

Will Negroes Use Guns?

by Harlon Joye

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The last decade has produced a vast resurgence of militant civil rights actions. Sit-ins, Freedom Rides, boycotts, mass protests, use of Federal troops to enforce integration and Supreme Court decisions have characterized the period. At the same time, two philosophies -- non-violent direct action and Black Muslimism -- have become widely accepted and have replaced legal appeals as the dominant methods of ending segregation. Yet one of the most controversial figures of the period is a man who embraced none of these concepts.

Robert Williams, former president of the Monroe, N.C. NAACP, aroused the antagonism of liberal and conservative, white and Negro, simply by asserting a time honored maxim -- "Liberty and freedom are often created through violence." Williams even stopped short of embracing that maxim. He advocated no guerrilla warfare, no sabotage of Southern industry, no army of liberation. He merely preached and practiced the concept of armed self defense.

That the Southern segregationists exerted every effort to destroy the man and his dangerous philosophy is no surprise. That the white liberal and even many Negro civil rights activists were just as anxious to see him destroyed is a shock. His philosophy and story have been badly distorted even in integrationist circles. Therefore, his book, Negroes with Guns, is a welcome arrival. Through it, Williams clarifies his beliefs as well as the story of events in Monroe and reveals the advantages and disadvantages of using armed self defense in the civil rights struggle.

Negroes with Guns was put together by editor Marc Schleifer from a three hour interview with Williams in Cuba and material from Williams' newspaper, the Crusader. Some of the weaknesses and gaps in Williams' argument may stem from this make-shift creation. Schleifer has also included an article by Truman Nelson, a scholar of the Abolitionist movement, and two short pieces by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In a moving, impassioned narrative, Williams describes the growth of a working class NAACP chapter, their routing of a KKK caravan by returning its gunfire, the Monroe "kissing case", and the final violent day which led to Williams' flight to Canada and then to Cuba -- as a "trumped-up" kidnapping indictment placed his name in the FBI "wanted" files. Throughout, the author's indignation and his intense love of liberty and hatred of segregation are always present.

However, there are now many chronicles

of atrocities in the South and of the heroic courage of those Negroes and whites fighting for integration. Negroes with Guns merits a special place in civil rights literature because it also advocates a controversial policy of civil rights action.

The concept of armed self defense cannot be simply shrugged away. Williams' book should (and must) stir some much needed reconsideration of the tactics and strategies of the civil rights movement. The author's major thesis is deeply rooted in the "American tradition": The United States was created by men willing to defend themselves and their freedom. Americans have usually admired those who fought unjust tyranny. As an American, the Negro claims this heritage of defending his rights, his family, and himself.

Negroes with Guns, therefore, is not an epistle of "black chauvinism" and race hatred. Neither does it attempt to repudiate the tactical use of non-violence. Stressing his own arrest in a sit-in and his cooperation with the Freedom Riders who came to Monroe, Williams advocates a flexible policy in fighting segregation: "We too believed in non-violent tactics in Monroe. We've used these tactics; we've used all tactics. But we also believe that any struggle for liberation should be a flexible struggle. We shouldn't take the attitude that one method alone is the way to liberation. This is to become dogmatic."

However, he sees limitations to using non-violence: "We must use non-violence as a means as long as this is feasible, but the day will come when conditions become so pronounced that non-violence will be suicidal in itself." This conclusion stems from Williams' analysis of social change: "Social change in something as fundamental as racist oppression involves violence. You cannot have progress here without violence and upheaval, because it's a struggle for survival for one and a struggle for liberation for the other. Always the powers in command are ruthless and unmerciful in defending their position and their privileges... This is a truth that was revealed at the birth of America..." Recognizing that equality cannot be simple integration into the current social structure, he writes "It is important for racists to maintain these peripheral forms of segregation (lunch counters, bus stations, etc.). They establish an atmosphere that supports a system. By debasing and demoralizing the black man in small personal matters, the system eats away the sense of dignity and pride which are necessary to challenge a racist system. But the

fundamental core of racism is more than atmosphere -- it can be measured in dollars and cents and unemployment percentages." "We felt ...that what we needed was a broad program with special attention to jobs, welfare, and other economic needs." "But when Afro-Americans get into the struggle for the right to live as human beings and the right to earn the same amount of money, then they'll meet the greatest amount of resistance and out of it will come police-condoned or inspired violence."

