

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE ON
A RACIAL HISTORY OF A CENTURY

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Histories tend to be written long after the events themselves are well past. And they tend to be written by historians who had not themselves experienced those events. Rather these historians have learned about the events indirectly, through records, newspapers, and interviews with those who may have been there. Lately, especially since the racial disturbances on the days after April 7th, when Timothy Thomas was shot by a Cincinnati policeman, I have been disturbed about assumptions made by newspapers, scholars and community leaders in commenting on the background leading up to these disturbances. While my memory is not something to write home about, since I lived through most of the times they write of, I feel a need to amend and comment on some of what has been stated by others. So I am writing a history. . . a history as seen and lived by Charles Judd. I write this for two reasons: to fill in gaps and correct what I see as distortions, and to understand my own unfulfilled dreams, and to ask why.

The Journal, "Race & Poverty", a so called, "cutting edge" journal, had a memorable comment in an article of its 2001 Nov./Dec. issue, by Theodore M. Shaw, "The edifice of formal American apartheid has been dismantled, and black Americans have achieved a level of integration their parents could only dream about, yet racial segregation remains an intractable and seemingly permanent characteristic of American life."

Fifty or seventy years ago we had no idea what the future would bring, but we had dreams. Much progress and some regression has happened in those years with little of it written as history. Many books have been written about those years, usually of individuals or

single events but no real comprehensive history and few who write were there to experience the times themselves.

As a result of April 7th, we Cincinnatians have been forced to confront our racial Problems. Many of us have attended meetings discussing these issues, especially to learn "what we can do". At these meetings most of the speakers, and attendees, of all races, were only children or not yet born when the most dramatic changes in racial relationships occurred forty and fifty years ago. . .

Many of you heard me read a paper here ten years ago, entitled "A dream I had, shattered". I remember Gene Mihaly telling me that I was too pessimistic, and I really hoped he was right. But, even my pessimism then didn't anticipate April 7th, 2001. Following the 7th, what I felt brought tears, but not despair. Our morning newspaper outdid itself, every day, in abetting negative reactions to our city, which especially reacted with the readers living in the suburbs. Some of our radio stations were a disgrace. That kind of reporting does not lead to constructive solutions for the future, in my opinion. What would have been helpful, I feel, would have been a history of Cincinnati's intergroup/interracial relations from earlier in the last century to the present.

In the 50s and 60s I had a dream that within a reasonable time segregation and discrimination would diminish, and that our neighbors and friends would include people of all colors and ancestry. The truth is that I have fewer friends today that differ from my background than I did forty or fifty years ago. Part of this, for sure, is that many friends from that era had died and I am no longer as active in our city. However I continue to have the dream that real brotherhood will be possible sometime.

This history that I recount tonight is in three parts. First, I will recall what America, Cincinnati

and I were like in thought and practice prior to World War II, as I experienced it. Second I will review the profound changes made in our society after the war and through the sixties, changes resulting from demonstrations, marches, riots, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s actions and finally the enactment of laws outlawing discrimination. I will draw on my own personal experiences and observations here in Cincinnati during this period. The last section will be about those years most of us will remember, the past thirty years, again using Cincinnati as my prism.

I conclude this paper with a few personal thoughts and some hopes and fears for tomorrow.

First forty-five years of the 20th Century

Jean I moved to Cincinnati in 1941 from a small farming county seat north of Chicago, near the Wisconsin border, called Woodstock. The residents were people who worked in the only factory in town - where I worked for three years - or they supplied the needs of the surrounding community: they farmed, they ran the county services, they taught the children, or they doctored and lawyered the residents. Not one was a person of color, not even the day help for the few people of wealth.

I grew up in Oak Park, the first town west of Chicago, a town with only a handful of African Americans. Jean was born in Chicago, but grew up on the upper east side of Manhattan, where even the doormen were white. In both Oak Park and affluent parts of Manhattan in the first half of this century, African Americans were scarce. Except for "help", Blacks were seldom seen other than on the El in Chicago, the subway in New York, in streetcars or on sidewalks in the shopping areas. Our grade schools, our high schools, and even our colleges reflected our neighborhoods, almost 100% white. My high school, Oak

Park High School, had one or two African Americans in each year's class.

