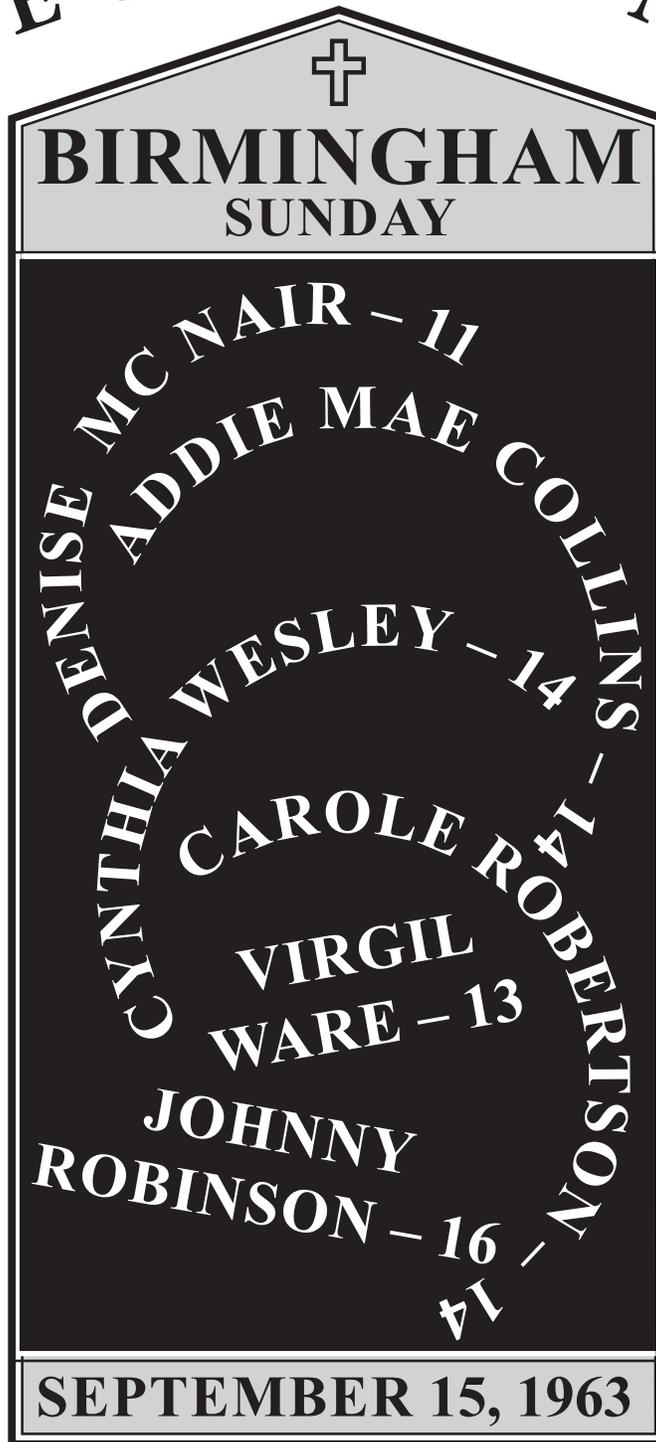


T E S T I M O N Y



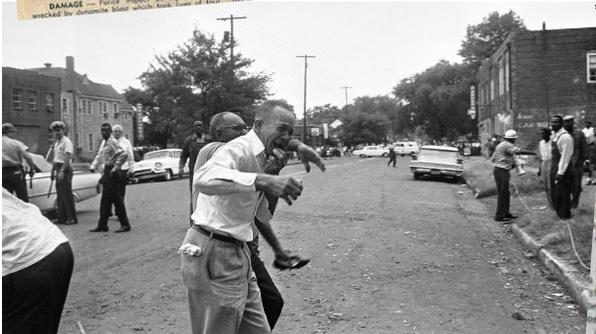
2022

*Collected Documents from Internet Sources
and Past Remembrances in Miami, Florida*

SEPTEMBER 15, 1963



Sarah Jean Collins, 12, younger sister of Addie Mae Collins, lost an eye in the blast.



A grieving relative is led away from the site of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, on September 15, 1963. Four black girls were killed and at least 14 others were injured, sparking riots and a national outcry.

A DAY NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN



R E M E M B E R I N G



Addie Mae Collins



Carole Robertson



Cynthia Wesley



Denise McNair

SEPTEMBER 15, 1963

2022

REFLECTIONS FROM TWO ICONIC WOMEN OF BIRMINGHAM



“But I’ve often pointed out that some of my very earliest childhood memories are the sounds of dynamite exploding. Homes across the street from where I grew up were bombed when they were purchased by black people who were moving into a neighborhood that had been zoned for whites. So many bombings took place in the neighborhood where I grew up — and we now know that Chambliss was probably responsible — that the neighborhood came to be called “Dynamite Hill.” And, of course, as you know, the city of Birmingham was known as “Bombingham.” In fact, on September 4th, 1963, less than two weeks before the 16th Street church bombing, the home of the leading civil rights attorney in Birmingham, Arthur Shores, was bombed. And that house was right down the street from our house...”

– Birmingham native Dr. Angela Y. Davis

Interview with “Democracy Now,” September 16, 2013

Source: https://www.democracynow.org/2013/9/16/terrorism_is_part_of_our_history

“Well, we knew those little girls. Denise McNair was my little friend from kindergarten,” she recalls. “And she was a playmate and I just couldn’t believe that she was dead. And she was not, of course, the only one. Addie Mae Collins was in my uncle’s homeroom in school. These were innocent children. This was homegrown terrorism. I know a little bit of what it’s like to have somebody try to terrorize a community. These little girls weren’t gonna hurt anybody. They didn’t have any political power. This was just meant to terrorize the community.”

– Interview with former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice,

who was 8 years old at the time of the bombing

and can remember her house, two miles away, shaking.

Reported by Katie Couric, “60 Minutes,” CBS-TV, September 24, 2006

Source: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/09/21/60minutes/main2029782.shtm>



Introduction

We begin this necessary Remembrance as we must, by invoking our traditional wisdom, by giving thanks for this Gift of Life while we still have it, for the challenges that strengthen us, and for the opportunities with which we are blessed to make this world better for humanity and for our future generations than it has been in the past. (This is especially true in these convulsive times of social strife and after the worst of a global pandemic that struck African Americans hardest of all, largely due to centuries of prior injustice, as we are challenged to envision and create the healthier, more equitable and harmonious society of the post-pandemic future.)

In that spirit, we thank and ask the Blessings and Guidance of the Creator and of the Spirits of our Ancestors to ensure that the words and images shared here are worthy of the Remembrance of a fateful day in history whose consequences live with us forever, and therefore must not be forgotten or lost from our consciousness.

We also give thanks, as we must, to our Mother Earth for all of the resources that make this Remembrance possible, and to the Indigenous Ancestors of this land for their wise stewardship of it over thousands of years, so that it continues to sustain us and nurture, even in these times of such great imbalance, ignorance, waste, and pollution.

The original, shorter version of this commemorative booklet was developed for the landmark 2015 Miami Premiere screening of Spike Lee's excellent documentary film "4 Little Girls," presented by the Kuumba Artists Collective of South Florida at the African Heritage Cultural Arts Center, on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, in the heart of the historic Liberty City district. The booklet has been improved and expanded in subsequent years with additional images, articles, and commentaries, most notably the inclusion of more information about the two teenage boys who were also murdered in Birmingham on that day.

It will be noticed that the various compiled items in this booklet of Remembrance come from different time periods – some immediately after the event, and some from recent years – in no particular chronological order, so that some of the facts reported from different sources may seem to be contradictory or incorrect in the details, particularly those reports closest to the actual time of the bombing, emerging from the inevitable confusion. But this, too, brings to life the shock, pain, and outrage of that moment, and all of the contributions have important insights to share.

This is indeed a Remembrance of all lives that were directly touched by the senseless murders of those six young people in one day, and of the physical and emotional injuries that have been inflicted on so many others, which have not ceased to haunt the devastated family members of all these victims, the Birmingham community, the nation, and the world. As such, this is also Remembrance of the strength, solidarity, resilience, and resolve that continue to inspire us as we still face such tragedies as senseless child homicides, and violence and deaths at the hands of the very police who are charged with protecting life.

Inevitably, this anniversary even connects us to the lives of the perpetrators of the murders in Birmingham as well, whose pathologically warped motives were both products and producers of the society that we know today. (What signal is sent to the nation's youth, then and now, that such murderers of people of African Americans and other peoples of color, as in the previous centuries of slavery and Native American genocide, can so routinely go virtually unpunished, as if these stolen lives simply do not matter?)

All of our lives have been shaped in some way by the incidents in Birmingham, Alabama, on September 15, 1963, even those who are born today, and those yet to be born tomorrow. It is proverbial that "Knowledge is Power." Knowing this history is to know ourselves better, and to know where we come from is necessary to know where we are going.

Dinizulu Gene Tinnie

*A founding member, Kuumba Artists Collective
Miami, Florida, September, 2020*

The 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing (1963)



16th Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama . Carol Highsmith Photo

The 16th Street Baptist was a large and prominent church located downtown, just blocks from Birmingham’s commercial district and City Hall.

On September 15, 1963, the congregation of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama greeted each other before the start of Sunday service. In the basement of the church, five young girls, two of them sisters, gathered in the ladies room in their best dresses, happily chatting about the first days of the new school year. It was Youth Day and excitement filled the air; they were going to take part in the Sunday adult service.

Just before 11 o’clock, instead of rising to begin prayers the congregation was knocked to the ground. As a bomb exploded under the steps of the church, they sought safety under the pews and shielded each other from falling debris. In the basement, four little girls, 14-year-olds Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, and 11-year-old Cynthia Wesley, were killed. Addie’s sister Susan survived, but was permanently blinded.

In the moments after the explosion, questions hung in the air - ‘Where is my loved one?’ ‘Are they ok?’ ‘How much longer can this violence last?’ They did not ask if this was an accident, they knew that this was a bomb that had exploded as it had dozens of times before in “Bombingham.”

(Continued on page 7)

The Aftermath

Upon learning of the bombing at the Church, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. sent a telegram to Alabama Governor George Wallace, a staunch and vocal segregationist, stating bluntly: ‘The blood of our little children is on your hands.’ The brutal attack and the deaths of the four little girls shocked the nation and drew international attention to the violent struggle for civil rights in Birmingham. Many whites were as outraged by the incident as blacks and offered services and condolences to the families. Over, 8,000 people attended the girls’ funeral service at Reverend John Porter’s Sixth Avenue Baptist Church.

The deaths of the four girls was followed two months later by the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, causing an outpouring of national grief, galvanizing the civil rights movement and ensuring the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.



*16th Street Baptist Church interior after the bombing
Birmingham Public Library*

Why This Church?

16th Street Baptist was a large and prominent church located downtown, just blocks from Birmingham’s commercial district and City Hall. Since its construction in 1911, the church had served as the centerpiece of the city’s African American community, functioning as a meeting place, social center, and lecture hall. Because of its size, location, and importance to the community, the church served as headquarters for civil rights mass meetings and rallies in the early 1960s.

Birmingham was the most segregated city in the United States and in April 1963. After an invitation by Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth to come help desegregate Birmingham, the city became the focus of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The desegregation campaign conceived by Shuttlesworth was known as “Project C” and was to be a series of nonviolent protests and boycotts.

Despite resistance from some of the church’s leadership and members of the congregation, the 16th Street Baptist Church joined the SCLC in their campaign. The church became the departure point for many of the demonstrations that took place in the city. On May 2, 1963, students ranging in age from eight to eighteen gathered at the church to march downtown and talk to the new mayor about segregation. After leaving the church they were met by police and many were jailed. By the time the “Children’s Crusade” and the ensuing demonstrations ended on May 10th, thousands of children and adults had been injured by fire hoses and attack dogs and incarcerated by order of “Bull” Connor, Commissioner of Public Safety.

The church came to be viewed by many as a symbol and a rallying place for civil rights activists; and it became the focal point for racial tensions and white hostility towards the civil rights movement in Birmingham. *(Continued on page 8)*

1963 Birmingham Church Bombing (continued from page 7)

Why Now?

