

2 From Protest to Politics: The 3 Future of the Civil Rights 4 Movement

5 The civil rights movement is evolving from a protest movement into a
6 full-fledged social movement--an evolution calling its very name...

7 by Bayard Rustin

8  The decade spanned by the 1954 Supreme Court decision on school

9 desegregation and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 will undoubtedly be recorded as the period in
10 which the legal foundations of racism in America were destroyed. To be sure, pockets of
11 resistance remain; but it would be hard to quarrel with the assertion that the elaborate legal
12 structure of segregation and discrimination, particularly in relation to public accommodations,
13 has virtually collapsed. On the other hand, without making light of the human sacrifices involved
14 in the direct-action tactics (sit-ins, freedom rides, and the rest) that were so instrumental to this
15 achievement, we must recognize that in desegregating public accommodations, we affected
16 institutions which are relatively peripheral both to the American socio-economic order and to the
17 fundamental conditions of life of the Negro people. In a highly industrialized, 20th-century
18 civilization, we hit Jim Crow precisely where it was most anachronistic, dispensable, and
19 vulnerable— in hotels, lunch counters, terminals, libraries, swimming pools, and the like. For in
20 these forms, Jim Crow does impede the flow of commerce in the broadest sense: it is a
21 nuisance in a society on the move (and on the make). Not surprisingly, therefore, it was the
22 most mobility-conscious and relatively liberated groups in the Negro
23 community—lower-middle-class college students—who launched the attack that brought down
24 this imposing but hollow structure.

25 The term “classical” appears especially apt for this phase of the civil rights movement. But in
26 the few years that have passed since the first flush of sit-ins, several developments have taken
27 place that have complicated matters enormously. One is the shifting focus of the movement in
28 the South, symbolized by Birmingham; another is the spread of the revolution to the North; and
29 the third, common to the other two, is the expansion of the movement's base in the Negro
30 community. To attempt to disentangle these three strands is to do violence to 1

31 reality. David Danzig's perceptive article, "The Meaning of Negro Strategy," correctly saw in
32 the Birmingham events the victory of the concept of collective struggle over individual
33 achievement as the road to Negro freedom. And Birmingham remains the unmatched symbol
34 of grass-roots protest involving all strata of the black community. It was also in this most
35 industrialized of Southern cities that the single-issue demands of the movement's classical
36 stage gave way to the "package deal." No longer were Negroes satisfied with integrating
37 lunch counters. They now sought advances in employment, housing, school integration,
38 police protection, and so forth.

39 Thus, the movement in the South began to attack areas of discrimination which were not so
40 remote from the Northern experience as were Jim Crow lunch counters. At the same time, the
41 interrelationship of these apparently distinct areas became increasingly evident. What is the
42 value of winning access to public accommodations for those who lack money to use them? The
43 minute the movement faced this question, it was compelled to expand its vision beyond race
44 relations to economic relations, including the role of education in modern society. And what also
45 became clear is that all these interrelated problems, by their very nature, are not soluble by
46 private, voluntary efforts but require government action—or politics. Already Southern
47 demonstrators had recognized that the most effective way to strike at the police brutality they
48 suffered from was by getting rid of the local sheriff—and that meant political action, which in
49 turn meant, and still means, political action within the Democratic party where the only
50 meaningful primary contests in the South are fought.

51 And so, in Mississippi, thanks largely to the leadership of Bob Moses, a turn toward political
52 action has been taken. More than voter registration is involved here. A conscious bid for
53 *political power* is being made, and in the course of that effort a tactical shift is being effected:
54 direct-action techniques are being subordinated to a strategy calling for the building of
55 community institutions or power bases. Clearly, the implications of this shift reach far beyond
56 Mississippi. What began as a protest movement is being challenged to translate itself into a
57 political movement. Is this the right course? And if it is, can the transformation be
58 accomplished?

