

WHERE DO
WE GO
FROM HERE

Chaos or Community?

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To the committed supporters of the civil rights movement, Negro and white, whose steadfastness amid confusions and setbacks gives assurance that brotherhood will be the condition of man, not the dream of man

A special note of thanks is due Hermine I. Popper, whose editorial skills and warm spirit of cooperation contributed greatly toward the completion of this book.

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Where We Are Going

I

As the administration has manifested a faltering and fluctuating interest in civil rights during the past year, a flood of words rather than deeds has inundated the dry desert of expectations.

One curious explanation of the defaults of the government warrants analysis, because it reveals, without intention, the disadvantages under which the civil rights movement has labored. After describing the obvious—the President's overwhelming preoccupation with the war in Vietnam—it then argues that in 1965 the President was prepared to implement measures leading to full equality but waited in vain for the civil rights movement to offer the programs. The movement is depicted as absorbed in controversy, confused in direction, venal toward its friends and in such turmoil it has tragically lost its golden opportunity to attain change today.

This argument, by explaining everything in terms of the presence or absence of programs, illuminates how the insistence on program can be used as a sophisticated device to evade action. Actually there was no dearth of programs in 1965, ranging from my own proposal, published in 1964, for a Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged, to elaborate and de-

tailed programs in the published material of many agencies, organizations and individual social scientists. If there had been a sincere disposition seriously to entertain a program, its preparation in final form would have taken but a few weeks. If the federal government had been consumed with fervor to strike an effective blow for civil rights, it need only have begun implementing all the existing laws that are a nullity from one end of the country to the other.

Underneath the invitation to prepare programs is the premise that the government is inherently benevolent—it only awaits presentation of imaginative ideas. When these issue from fertile minds, they will be accepted, enacted and implemented. This premise shifts the burden of responsibility from the white majority, by pretending it is withholding nothing, and places it on the oppressed minority, by pretending the latter is asking for nothing. This is a fable, not a fact. Neither our government nor any government that has sanctioned a century of denial can be depicted as ardent and impatient to bestow gifts of freedom.

When a people are mired in oppression, they realize deliverance when they have accumulated the power to enforce change. When they have amassed such strength, the writing of a program becomes almost an administrative detail. It is immaterial who presents the program; what is material is the presence of an ability to make events happen. The powerful never lose opportunities—they remain available to them. The powerless, on the other hand, never experience opportunity—it is always arriving at a later time.

The deeper truth is that the call to prepare programs distracts us excessively from our basic and primary tasks. If we are seeking a home, there is not much value in discussing blueprints if we have no money and are barred from acquiring the land. We are, in fact, being counseled to put the cart

before the horse. We have to put the horse (power) before the cart (programs).

Our nettlesome task is to discover how to organize our strength into compelling power so that government cannot elude our demands. We must develop, from strength, a situation in which the government finds it wise and prudent to collaborate with us. It would be the height of naïveté to wait passively until the administration had somehow been infused with such blessings of goodwill that it implored us for our programs. The first course is grounded in mature realism; the other is childish fantasy.

We do need certain general programs for the movement, but not for use as supplicants. We require programs to hold up to our followers which mirror their aspirations. In this fashion our goals are dramatized and our supporters are inspired to action and to deeper moral commitment.

We must frankly acknowledge that in past years our creativity and imagination were not employed in learning how to develop power. We found a method in nonviolent protest that worked, and we employed it enthusiastically. We did not have leisure to probe for a deeper understanding of its laws and lines of development. Although our actions were bold and crowned with successes, they were substantially improvised and spontaneous. They attained the goals set for them but carried the blemishes of our inexperience.

When a new dawn reveals a landscape dotted with obstacles, the time has come for sober reflection, for assessment of our methods and for anticipating pitfalls. Stumbling and groping through the wilderness finally must be replaced by a planned, organized and orderly march.

None of us can pretend that he knows all the answers. It is enormously difficult for any oppressed people even to arrive at an awareness of their latent strengths. They are not only

buffeted by defeats, but they have been schooled assiduously to believe in their lack of capacity. People struggling from the depths of society have not been equipped with knowledge of the science of social change. Only when they break out of the fog of self-denigration can they begin to discover the forms of action that influence events. They can then embark on social experimentation with their own strengths to generate the kind of power that shapes basic decisions.

This is where the civil rights movement stands today. We will err and falter as we climb the unfamiliar slopes of steep mountains, but there is no alternative, well-trod, level path. There will be agonizing setbacks along with creative advances. Our consolation is that no one can know the true taste of victory if he has never swallowed defeat.

For the moment, therefore, we must subordinate programs to studying the levers of power Negroes must grasp to influence the course of events. In our society power sources are sometimes obscure and indistinct. Yet they can always finally be traced to those forces we describe as ideological, economic and political.

In the area of ideology, despite the impact of the works of a few Negro writers on a limited number of white intellectuals, all too few Negro thinkers have exerted an influence on the main currents of American thought. Nevertheless Negroes have illuminated imperfections in the democratic structure that were formerly only dimly perceived, and have forced a concerned reexamination of the true meaning of American democracy. As a consequence of the vigorous Negro protest, the whole nation has for a decade probed more searchingly the essential nature of democracy, both economic and political. By taking to the streets and there giving practical lessons in democracy and its defaults, Negroes have decisively influenced white thought.

