



Max M. Kampelman Papers

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SPEECH DELIVERED BY MAX M. KAMPELMAN ON FEBRUARY 14, 1945
BEFORE PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE AND INTER-CULTURAL COMMISSION OF YM-YWCA AT COFFMAN MEMORIAL UNION, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA AS PART OF BROTHERHOOD WEEK.

I have a story. It's about a friend of mine, Marty Ponch. Marty is Jewish. Marty has a sister, who, in the course of giving birth to a baby, had to share a hospital room with a young Nisei girl. Marty's sister, who remembered what Marty had told her about the Japanese Americans and their problems, felt pretty proud of her tolerance at not objecting to her company and congratulated herself upon her Americanism.

The girls became rather chummy and pretty soon Marty's sister heard her Nisei roommate talk about the damn Jews and how they got us into the war.

I have another story, about another friend. When Jean went to school, she attended so many Brotherhood meetings that she came to believe what was said at them - and, what is more unusual, decided to live by what she believed.

Jean, therefore, associated with all kinds of people and one of the men she associated with was a Negro. Jean fell in love with him, as these things, I am told, sometimes happen, and they married. Jean is white.

With time, they found that they had been a bit hasty. And so they separated. But with time too, there came a child - one with more of a chemical called melanin and less of a chemical called carotene in his skin - and so he was a dark skinned child.

Jean, who refused to deny her motherly instincts, decided to bring her child up in an environment where he would be spared discrimination during his early years and so she has been living in Harlem, the Negro section of New York.

Little Georgie, now 5 and blissfully ignorant, is very happy as he grows into youth with his dark colored playmates. But Jean wasn't far from injury when the Negroes in Harlem rioted against the whites some year or so ago. And Jean knows what it is to feel loneliness in the midst of many as she waits in a store to be waited on and waits and waits and is ignored.

Now, if you will permit me, I have one more story. The Greensteins are a Jewish family who had a home next to ours and were our neighbors for many years. Their son Jerry and I were and still are very close friends. Their daughter Florence and I often went to parties and dated together.

The family is a rather intelligent one and, as middle class families go, were fairly socially conscious. Mr. Greenstein, as a successful business man and treasurer of the synagogue, often participated in inter-faith activities designed to abolish discrimination.

Suddenly, one evening, Florence, who worked for the OWI, came home and calmly told her parents that she was in love and had decided to marry one of her associates in the office. What resulted is difficult to describe: hysteria, anger, shouting, anguish.

Now Ken, whom she had decided to marry, was not just an ordinary fellow. He had just been appointed head of the new Television Division of the OWI on the West Coast. But Ken was a Christian. "And no daughter of mine will ever marry a Christian and give up her faith", vowed Mr. Greenstein. ...It's now about 2 years that Florence was asked to leave her father's house and as far as Mr. Greenstein is concerned, he has no daughter.

When I was first asked on Monday night to speak to you about Race Discrimination As A Danger to Democracy, I inwardly rebelled at the topic and said so. I had heard many people at many meetings talk about the subject with fine phrases and fancy platitudes, but as a college student eager to find answers to problems new to me, I was confused as the melodious affect of fine talk wore off.

We first learned from these talks that the Sociologists and Anthropologists had a very fancy word for what we've been talking about. It's "xenophobia"--hatred of the unlike.

All right, we said. If that's the trouble, let's get rid of the unlikeness. A few generations of intercourse of all people and we solve the problem. Communication will lead to miscegenation. Communication and miscegenation.

But what about the hatred of the Jews or the Germans, who are not so physically unlike so as to be beautified by miscegenation? What about Father Coughlin and Rex Stout? And what about those Jews and Negroes who do not wish to assimilate?

Here, our education man stepped in. Educate, he said. Emphasize likes, the common, the universal, the familiar. De-emphasize the unlike, the boundaries, the diversities, the creeds.

So we have: communicate, miscegenate, and educate.

