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A Jewish View on Segregation



PUBLISHER'S NOTE: This article is entirely voluntary by a Jewish Southerner who prefers to remain anonymous for the simple reason that the people who will agree with what he has to say or be tolerant of it, will remain silent; the cranks and crackpots who will wish to revile him for his right to form his own beliefs and act upon them will not remain silent. The author is unwilling to subject his family to abuse from such quarters. Any persons wishing to communicate with him can do so in care of: The Association of Citizens' Councils of Mississippi, 207 West Market Street, Greenwood, Mississippi.

DEDICATED to the maintenance of peace, good order and domestic tranquility in our community and in our State, and to the preservation of our States' Rights." On this magnificent motto stands the Association of Citizens' Councils of Mississippi.

What makes one Jew a better Jew than another Jew? Is a rich Jew a "better" Jew than a poor one? Is a Republican Jew a better Jew than a Democratic Jew? Is a Northern Jew a better Jew than a Southern one—or an Eastern Jew better than a Western one? Is an American Jew a better Jew than a French, or English, or Polish, or Russian Jew? Is a Jew who advocates integration better than one who favors segregation? Or vice versa?

We Jews are so subject to the hurts and humiliations of the generalities uttered as truths or facts by the non-Jews that it is unthinkable that we should be willing to generalize about each other. What Jew living anywhere, anytime in the more than 5000 years of our history has not smarted under such as this: "Jews are lucky." "All Jews stick together." "All Jews are rich." The expression "Jew him down" is understood and used from one end of this country to another. Yet, every Jew knows he is an individual. Not richer or poorer or luckier or unluckier or greedier or more open-handed because he is a Jew, but because of the sort of an individual he, personally, is. The sort of individual he is depends in large measure on his background, his family, his culture, his education, his social and economic status, the community in which he lives and other environmental considerations.

I, personally, am a "Jewish Southerner," not a Southern Jew. I am also a "Jewish American," not an American Jew. I was born and reared in Mississippi, educated here and in the neighboring State of Alabama. Lest you be tempted to indulge in a "generalization" at this point on

Mississippians and their total ignorance and lack of education, let me make a statement of statistical fact. THERE ARE MORE COLLEGE GRADUATES PER CAPITA AMONG THE WHITE POPULATION OF MISSISSIPPI THAN IN ANY OTHER STATE IN THE UNION. In case you are interested in another less vital fact, there are also more Cadillacs per capita in Mississippi than in any other State. I do not happen to own one. Many negro citizens in Mississippi do.

As a Jewish Southerner, I objected, and still do object, to the stand taken by national (?) Jewish organizations, and most particularly B'nai B'rith and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, in connection with the segregation decision. I accord every person in America, Jew or non-Jew, colored or white, the right to form an opinion on this controversial subject and to express it. That is the American way. While I may disagree violently with your opinion, I will defend your right to express it—as an individual. But, with an organization, especially a national organization, there is a difference.

National Jewish organizations such as B'nai B'rith and the American Jewish Congress, and others, each purport to speak for all American Jewry. Each is constantly striving to give the impression that that particular organization speaks for all Jews in the United States, regardless of locality. Nothing—nothing could be further from the truth. Most of these so-called National Jewish organizations have no Southern Jewish membership whatsoever. I doubt whether the strongest of these groups from the standpoint of Southern membership, the B'nai B'rith, can lay valid claim to having in membership a majority of Southern Jews.

When the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith took the position it did in filing a brief as a friend of the court, urging that segregation

in public schools be ruled unconstitutional, the organization did so in the name of American Jewry, including Southerners. I find it hard, if not impossible, to believe that 100 per cent. of these Southerners, just because they are Jews, subscribed to or in any way encouraged or even condoned the stand taken by B'nai B'rith on the segregation issue.

The same thing happened to Southern Christians—both Catholic and Protestant. They, too, are refusing to “go along” with what they consider unrepresentative national action by their church groups.

The thinking of the leaders of Jewish organizations is fairly clear to me. They surely feel that since Jews have always and will always be a “minority” group, we must be vocal in the fight by another “minority” group in its efforts to achieve “status.” And as far as that thinking goes—north of the Mason-Dixon Line—it may be accurate. The negro may be a minority group in the North. In many sections of the South the white people are the minority group.

