

EDITORIALS

A New Star In King's Crown

Atlanta's Negro riot — and no unruly gathering with overtones of violence should slide by under the euphemism of "demonstration" — shows that in the field of racial progress as in so many others, you just can't satisfy some people.

Atlanta has long been regarded as a municipal beacon of Negro progress and interracial goodwill shining in a darkened wilderness. It has been held up to other areas of the South as proof that Negroes and whites can jointly build a great city with opportunities and benefits for all, that progress can substitute for "never" and prosperity for "freedom now."

BUT SUDDENLY there is a smirch upon the image of Atlanta which had been as golden as the dome of the state capitol, sitting there on its own little Acropolis. Atlanta has had a race riot, its Negroes have poured into the streets shouting "black power," its mayor, second in succession with proved records of friendship to the Negroes of that city, has been attacked while he talked with the mob seeking an end to the trouble.

It is no more logical to expect all Negroes in a city to be wise and logical and understanding than it is to expect all white citizens of a city so to be. But it is tragic that a relative handful of nincompoops can destroy for the reasonable, hard-working and understanding majority of Negroes in a city such as Atlanta most of the goodwill they have enjoyed, and put sand in the gears of continued progress.

ATLANTA'S RIOT, and the personal, physical attack upon its pro-Negro mayor, give obvious excuse to other cities and other leaders to reject efforts for cooperation with Negroes for improved racial relations and opportunities. "If they can't even be satisfied in Atlanta, there's no point in trying," is going to be a general reaction.

Thus once more the excesses of the "black power" movement will react against the best interests of the vast majority of Negroes. And everyone should remember that the rioters in every city, north or south, represent but a minute portion of the Negro population of each city involved.

But this excess was itself inevitable. No matter the need, as Martin Luther King interpreted it, for focusing public attention upon the needs and wishes of the Negroes, when the civil rights effort took to the streets it laid the groundwork for rioting. And the successes which met Dr. King's tactic of provocation inevitably planted in other minds the idea that it pays to riot.

THE PARTICULAR riot in Atlanta was triggered by the shooting of a Negro suspect in a car theft investigation. Circumstances surrounding the shooting weren't clear in press reports of the riot. But it was white police against a Negro suspect, and to the militant "black power" groups anything a white policeman does that a Negro doesn't like is "police brutality."

This, too, is an outgrowth of the King doctrine that there is a moral obligation to disobey some laws. From this sprang the idea that you obey only the laws you want to obey, which is the same as saying you don't have to obey laws at all and those who try to make you do so are oppressive brutes.

Martin Luther King and his tactics of violent non-violence came from Atlanta, and now they have returned. In addition to all the progress with which he is credited, he must be credited too with Atlanta's riot.

And with the fact that the same day the wires carried the story of Atlanta's night of violence, they carried the word that Senate leaders concede passage of the newest civil rights bill is virtually impossible.