An examination of Southern segregation indicates that it has two primary causes -- one rooted in the economics of the area, the other in the psychology. The two reinforce one another and together support the system of segregation. Williams has grasped this fact, but his perceptive analysis stops short, for he does not use it to examine his own tactics and program.

The author claims that events in Monroe support his belief in armed self defense. He states that during the early Monroe sit-ins "not a single demonstrator was even spat upon." He traces the later violence in Monroe to the policy of non-violence announced by the Freedom Riders who came to town. Even then, Williams feels that only the whites' awareness of his policy prevented mass violence. Yet rioting took place. Both the non-violent demonstrators and random Negro citizens were beaten and jailed. Moreover, the rioting quickly became an excuse to attack Williams, and at this crucial point the author's policy failed to work.

In this context, Williams must answer several obvious questions: Did not the vicious attacks upon the Freedom Riders indicate a long smouldering hostility against Williams and his group? If, as Williams says, the Freedom Riders were attacked simply because they had already eschewed self defense, why was this violence so quickly utilized for a direct attack upon Williams -- despite his consistent avowal to meet violence with violence? Why did Williams flee when police and state troopers moved into his neighborhood? Why did his armed guards allow the search of their homes and the seizure of their weapons without firing a shot?

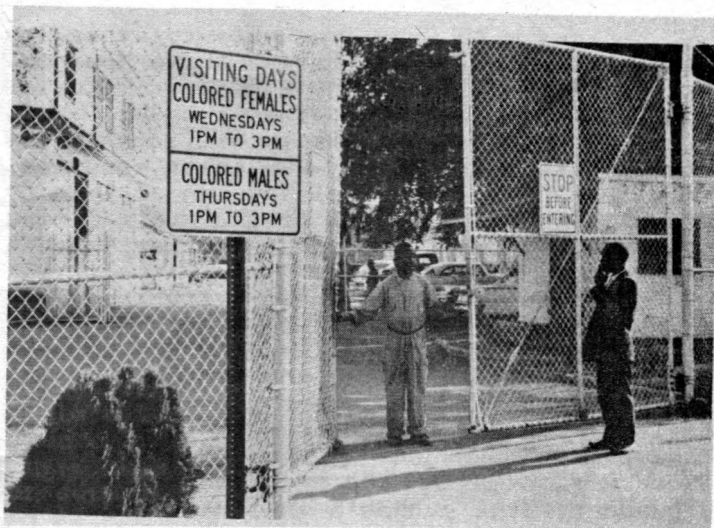
Obviously Williams is a brave man. His flight was judicious, not cowardly. The odds against him were just too great; he felt that this was not the time to fight. But when is the time to fight? When is the armed Negro to use his arms? If he capitulates to superior strength, self defense becomes a hollow threat. Williams might state that his policy would have continued to prevent violence if the non-violent resistors had not waved "a red flag in the face of the bull." The evident move "to get Williams" makes such an "if" highly implausible. The tension seems to have mounted with each successive incident

before the Freedom Riders' entry. The outbreak of violence seemed imminent. If an excuse for its outbreak had not appeared, one would have been manufactured. Thus Negroes with Guns is a tale of the failure of armed self defense -- not of its success as Williams would have it.

The situation in Monroe indicates the broader problems precipitated by a policy of armed self defense. Williams constantly requested Federal protection of Negroes' rights in Monroe. However, the FBI took action only after Williams' flight from the town, and then only to pursue him for a phony kidnapping. This FBI reluctance to intervene except in support of local police authorities has become a pattern in the South.

The Federal government is eager to hold the votes of both Northern Negroes and Southern whites. Thus it favors gradual change rather than massive onslaught against segregation. Only widespread violence (the Birmingham riots against the Freedom Riders) or Southern officials' blatant resistance to court decisions ordering token integration (the University of Mississippi) have pushed the government into active support of civil rights. In these cases, it has always supported the Negroes' rights since the violence was clearly the one-sided action of whites. However, if the Negro arms and fights back, the government is likely to exert its armed might to crush the Negroes in an effort to "restore peace."

Negroes who take up arms will speedily be branded "dangerous criminals" or "deranged persons" who must be stopped. The Southern local and state police forces will rush quickly into action -- against the Negroes. If Federal forces have to intercede, they are likely to join the local law enforcement groups in "restoring order." In such a case, the Negro will receive the worst of the battle. Thus a policy of armed self defense



Signs of Segregation

would probably increase the power arrayed against integrationists.

