

Disaster Study Number 11

# The Schoolhouse Disasters

*Family and Community*

*as Determinants of the Child's Response to Disaster*

HELEN SWICK PERRY

STEWART E. PERRY

Disaster Research Group

**National Academy of Sciences—**

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The Disaster Research Group conducts research, sponsors conferences and publications, and advises with officials on problems of human behavior in disaster and civil defense. It continues publication of the Disaster Study Series initiated by the Committee on Disaster Studies.

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Helen Swick Perry and Stewart E. Perry

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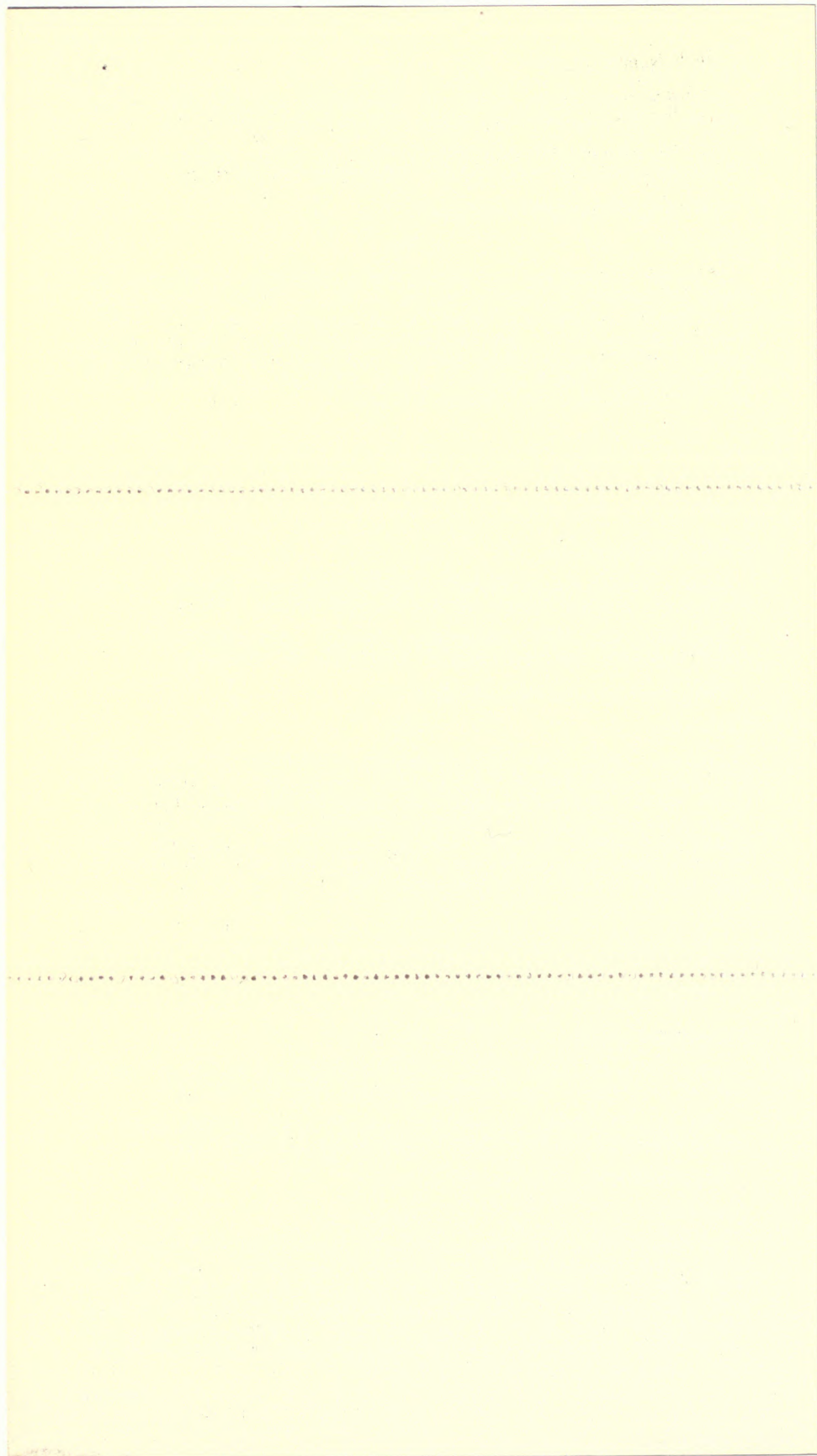
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Rescuers search for children under a Mississippi schoolhouse destroyed by tornado. This is only the beginning for children and families who must cope with the trauma of disaster.

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Disaster Research Group

Division of Anthropology and Psychology

## THE SCHOOLHOUSE DISASTERS

Family and Community as Determinants of  
the Child's Response to Disaster

by

Helen Swick Perry

Stewart E. Perry

Publication 554

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES — NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

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## FOREWORD

In December, 1953 the Committee on Disaster Studies, the National Institute of Mental Health, and the Mississippi State Department of Public Welfare collaborated in a study of the effects of disaster upon children and families. The event was the Vicksburg tornado. The results were published by the National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council in The Child and His Family in Disaster: A Study of the 1953 Vicksburg Tornado, by Stewart E. Perry, Earle Silber, and Donald A. Bloch.

In February, 1955 other tornadoes struck Mississippi. This time two rural schoolhouses were the main targets, and, again, most of the victims were children. While a systematic replication of the Vicksburg study was not feasible, the Committee on Disaster Studies (now Disaster Research Group) felt it desirable to attempt to refine and elaborate the findings of the previous study.

Subs.  
The purpose of Operation Schoolhouse was a case study, of a limited number of families, which would illuminate the processes by which a family, in the context of its community and sub-culture, may deal with the traumatic experiences of disaster. This purpose has been achieved, by a skillful research team composed of Dr. Ralph Patrick, chairman, Dr. Hylan Lewis, and Mrs. Rebecca Moore, and by the authors, Helen and Stewart Perry, who have patiently sifted and brooded over the field data and teased from it a provocative and useful report.

Publication of this report is gratifying not only because of the information and ideas it contributes to the study of an important problem but also because it signifies a remarkable amount of cooperation on the part of many people.

25159  
The authors, the field research team, and the Disaster Research Group are most grateful to the Mississippi families who cooperated so generously. We are again deeply indebted to Mr. J. A. Thigpen, then Commissioner, Mrs. Sarah Caldwell and other officials of the Mississippi State Department of Public Welfare for their wise guidance and assistance in establishing local arrangements, and for assigning an especially able member of their staff, Mrs. Moore, to the field team. We are grateful to many local persons whose cooperation was truly indispensable. These include: Mrs. Remelle V. Eason, Miss Lucille McDonald, Mrs. Georgia Pitchford, Mrs. Hazel Shelton; and

Messrs. S. R. Leatherman, William A. Leatherman, and S. R. Leatherman, Jr. Atlanta University and Washington University, St. Louis, enabled Dr. Lewis and Dr. Patrick, respectively, to take time for the field work.

Mr. Jeston Hamer did much work on the initial analysis of the data. Dr. Franklin Frazier, Dr. Earl Silber, Dr. John Clausen, Dr. Martha Wolfenstein, Mr. Stewart Perry and Mr. Hamer participated in the initial planning of the study. Many others, including Dr. Joseph Bobbit, Dr. Gerald Caplan, Dr. James Cowhig, Dr. Irving Janis, Dr. Reuben Hill, Dr. John P. Spiegel, and Dr. Donald Bloch kindly provided comments and suggestions.

Publication of this report does not necessarily imply agreement with every statement contained herein, either by the Disaster Research Group or by the sponsoring agencies.

Harry B. Williams  
Technical Director  
Disaster Research Group



## PREFACE

As the writers of this report, we would like to note that we did not participate in the field work on this project and that we had opportunity for only minimal contact with the field investigators during the time that we worked on the analysis of the data and the formulation of the findings. In the main, therefore, we must assume primary responsibility for the content of this report. Through correspondence with the field investigators, Hylan Lewis, Rebecca Moore, and Ralph Patrick, we have been able to clarify certain questions on the data; and all of these people have made useful comments and emendations for the revision of this manuscript. We are indeed grateful to them for their generous cooperation, particularly since this part of the work was in addition to their regular job commitments. We are especially grateful to Ralph Patrick who made a trip to Washington, D. C., for the express purpose of conferring with us on some revisions in the final report.

In addition, we would like to mention our appreciation of the work of Jeston Hamer who initially abstracted materials from the interviews; and to Harry B. Williams who encouraged us and made helpful suggestions during the period of our study.

H. S. P.

S. E. P.

September 19, 1957





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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Disasters provide a natural setting for the study of communities subjected to a common overwhelming stress. Sometimes the freakish processes of nature visit disaster in a strangely selective fashion. One such disaster was the tornado in Vicksburg in 1953 which seemed to single out children, because it tore down a theater during the Saturday matinee. Out of this idiosyncrasy of nature it was possible for the first time to conduct an extensive study of children in disaster.<sup>1</sup> When the Vicksburg project was completed, the Committee on Disaster Studies contemplated the study of a future similar disaster in order to explore the general validity of the hypotheses derived from the Vicksburg research.

In 1955, tornadoes struck at two rural schoolhouses in Mississippi, killing a number of children who were in class at the time. Again, children were the principal victims, and the Committee decided that this was an opportunity to find out more about how children behave after disaster and what might help them recover from the experience they undergo in such a situation. "Operation Schoolhouse" was organized as a research project to extend the investigations begun in the earlier study. But awful identity between the Schoolhouse and the Vicksburg disasters was an identity only in terms of its general human meaning -- that, in both instances, children were somehow the chosen victims of nature. In actuality, social and family structures of the people in the schoolhouse disasters meant that the experience for the children was a far different one.

True, there were similarities to the Vicksburg experience. But perhaps the central conclusion of Operation Schoolhouse is that the stress of disaster and reactions to it are somewhat more complex than earlier research seemed to indicate.

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1. Stewart E. Perry, Earle Silber, and Donald A. Bloch, The Child and His Family in Disaster: A Study of the 1953 Vicksburg Tornado (Committee on Disaster Studies, Report No. 5 / Washington, D. C.: National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council, Publication No. 394, 19567).

## Operation Schoolhouse: The Field Experience, the Methods, and the Sample

Operation Schoolhouse began with an Associated Press story. The story, dated February 1, 1955, from a Southern metropolis, read in part as follows:

Violent tornadoes ripped across the midsouth today, killing at least 29 persons -- many of them schoolchildren. . . . The two Mississippi twisters had a deadly affinity for school buildings. Each included an elementary school in its erratic, destructive path.

Preliminary investigation led the Committee on Disaster Studies to the conclusion that a study of children and families that had experienced the disasters was desirable and feasible. The Committee was fortunate in being able to secure Dr. Hylan Lewis and Dr. Ralph Patrick, both social anthropologists, to undertake research in the stricken communities. Through the cooperation of Mrs. Sarah Caldwell of the Mississippi State Department of Welfare and Mr. J. A. Thigpen, then Commissioner of the Department, a senior member of her staff of child welfare workers, Mrs. Rebecca Moore, was added to the team. Since the disasters had occurred in Southern rural communities, this team was particularly appropriate in terms of the special setting of the disaster. Dr. Lewis and Mrs. Moore, the two Negroes on the team, were to interview the Negro community; Dr. Patrick, as a white member of the team, was to make contact with the white community and assemble more general field notes. All had had professional experience in the deep South.

The general purposes of the study were initially formulated as follows: "To identify the major components of parent-child interaction and the total family interaction patterns which affect the symptomatology of children exposed to disaster. Extra-family influences (e.g., the manner in which the disaster experience is handled by the community, by peer groups, by the school, etc., and is affected by the prevailing cultural norms) and involvement events (e.g., injury, interpersonal loss, etc.) must be taken into account in studying this problem."

The main approach was planned as a disaster case study to investigate a limited number of families more intensively than had been possible in Vicksburg. In this way, existing hypotheses could be refined, a new hypotheses could be added, and the processes by which families cope with disaster could be further illuminated through qualitative analysis of intensive data.

In addition to the intensive study of a few families, a screening interview was planned for all the families who had children enrolled in the tornado-struck schools. While this procedure was intended primarily for use in selecting families to be more intensively studied, it was hoped that, as a secondary result, information suitable for statistical testing of some hypotheses might be secured.<sup>2</sup>

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2. See next page.



A planning session was held in Washington, where the team mapped out aims and procedures with staff and consultants of the Committee including one of the authors of this report. The disasters had occurred on February 1, 1955; by February 28, the research team had entered the field.

Hilltown and Delta Town,<sup>3</sup> the scenes of the disasters, are two small communities in the far northern section of Mississippi, about thirty miles from each other and in different counties. Both are little more than rural crossroads around which are gathered a few houses, a store or so, and a few churches. Each settlement is predominantly Negro, and in each the school building where the Negro children received primary education was swept away by a tornado that killed the only teacher, and killed or injured many of the children. Many houses and farms in both communities were also struck. All mortalities occurred in the Negro population. Although in both communities one or two members of the white race were injured, injuries were highest for the Negroes who comprised the greater part of the population.

Hilltown is in hilly country where the farming land is not rich. The countryside is badly eroded, and great ditches criss-cross red and yellow clay fields. The Negro population, as well as the white population, is made up largely of small landowners. Delta Town is situated on a 10,000-acre plantation in the rich flat delta land of the Mississippi River; the black loamy soil is mostly farmed by Negro sharecroppers or tenant farmers who may also work by the day for the white owners of the plantation--an influential family of long-term residence in that area.

The two communities, therefore, offer a strong contrast in social organization which obviously affected the manner in which the immediate disaster experience was handled. For example, relatively precise figures were easily available on the dead (26) and injured (109) in the Delta Town area, but not in the Hilltown area. This is probably a result of the more centralized organization of the plantation community,

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2. For example, it was hoped that the following hypotheses could be tested: 1) Emotional disturbance in the post-disaster child can be predicted from the occurrence of certain disaster events -- e.g., death in the immediate family. 2) Disturbance in the child can be predicted from the occurrence of a dissociative-demanding reaction to the disaster by the parent -- a particular disaster reaction which will be described further in detail. 3) Pre-existing family structures will in each family determine which member or members are permitted to be disturbed in the eyes of the other family members; for example, the role of the disturbed child will be appropriated by one person and may not be played by another member until it has been vacated by the first child. Unfortunately the data of the screening interviews were lost, and we will not comment quantitatively on these hypotheses.

3. In order to protect the identity of the respondents, we have changed the names of all towns and respondents.

where the families working on the plantation all share a common relationship with a centralized authority, the plantation owners. Cars equipped with two-way radios were one feature of the organization of the day-to-day plantation operation which provided a significant means of immediate post-disaster assessment of the damage and casualties. The more fragmented community of Hilltown had no such organizational or material facilities.

The differences between the two communities extend to the county seats -- in each case, about ten miles from the disaster scene -- where the white population is concentrated. Booth, in Hill County, is a good deal less prosperous than Avon, the Delta County seat. Avon is neatly laid out with many fine well-kept houses on broad green lawns; it has a manicured look of wealth and leisure. The two county seats are the local centers for economic and social activity, but the important marketing center for the whole area is Metropolis, thirty miles northeast of Delta Town and twenty miles northwest of Hilltown.<sup>4</sup>

From the beginning of the study, the field team had to recognize the importance of the local government in determining social rules and customs. In particular, introductions to county officials were necessary to avoid misinterpretations of the research team's mission. Initially the team met in Booth, county seat for Hilltown; and the Booth office of the State Welfare Department arranged introductions in both the Hilltown and Delta Town areas. In general, the white leaders, particularly in Hill County, had two concerns about the study: their fear, explicitly expressed, that the research team might be mistaken for labor recruiters for out-of-state enterprises; and their more implicit concern over any chance of disturbance of the existing interracial situation. The county officials were particularly helpful to the team in terms of geographical orientation in the Hilltown area, where roads were unmarked and the houses were widely separated.

For one week the team visited Negro families and individual citizens of the white community around Hilltown. The next week was spent in Delta Town. Persons in Booth provided introductions to the owners of the Delta Town plantation, whose cooperation was readily given. The cooperation of the plantation owners was, of course,

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4. Further information on the general characteristics of the two areas may be of interest to some readers. As compiled in rounded figures from U. S. Census data, Delta County population is just over 21,000, including 16,500 Negroes. For the Negro population, the estimated average family size is 4.1 persons, and the median income about \$620 per year. The total population in Hill County is 24,600, including 16,500 Negroes. The estimated average Negro family size is 4.7, and the median family income about \$400. U. S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Population: 1950 (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1952), II, part 24. We are indebted to Morton L. Brown for compiling this information.

necessary for any interviews with sharecroppers who worked on the plantation. The owners are one of the most influential families in the county, and the fact that they agreed to the study smoothed the way for other contacts in the area which were arranged in the county seat, Avon, through the local office of the Welfare Department.

