

Hearing Voices

For SPHEX 9-24-2020

Last week and this hold important anniversary dates in American history – September 17 for the signing of the Constitution and September 25 for the First Congress's passing of the Amendments that became the Bill of Rights. Neither document solved the matters addressed in this paper, but each includes ideals that we seek to fully realize. I realize I am fortunate to live in this country, but that doesn't mean I think we are perfect.

This spring and summer I have been thinking a lot about the turmoil in our country, once again concerning race matters, equality and justice – triggered this time by cell-phone videos of killings of unarmed or already subdued Blacks. Probably you have, too.

Though I originally had other topics in mind for this presentation, I decided instead to talk about what was more on my mind, so bear with me as I think out loud and then please add your thoughts.

Many of us are wondering how we have gotten to this place yet again and how we might gain positive outcomes from it. How can it be that so much progress has been made and yet much remains that is wrong? I don't know how you are approaching the situation, but I'm trying to gauge the potential and likely endurance of the current reform movement within a certain historical context. In doing so I have been hearing voices from the past. Have you? Listening to the voices helps me understand present circumstances.

Caveats: In keeping with what seems the current preference I will refer to members of a certain group as Blacks, except when quoting someone. And I will focus on Blacks and Whites even though I know there are issues concerning several groups.

Some observers are thinking of our present happenings as the third of three efforts to reconstruct our polity and finally rid ourselves of the racism that has flourished since the introduction of slaveholding in our country. In that formulation the first reconstruction effort comprised the Civil War, the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth amendments and the brief federally enforced Reconstruction period following the War. The second comprised what we typically refer to as the Civil Rights Movement, including the 1954 and 1955 Brown school desegregation rulings, the 1963 March on Washington, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (justified this time under the Commerce clause of the Constitution), the 1965 twenty-fourth Amendment reiterating voting rights and specifically eliminating the poll tax, the 1968 Fair Housing Act, Freedom Summer of 1964, and the Selma March of 1965,

Finally, in this paradigm concerning reconstructions the third effort to reconstruct our polity to provide equality and justice for all has commenced in our present time, partly under the Black Lives Matter banner.

Next I will review a bit more detail about each of these three movements.

In the first Reconstruction the three Civil-War Amendments were to abolish slavery, to guarantee equal rights under the law and to guarantee the right to vote. Further, though it gets little attention, there actually was a Civil Rights Act of 1875, providing for equal

treatment in public accommodations, public transportation, public schools, theaters, churches and cemeteries, and prohibiting exclusion from jury service. Where might we be now if our nation had fully embraced and enforced those amendments and that law!!! But the 1875 law was never embraced as Reconstruction enforcement waned. As early as 1874 William Wells Brown, a noted Black abolitionist proponent, writer and historian, had already observed, "There is a feeling all over the country that the Negro has got about as much as he ought to have." Then in 1883 the Supreme Court of the US ruled the law's public accommodations section unconstitutional.

I know there are other interpretations, but as I understand it the immediate post-civil-war-reconstruction effort was largely abandoned following the election of 1876. That removal happened as President Rutherford B. Hayes removed enforcement by federal troops, and the nation tired of the effort. That facilitated the reestablishment of white supremacy through control of voting eligibility and government. Jim Crow laws and practices, lynchings in almost all states, establishment at least in the deep south of a system of slavery by another name. That largely prevailed until after World War 2.

Of course an important message I hear from that is the importance of not relaxing too soon once a corrective course of action has been undertaken.

In the second period the peaceful disobedience led by Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, John Lewis, and many others was effective in calling attention to problems. The rhetoric of King was compelling, especially his "Letter From The Birmingham Jail" (explaining to ministers why Negroes would not wait longer for equal rights to happen) and his "I

Have a Dream” speech (including a word picture of what a society practicing equality could be like). After the second period began with the school desegregation cases in the 1950’s, and years of great progress, much of the momentum was ground down by friction from such things as backlash against affirmative action, resegregation of public schools, continued segregation of housing, renewed voter suppression and some regressive court rulings.

A lesson from this era is that laws can be challenged and changed via peaceful resistance, but staying the course is still required.

