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Integration—A Means or an End?

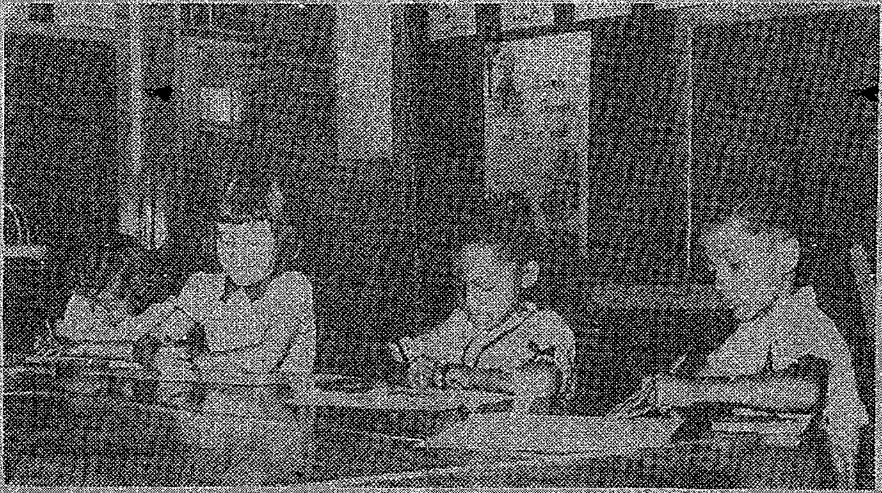
By DEBBIE MEIER

The word integration—a word which today dominates the civil rights movement—means different things to different groups and individuals.

Some cynics argue that the average Negro in Chicago remains loyal to the Dawson machine because both are largely indifferent to integration; the average Negro wants at most only more of the material comforts which American life offers to whites and still denies to him. There is, I suspect, more than a kernel of truth to this, but perhaps it is less "sinful" than many civil rights enthusiasts think. Most Negroes want better schools and better housing and are not, at best, too interested in the racial composition of either. They share, I would however argue, with the militant integrationists a desire to be treated as individuals, and not to be *excluded* or *pushed around* or *afraid* because of their race.

However for some middle class Negroes and for a great many of the liberal partisans of the civil rights movement, integration has a meaning quite apart from nonexclusion or nonfear. They lay their stress on inter-racial, white-and-black together imagery. They see such inter-racialism as both the means of eradicating prejudice and as the purpose and goal of the civil rights movement.

For the liberals the measure of the success of New York's permissive school transfer program is the extent to which it creates inter-racial schools (i.e. how many Negroes utilize it.) For the middle class Negro however its success exists simply in its promulgation, and since its existence itself eliminates the neces-



where the housing that is available to Negroes is in great scarcity and where such quotas are backed by institutional enforcements. But I think that more important today than the decision on whether to use them is the extent of our sensitivity to the dangers involved.

THE INDIVIDUAL

Our goal is actually not integration, but a society in which the rights of each INDIVIDUAL and the respect accorded to each INDIVIDUAL are unaffected by the color of his skin. None deny that the quota is in direct conflict ith such a concept—for it determines rights precisely with respect to skin color. Despite our occasional demogogic attacks on others for using immoral means for moral ends, we all recognize that the means-ends relationship cannot be expressed in any such simple formula. But one would hope that we had also become sensitive to the fact that if, in the midst of a long and difficult struggle for equality and human dignity in all corners of the globe, we turn topsy-turvy the meaning of the words themselves we are likely to have to pay a price for the resulting confusion.

In using quotas to achieve equality,

groes into our family, we may lose sight of what is, in the meantime, happening to the young civil rights militant (the so-called "New Negro") and possibly what is building up among the Negro "masses."

NATIONALISM

The latter, whose conception of integration is least infected by a desire to live in proper racial balance like a brotherhood poster, may become increasingly enamored of the various forms of Negro nationalism. For the young Negro militant we may smack too much of paternalism, in an era when he is seeking his individual "abstract" right to be treated with equality and dignity.

There are signs of this cleavage all around: in the split between liberals and even the far from extreme NAACP over the "Powell-type amendment," and in the labor movement. We tend to attribute it merely to the slowness of our progress toward integration. But the antagonism and bitterness, directed so often toward liberal white allies, which so surprises and frustrates us at the time, may have its roots also in the insensitivity of those whites closest to the Negro movement. For no matter how reasonable we think we sound, we are always asking for patience until "we" are ready. The joke circulating these days about the big strong Negro on a southern bus who warned the bus driver that he wasn't "one of them passive, non-violent Negroes you've been hearing about" is symptomatic.

What passes for realism in white liberal circles today (e.g. the quota system) is too often **limited** to solutions which take into account the temper and psychology of prejudiced or semi-prejudiced whites. A solution that fails to take into account the temper and psychology of Negroes, and of the young Negro leadership arising today, may in the end prove more unrealistic.

My recent experiences in civil rights projects and a perusal of civil rights literature during the past few years, makes me suspect that part of the "key" to this young leadership's hard-to-define position is more in the realm of "psychology" than "ideology." Bayard Rustin rather profoundly remarked once that Malcolm X's followers were no more interested in separatist solutions than we were, but the psychology and tone of the Negro nationalist movements are the basis of their appeal. What the young Negro is telling us is that we must look for solutions palatable to Negro dignity (thereby reversing the old "Uncle Tom" concern). The tactic of passive resistance, aiming as it does at "inconveniencing" others until they "convenience" him, is perfectly suited to this attitude. It is an attitude that doesn't even mind (think of it!) holding back progress and being a disrupter of liberal schemes, until such progress and such schemes include him on an equal basis. Its success will be based on the extent to which it forces whites to solve the race problem if they wish to solve other problems closer to their heart.

