase" that had just been announced.

This was probably the beginning of that particular sense of campus violence known as Tuition Riots. (No matter that the rampage was instigated by a rent increase — in those days the administration had a habit of raising dormitory rates and tuition by alternate years, so the spirit was the same.) On April 7, 1969, for instance, the headline read, "Stratton House Scene of Student Riots!" the subhead beneath it was "Riot Lints Two Hours, 16 MDC Car Present To Aid Security Force."

Beginning with this riot, however, a new trend can be detected. Along with the gradual appearance of anti-war protests on campus comes a gradually more serious animosity at the Tuition Riots. Of the 1963 riot, for instance (Protesting the 1962 hike to $1700), the Tech said, "The riot was conspicuous for its total lack of violence and 38 tear; there was also a noticeable absence of thrown objects, except, for flowerpots in the streets." The 1966 Tuition Riot inspired one observer to comment, "They were the most polite rioters I've ever seen — they didn't even bother to trample the hedge in the Court."

It is also at about this time that a definite pattern begins to emerge with respect to the "agenda" of the Tuition Riots. At one time or another in each of the Riots of the sixties, the demonstrators (I) gather at the Great Hall; (2) march to music and/or smoke clearing blaring from speakers in East Campus window; (3) search on the President's House, where he is usually either not at home or not residing; (4) "To Damn Much!" (4) perform some symbolic act upon one or another of the dorms, such as burning mouldooh at them on maize or rendering them over; (5) attempt to block traffic for awhile on Mass. Ave, usually for the most part while the light is red; and (5) forcibly enter and rampage through the campus with the intent of perpetrating a panty raid, although, in any of the past few years, it is nearly impossible to discover why they do not know what a panty raid is. Optional exercises (frowned upon in recent years) included (A) lightning headlocks, and (B) pulling fire sheds. The evenings usually end with the genuine attraction of the mob's strength, and, after the riot, some Dean or other would often explain to a small group of students precisely why tuition really did have to go up.

It is easy to jump to the conclusion that the conclusion that the evacuation of Tuition Riots was due to the greater political awareness of students, and their preoccupation with higher principles. A more plausible explanation, though, is that the anti-war movement was simply a step to the standing pool of violent energy that could or would not be sublimated even by expect MIT students. The evidence for this theory consists of the fact that even before the advent of Tuition Riots, students inflicted much havoc on each other in a fully unsecured action known as Field Day. To be sure, Field Day was not discontinued as a tradition until 1968, but it is generally agreed that the more recent manifestations looked much of the catastrophes of former times.

Field Day usually consisted of a series of games that were thinly-veiled excuses for wreaking bodily injury on members of another class. Examination of these games is evidence enough to cast doubt on the myth of the pell-mell violence of earlier days. In the middle of the November 15, 1968 issue of the Tech is an account of an event known as the Cuse Split:

"The main rush was the usual mess as in former years. The Freshman class was given possession of the cage and the Sophomores attacked their formation about it by flying wedges. The skirmishing lasted fifteen minutes and, as usual, some of the Freshmen fighting began with the firing of volley shots to signal to cease the struggle. While some of the Freshmen held the cage were finally unseated, the Sophomores having lost eleven hands on the stick."

"It seems the Freshman class was fatigued injured in the rush. He died at the City Hospital room after being taken there."

Not to accuse our forefathers of gross understatement as well, it should be noted that the event carried a rather more elaborate account of the incident, along with a note that another freshman had now "passed the danger point and will probably recover fully." From the haze of both eyes and "enlivenment of the heart."

(End. note: According to a usually well-informed source, the Eighth Annual Tuition Riot will be held tonight, consisting an F at 11 pm at the Great Hall. Students are urged to stay in their rooms and avoid the motorcycling of the heart.)