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THE SOUTHERN CASE FOR SCHOOL SEGREGATION

The Crowell-Collier Press

tradition of his home as his castle, and part from the farmer's conviction that, though the bottom fall out of the market on corn or pigs or cotton or tobacco, in the end his land will sustain him.

Whatever the root sources, the tendency has carried over even to the expanding cities of the urbanized South. It has not been a fear of integrated housing (this specter is a late arrival on the scene) that has made the South relatively so slow to embrace Federal grants for slum clearance, public housing, and urban renewal. Much of the public resistance, sometimes made manifest and sometimes merely sensed, is a consequence of this inbred feeling for property; it is a feeling that responsibility for housing rests with the individual first of all, and that no man's property should be taken under eminent domain except for literal public use. When Southern cities experienced their first wave of dime-store "sit-ins," early in 1960, the startled reaction sped at once to the rights of the store owner: This lunch counter was his *property*. Did he not have a right to control its use?

Finally, I would suggest that the Southerner as Conservative is affected, perhaps more strongly than he himself would acknowledge, by a respect for divine power. Again, the agrarian inheritance plays a part in this legacy. The miracle of the seed, the continuum of the forest, the closeness of animal birth and life—these work a profound influence on men whose existence is tied umbilically to nature. In the loneliness of field or prairie, the smallness of man and the largeness of God strike to the heart's core. The blessing of the harvest, the wrath of the storm, and the benediction of a slow and mizzling rain on freshly seeded land speak to the Southerner of God's handiwork.

Perhaps by reason of these influences, organized religion, predominantly among low-church Protestant denominations, continues to play a pervasive role in Southern life. To be sure, the parent Protestantism gives off some notable sports—the Faith Healers, snake-handlers, and the Holy Rollers—and the abiding fundamentalism of the region continues to manifest itself in pockets of strict Prohibition and in contemporary versions of the Tennessee Monkey Trial. But religion crops up in other ways, in the grace before meals expected at every public function, in the phenomenal sales of religious books, and in the incredible proliferation of choirs, sodalities, ladies' auxiliaries, young peoples' groups, vestries, boards of deacons, church suppers, and building-committee meetings that characterize life from Brownsville to Virginia's Eastern Shore. A Southerner who does not belong to *some* church is not regarded as suspect, exactly, but he is just a little odd. And if the low-tax Southerner traditionally is penurious in rendering unto his Caesars the things that are Caesar's, he is often sacrificial in rendering unto God the things that are God's.

The deference that is paid to Holy Writ and to evidences of divine intervention doubtless contributes to the character of the Southerner as Romantic. Faith and superstition and myth are cousins, hardly even once removed, and whatever else it may be, the South is first of all a land of legends. This is a terrible annoyance to historians; they look upon our pretty myths, and know they are not so, and expose their fallacies in a thousand footnotes, but like the South, the legends rise again. "Few groups in the New World have had their myths subjected to such destructive analysis as those of the South have undergone in recent years," C. Vann Woodward once observed.

Yet the myths persist. There is the Old South legend of the white-columned plantation, the hoop-skirted belles, the hot-blooded men. In the foreground, beneath the magnolia trees, the darkies are plucking banjos; in the background, rows upon rows of cotton, and off to one side, a steamboat coming around the bend. Master loves the Negroes, and the Negroes love old Master. The words and music are by Stephen Foster. This, we like to say, was how things *were* in the ante-bellum South. The exasperated scholar, emerging from his Will Books, cries out his anguish in the quarterly reviews: The records *prove* it was not so; they prove that slave ownership was limited; the records prove that Southern Negroes—as many as 100,000 or 200,000 of them—deserted to the Union cause in the War; the records probably prove there weren't but thirty-two banjos in all of Carolina.

