

By way of an introductory comment, it is necessary to state that it is unrealistic to begin making observations or to draw any conclusions about the present situation in Cleveland, Mississippi, without recognizing at the outset (and throughout) a fractured community. Very little sense can be made of the state of affairs here without coming to terms with the fact of two divided and uncommunicative groups.

I. Negro Community

There is within the Negro population here a group still characterized by traditional attitudes and dispositions towards the whites. This involves a kind of fear couched in terms of "the boss man" and often spelled out in speculation about the loss of jobs if the white man is angered by Negro actions or activities. There is widespread distrust of the whites as employers and merchants, with a great deal of talk about having been cheated and the possibility of being cheated. Following from these factors of fear and distrust, there is common confession of unwillingness to be straightforward with whites - real hesitancy to say what is felt and believed when the common rhetorical question is posed by the white: "That's all right with you, isn't it, boy?"

One response to this fear and distrust is to comply - to resign oneself to the kind of condescending and patronizing treatment suggested in the question above. It seems clear that one way of dealing with the fear present in the make-up of things is to "sell-out." Among the segment of Negro community which consistently acquiesces in the time-honored servant-master pattern of relationship to whites, awareness of tension in Mississippi has intensified Negro distrust and hardened refusal to speak one's mind.

Increasingly, there is among the Negroes the opposite kind of response to the same fear and distrust which pervade the current Mississippi situation. It might be said that the dramatic new factor in the composition of the Negro community here (and, in fact, the new factor in Mississippi society at large) is a more youthful group of people firmly aligned with the movement for Freedom. This movement has been made known to them by the local project. "Alignment" ranges from enthusiastic participation and labor in the COFO organization (voter canvassing, registration activities) to the willingness to attend meetings held for adults and young people. Involvement in the movement is of itself a repudiation of the response of acquiescence and resignation noted above.

One of the recurring issues of interest and concern among those who associate themselves with the civil rights movement is that of education. The pursuit of better educational opportunities is consistently linked with better job prospects. It is also directly related to the white challenge to prove literacy. The connection between the voter registration drive and the problem of Negro educational-level is clearly seen and understood.

There is within this new segment of the Negro community a pursuit of integrity (or, perhaps, full humanity) which expresses itself in many and different ways. There is more and more outward resentment of the condescending white attitude which is explicit in the address, "boy." Within the Negro community, a solidly disdainful sentiment is in force against the "Uncle Toms" who will not "stand up like men." Ridicule of those Negroes whose respectability in the eyes of whites appears to have been gained at the cost of Negro integrity and self-respect is now considered crucially important by many in the Freedom movement. What needs to be stressed is the fact that the desire for (1) education and voting rights, and (2) new integrity, are consistently discussed and understood as two sides of the same coin - a coin increasingly sought by the younger generation Negro.

The presence of white volunteer workers in this community has had an important effect on this latter group of freedom-oriented Negroes. It is difficult to estimate the effect of having whites in the Negro community as equals - in conversation, at the table, in church - but by all appearances, this has done a great deal to assure the Negro that he is a human being, that he is recognized by some whites as a human being, and that white condescension need not be the pattern for dealings between the races.

Perhaps the clearest way to get at the difference between the two general segments of the Negro community in this place is to say that some still operate as if they accept the proposition of Negro inferiority, although an energetic, enthusiastic and growing group rejects this assumption. The business of having white volunteers living as guests, brothers, and co-workers in Negro homes has added significantly to Negro confidence and self-respect. It has also served to destroy the myth that the doctrine of "separate but equal" society grows out of the laws of nature. The presence of white volunteers in the Negro community here has in concrete fashion given the lie to the premise that bi-racial relations, especially in the more intimate social areas, are unnatural.

(It might be added here with respect to our presence in Cleveland as Christian ministers, that the fact that we were there as white men associated with the movement was more important than the fact that we were clergy.)