Due to the success of the Birmingham Campaign, on May 10, 1963, the city agreed to desegregate lunch counters, restrooms, drinking fountains, and fitting rooms, to hire African Americans in stores as salesmen and clerks, and to release the jailed demonstrators. White segregationists opposed desegregation, however, and violence continued to plague the city.

On May 11th, a bomb destroyed the Gaston Motel where Martin Luther King, Jr. had been staying and another damaged the house of King's brother, A. D. King. NAACP attorney Arthur Shores' house was fire bombed on August 20th and September 4th in retaliation for his attempts to help integrate the Birmingham public schools. On September 9th, President John F. Kennedy took control of the Alabama National Guard, which Governor Wallace was using to block court-ordered desegregation of public schools in Birmingham. Around that time Robert Chambliss, who would later be named as a suspect in the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing, foreshadowed the violence to come when he told his niece, "Just wait until Sunday morning and they'll beg us to let them segregate."



*Bomb-damaged home of Arthur Shores, September 5, 1963
Marion S. Trikosko, LOC, LC-U9- 10409-18A*

Eventual Justice

The FBI office in Birmingham launched an immediate investigation. In a 1965 memo to J. Edgar Hoover, FBI agents named four men as primary suspects for the bombing - Thomas Blanton, Robert Chambliss, Bobby Frank Cherry, and Herman Cash. All four men were members of Birmingham's Cahaba River Group, a splinter group of the Eastview Klavern #13 chapter of the Ku Klux Klan. Eastview Klavern #13 was considered one of the most violent groups in the South and was responsible for the 1961 attacks on the Freedom Riders at the Trailways bus station in Birmingham.

The investigation ended in 1968 with no indictments. According to the FBI, although they had identified the four suspects, witnesses were reluctant to talk and physical evidence was lacking. In addition, information from FBI surveillances was not admissible in court. Hoover chose not to approve arrests, stating, "The chance of prosecution in state or federal court is remote." Although Chambliss was convicted on an explosives charge, no charges were filed in the 1960s for the bombing of the church.

In 1971, Alabama Attorney General Bill Baxley reopened the case, requesting evidence from the FBI and building trust with witnesses who had been reluctant to testify. Investigators discovered that, while the FBI had accumulated evidence against the bombers, under orders from Hoover they had not disclosed the evidence to county prosecutors. Robert Chambliss was convicted of murder on November 14, 1977; however, it would be decades before the other suspects were tried for their crimes. In 2000, the FBI assisted Alabama state authorities in bringing charges against the remaining suspects. On May 1, 2001, Thomas Blanton was convicted and sentenced to life in prison. In 2002, Bobby Frank Cherry was convicted as well. His boasts that he was the one who planted the bomb next to the church wall helped send Cherry to prison for life. Herman Cash died in 1994 having never been prosecuted for the murders of the four girls.

Source: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/16thstreetbaptist.htm>, accessed 09/01/17

The Bombing

By Mark Gado

By 9 a.m. on September 15, 1963, the class, which consisted of 80 teenage girls, began to assemble in the lobby of the Sixteenth Street Bethel Baptist Church [16th Street Baptist]. Though it was still summer, the morning was cool and crisp, with a temperature just into the 60s. Autumn was only a week away and it would be a welcome relief from the summer heat. Ella C. Demand led the class and the focus of instruction was “the love that forgives.” The girls descended into the basement while several hundred adults, who were attending formal Sunday services, were in the area on the first floor directly above Mrs. Demand’s class. Most of the girls knew each other and had grown up in the same neighborhood. They had attended the same schools and were all members of the same church.

The spiritual leader of the church was Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, whose home had been bombed no less than three times. Once, on Christmas Day 1958, his home was completely demolished by an explosion. Police Chief Connor’s reaction was to ask Reverend Shuttlesworth to take a lie detector test to clear his name in the bombing of his own house. These tactics attempted to place suspicion on leaders of the black civil rights movement. The goal was to portray them as “rabble-rousers,” agitators or un-American. They were frequently described as Communist sympathizers.

As Reverend John Cross delivered his sermon to a packed church, the girls listened attentively to Mrs. Demand’s instruction in the basement. There were a few latecomers and the students turned to look as they entered the large room. Denise McNair, 12 [11], who was in the Brownies and loved to play baseball, strolled in from the lounge area. She saw Addie Mae Collins, 14, sitting on the floor giggling with her classmates. In the group were Cynthia Wesley, 14, who played in the local school band, and Carol Robertson, 14, who aspired to be a singer. It was a friendly time and most of the group undoubtedly was looking forward to the end of Sunday class so they could return to their homes and play for the rest of the beautiful day. Then, at 10:22 a.m., their world ended.

A massive explosion shook the church to its foundation. The noise was deafening. The entire Sixteenth Street wall of the building collapsed into the room amid screams of terror. Broken glass flew through the air like bullets. Rocks and chunks of mortar crashed into the ceiling and into opposite ends of the basement. Those that survived said the incredible force of the explosion propelled the little girls through the air like rag dolls. “It sounded like the whole world was shaking,” said Reverend Cross later in court. “And the building, I thought, was going to collapse!” All the stained glass windows in the upper part of the church were shattered. The basement room filled with fine dust and all the lights went out. But one windowpane, which later became symbolic of the explosion, had remained mostly intact. Only the face of Jesus had been blown away.

Source: http://www.trutv.com/library/crime/terrorists_spies/terrorists/birmingham_church/4.html

The history of the 1963 16th Street Baptist church bombing

BY Sharelle M. Burt

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Tuesday, September 15, 2015, 4:02 PM

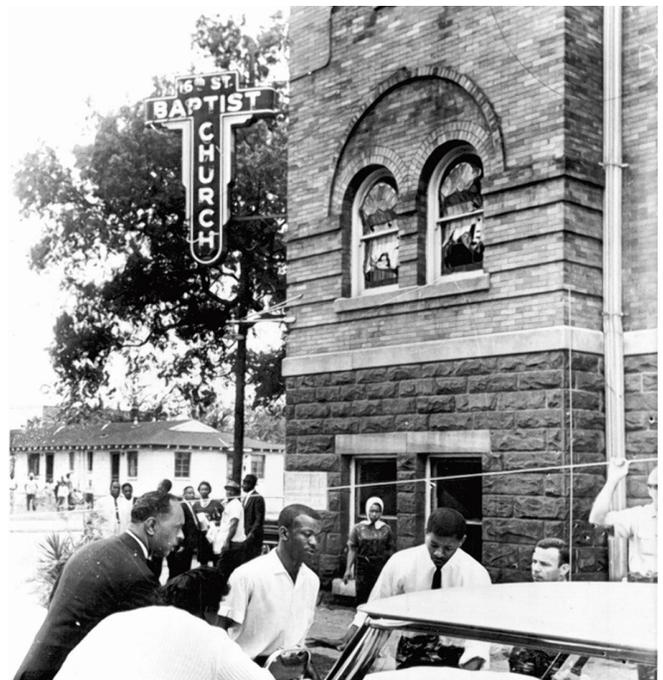


(From l-r) Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, Addie Mae Collins and Cynthia Wesley (AP)

Just three weeks after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his groundbreaking “I Have a Dream” speech, an Alabama church was bombed before a Sunday service — killing four girls and injuring several others. The horrific scene at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham was one of several tragedies at the peak of the Civil Rights movement that helped transform the nation.

On the 52nd anniversary of the bombing, here are several facts everyone should know of the senseless crime:

1. Members of the Ku Klux Klan called in bomb threats to the church several times prior to the bombing.
2. The bomb went off at approximately 10:22 a.m. on Sept. 15, 1963 as 200 church members were attending Sunday school classes .
3. The bodies of Addie Mae Collins, Carole Robertson and Cynthia Wesley, all 14, were found in the basement bathroom under the rubble with 11-year-old Denise McNair.
4. Sarah Collins, 10, was also in the basement bathroom and lost her right eye at the time of explosion.
5. Four Klan members — Thomas Edwin Blanton Jr., Herman Frank Cash, Robert Edward Chambliss and Bobby Frank Cherry — planted the bomb, made of 15 sticks of dynamite, underneath the church front steps.



One of the victims being removed from the historic church.



A twisted and broken stained glass window from the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. (AP)



A large crater left by a bomb that exploded near the church basement. (AP)

6. The four white supremacists were not charged until 1977, when Robert Chambliss was convicted of first-degree murder of victim Denise McNair. Blanton and Cherry were later convicted in 2001 and 2002 and sentenced to life in prison.

7. The church bombing was the third in 11 days.

8. The violent explosion eventually led to the Civil Rights Act being signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965.

9. Several movies and books depict what happened in Birmingham including “4 Little Girls,” directed by Spike Lee and “Selma,” directed by Ava DuVernay.

10. On May 24, 2013, President Obama awarded a Congressional Gold Medal posthumously to the four girls killed in 1963, presenting the medal to the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.

Source: <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/10-key-facts-16th-street-baptist-church-bombings-article-1.2361565>

One small shoe:

A legacy of the Birmingham church bombing

By Roy Peter Clark, Special to CNN

Updated 11:28 AM ET, Thu September 12, 2013

On Sunday morning Sept. 15, 1963, a dynamite bomb exploded at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, killing four black children, and injuring many others. The names of the dead girls were Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Denise McNair.

That afternoon a phone rang at the house of Gene Patterson, the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*. Patterson was mowing the lawn, his nine-year-old daughter Mary nearby. The call from the office carried the horrible news from Birmingham. Patterson, without changing his clothes, drove to town and with tears in his eyes banged out a column so powerful that Walter Cronkite would ask him to read it for the CBS Evening News.

It began:

A Negro mother wept in the street Sunday morning in front of a Baptist Church in Birmingham. In her hand she held a shoe, one shoe, from the foot of her dead child. We hold that shoe with her.

Every one of us in the white South holds that small shoe in his hand.

It is too late to blame the sick criminals who handled the dynamite. The FBI and the police can deal with that kind. The charge against them is simple. They killed four children.

Only we can trace the truth, Southerner -- you and I. We broke those children's bodies.

T.S. Eliot once wrote that it is the job of the poet to find the sacred object that correlates to the emotion he wants to express. For Patterson, the object was that one small shoe:

We hold that shoe in our hand, Southerner. Let us see it straight, and look at the blood on it. Let us compare it with the unworthy speeches of Southern public men who have traduced the Negro; match it with the spectacle of shrilling children whose parents and teachers turned them free to spit epithets at small huddles of Negro school children for a week before this Sunday in Birmingham; hold up the shoe and look beyond it to the state house in Montgomery where the official attitudes of Alabama have been spoken in heat and anger.



Eugene Patterson and his family

Patterson's mentor Ralph McGill once criticized his own early editorials on issues of racial justice as "pale tea," and Patterson accepted the judgment for himself. Every day from 1960 to 1968, he wrote a signed editorial column in the paper, many of them devoted to issues of segregation and racial equality. As the years went by, his voice grew stronger.

In those more than 3,000 columns Patterson urged Southerners to do the right thing, to embrace Christian charity and common decency, to follow the law, promising that if they changed, "the sky would not fall."

"I see what you're doing," one reader accused. "You're trying to make us think we're better than we are."

On many days, Patterson's column expressed sympathy for the plight of the white Southerner and confidence that the South could change on its own, without the heavy hand of the federal government.

But not on September 15, 1963.

In a column that runs 553 words, Patterson uses the words 'we,' 'us,' and 'our,' more than twenty times:

(Continued on next page)

One Small Shoe (continued)

Let us not lay the blame on some brutal fool who didn't know any better.

We know better. We created the day. We bear the judgment. May God have mercy on the poor South that has so been led. May what has happened hasten the day when the good South, which does live and has great being, will rise to this challenge of racial understanding and common humanity, and in the full power of its unasserted courage, assert itself.

The Sunday school play at Birmingham is ended. With a weeping Negro mother, we stand in the bitter smoke and hold a shoe. If our South is ever to be what we wish it to be, we will plant a flower of nobler resolve for the South now upon these four small graves that we dug.

It is almost unimaginable today that a columnist would be asked to read his work on the evening network news, but that's what happened to Patterson when CBS and Cronkite called. (Recordings of that show have not survived.) The broadcast carried the message of that one small shoe around the nation. Patterson received more than 2,000 letters in response.

