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## THE AMERICAN NEGRO TODAY\*

FRED R. HARRIS\*\*

"Am I supposed to feel guilty all the rest of my life just because some white man I never knew was cruel to his slaves?" a rather progressive-minded industrialist recently asked. "I get so tired of having people trot out all the old sordid history of the mistreatment of Negroes in America in justification for the failure of Negroes to take advantage of their opportunities and to condone their resort to violence," he said.

Many Americans—perhaps most—feel the same way. But we have been wrong in assuming we knew very much about American Negro history. And we have been wrong, also, in thinking that the only reasons for studying Negro history were those which the industrialist listed. There has quite rightly been a recent upsurge in the learning of Negro history by Negroes, because pride in heritage and heroes can be a powerfully unifying and motivating force, a mortar for building a sense of community and of belonging.

But there is great reason, also, for the study by non-Negroes of the history of the Negro in America. Basically, it is essential if we are to look at America as it is, and ourselves as we are.

### A VIOLENT PAST

Such a study makes certain conclusions inescapably, and sometimes painfully, obvious. For example, the life of the Negro in America has always been accompanied by violence. The first violent protest in America of slaves against their white masters occurred in 1526, just thirty-three years after the discovery of the New World, when slaves revolted in the very first settlement which contained slaves, a small Spanish colony in what is now South Carolina.

Black bondsmen in Gloucester County, Virginia, rebelled in 1663.

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\*This article is based on Senator Harris' book, *ALARMS AND HOPES: A PERSONAL JOURNEY, A PERSONAL VIEW*, published by Harper and Row in 1968. The book was written while Senator Harris was serving on the President's National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. The quotations in the article are drawn from the book.

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There was a widespread revolt of slaves in New York in 1712. A series of fires in Massachusetts in 1723 was attributed to Negro slave arsonists.

Another slave conspiracy was discovered in Virginia in 1730 in Norfolk and Princess Anne counties. Twenty-five whites were killed in a slave insurrection in Stono, South Carolina, in 1739. In 1741 in New York, following fires and rumors of a slave conspiracy, thirty-one slaves and five whites were executed.

Thirty-seven Negroes were hanged and many more deported in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1822, and in 1829 more than half of the Negroes in Cincinnati were driven out of town when the Negro areas of the town were burned and many Negroes were killed. There were other slave uprisings led by Vesey, by Gabriel and by Nat Turner.

Racial violence between whites and Negroes has had its most virulent outbreaks during time of war. Thus, during the Civil War and the period immediately following, there was violent rioting in Cincinnati between Negro and Irish river-boat workers, and there were lesser riots in Newark, Buffalo and Detroit.

In 1863 New York experienced a terrible riot growing out of tensions concerning the draft and hostility toward the Negro. This riot has been called the most violent interracial conflict in American history. The number of Negroes killed is unknown, but it is estimated that fifteen hundred white rioters were killed, and the Negro population of New York is said to have decreased thereafter by twenty percent, as Negroes fled to other areas.

During Reconstruction the Ku Klux Klan began a campaign of violence and intimidation against Negroes. Thirty-four Negroes and four whites were killed, and over two hundred persons were injured, in an outbreak of violence in New Orleans which required federal troops to restore order. Forty-six Negroes were killed and seventy-five were wounded in Memphis, and one hundred Negroes and white Republicans were killed in Colfax and Coushatta, Louisiana.

Some 3,400 Negroes were lynched in the South during and following Reconstruction, and, near the turn of the century, the violence moved north to Springfield, Illinois, where a white crowd, angered by a sheriff's refusal to release a Negro prisoner to them, moved to the Negro section and lynched the first Negro they found. When the three-day riot had ended, six persons had been killed.

- During and after World War I, racial tensions again erupted ex-

plosively into violence. In East St. Louis, Illinois, in 1917, thirty-nine Negroes and nine whites were killed and hundreds were injured as a white race riot destroyed three hundred buildings in a Negro area. Thirty persons were killed and hundreds wounded in Chicago in 1919, when many Negro houses were bombed and burned by whites. There were riots in Chester, Pennsylvania, and Philadelphia in 1917, and the year 1919 saw race riots in Omaha, Nebraska; Washington, D. C., Charleston, South Carolina; Longview, Texas; and Nashville, Tennessee.

The postwar race riot period came to an end in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1921, when a white mob, angered by reports that a Negro had attacked a white girl, and spurred on by fears arising from the activity of Negro militants in the Negro community, destroyed a square mile of a Negro neighborhood and killed over thirty people.

Interracial violence and lynchings subsided during the period prior to World War II, though a Harlem riot in 1935 left several hundred buildings damaged and one person killed, when Negroes became inflamed over the arrest of a Negro youth.

During World War II there was racial conflict in Mobile, Los Angeles, Beaumont, and Harlem, in incidents involving Negro servicemen. The 1943 riot in Detroit, where there had been a tremendous influx of recent Negro migrants and growing disputes over discriminatory employment and other practices, eventually required federal troops to restore order, but not before twenty-five Negroes and nine whites had been killed and hundreds injured, with property damage running to \$200 million.

In the same year, Negroes in Harlem became inflamed when a Negro soldier was wounded while intervening in a police arrest. They assaulted whites and looted and burned in a ghetto riot which killed six, injured more than five hundred, caused more than one thousand arrests, and damaged property worth millions of dollars.

In the postwar period, there were urban disorders in St. Louis, Youngstown, Cicero, and Chicago, and there were bombings in Kansas and Levittown, Pennsylvania, when Negroes attempted to move into white neighborhoods.

Despite this kind of violence, which has always been the twin brother of the downgrading of the Negro in America, the protest of the Negro against his status has been primarily peaceful and nonviolent.

## A PLACE IN AMERICAN HISTORY

It is also true that Negroes were among the very first Americans. Negroes participated in the exploration of North and South America and in the founding of the early European settlements on both continents in this hemisphere. No one came before them except the Indians. There were thirty Negroes in Balboa's 1513 expedition which crossed the Isthmus of Panama to the Pacific. It was Estevanico, a Negro explorer, who led the trek from Mexico in 1538 to present-day New Mexico and Arizona. Negroes accompanied DeSoto on his journey to the Mississippi in 1539, and they were with Menendez when he founded St. Augustine, Florida, in 1565.

In 1619 a Dutch ship sold twenty Negroes to the Jamestown colony. These twenty came to America not as slaves, but as indentured servants, a kind of bondage, limited in time, which was shared by many whites as well during the colonial period.

