

Negroes  
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# Separatism or Integration Which Way for America?

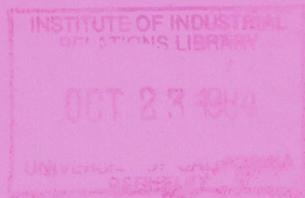
**A Dialogue:**

**Robert S. Browne**

*cards* **Bayard Rustin** //

*with an introduction by*

**John A. Morsell**



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A. Philip Randolph Educational Fund / 50c

The contents of this pamphlet were taken from speeches delivered before the Plenary Session of June 30-July 3, 1968, of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

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② A. Philip Randolph Educational Fund  
October, 1968 ③

① New York

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# Introduction

**John A. Morsell**

Readers of this pamphlet can expect to find something that is extremely rare in the debate presently taking place in the Negro community around the “integration vs. separation” issue. (I very nearly referred to the debate as “raging,” a not entirely inaccurate term in view of the passion with which the disagreement is most generally expressed.) We have here calm, reasoned expositions of two diametrically opposed views as to what should be the course and direction of the Negro American’s struggle for equality in the present and in the years ahead.

The National Community Relations Advisory Council has performed a service, not simply because it made this controversy a major subject for its annual meeting last summer. The commendation is due also because, in Robert S. Browne and Bayard Rustin, the Council chose protagonists who could marshal their respective arguments and present them with regard for the canons of logic and of polite discourse. In today’s climate, this is unusual.

Because Rustin and Browne approached the subject in this classic fashion, they were able to deal with a range of component issues instead of hammering away passionately at only one or two aspects. This, too, is a major service. Advocates of separatism or black nationalism in particular tend very often to rely upon emotional appeals to a cultural mystique or to vague invocations of a reclaimed “manhood” reminiscent of the *machismo* dear to the hearts of some Latin-American males. In posing

the issues upon which his advocacy stands or falls, Browne avoids these facile but diversionary paths and undertakes to base his case on a reasoned interpretation of the historical, sociological and psychological factors of relevance.

In candor, I should make it plain that I consider his interpretations in all three of those areas to be erroneous, and if this were a commentary instead of an introduction, I would address myself critically to his position. This is not my assignment, however, and the critique has, in any case, been quite well handled in the Rustin paper and discussion.

Rustin, for his part, does not rest his rejection on the ground most generally advanced by opponents of separatism — namely, that a separate nation for American Negroes on this continent (or anywhere else) is impossible of attainment. He does make this point, which it seems to me is hardly debatable (and which Browne accepts, *for the present*); but the burden of Rustin's argument is that such an event would be undesirable on its face. Here, too, the controversy has benefited by dealing seriously with aspects of the issue which are often overlooked.

In short, the cause of open, intelligent and honest debate on a deeply felt and divisive racial issue has been materially advanced by the Browne-Rustin debate. We must all hope that it will serve as a model for subsequent exchanges on the same subject.



# A Case for Separation

by Robert S. Browne

There is a growing ambivalence in the Negro community which is creating a great deal of confusion both within the black community itself, and within those segments of the white community that are attempting to relate to the blacks. It arises from the question of whether the American Negro is a cultural group, significantly distinct from the majority culture in ways that are ethnically rather than socio-economically based.

If one believes the answer to this is yes, then one is likely to favor emphasizing the cultural distinctiveness and to be vigorously opposed to any efforts to minimize or to submerge the differences. If, on the other hand, one believes that there are no cultural differences between the blacks and the whites or that the differences are minimal and transitory, then one is likely to resist the placing of great emphasis on the differences and to favor accentuating the similarities.

These two currents in the black community are symbolized, and perhaps over-simplified, by the factional labels of separatists and integrationists.

The separatist would argue that the Negro's foremost grievance is not solvable by giving him access to more gadgets, although this is certainly a part of the solution, but that his greatest thirst is in the realm of the spirit — that he must be provided an opportunity to reclaim his own group individuality and to have that individuality recognized as having equal validity with the other major cultural groups of the world.

The integrationist would argue that what the Negro wants, principally, is exactly what the whites want — that is, that the Negro wants “in” American society, and that operationally this means providing the Negro with employment, income, housing, and education comparable to that of the whites. This having been achieved, the other aspects of the Negro's problem of inferiority will disappear.

The origins of this ideological dichotomy are easily identified. The physical characteristics that distinguish blacks from whites are obvious enough; and the long history of slavery, supplemented by the post-emancipation pattern of exclusion of the blacks from so many facets of American society, are equally undeniable. Whether observable behavioral differences between the mass of the blacks and the white majority are more properly attributable to this special history of the black man in America or are better viewed as expressions of racial differences in life style is an arguable proposition.

What is not arguable, however, is the fact that at the time of the slave trade the blacks arrived in America with a cultural background and a life style that was quite distinct from that of the whites. Although there was perhaps as much diversity amongst those Africans from widely scattered portions of the continent as there was amongst the European settlers, the differences between the two racial groups was unquestionably far greater, as attested by the different roles which they were to play in the society.

### **Integrationist and Separatist Viewpoints**

Over this history there seems to be little disagreement. The dispute arises from how one views what happened during the subsequent 350 years.

The integrationist would focus on the transformation of the blacks into imitators of the European civilization. European clothing was imposed on the slaves; eventually their languages were forgotten; the African homeland receded ever further into the background. Certainly after 1808, when the slave trade was officially terminated, thus cutting off the supply of fresh injections of African culture, the Europeanization of the blacks proceeded apace. With emancipation, the national constitution recognized the legal manhood of the blacks, United States citizenship was unilaterally conferred upon the ex-slave, and the Negro began his arduous struggle for social, economic, and political acceptance into the American mainstream.

The separatist, however, takes the position that the cultural transformation of the black man was not complete. Whereas the integrationist is more or less content to accept the destruction of the original culture of the African slaves as a *fait accompli*, irrespective of whether he feels it to have been morally reprehensible or not, the separatist is likely to harbor a vague sense of resentment toward the whites for having perpetrated this cultural genocide and he is concerned to nurture whatever vestiges may have survived the North American experience and to encourage a renaissance of these lost characteristics. In effect, he is sensitive to an identity crisis which presumably does not exist in the mind of the integrationist.

