

# FULL SPEED AHEAD

Address of Roy Wilkins, Executive Director, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, to the Annual Youth Awards Dinner at the 60th NAACP Convention, Jackson, Mississippi, July 3, 1969.

New York, NAACP Special Contribution Fund, 1969.

There is much talk today about the lack of understanding between the youth and the adults. Most of it is true. The gap is there. Some part of it is due to the stand-pat attitude of the older people and part of it is due to the sweeping and dogmatic beliefs of our young people.

But the unmistakable fact is that it exists. Until we find a way that leads to understanding and trust and teamwork in pursuing the goals we all seek, confusion will be with us and working at cross-purposes will be the hallmark of our futility.

Is it fair to say that while youth-adult conflicts are in evidence among both white and black people in the United States and among populations in countries around the world, black Americans have had less of this than white Americans. The NAACP as an organization has had less than many other organizations.

This latter is because there is little difference in what both Negro adults and Negro youth desire. They want first-class citizenship. They want equality of opportunity with other Americans. They want their country and all parts of it to cease approving and rewarding racially discriminatory treatment.

They want equal employment in all categories and promotion on the job on the basis of ability.

They want a free market in housing, whether it be rental or ownership.

They want the best possible education for their children in the public schools.

They want crime — petty larceny as well as grand theft — to be controlled and stamped out. In their ordinary endeavors they want to be safe from black criminals as well as from white ones. In this connection they want prompt and effective action against drug addiction.

They want public recreation and travel free of racial inequities. They also want access to all types of public accommodation.

They want to be able to freely register and to vote, to have their people elected to public office and to bear their share of civic responsibility.

They want the police to be police, neither white nor black, working always to protect and not to persecute the people. They want the law enforcement machinery to give suspects a fair shake, from bail bonds to juries, to trial procedures, and to sentences.

If both adults and youth want these things, what, as the saying goes, is the hang-up? The difficulty seems to be principally a difference of opinions on the method by which the goals shall be achieved. A lesser difference seems to involve the psychological attitudes in the victory process.

They are impatient and rightfully so. They are irked and humiliated, if not insulted, by the delays and tokenisms and rebuffs they receive. They tend to be sweeping in their condemnation of their elders and to make no acknowledgment of past advances.

For example, we are meeting here in convention in Jackson, Mississippi. You are making history—you are a part of an event that will go down as a marker in the more than three centuries of the occupation by the two races of the soil of our country. Yet in some manner some of our youth attempt to convey that if this is history the Negro adults took too long to write it. And even so, it is said by some, it is not so much — no more than that to which we are entitled. This is true, but when one obtains that to which he was entitled and of which he has been deprived, is the satisfaction any less?

Despite this talk, the history is there and we are making it. The delay until now is not so much a mark of our weakness as it is of our growing strength.

We have come to one of the places for which our fathers sighed, but we are still far from our goals. No one can tell, certainly not the fast-talking youth, what the spreading of this week's sojourn will do. How many minds will it awaken and start on the road to change? In Jackson and in Mississippi how many Negro citizens, and particularly Negro youth, will be inspired and driven to new ambitions, far beyond the goals of yesterday? How many white Mississippians will be moved even though it be deep in their secret hearts, to re-examine the appraisals of human beings that have been handed down to them by their forefathers?

Will the evils of judgment according to skin color be wiped out overnight? I do not believe so. It would be almost superhuman to expect it. People are people, all with their individual strengths and failings. There are not more instant miracles like the conversion of Saul on the road to Damascus. But there are changes. People do alter their attitudes. Cooperation and respect do replace isolation and hostility. Here in our convention in Jackson, we are dealing with human beings. With them, attitudes and practices are not made to turn on and off like a water spigot.

It is in this context that our convention in Jackson should be judged. The question is not so much whether we were entitled to what we have received, but, rather, how will we use this stepping stone in the never-ending struggle of the down-people everywhere to secure an upgrading in their status, to secure a better life? It is also unrealistic to expect that a convention, meeting for a few days, can accomplish the tasks that only citizens, organized and on the job 365 days a year, can do.

Our young people who form the greatest asset of our race, must first decide to remain Americans and to fight unceasingly for all the rights and privileges of first-class citizenship. If we wander off and follow another star to a land of separatism and going-it-alone, we are charting a journey to a hazardous, even foolhardy, future.

There need be no uncertainty about where the vast majority of the race is going. All the polls declare that the majority is for integration in America. The FORTUNE Magazine poll even found a healthy percentage of those under 26 years of age in this category. Last week NEWSWEEK Magazine's latest poll found 78% of Negroes for an integrated society here in this country.

And we must examine every invitation to deviate from our arduous and soul-testing task of integration to discover those booby traps which would lead us into the desert of separatism.

Shall our young people give up on the U. S. Constitution and the Declaration of Independence in favor of the sayings of Chairman Mao? Does Chairman Mao know any more about the Delta country of Mississippi, the bayou country of Louisiana, about Eastern North Carolina or the ghettos of Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles and New York than we know? Does he have more than a saying with which to attack these conditions?

We have more than a saying for a weapon. We have a history going back to Crispus Attucks. Whether it wanted to become our property jointly with other Americans, or not, this has become our country.

