

*Distrust, fear, and violence
are the price of slum housing*

Blight, Bigotry, and Bombs

July 1952

WITHIN the past few years, we have witnessed the emergence of a new form of violence. Since January 1, 1951, more than 40 bombings have been perpetrated in the South by terrorists and vandals, and many more have been attempted.

The threat to law and order alone compels concern. But added to that is the disturbing fact that most of these depredations have grown out of racial and religious tensions. Bigotry, even in its non-violent aspects, is a clear and present danger in a nation built on diversity and respect for difference. When bigotry is coupled with bombs, the peril becomes acute.

Since the end of World War II, much progress has been made toward securing in law equal rights for all citizens. Decisions of the United States Supreme Court have lessened segregation in interstate transportation and higher education. Barriers have been lifted at polling places. The Armed Forces are discarding racial classifications. Better economic conditions are enabling minority-group members to seek better homes, often in areas hitherto closed to them. It is clear by now that this progress toward a broader democracy will continue, probably at an accelerating pace, in the years just ahead.

However, changes in age-old traditions are not accepted gracefully by some elements in the South. By reason of narrow self-interest or blind prejudice, these elements are waging a fierce rear-guard action against all such progress. Those among them who occupy responsible positions and who deliberately provoke racial antagonism are morally as guilty as the terrorists who resort to dynamite. Tension and violence are the inevitable results of the fear and hatred which they engender.

To the credit of the South, the bombings have been widely and vigorously denounced throughout the region. But expressions of temporary public outrage by themselves are not enough. Not a single case of bombing growing out of racial and religious tensions has resulted in conviction of the perpetrators.

Two things are urgently needed: First, frank recognition of the causes of tension and violence; and, second, public determination to eliminate lawlessness at its roots.

Those roots go deep into the everyday conditions under which our people live—and in no case more than in housing. The wretched slum dwellings of our Southern cities—nearly three-fourths of them occupied by Negroes—do us incalculable harm, morally as well as materially. Distrust, fear, rumor, and ultimately open violence are the fearful price we pay for the failure to provide long-range, constructive remedies for this problem.

As revealed in reports of the 1950 Census, over three-fourths of the American cities with the worst housing are in the South. Of 77 cities in the nation with 30% or more substandard dwellings, 59 are Southern cities.

The Negro population has the worst of this problem, by far. According to the 1950 figures, Negro-occupied houses in the typical Southern city have a dollar value less than half that of white-occupied houses. Overcrowding among Negroes is three and four times as great as among whites. More than twice as many Negro homes are dilapidated as white homes. In many Southern cities, three-fourths of all Negro-occupied houses are substandard—that is, they are inadequate or unsafe as shelter, or they lack minimum inside plumbing.

These conditions represent no improvement, and in some cases a worsening, since the 1940 Census. The reasons are easy to find:

Expansion of Negro residential areas has been almost completely blocked. Negro families that want and can afford decent housing in better neighborhoods have had little opportunity to secure it. More often than not, real estate interests and fearful white home owners have joined forces to bar the development of suburban expansion areas for Negroes. Thus, hemmed in on one hand by burgeoning business districts and on the other by older white neighborhoods, Negroes have had no choice but to seek a block-by-block conversion of the older housing from white to Negro occupancy. It is this desperate transition process which breeds conflict. The process has been repeated in place after place, with the climax of bombing and other measures designed to terrorize Negro home buyers. First come rumors that Negroes are about to buy in a previously all-white “fringe” neighborhood. As suspicion and tension mount, “protective” associations are formed, often under the leadership of professional bigots. And, finally, at the first evidence of a neighborhood sale to Negroes, emotion explodes into violence. Ironically, even at the expense of all that effort and anxiety and unrest, the best the Negro population gets is hand-me-downs.

The public housing need has not been adequately met in Southern cities with a large proportion of substandard housing. The American people have become firmly convinced that the opportunity to secure good housing is a fundamental human right in a democracy. Low-income families share that right to good housing, at rentals they can afford.

Civic-minded individuals and groups, public and private agencies, share an enormous responsibility in this critical situation—a responsibility so far largely neglected. We call on our fellow citizens to join in the following efforts:

1. Find the facts: Organize as local citizens to make a self-survey of housing conditions and tension areas in your community.
2. Insist on able and impartial police handling of housing tensions. It is a serious indictment of our law enforcement agencies that dozens of homes have been bombed without punishment of those guilty. In some instances, the police have openly sided with aroused white householders, and so have tacitly encouraged the resort to lawlessness. In other instances, the violence-minded have grown brazen on the ineptness and inactivity of law enforcement authorities. The remedies—modern standards of police training and performance—are not likely to be attained until an enlightened public opinion demands them.
3. Seek truly representative planning bodies, on which Negroes, Mexican-

*"Master race" orators on stage
at a police committee hearing*

Race Hatred Gets a Hearing

By Harold C. Fleming

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OCCASIONALLY an event takes place in the South which crystallizes all the curious, conflicting elements that go to make up Southern prejudices. Such an event was the recent public hearing on Negro police conducted by the Police Committee of the Atlanta City Council.

The issue of Negro police has been a controversial one in Atlanta for a long time. It became more controversial than ever recently when an impressively large group of civic organizations, supported by the Atlanta newspapers, began a concerted move to have Negro policemen employed in the Negro sections of the city. A survey by the Southern Regional Council provided some practical arguments in favor of the proposal. The survey revealed that more than forty Southern cities were successfully using Negro policemen; all the cities commenting announced their satisfaction with the colored officers, and many reported startling reductions in Negro crime. On the basis of these and similar findings,