

a rage uncontained



VIRGIL LAMAR WARE

1949-1963

Youth killed during wave of racist violence, Birmingham, Ala.

As members of the bombed Sixteenth Street Baptist Church waited with the wounded and grieving at the hospital on September 15, 1963, the streets of Birmingham erupted. Some blacks, who had struggled through months of threats and violence during the campaign for civil rights, could no longer contain their rage. They threw rocks at police and gangs of whites, and set fire to several white businesses.

The families of the four dead girls tried to stop the violence. Chris McNair, the father of the youngest victim, said, "We must not let this change us into something different than who we are. We must be human."

Yet, even as black leaders pleaded with their followers not to meet violence with violence, two other black youths were killed that day.

A 16-year-old boy, Johnny Robinson, was among a crowd of black youths who were throwing rocks. When the police arrived, the youths turned to run. The police fired shotguns at them. Robinson was killed by a load of buckshot in the back.

In a suburb of Birmingham, 13-year-old Virgil Ware was riding on the handlebars of a bicycle while his older brother, James, pedaled. It was Sunday afternoon; neither of them had heard about the bombing. As James brought the bike down Docena-Sandusky Road in Pratt City, they were approached by two white boys riding a red motorscooter decorated with Confederate stickers. The boy riding on the back of the motorscooter pulled out a .22-caliber pistol and fired twice without saying a word.

Virgil was hit in the chest and

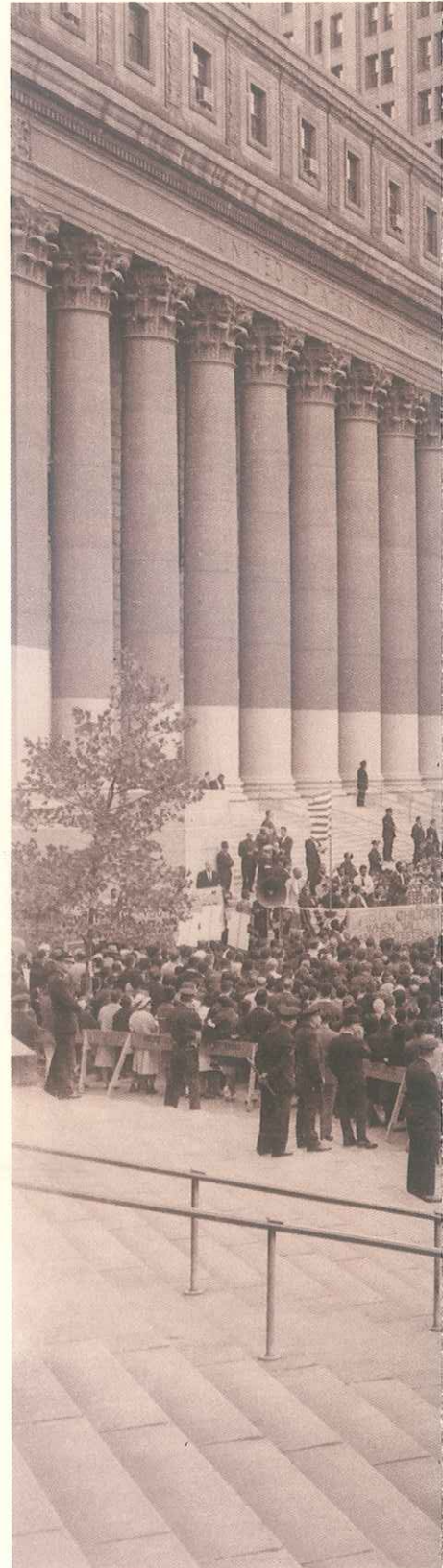
the face. He fell from the handlebars to the ground and died.

The killers of Virgil Ware were quickly identified as Michael Lee Farley and Larry Joe Sims, both 16, Eagle Scouts and regular churchgoers. They confessed to the killing but told the police they didn't know why they shot Virgil Ware.

An investigation showed that Farley and Sims had attended a segregationist rally before the shooting. They also had visited the headquarters of the National States Rights Party (NSRP), a white supremacist group whose members had been involved in bombings and other racial violence. The NSRP taught that black people were less than human and they didn't deserve to live in America. Farley and Sims, indoctrinated in such fanatical racism, killed Virgil Ware casually, as if they were shooting at an animal.

The white youths went to trial — not for murder, but for the lesser charge of manslaughter. They were convicted and sentenced to seven months in prison. But Joe Sims, the boy who pulled the trigger, was released after only a few days in custody. The trial judge set him free and warned him not to have another "lapse."

In 2004, after decades of resting in a makeshift graveyard under a mound of dirt marked with fading blue silk flowers but no headstone, Ware's remains were re-interred under a custom-designed bronze marker that bears a likeness of Virgil and the phrase, "Gone But Not Forgotten." And signs commemorating the teenager's death were posted by the City of Birmingham on DeKalb Street, near where he lived.



RIGHT
Angered by the murder of four schoolgirls in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing, people took to the streets of Manhattan in protest.



When violence erupted in the aftermath of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing, Chris McNair, father of the youngest victim, pleaded for calm: "We must not let this change us into something different than who we are. We must be human."