

Who Is Guilty in Birmingham?

A young lawyer pinpoints the spot where responsibility for a Sunday outrage lies.

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* FOUR little girls were killed in Birmingham yesterday. An aroused, remorseful, worried community asks, "Who did it? Who threw that bomb? Was it a Negro or a white?"

The answer should be, "We all did it." Every last one of us is condemned for that crime and for the bombing before it and for the one last month, last year, a decade ago. We all did it.

A short time later, white policemen killed a Negro and wounded another. A few hours later, two young men on a motorbike shot and killed a Negro child. Fires broke out and, in Montgomery, white youths assaulted Negroes. And all across Alabama an angry, guilty people cry out their mocking shouts of indignity, and they say they wonder "Why?" and "Who?" Everyone "deploras" the dastardly acts.

But, you know, the answer to "Who did it?" is really rather simple. The "who" is every little individual who talks about the "niggers" and spreads the seeds of his hate to his neighbor, to his son. The "who" is the jokester, the crude oaf whose racial jokes rock the party with laughter. The "who" is every governor who ever shouted for lawlessness and became a violator of the law. The "who" is every senator and every representative who, in the halls of Congress, stands and with mock humility tells the world that things back home aren't really as they are. The "who" is the courts that move ever so slowly, the newspapers that timorously defend the law. The "who" is all the Christians and all their ministers who spoke too late in anguished cries against the violence. The "who" is the coward in each of us who clucks admonitions.

We are the result of ten years of lawless preachments; of ten years of criticism of law, of the courts, of our fellow men; of a decade of telling school children the opposite of what the civic books say. We are a mass of intolerance and bigotry and indictments shouted before our young people. We are cursed by the failure of each of us to accept responsibility, by our defense of an already dead institution.

Yesterday while Birmingham, which prides itself on the number of its churches, was attending worship services, a bomb went off and an all-white

police force moved into action, a police force which has been praised by city officials and others at least once a day for a month or so, a police force which has solved no bombings, a police force which many Negroes feel is perpetrating the very evils we decry.

And why should Negroes think this? Well, after all, there are no Negro policemen, no Negro sheriffs or deputies. Few Negroes have served on juries, few have been allowed to vote, few have been allowed to accept responsibility or granted even a simple part to play in the administration of justice. Do not misunderstand me. It is not that I think that white policemen had anything whatsoever to do with the killing of these children or with the previous bombings. It's just that Negroes who see an all-white police force must think in terms of its failure to prevent or solve the bombings, and must think perhaps Negroes would have worked a little bit harder. They throw rocks and bottles and bullets and we whites don't seem to know why the Negroes are lawless. So we lecture them.

Birmingham is the only city in America where the police chief and the sheriff in the school crisis had to call the local ministers together to tell them to do their duty. The ministers of Birmingham who have done so little for Christianity call for prayer at high noon in a city of lawlessness and, in the same breath, speak of our city's "image." Did those ministers visit the families of the Negroes in their hour of travail? Did any of them go to the homes of their brothers and express their regrets in person or pray with the crying relatives? Do they admit Negroes into their ranks at the church?

Who is guilty? A moderate mayor elected to change things in Birmingham and who moves too slowly and looks elsewhere for leadership? The business community which shrugs its shoulders and looks to the police or perhaps somewhere else for leadership? A newspaper which has tried so hard of late, yet still finds it necessary to lecture Negroes every time a Negro home is bombed? A governor who offers a reward but mentions not his own failure to preserve either segregation or law and order? And what of those lawyers and politicians who counsel people as to what the law is not, when they know full well what the law is?

Those four little Negro girls were human beings. They had lived all their years in a leaderless city, a city where no one accepts responsibility, where

Mr. Morgan, a Birmingham resident, spoke these words in an address to the local Young Men's Business Club.

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everybody wants to blame somebody else, a city with a reward fund which grew like Topsy as a sort of sacrificial offering, a balm for the conscience of the "good people"—the people whose ready answer is for those "right-wing extremists" to shut up, the people who absolve themselves of guilt, the liberal lawyer who told me this morning, "Me? I'm not guilty," then proceeded to discuss the guilt of the other lawyers, the ones who told the people that the Supreme Court did not properly interpret the law. And that's the way it is with the southern liberals; they condemn those with whom they disagree for speaking, while they sit in silence.

Birmingham is a city in which the major industry, operated from Pittsburgh, never tried to solve the problem. It is a city where four little Negro girls can be born into a second class school system, can live a segregated life—ghettoed into their own little neighborhoods, restricted to Negro churches, destined to ride in Negro ambulances to Negro wards of hospitals and from there to a Negro ceme-

tery. Local papers, on their front and editor pages, call for order and then exclude their names from the obituary columns.

Who is really guilty? Each of us. Each citizen who has not consciously attempted to bring about peaceful compliance with the decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States; each citizen who has ever said, "They ought to kill that nigger"; each citizen who votes for the candidate who hoists a bloody flag; every citizen and every school board member and school teacher and principal and businessman and judge and lawyer who has corrupted the minds of our youth; every person in this community who has, in any way, contributed during the past several years to the popularity of hatred is at least as guilty, or more so, than the demented fellow who threw that bomb.

What's it like living in Birmingham? No one really has, and no one ever will—until this city comes part of the United States.

Birmingham is not a dying city; it is dead.

Sexuality in Crisis

Ironically, widespread knowledge of sexual matters has failed to prevent or dispel a crisis of quite staggering proportions.

LLOYD J. AVERILL

★ THERE IS in these days a sexual crisis among us. Not that there is anything really new about that. Ours is by no means the only generation which has found itself bewildered by that mysterious human potency we call sex. The Victorian era had its element of sexual crisis, and so did the flaming era which followed the death of Victorianism.

But there is something peculiarly ironic about the situation our own generation faces. We are, by all odds, the best-educated victims of sexual crisis in history. There has probably never been such open, unabashed discussion of sexual matters as there is today—not a flagrant, defiant openness which delights to flaunt the problem, but a serious, dogged openness which seeks a cure for the problem in education and discussion.

A casual consulting of widely circulated periodicals turns up an almost endless string of columns and special articles by sociologists and medical experts, articles which deal frankly with the problems of sexual adjustment in marriage. Parents are intent as never before upon giving their children adequate information about the sexual side of life.

Churches and schools and youth clubs are more aware than ever of their roles in the sex education of the child.

Education and openness have assuredly had their effect. When it comes to our bodies, we know how to call things by their right names. When it comes to the origins of life, children are no longer kept in the dark by vague and sometimes ingenious metaphors but are told frankly where babies come from. When it comes to dating, the adolescent has a pretty good idea of how his own physiology functions. And when it comes to marriage, the manuals on sexual technique have been faithfully read. The irony is to be found in the fact that this generation of openness and education has nevertheless produced a sexual crisis of staggering proportions, a crisis which our openness and education have failed to prevent and appear helpless to dispel.

Writing from his German prison cell in the middle of World War II, Dietrich Bonhoeffer made a comment which at first reading may seem irrelevant to our problem but which on deeper reflection may illuminate that irony. Shortly after a severe air raid he wrote, "People are talking quite openly about how terrified they were. I don't quite know what to make of it. Surely terror is something we ought

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