The Great Debate

Is Violence Necessary to Combat Injustice?

For the Positive: Williams Says "We Must Fight Back"

By ROBERT F. WILLIAMS

In 1914, I was an enlisted man in the United States Marine Corps. I shall never forget the evening we (the historic Supreme Court) decided that segregation in the public schools is unconstitutional.

At last I felt that I was a part of America and that I belonged. That was what I had always wanted, even as a child.

I returned to civilian life in 1915 and the hope I had for Negro liberation faltered.

Acts of violence and words and deeds were the only way out of all that was left to me. I had already come to a conclusion that the Klan had constitutional rights.

But I have become disillusioned...

What Will Deter?

Laws serve to deter crime and protect the weaker from the stronger in civilized society. Where there is a breakdown of law, there is the force of deterrence.

There are only civilized and moral individuals respect the rights of others.

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I have great respect for the pacifist, that is, for the纯净 pacifist. I am not a pacifist and I am sure that the people are not. Peaceful resistance is a powerful weapon in the hands of the oppressed...

In 1915 the Klan moved into Monroe and Union County (N.C.). Their numbers steadily increased to the point

nudate and organize in the same way as the NAACP.

Not having been infected by true-theorist pacifism, a group of Negroes who shrewdly understood that the city officials would have to depose the Klan from its constitutional position. After his talk he was told of numerous instances between Klansmen and Negroes. Klansmen have been legally turned from the City of Monroe.

"Nick Inside"

On May 3, 1919, while president of the Union County branch of the NAACP, I made a statement to the United Press International after a trial wherein a white man was supposed to have been tried for kicking a Negro maid about a flight of stairs in a local white hotel. In spite of the fact that there was an eyewitness, the defendant failed to show up for his trial, and was completely exonerated.

Another case in the same county involved a white man who had come to a Negro mother's home and attempted to rape her. In recollection he could not remember the defendant, and the woman testified that he had "not been guilty. He was just drunk and having a little fun." A white woman neighbor testified that the woman had come to her house excited, her children bare, her feet bare and begging her for assistance; the court was unmoved.

This great misjudgment of justice left us inside, and I said then what I say now. I believe Negroes are willing to defend themselves, their women, their children and their homes. They should be willing to do so in repelling their assailants...

The second is violence enacted in self-defense, which all societies, from the most primitive to the most civilized and cultured, accept as moral and legal.

The third is violence in a test of advancement, organized as in warfare, deliberately and consciously. To this tendency many Negroes are being tempted today.

Violence Confuses

There are innumerable parallels in this approach. The greatest danger is that it will fail to attract Negroes to a real collective struggle, and will continue to have not yet culminated, which has not supported either side...

It is unfortunately true that however the Negro acts, his struggle will not be free of violence instilled in his enemies, and he will tend toward courage and willingness to sacrifice to defeat this manifestation of violence. But if he seeks it and organizes it, he cannot win.

Does this leave the Negro without a positive method to advance? My Robert Williams would have us believe that there is no effective and practical alternative. He argues that we must begin to live and submit or take up arms. To use the issue divides the whole problem. There are other meaningful alternatives.

The Negro people can organize socially to balance many forms of struggle which can drive their enemies back without repressing their forces. Numerous creative forms have been developed by the mass protests, sit-ins, and strikes...

Editor's Note

The great debate in the integration movement in recent months has been the question of violence vs. non-violence, as instruments of social change. The contrast between the positive approach was brought down to the Southern scene by Mr. Martin Luther King, Jr., leader of the non-violent movement. We reprint excerpts from both articles here.

For the Negative: King Sees Alternative in Mass Actions

By MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

The Negro has been a victim of a struggle for centuries which has been waged against the Federal Government . . . There is reason to believe that the Negroes of 1965 will not accept imposition any such compromise in their contemporary struggle for integration.

It is automatic in social life that the imposition of frustrations leads to two kinds of reactions. One is the development of a wholesome social organization to resist with effective, firm measures any efforts to impose pressure. The other is a confused, anger-instigated drive to strike back violently, to inflict damage . . . It is punitive—not radical or constructive. The current call for violence have their roots in this latter tendency.

Here one must be clear that there are three different views on this subject of violence. One is the approach of pure firebreathing, which cannot either pacifist or mutually destructive, for it requires extra-ordinary discipline and courage. The second is violence directed in self-defense, which all societies, from the most primitive to the most civilized and cultural, accept as moral and legal.

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