

law is its binding effect regardless of personal agreement. Nevertheless, those who are willing to stand the penalties of the law rather than yield a deeply held moral conviction may provide a voice of conscience that might not otherwise be heard. And even though on occasion an asserted moral position may have little or no substance to it, perhaps free institutions are safer when citizens are courageous enough to risk much for their convictions.

Clearly the stability of the country depends upon the justness of its laws and institutions and the obedience of its citizens to these laws. Despite the riskiness of the position, and I submit that the contrary position would be even more risky, recognition of the moral justification, or even moral duty, of civil disobedience in certain circumstances poses less of a risk to the stability of this country and its quest for justice than undeviating, docile obedience.

BLACK IMAGES AND WHITE IMAGES: THE COMBUSTIBILITY OF COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

Royal Shipp

America's worth to the world will be measured not by the solutions she seeks to impose on others, but by the degree to which she achieves her own ideals at home. That is a fitting measure, and an arduous test, of America's greatness.

Ronald Steel in PAX AMERICANA

The problem of the American Negro is first and foremost a problem in the American mind. On this subject the American mind as a whole — both white and black — is a shambles.

McGeorge Bundy in THE STRENGTH OF GOVERNMENT

As is true for most Americans, I am frightened by what is rhetorically (and often demagogically) called the breakdown of law and order in my country. As is also true for most, no member of my family has suffered physical harm, loss of income or property, and only a very little inconvenience. But I am frightened. Negro riots alarm me because I live and work close enough to potential trouble spots that we conceivably could be harmed (people I know have been); student riots, and now the "police riots" of Chicago, frighten me because of their implications for the survival of my country in a form which continues to guarantee freedoms I consider essential for my happiness and progress. I am convinced this survival will depend on the number of

Americans willing to undertake the traumatic task of honest evaluation of self and current institutions for the purpose of isolating and correcting attitudes and practices which cause riots. My attempt to analyze these causes here will be limited to what I consider the least dangerous riots, especially at the present time — those confined to black ghetto areas of large cities in which most participants are black people and law enforcers.

Coming from a comfortable western Mormon home as I did, attending graduate school and living in a large eastern city provided a number of cultural shocks of varying intensity. One of the most frustrating was the necessity of changing attitudes toward and conceptions of black people. It is difficult for any white American to cut through the misconceptions and mythology surrounding the "race question"; it is doubly so for western Mormons who live most of their lives without any significant contact with blacks, and who have the added onus of being committed to a religion which explicitly discriminates against and assigns a God-decreed different, if not lower, status to blacks.

Massive and violent acts of black civil disobedience during recent "long, hot summers" and the subsequent black desire for separatism have been particularly difficult to comprehend. The riots last spring in my city affected me in ways I hadn't expected. I was excited by being so close to the action; but I was relieved not to be closer. I felt sympathy for the victims. I was scared and shocked. And I was bewildered. In talking to other Mormons in the area I discovered most of them divided three ways: Some joined the lines at the local gun stores, arming themselves to the slogan, "I'm going to get myself the first sixteen niggers to cross the bridge." There were the incredulous ones who cried out, "What do THEY want? Aren't THEY better off than THEY ever were before? Haven't we already done enough for THEM?" — at all times keeping blacks comfortably in the third person. A smaller group said, "I recognize my prejudice. How can I change? Can I do anything to help?" Because I was both alarmed and touched by those attitudes, and uncertain about my own attitudes and responsibilities, I sought to understand the causes of these black urban riots. And largely, I think, because of my Mormon background I wanted to do whatever I could to ameliorate conditions which cause riots.

WHITE PREJUDICE AND RIOTS

Without question the most serious aspect of the urban crisis is the present struggle of blacks for equality and justice. In August, 1965, the fires of Watts elevated this struggle to a new level of intensity. Since then similar civil disorders have shattered cities throughout the nation. After Detroit and Newark, in 1967, President Johnson appointed the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders to study the causes and possible solutions. This group, commonly called the Kerner Commission, reported that the central and basic cause of Negro problems was the prejudice of white Americans. This accusation, while not new, has raised so much controversy — among blacks and whites, among liberals and conservatives — that the main points

of the Commission's analysis have been obscured. Much of the discussion has degenerated into arguments of whether white aversion to and discrimination against blacks is due to "class" or "race" attitudes, and the extent to which the problems of blacks result from their own inadequacies as opposed to debilitating forces mostly beyond their control.

