

The New Year and The New Negro

With 1963 going down in the history books as one of the most tumultuous years in American race relations, the American Negro would do well to take a good, long look into the coming year, with eyes and mind open to the arrival at basic racial strategy.

The future is always clouded and must be evaluated by searching review of the past if the prophets are to arrive within shooting distance of accurate prediction.

1963 was characterized by much noise but hardly proportionate progress in the battle towards equality of citizenship for American Negroes. The succession of protest marches, sit-ins, and localized mass demonstrations in cities throughout the nation, opened relatively few real economic doors to the Negro American. Frankly a great many more avenues were opened to enable the Negro to spend his money than were opened on opportunity for him to earn it.

Tragically, in very few instances was the one-time battle cry of the striving Negro heard across the land...the challenge to "buy black," which sparked the initial revolution against joblessness in Chicago and later wrote an exciting Future Outlook League chapter into the history of Cleveland and Ohio.

Led by an army of status-seeking social workers, the traditionally Negro advancement movements like the NAACP and Urban League authored programs designed to so thoroughly integrate the Negro into the national fabric that, if full success had crowned their efforts, not a single Negro-owned business would have survived.

Adding to the confusion of the national betterment effort was the clashes in philosophy that accompanied it. These ranged from the hate-the-white-folks separatist movement of the Muslims, through the ultra-conservative dedication of the Urban League to produce, like magic, a generation of professionals and white collar workers safe and secure in the gigantic industrial complex hitherto sacrosanct to the whites. It moved through the NAACP hierarchy out of the courtrooms, where the fundamental issues of lawful rights suddenly moved out into the streets to match the more spectacular efforts of a militant CORE and its burgeoning army of collegians, and finally come to rest in the Ghandi impregnated ranks of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in which the "love-'em-to-defeat" non-violent techniques of Dr. Martin Luther King blossomed and spread with each passing day.

In between, but hardly discernible were the struggling Negro business leaders who

since the first dawn after the Emancipation Proclamation more than 100 years ago, have been trying with dull tools to build and maintain for the free Negro in America a basic economic foundation. The downtown barbershop serving the millionaire class; the legion of skilled and suave hotel, resort and restaurant servitors of yesterday, the 40-acre Negro farmer, the hotel keeper, the newspaper publisher, and the hundreds of small service establishments that gave basic employment to Negro neighbors is suffering and dying as the Negro flocks to government jobs, latches onto the safe harbor of social service agencies which continue to expand as Negro misery continues to outdistance it.

"Go to the ant, thou sluggard" said Aesop in the fable known to almost every school child, but the wage-earning Negro grasshoppers of post World War years turned deaf ears and gaily fiddled away their new substance on Cadillacs, cognac and caviar. The Negro's biggest business, insurance, continued to grow but at a rate disgraceful in the face of the swelling Negro population and the new liberality of big white underwriters who were quick to design policies attractive and flattering to the growing Negro middle class.

Negro professionals, particularly in the field of medicine, while growing constantly in skill has set its eyes upon the goal of assimilation into the white hospital complex. Thousands of ailing Negroes are flocking into the newly-opened public clinics while the all-Negro hospital struggles, not for competent staff, but for business enough to meet the payroll.

Amid it all the Negro professional is the rarest bird to be found in the March to Freedom.

That Negro solidarity can be achieved in a most spectacular way was eloquently demonstrated in the historic March on Washington, but as yet the March has not moved a reluctant Congress to action, nor has it resulted in a summit meeting of Negro leadership that can set realistic goals for 1964 and the critical years that follow.

The one very definite asset that the Negro carries into 1964 is his awareness that if he is willing to fight, to carry his own weight, he can very well reach all his long-treasured goals before his children spawn another generation.

Just what those goals are--at least the ones that all Negroes will be willing to contribute sweat and tears to achieve in 1964, is still the \$64 question for the New Year.