

THE NEW RACISM: The Remedy Is Black Education — of Whites!

By Clarence A. Amann
(The First of Two Parts)

"The fact of this separation of white and black was clear to me: it was its effect upon the personalities of people that stumped and dismayed me. I did not feel that I was a threat to anybody; yet, as soon as I had grown old enough to think, I had learned that my entire personality, my aspirations had long ago been discounted: that, in a measure, the very meaning of the words I spoke could not be fully understood."

— Richard Wright: *American Hunger*, 1944, 1977

"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."

— Report of the National Advisory Commission (Kerner) on Civil Disorders, 1968

These statements should be dusty anachronisms. That they are not is a truth that blots the scutcheon of our pride in our apparent "progress" in racial understanding in America. That they may be more subtly and intractably apt today than in the turbulent 60s becomes daily more evident.

A new racial unrest has arisen in the land. And it cannot be taken lightly. The grim loss of 23 black children in Atlanta, the unrest in Miami early last year in the wake of unsatisfied charges of police brutality that ended in the death of a black citizen, the questionable court exoneration of Ku Klux Klan members accused of killing blacks in Greensboro, N.C., and the mysterious and unprovoked killings of individual blacks in Buffalo and Rochester, all witness the new threat that has gripped with understandable fear the members of black communities countrywide. These new attacks have also rubbed raw the wounds of the 60s that have only lately felt the scar tissue of acceptance promise to become the more solid flesh of community.

In our own area, new responses are being mounted to meet the threat. They warrant the serious attention of all our citizenry. Yet, here as elsewhere, the impending dangers are likely to be given the same "enthused apathy" that has been accorded the severe warnings of the report of the Kerner Commission a decade ago. What will it take to move us?

Last year several incidents of cross-burnings and anti-black vandalism disturbed the comfortable environs of Rochester. Local officials tended to label these "just pranks" and to counsel temperance in response. Tension in the local black community inspired a more serious view. The Office of Black Ministries of the diocese found it appropriate to hold an ecumenical "major day-long conference" in June. Its theme was "The Ku Klux Klan: Past History/Present Menace."

This observer participated in that conference and experienced mixed feelings as the discussions progressed. Some very forceful rhetoric and literature were presented, summing all to a "life and death struggle... a fight we must win, by uniting black, Latino and white, poor and working people to stop the Klan by whatever means are necessary." Among the proposals presented to the convention were these:

— to establish a mutual support and self-defense network for victims of racist harassment or attack. This could possibly include a "hotline" number which could be called at any time and a telephone number which could quickly mobilize support for those under attack;

— to organize in the near future a mass demonstration, with broadest possible support, against racism and against the Klan.

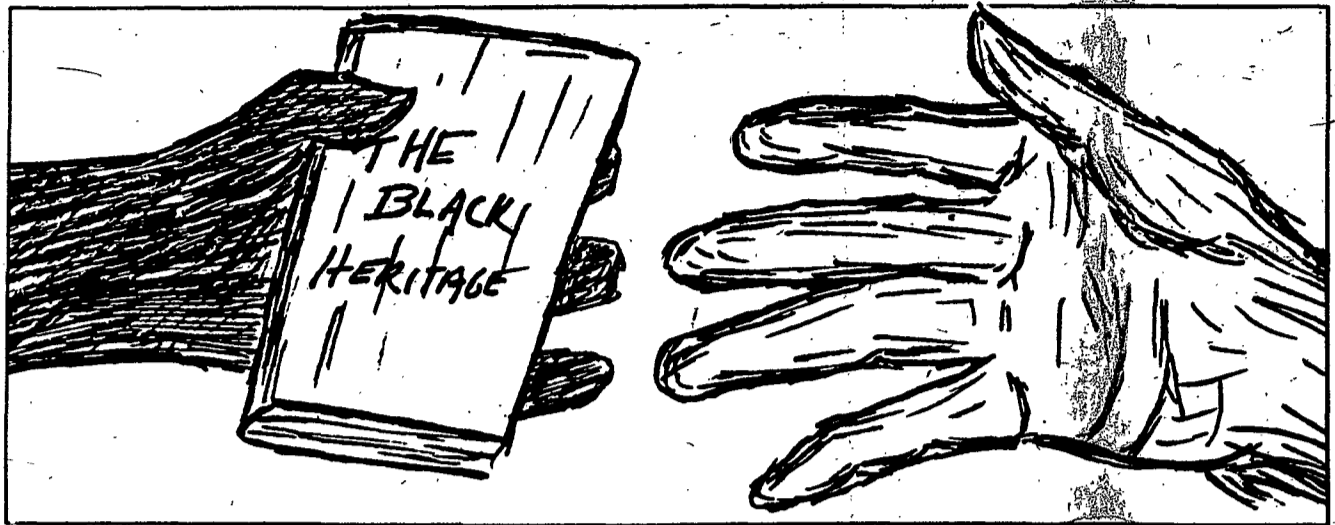
Shades of the early 60s!

