

RPW: Now, you were going to speak about the identity crisis in general.

BR: Yes. I think the identity crisis on the part of a number of Negro writers and thinkers today, has attempted to turn the Negro toward a separate state, a nationalism or a return to Africa, or a rejection of whites and calling for the emergence of a Negro expression. Many of them talk about Negroes as being the the soul people and they feel that from this a great new thing is going to spring. Now, I happen to believe that the Negro is in fact at this moment - does have a very peculiar mission, that he is, as it were, the chosen people - by which I do not mean the superior or that he's any better or that he's any more noble or any more de-praved. It means I think that he has now an identity which is a part of the national struggle in this country for the extension of democracy. He is a movement; like many who are at the bottom of the barrel, if he shakes the barrel shakes, and I believe that we are chosen non-violently to eradicate from this country the last vestiges of privilege and racism. This is our destiny. In the degree that a Negro goes into the streets or into courts or into restaurants, theaters, hotels, into the legislative halls or marches before them, as a part of that he will find his true identity, which is to say that out of his absence of privilege he moves beautifully and non-violently and in the process brings a great deal of beauty to his country. Now, therefore, you will not find those who are deeply

involved in the struggle concerned with the problem of identity to the degree that you will find those who stand outside the struggle doing nothing about it, debating who they are. A man finds out who he is expedientially, and I think this is what the real answer here is. I'd like to give you a few illustrations. For many years they have been telling us we have an inferior school system in this country. I think it was not until Negroes moved to get quality integrated education that the whole nation now is forced to debate the school question. President Kennedy promised the Negro and white leaders who marched on Washington that he would, when they went in to see him the night of the March for jobs and freedom, he promised them he would do something about it. His answer, inadequate but a good start, was war on poverty. This was not because the white poor were moving, but because the Negroes had to move. Therefore, we gave something to the whole nation. When one considers the situation in Congress, where the Congress seems to be designed so that social legislation is difficult to get, it is the movement of the Negroes trying to get the white to vote which will remove from Congress many reactionary Southerners who keep all of our grandparents from getting medical care, because they will block it. Now, our identity is to put content - total content into the Declaration of Independence, into the Constitution of the United States, which will from the beginning in that they institutionalized slavery. Our destiny is to clarify this and to make a great contribution to all people. That is to say,

number one, our destiny is here, not in Africa. It is in cooperating with white people, not separating ourselves from them and thinking we're different. It is in working with them, and being the catalyst for basic social change in this country. Another illustration is that although Pope John for an ecumenical movement around the world, the one place he got it fairly quickly was in the cooperation of Catholics, Protestants and Jews who for the first time were forced to come together to fight for a civil rights bill because we were in motion. Therefore, I take credit as being a part of the creation of this ecumenical movement. And that's what I think our true identity is - struggle - and not a lot of foolishness about culture and the like, but that the culture which is truly new and which we will contribute lies in our struggle.

RPW: That leads to another question. This, like all questions in the future, is bound to be an open question, but how do you envisage - what do you envisage as the meaning of integration? How do you think of it?

BR: I think of integration as fundamentally being that every individual, regardless of his color, will have the right and the obligations - both rights and obligations which are implied in the Constitution and in the creative laws. This means that children will go to school together. It means that color will have no place in jobs, that before the law all men are equal.

RPW: That is, you are taking this on a civil rights basis, then,

primarily an SEPC basis - this is your ground work.

BR: Well, I think that that is the platform on which other things will come. In other words, I think, sir, that you do not change attitudes first, that attitudes are gravely shaped by the institutional way of life we live, and therefore I do not expect every white person in the country to like me, given our history, any more than I can not have some bitterness at times toward white people. We are both victims of having been trapped for three hundred years, and it wasn't your grandfather's nor my grandfather's fault really. And if it was, what difference does it make? We're here now sitting together. And if I have to deal with you and you are ill mannered, I do not have time to assume that - and to look into a psychological history to find out why. I should deal with the situation the way it is. And I think the same thing has to be true of our social behavior. And therefore ultimately some Negroes will be rejected in a certain society just because they are not nice people. So what's wrong is that they are rejected because they're Negroes even if they are nice people. And so the attitudes will come, but first we've got to have what I think you call the FEPC approach.