To many observers, the separatist appears to be romantic and even reactionary. On the other hand, his viewpoint strikes an harmonious chord with mankind's most fundamental instinct — the instinct for survival. With so powerful a stimulus, and with the oppressive tendencies congenitally present in the larger white society, one almost could have predicted the emergence of the burgeoning movement toward black separatism. Millions of black parents have been confronted with the poignant agony of raising black, kinky-haired children in a society where

the standard of beauty is a milk-white skin and long, straight hair. To convince a black child that she is beautiful when every channel of value formation in the society is telling her the opposite is a heart-rending and well-nigh impossible task. It is a challenge that confronts all Negroes, irrespective of their social and economic class, but the difficulty of dealing with it is likely to vary directly with the degree to which the family leads an integrated existence. A black child in a predominantly black school may realize that she doesn't look like the pictures in the books, magazines, and TV advertisements, but at least she looks like her schoolmates and neighbors. The black child in a predominantly white school and neighborhood lacks even this basis for identification.

### **The Problem of Identity**

This identity problem is not peculiar to the Negro, of course, nor is it limited to questions of physical appearance. Minorities of all sorts encounter it in one form or another — the immigrant who speaks with an accent; the Jewish child who doesn't celebrate Christmas; the vegetarian who shuns meat. But for the Negro the problem has a special dimension, for in the American ethos a black man is not only 'different,' he is classed as ugly and inferior.

This is not an easy situation to deal with, and the manner in which a Negro chooses to handle it will be both determined by and a determinant of his larger political outlook. He can deal with it as an integrationist, accepting his child as being ugly by prevailing standards and urging him to excel in other ways to prove his worth; or he can deal with it as a black nationalist, telling the child that he is not a freak but rather part of a larger international community of black-skinned, kinky-haired people who have a beauty of their own, a glorious history, and a great future. In short, he can replace shame with pride, inferiority with dignity, by imbuing the child with what is coming to be known as black nationalism. The growing popularity of this latter viewpoint is evidenced by the appearance of 'natural' hair styles among Negro youth and the surge of interest in African and Negro culture and history.

### **Black Power, Black Consciousness, and American Society**

Black Power may not be the ideal slogan to describe this new self-image that the black American is developing, for to guilt-ridden whites the slogan conjures up violence, anarchy, and revenge. To frustrated blacks, however, it symbolizes unity and a newly found pride in the blackness with which the Creator endowed us and which we realize must always be our mark of identification. Heretofore this blackness has been a stigma, a curse with which we were born. Black Power means that henceforth this

course will be a badge of pride rather than of scorn. It marks the end of an era in which black men devoted themselves to pathetic attempts to be white men and inaugurates an era in which black people will set their own standards of beauty, conduct, and accomplishment.

Is this new black consciousness in irreconcilable conflict with the larger American society?

In a sense, the heart of the American cultural problem always has been the need to harmonize the inherent contradiction between racial (or national) identity and integration into the melting pot which was America. In the century since the Civil War, the society has made little effort to find a means to afford the black minority a sense of racial pride and independence while at the same time accepting it as a full participant in the larger society.

Now that the implications of that failure are becoming apparent, the black community seems to be saying "Forget it! We'll solve our own problems." Integration, which never had a high priority among the black masses, now is being written off by them as not only unattainable but as actually harmful — driving a wedge between those black masses and the so-called Negro elite.

To these developments has been added the momentous realization by many of the 'integrated' Negroes that, in the United States, full integration can only mean full assimilation — a loss of racial identity. This sobering prospect has caused many a black integrationist to pause and reflect, even as have his similarly challenged Jewish counterparts.

### **Integration—a Painless Genocide?**

Thus, within the black community there are two separate challenges to the traditional integration policy which long has constituted the major objective of established Negro leadership. There is the general skepticism that the Negro, even after having transformed himself into a white blackman, will enjoy full acceptance into American society; and there is the longer-range doubt that even should complete integration somehow be achieved, it would prove to be really desirable, for its price may be the total absorption and disappearance of the race — a sort of painless genocide.

Understandably, it is the black masses who have most vociferously articulated these dangers of assimilation, for they have watched with alarm as the more fortunate among their ranks have gradually risen to the top only to be promptly 'integrated' off into the white community — absorbed into another culture, often with undisguised contempt for all that had previously constituted their racial and cultural heritage. Also, it was the black masses who first perceived that integration actually in-

creases the white community's control over the black one by destroying black institutions, and by absorbing black leadership and coinciding its interests with those of the white community.

The international "brain drain" has its counterpart in the black community, which is constantly being denuded of its best trained people and many of its natural leaders. Black institutions of all sorts — colleges, newspapers, banks, even community organizations — are experiencing the loss of their better people to the newly available openings in white establishments, thereby lowering the quality of the Negro organizations and in some cases causing their demise or increasing their dependence on whites for survival. Such injurious, if unintended, side effects of integration have been felt in almost every layer of the black community.

### **Negro Distrust of White America**

If the foregoing analysis of the integrationist vs. separatist conflict exhausted the case, we might conclude that all the problems have been dealt with before, by other immigrant groups in America. (It would be an erroneous conclusion, for while other groups may have encountered similar problems, their solutions do not work for us, alas.) But there remains yet another factor which is cooling the Negro's enthusiasm for the integrationist path: he is becoming distrustful of his fellow Americans.

The American culture is one of the youngest in the world. Furthermore, as has been pointed out repeatedly in recent years, it is essentially a culture that approves of violence, indeed enjoys it. Military expenditures absorb roughly half the national budget. Violence predominates on the TV screen and the toys of violence are best-selling items during the annual rites for the much praised but little imitated Prince of Peace. In Vietnam, the zeal with which America has pursued its effort to destroy a poor and illiterate peasantry has astonished civilized people around the globe.

In such an atmosphere the Negro is understandably restive about the fate his white compatriots might have in store for him. The veiled threat by President Johnson at the time of the 1966 riots, suggesting that riots might beget pogroms and pointing out that Negroes are only 10% of the population was not lost on most blacks. It enraged them, but it was a sobering thought. The manner in which Germany herded the Jews into concentration camps and ultimately into ovens was a solemn warning to minority peoples everywhere. The casualness with which America exterminated the Indians and later interned the Japanese suggests that there is no cause for the Negro to feel complacent about his security in the United States. He finds little consolation in the assurance that if it does become necessary to place him in concentration camps it will only be as a means

of protecting him from uncontrollable whites. "Protective incarceration" to use governmental jargonese.

