

Who Speaks For The Negro?

Stokely? Rap? Williams? Young? McKissack? Powell? etc. -

To which speaker are you listening?

There are many sounds coming from the Negro Community as it tries to disengage itself from the entanglement of the web weaved by Racism, Prejudice and Discrimination. The sounds are at times uncertain and unsure; at times devastating and disruptive. ~~On some~~ Occasionally we hear sounds of Faith and hope and light. At other times it seems as if a man who is being choked to death struggles to push words of warning past his lips. The sounds are many - but they are not new. They are very, very old - Centuries old. In fact. But still they are repeated. Who is it uttering these tired old sounds - An Educator? A Minister? A Lawyer? A "Black Militant"? A Newspaper editor? A Man? A Child? A group which was born going downward? A people in search of their humanity? Who speaks for the Negro and what is he trying to say? Are all of the sounds valid? Which voice can be trusted? Can any Black Man's voice be trusted? These are

very real questions which we must somehow try to answer if men are to ever be free to trust the humanity of man, All Mankind.

Rev. St. Paul Epps recently toured the Black Ghettos of Watts, Harlem, Mississippi and Newark. He observed, "I keep hearing them say the same thing. It is as though I were listening to an L.P. of the dissident voices from across the nation. This is the way it sounds to me.

"Nobody will listen to us"; "I WANT to be respected as a person"; "We WANT to be represented"; "We want to be consulted - counted in"; "we are just tired of waiting for full freedom and equal social justice"; ... We are all tired, very tired.

These words were spoken by Negroes who were born in a prison - with little hope for escape. They were spoken by a people who had trusted the counsel of those who said, "just be patient"; things will get better; "we will go to Congress and to the Courts" And by these

legitimate methods of change - things
will be made a right. Justice will prevail
in this land. The Bewildered Ghetto inhabit-
ant trusted these spokesmen for justice
through law. Well, these spokesmen - usually
members of the NAACP or the Urban League
or a Negro Chamber of Commerce - went
to the Congress and the Courts and
the laws were enacted and judicial
decisions handed down - But, nothing hap-
pened to change the desperate existence
of the Ghetto residents. There was action
at the top - But ^{his reputation is} ~~he lives~~ at the bottom
and he felt not one tremor of change.
He lost faith in the methodology of the
spokesmen who counsel patience. He now
gropes for the handles which will once
more give him hope and personhood and
humanity. The voices which have become
the spokesmen of the bleak ghetto existence
~~have been~~ are filled with venom and
bittered. There is another element in these
voices and that element is fear. No

words articulate this fear as clearly as
the pathetic cry "Black Power". In my
judgment, the concept of Black Power acts
as a shield for Blacks against the on-
slaughts of the system and structures
which control this country. Structures
created by dominant white society and
maintained by it, the militant advocates
of "Black Power" established its credentials
with the alien-disinherited of the ghetto
and began to speak a revolutionary
language to white America... Their mythology
was dramatic and at times violent.
They were determined to get white America
to sit up and listen to them speak.

Tom Wicker in his introduction to the re-
port of the President's Commission on Civil
Disorders made this observation, "What white
Americans have never fully understood - 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. We cannot quarrel with that
assertion. Black Americans have always known
this. The various voices of the community
said in a thousand ways - give us the
same kind of life you ^{would} have if
and pleading and praying for an equal
stake in this country. But, white America
refused to listen and to hear and to
act. The dominant society - supported by
all of its institutions ^{the dominant energy which is the church} - including the press -
somehow decided that these dissident voices
needed no serious attention and con-
sequently the smallest concession was all
that was given - "we have kept our Negroes
happy," was the attitude - they don't require
much. And, now there is so little time left
to save this country from a tragic and
irreversible contradiction. America has always
known what was right. She has spoken to
her citizens in noble words. This country
spoke in the Declaration of Independence and
the preamble to the Constitution and Ameri-
ca's most quotable quotes are ^{paraphrasing}
memorized by little children with hesitant tongues. The Great Civil

War Amendments, the 13th, 14th and 15th, are made the subject of a special section in American History courses. We are told that the 13th abolished slavery, yet continue to experience the 20th Century slavery of the plantation system. The 14th supposedly made every man born or naturalized in the United States, a citizen of the United States. Yet, today, ~~there~~, the attributes of full citizenship are denied almost 20 million Americans. The 15th Amendment purported to confer upon all the right to vote. — But, the year, 1965 saw the National Congress struggling with a voting rights bill and the introduction of federal registrars to help guarantee the unencumbered right to vote. ^{And the struggle is renewed in 1970 - because of Administration's & Southern efforts to weaken this measure} The solemn pledge of allegiance, "One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all," ^{Printed words} ^{U.S. natl} ~~part~~ ^{part} of the of America. Did it become a part of the

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"fact" of America? History tells us that it is for these time-worn principles that a Revolution was fought and won, the American Revolution, a bloody and spirited confrontation ~~between~~ of a young nation and the power of Great Britain. The Revolution was won and all of the words were there and they still are. Yet, we continue to struggle for their meaning. We are still trying to define America; to affirm and actualize its promise.

The real question which now arises is, "Did anybody believe these promises of America?" ~~were the spokesmen of this country, ^{that} ~~that~~?~~ ~~was anybody~~ ^{truly} serious? I submit that the Negro believed — and that white America could not risk belief.