These labors of genealogy go utterly unrewarded. With what Cash has described as the South's "naive capacity for sell their own wares, compete among themselves until they have learned to compete in the whole wide world. They will exert, within their own community, the moral leadership necessary to reduce crime and illegitimacy. By participation first in their own constructive public affairs they will prove themselves capable of contributing actively to the civic, social, and economic life of their counties, towns, and cities. They will stop trying simply to imitate the white man; they will discover themselves first, and if this inner self is all that the liberal anthropologists assert it to be, the discovery should lead to wondrous exploitation. *Ebony* magazine made this same point editorially in 1959, when it urged its readers to stop complaining about being referred to as "Negro" or as "colored": "The real problem is the man called Negro. If he would spend as much time dignifying his race as he does decrying its designation, if he would quit worrying about the label and concentrate upon improving the product, the stuff inside, the name would take care of itself."

This was sound advice, and one of the hopeful aspects of the South in the early 1960s (there are not many) is that a new generation of young Negroes may even act upon it. Carleton remarks in his essay upon the increasing nationalization of the Southern Negro, who now, more often than not, has some Northern connections; and he says this:

"Not only has the Southern Negro been nationalized, he has also developed his own propertied and business classes, his own wealthy and middle classes. Every Southern city of any size has a group of economically comfortable and relatively independent lawyers, doctors, teachers, morticians, contractors, insurance agents, and owners of small businesses —garages and filling stations, restaurants, taverns, barber shops, beauty parlors, stores, and so forth. These people have education or considerable economic independence, or both."

In my own observation, this is quite true; the notable fact, as yet unrecognized by many staunch Southern segregationists, is that a new Negro is in fact emerging—the bright young high school senior, the serious college student, the impatient middle-class Negro couple, struggling for respectability and status. Their impact is yet to be wholly felt within their own race, but it is being felt increasingly upon white institutions; and as a consequence, as Carleton observes, racial attitudes among white persons in certain parts of the South *are* subtly changing. He terms this a "softening." It is sometimes a hardening, too, as white families, having long cherished an affection for "their" Negroes, discover that their charges prefer not to be known as Uncle Toms or Aunt Jemimas; the disillusioned reaction, out of chagrin and embarrassment, is to let them bail themselves out of trouble, if that's the way they want it. The relationship changes. But if the Southern Negro is to find salvation at all, he must find it in this trend to independence and maturity. "The most important immediate force at work to emancipate the Negro of the South," says Carleton, "is the Southern Negro himself. A great change has come over him. He is no longer an Uncle Tom, or even the kind of Negro approved of by Booker T. Washington. He now talks back. He has a new self-respect, a new confidence, a new independence. Increasingly he is depending less on Northern Negro initiative and leadership and is supplying his own." To the extent that this prophecy is fulfilled—for all the bitter incidents, severances, and failures that may be expected—the upward and forward motion of the Negro will be recorded.

"The fault is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings." The brooding, introspective advice of Cassius ought not to be spurned; it ought rather to be put to thoughtful use by those genuinely (as distinguished from merely politically) concerned with the Negroes' movement out of an underling's status. James B. Conant has recognized this, however belatedly, in his *Slums and Suburbs.* Here Dr. Conant paints a grimly realistic picture of a Negro child's life in the urban slums of the North, where the child may live six flights up in a tenement offering "one filthy room with a bed, a light bulb, and a stink." It is after visiting such tenements, and inspecting the schools attended by slum children, that he grows impatient "with both critics and defenders of public education who ignore the realities of school situations to engage in fruitless debate about educational philosophy, purposes, and the like: These situations call for action, not for hair-splitting arguments."

Dr. Conant is a distinguished spokesman for liberalism, but unlike most of his fastidious brethren, he came to the slums, and smelled them, and began to see realities fair and clear. What he has to say about Negro education merits a sober hearing. He is convinced that it is wrong to insist upon a curriculum completely unsuited to the needs of the children required to take it: "Foreign languages in Grade 7 or algebra in Grade 8 . . . have little place in a school in which half the pupils in that grade read at the fourth grade level or below. Homework has little relevance in a situation where home is a filthy, noisy tenement." By the same token, it may be suggested that in the rural South, school offerings ought to be adapted to real life also; and though Dr. Conant is a staunch opponent of school segregation as such—that is, to the assignment of pupils to schools solely by reason of their race—he sees no reason why satisfactory education cannot be provided in all-Negro schools. Arbitrarily to shift children around, simply to satisfy sociological theories of an ideal race-mixture, impressed Dr. Conant as wrong. This approach treats children "as though they were pawns on a chessboard."