The Negro is unlikely to gain his freedom without the aid of the white liberals. The odds against him are simply too formidable without allies. Despite the often "lukewarm" support of liberals, their help is desperately needed and if often tendered in money and pressure during times of greatest newspaper publicity. Pressure for Federal protection must be exerted by liberals in the North; pressure for local concessions must be exerted by white "neutrals" in the South.

The latter have usually acted only when the disruption of their normal pattern of life forced them to take a stand. Sometimes horrified by segregationist violence, they have sought token integration in order to restore social tranquility. The weight of these two groups has been an important factor in the civil rights advances of the last decade.

However, as Williams has pointed out, the white liberals are "Hypocritical." They praise the valiant deeds of the European undergrounds in World War II; they are proud of the American revolution; but they are horrified if a Negro even talks of using arms to gain his liberty. This attitude seems partially based on a semi-conscious fear: "The Negro has been oppressed so long; might not all those stored-up aggressions break forth if he is armed?" Such fear may reflect a deep seated guilt carried by all whites -- as some psychologists suggest. But it is more apt to be stated as a rational concern: "In a racial conflict, one's skin is the badge of one's allegiance. Regardless of one's sympathies or ideology, a white is likely to face the Negro's wrath simply because he is white. This is racism in reverse."

A second factor is a more important determinant of liberal "hypocrisy". To some degree, most liberals today join in the "celebration of American democracy." "This is the best of all possible worlds; the few things wrong with the system can be worked out within the current social and political structure. There is no problem which will not yield to a reasoned, slow application of the democratic process. Segregation is no exception; Negroes using arms will only intensify existing tensions and prolong the period of change." This attitude often tends to become an argument from the status quo. "Look at how far the Negro has come in a decade. Progress is being made, but we cannot trample on the 'rights' of the Southern white while gaining freedom for the Negro."

Regardless of the actual reasons for white "hypocrisy", the civil rights movement must live with it. The use of arms -- even in self defense -- will cost the Negro his white liberal allies and drive away the Southern white "neutral". The latter will still have to make a choice, but now he can blame the violence on both sides -- or more likely, on the Negro alone. His mildly segregationist views, his belief in law and order, and

his fear will all coincide. He will readily support armed action against Negroes in order to "restore order". The loss of these "fair weather allies" would pit the civil rights movement against insurmountable odds.

Williams has emphasized the need for flexibility in the civil rights struggle. That emphasis must be kept in mind when considering civil rights tactics, for armed self defense alone does not solve one of the major problems -- how to press one's demands for equality. In the actuality of Monroe, Williams used non-violent direct action and petitioning, as well as armed self defense. Does one use arms only in order to defend one's home and person against direct attack? If a Negro is jailed, does one use arms to free him? If a woman is raped and the culprit freed by a white jury, does the movement apprehend the man, try him in a vigilante court and administer justice? If non-violent action fails to gain its aims, is armed force then applied?

The answers to such questions will determine the entire organization, attitudes and success of any movement which advocates the policy. At some points, armed defense comes very close to armed aggression. Where does Williams draw the line between the two? He implies that the simple existence of a militant Negro movement with guns will end all persecutions of Negroes. The possession of arms may end some direct white aggression, but persecutions are likely to become more indirect - handled in ways that armed defense cannot prevent. The advocates of armed defense must face this question much more directly than Williams does.

Williams' theories have met great resistance and criticism on logical and emotional planes. On the other hand, non-violent direct action has gained widespread uncritical acceptance among liberal and radical whites. Does the latter really deserve this hearty embrace? When subjected to the same type of criticism that self defense receives, the theory of non-violence also displays many weaknesses.

Non-violent direct action attempts to initiate mass action -- to forge a united Negro movement large enough to disrupt the everyday life of the Southern community and to force concessions as the price of tranquility. However, the non-violent activists have rarely been able to build such a mass movement in any area. Small disciplined groups large enough to overcome small peripheral targets are more easily built. The disruptive effect of a small number has often been sufficient, so long as the specific target and the specific goals are small. Thus, non-violent groups have integrated bus stations and lunch counters, parks and beaches.