The duration and outcome of the present reconstruction effort is yet to be determined. One thoughtful observer (David Brooks) recently said, “This moment in history is largely about race. It is about the transition from a certain kind of white dominated America to a diverse America and that some will do anything to stop it.” This statement reminds us that the situation we are experiencing is no longer as literally or figuratively so Black and White as it was in the 1960s.

So far in the present period we have seen the videos of unjustified killings of individuals by law officers, and of violence against peaceful protesters, having an effect similar to that of Bull Conner’s attack dogs, fire hoses, whips and police truncheons in the 1960s. And we are seeing persistent protests, with strong efforts directed toward removing statues seen as symbols celebrating white supremacy. At times during mainly peaceful protests, some of the protestors go out of bounds or some who are not a part of the protest take advantage of the situation to loot and burn. A statement James Baldwin made following a speech at a 1986 National Press Club luncheon provides a strong clue

as to why this may happen. In response to a question about why he had lived abroad for years, he said, “Things here had reached a point where I thought if someone called me nigger one more time, someone was going to die, and I didn’t much care which of us it would be.” *If one substitutes “another law officer kills an unarmed Black man” for “calls me nigger,” one gains perspective about how anger and despair over mistreatment can lead to desperate acts.*

Also in this time there are efforts in Congress to once again strengthen voting rights, and to classify lynching a federal crime. Isn’t it amazing that these are necessary this late in our history!?

Collectively we react with surprise each time racial equality concerns boil up, but throughout all those years there have been enough voices sending messages about injustices and calls for help and change that the only explanation for surprise must be that we were not listening. I will mention just a selected few of the messages. I’m sure you will think of many others.

There must have some particular reason that Lynchburg once had two institutions for Black use in sight of each other on 12th street named for Black poets - The Paul Laurence Dunbar High School and the Phillis Wheatley YWCA annex. Perhaps it was because poets had, or seized, the right to speak out against racism and for equality when others were unable to. Or maybe it was as a show of pride in the poets’ achievements and recognition. And just a few blocks from those institutions was Anne Spencer’s home, where many notables gathered. The well-regarded poet, Langston Hughes, whose

collected writings represent a life-long dialogue with our country about race matters, was one of the Spencers' guests.

Hughes and Dunbar may be the more widely known of these poets, but Wheatley, captured in Gambia, Africa, brought to Massachusetts on a ship named the Phillis, sold to the Wheatley family, was taught to read and write, wrote poetry and is thought to have been the first published African-American poet.

Having noted that there must be a reason for this concentration of poetry references in that one particular section of town, it takes only a small leap of imagination to conjure the voices to be heard from the namesakes of the school, the YWCA Annex, and from the Spencer home. In addition to Hughes, visitors included W. E. B. DuBois, Paul Robeson, Walter White and Thurgood Marshall. Plenty was being said for many years.

Was anybody listening when Phillis Wheatly (1753-1784) showed her intellectual potential by publishing poetry and other writings in the 1700s?

Was anybody listening when Paul Lawrence Dunbar (1872 – 1906), the son of parents who had been freed from slavery, wrote in the closing verse of his poem, "Sympathy".

the title line of which later was echoed in a book title by Maya Angelou?

"I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
 When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore, --
 When he beats his bars and would be free:
 It is not a carol of joy or glee,
 But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
 But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings ---
 I know why the caged bird sings!"

Or when he included these lines in "The Haunted Oak," about a falsely-accused man kidnapped from jail and lynched,?

"Pray, why are you so bare,
Oh, bough of the old oak tree,
And why, when I go through the shade you throw,
Runs a shudder over me.

...

I bent down to hear his sigh,
I shook with his gurgling moan,
And I trembled sore when they rode away,
And left him there alone.

...

I am burned with dread, I am dried and dead,
From the curse of a guiltless man."

(Even now, the Emmett Till anti-lynching bill, awaits action in the U. S. Senate. One hopes it isn't needed now to prevent actual lynchings, but as passed by the House it still would serve as a historical record and statement of principle.)

Or when he wrote "I, too, sing America"?

