

Letters To The Editor

To the Editor:

Granting that neither the national or the local news media have a monopoly on the truth, one who maintains a high regard for the city and people of Cambridge, both Negro and white, as I do, can only be sickened by what, on careful reading of various sources, appears to have been a perversion of his authority by Cambridge Chief of Police Brice Kinnamon in the recent racial disorders in Cambridge, and/or a considerable irresponsibility on the part of the membership of the Rescue Fire Company.

Even the local press affirms that only a small fraction of the Cambridge Negro community was involved in the disorders, and those accused of actually setting fire to buildings and the like turn out to be, as one might have guessed, a tiny fraction of a fraction - of what in other circumstances would be recognized as juvenile delinquents at worst, apparently more interested in "burning down the schoolhouse" than in correcting racial injustices. Yet the "Dorchester News" reports (Aug. 2, 1967) that "firemen did not enter the area (where 12 buildings were burning) until an hour after the fire began, under orders of police," and "Time" magazine reports (Aug. 4, 1967) that "the white volunteer fire company failed to respond to the fire until it had practically burned out, leveling a school, a church, a motel, and a tavern." To Negro pleas to send the firemen in, Chief Kinnamon is reported ("Time, Aug. 4) to have replied: "You people ... stood by and let a bunch of goddam hoodlums come in here." Etcetera.

Now, even after one has subtracted a little from "Time" and added a little to the "News" in the interest of objectivity, this certainly sounds like the Cambridge police and fire departments' poorest hour. One hopes that the reports, local and national, are entirely false; one fears that they aren't. The principal sufferers, of course, from what appears to have been the shared irresponsibility of the riot-inciters, Chief Kinnamon, the arsonists, and the R.F.C., are the great majority of a responsible and too-long-suffering Negro community, particularly such successes-against-odds as Hansel Greene, whose tragic suicide, after the loss of a lifetime's enterprise in the fire, prompts this letter. Greene himself is reported ("Time") to have blamed the Negro arsonists for the fire; but all things considered, mustn't the responsibility for his losses and subsequent suicide be laid as much at the door of Chief Kinnamon and

those of his way of thinking as at the door of H. "Rap" Brown & Co.?

This isn't to minimize the gravity of arson and riot, no matter how serious and long-standing the abuses that lead to them, or to defend the inflammatory rhetoric of Negro racists, however more warranted it is than that of white racists. But to punish the best elements in a community for the actions of its worst, as Kinnamon's attitude has done, seems a misuse of his office as outrageous as State's Attorney William Yates' reported intention ("Dorchester News," Aug. 2, 1967) to request "waivers for the juveniles (charged with arson) to be tried as adults in the circuit court" without even considering the unfortunate involvement of the Rescue Fire Company and Mr. Kinnamon with that focus of past Negro grievances, the R.F.C. arena and pool, one wonders what kind of fireman it is who puts out fires only in the house of people he approves of; what kind of policeman it is who refuses to protect a law-abiding citizen from the depredations of a law-breaker because they both happen to be the same color; what kind of state's attorney it is who defines a juvenile as a white child.

It's a famous but ugly little irony that unsympathetic officials of the sort Chief Kinnamon appears to be, who hold the Negro community entirely responsible for its own sufferings, are usually the first to blame civic disorders on "outside agitators" - though we all know that people like H. "Rap" Brown can be effective only in communities (like my own current home city, Buffalo) that fail to take large-scale measures to correct large-scale inequities. Arson is a crime; so is riot-inciting; but permitting a man, even a "goddam hoodlum," to make a speech, even a speech that turns out to be riot-inciting, is certainly not a crime, particularly when, as in the case of most citizens of the Second Ward, the "permission" consists of one's staying home and minding one's own business. That such citizens should cynically be denied protection by their police force and the "Rescue (must we read "Red-neck"?) Fire Company is a discreditable, intolerable state of affairs; it warrants a review, by objective municipal or state authorities, of the qualifications for office of the leaders of those organizations.

My personal sentiments in the civil-rights movement are admittedly liberal; I happen to believe, for example, that local (or once-local) leaders of the movement in Cambridge, like

Mrs. Gloria Richardson Dandridge, will in generations to come be lectured upon in meetings of the Dorchester County Historical Society in the same spirit as Anna Ella Carroll, Harriet Tubman, and Thomas Holiday Hicks. But surely the misplaced resentment, or whatever accounts for such apparent lapses from duty as Chief Kinnamon's and/or the R.F.C.'s in the July disorders, must be condemned by everyone, liberal or conservative, who cares about simple justice and wishes well for the people of Cambridge.

Yours truly,
John Barth
Dept. of English
State University of New York at Buffalo
Buffalo, N.Y.

Editor's Note: The Banner was asked to withhold publication of Mr. Barth's letter pending receipt of the following telegram which arrived yesterday afternoon:

"Please add this PS to my letter of August 6: These criticisms are based on available news reports. If the reports are incorrect or incomplete, the public deserves a public reply to my criticism."