A much more fruitful approach would be for whites to recognize the pervasive discrimination which exists against black people in the United States and relate the results of this to the inferior physical living conditions, educational opportunities, and income-earning prospects of most blacks, and most importantly, to relate white attitudes toward blacks to the image blacks have of themselves.

It is inescapable that a successful and relatively peaceful integration of blacks into the mainstream of American life will require significant changes in both blacks and whites: (1) black development of a justified positive self-image which is the key to personal success, and (2) white acceptance of blacks as equal individuals. The first of these is now being fulfilled at a more rapid rate than at any other time in our nation's history as a result of black power movements and subsequent black pride. The second is proceeding more slowly, if at all, and thereby creating an environment among the most explosive in the stormy history of race relations in this country. Extreme reactionary and repressive tactics worked in the late nineteenth century to "keep the Negro in his place," when he began asserting what he assumed were constitutional and legal rights, but such repression would not work again and attempts to impose it would almost certainly result in a civil war of some sort. In fact, today the most militant blacks are doing all they can to provoke white repression so the confrontation will occur sooner.

Essential changes in white attitudes require an acknowledgment of the existence of prejudice and an understanding of how it is related to conditions which have led to past riots and, if not corrected, may lead to more riots in the future. Blacks have long recognized that the prejudice of whites is the central source of their difficulties. Whites have usually responded to this as merely the Negro's way of rationalizing his problems, but now the Kerner Commission, an intelligent and politically diverse group, after careful study, has unanimously identified white racism as the basic cause of racial unrest and violence.

The most fundamental [cause of riots] is the racial attitude and behavior of white Americans toward black Americans. Race prejudice has shaped our history decisively in the past; it now threatens to do so again. White racism is essentially responsible for the explosive mixture which has been accumulating in our cities since the end of World War II.¹

The reaction to this charge has been mixed. Many whites, even those most obviously prejudiced, deny their racism. Some whites will admit to the possibility of prejudice, but fail to see any relationship between their attitudes

¹*Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1968), p. 5.

and the problems of black people. Cutting through the rhetoric and emotion enshrouding the issue leaves little question, however, that the majority of white Americans are prejudiced. McGeorge Bundy points out the difficulty of recognizing and admitting this in oneself:

Prejudice is a subtle and insidious vice. It can consume those who think themselves immune to it. It can masquerade as kindness, sympathy, even support. . . . No man is the best judge of his own behavior in such matters. . . . Yet the corrosiveness of white prejudice requires honest recognition, for as long as it persists it will be the most powerful single enemy of the very Negro progress which will in the end do most to end it.²

Willie Morris, editor of *Harper's Magazine*, is characteristic of an increasing number of Americans who admit prejudice while striving to overcome it. He recognizes that such antipathy is very close to the surface and is likely never to be entirely eliminated.

I discovered most of all in these trips to work each morning [on the New York subways] that they brought out in one his old, latent, controlled hostility toward people of other races — an inevitable battle, if one speaks honestly, that requires the total application of a man's civilized acquisitions.³

White prejudice and discrimination — past and present — are basic causes of the race problem because of the important impact of white attitudes upon the Negro self-image. It is increasingly obvious that the dignity and the self-respect of blacks is not only the source of the problem but the key to its solution. True, only blacks can solve their problems through self-improvement, but white attitudes now prevent this from happening. Ralph Ellison, one of the "Negro" writers best able to describe how it is to be black (something whites can never completely understand), tells of the problems caused by whites who fail to see blacks as people, and the effect this has on black self-concept:

Then, too, you're constantly being bumped against by those of poor vision. Or again, you often doubt if you really exist. You wonder whether you aren't simply a phantom in other people's minds. Say, a figure in a nightmare which the sleeper tries with all his strength to destroy. It's when you feel like this that, out of resentment, you begin to bump people back. And, let me confess, you feel that way most of the time. You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world, that you're part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with your fists, you curse, and you swear to make them recognize you. And, alas, it's seldom successful.⁴

²McGeorge Bundy, *The Ford Foundation Annual Report*, October 1, 1966 to September 30, 1967 (New York: The Ford Foundation, 1968), pp. 2-3.

