

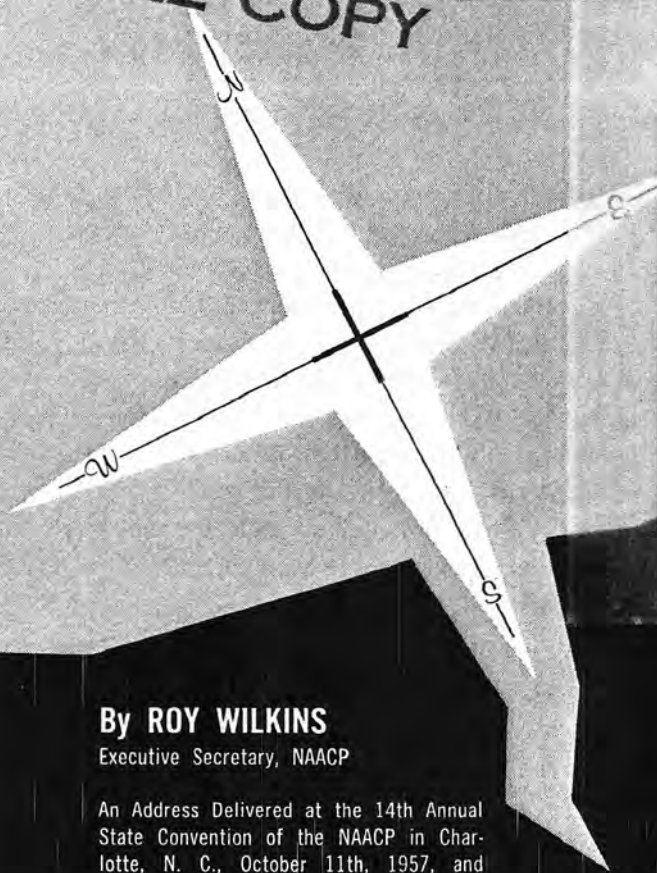
# Integration Crisis

NAACP  
DIVISION OF RESEARCH  
AND INFORMATION

in the

South

FILE COPY



By **ROY WILKINS**

Executive Secretary, NAACP

An Address Delivered at the 14th Annual State Convention of the NAACP in Charlotte, N. C., October 11th, 1957, and Broadcast over Radio Network Facilities of the American Broadcasting Company

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE  
20 West 40th Street      New York 18, N. Y.

## INTEGRATION CRISIS IN THE SOUTH

I AM PLEASED to be able to counsel once again with the delegates to the North Carolina state convention assembled here under President Kelly Alexander and your other fine officers for your fourteenth annual meeting. Much has happened since I spoke to you two years ago at a state-wide rally in Raleigh, and although North Carolina has had a period of soul-searching which is not yet ended, the state is struggling toward the right decision.

Its legislature refused to join other states in passing bills which would have restricted the freedom of its citizens to function in the NAACP, or the freedom of our organized body to assemble, speak freely, and petition for redress of grievances. In turning its back upon this type of repression, North Carolina has done no special favor to the NAACP; it has, instead, favored itself and the nation by upholding the precious liberties of the individual which are the very foundation stone of America itself, and of the Western world.

Some of the state's newspapers have given leadership to those who want to think on the issue. On June 1, 1955, the *Charlotte News* editorial, "End of An Era," declared: "Racial barriers which have existed for generations must be dissolved. A massive change . . . is about to take place."

Three North Carolina cities have ventured to put their little toes into the waters of public school desegregation and have not yet been

drowned, nor even poisoned. We believe they have acted with courage to make a beginning, and that is good. I hope we will be forgiven for offering the wholly natural and expected advice given to all would-be swimmers: "Come on in, the water's fine!" Or, you might say, having made a start, they should not be satisfied with a little Methodist water, but should try the Baptist way.

We do not underestimate the difficulties involved in making a great change in a pattern of living, nor do we brush aside lightly the adjustments each person must make. But we would hope that, in North Carolina and in other Southern states, millions of white people genuinely desire to attain fairness for their fellowmen and peace for themselves. The inflammatory pronouncements and degrading performances of a noisy minority only serve to highlight the existence of the substantial majority which abhors violence and would seek a just solution to a complex problem.

THE EVENTS of the past month have added enormously to the expected complications, and needlessly so. Our nation is today faced with the gravest constitutional crisis in our times. Many factors — tradition, law, psychology, politics and economics — went into the making of the tragedy at Little Rock, but the catalytic agent that set off the explosion was the action of the Governor of the state. No one can tell the end result of this tragic situation. Its repercussions are already being felt, not only throughout the South and

the entire nation, but also throughout the world.

