

Equal Opportunity Day has special meaning for those of us who possess the capacity to assist in the creation of opportunities. Even in this era, it is still more blessed to give than to receive and the question that we must all pose for ourselves is whether we have given enough -- enough money, enough time, enough energy and enough voice to our convictions that the problems of the minorities must be solved.

Our nation cries out for leadership -- leadership at the governmental level and leadership from the private sector. We need to establish in all the cities and towns of the Nation a standard of behavior that will result in a more equitable and harmonious relationship between the various racial and ethnic groups. Standards of behavior don't just "happen" -- someone purposefully sets out to create a community atmosphere in which a certain mode of behavior is smiled or frowned upon. Generally, it is a combination of the government and economic leaders of a community that are most successful. It was precisely this kind of group under the leadership of former Mayor Ivan Allen and the late editor of the Atlanta Constitution, Ralph McGill, that provided the atmosphere that permitted that city to forge ahead in the middle 50's toward compliance with the Brown decision when other cities were deciding to adhere to the "massive resistance" philosophy.

WHITNEY YOUNG'S CONTRIBUTION TO CIVIL RIGHTS NEGOTIATION

One of Whitney Young's greatest contributions was the dimension of dignity, skill, patience and dedication that he brought to the arts of negotiation and compromise in the field of civil rights. Whitney Young was the essential link between America's desperate and angry blacks and her comfortable and complacent whites. He knew how to listen to the former and to identify with their problems. He also knew how to transmit these enormous grievances to the Nation's centers of white power and how to recommend timely and practicable solutions.

To many, "compromise" is a distasteful word. But Whitney Young demonstrated that compromise need not be demeaning, need not signify surrender of principle, and need not mean sacrifice of self-respect or personal dignity. Nor, to Whitney Young, did compromise mean postponing basic rights or delaying action on historic injustices. On the contrary, civil rights compromise was to Whitney Young a strategy -- a device to make Americans face themselves and acknowledge the contradiction between their behavior and the Nation's stated principles.

While others excoriated the Establishment, Mr. Young sought to make it responsive. While others rebuked the Establishment with harsh and violent language, he quietly reminded the Establishment of its duty to work to improve American society. At the same time, he quietly and pointedly reminded the practitioners of harsh rhetoric that what counted was not fiery words, but solid deeds, programs, and accomplishments.

Whitney Young made no apology for dealing with the Establishment, nor did he owe any. In "Beyond Racism," his 1969 book, he readily acknowledged the Urban League to be the agency "that has the strongest contacts with the Establishment." He continued: "Because of its long-standing dedication to interracial teamwork, it (the Urban League) is in the best position to challenge white leadership when challenge is needed, and to assist when assistance is in order."

A few pages later, Mr. Young added: "Black people have a responsibility to organize the black community and then to work together with concerned white people to build an Open Society, free of racism, free of poverty."

Mr. Young used to tell about his commuter train ride from New Rochelle to New York, and how he would ask himself whether he should get off at 125th Street to "cuss whitey" or continue downtown to "talk to an executive of General Motors about 2,000 jobs" for jobless blacks.

Whitney Young believed that Black Americans can find the road to freedom through American institutions and the American democratic system. "The Negro's destiny in this country," he wrote in 1964, "is not to identify himself as a bloc against all white citizens. It is rather to ally himself with decent people of good will of every race, color, and creed in a coalition against evil and prejudiced people of whatever race."

Whitney Young was welcome at the White House even at times when other black leaders were not. That did not, however, stay his hand when he had something critical to say about the Nation's political leadership, current as well as past.

Whitney Young's advice was sought by Presidents, Popes, Cabinets and corporations. In the nomenclature of the civil rights movement he generally was described as a "moderate," as opposed to a "militant." But Whitney Young had little use for such differentiations. In his 1964 book, "To Be Equal," he wrote: "Our enemies never make such fine distinctions. We are separately but equally hated by them."

A bit earlier in the same book he counseled: "We must think today not in terms of individual leaders or the approach, but of levels of leadership involving many people, with a variety of approaches and tactics."

Whitney Young was not entirely at home and comfortable with either the militants or the Establishment. Openminded and keenly aware of the massive problems confronting the Nation, he was a bridge between the two groups -- an interpreter, if you will, for two widely separated sets of opinion-makers which at times hardly seem to be even using the same tongue. It was a unique role, and it took a unique man to fill it. In so doing, Whitney Young added large and valuable new dimensions to the art of civil rights negotiation, and contributed mightily to civil rights progress.

WHITNEY YOUNG'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

For ten years, Whitney M. Young, Jr. served as executive director of the Urban League. These were ten immensely important years -- years that included the March on Washington, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the other civil rights advances that followed. Whitney Young helped shape them, and dedicated his life and organization to the task of making each civil rights achievement mean something in the daily lives of black Americans.

Whitney Young was best known, and rightfully so, for his creative and persistent efforts to get more and better jobs for black Americans. But he was, of course, knowledgeable about every aspect of the civil rights struggle. He consistently reminded the Nation that justice and equal opportunity must be made available in every field -- in education, in housing, in welfare, in health services and in the whole of American life.

Whitney Young was determined and dedicated. The civil rights struggle, as he saw it, was "a struggle between people who care and people who are callous."

During the 10 years that Whitney Young led the Urban League, its branches increased from 63 to 98, its professional staff from 300 to 1,200, and its budget tenfold. The League reached deeper into grassroots black America, setting up programs in ghettos and (despite its name) rural areas. The League helped 54,000 blacks find jobs and channeled \$45 million into meaningful programs. Mr. Young communicated his views effectively through his commentary, "To Be Equal," which was carried by over 100 newspapers and more than 40 radio stations.

