

WHY WE CAN'T WAIT

In this and the following article SR offers an examination of some current aspects of the civil rights struggle and race relations in America. Dr. King's article is a preview of his new book, "Why We Can't Wait," to be published by Harper & Row next month. Calvin Kytte, whose personal reflections on the nation's racial problems begin on page 20, was born in the South and now lives in Ohio, where he has been practicing corporate public relations for the past fourteen years. An editorial on the changing leadership in civil rights appears on page 22.

By MARTIN LUTHER KING

IT IS the beginning of the year of our Lord 1963.

I see a young Negro boy. He is sitting on a stoop in front of a vermin-infested apartment house in Harlem. The stench of garbage is in the halls. The drunks, the jobless, the junkies are shadow-figures of his everyday world. The boy goes to a school attended mostly by Negro students, with a scattering of Puerto Ricans. His father is one of the jobless. His mother is a sleep-in domestic, working for a family on Long Island.

I see a young Negro girl. She is sitting on the stoop of a rickety wooden one-family house in Birmingham. Some visitors would call it a shack. It needs paint badly and the patched-up roof appears in danger of caving in. Half a dozen small children, in various stages of undress, are scampering about the house. The girl is forced to play the role of their mother. She can no longer attend the all-Negro school in her neighborhood because her mother died only recently after a car accident. Neighbors say if the ambulance hadn't come so late to take her to the all-Negro hospital, the mother might still be alive. The girl's father is a porter in a downtown department store. He will always be a porter, for there are no promotions for the Negro in this store, where every counter serves him except the one that sells hot dogs and orange juice.

This boy and this girl, separated by stretching miles, are wondering: Why does misery constantly haunt the Ne-

gro? In some distant past, had their forebears done some tragic injury to the nation, and was there a curse of punishment upon the black race? Had they shirked their duties as patriots, betrayed their country, denied their national birthright? Had they refused to defend their land against a foreign foe?

NOT all of history is recorded in the books supplied to school children in Harlem or Birmingham. Yet this boy and this girl know something of the part of history that has been censored by the white writers and purchasers of board-of-education books. They know that Negroes were with George Washington at Valley Forge. They know that the first American to shed blood in the revolution that freed his country from British oppression was a black seaman named Crispus Attucks. The boy's Sunday-school teacher has told him that one of the team who designed the capital of their nation, Washington, D.C., was a Negro, Benjamin Banneker. Once the girl had heard a speaker, invited to her school during Negro History Week. This speaker told how, for two hundred years, without wages, black people, brought to this land in slave ships and in chains, had drained the swamps, built the homes, made cotton king, and helped, on whip-lashed backs, to lift this nation from colonial obscurity to commanding influence in domestic commerce and world trade.

Wherever there was hard work, duty work, dangerous work—in the mines, on the docks, in the blistering foundries—Negroes had done more than their share.

The pale history books in Harlem and Birmingham told how the nation had fought a war over slavery. Abraham Lincoln had signed a document that would come to be known as the Emancipation Proclamation. The war had been won, but not a just peace. Equality had never arrived. Equality was a hundred years late.

The boy and the girl knew more than history. They knew something about current events. They knew that African nations had burst the bonds of colonialism. They knew that a great-great-grandson of Crispus Attucks might be ruled out of some restricted, all-white restaurant in some restricted, all-white section of a Southern town, his United States Marines uniform notwithstanding. They knew that Negroes living in the capital of their own nation were confined to ghettos and could not always get a job for which they were qualified. They knew that white supremacists had defied the Supreme Court and that Southern governors had attempted to interpose themselves between the people and the highest law of the land. They knew that for years their own lawyers had won great victories in the courts that were not being translated into reality.

THEY were seeing on television, hearing from the radio, reading in the newspapers that this was the 100th birthday of their freedom.

But freedom had a dull ring, a mocking emptiness when, in their time—in the short life spans of this boy and girl—buses had stopped rolling in Montgomery; sit-inners were jailed and beat-

en; freedom riders were brutalized and murdered; dogs' fangs were bared in Birmingham; and in Brooklyn, New York, there were certain kinds of construction jobs for whites only.

It was the summer of 1963. Was emancipation a fact? Was freedom a force?