While the Little Rock affair must bear the blame for the immediate crisis, it must not be forgotten that those organized elements which have preached defiance of the courts, while piously disclaiming violence, have created the climate in which mobs have felt free to act. Self-styled respectable citizens, banded together for a campaign of resistance to the decision of the nation's highest court, have given the green light to gangsters.

The manicured hands of the solid citizens did not throw a stone or swing a fist. Their voices did not jeer at six-year-old children in Nashville and their well-bred mouths did not spit upon a girl here in Charlotte. But their exhortations inspired less-restrained members of the communities to overt action. They cannot purge themselves by pointing the finger at another sinner, Orval Faubus.

While all Americans join President Eisenhower in his sadness at the use of troops anywhere, as between troops to obstruct the orders of our courts and troops to uphold those orders, there can be but one choice. The President has earned not only the thanks of Negro citizens—hounded by actual mobs and harassed on all sides by the mob spirit—but the thanks as well of millions who saw the fate of the American dream trembling in the balance.

Those politicians who now scream at Federal troops in Little Rock were as silent as a tomb when Arkansas National Guardsmen carrying guns turned back school girls carrying books.

In a larger sense, the Little Rock tragedy poses a serious political problem which may well

re-shape political alignments throughout the country. Clearly the supporters of Governor Faubus are political orphans with no established home in which to seek refuge. Certainly neither party can support the Governor's use of troops to defy a Federal court order. Neither the Republicans nor the Democrats will go before the American people on such a platform. No, the major political parties can only face the people on a platform calling for the observance of law and order and respect for constituted authority.

There is no place for the supporters of Governor Faubus' segregation stand in a national political party because there is no future for a party whose principal plank is the advocacy of racial bigotry. Their only future would seem to lie in the organization of a provincial political clique dedicated to the maintenance of an obsolescent way of life. And no matter what they name it, or who sponsors it, or how its objectives are described, it will still be a party of racial bigotry, as reprehensible as anything sponsored by the late Adolf Hitler. Enlightened Southerners recognize the futility of joining any such desperate cabal.

As for the Negro voter, I cannot predict the impact Little Rock will have upon his decisions in 1958 and 1960. He has seen all the pictures from Little Rock. He knows the political affiliations of the leading actors in the drama. He knows who sent what troops to do what. He has noted who supports whom. He knows his own local and state situation. When he enters the polling place it is certain that he will weigh all these factors and a variety of others which affect his daily life.

**E**VEN BEYOND the constitutional crisis, our country faces what might be called a survival crisis. The Soviet satellite that has been traveling around the world this past week is not so much in itself. The United States can and will launch a satellite. The British could launch one. Our uneasiness stems from the fact that we did not believe the Russians had the know-how and the capacity to launch a satellite at this time.

Our country will surely correct its error and revise its calculations. It is unthinkable that we should be at the mercy of the Soviet Union or of any other country. But in re-orienting ourselves, we will need to mobilize all the resources and skills available in our population.

For example, we cannot afford second-class education for any American child, or second-class citizenship for any American adult.

As we face a ruthless and skillful adversary bent upon destroying our way of life, we must educate, train and utilize every ounce of manpower and every brain and skill we possess. It is axiomatic that the segregated school system does not provide that equality of opportunity demanded by our Constitution, or, now, urgently required by national security.

One lone Negro scientist worked on the first atom bomb, but he was educated in Illinois and graduated from the University of Chicago. Hundreds like him should have been graduated from the educational systems of the South to serve their country. Instead, they were condemned to schools without adequate mathematics courses, without physics and chemistry laboratories, and even without proper facilities

for useful vocational training.

The separate-but-equal theory has been proved through sixty years of trial to have been merely separate. Those who seek to perpetuate it at all costs are not only trampling upon decency and fairness and the mandates of the American tradition; they are trifling with the security of our country.

It is later, far later, than we think. We can no longer afford the luxury of debating whether nine or ninety, or nine hundred thousand non-white American children shall have access to the best education alongside white American children. Less than the mutual respect and dedication and unity which such education will provide, and less than the maximum employment of our manpower potential may spell disaster.

In this connection, the mobs which disrupt communities discourage the investment of capital and the location of industry in the affected areas. Thus, they not only retard the development of the areas concerned, but tend to dislocate the program of production dispersal which is a part of security planning. The United States is upon shaky ground, indeed, if it must depend upon workers who take a few days off now and then to chase Negro school children, or to snatch at random a Negro man and mutilate him.

**I**N THE END, of course, the real crisis facing us is a moral one. Political and economic expediency are important factors, but they fade before the meeting of man with himself, in his heart and in his conscience. No decision which is not rooted in the hearts of

men will have a useful permanence, and this is not to decry the function and persuasiveness of laws and court opinions on our temporal behavior, any more than it is to decry the function and persuasiveness of the tenets of the Bible on our spiritual behavior.