"I am the darker brother,
They send me into the kitchen
When company comes.
Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed ---
I, too, am America."

Was anybody listening when Langston Hughes {1902 - 1962 } provided a graphic description of the forced fake confession of a teenager, including these lines in his 1940s poem, "Third Degree"?

"Hit me! Jab me!
Make me say I did it. ...;

“Slug me! Beat me!
Scream jumps out
Like blowtorch.
Three kicks between the legs
That kills the kids
I’d make tomorrow.

....
When you throw
Cold water on me,
I’ll sign the
Paper ...”

Or
“What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore ---
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over –
like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?”

The raisin in the sun image later became the title of a famous play by Lorraine Hansberry about Black life in Chicago under the heels of Whites.

Or
Let America be America Again (1936)
‘Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.(America never was America to me.)
O, Yes
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath –
America will be

Or
In Chicago
They’ve got covenants
Restricting me ==
Hemmed in
On the South Side,
Can’t breathe free.
but the wind blows there.

*I reckon the wind
Must care.*

(Hughes spoke at two weekly assemblies at Lynchburg College in December 1946. A news account of his reading provided a brief profile about him but does not tell which of his works he presented.)

Was anybody listening when Lynchburg's Anne Spencer (1882-1965), the daughter of a formerly enslaved mother and an aristocratic father, wrote "White Things," which included these lines:

Most things are colorful things – the sky, earth, and sea
Black men are most men: but the white are free

....

They pyred a race of black, black men,
And burned them to ashes white; then
Laughing a young one claimed a skull.
For the skull of a black is white, not dull,
But a glistening awful thing;
Made it seems for this ghoul to swing
In the face of God with all his might.
And swear by the hell that sired him:
Man maker, Make white

If the famous guests at Anne Spencer's home had spoken their messages from there, would anyone have been listening? When Thurgood Marshall said he had never heard of delaying Constitutional rights before Negroes were involved? When Paul Robeson was forceful in pressing for civil and economic rights for Blacks and workers? When W. E. B. Dubois was a civil rights activist and one of the founders of the NAACP in 1909? When Walter White was leading and speaking for the NAACP for 25 years?

Of course it isn't only poets and other nationally famous people who raise their voices to meet important moments. Posing the question, "Was anybody listening," calls to mind a number of local voices.

In their histories of Lynchburg, Darrell Laurant and Jim Elson summarized some episodes which occurred in the 1969 – 71 – one of the periods of heightened tension in race relations in Lynchburg. In July and August, 1969. Strong protests and some disorder were mounted over the withdrawal of permission for LYNCAG's continued use of the vacant Marse T. Jones elementary school for a summer program. Because some council members were out of town, those available wanted to delay meeting about the matter, but respecting the insistence of Reverend Haywood Robinson that it would be perilous to wait and that they must meet right away and in the inner city, four City Councilmen went to an emergency meeting at Dunbar High School, attended by 400 – Black and White. Near the beginning of the meeting, Councilman Bill Vaughan, though earnest about listening and looking for a solution, asked – to the incredulity of many – "Why didn't you tell us what the problem really was?" But, in spite of that seemingly unaware opening, there was real listening that time – the city fixed up the building and restored use by the program.

Then in February, 1971, long-festered race concerns boiled up again when E. C. Glass principal William Porter declined to recognize National Black History Week at the school and made insensitive remarks about it. Some 70 students participated in a demonstration and were told to return to class or leave the school. Forty left, but of course that was not the end of the matter. M. W. 'Teedy' Thornhill, Rev. James Brooks, and other leaders

pressed for attention to the matter – “Not tomorrow, not next week, not when you get around to it, but tonight.” - from the School Board and Superintendent Fred Young, and eventually from City Council. There was some vandalism at Glass, at Dunbar and out in the city. That led to policemen working overtime to provide more presence for days.