As a case in point, take my own State, County and Town. Statistics show that 45 per cent. of Mississippi's population is negro. But that does not give an accurate picture of the distribution of this negro population. There are many of the “hill” counties with little or no negro population. Yet in my own county, there are about 20,000 white people and 40,000 negroes. In this county, there are 4,000 white children of educable age—6 through 21—and 8,722 colored children of the same ages. In my own town, there are 500 white children in the white consolidated 12-grade school. There are over 1,000 colored children in the colored consolidated 12-grade school.

Should integration come (personally, I don't think it ever will), there would be two colored children to every white child in every grade in school. My own 10-year-old daughter, who is in

the upper section of her class, will be in the 5th grade this year. In that 5th grade, in an integrated school, the class would be something like this (assuming half boys and half girls): 5 white girls, 5 white boys, 10 colored girls, 10 colored boys. The white boys and girls would be all 10 or 11 years old. But what of the colored boys and girls? Our records show that the rate of failures among the primary students is very, very high. The colored boys and girls in that 5th grade room would range in age from 12 to 15. Given the same economic, social, moral and financial backgrounds, it would still be considered unwise in many educational circles to mix such a varied age group. But when you add to the variance in ages 10 to 15—the difference in cultural, moral, economic and educational backgrounds, I find it impossible to see this as the way to assure the advancement of Mississippi's negro boys and girls.

The one thing which General Nathan Twining found most distressing and disturbing on his recent visit to Russia was the fact that they are going to win the "classroom" war in the race to produce more and better scientists in the coming generation. This fact has long been known to professional educators and lay leaders who have concerned themselves with schools and their problems. Now the military has caught on. In the interests of national defense, isn't this a very poor idea to undertake an integration program which would inevitably result in fewer and less adequate scientists when the crying need is for more and better trained people? If you think I'm "just whistlin' Dixie", to use a Southern expression, I advise you to study the facts and figures which have been brought out in the investigation of the deterioration of the public schools in Washington, D. C., the nation's capitol, as a direct result of their hasty and ill-considered determination to make the Washington system a model of integration for others to

follow. This investigation should be doubly interesting to American Jewry, or Jewish Americans, as you prefer, in view of the fact that the attorney heading the investigating committee is Mr. Will Gerber, of Memphis. Mr. Gerber is a Jewish Southerner.

I am wholeheartedly in favor of the advancement of the colored people of the State of Mississippi, the South and the nation. I am wholeheartedly opposed to the thinking of those who claim it can be achieved by integration.

Where then can I go to implement my sincere desire to help the negro advance, as they desire to do, yet not at my expense and at the expense of my children? In other words, how can I help them to help themselves educationally, economically, culturally at their own rate and at the pace best suited to their capacities. It can only be done through continued segregated facilities. By expense, as used above, I do not refer to financial expense. This I gladly assume. The expense I referred to was moral, educational, cultural. What group could I join that would speak out for the preservation of segregation and at the same time lend the Mississippi negro a hand in advancing? There was such a group and I joined it. The Citizens' Council—dedicated to the preservation of segregation, but not "against" the negro. Not opposed to his achievement or advancement. Just dedicated to the proposition that that achievement and advancement could best come about through continued segregation.

But, some have said, the Citizens' Council is a renewal of the KKK. Nothing could be further from the truth as regards Mississippi Councils. Any community anywhere, large or small, which has a so-called Citizens' Council that is accused of emulating KKK tactics, has only itself and its so-called "best citizens" to blame. Where community leaders have assumed their rightful responsibilities of leadership and

where the lawyers, doctors, business leaders and educators have organized Councils, there you have peaceful, harmonious relations with no remote resemblance to the KKK. While Klansmen hide their faces, members of the Citizens' Council proudly proclaim their membership.