There was a part of Chicago, on the south side, where most of the African Americans lived. Those that had jobs, took the El to work, since autos were still a luxury.

In 1941, when Jean and I arrived in Cincinnati there were distinct areas where the Whites lived, and other areas where the Blacks lived. I would imagine that the few Blacks in "white neighborhoods" came originally as domestic or yard help to the original white families. My memory is that most African Americans lived in "the West End" or just up several of the hills. It took the end of the war and later "urban renewal" to propel a change in neighborhoods.

I am remiss if I do not admit that it wasn't until the fifties when I came to realize and then fully accept that Blacks were just as human, just as smart, and with the same rights to full citizenship as me. It was at the same time that I also learned that there was a handful of brilliant African Americans who were making a difference in our country, people such as Thurgood Marshall, A. Philip Randolph, Marion Anderson, Whitney M. Young, Jr., Bayard Rustin, and Cincinnati's own Theodore M. Berry. These persons, and many others born early in the 20th century, lived lives to insure a country where all men and women are born equal.

My upbringing, as was true of most Whites, was sheltered. Neither Jean nor I, had been given, at home or in school, any information about African Americans. Our history books provided scant and often inaccurate information. The admonitions at home of always to be polite to others, never mentioned persons of color. We learned in school that only the south had slaves, that the Civil War was fought over slavery, leaving us with the notion that the South was responsible for the presence of Blacks in the North. Many people still don't know that some Southerners did free their slaves

willingly and that there was a substantial number of slaves owned by Northerners who were not freed until slavery became unlawful, well into the 19th century. Even after the Civil War, many Blacks were subsequently imprisoned on trumped up charges and used to replace slaves in tending crops.

Most of us today do not recall how prominent was the discrimination of Blacks in the work place. The reality is that, except for janitors, most hiring was strictly "white only". Even in the war years, with the exception of foundries, and the like, "white only" was the usual practice. I came to Cincinnati in 1941 to work in a factory on Spring Grove Avenue, a good size factory. The Blacks employed there were limited to the lowest paying jobs, and there were not many of those. After the war I changed jobs and my new company's employees were all white too, with the exception of a handyman and some janitors.

In the 1950's, after I was involved with "Race Relations" in Cincinnati, I tried to set up a program at a factory in Muskegon, Michigan, to hire African Americans in all classes of work. I thought our factory's employees should mirror the town. It took much patience and time, to accomplish this. I had not anticipated the reactions of the existing employees. This was before Fair Employment Practice laws had been enacted and the union even threatened a strike if we proceeded. Quietly we did proceed, however, and our efforts were eased when it became illegal to discriminate because of color.

I write pre-1945 20th century reflection, not to excuse the "white consciousness" of those years but to help us remember and understand how seemingly inborn and automatic was the sense of superiority we had in being born white. Confronting this reality about ourselves may be the first step in moving us to a new understanding.

Mid Century

The sixth decade of the 20th century was an important time in my life, and it also was significant in the history of integration. But even before the fifties, events were happening that set the stage and began to awaken our consciousness. Eleanor Roosevelt in the 1930s was calling our attention to a "race" problem. Senator Truman's committee looked into discrimination in war work factories which made news but changed little. Meanwhile a Black consciousness was gaining strength; helped by the migration of Blacks from the South and the expanding Black communities growing in their mostly segregated neighborhoods. Yet not much changed in the minds of whites. A few African American authors were published with acclaim, such as Richard Wright, whose first book, "Native Son", is still being read, as is "The Invisible Man", written by Ralph Ellison. The best known of all the early Black intellectuals, W.E. DuBois, was one of the few Blacks to attend Harvard, receiving both an A.B. and a PhD, early in the 20th century. He later edited the NAACP's publication, "Crisis", and wrote, "The Souls of Black Folks".

In the 1940s, following the Second World war, President Truman integrated our armed forces. Later a real advance in awareness came when Branch Rickey ended "White Only" in our national pastime, Major League Baseball. He hired Jackie Robinson to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. While White fans objected, many Blacks, for the first time, went to the National League parks to see their hero. Soon Jackie Robinson was everyone's hero and the ugly signs gradually disappeared. It wasn't long before more Blacks were signed, and soon they played on all major league teams. Imagine our national pastime today without our African American stars?

