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Equal, Not Separate

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A recent meeting of black and white community leaders discussed many questions. What are the differences between yesterday's forced segregation imposed by law and today's voluntary re-segregation? Must we forever abide by the law that birds of a feather flock together, in "neighborhoods" defined by race, religion, ethnicity and economic status?

In our pluralistic planet and our belief in the oneness of mankind (made in His image), must we return to the tribal villages and ghettos at a time when the walls are coming down elsewhere in the world? Will those who have "made it" always separate themselves from others who have not?

Blacks and whites have come a long way together. Can we continue together on the long road to racial equality and harmony?

On one point all can agree: There has been significant progress and improvement in race relations in America in the past half-century. Credit is due to those who struggled against bigotry and violence to eliminate some of the most outrageous evils of injustice and inhumanity.

Among the advance guard were blacks like Bob Watts, Verda Welcome, the Mitchells, the Jacksons, the Rev. Marion Bascom, Enolia McMillan, Furman Templeton, David Glenn; and whites like the Hollanders, Sandy and Carol Frank, Marvin Braiterman (one of the "freedom-rider" lawyers who went to Mississippi to confront mobs and dogs in providing legal defense for blacks being hustled to jail (or the nearest tree), the Waxters, the Nileses, Henry and Hannah Waskow, the Rev. Guthrie Spears, the Rev. Chester Wickwire, many other ministers and rabbis such as Morris Lieberman, Ed Israel, Philip Schreiber, Israel Goldman, Murray Saltzman and Fred E. Weisgal, Leon Sachs, Mal Sherman. Many survive, many are gone, but their descendants are carrying on the fight for equal opportunity.

A few other veterans whose names come to mind are Parren Mitchell, the Rev. Owings Stone, the Rev. Asbury Smith, the Rev. Don Frank Fenn, William H. Proctor, the Rev. Irving Murray, Prof. Arthur Lovejoy, Carrie Ramsey, Una Corbett, June Wing, William

Passano, Sen. Harry Cole, Edgar Ewing, Juanita Tesar, Mildred Atkinson, Lane Berk, and many more.

It is hard now for young people to understand, and for their elders to recall, why these battlers ever had to fight for rights that are now so routine and taken for granted. The victories seem as remote and irrelevant as the Peloponnesian War.

Not until 1947 was the first Negro allowed to become a part-time teacher on the staff of Johns Hopkins Hospital, where now there are many world-renowned black surgeons, teachers and doctors.

Not until the late Forties were the first Negro cops assigned (to police black areas only); the first two Negroes trained to become shipyard workers; the first Negro permitted to golf on municipal courses (only on certain days); the first interracial tennis match staged, with 34 arrested; the first Negro midshipman graduated from the Naval Academy, and (incredibly) the first Negro plumber licensed.

As recently as the Fifties, Parren Mitchell became the first Negro enrolled at College Park; Governor McKeldin appointed the first Negro magistrate; the first colored students were admitted to the "A" Course at Polytechnic; the first Negro firefighters were appointed; Negro candidates were elected to the General Assembly for the first time, and the first Negroes and women were admitted to membership in the Baltimore Bar Association.

The slow process of battering down walls continued through the Sixties. Virtually every victory resulted from the combined efforts of black and white civil-rights activists. Yes, it was a "different" time (and worse than now), but it started a process that must continue. We have not realized the dream of Martin Luther King, but we're a lot closer to it than we were then. And we have a much better chance of getting there if we stay together instead of drifting apart.

African-Americans have made notable progress, swimming upstream in the professions, trades, sports and the lower and middle levels of commerce and industry.

Many are achieving equality and often ownership in the workplace, but, with a few distinguished exceptions like Colin Powell, not yet in managerial and boardroom top jobs for which many are now more than qualified.

Until they get there -- and they will -- they should keep swimming in the mainstream and not be tempted into the stagnant side pools and shallows of self-segregation.

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