

"In The American Tradition"

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CONTINUED FROM LAST
WEEK

Now we say that these violent conflicts in the past and the one we are presently engaged in were inevitable and necessary. Maybe they were. But when we have said that, we may be able to understand how Black Power spokesmen are saying that the Negro's freedom will not be achieved without violence. Rational men must respond that civil disorders are fruitless, that they will not achieve freedom. But some Negroes are saying that this is not the question. They would rather die than go on this way.

"Violence is as American as Cherry pie." No one knows that better than the American Negro. The history of the Negro in America is a bloody chronicle of violence. Over three hundred years ago, the first Negroes were brought to these shores in chains. For two centuries they were bought and sold like animals. Children were separated from their parents—violently—and wives from their husbands. The first steps toward their freedom were taken in blood. The great American experiment almost floundered on this issue a century ago. And then for a century more the Negro has been subjected often to intimidation and not infrequently to mob violence. And a recent congressional committee reported that even today the Ku Klux Klan remains "a vehicle of death, destruction and fear."

Listen to this advertisement which appeared in a newspaper in the early 1800's: "Fifty dollars reward.—Ran away from the subscriber, his Negro man Pauladore, commonly called Paul. I understand Gen. R. Y. Hayne has purchased his wife and children from H. L. Pickney, Esq. and has them on his plantation at Goosecreek, where, no doubt, the fellow is frequently lurking." (Du Bois, 11-12)

Or again: "Fifty dollars reward.—Ran away from the subscriber, a Negro girl named Maria. She is of a copper color, between 13 and 14 years of age—bareheaded and barefooted. She is small for her age—very sprightly and very likely. She stated she was going to see her mother at Maysville." (Ibid)

The Negro in America knows and remembers that he was a slave. This is a part of his history which he has to live with. Violence and pain. But now, for the first time, the shoe is on the other foot. So we hear again the words of Hosea, addressed to us: "They have sown the wind and they shall reap the whirlwind." (8:7) We have planted the seeds of this violence for three hundred years and have no right to be surprised that they are now full grown.

When we chronicle the history of violence in America we have touched only one aspect of the cause for the riots. The other side of the story is the present plight of poverty-stricken Negroes in our society, whether they live in the slums of the large cities or in the

shacktowns of community after community. It is almost impossible for those of us who are white to comprehend the agony of these men and women and children.

Few writers have been able to put into words that pain and suffering better than the Negro novelist James Baldwin. In one of his short stories written in 1958, one of his characters looks out the window of a tenement upon the mass of humanity and dirty buildings and garbage cans and says: "All that hatred down there... all avenue apart." This in 1958! Or in another story a Negro tells of returning by boat to New York: "A big, sandy-haired man held his daughter on his shoulders, showing her the Statue of Liberty. I would never know what this statue meant to others, she had always been an ugly joke for me." Or again, the same character gives his view of the small Southern town where he grew up: "It's a terrible town, anyway, the whole thing looks as though it's built around a jailhouse. There's a room in the courthouse, a room where they beat you up." This is the way America has looked to Negroes for generations.

This feeling is produced by the depth and breadth of white prejudice with which the Negro has to live. George Lincoln Rockwell, the head of the American Nazi party until his recent murder, was asked last year how many people in this country agreed with him. He admitted that his organization was small, but felt it had widespread support. He said: "When the time comes, millions of Americans will fight with me under the sign of the swastika." As he put it, "Every nigger hater is a Nazi at heart." Sad but true. And the Negro has had to bear this hatred. This hatred and more subtle forms of discrimination have led to the conditions of American slums today: inferior education, unemployment, under-employment, squalid housing conditions. In short, they have cut off the Negro's hope.

So the contemporary causes of the riots are the prejudice and injustice which the poverty-stricken Negro has experienced. As William Sloan Coffin, Jr., repeated recently, "There are no revolts without revolting conditions." No one who has walked through the slums of our cities can deny that these revolting conditions exist. To walk through these slums is to see, as the prophets say, the face of the poor trampled in the dust.

What caused the riots? I am suggesting that the biblical tradition gives an explanation which is borne out by an examination of the facts: Our history of violence, especially toward the Negro and our failure to deal justly with the Negro have caught up with us. History is handing us its bill. To be sure, there are other factors to be mentioned, but the roots are deep in our history and our present situation.

So there we have the problem, and an explanation from the prophets supported by the facts of our history. Where do we go from there? Is there any way to stem the rising tide

of violence? We have not seen the last of the riots, as events of this week have made clear.

