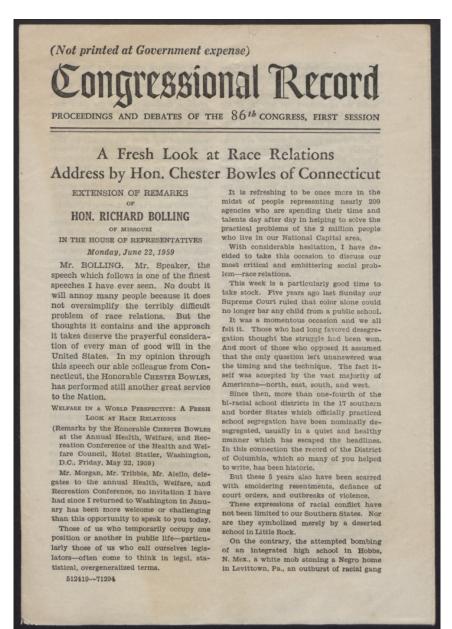


CENTER FOR ARKANSAS HISTORY AND CULTURE UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS AT LITTLE ROCK

"A Fresh Look at Race Relations"



"A Fresh Look at Race Relations. Address by Hon. Charles Bowles of Connecticut," June 22, 1959, p. 1 (Bishop Robert R. Brown Papers)

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war in Chicago—these are signs to give pause to all the participants in America's racial conflict.

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In 1954 the Nation as a whole underestimated the significance and meaning of the Supreme Court's decision. Since then we have tragically missed opportunities for constructive action.

After several years of optimism and complacency it is now clear that integration is a bigger, more stubborn, more universal, and more important problem than many of us imagined. We know now that racial differences and discrimination go deeper than Supreme Court decisions, not to mention paratroopers, can reach.

All of us, North and South, Negro and white, need to think anew.

Where and how do we go from here?

For we must go on in fulfilling the promises of the Constitution and of our national conscience. We can pause for reappraisal, but we cannot stop or go back.

The problem is full of agony and, as in most great issues, no one side has a monopoly of truth. Each has its points which must be considered with both humility and tolerance. All of us need to be awakened from our dogmatism and from our cliches.

My remarks today will undoubtedly disappoint those who have taken extreme positions in this controversy. Yet my approach inevitably reflects my personal experienceas a longtime friend of the South, as a former Governor of a northern industrial State, as a former Administrator of a large Federal agency in the turmoll of wartime Washington, and as U.S. Ambassador to India, where I saw our difficulties as the dark-skinned two-thirds of the world see them.

I offer my views not as solutions, but as guidelines to the kind of national discussion which I think is long overdue.

1. We must recognize the problem of discrimination as a national, not a sectional one.

Half of all American Negroes now live in the North. There is now no northern city without its tensions and its shame.

Yet many northerners still smugly look at racial discrimination as a sectional problem. Thus they condemn what they consider to be the slow pace of integration in the South, 512410-71224

while remaining indifferent or nearly so to the discrimination all around them.

There are 39 States outside the South. Only 19 have established Fair Employment Practices Commissions. In the other non-Southern States, there has been no legislative action on employment discrimination at all.

Since 1949, when we in Connecticut first authorized our State Commission on Civil Rights to prevent discrimination in publicly owned housing, there has been some progress elsewhere. Yet today only nine States outside the South have adopted antidiscrimination legislation affecting publicly assisted housing. In 30 other non-Southern States, no official action to end housing discrimination has occurred.

The great northern and western industrial cities are all drawing Negroes out of the South, and are all faced with the demoralization of city slum life that goes beyond race.

There are five times as many Negroes in Chicago as in Birmingham, four times as many in Detroit as in New Orleans, six times as many in Los Angeles as in Miami.

In most northern cities the professed equal protection of the laws still hides extensive segregation in fact—by residential exclusion, and by the natural selection of poverty. In few of our major northern cities do more than 20 percent of the Negro students attend school with white children.

To be sure, some cities such as New Haven, Pittsburgh, and Washington are now taking far-reaching steps to rebuild themselves, including the slum clearance and human rehabilitation essential to the solution of racial conflicts.

Yet almost any northern community that honestly examines its own racial relations will realize how far it is from living up to its professed ideals. And once we see what is missing in our own cities and States, we will be less inclined to feel that it is enough to denounce the foolhardy actions of white extremists south of the Mason-Dixon line. Nothing will speak more persuasively to the South than a better example among the too-ready critics farther North.