Patterson would go on to win a Pulitzer Prize in 1967 for his editorial columns on racial justice. He briefly served as managing editor of the *Washington Post*, taught at Duke University, and became editor of the *St. Petersburg Times* (now the *Tampa Bay Times*) and chairman of the Poynter Institute, the school for journalism and democracy where I have worked since 1979.

Patterson hired me to teach writing there and became my friend and mentor until his death earlier this year at the age of 89. The library at Poynter is named after him. His photo hangs there, not far from a calligraphed rendition of his famous editorial.

It is part of an artistic work by the late African American artist John Scott called "I Remember Birmingham," comprising four glass cubes, each one representing one of the dead girls. Words etched on the glass are intended to be "heard" as the lost voices of the victims. The translucent cubes remind us of the stained-glass shattered in the bombings. (Three former members of the Ku Klux Klan were eventually convicted of murder for the bombings; one survives, in prison.)

This may be the 50th anniversary of their deaths, but I think of those four girls every day of my working life. Patterson never took credit for his progressive views on race. He knew what he was doing was dangerous. A ball peen hammer in a desk drawer not far from his typewriter was there for any Klansman who might wander in. "I never had to use it," he told me, "but I pulled out the drawer a couple of times." He repeated again and again that the heroes of that era were black civil rights workers who put their lives on the line every day to dismantle America's version of apartheid, men and women such as Rep. John Lewis.

I met Lewis at a tribute for Patterson held in 2002 at Gene's old newspaper in Atlanta. Patterson, who had been a tank commander in Patton's army, was an emotional man who could almost never bring himself to read his old work aloud, so I read "A Flower for the Graves" to a group of assembled admirers. "I remember reading it back then," Rep. Lewis told me. "I had tears in my eyes."

In 2003 Patterson did a radio interview with WUNC in North Carolina. Host Frank Stasio asked Gene to read the column on the air, and he did so reluctantly, but only a couple of passages, his voice rising like a preacher when he came to the phrase "one shoe."

"God, Gene, you still sound angry," said Stasio.

Patterson responded, his voice catching, "About that -- yeah."

<http://www.cnn.com/2013/09/12/opinion/clark-patterson-birmingham-bombings/index.html>

TWO INSIGHTFUL MEMORIES

Never Forget

Thank you so much for this kind acknowledgment of my 4 martyred Sunday School classmates. What is not known is the effect the bombing had upon the survivors, immediate and extended families. Some were for years in and out of mental hospitals but somehow managed to raise families. One walks in almost constant fear that some other blast is about to occur in the next second. Others self-destructed on alcohol. One committed suicide, an otherwise successful career man, but others overcame self-annihilation, as myself. What is also not known is the bravery rendered by the pastor of the church at this time, the Rev. John H. Cross, who single-handedly dug through the rubble of the church to see if there were any survivors, when the police and the FBI refused to do so for fear of a second bomb. Also not known is the bravery and the resistance put forth by the Birmingham Black community against the KKK. There was a popular Black civil rights attorney whose home had been repeatedly bombed by the KKK. This was prior to the 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing. There was no question who was doing these bombings, so why all the mystery about organizational involvement against the 4 little girls, as if these men were committing individual acts of terrorism? The KKK was never indicted. Oral history has it that the attorney had legally purchased an automatic weapon and had his daughter trained on it. On the D-Day that the KKK was to make a final assault on the attorney, the Black community and the attorney, tired of running, gathered at his home to resist with pistols, rifles, shotguns and one automatic weapon. It is said by witnesses, since no White or Black media would dare to have reported such a Black resistance at the time, that two carloads full of dead Klansmen made their last stop around the corner from the attorney's house at a Jewish cemetery called Enon Ridge. This is more or less down the street from Angela Davis' home, and most certainly had an impact on her subsequent worldview. Birmingham, a big country town that produced an Angela Davis and a Condo Rice.

– Omowale Za, 2005

Birmingham Sunday 9/15/63

On Sunday, September 15, 1963, four little girls were blown up in a white terrorist attack when 16 sticks of dynamite were savagely blown up in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama.

The names of the four precious ancestors that were killed in that attack are Cynthia Wesley – 14, Addie Mae Collins – 14, Carole Robertson – 14, Denise McNair – 11. A lesser known fact is that two Black youths were also killed that day as a result of the violence that erupted after the bombing. They were Johnny Robinson, 16, who was killed by the police for allegedly throwing stones at cars, and Virgil Ware, 13, who was gunned down while riding his bike in a suburban area.

It was a youth day service at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and the Black children at that church were deliberately targeted because the church was the hub of civil rights activism in which Black youth were standing up and challenging the system. Grade school children were walking out of school, demanding equal rights. And they were also being arrested for doing so.

The bombing occurred two weeks after Martin Luther King's famous march on Washington, and was the fourth bombing in a month in Birmingham. It is most unfortunate that the many significant contributions and blood sacrifice that Black youth have made for civil and human rights have been overshadowed. And it is a travesty that the only association that this society has with Black youth today is with violence. While that is a problem that must be allowed and corrected, the truth is that this country has a long and vicious history of committing acts of violence against them. And the perpetrators of this violence were always embraced and protected by their society.

September 11 is not the only date and incident that should never be forgotten either! And I know that as an African person, I will never forget.

– Lisa V. Davis, 2005

Never to be Forgotten:
THE TEENAGE BOYS, 09/15/63

The four girls at the Baptist Church were not the only young people to die that Sunday in Birmingham.



James [**Johnny**] **Robinson**, a black 16-year-old, became involved in a rock-throwing incident with a gang of white teenagers. As he fled from the scene, Robinson ran down an alley near the Sixteenth St. Church and was promptly shot in the back and killed by a white City of Birmingham police officer.



A few hours later, on the outskirts of the city, 13-year-old **Virgil Ware**, black, was riding on the handlebars of a bicycle with his older brother. From the opposite direction, a red moped, decorated with the Confederate flag, quickly approached the two boys. Without warning, the operator of the motor bike, a white 16-year-old, pulled out a gun and shot Virgil twice in the chest, killing him instantly. The moped sped off (the shooter, who was later convicted of 2nd degree manslaughter, received a seven-month jail sentence).

http://www.trutv.com/library/crime/terrorists_spies/terrorists/birmingham_church/5.html

Six Dead After Church Bombing

Blast Kills Four Children; Riots Follow

Two Youths Slain; State Reinforces Birmingham Police

United Press International

September 16, 1963

Birmingham, Sept. 15 -- A bomb hurled from a passing car blasted a crowded Negro church today, killing four girls in their Sunday school classes and triggering outbreaks of violence that left two more persons dead in the streets.

Two Negro youths were killed in outbreaks of shooting seven hours after the 16th Street Baptist Church was bombed, and a third was wounded.

As darkness closed over the city hours later, shots crackled sporadically in the Negro sections. Stones smashed into cars driven by whites.

Five Fires Reported

Police reported at least five fires in Negro business establishments tonight. A official said some are being set, including one at a mop factory touched off by gasoline thrown on the building. The fires were brought under control and there were no injuries.

Meanwhile, NAACP Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins wired President Kennedy that unless the Federal Government offers more than "picayune and piecemeal aid against this type of bestiality" Negroes will "employ such methods as our desperation may dictate in defense of the lives of our people." Reinforced police units patrolled the city and 500 battle-dressed National Guardsmen stood by at an armory.

City police shot a 16-year-old Negro to death when he refused to heed their commands to halt after they caught him stoning cars. A 13-year-old Negro boy was shot and killed as he rode his bicycle in a suburban area north of the city.

Police Battle Crowd

Downtown streets were deserted after dark and police urged white and Negro parents to keep their children off the streets. Thousands of hysterical Negroes poured into the area around the church this morning and police fought for two hours, firing rifles into the air to control them.

When the crowd broke up, scattered shootings and stonings erupted through the city during the afternoon and tonight. The Negro youth killed by police was Johnny Robinson, 16. They said he fled down an alley when they caught him stoning cars. They shot him when he refused to halt.

The 13-year-old boy killed outside the city was Virgil Ware. He was shot at about the same time as Robinson.

Shortly after the bombing police broke up a rally of white students protesting the desegregation of three Birmingham

schools last week. A motorcade of militant adult segregationists apparently en route to the student rally was disbanded.

Police patrols, augmented by 300 State troopers sent into the city by Gov. George C. Wallace, quickly broke up all gatherings of white and Negroes. Wallace sent the troopers and ordered 500 National Guardsmen to stand by at Birmingham armories. King arrived in the city tonight and went into a conference with Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, a leader in the civil rights fight in Birmingham.

The City Council held an emergency meeting to discuss safety measures for the city, but rejected proposals for a curfew.

Dozens of persons were injured when the bomb went off in the church, which held 400 Negroes at the time, including 80 children. It was Young Day at the church.

A few hours later, police picked up two white men, questioned them about the bombing and released them.

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. wired President Kennedy from Atlanta that he was going to Birmingham to plead with Negroes to "remain non-violent."

But he said that unless "immediate Federal steps are taken" there will be "in Birmingham and Alabama the worst racial holocaust this Nation has ever seen."

Dozens of survivors, their faces dripping blood from the glass that flew out of the church's stained glass windows, staggered around the building in a cloud of white dust raised by the explosion. The blast crushed two nearby cars like toys and blew out windows blocks away.

Negroes stoned cars in other sections of Birmingham and police exchanged shots with a Negro firing wild shotgun blasts two blocks from the church. It took officers two hours to disperse the screaming, surging crowd of 2,000 Negroes who ran to the church at the sound of the blast.

At least 20 persons were hurt badly enough by the blast to be treated at hospitals. Many more, cut and bruised by flying debris, were treated privately.

(The Associated Press reported that among the injured in subsequent shooting were a white man injured by a Negro. Another white man was wounded by a Negro who attempted to rob him, according to police.)

Mayor Albert Boutwell, tears streaming down his cheeks, announced the city had asked for help.

“It is a tragic event,” Boutwell said. “It is just sickening that a few individuals could commit such a horrible atrocity. The occurrence of such a thing has so gravely concerned the public...” His voice broke and he could not go on.

Boutwell and Police Chief Jamie Moore requested the State assistance in a telegram to Wallace.

“While the situation appears to be well under control of federal law enforcement officers at this time, the possibility of further trouble exists,” Boutwell and Moore said in their telegram.

President Kennedy, yachting off Newport, R.I., was notified by radio-telephone and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy ordered his chief civil rights troubleshooter, Burke Marshall, to Birmingham. At least 25 FBI agents, including bomb experts from Washington, were being rushed in.

City Police Inspector W.J. Haley said as many as 15 sticks of dynamite must have been used.

“We have talked to witnesses who say they saw a car drive by and then speed away just before the bomb hit,” he said.

In Montgomery, Wallace said he had a similar report and said the descriptions of the car’s occupants did not make clear their race. But he served notice “on those responsible that every law enforcement agency of this State will be used to apprehend them.”

The bombing was the 21st in Birmingham in eight years, and the first to kill. None of the bombings have been solved.

As police struggled to hold back the crowd, the blasted church’s pastor, the Rev. John H. Cross, grabbed a megaphone and walked back and forth, telling the crowd: “The police are doing everything they can. Please go home.”

“The Lord is our shepherd,” he sobbed. “We shall not want.” The only stained glass window in the church that remained in its frame showed Christ leading a group of little children. The face of Christ was blown out.

After the police dispersed the hysterical crowds, workmen with pickaxes went into the wrecked basement of the church. Parts of brightly painted children’s furniture were strewn about in one Sunday School room, and blood stained the floors. Chunks of concrete the size of footballs littered the basement.

The bomb apparently went off in an unoccupied basement room and blew down the wall, sending stone and debris flying like shrapnel into a room where children were assembling for closing prayers following Sunday School. Bibles and song books lay shredded

and scattered through the church.

In the main sanctuary upstairs, which holds about 500 persons, the pulpit and Bible were covered with pieces of stained glass.

One of the dead girls was decapitated. The coroner’s office identified the dead as Denise McNair, 11; Carol Robertson, 14; Cynthia Wesley, 14, and Addie Mae Collins, 10 [actually 14 – Ed.].

As the crowd came outside watched the victims being carried out, one youth broke away and tried to touch one of the blanket-covered forms.

“This is my sister,” he cried. “My God, she’s dead.” Police took the hysterical boy away.

