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WE HAVE MET THE ENEMY

A discussion of the needs of the white community with regard to racism and how to involve whites in anti-racism efforts.

Prepared for

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WE HAVE MET THE ENEMY

The problem of race in America is essentially a white problem which the white population must resolve. There have been suffucient notices given to the white population, so that it should no longer be necessary to say so.

In 1964, Malcolm X, in his autobiography told "whitey" to get out of the black community, and to take care of racism in the white community. Not much later Stokely Carmichael said, "If the white man wants to help, he can go home and free his own people." 1/

More recently J. Metz Rollins said, "Every institution, every assumption in American life ... supports and keeps white racism alive and well ... It is necessary for whites to understand that the next move is up to them. The burden is on them ... because white racism is their problem." 2/

The Kerner Commission put it accurately in early 1968: "The most fundamental /matter/ 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 ... since the end of World War II." 3/ With Pogo white America can now say, "We have found the enemy, and them is us."

We know, however, that whites have been visibly involved in civil rights affairs for more than a decade. The problem is that whites have spent most of their time looking at the effects of racism, and not at the causes. Housing studies, for instance, traditionally document with great detail the numbers of substandard dwelling units in which minority families live, rather than focus upon the various systems which create the substandard housing and prevent minority families from choosing other alternatives. The Kerner Commission may have provided an accurate diagnosis of America's problem in race -- white racism -- and might logically have then prescribed changes in the systems which created the conditions of the inner cities where the 1967 rebellions occurred. But instead the Commission prescribed various remedies intended to improve the condition of minorities in inner cities, completely missing its own point.

The focus of attention in eliminating racism must be upon the causes, and not upon the victims. Those causes are generally embodied in institutional structures and policies, and in resulting practices. However, focus upon institutions must take into consideration the fact that institutions are made up of people. While a given institution is always more than a simple total of the individuals involved, those individuals must also be within the focus, since each person has the potential to affect his institution. Therefore, both the institution and the individuals within it must be targets for change.

With this in mind:

> Racism may be viewed as any attitude, action, or institutional structure which subordinates a person or group because of his or their color. Even though "race" and "color" refer to two different kinds of human characteristics, in America it is the visibility of skin color ... that marks individuals as "targets" for subordination by members of the white majority. This is true of Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, Japanese Americans, Chinese Americans, and American Indians. Specifically, white racism subordinates members of all these other groups primarily because they are not white in color, even though some are technically considered to be members of the "white race" and even view themselves as "whites."
>
> ...Racism can occur even if the people causing it have no intention, ... or are totally unaware of doing so. Racism can be a matter of result rather than intention... 4/

This is an operational definition, about which it might well be asked, "how is it possible for racial subordination to operate in this way without more serious challenge?" The answer lies in the totality of the dominant white culture. White people are totally immersed in a milieu of whiteness. As a fish does not question the fact that he swims in water, a white American does not question the fact that he operates within a culture that belongs to him, is a part of him and which apparently serves him very well.

Recently an all-white group of seminar participants designed a community that would be "believable" and clearly racist. Four different but related characteristics marked their creation:

1. Whites retain most of the key decision-making positions -- whites kept the power.
2. Whites set up informal policies and practices to discourage black access to community resources and higher level influence in critical institutions, while claiming their community was open -- whites secured community benefits for themselves.
3. Whites assumed standards of success and normalcy that were insensitive to alternative life meanings and life styles -- whites maintained their ethnocentrism.
4. Whites made sure that attention was focused critically or paternalistically on blacks (minorities) and not on themselves -- whites continued to believe blacks were the problem in race.