At a March 9, 1971, City Council meeting, with race concerns still boiling in the community, Mayor Leighton Dodd read a five-page personal statement. He began by saying “Although everyone is talking about the schools, I can’t help but feel that they are not the real problem but are a symptom of a larger problem – that being the lack of understanding and trust between Blacks and Whites. No, the schools are not the problem, but they are the battleground.” Dodd continued, saying that he had been asking himself all the wrong questions: “Why do Black people have to demand so much? Why can’t they be satisfied with what many of us are trying to do?” Instead he tried to ask another one: Why doesn’t the Black community trust the white community? Then he provided some answers: local discrimination in jobs, bank loans, and housing. Coming from a bank officer these examples were particularly meaningful. He added examples of how few Blacks were employed in certain City departments. Then he said, “In the past ten years, we have gone outside the city on three occasions to hire a school superintendent. Yet right in our midst we were fortunate to have a man who was eminently qualified, Mr. Seay...” (That reference was to Clarence “Dick” Seay, long-time principal of Dunbar High School, and by then a member of City Council.) Leighton concluded with “Only by being totally honest with ourselves and others can we create mutual trust. This is what I have tried to begin here tonight.”

The Rev. Herman Ford, chairman of a delegation of the Black community concerned with equality of education, replied, "This is what we stayed awake many nights and hoped for ... that we could find in our city those whom we could trust and those who would trust us. I commend the God who made Mr. Dodd." For his work on race concerns, Reverend Ford had previously received a shotgun blast at his home. Following his remarks that night Mayor Dodd received a burning cross in his front yard, but overall communication in the city was opened a lot.

The message I take from these episodes is that local people addressing local problems, and careful listening make a difference.

As if we don't already have enough to think about, we have a presidential election in which race matters are in play. If a potentially calamitous post-presidential election period occurs as some are suggesting likely, it will heighten the tensions already existing. It has happened before and could happen again. When you think of a presidential election disputed after the votes are cast, which one comes to mind? The result of the 1824 election of John Quincy Adams over Andrew Jackson was not settled until February (by the House of Representatives). Adams was elected even though Jackson had more popular and originally more electoral votes – though not a majority in a four person race. As we all recall the 2000 election was settled (by the Supreme Court) weeks after the voting. But the voice I hear from the past on this is from the election of 1876 because how that election turned out had such consequential results for civil rights.

As told by Roy Morris, Jr in Fraud of the Century, voter turnout was heavy – over 80% of those eligible to vote did so (in South Carolina 101% voted). Samuel Tilden received 50.9% of the popular vote but with electoral votes of four states {three in the deep South) in dispute, was one vote short on electoral votes. Rutherford Hayes got 47.9% of the popular vote but eventually was elected 185 to 184 in electoral votes. That outcome resulted after all the disputed votes were awarded to Hayes by the special fifteen-man electoral commission established via a compromise between the House and the Senate. (That compromise commission was the way forward crafted to resolve the Senate's claim, that as the body constitutionally tasked with opening electoral ballots it should decide which ballots to accept, and the House's claim that it was the body tasked with electing the president in case of a hung electoral college.) The decision was finally reached barely in time for inauguration day four months after citizens had voted. The four states were South Carolina (7), Florida (4), Louisiana (8), Oregon (3). It is believed that the votes necessary to put Hayes on top were garnered by a promise from Hayes to recall federal troops from enforcing Reconstruction era requirements in the South. Might we be in for another lengthy wait for results from a presidential election if our coming election is a close one in either popular or electoral votes? As we have an incumbent saying that if he loses that will be evidence of fraud, and refusing to acknowledge that he must leave office if he loses, that seems possible.. And with protestors – some armed - on both sides already in the streets over other matters, it is hard to imagine that all would wait calmly for months for an outcome. Our Constitution's disproportionate allocation of representation in the Senate, in the Electoral College, and in the House if an election ends up there, always leaves the door open for an skewed

presidential election outcome and a troubled majority of voters. The election of 1876 provides a warning that a messy outcome could happen, but also evidence that our country can survive even if it does.