Local cooperation was absolutely essential in both of these communities. There are networks of close relationships among most of the residents of these small communities, both white and Negro. In less closely knit communities, less time might have to be spent in carefully interpreting the research to all leading citizens.

Early in their work, the field team obtained from the two county superintendents of schools complete lists of children enrolled in the two stricken schools. An interviewer contacted the family of each one of these children, excepting one family which had moved away before the field team arrived. This was a manageable task, since there were fewer families involved than there were children in the school. This initial contact served as a screening interview for the selection of families to be more intensively interviewed.

More extended interviews were held with fourteen families -- four in Hilltown and ten in Delta Town. Several members of each family were interviewed. These fourteen families were selected because they had all suffered injury or death by the disaster. Table I describes the families upon which the conclusions and discussion of this study is based. There were approximately forty children enrolled in both schools, and twenty-nine of these came from the families included in our working sample.

It should be noted, therefore, that the families studied here were not selected with the intention that they constitute a probability sample of any universe of families, nor can these families be compared in detail with the total number of families who had children at the two schools, since the information collected on these families in the initial screening interviews was lost. Nevertheless, it can probably be assumed that the working sample includes about 70 percent of the families who had children in the schools at that time -- a very high proportion. The group of families studied is almost undoubtedly weighted on the side of families who actually suffered loss or injury; there is only one interview with a family who did not suffer injury or loss. Also included are two families who, though they had no children enrolled in the schools, did have children who were killed or injured.

Table II gives the ages of all those children who are included in the study whether or not they were enrolled in school. For classification purposes, we arbitrarily cut off the age range for children at age seventeen. Those children enrolled in the two elementary schools ranged from ages six to seventeen; six children in this age range were not so enrolled, and, of course, those younger than age six were not enrolled.

Most of the interviews took place during the period from February 28 to



TABLE I

The Families of Operation Schoolhouse

Code Name	Hill or Delta Area	Pre-disaster Household*		Number Killed		Number Injured		Number Children Enrolled**
		Adult	Child	Adult	Child	Adult	Child	
1. Able✓	D	2	3	-	2	-	-	2
2. Bell✓	D	2	7	-	3	1	2	3
3. Clark	H	3	4	-	-	-	1	2
4. Dorsey	D	5	2	1	-	1	1	2
5. Floyd	D	1	7	-	-	1	4	4
6. Grady	D	2	2	-	2	-	-	0
7. Morse✓	D	3	2	-	-	1	1	1
8. Norris	D	2	3	-	2	-	1	0
9. Pierce✓	H	3	3	1	1	-	2	3
10. Smith✓	H	2	6	-	1	-	1	4
11. Simpson✓	D	3	1	-	-	2	1	1
12. Turner✓	D	1	10	-	-	1	1	2
13. Vinson	H	2	7	-	-	-	2	4
14. Wilson	D	1	5	-	-	-	-	1
<u>Totals</u>		32	62	2	11	7	17	29

✓ Family specifically cited in text

\* Living together under one roof just prior to the tornado

\*\* Enrolled in the two schools that were destroyed

TABLE II

Age of Children in Study

<u>Age</u>	<u>Number</u>
Infancy	2
One	4
Two	5
Three	5
Four	6
Five	5
Six	4
Seven	5
Eight	3
Nine	5
Ten	2
Eleven	2
Twelve	3
Thirteen	3
Fourteen	3
Fifteen	1
Sixteen	3
Seventeen	<u>1</u>
Total	62



March 10. There were also return interviews with five of the families (two in Hilltown and three in Delta Town) which were made on a short trip back to the area in June. The first group of interviews was recorded by notes made during the interview and transcribed within the next two or three days. The return interviews in June were tape-recorded.

All interviews used in this analysis were conducted in a relatively unstructured manner. We have described in this paper our impressions gained from intensive reading of these protocols, using the materials for illustrative rather than demonstrative purposes. Initial procedures of analysis -- abstracting related materials from each interview -- were conducted by Jeston Hamer, who had also participated in the planning of the project. Unfortunately, Patrick, Lewis, and Moore were unable to devote the necessary time to the analysis of the data, and the present authors assumed the task at the invitation of the Committee in order to complete a report on the valuable data obtained by the field team.

The vicissitudes of disaster research, executed on necessarily short notice, have obviously accompanied Operation Schoolhouse. Despite any limitations which short time, accident, and the competing obligations of the initial research team have imposed, we are convinced that the materials gathered are a tribute to the capacities of the field team. Their observations provide a rich source of data on a topic which has not been so intensively studied before. Compared to the Vicksburg study, for example, the field interviews were conducted with children and parents in the families selected, instead of being confined to the mothers alone; the interview protocols were in general more lengthy; and there were intensive return interviews, tape-recorded and providing a perspective over time not permitted in the single survey of the Vicksburg study.

We would like to make one more comment on the general implications of the working sample. The families interviewed in this study differ in three important respects from the sample of families studied in the Vicksburg disaster: The schoolhouse families are Negro, rural, and lower middle class or lower class representatives; the Vicksburg families studied were white, urban, middle class representatives. There were differences in responses to disaster between these two groups -- the schoolhouse families and the Vicksburg families -- but the reasons for such differences cannot be readily assigned to any one of the grossly differentiating variables -- race, class, and/or economic setting. We emphasize that the physical anthropological variable of race per se has little significance in disaster response. Insofar as race might have any significance in how one responds to a disaster, this significance is a result of the social position of the members of a race in the community.

#### A Preliminary Note on Emotional Symptomatology in Children After Disaster

In making a preliminary evaluation of the symptomatology reported in these data, we have become conscious of the necessity for separating "normal" symptomatology



as the result of disaster from neurotic reaction. That is, in a given disaster, what are some of the "normal" reactions of a child to a given disaster event? After the disaster has moved into retrospect, what traces can it be expected to leave in the emerging personality of the child? And what are relatively normal levels of influence from the event as they persist through life? These questions are important to this study since most children in these two communities suffered some severe trauma, and such trauma can be expected to have some aftereffects for a long time, even in a relatively normal child.

In trying to answer questions of these sorts, we have found it useful to consider the effects of two disaster events as reported by Alben Barkley in his reminiscences. Both of these events were less intense than the events experienced by the children in Delta Town and Hilltown. We can assume, for purposes of this report, that Barkley was a relatively normal person all of his life. At the time that he wrote the book, it had been some sixty years since he had experienced the disaster events, yet they still had some influence on him, since he remembered and wrote about them after a long life full of other happenings. Let us consider first, Barkley's experience as a child in a storm which made his home uninhabitable but seems not to have injured anybody in his family:

I...experienced my first cyclone at Lowes. We were living in the little frame house -- the only one Father ever owned when I was growing up -- and I was convalescing from an attack of pneumonia. The cyclone hit our house, lifted it off its foundation, and moved it back about fifteen feet. We walked a quarter of a mile through the rain, wind, and mud to Joe Dunn's house, and, even though it was the first time I had been out since recovering from my illness, it did not bother me. For almost a year after, however, the sound of wind or the sight of a black cloud in the sky would make me nervous.<sup>5</sup> (Italics ours)

In the data on the two communities under study, there is evidence of much fear of storms, but we would be inclined to believe that this fear of anything reminiscent of the storm is to be expected for a long period of time. This is well within the limits of normal symptomatology.

Barkley's report on the interpersonal significance of another disaster is a significant example of the way in which disaster takes on new connotations:

...when I was nine years old, our rented house burned down, and we lost every earthly possession we owned, with the exception of one feather mattress which Mamma had outside for airing. Father and

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5. Alben W. Barkley, That Reminds Me-- (New York: Doubleday & Co, Inc., 1954), 52.

I were working in the fields, and by the time we ran home it was too late to save anything. Father was a strong man, but he leaned against a tree and wept. It was the first time I ever saw him give way to emotion, and to me that was more upsetting than the fire. I wept too.<sup>6</sup> (Italics ours)

Again, we would like to point out that any parent, regardless of his relative maturity, might show such response to the stress of a disaster experience. This kind of response on the part of significant adults has influence on the child in terms of whether or not this kind of reaction is temporary and what the basic pattern of the family's stability or instability is. While the reactions of the parents may be more significant to the child than the actual disaster events, the child's ability to integrate such parental emotion depends on a multiplicity of factors, which we shall comment on as we go along.

The record seems to show that within the over-all continuum of his familial and societal environment Barkley found the means to integrate these two traumas. This is evidenced by the record of his life which shows a relative lack of psychological symptomatology.

With this as preface, we should like now to examine briefly the evidences of symptomatology found in the children of Operation Schoolhouse. It should be noted first that it is difficult to investigate emotional symptomatology, even in a clinical setting. It is more difficult to do so when the investigators must invade the homes and privacy of families who are not seeking help from a clinic. The research team for Operation Schoolhouse managed to handle this problem successfully. One of the main reasons why it was possible to obtain the cooperation of the Negro families who were studied was the fact that the family interviewers, Mrs. Moore and Dr. Lewis, were themselves Negro. Additionally, they were well aware, by training and experience, of the cultural and social problems in communicating with these families. Mrs. Moore, for example, had worked with such families in her position as a child welfare worker, and Dr. Lewis had had research experience in Negro community studies.

The interview reports indicate that the children of Hilltown and Delta Town showed the same sorts of emotional symptomatology as the Vicksburg children. But the proportion of children with symptoms seemed smaller, and generally the symptoms were of a lesser degree of severity. Only one case of bedwetting was reported, and there seemed to be no symptoms which were related to experiences marginal and irrelevant to the natural phenomenon of the disaster. For example, there were fears of wind and bad weather, but only one child was reported as more reluctant to go to school after the disaster than before it. This contrasts sharply with children in Vicksburg who,

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6. Ibid., 48.



in many cases, were afraid to go to a theater or any public gathering after having been in the movie house which collapsed. Children in Hilltown and Delta Town seemed to have no fears about returning to school, even though they had been at school when the disaster occurred. It should be noted, however, that, in these two areas, it is standard practice to dismiss children when a storm seems likely; and this practice seems to have been somewhat reinforced by the disaster.

Eating and sleeping disturbances also occurred to a lesser extent in the immediate post-disaster period of the schoolhouse disasters, although mild sleeping disturbances were present in a few of the children as late as four months after the disaster. The Vicksburg study showed many more such disturbances three months after the disaster. Withdrawal and autistic-like behavior was evidenced in at least three families in the schoolhouse disasters, but in only one family did it appear that such behavior was seen for the first time after the disaster. We would feel, in general, that most of the symptomatology shown in these children was closely related to pre-existent emotional problems.

Our over-all impression of the children's emotional symptoms is that there was surprisingly little disturbance, in bodily functions, in play and work habits, in relationships with peers and adults, and so on. This is particularly surprising when one considers the high saturation of these disasters as compared to Vicksburg.

Most of the emotionally troubled children seemed to have been disturbed for varying rather than common reasons -- dependent on idiosyncratic family or personal history patterns, or the actual particular intensity of the disaster event to a given child. We located only one systematic factor which might be considered pathogenic for the group of families studied. We felt there was one difficult problem for all of our respondents which we hypothesize is linked to the basic ethical conflicts in the racial pattern of the South. The problem is that of finding some meaning and explanation for the disaster experience by the conventional means used by many disaster-struck populations -- that is, traditional religious explanations. It was difficult for the community to use the main available rationale -- religious concepts -- to understand the disaster because the disaster mobilized awareness of the discrepancies between their religious-ethical values and the structure of the bi-racial community. It appeared to point up these discrepancies by the very fact that only Negroes were killed in the disaster. This awareness was for the most part not verbalized; its existence can be postulated on the curious gaps in the respondents' explanations of the meaning of the disaster and the fumbling character of these explanations, as contrasted to those given in the Vicksburg study.

Several factors seemed to minimize the disaster for the children. Some of the more important factors are introduced here and developed more fully in later sections.

The disaster was a shared experience. The very saturation of these disasters

had certain assets to the individual person who suffered injury or loss of a close friend, for the experience was a shared one. The necessity to talk about the traumatic experience did not have to be suppressed; nor could it be suppressed by those who might try to evade it, since the subject was brought up in various ways and in various settings in the community.

The child's dependency needs were apparently recognized and met rather adequately. For a multiplicity of reasons, the children in the two communities seem to have been more fortunate than the Vicksburg children in terms of the adults' awareness of dependency needs and their willingness to meet the needs in rather meaningful ways.

Almost all of the children seemed to have more than the immediate family for the fulfilment of needs. The family household systems were flexible enough so that the children seemed able, in most instances, to find some satisfactory substitute relations in case of the removal of the mothering figure by death or injury.

The child normally has a role of responsibility in the household in these communities. In the two communities studied, the child seems to gain self-esteem in the household through his responsibilities as a member of the family. Thus, one of the immediate results of the loss of any person in the family over, say, seven years of age is the realignment of household or farm duties. It often means that a child is given tasks beyond his years, since the death of someone may necessitate some shift upwards in terms of responsibilities: The assumption of new prestigious duties seems to represent a stabilizing influence for the child. By contrast, in the middle-class families studied in Vicksburg, the child is not considered important in the functioning of the family; he is more in the position of a valued possession.

Education as a social institution continued to have positive value for the respondents in spite of the fact that the setting for each disaster was a schoolhouse. It would seem a part of human nature to attach irrational fears to the setting of such a disaster and for such fears to make it more difficult for children to digest the experience. In Vicksburg, for instance, where a theater building was destroyed, many parents were reluctant to have their children go to the movies after the disaster. Yet, after the schoolhouse disaster, parents did not indicate any irrational fears about school buildings per se or about their children attending schools. In fact, the planning for new school buildings, and so on, seemed to be a meaningful and constructive community interest in the post-disaster period.



## CHAPTER II

### THE IMPACT OF THE DISASTERS

#### A General Statement on the Psychological Impact of Disaster

As a general frame of reference for viewing disaster and its impact, we believe that it is useful to think of the way in which the thought processes immediately attendant on disaster impact must differ from normal thought processes. In this connection, Sullivan's conceptualization of the schizophrenic-like processes which are a normal part of human development seems relevant to us.<sup>7</sup> Briefly, Sullivan believes that the referential processes and perceptions of early and late infancy are diffuse and schizophrenic-like. The child's perception of "thee and me" has not emerged, and his thought tends to be global, diffuse, and undifferentiated. In the period of learning language and establishing consensus with the significant adults on the meaning of words, the developing child learns to separate off from awareness those things that are not acceptable in the culture. Schachtel<sup>8</sup> puts this same idea in another way when he says that any language carries only certain vessels for the feelings that a child experiences; the feelings of a child that find no counterpart in the language of the culture must be lost, for the most part. According to Schachtel, this was the unusual accomplishment of Marcel Proust -- he was able to recapture those lost feelings; but, in a sense, Proust almost had to become psychotic to establish such communion with the past.

Correlatively, Sullivan feels that once language is established and the part of personality that is unacceptable to the culture is dropped, any threatened return of such unprovided-for feelings is a threat to the person. That is why such processes recur in the normal person only in the form of dream processes. Anything else would be too difficult

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7. Harry Stack Sullivan, Clinical Studies in Psychiatry (New York: Norton, 1956), see especially, ch. 1.

8. Ernest G. Schachtel, "On Memory and Child Amnesia," Psychiatry, X (1947), 1-26.

to assimilate. In other words, the culture places certain inhibitions on what it is safe even to think about. The inexplicable, the uncanny, always arouses fear in us. In fact, Sullivan sees the mental disorder of schizophrenia as merely the emergence of that which all of us fear, and which is, in fact, a part of the early history of all of us. Most neuroses, then, are seen as protection against this unpleasant possibility -- the emergence of diffuse referential processes or schizophrenic-like processes into awake, conscious life. Obsessionalism, for instance, is the use of verbal magic, either spoken or not spoken, to ward off the emergence of these earlier processes. Similarly, the bodily preoccupations of hypochondriasis, however unpleasant, are preferable to the diffuse processes of undifferentiated thought. In both of these examples, one should note how the bizarre and unacceptable events of life are explained away in conventional terms. To report to one's co-workers at an office that one is depressed because one's wife did not treat one respectfully at breakfast may not be conventionally acceptable; to comment on a severe headache immediately makes the experience communicable as a conversational ploy.

This is, of course, an oversimplified explanation of Sullivan's approach to mental disorder as an exaggeration of normal processes of living. Perhaps it will suffice, however, as background for our hypothesis that the psychological experience of disaster has some of the characteristics of schizophrenic-like processes. It is as if the world has suddenly become a nightmare; one finds oneself in the midst of utter confusion, bedlam, horror, with no orienting landmarks. One has only to read through the data from several disasters to experience some of this sense of disorientation. Perhaps society's interest in disaster at present is much the same as its interest in the mental patient. In other words, within our time, we have become less isolated from the affairs of other people, whether they be mental patients or people in disaster. Our interest in the emergence of schizophrenic-like patterns of life, whether man-induced or phenomena of nature, is an attempt to prepare for the possibility of such an eventuality erupting in our own lives. We need, ourselves, to have certain formulae for dealing with such disaster: A relative might become mentally disordered; or a relative might be hit by a tornado. By such devices we admit, however covertly, the possibility that it might happen to us.