The seminar participants who designed this racist community were suprised on two counts: (1) the task was easier than they had first imagined; and (2) without their intentionally planning it, the final design clearly resembled their own community. 5/

The racist community designed by the participants violated each of the three basic elements of justice. Justice rests upon the way society deals with power, resources and culture. A racist society maintains power within the dominant group, denying self-determination to those without power. A racist society closes off community resources and institutions from the subordinated group,

thus denying resources to persons who are not a part of the dominant group. A racist society demands acceptance by everyone of cultural standards of the dominant group, resulting either in assimilation of subordinated groups, or their alienation, both of which deny the pluralism which accepts cultural variety.

Increased political organizing and the election of minority group persons to office represents increased self-determination by minority communities; efforts towards community control of schools and police are also attempts by minorities to determine the direction of their own lives. Access to resources and institutions is being increased in minority communities through capitalism ventures, community corporations and cooperatives. The well-known efforts to build pride within minority communities in their own culture points toward new possibilities for cultural pluralism.

Of greater significance in this discussion, however, are the ways in which white people are involved in eliminating racism. The most familiar is the appeal to conscience and morality, by which one is called upon to eliminate racism because, "It is the Right Thing." This is closely related to traditional appeals to one's humanity, his Christianity, or to brotherhood in general. Results of such appeals engender little response, and most of that response is by and large paternalistic; that is, doing something to "help the less fortunate, the disadvantaged, the

underprivileged." It results also in a focus on interpersonal relationships, or on individual attitudes and feelings, which, in the long run, do not last. These fail, however, to focus upon the systems and institutions which continue to perpetuate racism irrespective of ones feelings, intentions, or sense of morality.

Another familiar pattern for white involvement in eliminating racism is the "Confession-of-Guilt" syndrome. Black-white encounters have appeared to be the most legitimate of these, in which the self-confessed guilty white person lets an angry black person verbally flagellate him. Not only is the anger of the black person drained off in a useless exercise, but the white person has his guilt reinforced, and is left paralyzed by it. Both parties have played their games, and nothing results.

Much white involvement has been related to legislative change; 1964 and 1965 saw the major laws passed, and great effort has been made since to strengthen these. But the response to such legislation has been a marked reluctance on the part of whites to allow or to press for full implementation of these laws. School desegregation has proceeded painfully slowly, although the HEW regulations implementing the law were issued only a year after the law was passed. The Department of Transportation issued implementing regulations in 1970, six years following the passage of the Act.

Another aspect of white implementation of desegregation of schools is that it has resulted either in assimilation of minorities into the white cultural standards, or in the alienation of minorities. In both cases whites have reaffirmed their own ethnocentric cultural standards, and the resulting alienation has left whites confused and bewildered.

Equal employment efforts, aided also by law, were first marked by efforts at being "color-blind." In fact, all indications of race had to be removed from applications and other records. It was easy for an employer to find alternative means whereby to identify the race of an employee or applicant, and racist exclusion from jobs continued. Those who sincerely tried to operate on a color-blind basis produced almost the same effect because they were utilizing white standards and traditional mechanisms and structures. Whites operate on the basis of color almost automatically; the racism in white institutions developed as a result of such automatic response and in some instances by specific design and even by law. The system that was constructed on the basis of skin-color, cannot be dismantled by color-blindness.

White involvement in the elimination of racism has not been overwhelmingly successful. The remark to one white man perhaps applies to us all: "That's a fine job, but you have been concerned with the wrong people, the wrong things, in the wrong place in the

wrong way at the wrong time." 6/ The point was that the white man had been concerned with minority people, and he should have been concerned with white systems and institutions.

There are several specific needs within the white community which must be recognized and dealt with in any effort to combat racism, especially if anti-racism efforts are to include members of the white community.

The first is that the white community must understand where the real problem is. The white community perceives the race in traditional terms as, "The Black Problem." The white community must understand that what is perceived are symptoms, and that the problem consists of basic causes which are within white institutions and white culture. The white community must get the problem straight before it can act effectively.