Mamie Grier, superintendent of the Sunday School, said when the bomb went off “people began screaming, almost stampeding” to get outside. The wounded walked around in a daze, she said.

One of the injured taken to a hospital was a white man. Many others cut by flying glass and other debris were not treated at hospitals.

Fourth in Four Weeks

It was the fourth bombing in four weeks in Birmingham, and the third since the current school desegregation crisis came to a boil Sept. 4.

Desegregation of schools in Birmingham, Mobile, and Tuskegee was finally brought about last Wednesday when President Kennedy federalized the National Guard. Some of the Guardsmen in Birmingham are still under Federal orders. Wallace said the ones he alerted today were units of the Guard “not now federalized.”

The City of Birmingham has offered a \$52,000 reward for the arrest of the bombers, and Wallace today offered another \$5,000.

Dr. King Berates Wallace

But Dr. King wired Wallace that “the blood of four little children ... is on your hands. Your irresponsible and misguided actions have created in Birmingham and Alabama the atmosphere that has induced continued violence and now murder.”

Source::<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/longterm/churches/archives1.htm>

JOHNNY'S DEATH: THE UNTOLD TRAGEDY IN BIRMINGHAM

Forty-seven years ago this week, on Sept. 15, 1963, a bomb exploded at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. The blast killed four little girls and became a tragic marker in civil rights history.

Racial violence broke out on the streets there that afternoon, leading to another, less well-known killing that day. For decades, the circumstances surrounding 16-year-old Johnny Robinson's death remained a mystery.



NPR. Courtesy of Diane Robinson Samuels

Johnny Robinson, who was 16 when he was killed during the unrest following the infamous church bombing in Birmingham on Sept. 15, 1963.

The family didn't talk about what happened to Johnny just a few hours after the explosion at the Baptist church.

"Back in those days parents didn't discuss that," says Leon Robinson, 60, Johnny's

brother. "They didn't set down and talk to us like we talking now. Kept everything inside, you know. So we just had to deal with it ourselves. That's what we did."

Johnny's sister, Diane Robinson Samuels, remembers arriving at the hospital late in the afternoon on that awful day.

"My mama was coming out the door, and she said, 'Your brother dead, your brother dead,'" Samuels, now 62, recalls. "I think it was about four, five cops was there. And she was just beating on them. With her fists, just beating, 'Y'all killed my son, y'all killed my son.'"

Her older brother Johnny was dead, shot in the back by a white police officer. Today, FBI files in the archives of a Birmingham library offer more detail about what happened that afternoon.

First, Slurs And Soda Bottles

Johnny was hanging around with a few other black teenagers near a gas station on 26th Street. It was a tense scene. White kids drove by, waving Confederate flags and tossing soda pop bottles out car windows. They exchanged racial slurs with Robinson and his group.

FBI agent Dana Gillis works on civil rights cases in the South. "There was a lot of back and forth that you might expect

between individuals that were sympathetic to the death of the girls and their families as opposed to those individuals who had no feelings whatsoever for what was being done," Gillis says.

Witnesses told the FBI in 1963 that Johnny was with a group of boys who threw rocks at a car draped with a Confederate flag. The rocks missed their target and hit another vehicle instead. That's when a police car arrived.

Officer Jack Parker, a member of the all-white police force for almost a dozen years, was sitting in the back seat with a shotgun pointed out the window. The police car blocked the alley.

Gillis describes what happened next.

"The crowd was running away and Mr. Robinson had his back [turned] as he was running away," Gillis says. "And the shot hit him in the back."

Other police officers in the car offered differing explanations for the shooting.

One said it could have been an accident because the driver slammed on the brakes — jostling Parker, who mistakenly fired the gun. Another officer said the car might have hit a bump in the road.

But other witnesses with no ties to the police said they heard two shots and no advance warnings. Some news reports at the time concluded, mistakenly, that the kids had been tossing rocks at the police.

A local grand jury reviewed the evidence back in 1963 but declined to move forward with any criminal prosecution against the white police officer. A federal grand jury reached the same conclusion a year later, in 1964.

Doug Jones prosecuted two of the men responsible for the bombing when he was the U.S. attorney in Birmingham during the Clinton administration. Jones is white, and a lifelong resident of the area. He says he's not surprised the Johnny Robinson case went nowhere.

"Those cases involving the excessive force or discretion of a police officer are very, very difficult to make even in today's world much less in 1963 where you would most likely have an all-white, probably all-male jury who was going to side with that police officer by and large," Jones says.

No Attention Paid

The four little girls who died in the church basement attracted worldwide attention. The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered the eulogy at a joint funeral service for three of them.

But Johnny Robinson's death, six hours later, mostly went unrecognized.

Continued on page 19

Johnny Robinson *(continued)*

Leon Robinson and Diane Robinson Samuels say that for years their family didn't talk about what happened to their brother Johnny the day he was killed.

The Justice Department and the White House asked about the Johnny Robinson case at the time.

But a Birmingham civil rights leader, the Rev. C. Herbert Oliver, called Washington to say the government wasn't protecting black children. Instead, Oliver said, law enforcement seemed to be more interested in shooting them.

Leon Robinson, Johnny's little brother, might agree with that. "I was just so thankful I wasn't with him that day," Robinson says. "I probably would have wound up getting killed too."

He says the family never heard concern from anyone at the White House or even the Birmingham police. "No, no, no, no," he says. "That wasn't going to happen. Not here in Alabama. That ain't going to happen here."

Then a few years ago, the FBI reopened the investigation as part of its effort to figure out whether it could prosecute old civil rights cold cases from the 1960s.

It wasn't until the FBI's Gillis came to the family's neighborhood a few months ago that the Robinsons got a real picture of what happened to their 16-year-old brother.

Mixed Emotions

On a recent day, Samuels sat at her kitchen table in a tan brick house, touching a plastic bag filled with mementos — like her brother's funeral program and some autopsy photos from a book that show the fatal wound in his back.

"We didn't hear nothing else about what was going on, whatever; til that FBI came here, we didn't even know it was no cold case or nothing," Samuels said. "Then he came to our house and sit down to tell us what had happened. Me and my brother now. They didn't tell us while my mama was living; my mama died in 1991."

The family says Johnny was a good kid. But the Robinsons had troubles. Their father died in a fight with a neighborhood man a few years before Johnny's death. The younger kids went to live with an aunt.

In the years after Johnny's shooting, their mother didn't want to discuss it. She ended up in a psychiatric hospital for a while. Robinson said the family never really talked about what happened. In fact, he says, he and his sister went to school the next day.

That reluctance to talk about it is one reason Johnny's death didn't get much notice until recently. There are other reasons as well.

The police were plenty busy around that time. They were fighting, among other things, a proposal to integrate the force by bringing in black officers.

J
Jack Parker, the officer who shot Johnny, was head of a Fraternal Order of Police lodge. He signed an ad in the newspaper that fall arguing against integration of the police force. Parker died in 1977.

The FBI and the Justice Department told the Robinsons they couldn't move forward with a possible case of excessive force or hate crimes against a dead man.

Johnny's previous brushes with the law also may have been a factor. They made his story just a little less shocking than the little girls' tragic end. Johnny had a juvenile record and had served time in detention. He'd been picked up by the Birmingham police in 1960, when he was 13 years old, on suspicion of burglary and grand larceny.

In the past few years, the Robinsons have started to get some local recognition. The city of Birmingham proclaimed Johnny Robinson a foot soldier in the civil rights movement.

Gillis of the FBI says he's sorry it took so long for the family to get information about their brother's death. "When you look at the history of that day and age, that was just the loss of a life," Gillis says. "And it may not have been a life that had value on the part of the institutions that were in place at that time."

Tom Perez, leader of the Justice Department's civil rights unit, says that while telling the story of Johnny's death most likely won't bring a legal conclusion to the story, it may help bring another kind of resolution.

"People have died, memories have faded, evidence has disappeared or is no longer available," Perez said. "The measure of our success is ... our ability to uncover the truth in all of these cases. And as a result of uncovering the truth, I think we are bringing closure and understanding to this dark chapter in our nation's history."

But Samuels says she has mixed emotions about revisiting the past. She says her heart's still heavy. And she's had several heart attacks. But she also feels the death of someone like Johnny — a kid who may have had some problems but didn't deserve to die — belongs in the annals of civil rights history.

"They shouldn't have just focused on them little girls," she says of the attention paid to the bombing victims by those who mourned the violence of Sept. 15, 1963. "You know. The big wheels. I guess you had to be in the big league. But in my heart, me, I am a big wheel. And that was my brother."

NPR producer Evie Stone contributed to this report
Source: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129856740>

VIRGIL LAMAR WARE

In the tense atmosphere that followed a deadly church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, on September 15, 1963, Virgil Ware was killed by two white teenagers.

Synopsis

Born on December 6, 1949, Virgil Ware grew up in Alabama at a time when the South was divided by conflicts between supporters of racial equality and segregationists. After a church bombing killed four girls on September 15, 1963, two white teenagers shot and killed Ware that same day. His death was forgotten for years, but Ware is now recognized as being a casualty of the Civil Rights Movement.

Early Life

Virgil Lamar Ware, known as Virgil Ware, was born on December 6, 1949. He grew up in Pratt City, a suburb of Birmingham, Alabama. The third of six children, Ware was an excellent student who enjoyed playing football and wanted to become an attorney.

Gunned Down

When a bomb went off at Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church on the morning of Sunday, September 15, 1963, it killed four young girls (Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson and Cynthia Wesley) and sent racial tensions in the city spiraling to a new high. That day, Ware—unaware of the bombing—set out with his brother to find a bike so that he could take part in a paper route. It was while on this errand that Ware encountered two white 16-year-olds: Michael Lee Farley and Larry Joe Sims. Farley and Sims—Eagle Scouts who had attended a segregationist rally earlier in the day—had heard of the bombing, and of the protests that were going on in the city. Thinking that Ware and his brother had been throwing rocks, Farley directed Sims to scare them by shooting Farley's handgun as they drove past on a motorbike. After Sims fired, Ware tumbled off the handlebars of his brother's bike. Sims and Farley did not stop to find out why.

Hit in the chest and face, the 13-year-old Ware died on the Docena-Sandusky Road on the outskirts of Birmingham. In addition to the young women killed in the bombing, Ware's September 15, 1963 death followed that of Johnny Robinson, who had been killed by a policeman a short time earlier.

When confronted by police, Sims confessed to shooting Ware, saying he had done so accidentally, as he had fired with his eyes closed. Sims and Farley were charged with first-degree murder. At trial, Sims was convicted of second-degree manslaughter; Farley pled guilty to the same charge. They were both sentenced to seven months in jail, but a judge then altered the penalty, giving them two years' probation instead. Decades later, Sims and Farley both apologized to Ware's family.

Recognition

Buried with no headstone, the condition of Ware's grave deteriorated over the years. After a news story shared this information, donations were sent in to help. Ware was reburied in a new grave, with a marker, in 2004.

Though the deaths of the four girls received more attention for years, Ware is now acknowledged as another "foot soldier" of the Civil Rights Movement. In 2013, he was inducted into Birmingham's Gallery of Distinguished Citizens.

Source: <https://www.biography.com/people/virgil-ware-21443785>

THE LEGACY OF VIRGIL WARE

By Tim Padgett and Frank Sikora

TIME Magazine

Monday, September 22, 2003



THE VICTIM: He was just 13, a smart, skinny kid who, his brother says, wanted to be a lawyer when he grew up
COURTESY OF THE WARE FAMILY

As Virgil Ware, 13, soared down a lonely stretch of road outside Birmingham, Ala., perched on the handlebars of his brother's bicycle, he was happily unaware of the carnage downtown. It was Sunday, Sept. 15, 1963. At 10:22 that morning, four black girls had been killed by a dynamite bomb set by the Ku Klux Klan at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. The church was a focal point of Birmingham's civil rights turmoil that year, but that unrest hadn't touched Virgil and his coal-mining family, who lived in a modest, all-black suburb and rarely even saw white people. All Virgil had on his mind that day was the money he and his brothers were going to make with the newspaper route they had just secured.

Larry Joe Sims, 16, an Eagle Scout at Birmingham's all-white Phillips High School, wasn't preoccupied with the civil rights movement either. His family quietly sympathized with blacks' efforts to eat at regular lunch counters, attend integrated schools and vote without hindrance. His father, a manager at a Sears store, privately scorned Eugene (Bull) Connor, the police commissioner who turned fire hoses and attack dogs on black demonstrators, some as young as 7. Still, if the Simses lamented the injustices, they didn't challenge them. As a teen, Sims had girls, his guitar and the Beach Boys on his mind.