The very nature of the phenomenon of disaster is then reminiscent of one's worst fear -- the nightmare that turns into reality. It is the uncanny, the schizophrenic-like, come to life. The first and most poignant necessity is to find some formulae for putting the disaster into some frame of reference. We cannot stay long sane and view disaster of catastrophic proportions without trying to fit it into some explainable framework furnished by society generally, by its institutions, such as the church, or if one is a child, furnished by significant adults. This setting of the world aright may often take the form of rationalizations, formulae of words. Sometimes these rationalizations take the form of denial of the disaster, which also is expressed in a formula: It is better not to talk about it. This particular formula was a fairly prevalent one in the Vicksburg disaster, although it was not so prevalent in the schoolhouse disasters.



This need for a rationalization or conceptualization for somehow handling the disaster experience is partially met by the pattern of opportunities provided in the family and in the cultural and social structures -- language, institutions, and so on -- in the disaster community. Such family and cultural patterns may also present the person with handicaps for integrating the disaster experience, as did the general feeling in Vicksburg that it was better not to talk about the tornado.

To summarize, we would say that the extent of the schizophrenic-like disorganization of thought process will depend, first of all, on the intensity of the trauma-event. For example, the child's world is more disorganized if all of his siblings are killed in the disaster than as if they suffer only minor injuries. In this section we consider the extent or intensity of the disaster and its immediate impact in the schoolhouse disasters. In later sections of the report, we consider the assets and liabilities in the social and family structure -- the tools which were available to the child for the reintegration of his world, once the disaster had happened.

### The Saturation Effect of the Schoolhouse Disasters

The most important feature of the schoolhouse disasters was the overwhelming saturation of death and destruction which the two schoolhouse communities suffered. In this respect, the event differed considerably from the Vicksburg experience. In Vicksburg, although the damage was great and there was some loss of life, the sample of families studied contained only one family in which a member had been killed and very few families in which there were severe injuries. In Hilltown and Delta Town, on the other hand, there were serious injuries or deaths in all but one of the fourteen families studied. Many families lost all, or almost all, of their belongings. And in each community the school was destroyed and the teacher killed.

In Delta Town, ten families were studied. In two of the families, all the children were killed, except for an infant in one of the families.<sup>9</sup> All except one family had a child either injured or killed. In five families there was at least one child killed: in one family, one child killed; in three families, two children killed; in one family, three children killed. In Hilltown four families were studied, all of which had children injured and two of which had a child killed. From the data, it is evident that probably no child escaped the disaster without experiencing the death of some close friend or relative. It should be emphasized again that in each settlement all the school children lost their teacher.

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9. This, of course, meant that there were only eight families in Delta Town in which we could get information from the children themselves about their own reactions to the disaster.

What can be the effect of such saturation? We see in it not only an overwhelming trauma but also a certain built-in loophole for emerging from the disaster with some opportunity for overcoming the trauma. The very saturation of the disaster means that the experience is rather fully shared in the community groups affected. For the child and the adult, there is the knowledge that he is not alone.

In the disasters studied, the saturation of destruction meant that the experience could not be shut off, compartmentalized, or selectively inattended, as was often the case in Vicksburg families. In urban Vicksburg, the lesser degree of integration of the community and the lesser degree of disaster saturation served to reinforce any tendency to suppress discussion of the traumatic events. In Hilltown and Delta Town, such suppression was practically unknown. The need to talk about the traumatic experience could not be suppressed or evaded; and, indeed, there was little possibility of such suppression when everyone had been involved so directly.

In those families in which the disaster took its greatest toll, there was generally a great deal of talk about the events of the disaster. The children seemed to talk readily about their friends who were killed, and the parents discussed details of the disaster freely in front of the children. The only two families in which we found a positive prohibition against talking about the disaster did not suffer greatly from the disaster. There were no deaths in their immediate families; and the prohibition about talking seems to have been in terms of talking about other people who were killed, with some fear of supernatural punishment.

In one family, the grandmother, who was the mothering figure, did not want her little granddaughter, aged four, to talk about two siblings who were killed. In the initial interview in February, she reported: "I don't talk with her about it [the deaths and the disaster]." By the June interview she had abandoned this position: "I used to make her hush, [about the children who were killed], but now I realize that it's best to let her talk." The child, who was in the room at the time of the interview, volunteered at this point, "I kinda miss my little brother."

There was one curious exception to the phenomenon of saturation and its concomitant phenomenon of out-in-the-open recognition and verbalization of the experience. In neither community was any white person killed, although our information was that one or two white persons were injured. This inconsistency of experience between the white and Negro subgroups is discussed later in the report.

Grief and disaster saturation. We would like to point out the significance of the saturation effect of these disasters, in terms of the social and psychological manner of dealing with grief. It is our impression that in many American families, particularly in urban areas, a death in the family acts in such a way as to isolate that family. For a short period -- between the time of the death and the actual interment, and even for a brief period after interment -- there are ritualized procedures for relating the family



to immediate friends and relatives; and these rituals may serve as an emotional bond of some intensity between the participants for that period. But this acceptable ritual for closeness in the immediate bereavement period may, in the post-funeral period, become an embarrassment between the same participants. That is, there is no way for a family who has suffered bereavement to share its experience on an everyday level with the community, except in terms of the viewing of the body and the funeral rituals. After the funeral is over, society sets up a kind of emotional leprosarium in which the family is kept isolated until it can cleanse itself of the emotional contamination of death.

At the same time, the expression of emotion and grief is necessary for the bereaved person. The bereavement can be overcome only by a kind of erasing process which goes on by means of the repetition of the bereaving events within the consciousness, in one's mind at least, if not aloud. There is then a built-in contradiction between the requirement of the erasing process and the social isolation of the bereaved person. The bereaved person must go through the grieving period, reliving past events, in an atmosphere which ordinarily enjoins him to keep it to himself.

In the case of the schoolhouse disasters, no such isolation of the grieving ones was possible, or necessary; the saturation made it inevitable that the grief was shared and the disaster relived together. In the Morse family, for instance, this necessity to talk about the loss of friends was recognized by the seventy-six-year-old grandfather, who had a granddaughter, sixteen years old, and a son, twelve years old, injured in the tornado:

She [granddaughter] talks a lot about Mary Jackson who was killed. They went to school together... She do be lonesome now. She don't have the same getup... He [son] is always talking about a lot of his schoolmates killed. ... His schoolmates that was lost or hurt affected him deeper than anything else.

The erasing process of grief was also, we feel, hastened in the schoolhouse communities by attitudes of greater acceptance towards the expression of bereavement, as contrasted with attitudes of the Vicksburg families.<sup>10</sup>

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10. Cf. studies of the Coconut Grove disaster, especially Erich Lindemann, "The Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief," American Journal of Psychiatry, CI (1944), 141-148. John Bowlby also comments rather extensively on this process of grieving and its function in the restoration of mental health: "For long it has been the tradition that the less children were encouraged to express their distress at death or separation the better -- they would then get over it more quickly. This view is not supported by modern knowledge. 'If the sorrow of death falls upon a family,' writes Sir James Spence, 'it should not be hidden from the children. They should share in the

Sirens and ambulances. In every disaster apparently, there are some rather individual though quite marginal features which take on special meaning for the population. It was noted earlier that the children studied here seemed to have none of these fears related to such marginal features, irrelevant to the natural phenomenon of the tornadoes. But there appeared to be something quite close to this irrational association of disaster and a marginal event, as revealed in concern about ambulances and sirens. In both areas certain respondents, both children and adults, seemed to believe that some children died of fright, not injuries, as a result of their trip by ambulance from the disaster scene to the nearest hospitals.<sup>11</sup> Physiologically, death by fright is, of course, possible. What concerns us here, however, is the belief rather than the establishment of causes of death.

For instance, an eleven-year-old child, Billy Ray Bell, who had three siblings killed in the disaster, reported to Mrs. Moore that he was scared on the way to the hospital in an ambulance: "I thought I was going to get an operation. That's all." The child then modified his statement by saying that he wasn't scared, but he felt funny. Later in the same interview, Billy Ray gave more details about his ride to the hospital: "Every time the man pulled that thing [siren] my sister [who died shortly after reaching the hospital] would scream. My father said she was just scared. I was put in beside her. The blood was running out of her eyes. When we got to the hospital my father took her out of the car. We went in and I didn't see her any more."

Respondents in both towns reported that a doctor told them that one or another child died of fright as a result of his ride to the hospital in an ambulance. This legend was strengthened in Hilltown by the guilt of a leading white citizen who felt responsible for the death of a Negro boy, whom he sent off in an ambulance:

Well, I saw pretty soon that Agnes Pierce's boy, Pete, was bad off with shock, and I knew that he was going to die if something wasn't done for him pretty quick. [Respondent showed increased emotion here. His voice sometimes broke as he was speaking of the Pierce boy.] Somebody said that he would take him to town in a car, but an ambulance drove up, and so they put him in there on a stretcher. Then the doctor drove up and I ran to him and told him that there was a nigger boy going to die of shock if he didn't do something quick. He said, "Where is he?"

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weeping naturally and completely, and emerge from it enriched but unharmed.' In helping the children experience their grief, the grownups have a vital role to play, whether it be death or absence which is being mourned." In John Bowlby, Child Care and the Growth of Love (London: Penguin Books, 1953), 142.

11. It is possible, as Hylan Lewis has suggested, that the respondents were reflecting their suspicion that the injured were neglected on the ambulance rides -- a suspicion which would not have been easy to verbalize directly in this particular setting.



["I said"] "Right over there in that ambulance." And just then that ambulance shot off for town. And you know that boy died on the way to town before the doctor had even seen him. If I had done something else, I could have saved that boy and he might be alive now. [Interviewer gives reassurance for respondent's guilt.] I knew that boy and his mama and daddy well -- about as well as a white man can know a nigger.

Several parents reported that their children still did not like to hear an ambulance siren several months after the disaster, that it scared them. The fear in the children was undoubtedly strengthened by the local belief that some had died from the same fright. We would maintain that such fears in the survivors are reality-oriented in the same way as are their fears of black clouds and wind. But such fears may be longer-lasting in a context of elaborated community and family beliefs about such marginal events as ambulance sirens.

### The Dissociative-Demanding Response

In the Vicksburg study, an immediate dissociative-demanding response of parents to the disaster impact was isolated as a clue to the persistence of emotional disturbance in children. If the parent and the child were together at the time of impact, this response could occur then; or the response could occur at the first meeting of parent and child after the tornado, if they had not been together at the point of impact. The dissociative-demanding response may be described quite simply as a reaction to the impact that psychologically takes the parent out of the threat situation and at the same time demands helplessly that the environment take over to meet his needs. On a behavioral level, such a response is exemplified in hysterical weeping and screaming for help, especially when the person has not been injured; or it may be alternating screaming and fainting; or it may be exemplified in stunned, trance-like, helpless behavior with nonspecific requests for help, directed towards the environment at large.

It was hypothesized in the Vicksburg report that such behavior was an important clue to pre-existing parent-child relationships and to persisting post-disaster emotional disturbance in the child. In the first instance, the response seemed to postdict that the child had not had a dependable, protecting parent in times of stress. In the second instance, the response seemed to add stress to the child's disaster experience by overlaying the stress of the natural events with the additional stress of experiencing the parent as deserting the ordinary parental function of help and dependability, and, further, demanding such help and dependability from the child.

These hypotheses were among those which Operation Schoolhouse was especially instituted to explore further. The schoolhouse data do not support the Vicksburg hypothesis as to the relationship between persistence of emotional disturbance in the child and

a dissociative-demanding response in the parent. The hypothesis that parents who show a dissociative-demanding reaction tend to have been undependable parents in the past seems supported on an impressionistic basis. But in both instances the schoolhouse project has indicated a variety of factors which must be considered in connection with evaluating the Vicksburg hypotheses.

The underlying assumption in the Vicksburg description of the dissociative-demanding response was that it was an inappropriate response to the particular disaster situation studied and to the specific situations which such parents reported themselves as experiencing. The qualifications which the schoolhouse disaster data indicate refer mostly to the necessity of examining the assumption of the inappropriateness of a dissociative-demanding response.

One factor to be considered is, of course, the actual events of the disaster that the parent experienced at the point of impact of the tornado. Is it inappropriate for a mother to burst into uncontrolled screaming when she arrives on the scene of a disaster and sees the bodies of her own and other children strewn over the ground? In terms of later responses, one must also consider the level of saturation. For example, some of the children who were not killed outright died later, sometimes several days later. The stress, therefore, lasted for a considerable period. The degree of upset was so great under such circumstances that it is difficult to evaluate what would represent appropriate responses during that period.

Reports of the scenes at the Hilltown school indicate that the initial response of the surviving children was one of silence, punctuated only by the calls of the injured and dying. But, as adults and parents gathered, there was wailing and crying. Two mothers were reported by others and by themselves as having fallen to the ground, rolling about in abandoned anguish. Other adults moved through the rescue performance in kind of a trance. Still others moved with dispatch and efficiency. In Delta Town, the children were in the process of leaving the school -- some had gone into neighboring houses -- at the point of impact. So these children were more scattered. There was not the single important disaster scene, as in Hilltown. There were, nevertheless, the same reports of initial stunned silence on the part of the children and of both distraught and trance-like behavior on the part of many of the adults. Whether the behavior of the parents at impact time and shortly thereafter had any effect on the child survivors is difficult to document, merely because the level of saturation of both disasters was so high.

In addition, there are certain factors found in the culture which would seem to necessitate some different criteria for evaluating what constitutes such a response. Fainting, abandoned grief, and so on have cultural as well as personal significance. For example, some patterns of religious behavior in rural Southern areas permit and even call for a high degree of expression of emotion in periods of exaltation and bereavement. Most of the schoolhouse respondents were Fundamental Baptist. We



would think, therefore, that the religious climate of the respondents allowed for much expression of emotion.

Aside from the support of established patterns of religious behavior, there are more general cultural factors which should be taken into account in evaluating what constitutes a dissociative-demanding response. The total way of life of a segment of society may mean that particular kinds of behavior are more frequent and acceptable means of personal expression in that segment than in other segments. For example, conversion hysteria has almost disappeared in the private practice of psychiatry; yet it still appears fairly frequently in clinic practice.<sup>12</sup> In other words, in our culture such symptoms seem to be more congenial to the way of life of the lower and rural classes than of those classes which are more aware of psychiatry and better able to pay for psychiatric treatment.

In the families studied, we found a high incidence of hysterical, physiological expression of psychological maladjustment, a pattern which appears to have been well established before the tornado. Furthermore, the respondents reporting such expression seemed to recognize it as a response to psychological conflict. For example, one wife noted that when she was angry with her husband's behavior towards her, she would get dizzy spells; and she connected her symptom with her anger. In other words, hysterical, physiological symptoms were an acceptable way of expressing psychological problems. The way of life of these families seems to mean that such symptomatic response to psychic disturbance is both a frequent and acceptable means of expression. As such, then, the behavior of the dissociative-demanding response in these communities is not necessarily inappropriate; nor is it as extreme an expression of disturbance in these adults as it might be in the case of a middle-class urban adult. Such behavior in a parent at the time of disaster would probably be viewed by a child in the schoolhouse communities as a less traumatic, less unusual event than by a child in a more urban setting.

In addition, the duration and quality of the dissociative-demanding response in this study seemed to have a different psychological quality from that found in Vicksburg. We believe that this was related to the ease with which an adult could switch from a dependent role into a dependable role: The helpless mother at the actual scene of the disaster might an hour later become a tower of strength and comfort for a stricken child.

The ease with which a mother can shift from one emotional role to another in this sub-culture is probably related to her overt acknowledgement of dependency needs.

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12. Paul Chodoff, "A Re-examination of Some Aspects of Conversion Hysteria," *Psychiatry*, XVII (1954), 75-81; also Thomas A. C. Rennie and Leo Srole, "Social Class Prevalence and Distribution of Psychosomatic Conditions in an Urban Population," *Psychosomatic Medicine*, XVIII (1956), 449-456.

Mothers expect to be dependent on their children for various household chores from the time the child is physically able to handle the job. They sometimes make excessive demands on the child. But there is an implicit feeling that the child's needs must be met under certain conditions, and this kind of disaster seems to be one of these conditions. The general attitude of the mothers might be summarized as follows: I take care of them when they need it because they take care of me when I need it. And both mothers and children seem to take pride in their ability to take care of the other during the period when the other is needful.