In the light of the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan generally, as well as its new growth, and of particular Klan-black confrontations in specific locales, the concern then was truly understandable and necessary. The new incidents of anti-black terrorism, especially if separate from the investigations of the Klan, whether the horrendous mass murder in Atlanta, or the seemingly isolated but similar slayings in Buffalo and Rochester, have made that black fear and concern more severe and demanding of response.

One must keep in mind, nevertheless, the obvious failure of emergency responses in the past, at least toward achieving long-range and enduring changes of attitudes, especially those of whites as they are forcefully reflected in the opening quotations.

For if these responses had succeeded, the present black fear and anti-Klan symposia as well as the formation of militant defense plans would be unnecessary, an anachronism.

Citizens, black and white, of good will and clear judgment will want to forestall extremist moves by individual citizens and factions, moves inevitably fraught with risks of new



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violence. Thoughtful whites deplore the growing recruitment of a new and more sophisticated Klan membership. Yet, too many will myopically sympathize with Klan pledges of job protection for blue collar whites fearful of affirmative action measures in business and industry. And the concern for preservation of white supremacy in the professions will make Klan sympathizers of a white braintrust who would never become card-carrying Klan members. In the face of this new white threat, black wariness urges a vigilant spirit and consequent protection "networks" potentially militant and physically "ready." This continuing need for concern against white racist threats witnesses to the failure of measures taken in the past, on both sides, to effect lasting results. Much more is needed.

The point is that attitudes have not changed enough, maybe even not significantly. When "push comes to shove," our centuries-long ethnocentric prejudices prevail. And thus when the Ku Klux Klan finds a situation such as obtained too recently in the school tensions in Boston, or in the police brutality tensions in Miami or Rochester, offering a promising arena for the purist, pro-America fight against "reverse discrimination," it will seize upon such avidly and find successful support for its racist agitation, if not card-carrying cross-burners and sheet-clad assassins.

The insidious results are the same, however, in the destructive perpetuation of racial antagonism and sustained injustice. Racism is far bigger than the Ku Klux Klan.

The irrefutable conclusion to be drawn is that education — of whites to the black experience, in all its facets, is still the answer, and the only sure solution.

Ideally, every American must be made aware of the real meaning of racism and how it functions now as well as how it developed over the years.

A deep understanding must be grasped of the injustices racism has instituted in the past, and is still rationalizing today. Only this kind of education to understanding will reshape white ethnocentric attitudes in such a way that one day we will deal immediately and effectively with every threat to racial justice, whether it be a dramatic ritual cross-burning at a legalized Klan assemblage, or a "prankish" gesture by a renegade, unsanctioned parcel of sophomore Klan aspirants. What is more important, it is only this kind of thorough education that will let the "well-meaning" citizenry generally recognize the subtle functioning of racism, wherever it appears in American society, for it is the atmosphere of generally institutionalized bias that breeds both petit racists and racist psychotics and murderers as well.

(Continued Next Week)

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