But by 4:45 that Sunday afternoon, as if caught on the billows of the church blast, Virgil Ware and Larry Joe Sims were hurtling toward another racial tragedy. Succumbing to peer pressure, Sims had gone along with friends to a segregationist rally that day—and now he was holding a revolver that his classmate, Michael Lee Farley, 16, had handed him as they rode home on Farley's red motorbike, its small Confederate flag whipping in the wind. As they passed Virgil and his brother James, 16, Farley told Sims to fire the gun and “scare ‘em.” Sims closed his eyes and pulled the trigger. Two bullets hit Virgil in the chest and cheek, hurling him into a ditch as the motorbike sped

on. “I’ve been shot,” Virgil said. “No you ain’t,” James said in disbelief. “Just stop tremblin’, and you’ll be O.K.”

He wasn't. Instead, Virgil Ware became the sixth and final black person to be killed in Birmingham that Sunday. (Another youth had been shot in the back by police after he threw rocks to protest the church bombing.) Virgil was the last civil rights casualty of the summer of '63—when the defining social movement of 20th century America became a national concern and not just a Southern one.

Network television brought the season's atrocities into U.S. living rooms along with the triumphs, such as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s “I Have a Dream” speech at the March on Washington 2½ weeks earlier. Northerners, including President John F. Kennedy and his Attorney General brother Robert, enlisted in the struggle that would lead to the passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 the next summer.

But Virgil Ware's death went largely unnoticed then and is hardly recalled today. And so it is with the stories of hundreds of other bystanders swept into civil rights traumas. Their tales don't involve the main characters of the day—villains like Connor or martyrs like King. But what these incidental players did and suffered—and how those actions may have changed them—is just as important a legacy of the movement as the key historic turning points studied in schools today.

The story of Sims and Farley and their victim's family did not produce a clean, redemptive outcome for all. Told that this month marks the 40th anniversary of Virgil's death, Farley twirls his fingers sarcastically and says, “Whoop-de-do!” But Sims, who like Farley got no prison time for the killing, says his indifference about civil rights died that day too—and friends say he told them he decided to serve in the Vietnam War because he felt he still had a “debt” to pay. “Virgil knows in heaven that positive consequences came from this,” Sims told Time in his first-ever interview about the killing. “He knows that his death helped change society—that it changed me.” As for the relatives whom Virgil left behind, they suddenly found themselves involved in a movement that had seemed remote before his death, and they drew strength from its nonviolent philosophy. “You can't hate anyone and call yourself a Christian,” says Virgil's brother Melvin, who has since become an avatar of racial harmony in his community.

Birmingham in 1963 desperately needed change. It was the civil rights epicenter, a place where bombings of the black community were so frequent that the town was nicknamed “Bombingham.” Most white families were apoplectic about federal court orders to integrate the city's public schools, and one of their champions was the Farleys' Baptist pastor, the Rev. Ferrell Griswold. Griswold (who died in 1981) was, ironically, an American Indian whose birth certificate read “colored,” but he harbored a century's worth of Native American hatred for the Federal Government and spoke out for states' rights

Continued on page 20

The Legacy of Virgil Ware (continued from page 21)

at segregation rallies—like the one Farley and Sims attended that Sunday. Virgil's killing "haunted him afterward," says Griswold's son Jon, 40, who teaches English in Birmingham to migrants. "He refocused." The older Griswold eventually stopped speaking at rallies, telling friends, "We have to change hearts before we tackle politics."

But even before Griswold's conversion, some whites were hearing a different kind of message from ministers like the Sims' Baptist pastor, the Rev. Ralph Jernigan. He often quoted Bible passages about Jesus' breaking down the "middle wall of partition," as code for racial tolerance. "You couldn't convey too much from the pulpit," Jernigan, 72, recalls, "because you could alienate the people you wanted to lead. But Larry Joe Sims and his family were not racist. That's why what happened was so amazing to all of us."

And it was also especially heartbreaking because it happened to Virgil Ware. A smart, skinny kid, the third of six children whose father and uncles worked in the nearby Docena coal mine, he had just entered the eighth grade at the all-black Sandusky Elementary School near his home in suburban Pratt City. An A student who played tight end on the football team, Virgil seemed the sibling "who was most likely to go to college," says brother Melvin, 54, a crane operator in Birmingham. "He wanted to be a lawyer. When we'd watch Perry Mason, Virgil'd always be the one who guessed who did it." He was also, adds Melvin, the favorite of their mother Lorene, a cleaning woman who died in 1996 still grieving for her son. When Virgil made an extra dollar or two delivering coal, "he'd come home and say, 'You need a couple quarters of this, Mama?'" recalls James, 56, a Birmingham truck driver.

In that late summer of '63, the three brothers had agreed to share a paper route delivering the Birmingham News—and to buy a car with their earnings. But Virgil needed a bicycle. So that Sunday after church, at around noon, he and James rode James' bike to Docena, where an uncle had a scrapyard. The church bombing had already occurred, but word hadn't reached their uncle's when, shortly after 4 p.m., they headed home after failing to find a bike for Virgil. The boys took a rural stretch called the Docena-Sandusky Road, flanked by pine and mimosa trees rising from a tangle of swamp grass and kudzu. As Virgil clutched the handlebars, telling his brother where to steer, James says, they laughed about the girls they would pick up in their new car.

Farley, meanwhile, was showing off the pearl-handled, .22-cal. revolver he had bought for \$15 from a school friend two days earlier. Farley, like Sims, was an Eagle Scout, but now, wearing his gun in a shoulder holster, he looked more like an enforcer wannabe amid the anti-integration rally's crowd of 2,000 whites. To his credit, Griswold denounced the church attack and spoke against violence. But moments later, a youth strung up an effigy of Bobby Kennedy, and the crowd burned it.

Afterward, Farley, Sims and friends stopped at the offices of the National States Rights Party, a Klan-associated group. Farley bought a mini Confederate flag for 40 (cents), and they heard reports of retaliatory rock throwing by angry black youths. A white teenager, Dennis Robertson, while returning from his job, was struck in the head with a brick hurled by a black teen; he would spend days in critical condition before recovering. Upset by the news, Farley headed out. Sims, caught up in the day's emotions, says he "went along for the ride" on Farley's motorbike.

Two of Farley's friends saw Farley and Sims about to head west on the Docena-Sandusky Road. The friends claimed that they'd seen Virgil and James throwing rocks, which James vehemently denied then and today. "We'll take care of them," said Farley, according to police documents. But instead he gave the revolver to a stunned Sims, who had never fired a gun. Farley still insists that the Ware brothers had rocks in their hands, but Sims says, "I guess we were just expecting rocks to be coming at us." Sims is right-handed; the gun was in his left hand. "I thought I was shooting at the ground," he says. "I remember pop-pop and then thinking, Oh no, I might have hit [Virgil] in the leg." He and Farley went to a friend's house and asked him to hide the gun under his mattress.

The next day Detectives E. Dan Jordan and J.A. McAlpine tracked down Farley, who initially denied involvement. They later found Sims at his home in suburban Forestdale. Sobbing, he confessed in front of his parents. Jordan, now 74 and retired, says Farley fumed, as if he considered Sims and the detectives traitors. But Jordan says he was unmoved. He had felt "demeaned—you know, having to obey Bull Connor, jailing up black children in cages. The civil rights movement was changing the way we thought about things."

Farley and Sims were charged with first-degree murder, but an all-white jury convicted Sims on a lesser charge of second-degree manslaughter (to which Farley then pleaded guilty). A white judge, Wallace Gibson, suspended the boys' sentences and gave them two years' probation—scolding them for their "lapse"—which made Lorene Ware "break down in the courtroom crying and hollering," recalls Melvin. Says James: "You could get more time back then for killing a good hunting dog."

But, James adds, the ordeal "made our family realize there was a civil rights movement going on and we could make Virgil's death be a part of that." It didn't exactly work out that way. The movement wanted Lorene Ware to hit the stump, but because speaking publicly about Virgil's killing was too painful for her, his story faded away, an obscure, salt-in-the-wound footnote to the Sixteenth Street Church bombing.

Civil rights and racial reconciliation instead became a personal journey for the Wares. If not for the movement's nonviolent tenets, for example, Virgil's brothers say their rage might

The Legacy of Virgil Ware (continued from page 22)

not have worn off. Melvin was the angriest, and although he thought for years about revenge, he eventually immersed himself in his Christian faith, encouraging whites and blacks to attend each other's church services. James too has long forgiven Farley and Sims, but he says he found real meaning in Virgil's death one night years later, in the '60s, when his car got stuck in a ditch on the same dark Docena-Sandusky Road. Two young white men pulled up and approached him, "and I thought, Oh, no, it's all gonna happen again." But the men helped him pull his car out. "I asked them if I owed 'em anything," James says. "They said, 'Just help the next guy.'"

Virgil's sister Joyce, 50, has not forgiven. "Lord knows I haven't," she says. "That was my brother." Nor does she wholeheartedly trust white people—especially considering that while Farley and Sims were free to finish high school, attend college and build middle-class lives, the Wares still live in much the same humble, segregated circumstances they did 40 years ago. Yet that too is changing. Four years ago, Melvin's daughter Melony, 26, became the first in the Ware family to graduate from college, and her younger sister Mindy, 19, is now a pre-med student at Alabama's private Talladega College. They say they have been inspired in large part by their Uncle Virgil.

Farley, 56, remains bitter. He won't discuss his life since 1963, but friends and neighbors say he is married, has a son and is a desktop publisher who works at home in the affluent, white Birmingham suburb of Trussville. He also, they add, rarely comes out. Speaking briefly with *Time*, he complained, "No one seems to care about what I've suffered for 40 years!"

Sims, 56, was more remorseful from the start, though, he says, "I do still believe that what happened was an accident." He became a more active civil rights advocate and purposefully befriended the black woman who cleaned his fraternity house at Auburn University. But after graduating in 1969, he felt he still had "something heavy" to purge. He did it in part by going to Vietnam, even though his graduate studies could have kept him out of the draft. He also rejected the Army's offer of officer training, because "I was aware that it was people from poorer families, like [Virgil's], that were being sent to fight the war. I needed to see the war from the grunt's-eye view." He was awarded a Bronze Star for valor in combat. When told that Lorene Ware successfully petitioned the U.S. government to

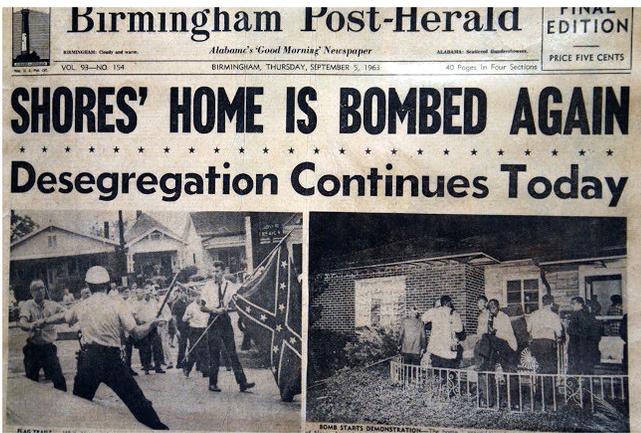
keep her remaining sons out of Vietnam, Sims says, his voice choking, "Thank God."

Still, it wasn't until 1997 that either Farley or Sims called to apologize—and, ironically, it was Farley who telephoned James Ware when one of the few articles to recall the tragedy ran in a local paper. Sims, married to a woman from Ohio and a retail manager on Mississippi's Gulf Coast, is a born-again Christian. But he claims he hadn't contacted the Wares because "I never knew how I'd be received, and I didn't want to hurt them more." Last month, however, he finally called to ask their forgiveness, "to let them know my sorrow—that I was a scared and stupid kid."