### Hospital Care of Children: The Ability to Meet Specific Needs of the Children

Throughout the data, there is strong evidence of the ability of parents to meet the emergency needs of their children on a meaningful level. This ability to take care of was evidenced particularly in the hospital setting. Parents, for the most part, seemed to subscribe generally to the attitude that a seriously injured child should not be left alone in the hospital night or day. Even mothers who showed chronic evidence of neurotic dependence on their children and dissociative-demanding response to the actual disaster were able to rally and be supportive in the hospital setting.

Mrs. Able, a grandmother who acted as mother for three grandchildren, provided an example of this ability to shift from a demanding person to a dependable, giving person. A chronically ill and complaining person, she described her own behavior at the time she first appeared on the scene of the schoolhouse disaster as follows: "It was something filling, I felt just like hollering. I did holler and scream and fell out and rolled in the mud and everything." But, within an hour or so after the disaster, Mrs. Able was able to become supportive of one of her grandchildren who was seriously injured and who died within twenty-four hours after the disaster. An excerpt from the interviewer's report reads as follows:

Mrs. Able said that she stayed in the hospital with her, Honey, [her grandchild, raised as her own child] until she died, which was around 2:15 [p.m.] the next day. She said that she felt so bad while she was in the hospital. "But I wouldn't take any medicine, I wouldn't let them give me any. They wanted to put me to bed and to give me shots but I wouldn't take them." I asked her why, "I felt like so many more people needed the bed than I did."

This kind of hospital visiting pattern is frequent in rural populations and is not peculiar to our sample. Hospitals are relatively more distant in such areas than in urban areas. Whether the pattern is more a function of the rural character of the population, or is a reflection of the ability of parents to meet the needs of their children more appropriately, is really academic. In either event, the child who is



visited more often in the hospital and for longer periods seems to have a psychological advantage in terms of good recovery, as Bowlby has pointed out.<sup>13</sup>

Another example of the kind of devotion exhibited by parents was found in the case of Mr. Morse, whose twelve-year-old son was injured seriously in the tornado:

Yes, I spent sixteen days and nights there in the hospital. I sat up in the chair all that time. There was no place to sleep and I boarded myself. The boy's mother came down there twice during that time. [The much younger mother is separated from the father, and he feels that the mother neglects the boy.]<sup>14</sup>

Most children apparently had some adult from the family with them during most of the time they were hospitalized. Even if this meant going as far as Metropolis, where quite a few of the injured were taken, the families made the effort to get there just as often as possible, with one adult often staying with a seriously injured child twenty-four hours a day.

The Smith boy, Tom, seventeen years old, had to be re-hospitalized in June as a result of injuries sustained in the tornado. His mother, who was generally evaluated by the interviewers as a demanding and somewhat immature person, reported that she spent all of her time with him at the hospital sitting up at night:

Interviewer: Did you go every night?  
Mrs. S.: Just 'bout every night. We didn't miss but a very few.  
Interviewer: You went every other night, Mrs. Smith?  
Mrs. S.: I stayed over there --  
Interviewer: Oh, you stayed over there with him a week. You stayed in the hospital there?  
Mrs. S.: In the hospital, side of his bed, sittin' on his bed.  
Interviewer: Didn't you have a bed for yourself there?  
Mrs. S.: No, sir.  
Interviewer: You mean you sat up the whole time?  
Mrs. S.: Yes, sir.

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13. John Bowlby, Maternal Care and Mental Health (Geneva: World Health Organization, Monograph Series No. 2; 1951).

14. In the case of Mr. Morse, many other factors may have operated to make it easier for him to stay with his child in the hospital. Mr. Morse was virtually retired, and a number of grown and married children shared his household. The kind of concern which Mr. Morse exhibited for his twelve-year-old son, however, is only a somewhat extreme example of the general care pattern in both communities studied.

Interviewer: That must have been awfully hard.  
 Mrs. S.: No'm. It wasn't so hard for me to do.  
 Interviewer: You mean you'd sit up all night, too.  
 Mrs. S.: Yes, sir. Well, I wouldn't sit up all night long.  
 I'd . . . /lay/ my head down on his bed.  
 Interviewer: How did you get your meals?  
 Mrs. S.: Well, I'd go out there to the cafe and get my meals  
 every day -- afternoons.

It is obvious that this ability to take care of could be continued intermittently for a long time, since in the above instance the child's injury was four months old. We say "intermittently," since the data also show that Tom was, at the same time, in the process of taking over new duties in the household -- a realignment of responsibilities necessitated by his injury and the death of his sister -- so that his parents were also depending on him.

This ability to meet the child's demands for whatever time was necessary in the post-tornado period is well substantiated by the data. In some instances, a parent reported that a child was spoiled and indicated that his demands had been excessive since the tornado. But only rarely was an injured child actually denied the psychological and emotional attention which he needed. Two children in particular seemed to have their needs unfulfilled -- Sylvia Simpson and Maureen Pierce. We shall show later on that their family situations were different in important ways from the other families in this study.

#### A Note on Appropriation of Roles in the Post-Disaster Family

Related to the dissociative-demanding response as it appeared in these families is the whole subject of role-taking. In the Vicksburg study, the hypothesis was advanced that in each family there might be a certain amount of dynamic space for a given role: "...it may be that in many instances the overt disturbance /in one child/ does not actually show itself, at least within the family -- or it may not develop -- unless or until the family psychic economy permits it. When, for example, the child who was earlier seen by the parents as disturbed has recovered, thereby freeing the role or space for someone else to take it."<sup>15</sup>

There is quite clear evidence in the data on the schoolhouse disasters that such appropriation of roles took place in these families also. In the Turner family, for instance, two brothers who were both injured took turns being disturbed: At the time

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15. Perry, Silber, and Bloch, op. cit., 34



of the initial interview in February, one of them was disturbed and the other was reported as being all right; by June, the first one had recovered and the second one was more disturbed. There is other evidence of this kind. Mrs. Able, for instance, was asked by the interviewer how she had been feeling since the storm. "I been feeling 'bout the same, no worsen." At this point her husband commented, "Couldn't afford to be too sick 'cause everybody else was."

The significant difference between the Vicksburg and the schoolhouse disasters was that in the latter group of respondents there seemed to be greater fluidity in the interchange of roles, with no particular denial of the need for dependency. The very fact that the lines of demarcation between one family unit and another were not clear-cut in many instances means that the number of roles of dependency that could be taken care of at a particular time had some elasticity. Grandmothers and aunts, for instance, were available to families as auxiliary help in the time of need.

Among the families in the schoolhouse disasters, dissociative-demanding response on the part of a parent at the time of the disaster did not have a direct relationship with the ability of the parent to meet the demands of the child in the emergency period immediately following the disaster; roles of dependency were shifted with alacrity, and the helpless parent often rallied swiftly to meet the reality needs of a child.

In this section, some of the factors involved in the actual impact of the disaster and the psychological significance of them have been considered. But to separate family relationships at impact time from continuing family relationships after the disaster is of course arbitrary. In the next section, we consider these continuing family relationships explicitly and in more detail.

In this section on impact, the problems of rescue work have been omitted. In the two communities involved rescue work had certain complex implications in terms of white-Negro relationships -- a fact which the investigators commented on quite extensively in their reports and which we will develop somewhat in the section on cultural and societal factors in the meaning of the disaster.



## CHAPTER III

### THE ASSETS AND LIABILITIES OF THE FAMILY STRUCTURE

#### The Flexibility of Family Limits as an Emotional Resource

The fulfillment of a child's needs after a disaster is not necessarily limited to what can be achieved in relationships within his immediate family. Thus, in the school-house disasters, if the mother was removed from the picture by death or lengthy hospitalization, the child generally was able to find substitute mothering relations in the households of near or distant kin. In other words, it appears as if there was a great deal of flexibility in the limits of the family in terms of the number of sources from which the child could obtain the benefits of substitute parental care. This flexibility in intimate living arrangements seems to have been a general phenomenon in the families whom we studied. Even before the disaster, the households of aunts, uncles, grandparents, and so on -- including those living in other states -- often served as temporary or relatively permanent homes for the child.

Of course, such flexibility in the provision of parental-like care which this sort of family system permits offered continuing opportunities for recovery from the trauma of disaster. The accessibility of substitute homes was particularly important in the post-disaster period for those children who lost one or both parents. For instance, Maureen Pierce, who was one of the more disturbed children studied, was able to find comfort and security in the household of one or another of two nearby relatives -- an aunt and a grandmother. Maureen's mother was killed in the disaster. After the disaster, her father was more in need himself than capable of reassuring Maureen; and, when a storm was brewing, Maureen did not feel comfortable or safe at home. She would get up, even if the storm came in the middle of the night, and walk over to the home of her aunt or her grandmother to stay there throughout the bad weather. It might be noted also that, shortly after the disaster, Maureen and her younger sister Winifred went to a nearby state to stay with relatives for two months. This visit was made at the children's own suggestion. Neighbors commented on the improvement in the children as a result of the visit.



Not only did children in the schoolhouse communities have a relatively easy opportunity to move in with kin outside the nuclear household, relatives from other households came from near or far to provide needed support. Aunts, or uncles, or others came to some of the disaster-stricken homes to take care of the children. One respondent considered the possibility of having a young cousin come to live with them to provide companionship for his son who had three siblings killed in the disaster.

The flexibility or fluidity in the limits of the family within which the child might find support and care seems to have been based on a real affection for children, rather than mere casualness in living arrangements. As Myrdal points out, "There are few unwanted children [among Negroes]." <sup>16</sup> This kind of flexibility in care for children, based on real affection, seems to us to have been an important asset for the child in meeting and handling the schoolhouse disaster event.

### The "Responsible Status Role" of the Child

One impression emerges strikingly from the data on these two communities: Every able-bodied child seems to have duties in the household; he is held responsible for these duties and he takes pride in their accomplishment. We consider that the status the child derives from performing these duties is one of the assets in the family structure for the child to use in resuming life after a disaster. The child's place in these families differed importantly from that of the urban middle-class Vicksburg child.

In order to discuss this difference, we have borrowed from Ruth Benedict's idea of the responsible-nonresponsible dichotomy in American middle-class culture as compared to other cultures.

We think of the child as wanting to play and the adult as having to work, but in many societies the mother takes the baby daily in her shawl or carrying net to the garden or to gather roots, and adult labor is seen even in infancy from the pleasant security of its position in close contact with its mother. When the child can run about it accompanies its parents still, doing tasks which are essential and yet suited to its powers, and its dichotomy between work and play is not different from that its parents recognize, namely the distinction between the busy day and the free evening. The tasks it is asked to perform are graded to its powers, and its elders wait quietly by, not offering to do the task in the child's place. Everyone who is familiar with such societies has been struck by the contrast with our child training. Dr. Ruth Underhill tells

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16. Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma (New York: Harper & Bros , 1944), 935.

me of sitting with a group of Papago elders in Arizona when the man of the house turned to his little three-year old granddaughter and asked her to close the door. The door was heavy and hard to shut. The child tried, but it did not move. Several times the grandfather repeated, "Yes, close the door." No one jumped to the child's assistance. No one took the responsibility away from her. On the other hand there was no impatience, for after all the child was small. They sat gravely waiting till the child succeeded and her grandfather gravely thanked her. It was assumed that the task would not be asked of her unless she could perform it, and having been asked the responsibility was hers alone just as if she were a grown woman.<sup>17</sup>

Benedict selected her example from the Papago tribe in Arizona; it seems to us that there are comparable examples in the data that we have studied.

The interrelationship of work and play in terms of family relationships is poignantly illustrated by Mrs. Bell's description of how she missed her children, aged ten, five, and three, who were killed in the disaster: "...we talk about them and what they say the last time and how they was looking the last time and how we played and worked with them." [*Italics ours.*]

Benedict also makes a distinction between the child who is led to believe that he is doing adult work and the child who is actually making a valuable contribution to the household. In the following excerpt, Mrs. Bell indicates the importance she normally attaches to the household duties performed by her children<sup>18</sup> /the oldest of whom is eleven years old/ although she has eased up on her demands on them since the tornado:

And I don't fuss at them no more like I used to. I've seen the time where they'd be fixing the bed or something and wouldn't fix it right. And I'd go tell them if they not gonna do it right to not do it at all. And if I'd go in and show them how to do it and come back and it don't be fixed right, why I'd whip them, fuss at them or something. But now, my daughter go in there and do something and don't do it right I tell her go 'head on -- I can fix it.

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17. Ruth Benedict, "Continuities and Discontinuities in Cultural Conditioning," *Psychiatry*, 1 (1938), 162-163.

18. Hylan Lewis has suggested that the child's work may be defined by these respondents not only as an aid to the running of the household but also as discipline and training -- in line with the Protestant or Puritan ethic.

## Realignment of Child's Duties After Disaster

Since most children had responsibilities within the household before the disaster, the death of a child in a family necessitated a realignment of duties. This realignment of duties seemed in some instances actually to help a child make a good recovery. A child might take pride in a new assignment or he might have to learn a new skill in order to perform a task he had never done before. The following excerpt will perhaps illustrate some of the challenge in such a situation. As background for reading this excerpt, it is well to keep in mind that seventeen-year-old Tom Smith still wore a cast on his neck at the time of the interview, that his twelve-year-old sister was killed in the disaster, and that it had been necessary for the family to realign responsibilities for household duties:

- Interviewer: What do you do all day?  
Tom: Nothin'. Stay at the house and listen to ball games.  
And cook dinner.
- Interviewer: You cook? Can he cook?  
Mrs. S.: Yes, sir. He cooks dinner every day.
- Interviewer: Including Sunday?  
Tom: No, just during the week.
- Interviewer: You cook on Sunday then, Mrs. Smith?  
Mrs. S.: Yes, sir.
- Interviewer: Who cooks the breakfast?  
Tom: Martha fixes the breakfast.
- Interviewer: Who washes the dishes?  
Tom: She do most of the time.
- Interviewer: So you're the chief cook, and she's the chief bottle washer. Oh, Mary Ellen washes the dishes? How old are you Mary Ellen?  
Mary Ellen: Eight.
- Interviewer: How old are you, Martha?  
Martha: Fifteen.
- Interviewer: What do you do, Martha?  
Martha: Clean the house.
- Interviewer: O.K. Tom cooks, Mary Ellen washes the dishes, Martha cleans the house, and what does Tony [5 years old] do? He plays, I guess?  
Tom: That's what he do lots of times.
- Interviewer: Now you do that particularly when you're in the field. Is that right Mrs. Smith? And you're in the field most all day, particularly now chopping cotton. What can he cook? Is he a pretty good cook?  
Mrs. S.: Yes, sir. He do pretty good. For dinner he boils some, maybe make a puddin' or something.



Interviewer: Who taught him to cook?  
Mrs. S.: I did.  
Interviewer: When did you start teaching him?  
Mrs. S.: Oh, well, I just taught him to start himself since--  
Interviewer: Since he's been around the house some.  
Mrs. S.: Yes. 'Course I always taught him to cook when he was comin' up. Always taught him to cook some. He just started to make a fair meal the last few weeks.

Interviewer: You've just been doing that since you've been home then. Do you like that?  
Tom: Yes, sir....  
Interviewer: Who gets in the wood and water? How far do you have to go to get water?  
Tom: Up there to that little house up there...  
Interviewer: Who gets the water?  
Martha: I go.  
Interviewer: How often do you carry water?  
Martha: Three times a day.  
Interviewer: How many do you carry? Two buckets?  
Martha: Yes, sir.  
Interviewer: And you walk about -- what's that, about 200 yards, isn't it?  
Interviewer: You go ahead and do your chores. Who gets the calves in? Oh, Tony and Mary Ellen. Tony is how old?  
Martha: Five.  
Interviewer: Everybody has something to do, huh? Now, who teaches who to do what? Who teaches Mary Ellen to wash dishes and all?  
Martha: Tom -- he teaching 'em to wash dishes and Mother teaches 'em to get the calves in.  
Interviewer: Your Mother takes care of the calves, huh? And she teaches them that. Do you have any pigs?  
Martha: Yes, sir.  
Interviewer: Your Daddy's away, though, most of the time. I mean away working over in the fields at Mr. Miller's....  
Martha: Yes, sir.  
Interviewer: Do you do everything she ✓sister who was killed✓ used to do? No? What is it she used to do that you don't do?  
Martha: Wash dishes.  
Interviewer: Oh, she was the dish washer. And Mary Ellen washes the dishes now. Your sister used to cook, too, didn't she?

Martha: Yes, sir. She cooked.  
Interviewer: And, Tom, you cook now, do you? Now who looks after the little baby?  
Martha: Tom looks after her while I'm in the field.  
Interviewer: Can you change diapers? What do you do? Just watch her and all?  
Tom: Yes, sir. I watch her most of the time.  
Interviewer: Do you feed her?  
Tom: Yes, sir....