The very fact that such alternatives are becoming serious topics of discussion has exposed the Negro's already raw and sensitive psyche to yet another heretofore unfelt vulnerability — the insecurity he suffers as a result of having no homeland which he can honestly feel is his own. Among the major ethno-cultural groups in the world he is unique in this respect.

### **Need for Nationhood**

As the Jewish drama during and following World War II painfully demonstrated, a national homeland is a primordial and urgent need for a people, even though its benefits do not always lend themselves to ready measurement. For some, the homeland constitutes a vital place of refuge from the strains of a life led too long within a foreign environment. For others, the need to reside in the homeland is considerably less intense than the need merely for knowing that such a homeland exists. The benefit to the expatriate is psychological, a sense of security in knowing that he belongs to a culturally and politically identifiable community. No doubt this phenomenon largely accounts for the fact that both the West Indian Negro and the Puerto Rican exhibit considerably more self-assurance than does the American Negro, for both of the former groups have ties to an identifiable homeland which honors and preserves their cultural heritage.

It has been marvelled that we American Negroes, almost alone among the cultural groups of the world, exhibit no sense of nationhood. Perhaps it is true that we do lack this sense, but there seems to be little doubt that the absence of a homeland exacts a severe if unconscious price from our psyche. Theoretically, our homeland is the U.S.A. We pledge allegiance to the stars and stripes and sing the national anthem. But from the age when we first begin to sense that we are somehow "different," that we are victimized, these rituals begin to mean less to us than to our white compatriots. For many of us they become form without substance; for others they become a cruel and bitter mockery of our dignity and good sense; for relatively few of us do they retain a significance in any way comparable to their hold on our white brethren.

The recent coming into independence of many African states stimulated some interest among Negroes that independent Africa might become the homeland which they so desperately needed. A few made the journey and experienced a newly-found sense of community and racial dignity. For many who went, however, the gratifying racial fraternity which they experienced was insufficient to compensate for the cultural estrangement that accompanied it. They had been away from Africa for too long and

the differences in language, food, and custom barred them from experiencing that “at home” sensation they were eagerly seeking. Symbolically, independent Africa could serve them as a homeland: practically, it could not. Their search continues — a search for a place where they can experience the security that comes from being a part of the majority culture, free at last from the inhibiting effects of cultural repression and induced cultural timidity and shame.

### **“This Land Is Our Rightful Home.”**

If we have been separated from Africa for so long that we are no longer quite at ease there, then we are left with only one place to make our home, and that is in this land to which we were brought in chains. Justice would indicate such a solution in any case, for it is North America, not Africa, into which our toil and effort have been poured. This land is our rightful home and we are well within our rights in demanding an opportunity to enjoy it on the same terms as the other immigrants who have helped to develop it.

Since few whites will deny the justice of this claim, it is paradoxical that we are offered the option of exercising this birthright only on the condition that we abandon our culture, deny our race, and integrate ourselves into the white community. The “accepted” Negro, the “integrated” Negro, are mere euphemisms, hiding a cruel and relentless cultural destruction which is sometimes agonizing to the middle class Negro but which is becoming intolerable to the black masses. A Negro who refuses to yield his identity and to ape the white model finds he can survive in dignity only by rejecting the entire white society, which ultimately must mean challenging the law and the law enforcement mechanisms. On the other hand, if he abandons his cultural heritage and succumbs to the lure of integration he risks certain rejection and humiliation along the way, with absolutely no guarantee of ever achieving complete acceptance.

That such unsatisfactory options are leading to almost continuous disruption and dislocation of our society should hardly be cause for surprise.

### **Partition as a Solution**

A formal partitioning of the United States into two totally separate and independent nations, one white and one black, offers one way out of this tragic situation. Many will condemn it as a defeatist solution, but what they see as defeatism may better be described as a frank facing up to the realities of American society. A society is stable only to the extent that there exists a basic core of value judgments that are unthinkingly accepted by the great bulk of its members. Increasingly, Negroes are demonstrating that they do not accept the common core of values that underlies Amer-

ica — whether because they had little to do with drafting it or because they feel it is weighted against their interests.

The alleged disproportionately large number of Negro law violators, of unwed mothers, of illegitimate children, of non-working adults *may* be indicators that there is no community of values such as has been supposed, although I am not unaware of racial socio-economic reasons for these statistics also. But whatever the reasons for observed behavioral differences, there clearly is no reason *why* the Negro should not have his own ideas about what the societal organization should be. The Anglo-Saxon system of organizing human relationships certainly has not proved itself to be superior to all other systems and the Negro is likely to be more acutely aware of this fact than are most Americans.

This unprecedented challenging of the “conventional wisdom” on the racial question is causing considerable consternation within the white community, especially the white liberal community, which has long felt itself to be the sponsor and guardian of the blacks. The situation is further confused because the challenges to the orthodox integrationist views are being projected by persons whose roots are authentically within the black community — whereas the integrationist spokesmen of the past often have been persons whose credentials were partly white-bestowed. This situation is further aggravated by the classical inter-generational problem — with black youth seizing the lead and speaking out for nationalism and separatism whereas their elders look on askance, a development which has at least a partial parallel within the contemporary white community, where youth is increasingly strident in its demands for thoroughgoing revision of our social institutions.

### **The Black Nationalists**

If one were to inquire as to who the principal spokesmen for the new black nationalism or for separatism are, one would discover that the movement is essentially locally based rather than nationally organized. In the San Francisco Bay Area, the Black Panther Party is well known as a leader in the tactics of winning recognition for the black community. Their tactic is *via* a separate political party for black people, a format which I suspect we will hear a great deal more of in the future. The work of the Black Muslims is well known, and perhaps more national in scope than that of any other black nationalist group. Out of Detroit there is the Malcolm X Society, led by attorney Milton Henry, whose members reject their United States citizenship and are claiming five southern states for the creation of a new Black Republic. Another major leader in Detroit is the Rev. Albert Cleage, who is developing a considerable following for his

preachings of black dignity and who has also experimented with a black political party, thus far without success.