60 II

61 The very decade which has witnessed the decline of legal Jim Crow has also seen the rise of *de*
62 *facto* segregation in our most fundamental socio-economic institutions. More Negroes are
63 unemployed today than in 1954, and the unemployment gap between the races is wider. The
64 median income of Negroes has dropped from 57 per cent to 54 per cent of that of whites. A
65 higher percentage of Negro workers is now concentrated in jobs vulnerable to automation than
66 was the case ten years ago. More Negroes attend *de facto* segregated schools today than

67 when the Supreme Court handed down its famous decision; while school integration proceeds
68 at a snail's pace in the South, the number of Northern schools with an excessive proportion of
69 minority youth proliferates. And behind this is the continuing growth of racial slums, spreading
70 over our central cities and trapping Negro youth in a milieu which, whatever its legal definition,
71 sows an unimaginable demoralization. Again, legal niceties aside, a resident of a racial ghetto
72 lives in segregated housing, and more Negroes fall into this category than ever before. These
73 are the facts of life which generate frustration in the Negro community and challenge the civil
74 rights movement. At issue, after all, is not *civil rights*, strictly speaking, but social and economic
75 conditions. Last summer's riots were not race riots; they were outbursts of class aggression in a
76 society where class and color definitions are converging disastrously. How can the (perhaps
77 misnamed) civil rights movement deal with this problem?

78 Before trying to answer, let me first insist that the task of the movement is vastly complicated by
79 the failure of many whites of good will to understand the nature of our problem. There is a
80 widespread assumption that the removal of artificial racial barriers should result in the automatic
81 integration of the Negro into all aspects of American life. This myth is fostered by facile analogies
82 with the experience of various ethnic immigrant groups, particularly the Jews. But the analogies
83 with the Jews do not hold for three simple but profound reasons. First, Jews have a long history
84 as a literate people, a resource which has afforded them opportunities to advance in the
85 academic and professional worlds, to achieve intellectual status even in the midst of economic
86 hardship, and to evolve sustaining value systems in the context of ghetto life. Negroes, for the
87 greater part of their presence in this country, were forbidden by law to read or write. Second,
88 Jews have a long history of family stability, the importance of which in terms of aspiration and
89 self-image is obvious. The Negro family structure was totally destroyed by slavery and with it the
90 possibility of cultural transmission (the right of Negroes to marry and rear children is barely a
91 century old). Third, Jews are white and have the *option* of relinquishing their cultural-religious
92 identity, intermarrying, passing, etc. Negroes, or at least the overwhelming majority of them, do
93 not have this option. There is also a fourth, vulgar reason. If the Jewish and Negro communities
94 are not comparable in terms of education, family structure, and color, it is also true that their
95 respective economic roles bear little resemblance.

96 This matter of economic role brings us to the greater problem—the fact that we are moving into
97 an era in which the natural functioning of the market does not by itself ensure every man with
98 will and ambition a place in the productive process. The immigrant who came to this country
99 during the late 19th and early 20th centuries entered a society which was expanding territorially
100 and/or economically. It was then possible to start at the bottom, as an unskilled or semi-skilled
101 worker, and move up the ladder, acquiring new skills along the way. Especially was this true
102 when industrial unionism was burgeoning, giving new dignity and higher wages to organized
103 workers. Today the situation has changed. We are not expanding territorially, the western
104 frontier is settled, labor organizing has leveled off, our rate of economic growth has been
105 stagnant for a decade. And we are in the midst of a technological revolution which is altering the

106 fundamental structure of the labor force, destroying unskilled and semi-skilled jobs—jobs in
107 which Negroes are disproportionately concentrated.

108 Whatever the pace of this technological revolution may be, the *direction* is clear: the lower rungs
109 of the economic ladder are being lopped off. This means that an individual will no longer be able
110 to start at the bottom and work his way up; he will have to start in the middle or on top, and hold
111 on tight. It will not even be enough to have certain specific skills, for many skilled jobs are also
112 vulnerable to automation. A broad educational background, permitting vocational adaptability
113 and flexibility, seems more imperative than ever. We live in a society where, as Secretary of
114 Labor Willard Wirtz puts it, machines have the equivalent of a high school diploma. Yet the
115 average educational attainment of American Negroes is 8.2 years.

