

by Irving Bernstein

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The negotiators returned to the table that evening, May 8, the next day, May 9, and into the morning of May 10, 1963. There were no demonstrations during that period. Under Marshall's watchful eye, Vann and Young worked out the Birmingham Truce Agreement. The essentials were as follows:

1. Fitting rooms desegregated within 3 days after the end of demonstrations.
2. The removal of Jim Crow signs from washrooms, restrooms, and drinking fountains within 30 days of the establishment of the new city government.
3. Lunch-counter desegregation within 60 days of the new city government taking office.
4. "A program of upgrading Negro employment" [the fact that it would involve only one sales person or cashier was not published].
5. Creation of a Committee on Racial Problems and Employment within 15 days of the cessation of demonstrations.
6. The release of those who had been arrested [nothing was announced about the bail arrangement].

That afternoon, Friday, May 10, SCLC called a press conference at the Gaston Motel, its headquarters and the place where King was staying. Shuttleworth was allowed to read a laundered version of the truce agreement. King then hailed it as "a great victory" and the first step toward the total desegregation of Birmingham. He promptly left for Atlanta. Smyer announced tersely that his committee had made an agreement, but carefully noted that he did not speak for any city official, the courts, or the board of education. Robert Kennedy stated that the agreement was "a tremendous step forward for Birmingham, for Alabama, and for the South generally." Marshall went back to Washington.

This optimism was not shared by the opposition. Connor said the Negroes "didn't gain a thing" and urged white people to boycott the stores that agreed to desegregate. Arthur Hanes, the "old" mayor, denounced the agreement as "capitulation by certain weak-kneed white people under threats of violence by the rabble-rousing Negro, King." He added omi-

nously, "I certainly am not bound by the concessions granted to the terrorist, King, and I have no intention of doing one thing to implement or facilitate these agreements." Boutwell made a noncommittal statement, though he let word out privately that, once in power, he would help effectuate the agreement. In any case, there was now quiet in the streets, and the state troopers sent in by the governor left town.

On Saturday night, May 11, about a thousand berobed Klansmen from Alabama and Georgia gathered in suburban Bessemer's Moose Club Park for a rally. As Michael Dorman wrote, "Two flaming crosses sent eerie shafts of light shimmering across the park. Racist speeches were shouted into the night." The Klansmen began leaving the rally about 10:15.

At 10:30 a bomb thrown from a moving car hit the front of the Reverend A. D. King's house and made much of it a shambles. Fortunately, King, his wife, and their five children were in the rear and escaped unharmed. At 11:58 another bomb exploded at the Gaston Motel in the room immediately beneath the one Martin Luther King, Jr., had occupied. He had offered the room to the Reverend Joseph Lowery, who planned to stay there but later changed his mind and went home to Nashville. The motel was severely damaged, but injuries were minor.

An angry crowd of blacks gathered outside the motel. Since this was Saturday night, many had been drinking. As the local police and firemen arrived, the blacks attacked with rocks and bricks. Soon Colonel Al Lingco, Wallace's tough enforcer, arrived with his heavily armed state troopers. Connor sent in his dogs and his special six-wheeled armored riot car. Fires started and a full-scale riot erupted, which raged for four hours. By 4:30 Sunday morning the police had sealed off the area. Hedrick Smith wrote in the *New York Times*:

Much of the nine-block area looked as if a vicious storm had struck. Smashed and disabled police cruisers were abandoned in the streets. Seven stores and homes lay charred by fire. There was a hole in the brick wall of the A. G. Gaston Motel, caused by an explosion. Plate-glass windows were shattered in store after store in the Negro area.

Hospitals treated more than fifty people who had been wounded.

Burke Marshall, resting at his farm in West Virginia, was awakened at 2:00 a.m. with the disastrous news from Birmingham: the Attorney General shortly thereafter at his home in McLean, Virginia. The President, spending the weekend at Camp David, was briefed when he awoke. Helicopters brought all three to Washington. On late Sunday afternoon the President met at the White House with the Attorney General, Marshall, Katzenbach, McNamara, Vance, and Army Chief of Staff General Wheeler.

The immediate question was whether the aroused and tough blacks would

by Army Arrington

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