Lacking sufficient access to television, publications and broad forums, Negroes have had to write their most persuasive essays with the blunt pen of marching ranks. The many white political leaders and well-meaning friends who ask Negro leadership to leave the streets may not realize that they are asking us effectively to silence ourselves. The twice forgotten man in America has always been the Negro. His groans were not heard, his needs were unfelt, until he found the means to state his case in the public square. More white people learned more about the shame of America, and finally faced some aspects of it, during the years of nonviolent protest than during the century before. Nonviolent direct action will continue to be a significant source of power until it is made irrelevant by the presence of justice.

II

The economic highway to power has few entry lanes for Negroes. Nothing so vividly reveals the crushing impact of discrimination and the heritage of exclusion as the limited dimensions of Negro business in the most powerful economy in the world. America's industrial production is half of the world's total, and within it the production of Negro business is so small that it can scarcely be measured on any definable scale.

Yet in relation to the Negro community the value of Negro business should not be underestimated. In the internal life of the Negro society it provides a degree of stability. Despite formidable obstacles it has developed a corps of men of competence and organizational discipline who constitute a talented leadership reserve. Their cumulative strength may be feeble measured against the mammoth of white industry, but within the community they furnish inspiration and are a resource for the development of programs and planning.

They are a strength among the weak though they are weak among the mighty.

There exist two other areas, however, where Negroes can exert substantial influence on the broader economy. As employees and consumers Negro numbers and their strategic disposition endow them with a certain bargaining strength.

Within the ranks of organized labor there are nearly two million Negroes. Not only are they found in large numbers as workers, but they are concentrated in key industries. In the truck transportation, steel, auto and food industries, which are the backbone of the nation's economic life, Negroes make up nearly 20 percent of the organized work force, although they are only 10 percent of the general population. This potential strength is magnified further by the fact of their unity with millions of white workers in these occupations. As co-workers there is a basic community of interest that transcends many of the ugly divisive elements of traditional prejudice. There are undeniably points of friction, for example, in certain housing and education questions. But the severity of the abrasions is minimized by the more commanding need for cohesion in union organizations.

If manifestations of race prejudice were to erupt within an organized plant, it would set into motion many corrective forces. It would not flourish as it does in a neighborhood with nothing to inhibit it but morbid observers looking for thrills. In the shop the union officials from highest to lowest levels would be immediately involved, for internal discord is no academic matter; it weakens the union in its contests with the employers. Therefore an important self-interest motivates harmonious race relations. Here Negroes have a substantial weight to bring to bear on all measures of social concern.

The labor movement, especially in its earlier days, was one of the few great institutions where a degree of hospitality and mobility was available to Negroes. When the rest of the nation accepted rank discrimination and prejudice as ordinary and usual—like the rain, to be deplored but accepted as part of nature—trade unions, particularly the CIO, leveled all barriers to equal membership. In a number of instances Negroes rose to influential national office.

Today the union record in relation to Negro workers is exceedingly uneven, but the potentiality for influencing union decisions still exists. In many of the larger unions the white leadership contains some men of ideals and many more who are pragmatists. Both groups find they are benefited by a constructive relationship to their Negro membership. For those compelling reasons, Negroes, who are almost wholly a working people, cannot be casual toward the union movement. This is true even though some unions remain incontestably hostile.

In days to come, organized labor will increase its importance in the destinies of Negroes. Automation is imperceptibly but inexorably producing dislocations, skimming off unskilled labor from the industrial force. The displaced are flowing into proliferating service occupations. These enterprises are traditionally unorganized and provide low wage scales with longer hours. The Negroes pressed into these services need union protection, and the union movement needs their membership to maintain its relative strength in the whole society. On this new frontier Negroes may well become the pioneers that they were in the early organizing days of the thirties.

The trade union movement in the last two decades, despite its potential strength, has been an inarticulate giant with

an unsteady gait, subjected to abuse and confused in its responses. Some circles of labor, after simmering discontent, are now allowing their challenge to vent itself.

The Teamsters Union, ousted some years ago from the AFL-CIO, instead of tottering or perishing, launched an expansion program that has increased its membership to nearly two million. It is not well known that the Teamsters have well over a quarter of a million Negroes in their ranks, with some of the highest rates of pay enjoyed by Negro workers anywhere in industry. In other mass unions new leaders have emerged with a deep commitment to broad social issues.

Recently, Walter Reuther and other leaders of one and a half million auto workers have announced a new policy directed toward a restoration of the crusading spirit that characterized the unions of the past. They have fashioned a program for organizing the poor, Negro and white, in the South and the North. This will be no simple crusade, because the poor have many problems to overcome even to get into motion. Yet they are so many millions in number that the promise is stirring and its implications are vast.

The emergence of social initiatives by a revitalized labor movement would be taking place as Negroes are placing economic issues on the highest agenda. The coalition of an energized section of labor, Negroes, unemployed and welfare recipients may be the source of power that reshapes economic relationships and ushers in a breakthrough to a new level of social reform. The total elimination of poverty, now a practical possibility, the reality of equality in race relations and other profound structural changes in society may well begin here.