116 Negroes, of course, are not the only people being affected by these developments. It is reported
117 that there are now 50 per cent fewer unskilled and semi-skilled jobs than there are high school
118 dropouts. Almost one-third of the 26 million young people entering the labor market in the
119 1960's will be dropouts. But the percentage of Negro dropouts nationally is 57 per cent, and in
120 New York City, among Negroes 25 years of age or over, it is 68 per cent. They are without a
121 future.

122 To what extent can the kind of self-help campaign recently prescribed by Eric Hoffer in the *New*
123 *York Times Magazine* cope with such a situation? I would advise those who think that self-help
124 is the answer to familiarize themselves with the long history of such efforts in the Negro
125 community, and to consider why so many foundered on the shoals of ghetto life. It goes without
126 saying that any effort to combat demoralization and apathy is desirable, but we must understand
127 that demoralization in the Negro community is largely a common-sense response to an
128 objective reality. Negro youths have no need of statistics to perceive, fairly accurately, what their
129 odds are in American society. Indeed, from the point of view of motivation, some of the
130 healthiest Negro youngsters I know are juvenile delinquents: vigorously pursuing the American
131 Dream of material acquisition and status, yet finding the conventional means of attaining it
132 blocked off, they do not yield to defeatism but resort to illegal (and often ingenious) methods.
133 They are not alien to American culture. They are, in Gunnar Myrdal's phrase, "exaggerated
134 Americans." To want a Cadillac is not un-American; to push a cart in the garment center is. If
135 Negroes are to be persuaded that the conventional path (school, work, etc.) is superior, we had
136 better provide evidence which is now sorely lacking. It is a double cruelty to harangue Negro
137 youth about education and training when we do not know what jobs will be available for them.
138 When a Negro youth can reasonably foresee a future free of slums, when the prospect of
139 gainful employment is realistic, we will see motivation and self-help in abundant enough
140 quantities.

141 Meanwhile, there is an ironic similarity between the self-help advocated by many liberals and
142 the doctrines of the Black Muslims. Professional sociologists, psychiatrists, and social workers

143 have expressed amazement at the Muslims' success in transforming prostitutes and dope
144 addicts into respectable citizens. But every prostitute the Muslims convert to a model of
145 Calvinist virtue is replaced by the ghetto with two more. Dedicated as they are to maintenance
146 of the ghetto, the Muslims are powerless to affect substantial moral reform. So too with every
147 other group or program which is not aimed at the destruction of slums, their causes and effects.
148 Self-help efforts, directly or indirectly, must be geared to mobilizing people into power units
149 capable of effecting social change. That is, their goal must be genuine self-help, not merely
150 self-improvement. Obviously, where self improvement activities succeed in imparting to their
151 participants a feeling of some control over their environment, those involved may find their
152 appetites for change whetted; they may move into the political arena.

153

154 III

155 Let me sum up what I have thus far been trying to say: the civil rights movement is evolving
156 from a protest movement into a full-fledged *social movement*—an evolution calling its very
157 name into question. It is now concerned not merely with removing the barriers to full *opportunity*
158 but with achieving the fact of *equality*. From sit-ins and freedom rides we have gone into rent
159 strikes, boycotts, community organization, and political action. As a consequence of this natural
160 evolution, the Negro today finds himself stymied by obstacles of far greater magnitude than the
161 legal barriers he was attacking before: automation, urban decay, *de facto* school segregation.
162 These are problems which, while conditioned by Jim Crow, do not vanish upon its demise. They
163 are more deeply rooted in our socio-economic order; they are the result of the total society's
164 failure to meet not only the Negro's needs, but human needs generally.