When the tactic has been tried on a mass scale against the entire segregation system (as in Albany, Ga.), its success has been much less spectacular. When the goal is too broad, when the target is the entire segregation structure of the community, the action has usually failed. Non-violent direct action

works only when it is able to exert enough pressure to force a capitulation. The degree of change from the old "status quo" is a vital element in any decision to concede to demands. If the immediate goal overreaches the strength which the movement can muster, the leadership may be forced to accept a compromise far short of the stated goal. Such an occurrence often has a highly demoralizing effect, as a large proportion of the participants feel sold out -- even if realistic appraisal shows that achievement of the goal is strategically impossible at the time. In places like Atlanta, the feeling of betrayal has often pushed people toward groups like the Black Muslims.

As the movement advances from attacks on peripheral targets to an attack upon the larger basic institutions, the resistance is likely to increase in intensity and subtlety. Victories then require massed strength on a large scale. If the civil rights movement is able to muster mass force, the subtlety may well turn to violence of an intensity unseen to date. Williams sees this problem clearly. His argument -- that non-violent resistance will reach the limit of its powers at this point -- is rooted in such an analysis.

To a lesser degree, Williams also recognizes another factor which influences the success of non-violent action. Such action has always tended to heighten the conflict between diverse values held by the segregationist. While racism may be a "mass psychosis", as Williams states, the segregationist (particularly the Southern power elite) is not totally "race dominated". He holds a number of values and goals which do not always coincide. There is often a latent conflict between national and regional mores, psychological and economic values.

Non-violent direct action often brings these conflicts into the open. Thus disruption of business activities may force the businessman to choose between the capitalist

ethic of profits and the traditional regional value of segregation. When direct action cuts into his profits, he must sacrifice one or the other. The average citizen must choose between the traditional respect for the law and total segregation. By preventing the simultaneous attainment of several goals, non-violent action forces an actual choice between values. If the demands of the civil rights movement are peripheral to the system, the segregationist will sacrifice a little segregation to avoid further social disruption.

However, when the demands touch the heart of the economic, political, and social structure of the South, these values no longer conflict but reinforce one another. At that point, as Williams notes, the movement is likely to meet violent resistance. The non-violent civil rights movement has not developed an analysis nor a program which can overcome these weaknesses.

Martin Luther King's attempt to couple non-violence and the Gandhian-Christian concept of loving one's enemy has often created additional disadvantages for the non-violent movement. This coupling has been criticised by writers as diverse as Williams and the psychologist Kenneth B. Clark. However, many of those prominently engaged in non-violent action in the South have avoided this problem. They use non-violence only as a tactic -- the practical way to gain equality. Such use of non-violence may have important consequences as the regional and national environments change.

Regardless of the logical criticisms of both self defense and non-violent direct action, economic, political and social factors will actually determine what methods the civil rights movement employs.

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In Part I of this article we presented an analysis of both armed self-defense and non-violent direct action. Such an analysis required a certain amount of abstraction from the political, economic, social and psychological factors influencing the trend of civil rights in this country. Yet it is precisely these factors which will ultimately determine the methods employed by the civil rights movement and their efficacy.

Future civil rights historians will probably cite the Birmingham demonstrations as one of the tenor of the movement. The Birmingham demonstrations, however, were caused by psychological and economic trends noticeable well before their actual eruption. Events in Birmingham have merely accelerated these trends. They, in turn, have placed the liberals and advocates of non-violence in an extremely painful dilemma.

In recent years, the Negro has borne the brunt of the unemployment problem in the U.S. The homily "last hired first fired" is a concise simplification of a complex phenomenon. As automation expands unemployment, the Negro has been hardest hit. Negro unemployment is at present nearly 15% of the Negro work force. The rate among Negroes in the 16-25 year age bracket is probably much greater. (About 250,000 Negro youth are unemployed, compared with 900,000 white youth). Such a heavy unemployment rate, coupled with the paucity of well-paid skilled jobs available to Negroes, has increased the economic and psychological hardships in the Negro community, particularly in the Negro ghetto.

Simultaneously, the turtle pace of civil rights advance has pushed the Negro's frustration to a new peak. These factors have contributed to a new sense of militancy and urgency in the Negro community. Militancy in the Northern Negro ghetto is not new. Such feelings gave rise to the Marcus Garvey movement in the 20's, the boycott movement in Harlem under Adam Clayton Powell Jr. in the late 30's, and the '43 riots. The newness lies in the highly articulated disgust with white hypocrisy, in the power of this militant atmosphere to push moderate civil rights groups into more radical action, in the widespread awareness of this feeling before any major riots have occurred, and in the corresponding militancy of Southern Negroes.