But, some have said, the Citizens' Councils are anti-Semitic. Nothing of the sort. Where prominent Jewish leaders have enrolled as members and taken an active part in the duties of the Council, there is no chance of anti-Semitism creeping in. There are communities where Jewish leaders have flatly refused to join, although in these same communities prominent Catholic and Protestant men have joined, despite the stands taken on segregation nationally by their church groups. Who can blame them for feeling a bit bitter against white Southerners who try to stay "neutral" on such an issue? The white person who lives and works in the South has got to realize, from first-hand knowledge of the situation, what integration would mean, and he can do one of three things: He can realize it, and do all in his power to keep it from happening. He can realize it, and still feel that it is the thing to do and therefore be in favor of it. He can realize it, and desire earnestly to be "neutral" and let happen what will—but his will be a false neutrality in the eyes of his neighbors who will figure that "silence gives consent," because if everybody decided to be "neutral" the silence would be pure and simple consent. So the Jew who attempts to be neutral is much like the ostrich. And he has no right to be surprised or amazed when the target he so readily presents is fired upon.

Because I have always manifested such respect for my own religion, my fellow-members of my local Citizens' Council would not for one moment entertain thoughts of turning the Council's activities into anti-Semitic channels. This pattern is, I am confident, being repeated in all

the towns and cities where respected and self-respecting Jewish Southerners have felt as I feel—that segregation must be maintained and that membership in the Citizens' Council will help to maintain it. I speak from first-hand knowledge when I say that there are many Jewish members of Citizens' Councils both here and in Alabama. They realize, as I do, that any white Southerner, Christian or Jew, must do all he can to help maintain segregation. When integration comes to the South, the white Southerner will have to leave.

In many parts of the country, organizations are springing up which have adopted the obvious, famous and popular name "Citizens' Council." Some are well led and have the support of the finest elements in their community. Some may not be. In a movement of this magnitude it is natural that some of these organizations would not be well led and that opportunists would seek to take advantage of the chaos and confusion caused by the "Black Monday" decision of the Supreme Court.

Each Citizens' Council and its leaders will have to be judged according to their actions and deeds. Each Council in Mississippi and in most other States is a separate, independent, autonomous group which elects its own officers and maintains its own treasury. They are not responsible to nor for any other group or individual. The fact that the movement has grown spontaneously under these conditions proves the righteousness of our cause, brought about by popular resistance of good citizens to the obviously political "Black Monday" decision of the Supreme Court. Since this movement is based on public opinion, it is hoped that public opinion will eliminate unworthy, self-seeking rabble rousers who attempt to acquire personal publicity and who mistake notoriety for support.

Here in the South, particularly in smaller cities and towns, we cannot give lip service to

integration as is done in the North and avoid having it by zoning laws, restricted neighborhoods, and such subterfuges. In the hundreds of small towns which comprise these Southern States, there is no such thing as zoning. Two or three schools will serve the whole town and those families living within a radius of 15 to 20 miles outside of the towns. Colored and white people live on "both sides of the tracks." Colored farmers live side by side with white farmers. No, the only way we can have segregation is to say so openly and frankly and let everybody know where we stand—and where he stands.

The NAACP would have the world believe that the million negroes in Mississippi and the millions of others in other Southern States are solidly united in their burning desire for advancement. Statistics on school attendance tell a different tale. Nationally, about 50 per cent. of the boys and girls who enroll in the first grade complete the full 12 grades and graduate from high school. In Mississippi, among the white students, the State average is 33 per cent. Among the negro students, this average is 3 per cent. In our home county, the average among the white students is 20 per cent. and among the negro students is 2 per cent. It would seem to be that the larger the negro population in a town or county, the fewer complete their high school education. This is true despite the fact that in some sections of the State, notably in the rich Delta country, colored students are enjoying a full nine months of school, in newly built, modern buildings that are far better staffed, offer a longer school term and more varied curriculum than many white students enjoy in poorer sections of the State.

Yet, we venture the opinion that the negro in the South in general, and Mississippi in particular, has done more "advancing" than those in the so-called integrated States. We have to-

day in Mississippi 14 negro college presidents. We have 191 negro college professors. There are 1531 negro men and 841 negro women working in the negro colleges of the State of Mississippi. There are 2889 negro teachers holding Bachelors degrees or Masters degrees in the State of Mississippi. These teachers hold either the A or AA certificate. We have 7030 negro teachers in the State of Mississippi. How many negro college presidents do you find in New York State? In Illinois? In Michigan? How many college professors? How many negro classroom teachers?