165 These propositions have won increasing recognition and acceptance, but with a curious twist.
166 They have formed the common premise of two apparently contradictory lines of thought which
167 simultaneously nourish and antagonize each other. On the one hand, there is the reasoning of
168 the New York *Times* moderate who says that the problems are so enormous and complicated
169 that Negro militancy is a futile irritation, and that the need is for "intelligent moderation." Thus,
170 during the first New York school boycott, the *Times* editorialized that Negro demands, while
171 abstractly just, would necessitate massive reforms, the funds for which could not realistically be
172 anticipated; therefore the just demands were also foolish demands and would only antagonize
173 white people. Moderates of this stripe are often correct in perceiving the difficulty or impossibility
174 of racial progress in the context of present social and economic policies. But they accept the
175 context as fixed. They ignore (or perhaps see all too well) the potentialities inherent in linking
176 Negro demands to broader pressures for radical revision of existing policies. They apparently
177 see nothing strange in the fact that in the last twenty-five years we have spent nearly a trillion
178 dollars fighting or preparing for wars, yet throw up our hands before the need for overhauling our

179 schools, clearing the slums, and really abolishing poverty. My quarrel with these moderates is
180 that they do not even envision radical changes; their admonitions of moderation are, for all
181 practical purposes, admonitions to the Negro to adjust to the status quo, and are therefore
182 immoral.

183 The more effectively the moderates argue their case, the more they convince Negroes that
184 American society will not or cannot be reorganized for full racial equality. Michael Harrington has
185 said that a successful war on poverty might well require the expenditure of a \$100 billion.
186 Where, the Negro wonders, are the forces now in motion to compel such a commitment? If the
187 voices of the moderates were raised in an insistence upon a reallocation of national resources
188 at levels that could not be confused with tokenism (that is, if the moderates stopped being
189 moderates), Negroes would have greater grounds for hope. Meanwhile, the Negro movement
190 cannot escape a sense of isolation.

191 It is precisely this sense of isolation that gives rise to the second line of thought I want to
192 examine—the tendency within the civil rights movement which, despite its militancy, pursues
193 what I call a “no-win” policy. Sharing with many moderates a recognition of the magnitude of the
194 obstacles to freedom, spokesmen for this tendency survey the American scene and find no
195 forces prepared to move toward radical solutions. From this they conclude that the only viable
196 strategy is shock; above all, the hypocrisy of white liberals must be exposed. These spokesmen
197 are often described as the radicals of the movement, but they are really its moralists. They seek
198 to change white hearts—by traumatizing them. Frequently abetted by white self-flagellants, they
199 may gleefully applaud (though not really agreeing with) Malcolm X because, while they admit he
200 has no program, they think he can frighten white people into doing the right thing. To believe
201 this, of course, you must be convinced, even if unconsciously, that at the core of the white
202 man's heart lies a buried affection for Negroes—a proposition one may be permitted to doubt.
203 But in any case, hearts are not relevant to the issue; neither racial affinities nor racial hostilities
204 are rooted there. It is institutions—social, political, and economic institutions—which are the
205 ultimate molders of collective sentiments. Let these institutions be reconstructed *today*, and let
206 the ineluctable gradualism of history govern the formation of a new psychology.

207 My quarrel with the “no-win” tendency in the civil rights movement (and the reason I have so
208 designated it) parallels my quarrel with the moderates outside the movement. As the latter lack
209 the vision or will for fundamental change, the former lack a realistic strategy for achieving it. For
210 such a strategy they substitute militancy. But militancy is a matter of posture and volume and
211 not of effect.

212

213 I believe that the Negro's struggle for equality in America is essentially revolutionary. While
214 most Negroes—in their hearts—unquestionably seek only to enjoy the fruits of American society

215 as it now exists, their quest cannot *objectively* be satisfied within the framework of existing
216 political and economic relations. The young Negro who would demonstrate his way into the
217 labor market may be motivated by a thoroughly bourgeois ambition and thoroughly “capitalist”
218 considerations, but he will end up having to favor a great expansion of the public sector of the
219 economy. At any rate, that is the position the movement will be forced to take as it looks at the
220 number of jobs being generated by the private economy, and if it is to remain true to the masses
221 of Negroes.

222 The revolutionary character of the Negro's struggle is manifest in the fact that this struggle may
223 have done more to democratize life for whites than for Negroes. Clearly, it was the sit-in
224 movement of young Southern Negroes which, as it galvanized white students, banished the
225 ugliest features of McCarthyism from the American campus and resurrected political debate. It
226 was not until Negroes assaulted *de facto* school segregation in the urban centers that the issue
227 of quality education for *all* children stirred into motion. Finally, it seems reasonably clear that the
228 civil rights movement, directly and through the resurgence of social conscience it kindled, did
229 more to initiate the war on poverty than any other single force.