To play our role fully as Negroes we will have to strive for enhanced representation and influence in the labor movement. Our young people need to think of union careers as

earnestly as they do of business careers and professions. They could do worse than emulate A. Philip Randolph, who rose to the executive council of the AFL-CIO, and became a symbol of the courage, compassion and integrity of an enlightened labor leader. Indeed, the question may be asked why we have produced only one Randolph in nearly half a century. Discrimination is not the whole answer. We allowed ourselves to accept middle-class prejudices toward the labor movement. Yet this is one of those fields in which higher education is not a requirement for high office. In shunning it, we have lost an opportunity. Let us try to regain it now, at a time when the joint forces of Negro and labor may be facing an historic task of social reform.

The other economic lever available to the Negro is as a consumer. As long ago as 1932, in his book *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Reinhold Niebuhr pointed out that “boycotts against banks which discriminate against Negroes in quantity credit, against stores which refuse to employ Negroes while serving Negro trade, and against public service corporations which practice racial discrimination, would undoubtedly be crowned with some measure of success.”¹ These words have proved to be prophetic, for we have been seeing the success of this approach in the last few years.

SCLC has pioneered in developing mass boycott movements in a frontal attack on discrimination. Our dramatic demonstrations tended to obscure the role of the boycott in cities such as Birmingham. It was not the marching alone that brought about integration of public facilities in 1963. The downtown business establishments suffered for weeks under our almost unbelievably effective boycott. The significant percentage of their sales that vanished, the 98 percent of their Negro customers who stayed home, educated them forcefully to the dignity of the Negro as a consumer.

Later we crystallized our experiences in Birmingham and elsewhere and developed a department in SCLC called Operation Breadbasket. This has as its primary aim the securing of more and better jobs for the Negro people. It calls on the Negro community to support those businesses that will give a fair share of jobs to Negroes and to withdraw its support from those businesses that have discriminatory policies. The key word in Operation Breadbasket is “respect”; it says in substance, “If you respect my dollars, you must respect my person. If you respect my quantitative support, then you must respect the quality of my job and my basic material needs.”

Operation Breadbasket is carried out mainly by clergymen. First, a team of ministers calls on the management of a business in the community to request basic facts on the company’s total number of employees, the number of Negro employees, the departments or job classifications in which all employees are located, and the salary ranges for each category. The team then returns to the steering committee to evaluate the data and to make a recommendation concerning the number of new and upgraded jobs that should be requested. The decision on the number of jobs requested is usually based on population figures. For instance, if a city has a 30 percent Negro population, then it is logical to assume that Negroes should have at least 30 percent of the jobs in any particular company, and jobs in all categories rather than only in menial areas, as the case almost always happens to be.

The next step is negotiation. The team of clergymen returns to the management of the company and transmits the request to hire or upgrade a specified number of “qualifiable” Negroes within a reasonable period of time. The negotiating sessions are also educational, in that the clergymen seek to arouse within management an awareness of the dev-

astating problems of the ghetto and point out the immorality of companies that make profits from Negro consumers while at the same time excluding them from jobs.

If negotiations break down, the step of real power and pressure is taken. This fourth step consists of a massive call for economic withdrawal from the company's product and accompanying demonstrations if necessary. The ministers go to their pulpits and to other communications media and ask Negroes to stop buying the employer's product or patronizing his business. Clergy-led teams dramatize the dispute to the ghetto inhabitants by picketing the stores where the products in question are sold. The fall-off in trade and the concomitant silencing of the cash register as a result of this boycott is a powerful force in causing the company ultimately to meet the demands.

In most cases it is not necessary to go to step four, because most business executives are keenly aware of the Negro's buying power and the consequent effect of its withdrawal. At present SCLC has Operation Breadbasket functioning in some twelve cities, and the results have been remarkable. In Atlanta, Georgia, for instance, the Negroes' earning power has been increased by more than \$20 million annually over the past three years through a carefully disciplined program of selective buying and negotiation by the Negro ministers. During the last eight months in Chicago, Operation Breadbasket successfully completed negotiations with three major industries: milk, soft drinks and chain grocery stores. Four of the companies involved concluded reasonable agreements only after short "don't buy" campaigns. Seven other companies were able to make the requested changes across the conference table, without necessitating a boycott. Two other companies, after providing their employment information to the ministers, were sent letters of commendation for their

healthy equal-employment practices. The net results add up to approximately eight hundred new and upgraded jobs for Negro employees, worth a little over \$7 million in new annual income for Negro families.

In Chicago we have recently added a new dimension to Operation Breadbasket. Along with requesting new job opportunities, we are now requesting that businesses with stores in the ghetto deposit the income for those establishments in Negro-owned banks, and that Negro-owned products be placed on the counters of all their stores. In this way we seek to stop the drain of resources out of the ghetto with nothing remaining there for its rehabilitation. The two chain grocery stores with which we have so far negotiated, Hi-Low and National Tea, have readily agreed. They have now opened accounts in the two Negro banks of Chicago, and their shelves display every Negro-owned product of the city. This has given new vibrancy and growth to Negro businesses in Chicago, and will contribute to the continued economic growth of the city.

III

The final major area of untapped power for the Negro is in the political arena. Negro population is burgeoning in major cities as tides of migrants flow into them in search of employment and opportunity. These new migrants have substantially higher birth rates than characterize the white population. The two trends, along with the exodus of the white population to the suburbs, are producing fast-gathering Negro majorities in the large cities.