## II. White Community

Although much protest is heard from whites that it is only "outside agitation" which upsets them at the present, it becomes evident during conversation that fear is a major element in the typical white attitude towards the Negro community. This brand of fear is not trepidation about physical injury, but grave uneasiness about what is taking place among the Negroes - and uneasiness about what they are being told by civil rights people. What is seen to be threatened by the whites with whom we talked is all that is meant by the phrase "the Southern way of life." It is from this fear of the "overturning of our way of life" that many of the ominous suggestions about "Communist conspiracies" and "leftist, beatnik infiltration" issue. Apart from fearful concern about outside influences operating in the civil rights movement, there is markedly less understanding of the Negro attitude and aspiration (as expressed locally) by the whites than is admitted. The Negro community seems to have a clearer idea of what the whites are attempting to preserve than the whites do of what the Negroes desire.

Concern is growing among whites due to the summer's activity, and the anxiety within the white community is intensified by suspicions that much more is in the offing in the way of Negro demands and action. The argument that "the Nigra is happy" is not used so widely now, but it has been only slightly changed into dark suggestions about how happy the Negro would be if agitators and left-wingers would stop trying to "indoctrinate" them.

Mounting concern about the state of affairs in Cleveland has not, however, changed the basic white point of view or range of sentiments. It is readily admitted by many that much of what causes and sustains the white attitude is most accurately understood in economic terms. It is stated flatly and with no apologies that segregation is necessary to maintain the present balance of wealth, and that, furthermore, the segregated society best serves the total citizenry of Mississippi (and certainly Cleveland) at this time.

## III. Leadership

A. White. On the basis of a number of conversations with a portion of the white community who might be termed "moderates" (i.e., they were willing to engage in civil conversations with clergy volunteers in the Mississippi Summer Project), it is evident that they are determined that the problems of "their Negroes" be solved by the white timetable and on the terms they set down. Whites spoken to voiced equally firm determination that these problems be approached and solved in ways which do not involve threats, strife or force.

These "moderates" of the white community (none of whom, it should be pointed out, could be said to favor integration) are not organized or recognizable as a defined group. Indeed, they are extremely hesitant to commit them-

selves to a moderate viewpoint regarding the race issue, even in the presence of other moderates. They openly admit to concern about disparagement and hostility from fellow whites, who, they also admit, are organized to the point of knowing at least where they stand (the White Citizens' Council and Ku Klux Klan were mentioned).

Leadership from the white churches in the area of inter-racial relations has not been forthcoming. The white clergy with whom these issues were discussed showed no inclination to depart from the general viewpoint of white laity, except for one clergyman who expressed great enthusiasm about a program for improving the moral standards of the Negro community. There is substantial resentment of the white clergy volunteers working in the Mississippi Summer Project, and hostility towards the National Council of Churches is intense. One white man made the remark that he was willing to debate issues of civil rights with us, but he would not discuss NCC because he was biased. In another instance, a white clergyman requested that clergy volunteers move out of the Negro community into the local Holiday Inn in order to make themselves available as "mediators" between the two communities. When it was suggested to him that the commitments and loyalties of clergy volunteers in Mississippi were in basic accord with the Negro freedom movement, and, further, that it might be possible for the established white clergy in Mississippi to serve as mediators, conversation ended.

B. Negro. There are several Negroes considered by the whites of Cleveland to be "responsible" and "proven." Given the attributes which produce this white approval, however, these men are widely held to be "Uncle Toms" by the younger Negroes. Much is heard from both racial groups about exploitation by Negro leaders of their own people.

A curious paradox involving the reputed Negro leadership is the encouragement of these people by the whites at the same time that they are intimidated and told specifically what it means to be a "responsible Negro." Warnings to Negro teachers that integration of schools will oust them from their jobs are indicative of the attempt of whites to cite as the leaders of the Negro community those men over whom they hold significant sway. A difficult aspect of this dilemma is the fact that so few Negroes in Cleveland are economically independent of the white. Most Negroes here, and all that were mentioned as "responsible" by the whites, are directly answerable to white employers, or to supervisors or systems (school, county, etc.) controlled by whites. There is no economic independence available to the Negro here, since banking, financing, and insurance must be transacted with white enterprises. In short, then, Negro leadership recognized by the white community is made up of men who

are not free to lead their people without surrendering almost immediately any real responsibilities and powers into the hands of white superiors.