2. The Constitution as interpreted by the Supreme Court will ultimately prevail.

The Constitution, after all, is color-blind. The 14th amendment does require the end of racial discrimination in all parts of our

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public life. The universal declaration of human rights, endorsed overwhelmingly by the people of the world, affirms this as one of the first principles of world order.

Moreover, our Constitution will be enforced. The Supreme Court has ordered desegregation with all deliberate speed.

Negro litigants will see that this is complied with—and the new Negro arising in the South and elsewhere, will supply all the litigants necessary, no matter what pressures are organized to stop him.

There can be no question but that in parts of the South, school desegregation will continue for some time to be massively resisted. The courts, the Department of Justice, and the President have no choice but to enforce the Constitution, gradually, case by case, step by step.

The courts and the country obviously will accept very gradual steps in good faith compliance. But regardless of what party is in power, the observance of the law ultimately will prevail.

The great hope, however, is not for a reluctant and grudging acceptance of the inevitable force of the law. Rather, the hope is that recognition of historical necessity will encourage an increasing effort to bring the various elements in each community into harmony.

3. We must supplement litigation with persuasion.

Of course the law itself is a powerful teacher. The end of segregation in the Armed Forces, in the Nation's Capital, and on interstate trains did more to convince many skeptics that integration in these areas made sense than any amount of talk could have done.

There appears to be a temptation, however, to rest on the cars of lawyers and judges and say that this is all now a matter of law and order.

The President seemed to say precisely this when he stressed that he has told no one, not even his wife, whether he thinks the Supreme Court desegregation decision was right or wrong.

But Court orders alone will not suffice to change the minds and hearts of people. Somehow those who seek to end racial prejudice must go deeper than statutes and Court decisions.

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If this were merely a legal issue between those who believe in upholding the law and those who seek to circumvent it, then there would have been no issue until the Supreme Court acted in 1954. But this turns the problem upside down.

The Court acted because the constitutional guarantee of equality involves the deepest political principles of this Nation and because there was a moral issue presented which went to the heart of our Bill of Rights and our Christian civilization.

The law does not get its sanction merely because it is the law. It wins support because it embodies the moral purpose of soclety.

The task of our political leaders, and of all who want to establish equal rights is not only that of invoking and carrying out court decisions but also of convincing people that they are right.

That is why the proposal for an independent Federal agency like the "Community Relations Service" advocated by the Senate majority leader, Senator LYNDON JOHNSON, could be so important. Conciliation, provided it is consistent with the guarantees of the Constitution, is precisely what is needed to help the law.

As Senator JOHNSON himself has said: "Controversies involving civil rights have reached a point where they can be paralyzing to whole communities. But they are controversies which can be settled if the yawning chasm between people can be bridged * * * (by keeping) open the channels of communication among our people."

4. The new generation, white and Negro, must rise above the deep-seated prejudices of their elders.

The spectacle of Negro children in Little Rock, Clinton, Sturgis, Nashville, and the integrating cities of North Carolina walking quietly to and from school through jeering, angry mobs shocked most Americans, as it did people around the world.

When one remembers the fears of childhood—of changing to a new school, even when everyone is friendly and of the same race—one can imagine how these lonely Negro children felt in the midst of unfriendly white crowds.

Yet is not the old prophecy coming alive again? Are not the children leading us now?

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In almost every city and town in the South where school integration has begun, the chlidren are making out all right together. "If the grownups would just leave us alone, there would be no trouble," said a white student in Little Rock.

5. White and Negro moderates both have an historic role to play.

Many white southerners are still content to say that the problem will take a long time to solve and that the Negro must be patient. No thoughtful man expects a quick solution. But we cannot afford to forget that a

lot of time has already passed. It is now 96 years since emancipation, 183 years since a southerner wrote the declara-

tion to which this Nation is dedicated. That all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and that to secure these

rights governments are instituted among men—these are not just the words of Thomas Jefferson. They are the political creed of this country. Yet the historic timetable for establishing these equal rights for all Americans has been gradual indeed.

