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WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH BLACK POWER?

(Preached at The Community Church of New York on Sunday,
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Like Hurricane Inez, smashing her way blindly, unpredictably, irresistibly across the Caribbean, threatening every living creature in her path, so is that horrid hurricane of fear and hate which we call the White Backlash, smashing its way across this broad American land.

It has killed the 1966 Civil Rights Bill, with its essential provisions for open occupancy housing and Federal protection for civil rights workers from terror and murder in the South. Bowing before the White Backlash, Congress has, in effect, given the green light to all those whites in the suburban areas who are saying to Negroes, "We don't want you in our neighborhoods! Don't try to get out of your ghettos!" It has said to all of those struggling for equality in the South, "Congress will not defend you. Defend yourselves!"

The White Backlash has lynched justice in most of our Southern courts. This very week the murderers of Mrs. Viola Liuzzo and of Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman and James Cheney are still at large. Lynching is still law in the South, for juries will not convict, and the fact that one of the juries which set free a Civil Rights worker's murderer was composed of eight Negroes and four whites, only serves to dramatize the degree of the terror that reigns down there.

The White Backlash is at this moment slowing the process of school integration in the South. It has reversed it in the North. It threatens to destroy all the accomplishments of twelve hard years of struggle. Despite the fact that only 6% of the Negro children in the South are in integrated schools, which means that 94% are still in segregated schools, twelve years after the Supreme Court decision, we hear cries in Congress that integration is moving too fast, and that those officials who have been trying to speed up the process must be Communists. Make no mistake about it, this hurricane of hate carries a McCarthy mood, and if we let it run its course, it will have most Americans fearing and hating each other before it is done. In the North as well, the process of integration in education has come to a virtual standstill, if not worse, for there are, in fact, more de facto segregated schools in the North every year.

The White Backlash threatens to engulf one of the most progressive steps in years towards winning the confidence of the minority groups in the Police Department, here in New York City — the Civilian Police Review Board. There can be no question but that many of the riots have arisen because of the lack of confidence of minority groups in the police. The Civilian Police Review Board, here in New York, has begun to restore confidence, but it is now being viciously attacked with as rascally a racist appeal as I can ever remember in

my years in this city. The advertisement in the New York City newspapers, portraying a young, white woman surrounded by darkness, and suggesting that if she is not to be attacked and raped the Civilian Police Review Board must be destroyed, is blatantly racist and can only create the kinds of fear and hate for which we in the city ultimately will pay a terrible price. Are we not still close enough to the primordial savageries unleashed by Adolph Hitler, to have respect for the primitive that remains within us, just a little below the hard and finely-polished surface of civilization that we wear? Can we not realize what can happen when "the furies" are released, and have a little care? But the racist ad is being repeated. It has evidently brought money pouring into the coffers of the Policemen's Benevolent Association's so-called "Independent Committee," which has been sponsoring it.

Finally, the Gallup Poll this week indicates that 52% of all adult Americans believe that the Administration is going too fast with this business of integration. Only 10% of the whole, the percentage that is the minority itself, felt that the Administration was not going fast enough, and all of this despite the fact that in virtually every area that counts, there is practically no discernible progress at all.

What has caused this incredible, massive movement of thought and feeling that we call the White Backlash, which has been capable of reversing so quickly what appeared to be a slow, steady march toward equality of all races and liberty and justice for all Americans? The answer, we are told, may be found in two little words spoken by a very young man, Stokely Carmichael, Chairman of the Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee, this last summer. The words were: "Black Power!" If anyone is inclined to belittle the evocative power of mere words, let him take heed. These two have unleashed "the furies."

But what do these words actually stand for, and why do they evoke so fearful a response? May God help us to understand the answer to this question, lest our blind reactions sweep away everything we Americans ultimately believe in.

Surely there is nothing very strange about the word — Power. Power is one of the necessary ingredients to viable personality and social progress. All minority groups have sought power to progress through social solidarity, from the very beginning of time. This very day Fifth Avenue is tied up all day long in the Pulaski Day Parade, a demonstration of Polish power. And what is the Steuben Day Parade, the Columbus Day Parade, the St. Patrick's Day Parade, but demonstrations of German, Italian and Irish solidarity and power? We are familiar with Jewish power, organized through the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress and many other organizations working to promote this power and exercising it not only for Jewish interests but for the general interest and welfare as well. We are familiar with Catholic power, quietly brought to bear for the advancement of both Catholic interests and the general welfare, and I emphasize both of these things because I have frequently been very grateful for Catholic power exercised for great, good goals with which I was in full accord. There is an amazingly large number of organizations of Catholics in almost all of the vocations for the advancement of Catholic interests and the general welfare. All such organizations exercise power through social solidarity

of their minority status.