Our race has helped to shape the political, economic and social development of the United States even in the years when we could not vote in the numbers that made a difference in the decisions. Now that we are beginning to vote in decisive ways, shall our young people throw that emerging power in the trash can and traipse off after some Black nation located in a Never-Never land?

We would be throwing Charles Evers, as Mayor of Fayette, Mississippi, and as Democratic National Committeeman from Mississippi, to the wolves. We would be giving up Rep. Robert Clarke in the state legislature and our representatives in all the state legislatures over the nation. Counted out, too, would be our U. S. Senator from Massachusetts, our Congressmen, our U. S. Supreme Court Justice, and our hundreds of persons in elective (including Mayors in Gary, Chapel Hill and Cleveland) and appointive offices in cities and states, North, South, East and West.

In addition to our black officeholders, we would be tossing in the legislation, from city ordinances to Congressional enactments, that our presence has placed upon the books. Victims, too, would be the history-shattering court decisions woven into the law of our land because of us. These things have benefitted white Americans as well as black. They have been landmarks along the long road of man's progress out of the wilderness toward peace and freedom. We caused them to emerge, not because we were black and separate, but because we are one in the family of humans.

If we were to go into the economics, cultural efforts and politics of a separate state, we should be talking all tonight and all next week. There are taxes and tariffs, trade and barter, highways, canals, harbors, roads and piers, sewage systems, airports, crops, minerals, animal husbandry, schools, colleges and universities, research, employment, wages and hours, retail

and wholesale trade and distribution, the armed services, drama and the arts, government and politics — these and a hundred more. For building and maintaining these, and for protecting them with army, navy and air defense, we would be responsible.

It is not that we as a people are incapable of tackling and solving these problems. We would find the men and the way. But we could not do it by ourselves. We could not do it by extolling blackness and downgrading whiteness. We could not sneer at brown men or red or yellow ones, or at those who spoke a different language or worshipped in a different way.

It is too late in the day of man's awakening and of his increasing dependence on other men for us to be talking blackism (which, unless carefully defined and scrupulously observed, will descend to the very racism whose ravages we seek to escape) and separatism. It is too late for isolation, ignorance and hate. These are the things that have robbed us and held us down; we cannot, we must not, adopt them as guiding lights for our race. However hard we may consider our lot today, that program of suspicion, hatred and conflict will lead us only to spiritual death.

Let our youth, then, study the worthy black studies demands with an eye to correcting the ignorances among the whites as well as the self-deprecation among young blacks. We need to know our history during this 350-year struggle in America so that we will be proud of what has been done against heart-breaking odds. But white students need to know this too, so that completely segregated black studies, limited to black students and black faculty, simply do not make sense.

And if we wish these studies to be more than pap to soothe our adolescence, if we wish them to be endowed with the dignity befitting a great race of men, our youth will insist on the inclusion of black studies in the college curriculum in the same way, with the same thoroughness and on the same high scholarship plane as are other studies of other peoples.

Similarly we must be emphatic in condemning separate black dormitories. We will never learn to function in the world of men of all nations until we begin to function with all men on our college campuses. We do not need, as an official, underwritten part of a college, an all-black club, a wailing wall enabling us to commiserate with one another upon our racial troubles. If we need racial gathering places to bolster our spirits in times of stress, let us build them ourselves, at our own expense. Let us not brand ourselves as special beings apart, with the general society, in the name of equality, furnishing the Jim Crow facilities.

We must function on the job level with the same guidelines. It is fashionable now, in certain Negro circles, to downgrade the so-called Negro middle class. The people who are attempting this are trying to split the Negro race. They are as divisive as any hostile white group. They would weaken and destroy our growing racial unity by trying to make "middle-class" a bad word. Some middle-class Negroes have gone about their business, but many more have helped the fight mightily. Our own NAACP which has won more victories against our opponents than all others except, in some instances, the church, started as a frankly, unashamed, intellectual middle-class organization. Today its membership spreads across the whole spectrum of Negro life.

No, the black middle class, while not perfect (what is?) has driven ahead, not merely in its own behalf, but for all men, high and low. For example, the 79 Arkansas sharecroppers whom the NAACP set free in 1923 after battling successfully charges of insurrection and the murder of a white man, did not benefit only the Negro middle class. It freed hardworking black farmers and farm laborers, poor and with little schooling. It made law in the United States for anyone caught in a similar trap. White and black, poor and rich, city and rural men, doctors of philosophy and men with a fourth-grade education have benefitted. The Negro middle class should not be spat upon.

Today's talk about self-defense is not new. Long before the militants sought to be tough and different, this principle of self-defense was established firmly by old line organizations and "timid" old folks. So, pursue the onward and upward goals in money and property, technical and professional skills. Pause as you go forward to attack evils, to revise values, to seek peace and respect between people and nations.

