

# The Guide Post

## The Question Of The Seven Men Standing In The Light Of Virginia's Electric Chair

By VIVIAN CARTER MASON

*"Justice is itself the great standing policy of civil society, and any departure from it, under any circumstances, lies under the suspicion of being no policy at all."*

—Edmund Burke

**T**HERE IS A tormenting question haunting the minds of many people today. That question is "how is it possible that seven men stand in sight of the electric chair, doomed to death for the crime of rape while scores of others convicted of the same crime are either serving their sentences at hard labor or perhaps are free." Such a question would make you gape and wonder at the ways of judges, juries and justice until you identified the hapless characters in the sordid drama.

"The Martinsville Seven," as the people in the street call them, are counting the days that plunge them deeper and deeper into the abyss, are black men. There is no doubt that they were "stupid, foolish, dumb, ignorant, unlettered, lustful, horrendous, crazy as lunatics, utterly mad and without reason." They must have been all that and more to have looked at a white woman, twice in the State of Virginia, no matter what the circumstances. What actually were the real facts in the case may never be known. Sometimes truth is stranger than fiction and it can be just as dangerous as a lie in a whole lot of circumstances.



MRS. MASON

ANYHOW THESE BLACK men were arrested, tried and convicted of the crime of rape and sentenced to die in the electric chair . . . all seven of them. Now they are not the first Negroes in the State of Virginia to suffer conviction for this crime. Since 1908 forty-four Negroes have been executed on this charge. But note this, well. Of the scores and scores of white men arrested, tried and convicted of the same crime, the crime of "rape", NOT A SINGLE ONE, NOT A SOLITARY ONE has been executed for it. When you think of that you are compelled to ask yourself, "Well, what kind of justice is that?"

Negro women have been raped by white men, officers sworn to uphold the law were found guilty of this crime against a young Negro matron in Richmond, a crime committed under the foulest circumstances, but were they electrocuted? Of course not, they drew light sentences. White children have been maimed and criminally assaulted by white men, white women have been "raped" by white men and they have not been executed. "Rape" on a Negro woman by a Negro man is rarely punishable let alone by execution. In fact, if you take a look at the court cases, you must conclude that crimes committed by Negroes against Negroes are almost worthy of citations. If Negroes cut each other up, kill each other off and precipitate the homicide rate to disgraceful proportions nobody seems to care and the judges can always plead extenuating circumstances, "Just a couple of bad Negroes." But oh, what a different story when the crime is committed against a white person, the wheels of justice are oiled up quickly and they roll on time . . . so another (Continued on opposite page)

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(Continued from preceding page) "chain ganger" or candidate for the "chair" is on his way.

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THERE IS A DREADFUL AND highly explosive factor in the dispensing of justice on the basis of color. Can there be any doubt in anyones mind that the "Martinsville Seven" were convicted twice, once for "rape" and secondly for being colored? How else can you explain the fact that white men have also been "stupid, foolish, dumb, ignorant, unlettered, lustful, horrendous, crazy as lunatics, utterly mad and without reason" . . . have been accused of the self-same crime, yet none have died for it?

There cannot be two standards of justice, if men are to believe in and trust the integrity of our courts. One kind of justice for white and Negro peoples, and it's a short step for two kinds of justice for other people, for the rich and the poor, for employers and employees, for the Jews for the Gentiles and so on.

When that day comes, when there is even a hint of it the foundations of our society will be fatally undermined. The people of Virginia want every man and woman alike subject to the laws and the penalties for breaking those laws. Every fair-minded citizen should write to Governor John S. Battle at once and ask for executive clemency. The power to do this lies in his hands. Perhaps he will rescue Virginia from the lonely eminence of double handed justice. Why don't you write and ask him to?