³Willie Morris, *North Toward Home* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), p. 347.

⁴Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: The New American Library, A Signet Book, 1947), pp. 7-8.

Many of the problems of being black are accentuated today because of 100 years of frustrated expectations and unfulfilled promises. Present-day blacks, even more so than in the days of slavery, must hate themselves for their diffidence in associations with white people, many of whom are patronizing, or worse, in dealing with blacks. Small wonder, then, that black power movements are gaining disciples.

"What white Americans have never fully understood," says the Kerner Commission report, "but what the Negro can never forget, is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it."⁵ This serious charge points out that in addition to attitude changes solutions to the problems will require economic resources and responsive political institutions. Enormous resources will have to be expended in building schools and houses, in providing job training and health care. Residents of ghettos lack these resources, and, as is true for all poor minorities in a democracy, they lack political power. Dick Gregory describes democratic processes:

You see, America ain't nothing but a cigarette machine now: you can't communicate with her.

You know if you're running through the airport and put 40 cents in the cigarette machine, pull it and you don't get cigarettes, that's a funny feeling when you can't talk to that machine. . . . And there's a little message [on the machine] to tell you what to do if you blow your dough. . . . "Welcome to Hartford, Connecticut. In case of problems with this machine, call Giddings Jones, Kansas City, Missouri." Now you hear the last call for your flight and you stand there looking at that cigarette machine that you can't relate with and that's got your 40 cents and your flight's leaving, so you do the normal thing — you kick that machine — pow.⁶

And yet many whites refuse to believe that blacks have any special disadvantages. "I made it myself. Why can't they?" is a common response. But if this were true why was it necessary to pass Civil Rights laws, enforcing them by police action, in order to assure blacks the same basic "inalienable rights" important to all Americans? Congress has not had to pass such legislation for the benefit of whites. One Mormon friend said to me, "I feel about the Negro the way I feel about women. They must prove that they are worthy." That's very similar to telling a man he must win a card game when the cards are stacked against him. The most debilitating force every black person must face, something which pervades his entire life, is that most whites regard him as inferior. Only a very strong personality can avoid the inevitable, self-destructive inner agreement which eventually must occur.

BLACKS IN URBAN AMERICA TODAY

Blacks in America today earn less income; live in worse houses (but pay more than do whites who live in houses of the same quality); have shorter

⁵*Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, p. 1.

⁶Dick Gregory, "Gregory Remembers Selma," *The Washington Post*, April 14, 1968, p. B-3.

lives, higher rates of infant mortality; are more likely to be unemployed, more likely to be hungry; have less education, and are less prepared than whites finishing comparable numbers of years of schooling. According to every indicator we have been able to devise to measure the "quality of life," blacks are worse off than whites. It is very comfortable for us to attribute these aggregate shortcomings to certain racial characteristics or to less valiant preexistent behavior (when we do this it's called racism, just like the Kerner Commission said), but our Mormon theology shouldn't let us get away with this simplistic view of the world, because we, more than most, have a high regard for the present world and for the importance of our physical and social environment in the world. Thus we emphasize the importance of close family relationships, marriage within the Church, attendance at meetings, etc. In order to understand the rage of blacks today we need to think of the environment in which many of them have grown up and now live, and the effects of these conditions on their personalities and characters.

People living in slums, particularly those growing up in slums, are shaped by what has been called "the culture of poverty." Some thirty million Americans, including a disproportionate share of ghetto blacks, are impoverished according to United States Government definitions. Of these, an estimated ten million suffer from malnutrition, which sometimes causes irreparable brain damage in children. Blacks in ghettos experience a gradual erosion of their humanness. They are not aware of a past of which to be proud and often have little hope for the future. Without this pride and this hope the difficult task of self-identity is often impossible. Recent emphasis on educational programs in Afro-American studies and recent rewriting of American history to reflect the positive contributions of blacks are belated attempts to provide Negroes with a dignified and noble heritage.

