

# Black Backlash

NAT HENTOFF

THE WHITE PRESS has been focusing on the "white backlash"—the presidential primary votes received by Governor George Wallace in Wisconsin, Indiana and Maryland; the sanctification of the "neighborhood school" in Northern white communities; the resistance to fair housing laws in California; and many other illustrations that whites outside the South are also far from "ready" for integration. Arthur Spingarn, who will surely be the last white president of the NAACP, points to the backlash and blames "extremist" Negro demonstrations. "Friends" of the Negro, such as the *New York Times*, also lecture the Negro militants and warn that they are losing white allies by their "irresponsible" tactics. ("Responsible to whom?" one of these militants asks with tart logic.)

Despite this alarm at the backlash among white liberals and moderates, the phenomenon itself is no surprise to most Negroes—from the apathetic to the most revolutionary. They know, as Charles Silberman has put it in his book, *Crisis in Black and White*, that "the tragedy of race relations in the United States is that there is no American Dilemma." With exceptions, "White Americans are not torn and tortured by the conflict between their devotion to the American creed and their actual behavior. They are upset by the current state of race relations, to be sure. But what troubles them is not that justice is being denied but that their peace is being shattered and their business interrupted."

What the "white backlash" is creating in Negro communities, however, is an intensification of the crisis in Negro leadership. The extent of white resistance to such integration as requires more than pietistic affirmations of the American Creed gives added impact to the new wave of Negro militants who claim that the established leadership—with its focus on civil rights—is irrelevant to what must be done. Daniel Watts, who belongs to that new wave, writes in *Liberator* ("the voice of the Afro-American protest movement in the United States and the liberation movement of Africa"): "We in up-South (N.Y.C.) have long had 'civil rights'

legislation, F.E.P.C., bi-racial committees, interracial committees, councils for brotherhood, city-wide Human Rights committees, state-wide Human Rights Committees; name it, we have it; despite all these bromides, we are still out in the streets demanding integrated schools for our children, desegregated housing and an end to discrimination in job employment."

A BASIC credo of the putative new leadership has been sounded by Lawrence Landry, a Chicago sociologist who was instrumental in leading two school boycotts in that city and is also engaged in a battle to overturn the "accommodating" Negro political leadership of Congressman William Dawson in Chicago. "The black man," Landry declared a few weeks ago, "has come to the very wholesome conclusion that the white power structure has given the black man all he's going to give him." An answer, therefore, is for the Negro to gain more power—political power through capitalizing on ghetto concentration and economic power through boycotts and social dislocation. Landry is a member of ACT, a "third force action group," which includes such other newer leaders as Jesse Gray of the Harlem rent strikes, Mrs. Gloria Richardson of Cambridge, Maryland, and Stanley Branch, chairman of the Committee for Freedom Now in Chester, Pennsylvania. Also part of ACT are some of the more impatient members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and several "young Turks" from CORE such as Isiah Brunson, chairman of the Brooklyn chapter which initiated the abortive stall-in on opening day of the World's Fair.

At a Washington meeting of ACT in April, Nahaz Rogers of the Negro American Labor Council declared: "ACT will not function in a manner that is acceptable to white people. It will do things that are acceptable to Negroes." Yet another new group is RAM (the Revolutionary Action Movement) which considers itself "somewhere between the Nation of Islam and SNCC" and also intends to be part of the international black and Asian movement for "liberation." Max Stanford, Field Chairman of RAM, asserts: "As revolutionary black nationalists, we do not believe that standing on the street corners alone will liberate our people. Rev-

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NAT HENTOFF is a well-known writer and critic. His latest book, a study on race relations entitled *The New Equality*, will be published in early August by Viking Press.

olutionary black nationalists must act as a vanguard to show our people how to seize power so that they may gain some control over their lives."