Will positive outcomes be gotten from this latest rights and justice effort? I will call attention to two particular items and invite consideration of them in our discussion time. *The call from some for financial reparations is one of the more controversial proposals currently on the table.* (Synonyms for reparations – satisfaction, amends, compensation, redress, restitution, atonement, etc. - suggest some of the nuances that could be involved.) The argument for reparations goes something like this: Even though there is no amount of money and no policy that could ever make up for the individual and group physical, emotional, and economic damages inflicted by hundreds of years of enslavement, ninety years of Jim Crow and still more years of such things as de facto segregation - with their effect on overall quality of life, wealth building, and quality of schools. The resulting collective loss of opportunity for many has continued through generations with effects still seen today. A counter argument asks, would reparations actually help our situation or create a destructive backlash driven by a sense that “I didn’t do anything to these people so why do I owe them for something someone else did to their ancestors so long ago?” When Martin Luther King spoke of reparations nearly sixty years ago, he said the nation had defaulted on the promise in our founding documents of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all. And he said, in The March on Washington, that Negroes had come to cash the check that had been marked defaulted for lack of funds. He saw

equality in economic opportunity and payment of just wages as key needs. He also said, “It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment and the determination of the Negro.” Abolitionist William Wells Brown, quoted above on another matter, said much earlier, “All I demand for the black man is, that the white people shall take their heels off his neck, and let him have a chance to rise by his own efforts.”

Of course other ways of making amends are important, too. As a facilitator for one of the groups in the 2007-08 Lynchburg Dialogue on Race I saw, when it was time for the group to propose actions to take, that the first item to come up was a desire for Lynchburg to openly admit its racist past and to tell the story of that at significant places. For example, by placing at the site of the former Riverside Park pool a complete telling of what had occurred there. Of course we have ongoing debates about Confederate statues, with the timing of creation of most of them suggesting that their primary purpose was reestablishing White supremacy. Kim Payne covered that ground for us in his paper on statue controversies. Colleges and universities are among the institutions that are making efforts to acknowledge their past faults concerning enslavement and discrimination.

As we have seen, what form reforming of policing should take is another highly controversial issue to be dealt with. An argument for reform cites both systemic racism in some departments and rogue racist officers as evidence of the need. From some this has led to calls for better screening training and oversight of officers to redefine policing;

from others to more extreme calls for defunding or even disbanding police departments. A counter argument goes something like this: Policing is inherently dangerous work. The individual police officers I have known have been decent persons, trying to do their assigned duty, who deserve fair treatment from those they protect, and even well-intentioned officers can make tragic mistakes.

Personally, though I see fair policing as a benefit for all of us, but it turns my stomach when rogues, or members of systemically racist departments, commit wanton acts – even murder - against individuals or groups. And that revulsion is magnified if they are not held accountable by their own ranks and through the legal system.

What can be the cause of an officer kneeling on the neck of an already-handcuffed person until dead, or shooting him after he has been subdued? When I was twelve years old, I witnessed something that comes very clearly to mind every time a new report of unnecessary violence by police officers against Blacks comes to light. A schoolmate had been appointed to the role of assisting safe crossings by students at a busy arterial street. He wore an over-the-shoulder and across-the-chest harness and a badge signifying his position. As I arrived there one day to cross, two Black school-age boys were coming up the sidewalk. They must have been playing hooky because there was no school in that vicinity that they would have been allowed to attend at that time. The student crossing guard said, “watch this,” walked toward the boys, and bumped and bullied them off of the sidewalk. I was shocked and couldn’t understand that unprovoked behavior. To this day - seventy-five years later – I am still trying to understand such actions. Did his

position give him some sense of authority to do as he pleased? Had he developed some kind of racial animus that was triggered by the simple presence of the boys? Or what? As hard as it has been to change laws, physical structures and signs signifying White supremacy, it has been even harder to change structures held in hearts and minds.

In summary: This somewhat idiosyncratic contemplation has considered efforts at reconstruction of the American polity and has seen great advances, backsliding and needs to continue on. The great progress of Civil War era reforms ended legal enslavement, but left a legacy of racism and segregation in place. The great progress of 1950s – 1960s Civil Rights movement ended legal segregation, but left de facto segregation and discrimination, still based on (often less overt) racism, in place. The duration and outcome of the present reform movement are yet to be determined.

When asked recently, “What is the next step?” a spokeswoman for a protesting group said “To identify actionable items and have a lasting impact.” That sounds like the right goal – maybe we should all adopt it.