230 It will be—it has been—argued that these by-products of the Negro struggle are not
231 revolutionary. But the term revolutionary, as I am using it, does not connote violence; it refers to
232 the qualitative transformation of fundamental institutions, more or less rapidly, to the point
233 where the social and economic structure which they comprised can no longer be said to be the
234 same. The Negro struggle has hardly run its course; and it will not stop moving until it has been
235 utterly defeated or won substantial equality. But I fail to see how the movement can be
236 victorious in the absence of radical programs for full employment, abolition of slums, the
237 reconstruction of our educational system, new definitions of work and leisure. Adding up the
238 cost of such programs, we can only conclude that we are talking about a refashioning of our
239 political economy. It has been estimated, for example, that the price of replacing New York
240 City's slums with public housing would be \$17 billion. Again, a multi-billion dollar federal
241 public-works program, dwarfing the currently proposed \$2 billion program, is required to
242 reabsorb unskilled and semi skilled workers into the labor market—and this must be done if
243 Negro workers in these categories are to be employed. “Preferential treatment” cannot help
244 them.

245 I am not trying here to delineate a total program, only to suggest the scope of economic reforms
246 which are most immediately related to the plight of the Negro community. One could speculate
247 on their political implications—whether, for example, they do not indicate the obsolescence of
248 state government and the superiority of regional structures as viable units of planning. Such
249 speculations aside, it is clear that Negro needs cannot be satisfied unless we go beyond what
250 has so far been placed on the agenda. How are these radical objectives to be achieved? The
251 answer is simple, deceptively so: *through political power*.

252 There is a strong moralistic strain in the civil rights movement which would remind us that
253 power corrupts, forgetting that the absence of power also corrupts. But this is not the view I
254 want to debate here, for it is waning. Our problem is posed by those who accept the need for
255 political power but do not understand the nature of the object and therefore lack sound
256 strategies for achieving it; they tend to confuse political institutions with lunch counters.

257 A handful of Negroes, acting alone, could integrate a lunch counter by strategically locating
258 their bodies so as *directly* to interrupt the operation of the proprietor's will; their numbers were
259 relatively unimportant. In politics, however, such a confrontation is difficult because the
260 interests involved are merely *represented*. In the execution of a political decision a direct
261 confrontation may ensue (as when federal marshals escorted James Meredith into the
262 University of Mississippi—to turn from an example of non-violent coercion to one of force
263 backed up with the threat of violence). But in arriving at a political decision, numbers and
264 organizations are crucial, especially for the economically disenfranchised. (Needless to say, I
265 am assuming that the forms of political democracy exist in America, however imperfectly, that
266 they are valued, and that elitist or putschist conceptions of exercising power are beyond the
267 pale of discussion for the civil rights movement.)

268 Neither that movement nor the country's twenty million black people can win political power
269 alone. We need allies. The future of the Negro struggle depends on whether the contradictions
270 of this society can be resolved by a coalition of progressive forces which becomes the *effective*
271 political majority in the United States. I speak of the coalition which staged the March on
272 Washington, passed the Civil Rights Act, and laid the basis for the Johnson
273 landslide—Negroes, trade unionists, liberals, and religious groups.

274 _____

275 There are those who argue that a coalition strategy would force the Negro to surrender his
276 political independence to white liberals, that he would be neutralized, deprived of his cutting
277 edge, absorbed into the Establishment. Some who take this position urged last year that votes
278 be withheld from the Johnson Humphrey ticket as a demonstration of the Negro's political
279 power. Curiously enough, these people who sought to demonstrate power through the
280 non-exercise of it, also point to the Negro "swing vote" in crucial urban areas as the source of
281 the Negro's independent political power. But here they are closer to being right: the urban Negro
282 vote will grow in importance in the coming years. If there is anything positive in the spread of the
283 ghetto, it is the potential political power base thus created, and to realize this potential is one of
284 the most challenging and urgent tasks before the civil rights movement. If the movement can
285 wrest leadership of the ghetto vote from the machines, it will have acquired an organized
286 constituency such as other major groups in our society now have.