The white southerner nevertheless has a case he can and should make. Generations of slavery, second-class Negro citizenship, inferior schools, houses and jobs are now plaguing us in the form of high rates of disease and crime and a low level of education in areas where Negroes predominate.

To be sure, such demoralization is also the state of much of the rural poor whites of the South and Puerto Ricans brought up and trapped in our congested urban slums.

But the Negro has been an outcast longest, has suffered most, and is now the most extreme example of a problem facing the whole country.

This argument is indeed a good reason for doing more than simply integrating the schools. It underscores the need for getting at the very conditions which produce the demoralization in the first place.

The demoralization of the Negro does endanger southern white society, just as the demoralization of any members of a community endangers that community.

Take a county where a depressed Negro population outnumbers the white two or three or four to one. If that Negro community is ill housed, ill fed, ill clad, if it is sick, ignorant, and angry, can a relatively

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well-off white minority be "safe" in any meaningful sense of the word?

Or take a big southern city. If half of the town is a Negro slum, breeding uneducated bitterness, juvenile crime and racial violence, what kind of community will this be for the white people who pretend to want to live there?

The new South that is now taking shape has no room for low and inhuman standards of life for anyone.

Instead of using demoralization as an excuse for doing nothing about integration, it should cause the southern moderate to insist that a wast amount more must be done in a number of fields.

We need a far-reaching program to end the demoralization of much of the Negro community and of the poor whites as well. By championing slum clearance and measures for adequate housing and public health, the white South might then be in a position to ask the Negroes, the courts, and the rest of the country to accept a realistic pace for school integration—perhaps beginning only in the first grade and at the college and university level, with a voluntary transfer system with even segregation by sex in some areas where coeducation adds to the fears about integration.

But by holding back, southern moderates leave the field not only to the white demagogues but to future Negro demagogues.

So far Negro leadership has been on the whole remarkably intelligent and restrained and the Negro people have accepted its counsel. They have steadily offered the hand of friendship and compromise for acceptance by at least some substantial part of the white South.

A new Negro is standing up in the South and elsewhere. His expectations may not all be met. But some good and true men of the white South must meet him face to face, must sit down at roundtable conference, must talk with him and understand him.

Without such a minimum response, it is too much to expect that the majority of Negroes will forever stand by the moderate ministers of the Gospel and the well-trained lawyers who now speak for them.

6. I believe that the Christian Church must take the initiative in advancing a racial reconciliation.

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Let's face it: In many churches in America, a minister who goes against the prevailing sentiment of his congregation risks his job as much as the politican who alienates his constituents.

But from the beginning of the Christian era, it has been the church's duty to prevall against erroneous opinions, even at the price of martyrdom. Surely the church today should be the last citadel against the public relations approach that has infected so much of American life.

Many bishops and ministers in the South have spoken against violence and in favor of law and order. But is this enough?

There will be violence, and the law will be frustrated, unless the two sides in the racial conflict now splitting every southern community begin to communicate again with each other, to negotiate, to reason together, to find common remedies.

Is this not the time for the white and Negro ministers of every southern community to form a continuing roundtable conference dedicated to finding Christian solutions to the racial problems of their community?

For, after all, no country should be in a better position than the United States of America to solve this problem this way. Not only do we have nearly two centuries of democratic experience behind us, but the racial groups in this country, particularly in the South, have the great good fortune and blessing to share the identical Christian faith.

It is no coincidence that it was a white minister in the South, perhaps the most fervently religious section of our country, who said of the integration crisis: "There's just one question to ask: what would Christ do?"

In our hearts we know the final answer. We know that Christ came to demonstrate the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. We know we are our brother's keeper.

We know too that we have done those things which we ought not to have done and left undone those things we ought to have done.

We know that the pride of race, the fear of the strange and the different is one of man's original sins and that it has not been fully erased from man's mind anywhere.

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But we also know, as Lincoln said, that the Declaration of Independence "gave liberty not alone to the people of this country, but hope to all the world. It gave promise that in due time the weights would be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance."

Our religious and democratic faith tells us to get on with this job like men.

7. Our capacity to deal with discrimination in America is a measure of our capacity to lead a worldwide revolution for freedom.

My own perspective on this problem has been, I confess, affected by looking at it for some time from the other side of the globe. As a former Ambassador to India, I know how spectacularly American prestige rose as a result of the Supreme Court desegregation decision.

