

We are celebrating today the tenth anniversary of the famous Brown decision of the Supreme Court -- a decision that reversed for all time the immoral and fallacious compromise of "separate but equal" opportunity for education.

If one looks objectively at what has happened to American education since the Brown decision, one might ask why or what we are celebrating. True, the border states rather quickly acted to correct a legislative commitment to separate education, recognizing the fact that indeed it was not really equal. In the deep South, less than 1% of the Negro youngsters have had new access to white schools in the ten years since the decision of the Supreme Court. And in the North, in most of the large metropolitan centers where schooling is related to housing, Negro children dwelling in the worst sections of the city generally are de facto segregated in the neighborhood schools in the slums. At least the South has been frank about the problem. Here in the North we have been mainly hypocritical and smug looking South, rather than at ourselves.

What the Court did was to establish a fact and an ideal. The fact established was that schools segregated by race are not really equal.

The ideal established was a repetition of the dream of the Constitution and Bill of Rights: that in this fair land of America, all Americans should have equal opportunity to develop themselves to their full potential as persons. The main thrust of such personal development must be through education.

It has taken the last ten years to teach us that the decision of a court, even the Supreme Court of the land, does not automatically turn injustice into justice, a bad dream into Utopia. We have also learned in the past ten years that the achievement of the promises of the Constitution depends upon the recognition of the law and the ideal of law by each individual American. Moreover, we have learned that the problem of creating a land of equal opportunity does not merely depend upon one aspect of the problem, namely education, but that equality of opportunity is only real if it is applied across the whole spectrum of daily living: homes and neighborhoods, jobs and voting, access to public accommodations and educational opportunity.

No row of judges in Washington, however distinguished, delivering a judgment, however eloquent and moving, can lift the problem from the place where it really gets solved or is allowed to fester -- in the hearts and

attitudes of every American citizen. This is every man's problem and every man must take his stand for or against what America really professes to be to all the world. Either we believe in the personal dignity of every American or we do not. It does no good to profess this belief when it costs nothing to each of us personally. It is the cheapest kind of dishonesty to say: "I admit the equality of Negroes, but I do not want a Negro to live next door, to eat or work or worship beside me, to go to school with my children, to hold a position of distinction, to get the same consideration from the clerk or the policeman, to really be my equal."

Of course, one does not establish equality by declaration, although equality of opportunity can be established this way. Once opportunity is equal, then it becomes the personal problem of each American, Negro and White, to prove himself a responsible American by using the opportunity to become worthy of respect. Too many Americans today, both White and Negro, expect respect without being worthy of it, because they do not use the opportunities that do exist to become better educated, to work hard, to be politically responsible, to be good parents and good neighbors, and good young people, too. *

The worst crime in America today is to deny full equality of opportunity to everyone and then to criticize those persons who do not measure up, even though they have not had the full opportunity to do so. I suspect that the worst crime of Americans tomorrow -- when hopefully equality of opportunity will have become a reality -- will be the automatic demand for respect whether or not one has used the opportunities available. For the time being, however, I am for equality of opportunity across the board today. Only then can we, as a nation, honestly expect that every American, White or Negro, prove that he is worthy or unworthy of respect. Meanwhile, each of us must, despite the harsh inequalities that do exist, try desperately to balance the actual situation by respecting in every man the dignity inherent in his humanity, as a child of God, created in God's own image and likeness, destined to be an heir of heaven. In time, each of us will face his own judgment, which in the words of Our Lord, will be based on this simple test: whatsoever you did to one of these, my least brethren, you did it to Me.

What does this mean to each of us? It means simply that in each

of our personal lives we place our most precious hope, our salvation, on the line for our personal achievement or non-achievement of social justice and social charity. We did not establish this rule. If we profess to be Christians, it was established, long ago, for us. And in our day, today, while we commemorate a legal decision of ten years ago, we are really thinking of what Our Lord said almost two thousand years ago. If we do not measure up to this rule, whatever else we do, we simply are admitting that we are not Christians. Social justice and social charity are achieved by deeds, not by words, and not automatically by laws or by legal decisions. And where social injustice and social uncharity exist, each one of us must strive mightily to balance the scales, to help our neighbors achieve the human dignity that is inherently theirs.

After ten years of frustration, culminating in the tragic comedy now taking place in the United States Senate, we are facing, as a nation, the moment of truth. Tear gas, cattle prods, police dogs, and a long hot Summer will not give us the real answer. The fact of inequality, the actual travesty of the ideal of America, are all too evident. What we need now is

real conviction regarding the dignity of man, and the reality of this conviction expressed in the life of all Americans, whether they be presidents or laborers. America is the true land of the free, but each day we must increasingly make it more so. This is the greatest moral challenge of our times, and it affects every man, woman, and child in America.