The Americanization of Sambo

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The Same War

"Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent. The beginning of an old and revered document of American history. But listen to these words again, and notice their contemporaneity: "... a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

"Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure." What strikes me is that in a frightful sense we are still fighting that same war. The combatants are different, the weapons have changed, and the field is no longer North and South. But we are being tested and the issue remains exactly the same as in Lincoln's day, namely, whether that nation so conceived... can long endure."

There have been several voices raised in recent years calling us to the recognition of our grave position. Gary Wills called a recent book The Second Civil War and made this assertion: "Our crime is not that America is white, but that we do not even know it is. The Negro does. He knows it every time a policeman passes. That is when power speaks to him. Suburbs supply mercenaries to the inner city. The white army of occupation is maintained. That is what this country wants; but it does not want to know that it wants it. The white man does not think of his country as white; but he is very careful to keep it that way."

An even more prescient statement comes from LeRone T. Bennett, Jr., in his book The Negro Mood: "This is an important moment in the history of the Commonwealth. There stretch out before us two roads and two roads only. America must now become America or something else, a Fourth Reich perhaps, or a Fourth Reich of the spirit. To put the matter bluntly, we must become what we say we are, or give in to the secret dream that blights our hearts."

Sterling Tucker, of the Urban League, described the American mood recently as "sick and tired, tired and sick; tired of being sick and tired." But being "tired of being sick and tired" leaves a society like ours vulnerable. We become impatient, frenzied, frustrated. We yearn for quick if not easy solutions to war, racism, and poverty. We tend to lose the significance of events when grievous social ills are laid bare with objectionable language.

Real Pornography

Let me illustrate. A recent issue of Christianity Today reported an evangelical conference under the caption, "NAF Hits at Pornography." What they were really talking about in a broader sense was "The Moral Crisis in America." That's fine, but the real pornography today, the profanity that is truly objectionable from a biblical standpoint, has to do with poverty amid unparalleled riches and the animosities of the affluent believers toward the poor; monetary or fiscal irregularities that reward the rich through tax loopholes and subsidies and penalize the poor in the name of welfare and a balanced budget; cries for law and order in the face of long-standing abuses heaped on the oppressed in the name of the law; the criminal retreat of evangelical churches from the inner cities; the request of a certain fundamentalist university to arm its guards with submachine guns; the hypocrisy of evangelical forces who engage in social work abroad but who resist such ministries at home; the superpatriotism of believers who seem not to understand that God is not an American; the suffocating "sounds of silence" coming from those good people who allow evil to triumph by their refusal to act justly toward their neighbors.

I submit to you that this is obscenity and it stinks in the nostrils of a holy and compassionate God. And yet these issues are studiously overlooked by major sections of the Christian church.

Need for Sell-Image

What are the issues behind all the liberal rhetoric and the conservative reaction? The first is the black man's (and indeed all men's) need for a proper self-image. I don't remember what grade it was, or how old I was, or how I reacted to the exposure, but one day I met Little Black Sainbo, in all of his black innocence. I don't even recall what the story line was, but I do know that he is still with us—all of us, black and white alike. He has grown up, of course; sometimes he is visible and sometimes he is invisible. To white men he is most invisible when he is physically present.
He has been called colored, darky, and Negro, and when he responds to these words he is acceptable if not assimilated. It is when he insists on being AfroAmerican or black that he suddenly becomes a threat; he ceases in our minds to be an American. When America hears "black power," there is an altogether different reaction than if Stokely had merely shouted, "Negro power."

Some of us had to search all our lives for the

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meaning of our existence in a white world, only to discover that the worst thing about being Sambo is that by the time you passed through the educational system you had a white mind. The church and Christian literature did very little to alter this image, for the church's imagery and vocabulary are weighted against anything black. A children's book has a "black scowl" creep over the face of Cain; a children's worker lectures from a wordless book to black children and black is the symbol for sin. White, of course, stands for purity and salvation.

Margaret Burroughs, ponders this fact of life in poignant words:

"What shall I tell my children who are black
Of what it means to be a captive in this black skin?
What shall I tell my dear ones, fruit of my wont, Of how beautiful they are, when everywhere they turn
They are faced with abhorrence of everything that is black. The night is black and so is the bogeyman.
Villains are black with black hearts.
A black cow gives no milk, a black hen lays no eggs.
Bad news comes bordered in black, mourning clothes black; Storm clouds black, black is evil And evil is black, and devil's food is black
What shall I tell my dear ones raised in a white world A place where white has been made to represent All that is good and pure and fine and decent, Where clouds are white and dolls, and heaven Surely is a white, white place with angels Robed in white, and cotton candy and ice cream And milk and ruffled Sunday dresses And dream houses and long, sleek Cadillacs
And angels' food is white . . all, all white."

I think my reaction to this was about the same as yours. It is a bit overstated. After all, the most exotic and exquisite orchid is black, and no woman would be caught dead without a basic black dress in her wardrobe. But the point is well-taken.