A black friend who lives in Washington, D.C.'s, riot area emphasized that rioting enabled Negroes to develop greater pride in themselves than ever before. This may sound perverse, but the whole situation is perverse. He said that when he attended school, a private one, the teacher asked the students to tell the origin of their ancestors. My friend relates that when his turn came, he was so ashamed of his African origin that he invented a fictitious island in the South Seas, claiming his forebears had come from there. One of his friends, in a similar experience, was simply skipped by the teacher who was asking class members for their origins.

Without hope in the future, such time-honored American and Mormon moral principles as investment of time in education and job training, and the use of financial resources to make investments with long pay-back periods, have little appeal. This helps explain the purchase of television sets, "flashy" clothing, and late-model automobiles when the money is needed for more "worthwhile" purposes. When one has little hope in the future, the most appealing "investments" are those returning a maximum of pleasure in a very short time.

Being made aware when very young that whites consider them inferior, being constantly despised and discriminated against finally causes many blacks

to develop a self-opinion of inferiority. The accompanying despair and anger felt by Negroes have been the central theme for many black writers over the past several decades, particularly since the end of World War II. In *Another Country*, James Baldwin attempts to explain Negro emotions through a character who is unable to make anyone, even his sister, his white girl friend, and his best friend (also white) understand the terrible forces which consume and finally destroy him. Even the most sympathetic whites are unable to comprehend such massive frustrations and hopelessness.

White disrespect toward blacks was an important grievance reported by the Kerner Commission. Such treatment intensifies for blacks the self-doubts common to all people. We are all, in large measure, what we have been told we are, and whites, through their treatment of blacks and through white-controlled institutions have spent centuries inculcating Negroes with feelings of inadequacy. As a prominent black psychologist has said:

Human beings who are forced to live under ghetto conditions and whose daily experience tells them that almost nowhere in society are they respected and granted the ordinary dignity and courtesy accorded to others will, as a matter of course, begin to doubt their own worth. Since every human being depends upon his cumulative experiences with others for clues as to how he should view and value himself, children who are consistently rejected understandably begin to question and doubt whether they, their family, and their group really deserve no more respect from the larger society than they receive. These doubts become the seeds of a pernicious self- and group-hatred, the Negro's complex and debilitating prejudice against himself.⁷

This gnawing self-doubt can place even well-trained and educated blacks at a disadvantage in competing with whites. Often feelings of inferiority are covered with a façade of bravado, identified as one of the forms of fantasy in which blacks engage from the time they are very young. The damage is done early in a child's life. By the age of three most black children know skin color differences and almost always consider black and other dark colors undesirable. This early awareness of blackness stays with children for the rest of their lives and dominates their relationships with themselves, with other blacks, and with whites. Such personal tragedies as poor performance in school, inability to get or advance in a job do not happen to whites because they are white: they just happen. But when these happen to blacks it is because they are black, or so they have been conditioned to think by innumerable contacts with whites when their self-respect has been undermined.

The disrespect often shown blacks in a subtle way (sometimes it isn't so subtle) was brought home to me one day when two men came to waterproof my basement, both strangers, one white, the other black. The white man, without introducing himself, said, "I am leaving my boy to do the work. You don't have to worry. This boy is all right." He left before I had a chance to ask who would vouch for *him*.

⁷Kenneth B. Clark, *Dark Ghetto* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965 — quotation from the Harper Torchbook edition, 1967), p. 13.

RIOTS AND RUMORS OF RIOTS

Much to everyone's relief, the summer of 1968 passed without major rioting. The reasons for this are complex and not well understood at this point, but some of them suggest grounds for future optimism. Responsible blacks (including many militant leaders) recognize that most of the positive results of rioting have been achieved and that further movements in this direction will surely bring retaliatory repression. Black leaders now see, often for the first time, the possibility of making changes and improvements through organizing for political action and through the united efforts of the black community. The confidence to try this approach did not exist a few years ago and developed only recently through black power-pride movements and, strange as it seems, the riots themselves helped instill in blacks a sense of pride and control over their destiny which had been missing. The success or failure of their new venture in politics and community action will largely determine whether riots occur in the future. Lack of substantial accomplishment, accompanied by repressive police and military actions, would certainly create an environment sufficiently desperate to ignite more violence. Future riots would likely take a somewhat different form, resembling guerilla and sniper warfare instead of large-scale looting and burning.

