

Three Birmingham Police Slayings

Half of the six police-Negro homicides listed in 1950 by this newspaper have been committed in Birmingham. One each has occurred in Bessemer, LaFayette and Dothan.

There is a real cause for concern in Birmingham because of violence, by police and by private individuals. Three instances of fatal violence in the downtown area remain unsolved. The record shows these police slaying:

Eugene Burke was killed on February 9.

Charles L. Howard was killed the night of March 18.

Raymond Smith Jr. was killed the night of March 23.

Within the span of five days two Negro citizens have been killed by police. Neither was reported to be under arrest by police who from public reports had time to do so, it seems. Both victims allegedly "resisted arrest." Both happened at night. One victim is said to have used a brick, the other a knife.

What the civic leadership of Birmingham, white and black, will be moved to do, is beyond this editorial. When questionable and apparently avoidable killings are allowed to go unchallenged a city's leadership must share jointly the blame. How long will Birmingham's leadership remain silent and indifferent to violence?

In the death of Smith, lies an almost wholly incredible account, as reflected by official reports. Smith had been "searched thoroughly." Still he might have had a knife "hidden up his sleeves." It seems that any "thorough" search would have taken in this area in the frisk or brush down.

One may ask whether an officer could be considered competent who is guilty of an obviously shabby search? Should a man meet his death as the results of too loose a check up by police, should his death be put down as excusable?