The black students at white colleges are one highly articulate group seeking for some national organizational form. A growing number of black educators are also groping toward some sort of nationally coordinated body to lend strength to their local efforts for developing educational systems better tailored to the needs of the black child. Under the name of Association of Afro-American Educators, they recently held a national conference in Chicago which was attended by several hundred public school teachers and college and community workers.

This is not to say that every black teacher or parent-teacher group that favors community control of schools is necessarily sympathetic to black separatism. Nevertheless, the general thrust of the move toward decentralized control over public schools, at least in the larger urban areas, derives from an abandoning of the idea of integration in the schools and a decision to bring to the ghetto the best and most suitable education that can be obtained.

### **Ghetto Improvement Efforts**

Similarly, a growing number of community-based organizations are being formed for the purpose of facilitating the economic development of the ghetto, for replacement of absentee business proprietors and landlords by black entrepreneurs and resident owners. Again, these efforts are not totally separatist in that they operate within the framework of the present national society, but they build on the separatism that already exists in the society rather than attempting to eliminate it. To a black who sees salvation for the black man only in a complete divorce of the two races, these efforts at ghetto improvement appear futile — perhaps even harmful. To others, convinced that coexistence with white America is possible within the national framework if only the white will permit the Negro to develop as he wishes and by his own hand rather than in accordance with a white-conceived and white-administered pattern, such physically and economically upgraded black enclaves will be viewed as desirable steps forward.

Finally, those blacks who still feel that integration is in some sense both acceptable and possible will continue to strive for the color-blind society. When, if ever, these three strands of thought will converge toward a common outlook I cannot predict. In the meanwhile, however, concerned whites wishing to work with the black community should be prepared to encounter many rebuffs. They should keep ever in mind that the black community does not have a homogeneous vision of its own predicament at this crucial juncture.

# Toward Integration as a Goal

by Bayard Rustin

Dr. Browne dealt with the concept of separation in psychological rather than sociological terms. The proposition that separation may be the best solution of America's racial problems has been recurrent in American Negro history. Let us look at the syndrome that has given rise to it.

Separation, in one form or another, has been proposed and widely discussed among American Negroes in three different periods. Each time, it was put forward in response to an identical combination of economic and social factors that induced despair among Negroes. The syndrome consists of three elements: great expectations, followed by dashed hopes, followed by despair and discussion of separation.

## Post-Civil War Separatism

The first serious suggestion that Negroes should separate came in the aftermath of the Civil War. During that war many Negroes had not only been strongly in favor of freedom but had fought for the Union. It was a period of tremendous expectations. Great numbers of Negroes left the farms and followed the Union Army as General Sherman marched across Georgia to the sea; they believed that when he got to the sea they would be not only free but also given land — “forty acres and a mule.” However, the compromise of 1876 and the withdrawal of the Union Army from the South dashed those expectations. Instead of forty acres and a mule all they got was a new form of slavery.

Out of the ruins of those hopes emerged Booker T. Washington, saying in essence to Negroes: “There is no hope in your attempting to vote, no hope in attempting to play any part in the political or social processes of the nation. Separate yourself from all that, and give your attention to your innards: that you are men, that you maintain dignity, that you drop your buckets where they are, that you become excellent of character.”

Of course, it did not work. It could not work. Because human beings have stomachs, as well as minds and hearts, and equate dignity, first of all, not with caste, but with class. I preached the dignity of black skin color and wore my hair Afro style long before it became popular; I taught Negro history in the old Benjamin Franklin High School, where I first got my teaching experience, long before it became popular. But in spite of all that it is my conviction that there are three fundamental ways in which a group of people can maintain their dignity: one, by gradual advancement in the economic order; two, by being a participating element of the demo-

cratic process; and three, through the sense of dignity that emerges from their struggle. For instance, Negroes never had more dignity than when Martin Luther King won the boycott in Montgomery or at the bridge in Selma.

This is not to say that all the values of self-image and identification are not important and should not be stimulated; but they should be given secondary or tertiary emphasis; for, unless they rest on a sound economic and social base, they are likely only to create more frustration by raising expectation or hopes with no ability truly to follow through.

### **Post-World War I Separatism**

The second period of frustration and the call for separation came after World War I. During that war, 300,000 Negro troops went to France — not for the reason Mr. Wilson thought he was sending them, but because they felt that if they fought for their country they would be able to return and say: “We have fought and fought well. Now give us at home what we fought for abroad.”

Again, this great expectation collapsed in total despair, as a result of post-war developments: Lynchings in the United States reached their height in the early twenties; the Palmer raids did not affect Negroes directly but had such a terrifying effect on civil liberties that no one paid any attention to what was happening to Negroes; the Ku Klux Klan moved its headquarters from Georgia to Indianapolis, the heart of the so-called North; and unemployment among Negroes was higher at that period than it had ever been before. It was at that time, too, the Negroes began their great migration to the North, not from choice but because they were being driven off the land in the South by changed economic conditions.

The war having created great expectations, and the conditions following the war having shattered them, a really great movement for separation ensued — a much more significant movement than the current one. Marcus Garvey organized over 2,000,000 Negroes, four times the number the NAACP has ever organized, to pay dues to buy ships to return to Africa.

### **Present-Day Separatism**

Today, we are experiencing the familiar syndrome again. The Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 and the Supreme Court decisions all led people seriously to believe that progress was forthcoming, as they believed the day Martin Luther King said, “I have a dream.” What made the March on Washington in 1963 great was the fact that it was the culmination of a period of great hope and anticipation.

But what has happened since? The ghettos are fuller than they have

ever been, with 500,000 people moving into them each year and only some 40,000 moving out. They are the same old Bedford-Stuyvesant, Harlem, Detroit, and Watts, only they are much bigger, with more rats, more roaches, and more despair. There are more Negro youngsters in segregated schoolrooms than there were in 1954 — not all due to segregation or discrimination, perhaps, but a fact. The number of youngsters who have fallen back in their reading, writing, and arithmetic since 1954 has increased, not decreased, and unemployment for Negro young women is up to 35, 40, and 50 percent in the ghettos. For young men in the ghettos, it is up to 20 percent, and this is a conservative figure. For family men, the unemployment is twice that of whites. Having built up hopes, and suffered the despair which followed, we are again in a period where separation is being discussed.