Since black urban riots of the past few years played such a large role in the present state of the black struggle for freedom and justice, an accurate knowledge of the actual happenings is basic to understanding the problem. Not unexpectedly, the seriousness of these riots has been exaggerated by most people. Total property damage caused during all riots in this country since 1964 has been estimated at less than \$250 million, about half the amount of damage caused by a single good-sized hurricane. Total Americans killed in all the riots since 1964 are fewer than those dying each day in traffic accidents or American soldiers dying each week in Vietnam.

Furthermore, the riots of recent years are not race riots in the usual sense, although that term is sometimes used to describe them. Unlike the long series of periodic race riots which have marked this country's history since its beginning, little direct confrontation has occurred between whites and blacks in the recent disorders. The exception to this is, of course, that in most cases white policemen and soldiers were fighting against Negroes. This suggests that it would be more accurate to compare the recent riots with prison riots, in which prisoners fight against guards and destroy property in their own cells, than with race riots.

The urban riots usually have followed a similar pattern, resulting from a long series of grievances accumulated over the years. Then, in most cases, one specific incident, not unusually serious if considered alone, triggered the riot. In their investigation, the Kerner Commission found no evidence of an underlying plot or organized response to outside agitators. This is not to say that Communists and other revolutionaries may not have been taking advantage of the turmoil — simply that there is no evidence to suggest that their activities were the cause of any riots.

ROUNDTABLE: The Struggle for Justice and Order/85

The riot areas have been restricted almost entirely to black ghettos and the disorders have consisted mainly of breaking windows, looting, and burning retail establishments in the ghettos, owned mostly by whites living outside the area. Negro homes in the ghettos were burned only when fires from the stores got out of control.

Although rioters represented all types of people, they had certain common characteristics identified by the Kerner Commission. Most often riot participants were:

- (1) Young males. In Detroit over three-fifths were between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four.
- (2) Single.
- (3) Somewhat better educated (reached a higher grade in school) than the average of ghetto dwellers.
- (4) Employed, but usually on a part time basis only or in a very menial type of job.
- (5) Hostile to whites.
- (6) Much more informed about political issues than most blacks.
- (7) Proud of being black and of the unique characteristics of the race.

The extent and kind of participation of ghetto residents in the riots is difficult to determine. The accuracy of such data as are available may be questionable because some people asked may have been participants but reluctant to admit it. The best data which are available came from surveys conducted by the Kerner Commission. A Detroit survey revealed that about eleven per cent of total residents in two riot areas admitted participation in rioting, twenty to twenty-five per cent identified themselves as bystanders, over sixteen per cent were "counterrioters" who urged rioters to "cool it," and the remaining forty-eight to fifty-three per cent said they were at home or elsewhere and did not engage in the rioting. In a survey of black males between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five residing in the disturbance area in Newark, about forty-five per cent identified themselves as rioters, and about fifty-five per cent as "noninvolved."⁸

RIOTS, LAW, AND ORDER

Black riots have generated great concern among many Americans, who fear "violence in the streets" and the "breakdown of law and order." It is axiomatic that nothing is so dangerous to personal freedom and free institutions as anarchy, including, perhaps, massive acts of civil disobedience. But crime and lawlessness have always resulted from slum conditions, regardless of the skin color of the slum dwellers. At the beginning of this century, the slums of the lower East Side of New York City, inhabited mostly by whites, were characterized by such high crime rates that even policemen could not

⁸*Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, p. 73.

be forced to enter. As Robert Wood pointed out in a recent interview, most of the crisis in our cities is a "crisis of expectations," and that actually streets are safer today than they were in Victorian times, but that we are no longer satisfied by things as our forefathers had them.⁹

There exists, in America, a long and venerable tradition of disobedience to "unjust" laws (even official Mormonism has opposed civil authorities on occasion), and there is some truth in the assertion that "Violence is as American as apple pie." So before bringing in a blanket indictment against blacks for rioting we should consider carefully the experience of blacks in America with the legal process over the past 100 years. During most of this period government institutions at all levels failed to protect the "life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness" of blacks, who finally, in the 1950s and early 1960s, engaged in various kinds of non-violent "illegal" demonstrations. In the absence of these it is unlikely that injustices ever would have been corrected. Participating blacks knew, of course, that laws which should have protected their rights had been twisted or ignored by whites for years. The Kerner Commission reported that during the years 1880 to 1900 about 100 Negroes were lynched in the United States *every year*. Whites committing these acts often bragged openly about them without fear of legal reprisal.