The changing composition of the cities must be seen in the light of their political significance. Particularly in the North, the large cities substantially determine the political destiny of the state. These states, in turn, hold the dominating electoral votes in presidential contests. The future of the

Democratic Party, which rests so heavily on its coalition of urban minorities, cannot be assessed without taking into account which way the Negro vote turns. The wistful hopes of the Republican Party for large city influence will also be decided not in the boardrooms of great corporations but in the teeming ghettos. Its 1964 disaster with Goldwater, in which fewer than 6 percent of Negroes voted Republican, indicates that the illustrious ghost of Abraham Lincoln is not sufficient for winning Negro confidence, not so long as the party fails to shrink the influence of its ultra-right wing.

The growing Negro vote in the South is another source of power. As it weakens and enfeebles the Dixiecrats, by concentrating its blows against them, it undermines the congressional coalition of Southern reactionaries and their Northern Republican colleagues. That coalition, which has always exercised a disproportionate power in Congress by controlling its major committees, will lose its ability to frustrate measures of social advancement and to impose its perverted definition of democracy on the political thought of the nation.

The Negro vote presently is only a partially realized strength. It can still be doubled in the South. In the North, even where Negroes are registered in equal proportion to whites, they do not vote in the same proportions. Assailed by a sense of futility, Negroes resist participating in empty ritual. However, when the Negro citizen learns that united and organized pressure can achieve measurable results, he will make his influence felt. Out of this consciousness the political power of the aroused minority will be enhanced and consolidated.

Up to now that power has been inconsequential because, paradoxically, although Negroes vote with great discernment and traditionally as a bloc, essentially we are unorganized, disunited and subordinated in the decision-making process.

There is no correlation between the numerical importance of the urban Negro vote to the party it supports and the influence we wield in determining the party's program and policies, or its implementation of existing legislation. Our political leaders are bereft of influence in the councils of political power.

The new task of the liberation movement, therefore, is not merely to increase the Negro registration and vote; equally imperative is the development of a strong voice that is heard in the smoke-filled rooms where party debating and bargaining proceed. A black face that is mute in party councils is not political representation; the ability to be independent, assertive and respected when the final decisions are made is indispensable for an authentic expression of power.

Negroes are traditionally manipulated because the political powers take advantage of three major weaknesses. The first relates to the manner in which our political leaders emerge; the second is our failure so far to achieve effective political alliances; the third is the Negro's general reluctance to participate fully in political life.

The majority of Negro political leaders do not ascend to prominence on the shoulders of mass support. Although genuinely popular leaders are now emerging, most are selected by white leadership, elevated to position, supplied with resources and inevitably subjected to white control. The mass of Negroes nurtures a healthy suspicion toward these manufactured leaders. Experience tells them that color is the chief argument their leaders are offering to induce loyalty and solidarity. The Negro politician they know spends little time in persuading them that he embodies personal integrity, commitment and ability; he offers few programs and less service. Tragically, he is in too many respects not a fighter for a new life but a figurehead of the old one. Hence very few

Negro political leaders are impressive or illustrious to their constituents. They enjoy only limited loyalty and qualified support.

This relationship in turn hampers the Negro leader in bargaining with genuine strength and independent firmness with white party leaders. The whites are all too well aware of his impotence and his remoteness from his constituents, and they deal with him as a powerless subordinate. He is accorded a measure of dignity and personal respect but not political power.

The Negro politician therefore finds himself in a vacuum. He has no base in either direction on which to build influence and attain leverage.

In Negro life there is a unique and unnatural dichotomy between community leaders who have the respect of the masses and professional political leaders who are held in polite disdain. Those who lead civil rights groups, churches, unions and other social organizations are actually hybrids; although they bargain for political programs, they generally operate outside of partisan politics. In two national polls² to name the most respected Negro leaders, out of the highest fifteen, only a single political figure, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, was included and he was in the lower half of both lists. This is in marked contrast to polls in which white people choose their most popular leaders; political personalities are always high on the lists and are represented in goodly numbers. There is no Negro political personality evoking affection, respect and emulation to correspond to John F. Kennedy, Eleanor Roosevelt, Herbert Lehman, Earl Warren and Adlai Stevenson, to name but a few.

The circumstances in which Congressman Powell emerged into leadership and the experiences of his career are unique. It would not shed light on the larger picture

to attempt to study the very individual factors that apply to him. It is fair to say no other Negro political leader is similar, either in the strengths he possesses, the power he attained or the errors he has committed.

And so we shall have to do more than register and more than vote; we shall have to create leaders who embody virtues we can respect, who have moral and ethical principles we can applaud with an enthusiasm that enables us to rally support for them based on confidence and trust. We will have to demand high standards and give consistent, loyal support to those who merit it. We will have to be a reliable constituency for those who prove themselves to be committed political warriors in our behalf. When our movement has partisan political personalities whose unity with their people is unshakable and whose independence is genuine, they will be treated in white political councils with the respect those who embody such power deserve.

In addition to the development of genuinely independent and representative political leaders, we shall have to master the art of political alliances. Negroes should be natural allies of many white reform and independent political groups, yet they are more commonly organized by old-line machine politicians. We will have to learn to refuse crumbs from the big-city machines and steadfastly demand a fair share of the loaf. When the machine politicians demur, we must be prepared to act in unity and throw our support to such independent parties or reform wings of the major parties as are prepared to take our demands seriously and fight for them vigorously. This is political freedom; this is political maturity expressing our aroused and determined new spirit to be treated as equals in all aspects of life.