The Black Muslims have been characterized as the extremist danger in the Negro community. Their growth has been decried by the politicians and the press -- liberal and conservative alike. However, they might be better described as the articulators of a hostile current toward whites running throughout the Negro community, for their voice merely echoes a sentiment reaching much further than their membership. The Black Muslims have offered many Negroes a pride in the color of their skins, a belief that Black is not only equal to, but superior to, the White. This new identity is sustained by caricaturing the White as the symbol of evil. This image catches and holds the imagination of many Negroes, for which

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of them has not suffered gross injustices at the hand of the White? The Muslim's debunking of the white liberal receives especially enthusiastic reception. By aggressively voicing already existing sentiments, the Muslims have not only built up their own separatist movement, but they have also intensified the militancy of the Negro community -- of both those advocating widespread non-violent action and those ready to shoot whites in order to gain rights. In recent months even so astute a politician as Adam Clayton Powell Jr. acknowledged the changing atmosphere in Harlem by expressing sympathy for the Black Muslims and by denouncing the policy of the NAACP of having whites in leadership positions.

These two trends -- the economic and the psychological -- have reached new heights simultaneously. They are partly cause and partly effect of a change in the non-violent civil rights movement. During the last decade, one shift in Negro leadership has already taken place. Until the late '50's, upper class and upper-middle class Negroes dominated the civil rights movement. Through the NAACP and the Urban League, they conducted legal battles to expand equality. By 1956, the major part of that battle had been won, but the movement's progress was still slow. A middle class group, primarily preachers and students, gave new impetus to the movement by advocating and practicing non-violent direct action. NAACP leaders protested such tactics. Their own backgrounds precluded such conceptions; they saw the philosophy as one which would increase tensions and destroy their gains. Although the NAACP has finally adopted the policy of direct action, it has lost actual leadership to CORE, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The concept of non-violent action was framed in religious terms, but it is also probably rooted in a middle-class reluctance to use violence. The students partially divorced non-violence from its religious moorings. For the non-violent movement to be successful, it has had to involve more and more adherents in larger and larger demonstrations. The first major success in producing massive demonstrations took place in Birmingham. Events there present a microscopic picture of the changes to be expected. By enlarging the scope of the movement and by broadening the participation, the leaders have involved many lower-class Negroes. In Birmingham, lower-class Negroes did not participate in large numbers, but they were present on the sidelines. While hoses and dogs were used against the demonstrators, the lower-class on-lookers suffered the worst of the police violence. At the same time, these Negroes saw other Negroes - including children - standing up to the White. They saw the possibility of their acting -- of loosing many years of pent-up frustrations. A new atmosphere of anger and hope grew in Birmingham. It started with mild heckling of the police; it erupted the night of the Birmingham riots. On that night, the lower-class Negroes broke the code of non-violent action and returned the attack of the police.

As more and more lower-class members become involved in the civil rights movement, its goals and its leaders will change. Until the Birmingham riots, the movement had concentrated on predominantly middle-class objectives. The public fac-

ilities, the stores and restaurants, even to some extent the schools, are not the main concern of the lower class. Their primary interests lie in jobs and housing. Moreover, the lower class Negro has neither the middle-class inhibitions nor the logical and moral arguments against the use of violence. They have suffered violence all of their lives. They have borne the brunt of police brutality; they have lived by the "American code" that a man must defend himself if he is to be a man. As they become involved, leaders who can appeal to them will spring up -- leaders like Malcolm X and Robert Williams, who advocate defending one's self with arms if necessary.

So far this militant atmosphere, this inclusion of more lower-class Negroes, had only intensified the non-violent movement. But these factors, coupled with economic necessity, have already begun to change the immediate goals.

Since Birmingham, there has been a concerted attack upon job discrimination in Northern cities. Pickets and sit-ins protesting company and union discrimination have multiplied. These in turn have intensified the opposition to the civil rights movement.

From the news stories, one would think that the non-violent movement had been victorious in city after city. Albany, Ga., McComb, Miss., Knoxville, Tenn., Heywood County, Tenn., Birmingham, Ala. -- these names have appeared and disappeared in headlines across the country. Yet in these localities, conditions are as bad -- and sometimes worse -- than before the demonstrations. However, only the demonstrations are news, not the aftermath. Some victories have been made, some extremely important; but most have been token victories only, and all have cost a high price in continuing oppression.

