

UNITING THE RACES

By JULIAN BOND

THIS COUNTRY, which was "discovered" by white men over 400 years ago and "founded" by them in 1776, always was and still is, in the eyes of most of its citizens and rulers, a white man's heaven. In *The Federalist* papers, John Jay wrote, "Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people . . . a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs." Under Jay's philosophy, black men were designed by Providence to work for white men; Indians, who were unsuited by Providence to be slaves, had to be exterminated; and Mexicans, being neither Indian nor black, became cultural enemies holding territory that the expansionist white man coveted. America gave birth to the rhetoric of democracy while it breathed life into what became institutionalized racism. European immigrants came here to escape oppression and their young became oppressors.

The record of domestic imperialism waged by white America is matched by a history of varied response from its nonwhite victims—a history of militant resistance, of separatist movements and of quiet heroic struggle—all aimed at getting the white man's foot off the nonwhite's neck, the white man's noose off the red or black or brown throat. That rebellion has been bloody, as were the uprisings of Denmark Vesey and Nat



Turner; and it has been nonviolent—employing oratory, petition, marches, the ballot, the courts and civil disobedience. Now, as we enter the Seventies, it has returned to violence and to blood.

The history of that rebellion is not exclusively black. "Are we not being stripped, day by day, of the little that remains of our ancient liberty?" challenged Tecumseh, a Shawnee Indian. "Do they not even now kick and strike us as they do their blackfaces? How long will it be before they tie us to a post and whip us and make us work in a cornfield as they do them? Shall we wait for that moment or shall we die fighting before we submit to such?" As usual, a moderate in the crowd answered Tecumseh by saying, "Let us submit our grievances, whatever they may be, to the Congress of the United States." This debate took place in 1812. Whichever side prevailed in that particular dispute, the cause of justice did not—if the present condition of American Indians is an indication.

Today, those same rebels—blacks, Spanish-speaking people, Indians—still fight against white providence. Tecumseh's call to violence still rings out in modern ghettos, barrios and reservations. It is heard because nearly 200 years after the "founding fathers" proposed to dissolve Americans' differences in a melting pot, the only thing that remains unabsorbed is *us*—and our skins. So we no longer wish to melt, to be absorbed, to fit in, to join up, to swim in the mainstream. What black people—and Spanish Americans and the original Americans—*do* want is a share of the goodies they see so abundantly spread around them. We want to have the opportunity to live a decent life. That means a life supported by a family income that is more than barely at the poverty level. It means a life in which education and jobs are guaranteed. It means a life in which police are compassionate public servants, in which storekeepers are not avaricious, in which politicians at least approach honesty.

We have won some small victories. We now have free access to restaurants (concluded on page 154)

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—which is fine, except that most of us can still afford to eat only at the five-and-ten-cent-store lunch counters where we originally made our stand; and some of us are literally starving. The system conceded to black people the right to sit in the front of the bus—a hollow victory when one's longest trip is likely to be from the feudal South to the mechanized poverty of the North. It has legislated the right to vote for people who seldom see candidates in whom they can put their trust. And this system in 1968 selected as President of the United States a man who, clearly, was not our choice.

Although unemployment and underemployment are among our most crucial problems, this man's Government gives nearly \$10,000,000 in Federal contracts to three textile firms in the Carolinas with proven records of discrimination—on the oral promise that they will "do better"; even Nixon's equal-opportunity bureaucrats couldn't stomach that one. Here is a man who cannot help but know that capitalism has yet to solve the problems of white poverty, yet he offers a pitifully underfinanced public-relations gimmick called black capitalism as an answer to our needs. And while black, brown and red Americans suffer more than whites from the war in Vietnam—in terms of both inductions and deaths—this man has yet to reveal any viable plan for ending the war, the secret plan he said he had more than a year ago. But the war does more, of course, than kill our young men. The 30-billion-dollar annual drain on the Treasury for this conflict and the entire inflated military budget are testimonies to us that America is more interested in killing than in exalting life.

To discuss what could or should be done by any American President or American Congress to include nonwhite Americans as recipients of the supposed benefits of the American way of life is to discuss an endless list of existing but unenforced Executive orders and Presidential promises. It has been over 15 years, for instance, since the United States Supreme Court, in *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka*, declared that segregation in public schools was illegal. The next year, Southern schools were ordered to desegregate with "all deliberate speed." Yet, a decade and a half later, every American city—North, South, East and West—still maintains a racially segregated school system.