APPENDICES

A. Langston Hughes and Anne Spencer corresponded over a period of years and his collected works include “On Anne Spencer’s table There lies an unsharpened pencil - as though she has left unwritten Many things she knows to write.” That observation stands alone in an anthology of Hughes’s writings. In my imagination it was a note to himself, jotted down at the moment the scene caught his eye, that he intended to amplify into a more complete reflection about Spencer. But how might he have developed it? Did he think Spencer’s voice had been muted by the culture in which she lived, or that she had self censored herself? Or simply that she could have written and published so much more?

B. Among the voices I have been hearing is that of a friend, Joe Nelson, in a set of essays in 1963-64 at what is now the University of Lynchburg. The then Lynchburg College had been founded as Virginia Christian College in 1903 under a charter for Whites only. Maybe state policy required “Whites only” in 1903, and certainly the prevailing mores of Lynchburg did, but by the 1960’s different winds were blowing and overcoming segregation was a goal. With just a few changes to broaden its scope, his statement would apply well to our situation today. He began the first essay with an example of white privilege and closed it with, “The problems from the history of our nation and from the degrading Jim Crow system need attention; that is, remedies in good faith. The system deserves to be junked.” The concluding essay ended with, “The haggling, hemming and hawing, bargaining and resisting have gone on far too long. I believe the evidence is now clear that integration would be good for the nation. Part by part, I hold that it is good for business, good for arts, good for sports, good for religious groups, good for education, good for labor, good for government, and good for our immortal souls.” (The following year when Carey Brewer came as the new president with an understanding with the Board that he did not intend to be president of a segregated college, the College’s door of opportunity was opened to a moral width by removal of the restriction to Whites.)

C. “racism The belief that some races are inherently superior (physically, intellectually, or culturally) to others, and therefore have a right to dominate them. In the United States, racism, particularly by whites against blacks has created profound racial tension and conflict in virtually all aspects of American society. Until the breakthrough achieved by the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s, white domination over blacks was officially institutionalized and supported in all levels of government, by denying blacks their CIVIL RIGHTS and opportunities to participate in political, economic, and social communities.” *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* by E.D. Hirsch, Joseph F. Kett, James Trefil, Houghto Mifflin Company, Boston, 1988. This entry from the section on American politics.

Does that entry, with the implication that racism was solved in the 1950s and 1960s, look as accurate now as it might have when published in 1988? Then, the results of the Civil Rights Movement in areas such as school integration looked to be still moving ahead. As it turned out 1988 was the peak year for school integration as measured by the percent of Black students attending majority White schools (43.5%). By 2011 that figure was back to 23.2%. By now Latino students are the most segregated group in U S schools.

Thomas C. Tiller

REMARKS FOR THE CITY COUNCIL MEETING
TUESDAY, MARCH 9, 1971

BY
LEIGHTON B. DODD

In the past few weeks, I have heard from many different sources - newspapers, radios, T.V., parents, and students - about problems relating to our schools. Although everyone is talking about the schools, I can't help but feel that they are not the real problem but are just a symptom of a much larger problem -- that being the lack of understanding and trust between both blacks and whites. No, the schools are not the problem, but they are the battleground. Isn't it sad when we reach the point where we use our children to fight our battles because our prejudices won't let us do it?

All of us are aware of the crisis involving the schools and the black and white community. Like many of you, I have tried to find some perspective that would help; but I just end up with frustration and a sense that the problem is so complex, it seems hopeless. I have spent the last few weeks thinking, talking, and probing, trying to find some solution. I still don't have the solution; but I believe for the first time, I am beginning to recognize the problem.

I began recently to focus away from the problem on the larger scale and tried to listen and understand the problem as it related to me as a person. What I am about to say are the opinions and feelings of just one person - MYSELF. It is really an effort to try to share with you what I have felt these past weeks. It

began when I realized that I've been asking myself all the wrong questions -:

- (1) Why do black people have to demand so much?
- (2) Why can't they be satisfied with what many of us are trying to do?
- (3) Is a militant core of adults behind all the trouble?

Instead of all these usual questions, which most white people ask, I tried to ask another one.