Detroit experienced a race riot during World War II, and this served as a wakeup call and a warning to

many city leaders around the country to take a look at local practices. Soon after the Detroit disturbance, the Cincinnati City Council created a group to do something about "race". This committee was given an unusual name: "The Mayor's Friendly Relations Committee", or MFRC. The City Council funded it with a budget to hire a director, an assistant, a secretary and a room in City Hall. The first director was Marshall Bragdon; Virginia Coffey was his assistant.

Still most of the white citizenry remained unconscious of their deep-seated and discriminatory racial attitudes. Employers continued to put up signs, "No Negroes need apply". Movie Theaters in the center of the city were "white only". Most restaurants refused to serve blacks, with a few exceptions such as the Gibson Hotel and the University Club. Our public transportation in Cincinnati, unlike that of the south, never was segregated, but some of our taxis refused Blacks. Cincinnati had a black hotel and restaurant, called The Manse, located in Walnut Hills. I remember going to lunch there with a friend who felt more comfortable eating there rather than in our downtown.

The agenda for the M.F.R.C. was education. Schools, churches and public facilities were the usual venue to discuss "equality". MFRC understood that reminding people of the religious injunction "Love thy Neighbor as thy Self" would not change habits, since most Whites didn't think of Blacks as neighbors. Bragdon and Coffey went into many Churches, Temples, Schools, and Civic Associations. They were not always welcomed, but gradually they were accepted, and slowly a number of white citizens joined them and became workers for change.

And much had to be changed. Even small things that whites took for granted, such as traveling without problems. Dining cars in trains didn't encourage Blacks, and most Black passengers took a sandwich to be eaten at their seat. When traveling by car there was a constant fear of being "questioned" by highway police,

and only some of the poorest motels or hotels - and these were rare - would accept Blacks as guests. Restaurants could be a source of embarrassment. Traveling by bus was usually open to Blacks but bus travel had the problem of eating at bus stops, so sandwiches were usually carried along. The worst part of bus travel for Blacks was having to use dirty toilets, since decent ones were often "White Only".

The major event of the fifties was the 1954's Supreme Court's decision declaring segregated schools unconstitutional. I can remember vividly being in the M.F.R.C.'s office when Ted Berry, a member of the City Council, came in and told us the news. That date has forever after become the demarcation line between segregation as an accepted custom and from segregation as a wrong to be righted. A poignant anecdote of that era is the day I ate lunch with Ted Berry and others in the MFRC room when Ted had brought both chocolate milk and white milk to drink with his lunch. As he poured some of each into a glass, he said, "it is best to mix black and white". Those MFRC years were the start of a close and lasting friendship with Ted until his death in 2000.

Following the court order to desegregate all schools, the next immediate task was to make it unlawful to discriminate in employment, in public accommodations and in housing. We began this effort here in Cincinnati, armed with a 1953 study on employment segregation by Alfred Kuhn for the Wilder Foundation. With this study in hand we asked our City Council to pass an ordinance outlawing discrimination in employment, but we found that all five Republicans were opposed; their slogan was, "you can't legislate morality".

Our first tactic was to appeal to members' religious convictions. The following anecdote illustrates how naïve, though earnest, we were in those days. Since one of the Republican council persons, Donald Clancey, was a Catholic, or so we thought, Mike

Israel and I made a date to see Archbishop Alter. After telling his office our mission, and making a date, we drove to his mansion in College Hill. We arrived and were ushered into a beautiful drawing room. His holiness descended the stairs, wearing a beautiful robe and came walking toward us. He was very cordial and listened to our story. Then he told us that he had looked up Mr. Clancey and found that Mr. Clancey was not a member of the Church. He then stood up, cordially wished us well, but didn't offer any help.

We kept pressing and one day Mayor Carl Rich, a Republican, came to us and said, "Go ahead, I will be your fifth vote". Unfortunately we waited until after the election on keeping Proportional Representation, and in that time Carl was appointed to fill a vacancy in Congress. So we missed our chance: all republican votes remained NO and Cincinnati did not have a Fair Employment Practice Law.

