

Here's How Harlem Felt About Slayer's Acquittal

(How did the residents of Harlem feel when a New York grand jury refused to indict a police lieutenant whose fatal shooting of a 15-year-old Negro boy incited bloody violence in the upper Manhattan colored community. Paul Weissman sought the answer to this question for the New York Herald Tribune. His observations follow:)

The wooden barricades went up around police precinct houses in Harlem as soon as the Manhattan grand jury refused to indict Police Lt. Thomas R. Gilligan.

When Lt. Gilligan shot 15-year-old James Powell, Harlem tempers began simmering, finally boiling over into the rioting that ripped the Negro ghetto. When the grand jury declined to indict the lieutenant, more of the same was feared. A long week end was approaching. Would the rioting recur?

The long week end ended yesterday. There had been no violence.

But Harlem no longer needs holiday spirit to explode. The week end was over. The fears remained.

"It won't happen again, because nobody's going to give the 'go' signal," said Capt. Lloyd Sealey, first Negro to hold command in Harlem's 28th precinct.

That was the day the news of the jury decision spread, the day the barricades went up.

The next day and all last week it was quiet. The only crowds on 126th St. were the block-long lines outside the Apollo Theater where Johnny Butler was on stage. At the corner of Lenox Ave., George Simmons, a Black Muslim, was sing-singing:

"If you don't want to drink black coffee, eat black bread or mar-ry black then go in the river and drop dead." More policemen than pedestrians were listening to him and the chorus of "A-mens" was weak. Simmons did not mention Lt. Gilligan.

NON-INFLAMMATORY

Negro leaders unanimously denounced the grand jury

point a special prosecutor to re-investigate the case.

But feelings were intense after the Grand Jury finding. Predictably, they varied in different parts of the city.

In Seagate, the city-owned East Bronx housing project where Jimmy Powell lived, neighbors were stunned and shocked.

"Gilligan," said Mrs. Loretta Green, biting down hard on the double 'l', "that man is free. If Jimmy had been hit by a car or slipped on a banana peel, you know, like it was his own fault. Then OK. But to be shot down like a dog and let his murderer get away with it. How can you ever believe a white man after that?"

"That was a nice boy who used to loan his clothes out when the other kids didn't have a shirt to go to a local gig. There are still a lot of kids around here wearing Jimmy's clothes, so how do you think we feel?"

The refrain in Seagate, as in Harlem, was the same: "Did a 200-pound man really have to shoot a 115-pound boy to protect himself?"

On E. 76th St., where the incident occurred near Robert Wagner Junior High School, the answer was yes.

"I got 300 tenants here," said a doorman, "and they all go with the jury. What would you do in the spot he was in? You don't know those animals. They used to throw garbage in this doorway so it would look like their home."

A district police lieutenant pointed out that no one knows what a man must do to handle a crisis situation, "but I'll tell you this," he said. "If that Grand Jury didn't acquit Gilligan, this city would be without a police force in 24 hours."

IMPULSE PARALYZED

There were many reasons it was quiet in Harlem early last

week. Cool weather was one. Another was that virtually 98 per cent of residents had expected Lt. Gilligan to be acquitted. Others argued that frustration and anger can cut so deeply that the impulse to violence is paralyzed. Politically conscious Negroes say the community has been made to think violence can only help the cause of Sen. Barry Goldwater and that if he is elected, they can "forget about the Emancipation Proclamation."

But there are still other voices. "Look, we know there is no difference between New York and Mississippi justice when it comes to black vs. white," Percy Sutton, a lawyer, was saying because he was talking to a white reporter. "Instead of dogs and fire hoses, up here they use live bullets. Did a 200-pound policeman really have to kill a 115-pound boy to protect himself?"

"Those downtown people are using the law to slap us in the face," a youth worker said. "It's going to be the same thing when the Police Review Board takes its orders just like the Grand Jury." "Do you really think anyone here expected any more?" his assistant asked. "Look, nobody's gonna whip it up so you might just as well go back downtown," still another said. At CORE chapter headquarters, a one-room office over Jay's Bar on 126th St., one worker looked up at a placard that had the telephone numbers of two news services, of the Amsterdam Courier, the Herald Tribune, and the Times and the Post. He said:

"The Grand Jury action... the Grand Jury action... and that was all. This kind of pain and sense of injustice was general in Harlem and there are two opposing views of what it means.

though both ultimately lead to the same conclusion.

"As a result of the Gilligan incident," a fund-raiser said, "there has been an almost total polarization of black and white. It has been coming for a long time. Now the era of hypocrisy is over and the black man expects more than talk. He wants jobs, not unemployment checks. Clean streets, not promises. Action, not talk. The barriers are up and somebody's got to get a Marshall Plan going for our side."

"You want to know why it's quiet?" asked Bernard Dyer, a worker for HARYOU, "It's simply that the Negro movement has taken its next step. The day of protests is over. The day for programs is here."

If there is a new mood in Harlem it is going to need an awful lot of growins: help all

over this city. Because back on E. 76th St. where a 15-year-old boy was killed last July, there was still one man who was saying:

"You know, fella, there's too much about this here race problem. In the old days, a cop shot a kid stealing and that was it. Today, all you got is fuss and feathers."

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