The second need of the white community is to recognize the costs of racism to itself. White children have been and still are generally miseducated regarding minorities of color and their role in American history. It should be in the self-interest of whites to correct this miseducation. On another level, the economic costs and the costs in terms of lost human resources which result from racial subordination are enormous. But most important, while racial subordination generally results from the normal operation of our systems and institutions, it will be impossible for any of us to be fully human and to interact freely with one another. The white community, in its fears (many of which result from racism) bears heavy costs for racism.

Another need within the white community is an understanding of, and the need for changes in, the dissemination of information pertaining to race. The previous need alluded to the educational system and its influence over the minds of people; perhaps the influence of the information media even exceeds the influence of the schools. Whites must come to understand where and when racism is being perpetuated, even strengthened, both in programming and in advertising, as well as through school curricula.

Whites must also begin to understand and appreciate how the mechanisms and structures by which most of white institutions "normally" operate tend to subordinate on the basis of color.

Most institutions tend to reinforce traditional systems of operation. If they are "liberal" they may be found to be including more numbers of minorities. But this usually means asking whites to accept the minority persons on white terms. Decision-making is left in white hands, a few doors are open and a few resources made available, but genuine access to resources generally remains closed. No one questions the norms and standards upon which operations are based, so white standards continue to dominate.

Whites need to understand that such "liberality" perpetuates racial subordination under new guises. Self-determination, open access to resources and structures and cultural pluralism need to be understood to be the marks of a nonracist institution.

There are several means by which these needs of the white community can be met. One is to assist white institutions -- schools, businesses, governmental agencies, community organizations, industries, and churches -- to analyze themselves in terms of racism, and to effect changes necessary to eliminate racist aspects of their operations. The self-analysis process of an organization educates all those involved and moves at the same time toward effecting changes to benefit the whole community.

Another way to strengthen efforts within the white community to eliminate racism, is to facitilate communications among white organizations which are committed to combatting racism. Knowledge of others who are similarly committed is in itself strengthening, but moreover, a network linking white anti-racism efforts will create a base from which techniques, skills, and resources may be shared, thus reducing the effects of isolation.

Yet another way to make it possible for the white community to become more effective is to develop specific goals which white community groups can hold in common with active groups from the minority communities, thus developing collaborative efforts toward common goals. Minority community members who are sensitive to the needs of the white community should be in a position to assist in keeping the focus away from minorities and upon white institutions.

Finally, a brief word about how official human rights agencies can facilitate anti-racism efforts in the white community. Primarily, because of the constant requests for information and skills which most such agencies receive, coupled with on-going mandated responsibilities, official human rights agencies are in a most opportune position to change the focus of anti-racism efforts away from paternalistic symptom-oriented efforts, and toward the basic causes within white institutions and systems. Human rights agencies have the skills and resources with which to facilitate interchange among white anti-racism efforts. Such agencies also are able to become the focal point for the development of collaborative efforts among various active civil rights groups, most crucially including white groups.

We are aware that whites can drop out of the civil rights activities and withdraw from involvement, whereas minorities of color can never do so. The involvement of whites in civil rights and anti-racist activities is an absolutely essential ingredient to any real long-run success. Thus, it becomes basic to any civil rights activity to inquire, where are the white folks involved, and what are they dong? The official human rights agencies have the double job of assuring that whites are in there, and that they are doing the right things.

FOOTNOTES

1/ Quoted by Joseph R. Barndt, "Setting the White Man Free," Hessel, Dieter, ed., The White Problem, (New York, Presbyterian Distribution Service, 1970), p. 14.

2/ Rollins, J. Metz, Jr., "As the Black Community Sees It," ibid., pp. 5 and 10.

3/ Report, The National Advisory Committee on Civil Disorders (Washington, D. C., U. S. Government Printing Office, 1968), p. 91.

4/ U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, Racism in America and How to Combat It, (Washington, D. C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 5.

5/ Terry, Robert W., "New Whites: Justice and Racism," an unpublished paper.