Across the country, marches, demonstrations and voting rights committees in the south were making all Americans aware of the evils of segregation and bigotry. Cincinnatians, including a few from the Literary Club, joined these marches. Martin Luther King, Jr. with his powerful voice, was the first Black that many whites listened to seriously. His call to a Washington March drew many of us, both black and white, traveling together to Washington on many busses and train cars.

Looking back we don't think of Vatican II as important in ending segregation, but in 1962, the ecumenical council called by Pope John 23rd, changed minds. New volunteers came from all parts of the city and legislators reexamined their views.

In 1862, a Democratic Governor, Michael DiSalle, was elected and a state wide campaign was mounted for an Ohio Fair Employment Law. After much work we checked votes and found we were still several short in the House. Mike DiSalle asked us to hold up the vote.

Later he came back and said, "OK". We often wondered what DiSalle had to give for those two votes. In the next few years, the U.S. Congress voted on all three anti-discrimination laws. The law of the land now recognized discrimination to be illegal!

These important laws were passed in the middle sixties, but laws take time to have any effect. Gradually, despite or because of riots in many cities, some following the death of Martin Luther King Jr., the white population began to change. For the most part overt discrimination ceased in equal access to jobs, housing and accommodations. However, a change of heart may take longer than a change of practice. Acceptance of blacks by most whites as social and intellectual equals did not follow. It wasn't until 1975 that the Cincinnati Community Chest felt safe enough to add to its campaign an agency called HOME working for fair housing. And it was more than a decade before the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority stopped discrimination completely.

Cincinnati was no different from most cities and experienced its riots following the shooting of Martin Luther King, in 1967. At that time Grant Cannon, with Bob Beck and I, wrote and published a short piece, titled, "Why did it Happen?" Let me quote a sentence from one of the early paragraphs, "In Cincinnati, Negro spokesmen have been allowed - no, encouraged - to talk freely. Talk failed because no one paid much attention. Unsolved problems remained unsolved." These words sound eerily like words we all felt and said after last April.

Riots are destructive: anti-discrimination laws are constructive. For better or worse, each serves to propel change. In the 1960's, the changes resulted in, first and foremost, jobs. Likewise there were changes in education where the quality of all schools became a concern in addition to mixing black and white students. Discrimination in restaurants, hotels, parks, and entertainment ceased if it hadn't already.

What did not follow, however, was the elimination of poor neighborhoods, or ghettos. No longer were these ghettos solely based on color; now they were ghettos of poverty. Yet, as race and poverty remain intractably intertwined, this may be a moot point.

A final note on the results of the 60's - a minor point perhaps but significant in terms of a change in consciousness - is that the Mayor's Friendly Relations committee changed its name to the Cincinnati Human Relations Council. A new era of respect for race relations, we hoped.

The Close of the Century

After the sixties our segregated country was no more, in principle. We believed we were now a color free society. We had great hopes for the future. These changes especially affected the lives of African Americans. And yet, in many ways for whites it was only the rules that had changed. But the seventies came in with a new agenda for those of us who had played a part in this awakening; now we had to make it work. And we were only part-way there.

On the positive side, the close of the sixties brought a pride in being Black, in being called an African American and identifying with Africa. Being a descendent of slaves is no longer a source of shame but is now a source of pride.

In the area of higher education, one of the remarkable changes is the phenomenon of "Black Studies" as a separate department in universities. Some of them needed student strikes or pressure from the faculty or community to see racial relations as a valid intellectual area of study. It will be interesting to see how these departments integrate their research and perspectives into other departments.

The area of housing patterns, with its more insidious forms of discrimination, were, and remain, a harder task. Now that it was unlawful to refuse to sell or rent to anyone on the basis of race, if that person has the funds, we find areas segregated by income instead. The "Negro" areas of earlier times that were inclusive of families and persons of all income levels, had one advantage; many stable families lived there and were models for others. Cincinnati now has sections of the city, as do all American cities, where only poor people live, usually with a high percentage of single parent families, mostly needing help from agencies. The neighborhoods also include many unemployed single men, both Black and White. Poor White families, of which there are more than there are poor Black families, statistically, congregate in different areas because they know different ropes or they are treated differently by the various agencies. Nevertheless, a ghetto, for any reason and of any type today, is a disgrace.