Case Material on Emotional Disturbance: Its Relation to Family Structure, Pre-Tornado Trauma, and Developmental Age of Child

So far the report has outlined some aspects of family structure which seem to have been helpful to these children in overcoming the stress of the disaster experience. Now we consider those children who showed pronounced emotional disturbance and suggest how this symptomatology may be related to certain variables, at the outset emphasizing the immense complexity and multicentricity of factors which have to be taken into consideration in any such analysis. This section examines, for instance, the effect of chronic inadequacy of parents as compared with the acute inadequacy of a family situation that developed as the result of the disaster. As a complicating factor, the acute inadequacy may hit two children in the same family in quite different ways, dependent on age and family position. Again, post-disaster symptomatology may be closely connected with the history of previous psychological and physical trauma. And, finally, the developmental age of the child may be an important factor in the child's experience of disaster within the family and in relations beyond the family.

We do not pretend to do more than touch on a few important variables in the following cases. These variables are not treated as isolated pathogenic phenomena, but only in terms of how they might play into the family structure. We believe that each of the children discussed here showed marked disorder; but at the time of the second interviews, none of them showed an increase of emotional disturbance since the first interview. Instead, there seemed to be a slight tendency toward improvement, although we might find this conclusion difficult to document adequately.

Chronic and Acute Lack of Parental Support

In the two families considered here, special problems of dependency existed. In the Simpson family these dependency problems were chronic; in the Pierce family, the problem of dependency emerged from the disaster, since the mother, who was the dependable parent in the family, was killed in the disaster. Let us consider first the Simpson family.



Sylvia Simpson is the nine-year-old daughter of middle-aged parents. They have only one other child as far as the record shows -- a twenty-nine-year-old son (or stepson) visiting from Chicago at the time of the disaster. All four members of the family were injured during the tornado. When the storm was approaching, Mr. Simpson went to the school, at his wife's request, and brought Sylvia home. When he returned home with Sylvia, Mr. Simpson and his wife decided to take Sylvia and go across the street to stay with a neighbor who was alone. They left their adult son sleeping on a couch. They were in the neighbor's house when the storm struck. Mr. Simpson reported that the first thing he remembered after the storm hit was finding himself on the ground: "Everytime I would get up the wind would blow me down. I saw I couldn't get up so I stayed on the ground until it was over. I forgot I had a wife and child. I just prayed to the Lard." When the storm was over, Mr. Simpson got up, looked around and saw his wife seated on the ground. Near her, stretched out on the ground and screaming was Sylvia. Mrs. Simpson called to her husband to come over and help her up, which he did. Sylvia got up by herself. All three of them went to another house for shelter. Sylvia had been burned by a falling stove. According to Mr. Simpson Sylvia was able to walk alone but he had to help his wife. He then went on to say, "In about twenty-five minutes the Red Cross ambulance came down here, took my wife [and some neighbors] to Avon hospital. . . . I came back here to where my house was and found some of my clothes, laid them on a concrete block, and asked one of my friends to take care of them for me. My side was hurting me so bad. I walked to the main road. They got a car and sent me to the hospital." According to Mr. Simpson, he left his daughter, Sylvia, with a friend of theirs for the night. The next day Sylvia herself was taken to the hospital by Red Cross workers.

When the interviewer asked Mr. Simpson what was the worst thing about the storm for him, he replied as follows: "One thing I can't understand, I was in the kitchen when the house went down, the chimney was made of stones and I can't understand why some of them didn't fall on me."

Here is a picture of a father preoccupied with his own narcissistic needs -- his own injuries, his clothes, and so on: What support he was able to give any one was pretty much limited to his wife. His child seemed to be out of the picture; he apparently had no recognition of her needs. The child, Sylvia, was well aware of this attitude on his part. In her interview, she reports that she was afraid, when he left her with friends after her mother had already gone to the hospital, that he, too, would go to the hospital and leave her. According to Sylvia's report, he told her that he would not go, but, as we know, he did go to the hospital without telling her.

Mrs. Simpson emerges from the interview data as dependent, sickly, and quite unable to give any mature help to Sylvia. She reported a six-year history of hay fever. "The doctor says there is no cure for it." She described Sylvia as a "slip up." When she first got pregnant, she hated Sylvia's coming, but she told the interviewer that she is glad now. "I didn't think I could make the trip [live through the pregnancy]. [But I'm glad now.] Some day she may do me some good."



At the end of this initial interview, the interviewer gave Sylvia some crayons, and Sylvia asked her mother to put them safely away for her. Mrs. Simpson told Sylvia to put the crayons away herself, and specified which drawer they were to be placed in. It is obvious in the interaction of the interview that Mrs. Simpson typically finds it almost impossible to meet Sylvia's needs, because she has too many of her own.

We have given this background of family interaction to show that in this family there is normally little ability to meet the child's needs and that both parents are chronically concerned with meeting their own needs. This kind of interaction is different in two ways from other families in this study: First, in most of the families studied there was at least one parent who was able to respond in a mature way in the taking-care-of process; in this family, neither parent was able to respond. Second, in most families, there was an ability, even in a dependent parent, to put aside dependent needs temporarily in order to meet an injured child's needs. But in the Simpson family, the needs of the parents remained rigid and unyielding in the period of disaster. Furthermore, there were no other family members available to take up the slack left by the parents. The Simpsons have no relatives in the community. The twenty-nine-year-old son was himself injured and immediately after the storm was over, he ran hysterically down the road and was soon hospitalized with the two parents.

We believe that there is evidence that the child was quite disturbed as a result of this family situation of mutual dependence of the parents. Previous to the disaster, Sylvia had been taking care of an eleven-month-old neighbor's baby. Mrs. Simpson reported, when asked whether any of Sylvia's friends were killed in the tornado, that the baby had been killed and went on to say: "She misses him. She talks about him two or three times a day. I have to make her hush."

A picture that Sylvia drew for the interviewer shows Sylvia, her father, her mother, and the eleven-month-old baby. Only the baby is smaller; Sylvia is almost the same height as her mother and father. This seems to us to be quite an accurate picture of the actual state of affairs. Another picture that Sylvia drew of the scene of the disaster shows her teacher and the baby who were killed; those are the only two figures in the picture which also includes a car, boards, and a chimney, all of which were destroyed in the storm. In other words, Sylvia seemed to feel that the most important result of the storm was that it destroyed her teacher and her nursing.

Mrs. Simpson said that even now when a storm comes up, Sylvia becomes disturbed; at such times, Sylvia may say to her mother, "Mama let it shake. It's the Lord's will." This seems an obvious plea on the part of the child that the mother be more calm in the storm. It also shows that Sylvia probably feels that "the Lord" is somewhat more dependable in His planning than her parents, even though "the Lord" wills that there be a storm.

According to her parents, Sylvia was very fond of school before the disaster. She liked her teacher who was killed. Her mother described their relationship as

follows: "That was her Sylvia's heart and she the teacher was hers." Yet Sylvia had not started back to school a month after the disaster; her father reported that the school was too far away and gave this as the reason for her nonattendance. However, the mother said that Sylvia would not leave home alone except to go to the mail box. Otherwise her parents had to go with her whenever she left the house. One would deduce from this that the reason that Sylvia was not back in school was her fear. The mother stated that since the tornado, "I can't seem to give her enough to eat," and added that Sylvia craves sweets more than before and resists attempts to get her to eat vegetables first. If the mother tries to get her to eat vegetables, Sylvia will "fall out and almost faint. She has a crying spell. She wasn't like that before."

Mrs. Simpson reported that Sylvia has few playmates, none of them in nearby families, and that, when she does have a playmate, she plays mama and daddy. This would seem to tie in with her care of the eleven-month-old baby; it seems possible that before the tornado she got some kind of vicarious pleasure out of playing the role of a more adequate parent than the ones she has.

There was only a brief follow-up interview of this child in June, but we would judge from it that her behavior still showed much the same pattern as in the March interview. We would hypothesize that Sylvia had little support from her parents either before or after the tornado; that the tornado represented to her simply another hard blow in a long series of blows; that she will show for some time rather definite symptomatology as a result of the tornado; and that her prognosis for mental health is not too good. The tornado obviously posed some new problems for Sylvia in the loss of her teacher and her nursling, and in the lack of support supplied by her parents. But the latter event is probably less traumatic than the former, since the latter is a long-enduring reality for which Sylvia has to find compensations over the long haul, and for which she has already had to make compensations in the past. Indeed, it seems that the storm deprived Sylvia of two major compensations she had developed.

Thirteen-year-old Maureen Pierce contrasts with Sylvia in that before the tornado she seems to have had a fairly secure, content life. Her mother, Agnes Pierce, who was killed in the disaster, was the teacher of the school that Maureen attended. Her father has always been a dependent person, we would judge. But the mother's upward mobility, her ability to plan for education for her children, and so on, was evidence of her general dependability. The family seemed to be a close-knit one, with numerous kin people in the immediate geographic vicinity and other relatives in a nearby state. The investigators described a family with many middle-class standards: they have photographs of family members, which they showed to the investigators; the father has a stand in Metropolis where he sells farm produce; and their living standard is higher than the other families visited. The Pierce family is an old one in the community, with extensive land holdings, a significant quota of pride and tradition, and close ties in previous generations with prominent whites -- in other words, a stable, differentiated unit in contrast with the tenant families.

Before the disaster, Maureen's family consisted of her mother and her father; her older sister, Marjorie, sixteen [who gave birth to an illegitimate son immediately after the disaster]; her brother Pete, also thirteen [who was killed in the disaster]; her younger sister Winifred, six, who was in the same school as Maureen. She also has a brother, Charles, but he was living in Detroit and came home only after the disaster. Just before the disaster, we would judge that there was some anxiety in the family over Marjorie. Mrs. Pierce had high hopes for Marjorie's education which included sending her to college, but Marjorie had become pregnant, which had placed an additional expense on the family. One would gather that this middle-class family had been somewhat unhappy about Marjorie's being pregnant before marriage, but there did not seem to be any personal rejection of Marjorie because of it. There is some evidence to indicate that Mrs. Pierce herself had had an illegitimate son; there is an older married son who bears Mrs. Pierce's maiden name.

After the disaster, Maureen's situation changed very abruptly. Her mother was killed, and Marjorie became the actual "mother" of the household, since Mr. Pierce placed her in that position by necessity. He said that "the first name I call is hers," in describing the way he felt about his dependency on Marjorie after the disaster. There is evidence that Marjorie felt rather self-important in her new role; she was now delivered of the baby, and she suddenly found herself transferred from a member of the family who was of some concern to her parents into a role in which she was much needed and very much appreciated. In the interview Marjorie complained about Maureen's laziness; she was good-natured about it, according to the interviewer, but she was chiding at the same time. Marjorie reported in the June interview that all that Maureen wanted to do was to lie on the bed and play with the baby [Marjorie's baby] to keep from doing any work.

In addition to the loss of her mother, Maureen lost her brother, Pete. It is not known whether they were twins, but in any case the proximity of their ages would make the loss of her brother peculiarly significant. To further complicate Maureen's position in the household, her brother, Charlie, who is somewhere between Maureen and Winifred in age, came home from Detroit after the disaster.

But the tornado brought other losses outside of the family to Maureen; her best chum, Betty Lou Smith, was trapped in the tornado, and Maureen tried to rescue her and failed. We discuss a little later what the loss of a chum at this age probably means, and give evidence to indicate that this loss was perhaps the worst loss of all to Maureen. And, finally, Maureen lost her teacher, who also happened to be her mother; this loss must have had meaning for her in a two-edged way, since the authority figures at home and at school were now both gone. And there was no adequate substitute in the home; neither Marjorie nor her father was able to meet Maureen's needs at all, according to the data.

The six-year-old Winifred might be thought of as having suffered almost identical trauma as Maureen. But this would not hold up on closer examination. Pete would not



have the same meaning, either positively or negatively, for Winifred as for Maureen. And Winifred was too young to experience grief in the same way as Maureen -- a point which we discuss in some detail later. But the most important difference, from Winifred's viewpoint, was her relationship with her father. She was able to relate to him after the disaster and he to her, whereas Maureen and her father were estranged.

Mr. Pierce seems to have had some necessity to view his losses in the tornado as the most acute losses suffered by anyone. We would think that Maureen's loss and trauma were actually greater than that of any other person interviewed in either community. We would hypothesize that Mr. Pierce could not bear the competition of Maureen's loss with his own; that, to use the concept of dynamic space again, there was not room in this family for more than one completely grief-stricken, bereft, dependent person; and Mr. Pierce was concerned lest that position be usurped by Maureen. Part of the dynamics of this situation probably centers around the fact that Maureen was adult in many ways at thirteen. Her grief was closely akin to the kind of grief that Mr. Pierce suffered over the loss of his wife. Winifred was still a baby, and Mr. Pierce seemed able to meet her needs in a kind of reciprocal dependency way. During April and May, Winifred and Maureen stayed with relatives in another state. Mr. Pierce described for the interviewer in June how he missed Winifred during that time: "You know, I never remember the baby ... leaving the house. We never have been apart. I don't reckon she ever leave the house at night, never have. And so the baby, you know, that's all the comfort in the world to me, specially sleeping with me every night, too, you know. And fact of the business she just her father's child. She's been that all her days. I sure did miss her. I'm tellin' you I missed her bad...." We would like to emphasize that Winifred was also a disturbed child. She was injured quite badly in the tornado, and in June she still showed acute signs of distress particularly at any sign of a storm. Her father describes her as follows: "...looked like she might have something like a rigor, you know." But the disturbance was handled by her father in a more supportive way; he could express sympathy and concern. The following excerpt from the June interview will give some indication of the different way in which Maureen's disturbance was handled:

- Mr. Pierce: Now you come back to Maureen. I have some awful thoughts about her, awful thoughts. I just don't know. She's much, much fractious than she ever have been....
- Interviewer: She's hard to get along with?
- Mr. Pierce: She's just -- oh, she nothin' like she have been along that line. She was real good, but now at times she cannot stand talk.
- Interviewer: Nobody say anything?
- Mr. Pierce: No one! I don't care if it's me or her sister or brother or her grandmother or auntie or anyone.
- Interviewer: What will she do if you say something to her?
- Mr. Pierce: Well, she just, you know, she just go all to pieces.

- Interviewer: Does she scream or what?
- Mr. Pierce: Well, she might not say nothin' or she might go out yonder and sit on that bank and you can call her four or five times. . . and she don't say anything and after a while she'll probably come on back into the house. And at times she just give you such a quick answer -- answer you 'fore you get the word out of your mouth, like that, and at times she don't want. . . Now that goes and comes. It's not continual thataway, you know, but --
- Interviewer: Is she more like that when a storm -- at a time when the weather is bad?
- Mr. Pierce: Well, no, if the weather is bad she don't be still long enough and actually that's all she has on her mind is the weather. But the sun can be shinin' bright. And that don't have to be here; it can be down there in the field or here or it can be down there in the road or it can be just anywhere. I just don't know. I wonders and thinks and. . .and that's how it happened today. And then at times she just as sweet as she can be. And at times you just can't say nothing reasonable with her nohow. That's something that never have been. Quite naturally you know, you know your children -- you know their disposition -- you know this one and that one and you know what they like and what they don't like. But at times she don't like anything.

For Maureen Pierce, then, the shift from a family in which there was a strong person on whom she could depend for maternal support in time of need to a family in which this function was delegated to a sister only three years older than herself was an upsetting change in itself. She had been used to one strong parent, and that parent's loss was a substantial one, in terms of her disaster-induced dependency needs. This kind of removal of a dependable figure from a child's life is more intense an experience than the failure in time of crisis of two chronically dependent parents, as in the case of Sylvia Simpson. Maureen's failure to get help from her father was more difficult for her to handle, in a sense; if, like Sylvia, one has never experienced a dependable parental figure then one cannot suffer the loss of such a figure.

Just as Maureen's experience of not having her post-tornado needs met was different from Sylvia's experience of not having hers met, so Winifred's experience in the Pierce family was different from Maureen's in the same family. We mention this to emphasize again the complexity of factors in evaluating what happens to a child. Different children in the same family can experience quite different attitudes; and

children facing the same problem in different families experience the problem quite differently from each other, since they integrate it in terms of their varying capacities.

### A Note on Disaster as A Triggering Point for Latent Symptomatology

We would like to comment briefly at this point on one eleven-year-old child, Billy Ray Bell, who showed more acute symptomatology than any other child in the post-disaster period. By the time of the June interview, he had developed epileptic attacks which were not present prior to the disaster. Here again a complexity of factors have to be examined in order to arrive accurately at any possible hypothesis for determining what part the disaster has played in his symptomatology. His family, like the Pierce family, is somewhat more upwardly mobile than the other families in the Delta Town respondents. Mr. Bell occupies within his community a relatively privileged and prestigious position as chauffeur for the Buchanan family, who own the plantation; his occupational status contrasts favorably with the field labor status of almost all of the other members of the Negro group in Delta Town.