Surprisingly enough, two recent books detail the fact that there were many important Negro members of that greatest of all American folk hero groups, the cowboys. A great many of the blue-caped, yellow-legged soldiers who, at the bugle's sounding of the charge, dashed forward to win the West, were, as the Comanche Indians called them, "Buffalo Soldiers"—Negroes.

Perhaps it is a shock to realize that many of those Negroes who fought in the Revolutionary War were probably more American than were the white colonists who fought alongside them. Slavery was no culture bearer. It stripped a man of ties to the homeland from which he had been forcibly torn. It took from him his religion, his language, and his culture. Even the American Indian, whose history is sad enough, retained some memory of, and ties with, his own kind, his own religion, culture, history, heritage, and heroes. Not so the Negro slave and his descendants. He was an American or he was nothing.

Negroes were true Americans also in that they subscribed fully to the political philosophy which was the basic foundation of this country, the doctrine of the natural or inherent rights of man, a doctrine enshrined in the words of the Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Beginning with the successful petition for his freedom in 1661 of a Negro slave in the colony of New Netherlands, peaceful protests and petitions by Negroes to secure the natural rights which America had declared were every man's due were frequent throughout the colonial period, and have been ever since.

As the harshly discriminatory Jim Crow laws began to flourish just before 1900, a Negro wrote:

In the degree that they stand by in silence and see the Negro stripped of his civil and political rights by a band of unscrupulous men they compromise their own civil and political freedom. . . . If by a mere technicality one class of citizens can be deprived of the rights and immunities guaranteed by the organic law of the nation, what is to prevent any other class from sharing the same fate?

"Can't you white people see that all we want is to be Americans?" a young Negro asked recently "If we're not allowed to be Americans, we're not anything." More than any other people in this country, the American Negroes have always consistently stood up for and fought for the principles on which this nation was founded. Yet the Negro is the only American who has systematically and consistently been denied equality and kept in an inferior status by law and by persistent and chronic racial prejudice.

As was true of those first twenty Negroes who were sold to the Jamestown colony, the Negroes who came to the American colonies during the first twenty years thereafter had relatively the same status as whites. Like many whites, they came as indentured servants, worked their prescribed terms of years, and then entered society as free men.

But then something happened. The commerce in tobacco and sugar in the colonies and the Caribbean Islands, and the plantation economy which sprang from it, demanded a large supply of cheap labor. With the advent of this new economic force and the interests of merchants and shipowners in Britain and the New England colonies, the status of the Negro changed radically *Not a Southern state, but Massachusetts, in 1640, was the first to give legal approval to slavery for life for Negroes.* No longer could they work out their freedom in a term of years, as was true for whites. State after state soon followed the example of Massachusetts.

Worse still, the children of a Negro slave woman were also declared by law to be slaves from birth to death. As a Maryland judge stated

it: "Suppose a brood mare be hired for five years, the foal belong to him who has a part of the dam. The slave in Maryland, in this respect, is placed on no higher or different grounds." There was no way out of it, no way for most slaves to gain freedom by their own efforts; the Negro passed from the role of humanity to that of property. America embarked upon the systematic legal denial of fundamental human rights and equality to the Negro, in a system unique in Western civilization.

At first there was some argument as to whether a Christian Negro who had been baptized could, together with his descendants, be held in slavery for life. Soon, however, this rather delicate philosophical and theological question was cast aside and overridden on the rationale that otherwise a master, to protect his property rights, would refuse to look after the souls of his servants.

How could a Christian believer in one God and one plan of salvation for all men approve slavery for some? How could a person intellectually and morally justify his support for making slaves of other human beings when there were current and widely voiced, persuasive and vigorous arguments against it? It could not be done by a man who would keep his mental health and self-respect, unless he could at least partly convince himself that the Negro was not a human being in the complete sense.

There grew up, therefore, a great body of religious and intellectual argument which sought to prove the inborn or biological inferiority of all Negroes. To this end much was made of the obvious differences in the physical appearance of the Negro—his hair, his broad nose, his color; and the poor slave, cut off from all that was familiar, transported like an animal across the ocean in the foul, dark hold of an evil-smelling slave ship, thrown as a stranger into a cruel and harsh new world, often seemed to fit, not surprisingly, the assessment made of him.

Preachers of slaveholding congregations spoke of what they saw as the clear Biblical justification for the lower status God had ordained for the Negro, and their flocks responded with warm choruses of *Amens*. Even as late as when I was a boy, my grandmother was still repeating some of those Biblical arguments. "The Negro is a descendant of Ham," she would say, "and he has the mark of Cam on him." She would remind me that even St. Paul himself in his letter to the Ephesians wrote: "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling.

The theory that Negroes were less than human beings began quite commonly to be codified into law. South Carolina in 1712, for example, declared by statute that Negroes must be controlled in such a way "as may restrain the disorders, rapines, and inhumanity to which they are naturally prone and inclined."

With the adoption in America of the doctrine of the inherent equality of all men, the foundation of the American Revolution, six of the northern states abolished slavery, and it was thought by many that slavery in the rest of the country would soon wither away and die a natural death. Again a strong economic force intervened: the cotton gin was invented, and with it came a fantastically renewed demand for cheap labor to work the cotton fields. The 1800's saw slave traffic to America rise to levels unprecedented in the world's history, the number of slaves increasing from 900,000 to nearly four million by 1860. The inconsistency of this practice and way of life with the principles undergirding the new Republic and the then prevailing and ever-growing world view drove the supporters of slavery to even more racist rationales than had been required in the pre-Revolutionary era.

Thus, if the roots of racism were nurtured in the soil of economics, they were watered increasingly by false moral and pseudo-scientific justification. These arguments had a kind of logic of their own—with terrible consequences. A man who justified slavery on grounds of the inherent moral and biological inferiority of Negroes as a race could make little, if any, distinction between free and slave Negroes. To him, if all slaves were black, and all slaves were inferior, then all blacks were inferior.

#### SLAVERY IN NORTH AND SOUTH AMERICA

Racism in America did not spring entirely from slavery. There were deeper and darker kinds of fears and prejudices which preceded slavery here and, indeed, made the kind of slavery which developed in America possible.

There was, for example, a marked contrast between slavery in North America and slavery in Spanish and Portuguese America. The people who settled these latter areas had had a long history of contact with the Negro. They did not generally see him as a moral and biological inferior, but as a fellow human being who happened by circumstance, perhaps temporarily, to be enslaved. These attitudes were reflected in church teachings and in the law. The freeing of slaves was favored



and encouraged by the church, by the law, and by custom. It was a common and greatly approved practice for a man to free one or more of his slaves on such happy and festive occasions as the marriage of a daughter or the birth of a child. By contrast, in North America the law placed difficult and sometimes impossible obstacles in the way of an owner who sought to free his slaves.