The future of the deep structural changes we seek will not

be found in the decaying political machines. It lies in new alliances of Negroes, Puerto Ricans, labor, liberals, certain church and middle-class elements. It is noteworthy that the largest single civil rights action ever conducted was the New York school boycott, when nearly half a million Negroes and Puerto Ricans united in a demonstration that emptied segregated schools.

The art of alliance politics is more complex and more intricate than it is generally pictured. It is easy to put exciting combinations on paper. It evokes happy memories to recall that our victories in the past decade were won with a broad coalition of organizations representing a wide variety of interests. But we deceive ourselves if we envision the same combination backing structural changes in the society. It did not come together for such a program and will not reassemble for it.

A true alliance is based upon some self-interest of each component group and a common interest into which they merge. For an alliance to have permanence and loyal commitment from its various elements, each of them must have a goal from which it benefits and none must have an outlook in basic conflict with the others. Thus we cannot talk loosely of an alliance with all labor. Most unions have mutual interests with us; both can profit in the relationship. Yet with some unions that persist in discrimination to retain their monopoly of jobs we have no common ground. To talk of alliances with them is to talk of mutual deception and mutual hypocrisy. The same test must be applied to churches and church bodies. Some churches recognize that to be relevant in moral life they must make equality an imperative. With them the basis for alliance is strong and enduring. But toward those churches that shun and evade the issue, that are mute

or timorous on social and economic questions, we are no better than strangers even though we sing the same hymns in worship of the same God.

If we employ the principle of selectivity along these lines, we will find millions of allies who in serving themselves also support us, and on such sound foundations unity and mutual trust and tangible accomplishment will flourish.

It is no mere academic exercise to scrutinize alliance relationships. They are the keys to political progress. Of late some scholars have begun to question the usefulness of the Negro vote as a tool for social advancement. Matthews and Prothro put it "that the concrete benefits to be derived from the franchise—under the conditions that prevail in the South—have often been exaggerated. . . . The concrete, measurable payoffs from Negro voting in the South will *not* be revolutionary."³ They point to the limited gains Negroes have attained in the North and apply them to the South. Their conclusion has some validity because they confine them to conditions that *prevail* in the South. But conditions in the South are not static; they are changing.

A primary Negro political goal in the South is the elimination of racism as an electoral issue. No objective observer can fail to see that even with a half-finished campaign to enfranchise Negroes some profound changes have already occurred. For a number of years there were de facto alliances in some states in which Negroes voted for the same candidate as whites because he had shifted from a racist to a moderate position, even though he did not articulate an appeal for Negro votes. In recent years the transformation has accelerated, and many white candidates have entered alliances publicly. As they perceived that the Negro vote was becoming a substantial and permanent factor, they could not remain aloof from it. More and more, competition will develop among

white political forces for such a significant bloc of votes, and a monolithic white unity based on racism will no longer be possible.

Racism is a tenacious evil, but it is not immutable. Millions of underprivileged whites are in the process of considering the contradiction between segregation and economic progress. White supremacy can feed their egos but not their stomachs. They will not go hungry or forego the affluent society to remain racially ascendant. Governors [George] Wallace and [Lester] Maddox, whose credentials as racists are impeccable, understand this, and for that reason they present themselves as liberal populists as well. Their demagoguery is little known to Northerners, who have no opportunity to hear the speeches they make in local communities. Temporarily they can carry water on both shoulders, but the ground is becoming unsteady beneath their feet. Each of them was faced in the primary with a new breed of white Southerner. Their opponents were not inconsequential political figures. Former governors were in the race, making open public appeals for the Negro vote and for the first time in history meeting with Negro organizations to solicit support. They championed economic reform without racial demagoguery. They won significant numbers of white votes, insufficient for victory but sufficient to point the future directions of the South.

The time may not be far off when an awakened poor and backward white voter will heed and support the authentic economic liberalism of former governor [Ellis] Arnall of Georgia and former lieutenant governor [Richmond] Flowers of Alabama. Then with the growing Negro vote they will develop an alliance that displaces the Wallaces and with them racism as a political issue.

It is true that the Negro vote has not transformed the

North; but the fact that Northern alliances and political action generally have been poorly executed is no reason to predict that the negative experiences will be automatically extended in the North or duplicated in the South. The Northern Negro has never used direct action on a mass scale for reforms, and anyone who predicted ten years ago that the Southern Negro would also neglect it would have dramatically been proved in error.

Everything Negroes need—and many of us need almost everything—will not like magic materialize from the use of the ballot. Yet as a lever of power, if it is given studious attention and employed with the creativity we have proved through our protest activities we possess, it will help to achieve many far-reaching changes during our lifetimes.

The final reason for our dearth of political strength, particularly in the North, arises from the grip of an old tradition on many individual Negroes. They tend to hold themselves aloof from politics as a serious concern. They sense that they are manipulated, and their defense is a cynical disinterest. To safeguard themselves on this front from the exploitation that torments them in so many areas, they shut the door to political activity and retreat into the dark shadows of passivity. Their sense of futility is deep, and in terms of their bitter experiences it is justified. They cannot perceive political action as a source of power. It will take patient and persistent effort to eradicate this mood, but the new consciousness of strength developed in a decade of stirring agitation can be utilized to channel constructive Negro activity into political life and eliminate the stagnation produced by an outdated and defensive paralysis.