287 But we must also remember that the effectiveness of a swing vote depends solely on “other”
288 votes. It derives its power from them. In that sense, it can never be “independent,” but must opt
289 for one candidate or the other, even if by default. Thus coalitions are inescapable, however
290 tentative they may be. And this is the case in all but those few situations in which Negroes
291 running on an independent ticket might conceivably win. “Independence,” in other words, is not a
292 value in itself. The issue is which coalition to join and how to make it responsive to your
293 program. Necessarily there will be compromise. But the difference between expediency and
294 morality in politics is the difference between selling out a principle and making smaller
295 concessions to win larger ones. The leader who shrinks from this task reveals not his purity but
296 his lack of political sense.

297 The task of molding a political movement out of the March on Washington coalition is not
298 simple, but no alternatives have been advanced. We need to choose our allies on the basis of
299 common political objectives. It has become fashionable in some no-win Negro circles to decry
300 the white liberal as the main enemy (his hypocrisy is what sustains racism); by virtue of this
301 reverse recitation of the reactionary’s litany (liberalism leads to socialism, which leads to
302 Communism) the Negro is left in majestic isolation, except for a tiny band of fervent white
303 initiates. But the objective fact is that *Eastland and Goldwater* are the main enemies—they and
304 the opponents of civil rights, of the war on poverty, of medicare, of social security, of federal aid
305 to education, of unions, and so forth. The labor movement, despite its obvious faults, has been
306 the largest single organized force in this country pushing for progressive social legislation. And
307 where the Negro-labor liberal axis is weak, as in the farm belt, it was the religious groups that
308 were most influential in rallying support for the Civil Rights Bill. The durability of the coalition
309 was interestingly tested during the election. I do not believe that the Johnson landslide proved
310 the “white backlash” to be a myth. It proved, rather, that economic interests are more
311 fundamental than prejudice: the backlashers decided that loss of social security was, after all,
312 too high a price to pay for a slap at the Negro. This lesson was a valuable first step in
313 re-educating such people, and it must be kept alive, for the civil rights movement will be
314 advanced only to the degree that social and economic welfare gets to be inextricably entangled
315 with civil rights.

316 The 1964 elections marked a turning point in American politics. The Democratic landslide was
317 not merely the result of a negative reaction to Goldwaterism; it was also the expression of a
318 majority liberal consensus. The near unanimity with which Negro voters joined in that expression
319 was, I am convinced, a vindication of the July 25th statement by Negro leaders calling for a
320 strategic turn toward political action and a temporary curtailment of mass demonstrations.
321 Despite the controversy surrounding the statement, the instinctive response it met with in the
322 community is suggested by the fact that demonstrations were down 75 per cent as compared
323 with the same period in 1963. But should so high a percentage of Negro voters have gone to
324 Johnson, or should they have held back to narrow his margin of victory and thus give greater

325 visibility to our swing vote? How has our loyalty changed things? Certainly the Negro vote had
326 higher visibility in 1960, when a switch of only 7 per cent from the Republican column of 1956
327 elected President Kennedy. But the slimness of Kennedy's victory—of his “mandate”—dictated a
328 go slow approach on civil rights, at least until the Birmingham upheaval.