But what about the hatred that survives even these three therapies? What do we do when the devil hangs on?

The materialist here supplies us with an answer: Economic Security. Economic security will evaporate the devil, he says.

But the rich are economically secure and so many of them are full of the devil!

So the psychologist came on the picture - Psychological Adjustment.

But the world is maladjusted. How ~~xxx~~ can you get rid of the devil by adjusting people to a bedeviled world?

By this time, we're getting tired and we decide to look at the church. Divine Love is what they tell us.

But the South is the churchiest section in the country and we know all about the South. And how many churchmen in the North do we know who make an effort to establish their churches and services as inter-racial affairs.

So you see. All this left me very confused and I didn't like to be put in the position of confusing you like I was confused. Communication, Miscegenation, Education, Adjudication, Medication, and Invocation are all of them convincing and worth a try. But the Devil may still win.

There was another reason why I rebelled at the topic. Here was a group of students, eagerly searching for firm foundations and truths in a confusing and frustrating world, why should someone have to talk to groups like this about Race Discrimination as a Danger to Democracy?

Of course, racial discrimination and democracy are inconsistent. We are risking the future of civilization in a war against a system which proved that

bigotry and hatred among groups was a cancer to democracy. Why should it be necessary to repeat it?

And then I thought of the stories I shared with you a few moments ago and I knew. We are all guilty. The devil is in all of us! My suggestion, therefore, is that all of us get rid of this "holier than thou" attitude. Let us - who howl at fascism, moan over discrimination and consider ourselves enemies of bigotry - let us stop baiting the Southerners. The devil is in us too!

We may belong to the right societies, including the Urban League. We may all participate in brotherhood weeks and talk about the dignity of man, his rights, his equality. We may even think we believe in them. The test is whether we really live by them.

Would those of us who are white want our daughter, our sister-would we marry a Negro?

And you who are Negroes, do you really love the white skinned so and sos who seem so secure and superior as they're protected by the color of their encasement and don't know what it is to be labelled at sight?

Well then, with this realization, what are we to do about the devil? We are first to understand and define him in relation to what we mean by democracy.

Democracy has been defined not as "I am equal to you", but as "You are equal to me." Compare this definition with what a Boston police officer said last year at the time of the riots against the Jews and Negroes. This is a democracy, he said, and we must abide by the democratic principle. Democracy, he continued, means majority rule - and Jews and Negroes are in the minority.

Let us quietly ponder for a moment the implications of that statement. Those of us who have in the past perhaps glibly accepted that definition of democracy: does it justify our being here today? But who ever said that democracy means majority rule (period)?

The early church brought the idea of democracy as a living force into the world for the first time. In the sight of God, it taught then, all men are equal, for there is no limit to God's bounty and there is no limit to his nature which all men share. On that rock it was founded and on that rock it was charged with defending the dignity of man against every tyranny and violation, whether by king, state, or people.

The dignity of man and human brotherhood. That was the democratic doctrine which grew out of early religious thinking and that is the doctrine behind the preamble to the Declaration of Independence upon which our democracy is based.

We can now better understand the nature of the devil. It is that power which recognizes no inherent dignity in mankind and which makes sham of brotherhood.

It is totalitarianism which sets up the state as the lord over the individual.

It is a government by majority rule (period) which has no room for those who dissent and does not respect the rights of minorities.

It is the practice of discrimination and hatred of peoples - all peoples - not only Negroes and Jews, but also Germans and Japanese, Japanese-Americans and those in Japan too. It is the practice of discrimination and prejudice against

refugees, socialists, communists, and conscientious objectors.

Our topic, therefore, becomes inadequate. It is not racial discrimination and racial hatred as such which endanger our democracy as much as discrimination, hatred, and bigotry per se and all practices which deny the basic brotherhood and dignity of man which endanger democracy.