But these children, white and black, are not mere pawns on a chessboard, and whatever the sins or submissions of their great-grandfathers may have been, they merit consideration in their own right. In the South, this consideration steadily is being extended. If we of the South cannot turn the clock back to 1868, when the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified, at least we can strive to turn the clock back to 1896, when the doctrine of separate but equal school facilities received a sort of casual endorsement from a Supreme Court concerned primarily with a question of public transportation. True, the apostles of the Brave New World will denounce the idea of applying the constitutional principles of 1896 to problems of the early 1960s, but there have been entirely too many such denunciations from thoughtless and ill-informed pedagogues. The Negro (precisely as the white) is entitled, so far as a system of education is concerned, to the same educational opportunities afforded his white counterpart, and neither more nor less. What he does with these educational opportunities thereafter is his question to answer.

I do not profess to know what the future holds for the Southern Negro, or for that matter, for the Northern Negro. The achievements of the colored people of the 1950s merit at least provisional applause: They are fighting their way out of millennial shadows—and more power to them! If an arriving generation of Negro children can sustain this momentum, the race should move ahead, first within itself, as Dr. Conant pleads, and in time—*in time*—toward equality with the larger and more established community around it. When that hour of equality arrives—whenever that hour arrives—white "prejudices" predictably will dissolve; there no longer would be a basis for them. What comes thereafter I cannot suggest, but it is reasonable to surmise that barriers once lowered will not thereafter be raised capriciously again. When the Negro race proves itself, in terms of Western values of maturity and achievement, it will be time enough to talk of complete social and economic integration. Until then, it is pointless to argue sociology; it is more useful, in every way, to meditate upon the transcendent issues of the law.

This slow path toward evolutionary change should commend itself to reasonably minded men. Whatever violence to constitutional law was done by the *Brown* decision, it is done; we ought not to condone it, defend it, rationalize it, or forgive it, but we ought not to pretend that it never happened. We of the South have to live with these new legal principles, and accommodate our society to them. So far as the education of children is concerned, this can be done (1) by continuing to provide the best possible schools our resources can provide; (2) by continuing to separate children by race, in the certain conviction that such basic pupil assignments violate no law or court order, and are in accord with community wishes; and (3) by approving and accepting individual, particular applications for transfer or admission on a genuinely nondiscriminatory basis. And if, in addition, entirely apart from any racial considerations whatever, a freedom-of-choice program can be put in motion to stimulate the growth of private education, the South's school problems can be controlled for a long time to come.

Your petitioners are hopeful that such an approach, much as it may annoy the advocates of compulsory integration, will find a favorable response among men who are willing to take the long view. It seems to us wholly in accord with the oldest principles of federalism—principles that have contributed much to the strength and vitality of this Republic. It is the diversity of the States, their ability to experiment, their right and power to respond to a variety of local conditions and customs that together prevent the evils of excessive centralism. "The traditions and habits of centuries were not intended to be overthrown when the Fourteenth Amendment was passed," said Holmes. He remarked again: "There is nothing that I more deprecate than the use of the Fourteenth Amendment beyond the absolute compulsion of its words to prevent the making of social experiments that an important part of the community desires, in the insulated chambers afforded by the several States, even though the experiments may seem futile or even noxious to me and to those whose judgment I most respect."