- (1) Why is there no trust?
- (2) Why doesn't the black community trust the white community?

This is the real question. Only when we recognize this can we try to answer without being so defensive. I think I have finally answered, in my own mind at least, this question, -- Why is there no trust?

The black community has been talking about equal-job opportunities for years. I have listened to the words, but I have never really heard. For example: I work for one of the most open and aggressive banking organizations you could hope to find anywhere. We have hired a number of blacks; but we still don't have a single black officer, nor do any of the other four banks in Lynchburg. You can say, well you are an officer of that bank, why don't you do something about it. That's simple, I just never really considered it my problem.

We don't have to look far for other examples. Our local newspapers and T.V. station are always telling us what is wrong - and what is right - with our community, frequently from different points of view; but it's interesting to note that neither of them has a black reporter nor a black announcer.

I use these examples only because they seem to be so visible. I am not saying this is discrimination, but the results are the same. Let me give you another example. Although I have heard each Councilman, myself included, sit up here and say there is no discrimination in hiring in city government, however, after all of these years, there is still no black in City Hall and only one black city fireman out of a total of ninety-six. Maybe this is not discrimination; but if I were a black, in all honesty, I would have my doubts.

We, as whites, always say that when a qualified black man applies, he is given an equal chance. That is not enough, because of the lack of trust, frequently, the black man does not apply; and sometimes, even if he does, in my opinion, always he isn't/given an equal chance. This is why there is no trust! But more important, I feel we have been so insensitive to the local black talent that we could, with imagination, put to use.

In the past ten years, we have gone out of the city on three different occasions to hire a school superintendent. Yet, right in our midst, we were fortunate to have a man who was eminently qualified. Mr. Seay, who is now serving on City Council. I might have understood his saying no so he could stay closer to the students as a principal; but we didn't even ask; and that oversight, that lack of sensitivity to available talent helps one answer the question: Why is there no trust?

eminently

There are other reasons why the black community does not trust the white community. A retired black gentleman, who is a customer of the bank I work for, has been trying for about eighteen months to buy a brick house in a good neighborhood. He has the money to pay for it, yet for some reason, he hasn't been able to find a house. It is hard for me to believe that if this man were white that he wouldn't have been able to find a house by now.

What I am saying in a very personal way is that I have assumed that progress between blacks and whites was someone else's problem. I have not taken advantage of the opportunities really within my reach to help.

I think that we, as whites, must somehow believe that the black man doesn't trust us because for years we have been able to afford to be insensitive to his problems; if we are to have healing and reconciliation, we can no longer afford to be insensitive. We must set aside our defensiveness and take constructive steps to create a climate that will give blacks and whites reason to trust each other.

I do not mean my remarks here tonight to be an indictment except for one person - me. What I have been saying tonight is a result of much thought and self-analysis. What I have tried to express to you are my feelings on what I consider a very important problem.

Maybe if each of us, as individuals, as citizens, and yes, even as Councilmen would examine our feelings -- our feelings, not our thoughts -- toward each other, I'm convinced we would recognize the many opportunities that have passed us by to improve ourselves - and our city. I am convinced we could change the racial climate within our city to one of mutual trust.

Perhaps this is too vague - too general - there is certainly no clear program; and I have not dwelled at all on the other side of the coin, the lack of trust in us as whites of the black community - afraid if we give in on one demand, we shall be overrun with demands - fear of trusting your leadership while asking you to trust ours. Certainly this is a key factor in our problem, but tonight I have tried to say that I understand your lack of trust in us, - and will as an individual and as a Councilman, try to restore that trust.

It is a difficult road. We have much to undo and much to redo; but I am optimistic about our future, and I hope you can accept these stumbling expressions as simply a feeling.

I heard Flip Wilson say the other night when talking to a white guest on his show something that is very apropos for us here tonight.

I quote - "We may have come over on different ships, but we are all in the same boat now." End quote. Since we are all in the same boat, if we sink, we all sink -- I don't intend to sink. No one needs to sink.

Only by being totally honest with each other and with ourselves can we create mutual trust. This is what I have tried to begin here tonight.