Trained in social work -- he was for 7 years dean of Atlanta University's School of Social Work -- Whitney Young was adept at using a timely anecdote or trenchant phrase to make a point. Speaking of the timidity of some of the Nation's religious institutions, for example, he declared: "It has been easier to integrate the chorus line of a burlesque show than to integrate a choir in most of our churches."

In an era in which the civil rights movement was at its apex, Whitney Young was among its brightest beacons.

CIVIL RIGHTS BATTLES ARE UNFINISHED, NOT COMPLETELY WON

"We are now in the post-civil rights period," Whitney Young wrote in "Beyond Racism," which was published in 1969. "It is no longer a question of legal rights, but of whether white America will share political and economic power with Black America -- and whether America itself will survive."

Today, more than two years later, one must say with regret that Whitney Young, believing as he did in the redemption of America, was over-optimistic when he made that statement. The legal rights of minorities are still very much at issue, and, to a degree, the battles of the 60s still are being fought in the 70s.

As one examines some of the anti-busing legislation being proposed and even approved in Congress, one wonders if the Nation is not indeed moving backward rather than forward in the field of civil rights.

Legislation to give the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission enforcement power faces an uncertain future, as do measures to open up white suburbia. In fact, housing segregation is on the increase.

When one puts the gains and retreats side by side on the balance sheet, one is hard pressed to say truthfully that the Nation's massive civil rights problems are on the way to solution. The issues today are vastly more complex than they were a decade ago when the civil rights movement was soaring toward its apex. It was relatively simple to determine that a bigoted registrar was denying a Southern Negro the right to vote. It is infinitely more difficult to determine that a subtle achievement test is denying a job or promotion to a minority

worker. Further, civil rights today no longer is thought of as exclusively involving blacks. In the past we have been so pre-occupied with the overwhelming injustices inflicted upon blacks that the problems of other minorities tended to get overlooked. But today other minorities -- Indians, Mexican Americans and others -- rightfully are demanding that their grievances also be heard.

But even if we mentally turned the clock back and thought of civil rights solely in terms of the rather clearcut issues of the 60s, we could not, by any stretch of the imagination, call the task completed.

For example, voting was the greatest problem facing the Commission on Civil Rights when it was created in 1957. The Commission investigated voter discrimination, established it to be a major national problem, and recommended remedies. Finally, in 1965, the Voting Rights Act passed, and everyone optimistically assumed that voting discrimination would be stopped once and for all. As recent events in Mississippi have indicated, such has not been the case. So now we are, in a way, back where we started, and the Commission is preparing to do a followup study on the extent to which voter discrimination continues.

We are all familiar with the fact that school segregation still exists in America more than 17 years after the Brown decision. In large part, this school segregation is related to the housing segregation which I have mentioned. The Commission and others dedicated to equality in America have urged that buses be used, where all else fails, as a means of facilitating desegregation. (I was interested to note that Whitney Young, in his 1964 book, called for busing.) But I need not go into detail, before this audience, about the near-hysteria over school busing that seems gripping the Nation and terrorizing much of its political leadership.

Certainly the 1968 Fair Housing law must be described, at this point, as one of the greatest unfulfilled promises of all time. The dual housing market is as much a reality today as it was when the law was passed, and our urban areas are becoming more segregated than ever. We can never expect to have peace and order in our cities so long as our urban populations are rigidly divided along racial and economic lines.

The Commission has concentrated much of its attention during the last several years on the tremendous problem of suburban access. We have been trying to persuade a whole cluster of Federal agencies -- the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the General Services Administration, and the various boards that regulate lending institutions -- to push toward breaking the white suburban noose that encircles most of our major cities. Among other things, we have called for denying Federal grants for things like water and sewer services and open spaces to communities which deny room for low- and moderate-income families. I am glad to say that some people in Congress are showing interest in our proposal.

Administration of justice is the field in which perhaps the least amount of real civil rights work has been done. The recent tragic prison incidents in New York and California might well be described as products of the inattention and neglect that administration of justice has been given. The inattention and neglect affects not only blacks, but others who are racially or economically disadvantaged. The new nationwide emphasis on "law and order" poses still greater threats to even-handed

justice in America. The whole process -- from arrest, and conditions leading up to arrest, to prison and post-prison -- cries out for deep study of who receives justice in our society and who does not.

These are but a few of the critical pieces of unfinished civil rights business -- and we arrive at them without even mentioning the growing national concern about sex discrimination.

Beyond all that is the fact that virtually all of the issues that I have mentioned relate to each other. Let us return, for example, to voting. Voter discrimination in the South nowadays rarely takes the shape of physical intimidation along the lines of the murders, beatings and threats that were so common a decade ago. But voter intimidation can still occur in the form of economic threats and reprisals against blacks -- field hands, laborers, domestics, and the unemployed -- who depend on whites for their livelihood. Not until the disadvantaged have some measure of financial security will they be able to vote as they please in the South, or be able to afford good housing and a decent education in the North.

So we are attempting to thread our way through a very complex web. At this point, there is no person in the Nation who can say honestly that we are anywhere near breaking through the maze into the Promised Land of equal opportunity in America.

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20425



STAFF DIRECTOR

November 11, 1971

Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.
President
Notre Dame University
Notre Dame, Indiana 45665

Dear Father Ted:

Enclosed are some random and disconnected ideas which you might wish to use in the Equal Opportunity Day address. If the word "compromise" gives you some difficulty you might just want to stay with the word "negotiation."

If we can provide any more assistance on this, please let us know.

Sincerely,


JOHN A. BUGGS
Acting Staff Director

Enclosure