

RACES

War in Little Egypt

Violence is no stranger to Cairo (rhymes with Pharaoh), Ill., a decaying former riverboat port at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Below the Mason-Dixon Line and closer to Little Rock than Chicago in attitude as well as mileage, the capital of the state's "Little Egypt" section is a thoroughly Southern town. Its 4,000 white citizens are determined to maintain the local system of *apartheid* over the town's 4,000 blacks that has persisted since before the Civil War.

White Cairoites responded with cross burnings and shotgun blasts when blacks attempted to integrate local schools in 1952, clubbings when they sought admittance to a community roller rink ten years later, and fire-bombings when they demanded appointment of a black police official in 1967. Last week violence erupted again in Cairo as blacks continued to seek a fuller share in the life of their tiny community.

Short-Lived Peace. Cairo's latest troubles began earlier this year when the Rev. Gerald Montroy, a white Catholic priest, arrived in town from East St. Louis and took up his duties in the heart of a black neighborhood. He drew together the local N.A.A.C.P., a cooperative association and a couple of street gangs, and with the Rev. Charles Koen, a local black minister, formed the United Front.

The new coalition charged intimidation of the black community by the "White Hats," a 600-member vigilante outfit formed and deputized during the 1967 disturbances. It also presented city officials with a list of seven demands, including appointment of a black police chief and assistant fire chief and a near equal black-white ratio in all city jobs. The demands and a boycott used to dramatize them touched off a rash of snipings, which ended only after Illinois Governor Richard Ogilvie sent in National Guardsmen to keep the peace.

The peace was short-lived. A new wave of fire-bombings swept the town early this summer, forcing the resignation of Police Chief Carl Clutts. The new chief, William Petersen, made some progress toward cooling the conflict when he took away the deputy status that had been granted the White Hats. The group disbanded, but resurfaced almost immediately in a new organization, the United Citizens for Community Action, whose leader, Lumberman Robert Cunningham, is considered excessively racist even by local white supremacists.

Headed for Anarchy. Already high, tensions exploded when the City Council forbade assemblies of more than two persons anywhere in town. United Front lawyers went before a federal district court seeking an injunction to strike down the ordinance, and scores of blacks gathered at Montroy's church for a march on police headquarters. When club-wielding state and local police drove

them back into the all-Negro Pyramid Courts housing project, weapons appeared in black and white hands, and Cairo seemed headed for anarchy.

In a futile effort to quiet matters, Chief Petersen and Mayor Lee Stenzel resigned. Their action prompted Cunningham's group to cancel a planned rally, but failed to prevent shooting. Automatic rifle fire crackled through Pyramid Courts and two Negroes were slightly wounded.

Even though Cairo's Negroes lost the skirmish, they may have won a larger battle. A federal judge struck down the town's anti-picketing ordinance and the Governor's office has promised Cairo an immediate grant of \$290,000 for community projects. More important, the City Council, weary of both the tension and the fighting, voted to meet with "any interested parties," including the United Front, in search of a truce in Cairo's war between the races.

BILL MAHAN—LEVITON-ATLANTA



A DIFFERENT BURNING: Ku Klux Klan leaders claiming to represent 350 of North Carolina's 1,200 Klansmen incinerated their membership cards on a cross outside Concord, N.C., after breaking away from the United Klans of America. The split over control of funds and local chapter autonomy pointed up the nationwide decline of hooded white supremacists. Klan membership has dropped in three years from 14,000 to 6,500, reversing the revival of the Klan during the first years of the civil rights era.

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