

Editorial

BY WHITNEY M. YOUNG, JR.

This Is One Job That Can Be Done Only By You!

The Not-So-Silent Majority

One of the biggest myths around these days is that there is a "silent majority" of Americans that supports the war and is against social reforms.

The center of the so-called silent majority is the white working class. Blue-collar workers who wave the flag and try to keep blacks out of their schools, neighborhoods, and unions, are portrayed as typical by the press and by political pundits.

But there is at least as much evidence to show that these white workers are hurtin today, and that a lot of the bigotry some people show is but a symptom of their social and economic frustrations.

If this is so, then there is a good chance that blacks and whites can climb over the racial barriers to support programs of common interest. White workers have the voting power and the unified institutions such as trade unions, churches, and ethnic associations that could make them valuable allies in the fight for a better society.

Of course, getting through to some groups is no easy job. They've been fighting against their own interests for so long that a massive educational job is necessary. Just look at so many poor whites in the South, for example, who could be living much better lives today if they had fought shoulder-to-shoulder alongside of their black brothers against the system that oppresses them both.

But the white working class today is no silent mass - it is increasingly restless. It suffers from the rising cost of living, from unemployment, expensive and inadequate medical care, crime, lack of decent housing, and all the other problems that hit black people, too.

It may give lip service to the war, but how long will it willingly send its sons to be killed for a cause it can't possibly understand? If it can be made to see that this ill-considered war is costing it economic security as well as the lives of its children it may yet be willing to see that real patriotism demands an end to the slaughter.

Young factory workers are different, too. News reports indicate that they are more restive, less willing to take orders, angry at boring, meaningless work, and no longer subject to union discipline and loyalty. Just as we have seen that there is a new breed of student, so too is there a new breed of worker. He's far less rigid, and might be willing to strike a coalition with blacks if that is the way he can get the system to respond to his needs.

There was a time when a truck driver and a hippie were seen as mutual enemies, and beating up on long-haired kids was considered a sport. But the recent teamsters' strike out West brought students and drivers together and the workers got a new understanding of the kids, and appreciated their support. Because the two groups had mutual aims, they were able to overcome mutual suspicions and hatreds.

Ethnic groups too, can unite on issues. Italian-Americans recently demonstrated against what they call police harassment in New York. Well, blacks have been protesting police actions for a long time. Surely, if other groups feel the crunch, they will be in a better position to understand what blacks and other minorities have been saying all these years.

About 70 million people live in families that earn between \$5-10,000 a year. Most are white. When blacks call for economic reconstruction of the society to bring better conditions to poor and moderate income people, they are calling for measures that will help all those white people, too.

Economic security, meaningful jobs, expanded housing and medical programs, better schools, open admission to colleges - all these are measures black people are fighting for and are measures that will benefit most white people.

Many people in the Administration seem to be appealing to the bigotry and the ugly frustrations of that "silent majority." But you can't fool all the people all the time and sooner or later white workers are going to see where the action really is, and hopefully, they won't trade their lives and economic security for petty hatreds.

Now is the time for a massive educational campaign to be launched by civil rights groups and especially by white liberals, unionists, churches, and ethnic associations to forge the coalitions that will channel the aimless frustrations of white workers into action to make this a better society for all of us.

DOING IS THE GREAT THING. FOR IF, RESOLUTELY, PEOPLE DO WHAT IS RIGHT, IN TIME THEY COME TO LIKE DOING IT.
RUSKIN

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960 B.C.

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ARTIST'S CONCEPTION ABOVE

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