

How I See Black America

STANLEY WARREN

Blacks, looking for a fairer partnership in America, have had to face many negative developments in recent years. This writer believes that "our only hope is to put our faith in the young people of today."

BEING BLACK in America has turned into a series of paradoxes with subtle nuances; it has lost its simple and direct cause-effect relationship.

Notwithstanding the small band of militant separatists in the country, we have been steadily pushing for integration since the first abolitionist crusade. Today we are faced with the realization that our quest may have led us to a position where we must compromise our integrity or accept the totally legal and devastating effects of full integration. We are being castigated by laws that we helped to create.

After the legal and congressional decisions of the decade between 1954 and 1964, we had reasons to believe that the machinery for full integration was available. Full integration appeared to mean that blacks would receive an equal partnership in the American

scheme. Since the early 60's it seems that everything has changed except our concept of what integration actually means. In our naïveté we believed that integration meant that we would be in a receiving position until the scales of humanity were balanced, then we would proceed from that point on an even basis.

Blacks in America were unprepared for the more than 50 percent white enrollment at three formerly all black colleges and the drain of top students and faculty to previously all white institutions, resulting in black institutions being forced to change their missions and to justify their existence. We were unprepared for one-way busing and the long, drawn out legal battles that have left inner-city schools decaying and unproductive. The list of surprises is endless.

An Erosion of Confidence

City governments have gerrymandered districts and combined county and city governments into political donuts with blacks holding down the economically and politically empty center cities. Black votes are no longer sought because they do not matter in

many areas. On the federal level, the impounding of funds by the executive branch has had a devastating effect on domestic programs designed to employ and assist blacks. Ironically, the infamous Watergate Affair and the resulting diminished public confidence in the office of the President seem to have slowed the dismantling of "the Great Society."

Many blacks have failed to notice that there has been a change in the tenor of the times. Interest in the black cause has diminished as liberals turn to new battles such as the Equal Rights Amendment, the energy crisis, the Indian Movement, and other causes. This change has been heralded by passage of an Ethnic Heritage Studies Act by Congress, designed to create more interest in "white studies."

After a record black college enrollment in 1972, the '73 figures show a significant decline in college enrollment for blacks. At the core of our hopes for a pluralistic society has been an educated populace. From the

"Talented Tenth" of DuBois to the Street Academies of Philadelphia, education has been our trump card. If this erosion of confidence among blacks in the education process continues, there is reason to believe that more and more black students will shorten their educational careers.

A combination of the nostalgia of the 50's and the black movie craze has caused many blacks to again seek beauty in bleaching cream jars and pressed hair. Black women are being looked upon as objects rather than people. These are directions that blacks can ill afford for they represent significant reversals in the movement toward black awareness.

Blacks Have Made Great Strides

Even though the situation appears very bleak, upon second glance perhaps it is not as bad as it seems to be. Blacks have made great strides in the past decade despite minor setbacks.

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The National Black Political Caucus is spreading its tentacles to all parts of the United States. Local groups are becoming active, creating a black political power base not seen since Reconstruction. Election of a black mayor is no longer considered a freakish phenomenon. Black businesses, including a few national banks, are growing in number and we are slowly moving away from the socially oriented occupations that give only token financial returns. Blacks are moving into fields that have long been the jurisdiction of white capitalists. Construction and building trades, heavy equipment, cable television, and manufacturing are but a few areas in which blacks have managed to scratch the surface.

Blacks in America have moved to higher educational levels, higher income levels, and higher tax brackets. Although we can cer-

tainly be proud of our achievements in the face of overwhelming odds, it does not pay to stop and look back too often or to reminisce too much.

Black America is like Pandora's box; it seems to be a little bit of everything. It appears that our only hope is to put our faith in the young people of today. If we believe that the substance of which our youth are made comes from some mixture of Superfly hairdos, cocaine, and pot, I think we are selling them short and we are selling ourselves short as well. No generation of blacks has been without a similar system of "moral degradation." Yet, young people have always shaped a better world than they inherited. Save the children!

—STANLEY WARREN, *Director of Black Studies, Afro-American House, DePauw University, Greencastle, Indiana.*

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