While touring Africa 4 years ago I sensed against how vital a successful solution of our racial troubles is for our future relationship with the two-thirds of the world's people who are colored.

In the winter of 1957 in South Asia I saw the enthusiasm generated by the successful conclusion of the Negrocs' buts boycott in Montgomery, Ala. Later in the Soviet Union I saw the Communists take full propaganda advantage of the bombing of Negro churches in the same State.

Of course we can say that prejudice is as old as the hills and just as persistent. India, for instance, has known conflict and caste through centuries of struggle between Hindus and Moslems, Brahmins and untouchables.

In Algeria there is open warfare between the French minority and the Arab majority. In all of Africa the outnumbered white man feels the stirring of the slumbering African masses.

Therefore as we Americans concentrate on a new effort on our own major social problem, we can take mild comfort from the awareness that our country does not stand alone in isolation as an immoral historic throwback to a bygone age of prejudice.

Having said this, I hasten to add what is merely the other side of this coin. The world community has a vested interest in the speed and effectiveness with which we end discrimination in the United States. Our own role in the world depends increasingly upon the same proposition.

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As is true in so many other aspects of our national polley today, the world situation is requiring us to do the things which we should do anyway. No one but a cynic would argue that we should suddenly become interested in equal rights for Negroes merely because our propaganda position in the world would be helped by such progress.

Nevertheless, it remains more true today than it was in 1947, when one of our distinguished former Secretaries of State, Henry L, Stimson wrote:

"No private program and no public policy, in any section of our national life can now escape from the compelling fact that if it is not framed with reference to the world, it is framed with perfect futility."

In closing, I should like to suggest that all of us, northerners and southerners, easterners and westerners, Negroes and whites can learn much from a study of that incredible man, Mahatma Gandhi.

There were always two sides to Gandhi's program. One was direct resistance to unjust laws or practices. The other was constructive popular action to create the conditions of justice.

He begun his career before the turn of the 20th century in the Union of South Africa where he went as a lawyer for some Indian traders.

In 1803, South Africa was a land run by some million Europeans who sat on top of some 5 million Africans who had almost no rights at all. In addition, were 100,000 Indians, most of whom had been recruited as cheap labor for the white plantations and mines.

Soon after he reached Pretoria, the young man of 24 invited all the Indians in the city to a meeting. He urged them to fight racial discrimination but without hating or hurting their opponents.

And since their aim was to reason with the whites, the first thing they should do, he said, was to consider the reasons given by the whites for their discrimination.

To the Indian merchants before him, known for silck dealings and sharp bargainings, he proposed complete truthfulness and more concern for the poor. He called on all Indians to do something to improve the unsanitary conditions in the Indian sections of town.

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Why walt for legal victories for the necessary drain cleaning? he asked.

We can't blame the whites for all our troubles, he argued. Perhaps we can't by ourselves end all the poverty in which our people are trapped, but if those of us with some money and some education will join in, the slums can be cleaned up, freshened with a coat of paint and made habitable; the illiterate adults can be taught to read; volunteer schools can be provided for the children of the poor.

And he began to build the institutions to do these constructive tasks.

In 1913 he returned to India, after negotiating a settlement with Prime Minister Smuts who once jailed him but later came to say to him, "I am not worthy to stand in the shoes of so great a man." And for over 30 years in India, Gandhi pressed his constructive program of village improvement, the end of untouchability, and the reform of individual lives.

The bus boycott in Montgomery carried out with dignity and restraint represented an adaptation of Gandhian principles in democratic America.

"We are seeking to improve not the Negro of Montgomery but the whole of Montgomery," said Rev. Martin Luther King on the occasion of the formation of the Montgomery Improvement Association which conducted the boycott.

Instead of merely sitting by until the Supreme Court ruled bus segregation unconstitutional, the Negroes of Montgomery in amazing unity carried out a courageous, peaceful, direct action which took the Nation by surprise.

The long-term effects of this Gandhiantype action on the white conscience may take time to register. But it had an immediate effect in changing the Negroes.

Perhaps the change is best reflected in the story of the old Negro woman who, when asked if her feet were not tired from plodding so many miles each day to work replied, "Brother, for a long time my feet have rested, but my soul's been tired. Now my feet are tired, but my soul is resting."

In this light, with good cheer, let us move ahead with all deliberate speed.

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