Birmingham's changes have also come in fits and starts. Although its schools were desegregated by the end of the '60s, they are 97% black today in a city whose population is 74% black. More than 75% of the city's residents live in nonintegrated neighborhoods, and 90% say their church or place of worship has no members of other races, according to research by Natalie Davis, political-science professor at Birmingham-Southern College. On the other hand, Birmingham's mayors since 1979 have both been black, and its current police chief is a black woman. According to a 2002 poll by the Birmingham Pledge Foundation, one of the U.S.'s most respected antiracism projects, the average Birminghamian eats lunch with someone of another race at least three times a month and invites someone of another race home for a social visit at least seven times a year. Also, more than half the respondents said they had been involved in a community project with someone of another race. "There is more discussion and action about improving race relations here than any place I've ever lived, North or South," says Lawrence Pijaux, director of Birmingham's Civil Rights Institute.

That progress owes plenty to people like Virgil Ware. He still lies in a nondescript grave marked only by blue carnations and hidden in a thick roadside forest. Each Mother's Day, his sister Joyce clears the overgrowth. "When we hit the lottery, we're going to move you," she tells him as she works. In the warmest months, swarms of fireflies illuminate the site—innocent reminders of the larger conflagrations that swept through Birmingham in the summer of 1963.

Source: <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,485698,00.html>



The “Bombingham” moniker was well-earned, as dynamite became the racists’ weapon of choice against inevitable progress toward equality. Only ten days before the deadly blast at the Church, the Post-Herald reported another bombing of activist attorney Arthur Shores’ home.

NOTE Attorney Shores is mentioned by Angela Davis on page 2, and is certainly the lawyer to whom Omowale Za refers in his remembrance on page 14.



*March sponsored by CORE in memory of the four little girls, 16th Street, NW, Washington, D.C.,
September 22, 1963*

*Source: Thomas J. O’Halloran, LOC, LC-U9- 10515-6A
(Library of Congress, U.S. News & World Report Magazine Photograph Collection.)
National Park Service*

Birmingham, Alabama, and the Civil Rights Movement in 1963

The 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing

The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham was used as a meeting-place for civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, Ralph David Abernathy and Fred Shutterworth [Shuttlesworth –Ed.]. Tensions became high when the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) became involved in a campaign to register African Americans to vote in Birmingham.

On Sunday, 15th September, 1963, a white man was seen getting out of a white and turquoise Chevrolet car and placing a box under the steps of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Soon afterwards, at 10.22 a.m., the bomb exploded killing Denise McNair (11), Addie Mae Collins (14), Carole Robertson (14) and Cynthia Wesley (14). The four girls had been attending Sunday school classes at the church.

Twenty-three other people were also hurt by the blast.

Civil rights activists blamed George Wallace, the Governor of Alabama, for the killings. Only a week before the bombing he had told the New York Times that to stop integration Alabama needed a “few first-class funerals.”

A witness identified Robert Chambliss, a member of the Ku Klux Klan, as the man who placed the bomb under the steps of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. He was arrested and charged with murder and possessing a box of 122 sticks of dynamite without a permit. On 8th October, 1963, Chambliss was found not guilty of murder and received a hundred-dollar fine and a six-month jail sentence for having the dynamite.

The case was unsolved until Bill Baxley was elected attorney general of Alabama. He requested the original Federal Bureau of Investigation files on the case and discovered that the organization had accumulated a great deal of evidence against Chambliss that had not been used in the original trial.

In November, 1977 Chambliss was tried once again for the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing. Now aged 73, Chambliss was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment. Chambliss died in an Alabama prison on 29th October, 1985.

Source: http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/m_r/randall/birmingham.htm

• *The Murder of Four Girls*

On the early Sunday morning of September 15, 1963, Ku Klux Klan member, Robert Edward Chambliss stood a few blocks away from the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. On this morning, five girls were changing into their choir robes in the church basement. At 10:19 [10:22] a.m., a bomb exploded, killing four of the girls and injuring twenty people. The four girls who died were eleven-year old Denise McNair, and fourteen year olds Addie Mae Collins, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley.

• *The Significance of the 16th Street Baptist Church*

The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church had served as an important part of the African-American community and was used as a meeting place during the civil rights movement. The church was used for mass rallies and Martin Luther King Jr. was among the many leaders who spoke at these events. It had also been the headquarters for several desegregation protests. When the church was bombed, it was a sign of the hostility that segregationists had against the civil rights struggle.

• *The Aftermath of the Bombing*

While the bomb came as a surprise, bomb threats had been made in the past. In those instances, the church had been able to take special precautions. This time, no threat had been made. The explosion blew a hole in the east side of the church. It shattered windows, walls, doors, and the air was filled with a thick cloud of dust and soot. As community members dug through the debris in search of survivors, they discovered the bodies of the four victims.

Grief was not only felt in the African American community, but white strangers expressed their sympathy to the families of the four girls. At the funeral of three of the girls, Martin Luther King gave the eulogy, which was witnessed by 8,000 mourners, both white and black. [See page 33.]

• *The Investigation into the Bombing*

The FBI led the initial investigation into the bombing. According to a 1965 FBI memorandum to director J. Edgar Hoover, it was determined that Robert E. Chambliss, Bobby Frank Cherry, Herman Frank Cash, and Thomas E. Blanton Jr. had planted the bomb. Based on the investigation, the Birmingham FBI office recommended prosecuting the suspects. Hoover, however, blocked their prosecution by rejecting the recommendation that the federal prosecutor receive the testimony that identified the suspects. By 1968, charges had not been filed and the FBI closed the case.

In 1971, Alabama Attorney General Bill Baxley, reopened the case. On November 18, 1977, Robert Chambliss was convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison. The case was again reopened in 1988 and in July 1997, after the FBI received a tip. Herman Frank Cash was still one of the prime suspects, but before a case could be established against him, he died in 1994.

On May 17, 2000, Thomas Blanton Jr. and Bobby Frank Cherry were charged with the murder of the four girls. Blanton was tried, convicted, and sentenced to life in prison on May 1, 2001. For the jurors who convicted him, the 1964 taped conversations that the FBI secretly recorded, weighed heavily on their decision. The tapes had remained secret until 1997, when the case was reopened. In one recorded conversation that took place between Blanton and his wife, Blanton told her that he was at the Klan meeting where both the bombing was planned and the bomb was made. In another recorded conversation, Blanton spoke about the bombing to an FBI informant while driving in a car. For the jurors, the taped conversations provided enough evidence to convict Blanton of murder.*

Bobby Frank Cherry's trial was postponed after the judge ruled that he was mentally incompetent to assist his attorney. After Cherry was found competent to stand trial, on May 22, 2002 he was found guilty of four counts of murder. He was sentenced to life in prison. For the family and friends of the four murdered girls, the conviction of Blanton and Cherry was a long awaited victory.

<http://afroamhistory.about.com/od/16thstreetbaptistchurch/a/16streetbombing.htm>

* NOTE: In August, 2017, Thomas Blanton Jr. was denied parole. He becomes eligible again in five years.

The Perpetrators

...In 1965, J Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI, stated that any chance of prosecution was “remote” and in 1968, the FBI pulled out of the investigation. Initially, no-one was arrested for the outrage. Eventually, a known member of the KKK was arrested in 1977 – Robert Chambliss. He was sent to prison and died there in 1985. However, many believed that he was not the only one involved.

In 1980, a US Department of Justice report stated that Hoover had blocked evidence that could have been used in the pursuit of suspects. This led to the Alabama district attorney reopening the case. However, while the case was reopened, no new charges were filed.

In 1985, Chambliss died – but never admitted that he had any part in the bombing.

In October 1988, Gary A Tucker admitted that he had helped set up the bomb. Dying of cancer, no charge was laid against him – but federal and state prosecutors reopened their investigations. In May 2000, Thomas Blanton and Bobby Frank Cherry surrendered to the authorities after they were indicted on four counts of first-degree murder and “universal malice”. One year later, Blanton, aged 62, was sentenced to life in prison after being found guilty on four counts of murder.

“I guess the good Lord will settle it on Judgment Day,” Blanton said after the verdict was announced.

“I’ll sleep well tonight, better than I’ve slept in many years,” said the Rev. Abraham Lincoln Woods, a leader of Birmingham’s black community who pushed authorities to reopen the case.

Woods, the president of Birmingham’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference and pastor at St. Joseph Baptist Church, said the verdict “makes a statement of how far we’ve come.”

Bobby Frank Cherry was initially deemed to be mentally unfit to stand trial. However, this was overturned and he was found guilty after members of his family gave evidence against him.

“This whole bunch lied all the way through this thing,” he said when Circuit Judge James Garrett asked him whether he had anything to say. “Now, I don’t know why I’m going to jail for nothing. I didn’t do anything.”

Cherry was also sentenced to life in prison and died in November 2004 of cancer.

The role of the FBI has been criticised by some with regards to this case, particularly the role played by J Edgar Hoover. It was only after 14 years that the FBI released 9,000 files relevant to the case – including the so-called ‘Kitchen Tapes’ in which Thomas Blanton was heard telling his wife about building the bomb and planning to use it. Bill Baxley, who had been Alabama’s attorney general when Robert Chambliss had been put on trial in 1977, stated that he felt he would have been able to prosecute Blanton and Cherry many years earlier than they were, if the FBI had released these files to him then. Why Hoover sat on these files is open to speculation. In 1965, Hoover had stated that any chance of a successful prosecution was remote. Yet he almost certainly knew that the FBI had files that could have led to the successful prosecution of those who had carried out the bombing. After all, that same evidence was used in later years to successfully prosecute those who had carried out the bombing.

http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/1963_birmingham_church_bombing.htm

The FBI & the Birmingham church bombing

By Monica Moorehead [1997]

One of the most heinous terrorist acts of the civil-rights or any era has been resurrected in the national news. And deservedly so.

On Sept. 15, 1963, on a Sunday morning in Birmingham, Ala., a powerful bomb was thrown into the basement of the all-Black Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Sunday school was in session.

The explosion instantly killed 11-year-old Denise McNair along with Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley and Carol Robertson, all 14 years old. Scores of others were injured.

On the eve of the 34th anniversary of what has come to be known as the Birmingham bombing, filmmaker Spike Lee has made a moving, extraordinary feature-length documentary movie entitled "Four Little Girls." And in early July the Federal Bureau of Investigation announced it is reopening the bombing case based on "new information." Lee's documentary includes interviews with the surviving family members, friends and acquaintances of the four murdered children, with leaders and foes of the civil-rights movement, and with news analysts. These interviews are interwoven with historic footage of some of the most dramatic images of the civil-rights movement, especially highlighting the role of young people.

Lee's film provides an incredible glimpse into the lives of these four girls and how those who knew and loved them have heroically dealt with the terrible pain of their losses.

The documentary will be shown on HBO next February [1998]. It is in limited theatrical release for only two weeks in a handful of cities.

It is no accident that the bombing took place at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.

CIVIL-RIGHTS CENTER

Birmingham, the state's industrial hub, was seen as the center of the civil-rights movement. A number of Freedom Rides went from Birmingham to Montgomery. The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was the civil-rights movement's main organizing center.

Activists--especially Black youths--came there to map out strategies for reaching out to high-school students to get involved in the struggle for winning basic democratic rights for Black people.

This is how Harrison Salisbury, a *New York Times* reporter, described Birmingham--or Bombingham as it was called in civil-rights circles--in 1963: "Whites and Blacks still walk the same streets. But the streets, the water supply and the sewer system are about the only public facilities they share.

"Ball parks and taxicabs are segregated. So are libraries. A book featuring black rabbits and white rabbits was banned. A drive is on to forbid 'Negro music' on 'white' radio stations.

"Every channel of communication, every medium of mutual interest, every reasoned approach, every inch of middle ground has been fragmented by the emotional dynamite of racism, reinforced by the whip, the razor, the gun, the bomb, the torch, the club, the knife, the mob, the police and many branches of the state's apparatus."

The city was run by the notorious police chief, Eugene "Bull" Connor. He ordered the Fire Department to turn its fire hoses full-force against Black demonstrators. He carried out mass arrests, ordering his Nazi-like storm troopers to beat Black people senseless and sic their vicious dogs on young children and adults.

This is exactly what happened on May 3, 1963.

The FBI & the Birmingham church bombing *(continued)*

Martin Luther King had called for a mass march in Birmingham. Thousands from the Black community came out in the streets.

Fifteen hundred young people overflowed the jails within three days.