This lack of follow-up erodes the pressure for stronger Federal measures and the sympathy for continued demonstrations. Thus, many liberals, including the Kennedy administration, are advocating a diminution of protests. They speak of the great advances made by the Negro and ask for a cooling-off period. Moreover, they point out the increasing number of white moderates now active in the South. The mayor of Atlanta, Ga. openly advocates the Federal Public Accommodations clause of Kennedy's civil rights bill. A Negro state senator is elected in Georgia. The governor of North Carolina declares an all-out fight against segregation in his state. The University of Alabama is integrated peacefully despite Governor Wallace's public protests. Bull Connor's Birmingham administration is replaced by a moderate City Council. Salisbury, Maryland demonstrated the feasibility of peaceful integration. Yet in Gadsden, Ala. and in Albany, Ga., those jailed for civil rights work suffer horrendous treatment. In Danville, Va., Negroes are beaten on the streets. In Monroe, N.C., Negroes live under an oppressive city administration. In Cambridge, Md., violence is stopped only after a National Guard regime and Justice Department intervention.

As the earlier "massive resistance" programs of the South fell in the courts, as violence repelled Northern industry and disrupted communities, the "moderates" gained power. Their policy of gradual change may reign for some time. A few Negroes may be accepted in political po-

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sitions, some industry may be integrated, peripheral segregation may fade, segregation statutes may be repealed -- to be replaced by Northern style segregation. This does not mean, however, that the Negro will be permitted any amount of political power. The basic institutions of segregation will remain, and any attempt to destroy them will probably be met with violence. The "moderates" in the South are moderates only within a spectrum which labels non-violent demonstrators extremists.

In Birmingham, the steel companies were instrumental in pressuring the whites to negotiate. They were troubled by the effect of violence upon their public images and upon their profits. Thus, they did their bit as "public spirited citizens." But now, the Northern civil rights movement is attacking the job issue. What happens when these targets are attacked in the South? If Negroes turn their efforts to better job opportunities and better pay, the businessman is hurt in the short run no matter which side he takes. If he supports the segregationist, the resultant social disorder and violence hurts business. If he supports the Negro, not only do his wage costs rise, but the attraction which pulls Northern industry South is lost. He is placed in this dilemma at a time of growing Northern opposition to civil rights demands.

North and South, the increasing militancy of the movement is likely to encounter greater antagonism from the economic powers -- corporations, small business men, and unions. Yet, since unemployment affects the Negro disproportionately, economic issues must gain greater importance. In addition, the spreading aggressiveness in the ghettos and the growing militancy in the South push the civil rights movement into the battle for more jobs and better housing. The tougher battle against greater odds in these areas could increase the frustration in the Negro community.

Since the Birmingham demonstrations, the Kennedy administration has finally recognized this trend. Although less than six months ago, Kennedy spoke out against a civil rights bill during this Congress, he is now supporting the most sweeping civil rights bill since Reconstruction days. The bill seems designed primarily to reduce the Negro's pressure. One of its most important provisions would remove the most frequent target of non-violent attack -- privately owned restaurants, etc. However, Kennedy has not recognized -- or cannot solve -- the area of increasing concern: job opportunities for Negroes. The bill is weakest in this very area. Kennedy has not solved the white unemployment problem. How is he to expand job opportunities for Negroes? The Administration's bill would create job training programs. This is a feasible action in an expanding economy, but in the special conditions of 1963, it seems relatively fruitless -- particularly in light of the earlier defeat of the Aid to Depressed Areas Bill.

Herein lies the Negro's paradox. In the past, periods of Negro militancy have usually coincided with periods of employment expansion -- in the 20's, the late 30's, during World War III. Now, however, he is bucking the economic trend. This factor is the greatest obstacle he faces, for the white's argument is a pragmatic one: "There aren't enough jobs to go around. They

want to lay off whites to hire Negroes. Maybe my job will be the next one they'll want." These arguments are heard even in the building industry where employment has been expanding, for the construction boom is at its peak and faces a decline in the next five years. (This new civil rights push may lead to even greater opposition. Unemployed white workers may begin to resent the highly articulate Negro movement, deciding that Negroes are taking the jobs which they should have. Such an attitude could develop very easily among the growing ranks of unemployed youth. Violence could then break out on a vast scale).