I am not unaware that this quest for an identity is fundamental to the security of all men, but in a country where color is so important to one's social values, this is an acute issue for black Americans.

**Question of Community**

A second issue confronting black men today, and shared by all men everywhere is the question of community. If identity deals with "Who am I?," the question of community deals with "Who is my neighbor?" The Kerner Report declares us dangerously close to the ultimate and irrevocable polarization-black and white, separate and unequal. The difference now is that at a time when white America seems willing to integrate, the black American seems uninterested. He feels, and rightly so, that he must consolidate his own community, get himself together, before integration can take place among equals. As long as the idea of integration was predicated on the assumption of white cultural superiority and the black man had to make all the adjustments, it was a false concept. Coupled with this is the profound lack of faith in the white community, and added to this a recognition that white society seems to be disintegrating—thus integration would be something like fighting over the last berth on the Titanic.

But the hard facts are that this society cannot long endure if there is no reconciliation, and there is a difference here between reconciliation and integration. There must be fostered a community mood—a mind-set that accepts the existentialist notion that "to be is to belong to someone."

We need to remember the social dimensions of the Gospel. The evangelical is too individualistic about his salvation: "Christ is a personal Savior," "you can change society by changing men," etc. What God holds out for men is an answer to social alienation as well as personal guilt towards God. There is a brotherhood of man quite apart from Christ as Lord; the problem is a lack of power to flesh it out. But to become a disciple would not mean that this brotherhood is therefore null and void. We have virtually ceased to talk about what scriptural fellowship implies in principle to the man on the street.

Perhaps of greater importance is the need to convey the strategic and psychological necessity of separateness as the prelude to viable and redemptive community among men. Factually speaking, the whole concept is more of a dream than a reality for any ethnic group. Why should you expect black men at last to integrate when Polish and Italian people don't?

**Black Power**

The real issue, of course, is power. This is the current American dilemma. The use of power is the key to the emergence of every ethnic group in American history. One need only consider the American Indian to realize what powerlessness can mean in a power-oriented society, or how powerlessness can be perpetuated when white men representing the power structure administer Indian affairs.
The ghetto is another example. Black people, aware of the factors, are seeking to develop the economic and political power to be truly self-determinative. Of course, you know all this, but the spectre of black people controlling their own institutions, making decisions in areas directly affecting themselves; insisting that traditional institutions be accountable to black citizens is really threatening. Power must be shared; the master must become a brother and partner.

The black community is becoming aware that hallowed institutions are not easily susceptible to change. Nathan Wright, Jr., puts it this way:

"Any element in a society that survives long enough to evolve into an institution does so by its ability to satisfy

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... certain needs of the society or by its compatibility with the established patterns of social relationships. In turn those who control these institutions have an interest in preserving order and the stability of society as a whole. It is important to understand this point because it is often lightly assumed that our schools and churches-along with other social institutions-are natural agencies of social change. They are not. They are designed to uphold the existing order. Only when this point is acknowledged may we begin to understand the mounting failure of all our institutions to keep pace with the needs of our rapidly changing society" (*Let's Work Together*, page 53).

Significant black leaders—and white leaders as well—understand this. So do our young people, especially at the college level. The issue in all these areas is power, control, the sharing of power.

"The Rev. William Pannell, evangelist and author, was a former staff director with Youth for Christ, International. He was a featured speaker at the 1969 ASA Convention at Cordon College. This paper is based on a speech given before the Evangelical Press Association in Grand Rapids in May 1969.

In 2003 when I founded the American Sambo Association with my coach Alexander Barakov, the Sambo community in the United States was in a critical state of division and rapidly declining. We came on the scene as a small group intending to help bridge divides in the community and promote our beloved style. I am very proud to say that in the 12 years since our founding, we have achieved these goals and so much more. The ASA has been a voice for the American Sambo community for over a decade. In that time we have trained multitudes of people across this country while serving as a resource for those The Americanization of Emily: During the build-up to D-Day in 1944, the British found their island hosting many thousands of American soldiers who were "oversexed, overpaid, and over here". That's Charlie Madison exactly; he knows all the angles to make life as smooth and risk-free as possible for himself. But things become complicated when he falls for an English woman, and his commanding officer's nervous breakdown leads to Charlie being sent on a senseless and dangerous mission. Comedy, romance, uncategorized. Director: Arthur Hiller. Starring: Edward Binns, James Coburn, James Garner and others. During the build-up to D-Day in 1944, the British found their island hosting many thousands of American soldiers who were â€œoversexed, overpaid, and over hereâ€. That's Charlie Madison exactly; he knows all the angles to make life as smooth and risk-free as possible for himself. But things become complicated when he falls for an English woman, and his commanding officer's nervous breakdown leads to Charlie being sent on a senseless and dangerous mission. Running time: 1:55:00.