Billy Ray had only one dependable parent, his father, just as Maureen and Winifred had only one dependable parent, their mother. Billy Ray's mother was dependent, sickly, demanding, and immature in many ways; she was, however, unlike Mr. Pierce, able to meet some of the needs of her children arising out of the disaster; she was able, in other words, to turn off some of her own needs for a limited period of time. Billy Ray has a long history of physical and psychological difficulty. When he was only nine months old, his head was seriously injured in a fall. According to the mother, the doctor in attendance at the time predicted that Billy Ray might be bothered with his injury between the age of ten and twelve. In the tornado, Billy Ray had his back injured, not his head, but he had been having headaches since the tornado. Additionally, it would seem that part of Billy Ray's current and past difficulty stems from an earlier psychological trauma. His father went into the Army when Billy Ray was a month old, and he did not get to know his father until he was more than two years old. His mother spoke of him as being "spoiled" while his father was away. At any rate, it is quite possible that the child suffered some trauma upon the return of his father from the Army. Various studies<sup>19</sup> seem to indicate that the child who is born in war-time and who does not remember his father, or never knew him before he went into the Army, may find the father's return a traumatic experience; in the eyes of the child the father may be usurping the child's place in the family. The child's reaction will, of course, depend on how the mother and father define and behave in the situation.

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19. Lois H. Stolz, Father Relations of War-Born Children (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954), passim.



Although the investigators reported that Billy Ray was an "alert" child and although he seemed to be able to assume a great deal of responsibility in the household (on the morning of the June interview, Billy Ray had swept, fixed breakfast, ironed, changed the baby, and so on, for his mother), he was obviously an upset child and has been so for some time. At eleven years of age he was only in the second grade; it seems clear that this is not related to mental retardation but to other factors which, of course, predate the tornado.

We have mentioned this child's case in order to show again the difficulty of assessing symptomatology which appeared after the tornado. It would seem that the patterns of dependency within the family are not so difficult that Billy Ray could not handle them; but his early accident, and the possible emotional trauma of his father's return from the Army are long-term situational difficulties which seem to be strong predispositions for the appearance of the epilepsy, although the tornado may have aggravated the condition on a physical and/or a psychological level.

### Developmental Eras as A Framework for Viewing the Effect of A Particular Disaster Event

Since death was so pervasive in the two communities studied -- as a minimum, each child lost his teacher at the outset -- it seems useful to examine some of the content of grief and its meaning. For this purpose, we have borrowed from Sullivan's concept of grief and its relation to developmental eras. In the child, grief is of a different order from the grief experienced in the developing person. To a child the death of a significant adult is a traumatic event; but the trauma is found in the fact that the child is apt to suffer a discontinuity in the way in which his dependency needs are met. As a result of such trauma, the child may often regress for a period and become more demanding, until he has reestablished a relationship with some responsible person who will meet his dependency needs.

Winifred Pierce is such a child; the loss of her mother was experienced by her largely as deprivation. There are elements of narcissism in such grief, for the child regrets the loss of someone who produced contented and happy feelings in himself. Mary Ellen Smith, who was seven, seemed to experience her loss of her sister, Betty Lou, twelve, in much the same way. Mrs. Smith was dependent on her older children for many child-care duties; and Mary Ellen seems to have been a charge of her older sister's. After the tornado, Mary Ellen's behavior was described as "don't-care" by her mother. Her father said in the June interview that "She acts mighty queer all the time. She got no memory. I just don't know what in the world to think 'bout her. 'Course she could grow out of it." When the interviewer asked Mr. Smith whether Mary Ellen misses Betty Lou, Mr. Smith answered "Well, I ain't never heard her say."

The kind of grief experienced by Maureen Pierce in the loss of her chum, Betty Lou Smith, was of a quite different order, and Maureen was able to be fairly articulate about it. The explanation for this is found in Sullivan's concept of adult grief as first experienced in preadolescence:

Grief in this biologically human sense is dependent on the integrative tendency which I call love -- the capacity for intimacy which first appears in preadolescence. Below the level of preadolescent development, all ties between developing personalities are fugitive in terms of the ability for closeness. The juvenile, for instance, may have a very keen awareness of what is lost, of awkwardness about a playmate's moving to another city; there may even be some feeble attempt at correspondence. But the whole thing withers very rapidly, and other people are discovered to fill the place very nicely. Nothing of that kind applies to the chum in preadolescence. The chum's death, for instance, is a major incident -- literally the most important thing that has happened to the personality in the area of recollection. Such an incident is usually handled in personality by the dynamism of grief.<sup>20</sup>

It is self-evident from the interview that Maureen suffered at least as much about the death of her chum as about the death of her mother. In her composition written at school about the disaster, Maureen reports that Betty Lou "was berry with my ring on sho i cood remmer here" / "was buried with my ring on so I could remember her". There is a hint of guilt here, and this guilt is the kind of clinging to grief that an adult experiences -- a feeling that it is somehow wrong to go on with life when the dead friend is no longer able to experience living. In addition, Maureen suffered because she was unable to lift the planks off of Betty Lou, who was trapped in the disaster. She reports that she and Martha Smith couldn't get the boards off Betty Lou: "it took fifteen men to get it off her." Actually, no more than three men were needed to move the debris from Betty Lou, but Maureen felt responsible somehow for Betty Lou's death, and the exaggeration served to assuage the guilt.

We believe that in Maureen's case, her particular era of personality development at the time of the disaster made some real difference in the intensity of her experience. We would like to point out, however, that if Betty Lou had survived the disaster, Maureen might have found solace in her relationship with Betty Lou for the loss of her mother and her twin brother. The expansion of relationships beyond the immediate family and kin system has inherent in it both assets and liabilities for meeting disaster. In Maureen's case, this expansion ended disastrously.

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20. Sullivan, op. cit., 105-106.

In the case of fourteen-year-old Martha Smith and her seventeen-year-old brother, Tom, who were already adolescent, the experience of the death of their sister, Betty Lou, and of their teacher, Mrs. Pierce, had some of the maturity of adult grief also; but their loss was not so poignant as Maureen's, and we believe that they had already developed certain more mature ways of dealing with it. The trauma of Martha and Tom seemed to be much the same as that shown by the relatively mature adult in the data studied. They reached out for new experience and increased maturity in order to compensate in part for the loss. In this desire for more adult status on the part of the two older children, the parents seemed to be quite cooperative. We do not think that it is a coincidence that Martha, who used to smoke privately before the disaster, smoked in front of her parents by the time of the June interview and that she was allowed to drive the car. This change in status did not happen immediately after the disaster, but by June there were indications that Martha had expanded considerably in several directions. At the time of the March interviews, Martha was still not eating on Tuesdays (the day of the disaster); she had had trouble eating ever since the disaster, and she had given up even trying to eat on Tuesdays. While this showed real disturbance, it was a ritualistic and compulsively obsessional handling of her anxiety; by the time of the June interview, her eating habits had become normal again.

Tom also showed an adolescent ability to absorb and integrate the experience. The section on the meaning of disaster includes an excerpt which shows Tom's mature attempt to find some way of integrating the experience. In the June interview, Tom reported that he and his sister, Martha, did not rush home from school any more when a storm came up. The interviewer asked them why they stay at school, and Tom answered "I'd just as soon. I wouldn't let on like I was scared. Just kinda tough it out." There is other evidence in the interview material to indicate that Tom had already found in his expanding world new friendships which made it possible for him to find support for recovery from the outside world, beyond his family and relatives.

If either Martha or Tom had experienced the loss of an adolescent sweetheart, we would expect that they would have had areas of greater sensitivity centering around that loss; but they appear to have been more fortunate than Maureen Pierce. The loss of their sister does not represent the same kind of loss, developmentally speaking, as the loss of Maureen's chum.

We have only touched briefly on the relationship of developmental eras to the whole subject of recovery from disaster. As the child develops, his world enlarges beyond his family and relatives; in this expansion, he finds new sources of comfort and strength; but his ability to suffer, in an adult sense, also seems to expand.



## CHAPTER IV

### CULTURAL VALUES AND SOCIETAL STRUCTURE

In this section the assets and liabilities inherent in the cultural-social complex characterizing the two communities are considered. These matters are treated briefly and cursorily because they involve a more thorough analysis of the field notes than could be undertaken here. But we feel it is important to indicate some of the ways in which the family is dependent on the society for restitutive functions after disaster. The failure of the society to provide adequate support may be a quite serious handicap to the family and to the child over the long haul. In the families studied here, the impact of the Negro-white caste system showed certain eroding effects on the ability of the society to function properly in sustaining the family's search for meaning -- its attempt to digest the experience.

#### The Value of Education as A Social Institution

As indicated earlier, the parents in Operation Schoolhouse continued to give overt support to the idea that education is a valued social institution, in spite of the fact that the schoolhouse buildings were destroyed. In other disasters reported in the literature, irrational fears often are centered on the locus of the disaster; in the Vicksburg disaster, for instance, the theater building became the focus of fear.

This disaster occurred at a time when national attention was focused on the problem of the segregated school and the disaster was concentrated on two segregated Negro schools. No mention is made by any of the respondents of the implications of such a disaster in terms of the national situation; and, in fact, there may have been little conscious awareness in either the Negro and white populations of the implications at a national level. But certainly there were some respondents who hinted at some knowledge of some of the implications. The Negro principal in Delta Town, for instance, had some awareness of the pressing social situation in his locality. His attitude was summed up in a philosophy of watch and wait, as reported to Lewis.

We believe that some of this over-all psychological set of watch and wait was communicated at some level to the respondents in our study and that their response was to fall back on their chronic attitude toward education as an institution. This value seems to be more an implicit value than a measure of achievement or performance. For instance, it is probably true that the rural child in the South, regardless of race, attends school more infrequently than the urban child. And certainly the performance in school of the rural Negro child is considerably poorer than that of a child in a big city. But performance must be separated from the hope, the dream. To the child who has nothing to look forward to except a life of chopping cotton, the escape through education must exist as a hope, however vain. Indeed, part of the futility of the hope may lie in the fact that he is taught by adults who grew up in the same educational system.

In both communities, the respondents gave every indication that education has an enduring value for them comparable to that which Myrdal describes:

...education is such a high value to this group, which has to struggle for it, that it is understandable why education is more important, relatively, for Negro status than for white status.... [In this respect] the American Negro world is strikingly different from the American white world.

...the masses of Negroes show even today a naive, almost religious faith in education.<sup>21</sup>

In this study, both children and adults showed this same aspiration in respect to education. In Delta Town, particularly, education was mentioned as the one feasible way in which children can escape a lifetime of chopping cotton. In the more middle-class families of Hilltown, and in the most prosperous family in Delta Town (the Bells), the emphasis on education as a way of escaping field work, of course, did not appear; the families did not feel as totally dependent on education for escape, but their reverence for education was just as strong.

In the post-tornado period, extending through the June interviews, the families showed an interest in restoring the schools, in finding a suitable location, and so on. We believe that this kind of interest was organizing, clarifying, and therapeutic for the families involved, particularly in view of the strength of the aspirations centering around education. Nowhere did we find a suggestion that children should be kept out of school and close to home, because they were upset by the storm. This is in contrast to the Vicksburg experience in which parents often displayed a tendency to keep the child near them and at home, even after school had been resumed for some weeks. In Hilltown, the surviving uninjured children were almost immediately transferred to the

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21. Myrdal, op. cit., 694 and 884.

nearest school. In Delta Town, the transfer of students to another school apparently took longer, but we found only one case of a child who was not in school for the simple reason that the child was too upset to leave the house alone. School, to these families, seemed to be too important, too much an integral part of their lives, to be interrupted any longer than absolutely necessary.

To summarize, the fact that parents (and children) showed no reluctance about the child's returning to school is doubly indicative of the importance of educational values to the communities, particularly in view of the fact that the two community schools had been destroyed. Merely the fact that the disaster had occurred, in large part, at the schools would seem likely to encourage resistance to returning to school. Yet, we found no evidence of any post-disaster resistance -- except, as mentioned before, in the case of one child. This seems to augur for a conclusion that school-going for these children was a considerable asset for maintaining stability in the post-disaster period and for recovery from the disaster trauma.

### The Negro-White Caste System

On a number of counts it seems necessary to look at the structure of Negro-white relations in terms of the disaster events. The most spectacular of these was the contrast between the social organization of Hilltown and that of Delta Town and how this made a difference in terms of the response of the white community to the immediate demands of rescue operations. The plantation white society responded in an efficient, well-administered, and swift fashion to organize and carry out rescue operations; in Hilltown, however, the whites were inefficient and less organized, and some of them who were actually on the scene did not take part in rescue operations. Part of this differential community rescue response must be attributed to the fact that the plantation was well organized as a business operation.

These two disasters were limited almost exclusively to the Negro populations. A number of houses of whites were destroyed or damaged in varying degrees, but in each community only one white person suffered injuries and these were of a minor nature. This fact was cause for much comment and puzzlement among the Negroes. It was especially perplexing to the Negroes of Hilltown, since it was a repetition of what had happened before. Three years before the schoolhouse disaster, a storm had ravaged a community some eight miles away in which only Negroes had been injured. The coincidences involved in these two disasters taxed the capacities of the respondents to rationalize or make meaningful their experience of them.

Both the white and Negro communities of Hilltown showed evidence of confusion and bewilderment over this phenomenon; the white community also showed some guilt, and the Negro community some repressed anger. Mr. Templeton, a white respondent who is influential in Hilltown, was asked by Patrick to comment on what he thought was the Negro's explanation of the tragedy:



They are all fatalistic about death. They think you have a set time to go, and that you have no control over it. Now, there is some intimation that the poor niggers got killed because of the poor building that was used as their school. Have you been up and down that road where the storm hit? That old church where the school was held was about as well constructed as any of the other buildings along that road. These doys there is so much race consciousness that even when a storm comes along they try to blame that on something else.

Although this respondent referred to the fact that there was some "intimation" of blame of the white community, there was no direct evidence of such blame among the Negro respondents in the study. There was, however, some veiled criticism of the old building among the Negro (adult) respondents, but this was never overtly blamed on the white community.

One might surmise, however, that the Negro community of Hilltown had some repressed anger against the white community which was channeled into a focal resentment against one white man who was directly involved in the disaster at the schoolhouse. On the day of the disaster, a white state auditor was in the schoolhouse conducting an audit of attendance records. Both the white and Negro communities were inclined to blame his presence for the outcome of the disaster; it is almost as if the white community gave permission to the Negro community to show its anger against the white people in this way. Mr. Templeton commented on this as follows:

You know, there was a white man in that school when the cyclone hit, checking to see that they weren't padding the attendance or something like that. Well you know the way niggers act----they wait around for a white man to tell them what to do. Now if that white man had been at the school any other day but that one, none of those niggers would have got killed. Do you know niggers? [The interviewer assures the respondent that he grew up in North Carolina.] Well they are first cousins to wild animals, and they know what to do at a time like that. That teacher would have had those kids out of there and in a ditch holding onto a bush if that white school man had not been there. But when that white man was there, she just stood around and waited for him.

Tom Smith, one of the Negro children in the schoolhouse, mentioned that "the white man opened the door. The room filled with wind and the top went off." Maureen Pierce also believed that the storm hit the schoolhouse when the white visitor opened the door. With the Negro children, the white man seems to have been made responsible for the actual destruction of the building, since he opened the door at the wrong instant.

These considerations of the relationships of Negro and white seemed to be important elements in the disaster population's struggle to evaluate their experience.

## The Struggle To Arrive at the Meaning of the Disaster

There seems to be rather strong evidence that the social expression of disturbance after the tornado centered around the attempt to see the meaning of the disaster. There were expressions of confusion and perplexity, bewilderment and incoherency. Even three months after the disaster there was much evidence that this problem of finding an agreed-upon rationale for the disaster in terms of family or community values remained of paramount interest. Yet our respondents in both of these communities historically have certain institutionalized ways of finding meaning through religious values. As Myrdal points out, "Southerners are more religious than the rest of the nation, and the Negroes, perhaps, still a little more religious than the white Southerners."<sup>22</sup> In addition, rural populations manifest more religious behavior than urban groups. Thus, one would expect that the communities studied would have had a relatively available opportunity for arriving at a socially meaningful, shared understanding of the disaster events.

It is necessary, then, to examine some of the factors which seemed to complicate the process of finding meaning, or a rationale, for the disaster, particularly in terms of the confusion which seemed to arise in terms of the religious and ethical values already built in to the culture. As a preliminary to an examination of the data, we consider, first, the normal confusion that follows upon any sudden shock -- illness, death, destruction, and so on -- in terms of the psychoanalytic construct of regression; we then examine some of the ways in which a person or a society emerges from the period of trauma by the affixing of responsibility or blame and by the re-establishment of cultural and ethical values to give meaning to the disaster, or to make it possible for the person or community to digest the disaster.