These factors add to the Negroes frustration and to his impatience with white "hypocrisy." He sees the white, including the white liberal, attempting to protect only his own interest. The opposition of unions, more concerned with their fight against automation than with the Negro's plight, aggravate his discontent. But it is not only in the economic field that white "hypocrisy" is found. The liberals' plea for an end to demonstrations has already been cited. Other liberals argue that demonstrations will defeat Kennedy's civil rights bill. The white liberal measures progress by the distance the Negro has come in the last decade. He stresses the speed of change. The Negro measures progress by the distance he still must travel before he gains full equality. He stresses the slowness of change and often interprets the white's "go slow" admonitions as sheer cant. Moreover, he looks askance at the President's Civil Rights bill. He details its weaknesses and omissions. He argues that the President only offered a civil rights bill after he was under great pressure. He points out that the President was silent while dogs and hoses were used against children in Birmingham -- that he only took action when whites and white property were endangered by the riots. In addition, he notes the sudden sparsity of white newspaper coverage of atrocities in the South and says Kennedy is exerting pressure to keep news of inflaming incidents at a minimum. He sees Kennedy playing the Dixiecrat against the integrationist for the maximum political gains.

The Negro points to the past history of the Kennedy administration. Two years ago, the Kennedy administration persuaded civil righters to initiate a voter registration drive. It promised full cooperation. By channeling Negro's aspirations in this direction, the administration probably sought to reduce the pressure created by sit-ins and Freedom Rides. If the program were successful, the Administration would share the credit and would gain a group of democratic voters who could exert pressure on the Dixiecrats. However, the administration probably did not envision such an energetic program nor such fierce Southern resistance. Violence flared in community after community as the registration program advanced, but results have been meager. Part of the failure is blamed on the administration's own ambivalent actions. The government has been willing to act only in those counties where Negroes constitute the smallest percentage of the population. When cases are brought to court, Kennedy-appointed segregationist judges often refuse to decide in favor of civil rights. (This has been particularly true in Mississippi where judges are picked according to the preference of Senator

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Eastland.) FBI agents investigating racial atrocities are usually Southern, often from the very region being investigated. Their own Southern backgrounds and their frequent cooperation with local law authorities have often colored their findings. Kennedy is finally pushing for a stronger mandate to stop disenfranchisement, only now, after Birmingham angered urban Negro voters.

This constant "hypocrisy" is stressed not only by the Black Muslims and the lower classes but also by a growing number of Negro intellectuals. Many civil rights workers have also become more and more frustrated as they face death daily and gain few results. Thus the administration's own policies have increased the militancy of the movement. Many activists are now convinced that meaningful change cannot be made within the present economic and political structure. In the future, a policy of overall change -- of social revolution -- may develop rapidly within their ranks.

If the civil rights movement does not quickly succeed in broadening job opportunities, the situation may grow more and more explosive. Already many astute observers are declaring that any minor police incident in the ghettos could erupt into full scale riots. The job demonstrations and the preparations for the massive August 28th March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom provide only a temporary outlet for the frustrations packed into areas like Harlem and Chicago's South Side. If riots break out, they could rapidly spread from one city to another. Such riots will be crushed by police -- efficiently and probably with great bloodshed on a scale comparable to the race riots of 1919 -- and many Negroes have vowed that all of that blood won't be Negro blood.

Past outbreaks in the ghettos have usually produced some alleviation of the conditions causing racial tension. However, in this period of high Negro militancy and sluggish economic conditions, reparations sweeping enough to restore racial peace are unlikely. Continued force would probably be necessary. While a semi-military occupation of the ghettos might keep the peace, it would probably increase Negro-white altercations and lead to a greater and greater reliance on arms for self defense as Robert Williams advocates and arms for attack.

Thus the civil rights movement creates its own paradox -- North and South. In the North, growing unrest in the ghettos directs the struggle toward economic issues. Frustration on economic issues could heighten the explosiveness of a situation which is already extremely touchy. The growing militancy of the Northern Negro could intensify the Southern Negro's willingness to use violence. Small groups of armed Negroes determined to defend themselves might spring up in many communities. (Some civil rights groups are already discussing ways to meet this problem. Arsenals are being built in some Southern towns.) Sporadic outbreaks of violent retaliation for atrocities are likely to follow. Then, sooner or later, armed conflict could break out in one community and spread to others. Even the formation of a guerilla civil rights movement engaging in sabotage cannot be discounted totally.