329 Although Johnson's popular majority was so large that he could have won without such
330 overwhelming Negro support, that support was important from several angles. Beyond adding
331 to Johnson's total national margin, it was specifically responsible for his victories in Virginia,
332 Florida, Tennessee, and Arkansas. Goldwater took only those states where fewer than 45 per
333 cent of eligible Negroes were registered. That Johnson would have won those states had Negro
334 voting rights been enforced is a lesson not likely to be lost on a man who would have been
335 happy with a unanimous electoral college. In any case, the 1.6 million Southern Negroes who
336 voted have had a shattering impact on the Southern political party structure, as illustrated in the
337 changed composition of the Southern congressional delegation. The “backlash” gave the
338 Republicans five House seats in Alabama, one in Georgia, and one in Mississippi. But on the
339 Democratic side, seven segregationists were defeated while all nine Southerners who voted for
340 the Civil Rights Act were re-elected. It may be premature to predict a Southern Democratic
341 party of Negroes and white moderates and a Republican Party of refugee racists and economic
342 conservatives, but there certainly is a strong tendency toward such a realignment; and an
343 additional 3.6 million Negroes of voting age in the eleven Southern states are still to be heard
344 from. Even the *tendency* toward disintegration of the Democratic party's racist wing defines a
345 new context for Presidential and liberal strategy in the congressional battles ahead. Thus the
346 Negro vote (North as well as South), while not *decisive* in the Presidential race, was
347 enormously effective. It was a dramatic element of a historic mandate which contains vast
348 possibilities and dangers that will fundamentally affect the future course of the civil rights
349 movement.

350 The liberal congressional sweep raises hope for an assault on the seniority system, Rule
351 Twenty-two, and other citadels of Dixiecrat-Republican power. The overwhelming of this
352 conservative coalition should also mean progress on much bottlenecked legislation of profound
353 interest to the movement (e.g., bills by Senators Clark and Nelson on planning, manpower, and
354 employment). Moreover, the irrelevance of the South to Johnson's victory gives the President
355 more freedom to act than his predecessor had and more leverage to the movement to pressure
356 for executive action in Mississippi and other racist strongholds.

357

358 None of this *guarantees* vigorous executive or legislative action, for the other side of the
359 Johnson landslide is that it has a Gaullist quality. Goldwater's capture of the Republican party
360 forced into the Democratic camp many disparate elements which do not belong there, Big
361 Business being the major example. Johnson, who wants to be President “of all people,” may try

362 to keep his new coalition together by sticking close to the political center. But if he decides to do
363 this, it is unlikely that even his political genius will be able to hold together a coalition so
364 inherently unstable and rife with contradictions. It must come apart. Should it do so while
365 Johnson is pursuing a centrist course, then the mandate will have been wastefully dissipated.
366 However, if the mandate is seized upon to set fundamental changes in motion, then the basis
367 can be laid for a new mandate, a new coalition including hitherto inert and dispossessed strata
368 of the population.

369 Here is where the cutting edge of the civil rights movement can be applied. We must see to it
370 that the reorganization of the “consensus party” proceeds along lines which will make it an
371 effective vehicle for social reconstruction, a role it cannot play so long as it furnishes Southern
372 racism with its national political power. (One of Barry Goldwater's few attractive ideas was that
373 the Dixiecrats belong with him in the same party.) And nowhere has the civil rights movement's
374 political cutting edge been more magnificently demonstrated than at Atlantic City, where the
375 Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party not only secured recognition as a bona fide component
376 of the national party, but in the process routed the representatives of the most rabid
377 racists—the white Mississippi and Alabama delegations. While I still believe that the FDP made
378 a tactical error in spurning the compromise, there is no question that they launched a political
379 revolution whose logic is the displacement of Dixiecrat power. They launched that revolution
380 within a major political institution and as part of a coalitional effort.

381 The role of the civil rights movement in the reorganization of American political life is
382 programmatic as well as strategic. We are challenged now to broaden our social vision, to
383 develop functional programs with concrete objectives. We need to propose alternatives to
384 technological unemployment, urban decay, and the rest. We need to be calling for public works
385 and training, for national economic planning, for federal aid to education, for attractive public
386 housing—all this on a sufficiently massive scale to make a difference. We need to protest the
387 notion that our integration into American life, so long delayed, must now proceed in an
388 atmosphere of competitive scarcity instead of in the security of abundance which technology
389 makes possible. We cannot claim to have answers to all the complex problems of modern
390 society. That is too much to ask of a movement still battling barbarism in Mississippi. But we can
391 agitate the right questions by probing at the contradictions which still stand in the way of the
392 “Great Society.” The questions having been asked, motion must begin in the larger society, for
393 there is a limit to what Negroes can do alone.

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