(The town of Mound Bayou, eight miles to the north of Cleveland, is often pointed out by the whites as evidence that an all-Negro community has little economic success. What is not pointed out with the same frequency is the fact that Mound Bayou is economically dependent upon neighboring white communities for major banking support, etc.)

#### IV. Communication Between Communities

In view of the fact that the Negroes considered "responsible" by the white community are increasingly looked upon as simply "scared" by the freedom enthusiasts of the Negro community, there is no real understanding of the true make-up of the Negro power structure. This is a most disturbing point for the whites to hear, and yet they are steadfast in their refusal to have anything to do with local figures who are linked with the freedom movement.

It is apparent that the white community recognizes its obligations to the Negroes in areas of education, road improvements, recreational facilities, etc. There is not widespread resentment, in theory, to Negro voter registration, but "literacy" and absence of agitators are firmly stated prerequisites. This paternalistic concern of the "moderate" whites is not strong enough to be effective - that is, there has been no organization or mobilization toward the professed goals for the Negro community.

(NOTE: When the objectives of COFO's project and the SCLC citizenship classes were enumerated to the whites without their sponsors' names mentioned, there was much enthusiasm and assent. The observation then had to be forced upon them that these despised organizations and their programs were necessary precisely because white concern for "our Nigras" had never shown signs of translating words of concern into specific, constructive action.)

At the very root of communication failure between the whites and the important figures behind the younger Negroes stands the fundamental issue: complete social segregation versus integration. This basic difference, and all that it calls up in the minds of both parties makes communication (even regarding common desires and hopes) impossible. Whites will neither initiate discussion nor listen to demands, and Negroes have no reason to suppose that whites are now serious in their wants for the Negro community. Increasing Negro impatience with the way things are grows out of the newly discovered sense of dignity and the realization that the freedom movement points to the opening up of new job opportunities and public privileges.

There is rigid white attachment to the segregated society. The defense of this system sometimes comes in fearful predictions of intermarriage and "mongrelization." It has been said by Negroes here that it is a little

late for the Southern white man to raise shouts of horror and disgust at the prospect of bi-racial intimacies. As one man put it, "The white has been hiding behind the skirts of his women long enough - it's time for him to come out and face the real issue, which he knows and we know is economic!"

Admission that the greatest factor in the integration-segregation struggle is economic in character was also widely encountered among "moderate" whites. Communication failure between these communities is a result of the stalemate existent before any conversation begins: the whites oppose integration (and integrationists), and many Negroes, especially the emerging generation, are committed to a movement demanding integration. The segregated society preserves the present balance of wealth. This is as the white man wants things, but the economic implications of this system for the Negro are dreary, as he fully recognizes. Out of these two views of the same problem grows the block to communication between the races. And yet, at the heart of this very complicated stalemate there is the basic problem of two opposed attitudes about the Negro: to the white the Negro is a servant cog in the economy who does not merit consideration as a being equal to his employer, - but by the Negro it is urgently felt that his status as a human being with dignity and basic integrity must be acknowledged.

For these reasons, the prospects in Cleveland at this time for any significant exchange of ideas or trust between whites and Negroes are remote, if not out of the question. Such exchange is not desired by the whites (moderate or otherwise), and the sincerity of any white overtures would be highly suspect to the Negro community. Actually, the impossibility of productive and creative dialogue here is ruled out for the same reason on both sides. Neither wishes to be presented with demands. The whites are hostile to the civil rights movement and all that it brings, and the Negroes are properly cynical about white delaying actions, which one of them has compared to a pacifier given to a child who has outgrown it.