In response to this brutal repression, Black people pelted the police with rocks, bricks and bottles. A full-scale rebellion had erupted in Birmingham--which scared the racist local authorities, and forced President John Kennedy to address the country about Birmingham.

FBI'S ROLE

The neo-fascist J. Edgar Hoover, one of the civil-rights movement's biggest enemies, ran the FBI during this period. Hoover was the mastermind behind Cointelpro-- Counterintelligence Program--whose main goal was to destroy every national-liberation movement inside the United States.

In order to infiltrate the civil-rights movement, the FBI cooperated with racist state and local authorities throughout the South, including Birmingham. In the book "Agents of Repression," authors Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall write: "Hoover dubbed King 'the most notorious liar in the country.' At the same time agents in Birmingham, Ala., actually were passing information to the Ku Klux Klan, via a police liaison they knew to be a Klansman, facilitating physical attacks on civil-rights workers, thus going way beyond what King had asserted in theory."

A KKK member, Robert Chambliss, was the only person convicted of the Birmingham bombing. That was in 1977. He died in prison. But there were always assertions that he was not the lone mass murderer. In fact, in light of the insidious role the FBI played during the civil-rights era, everyone should seriously question why the Bureau is reopening this case almost 34 years later--when it already knows all the guilty parties that were involved in this crime, starting with itself.

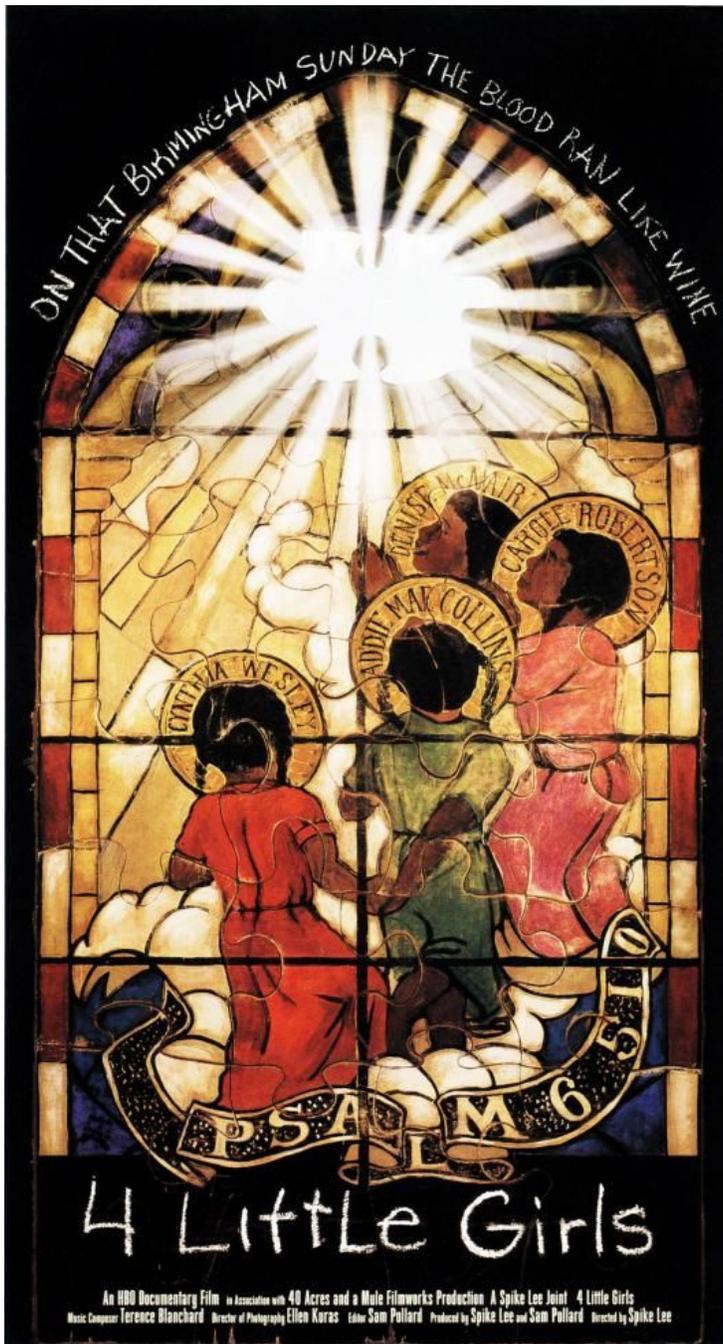
The fact that the FBI is reopening this case is tantamount to a fox guarding the chicken coop. What is really needed is an independent investigation into the bombing, and a demand that the FBI make public all its records--not only on the bombing, but on the FBI's sordid role in working hand in hand with "Bull" Connor and the racist Birmingham administration.

The FBI claims there is no direct correlation between its reopening the case and the release of Lee's "Four Little Girls." But of course, the FBI knew when Lee started filming the documentary and when it would be released.

The FBI wanted to put this bombing behind it. Now a whole new generation of progressive activists and organizers will know what happened on a Sunday morning on Sept. 15, 1963, in Birmingham, Ala. And they will never forget.

Source: <http://www.4littlegirls.com/97news.htm>

Copyright Workers World Service: Original online document Reprinted with permission from the July 24, 1997 issue of Workers World newspaper



SPIKE LEE'S '4 LITTLE GIRLS'

1. About the Documentary

Remembering four little girls

American Visions, Feb-March, 1998

by Denene Millner

Four young black girls arrived at Sunday school, dressed in their usher whites, giggles on their lips, and hair slightly disheveled from gleeful play--ready to learn about Jesus and sing God's praises at their mamas' knees. It was Youth Day at the 16th Street Baptist Church, and even in the midst of the racial turmoil that had seized Birmingham, Ala., they were four little girls living the blissful lives of, well, four little girls.

Hate robbed them of their childhood pleasures. A bomb, planted by a Ku Klux Klansman fiercely opposed to integration, ripped through the basement of their church, sending brick and mortar and furniture hurtling. So strong was the blast that it blew out the face of Jesus in the stained-glass window and stopped the clock.

..

By the time the chaos had settled into an eerie calm, Carole Denise McNair, 11, and Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley and Carole Rosamond Robertson, all 14, were dead--buried beneath piles of debris. September 15, 1963, would forever be their day--the day that they became martyrs for the civil rights struggle.

Their deaths changed Alabama--and America, for that matter. In 1963 Jim Crow ruled the South; Medgar Evers was assassinated; thousands marched on Washington, D.C.; and racists set so many bombs in Birmingham that the predominantly black section of town was called Dynamite Hill. But these four girls were the proof that the civil rights movement needed to show America that racism was destroying the fabric of the United States. Less than a year after they died, Congress pushed through the long-fought-for Civil Rights Act of 1964.

While everyone remembers Denise, Addie Mae, Cynthia and Carole as the four little girls, no one really knows the stories behind their stories--how the lives of four families and countless friends were torn to shreds. This month, after more than three decades of silence, their stories will be heard on HBO, and the world will know their pain. In the documentary *4 Little Girls*, director Spike Lee brings to the screen a detailed accounting of the happiness, the sadness, the glory and the pain that were Denise and Addie Mae and Cynthia and Carole.

(Continued on page 31)

About the Documentary (continued)

“African Americans are far too quick to want to forget,” Lee explains about why he chose to make the documentary. “We don’t want to remember. It’s always: ‘Let’s forget about slavery, Emmett Till, Rosa Parks, Medgar Evers. Why you wanna go back and bring that up--dredge up that stuff?’ Consequently, we have a generation of black kids who think this is the way it always was--that we could always live where we wanted, eat where we wanted, have church where we wanted. We need to remember.”

While a graduate film student at New York University in the 1980s, Lee wrote a passionate letter to Denise’s father, Christopher McNair, asking if he could do a movie about his daughter, who had shunned giving any more than tempered, cursory comments about his daughter’s death--partly due to fear of retribution, partly because he was tired of people telling him to “let it alone”--declined.

Years later, Lee pitched his idea to McNair again. This time, the reluctant father said yes. “I realized it was stupid to forget,” McNair says of his change of heart. “I want people to, number one, know who the four little girls were and, number two, understand that it just doesn’t pay and that this could have happened anywhere in the United States. Those girls--my daughter--should not have died.”The film uses bomb survivors, the children’s families, their friends, witnesses, prosecutors, activists and those who defended segregation to tell the story of the bombing and the circumstances that led to it.

Lee, who has often come under fire for the political stands that he’s taken in his cinematic work, says that he chose to film *4 Little Girls* as a documentary because he wanted to tell the story without being accused of compromising the story’s integrity--a move, industry observers say, that could very well increase Lee’s chances of being nominated for an Oscar this year. “I want the audience, especially the parents, to think about what they might have done had their child been taken away from them like that,” Lee says. “I want the audience to come to know and love those four little girls.”

COPYRIGHT 1998 Heritage Information Holdings, Inc.

COPYRIGHT 2008 Gale, Cengage Learning

Source: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1546/is_n1_v13/ai_20330373/?tag=content;coll

2. Making It Plain

Etched in Memory: 4 Little Girls.

Rob Nelson

Published on November 19, 1997

CIVIL RIGHTS HAS taken on a new kind of struggle within recent cinema--a battle of representation wherein white-knight fictions like *Ghosts of Mississippi* and *A Time to Kill* are created for mass consumption, while truthful docs like *Freedom On My Mind* and Spike Lee’s *4 Little Girls* play only a handful of specialized venues en route to the small screen. Befitting the movement itself, this filmic business-as-usual supplies an ideal context for activism. Indeed, it has enabled Lee to launch another perfectly timed counteroffensive: a calmly wrenching mix of oral history and period newsreels, recalling the fateful Sunday in mid-September 1963 when a white supremacist’s bomb took the lives of four churchgoing black girls in Birmingham, Alabama. As Lee has expressed his belief that no other black filmmaker could have secured the meager \$1 million budget for this project, *4 Little Girls* is political mainly by virtue of having been made. Accordingly, it’s the director’s most purely mournful work, a memorial service in a time of historical amnesia.

Melancholy from its first frames, *4 Little Girls* opens with a long tracking shot through a cemetery, intercut with

Continued on page 32

Making It Plain (continued from page 31)

'60s images of segregated bathrooms, Klan marches, police with attack dogs, and lynched black bodies. It's Lee's way of drawing an immediate connection between the social climate and its consequences; but those tombstones also announce this as the story, first and foremost, of four little girls. Family interviews and old photos sketch four distinct personalities. Carole Robertson was a girl scout who was carrying a Bible at the time of the bombing; her sister recalls sitting with her in a movie theater balcony, tossing popcorn on the white people below. Cynthia Wesley is immortalized by a friend who remembers the bright look in her eyes the last time he saw her. Addie Mae Collins was a sensitive young soul who held a funeral ceremony for a dead bird. And Denise McNair once asked her dad point-blank to explain why she couldn't get a sandwich from a segregated lunch counter. "I'm not sure if she ever understood," her father says into the camera. Lee, sitting off-screen, brings it even closer to home: "How did she feel?"

Viewing race politics through a personal lens, *4 Little Girls* nevertheless puts the tragedy in context. The year 1963 began with Alabama governor George Wallace's pro-segregation speech that he later enforced by personally blocking a doorway at the state university. By spring, the volatile old-South steel town of Birmingham became the locus of both resistance and violence, as peaceful petitions to integrate department stores were met with rampant police brutality, the arrest of Martin Luther King, and President Kennedy's deployment of 3,000 National Guard troops to the city. The film's footage of police commissioner and mayoral candidate Bull Connor driving an armored tank through black neighborhoods reveals the freedom with which white supremacist terror was perpetrated. (One interviewee describes Connor as "the walking id of Birmingham.") Then, only two weeks after King's "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington, a bomb tore through the basement of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, killing the four girls--one age 11, the others 14--who were there to attend Sunday school

Lee's film makes plain the irony that this devastating event was also a radicalizing one: "We were able to transform a crucifixion into a resurrection," says Jesse Jackson, while retired newscaster Walter Cronkite opines, "I don't think the white community realized the depth of hate until then." In its way, *4 Little Girls* aims to function similarly as a catalyst. The film invokes the recent resurgence of African American church burning with TV-news footage from 1994 and exposes the ailing Wallace's pathetic attempts to finesse his own character by referring to his black assistant as "my best friend." Lee also includes brief glimpses of the horrible morgue photos of the girls' torn bodies and scenes from 1977 showing the indictment of a grinning former Klan member named Robert "Dynamite Bob" Chambliss. In so doing, one of Lee's projects is to chart from past to present the course of all that powerful energy: the outrage and grief, the activism in fighting for justice or in simply coping. "How does your anger come out?" he asks one of the girls' mothers--and part of what he's getting at is, How can we harness it?

