
Jack Nelson is a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and one of America's leading reporters on the civil rights movement. His latest book, Terror in the Night is a "non-fiction thriller" that is sure to please anyone who enjoys a faced-paced, action packed book. According to the jacket cover, Terror in the Night is "the explosive story of how the FBI and the Meridian police, bankrolled by the Jewish community and assisted by informants, planned an ambush that killed a female elementary-school teacher and left the Klan's top hit man critically wounded. Some cried entrapment. Some cried murder. Still others cried justice.

And some, who will read this book will cry "exploitation and sensationalism!" The implication in the blurb is that the Jewish community bankrolled an "ambush" which resulted in the death of an innocent elementary school teacher.

The "female elementary school teacher" was no innocent bystander. She was a cold blooded terrorist out for murder. At the time she was shot, she was armed and dangerous. Her car was parked in front of the house of Meyer Davidson, a Jewish community leader active in the civil rights movement. She was there with her partner, Tommy Tarrants who had brought sixteen sticks of dynamite to blow up Davidson's house and kill his family. The ambush could just as well have said that the ambush put an end to the Klan's reign of terror and that one Klan terrorist was killed and the other captured. Instead, the book is written and advertised as a shocking expose.

In fact, we have known for years now that the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover abused its powers. We know they illegally kept files on presidents, senators, and congressmen. We know that Hoover himself hated Martin Luther King, Jr. and waged a virtual war against the civil rights leader. So it is hardly a surprise to learn that when the FBI was ordered by Johnson to get the Klan, they used the same illegal tactics they used against the others. It is hard to imagine that readers of this book will be able to feel outrage over FBI infiltration of the Klan! Certainly, the FBI's abuse of power should be a concern to every citizen, but this book does not tell us anything we did not already know about that abuse.

There are interesting revelations which I hope will not get lost in the hoopla over the abuse of police power. Jack Nelson could not have written this book without the unstinting cooperation of the man at the center of the story: Thomas Albert Tarrants III. Tarrants transformation from a hate filled murderer to missionary anti-racist is one of the most intriguing aspects of this story.

Second, Jewish readers will find the sensitive description of the Southern Jews dilemma during the civil rights movement well worth reading. Of course, there were Jews on all sides of the issues, including many who supported segregation. But those like Rabbi Nussbaum, who supported the civil rights movement, found themselves in an excuisitly difficult and dangerous position.

Finally, this story may help sensitize readers to the reality which allowed for a reign of terror to go on for years against the black community. After Temple Beth Israel was bombed, then Governor John Bell Williams rushed to the scene and issued a public statement in which he said, "it defies the
imagination of civilized people to understand a mind so depraved as to destroy any house of
worship." The irony was that "Williams had been silent while at least two hundred black churches
in Mississippi were bombed or burned during his time as a congressman and governor." (116)

The attack on the Jewish community ended the Klan's reign of terror. After the synagogue
bombings, the Jewish community closed ranks. The ADL brought pressure on the FBI, local
leaders raised significant sums of money to be used in the campaign against the Klan, and political
pressure was brought on state officials from the Governor on down. In the end they were
successful. The question that lingers is: why was the bombing of two hundred black churches not
enough to mobilize the forces of justice?