RPW: Now, I was to try to get beyond that, and I've talked to various people on that question and some say what you say as at the moment, but it's an open - it's a matter of we start there and then history will take care of it in the future.

Some try to envisage actual problems and actual programs beyond that

point.

BR: Yes, well, I would say that my philosophy of faith in history leads me to believe that if you deal creatively and non-violently with a problem which is before you, you are then setting the groundwork for a hundred years from now, no matter what the objective situation is. I think it's the same thing a psychiatrist says to a patient who comes in and talks about what he's going to be doing in two weeks. The psychiatrist says, now wait a minute, let us see what you intend to do tomorrow when you get up. Because I think I went through enough social planning when I was a Marxist Communist, and I know that the minute you have a blueprint you are - you tend to get ends and means separated, because if you've got a blueprint then any means is good enough to get to it. But I reverse the process - non-violent, creative action now - take care of the rest as you go along.

RPW: I could give you an example of what I was speaking of in Dr. King's discussion of the third phase, you see, the phase past the civil rights stage, the question of what he calls - well, to use an old phrase for it, the old, old phrase, self-improvement, a change of standards - a Negro's responsibility, which is of course what
take any white individual in the same position -
adjusting change of status to the side - one the side which he lives.

BR: I am very unimpressed with this kind of thinking, because as I look at how other groups in our society who had many of the characteristics - or were supposed to have had - that the Negroes are now accused

so-called improvement - now, by this - comes later. This I do not mean that we should not teach our children to be honest and to be moral and not to use dope, and all these things. But the economic self-improvement and all of this that's so often talked about is ridiculous. For one thing the Negro is a consumer. While there are a few Negro millionaires, by and large the Negro population has which is difficult, to save its money as a racial group which is almost unknown, what could we break into that's a master industry? Kaiser himself spent millions of dollars and then was finally run out of the automobile industry by steel and others who didn't want him in it, in the automobile industries. So that I say the best way for the Negro to really improve himself is to become a part of the struggle. Illustration. In Montgomery, when Dr. King was crime amongst Negroes to one another feel almost to nothing because they had a sense of dignity.

RPW: Yes, I remember - yes.

BR: But certainly we should live up to all the standards, strive for all the standards that the society . This gives me an opportunity to say something about Malcolm X here. Malcolm X and the Muslims claim that they have cured prostitutes and dope addicts, and I am paid to say that perhaps they have. I know one fellow who was a dope addict that they cured. What they fail to see is that they do not work to destroy ghettos; they do not work to get real jobs that are obtainable for people; they do not work to get real education for the Negroes. Their mind is off on Arabic

somewhere. So therefore as the ghetto gets bigger and conditions get worse, for every prostitute or dope addict that they by some religious mysticism bring out of it - and I'm more happy for their doing it - the ghetto itself makes ten more. And therefore I think one must keep one's eyes on removing the objective situation that makes for ghetto life.

RPW: Have you any guess about where Malcolm X is going next?

BR: Well frankly I think there's every indication that Malcolm X doesn't know where he's going, and I think he's somewhat frightened to come back here.

RPW: He's played in several directions.

BR: Yes - yes.

RPW: Have you read the Post article? In the Saturday Evening Post?

BR: No - oh, yes, I read that. It's the one where he talks about Goldwater -

RPW: directions.

BR: Yes. I feel he's just lost.

RPW: How much organization does he have available now, do you know?

BR: Oh, very little - practically nothing. There's a few frustrated youngsters and a few confused writers and others, but even before he left here these Sunday meetings which he was having got smaller and smaller. Because he does not have any - he does not propose, if he has any real answers to the immediate problems which Negroes want an answer to.

RPW: It's a verbalism now so far.

BR: Yes. And tragically, in verbalization becomes in a period of confusion.

RPW: Speaking of programs, that there is a good deal of debate in the Negro leadership about the future of demonstration, about the kind of demonstrations that are possible in their next phase. What's your line of thought on that?

