

Editor's Page

New York And Gomorrah

"And the Lord said: 'Verily, the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and, verily, their sin is exceedingly grievous . . .'"—Genesis, 18:20

"Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground."—Genesis, 19:24-25

The bold headlines on top of page one of the Friday, July 15, 1977, edition of the *New York Times* blandly report the horrors: "New York's Power Restored Slowly: Looting Widespread, 2,700 Arrested; Blackout Results in Heavy Losses." The shocking nature



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of the New York events is that criminality and looting have become, Sodom-like, acceptable modes of public behavior, at least temporarily. Tens, possibly hundreds, of thousands of individuals have collectively robbed, looted, destroyed, injured and raped in broad daylight, with the police often standing idly by. The thin veneer of civilization suddenly broke wide open, and the primitive, uncontrolled and hate-filled nature of these people suddenly showed with full illumination. Some termed it "the Night of the Animals," others protesting correctly that such human behavior is

not characteristic to many species, and that such comparisons are, therefore, unfair and insulting to animals.

The story contains shocking lessons for us all, lessons that many will refuse to learn because they upset preconceived notions about the nature of Man and this society. Here is one lesson that physicians will have very little trouble with. Holier-than-thou "liberals" and self-proclaimed "reformers" of Medicine will, on the other hand, have to ignore yet another fact of life. Two large photographs appear on that page of the paper, the one at the bottom showing healthy and able-bodied young men brazenly carrying off stolen mattresses, furniture and other household items. We are simply told that "looters acted swiftly as store alarms were silenced by the power cutoff." The other photograph, on top, right under the headlines, shows "emergency surgery (being) performed outdoors on dozens of injured New Yorkers at the Brooklyn Jewish Hospital, under spotlights powered by Fire Department generators. Despite the adverse conditions, staff members coped satisfactorily with the situation. No deaths were reported." Teams of busy physicians and nurses are seen seriously tending to their task.

And they, Senator Kennedy and his troops, assisted by the media, blame and malign us? Such a juxtaposition of pictures, not the work of PR departments of the AMA but of the *New York Times*, which does not often treat Medicine fairly, speaks louder than thousands of words. The usual repeated and relentless attacks upon our profession make it almost apparent that we are the potential thieves and looters that society must watch with suspicion and guard itself against by quality assurance regulators. In a crazed society which somehow accepts open, shameless and guiltless delight in the manna from heaven that brought a "Christmas in July," physicians remain among the relatively few who

still stand for self-sufficiency and individual responsibility. They can be sued for malpractice because they are collectible, and responsible for themselves and for their deeds. We have an address, assets, our dignity and our professional code of ethics. So, we can be blackmailed, and blamed even for poor results that are no one's fault.

"And Abraham drew near, and said: "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Perhaps there be fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that *are* therein? . . .

Shall not the Judge of all the earth do justice? . . . And the Lord said, if I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place for their sakes."—Genesis 18:23-26

Physicians, with some exceptions, are surely not the only righteous ones in our society, but, as the two pictures on the front page of the *New York Times* strongly suggest, we are the most visible. Rather than being the bane of society, as our detractors picture us, we, with some others, may well be its saving grace.

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