In our time, Dick Gregory tells about taking a five-year-old Negro boy by the hand and trying to integrate a southern school:

You're not only being attacked by the mob, but by the police, and the first thing you know you land in the gutter with that cracker's foot on your chest and a double-barreled shotgun on your throat saying, "Move, nigger, and I'll kill you," and you're scared, man, you're scared to death . . .

Then you remember that there's a five year old hand missing out of your hand, and as you lie there in the gutter with the rifle at your throat you turn your head to try to find that five year old kid, and you find him just in time to see a brick hit him right in the mouth. . . . And the kid can't even react like a five year old kid should react after being hurt. He can't run to the adults because they're spitting on him and kicking at him. . . . The last sight you see is a white mother lean over that little kid and spit on him and stomp at him, but filled with so much hate she misses.¹⁰

Negro women, peaceful demonstrators in most cases, were beaten by southern policemen and attacked by police dogs within the past ten years. These violent acts by law enforcers influenced blacks throughout the nation who saw the action "live" on television. White teachers in Negro schools reported increased hostility toward them from black students who saw these programs.

It soon became obvious, however, that the accomplishments of peaceful demonstrations were limited. With the passage of the Civil Rights acts of 1964 and 1965, and buttressed by excessive promises of some politicians, Negro

⁹"Robert Wood Talks About the City," *Dialogue*, Autumn, 1968, Vol. III, No. 3.

¹⁰"Gregory Remembers Selma," p. B-3.

expectations soared while changes in white attitudes and governmental institutions changed only slowly. This combination proved explosive, and resulted in riots which, however destructive of private property and potentially dangerous to democratic institutions, have shocked the white power structure into a realization that solutions to the problem must come soon.

WHAT DO RIOTS ACCOMPLISH?

Citizens favored by the American economic and political system uphold and defend law and order because continuation of the status quo assures the maintenance of a favored position in the society. And, while national institutions and principles have been evolving throughout history, some find an accelerated rate of change to be intolerably traumatic. But blacks, not well treated by the system, do not find it compulsory to defend that which has resulted in their gross mistreatment.

Unpleasant as it is to face, riots bring results. No matter how impassioned the rhetoric condemning violence and disregard for law and order, the fact remains that before this phase of the black struggle for freedom concessions in the direction of justice for blacks were extremely slow in coming and were mainly token. But following Watts and conflagrations in other cities meaningful actions were taken on many fronts. Dick Gregory, speaking to a Yale senior class dinner party in early summer 1968 said:

How many of you read where Henry Ford 31½ weeks ago hired 6000 Negroes? . . . And why do you think he hired them — because of nonviolence? You damn right know it wasn't. The fire got too close to the Ford plant. Don't scorch the Mustangs, baby. . . .

You all are running around talking about how much riots hurt. Man, do you realize how long it would have taken us under peaceful channels to have 6000 black folks hired?¹¹

Positive benefits of the riots to blacks have come in a number of areas. All major types of financial institutions have committed resources to ghetto areas, and large manufacturing corporations are hiring blacks and training them for jobs. Congress enacted a comprehensive Federal open housing law. And, perhaps most important, the riot experience seems to have been associated with increased racial pride in the minds of many participants. As one interviewed for the Kerner Commission said:

I was feeling proud, man, at the fact that I was a Negro. I felt like I was a first-class citizen. I didn't feel ashamed of my race because of what they did.¹²

ASSIMILATION — BLACKS AND MORMONS

Minority groups, their relationships with other people, and the extent of their assimilation into the more general society have been problems faced

¹¹"Gregory Remembers Selma," p. B-3.

¹²*Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, p. 76.

throughout history. For a variety of reasons blacks have experienced an unusually difficult time in being accommodated into the American mainstream. Their special problems, and the likelihood and conditions of eventual success are highlighted here by comparing blacks with other American minority groups — particularly Mormons.

