



**Smithsonian Institution**

*National Museum of African American History and Culture*

## **Delegate Magazine 1969**

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The Role of All Blacks in Economic Self-Determination

As an example, when we hear white people talk about "Look at those blacks over there. They have a bunch of children, and never married," we have to recognize there was a time in our history when marriages among blacks were not permitted. Sexual intercourse in many instances was permitted only for breeding purposes. So, when we look around and see the light skinned black people here today, they are most often the direct results of white men plundering and ravaging our black women. Light-skinned black people today are the direct results of this.

So, when we talk about an animalistic trend among blacks, we can see who created that animalistic trend. And brothers that affects our economics.

When white people talk to us about family separation, they started that separation and have done little about it. It is sad but true that they also have to take the burden for continuing this kind of separation by the unfair welfare laws they created. This, brother, affects our economics because not only could blacks not marry during slavery, but even today when a black man is kept out of the economic mainstream and he can't take care of his family temporarily, he's got to get out of the house in order to qualify his family for welfare. And, if he gets caught back in his own home, we've even got some black social workers that are so oppressed in the mind, that they often go along with the agenda and report him. Brother, this behavior only creates more family disorganization and more economic problems.

So, when we talk about family disorganization, we should tell unknowing and kindly white folks who created this that their forefathers helped create it, and it's up to white America to take a large part of the weight in getting it off. But our own people are to blame in large part for continuing to accept this. For, all of us have been too busy trying to do the impossible... to be white. We've got to think black. We can't be white. We have a lot of people who talk about what we have to do to integrate. In fact, until this year the Urban League had social integration as one of their stated goals. Another major organization still has this as an immediate objective.

Let's take a look at the integration process and see for ourselves if black can integrate today into the white mainstream. If a black person and white person in this nation married, what would their children be? What would they be sister? ...Right! They would be black. Integration in our country has come about historically through amalgamation, that's true for whites. But, if any person who was the product of mixed marriage married a white, what would their children still be? (pause) Black. So, as this country tends to move toward integration, what would this country become? (audience response) Black!

You know white folks aren't ever going to stand for that!! (laughter) So, let's not fool ourselves about social integration at this point.

I think almost every well-meaning person in this land knows the value of desegregation, where all men are free to get the kind of education they need without forced segregation, free to pursue employment of their choice without segregation and free to do all the other things others do without being barred. This kind of desegregation characterizes an "open society"—not an integrated one.



Individual integration, by personal choice, is something I feel must always be possible. However, to have group integration as a total objective seems impractical when there is a wide variance in general status of the groups. It would seem to me that a far more reasonable goal would be to work for those conditions whereby "blackness" is not perceived of as a handicap in our society, thereby enabling far more individuals to identify with blacks, if they chose, without stigma. Self-aware blacks have no need to impose themselves socially on anyone.

Now, I'm only saying this... that so many of us have gone along with white folks as defining complete integration—social or otherwise—as the immediate route to black salvation. It's an impossible route. It's an impossible way, until we first become peers and can integrate by individual choice without the stigma of their being part of a black community.

And if we define a problem wrong, what kind of solutions can we come up with except wrong solutions? We've done this for years.

Our problem is historically rooted in the social conditions and unfair historical social acts that were imposed upon black people by a large part of white Americans years ago. And if we don't look at it in that historical context, why don't we have the guts or courage, or the dignity, as I would call it, to agree to stand up forth right to white America and say, "This kind of racism is a kind of racism you are heirs to because of your forefathers who created these dastardly conditions? And you are heirs to it and even for your own good you have done nothing to rectify it."

Now, one of the things I think has hurt us, too, is that so often we stand for white people to make plans for us. I'm not questioning their integrity. The Self-Determination Act was written by white men, I think most of them had good intentions. I'm not going to question that. But they certainly don't have the insight to know even who they are as heirs to a racists culture.

When the present Commission on Civil Disorders came out with its report, it stated that the problem was racism and no white person could understand it. The report, I think, was wrong because it did not tell these people that they were heirs to a system that is racist... that their forefathers were racists and were guilty of racists acts. Further, because nothing was done to correct it or to compensate for it... that they were heirs to racism and whether one willed it or not, every white person in America today is living in the role of oppressor. Because today any white, who has an advantageous position due to the simple denial of any black person the right to compete for it, is, by cultural circumstance, cast in the role of oppressor. This does not in fact make him a racist.

But I think that once white people are told about the racism to which they are heirs and they feel sorry about it and move to change it, they can be friendly advocates for equity. And as true advocates for a just cause, they should be welcomed as such.

However, I think that when we, as blacks, call this to their attention and let them know the kind of racism that has gone uncorrected for generation... the kind of pain that has been inflicted on black people and

if they still keep their feet on our toes... if they do nothing to try or don't do all that they can, rather, to try to change it, they are in fact a racist. Brother, this too, affects our economics.

There are many people who are, by cultural circumstance, heirs to racism, but who can be converted to be advocates of the kind of justice that will bring tranquility to this nation.

We as blacks, are going to have to stick together first, to educate ourselves and then second to try to educate the white people. This way we can separate out more easily our advocates from our foes. We've got to help everyone—black and white—understand that America for several centuries has taken unfair advantage of blacks. And, in any unfair relationship, we should have the recourse of equity. Black people all need equity in this nation for the kind of sacrifices and the kind of injustices inflicted on them. When you jail a man wrongly and he comes out of jail, he's due compensation for his imprisonment. All black people in this nation are, to a high degree, psychologically crippled and mentally enslaved by the imposition of a white racist system, the vestiges of which still run, in some ways as deep as the yoke.

[[image - black & white photograph of Kenneth Brown holding a sign advertising a Clairol sweepstakes]]  
[[caption]]Kenneth Brown, Salesman, Haircolor & Toiletries Division of Clairol[[/caption]]

[[image - black & white photograph of Walter Leaphart]]  
[[caption]]Walter Leaphart, Assistant to Director of Clairol Sales Solon Division[[/caption]]

[[image - black & white photograph of Robert Shepherd]]  
[[caption]]Robert Shepherd, Assistant Product Manager, Clairol[[/caption]]

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