

Birmingham and Related Matters

The events in Birmingham have not revealed any new interracial problems; but they have dramatized some of the consequences of allowing our old problems to fester unsolved.

The problem is society's failure to treat every person as a human being, entitled to all of his God-given and Constitutional rights. The consequence, as we have seen, is the breakdown of law and order.

Every American has a stake in this problem and its consequences. Every religious man has a stake in this problem and its consequences. Every member of the Jewish community therefore has a triple stake in this problem and its consequences: primarily because he is an American and because of his religious heritage, but also because his personal security and the security of his religious institutions are inevitably threatened by any breakdown of democratic law and order. This specific threat has also been dramatized by events in Birmingham.

Further, we cannot escape responsibility for this problem, or the burden of its consequences wherever they may appear. The consequences of the problem in San Francisco will, of course, be felt by all of us in San Francisco. But the consequences of the problem in Birmingham will also be felt by all of us in San Francisco.

Therefore, the Jewish Community Relations Council of San Francisco, the Peninsula and Marin is expressing to appropriate public officials in the national government its urgent concern that every effort be made by that national government to buttress racial justice and the maintenance of law and order in Birmingham or wherever they may break down.

At the same time, the Jewish Community Relations Council re-emphasizes its continuing concern with responsibilities that San Franciscans have at home. San Francisco and Birmingham cannot be equated, but, in different form, the same basic problem exists here as in Birmingham: a widespread failure to treat every person as a human being, on his own individual merits. In this area, for example, this problem is manifested as a widespread refusal to rent or sell housing to otherwise qualified non-whites; and a continuing reluctance to employ non-whites on a level for which they are qualified. The effect is to cancel them out as individuals and human beings. The Jewish community must continue to bend its efforts to the reduction of this problem at home, at the same time that it supports the extension of human rights everywhere.

5/1/63