

M IS FOR

MISSISSIPPI

M AND
URDER

*Foul deeds will rise,
Though all the earth o'erwhelm, to men's eyes.
Hamlet, I, ii*

Backdrop for Murder

A Few Killings—An Associated Press dispatch written by Sam Johnson and datelined from Jackson, Miss., September 9, 1954, says in part:

“White men who want to keep segregation in force are banding into ‘citizens councils’ throughout Mississippi, several legislators said today.

“The peaceful approach was emphasized by several leaders in Washington County... But some other legislators from the Delta and other ‘black counties’ where Negroes outnumber whites, predicted bloodshed...

“One said ‘a few killings’ would be the best thing for the state just before the people vote on a proposed constitutional amendment empowering the Legislature to abolish public schools.

“The ‘few killings’ would make certain that the people would approve the amendment and ‘would save a lot of bloodshed later on,’ he added.”

Obligated to Defy—Buck P. Patton, a staff writer for the Memphis, Tenn., *Press-Scimitar*, reports a rally of the Citizens Council at Senatobia, Miss., August 12, 1955, and quotes United States Senator James O. Eastland (Dem.,

Miss.) as saying: "On May 17 the Constitution of the United States was destroyed...You are not required to obey any court which passes out such a ruling. In fact, you are obligated to defy it."

Gun and Torch—Although he said it was "abhorrent," John C. Satterfield, president of the Mississippi Bar Association and a member of the board of governors of the American Bar Association, in a speech at Greenville, Miss., nevertheless listed "the gun and torch" as one of the three methods of continuing segregation.

Blood on Marble Steps—The New York *Times* for April 23, 1955, reports a speech by Frederick Sullens, editor of the Jackson, Miss., *Daily News*, before the American Society of Newspaper Editors meeting in Washington, D. C., at the Statler Hotel April 22, in which he is quoted as saying: "Mississippi will not obey the decision. If an effort is made to send Negroes to school with white children, there will be bloodshed. The stains of that bloodshed will be on the Supreme Court steps."

White Man's Problem—In a front page editorial August 22, 1955, the Jackson, Miss. *Daily News* describes Dr. A. H. McCoy, state president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, as "insolent, arrogant and hot-headed" and says, "The fanatical mouthings of McCoy have reached the limit. If not suppressed by his own race, he will become the white man's problem."

Blood on Their Hands—An editorial in the Yazoo City, Miss., *Herald* early in September, 1955, says: "Through the furor over the Emmett Till case we hope someone gets this over to the nine ninnies who comprise the present U. S. Supreme Court. Some of the young Negro's blood

is on their own hands also.”

This is not the United States—In the first of a series of articles appearing in the New York *Herald Tribune* September 18, 1955, Homer Bigart, its world-famous correspondent, quotes Robert P. Patterson, executive secretary of the Mississippi Citizens Councils, as saying: “Sir, this is not the United States. This is Sunflower County, Mississippi.”

In this climate of opinion which derides the courts and the rule of law, which harps on violence, sometimes nakedly and sometimes through the device of repeated disavowal, three persons were murdered in Mississippi between May 7 and August 28, 1955.

Getting Away With Murder




Near midnight on May 7 the Rev. George W. Lee was driving home in his town of Belzoni, Miss., in Humphreys County. Another car overtook him on a dark street. There were two shotgun blasts from the passing car and Rev. Lee slumped over his steering wheel with his jaw shot away. He died before he could be taken to a hospital.

Rev. Lee was the first of his race to register to vote in Humphreys County and he had urged others to register. He had told a friend on the afternoon of his death day that he had been ordered to remove his name from the registration list. He had refused to do so.

No arrests have been made.

The Sheriff said the lead pellets in Rev. Lee's jaw and neck "could have been fillings from his teeth."




In the broad daylight of Saturday afternoon, August 13, Lamar Smith was shot dead in front of the courthouse at Brookhaven, Miss. He had been active in getting voters out for the primary election August 2 and was working on the run-off primary scheduled for August 23.

Brookhaven is the home town of Circuit Judge Tom Brady who has been active in the formation of White Citizens Councils and who has made speeches in and out of Mississippi advocating the impeachment of the United States Supreme Court.

A grand jury on September 21, 1955, failed to return an indictment against the three men arrested in connection with the Smith murder.

The District Attorney is reported in a United Press dispatch as accusing the Sheriff of refusing to make an immediate arrest "although he knew everything I know" about the slaying. In another dispatch the District Attorney is quoted as saying: "The Sheriff told me he saw Noah Smith (one of the accused men) leave the scene of the killing with blood all over him. It was his duty to take that man into custody regardless of who he was, but he did not do it."



Sometime after 2 a.m. on August 28, Emmett Louis Till, 14, who had come to the town of Money, Miss., from Chicago to visit his great-uncle, Moses Wright, was kidnapped at gun point, beaten, shot and thrown into the Tallahatchie River.

Two half-brothers, J. W. Milam, 36, and Roy Bryant, 24, were tried for murder in Sumner, Miss., in Tallahatchie

County where the body was found. The two admitted taking the Till boy from his uncle's cabin because he allegedly "wolf-whistled" at Mrs. Bryant three or four days earlier, but said they released him unharmed a short time later. Moses Wright identified Milam from the witness stand as the man who had come to his home with a drawn gun, demanded the Till boy, took him from his bed and pushed him into a waiting car.

An all-white jury (only voters may serve on juries and none of the county's 19,000 Negroes is permitted to vote) took only one hour and seven minutes to acquit the two defendants who were released on bail pending the facing of a kidnap charge in neighboring LeFlore County later in the fall or winter.

The Sheriff said the body was not that of the Till boy, but was part of a plot by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

John C. Whitten, one of the five attorneys defending Milam and Bryant, in addressing the jury said: "I am sure every last Anglo-Saxon one of you has the courage to free these men..."

The Jackson (Miss). Daily News said editorially, September 25, 1955: "It is best for all concerned that the Bryant-Milam case be forgotten as quickly as possible. It has received far more publicity than should have been given."

This Is Mississippi

These were not murders of passion, or for profit, but futile, cold, brutal murders to bolster a theory of superiority based upon skin color.

It is the people who make a state. It is their sense of decency and humanity, their delineation between right and wrong, their relative kinship to the Almighty and their stewardship of that kinship which determine the society of the state.

This is Mississippi, a state within the United States of America, 179 years after the Declaration of Independence which asserted: "All men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights..."

This is Mississippi, 164 years after the ratification of the Bill of Rights which declares (Article V) that no citizen shall "be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law."

This is Mississippi 85 years after the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution which provides: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state, on account of race, color or previous condition of servitude."

This is Mississippi, 2000 years after the birth of Jesus Christ who said once to his disciples: "...yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me." (St. John 16:2,3.)

Delta Region of Mississippi



Belzoni, site of assassination of Rev. George W. Lee.

Brookhaven, where Lamar Smith was shot down in broad daylight in front of Courthouse.

Money, site of the Bryant store and kidnaping of 14-year-old Emmett Till whose body was recovered three days later from the Tallahatchie River across the county line.

Sumner, where the accused slayers of the boy were tried and acquitted.

Winona, state headquarters of the White Citizens Councils.

*The National Association
for the Advancement of Colored People.*

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