In Spanish and Portuguese America there was a presumption that a Negro was not a slave until it was conclusively proved otherwise. In North America, on the other hand, a Negro who could not prove that he was free was usually presumed to be a slave and was sold at public auction if his owner did not claim him.

Though slavery was, of course, brutal in both Americas, the marked difference between the attitudes of the two societies toward freedom or slavery for the Negro indicates that those who settled North America harbored from the first greater fear, prejudice, and hostility toward the Negro. The type of slavery which developed in North America both resulted from and further strengthened these underlying feelings.

#### THE PROBLEMS OF FREEDOM

It is not surprising, therefore, that the different attitudes toward the Negro in Latin and Portuguese America on the one hand, and in North America on the other, resulted in marked differences in treatment of the Negro after he had been set free. In Latin and Portuguese America, since he had been all along considered to be a human being, the Negro who gained his freedom was generally faced with fewer obstacles against his full incorporation into the total community; he found public office, private and public employment, the ownership of property, and other rights of full citizenship rather freely open to him.

In North America, however, the position of the freed slave was quite different. When a master freed a slave, he only gave up his own rights; the master did not by such act make the former slave a citizen, since this power was reserved only to the government of the state. Some slave states would not allow a free Negro to live within their borders without a court certification of his good character. There were legal barriers to voting and property ownership, free travel and equal protection of the laws in court. In short, the free Negro in America was quite commonly treated differently and more severely

by the law, the church, and society; he was something more than a slave, but something less than an equal citizen and human being.

Prejudice against the Negro did not end in America, then, with his freedom. Indeed, the evidence indicates that emancipation heightened and increased the hostility of the whites toward him.

Even Thomas Jefferson, who abhorred the evils of slavery, could hardly envision free Negroes living in equality with whites in America. He wrote that "the blacks are inferior to the whites in the endowments of mind and body. . . This unfortunate difference of colour, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people." He felt it would be better for Negroes and the future of the new nation if free blacks were resettled in colonies of their own in some other part of the world.

The idea of Negro removal and resettlement outside America had great appeal for a great number of whites. For many it obviated the alternative necessity of granting equal status to the free Negro. Some abolitionists, such as William Lloyd Garrison, for a time supported the plan for colonizing the Negroes elsewhere, though they later changed and fought such plans bitterly.

When the American Colonization Society was formed in Washington in 1816, among its members were Henry Clay, who chaired the first meeting; Bushrod Washington, heir of the first President and a member of the Supreme Court; and Francis Scott Key, author of "The Star-Spangled Banner." Later members included two other Presidents, James Madison and Andrew Jackson, and such well-known statesmen as Stephen Douglas, John Marshall, William Seward, and Daniel Webster.

President James Monroe sent a delegation to Africa to explore the possibilities of colonizing American Negroes there, and the small settlement of Liberia was eventually established, though its colonizers, living in a strange and inhospitable environment, were met with almost insurmountable difficulties, and the colony never flourished.

From his earliest public days, Abraham Lincoln wrestled with the practical arguments against his deep-seated belief in the immorality of slavery. In his famous debates with Douglas, he examined what might be done with the freed Negro in America. "Free them and make them politically and socially our equals?" he asked. "My own feelings will not admit of this; and if mine would, we well know that those of the

great mass of white people will not . . . A universal feeling, whether well or ill-founded, cannot be safely disregarded."

Lincoln, too, then, was attracted to the colonization plan, and, later, as President, appealed to free Negroes to support it. He sent government delegations at various times to Central America, Europe, and Haiti to explore the possibilities of setting up Negro colonies—all without success.

The almost siren-like call which the colonization idea had for many was from the first, however, doomed to failure by the vigorous opposition of most free Negroes, who rightly claimed that they were Americans—and only Americans. As a leader in the Colonization Society eventually recognized, "The free people of color, taken as a community, look on our undertaking with disaffection."

Though slavery ended throughout America with the Civil War and its aftermath, white prejudice did not. "However much they admit that the relations of masters and slaves have been destroyed by the war and by the President's emancipation proclamation," an official of the Freedmen's Bureau reported, "they still have an ingrained feeling that the blacks at large belong to the whites at large." Indeed, President Andrew Johnson himself had vetoed the original Freedmen's Bureau bill on the ground, among others, that its enactment into law would not permit states to "exercise any discrimination between the races." He was against the bill because it seemed to him that it was aimed at "perfect equality between the white and colored races."

These objections after the war to equality for Negroes were not wholly Southern objections. Connecticut, Wisconsin, and Minnesota at first rejected constitutional amendments which would have given Negroes the right to vote in those states.

Later, when the United States Constitution had been amended to safeguard the right of all Negroes to vote, serious attempts were immediately made in the South to limit through fraud and violence its exercise or effect, and when these efforts proved less than fully successful, state after Southern state changed its laws and constitution so that, by poll taxes, literacy tests, restricted party primaries, and "grandfather clauses" (allowing the right to vote only to those whose grandfathers had been voters), the Southern whites finally succeeded in denying Negroes the right of voting citizenship.

Many in the North had lost interest in the Negro, or had made political or commercial compromises with the South, and they stood

by in silence while this, the most basic of all acts of discrimination, became standard practice in the South. Its legality was approved by the Supreme Court of the United States, which also declared the civil rights legislation passed by Congress in 1875 unconstitutional. The effectiveness of these disenfranchisement efforts is illustrated by the fact that the 130,344 Negroes registered to vote in Louisiana in 1896 had dwindled to only 5,320 just four years later.

If some grounded their objections to full citizenship for the Negro on his lack of education, it is ironic that many also opposed his education. "If our civilization is to continue, there must be at the bottom of the social fabric a class who must work and not read," a prominent Virginia clergyman stated. "Now grant that the free public school does all that its wildest boasts can claim; that it elevates the Negroes out of this grade," he continued. "The only result will be that white people must descend into it and occupy it."

*Nation* magazine, reflecting the fact that Northerners were occupied with other matters and had simply grown tired of pressing for a permanent solution to the Negro question, opposed federal action in behalf of education or voting rights for the Negro and asked: "Who or what is he that we should put the interests of 55 million whites of the continent in peril for his sake?"

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF "JIM CROW" LAWS

That racism was deeper than slavery and was even enhanced by emancipation is most dramatically shown by the strange and unexplainable Jim Crow laws which suddenly, following the Reconstruction period, sprouted and spread like weeds, after years of close contact between whites and Negroes.

