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The Trials of Atlanta

UNTIL THIS week, the City of Atlanta had maintained a glowing reputation as one of the hardest-working communities in the building of interracial harmony and progress. Through the efforts and cooperation of whites and Negroes, it established itself as a model of peaceful integration, a model studied by other Southern communities trying to solve their own racial problems.

Then Stokely Carmichael came to town with his inflammatory sales pitch for "black power" and his rantings against "the white devils." And on Tuesday night, Carmichael's loud-speaker campaign came to fruition with the rioting of a mob. This mob attacked the mayor, who tried to reason with its members. It attacked the policemen who tried to restore order. But it did more—it attacked the concept Atlanta has represented, the concept that real compromise and cooperation can achieve a spirit in which all races can work together to build a better city.

THIS WAS perhaps the greatest damage that the mob did. Now other city fathers may be tempted to shrug their shoulders and say: "What's the use? Atlanta has done as much as any city in the South to make cooperative integration work, and look what happened."

Dallas citizens in particular may be discouraged by Atlanta's experience, for the two cities are very much alike in their populations, in their economies and in their attempts to build through interracial cooperation.

But before we decide to abandon the path that Dallas and Atlanta have

tried to follow, it would serve us well to look deeper into the events of the current week. There is more to the story than the headlined activities of Carmichael's SNCC barnstormers or of the hundreds of young rioters.

We should note that there were Negro as well as white leaders who tried, at the risk of their safety, to quell the violence. There were Negro as well as white policemen who skillfully restored order before the riot turned into a bloodbath.

And, perhaps most important, the Negro Atlantans, local civil-rights leaders and ministers, were the ones who organized a door-to-door campaign the following day to counter Carmichael's efforts to turn the city into a battleground.

IN SHORT, in Atlanta, there is a durable fabric of society, a fabric that has been woven of both white and black threads through the years of cooperation. The efforts of these years have not been as dramatic or as well-publicized as the riot, but in the final analysis they should prove to be more lasting in their results.

These results of the work of men of good will will not be destroyed overnight by men of Carmichael's stripe. Rational Atlantans of both races cannot stand by and see their community torn asunder, because those of both races know that they have a stake in its future.

The Rev. Samuel Williams, president of the Atlanta chapter of the NAACP, summed it up most succinctly when he declared:

"Atlanta is not by far a perfect city but it is too great to be destroyed by simpleminded bigotry."