

Ace Reporter Examines Racial Friction

(Robert R. Kirsch, book editor of the Los Angeles Times, recently reviewed an important new study of racial friction in this country by ace reporter Samuel Lubell. Kirsch's review follows.)

Samuel Lubell is a living example of mad over computer. Not that he deprecates the use of statistics or electronic devices, but that he regards these as instrumentalities rather than a substitute for mentality.

He is, in fact, a well-educated reporter, who recognizes that the activities of men, being based on a multiplicity of factors—historical, cultural, psychological and economic—demand a balanced interpretation and judgment, imbued by common sense and understanding. In brief, political analysis is not primarily a science. It is an art. And in this art, Lubell is practically in a class by himself.

The fact that he has been uncannily accurate in his predictions of elections since 1952 (he foresaw the write-in swing to Lodge in the New Hampshire primary long before the computer pundits) is really of less consequence than his ability to understand root causes and motivations. And this in turn comes from good, solid reporting which is being able to ask the right questions of the right people at the right time. In a time when the ordinary man has become an integer—a mode, median or mean—a great many observers have lost sight of this basic truth.

All of this, and more, is demonstrated in **WHITE AND BLACK: Test of a Nation** (Harper & Row, \$4.95) in which Lubell, with no little courage, addresses himself to the central problem of our time and reaches conclusions unlikely to satisfy those at the polar extremes. One reason is that as one goes to extremes, the proffered solutions to increasingly complex questions get increasingly simple. And if there is anything about the race problem, it is not simple.

The firm bedrock of this book is to be found in its brilliant narration of the historical forces which led

to the current demand for integration and equal rights. There is nothing particularly new in this, but it serves to remind readers that the emotionality of the present has its roots in the past. But if emotion is an essentially irrational condition, it is nevertheless a reality. The real problem comes when emotion clashes with reason in an effort to secure a climate in which the moral and legal demands of the Negro can be conceded without demolishing the arena in which our political and economic contentions can be contained and worked out.

Segregationists will have a fit when they read that Lubell considers it a sine qua non that all discriminatory legislation against the Negro be wiped out. He argues that it is indispensable to any viable solution that the irritating reminders of lower status which rob the Negro of his dignity and his identity have no place in America.

Integrationists will be equally annoyed when Lubell suggests that legislation may not be anywhere near as effective in solving the ultimate problems as they think.

Negroes may question his criticism of demonstration tactics, of political maneuvering, of bloc voting, of economic special treatment, as in the end methods which may blur and even deny the ultimate aim—which is recognition of the Negro as an individual human being.

Yet, whatever your response, any careful reading of Lubell's book must result in at least the recognition of the complexity of forces involved. Let us consider some of these points:

"The heart of any racial peace should be a clear-cut national commitment to individualism as against racialism—to agree among ourselves to bring into existence the conditions which will enable us to

treat each Negro as a recognizable individual and not as an anonymous black face."

In the South, Lubell argues that the moderates on both sides should be given a chance to solve the problems on local levels through Racial Peace Commissions which might restore the Negroes' "willingness to accept gradual measures . . . if a timetable of actions to be taken was set up and carried through."

In the North, different conditions prevail, and there is a tendency to be blinded by the lack of overt difficulties (a blindness which is fast disappearing in the light of recent events). Here, says Lubell, residential mobility is crucial:

"Individual Negro families must be able to register their social and economic progress by moving to better neighborhoods."

Ultimately, for both Negro and white the essence of the problem is to learn to know one another as individual human beings.

Without this voluntary rapprochement, Lubell argues, the bloc thinking may be hardened, thus increasing rather than decreasing racial tensions.

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