After a visit to South Carolina, Virginia, and Florida in 1878, a suspicious former opponent of slavery reported that the acceptance of Negroes in these states on trains and street-cars and in the police and militia was in some ways superior to that in New England. Similarly, a member of the English Parliament, a writer in the *Atlantic Monthly*, a Bostonian Negro, and many others, after traveling through the post-Civil War South, remarked upon the surprising mixing of the races in restaurants and saloons, at the theater, on trains and in other public accommodations. This casual intimacy between Negroes and whites was borne out by another Northern Negro traveler in the South who returned home to declare that "I think the whites of the South are

really less afraid to contact with colored people than the whites of the North."

Though these general acts of tolerance of Negroes existed simultaneously, in a kind of mass schizophrenia, with other and widespread acts of violence and brutality against them, they nevertheless were quite common throughout the South after the Civil War. Indeed, in opposing the enactment of Jim Crow laws in South Carolina, an influential and conservative Charleston editor argued, in an editorial which, sadly enough, was more prophetic than effective, that such laws were unnecessary since the state had gotten along without them for a third of a century, including a long period of reconstruction.

If there are to be Jim Crow cars on the railroads, there should be Jim Crow cars on the street railways [he wrote]. If there are to be Jim Crow cars, moreover, there should be Jim Crow waiting saloons at all stations, and Jim Crow waiting houses. There should be Jim Crow sections of the jury box, and a separate Jim Crow dock and witness stand in every court—and a Jim Crow Bible for colored witnesses to kiss.

While there had been virtually none until the 1890's, Jim Crow laws proliferated and spread until they were universal throughout the Southern and border states by the early 1900's. Negroes were prohibited from using the same public accommodations or conveyances, and the law enforced separate or segregated schools and hospitals, prisons, restaurants and bars, hotels and boarding houses, toilets, railway and streetcars and waiting rooms. Negroes and whites could not use the same water fountains or ticket windows. They could not mix in fraternal societies or at circuses, parks, race tracks and sports events. They could not live in the same residential areas, nor could they even be buried in the same cemeteries.

The argument of the Charleston editor that one form of segregation was just as logical as any other proved all too true. New Orleans required separate districts for its Negro and white prostitutes. Oklahoma required telephone companies to provide separate telephone booths for Negroes and whites. White and Negro school textbooks had to be kept and stored separately in North Carolina and Florida, and the mixing of the races while playing dominoes or checkers was specifically prohibited in Birmingham.

It is important to note three additional facts in connection with this

wave of discrimination against Negroes. First, it was discrimination by law. Second, it was directed not just at some, poorly educated, criminal, or otherwise socially unacceptable Negroes, but against all Negroes. Third, it did not assign to the Negro a fixed lower status, but constantly pressed him further down, socially, politically, and economically.

Even though this sudden and harsh renewal of racism in the South, where most of the Negroes lived, obviously grew out of the continued belief of many in the inherent inferiority of the Negro, and fed upon the relaxation of opposition by Northerners (some of whom capitulated because they despaired of ever gaining approval for Negro equality), its sudden resurgence, its virulence, and its lasting, widespread acceptance are still hard to explain. It was made politically feasible when the Negro was stripped of his power at the ballot box. It was spurred on by the opposition of the white Northern and Southern laborer to the Negro as a competitor for jobs and a threatened cause of lower wages. It gained momentum from the hostility of many whites, both Northern and Southern, who saw the Negro as the reason for continued friction between the two sections or who made him the scapegoat for general economic ills because they felt he was a drag on the economy.

This systematic downgrading of the Negro was also made more socially acceptable throughout the country by the growth of American imperialism, marked by the Spanish-American War, which began in 1898 and resulted in American jurisdiction over the colored peoples of Cuba, Hawaii, and the Philippines. Imperialistic national policy was openly justified by many of its proponents in the North, where it was strongest, on grounds of racial superiority. Senator Albert Beveridge, for example, argued that:

God has not been preparing the English-speaking and Teutonic peoples for a thousand years for nothing but vain and idle self-contemplation and self-admiration. No! He has made us master organizers of the world to establish system where chaos reigns.

Such arguments did not go unnoticed in the South. "No Republican leader, not even Governor Roosevelt, will now dare to wave the bloody shirt and preach a crusade against the South's treatment of the Negro," declared U. S. Senator Bill Tillman of South Carolina. "The North has a bloody shirt of its own. Many thousands of them have been made

into shrouds for murdered Filipinos, done to death because they were fighting for liberty," he said.

Whatever the various causes for enactment of the Jim Crow laws, their effect was lasting. Though called upon equally to fight for their country during World War I, Negroes were segregated in the armed forces, and the lower scores of Negroes on Army tests were widely argued as proof of their natural racial inferiority.

Immediately prior to the beginning of World War II, many military leaders still believed that Negroes should be used only in labor battalions, and they were generally excluded from the Air Corps and the Marine Corps and the Army Tank, Signal, Engineer and Artillery corps; they were limited to menial jobs in the Navy and Coast Guard. In 1940 the War Department, over Negro protest, declared:

The policy of the War Department is not to intermingle colored and white enlisted personnel in the same regimental organizations. This policy has been proved satisfactory over a long period of years and to make changes would produce situations destructive to morale and detrimental to preparations for national defense.

Strong White House pressure helped to overcome resistance to the Negro serving in all types of units, but during most of the war Negroes still continued to serve in the military on a segregated basis. On the home front, Swedish writer Gunnar Myrdal noted in 1944 that in America "segregation is now becoming so complete that the white Southerner practically never sees a Negro except as his servant and in other standardized and formalized caste situations."

Nor, try as we may to avoid becoming aware of it, has discrimination yet faded from our national life, despite strong Congressional action and Supreme Court decree. Today the passage of a national open-housing law to secure for Negroes the right to live where they wish in America, without any exceptions, still remains a legislative impossibility. In late 1967, on a visit to a Northern city where demonstrations for a local open-housing ordinance had erupted into violence, I found that the demonstrations had begun after a Negro Vietnam war veteran, who was not particularly seeking to integrate the city but only to secure a better house, could not buy one across the street from the Negro section, even though since World War II the local Negro population had grown by forty-six percent while the area Negroes were allowed to live in had grown by only twenty-six percent. In early

1968 I received a call from a person in a town in Oklahoma, asking my help in behalf of a Negro major who had just returned from Vietnam and who was being barred from burying his baby son in a local cemetery. Discrimination is, indeed, persistent.

#### A HISTORY OF COMPROMISE

A full study of American history also reveals that we have, at most, only temporized and compromised with the so-called Negro question, failing ever to face it squarely and settle it for good.