Dr. Kenneth Clark, Negro educator and expert on Negro-American Affairs, deals with this tension. He says, ^{that} "A basic dilemma of America is whether the Negro should be accepted and taken seriously as a human being and permitted the rights and privileges accorded other human beings in

~~our political system~~. The Negro's part of this basic dilemma is whether to persist in his insistence upon his unqualified rights as a human being without regard to the risks or consequences -- or whether to accommodate to the resistance by subtle or flagrant forms of withdrawal from the fray. (Again - Black Power is not a withdrawal from the fray.)

"The gnawing doubts of white Americans as to their status and worth as human beings -- the deep feelings of inferiority growing out of actual inferior status in the land of their origin in Europe -- impelled American whites to develop and enforce social and institutional arrangements designed to inflict upon Negroes an inferior status. The demanding status needs of whites were powerful enough to counteract the logic, the morality and the powerful political democratic rhetoric which is also an important American reality." If you disagree with this statement, I call upon you to explain why 90% of the

American population, the dominant, overwhelming white majority, found it necessary to devise and enact grandiose schemes, mechanisms and processes, ^{designed} to subjugate 10% of the population, ... mainly the black minority.

Clark continues, "this critical American dilemma is reflected in Negroes not only in terms of literal acceptance by Negroes of the Creeds and promises of America, ^{+ the Christian faith} but also in terms of deep doubts concerning the worth of self, the reality of the inferior status ~~at~~ to which the Negro has been subjugated behind the walls of segregation is not only humiliating, - but a stimulus to self-doubt, self-hatred, personal and group frustrations, hostility towards self and the white majority and aggressions." These have been the net results of Racial Prejudice and Discrimination as practiced by the dominant group in American Society, ~~these have been the net results of an incomplete America, have you ever questioned the extent of your own contribution to the extent of your own contribution to~~ have you ever questioned the extent of your own contribution to

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The perpetuation of this kind of system, Do you in your contacts with minority people serve their further dehumanization and self-doubt and sense of unworthiness? Can you define the promise of America - and if you define it, can you ^{help} make it real?

This necessary process of definition, affirmation and actualization is not easy. The restlessness of the youth who belong to this moment of history, yet feel estranged from it, presents stark evidence of this difficulty. It has involved the collective effort of social scientists, psychologists, theologians and other social engineers. All these recognize that a promise is not made in a vacuum - in air or to land and water. A promise is made to a person, a responding, expecting person. This country made an historical promise to a people, a responding, expecting people. Whoever was at any time vested with the right to speak for America said, "People of America, we promise you a land committed

to the principles of freedom, equality, justice and human dignity. "But, again the problem of meaning, of definition clouded the issue. The spokesmen had not enlarged their definition of people to include "All" people. The social engineers began to work gradually on the "Included", the white majority, to try to persuade them to take in the "excluded", mainly, the black minority. Some progress was made - but not enough - Never enough. Full inclusion could only be "enough". The excluded became tired of empty promises, meaningless phraseology, exploitation and intimidation. They became tired of a thousand blatant and subtle indignities heaped upon their heads and stored in their gut, a thousand different times on a thousand different days. The minority was and is - "sick and tired" - but they still have faith - always, the faith. They became impatient and the methods and techniques of the engineers were painfully

Slow! Bold, Dramatic and Courageous Action
 was and is needed, An instant application
 of the power of men and women of good
 will is needed, ^(The power of the present is needed) A commitment of the National
 Will is a must if our historical resolve
 is to be fulfilled. America has the re-
 sources to solve the problem of human
 relations complicated by ~~and~~ a prevailing
 racism. We can become the country
 we promise. Patterns of behavior and
 interaction between the ruling structure
 and the excluded must be changed.

William Brink and Louis Harris did a study
 of U. S. Racial Attitudes which they published
 in a book entitled, "Black and White", In
 Chapter 1, "At the Crossroads", they observe,
 "Americans are, on the whole, a tolerant peo-
 ple and a generous people. They have fought
 to try wars of liberation, sacrificing their sons
 with not much more assurance than that a
 principle was at stake. Since World War
 II they have bankrolled their shattered
 allies and the underprivileged nations

of the world, with only an occasional wince at the pinch ~~of~~ their pocketbooks, they have opened their hearts to the oppressed and their shores to the homeless, they have done all that - ~~kept~~ but they have not seen fit to grant to America's 21 million Negroes the freedom that was guaranteed them by the Constitution of the United States and reinforced by Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.

"Why? the answer, of course, is rooted in three centuries of American history. No nation can, overnight, shed a prejudice ingrained for three hundred years - years ⁱⁿ which the Negro always has been an alien creature with an alien skin in an alien world." Other ethnic groups have been integrated into and assimilated by American society. They simply fade into the mass ^{from} color of white America. Not so with the Negro. His visibility continues to call attention to his presence on the American scene. James Baldwin, a Negro author has written of the Negro; "You were born

Where you were born and faced the ⁽¹⁴⁾ future you faced because you were black and for no other reason. You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being.

^{STATE} Prejudice and Discrimination based on race has produced a society which has a cancer built into it. Palliatives and band aids cannot cure the ill. Half-hearted increments and patchwork will not move us along the path toward a ^{just} ~~good~~ society. Radical surgery is needed, and radical surgery must be performed and basic change must result.

The struggle of the Negro could be described as a valiant effort to overcome the last vestige of his "non-being" - his invisibility - and an accompanying effort to secure his individuality, his wholeness and relevance as a human being.

[Who speaks for the Negro? NO ONE.
He] ^{THE BLACK MAN} stands silhouetted against a thriving

Abundant America, His presence speaks (15)
for itself. He wants - IN - He wants ^{America} you
to hear him - understand his condition -
and support his humanity. He knows that
if ^{this country} you desert him - you will save him, you
will save this country and you will
save yourselves.