In the future we must become intensive political activists. We must be guided in this direction because we need political strength more desperately than any other group in

American society. Most of us are too poor to have adequate, economic power, and many of us are too rejected by the culture to be part of any tradition of power. Necessity will draw us toward the power inherent in the creative uses of politics.

Negroes nurture a persisting myth that the Jews of America attained social mobility and status solely because they had money. It is unwise to ignore the error for many reasons. In a negative sense it encourages anti-Semitism and overestimates money as a value. In a positive sense the full truth reveals a useful lesson.

Jews progressed because they possessed a tradition of education combined with social and political action. The Jewish family enthroned education and sacrificed to get it. The result was far more than abstract learning. Uniting social action with educational competence, Jews became enormously effective in political life. Those Jews who became lawyers, businessmen, writers, entertainers, union leaders and medical men did not vanish into the pursuits of their trade exclusively. They lived an active life in political circles, learning the techniques and arts of politics.

Nor was it only the rich who were involved in social and political action. Millions of Jews for half a century remained relatively poor, but they were far from passive in social and political areas. They lived in homes in which politics was a household word. They were deeply involved in radical parties, liberal parties and conservative parties—they formed many of them. Very few Jews sank into despair and escapism even when discrimination assailed the spirit and corroded initiative. Their life raft in the sea of discouragement was social action.

Without overlooking the towering differences between the Negro and Jewish experiences, the lesson of Jewish mass

involvement in social and political action and education is worthy of emulation. Negroes have already started on this road in creating the protest movement, but this is only a beginning. We must involve everyone we can reach, even those with inadequate education, and together acquire political sophistication by discussion, practice and reading. Jews without education learned a great deal from political meetings, mass meetings and trade union activities. Informal discussions and reading at home or in the streets are educational; they challenge the mind and inform our actions.

Education without social action is a one-sided value because it has no true power potential. Social action without education is a weak expression of pure energy. Deeds uninformed by educated thought can take false directions. When we go into action and confront our adversaries, we must be as armed with knowledge as they. Our policies should have the strength of deep analysis beneath them to be able to challenge the clever sophistries of our opponents.

The many thousands of Negroes who have already found intellectual growth and spiritual fulfillment on this path know its creative possibilities. They are not among the legions of the lost, they are not crushed by the weight of centuries. Most heartening, among the young the spirit of challenge and determination for change is becoming an unquenchable force.

But the scope of struggle is still too narrow and too restricted. We must turn more of our energies and focus our creativity on the useful things that translate into power. This is not a program for a distant tomorrow, when our children will somehow have acquired enough education to do it for themselves. We in this generation must do the work and in doing it stimulate our children to learn and acquire higher levels of skill and technique.

It must become a crusade so vital that civil rights organizers do not repeatedly have to make personal calls to summon support. There must be a climate of social pressure in the Negro community that scorns the Negro who will not pick up his citizenship rights and add his strength enthusiastically and voluntarily to the accumulation of power for himself and his people. The past years have blown fresh winds through ghetto stagnation, but we are on the threshold of a significant change that demands a hundredfold acceleration. By 1970 ten of our larger cities will have Negro majorities if present trends continue. We can shrug off this opportunity or use it for a new vitality to deepen and enrich our family and community life.

How shall we turn the ghettos into a vast school? How shall we make every street corner a forum, not a lounging place for trivial gossip and petty gambling, where life is wasted and human experience withers to trivial sensations? How shall we make every houseworker and every laborer a demonstrator, a voter, a canvasser and a student? The dignity their jobs may deny them is waiting for them in political and social action.

We must utilize the community action groups and training centers now proliferating in some slum areas to create not merely an electorate, but a conscious, alert and informed people who know their direction and whose collective wisdom and vitality commands respect. The slave heritage can be cast into the dim past by our consciousness of our strengths and a resolute determination to use them in our daily experiences. Power is not the white man's birthright; it will not be legislated for us and delivered in neat government packages. It is a social force any group can utilize by accumulating its elements in a planned, deliberate campaign to organize it under its own control.

IV

While the existence of a militant morale is immensely important, a fighting spirit that is insufficiently organized can become useless and even hazardous. To attempt radical reform without adequate organization is like trying to sail a boat without a rudder. Yet any mature analysis of recent events cannot fail to recognize the frailties of Negro civil rights organizations.

Prominent among the significant weaknesses of our organizations is their disunity and petty competition. When false rumors are circulated that some leaders have “sold out” to the power structure or are making opportunistic alliances with one or another political party to gain individual advantage, the whole movement suffers. If the criticism is true, it is not destructive; it is a necessary attack on weakness. But often such criticism is a reflex response to gain organizational advantage. Too often a genuine achievement has been falsely condemned as spurious and useless, and a victory has been turned into disheartening defeat for the less informed. Our enemies will adequately deflate our accomplishment; we need not serve them as eager volunteers.

Why are so many of our organizations too small, too beset with problems that consume disproportionate attention, or too dominated by a sluggish passivity and smug complacency? For an answer we must return to the nature of our original objectives. For much of the last decade we took on the task of ending conditions that had long outlived their purpose. The desegregation of most public facilities, for example, was overdue for change. It was not necessary to build a widespread organization in order to win legislative victories. Sound effort in a single city such as Birmingham or Selma produced situations that symbolized the evil every-

where and inflamed public opinion against it. Where the spotlight illuminated the evil, a legislative remedy was soon obtained that applied everywhere. As a consequence, permanent, seasoned and militant organizations did not arise out of compelling necessity.