### **A Frustration Reaction**

I maintain that, in all three periods, the turn to separation has been a frustration reaction to objective political, social, and economic circumstances. I believe that it is fully justified, for it would be the most egregious wishful thinking to suppose that people can be subjected to deep frustration and yet not act in a frustrated manner. But however justified and inevitable the frustration, it is totally unrealistic to divert the attention of young Negroes at this time either to the idea of a separate state in the United States, or to going back to Africa, or to setting up a black capitalism (as Mr. Nixon and CORE are now advocating), or to talk about any other possibility of economic separation, when those Negroes who are well off are the 2,000,000 Negroes who are integrated into the trade union movement of this country.

This is not to belittle in any way the desirability of fostering a sense of ethnic unity or racial pride among Negroes or relationships to other black people around the world. This is all to the good, but the ability to do this in a healthy rather than a frustrated way will depend upon the economic viability of the Negro community, the degree to which it can participate in the democratic process here rather than separate from it, and the degree to which it accepts methods of struggle that are productive.

I would not want to leave this subject without observing that while social and economic conditions have precipitated thoughts of separation, it would be an over-simplification to attribute the present agitation of that idea exclusively to those causes. A good deal of the talk about separation today reflects a class problem within the Negro community.

I submit that it is not the *lumpen-proletariat*, the Negro working classes, the Negro working poor, who are proclaiming: "We want Negro prin-

cipals, we want Negro supervisors, we want Negro teachers in our schools.” It is the educated Negroes. If you name a leader of that movement, you will put your finger on a man with a Master’s or a Ph.D. degree. Being blocked from moving up, he becomes not only interested in Negro children, but in getting those teaching jobs, supervisory jobs, and principal jobs for his own economic interest. While this is understandable, it is not true that only teachers who are of the same color can teach pupils effectively. Two teachers had an effect upon me; one was black, and the other was white, and it was the white teacher who had the most profound effect, not because she was white, but because she was who she was.

### **Anatomy of Rebelliousness**

Negroes have been taught that we are inferior, and many Negroes believe that themselves, and have believed it for a long time. That is to say, sociologically we were made children. What is now evident is that the entire black community is rebelling against that concept in behalf of manhood and dignity. This process of rebellion will have as many ugly things in it as beautiful things. Like young people on the verge of maturity many Negroes now say, “We don’t want help; we’ll do it ourselves. Roll over, Whitey. If we break our necks, okay.”

Also, while rebelling, there is rejection of those who used to be loved most. Every teen-ager has to go through hating mother and father, precisely because he loves them. Now he’s got to make it on his own. Thus, Martin Luther King and A. Philip Randolph and Roy Wilkins and Bayard Rustin and all the people who marched in the streets are all “finks” now. And the liberals, and the Jews who have done most among the liberals, are also told to get the hell out of the way.

The mythology involved here can be very confusing. Jews may want now to tell their children that they lifted themselves in this society by their bootstraps. And when Negroes have made it, they will preach that ridiculous mythology too. That kind of foolishness is only good after the fact. It is not a dynamism by which the struggle can take place.

But to return to separation and nationalism. We must distinguish within this movement that which is unsound from that which is sound, for ultimately no propaganda can work for social change which is not based in absolute psychological truth.

### **The Phenomenon of “Reverse-ism”**

There is an aspect of the present thrust toward black nationalism that I call reverse-ism. This is dangerous. Black people now want to argue that their hair is beautiful. All right. It is truthful and useful. But, to the degree that the nationalist movement takes concepts of reaction and turns them

upside down and paints them glorious for no other reason than that they are black, we're in trouble — morally and politically. The Ku Klux Klan used to say: "If you're white, you're right; if you're black, no matter who you are, you're no good." And there are those among us who are now saying the opposite of the Ku Klux Klan: "He's a whitey, he's no good. Those white politicians, they both stink, don't vote for either of them. Go fishing because they're white."

The Ku Klux Klan said: "You know, we can't have black people teaching," and they put up a big fight when the first Negro was hired in a white school in North Carolina. Now, for all kinds of "glorious" reasons, we're turning that old idea upside down and saying: "Well, somehow or other, there's soul involved, and only black teachers can teach black children." But it is not true. Good teachers can teach children. The Ku Klux Klan said: "We don't want you in our community; get out." Now there are blacks saying: "We don't want any whites in our community for business or anything; get out." The Ku Klux Klan said: "We will be violent as a means of impressing our will on the situation." And now, in conference after conference a small number of black people use violence and threats to attempt to obstruct the democratic process.

What is essential and what we must not lose sight of is that true self-respect and a true sense of image are the results of a social process and not merely a psychological state of mind.

It is utterly unrealistic to expect the Negro middle class to behave on the basis alone of color. They will behave, first of all, as middle-class people. The minute Jews got enough money to move off Allen Street, they went to West End Avenue. As soon as the Irish could get out of Hell's Kitchen, they beat it to what is now Harlem. Who thinks the Negro middle classes are going to stay in Harlem? I believe that the fundamental mistake of the nationalist movement is that it does not comprehend that class ultimately is a more driving force than color, and that any effort to build a society for American Negroes that is based on color alone is doomed to failure.

### **Options and Choices**

Now, there are several possibilities. One possibility is that we can stay here and continue the struggle; sometimes things will be better, sometimes they will be worse. Another is to separate ourselves into our own state in America. But I reject that because I do not believe that the American government will ever accept it. Thirdly, there is a possibility of going back to Africa, and that is out for me, because I've had enough experience with the Africans to know that they will not accept that.

There is a kind of in-between position — stay here and try to separate, and yet not separate. I tend to believe that both have to go on simultaneously. That is to say there has to be a move on the part of Negroes to develop black institutions and a black image, and all this has to go on while they are going downtown into integrated work situations, while they are trying to get into the suburbs if they can, while they are doing what all other Americans do in their economic and social grasshopping. That is precisely what the Jew has done. He has held on to that which is Jewish, and nobody has made a better effort at integrating out there and making sure that he's out there where the action is. It makes for tensions, but I don't believe there's any other viable reality.

Furthermore, I believe that the most important thing for those of us in the trade union movement, in the religious communities, and in the universities is not to be taken in by methods that appeal to people's viscera but do not in fact solve the problems that stimulated their viscera.

