

The National Anguish

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The racial demonstrations of 1963 may, in time, be recognized as events of great importance to the perfection of American democracy. The progress toward human equality before the law proclaimed by the Constitution of the United States and its amendments, and pragmatically confirmed by the Emancipation Proclamation, is measured now by the demonstrations. Our country is being asked by a group of citizens whether it is only masquerading to the world as an exponent of human rights. The mettle of our social structure stands tested in a way that may determine the ultimate destiny of our nation and the principles on which it was founded.

These are stirring times in which we live. The demonstrations for racial equality expose such critical issues in our democracy that we stand as much at a crossroad of destiny as Americans did in the summer of 1861. Because the Negro community of Wisconsin is relatively small and concentrated in the industrial counties, the issue of racial equality may seem remote to many of our citizens. But the issue is not industrial or metropolitan or Southern. It is a national issue. It is a human issue. Above all, it is a moral issue, and that is why it is an important issue to discuss in the editorial pages of a medical journal. For we are human beings as well as doctors.

Racial inequality has cost America dearly. The thousands of lives in the Civil War to establish, among other things, that slavery was not part of American culture must ever remind us that no man bears a heritage of servitude because of an accident of birth. In the century since the legal end

of slavery in this country we have taxed ourselves heavily by depriving ourselves of the human resources that might have been available to us if all of our citizens had, in fact, equal opportunity. We have imposed a burden of bigotry on our national character that has made our posture in the family of nations hypocritical.

If they succeed in no other respect, the demonstrations will have forcefully shown that the problems on the Negro minority are national problems. They will have shown that discrimination because of race is wrong—economically, socially and morally. It is to be hoped that the demonstrations proceed peacefully, without the hoodlumism and impatience that could alienate the public opinion so necessary to the Negro cause. But no matter how the events of this summer transpire, nobody—no bigot, no politician, no backwater demagogue—will ever again be able to use the tired wheezes of “state rights” or “inalienable right of the majority to oppress a minority” as an excuse to support a stance of racial superiority. Respectability and morality go hand in hand, and respectable America can no longer afford the immorality of racial discrimination.

As doctors, and respectable members of our community, we will take the lead in sympathizing the goals of the peaceful, responsible demonstrators, and we will use our position to explain their methods and their purposes.

—DNG

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