Not only is this approach in accord with a wise federalism; it also offers the greatest opportunity to the Southern Negro himself. In the course of a debate in the *Saturday Review* with William Sloane Coffin, the New York-born William F. Buckley, Jr., said this: "If it is true that the separation of the races on account of color is nonrational, then circumstance will in due course break down segregation. When it becomes self-evident that biological, intellectual, cultural, and psychic similarities among the races render social separation atavistic, then the myths will begin to fade, as they have done in respect of the Irish, the Italian, the Jew; then integration will come—the right kind of integration."

The South has begun to look upon its Negro people, since *Brown,* in a new way. Shortcomings of the Negro that earlier had been merely sensed are now acutely seen. But this is no bad thing. Before any social ill may be remedied, it first must be diagnosed and understood. Many a Southerner is now sensitive to the outward and visible signs of segregation; he was not so before. Today the detritus of a crumbling institution may be observed at every hand, and there are times when he squirms a little inside. This retreat to neutrality on the white man's part is a necessary condition if the Negro, *by his own exertions,* is to find an equal place in the sun. In the end, the white man cannot do the job for him; Jim Crow is dead, but the legal shot that felled him also put Massa in the cold, cold ground. It is said that the high court "cast off the Negro's shackles"; it cast off his crutches too. The paternalism of generations is vanishing year by year, to be replaced by a healthy skepticism: The Negro says he's the white man's equal; *show me.*

No decree of court, no act of Congress, can give the Negro more than this. He has no right—no legal right, no moral right—to intrude upon the private institutions of his neighbors. If individual liberty means anything, it must mean that each individual, regardless of color, is at liberty to choose his own personal and business associates, and to choose them for whatever reason. This the Negro must understand. If he is to become a part of this association, on equal terms, he must do what every other race of men has done since time began, and that is to demonstrate his worth to the community he seeks to enter. For more than three-hundred years, the white South by and large has regarded such entry as impossible. I would be less than honest if I did not acknowledge that a great part of the Deep South still views the slightest yielding as anathema. But elsewhere in my changing and unchanging land, the old unequivocal "no" to Negro equality slowly merges into a doubtful "maybe." On the day that I write these concluding paragraphs, the local transit company in Richmond has announced employment of its first Negro bus drivers. The story made page one; but it made just the bottom of page one, and the Capital of the late Confederacy will not voice the slightest ripple of objection. If these drivers make it up the hill, others will follow. If the first Negro clerks in local retail stores can sell themselves, the experience of one merchant will persuade his neighbor. And the more the Negro people can do within their own neighborhoods and business communities, the more the white community's retreat to neutrality will continue.

I believe the South will maintain what I have termed essential separation of the races for years to come. This means very nearly total segregation in education, where the intimate, personal, and prolonged association of white and Negro boys and girls, in public schools, in massive numbers, as social equals, is more than community attitudes will accept. The sad example of Prince Edward County, where a resolute rural people abandoned all public schools, offers an instructive lesson to the advocates of frontal assault. "We see the wisdom of Solon's remark," Jefferson once observed, "that no more good must be attempted than the nation can bear." This essential separation also takes in such wholly social institutions as private clubs. I cannot foresee the integration of Protestant churches in the South. And whatever the Supreme Court may do in time to the miscegenation laws, ostracism, swift and certain, awaits those who would cross this marital line. But my guess would be that in areas of higher education, in many fields of employment, in professional associations, in such quasi-public fields as hotels, restaurants, and concert halls, doors that have been closed will open one by one. And a South that once

would have regarded these innovations with horror will view them at first with surprise, then with regret, for a time with distaste, and at last with indifference. As the migration of the Negro out of the South continues, other parts of the nation, at once benefited and handicapped for want of the South's experience in coexistence, will grapple in their own fashion with the cultural and economic assimilation of the Negro. They will not find it easy, but they can rely upon this: The South will not intrude its views upon theirs. This is a big country, a great country· it remains the freest country on earth, and the Negro people are a part of it. The law has done what it can for Negroes as a whole; the law will do more, in specific situations. The rest is up to time, and up to the Negroes themselves.