We must fight and work for a social and economic program which will lift America's poor, whereby the Negro who is most grievously poor will be lifted to that position where he will be able to have dignity.

Secondly, we must fight vigorously for Negroes to engage in the political process, since there is only one way to have maximum feasible participation — and that is not by silly little committees deciding what they're going to do with a half million dollars, but by getting out into the real world of politics and making their weight felt. The most important thing that we have to do is to restore a sense of dignity to the Negro people. The most immediate task is for every one of us to get out and work between now and November so that we can create the kind of administration and the kind of Congress which will indeed bring about what the Freedom Budget and the Poor People's Campaign called for.

If that can happen, the intense frustration around the problem of separation will decrease as equal opportunities — economic, political, and social — increase. And that is the choice before us.

## **Robert Browne (responding to Mr. Rustin's presentation):**

With much — perhaps most — of what Mr. Rustin has said, I am in substantial agreement. In one or two things I feel that I am in fundamental disagreement, and one or two statements I think are factually incorrect.

The historical framework Mr. Rustin developed is sound. I would comment only that it would be a disservice to conclude that, just because discussion of separation has risen and declined in the past, its current manifestation will also die out. It may, but it is not necessarily wise to operate on the assumption that it will.

Mr. Rustin projected three ways to achieve dignity: by gradual advancement in the economic order; by acquiring an ability to participate in the democratic process; and by the derivation of a sense of dignity from the struggle. I want to make a comment about the first point, that we achieve dignity by gradually advancing in the economic order.

Certainly, it is necessary to achieve the initial advance from starvation to having enough to eat. Beyond that, I am not prepared to accept the proposition. I realize that, by prevailing American standards, the success of a people is measured by the size of the Gross National Product, and an individual's success is measured by the size of his income. That is not how I measure my own success. I concede that if my income were zero and it went to \$1200, I would consider that a great success. But once it reaches, say \$6,000, providing a bare minimal standard for my family, I don't measure my success, I don't achieve dignity, from increasing income. I achieve my dignity in areas far removed from the economic sphere. I realize I am flying in the face of the accepted values of this country; nevertheless, I suggest that increasingly, among some people in the black community and some people in the white community, success is measured by standards other than the size of one's income and the number of gadgets one has. In a partitioned United States, the standard of living in the black portion would go down, of course. I am arguing that for the most part blacks would consider this a small price to pay. I dare say that per capita incomes in many of the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa have declined. I hear no pleas from those countries for a return to their pre-colonial status so that their national incomes can rise again.

Mr. Rustin observed that I had omitted from my presentation any economic analysis of the viability of a partitioned black nation. I didn't deal with it because the conclusion one reaches on that point depends on the assumptions one makes. If it is assumed that the black nation is given California, as it is, with nothing taken out, that those white people who want to leave leave and those who want to stay stay, that the best educated

whites are the ones who stay and the least educated are the ones who leave, and the best educated blacks are the ones who come, and so forth — on such assumptions one can conclude that the black nation's GNP will rise above the general level of the United States. So it is not meaningful, from an economic point of view, to argue that the nation will or will not be viable, except on the basis of certain assumed conditions. What area of the country? What people will be living there? In what condition will it be conveyed — after a scorched earth war has taken place, so that it will look like Viet Nam, or intact as it is? Will the new black nation be burdened with an enormous debt, representing payment for all the capital equipment to which it takes title — or will title be transferred in recompense for 250 years of uncompensated unemployment and slavery? The capital plant in almost any state in the United States probably far exceeds the capital plant in most of the newly independent countries, and many of the latter probably have a much smaller educated class than the new black nation would have — with all our problems in this country a far higher percentage of Negroes in America are educated than is true in most of the colonial countries — so I find it hard to see how one could not build up a fairly sound economy. But, again, it depends on the assumptions we make.

I violently disagree with Mr. Rustin's statement that "Class is ultimately a more driving force than is color." It is a fundamental disagreement, for if he is right, the whole structure of my thesis collapses; and, if he is wrong, his own is demolished.

Mr. Rustin says that my separate nation is unrealistic. From a political point of view, at this stage, it is unrealistic. I don't believe that white America is prepared to partition the country. But, in historical perspective, man's political architecture has proved itself extremely mutable. Few countries retain their national boundaries century after century. Why should the United States fly in the face of all history and say that our boundaries are settled forever? Things change rapidly. I hadn't heard much about a Quebec separatist movement until about a year ago; and another separatist movement is getting into headlines — Belgians are talking about splitting their country. One doesn't know. Things that seem so settled in one decade begin to come apart in the next.

Mr. Rustin's final statement was that we must work to make the Freedom Budget a reality. I am almost inclined to say, though I realize that I am exaggerating a bit, that the likelihood of making the Freedom Budget a reality now is as unrealistic as the likelihood of partitioning the United States.

## The meeting was opened to questions from the floor and the following exchanges occurred.

**Question:** Is white America ready to accept integration, in the sense that Mr. Rustin and Mr. Browne have been using the term? Is it any more realistic to expect it today, relatively or absolutely, than it was ten or twenty years ago?

**Mr. Rustin:** There is no objectively reliable answer to the question of whether the country is ready or more ready or less ready. The more meaningful question, in any case, is: Do Negroes *feel* that the country is ready or less ready? And on the other side, a meaningful question is not whether the white community is ready or less ready, in moral terms, but whether it is ready to do those things that will make integration possible.

From the beginning of this nation, it has been part of our mythology — deriving largely from the Protestant ethos — that, if the heart is in the right place, everything will come out right. Jefferson's heart was in the right place. He had a dream one night of the flag being torn to bits, with Negroes pulling on one side and whites pulling on the other. He awoke terrified, foreseeing a civil war, and on a slip of paper he manumitted his slaves: "On my death, all my few slaves are to be freed." A beautiful moral act. Yet I raise the question: Why did Jefferson not act politically as well as morally? Why did he not go into Congress and fight for the elimination of slavery? The same question applies to the Abolitionists. Every Abolitionist's heart bled for the Negro. By the end of the Civil War, when the Negro was asking for forty acres and a mule, the Abolitionists went back to their churches and their homes and forgot about an economic and political program that would implement true freedom.

