

DEMOCRACY IS FOR THE UNAFRAID

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What frightens me most today is not the recurring race riots, the economic pressures on "minorities," the internment of Americans of darker-skinned ancestry whose loyalty to the ideology of white supremacy is doubted, nor even the whole scope and viciousness of the recent growth of race hatreds and the insidious beginning of propagandism for a white alliance for "self-protection"--not these so much as the white man's sudden consciousness of his own fear of other races of which these are but manifestations. I can see no hope for any "minority" group, nor even for democracy itself, in the existence of this fear.

People who are afraid are cruel, vicious, furtive, dangerous; they are dishonest, malicious, vindictive; they destroy the things of which they are afraid, or are destroyed by them. The host who is afraid, hearing a noise in his kitchen, tiptoes down the back stairs and blows out the brains of an ice-box raiding guest whom he thinks is a burglar; the policeman who is afraid shoots the manacled prisoner who bends to tie his shoe lace; the industrialist who is afraid hires thugs and murderers to fight unionists; the capitalist who is afraid sabotages public welfare; the politician who is afraid attacks leaders of weakly supported causes to hide his own compromises; the statesman who is afraid endeavors to isolate his nation; and the government head who is afraid fails in the execution of laws, both national and international.

A race that is afraid bands in mobs to lynch, murder, intimidate, and destroy members of other races. Long ago we realized the Nazis did not hate the Jewish people so much as fear them. Members of the Ku Klux Klan, Silver-shirts, Bundists, and other similar American organizations whose aims are the destruction and intimidation of certain racial and religious groups are cowards from the word go; they are as representative of cowardly people as the Storm Troopers are of Nazism. Only cowards seek to destroy "minority" groups; courageous people are not afraid of them. In themselves such people are not dangerous. In themselves the cowardly are never dangerous, never more dangerous than Hitler in 1930. But when they become representative of the majority race within a nation, when they infect the entire body with their own cowardice, then a complete breakdown of law and decency follows, and all persons not contained in that race suffer the most cruel oppression.

This is what I fear is happening in America today--the cowardice of a relatively small percentage of white Americans is seeping into the consciousness of the majority and making them all afraid of the darker races.

Fear may easily become the greatest tragedy of this historic period. For the eventual peace of the world and the continuation of progress depend upon the white man's ability to live in equality, integrity, and courage in a civilization where he is outnumbered by peoples of other races. It is imperative that he be unafraid. For if, because of his fear, he finds himself unable to live as a neighbor and equal competitor with other races, there

will be no peace and little progress.

What concerns me more at the present is that, if the white man is not unafraid, the United States will never attain democracy.

Dictatorship is not so much a government for the weak and the afraid, but of the weak and the afraid. With even one dictatorship remaining in the world after the war, there will soon be another struggle. The fear of dictators is an evil and tremendous thing; they are afraid of everything that does not agree with them and of most things that do. Because of this, driven by it, struggling desperately to overcome it, dictators will always try to enslave the world. They have to; they cannot otherwise exist. Many of us have yet to understand this. We have also to understand that in the growing weakness of the white race in America, as demonstrated by its present fear-driven actions, dictatorship may come to the United States before we know what true democracy is like.

When the white man banishes his fear, he will banish with it all the bugaboos of race; and he himself will for the first time be free. For people who nurture race hatreds and dedicate their lives to the proposition that they are superior are never free; their thoughts, efforts, and aims are always limited and hindered by the necessity of proving it.

I once heard a rich and famous white man relate how he freed his mind of all thoughts of race and color and looked upon all peoples as equal in an effort to learn, if possible, whether there was any fundamental and distinguishable difference in peoples of different races. He realized that having been brought up in a tradition of white superiority, this would be impossible as long as he could identify people. So he pretended an eye infection and for a month went about with his eyes bandaged.

For the first time in his life as a rich, famous, white American he felt free. He was relieved of the necessity of pretending superiority, of hating people because of their color, of despising people because of their race; he did not every moment have to be aware of his reactions; he did not have to feel affronted, disgraced, humiliated, tolerant, condescending, or philanthropic because of another person's physical attributes or identifiable religious beliefs; his mind was free from all the psychoses of race antagonisms.

War is teaching this lesson of equality to many of our youths in uniform. Coming upon the bodies of two soldiers lying face downward in the muck of a distant battle field, both having died for the preservation of the same ideal, under the same flag, in the same uniform, they are learning the ridiculousness of thinking: "This man, being white, is superior to that man, who is black." They have learned that in a week's time the color which made one "better" than the other will have gone from both.

Here at home white Americans must learn courage, too. They must learn that Negroes and members of other races working and living side by side with them in a community of interests do not detract from their prestige but add to it; that equal participation by all peoples in the benefits of democracy is not a thing to bring disgrace but a thing to inspire praise and create pride. They must learn that bravery does not consist in persecuting the few and the weak (for then all our enemies would be the bravest of nations) but of protecting them.

The white race has attained leadership in the world of today. Although people of other races have played a magnificent part, the white race is largely responsible for the creation of our present civilization. So far, much of the white race's talent, its ingenuity, creative genius, and ability to organize, produce, and conquer has been employed to subdue and exploit the other races of the world. While the mechanics of this civilization may continue for many centuries to come, its character is bound to change, for the other races of the world have reached the point where they will no longer be exploited or subdued.

Now this is the question: is the white race courageous enough to accept the inevitable, to accept the fact that exploitation and oppression of other races is no longer physically or materially possible, and to continue its leadership in integrity and equality, competing with other races in fairness while respecting their rights of self-determination, meeting with them and negotiating justice and equity for all, dealing with them in culture and commerce? Or is it afraid of ultimate extermination or subjugation?