After the sixties many families left older neighborhoods for new ones. This includes Blacks as well as Whites. Some former "White" neighborhoods are now "Black" neighborhoods. While no neighborhood is completely White or Black any longer, and a few that could be called "integrated", our housing patterns for the most part suggest that we still see each other in black and white terms, as different from ourselves. With the freedom to move anywhere, controlled only by one's finances, the determining factor seems to be where most people think they will feel the most comfortable.

There are places in our society where we accept others readily, places where we enjoy each other, regardless of color. For example these are places where we work side by side for a livelihood; where we are educated; where we play together in team athletics; and also where we engage in community or political efforts. These are places where we have common purposes, or common tastes. Unfortunately, acceptance

doesn't occur in all places so it must be that it is because we still have racial hang-ups.

After the passage of the "fair-housing" laws, most real estate firms, insurance companies, mortgage institutions and apartment owners had to start dealing everyone from the same deck of cards, and this wasn't easy. In Cincinnati, an organization called Housing Opportunities Made Equal, or HOME, helped these firms become acquainted with the laws and helped train their employees. At the start it took the courts to enforce the laws, but today Cincinnati has a fine housing industry operating with fairness, and visitors come from all over the country to discover HOME's methods and to be trained. As one of the founders of HOME, this is one of my proudest accomplishments.

"Whites Only need apply" signs are now a thing of the past, and we find businesses to be some of the most integrated institutions in the country. This has had an effect with the education and training of many African Americans and their well being, but the opportunities for this betterment is still limited by the education available and by glass ceilings, most often there because of prejudice.

However, I find it disappointing to find that some of my tastes are shared by only a few Blacks, such as symphonic music, opera, and theater. I must admit that I do not share the artistic tastes of many young people, Black and White, and some of my counterparts in the Black Community. Last summer I met a friend of mine, Herb Allen, an African American, at the Opera. A week or so after, we met again, he told me that he was uncomfortable that evening at the Opera because he felt conspicuous. I'm sure that I would be uncomfortable, too, in situations that were mostly attended by Blacks. This is a challenge for us all.

The police departments show us how far we still have to come. Today most police forces are integrated, some very slowly, by both race and sex. However, in

most cities the kind of training that police receive and the attitudes that accompany notions of crime and criminal detection - such as profiling - have not changes as much as they should. Often police forces do not even recognize the need to change nor do they recognize their own deep seated prejudices. Many police find it very hard to treat everyone alike. For example, after the Cincinnati disturbances last Spring, it was reported that the police would still disburse groups lingering after the bars closed if the crowd was primarily Black, whereas this was not done if the crowd was White.

The Kerner Commission warned our country that we were in danger of becoming two nations, one Black and one White. That danger has not passed. We have both Whites, and Blacks, still holding prejudices about race. However when committees and commissions have tried to get discussions started they have been frustrated with the small numbers willing to talk about this issue. Despite the great 1954 Brown decision that an equal education cannot be a separate education, urban schools don't seem able to offer the same quality education as do some suburbs. Urban schools educate children who are frequently predominantly black and predominantly poor - yet we know that intelligence is not determined by race or income. Something else is at play here and the current era of education reform is trying to get at those systemic problems that remain and result in continued unequal education.

The white population today, on the whole, seems resistant to true and full integration. I have introduced Blacks to our Literary Club, and I have asked many of them afterwards to consider joining. I have also asked present members to nominate Blacks for membership. The result has been a disappointment. I point this out to illustrate that while much of Cincinnati and the rest of the country has come quite a ways from earlier in the century, there remain parts of our lives that reflect few of these changes.

Final Reflections

Societal changes come with a price; they necessitate personal changes and these are painful. In this final section I wish to add a few thoughts about the personal struggle of whites to adapt to these historical changes that the last century has witnessed. And I don't think these personal changes are over. I will also reflect on my remaining disappointments and hopes.

Most white, especially born in or before the fifties may still have some hang-ups about African Americans; I believe this has a connection to slavery and to the misinformed notions about slaves and slavery that we grew up with. How else to explain the Klu Klux Klan well into the 20th century, or the fear of a group that it may be socially inferior if it includes Blacks? Why does prejudice differentiate between African Americans and others with dark skin? Many African Americans have just as light a complexion as do many whites, and many persons from Asia or south America have dark complexions. To illustrate this I remember back before the sixties that when African American doctors visiting our medical school, would be given a turban to wear so that the group could go to Mechlenberg's restaurant for lunch together - a restaurant that refused to serve Negroes even in the fifties, yet was willing to serve dark-skinned foreigners.