Now, in the light of this perspective, what can we do to preserve the dignity of man and the values of human brotherhood so essential to democracy?

One of the early war pictures The Cross of Lorraine, had a scene in it in which a Nazi sergeant tosses a large round loaf of bread into the midst of several dozen famished French prisoners of war. There is a silent, tense pause. One man darts forward and a moment later 40 frenzied persons are pitted one against the other in a maddened heap. A priest forces his way into the midst. He tells them this is part of a trick to make them hate, fight, and kill one another. The torn loaf is placed on a table, cut to bits and divided among all.

Suppose there had been no one to stop this struggle for one loaf where 10 were needed. 40 Frenchmen would have gone on hating one another - war! Suppose again that this group of persons was made up of Frenchmen, Catholics, Jews and Negroes. If a Jew had been the first to reach the loaf, anti-semitism would have swept the hungry mob. If a Negro reached it first, race hatred of white against black would be born.

Now apply this principle to American life as we know it - to the world and international relations. To what extent to existing conditions promote friendly relations between races and peoples? To what extent do conditions drive people apart and develop hatreds?

Here then is a challenge to determine whether we're really interested in democracy. Those who are committed to democracy have a task. It is not a task for our leisure moments. It's one that demands our attention in every relationship of our daily living.

As members of society, I suggest that we must strive for an economy, national and international, and for a social and political relationship, national and international, which encourages cooperation rather than ruthless competition; which recognizes minority rights and denies the right of one individual, state, or combine of states to lord it over another.

As individuals, I suggest that we must commit ourselves to acting on our principles in our own lives; that by genuine fellowship we root out of our own lives any vestiges of prejudice or superiority; and, just as important, that we continually work and strive in our family and in our community to change those practices which violate our democratic principles.

Unless we are prepared to undertake that task and do all that we can, we do less than we ought and the cancer to our democratic body politic will grow until perhaps even these brotherhood meetings will be no more.

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FACTS AND INFORMATION TO BE BROUGHT OUT IN DISCUSSION:

"The world is crying for peace, but there is no peace anywhere without justice. Who is better qualified to work for peace and justice than those of us who have borne the scourge of injustice and who have known little peace in our souls because we could never accept injustice?" - Pauli Murray.

Facts about Jews to answer hate-mongers from PM, Anti-Defamation League.

Fallacy about races from THE RACES OF MANKIND, Public Affairs Pamphlet.

Poll Tax Fact Sheet material.

Explain reason for Jewish fear of inter-marriage, Negro discrimination against whites, and Nisei talk against Jews.

Add further economic information that with the end of the war men trained in violence will compete for few jobs. Also that even today with jobs, there is real insecurity for tomorrow.

"White man could not hold the Negro in the gutter without getting there himself" - Booker T. Washington.

Racial discrimination began in the 16th century and was started by northwestern Europeans, especially English and German, who travelled over the world spreading their ideas of superiority.

State Dep't official to Chinese Ambassador who described Japanese atrocities: "We'll ~~wipe~~ wipe those yellow bastards off the face of the globe".

Discrimination against COs part of the same problem: Professor Crespi's report from Princeton on study of public reaction to COs shows high degree of acceptability, especially among the educated, close to the scale of "I would not mind having him marry into my family".

We're all members of one minority group or other; understanding that and the fear that acts against 1 minority establish precedents which may be used against others is a good argument to use.

Facts on Japan: United Press reports a democratic underground; there is a Japanese Anti-War League in China, founded and led by Japanese political and labor exiles in China (Allied Labor News, PM, CIO News); Worldover Press reports more than 20,000 Japanese in Japan's concentration camps; NY Times clipping showing anti-war sentiment among Japanese labor groups.

Discuss FEPC and other legislation.

100,000 Negro Jews in this country with synagogues, practices and language.

NY Times reports a Hebrew colony in China with Asiatic physical characteristics but with Hebrew religious practices, prayers etc. mostly ancient.