But corrective legislation requires organization to bring it to life. Laws only declare rights; they do not deliver them. The oppressed must take hold of laws and transform them into effective mandates. Hence the absence of powerful organization has limited the degree of application and the extent of practical success.

We made easy gains and we built the kind of organizations that expect easy victories, and rest upon them. It may seem curious to speak of easy victories when some have suffered and sacrificed so much. Yet in candor and self-criticism it is necessary to acknowledge that the tortuous job of organizing solidly and simultaneously in thousands of places was not a feature of our work. This is as true for the older civil rights organizations as for the newer ones. The older organizations have only acquired a mass base recently, and they still retain the flabby structures and policies that a pressureless situation made possible.

Many civil rights organizations were born as specialists in agitation and dramatic projects; they attracted massive sympathy and support; but they did not assemble and unify the support for new stages of struggle. The effect on their allies reflected their basic practices. Support waxed and waned, and people became conditioned to action in crises but inaction from day to day. We unconsciously patterned a crisis policy and program, and summoned support not for daily commitment but for explosive events alone.

Recognizing that no army can mobilize and demobilize and remain a fighting unit, we will have to build far-flung,

workmanlike and experienced organizations in the future if the legislation we create and the agreements we forge are to be ably and zealously superintended. Moreover, to move to higher levels of progress we will have to emerge from crises with more than agreements and laws. We shall have to have people tied together in a long-term relationship instead of evanescent enthusiasts who lose their experience, spirit and unity because they have no mechanism that directs them to new tasks.

We have many assets to facilitate organization. Negroes are almost instinctively cohesive. We band together readily, and against white hostility we have an intense and wholesome loyalty to each other. In some of the simplest relationships we will protect a brother even at a cost to ourselves. We are loath to be witnesses against each other when the white man seeks to divide us. We are acutely conscious of the need and sharply sensitive to the importance of defending our own. Solidarity is a reality in Negro life, as it always has been among the oppressed. Sometimes, unfortunately, it is misapplied when we confuse high status with high character.

On the other hand, Negroes are capable of becoming competitive, carping and, in an expression of self-hate, suspicious and intolerant of each other. A glaring weakness in Negro life is lack of sufficient mutual confidence and trust.

Negro leaders suffer from this interplay of solidarity and divisiveness, being either exalted excessively or grossly abused. But some of those leaders who suffer from lack of sustained support are not without weaknesses that give substance to criticism. The most serious is aloofness and absence of faith in their people. The white establishment is skilled in flattering and cultivating emerging leaders. It presses its

own image on them and finally, from imitation of manners, dress and style of living, a deeper strain of corruption develops. This kind of Negro leader acquires the white man's contempt for the ordinary Negro. He is often more at home with the middle-class white than he is among his own people, and frequently his physical home is moved up and away from the ghetto. His language changes, his location changes, his income changes, and ultimately he changes from the representative of the Negro to the white man into the white man's representative to the Negro. The tragedy is that too often he does not recognize what has happened to him.

I learned a lesson many years ago from a report of two men who flew to Atlanta to confer with a civil rights leader at the airport. Before they could begin to talk, the porter sweeping the floor drew the local leader aside to talk about a matter that troubled him. After fifteen minutes had passed, one of the visitors said bitterly to his companion, "I am just too busy for this kind of nonsense. I haven't come a thousand miles to sit and wait while he talks to a porter."

The other replied, "When the day comes that he stops having time to talk to a porter, on that day I will not have the time to come one mile to see him."

When I heard this story, I knew I was being told something I should never forget.

We need organizations that are permeated with mutual trust, incorruptibility and militancy. Without this spirit we may have numbers but they will add up to zero. We need organizations that are responsible, efficient and alert. We lack experience because ours is a history of disorganization. But we will prevail because our need for progress is stronger than the ignorance forced upon us. If we realize how indispensable is responsible militant organization to our struggle, we

will create it as we managed to create underground railroads, protest groups, self-help societies and the churches that have always been our refuge, our source of hope and our source of action.

v

In recent years a multitude of civil rights programs have been elicited from specialists and scholars. To enhance their value and increase support for them, it is necessary that they be discussed and debated among the ordinary people affected by them. To facilitate study, I have grouped some of the more challenging proposals separately in an appendix to this volume. There is only one general proposal that I would like to examine here, because it deals with the abolition of poverty within this nation and leads logically to my final discussion of poverty on an international scale.

In the treatment of poverty nationally, one fact stands out: there are twice as many white poor as Negro poor in the United States. Therefore I will not dwell on the experiences of poverty that derive from racial discrimination, but will discuss the poverty that affects white and Negro alike.

Up to recently we have proceeded from a premise that poverty is a consequence of multiple evils: lack of education restricting job opportunities; poor housing which stultified home life and suppressed initiative; fragile family relationships which distorted personality development. The logic of this approach suggested that each of these causes be attacked one by one. Hence a housing program to transform living conditions, improved educational facilities to furnish tools for better job opportunities, and family counseling to create better personal adjustments were designed. In combination these measures were intended to remove the causes of poverty.