### Regression in the Ability To Seek Explanations and Meanings for the Disaster

We assume that some form of regression is a normal restitutive response of the individual to disaster or extreme trauma.<sup>23</sup> We consider regression here in terms of its

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22. *Ibid.*, 863.

23. We are using the term "regression" here in the broadest possible psychoanalytic sense. Bettelheim says, "The regression to infantile behavior was a mass phenomenon [in the concentration camp]," in Bruno Bettelheim, "Individual and Mass Behavior in Extreme Situations," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, XXXVIII (1943), 417-452. We assume that the regression was more pronounced in the extreme situation of the concentration camps which Bettelheim describes, but that in varying degrees, according to the intensity of the experience, it is a universal phenomenon in extreme situations. Forms of regression can include quite opposite-looking behavior -- for example, extreme restriction of activity as in trance-like states, extreme

possible manifestation in a given community's conceptual behavior as a chronic and enduring response to disaster. We have already suggested that a disaster with a high degree of saturation may produce interpersonal processes which may be thought of as schizophrenic-like; there is diffusion of meaning and a general feeling of unreality. To put it another way, the judgment and reasoning ability shown by an individual who has experienced disaster may give the appearance of regressing to earlier and more primitive types of reasoning; and this behavior may be considered within the range of "normal" reaction to disaster as long as it does not become a patterned way of behavior for too long a period of time.

In the data of Operation Schoolhouse, there is evidence that regressive patterns of behavior still existed in the adult communities at the time of the follow-up interviews five months after the tornado, and that they had become somewhat patterned in terms of the community's over-all conceptual behavior. Some of this behavior can be described as indicating a lack of ability to reason, comparable to the behavior one expects to find in a child of less than ten years of age. According to Piaget,<sup>24</sup> the child of less than ten will not be able to spot the incongruity in such a statement as this: "A poor cyclist had his head smashed and died on the spot; he was taken to hospital and it is feared that he will not recover." Several adult respondents in our study showed this same kind of incongruous reasoning in explaining the meaning of the disaster or the "cause" of it. Although some of the respondents were able to make explicit statements about their confusion and perplexity about the meaning of the disaster -- which we would consider normal behavior after disaster -- most of the respondents made conflicting statements and showed implicit confusion which they appeared to be unaware of. This seems to indicate a more chronic regression.

We have assumed here that the re-establishment of rational functions in seeking out the meaning of the disaster and establishing causal relationships is a necessary part of recovery from disaster. If so, the inability to find a meaning for the disaster may itself become a disjunctive force if it continues too long. The person, or the group, in such a case is unable to resume the task of living, simply because they cannot use the normal restitutive processes for getting over the disaster. While the families studied exhibited normal restitutive processes in other areas -- such as the normal processes of grieving, they seemed in general to be inept in this field of finding satisfactory causal relationships as compared, for instance, to the respondents in the Vicksburg study.

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over-activity as in uncontrolled running about, or extreme restriction of awareness with a highly goal-directed activity as in seemingly efficient searching behavior in a person who is unable to receive stimuli unrelated to his search.

24. Jean Piaget, Judgment and Reasoning in the Child (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1928), 62-63n.



This difference might be explained in any one of several ways. The saturation of the disaster in Hilltown and Delta Town was much greater than that in Vicksburg. It is certainly highly probable that a more widespread disaster would tax the rational function of the survivors more drastically; whether this function would be noticeably impaired for a period of several months seems more doubtful. In addition, it is quite likely that the greater depth and intensity of the interviewing in Operation Schoolhouse, as compared to Vicksburg, may be a factor in the uncovering of impairment of reasoning ability; that is, the freer the respondent is to talk, the more confused his productions may seem to the observer.

Even though these factors may be operative here, there are, in addition, cultural explanations which seem tenable. The over-all social characteristics of depressed social status shared by the respondents may show up in the quality of the causal thinking. We believe part of this impairment of reasoning ability may be explained in terms of the conflicts implicit in the cultural setting -- in particular, the discrepancy between the Negro-white caste system and the religious beliefs shared by whites and Negroes. The disaster emphasized the caste structure by the fact that only Negroes were killed. This fact makes it difficult for Negroes to use the agency of God as an explanation of the disaster and of the differential treatment of whites and Negroes. They have to answer the question for themselves, Why did God single out Negroes when He is supposed to be "above" the caste system? This question is impossible for them to answer, so they cannot very easily use religious explanations of the disaster. Any sort of religious explanation leads, after a while, to that unanswerable question.

They may try, then, to use naturalistic, "scientific" explanations, but they have not had much experience in the use of this mode of finding meaning in such situations. The result is that the respondents appear to flounder in a confusion of mixed explanations, none of which satisfies them.

#### Responsibility, Blame, and Religious Concepts<sup>25</sup>

As we have already noted, one might expect that the number of rationalizations for disaster that center around religion would be particularly high for the Southern rural

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25. While revising this manuscript for final publication, we have learned of T. D. Kendrick, The Lisbon Earthquake (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1957). We regret that we did not have an opportunity to read this book before analyzing these data; according to James R. Newman's review of the book in Scientific American, CXC VII (July 1957), 164, this book is an important one in the whole field of the meaning of disaster. As Newman says, "Sir Thomas reports the earthquake in vivid detail, but this is only the setting for his book. Primarily he is concerned with the effect of the calamity on men's place in the world, of crime and punishment and

Negro. Since the Negro and the Southern white community share a basically common set of religious values, any situation in which these values are placed under certain stress affects both the white and Negro communities. An important part of this conflict, whether activated or dormant, is the widely accepted fact that the religious segment of the white population in the South -- and particularly the white minister as the leader of that group -- cannot tolerate the inconsistency between the tenets of their faith and their position in respect to the Negro. Myrdal comments on this at some length, but, in essence, his finding can be summarized in his statement that "the average Southern white man, for natural reasons, can only be grateful not to have his stand on race relations exposed to the teachings of Christianity."<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, as pointed out by Myrdal in the same discussion, the Negro makes every effort not to confront the white man directly with this inconsistency, particularly since the strategic power is largely in the hands of the white community. Our reason for mentioning these general cultural forces in operation in the South is to point out that a disaster in such a setting mobilizes powerful awareness among white and Negro alike; and that the reappearance of the conflict within awareness produces psychological problems. We have found considerable evidence in the data that such problems were implicit in both communities. It is inevitable that the psychological conflicts arising from social conflicts which have been suddenly mobilized by disaster would affect the stability of the children involved. The security or insecurity of the adult population determines the emotional climate of the children in large part.<sup>27</sup>

One of the white ministers in one of the disaster areas here studied emerged as a hero in the rescue work; and we believe his attitude after the disaster is an illustration of the kind of phenomenon we are attempting to describe. Several of the Negro and white respondents reported on this minister's devotion to the work of rescuing the children from the schoolhouse ruins. Yet, in reporting on two interviews with him, the

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the wrath of God, of duty to one's fellows, of competing faiths and creeds, of optimism and human prospects."

26. Myrdal, *op. cit.*, 869

27. We want to emphasize here the distinction between acute, mobilized insecurities and chronic, channelized insecurities. Chronic deprivation breeds certain adjustive mechanisms which minimize, relatively speaking, the deprivation. But acute, sudden deprivations may catch the person off-guard, so to speak; and the mobilization of awareness of chronic deprivations -- that is, the breakdown of the adjustive or accommodative mechanisms -- may have the same effect as an acute or sudden disaster. Thus, for example, depressed classes will tend to be quiescent in the social order, unless and until the recognition of the potentiality of a better life and the mobilization of the awareness of their deprivation occur. Similarly, in the individual, the sudden breakdown of repressive mechanisms may bring about an acute recognition of a depriving state of affairs in the person's relations with significant others.

investigator commented on the minister's lack of interest in discussing any aspect of the disaster and his obvious anxiety about it. The significance of this as a general psychological set for the community is important, we believe. The white minister holds a particular value importance in the white community in the South, and this, in turn, affects the Negro community. The fact that he is bewildered and inarticulate tends to force the members of his white congregation into a position of withdrawal and selective inattention to the whole situation, and the defenses of the white community become more rigid than ever. There is abundant and striking evidence of this in the field notes. Patrick commented, for instance, on the tendency on the part of the white community to believe that the Negroes do not "feel" the disaster as much as white people would. Also, various informants told him jokes about survivors which communicate the idea that the Negro leads a loose and sexually animalistic existence. This is the typical defense of the white man, as reported by Myrdal and others, to avoid recognizing the Negro as a feeling person. In the face of the white man's reaction to the disaster, which is a restructuring of lines of defense already familiar to the Negro, the Negro finds it necessary to act even more humble and accepting of the disaster. This necessity to accept the disaster places constraints on what is discussed even among Negroes in their own homes. In none of the data is there any mention of the idea that the Lord should have punished the white people rather than the Negro, or as much as the Negro; but this conflict in trying to understand why the Negro was exclusively punished goes through all the data and is an important part of the psychological climate for the child.

Some of the implications of the process of fixing responsibility and blaming as they appear in disaster are now considered briefly. The determining of responsibility in a disaster is a normal restitutive process, we believe, by which meaning is restored. When a person or a group lacks the means for establishing responsibility, then certain other processes take over. Some of these processes have elements of irrational blaming in them; but, at times, such irrational blaming may even serve a restitutive function for a group or an individual, as long as this irrational blaming is not continued over a long period of time. During a war, for instance, one psychological device by which the bombed-out civilians in a city may be able to withstand the psychological trauma of the event is to blame the inhuman standards of the enemy for the atrocities of the war in general, and the bombing in particular; for the duration of the war they are able to overlook the inhuman aspects of their own participation in the war. The blaming that is dependent on national role in wartime usually dissipates rapidly at the end of war, and the individual citizen, unless pressed by national exigencies, goes back to more normal pursuits of judging people in terms of his usual sets of values and prejudices. But the value of the blaming device at the time of the onset of any disaster is not to be discounted as an emergency remedy for the impact of the shock. At the same time, the more mature way of meeting disaster is gradually to establish valid causal relationships or to fix responsibility, if it is possible to do so in a given situation.

By and large, it is our impression that most of the respondents in Operation Schoolhouse placed responsibility for this disaster on God, although they also assumed



personal responsibility for being sinful and deserving punishment. Sometimes the causal relationships were confused, as we have already noted, and natural phenomena were discussed dispassionately by the some respondent who a little later saw some supernatural purpose implied in the particular event. But no matter how confused the reasoning, the focal point seemed to center about the supernatural.

The fixing of the responsibility partly on God may have been on one level an expression by these Negro families of their confusion and resentment at white people in the community. Myrdal notes that "God and the angels are ordinarily white to Negroes as they are to white churchgoers;"<sup>28</sup> and the Negro sociologist, E. Franklin Frazier comments on the personification of God by Negro youth as follows:

The majority of Negro youth of all classes believe that God is white. To lower-class youth, He resembles a kindly paternalistic, upper-class white man. They believe that because of His goodness and justice, colored people will not suffer discrimination in the other world.<sup>29</sup>

In this disaster, this personification of God was threatened; the ethical values of the white man's religion had become confused through the accident of disaster. The Negro was left to deal with the question of whether the white man's God is as just and fair to the Negro as he is to the white man. This question did not become explicit in the respondents' productions, although some of them wondered at the fact that no whites were killed.

In this particular, also, there seems to be some difference in these data from those of the Vicksburg study. The respondents in Operation Schoolhouse seemed to be in more conflict about the meaning, and to be less resigned to the "Lord's will;" even if they mentioned the Lord's will, they expressed more complicated feelings as the interview progressed. A woman who had two children killed in the disaster and had only one surviving child reported in the first interview, when she was asked about the meaning of the disaster: "It was something the Lord intended to happen. I say their time just was out. That's all I say." There is a passivity in this statement which is quite at variance with a statement made in the presence of an interviewer at a neighbor's house three days later. The same respondent was commenting on a more recent storm, after the major disaster: "I went out on the porch and I just waved at Him and shouted, 'Jesus, You took care of me one time and You can do it again.'"

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28. Myrdal, *op. cit.*, 866.

29. E. Franklin Frazier, *Negro Youth at the Crossways* (Washington, D. C.: American Council on Education, 1940), 133.

There is also evidence that there was some anger against God for his punishment; some of the anger seemed to take the form of feeling that God had taken a toll; a picture arises of an Old Testament, avenging God. An explicit illustration of this attitude of the sacrificial significance of the tornado is found in a four-year old child, Sarah Able, who is being raised by her grandmother. The other children, Ted and Honey, siblings of Sarah, were killed in the disaster. The grandmother reported that Sarah was not afraid of wind and clouds and that if she, the grandmother, acted scared, Sarah would pet her and say, "Jesus ain't coming after you. He got Ted and Honey." This is probably an idea voiced by the grandmother herself which Sarah may have accepted more literally than her grandmother.

The ambivalences and confusion of causal relationships is found in the response of Mr. Morse, a seventy-three-year old father and grandfather:

✓The interviewer asks Mr. Morse why such disasters happen:✓  
They always say storms follow the water course. ✓Pause✓ I hardly  
know my ABC's but I know this: this day was ✓ap✓-pointed in creation  
and it took time to bring it here. The wicked ✓generation was spoke of  
and it took time but it has come upon us. . . . The deepest effect was  
seeing those dead children and peoples loying out there and although  
one can't kick about the Good Master, it's hard to think about the  
ones ✓parents✓ that had those little kids that was destroyed. But you  
can't say anything about what God did. Whatever He did, He knows  
best.

There is in this response a mention first of natural causes. Then there is an answer in terms of predestination. Finally, the respondent expresses in obverse his wish to criticize the Deity which is partly regretted at the end of the excerpt.

Only one adult respondent expressed this ambivalence in terms of conflicts between two supernatural powers:

I don't know what it means. I just hope it don't happen no more.  
It makes me feel we are living in dangerous times. According to the Bible  
it seems like sin might be the cause of it. I guess it's just in the foundation.  
The devil might have a part in it and the Lord must have a part in it too.  
Give the devil his pound and he'd take much more unless the Lord stepped  
in.

In the case of Mr. Pierce, whose wife, a teacher, was killed in the disaster, there was an interesting pattern of ambivalence in the initial interview; by the June follow-up interview, this had given way to a meaningful solution which met some of his dependency needs. In the initial interview, Mr. Pierce used the usual rationalization that "It must be the will of the Father." But in the same interview, this

rationalization gave way to doubt expressed in an explicit fashion: "It's just a mystery. Could be some kind of warning or what you may call it. I believes it pays to live close to the Lord. I think with all the trouble I'm having the Lord sees fit to have me stay here. It must be for some cause. I'd like to see someone unravel it -- this problem of mine." Three months later, this problem seemed to have been largely solved by Mr. Pierce: In discussing how he found help in the Bible, he said, "Well, I thinks about Job. You know Job lost all he had. And so for His wisdom he give God praise. . . . And so, I just found out my strength coming right from Him. I just get near to Him as I can and give myself to Him. Give myself to the Lord and go on." The reference to Job is an interesting one in terms of the anger Job felt against God which Job later repented of; in recognition of his repentance, God then visited rewards upon Job in his later years. One might surmise that Mr. Pierce is now depending on God to reward him in much the same way; and that he has met some of his dependency needs by this somewhat grandiose identification with Job as favored by God.

One of the few adult respondents who showed no ambivalences about the meaning of the storm and its cause is Mr. Bell. Since he works as a chauffeur for the Buchanans (the white plantation owners), and since his family is more upwardly mobile than other families in Delta Town, it may be that this attitude was a reflection of his identification with the Buchanans, who seemed to have pretty much the same attitude about the storm. Mr. Bell, when asked how he accounted to his children for the occurrence of the disaster, said, "I just tell them it's a storm -- that's all I know." His wife, however, showed the same pattern that so many respondents showed. Initially she told the interviewer, "I just think it happen, I don't know why. I told them /that/ people weren't right -- God ain't pleased with the way we are doing, I even includes myself. . . ." Later in the interview, Mrs. Bell showed some anger at God and some feeling that she was dealing with an avenging God: "I seen a man go down the road /just before the storm/ and he said the storm was coming up but my children were coming home and I said, 'Thank you Lord, you saved my children'. . . . The whole house started coming in on me. I cried, 'Lord have mercy, I asked you to take care of my children, you did that, but now you are getting ready to take me.' I went straight up in the air and Dickie were snatched from me. And then I said, 'Lord I asked you to save my children and you done took Dickie from me. . . .'"