I have a strong feeling that the people of B'nai B'rith who spoke so boldly and so loudly for integration are the people farthest removed from the problem not only here in the South but in their own back yards. They are, by virtue of education, profession, financial status and the rest of the factors involved, the least in position to be faced with the problems of integration affecting them directly. So they fall into the category of the "Let's you do it" integrationists. I wonder how many negroes live in the neighborhood of the presidents of so-called National Jewish organizations? How many belong to their Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary or Exchange clubs? How many belong to their Synagogues? How many will be found in the schools attended by their sons or daughters, grandsons or granddaughters, nieces or nephews? Ask these same questions with regard to the other leaders in Jewish organizations. Then ask yourself what about the stand of the less fortunate Northern Jew who finds himself in an economic status that throws him into the integrated neighborhoods and schools. Did he encourage the B'nai B'rith to take the stand it did? Somehow, I don't think so.

If Southern Jewry were of a mind to indulge in a little "finger pointing" we could sit here in the ivory tower of our isolation from the large

and terrible problems of the labor unions, labor racketeers, Communists in organized labor and the like which fill the papers daily. We could recoil in horror from the thought that a Jew could be a member of such groups, could condone the thing done to so fine a man as Victor Reisel. We could urge Northern Jewry to break away from affiliation with such undesirable groups and elements. We could piously point out that the good which would result from such an upheaval would surely make it up to them for their loss of life, limb and property. However, we realize that we are somewhat removed from the scene. So in a spirit of tolerance and sympathy, we leave the Northern public, including Northern Jewry, to settle their own labor problems, dishonesty, racketeering, communism, bossism, graft, corruption and the rest.

Is it too much to ask that they leave us to the solution of our own problems? Any jackass can be a Monday morning quarterback, an armchair general. Any idiot can successfully rear the other fellow's children or make a go of his marriage or solve his financial difficulties. But it is the smart man who knows that each person has not only the right but the obligation to settle his own problems to the best of his ability.

I am engaged, through the Citizens' Council, in attempting to solve the negro problem in a way that will be to the benefit of all Southerners, colored and white, and will not be to the detriment or detriment of any. The way to do this is through continued segregation. Any Mississippi negro who wants to advance can do so. He can have the best advantages of a good grammar school, high school and college education. He can return to his home as a doctor, lawyer, teacher or minister and make good. If he is really interested in the advancement of his people, he can help them enjoy the same advantages that he enjoyed. The negro cannot be advanced by legislation. He cannot have advancement poured

on him from the outside. He has got to have an inner desire to be advanced before he can be helped to advance.

Much criticism was leveled against the Citizens' Council in their early days of organization because it was rumored that they advocated and used economic pressure. Recent events have proven that the only organized economic pressure which has been applied has been by negro groups. These boycotts have solved nothing, have bred ill will and bad feelings. They have cost jobs and large sums of money. They have deprived many citizens, both white and colored, of public conveyances which they could ill afford to lose. Where is the criticism of economic boycott when employed by a negro group or labor unions? The Federal Government uses economic pressure to enforce race-mixing in all phases of Government endeavor. Is economic pressure only to be criticized when white Southerners employ it?

"Dedicated to the maintenance of peace, good order and domestic tranquility in our community and in our State and to the preservation of our States' Rights"—something worth working for—worth fighting for through the real Citizens' Council.

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ASSOCIATION OF CITIZENS' COUNCILS
Greenwood, Mississippi



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- Where Is the Reign of Terror?
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- The Ugly Truth About the NAACP
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Each Council should upon occasion mail certain pieces of this literature to every member of their Council or either distribute them at meetings. The Directors should urge all members to write to friends and relatives in other States and to pass this literature on to them so that each person can do his part in presenting the case for the South.

**Write: Association of Citizens' Councils
207 West Market Street
Greenwood, Mississippi**

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