While the Kerner Commission conclusion that "Our Nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white — separate and unequal"¹³ may well be true, this statement implies greater assimilation of previous minority groups in the United States than is warranted. In their study of ethnicity in New York City, Glazer and Moynihan concluded that there, and in parts of America resembling New York (i.e., large metropolitan areas), the "... melting pot ... did not happen."¹⁴

On the other hand, Mormons have been successfully assimilated and a brief review of our experience points up some of the necessary conditions for this to happen, many of which are not options for Negroes.

Mormons should feel empathy for blacks since we do share common experiences. Starting a little over 100 years ago, and for some years after, Mormons were also a minority against which violent acts of prejudice were perpetrated — including the martyrdom of a great leader. At that time, Mormons were considered as undesirable as blacks are today by many people. Some of the charges leveled against Mormons sound familiar. We were considered a violent people with low (or at least very unusual, which is frequently the same thing) standards of sexual morality. We were not desirable neighbors. "Would you sell your house to a Mormon? Would you want your daughter to marry one?" may well have been rallying cries of the mid-nineteenth century.

But Mormons had advantages blacks do not have. We were able to withdraw from the rest of society, and to form a separate nation for a time. This option permitted, and indeed required, Mormons to develop self-reliance, a great character-building exercise, and to create educational systems which later permitted us to reenter society. On the other hand, blacks today are not able to control public institutions serving them and are not forced (or permitted) to rely on themselves for their development. Current signs indicating greater black participation and independence portend more constructive black behavior in future years.

Temporary isolation in the West also permitted Mormons to inculcate themselves with the concept that they were literal offspring of God and have inherent in them the potential for Godhood. In order for a group to become convinced it is favored in God's sight, it must be relatively isolated from outsiders. How can a person consider himself chosen when many of his associates are very similar to him in the most meaningful ways? Until very recently blacks not only were unable to develop characteristics of a chosen people,

¹³Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, p. 1.

¹⁴Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1963), p. v.

but were systematically inculcated with feelings of inferiority. Signs of changing times are bumper stickers seen recently with the legend, "We're not the Negro minority, but the chosen few."

It took many years for Mormons to develop their unique ideals, and it likely could not have been done without the relative isolation of the early Utah experience. Blacks will not be able to count on such an experience because both the dynamics of large urban areas and present-day communication systems preclude such isolation.

Of equal importance, Mormons were able to rid themselves of, or at least put out of sight, peculiar characteristics repulsive to non-Mormons. Being accepted and admired came to us only when we showed we weren't so different from anybody else. We "improved" our moral standards by eliminating polygamy, and we were permitted to shorten legs and arms of temple garments, thereby allowing us to wear clothing similar to other Americans. But a major source of difficulty for black persons is that the color of their faces is always evident; they can never hide. A special and concentrated educational effort is needed to overcome the automatic repulsion felt by many at the mere sight of a black face. The Kerner Commission indicated the general dimensions of this effort:

[A solution to the problem] will require a commitment to national action — compassionate, massive, and sustained, backed by the resources of the most powerful and the richest nation on this earth. *From every American it will require new attitudes, new understanding, and above all, new will.*¹⁵ (emphasis added)

The role of the white is crucial because in the past white attitudes have been the main stumbling block to Negro advancement. What blacks require and demand and deserve from white Americans is to be judged, in the words of Martin Luther King, only by the "content of their character, and not by the color of their skin." Some may cry that actions of blacks during the riots prove their characters are not worthy of consideration, but then what do lynchings, police brutality, and assassinations prove about white character? Although we cannot condone violence and we must punish those who participate in it, we must take a searching look at some of the intolerable conditions which produce it and work intelligently and compassionately for change, especially working to change ourselves so that we can respond to others as human beings and not stereotyped masses.