Both whites and Negroes know in their hearts that the system that has been in vogue is morally wrong. As they talk with each other and make the moves dictated by emerging events, they both know this truth.

They know it as they make and hear the baseless charge of communism hurled at every dissenter from the philosophy and practices of the dead and enervating past. The absurdity of this accusation is revealed in the ever-widening circle of those accused: The NAACP, the National Council of Churches, Catholic bishops, daily newspapers and magazines, student associations, radio and television networks, organized labor, the United States Supreme Court and the President of the United States! The ridiculous theory is that anyone who opposes segregation is a Communist.

The white people know it as they busy themselves with devices to smash the NAACP and thus deprive Negro citizens of their law-abiding spokesman and defender. A recent national survey by the magazine, *Catholic Digest*, printed in its August issue, found that 94 percent of Northern Negroes and 93 percent of Southern Negroes support the views of the NAACP.

It is pertinent to recall here that in 1955 when the Governor of Mississippi called 90 hand-picked Mississippi Negro leaders to his office and asked them to endorse a voluntary

segregation plan, only one supported the Governor. The famed Montgomery, Ala., protest against bus segregation was a wholly indigenous action by local Montgomery Negro citizens, not inspired or led by the NAACP.

Thus it would appear that the state legislation aimed at suppressing the NAACP will not kill the determination of Negro citizens to enjoy their constitutional rights. Nor will it kill the NAACP, whose members intend that it shall stay alive and press its reasonable and wholly American program along all fronts. These laws deprive citizens of freedom of speech and assembly, and of freedom to pool their knowledge and resources to seek redress of grievances in the courts and in the arena of public opinion. No more un-American or unconstitutional measures could be imagined and, until they are stricken down, they are certain to plague white Americans who seek to exercise their freedoms.

Certain white people know this great moral truth even as they incite to violence by means of transparent warnings against violence. In fact, the invocation of violence represents the final dawning of truth. Physical excesses confess the bankruptcy of the host of sham "arguments" and the inevitability of the moral law.

On the upholding of law—spiritual and temporal—the forces for decency and justice can unite. The overwhelming majority of good white citizens of the South has been appalled and shamed by the ugly excesses of the past weeks. Only the mobsters and some weak and uneasy politicians have been brazen, the one ignorantly and unashamedly so, and the other behind a mask of face-saving phrases.

As Judge Lee Ward of the Twelfth Chancery District of Arkansas writes in his letter to *LOOK* magazine: "It is all right to disagree . . . But is *not* all right — under our system of government — for us to decide that we will ignore or violate the law as it has been interpreted by the Supreme Court. We do not have any such right . . . There is a vast difference between disagreement and defiance."

Most white Southerners do not relish the role of law-defiers and would like to work out a plan of compliance, even as did the people of Louisville, as did the people of numerous Texas cities and towns, and as did the people of Little Rock — for it must not be forgotten that Little Rock white citizens devised their own plan. Federal Judge Ronald Davies did not "bring a plan down from North Dakota and cram it down Little Rock's throat" as has been falsely charged.

In the working out of any plan, approached in good faith, Southern white people will have the active and understanding cooperation of Negro citizens, as long as the principle of desegregation is the core of the plan.

Immediately after the decision of May 17, 1954, Dr. Channing H. Tobias, National Board Chairman of the NAACP, issued a statement to an Atlanta conference of the NAACP held May 22 in which he said:

"It is important that calm reasonableness prevail, that the difficulties of adjustment be realized, and that, without any sacrifice of basic principles, the spirit of give and take characterize the discussions."

This is the spirit of the NAACP and Negro citizens today. Three and one-half years after

the decision we are still willing to meet and discuss with "calm reasonableness" any good-faith plan of desegregation.

We hate no man and have never used hatred as a weapon. We want only our rights as American citizens and the equal opportunity for our children that America promises to all its children.

Our people in the South have given a magnificent demonstration of their courage and restraint in the teeth of slander, threats, economic reprisals and mob violence.

Our children, through their courageous and dignified behavior before howling mobs, have made us proud and have challenged us not to fail them as they seek their own destiny in the world of 1977 and beyond.

I am confident that the NAACP organization in North Carolina, one of the best in the land, will not fail these children. Despite the present emotional outbursts, I remain confident that Americans, black and white, North and South, will not fail them, for they are the very stuff of which America is made.

To suggest that the present difficulties cannot be resolved is to deny the genius of Americans who have built a mighty nation from peoples of many cultures, using the amalgam of individual liberty and equality of opportunity.

To suggest a hopeless impasse is to deny the verities of our religious teaching and to renounce our partnership with God in the task of bringing His kingdom into the hearts of men here on earth.

The devotion and wisdom of the patriots, and the prayers of the righteous and the just will surely avert any such catastrophe.

*Issued by*

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE  
ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

October, 1957