One curious aspect of our attempts to understand the white attitude in Cleveland needs to be noted. Although conversations with white citizens were possible, and more than that, level-headed and candid, their outcome was the conclusion by them and us, that a bi-racial committee is impossible in Cleveland now.

#### V. School Integration

Nothing is unique in the feelings surrounding this issue in Cleveland. Whites fear the devaluation of education in the case of integrated schooling. Many admit (State Sovereignty Commission to the contrary) that Negro schools are inferior - at least in faculty quality. (Again an economic factor suggests

itself, for one suspects that Cleveland cannot now support two adequate school complexes and that this will not be a lesser problem in the future.) Because of a full understanding of this white viewpoint, and because it is clearly seen which of the school complexes comes out on the short end not only in terms of faculty, but in terms of textbook supplies, etc., the Negro community here is willing to force the issue at any time (i.e., as soon as they are assured of the availability of adequate legal protection).

#### VI. Voter Registration

The methods employed by the COFO project here to encourage and instruct prospective voters to register have changed Negro attitudes toward meeting this obligation. However, many accounts have been given of discriminatory treatment of those responding to the COFO effort. Names and addresses of applicants for registration are printed in the Cleveland newspaper. Intimidation and harassment in the form of threatened firings, etc. have been widespread here. Affidavits presented by Negroes giving evidence of at least a sixth grade education (thereby exempting them from questions of constitutional interpretation - Civil Rights Act, 1964) have been disregarded.

Predictably, apathy among Negroes here is more noticeable in the older citizenry. New interest in voter registration is in evidence. The effects of the Freedom Democratic Party registration program have been seen on national television. Because of the turn of events in Atlantic City, it is seen by many here for the first time that their vote can count for something significant.

The more candid whites with whom we talked were willing to affirm at one and the same time that the right to vote belongs to all (providing proof of literacy - via constitutional interpretation tests - to the county registrar), and yet that it is in the best interests of segregated society to deprive the Negro of his voting privilege.

#### Conclusion

The greatest force behind segregation in Mississippi and particularly in Cleveland, according to significant members of both white and Negro communities, is economic. Economic maintenance of "the Southern way of life" is simply dependent upon the existence of a servant class - and race is the traditional and most convenient means of defining and keeping defined such a class. Segregation preserves here the present balance of wealth. What this means is that the few Negroes who are rewarded economically are those who cooperate with, or at least do not buck the white power structure, which is frankly dedicated to the support of its own affluence. It is understood from whites of this city that they have heard and participated in talk of massive economic

reprisals against Bolivar County Negroes. (This is a very real possibility in a situation which has no labor shortage and is moving toward more complete mechanization of the cotton industry.) To repeat, segregation preserves here the present balance of wealth. This implies a great deal about the problem of the two views of the status of the Negro. In order to maintain his economic position through the suppression of the servant class, and in order to justify that suppression, the white must refuse to recognize and appreciate the full and equal humanity of the Negro.

A second major observation that needs to be made is that whites in Cleveland do not acknowledge the true Negro leadership on its own terms - i.e., as fully equal human beings. This failure to accept the people associated with the increasingly popular freedom movement follows logically from the loyalty to segregation.

The Negro in Cleveland is not in a position, regardless of the wishes and exhortations of the white community, to "help himself." There has not been a time when the Negro here has not been deprived, and there has been no direction for the talented and resourceful Negro to go, in view of the economic facts of life in this city. The Negro is generally limited in his aspirations to imitate the poorest elements of the local white culture. Any attempts to obtain help from outside the community are looked upon as encouragement of agitation.

The younger element of the Negro community now identifying itself with the impetus for freedom is now well into the process of organization. It is equally true to speak of the organized white element in favor of forceful suppression, though the outlines of this body have been evident somewhat longer. The lack of any effective and resolute middle factor points only to the real possibility of direct conflict between these two forces.

Robert T. Hall

Robert C. Gregg