

INTEGRATION VERSUS SELF DETERMINATION:

A COMMENT

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A Comment

The topic chosen for discussion tonight,² is a reflection of the historical tenacity of the problem of Black people, a fatal flaw in the political, economical and social character of life in America. We stand here 10 years after the cry of Black Power, over 2 decades since the school integration decision of the Supreme court, 50 years since the Black Nationalist Garvey movement, and 100 years since Abraham Lincoln. A fundamental question has been how to solve the Negro question, whats going to happen to Black people.³

In response, I question the use of integration as the key concept, and therefore, would like to contrast it with the concept of self determination. Moreover, I would like to add some more concepts to our discussion -- reform and revolution.

In general our view is that integration must be separated into two aspects: (a) the process of actual physical association between Black people and White people, based on the necessary motion of an advanced urban industrial capitalist society, and (b) the policy of the white ruling class, designed to produce conflict between the white and black masses, due to the previous policy of encouraging and sanctioning the most blatant pattern of white racism.

The objective process of integration is a historical necessity of the capitalist system, and it is precisely the rational pursuit of this that led to the Civil War and The Emancipation Proclamation, the work of the CIO breaking down racial restrictions of Trade Unions, and the two marches on Washington that led to the F.E.P.C. in 1942 and recent policies like Affirmative Action in the

60's and 70's. The profit system requires the use of all labor, either as producers of goods and services or as unemployed workers, potential scabs who lower wages. The historical necessity of integration is rooted in the workplace and extends most frequently to the public processes of life that are set up to serve the profit hungry workplace; riding on public transportation to get people to work, retail stores and supermarkets so that workers can get food and clothing, the Armed forces to protect foreign corporate interests in raw materials and markets, prisons to punish those who violate property or harm the workers to prevent them from going to work etc. Basically, this type of integration is independent of the will of anyone, it is an historical inevitability whether it is liked or not.

The policy of forced integration that deals with a direct assault on racism however is another phenomenon altogether. Capitalist policy has the fundamental contradiction of simultaneously embracing democracy and oppression, freedom and slavery, war and peace.

Concretely, this fundamental contradiction is democracy, freedom and peace for the privileged few in the society, and oppression, wage-slavery and war for the exploited masses of working class people - Black and White who fight the wars, fill the prisons, suffer unemployment starve on welfare, and all other forms of indignity and exploitation possible.

Now this policy of forced integration is a ploy that polarizes the masses as hostile racial camps, only serving to get the greedy robber barons off the hook and divert the attention of all poor working people to fight each other. This is one of the greatest achievements of America over the last 200 years -

a con game, the ideology of white racism.

The policy of integration is simply the other face of this con game, although it has been only used in the face of struggle when the forces for progressive social change are strong enough to demand change. So when the policy of white racism is being attacked, the masses are diverted with a policy of forced integration - but in U.S. history this has only been the case in short interludes, e.g. the reconstruction, the New Deal period, the 1960's, and now with the forced busing plans. Yes, some real victories have been won, but normally as short term gains taken back by a new wave of nationalism, Klu Klux Klanism, and all other forms of political reaction, and frequently what appears as an attainable victory is cut short by the predictable response of white people who have been conned by the psycho-cultural venom of white racist ideology.

This latter aspect is clearly revealed in the hypocritical policy of forced busing. Black people want quality education and will fight and sacrifice to get it. If forced busing is the answer then so be it. However, the white masses have been conditioned with racism and will rise up to fight busing as is happening places like Louisville and Boston. The ruling class privileged few are not involved personally in forced busing and can rest easy once racial conflict is fully restored to American life. In other words, in this current economic crisis it is no accident that the historic necessity of integration, rooted in the workplace that unites all people Black and White, is attacked by hypocritical integrationist policies that force white people to worship the white race by throwing rocks at buses transporting Black school children.

So I would like to introduce to you the concept of self-determination.

This means a policy of consistent democracy in the long run, a policy that allows for the voluntary development of intergration in all aspects of the society as an extension of the historical necessity of integration in the workplace. A truly democratic policy must be to equitably distribute all resources in the society -- like per capita investment in education, teacher training, housing, etc., and then a policy of open discussion, and education leading to voluntary patterns of integration. This is the only solution to conflict between Blacks and Whites. However public policy is made by the privileged few, and is made to serve their vested interest. And nothing could be more undemocratic since the masses of people are not involved in policy formation but are forced to abide by the policy handed down by any or all branches and levels of government.

But then this is nothing new for us in this country. These conflicts, hypocrisy and privilege goes back to the birth of the USA and is the only Bicentennial theme worth considering, since this fundamental conflict is 200 years old and must be resolved if we are to realize the promise of America, or as Langston Hughes wrote:

"Let America be America again, the land
that never has been get, and yet must be,
the Land where every man is free"

The issue, then, is reform or revolution. We can ask this as our Bicentennial question - Will the promise of 1776, 1863, and 1963 (American Revolution, Civil War, and Civil Rights Movement) be realized or not? All of these periods of change contained the promise of comprehensive and fundamental social change, that was subverted, and the spiders web of reformism was spun by the rulers,

seducing the masses with their diabolic venom of white racism.

In summary I will say:

(a) the problems of Black people cannot be solved by hypocritical reforms in the system; (b) the dual policies of racism and forced integration promoted by the ruling class must be exposed and fought against; (c) the policy of forced integration must be replaced by a demand for basic social change and self determination for Black people; (d) As someone once said, no white man is free if somewhere a Black man is a slave.

Now let me conclude with this reformulation of our question: The issue is not whether integration is possible, and if so, desirable. The issue is freedom, justice and equality for all as promised by the revolutionary spirit of fighting British tyranny in the streets of Boston, and not the sell out of this spirit by the propertied elites at the constitutional Congress; the revolutionary spirit of the masses in the March on Washington and not the hypocrisy of John Kennedy who embraced Dixiecrats as colleagues and appointed racist Federal Judges in the South, the revolutionary spirit of John Brown and not Abraham Lincoln who once proposed sending Blacks back to Africa as the solution to America's racial problem. Next, the second issue then is not is integration desirable, but how are we going to get freedom, justice, and equality for all.

I have chosen to conclude my remarks in the Bicentennial spirit of those who have been looking at this society from the bottom up with the words of Frederick Douglass spoken at a 4th of July celebration in 1852:

"At a time alike this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. Oh! had I the ability, and could reach the nations ear, I would today pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke. For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We needed the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused, the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the Nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be denounced."

Notes

1. The topic of the panel was "Is Racial Integration Possible in the U.S.? Is it Desirable?"
2. This presentation was made February 5, 1976 as part of the Simeon Leland Forum of Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. The other panelists were Attorney E. Duke McNeil, former president of The Woodlawn Organization, Jabari Mahiri, Managing Editor of Black Books Bulletin, and Dr. Ray Mack, Professor of Sociology and Provost, Northwestern University. The moderator was Cyrus Colter, Chairperson of Department of Afro-American Studies, Northwestern University.
3. Because this presentation was made as one of four on a panel, it was very brief. However, the general view presented here can be studied with a document from Peoples College: Introduction to Afro-American Studies (Chicago: Peoples College Press, P. O. Box 7696, 1975).