Benjamin Franklin wrote magnificent little adages, but he also helped make the Civil War, because he did not seem to realize that, by denigrating the Negro to four-fifths of a man under the Constitution so that white slave owners could have greater representation in the House of Representatives and could set up one kind of economy on that basis and a free economy on another, nothing other than war could happen.

By every measurement, the American people are more prepared to accept Negroes than ever before. They are not, however, prepared to do the things which make that acceptance possible, and therein lies the problem.

**Prof. Browne:** Just intuitively, I do not see that the white community is any more ready for integration now — in the mass, that is to say — than it was twenty or thirty years ago. When I see such things as the way Adam Powell was stripped of all of his power, apparently with the vigorous

acceptance of the white community across the country, this suggests to me that there is widespread fear of Negro power. I see nothing involved in the Adam Powell affair other than race. Twenty or twenty-five years ago, Paul Robeson said: "I've done everything that white society told me to do: I'm a Phi Beta Kappa from an outstanding university, I'm an all-American football end, I'm a great Shakesporean actor, I speak several languages, I'm a great dramatist, I'm a great concert singer, and still I'm a nigger." I suspect that it's not as bad as that now — there's a slight change at the margin, a difference of degree — but fundamentally no change has come about. Just two weeks ago, an outstanding Negro was forced to abandon a home he had bought on Long Island because — today, on Long Island, mind you — residents were bombing his home, cutting his car tires. The only thing that occasionally relieves my pessimism is that white youth seem to be different from the older generation, and maybe that's the one sign of hope that I see.

**Question (to Professor Browne):** When you discuss the separatist position that you take, I'm thinking of it in terms of the political and economic impact. Of course, while Negroes are disproportionately represented among the poor, our national problem of poverty encompasses many people, white, Spanish-American, Mexican-American, Chinese, Japanese, and others. How would you deal with the totality of that need?

**Prof. Browne:** Were I trying to deal with that problem, I suppose I would be relatively conventional. I would try to do some of the things that Mr. Rustin proposed: I would be active in political campaigns and try to see that we elected Congressmen who would look after these problems. To an extent, I do that. (I ran as a delegate to the Democratic Convention, and won. I had planned to picket the convention, but I was talked into running as a delegate.) That's what I would do. But in my presentation today, I'm not addressing myself to that.

**Question:** Professor Browne said that Negroes do not accept many of the common core values of America. The illustrations he gave include illegitimate children, unwed mothers, non-working adult males. I would ask him how far he thinks that rejection of common core values goes, into what other areas; and whether such rejection is a basis for his defense of separatism. I'd like Mr. Rustin to tell us whether he agrees with Mr. Browne's assessment of Negro attitudes toward prevailing American common values. And if he does so agree, I would ask both speakers: How can integration be entertained as an attainable goal, if the basic values accepted by the black society are so different from the basic values accepted by white America?

**Prof. Browne:** My view is not as dramatic as the question implies. I did not say with finality that Negroes do not accept white values. I said that *it may be* that the differences in observed behavior are reflections of a rejection of some American values, but that there are also possible socio-economic explanations. However, I do think that there are some differences; for instance in the sexual field. I attended a conference of Afro-American teachers in Chicago a couple of weeks ago. One of the people in the audience said, in discussing something rather like what we are discussing now, that one of the things that the majority culture has imposed upon blacks since they have been in this country is monogamy. As you can imagine, a great discussion ensued. Most of the participants defended monogamy. One woman took the microphone and said, very eloquently: "I happen to be a third wife. My husband is a Tanzanian, and I'm his third wife. And I think it's beautiful." And she gave a very moving explanation of how it worked for her and why she thought it was superior to monogamy. Another African woman gave many sound reasons why she thought that polygamy was the ideal arrangement, at least for Negroes. She didn't feel it was necessarily the ideal in general. But she said: "I'm not culturally imperialistic. I'm not saying that white people should be bigamists or polygamists, but I resent having their standards forced on me. Most blacks now accept monogamy because for hundreds of years this has been the way it's been done. But if we scratch deeper, if we go back far enough, we find that this is not necessarily our way of doing it. And we want to reexamine this sort of thing." That's just one example.

One of the aspects of this black revolution is the opening of very fundamental issues that have never been challenged before. At this early stage we don't know where we're going. Is there a black culture that is different from the white culture — fundamentally, ethnically, not for socio-economic reasons, but for ethnic reasons? We don't know yet. It's never been examined seriously. That's what we're doing now. We don't have answers at this point. All we would like is an open mind while we go through the process of studying it.

**Mr. Rustin:** When it comes to the question of polygamy, I suspect that the lines are not going to be drawn according to color, but according to sex, with more men being for it than women. Professor Browne quoted a Tanzanian woman. It is interesting to recall that the original Tanzanians were very much opposed to polygamy. Polygamy was brought in by the Arab conquerors. Wherever polygamy is found in Africa, it is an old Arab practice forced on the blacks.

There are characteristics and forms genuinely and distinctively Negroid. Forced into segregation and discrimination in this nation, Negroes inevit-

ably developed certain institutions, certain attitudes, many of which come from Africa.

The answer to the question about Negro values is that Negroes are ambivalent. I maintain that a minority living in a majority culture cannot exist without adhering to most of the fundamental concepts that that society accepts. It is a matter of protective coloration. Thus, if the automobile becomes a symbol of social mobility in our time, the Negro wants the biggest automobile that he can get and he is apt to paint it purple so nobody misses seeing that he's got it.

Negro attitudes toward sex and marriage are conditioned by Negro group experience. Do not forget that it is only a hundred or so years since Negro men were lined up against one wall and Negro women against another, examined as if they were livestock and mated in front of everybody to produce better "animals" — slaves. Family relationships were totally destroyed.

The storefront church in the Negro community is a unique institution of cooperation, love and affection, rivaled only by the institutions Jews have created to take care of their own. The storefront church keeps hundreds of thousands of Negroes off relief. It is a kind of club of its own.