In the original draft of the Declaration of Independence there was a condemnation of King George III for forcing the slave trade upon the colonies and thereby violating the "most sacred right of life and liberty of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither." These words were deleted in a compromise, believed essential to the success of the Revolution and the formation of the new nation, upon the demand of those who represented the interests of the plantation owners of the South and the ship-owners of the North, both of whom profited from slavery and the slave trade. This early compromise seems to have set a pattern.

The already hotly conflicting views about the Negro came into sharp and bitter dispute at the Constitutional Convention. Despite the fact that the Continental Congress, meeting in 1787 at the same time as the Constitutional Convention, had already prohibited slavery in the Northwest Territory and that six of the original thirteen states had by then abolished slavery, the Constitutional Convention neither endorsed nor condemned it. Its otherwise marvelous product declared that Congress could not prohibit the importation of slaves earlier than 1808, that the Southern states could count three-fifths of their slaves for purposes of their representative strength in the federal government, and that free states were required to assist in delivering up runaway slaves. Roger Sherman of Connecticut, a delegate to the historic assembly in Philadelphia, explained that he did not demand outright abolition of slavery, because "it was expedient to have as few objections as possible to the proposed scheme of government."

In the face of vigorous arguments, such as that of John Rutledge of South Carolina, who maintained that considerations of religion or humanity were not involved, but that the "true question at present is whether the South States shall or shall not be parties to the Union,"



Northerners at the Convention, according to the later statement of John Quincy Adams, "averted their faces and with trembling hand subscribed the bond."

As slavery was a central question in the Constitutional Convention, so it was, also, during the period of ratification which followed. Charles C. Pinckney of South Carolina argued for his state's approval of the Constitution, enumerating the points the South had won on the issue of slavery and stating that "considering all circumstances, we have made the best terms, for the security of this species of property, it was in our power to make."

Others, such as George Mason of Virginia, argued against ratification of the Constitution because of its handling of the slavery issue. "As much as I value an union among all the states, I would not admit the Southern states into the union unless they agreed to the discontinuance of this disgraceful trade, because it would bring weakness and not strength to the union," he said.

But the establishment of a strong federal government was the paramount issue. Thomas Jefferson, urging ratification despite the unsettled slavery question, said, "Great as the evil is, a dismemberment of the union would be worse." The Constitution was ratified and became the basic law of the land, but the question of what to do about the Negro remained.

The question was not long in surfacing again. When admission to statehood was sought for Missouri in 1818, free states and slave states were equally balanced, at eleven each. At issue, therefore, was the balance of power in the Congress and the national government. There were those, such as Representative James Tallmadge of New York, who were willing to precipitate a crisis on this issue. "If a dissolution of the union must take place, let it be so!" he said. "If civil war, which gentlemen so much threaten, must come, I can only say, let it come!"

But moderates, led by Henry Clay, eventually gained approval for what was called the Missouri Compromise, whereby when Maine was also admitted as a separate state, Missouri was approved for statehood without restriction on slavery, and slavery was prohibited in the rest of the original Louisiana Purchase territory which lay to the north and west of Missouri. Thomas Jefferson, who as President in 1806 had urged early approval of legislation to outlaw the slave trade, saw the Missouri dispute as a harbinger of things yet to come. "This momentous question, like a firebell in the night, awakened and filled me

with terror," he wrote. "I considered it at once as the knell of the Union. It is hushed, indeed, for the moment. But this is a reprieve only, not a final sentence."

Jefferson was right. Southerners began to press for a more effective fugitive slave law, and, in addition, there was the question of what to do about slavery in the new territories acquired through the Mexican War and in California, which sought statehood. There was great Northern reaction to the resulting Compromise of 1850, which papered the issue over temporarily by allowing statehood for California and organization of the Mexican territories without regard to the slavery question, by outlawing the slave trade in the District of Columbia, and by stronger provisions for enforcement of the fugitive slave law.

The issue did not stay papered over. It broke out again with the debate prior to eventual passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, authored by Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, which allowed these new territories, a part of the original Louisiana Purchase, to decide the issue of slavery for themselves, thus repealing the Missouri Compromise of 1820.

Inexorably, the nation moved toward civil war. In Abraham Lincoln, as in no other man, was embodied the terrible soul-searching which the Negro question has perpetually required of America. He opposed slavery, which he called a "monstrous injustice," on basic moral grounds, declaring that "the most dumb and stupid slave that ever toiled for a master does constantly know that he is wronged." In the Lincoln-Douglas debates he made clear that the slavery question was a moral question, saying: "The real issue in this controversy—the one pressing upon every mind—is the sentiment on the part of one class that looks upon the institution of slavery as a wrong, and of another class that does not look upon it as a wrong."

"Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid," Lincoln said on one occasion, continuing: "As a nation we began by declaring that 'all men are created equal.' We now practically read it, 'all men are created equal except Negroes.'"

Lincoln was elected to preside over a nation hopelessly in conflict. On the one hand there were the followers of William Lloyd Garrison, who had as early as 1831 written in *The Liberator*: "Yea, till every chain be broken, and every bondsmen set free! Let Southern oppressors tremble—let their secret abettors tremble—let their Northern apologists tremble—let all the enemies of the persecuted blacks tremble."

The cause gained popular support through Harriet Beecher Stowe's widely read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

On the other hand were men such as John C. Calhoun, who declared:

The relation which now exists between the two races in the slave-holding states has existed for two centuries. It has grown with our growth, and strengthened with our strength. It has entered into and modified all our institutions, civil and political. None other can be substituted. We will not, cannot, permit it to be destroyed! Come what will, should it cost every drop of blood and every cent of property, we must defend ourselves; and if compelled, we would stand justified by all laws, human and divine we would act under an imperious necessity There would be to us but one alternative—to triumph or perish as a people.

The nation was plunged into the "seas of blood" which Jefferson had foreseen. Lincoln's moral abhorrence of slavery was restricted by the constitutional questions involved, by his duty to save the Union and by his doubts that free Negroes could ever live in peace and harmony among whites.

At last, when the circumstances both permitted and demanded it, he first proclaimed emancipation in the states in rebellion, and later recommended a constitutional amendment for the general abolition of slavery, which was ratified and became effective in 1865

The task which lay before the country at the conclusion of the Civil War was set forth clearly by William Lloyd Garrison, who had written: "We are now to concentrate the whole power of American law, justice, conscience, sense of consistency and duty, and bring all to bear on the work of making the freedman in every sense a freeman and a citizen." It was not to be so.

The period after the Civil War was a time when the great desire for sectional reconciliation and the revival of states' rights were to be the prevailing forces. President Andrew Johnson vetoed an early Freedmen's Bureau bill because it required states to attempt to put Negroes and whites on equal footing. This led the way for what was to follow

The Negro was free, but he was provided little opportunity for attaining social, political or economic equality The Freedmen's Bureau

failed to establish any minimum wage, and the freed Negroes in the South received little more than subsistence pay. No means were devised to assist the former slaves toward becoming landowners, and there grew up the system of sharecropping, which tied the Negro tenant to the landlord in a near-feudal relationship.

Most detrimental for the future of the freed Negro, federal aid to education, first proposed seriously in 1870, with provisions for division of funds to be made among the states on the basis of the illiteracy rate—a device to allow the Negro to bring his educational level up to that of the whites—was never adopted. In the Southern states before the Civil War it had been a crime to teach a slave to read or write. In the years which followed the war, education, the universal vehicle for rising out of a lower economic class, was still effectively denied the Negro.

Many tired of the struggle in the Negro's behalf, and others despaired of success. Still others of the North, whose commercial interests depended upon protective tariffs, made alliances with Southerners who would support them. Then followed the Southern devices for taking away the Negro's right to vote and the flood of Jim Crow laws which kept him in enforced inequality and inferiority. When Congress in 1894 passed a bill repealing much of the civil rights legislation, President Grover Cleveland signed it into law without comment.

Prevailing public opinion—and resultant political realities—continued for years thereafter to delay a resolution of the Negro question. It was, for example, during the generally progressive administration of President Woodrow Wilson, who had during his campaign made an open appeal for the votes of Negroes, that the Post Office and Treasury Department in Washington began segregation in their offices, rest rooms and lunchrooms. Soon segregation was the general rule in the nation's capital, causing Booker T. Washington to say, "I have never seen the colored people so discouraged and bitter as they are at the present time." That discouragement and bitterness has continued and grown until the present day.

#### THE AMERICAN NEGRO TODAY

"But isn't it obviously true," it is often asked, "that the Negro is much better off today than ever before?" Two responses are required to that question.

First, Negroes generally have, indeed, made substantial and some-

times spectacular gains in recent years, but for many Negroes things have not changed much and may actually have grown worse. With major upsurges during and after the two world wars, there has been a massive migration of Negroes from rural to metropolitan areas and from the South to the North. While in 1910, ninety-nine percent of all Negroes lived in the South, today nearly one-half live in the North, and they are still moving North at the rate of about 170,000 each year—coming from backgrounds characterized by extreme discrimination and poverty and substandard education.

In a barbershop in the Negro section of Milwaukee not long ago, I talked with two Negro girls who had, independently of each other, recently moved there from small towns in Arkansas. They had come, they said, looking for jobs. "A girl friend of mine told me she had heard there were good jobs up here, so I came," one explained. For both, Milwaukee had proved to be a great deal less than the promised land. Each was working as a waitress in a Negro cafe, making only twenty-eight dollars a week, plus tips.

Seventy percent of all American Negroes now live in the cities, where discrimination and economic realities have packed the great majority of them into the deteriorating inner cores in constantly increasing numbers. Nonwhite population in the United States has doubled since 1910. Between 1950 and 1960, it grew nearly fifteen percent, twice as fast as the white population growth, and eighty-nine percent of this nonwhite population growth since 1950 has occurred in central cities. What do all of these figures and trends mean? They mean, for example, that, while the majority of whites now live in suburbs and their number in the inner core of cities has decreased by nearly 1.3 million since 1960, there are fifty percent more Negro teenagers living in city slums today than there were in 1960.

For Negroes living in these city inner cores, individual incomes have not risen at all, unemployment rates have declined, if at all, only slightly, and housing conditions have worsened even though rents have risen. In the Hough section of Cleveland, family income fell from a median of \$4,700 in 1960 to \$4,000 in 1965, and the proportion of poor families living there rose from thirty-one to thirty-nine percent. In Chicago's poorest Negro neighborhoods, the proportion of poor Negro families rose from thirty-three to thirty-nine percent between 1960 and 1966; in New York—mainly in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant—that proportion increased from twenty-eight to thirty-five percent.

Most of us never see these neighborhoods, and it is almost impossible for us to imagine them. Children there grow up in rat-infested tenements on garbage-strewn streets where crime and narcotics are ever-present. They usually go to run-down schools where consistently less is spent per pupil than in the white suburbs, often being taught by the least qualified teachers, many of whom do not really believe their pupils can learn. It is no wonder that a study in Harlem showed that the scores Negro schoolchildren made on intelligence tests actually went down while they were in school.

An increasing number of these children are growing up without fathers. In Watts, the percentage of fatherless homes increased from thirty-six percent in 1960 to thirty-nine percent in 1965. In the Hough section of Cleveland that percentage rose from twenty-three to thirty-two percent during the same period. That illegitimacy and the breakdown of families are not just some natural characteristic of Negroes, but are a direct product of discrimination and poverty, is clearly shown by the fact that, while forty-two percent of Negro homes with less than \$3,000 annual income are fatherless, the percentage drops to only eight in Negro homes with annual incomes of \$7,000 or more.

The path from appalling living conditions and broken homes to bad schools, to idleness on the streets is inevitably the way of life for an increasing number of today's young Negroes. "Here's what you've done to us, man," a young Negro slum dweller angrily said to me recently "You wouldn't let us have any boots, and now you come around telling us to pull ourselves up by our boot straps."

The second answer to the question about improved conditions for Negroes today reminds one of the man, who, when asked, "How's your wife?" responded: "Compared to what?"

"Well, Negroes are living a lot better and are treated a lot better here than they are anywhere in the world," one white lady said to me not long ago, and many white people say the same thing.

But American Negroes are not Angolians or Tanzanians or Biafrans or South Africans. They are Americans. They see the same television programs we see; they go to the same movies we go to; they fight in the same wars; they pay the same tax rates; they read the same magazines and newspapers; they have all the same hopes and fears. Middle-class Negroes feel the same sense of uneasiness that whites feel; poor Negroes feel the same powerlessness and frustration that poor whites feel; Negro adolescents feel the same alienation that white adolescents

feel—but the Negro in each instance feels these things more because he is black. For example, as one Negro economist said to me, “There are a lot of people who are poor because they are black, but there are not any white people poor because they are white.”

American Negroes are Americans, and they know that by American standards they are not doing very well. While the vast majority of Negro men are working, one out of every three Negro families still lives in poverty, and average Negro family income is only fifty-eight percent of that of whites. Unemployment is at least twice as high for Negroes as it is for whites, and Negro subemployment in city slums averages thirty-three percent.