Time has demonstrated that cutting off Federal funds has been the single most effective method of enforcing the Court's ruling; yet a combination of racist Southern Federal judges, a policy of appeasement practiced by Democratic and Republican administrations and a lack of national interest in this crucial question have conspired to hold the percentage of integrated black school children

in the South to 40 percent. Indeed—until they were stopped in October 1969 by a Supreme Court headed by his own appointee—the Nixon Administration was committing the most bestial sort of political fornication with its political bedfellows, the new Republicans of the South. Together, they instituted court action when other available methods promised to be too speedy. They relaxed Federal pressure at the 11th hour, giving aid and comfort to every segregation-minded school board and superintendent in the South.

The only just course of action for the Government is to insist that "all deliberate speed" has run its course; to immediately cut off all Federal funds to any school district that practices discrimination, whether that district is in Chatham County, Georgia, or Cook County, Illinois; to insist that existing black principals and schoolteachers in integrated settings retain their seniority and job level; to resist the use of culturally biased tests to assign pupils to honors programs or grade levels.

But education alone does not solve problems of poverty and unemployment for a people with high social visibility. Something more revolutionary is required. The Congress should declare that those farmers in the South and Southwest who have built fortunes by collecting Federal monies for not growing crops have forfeited the right to possess that land. The land, in turn, should be redistributed to the landless and frequently jobless people who work it for starvation wages while its owners get rich by harnessing their plows to the Federal wagon. In the South, this type of land reform would mean important progress in property ownership for poor black—and many white—sharecroppers. In the Southwest, it would mean the *chicanos* would have a chance to control the land whose soil their sweat has made fertile over so many years.

President Nixon has begun what no other President in recent years has dared to do—tamper with the outmoded and dependence-fostering welfare system. His proposed reforms, however, would actually work to penalize the large industrial states and would subsidize cheap black labor in the South. And his proposed national floor of \$1600 a year for a family of four would be amusing if there were not real people involved with real mouths to feed. The nation ought to establish a workable welfare floor for a family of four at \$5500 a year. The Congress ought to insist on retaining the food-stamp and commodities-distribution programs and should abandon the notion of indiscriminately forcing welfare recipients to work. Since no one remains poor by choice in this country, no one should be required to take an unaccept-

able job simply because he is poor. A national program enabling land ownership and establishing sustaining welfare standards, if implemented by every state in the union, would begin to halt the flow of poor, unskilled Americans from farm to city. Such a program, if capably administered, would begin to ease, if only temporarily and belatedly, the problems of America's overburdened cities. Federal and state governments, meanwhile, should become the employers of last resort by providing jobs for low-skilled Americans, particularly men, while these same men participate in training programs designed to fit them for today's job market.

If the American minorities—the Mexican, Puerto Rican, Indian and black Americans, and the slowly vanishing poor-white Americans—have the guaranteed opportunity for income, then the pathologies that distort their lives will begin to disappear. At the same time, the "colored" minorities in America must recognize the desperate need for the cultivation, singly and collectively, of the kind of power whites have monopolized since the American experiment began. Each group of us must recognize that evil men and an evil system now crush our every aspiration, that no question of education or job training or integration of jobs and housing can be implemented without a correlated grasp of power by the powerless. One simple way that the Government—if it wanted to—could facilitate this bid for legitimate power would be by dispatching Federal registrars to the numerous Southern counties where voting figures demonstrate that intimidation and fear still prevent black people from voting.

Finally, white America is going to have to accept the judgment of the Kerner Commission report that the fragmentation of the races in this country is *its* problem, and an explosive one. If programs and cures are not advanced and enforced, then no one can hope that life in America will grow less violent or tense, or that other Watts and Detroit and Newark will not occur again, with greater intensity and greater sophistication. Neither white nor black capitalism is guaranteed by our Constitution, but the 14th, 15th and 16th amendments do guarantee the right of all men to eat, breathe and live. White providence should want it no other way. The nonwhites of America will *struggle* to have it no other way. As an old black abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, said over 100 years ago, "We can be remodified, changed, assimilated, but never extinguished. . . . This is our country. . . . We shall neither die out nor be driven out; but shall go with [white] people, either as a testimony against them or as evidence in their favor, throughout generations."