So what's the matter with black power? Why should not the Negro seek the same social solidarity and resultant power that other groups have successfully sought and wielded for their advancement from time immemorial? Why should the call for black power have evoked the furies of the white backlash, threatening to sweep away the gains of years of struggle and to harden the hearts of American citizens against each other?

The answer, my friends, lies in the depths of the white psyche, the white, Western soul, and it is high time that we began to explore the deep, unconscious basis of prejudice in the white spirit. We have to do here with a deep, philosophical, religious and linguistic problem, which stems from our Western, Judeo-Christian, dualistic philosophy, which divided the universe into two parts, one dominated by God and the other by the Devil, which divided men into two categories, the Children of Light and the Children of Darkness, and which split human nature in two, the spirit, which was good, and the flesh, which was evil, and which set all of these forever at war with each other until the end of time. The spirit was to reject the flesh, light was to conquer darkness, and the Children of Light the Children of Darkness. And, inevitably, the imagery was transposed and the symbolism applied to the dark-skinned children of God. How simple a matter it became to excuse one's exploitation of the Children of Darkness if one belonged to the Children of Light, for light was good and dark was evil, day was good and night was evil, intellect was good and feeling was evil and of the flesh.

Yes, and white man even went so far as to project upon the black man all of his fears of the flesh, and to see him somehow as more capable of feeling, more capable of fierceness and anger, more capable of love, of sex, of all of the rejected side of the self that he called "flesh."

Even our language, dear friends, is full of it, and in that sense, full of derogation of dark-skinned people. We speak of "a dark day," a "black mood," a "blackguard" — by which we mean a villain; we speak of "the black gods" of magic and witchcraft, "black death" — the worst of the diseases. To "blacken" is to defame, to give a "black eye" is to slander. Among the synonyms listed in the dictionary for "black" are: "soiled with dirt, gloomy, boding ill, wicked." "To black out" is "to lose consciousness," one of the mysterious experiences which man most fears.

Now, you can see that our problem is not with the word, "power," but with the word "black." When you use the words "black power" in combination, you tend to evoke deep, racial memories and religious fears, which derive from the ancient religious dualism and the language in which it found expression, and which in turn has become part and parcel of the everyday language which we all employ, whose lethal fallout the dark-skinned peoples have had to bear as an extra psychological burden from time immemorial.

As Christianity carries within it the seeds of anti-Semitism, so Judeo-Christian dualism has always carried within it the seeds of racial prejudice. Any wise Christian must guard himself and his religion against the almost automatic anti-Semitism created by the circumstances of its historical beginnings, and all Judeo-Christian, Western, white men will have to guard themselves against the racial prejudice implicit in the dualistic philosophy,

and continued in expression in the very language and thought habits of Western life, even when the dualistic philosophy has been abandoned.

We are going to have to do something more about this than just being careful about what words we use, although I think it is very important that we be careful with words. I try not to use the words "dark" or "black" in a negative sense, as synonymous for something dismal or evil, just as I take care not to use the verb "to jew," meaning to beat down or drive a hard bargain. It behooves all of us to be sensitive to the feelings of our neighbors, and not to use words which stereotype and malign a whole people.

This will involve, first of all, our learning to accept all of ourselves, the emotional as well as the intellectual, the unconscious as well as the conscious, what we have called the dark side of the self as well as the light side of the self. We shall have to learn to accept our anger, our love, sexual expression as good and healthy and natural and desirable, and the unconscious mind as the source of much of our greatest creativity. Such acceptance of all of ourselves, we now know through psychiatry, is a prerequisite to rational self-direction and self-control. When we have learned not to reject what we call the darkness in ourselves, we will be less likely to project the fears and the hate relating to that rejection upon the innocent, the dark-skinned Negro.

At the same time, we must face the injustice of our white, age-long scapegoating of the Negro. We actually use his dark skin as the evidence that he contains all of those dark impulses and intuitions which we repress, and reject, in ourselves, as though he were as one-sided a man in that direction as we had made ourselves one-sided in the other direction. We try to force our one-sidedness upon him, projecting into him our rejected selves at the same time that we demand that he be like our accepted selves. We do all of this unconsciously, God help us, without knowing what we are doing.

