

GENERAL SCIENCE

Death Teaches Lessons

A study of letters to the editors of newspapers throughout the United States shows the American people's varying responses to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

►THE AMERICAN PEOPLE learned a lesson from the death of President John F. Kennedy. But it was not a single lesson.

The assassination seemed to give voice to many individual points of view that had up to that time been held silent.

This is the main conclusion drawn from a sampling of letters to the editors of newspapers in seven different geographical sections of the United States: Austin, Texas; Birmingham, Ala.; Cleveland, Ohio; Denver, Colo.; Evansville, Ind.; Knoxville, Tenn.; Roanoke, Va.

Of a total of 396 letters, 61 explained the moral lesson to be learned from the tragedy.

One put it this way: "Three men died this week because of a lack of respect for law and order and a lack of respect for the dignity of man," and urged Americans to reexamine their attitudes toward their fellow men. One said: "Hate will destroy this nation unless we the people stop it now."

One said: "Let us make use of this loss of life as a point to start from and remember to practice the golden rule daily . . . and ask what I can do for you not what you can do for me." And another said: "Let us go back 185 years and through education teach our children true patriotism."

In 61 of the letters, emotion was poured out. Some expressed personal feelings of loss. Other tried to give voice to the mood of the people. They grasped for comprehension of the event.

There was poetry. Rhyme was used in 171 communiques as a vent for feelings.

One wrote:

"Silent faces pass the bier of their late-fallen chief

Saddened eyes of men all reflect their grief . . ."

Another said:

"Etch this black deed upon our minds,
With all its searing pain,

Let men cry out from anguished hearts,
He shall not have died in vain."

Many persons had advice to give. Some of these 27 criticized the Dallas police, some said the press should have emphasized or deemphasized such and such. Others said the people were not behaving in a manner befitting the occasion. Eleven letters complimented the media on their coverage of the assassination and funeral.

Mr. Kennedy was eulogized in 26 letters. One of these said:

"He had riches and material comforts, yet he chose a life of service and devotion. He was endowed with fame and fortune, yet he preferred to minister, enlisting in the service of our country and humanity. He was of high state, yet he loved and cared for the less fortunate without regard to color, race, creed, religion or origin. He was a true American hero and a man of the world."

Letters from foreign friends accounted for 11 of the number. "Today England is mourning. We are torn apart inside and are emotionally exhausted." Thus they showed their sympathy.

There were five letters expressing anti-Kennedy sentiments, and five letters about the new President, Lyndon Johnson.

Nine letters expressed sympathy for and commended the courage of Mrs. Kennedy.

Nine letters were for the other two widows, Mrs. Tippit and Mrs. Oswald.

• Science News Letter, 85:27 Jan. 11, 1964

SOCIOLOGY

Widow's Troubles Studied

► WIDOWED WOMEN, and women who become head of a household, have their share of trouble in this world—but different kinds of trouble depending on where they live.

In India, for example, widows of the low caste of street sweepers are allowed by custom to remarry, but only to the brothers of their dead husbands. This means complications in many cases, because often the new husband of such a widow is still a child. Dr. Pauline M. Kolenda of Syracuse University, Syracuse, N. Y., told the American Anthropological Association meeting in San Francisco.

Still, this kind of widow, if she finds a suitable groom in a grown brother of her former husband, is far better off than her

"sisters" of higher castes who frown on any kind of remarriage, Dr. Kolenda said.

Marriages in India are mainly dictated by custom. No officials keep records of them and they are generally arranged by the family. If a deceased street sweeper has no brother a remarriage with someone outside the family is arranged, Dr. Kolenda said.

In contrast, women in the Western civilization who become heads of the household often have problems in finding a place to live. Dr. Helen Icken Safa, another Syracuse University anthropologist, said.

Even in getting public housing facilities, such a woman is discriminated against in favor of families with a man at the head.

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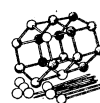
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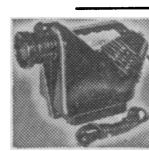
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