CONSERVATIVES' PLEASE NOTE

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For the liberals the measure of the success of New York's permissive school transfer program is the extent to which it creates inter-racial schools (i.e. how many Negroes utilize it.) For the middle class Negro however its success exists simply in its promulgation, and since its existence itself eliminates the necessarily punitive and degrading aspect of the segregated school (using segregation now merely as a term connoting racial homogeneity).

MANIPULATION

The question then is whether there is any value per se in the desire of Negroes to live (not just be able to live) in predominantly white environments, any more let us say than there may be value in the desire of nonreligious Jews to seek out non-Jewish neighborhoods in which to raise their families (or of whites to choose to live in predominantly Negro neighborhoods, etc.) As an individual one may think certain choices silly or uninspired, but I question whether once the onus of enforced segregation is removed, such decisions fall in the realm of morality at all and, in any case, whether society has a right to take upon itself the task of manipulating and enforcing certain inter-racial patterns.

This leads to another problem, which is precisely that of the desirability of the manipulation of racial groups to produce such inter-racial situations. This problem is raised in its sharpest form in disputes over the advisability of racial housing quotas.

The problem is complex. I stress this because I wish to avoid sounding as though the behavior involved is the equivalent of racism, or that the alternative solutions are so obvious that only malice can account for their being bypassed. Too many outstanding liberals and socialists favor such quotas to dismiss them with contempt. And they are supported, at least as brief temporary measures, by Negro civil rights militants of tested metal.

I oppose using such quotas—especially

moral ends, we all recognize that the means-ends relationship cannot be expressed in any such simple formula. But one would hope that we had also become sensitive to the fact that if, in the midst of a long and difficult struggle for equality and human dignity in all corners of the globe, we turn topsy-turvy the meaning of the words themselves we are likely to have to pay a price for the resulting confusion.

In using quotas to achieve equality, and in manipulating human beings in the interest of their self-respect, we may give our enemies more power than we give ourselves. We may paralyze all but the civil rights "sophisticate" and the outright discriminatory. We may, by being glib, fail to understand what we do to ourselves and to those being "quota-ed."

It is all very well to say that quotas ideally would work both ways—for whites and Negroes. The only thing is that in fact it "ain't so." Only Negroes are a "problem," only THEY must be kept in proper balance, carefully weighed and examined for dangerous spots. WE whites are the prize, the premium, while THEY are "tolerable" only if diluted. Without half intending to a discussion of quotas rapidly produces phrases and terms that reek with disregard for human, INDIVIDUAL dignity. In the eventual interest of all, we ask, how shall WE deal with THEM? How many are palatable? When is the moment of panic? What is the percentage point at which THEY "tip the balance?" We remain human beings with fears, neuroses, problems and deep-seated prejudices; THEY become objects with weights which we move around (if possible only with the permission of some selected group of THEIR leaders or representatives).

In the process there is also a tendency to legitimize the prejudices of whites, rather than to simply understand and deal with them. We lend also a kind of legitimacy ("of course, of course") to the fear which even the most liberal white is likely to have of simply being a numerical racial minority (quite apart from the other consequences — potential slums, differing social values, etc.).

As we adopt this manipulative line become more comfortable with our own fears, and adopt our "well-behaved"

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CONSERVATIVES, PLEASE NOTE

As free trade unionists, we of the AFL-CIO loyally support the principles of democracy and reject all forms of dictatorship. Totalitarianism—whether it be communism, fascism, Nazism, Falangism, Castroism or Peronism—is reprehensible to us. American labor yields to no one in the vigor and consistency of its opposition to every type of tyranny. Nor has our trade union movement ever shown any preference for one communist clique as against another. We see nothing but evil in communism, whether Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, Mao Tse-tung, Tito or Castro be its dictatorial standard-bearer.

Experience has taught us, however, to avoid certain dangerous mistakes in the fight against communism. One mistake often made by sincere anti-communists is to lump together all critics of our economic system with the communists who seek nothing less than the total destruction of that system. Opponents of communism who take this position render great service to the communist conspiracy when they equate democratic socialists and other serious critics of our social system with communists as enemies of liberty. In the present world situation, fraught with danger of Soviet aggression, this mistake can be very harmful to the forces of freedom and peace.

Is is not hard to see why rock-ribbed reactionaries should, wittingly or otherwise, resort to such a fantastic amalgam. They are anxious to preserve their privileges. That is why they resent and resist the efforts of the trade unions to assure the workers decent conditions of life and labor and a just share of the national product. For the same reason they consider every urgently needed social reform, no matter how much it might improve and strengthen our free society, as a threat to their "good old days."

It is, however, very unfortunate when those who take pride in calling themselves liberals fall into the same error. Some of these self-styled liberals have only contempt for trade unionists and democratic socialists. They resent and reject the democratic socialists, especially when they also happen to be trade unionists. Such prejudice is, at best, rooted in ignorance or in the utterly unwarranted and dangerous notion that they can speak for labor better than labor can speak for itself.

GEORGE MEANY