Neither ACT nor the still inchoate RAM are significant in numbers, but they do reflect a rising conviction among young Negro intellectuals as well as among more and more of those of the "lower classes" who are eager for action that the only way for Negroes to push beyond the present impasse is to implement the kind of philosophy that has been distilled by Daniel Watts: "There are only two things that move men and nations. Power and money." Money is in short supply, the theory goes, but there is the potential massed power of millions of Negroes.

CONFRONTED by this call for black power, Bayard Rustin—the free lance strategist for the older "movement" and the organizer of the August, 1963, March on Washington—points out that in this drive toward power, the Negro needs white allies. Rustin's plan is for a coalition that would include those fragments of organized labor which are not insularly somnolent, the unemployed of both colors, civil rights actionists and even, to some degree, the more committed white liberals. Without allies, Rustin continues, ten percent of the population cannot by itself get enough power. In theory, most of those in ACT would agree with Rustin. When Jesse Gray addressed a rally in embattled Cambridge, Maryland, a few weeks ago, he declared: "If half the Negroes in Cambridge stopped paying their rent tonight, poor whites in the same economic class would join the revolution tomorrow because they don't like to pay rent any more than you." As of now, however, there are no signs in Cambridge of this or any other form of bi-racial, "proletarian" solidarity.

The difficulty with the Rustin proposal, therefore, as it looks to such of the newer militants as Landry and Watts, is that these potential white allies are hardly to be seen so far. Accordingly, the new wave contends, Negroes have no choice but to go it alone until they do accumulate enough palpable power so that they *have* to be reckoned with. Malcolm X, who has met with members of ACT and who is calling for a united front of black political action now that he has left the Muslims, says flatly, "There can be no white/black solidarity until there's first some black solidarity."

The possible danger of this approach is that if it works—if the ghettos are really organized—these concentrations of Negro power may become calcified, producing an even deeper chasm between blacks and whites. Yet this is the direction in which those aspiring leaders are moving who intend to try to take control of "the movement" from such established figures as Roy Wilkins, James Farmer and Martin Luther King.

The Negro civil rights "establishment" recognizes that it has not reached nearly enough of the masses

and, in that respect, it is conceivable that if new charismatic black leaders do emerge, they can gain a degree of mass support. The weakness of "the establishment" is that it has not acted strongly and consistently enough to set a direction for "the movement" beyond civil rights. It is difficult to successfully rebut the consensus of the ACT-type of militant who claims that the present civil rights bill is essentially hollow because its provisions will not significantly change the way the masses of Negroes live. To be sure, the bill may help get more Negroes registered in the South, but for what candidates will they have a choice to vote unless they are organized in blocs? And what will motivate more Negroes to register in the North unless they have candidates who recognize and have a program for their most basic needs?

The bill may end discrimination in public accommodations, but if a Negro is too poor to eat in a prestigious restaurant or stay at a comfortable motel, of what use is this provision to him? The bill may also—and here it is at its weakest—diminish discrimination in employment; but if there are not enough jobs for those whom inferior education has condemned to unskilled and low-skilled work, of what use is the bill to *them*? Nor does the bill have anything to do with the radical reconstruction of public education—including its integration—which right now is stunting the potentialities of yet another generation of Negro youth.

Wilkins, Farmer and King have not so far undertaken a concerted drive to educate the electorate, black and white, as to what has to be accomplished beyond civil rights. Fragments of insight occasionally appear in some of their speeches; and more and more local chapters of CORE in particular are working in ghetto neighborhoods on specific problems of housing, education and employment. Yet, with regard to creating a national base for political action to achieve the necessary legislation beyond civil rights, the "establishment"—including Whitney Young of the Urban League—has failed to indicate its understanding of the degree of political and economic change which must take place if Negroes are to have an opportunity to be equal.

They have not, for example, persistently enough attacked the inadequacy of President Johnson's "war" on poverty. They are not calling persistently enough for major public works expenditures—which are badly needed, in any case—for schools, urban transportation systems and the like. Such public works can at least provide the adult unskilled and underskilled with a chance to support themselves and their families while they can still work.