Discrimination bars Negroes from many jobs and from membership in many unions. Where they are employed, they are three times as likely to be in low-paying jobs, and this is true even when they have equal educational attainment. Negroes with high school diplomas make an average of \$2,000 less per year than whites with high school diplomas. Negro college graduates make an average of \$3,000 less than white college graduates.

Figured in constant 1965 dollars, median white income in 1947 was \$2,174 higher than median nonwhite income. In 1966 this gap had grown larger, to \$3,036. Less income means, among other things, poorer housing and poorer health. Negroes are three times as likely as whites to live in dilapidated and deteriorating housing. They are twice as likely to have tuberculosis, and their average life expectancy is 7.2 years shorter. Maternal mortality is four times as high for Negroes as for whites, and the likelihood of a child dying between the age of one month and one year is close to three times as great for Negroes.

The issue is, indeed, still with us, still unsettled.

#### THE NEGRO IN AMERICAN WARS

History teaches, further, that, while there has always been a deep current of goodness in our country, and great numbers of white people have always pressed for full equality for Negroes, advances for them have come primarily when the national interest has required it.

In the beginning, free Negroes were barred from serving in the Revolutionary Army, General Washington himself ordering that recruiters were not to enlist “any deserter from the ministerial army, nor any stroller, negro, or vagabond, or person suspected of being an enemy to the liberty of America.” Thereafter, the British began a

practice which was of great concern to the colonists, that of promising freedom to runaway slaves who would enlist in the British Army. This development, together with the fact that he was hard-pressed for troops, caused Washington to join with others in reversing the initial policy. By the end of the war, the 300,000 soldiers who had fought in it included 5,000 Negroes, and those who had been slaves were freed. It should be noted that, following the war, Washington expressed his displeasure at owning slaves and that his will provided that his own slaves should be freed upon the death of his wife.

It was another war, the Civil War, which brought American Negroes their greatest advance, general freedom. Because some doubted their fighting qualities and because Lincoln feared that he would otherwise lose support of the border states for the war, Negroes were at first barred from serving in the Union forces. It was not until January 1, 1863, when manpower shortages had become critical, that Lincoln issued an order, at the same time as his Emancipation Proclamation freed the slaves in the South, permitting free Negroes to enlist in the Union Army and Navy. By the end of the war, 186,000 had served in what were called "The United States Colored Troops," though it was not until 1864 that they received the same pay as whites.

Despite his deep moral convictions against slavery, Lincoln's concern for the Union was uppermost in his mind when he answered Horace Greeley's demand for immediate emancipation, saying: "My paramount objective in this struggle is to save the Union, and not either to save or destroy slavery. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union." The national interest soon required it, and all slaves became free.

Another national crisis, World War I, brought the next real progress for Negroes. The kind of additional moral arguments it gave supporters of the Negro cause is exemplified by a speech of U. S. Senator Charles S. Thomas of Colorado, who, in strongly protesting a white race riot in St. Louis which had killed hundreds of Negroes and demanding a commission be established to investigate it, asked: "What right has the government to call upon any man to offer his life and give his time and his services to his country if the flag does not protect him on the field and his family at home?"

The 350,000 Negroes who served in the armed services during World War I, and the 42,000 of that number who saw combat, all served in



segregated units. Negroes were barred from service in the Marine Corps and were assigned only menial jobs in the Navy. Nevertheless, their contribution to the war effort brought definite progress for them. For the first time in any substantial numbers, Negroes became officers, trained in special camps set up in 1917. At home, Negro leaders were for the first time consulted by government, Negroes were appealed to in Liberty Bond, food conservation, and other drives, and thousands of Negroes were able for the first time to get better jobs because of the manpower shortage in defense, munitions, and other factors. This attraction of better jobs caused thousands of Negroes to migrate from the South to the North, and Negro employment in the non-farm sector increased by 300,000 during the decade between 1910 and 1920. As one observer stated, "For the first time in the history of the South, Negroes were asked to join in a common community effort."

Being at the bottom of the economic scale, Negroes were, of course, hit hardest by the Great Depression. There was considerable discrimination in the emergency programs enacted during the Roosevelt administration. There were differentials in wages under NRA for Negroes and whites; Negroes were excluded from skilled positions and training programs under the Tennessee Valley Authority; and public housing projects were maintained on a segregated basis. Nevertheless, the scope of the programs made necessary by the widespread poverty and hopelessness of the time necessarily benefitted the Negroes, who lived, generally, in the worst conditions of any of the large number of poor persons.

While the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt was the first consistently and openly to give its attention to improving the lives of Negroes, the most marked progress toward Negro equality during his administration came after Pearl Harbor.

Again, the total mobilization of the country and the fact that almost one million Negroes served on active duty during World War II allowed Negroes a greater sense of community with the rest of Americans. It also caused them to make greater demands. For example, A. Philip Randolph, Negro labor leader, threatened a mass march on Washington in 1941 to protest the rather general discrimination in employment being practiced throughout the country by both management and unions. The march was called off when President Roosevelt issued an Executive Order declaring that "there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries and government because of race, creed or national origin." This order and the

wartime manpower shortages caused Negro employment to increase spectacularly, though there was still strong and effective resistance.

Negroes were trained to become Army Air Force pilots; they were accepted for the first time into the Marines as noncommissioned officers and into the Navy as commissioned officers; and officer candidate schools were desegregated. However, other military facilities and units continued a policy of segregation, and the Red Cross blood banks separated Negro and white blood, though it was primarily the work of a Negro physician, Charles Drew, which had made the blood banks possible.

The GI Bill of Rights, enacted to assist all returning veterans to secure better education, skills and housing, applied equally to Negroes and materially aided them in furthering the economic and other gains they had achieved during the war.

Although the administration of President Harry S. Truman was especially noteworthy for its forceful and effective efforts toward equality, there is no question but that the Truman order for the total elimination of segregation in the armed forces would have taken a great deal longer to become fully effective except for the pressures of the Korean conflict. During the Korean War racial designations on troops shipped overseas for replacements were dropped for the first time, and complete integration was fully achieved in the armed services by 1954, when President Dwight D. Eisenhower reaffirmed the Truman order.