The most interesting comment on the meaning of the disaster in terms of the puzzlement and ambivalence the respondents showed is a taped follow-up interview with the Smith family in June, more than four months after the disaster. Two of the people who took part in this discussion are Martha and Tom Smith. Interestingly enough both of these teen-age children earlier wrote compositions at school on the disaster which form a part of the data. In March, one month after the tornado, Tom Smith wrote as follows: "it was the lord will it could not be hope /helped/." Martha Smith wrote: "What I think about Tornado, Well it is the lord will and it must be done." In the taped interview in June, these stereotypes did not appear, and it is apparent that the problem of meaning was much more complex and confusing than the earlier



formulation in the compositions would indicate.<sup>30</sup> We conclude this section with a lengthy excerpt from this interview, for it provides a striking glimpse into the real life need to make sense of the schoolhouse disasters:

- Interviewer: What do you think it all means, adds up to -- what's the message in all this?
- Mr. Smith: What, the accident?
- Interviewer: Yes, the children and family and life and things of that sort.
- Mr. S.: Well, I actually wouldn't know.
- Interviewer: Do you ever think about it any?
- Mr. S.: Oh, yes, sir. I thinks about it often, real often. Sho do.
- Interviewer: What do you think about? About things like this happening?
- Mr. S.: Yes, sir.
- Interviewer: Do you and Mrs. Smith ever talk about it?
- Mr. S.: Well, she don't talk about it very much now.
- Tom: There must be a reason for it.
- Interviewer: What reason would you figure?
- Tom: I don't know. I don't have the least idea.
- Interviewer: Are you searching for one? Where would you try to go to find a reason?
- Tom: I don't know.
- Interviewer: Would you like to have one?
- Tom: Yeah, I sho would love to know.
- Interviewer: Who do you think would give a reason for it? Does your teacher know a reason, your minister, your preacher, your Daddy or your Mother?
- Tom: I hoven't heard a reason -- ain't heard nobody say.
- Interviewer: You haven't heard anybody say at all? Have you heard anybody say, Martha?
- Martha: No, sir, I don't know.
- Mrs. S.: I was looking in the paper and they say they have the reason for it -- the tornado...the reason for the twister and they gonna try to find it.

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30. It is interesting to note that the depth interview enlarges and makes more complex the answers. At the same time, it is fairly obvious that some of the true feelings and conflicts are apparent in this kind of interview. In this particular, the information provided by the compositions is somewhat comparable to that from a formal interview schedule in that the children were given set questions to answer; as such, some of the expressions in the composition are superficial and tell very little about the real conceptual values of the children.

Interviewer: That was in the Metropolis paper? What did they say the reason was or did they say?

Mrs. S.: No, they just say they had it in a [experimental] box.

Mr. S.: Do they think that they would know the cause -- what's causing tornadoes?

Interviewer: They are trying to experiment to see what happens and they have a little contraption that they are experimenting with and made something like a tornado.

Mr. S.: Well, I don't think no man walking on the earth gonna find that. They might give a good reason and make a lot of them believe it. He might know what he's doing now, but I don't think so. I believe a man have to look to the Lord for that. That's where I believe he gonna have to get it from now. Me and all the rest of them.

Interviewer: The Lord's got the answer then?

Mr. S.: He sho is. And if you get a answer I believe that's where you gonna get it from.

Interviewer: How do you think the Lord's going to---?

Mr. S.: I don't know, sir. I believe you have to go to Him for it.

Interviewer: Go to church then?

Mr. S.: That's right.

Interviewer: You say you can't go to Him, Mrs. Smith?

Mrs. S.: No, sir.

Interviewer: Why can't you go to Him?

Mrs. S.: Because you can't go to Him. You just have to ask for it because He's not a man on earth and not anything for a person to have to go to. You have to ask Him for these things.

Interviewer: You ask Him when you pray, is that right?

Mr. S.: That's right.

Interviewer: And you pray more now than you did before?

Mrs. S.: Myself? Yes, sir.

Interviewer: [To Mr. S.:] Do you pray more?

Mr. S.: Not much more.

Interviewer: Do you pray more, Martha?

Martha: Yes, sir.

Interviewer: Do you pray, Tom?

Tom: Not much.

Interviewer: ...Martha, what do you pray for?

Martha: That there'll never be another one of them tornadoes. ...

Interviewer: Mrs. Smith, what do you pray for?



Mrs. S.: Well, I ask the Lord to show me what was wrong because tornadoes all come through the Him.... I want Him to show me was I wrong or who was wrong or living wrong.

Interviewer: You think there might have been something wrong?

Mrs. S.: There's something wrong, something going on wrong in the world somewhere. I don't know whether it was in me or who. I think there was something wrong because death is natural for all of us, but if it comes thataway there's something going wrong. We don't know what it is.

Interviewer: What do you think could be wrong? What kind of things?

Mrs. S.: Well, I don't know, sir. I wouldn't have no idea what was to be wrong -- haven't had no thought what could be wrong.

Interviewer: Do you think we should try to find out?

Mrs. S.: Well, I would like to.

Interviewer: I wonder how, though.

Mrs. S.: Well, there's no way how, just ask the Lord to show us, and then He show us in a way that probably be a change.

Interviewer: You think the Lord shows things to people?

Mrs. S.: Yes, sir.

Interviewer: Has he ever showed you anything?

Mrs. S.: Yes, sir. He have showed me a heap of things. In actually ways that probably I was wrong 'cause I would call it conscience whupping me, but it be ways He actually show me that I wasn't right or I wasn't doing right.

Tom: Don't blame your conscience with it.

Interviewer: It wasn't the conscience? You don't believe in conscience?

Tom: Yes, sir, I think conscience don't have nothing to do with it.

Interviewer: Why do you say there wasn't any conscience to that?

Tom: I don't think there was.

Interviewer: What do you think it was?

Tom: I don't know what it was, but I don't think it's conscience.

Interviewer: Why do you say that? You're a deep thinker, you know that?

Tom: I don't think He'd whup us like that.

Interviewer: How do you think He whips you?

Tom: I don't know.

Interviewer: Do you think conscience whips you?



Tom: Yeah.

Interviewer: Does your conscience ever whip you?

Tom: Sometimes but nothing like that.

Interviewer: Nothing like . . . a tornado. That's got nothing to do with conscience?

Tom: I don't think it has.

Interviewer: Well, how would you try to explain it?

Tom: I don't know.

Mr. S.: How would you explain it?

Interviewer: You've got me. To be very truthful with you, I know no more about it than you do. That's one reason we're here talking to people now. We're trying to see how they are affected by it. . . . what actually does happen when something like this does occur.

Tom: I don't know whether this was meant for us or we were just trapped in it.

Interviewer: You want to know whether it was meant for you or an accident? Which would you rather believe?

Tom: I don't know.

Interviewer: Would it make any difference? What difference would it make?

Tom: If we're trapped in it then it wasn't for us.

Interviewer: And then you were unlucky. Is that the idea? Now, suppose it was for you. Why would it be for you?

Tom: I don't know.

Interviewer: Those are some of the things you are trying to think about and figure out? Which one do you believe more?

Tom: I don't know. I heavily think that we were trapped in it.

Interviewer: Martha, what do you think? Do you think it was meant for you or were you trapped in it?

Martha: I don't know, sir. I say sometimes we was sinful.

Interviewer: You hear what they say, Mrs. Smith? I mean, do you agree with what they say?

Mrs. S.: Yes, sir. I agrees with them.

Interviewer: You think that we were trapped in it?

Mrs. S.: Yes, sir. We talked it over often with the little children.

Interviewer: Oh, you and the children talk about it. Do you talk about it when you are in the field?

Mrs. S.: Yes, sir. We talk in the field and on the highway. . . .

Mr. S.: Mortha talking about a trap. I wouldn't call it a trap.

Interviewer: What would you call it?

Mr. S.: Well, I just believe about it that it was the Lord's work. It sho was. And I believe if it had been a trap it

would a just been everywhere around. I don't think it was no trap.

Mrs. S.: Oh, yeah, it was a trap.

Tom: In a way it was a trap for all of us.

Mr. S.: I don't believe the Lord'd do trap work. Do you?

Interviewer: No. Of course, everything, as you say, has a purpose.

Mr. S.: See, He was working and they was left in His road at the time He was working.

Interviewer: That's what he was saying. Tom was saying that He got them by accident, he thought. That's what you meant, wasn't it? They just happened to be in the way?

Tom: Yes, sir.

Interviewer: In other words, like somebody'd take a shotgun shooting at a bird and kill something else, maybe kill a rabbit.

Mr. S.: Yes, sir. But I didn't call it thataway, though.

Interviewer: What did you call it? Shouldn't have shot the shotgun in the first place, huh?

Mr. S.: Well -- yeah. That's right.

Interviewer: If you pull the trigger you're held responsible for what happens when you pull the trigger. Is that right?

Mr. S.: Well, if you pull the trigger and shoot I figure that what you're shooting at you're shooting at, but then you could /have an/ accident and hit something else. But now I don't believe the Lord shoots thataway.

Interviewer: You mean the Lord shoots a rifle instead of a shotgun?

Mr. S.: No, sir.

Tom: Yeah, I think he was. I don't think he shoots scatter shots.

Mr. S.: That's why I say I don't believe it was no trap. I wouldn't call it no trap.

Interviewer: Do you think people deserve what they get?

Mr. S.: Yes, sir. I think what you get is for you.

Interviewer: Some people are better off than others. You think they are that way because /they/ are supposed to be that way?

Mrs. S.: No, sir.

Mr. S.: Well, no. I wouldn't call it thataway.

Interviewer: Well, it's a big mystery anyway. Sometimes it does me good just to think about it once in a while.

Mr. S.: Sho is. That's right.

Interviewer: Of course, people have been thinking about it for years and years /and/ don't have any answers yet. Sometimes they do decide upon a way of looking

at it. They all choose. [A person will say,] "This seems to be the right way of looking at it." And you get your ideas straight about it. Each person has to have some set of principles about it. Otherwise it would be kind of tough on you, wouldn't it? Gotta have some guide lines.

Mr. S.: That's right. Well, now, you know, you hear a lot of folks say [a person] get out here and get killed, well, it's just come his time to die. I reckon if it hadn't a been someone's time to die he wouldn't a died, regardless of what happened to him.

Interviewer: Now over in Avon some people told us that the reason the Lord came and took the younger children, more younger children than he took old folks, was just that he didn't want the old folks, that they weren't worth it. Do you think that's reasonable? Said when He got the old folks He wouldn't get very much because so many of them would be ready for hell anyway. That's what a lady told me.

Mr. S.: Now you know everybody don't speak it that way.

Interviewer: That's what she told me. Does it sound reasonable to you?

Mr. S.: Well, I just wouldn't say about that now. I don't believe that God would come in this house and kill that little child there and let me live. [Respondent's own daughter was killed in the disaster.] I don't believe He would do that.

Tom: That's as good a reason as any.

Mr. S.: I think that when your time comes it just done come.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The primary result of Operation Schoolhouse has been to suggest additional focal points for viewing the complex factors in children's disaster behavior which are inherent in the relation of the child to the family, the relation of the family to the subcommunity, and the relation of the subcommunity to the total community. The differences between the children of Vicksburg and the children in this study seem to point the way toward the necessity for refinement of the hypotheses in the Vicksburg study.

The saturation of the schoolhouse disasters was much greater than that of the Vicksburg disaster; if the hypotheses of the Vicksburg disaster were simply correct in a linear sense, then the schoolhouse disasters would have produced more intense symptoms in the victims and a greater number of symptoms. While the interview reports indicate that the children of Hilltown and Delta Town showed the same sorts of emotional symptomatology as the Vicksburg children, the proportion of children with symptoms seems smaller in the schoolhouse disasters and the symptoms were of a lesser degree of severity. For example, while the recurrence of bedwetting in children who had long been toilet-trained was a frequent regressive symptom in the Vicksburg sample, in the schoolhouse disasters only one such case was reported. In both groups of children fears of wind and bad weather were usual, but in the schoolhouse children there were almost no symptoms that were related to experiences marginal and irrelevant to the natural phenomena of the disaster. That is, Vicksburg children who had been in a theater that collapsed were for many months afraid to go to a movie or to any public gathering. But the children of Operation Schoolhouse seemed to have no fears about returning to school after the disaster. When substitute buildings were provided, the children were soon back in class. Finally, there was a general tendency of the Vicksburg children to stay close to home and to parents after the disaster, and the parents, themselves, tended to be reluctant to let their children get out of sight; but, in the schoolhouse communities, children and parents were both more likely to carry on with their individual activities as before.

At first glance, the Vicksburg hypotheses seem to have been negated to some extent by the findings of Operation Schoolhouse. On closer inspection, the data of

this study refine rather than negate Vicksburg hypotheses. The differences in findings are the product of variables in the schoolhouse families and communities which did not exist in the Vicksburg families or community. We would explain the differences between the two disasters in the following way: In the schoolhouse communities, the disaster was more of a shared experience. Proportionately more families were affected by the tornadoes than in the Vicksburg community. The very saturation of the schoolhouse disasters meant that most of one's friends and acquaintances had been through the same experience. The necessity to talk about the traumatic experience did not have to be suppressed; nor could it be suppressed by those who might try to evade it, since the subject was evoked in various ways and by various settings throughout the community. In Vicksburg, people tended to be isolated by their disastrous experiences from these people who had not undergone the same trauma. Also, there was a general tendency to act as if the thing had not occurred; for example, parents avoided the mention of those children who were killed. In the schoolhouse families there was more frequent and less tense discussion about the loss of friends and family members. In other words, their children were not cut off from a means of working through and integrating the disaster experience.

Second, the family household systems in Operation Schoolhouse were more flexible so that children seemed, in most instances, to be able to find satisfactory substitute relations in case of the removal of parental figures by death or injury; also, in the event that a parental figure was not disposed on occasion to offer the attention that a child might demand, there were others available to give that attention. In other words, the boundaries of the family system are extended to include additional adults and children to whom the child could look for necessary attention; but the smaller family systems of Vicksburg did not provide such auxiliary sources of satisfaction.

Third, there were more opportunities for the schoolhouse child to gain self-esteem in the family after the disaster. One of the immediate results of the loss of any person in these families was a realignment of household or farm duties. Often a child assumed new prestigious duties as a result of the tornado loss. In Vicksburg, on the other hand, children did not play so important a part in the household functions; rather than being partners in some small way in the running of things, they were in a position of being prized possessions, persons who, though valued, did not have prestigious responsibilities.

Fourth, in respect to the readiness to return to activities associated with the disaster, it should be recognized that education has a high value to the Negro group. In the families of Operation Schoolhouse both children and adults evidenced strong aspirations in respect to education. In Delta Town, particularly, education was mentioned as the one feasible way in which children can escape a lifetime of chopping cotton. Thus, the school had for these people a special importance which even the trauma of disaster could not destroy. The specific scenes of the disaster -- the schools -- were, therefore, less subject to irrational attitudes than were the theaters of Vicksburg.

While such factors seemed to operate to minimize the incidence of emotional disturbance in the schoolhouse children, there did seem to be one area in which they and their families were at a special disadvantage in comparison with the Vicksburg families. In the schoolhouse disasters, deaths occurred only in Negro families; and, in fact, only two or three whites were even injured. Thus, the tornadoes seemed to have struck at the Negro community and spared the white community. This peculiarity of the disaster, in the context of Southern racial traditions and life, placed a heavy burden on both whites and Negroes in their struggle to arrive at some personal understanding of the disaster.

In the wake of any sudden disaster, the survivors, both as a community and as individuals, have the psychological task of somehow interpreting what has happened to them so that the experience becomes more understandable and can be made meaningful as a part of their lives in the future. Sudden disaster seems capricious at the very least. Survivors ask themselves: "Why was my child killed, but not my neighbor's?" "Why was I spared, but my husband taken?" "Why did the tornado hit our town and then disappear before it came to the next city in its path?" And so on. These questions must somehow be answered in a way that makes personal and social sense to the survivors. Naturalistic or scientific explanations are sufficient for some people, but many survivors need another sort of explanation, generally one couched in terms of their religious traditions. They need an explanation that answers "why" and not merely "how."

The general source of such explanations in the Operation Schoolhouse communities is found, often in American communities, in the Christian religious traditions. But, in this disaster, these traditions apparently were not potent enough to interpret adequately the odd fact that only Negroes were killed in the tornadoes. The image of a just God who does not discriminate between white and Negro did not fit the disaster situation. It seemed, therefore, that families in this disaster, as compared with those in Vicksburg, had a more difficult time in the formulation of a socially and personally acceptable version of "the Lord's will."

It will be apparent to the reader that throughout this report we have been pointing to social processes as influencing the emotional response of children to disaster. The initial observations of children in disaster in the Vicksburg project pointed to the importance of parental reactions. But the research experience of Operation Schoolhouse has suggested that there are aspects of family structure and of societal structure which can strongly affect, both positively and negatively, the psychological equilibrium of the post-disaster child. This perhaps has been the central impression of the Schoolhouse project: The ways in which the child will respond to the disaster, including responses that fall into the realm of psychopathology, are influenced not only by the parent's own disaster reaction, but also by structural aspects of the family and community systems.







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