The boy in Harlem stood up. The girl in Birmingham arose. Separated by stretching miles, both of them squared their shoulders and lifted their eyes toward heaven. Across the miles they joined hands and took a firm, forward step. It was a step that rocked the richest, most powerful nation to its foundations.

The bitterly cold winter of 1962 lingered throughout the opening months of 1963, touching the land with chill and frost, and was then replaced by a placid spring. Americans awaited a quiet summer. That it would be pleasant they had no doubt. The worst of it would be the nightmare created by 60,000,000 cars, all apparently trying to reach the same destination at the same time. Fifty million families looked forward to the pleasure of two hundred million vacations in the American tradition of the frenetic hunt for relaxation.

It would be a pleasant summer because, in the mind of the average man, there was little cause for concern. The blithe outlook about the state of the nation was reflected from as high up as the White House. The Administration confidently readied a tax-reduction bill. Business and employment were at comfortable levels. Money was—for many Americans—plentiful.

Summer came, and the weather was beautiful. But the climate, the social climate of American life, erupted into lightning flashes, trembled with thunder, and vibrated to the relentless, growing rain of protest come to life through the land. Explosively, America's third revolution—the Negro revolution—had succeeded the American Revolution and the Civil War.

For the first time in the long and turbulent history of the nation, almost 1,000 cities were engulfed in civil turmoil, with violence trembling just below the surface. As in the French Revolution of 1789, the streets had become a battleground, just as they had become the battleground, in the 1830s, of England's tumultuous Chartist movement. As in these two revolutions, a submerging social group, propelled by a burning need for justice, lifting itself with sudden swiftness, moving with determination and a majestic scorn for risk and danger, created an uprising so powerful that it shook a huge society from its comfortable base.

Never in American history had a group seized the streets, the squares,

the sacrosanct business thoroughfares, and the marbled halls of government to protest and proclaim the unendurability of their oppression. Had room-size machines turned human, burst from the plants that housed them, and stalked the land in revolt, the nation could not have been more amazed. Undeniably, the Negro had been an object of sympathy and wore the scars of deep grievances, but the nation had come to count on him as a creature who could quietly endure, silently suffer, and patiently wait. He was well trained in service and, whatever the provocation, he neither pushed back nor spoke back.

Just as lightning makes no sound until it strikes, the Negro Revolution generated quietly. But when it struck, the revealing flash of its power and the impact of its sincerity and fervor bespoke a force of frightening intensity. Three hundred years of humiliation, abuse, and deprivation cannot be expected to find voice in a whisper. The storm clouds did not release a "gentle rain from heaven" but a whirlwind, which has not yet spent its force or attained its full momentum.

BECAUSE there is more to come; because American society is bewildered by the spectacle of the Negro in revolt; because the dimensions are vast and the implications deep in a nation with 20,000,000 Negroes, it is important to understand the history that is being made today.

Some years ago I sat in a Harlem department store, surrounded by hundreds of people. I was autographing copies of *Stride Toward Freedom*, my book about the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-56. As I signed my name to a page, I felt something sharp plunge forcefully into my chest. I had been stabbed with a letter opener, struck home by a woman who would later be judged insane. Rushed by ambulance to Harlem Hospital, I lay in a bed for hours while preparations were made to remove the keen-edged blade from my body. Days later, when I was well enough to talk with Dr. Aubrey Maynard, the chief of the surgeons who performed the delicate, dangerous operation, I learned the reason for the long delay that preceded surgery. He told me that the razor-sharp tip of the instrument had been touching my aorta and that my whole chest had to be opened to extract it.

"If you had sneezed during all those hours of waiting," Dr. Maynard said, "your aorta would have been punctured and you would have drowned in your own blood."

In the summer of 1963 the knife of violence was just that close to the nation's aorta. Hundreds of cities might

now be mourning countless dead but for the operation of certain forces that gave political surgeons an opportunity to cut boldly and safely to remove the deadly peril.

What was it that gave us the second chance? To answer this we must answer another question. Why did this Revolution occur in 1963? Negroes had for decades endured evil. In the words of the poet, they had long asked: "Why must the blackness of nighttime collect in our mouth; why must we always taste grief in our blood?" Any time would seem to have been the right time. Why 1963?