Complete integration of blacks into the society is not the central question for the present. To expect the change in attitudes in the "over thirty" generation necessary to bring this about would be naive. The outlook for future generations is more optimistic. As McGeorge Bundy has said:

Progress against prejudice will grow in speed as the next generation moves on stage. I believe that before the men now young are old — perhaps even before the present college generation begins to lose patience with its college-age children — this problem will be

¹⁵Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, p. 1.

more behind us than ahead. *For I believe the young today — both white and black — are learning to regard as natural the equality which many of the rest of us see only as logical. What we see as a legal right they tend to see as a human reality.*¹⁸ (emphasis added)

I also think this is happening, and to Mormon as well as other young people. I was teaching a class of high school students in Sunday School last year, and one Sunday I asked them their opinion of the marriage of Secretary of State Dean Rusk's daughter to a Negro, which had occurred the previous week. One girl gave a response which seemed to reflect a consensus of class members (admittedly, an unusually mature and thoughtful group), "I was real proud of her."

CAN MORMONS CHANGE?

At this time of crisis in America, Mormons, with a special stake in the preservation of the nation, are among the most concerned citizens. If, as has been argued, the greatest requirement is a change in attitudes, ideas, and prejudices — perhaps the most difficult requirement of all — what is the likelihood that this will happen to a substantial number of us? Like an act of repentance this change requires honest soul searching and new experiences. Will Mormons be able to make these changes? What special advantages or handicaps come from our religious teachings?

On the negative side, Mormonism assigns blacks to a theologically inferior position, leaving a mark on us from which escape is difficult. While it is difficult to admit the presence of prejudice in oneself, it is even more difficult to determine the origins of this prejudice. For Mormons, it is impossible to know the extent to which the Church's teachings about blacks are responsible for our attitudes toward them. But since blacks are explicitly discriminated against with respect to the Priesthood, it is obvious that this doctrine would be a major cause of prejudice in a great many instances. When we ask ourselves why, as we must, if the answer is that blacks lack something, or did something which results in their being less "worthy" than we are now, this attitude constitutes racism. There have been some public pronouncements from General Authorities admonishing us not to discriminate against blacks (particularly President Brown's 1965 General Conference statement that discrimination is a "moral evil"). But these have been few, and almost never does one hear this type of admonition from Ward and Stake leaders. Our attitudes toward blacks would certainly be different if statements and exhortations against prejudice and discrimination received more emphasis in our meetings and official publications. The Church's response in the April 1968 General Conference to the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is an example of our apparent lack of concern.

There is also a positive side to the question. Mormons are urbanizing even faster than most other Americans. This brings an increasing number into contact with the problems of slums and poverty, and because Mormons

¹⁸The Ford Foundation Annual Report, p. 4.

have a compulsion to get anxiously engaged in good causes we become deeply concerned. As Sterling McMurrin said in a recent speech:

Social reform is a product of the cities and industrial people, not of rural areas and agricultural people. The minor industrialization of parts of Utah . . . and the increasing numbers of urban industrially oriented Mormons, especially in the East and on the Pacific Coast, are already having an observable impact on Mormon thought and attitude with respect to the Negro issue.¹⁷

In the five years I have lived in the Washington, D.C., area I have seen many Mormons undergo quantum changes in race attitudes. These have usually not come about suddenly or because of dramatic happenings, but mostly as a result of common every-day experiences with blacks.

In an earlier *Dialogue* volume, Karl Keller described blacks as possessing a simple spirituality and exhibiting basic Christian behavior to a degree not achieved by most whites. I found this to be true through a small gesture by a black girl in the office when our third child was born. Others in the office paid little attention, but she brought in a small gift for the baby. I was so overcome the only thing I could say was the trite, "You didn't have to do that." She replied, "I know I didn't, but I wanted to. Where I grew up people thought births important enough occasions to make them a little special."

Associating with blacks in a school, work, or social relationship will inevitably change attitudes toward them. They have dreams, families, problems, boy friends "just like everybody else"; and pretty soon you stop thinking of them as black people and think of them as people. Two young girls I know from Utah, both now attending Brigham Young University, worked in Washington, D. C., last summer and both worked closely with black girls. Neither of my friends had associated much with Negroes before and it's safe to say that their attitudes toward all blacks will never be the same again because of their friendships with the two black girls they met.

Often something as simple as taking two little black five-year-olds on a Saturday afternoon picnic has powerful repercussions. One of the touching moments in my life came when I saw the tears in the eyes of a young Mormon mother after such an outing while she was giving each child a big farewell hug.

¹⁷Sterling M. McMurrin, "The Negroes Among the Mormons," Address given before the annual banquet of the Salt Lake City Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, June 21, 1968.