

Editorials

MISSISSIPPI BARBARISM

THE brutal kidnap-murder of Emmett Louis Till in Mississippi last August was an act of vengeance as monstrous as it was senseless. The alleged motive was a "wolf-whistle" at a white woman, Mrs. Roy Bryant. But little Till's real crime was the crime of being Negro in the Christian State of Mississippi—a State which holds the 71-year (1882-1953) American lynching record with 574 mob victims. Down in Mississippi, where racial linked sex is an obsession, prejudice quickly discovers motives where Negroes are concerned—even if they are children!

Till was kidnapped at pistol point from his Uncle's home in Money on August 28 by Roy Bryant and his half-brother J. W. Milam. This was four days after the alleged "wolf-whistle," leer, or "obscene gesture." If Mrs. Bryant had been insulted, why was it that she made no outcry at the time when her husband's store is located within only a few feet of a gas station? Regardless of the motive for the killing, Till's water-swollen body with one side of his face beaten to a pulp, a bullet hole in his head, and with a cotton-gin fan lashed to his feet, was fished out the Tallahatchie River some miles away.

IT is a hard conclusion. But the facts make it difficult to evade. The white people of Mississippi are directly responsible for this hideous crime. It is one more casualty in their campaign of reprisal being waged against the NAACP and Negro advancement. Citizens Councils are trying to squeeze the Negro down economically. Public officials wink at vote frauds and the organized campaigns to keep Negroes from the polls. And these same officials have boasted that they will not obey the Constitution in the Supreme Court's public school integration decisions. They claim the High Court is not a proper judicative body, but a court of "political shysters." They depict the fight for public school integration as an NAACP-crusade for "mongrelization" and then denounce miscegenation on every occasion. To these must be added the press-stimulated hate and hysteria. Thus the white minds of Mississippi are poisoned with every imaginable lie and slander about Negroes and the NAACP.

They beat Negroes for speaking their minds in an orderly fashion and even kill them, as they did the Rev. George W. Lee of Belzoni and Lamar Smith of Brookhaven for urging Negroes to vote. They threaten signers of desegregation petitions in violation of the first article of the Bill of Rights.

MISTAKE it not, these are punitive measures designed to control the Negro, to make him obedient and tractable, to keep him a second-class citizen in his own state.

Mississippi whines that she is misunderstood, that she is slandered, ridiculed, and maligned, and that there are good people in the State who condemn the lynching-crime of Money. But where are they? Excepting the socialist William Faulkner, no responsible citizen has spoken out in rage and indignation. There is no use for Mississippi to tell the country that the State condemns the Till murder if at the same time no responsible, highly-educated Mississippian denounces the crime and his State's preachers of violence and hate.

THE United States shouts its democracy to the world and pleads with tear-filled eyes for world peace, but crimes like this imperil the position of the United States as the leader of the Free World. We conclude with William Faulkner's (Nobel-prize novelist from Mississippi) condemnation of the Till killing. Faulkner said, in part:

When will we learn that if one county in Mississippi is to survive it will be because all Mississippi survives? That if the State of Mississippi survives, it will be because all America survives? And if America is to survive, the whole white race must survive first?

Because the whole white race is only one-fourth of the earth's population of white and brown and yellow and black. So, when will we learn that the white man can no longer afford, he simply does not dare, to commit acts which the rest three-fourths of the human race can challenge him for, not because the acts are themselves criminal, but simply because the challengers and accusers of the acts are not white in pigment? . . .

Because if we in America have reached that point in our desperate culture when we must murder children, no matter for what reason or what color, we can't deserve to survive, and probably won't.

The trial of Bryant and Milam was held at Sumner, Mississippi, September 19-23. The verdict of the jury, after 68 minutes of deliberation, was that the two men were not guilty of the murder of Emmett Till. Both men are to be tried in November on a kidnapping charge.

FATE OF THE WORLD

THOUGH most Americans are reluctant to admit the pervasive effects of race conceit and prejudice, the Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church (in a Pastoral Letter issued at their fifty-eighth general convention at Honolulu) warn:

We in the United States, whatever our protestations of superior virtue, just because we are the most powerful and prosperous nation in the western world, have inherited in great measure the fears and resentments of Asia toward the West. . . . Before God and men, we can make no case for contempt and assumption of racial superiority. . . . These are the deepest roots of our alienation from Asia. . . .