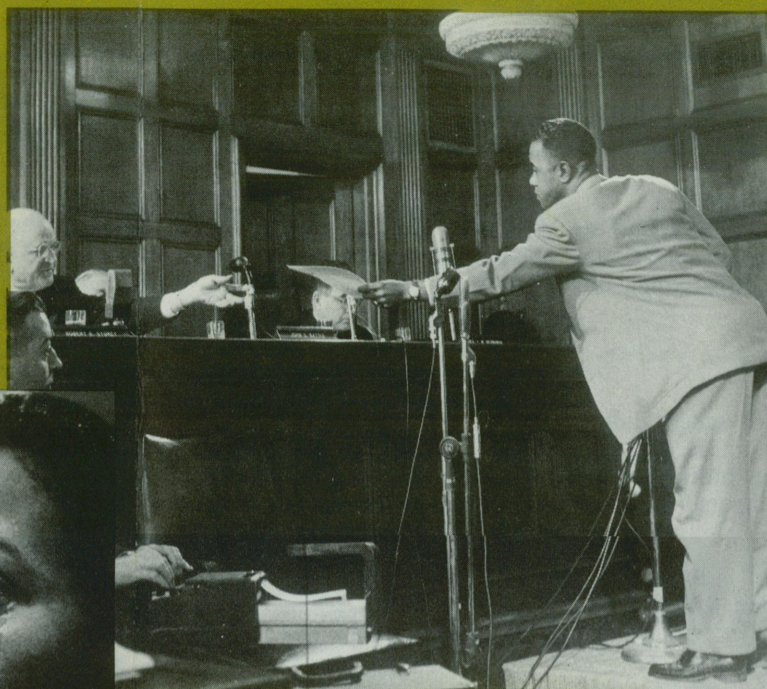
Above all, our youth must move ahead with determination, yes, with persistence in the use of all feasible weapons, but with compassion and understanding. We must develop competence in our chosen fields and must be ever on the watch for the rebuffs that are bound to develop because of race and religion. If you doubt that these are human frailties and not racial ones, look across the Atlantic and hear the tale of the persecuted Catholics in a part of Ireland. They complain of a denial of their civil rights. If you shut your eyes and listen only to the complaints, you would think you were at an NAACP meeting in rural Alabama.

The opportunities are here for young black people. Some doors are open and more are opening. The paths have been cleared by the oldsters whom the youth are wont to blame for "do-nothingness." But if you look closely, the apparent non-progress was slow because it was through the solid rock of unreasoning opposition. It was sure progress, however, using every means to gain an inch or a mile, a day or a year or a decade.

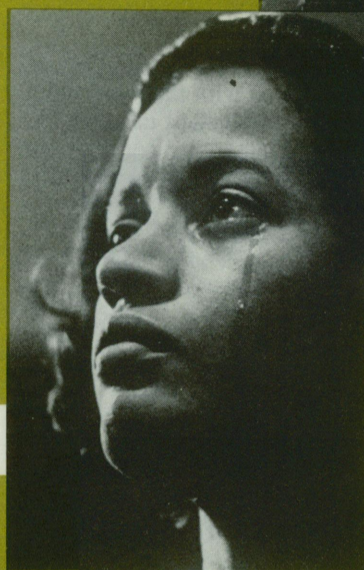
If you do as well, in the swift and complex world before you, the children of your generation will call you blessed.

**FREEDOM'S  
ROAD IS  
LONG AND  
HARD**

**it takes**



**Skill**



**Grief**



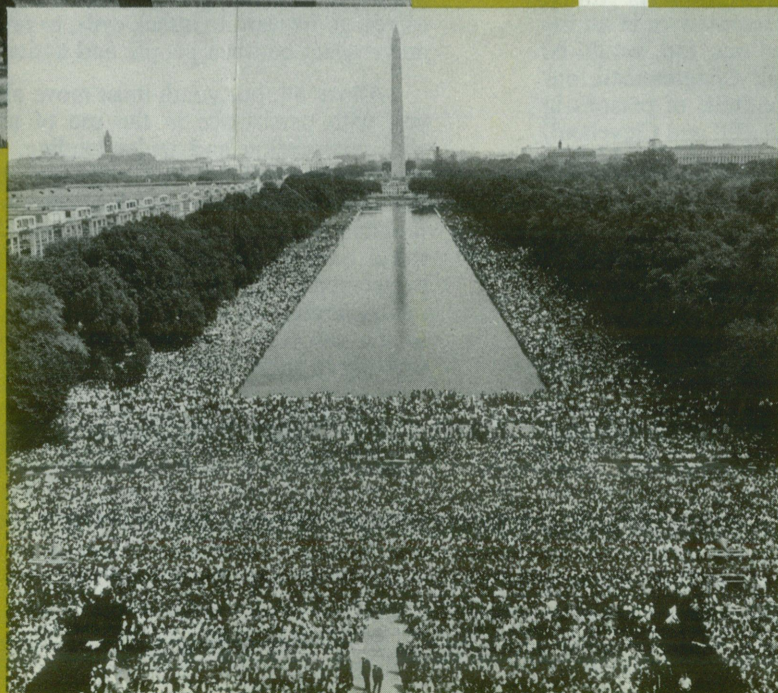
**Torment**



**Determination**



**Courage**



**Organization**

**TO REACH  
A WORLD WITHOUT  
FEAR OR PREJUDICE**