BR: Well, my line of thought is - I have two things to say. I think that we are in a period now where the fundamental problems can be solved through assistance from the federal government. We're going to need millions and billions of dollars for tearing down slums, for public works, and putting everybody back to work. That's a political job. And you have to work at it politically. Therefore, we must go into that job more deeply. However, secondly, I think that demonstrations must still be called upon because demonstrations have two objectives, not one. A demonstration first of all calls attention to an evil and simultaneously pricks the conscience of men. This will have to be done in the future at many levels. The problem is that in public accommodations it was possible to do the first and the second simultaneously, and the second is to cure the evil. You can go in front of a restaurant and demonstrate and prick the conscience, and integrate it - in the same act. In the North, however, today, where you are attempting to deal with jobs, schools and housing, you cannot simultaneously prick the conscience and solve it. You have to go to the legislature to solve it because you have to have billions of dollars. This is a part of that crisis, that many people don't under-

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stand this need. But the demonstration is still valuable for the first aspect. A third fact about demonstration is that instead of demonstrations now, attempting to be fundamentally Negroes parading, we must gear these demonstrations I believe so that more and more of the white dispossessed feel comfortable in them. That is to say, that instead of marching now for - by a restaurant, even if it exists in the North, what we should be marching for, the Negro and white together saying we will not fight in the streets over jobs. We know that full employment has to be had. Give us work. We want no more relief. So I think there needs to be something new brought into it, and that raises a very serious question.

RPW: Yes - the social base has to be changed.

BR: Exactly.

RPW: Let me ask another question not off that but related to it - a particular case. Another matter of the school situation in New York and elsewhere - but take New York. On one extreme we have the position - we have the PAT people. On one extreme we have the - those who sponsor massive busing system - of total mixing as a - the major criterion of education, the mixing of races. And how do you place yourself in this possible - oh, possible attitudes in between those extremes - as of now?

BR: I feel that the major problem has been the putting the thing in these extreme forms. I think we have to say what kind of school system do we need - number one, to prepare youngsters for the nature

of Twentieth Century life, which again includes automation, technological change. And how do we prepare people, not only to make a living, but to live creatively in a democracy. Now, out of these two things I come to the conclusion that we need quality schools, and we need integrated schools, because I don't believe it's possible for people to live together in a society, in a democratic society and be separated in going to school. School is not preparation for life - it is life, and it ought to be democracy. Now therefore my position is, let us come forward again with something which is so new, something which is so novel, that whites would not dare to raise the question of busing, and that Negroes would not dare to raise the question of busing, because I suppose you know there are just about as many Negro parents against busing as there are whites.

RPW: Oh, yes, I know.

BR: Now therefore the most creative idea that has come out to me is - on a totally different level - is Dr. Maxwell Snowshen of the educational park, that is, the university in effect for youngsters. And the reason I say this is, that if you will think of the high school music and art which is in the center of Harlem, white people fight to get their children in there. They don't raise the question that this is a high - a criminal area. They fight to get them in for one simple reason. The High School of Music and Art is one of our truly superior schools. Now, I think when the question of educational parks can be clearly seen, when we come forth - maybe that's

not it - but when we do come forth with a real answer to how we truly prepare people in the Twentieth Century and how we get democracy in the school together, and come forth with a superior thing, people will support it. I have that much faith in the American people.

RPW: Let's assume that. Meanwhile, there's the mere business of nose-counting, of our racial basis and the public school - in the public school system as opposed to private schools or parochial school systems. Just how is a reasonable integration program possible, given that

?

BR: I think that this is extremely difficult to conceive of. For example, some economists and people concerned with the movement of population maintain that of the fifteen largest cities in America by 1972, ten of those cities will have a greater Negro population than white, and that the school system will have an even greater (talking together)

RPW: Sure, because you have this other -

BR: Right. Now therefore I have never been one who took the view that the school system and the board of education can deal with all contradictions of our society in one fell swoop. Wherefore I am approaching this also from another angle. I am urging Negro people all over the country to fight now for low and middle income housing in predominantly lily white neighborhoods, on the basis that if you can then put Negro poor and white poor into those housing units, that this would be another way of maintaining an area where there

were Negroes and whites living close enough to go to the same schools.

RPW: What sort of resistance would you find with real estate people on that?