Why did a thousand cities shudder almost simultaneously and why did the whole world—in gleaming capitals and mud-hut villages—hold its breath during those months? Why was it in this year that the American Negro, so long ignored, so long written out of the pages of history books, tramped a declaration of freedom with his marching feet across the pages of newspapers, the television screens, and the magazines? Sarah Turner closed the kitchen cupboard and went into the streets; John Wilkins shut down the elevator and enlisted in the nonviolent army; Bill Griggs slammed the brakes of his truck and slid to the sidewalk; the Reverend Arthur Jones led his flock into the streets and held church in jail. The words and actions of parliaments and statesmen, of kings and prime ministers, movie stars and athletes, were shifted from the front pages to make room for the history-making deeds of the servants, the drivers, the elevator operators, and the ministers. Why in 1963, and what has this to do with why the dark threat of violence did not erupt in blood?

The Negro had been deeply disappointed over the slow pace of school desegregation. He knew that in 1954 the highest court in the land had handed down a decree calling for desegregation of schools "with all deliberate speed." He knew that this edict from the Supreme Court had been heeded with all deliberate delay. At the beginning of 1963, nine years after this historic decision, approximately 9 per cent of Southern Negro students were attending integrated schools. If this pace were maintained, it would be the year 2054 before integration in Southern schools would be a reality.

In its wording the Supreme Court decision had revealed an awareness that attempts would be made to evade its intent. The phrase "all deliberate speed" did not mean that another century should be allowed to unfold before we released Negro children from the narrow pigeonhole of the segregated schools; it meant that, giving some

courtesy and consideration to the need for softening old attitudes and outdated customs, democracy must press ahead, out of the past of ignorance and intolerance, and into the present of educational opportunity and moral freedom.

Yet the statistics make it abundantly clear that the segregationists of the South remained undefeated by the decision. From every section of Dixie, the announcement of the high court had been met with declarations of defiance. Once recovered from their initial outrage, these defenders of the status quo had seized the offensive to impose their own schedule of change. The progress that was supposed to have been achieved with deliberate speed had created change for less than 2 per cent of Negro children in most areas of the South, and not even one-tenth of 1 per cent in some parts of the deepest South.

THERE was another factor in the slow pace of progress, a factor of which few are aware and even fewer understand. It is an unadvertised fact that soon after the 1954 decision, the Supreme Court retreated from its own position by giving approval to the Pupil Placement Law. This law permitted the states themselves to determine where school children might be placed by virtue of family background, special ability, and other subjective criteria. The Pupil Placement Law was almost as far-reaching in modifying and limiting the integration of schools as the original decision had been in attempting to eliminate segregation. Without technically reversing itself, the court had granted legal sanction to tokenism and thereby guaranteed that segregation, in substance, would last for an indefinite period, though formally it was illegal.

To understand, then, the deep disillusion of the Negro in 1963, one must examine his contrasting emotions at the time of the decision and during the nine years that followed. One must understand the pendulum swing between the elation that arose when the edict was handed down and the despair that followed the failure to bring it to life.

A second reason for the outburst in 1963 was rooted in disappointment with both political parties. From the city of Los Angeles in 1960, the Democratic party had written an historic and sweeping civil rights pronouncement into its campaign platform. The Democratic standard bearer had repeated eloquently and often that the moral weight of the Presidency must be applied to this burning issue. From Chicago, the Republican party had been generous in its convention vows on civil rights, although its candidate had made no great effort in his campaign to con-

vince the nation that he would redeem his party's promises.

Then 1961 and 1962 arrived, with both parties marking time in the cause of justice. In the Congress, reactionary Republicans were still doing business with the Dixiecrats. And the feeling was growing among Negroes that the Administration had oversimplified and underestimated the civil rights issue. President Kennedy, if not backing down, had backed away from the key pledge of his campaign—to wipe out housing discrimination immediately “with the stroke of a pen.” When he had finally signed the housing order, two years after taking office, its terms, though praiseworthy, had revealed a serious weakness in its failure to attack the key problem of discrimination in financing by banks and other lending institutions.