To the Editor:
"I have listened time and time again, to people justifying the eruption of riots and what can be done to stop them, etc., but to my complete shock I have not heard anyone call to express his gratitude to the wonderful men on our police forces and fire departments.

Also to my horror I was amazed to see these men were sent before committees to explain their actions. May I say these men are hired under normal conditions to keep law and order and do we as a society expect them to show the same reactions under riot conditions? I for one cannot believe that we as adults expect this of any man or men.

When you think of a comparatively few who had to control a riot until it was decided to bring in the National Guard, and how under the circumstances, these men tried to control at great odds, the upheaval; to our men of the Police Forces and Fire Departments, who courageously protected our society, may I express my sincere congratulations.

Firemen who tried to save properties, unarmed, police who tried to control violence, at great odds, we as a society should be proud of these men, and stand behind them

Very truly yours,
Virginia L. DeHoog

Cambridge Officials Blasted By Writer For Riot Conduct

John Barth, a novelist and native of Maryland's Eastern Shore, yesterday sharply rebuked Cambridge authorities for their behavior in the recent racial disorders.

Mr. Barth, on the faculty of the State University of New York, in Buffalo, said in a letter to the Dorchester News and the Cambridge Banner:

Granting that neither the national nor the local news media have a monopoly on the truth, one who maintains a high regard for the city and people of Cambridge, both Negro and white, as I do, can only be sickened by what, on reading of various sources, appears to have been a perversion of his authority by Cambridge Chief of Police Brice Kinnamon in the recent racial disorders in Cambridge, and/or a considerable irresponsibility on the part of the membership of the Rescue Fire Company.

Even the local press affirms that only a small fraction of the Cambridge Negro community was involved in the disorders, and those accused of actually setting fire to buildings and the like turn out to be, as one might have guessed, a tiny fraction of a fraction of what in other circumstances would be recognized as juvenile delinquents at worst, apparently more interested in "burning down the schoolhouse" than in correcting racial injustices.

Poorest Hour
Yet the Dorchester News reports that "firemen did not enter the area where twelve buildings were burning until an hour after the fire began, under orders of police," and Time magazine reports that "the white volunteer fire company failed to respond to the fire until it had practically burned out, leveling a school, a church, a motel, and a tavern."

To Negro pleas to send the firemen in, Chief Kinnamon is reported (Time) to have replied: "You people ... stood by and let a bunch of goddam hoodlums come in here," etc.

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Hopes And Fears
One hopes that the reports, local and national, are entirely false; one fears that they aren't.

The principal sufferers, of course, from what appears to have been the shared irresponsibility of the riot-inciters, Chief Kinnamon, the arsonists, and the (fire company) are the great majority of a responsible and too-long suffering Negro community particularly such successes-against-odds as Hansel Green, whose tragic suicide, after the loss of a lifetime's enterprise in the fire, prompts this letter. Green himself is reported (Time) to have blamed the Negro arsonists for the fire; but all things considered, mustn't the responsibility for his losses and subsequent suicide be laid as much at the door of Chief Kinnamon and those of his way of thinking as at the door of H. Rap Brown & Co.

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That such citizens should cynically be denied protection by their police force and the "rescue" (must be read "red-neck"?) Fire Company is a discreditable, intolerable state of affairs; it warrants a review, by objective municipal or state authorities, of the qualifications for office of the leaders of those organizations.

Admittedly Liberal?

My personal sentiments in the civil rights movement are admittedly liberal; I happen to believe, for example, that local (or once-local) leaders of the movement in Cambridge, like Mrs. Gloria Richardson Dandridge, will in generations to come be lectured upon in meetings of the Dorchester county Historical Society in the same spirit as Anna Ella Carroll, Harriett Tubman, and Thomas Holiday Hicks.

But surely the misplaced resentment, or whatever accounts for such apparent lapses from duty as Chief Kinnamon's and/or the R.F.C.'s in the July disorders, must be condemned by everyone, liberal or conservative, who cares about simple justice and wishes well for the people of Cambridge.

Signed, John Barth, Department of English, State University of New York, at Buffalo, Buffalo, N.Y.

Salisbury To Honor Barth, Miss Adkins

Salisbury—John S. Barth, the novelist, and Bertha S. Adkins, a Salisbury native who served in the Eisenhower administration, will be awarded honorary degrees at Salisbury State College's commencement at 10.30 A.M. Sunday in the Civic Center here.

The speaker will be Douglas Kiker, NBC news correspondent and author of two novels.

Degrees will be awarded to 530 graduates. Most will be receiving Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Arts degrees. Master of Education degrees will be awarded to ... and Master of ...

Both recipients of the Honorary Doctor of Laws degrees are natives of the Eastern Shore.

Mr. Barth, who achieved national acclaim with his novels, "The Sot-Weed Factor" and "Giles Goat-Boy," was born in nearby Cambridge and now is a visiting professor at the Johns Hopkins University.

Miss Adkins, who served as Under Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare under President Eisenhower, is a native of Salisbury and now lives in Oxford Md. In 1974 she was named chairman of the Federal Council on Aging.

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