Then there is the barbershop. In my own barbershop in New York City, I can never get a seat when I go in, because it is always filled with roustabouts. It used to make me angry, so I said to the barber one day: "Why is it I come in here to get a haircut and I can't sit down because of those fellows running back and eating fried chicken and collard greens and chitlins and messing the place up?" He looked at me and said, "Man, you don't know what this is. This is not just a barber shop. This is our community away from home." He told me that most of the fellows who came there were from North Carolina, around Durham; none of them had decent homes to live in, they received their mail in that barber shop; chicken and "chitlins" and potato salad were back there so if any boy from down home was hungry he could come in and eat. And he told me: "I don't give a damn whether you like it or not. I'm not going to ask my friends to stand up because you're waiting to get a haircut." Now, you can say that's bad business, and it is, but it says something more fundamental about our way of living in this country.

There is another factor here worth noting: Such an absence of community and yet such sensitive feeling for people who are in trouble, such affection and mutual identification. When a white policeman arrests a Negro, even when he is guilty, and a hundred people gather to defend him, they do so not just because he is black and a white policeman is arresting him, but because of their knowledge that there is not equal justice in the court for blacks.

There is even a certain kind of beauty in those young Negroes—80,000 of them in New York City — who cannot get work. Mayor Lindsay knows they cannot get work. The statistics prove they cannot get work. The Freedom Budget has not been passed. So what do they do? They live by their wits, selling numbers, selling marijuana, and other things. Now, if I say that that's "soul," you'll say to me, "but Mr. Rustin, that's illegal stuff, and even dope." But there's a certain amount of grit, and determination on their part not to hit bottom, to get some of the things that life says they should have.

One final point, to make clear to Professor Browne what I was saying. When I talk of dignity springing from the economic order, I am not talking in the terms in which Professor Browne later discussed it. Why was it possible in 1955 for Martin Luther King to organize a boycott that neither he nor anyone else could have organized in 1933? Because, in 1933, Negroes in that part of Alabama were living as sharecroppers, totally dependent on the largesse of white people, who cheated them. When Negroes moved into Montgomery, where they were together and where there was a certain kind of economic development, only then could they afford to protest. When King said to me: "How will we ever get automobiles to take these people around?" the answer was very simple for me. I asked myself: where are there, in Alabama, Negroes in the trade union movement making decent wages? The answer was Birmingham. Will they have made enough money out of the trade union movement to be able to own cars? The answer was yes. Shall we go to Birmingham and get some cars? And we came back with cars to take the people around Montgomery.

That protest depended upon the organized steelworkers at the beginning because of their economic uplift. And certainly you cannot argue that that protest was not the beginning of Negro dignity in this country. The other side of that coin is that as long as American television tells Negroes, as it tells white people, that they have to have all the junk that is advertised on television, whether you like it or I like it, they cannot feel that they have dignity until they have some of those things. And the only way they're going to get them is with money.

**Question:** Mr. Rustin projected as desirable the concomitant development of Negro institutions along with the move into the suburbs, along with the move into industry, along with the move into every sphere of American life. That vision contrasts with Professor Browne's vision of separatism. Would Mr. Browne consider pluralism acceptable to the black militants?

**Prof. Browne:** I suspect that, if it could be achieved, it might very well be acceptable; and that the resistance to it derives from the growing conviction in the black community — certainly among “black militants” — that it is not achievable, that one should not exhaust one’s energies seeking after a will o’ the wisp. In an idealistic sense a large portion of the militants would buy integration as a very long-range desirable first objective. But this is in the long run, and we live in the short run, in the course of which integration is regarded as unachievable; and it seems to many the better part of wisdom to go after what appears achievable now, rather than to exhaust energies in a struggle for something that won’t be realized a century from now, possibly. The difference may be not necessarily in goals, but in time perspective. Separatism may be viewed by some as a tactic — perhaps the most effective way to bring about the millennium in the distant future — just as joining the United Nations may be seen by newly independent nations as a step toward an ultimate one-world anti-nationalist structure in the long-distant future. But that doesn’t stop the new nations from demanding independence now, despite the argument that the trend is toward the abolition of national frontiers and toward the disappearance of the old-type nationalism. Taking a very long-range perspective, these African countries shouldn’t have asked for independence. Africa was more united before than it is now. But, without exception, these countries felt that they could not work for one world until they had asserted their nationalistic rights and become independent.

**Question:** Mr. Rustin, at one point in his remarks, was applauded by this audience for his comment that the only thing that counts is whether or not a child has a good teacher, the implication being that race is entirely irrelevant. I do not think that that is a complete answer. I reject completely the concept that black children should have only black teachers, but I would like Mr. Rustin’s reaction to the suggestion that race could be at least one of the qualifications to be considered — of course, assuming qualifications of experience, intelligence, administrative ability, all of the customary requirements — that, in a Negro school, where the matter of self-image is important, race could be a valid consideration.

**Mr. Rustin:** I am in total agreement. I have worked to get more Negro teachers in the schools. Beyond that, I even think we need more Negro males in Negro schools. But the point I intended to make was that if the choice is between a white teacher who is excellent and a Negro teacher who is not, I would select the excellent teacher. I am in favor of teaching Swahili to children who want it, I am in favor of putting Negro history in the schools, I am in favor of many things that the nationalists are in favor

of; but what I am more in favor of is that children learn to read and write and do arithmetic. They will get some of the other things for themselves after that. I am in agreement that race is *one* of the elements. It ought not, however, to be the *fundamental* element.

**Question:** Mr. Abram put a final question to both Mr. Browne and Mr. Rustin which, he said, seemed to him a very fundamental question in this discussion: Whether they foresee the day when a presidential commission will not be able to say, as the Kerner Commission did, that America is a racist society.

**Prof. Browne:** No, I cannot in my own mind visualize that day, I am very sorry to say. I wish that I could, but it's beyond my ability to conceive.

**Mr. Rustin:** One does not always know for certain whether he is being honest with himself or, merely whistling in the dark. My philosophy of faith and history is that the problem is not and cannot ultimately be between Jew and Gentile, Catholic and Protestant, black and white, but that the problem ultimately is man's inhumanity to man. If I am to go on working, I can only work by adopting a philosophy of faith and a philosophy of history which says that my work is important, and that it is ultimately possible for a series of problems to be solved. These solutions will undoubtedly create new problems in their time, but I work on because I honestly and sincerely believe that the American people — many of them — are not racists, and that the fundamental problem is not individual racism in the United States but institutional racism. I want to work to relieve the institutional racism, which I think is the most serious.

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