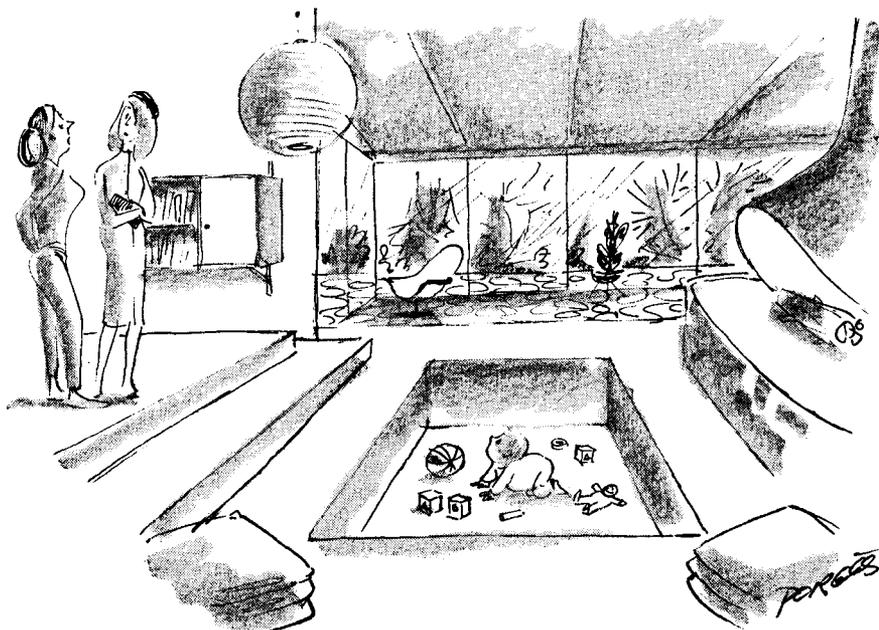
While Negroes were being appointed to some significant jobs, and social hospitality was being extended at the White House to Negro leaders, the dreams of the masses remained in tatters. The Negro felt that he recognized the same old bone that had been tossed to him in the past—only now it was being handed to him on a platter, with courtesy.

The Administration had fashioned its primary approach to discrimination in the South around a series of lawsuits chiefly designed to protect the right to vote. Opposition toward action on other fronts had begun to harden. With each new Negro protest we were advised, sometimes privately and sometimes in public, to call off our efforts and channel all of our energies into registering voters. On each occasion we would agree with the importance of voting rights, but would patiently seek to ex-

plain that Negroes did not want to neglect all other rights while one was selected for concentrated attention.

It was necessary to conclude that our argument was not persuading the Administration any more than the government's logic was prevailing with us. Negroes had manifested their faith by giving a substantial majority of their votes to President Kennedy. They had expected more of him than of the previous Administration. In no sense had President Kennedy betrayed his promises. Yet his Administration appeared to believe it was doing as much as was politically possible and had, by its positive deeds, earned enough credit to coast on civil rights. Politically, perhaps, this was not a surprising conclusion. How many people understood, during the first two years of the Kennedy Administration, that the Negroes' “Now” was becoming as militant as the segregationists' “Never”? Eventually, the President would set political considerations aside and rise to the level of his own unswerving moral commitment. But this was still in the future.

NO discussion of the influences that bore on the thinking of the Negro in 1963 would be complete without some attention to the relationship of this revolution to international events. Throughout the upheavals of cold war politics, Negroes had seen their government go to the brink of nuclear conflict more than once. The justification for risking the annihilation of the human race was always expressed in terms of America's willingness to go to any lengths to preserve freedom. To the Negro, that readiness for heroic measures in the defense of liberty disappeared or became tragically weak when



“It used to be our conversation pit.”

the threat was within our own borders and was concerned with the Negro's liberty. While the Negro is not so selfish as to stand isolated in concern for his own dilemma, ignoring the ebb and flow of events around the world, there is a certain bitter irony in the picture of his country championing freedom in foreign lands and failing to ensure that freedom to 20,000,000 of its own.

From beyond the borders of his own land, the Negro had been inspired by another powerful force. He had watched the decolonization and liberation of nations in Africa and Asia since World War II. He knew that yellow, black, and brown people had felt for years that the American Negro was too passive, unwilling to take strong measures to gain his freedom. He might have remembered the visit to this country of an African head of state, who was called upon by a delegation of prominent American Negroes. When they began reciting to him their long list of grievances, the visiting statesman had waved a weary hand and said:

"I am aware of current events. I know everything you are telling me about what the white man is doing to the Negro. Now tell me: What is the Negro doing for himself?"