Much of the above is hypothesis, but it may soon be fact. The number of Negroes advocating armed self defense is increasing. Neither Martin

Luther King Jr.'s optimism nor his admonitions against violence will stop its growth. Vast civil rights advances -- North and South -- could impede it, but the political and economic forces do not seem to be moving speedily in that direction. One does not have to be a Marxist determinist to note the inexorable trends of our time. Liberals and radicals cannot afford to sit in complacency, comforted by Kennedy's civil rights bill, confident that a Negro-moderate coalition in the South will soon break the Republican-Dixiecrat coalition in Congress. Neither can they merely support non-violent action and voter registration in the Negro communities North and South. If the Negro moves to greater militancy and the use of arms, liberal and radical avowals against violence and "black chauvinism" will mean nothing. If armed conflict breaks out in the South, it will spread North. If radical policies gain wider acceptance in the Northern ghettos, they will spread South. If the Federal government fails to find an acceptable solution to economic and housing problems of the Negro before the present antagonisms spur a recourse to arms, the government might set out to destroy these dangerous "black nationalists" and "subversives." In such an extreme case, the persecution of Negro groups could easily extend to white liberals and radicals. Changes in the civil rights movement will affect our future just as much as will changes in technology and foreign affairs.

At present the non-pacifist white liberal must examine his attitude toward the use of arms in the civil rights movement. He may not like the idea, but he must consider it in the light of the Negro's changing attitudes, the strengths and weaknesses of the use of arms, and the possibility that they may be used. There is still time to avert violence -- if enough people move. At present the liberal must join whole-heartedly in making the civil rights movement as radical as possible. He must be willing to join Negroes in jail and in demonstrations not only in the South but also in the North. The trend can be turned only if the civil rights movement grows rapidly in number and types of demands to the point where the search for immediate viable solutions becomes the major concern of the country. In addition, an analysis of the Southern power structure in terms of its strengths and weaknesses -- of points where attacks (non-violent and violent) will create the greatest impact -- is desperately needed. The movement itself must determine what ultimate power changes are needed -- what changes are necessary to bring about the envisioned society of equality. A well-thought-out plan to put pressure on large national businesses with branches in the South should be constructed. Ways of reducing the brutal attacks on Negroes must be found -- and of publicizing treatment in Southern jails.

In addition, there must be a serious attempt to link the civil rights movement and the white unemployed into one large movement seeking changes which will create jobs for all. The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom may offer the first opportunity for such an endeavor, but success will be far from easy. Many Negroes are suspicious of any movement extending beyond the pure civil rights issue. Too many times, the Negro has been called upon to link his cause to a more universal one. In each case -- World War I;

continued

the policies of the Communist Party in the 30's; the formation of the CIO; World War II -- he has carried his share of the sacrifices only to see others whisk away the gains. He is in no mood to be hoodwinked again.

Despite the former criticisms of the policy, perhaps armed self-defense may have to be coupled with non-violent direct action. If armed self-defense groups begin forming in the South independent of any organization, a method of combining them in a disciplined national armed self-defense group must be sought. The white liberal and radical can only attempt to foresee the direction which the movement will follow; they can only aid in planning; they can attempt to persuade its leaders that certain directions will bring happier results to all; but the final decisions lie outside their power.

Yet the very seriousness of the civil rights situation today may contain the possibility of vast social change -- change which can guarantee to each of us a society more conducive to freedom and control over our own destiny. Whatever the possibilities, we can neither stay out of the fight nor close our eyes to what is happening. "Freedom now or chaos tomorrow" is more than a battle cry. It is the reality of today.

A word should be said about Williams' present position. Now in Cuba, he is conducting a program aimed at the South -- Radio Free Dixie -- and is printing his paper, the Crusader. Whether because of his residence in Cuba or because of his great frustration over present conditions in the South, his pronouncements are extremely radical. For example, he now views the Kennedy administration as "fascist," closely linked to the Klu Klux Klan. His current attitude does not negate his arguments in Negroes with Guns, but his growing bitterness may be pondered as a possible view of things to come.



Demands for equal rights leads to booking for two Alabama grandmothers.