Father forgive us, for we know not what we do.

It is only as we understand something of this psychological process that we may be liberated from our own self-rejection and our projections upon the Negro of that which we reject in ourselves.

But a further factor feeding the White Backlash has been the white man's repressed knowledge of the enormity of his crimes against the black man with the consequent projection of massive inner fears upon him. Having tried to emasculate him sexually, we have projected upon him fantasies of sexual potency. Having committed incredible crimes against him, we have feared that if he were not sorely repressed, his anger might strike out and destroy us. All of this is truly understood by the experts, but now we see it in its full, irrational, terrifying madness let loose across the land.

These are the undercover forces, the furies, which have suddenly been unleashed by a nineteen-year-old* Negro youth's anguished cry for "black power." But that cry came at a time when increasing Negro pressure toward racial equality had probably generated, increased, though repressed, fears in the white majority, which has only given the unthinking savagery a more frightening magnitude.

* Reverend Harrington made an error here. Stokely's age is 25.

Now, friends, we have a further problem, those of us who are white, and that is, that having accumulated so massive a guilt in our exploitation of and prejudice against our Negro fellow-men, we unconsciously feel somewhere way down deep inside, that we can only wash away that guilt with some great act of compensation. Those of us who feel it deeply, are driven out onto the picket line, and into the struggle, and we would lay down our lives willingly. Yet, the net effect of this has not been wholly good, for it has often tended to rob the Negro of the opportunity of doing for himself, and of the satisfaction of fighting his own fight and winning his own battles. We have not often been content to remain behind the scenes, to shout our support from the sidelines, to run interference in a way that would really count in trying to change the minds of our neighbors about open occupancy housing and having Negro friends next door, and in sending our children into integrated schools. We have far too often said that if we cannot run the show, we won't give the money. Unconscious guilt makes people do strange things, and though the white Liberal is usually an intellectual, there is much evidence today that he does not understand his role, even yet.

Now, what can we do about all this? How can we deal with the causes of the White Backlash rather than the symptoms? How can we get the Civil and Human Rights Crusade back on the track and restore to America a whole and healthy rather than a split and mortally sick soul.

1. Let's stop blaming Stokely Carmichael. All he did was to coin the phrase which released the forces already there in the white heart. If he is to be blamed, it is only for his youth and naivete in giving the white conscience so easy an "out" so acceptable an excuse for giving up the struggle.

Perhaps we should thank him for forcing us white folks to reveal those hidden fears and deep hatreds of the inner psyche, for until we have learned to face them, we shall not be able to control them. We shall not learn to live with and love the dark side of ourselves. We shall be filled with unreasoning fears when the black man sits at the next desk or moves next door. In a sense, Martin Luther King, too, was right in marching his Negro civil rights workers into the lily-white suburbs of Chicago and evoking the hatred and unreasoning fear of their white inhabitants for all to see and ponder. The fear and hatred was there, and was it not better for Negroes to face it in solidarity, together, with some measure of white support, than for individual Negro families to face it all alone in isolation -- one by one -- as they have to in so many white suburbs across America? Can we really solve this problem unless we face ourselves, we white people?

But perhaps we should also warn Stokely Carmichael of the need for care in the choice and use of words and strategies. There is little point in evoking forces and furies which one has neither the resources nor the readiness to cope with. Real power is achieved through the hard, silent, time-consuming process of organization of human beings, for which there are no short-cuts. It is instructive that minorities which exercise real power do so silently, going to great lengths not to arouse the fears of the majority to unmanageable proportions.

Let us also acknowledge that Stokely Carmichael has never advocated black dominance. This is how he puts the matter: "Essential in the process of organizing Negroes to win power is the conquest of fear and the development of 'black consciousness': Self-respect, pride in the history of black people, our culture and institutions...The acquisition of political power responsible to black people is the current stage in our struggle to create a society in which people can make free choices as equals about all aspects of their daily lives. This is our goal and our concept of integration. Too often the goal 'integration' has been based on a complete acceptance of the fact that in order to have a decent house or education, Negroes must move into a white neighborhood or go to a white school. What does this mean?

First of all, it reinforces among both Negroes and whites the idea that 'white' is automatically better, and that 'black' is, by definition, inferior. Secondly, it allows the nation to focus, for example, on a handful of Negro children who finally get by Southern racist mobs and into white schools, and to ignore the 94% who are left behind in unimproved, all-black schools. Such situations will not change until Negroes have political power -- to control their own school boards, for example. With the achievement of such control, Negroes can become truly equal -- and integration then becomes relevant and meaningful."