All that we have said in no way condones violence, nor does it even excuse it. But it implies that if we expect to prevent its recurrence we must address ourselves urgently to the roots of it, the conditions of American cities produced by racism. And here is where our Christian duty and our national self-interest intersect: injustice to the savings of Jesus that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, the biblical tradition cries out that we be concerned about our neighbor, especially the poor and oppressed.

And hear this paraphrase of one of the text appointed for reading this Passion Sunday: The blood of Christ purifies your conscience from dead works to serve the living God. This says to me that those who have heard the Gospel are free. The bonds of the old guilt can be broken; we can make a new beginning. While 300 years of injustice cannot be forgotten, it can be overcome.

Assuming that we as free Christian citizens want to do something, here are a few suggestions:

First, each one must develop some real awareness of the depth of the problem. One needs to become sensitive, as far as possible, to what it feels like to be poor and to be a Negro. This means contact with Negroes and Negro communities is essential. A minister in Watts had a program to help sensitive people come to the problems. Groups of middle class white church people come into that slum community and he simply sends them

out to walk down the streets and to the stores to buy a few things. Then they know first hand what a slum smells like and know for themselves that the poor do pay more for inferior goods.

Second, the church must begin to be the church with reference to racial equality. Eleven o'clock Sunday morning is still the most segregated hour of the week. So many people are asking themselves: Is the church the most culture-bound institution in the country? Is the institution charged with furthering the love of God and of neighbor? Martin Luther King has said, "In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro, I have watched white churchmen stand on the sideline and mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities."

If he speaks harshly and strongly about the role of the church, remember that he speaks as a churchman, out of love and concern, and out of a confidence that the church can take the leadership in this struggle.

Third, we as individuals and as Christians can work in our own backyard. Your community is where you live, if even for a year, or four years. The large problem of injustice boils down to the sum total of thousands of little injustices in every town and city of our country. We as citizens can speak out to those with political and non-discrimination in education. All these needs exist in Durham.

Fourth and finally, those who are aware of the seriousness of the problem must call for radical re-direction of na-

tional goals. We are spending our national wealth and energy on war and space. But when I speak of re-direction of national goals, I am not speaking of money alone, but of the best use of all our resources. Solutions to the problems of the poor will not take shape until we apply massive amounts of creative energy to these problems. We can afford to do it. We cannot afford not to do it. The present crisis demands it. Justice demands it. And the Christian gospel demands it.

AP's Board Pays Tribute To Daniels

NEW YORK —The board of directors of The Associated Press paid tribute Monday to Frank A. Daniels, president of The News and Observer in Raleigh, N. C., who is retiring from the board.

The text of a resolution read at the annual meeting follows: Be it known by all... that the board of directors of The Associated Press hereby records its appreciation of the services of Frank A. Daniels, president of the Raleigh News and Observer and a member of this board since April of 1964.

Initially elected to fill a vacancy created by the death of Millard Cope, he was reelected in 1965 for a three-year term. In line with an apparent 1968 trend in other electoral contests, Mr. Daniels this year notified the nominating committee that he did not choose to run for the third term for which he was eligible.

A tough-minded newspaper executive, bank director and student of government tax problems, Frank Daniels brought to The Associated Press board, as



ASSIGNMENT—Chester Thomas, Gulf Oil Corporation Plantman Foreman at the company's Arlington, Texas, Distribution Center, and J. L. Tosh, Section

Head, go over a day's work for Thomas' crew. Thomas, who has been with Gulf for 19 years, is responsible for overseeing

the unloading, storing and loading procedures involved in maintaining a stock of 100,000 tires of 181 types.

he has to others, that spirit of self-determination and independence so characteristic of his home state of North Carolina. His was the valued voice that frequently strengthened deliberation by saying "no!" and asking "why?"

His fellow board members will miss Mr. Daniels' coherent strength at our formal sessions and his quiet affability during social gatherings. We regret this decision to retire and express to him our thanks for his attentive service, his imparted wisdom and his freely-given friendship.

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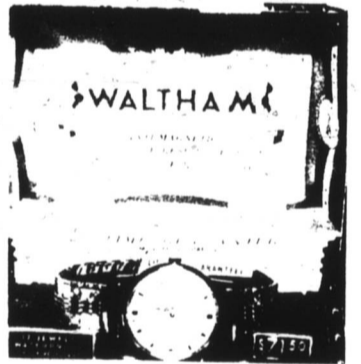
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