This is a more contemplative sort of anger than Lee had shown in the first phase of his career. Back in 1992, he kicked off *Malcolm X* with clips from the Rodney King beating while the American flag burned to a crisp "X"--an astonishing feat within the studio system. Then came his second, daringly uncommercial phase: the beautifully impressionistic *Crooklyn*, the hood-film eulogy *Clockers* (which, in its palpable sorrow, feels most like *4 Little Girls*), and last year's *Get on the Bus*, a fully collaborative, doc-like work of fictionalized history and one of the more creatively conceived and financed indies ever released as a studio film. Made for HBO, *4 Little Girls* is in some ways more indie than Lee has ever been: It's the straightforward work of a filmmaker with a camera, asking questions, reckoning with history and helping it along. The auteur is clearly at the top of his game, and yet one of the many great things about this film is that its real triumph is not Spike Lee's.

Source: <http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/02.19.98/tv-9807.html>

Eulogy For The Young Victims Of The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church Bombing

By the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

September 18, 1963, Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama

[Delivered at funeral service for three of the children killed in the bombing-Addie Mae Collins, Carol Denise McNair, and Cynthia Diane Wesley. A separate service was held for the fourth victim, Carole Robertson.]

This afternoon we gather in the quiet of this sanctuary to pay our last tribute of respect to these beautiful children of God. They entered the stage of history just a few years ago, and in the brief years that they were privileged to act on this mortal stage, they played their parts exceedingly well. Now the curtain falls; they move through the exit; the drama of their earthly life comes to a close. They are now committed back to that eternity from which they came.

These children – unoffending, innocent, and beautiful – were the victims of one of the most vicious and tragic crimes ever perpetrated against humanity.

And yet they died nobly. They are the martyred heroines of a holy crusade for freedom and human dignity. And so this afternoon in a real sense they have something to say to each of us in their death. They have something to say to every minister of the gospel who has remained silent behind the safe security of stained-glass windows. They have something to say to every politician *[Audience:] (Yeah)* who has fed his constituents with the stale bread of hatred and the spoiled meat of racism. They have something to say to a federal government that has compromised with the undemocratic practices of southern Dixiecrats *(Yeah)* and the blatant hypocrisy of right-wing northern Republicans. *(Speak)* They have something to say to every Negro *(Yeah)* who has passively accepted the evil system of segregation and who has stood on the sidelines in a mighty struggle for justice. They say to each of us, black and white alike, that we must substitute courage for caution. They say to us that we must be concerned not merely about who murdered them, but about the system, the way of life, the philosophy which produced the murderers. Their death says to us that we must work passionately and unrelentingly for the realization of the American dream.

And so my friends, they did not die in vain. *(Yeah)* God still has a way of wringing good out of evil. *(Oh yes)* And history has proven over and over again that unmerited suffering is redemptive. The innocent blood of these little girls may well serve as a redemptive force *(Yeah)* that will bring new light to this dark city. *(Yeah)* The holy Scripture says, “A little child shall lead them.” *(Oh yeah)* The death of these little children may lead our whole Southland *(Yeah)* from the low road of man’s inhumanity to man to the high road of peace and brotherhood. *(Yeah, Yes)* These tragic deaths may lead our nation to substitute an aristocracy of character for an aristocracy of color. The spilled blood of these innocent girls may cause the whole citizenry of Birmingham *(Yeah)* to transform the negative extremes of a dark past into the positive extremes of a bright future. Indeed this tragic event may cause the white South to come to terms with its conscience. *(Yeah)*

(Continued on page 34)

Eulogy (continued from page 33)

And so I stand here to say this afternoon to all assembled here, that in spite of the darkness of this hour (*Yeah Well*), we must not despair. (*Yeah, Well*) We must not become bitter (*Yeah, That's right*), nor must we harbor the desire to retaliate with violence. No, we must not lose faith in our white brothers. (*Yeah*), *Yes*) Somehow we must believe that the most misguided among them can learn to respect the dignity and the worth of all human personality.

May I now say a word to you, the members of the bereaved families? It is almost impossible to say anything that can console you at this difficult hour and remove the deep clouds of disappointment which are floating in your mental skies. But I hope you can find a little consolation from the universality of this experience. Death comes to every individual. There is an amazing democracy about death. It is not aristocracy for some of the people, but a democracy for all of the people. Kings die and beggars die; rich men and poor men die; old people die and young people die. Death comes to the innocent and it comes to the guilty. Death is the irreducible common denominator of all men.

I hope you can find some consolation from Christianity's affirmation that death is not the end. Death is not a period that ends the great sentence of life, but a comma that punctuates it to more lofty significance. Death is not a blind alley that leads the human race into a state of nothingness, but an open door which leads man into life eternal. Let this daring faith, this great invincible surmise, be your sustaining power during these trying days.

Now I say to you in conclusion, life is hard, at times as hard as crucible steel. It has its bleak and difficult moments. Like the ever-flowing waters of the river, life has its moments of drought and its moments of flood. (*Yeah, Yes*) Like the ever-changing cycle of the seasons, life has the soothing warmth of its summers and the piercing chill of its winters. (*Yeah*) And if one will hold on, he will discover that God walks with him (*Yeah, Well*), and that God is able (*Yeah, Yes*) to lift you from the fatigue of despair to the buoyancy of hope, and transform dark and desolate valleys into sunlit paths of inner peace.

And so today, you do not walk alone. You gave to this world wonderful children. [*moans*] They didn't live long lives, but they lived meaningful lives. (*Well*) Their lives were distressingly small in quantity, but glowingly large in quality. (*Yeah*) And no greater tribute can be paid to you as parents, and no greater epitaph can come to them as children, than where they died and what they were doing when they died. (*Yeah*) They did not die in the dives and dens of Birmingham (*Yeah, Well*), nor did they die discussing and listening to filthy jokes. (*Yeah*) They died between the sacred walls of the church of God (*Yeah, Yes*), and they were discussing the eternal meaning (*Yes*) of love. This stands out as a beautiful, beautiful thing for all generations. (*Yes*) Shakespeare had Horatio to say some beautiful words as he stood over the dead body of Hamlet. And today, as I stand over the remains of these beautiful, darling girls, I paraphrase the words of Shakespeare: (*Yeah, Well*): Good night, sweet princesses. Good night, those who symbolize a new day. (*Yeah, Yes*) And may the flight of angels (*That's right*) take thee to thy eternal rest. God bless you.

<https://www.drmartinlutherkingjr.com/birminghamchurchbombingeulogy.htm>



*Afterword, 2018: Even More Timely Today**

For those who were alive during the Civil Rights movement and the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, it may be difficult to believe that fully fifty-four years have flown by since that haunting incident was seared into our memory forever, as a reminder of how low human depravity can sink, and of how high human nobility and compassion can soar, even in the face of such a circumstance

For the more than 70% of the population who were born since 1963, or who were only children at that time, the incident may seem like ancient history, belonging to a time little connected to our own time. This would also be true of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. less than five years afterwards, on April 4, 1968, 50 years ago on that date in 2018.

Even for those who may well recall these events, it may be a lesser known fact that the date of Dr. King's assassination had profound significance, as it was exactly a year to the day after he delivered the most controversial, and arguably most courageous speech of his career, at Riverside Church in New York City in 1967, denouncing the immoral, unnecessary, and unjust war in Viet Nam. For daring to exercise the moral leadership to which he had a Divine calling as a minister of the Gospel, he was widely criticized by friends and foes alike, who saw this speech, in spite of all of its brilliance and truth, as being dangerous, improper ("he should stick to Colored people's affairs"), "unpatriotic" and even as a betrayal of the Lyndon Johnson administration which had enacted the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts.

The threat that he posed to the status quo, of merging the human rights movement he had led with the growing Anti-War movement made him a man marked for elimination

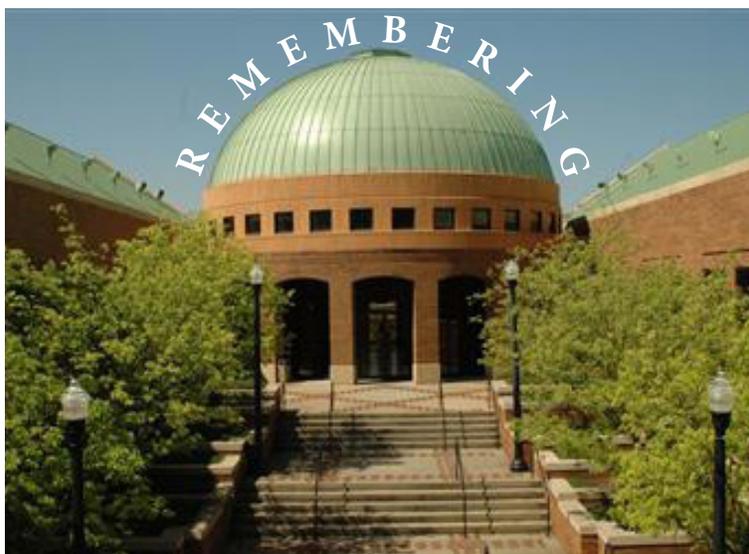
by his adversaries, who chose a date that would leave no doubt as to why he was targeted.

With the fiftieth anniversaries, in 2017 and 2018, of these two linked events come two tasks in our time: 1) to assess our gains and losses in the half century since Dr. King's assassination, and 2) to ensure that our younger and next generations know about and benefit from one of the most important social movements in human history.

There have certainly been gains – from greater freedoms for everyone in many aspects of life to the symbolic victory of electing an African American U.S. President, twice; but greater challenges have also emerged, as we witness renewed discrimination and "resegregation" in schools and housing, increasing erosion of the Voting Rights act, and as we recognize the largely unfinished work of ensuring economic justice, to which Dr. King dedicated the last years of his life (but did not live to see the Poor People's Campaign and the "Resurrection City" occupation of Washington, DC, which was barely a beginning). Moreover, whereas the Civil Rights movement succeeded in bringing a virtual end to Klan-motivated violence and killings, homicides within the Black community and killings by police have alarmingly increased.

Dr. King obviously did not accomplish the victories of the Civil Rights movement alone; it took millions of "foot soldiers," of all ethnicities and generations, to join that effort. A renewal of such a movement is needed now more than ever, to save this legacy, as current events demonstrate. Such a renewal can only come about with the Power of Knowledge. Remembering and grasping the significance of the sacrifice of six young people on a single Sunday in Birmingham, Alabama, may be a powerful place to start. – DGT

*Originally written in 2018, the 50th anniversary year of Dr. King's assassination, and updated in 2020



THE BIRMINGHAM CIVIL RIGHTS INSTITUTE

The highly acclaimed BCRI is located in the Civil Rights District, which also includes the 16th Street Baptist Church, Kelly Ingram Park, the once-thriving Fourth Avenue Business District and Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame in the Carver Theater. The Institute preserves much local and national history. The entire museum, with its exhibitions, programs, gift shop and other amenities, provides sobering reminders that the traumatic and tragic events of September 15, 1963, were but a fraction of a larger struggle in Birmingham, which included notorious Commissioner of Public Safety Eugene “Bull” Connor’s rabid opposition to equal Civil Rights for all citizens with his use of fire hoses and police dogs against nonviolent demonstrators and jailing of hundreds of children, among other injustices. More importantly, the museum honors the courage, resolve, and faith of the community, as well as the leadership of figures like the **Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth** and **Attorney Arthur Shores**, among many others.

September 15, 1963

A day to be remembered, because we cannot afford to forget.



NOTABLE ICONS

Born on September 15

Jazz legend **Julian “Cannonball” Adderley**
Tampa, FL (1926-1975)

Renowned operatic soprano **Jessye Norman**
Augusta, GA (1945-2019)



Produced by the Kuumba Artists Collective of South Florida
in cooperation with
The Florida Black Historical Research Project, Inc.
The *Dos Amigos/Fair Rosamond* Middle Passage Ship Replica Project
Designed and edited by Dinizulu Gene Tinnie