2. Let's try to understand the identity crisis in the Negro soul. There is a deep ambivalence in the Negro spirit today with respect to the long-range goal of integration. The Negro instinctively shies away from the dominant white mood, "I don't like you! Not next door!" He instinctively knows that without Negro solidarity there can be no power to change the way things are, and yet he has always been taught, both by the white man and his own Negro leadership, that integration is the goal. Booker T. Washington advised his Negro youth: "The white man (and his values) are right: we must earn equality, must come to deserve civil rights. And the way to become qualified and deserving is to become as much like what the white man tells us he is as possible, literally and figuratively." Later, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois described this philosophy as permanent acceptance of Negro inferiority, and so it was.

The lesson of all of this was that the Negro never could win acceptability from the white man on the basis of self-rejection. Until he was able to affirm the values of blackness, and be accepted as a black man fully by the white, rather than as a black man trying to reject his blackness and to become white, even a white man could not accept him. Just as the new nations have to achieve a sense of nationhood before they can give themselves fully to the building of an international community, so the Negro cannot base his drive for integration on self-rejection, but must move toward integration from self-acceptance and social solidarity with his group.

But how can the Negro achieve that self-acceptance? How can he

find himself in full enough measure to permit the work of integration to proceed? I suspect that he will be able to do so only when he, as a Negro, gains and successfully uses the real power of his own individual and social advance. This will mean his having to say, gently or not so gently, to his over-eager white friends, "Encourage me! Support my efforts! But let me do it myself!" For the white man, it means setting the Negro free for self-realization without rejecting him for his independence. As Charles Silberman put it in his book, "Crisis in Black and White," -- "Negroes cannot solve their problem of identity, therefore, they cannot achieve their manhood until they are in a position to make or to influence the decisions that affect them, in a word, until they have power."

This is why the cry for black power is so insistent in our day. Without some real leverage on events that touch his life, the Negro cannot replace his self-rejection with self-acceptance and the white man cannot learn to accept as an equal a Negro who is rejecting himself.

3. Let's try to understand the crisis in the white conscience. We have been talking so much about the black problem, that we have lost sight of the real problem, which is the white problem. Why are white people unable to accept black people as fully human, fellow men, fellow Americans, brothers, worthy of living in their neighborhoods, of attending school with their children, of participating fully in economic life, of holding the highest positions in their firms? We are running away from our own consciences, and the one thing that you cannot escape, for it goes right along with you, is your conscience. We have studied the Negro Problem to death, so now let us begin to study the White Problem in depth. I would urge our great Foundations to get together to develop a project designed to help the white man to understand why he has been running away from his Negro brother for all of these years, why he seems incapable of loving his neighbor as himself if his neighbor happens to have a dark skin, and to tell us how to help him stop running from all that he really believes in and that America stands for.

Finally, we need to understand how the frustrations in the Negro community, the crisis of confidence in the capacity of America to solve this problem, and the crisis in Negro identity, as brought to focus by the White Backlash, affect both our immediate programs in the field of integration, and our overall, long-range purpose and goal of American civil rights.

The field of equal opportunity in employment is paramount. A good job with a good income has a marvelous effect upon morale. It means that one can dress well, afford decent housing, be healthy, and best of all, feel useful, part and parcel of the on-going world. Negro unemployment is still more than twice that of white unemployment, and the gap is widening, not closing. We need a much more massive attack upon minority unemployment. I believe that we need Federal and State programs of sufficient magnitude to guarantee

every American who is willing to work a decent job, with on-the-job training. If it be said that this will be expensive, I can only say that it will cost a lot more to pay for prisons and welfare programs, and for the narcotic-addiction hospitals that will result from inaction.

In education, we need to put a new emphasis upon equality of education in the ghetto schools to make up for the long years of neglect. I believe that this will inevitably bring a change of emphasis from that which we have been making in the civil rights movement in recent years. We have been talking about integration as the touchstone, partly because we have felt that there was no way to get quality education for Negro children except through integrated schools. We have not succeeded in our integration efforts, mostly because white families have fled the integrating schools, but also because there was implicit in the process itself the notion that going to white schools would mean better education for Negro children. Everyone simply assumed that white children would not go into Negro schools, and the Board of Education, following, I suppose, what it believed to be the will of the majority of the population, simply refused to schedule any really significant busing of white children into Negro schools.