The American Negro saw, in the land from which he had been snatched and thrown into slavery, a great pageant of political progress. He realized that just thirty years ago there were only three independent nations in the whole of Africa. He knew that by 1963 more than thirty-four African nations had risen from colonial bondage. The Negro saw black statesmen voting on vital issues in the United Nations—and knew that in many cities of his own land he was not permitted to take that significant walk to the ballot box. He saw black kings and potentates ruling from palaces—and knew he had been condemned to move from small ghettos to larger ones. Witnessing the drama of Negro progress elsewhere in the world, witnessing a level of conspicuous consumption at home exceeding anything in our history, it was natural that by 1963 Negroes would rise with resolution and demand a share of governing power and living conditions measured by current American standards rather than by the obsolete standards of colonial impoverishment.

An additional and decisive fact confronted the Negro and helped to bring him out of the houses into the streets, out of the trenches and into the front lines. This was his recognition that 100 years had passed since emancipation, with no profound effect on his plight.

With the dawn of 1963, plans were afoot all over the land to celebrate the Emancipation Proclamation, the 100th

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TESTAMENT OF A TRANSPLANTED WHITE SOUTHERNER

By CALVIN KYTLE

ON A SUNDAY afternoon not too long ago I sat in my living room in Columbus, Ohio, and watched Senator Russell of Georgia in conversation with some indistinct interviewer for NBC Television. ". . . The National Council of Churches," I heard the Senator say. "Preachers like that boast of high moral principles, but they're not very practical." And suddenly, two disconnected, long-forgotten events exploded into my mind with clear and startling relevance. Abruptly, I was no longer in Columbus but in Atlanta, no longer a forty-four-year-old businessman but a fourteen-year-old boy. It was summer, 1934—the summer I discovered *Hamlet*; the summer the Methodist Church sent me to Lake Junaluska.

Hamlet was on my high school's required summer-reading list. I remember lying on my back on the porch glider, forcing myself to think about the lines and grumbling every time I had to stop to look up a word in the dictionary. But when I came to the passage in which Polonius speaks to Laertes, I sat up as if I'd been slapped. I was not at all sure what the line meant—"To thine own self be true." Even at fourteen I considered it an irritatingly ambiguous bit of advice for any father to hand a son. Still, I felt strongly that Polonius was speaking directly to me. It remains one of the few quotations from Shakespeare I can recite by heart.

As it developed, the summer itself turned into ambiguity. Until then, I had been a generally accepting, uncritical child, on whom the church was a governing influence. I had learned the catechism with my ABCs. Vacation Bible schools and revival meetings were as much a part of my summers as swimming and picnics. By the time I was twelve I was not only going to Sunday school and to church every Sunday morning but to Junior Epworth

League and to another service every Sunday evening.

What I got out of all this church-going was mostly an elementary idea of sin: it was sinful to drink, to smoke, to tell lies, to swear, to play cards. It was a decidedly fundamentalist brand of religion, focusing mainly on salvation and the hereafter. Significantly, it never dealt with the immediate problems of the community. These, it was understood, were problems for politicians and businessmen. For us children the Golden Rule was like good manners—something to be used in personal relationships, even if insincerely.

But in the summer of 1934 all this was changed for me. All of a sudden I became aware of conflict—of conflict within the church leadership; of conflict within segregated Southern society; of conflict within the human personality. That was the summer I lost my innocence. And it all came about because St. Mark's Church chose to send me to a week-long workshop for Young Methodists at North Carolina's Lake Junaluska.

I couldn't have felt prouder or more honored had Admiral Byrd chosen me as the Boy Scout to take to the South Pole.

On the third day at Junaluska, a Negro showed up. I didn't recognize him as a Negro at first. He was dark-skinned, yes, but he spoke better English than I'd ever heard before and he was dressed in a business suit. Besides that, staff members shook his hand when he arrived and set a place for him at their dinner table. Understand now—until that moment the only time I'd ever seen a Negro man wearing anything other than work clothes was at a funeral. Also, where I came from no white man ever shook hands with a Negro. To eat at the same table with him was unheard of.

Nevertheless, here, unmistakably, was a Negro and here were all these white Methodists treating him like an equal. Confused, I went off by myself to