While none of these remedies in itself is unsound, all have a fatal disadvantage. The programs have never proceeded on a coordinated basis or at similar rates of development. Housing measures have fluctuated at the whims of legislative bodies. They have been piecemeal and pygmy. Educational reforms have been even more sluggish and entangled in bureaucratic stalling and economy-dominated decisions. Family assistance stagnated in neglect and then suddenly was discovered to be the central issue on the basis of hasty and superficial studies. At no time has a total, coordinated and fully adequate program been conceived. As a consequence, fragmentary and spasmodic reforms have failed to reach down to the profoundest needs of the poor.

In addition to the absence of coordination and sufficiency, the programs of the past all have another common failing—they are indirect. Each seeks to solve poverty by first solving something else.

I am now convinced that the simplest approach will prove to be the most effective—the solution to poverty is to abolish it directly by a now widely discussed measure: the guaranteed income.

Earlier in this century this proposal would have been greeted with ridicule and denunciation as destructive of initiative and responsibility. At that time economic status was considered the measure of the individual's abilities and talents. In the simplistic thinking of that day the absence of worldly goods indicated a want of industrious habits and moral fiber.

We have come a long way in our understanding of human motivation and of the blind operation of our economic system. Now we realize that dislocations in the market operation of our economy and the prevalence of discrimination thrust people into idleness and bind them in constant or

frequent unemployment against their will. The poor are less often dismissed from our conscience today by being branded as inferior and incompetent. We also know that no matter how dynamically the economy develops and expands it does not eliminate all poverty.

We have come to the point where we must make the nonproducer a consumer or we will find ourselves drowning in a sea of consumer goods. We have so energetically mastered production that we now must give attention to distribution. Though there have been increases in purchasing power, they have lagged behind increases in production. Those at the lowest economic level, the poor white and Negro, the aged and chronically ill, are traditionally unorganized and therefore have little ability to force the necessary growth in their income. They stagnate or become even poorer in relation to the larger society.

The problem indicates that our emphasis must be two-fold. We must create full employment or we must create incomes. People must be made consumers by one method or the other. Once they are placed in this position, we need to be concerned that the potential of the individual is not wasted. New forms of work that enhance the social good will have to be devised for those for whom traditional jobs are not available.

In 1879 Henry George anticipated this state of affairs when he wrote, in *Progress and Poverty*:

The fact is that the work which improves the condition of mankind, the work which extends knowledge and increases power and enriches literature, and elevates thought, is not done to secure a living. It is not the work of slaves, driven to their task either by the lash of a master or by animal necessities. It is the work

of men who perform it for their own sake, and not that they may get more to eat or drink, or wear, or display. In a state of society where want is abolished, work of this sort could be enormously increased.

We are likely to find that the problems of housing and education, instead of preceding the elimination of poverty, will themselves be affected if poverty is first abolished. The poor transformed into purchasers will do a great deal on their own to alter housing decay. Negroes, who have a double disability, will have a greater effect on discrimination when they have the additional weapon of cash to use in their struggle.

Beyond these advantages, a host of positive psychological changes inevitably will result from widespread economic security. The dignity of the individual will flourish when the decisions concerning his life are in his own hands, when he has the assurance that his income is stable and certain, and when he knows that he has the means to seek self-improvement. Personal conflicts between husband, wife and children will diminish when the unjust measurement of human worth on a scale of dollars is eliminated.

Two conditions are indispensable if we are to ensure that the guaranteed income operates as a consistently progressive measure. First, it must be pegged to the median income of society, not at the lowest levels of income. To guarantee an income at the floor would simply perpetuate welfare standards and freeze into the society poverty conditions. Second, the guaranteed income must be dynamic; it must automatically increase as the total social income grows. Were it permitted to remain static under growth conditions, the recipients would suffer a relative decline. If periodic reviews disclose that the whole national income has risen, then the

guaranteed income would have to be adjusted upward by the same percentage. Without these safeguards a creeping retrogression would occur, nullifying the gains of security and stability.

This proposal is not a “civil rights” program, in the sense that that term is currently used. The program would benefit all the poor, including the two-thirds of them who are white. I hope that both Negro and white will act in coalition to effect this change, because their combined strength will be necessary to overcome the fierce opposition we must realistically anticipate.

Our nation’s adjustment to a new mode of thinking will be facilitated if we realize that for nearly forty years two groups in our society have already been enjoying a guaranteed income. Indeed, it is a symptom of our confused social values that these two groups turn out to be the richest and the poorest. The wealthy who own securities have always had an assured income; and their polar opposite, the relief client, has been guaranteed an income, however minuscule, through welfare benefits.

John Kenneth Galbraith has estimated that \$20 billion a year would effect a guaranteed income, which he describes as “not much more than we will spend the next fiscal year to rescue freedom and democracy and religious liberty as these are defined by ‘experts’ in Vietnam.”⁴

The contemporary tendency in our society is to base our distribution on scarcity, which has vanished, and to compress our abundance into the overfed mouths of the middle and upper classes until they gag with superfluity. If democracy is to have breadth of meaning, it is necessary to adjust this inequity. It is not only moral, but it is also intelligent. We are wasting and degrading human life by clinging to archaic thinking.

The curse of poverty has no justification in our age. It is socially as cruel and blind as the practice of cannibalism at the dawn of civilization, when men ate each other because they had not yet learned to take food from the soil or to consume the abundant animal life around them. The time has come for us to civilize ourselves by the total, direct and immediate abolition of poverty.