BR: You would find terrific resistance, and I think that wherever we move on this, because of the confusions, there's going to be terrific resistance, and I don't know that anybody honestly knows the answer to this. But here again I believe that if you can make a few simple steps, such as the Princeton Planning in some areas has attempted to do, and if we are careful in the process of trying to get youngsters together who ought to be together, that this could be helpful. Now, the one advantage to the educational park is that it gets at this problem of the unfortunate poor education of some Negroes, because even if some of them go to white schools, they may end up in black classrooms.

RPW: Sure - sure-

BR: Now, the educational park provides for this, because there are things in a huge institution which children, regardless of their intellectual abilities, could do together - sports programs, music programs, etc. So that I still come back to the educational park as being one of the sanest ideas. Now if you ask me how are you going to that, real estate places being what they are, the resistance of
and I don't know.

RPW: And how soon is another question.

BR: And how soon. So I think we are in a very serious, serious kind of dilemma, and one of the things which I am hoping for, is that soon

some of the country's greatest educators really get together and try to examine this in the light of the objective situation and not in the light of prejudice from whatever source it comes and pre-judgment.

RPW: I just have a little - some sort of hesitancy about this particular problem that becomes more and more acute every day in a big city - I mean, really it's like - you can - a person in New Jersey can work things out, because you have some -

BR: Small.

RPW: It's small - you can work it out. It seems almost hopeless.

BR: That's because the Negro population in a place like Princeton will remain limited (talking together)

is to fundamentally work around the University. But there's no great business there, it seems, that brings in great numbers of people. I agree with you that I do not see my way clear on the school question. Many problems. Here converges all the contradictions of RPW+ the society.

RPW: The particular ones. (not audible) What about the problem of centralization of leadership in the Negro movement, the civil rights movement - I'll say Negro - I'll distinguish that from over-all civil rights. You hear things on both sides, regretting it doesn't exist, fearing its existence - something that equates centralization with a power push, you see. Some people say it means a defect in responsibility because How do you think about that subject?

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BR: Well, from long experience I would not want to see it - centralization. Because I think I will see cooperation. For example, the NAACP has a very neat cut-out job to do. The Urban League has a job which is very clear to do. CORE - SNCC - each has its own job. And in fact, as one moves it causes accommodation from the other - one pushes one, one restrains one, and keeps us on what I consider a fairly progressive course.

RPW: May I interrupt? On that basis, how do you interpret the SNCC and CORE attitudes in terms of the moratorium proposed, you see - back last - what was it? late July, wasn't it?

BR: Well, I feel that SNCC and CORE attitude was essentially the fear that if they signed such a document, they would have difficulty with their left wing -

RPW: With their own wing?

BR: But what is interesting to note is that they have not engaged in major picketing demonstrations and the like, and for very good objective reasons. So that when you come to what I call the reality, there has been this cooperation.

RPW: What they did has voided what they said.

BR: Exactly. And those of us who did sign it, went to Atlantic City and were a part of that demonstration. So that it's - now the other thing I wanted to say is pretty philosophical. That is that no movement which has a unified leadership is a strong movement. There need to be tendencies. There needs to be accommodation. And I think

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a movement ultimately is stronger. Now when the time comes we do cooperate. There was never greater cooperation than the March on Washington, the marches frantically to schools in '59 - '58 and '59 - the prayer pilgrimage in 1957 - and I know because I have led most of these things, and I know that everybody has been cooperative. Furthermore, under attack there tends to be cooperation. There was no -

RPW: Yes, the ranks close.

BR: - you see - you have the four major groups cooperating in Mississippi on the voter registration - it's an uneasy cooperation but it's there.

RPW: What do you take as the gains in Mississippi this summer - the summer campaign?

BR: Well, I think that the major gain of the Mississippi project this summer was that there were a thousand youngsters from all over the North who carried back home an experience that if translated back home can be very helpful.

RPW: Now, how would that work out back home?

BR: I think that most of these youngsters are going to college campuses where they will interpret to other students on the campus what life really is like in Mississippi, the terror, the dread, the fear on the part of whites and blacks - because everybody is trapped. Secondly, I think it brought to the nation the concepts of

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