Our aim now should be, following a compensatory philosophy, to make up for past neglect by making our Negro and other minority schools the finest in the city, with the best prepared teachers, the largest staff of auxiliary personnel for remedial reading, counseling, family counseling, etc. We should make those schools so good, so outstanding, that white parents will want to send their children into them because of the superior education going on there.

This effort will require special organization for Negro parent participation, for the Negro parent simply will not believe that the ghetto school is of high quality unless he participates in the planning of its program and can see for himself. It will require a radical program of upgrading Negro teachers to be Assistant Principals and Principals, for the Negro children need the image of Negro leadership. If this is done properly it will tend to integrate the ghetto schools because it will make them so good that white parents will want their children to study there. Thus, integration remains the goal, but the immediate step has changed to an emphasis upon quality as a necessary prerequisite to ultimate integration, and Negro parent participation as a guarantee of quality and effectiveness.

What we must have no more of is such a fumbling of the issues as has taken place at Intermediate School 201 in Harlem. In the first place, this school was placed where the parents knew it could not be integrated, and they spoke their grave misgivings. Then for months the parents sought assurances that the school would be a high quality school, but the Board of Education refused to deal with them in any significant way or to give them any real voice in what was being prepared. When the Board finally sat down

with the parents, a week before school opening, it was already too late to create the kind of confidence necessary to move ahead. The good faith of the Board itself was in question, and this is what must be remedied by some new planning for a significant relationship of Negro parents to the school, to all of the ghetto schools, and a radical program of upgrading Negro personnel in the school system itself.

Similarly in the area of housing. We have been talking about placing all new low-cost, middle-income housing in middle-income white neighborhoods, to integrate those neighborhoods, and to stop the process of reinforcement of the ghetto. Yet, this has met with violent resistance in many white areas, and the Negro, himself, often does not want to leave the ghetto area because it is the source of his social solidarity. As one Negro leader put it to me: "If we were suddenly to disperse the people of the Negro ghetto now, we would emasculate and isolate ourselves, dispersing what little power we have through voting solidarity. Integration must come one day, but it can come only when acceptance on the part of white people makes it possible for us to disperse our strength." Thus, at the same time that integration is affirmed as a desirable ultimate, it is also understood that unless those who are in the minority, struggling for a little leverage upon their problems, stick together, they merely isolate themselves and render themselves impotent.

What we must do in housing, I believe, is to make a major assault upon the deterioration in ghetto areas themselves in terms of the radical improvement of all housing and services in them. I stand behind Comptroller Arthur Levitt's proposal for beginning the process of the renewal of Harlem, for example, with a fifty-story State Office Building at 125th Street and Park Avenue, surrounded by a whole complex of other new buildings, including a large parking garage, a bus terminal, a new 125th Street railroad terminal, a great, new theatre, a new hotel, a new department store, and a great deal of new, low- and middle-income housing. Radiating out from this there should be renewal plans for side-streets and other areas so that gradually the living conditions in Harlem will become so attractive that the area will naturally integrate. The fact is that Harlem is one of the most desirable places in New York in which to live, with its parks, broad avenues and easy transportation. A little imagination could make it a place where Negroes and whites would be proud to live side by side. Right along with this, I would have new, low- and middle-income housing built in middle-income white neighborhoods so that as the need for Negroes to draw together becomes less, the opportunity for places to live outside of the ghetto would also increase. This, plus a reasonable Federal open-occupancy law, could, over the next twenty-five years, bring about a neighborly America so far as housing is concerned.

Finally, in the area of voting, it is absolutely necessary for everyone in this land, and especially those who have been denied the right to vote, to use their votes. Better methods should be

found for encouraging minority people to register to vote, and to feel that it is worthwhile making the effort to register and to go to the polls. I say that now is the time for all of the political parties to include Negroes and Puerto Ricans among their candidates for the highest offices. Of course, the candidates must be fully qualified, and there are fully qualified people available. But, just as other minority groups have felt that it was significant to be represented on the ballot, so the Negro seeks, and should seek, this kind of political recognition.

The long-range goal remains the old American dream -- a community in which every individual has the opportunity to fulfill his inner potentials, a country in which every community is accepted and cherished for what it is and what it offers, including pride in its national or racial origin. Our long-range goal remains -- "One nation, indivisible, under God, with liberty and justice for all."