It is surprising how little my generation, and even my children's generation, knew about the prevalence of slavery in the North, not just in the South, and the difficulty some northern states had in prohibiting slavery. I had never realized that a fair-sized minority in the North was pro-slavery at the time of the Civil War. To many Northern patriots, the Civil War was fought only to preserve our Union.

We whites of my generation also grew up unaware of African American scholars. We had heard of George Washington Carver, a thinker who introduced many innovative ideas to society. But he was only one of Black inventors and scholars. Unlike Carver, most of those early Blacks never had a chance to use their intellectual talents to the fullest or develop their interest as they might have a century later, although early in our country's history some slaves bought their freedom, some were freed, and some escaped, creating a community determined to be and to be seen as fully human. When Oliver Wendell Holmes, the father of the chief justice, was Dean of the Harvard Medical School, in 1847 he had three qualified black men apply for admission, whom he wished to enroll.

Unfortunately the university demurred. It took a full century, until 1947, until an African American was enrolled as a medical student at Harvard. Today Harvard has a department of Black Studies staffed by outstanding scholars, and there are Black faculty in their other departments as well. Why is it that African Americans were kept from positions they were capable of for so long? What still keeps most whites, even today, from seeing African Americans as full brothers and sisters?

Living in two worlds, is normal for most African Americans. Most Whites have no idea what this would be like. We may begin to experience it when we are alone in a room full of the opposite sex, or if we spend several hours alone in Paris speaking only few words of high school French. Yet it is a profoundly different and far more dislocating experience to live a life everyday as two different people, one who is acceptable to whites, and one who is "the at-home" real self. This is one reason that the freedom to move anywhere finds many blacks not moving into an all-white neighborhood until a few brave families are already there.

One very obvious source of negative stereotypes that Whites have of Blacks is based on economic differences. Whites see street people who are often mostly Black gathered in places like Cincinnati's "Over the Rhine". Most of these are younger men. These men have a hard time getting a decent job, and what they do find is usually off and on day-labor employment at minimum wage, providing barely enough, or not enough, for rent and food, even with help from welfare agencies. There are probably just as many, or more, whites in the same situation, but they are scattered and aren't as obvious, at least to our white eyes. For both groups, Whites and Blacks, the reason is mostly a lack of education and the low wages paid for non skilled jobs. Unfortunately, Whites, frequently, including the police, may see such individuals as shiftless, irresponsible or, even dangerous.

America has a sad history in educating African Americans. Except for a few missionary type whites who came to the South to set up schools, and except for those in the Black community who began their own schools, formal publicly provided schooling only started at the beginning of this century. Even today, the public education in our major cities, with a few exceptions, such as Walnut Hills, is second-class compared with suburbs and smaller cities.

Likewise, our history of pay for non skilled work since the Depression is deplorable. Our minimum wage by law today is \$5.15 an hour. A recent N.Y. Times best seller, "Nickel and Dime" by Barbara Ehrenreich describes how impossible it is for a single person to live on eight or ten dollars an hour: yet many strive to provide for a family as well on this wage. I fear that the source for much of our negative stereotypes of African Americans will stay with us until we decide to do something about our city schools and the low pay for repetitive work. Achieving truly integrated neighborhoods would help even more to overcome stereotypes and see each other as neighbors, not the "other".

Our society has a long way to go still, so we must still dream of a time when we no longer have the memory of slavery, when we no longer need a group to feel superior to, when none of us thinks that certain others are inherently inferior mentally, morally or socially. As we continue our personal struggle for that day, let us not forget those who acted courageously and at personal risk to change society when these ideas and actions were not common place, and when there were no laws to protect them. We should remember the 60's freedom riders, the quiet work in communities by decent citizens whose names are not in history books, the bravery of a few politicians, such as Ted Berry, Thurgood Marshall, Eleanor Roosevelt and others. These persons, all, dreamed of a society where the word "race" wasn't used any more and where we didn't need to rely on the ideas of ancestors or skin color for security.
