

(CRISIS AND COMMITMENT, from page 2)

leadership in the world of nations.

It is not condoning riots to cry out against the conditions in the Negro ghettos which render some Negroes susceptible to the emotional gratification of pillage, looting and destruction. It is not condoning riots, but demanding the means to end them, that compels us to note the steady worsening of the average Negro's lot in the face of unprecedented general prosperity. It is not turning our backs on the need for education to note that the average Negro college graduate can expect a lifetime's earnings no greater than those of a white high school graduate. It is not an abdication of responsibility, but an affirmation of it, to say that society cannot perpetuate discrimination against Negroes and then blame the victims or their leaders for the outbursts of those who have been made desperate.

IT IS AN obligation of the whole of American society to take the massive actions which alone can turn the downward tide of Negro economic status with its concomitant growth of frustration and bitterness. It is the special obligation of those who can see more clearly and feel more keenly than the rest to assume their own leadership burden and to spare no effort to bring their fellows to an equal comprehension. It is the obligation, in particular, of the mass media to moderate their obsession with sensation and conflict and to help create a climate of genuine knowledge and understanding in which perspective is restored.

The near-total absence of this perspective is reflected in the survey figures showing declines in public sentiment favoring civil rights. Has the nation forgotten, for example, that for every Negro youth who throws a brick, there are a hundred thousand suffering the same disadvantages who do not? That for every Negro who tosses a Molotov cocktail, there are a thousand fighting and dying on the battlefields of Vietnam? It is a cruel and bitter abuse to judge the worth of these larger numbers, the overwhelming preponderance of the Negro population, by the misdeeds of a few.

WE CANNOT ignore the signs of a retreat by white America from the national commitment

to racial justice. The inadequacies of enforcement of this commitment, which has been hammered out over long years of judicial, legislative and administrative pronouncement, have been a scandal; yet we have seen the United States Senate scuttling enforcement of antidiscrimination law and refusing to act on legislation to protect Negroes against racist assault. We have seen the appeal of bigotry elevated to a major political instrument with votes being sought and won across the nation, by exploiting the so-called "white backlash." We have seen sometime friends pulling back in full retreat and yielding to the battlefield scavengers' ground which could have been held if it had been fought for.

This trend can be disastrous to the nation's, as well as the Negro's, welfare if it is not checked, if our forces are not rallied and if the hard, demanding job of building lasting public support is not pressed forward now. It can be worse than disastrous for the generation of younger Americans, white as well as black, who would then indeed face a future without viable idealism. Thousands of them have been personally involved in the civil rights movement over the last few years, many in situations involving hazardous confrontations. They are needed now more than ever before, in work which while seeming more routine and less adventurous, is in many ways harder and more vital. They can be effectively drawn to these new tasks only if they have assurance that the adult world in solidly engaged to the same purpose.

NINETY YEARS ago, this nation permitted the democratic promise of Emancipation to wither and die before a rampant reaction which condemned the Negro to segregation, disfranchisement, peonage and death. Then, as now, the voices of temporary liberalism sounded discouragement and disillusionment with the capacity of the freedmen for full citizenship. Then, as now, the South capitalized on Northern weariness with the "race problem" and was enabled to shut off the hope of freedom. But the "race problem" remained, and today we are paying for yesterday's default.

We are determined that this history shall not repeat itself and we call upon all our

Amos Walker

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countrymen, black and white, of all faiths and origins, to move with us."

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