### THE POST-WAR MOVEMENT

Two other factors of national interest have caused marked advancement for the Negro cause. First, more Americans began to perceive that the national interest required the projection of the proper image of America to foreign countries. In his message to Congress on February 2, 1948, President Truman recommended a comprehensive package of civil rights legislation, stating: "If we wish to inspire the peoples of the world whose freedom is in jeopardy, if we wish to restore hope to those who have already lost their civil liberties, if we wish to fulfill the promise that is ours, we must correct the remaining imperfections in our practice of democracy"

Similarly, in a brief filed in December, 1952, in the Supreme Court case concerning segregation in the public schools, the United States Attorney General stated:

It is in the context of the present world struggle between freedom and tyranny that the problem of racial discrimination must be viewed. Racial discrimination furnishes the grist for the Communist propaganda mills and raises doubt even among friendly nations as to the intensity of our devotion to the democratic faith.

The national interest, lastly, has required that the rule of law prevail in America, and that Supreme Court decrees be obeyed, despite both some violent and nonviolent attempts to thwart them. By this route the Negro has made some of his most spectacular gains. Beginning in 1944, with the holding that the "white primaries," which effectively barred Negro voting in the South, violated the fifteenth amendment to the United States Constitution, the Supreme Court had laid down a series of highly significant rules requiring integration in public travel, higher education and, in 1954, in the public schools.

The general support which Americans give to law was extended, though grudgingly and haltingly in some instances, to these Supreme Court decisions and others, and this helped create the kind of public opinion climate which allowed a great many additional legislative and other advances for the Negro.

#### WHITE SUPPORT FOR THE NEGRO CAUSE

From the very beginning, there has always been a strong body of white thought in America which has vigorously and consistently opposed discrimination against the Negro. The first formal protest against slavery in America was made by Quakers in Germantown, Pennsylvania, in 1668, and it was Pennsylvania, twenty-four years later, which became the first state to make the importation of slaves illegal. John Woolman, a New Jersey tailor and Quaker, began his active campaign against slavery in 1756.

The assertion of the natural equality of man and his right to revolt against tyranny, which was crystallized in the Declaration of Independence, struck a great many Americans as totally incompatible with treating the Negro as an inferior being. As Dr. Samuel Johnson put it: "How is it we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of Negroes?" Mrs. John Quincy Adams wrote her husband in 1774: "It always appeared a most iniquitous scheme to fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from others who have as good a right to freedom as we have."

Benjamin Franklin petitioned the first Congress in 1790 to give their "serious attention to the subject of slavery That you will devise means for removing this inconsistency from the character of the American people; that you will promote mercy and justice toward this distressed race "

Throughout the balance of American history, and until the present time there have always been a great many white Americans who have continued to fight for the full implementation of Franklin's petition. Sadly, some have grown cynical about America and its promise in the process.

Many others who have either approved of or acquiesced in discrimination against the Negro have thereby, consciously or unconsciously, denied the very basic teachings of their church and the foundation of the government to which they pledge allegiance, the inborn dignity and worth of every human soul; and many have been unavoidably brutalized and damaged thereby

There have been other white Americans who have agonized over and wrestled with the problem of making idealism compatible with practicality, and for them life has often been miserable and melancholy

But, for all white Americans, this persistent gap between ideal and reality has done severe damage to our collective mental health. As a nation, we have been living a false life.

#### NEGRO EFFORTS TO ATTAIN EQUALITY

From the very first, there have been peaceful protests and petitions by Negroes, beginning in 1661.

At an early stage, there was a division between types of Negro leaders. There have been those, such as Booker T Washington and others, who sought progress for the Negro through the more gradualistic approach of cooperating with whites and appealing to their better natures to win concessions. There have, of course, been other Negro leaders, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, who have demanded, as Du Bois did in a 1905 appeal, "aggressive action on the part of men who believe in Negro freedom and growth," and who have sought full equality for Negroes as a matter of right, not charity There have always been Negro leaders and followers of all gradations in between.

Negroes have always been able to see, quite clearly, the inconsistency in what they read or recite in the Declaration of Independence or the

Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag on the one hand, and how they are treated, on the other.

Many Negroes have worked faithfully and diligently within the framework of white attitudes, laws and customs to bring about progress and often have sunk back into a feeling of hopelessness and despair.

Many have stood up to the white man and have demanded equality as the inherent right of every free man, as was particularly true during the "freedom rides," boycotts, marches and demonstrations, and voter registration drives which characterized the civil rights movement in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Those were the days when, all over America, Negroes were buoyed up by a sense of an impending breakthrough as they stood together, proudly and full of hope, singing "We Shall Overcome." Those days ended—as everyone, Negro and white alike, saw on television—with fire hoses, police dogs, riot stick clubbings, Negro church bombings, and murders of civil rights workers. Some Negroes have thereafter become cynical and bitter, hostile toward all white people. A few have decided upon destruction of the system through violence. Some others see radical change through social upheaval as the only way left open. Some continue to work for Negro acceptance and integration. Few are left undamaged.

### THE PROBLEM OF IDENTITY

For Negroes as a group, the problem of identity has always been crucial. What they wanted to be called has changed from time to time, depending upon its connotation in white usage, but it has always been important. Thus, they have been "colored," or capitalized "Negroes," or "Afro-Americans," or "black." There have been calls to Negro identity in such movements as Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa," or Elijah Muhammad's "Black Muslims," or Stokely Carmichael's "Black Power."

Negro individuals, too, have always struggled with the problem of self-identity. No person knows who he is or what kind of person he is except through the insights he gets from the reactions of others to him. Each person from earliest childhood reassesses his self-image, his judgment of himself, almost from moment to moment, by the way people treat him, by the way they respond to him. "I must be a good person if so many people think so and treat me that way," a person says to himself one day. Perhaps, on another day, he says, "I must not be as

good a person as I should be, because certain people indicate as much." From all this mix he puts together a self-image.

What would be a person's self-image if all day, every day, he was made aware that the majority of people in the dominant society either thought he was worthless and therefore ignored him and his interests, or treated him as a person not entitled to general respect? What happens is, as tests indicate, that the person so treated often comes to think of himself in the same terms as those believed by the dominant society.

Day in and day out, every signal the Negro child receives from the dominant white society indicates that all Negroes are lazy, shiftless, stupid, superstitious, and easily frightened. He has difficulty thinking of himself except in those terms; he has difficulty thinking of himself in a positive, self-respecting way. Thus the appeal, aside from its unacceptable violent overtones, of the "black power" concept, which says: "You don't have to make yourself over in the white man's image; black is not ugly or weak or bad—but beautiful and strong and good."

The systematic downgrading of the Negro has been the most unhealthy and destructive factor in American society. It has taken its great and wretched toll throughout the years on countless human beings, black and white, severely crippling many of them and limiting the contribution they were able to make to their families and to the common good.