6/ Terry, Robert W., "Odyssey of a Racist," Life and Work (Detroit, Detroit Industrial Mission, 1969) Vol. II, No. 5, Winter 1969, p. 1.

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CURE

CITIZENS UNITED FOR RACIAL EQUALITY

~~ROOM 502, 520 E STREET, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101~~

3386 30th St., San Diego, CA 92104

295-5800

August 17, 1971

Mr. Steven Horn
President
California State College Long Beach
Long Beach, California

Dear Mr. Horn:

We are contacting you becauseof your participation on the U. S. Civil Rights Commission. We are interested in the article "We Have Met the Enemy" by Everett A. Waldo.

CURE is a San Diego organization of approximately 500 citizens concerned with combatting racism in the white community. We hold public informational meetings and panel discussions in the majority community. This provides an excellant opportunity to circulate reading material to citizens to reinforce the need for awareness of the problem of racism.

Would it be possible to obtain without charge, in brochure form, copies in quantity of the above mentioned article for public distribution at the CURE meetings?

CURE also publishes a monthly newsletter with a circulation of 3,000. We would like permission to publish excerpts of the article so it may receive a wider audience.

Your assistance in this maater is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Dorothy M. Lloyd
Executive Secretary

cc: Charley Erickson
USCRCom;Sacramento

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, LONG BEACH
90801

Office of the President

August 19, 1971

Mrs. Dorothy M. Lloyd
Executive Secretary
Citizens United for Racial Equality
3386 30th Street
San Diego, California 92104

Dear Mrs. Lloyd:

Your letter of August 17th arrived while President Horn is away from the campus. It will be brought to his attention when he returns later in the month.

Sincerely yours,

Betty Kolberg
(Mrs.) Betty Kolberg
Secretary to the President

/bk

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
3386 30th St., San Diego, CA 92104
295-5800

September 28,1971

Mr. Steven Horn
President
California State College Long Beach
Long Beach, California

Dear Mr. Horn:

This is reference to our letter of August 17, 1971 pertaining to our request for permission to reprint in our newsletter the article by Everett A. Waldo "We Have Met the Enemy".

You were on vacation at that time and unable to reply. We would appreciate knowing what the status is on our request.

Thank you,

Mrs. Dorothy M. Lloyd
Executive Secretary

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, LONG BEACH
90801

Office of the President

October 13, 1971

Mrs. Dorothy M. Lloyd
Executive Secretary
Citizens United for Racial Equality
3386 30th Street
San Diego, California 92104

Dear Mrs. Lloyd:

This is to acknowledge your letter of September 28th which has been forwarded today to Mr. John Buggs, Deputy Staff Director, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Washington, D.C. On August 24th, your earlier letter of August 17th was forwarded also to Mr. Buggs. You should be hearing from him directly.

Sincerely yours,

Betty Kolberg
(Mrs.) Betty Kolberg
Secretary to the President

/bk

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

Washington, D. C. 20425

October 19, 1971

Mrs. Dorothy M. Lloyd
Executive Secretary
CURE
3386 30th Street
San Diego, California 92104

Dear Mrs. Lloyd:

Your letter of August 17 to Dr. Stephen Horn requesting copies of the article "We Have Met the Enemy", by Everett Waldo, was forwarded to this agency for reply. However, inadvertently, the incorrect address was listed and the letter was returned. Please accept my apology for the delay.

Mr. Waldo's paper is to be published in a forthcoming edition of the Civil Rights Digest, a quarterly publication of the Commission which will be issued in early November. At that time, we would be happy to send 100 copies of the Digest to you at no cost for distribution at your meetings. However, larger quantities are not available through this agency. Additional copies may be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. Orders of more than 100 copies are entitled to a 25 percent discount. Since the Digest is not copyrighted, you may want to reprint or Xerox copies of the article, provided the Commission and the publication are given a credit line in all reprints. This is also applicable when excerpting from articles in the Digest.

If we can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

CARLOS D. CONDE
Director of Information
and Publications