Nor have the established leaders focused strongly enough on such programs as increases in and extensions of unemployment compensation and social security along with a radical revision of urban renewal and public housing policy so that the millions of Negroes

who live in deteriorating buildings can finally be decently housed—and not in segregated enclaves. There are generalized references to all these essentials in their pronouncements, but there are no comprehensive programs nor is there nearly enough emphasis on the co-ordinated *political* action required to elect legislators to bring these concepts into being.

Most basically, the “establishment” has not clearly enough joined with Bayard Rustin and similarly oriented strategists to call for more planning of the economy (without which structural unemployment will worsen) and for a change in the definition of work in an economy being increasingly reshaped by automation. Their goals have been too narrow, and if they continue to emphasize civil rights with only vague attention to economics and politics, the thrust of new black leadership will make greater inroads on their forces, actual and potential.

So far, none in the new wave—including Malcom X—have themselves been clear enough in presenting programs aimed at attacking the root causes of inequality; but because they do make fiercer sounds and because the masses will become even more frustrated if all they get are civil rights bills, more Negro support is bound to go to those who propose increasingly forceful action, whatever that action is. For all that has been written about the rage and despair among Negroes, whites generally have yet to fully realize that eventually all this intensity has to be channeled somewhere if it is

not to explode; and if there continue to be no signs of a broad national coalition, that intensity is going to be poured into various forms of black nationalism. A New York woman who was demonstrating at the World's Fair this spring said, “I have a little baby. I would rather it were dead than have to go through what my husband went through.”

A Southern Regional Council report on “the Easter Week outbreak in Jacksonville of racial violence, predominantly from Negro sources” describes “the hopelessness that is compounded out of the thudding impact upon the human consciousness of being poor, and being blocked by the very conditions of this poverty and by the weight of discrimination from any possible escape. This is hopelessness deepened by the new knowledge that the old dream of escape to the North is false—that up there it's just more of the dreary old same. ‘Our young,’ say Negroes in Jacksonville and elsewhere over the South in 1964, ‘don't care any more whether they die if they've got to go on living like we have to now.’”

What do Wilkins, Farmer, King and Young have to say to the young in Jacksonville and to the woman at the World's Fair beyond civil rights? Civil rights are essential, but they are only the beginning; and if the present Negro leadership does not act more urgently and specifically in political and economic terms, they will have fewer and fewer Negroes to lead because they have so far not shown where it is they're going.

*Guenter Lewy's New Book*

## The Church Under Hitler

GORDON C. ZAHN

IN ONE sense it might be said that the Church has come upon unfriendly times. Despite all the favorable attention earned by the irrepressible humanity brought to it by a John XXIII, despite the exciting revitalization under way at Vatican II, it finds itself the object of a continuing (and increasingly critical) review which has at times verged upon an outright indictment for complicity—at least by silence—in the criminal acts of Adolf Hitler and his Third Reich.

A new breed of German historians and journalists, including some outstanding Catholics, have played a significant part in this revisionist study. The most widely

publicized, though perhaps least meritorious in terms of scholarship, has been the contribution of Rolf Hochhuth and the worldwide controversy it has stirred. He, it will be remembered, did not content himself with chronicling the sad failure of German Catholicism to recognize a gross moral evil and oppose it effectively and in time; instead, he chose to indict the leader of the universal Church with a personal, and major, share of responsibility for the atrocity of the “Final Solution.”

Now we have yet another treatment of this general theme, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*, written by Guenter Lewy (McGraw-Hill. \$7.50). It is undoubtedly the best. Professor Lewy's analysis is different from the others in the range of issues it covers, in the probing thoroughness of its analysis, and in the author-

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GORDON C. ZAHN is the author of *German Catholics and Hitler's Wars* and the forthcoming book, *In Solitary Witness: The Life and Death of Franz Jaegerstaetter* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston).