

Tape #2
April 7.

CONVERSATION WITH DR. KENNETH CLARK

Can we make out a case for the Negro situation as being actually advantage -- an existential advantage psychologically?

I don't quite understand what you mean by that, existential advantage.

The fact that he is not burdened with a past, that he is free to create -- which is not true of some others burdened by a past.

But I think the Negro is burdened by a past, which determines the nature of the future which he is seeking to create. I think that he is burdened by a past that begins with disruption, that begins with stark and flagrant cruelty and barbarizy -- this is the beginning of his past, in a sense -- and this past continued into about two hundred years of systematic exploitation and cruelty, which is slavery -- this is his heritage and he has been the object of the problems of whites who have this glorious past. He is the culmination of the meaning of the white culture in civilization in terms of dehumanization of him. This is his past -- this is the past that he is burdened with and this is the past of the whites who are so proud of their past, you see. The Negro becomes the personification of all that is meaningful in the white man's past, because he now is the stark -- well, what is it -- the stark example of Magna Charta and all these things -- he is the example of the meaning of the white man's Christianity, etc., - alright, this is a complex past and its a kind of past which, as I said before, determines the nature of his present and the kind of future he is insisting upon. He is insisting upon a future that will make the white man whole.

Make the white man what?

Whole -- w h o l e -- There is something ironic about this

discussion about who has and who doesn't have a past, when actually the present has fused the past of Negro and white -- I mean this may be terribly disturbing to the white -- by the way, this image of fusion is both literal and figurative, I think here, because -- you asked me about my feelings about Africa -- it might be disturbing to the general American public for a Negro to dare to say that he feels no more identification with Africa, than he feels with Denmark or Ireland, but actually in terms of what he is, he is as much Irish or English or Danish as he is African, because of this more literal fusion - -

You mean blood fusion.

- - blood fusion that has occurred in America during these past three hundred years. You have a blood fusion, you have an historical fusion, you have a psychological fusion, and despite the -- I certainly haven't worked this out, I wish I had a little time and luxury in which to try and work it out, but much of the ambivalence that DuBois referred to and which we see so clearly today among Negroes, may be a reflection of this total fusion that he is, you see.

Do you see more resistance now to the blood fusion on the part of Negroes and the past, either in actual inter-marriage and actual inter-fusion of bloods, licitly or illicitly, and in the emulation of the white physical ideal that was true say -- oh, a generation ago?

I think on the ideological level, there is probably a greater resistance on the part of Negroes to mixture with whites now, than they have been in the past, but I think we ought to be careful to

make a distinction between ideology in verbal postures and what actually happens -- I am not sure and I would like to know where one can find reliable statistics on incidents of inter-marriage over a period of time.

There is a paradox here, isn't there -- implicit some one situation?

Unquestionably. I think the American race is best seen in terms of paradox and contradiction and inconsistency and mess -- verbal mess, coexisting with behavioral contradictions is a very mess, you see.

Do you remember Norman P piece in Commentary sometime?

I certainly do.

Solved only by assimilation -- What sort of sense does that make.

Well, I reacted to Norman's piece, and my first reaction was that this was a curiously and scathingly ^{honest} piece -- the second part of my reaction was, that I thought that his solution made no sense at all, for a very simple reason -- that it didn't work in the past and there is no reason to believe that it is going to work in the future. Norman P talked about assimilation of whites and Negroes as if this was something that was new -- was going to happen, you see. What this man -- I don't know why he didn't understand it -- but what he apparently didn't understand was that part of the problem was this -- that while males have long been exploiting Negro females -- this is part of racism, and one has to look long and hard to find any pure blooded American Negroes, and these are not -- the mixture of the American Negroes is not a reflection of preponderance of white women bearing children from Negro males, you see. Well, if miscegenation, which is the real word here,

rather than assimilation -- if miscegenation hasn't worked from slavery, if a white male could be as brutal toward his own flesh and blood as he was toward other Negroes or colored in America, why does Norman P. think that legalizing the mixture is going to change the psychological and social situation any.

Anyway, it is a long postponement of any solution or any
m at the best.

Right. I think what he is asking for will not be a means toward an end -- an ethical end -- but will be an indication of the fact that the ethical end was obtained by other means, you see. Once you get a meaningful equal status human form of interracial mixture in America, this would be one of your best indications that the complexities of the problems of racial cruelty have already been resolved.

There is some argument, of course, among sociologists, that the great melting pot hasn't been melting very well -- the Italians, the Irish, the Jews -- have actually had pretty hard
assimilation, but not central assimilation.

Well, you need only to look at the politics of such northern urban centers as Boston, New York, Chicago, to see that this is the politics of ethnic groups -- ethnic division of the available political spoils. Look at New York and you see that almost all power centers are divided in three, three, three -- you know -- Catholics, Protestants, Jews -- and among the Catholics, the struggle for status or control in terms of Irish Catholics, Italian Catholics, Polish Catholics -- these are some of the facts of American political social reality, at least in northern urban areas. Now in the South,

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you have these subordinated by the South's great preoccupation between the white and black, you see -- and I suppose that one of the most disturbing things that could happen to the South is for an accelerated migration of blacks, which would then confront the whites with the problems among themselves, you see.

That is true. it is happening already -- for instance, you always have a Republican governor in Louisiana, this last election.

Thats right. And of course if Senator Russell's plan for disbursing the Negro population out of the South were ever to be successful, then Senator Russell might find that his class of whites would be in terrible jeopardy from the working class , poor whites in the South.

The populas movement might be revived.

Oh, yes -- and with a ~~vengeance~~ ^{vengeance} here.

That is the worse news I have heard in a long time.

Worse news?

Worse news I have heard in a long time -- breaking this up.

Oh!

This tape with Dr. Clark to be resumed.
