

After the Riot

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In 1917 Texarkana businessmen formed an interracial council. It was not a happy venture, and did not last long. The one meeting ended in a near-riot, and for 47 years Negro-white relations continued catch-as-catch-can, sometimes simmering, sometimes exploding. But last month, after the new civil rights bill became law and there was another near riot, this twin city's power structure tried again. The new beginning promises to be amicable and possibly profitable.

Four persons were shot on a Sunday afternoon, July 5, at Lake Texarkana; the next day Negroes and whites met in an emergency session. In the background were the televised proceeding of St. Augustine, Fla. "We are not going to be another St. Augustine," one businessman said.

Texarkana had not prepared for difficulties that were certain to proceed from the enactment of the new civil rights law. This is probably typical of this entire section of East Texas. The junior college and Catholic and Episcopalian schools here were integrated, and both public school systems—Arkansas and Texas—begin desegregation this fall, but there was no master plan to desegregate public accommodations.

As yet the interracial group has taken no action except for agreeing to try to avoid violence and to see that the law is enforced on a fair and equal basis. Nevertheless, although other interracial groups have existed from time to time, this is the first one promoted by the power structure itself.

The incident which inspired the group's hasty formation occurred at Lake Texarkana, a Texas lake that is partly in Bowie, partly in Cass County. Negroes had previously used the beaches, but not frequently. The violence occurred on the Cass County side after 75 or so Negroes had been swimming several minutes. As they swam, whites spread broken glass over the ground between the beach and the parking lot. As the Negroes headed for their cars a white man brandished a bottle at them. Then a white man got a shotgun out of his car. Later, someone got a .22. When the scuffling was over three Negroes and one white were shot, none seriously, and a white had been cut by glass. Twenty-three of the Negroes were arrested later in Texarkana, Tex., for traffic violations and transferred to Linden, the Cass County seat, where they were charged with inciting a riot. One was also charged with assault with intent

to murder. All were released on bond to await grand jury action this month. No white was arrested.

Cass County is generally conceded to have a less tolerant racial climate than Bowie County. Many persons classify it with Harrison County (Marshall) and Marion County (Jefferson). "It's just like Mississippi," a Negro told me.

THE INTERRACIAL COUNCIL is working along slowly. L. E. Gilliland, manager of the Texarkana, Tex., Chamber of Commerce, says "It's going along real fine." Alex G. Sanderson, Jr., an attorney who is chairman of the group's special committee composed of himself, two other whites, and two Negroes, points out, "Our overall purpose is to avoid violence. A subsidiary purpose, as of now, is to keep open the lines of communication between the two races." Emphasizing that he can speak only for himself, Sanderson adds: "We would like to avoid any officious attitudes. We haven't acted yet in the sense you're talking of [to desegregate the city]. Ours is a stand-by group, and actually I can't anticipate anything that may come up."

There is a general reluctance of members, white and black, to "speak for the group," and this is one of its weaknesses. An outside observer also gets the impression that members of the group have not agreed on their goals. Logically, complete desegregation of all facilities covered by the civil rights law is involved, but pressure toward this end has, in the main, been generated by Negro leaders only.

Many of the group's potential problems seem to be being solved quietly without the group's guidance. Negro and white youths started testing local public accommodations soon after President Johnson signed the civil rights bill. Leading restaurants, motels and hotels, lunch counters, and a downtown cafeteria have desegregated, but there are still a number of hold-outs.

Recreation is still the major stronghold of segregation. Neither Texarkana has a swimming pool for Negroes, though whites have enjoyed theirs for years: Negroes have swum in ponds, barrow pits, and country streams and rivers. Recently a Negro boy drowned in a stock pond, and a letter-to-the-editor of the local paper pointed out he might not have, had he had a city pool to swim in.

MORE THAN A DECADE ago, Texarkana, Tex., voted a bond issue. John Jay Jones, a slave's son who is now a

prominent funeral home owner and a local NAACP leader, recalls the situation: "It was before the 1954 Supreme Court decision. The bond issue was over \$1,000,000. \$75,000 was earmarked for Negro recreation, none for white recreation. But the city fathers diverted from the Negro funds to fix up Spring Lake Park." A modern swimming pool was built there. "This left between \$12,000 and \$15,000." Jones said he was called and offered the remaining sum for Negro facilities. "I promptly refused to accept," he said, shaking his head. "It wouldn't buy the ground we'd need!"

One-fourth of the cities' combined population (about 50,000) is Negro. The past clearly indicates there are large pockets of race hatred here. There is violence in the history. The last lynching was in the early 1940's, when a Negro man, accused of raping a white woman, was dragged down Broad Street, which is the main commercial stem, and hanged. The FBI investigated, but the murderers were never publicly identified.

In 1956 Negroes tried to integrate Texarkana College. Henry Stilwell, Sr., then president of the college, addressed an inflammatory meeting of "White America" downtown. Although the Negro applicants qualified, they were turned back from the college by a yelling, gravel-throwing mob of pickets. Texas Rangers (Allan Shivers was governor then) and Bowie County sheriff's officers stood by and watched. Afterward a cross was burned in front of John Jay Jones' funeral home and a half-dozen shots were fired into the building. A Negro-owned service station was shot up, too. Stilwell has since died. The junior college is integrated, and this year it conferred degrees upon Negroes for the first time. This summer it recruited its first Negro football players, two local high school stars.

But violence still throbs just beneath the surface. A cross was burned a few months ago on a Negro's lawn. There was the lake incident. Recently when Negroes attended an all-white church, some of their white sponsors were threatened by anonymous callers.

At the Bowie County Democratic convention this summer, John Connally conservatives cooperated with extreme right wingers to pass a resolution praising Gov. George Wallace of Alabama and slamming the civil rights bill. Although a handful of white and Negro liberals yelled disapproval of the resolution, white "moderates" sat by dumb and the resolution passed overwhelmingly.

These are the things the new interracial group must face ultimately. Since they haven't had much practice in such things, they have a lot to learn, and they cannot know how much time they have, but as communities more anti-Negro than the Texarkanans have learned, the job can be done. □