

18-42

Techniques for Achieving Inter- racial Cooperation

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Reprinted from the
HARVARD EDUCATIONAL REVIEW
January, 1945

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IN ADDRESSING OUR thoughts to this subject, I think it is incumbent upon each of us at the outset to indulge in a period of rigid self-analysis and of a coldly objective examination of those factors which force us to think of the topic as a peculiar problem. Such examination will disclose that the need for community effort toward achievement of interracial cooperation has been made apparent by the suspicions, fears, animosities, and conflicts which are inherent in a bi-racial society such as we in our nation have created. These attitudes in turn are strengthening and deepening the dangerous expressions of racial insularity which created them, setting in motion a vicious cycle of aggression and counter-aggression which today represents the greatest single threat to the democratic ideal.

It is this racial insularity which makes the usually well-defined task of community organization seem to assume baffling proportions when directed to interracial activities. Instead of seeing citizens who are to be drawn together in a common experience, we are conditioned to see two

opposing forces, separated by walls of tradition and moats of animosities, whose height and depth are measured in almost exact proportion to our personal knowledge and understanding of, and sympathy with, the problem.

Segregation, and its inevitable concomitant, discrimination, have created much bitterness and resentment in the hearts of many Negro Americans, but admission of that fact does not imply that Negroes are unwilling to join hands in working toward the alleviation and ultimate elimination of these twin evils. The continued existence of segregation and discrimination, even in limited degrees, leads inevitably to the adoption of a Master race philosophy by an increasing number of white citizens, who accept the easier course of conforming to tradition in preference to risking the dangers of reprisal by challenging these practices. But this fact does not indicate that all white citizens permit such fears to becloud their judgment and sense of decency.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the pattern of physical separation creates a state that might be termed psychological segregation, through operation of which, each group ascribes to the other different aims and ideals, different thought patterns, different motives and objectives; living as it were, in separate and distinct thought worlds as well as in segregated physical environments. It is this almost universal condition of misunderstanding, suspicion, and distrust that presents real but soluble problems as we entertain plans for

interracial action in our respective communities.

And yet, the task of achieving interracial cooperation, of itself, holds no great mystery. It is the old, old problem of human relations, to which has been added the sharper spice which skin-color provides as an increased stimulus. White pepper in one's soup will provide plenty of heat, but the same amount of black pepper would be unbearable to the average palate because of the added visual stimulus. The Negro's "high visibility," as it appears to the white community, symbolizes the many superstitions associated with pigmentation by American society, and makes the problem appear in such magnitude that rationality often is excluded. Thus, there are the tendencies in community organization to enter upon this phase of work skeptically, fearfully, or hopelessly, because of our proneness to magnify its difficulties.

It seems to me that our first consideration in discussing method is that of starting from the firm foundation upon which is based all deeper, human relationships. To achieve any kind of mutual understanding and regard, people must share experiences which permit the interplay of character and personality. They must share a common objective; work together toward its achievement; experience the chagrin of frustration and the thrill of accomplishment—together. Football teams, business firms, and armies are built upon this principle. One teammate, partner or comrade-in-arms may have little in common with the other, but the mutually desired objective of the game, the deal,

or the fight will cement them into a hard-hitting combination.

In the white world, the Negro-phobe who opposes any form of interracial contact that is on a plane of dignity, and the person whose insecurity is such that he adopts the "me too" attitude to escape the reprisals of his more intolerant race brothers, are known factors. These we learn to discount or eliminate from immediate consideration as we plan our organization. Whether or not we devote sufficient time to the identification and selection of the positive factors—the forthright element of the white community and the socially intelligent member of the Negro community—is that which will determine the effectiveness of our efforts.

Granting that a solution to the problem of racial antipathies in America will not be found by the white population alone, and cannot be evolved by the Negro population, working in a vacuum, it is our task to discover how interracial movements on the local community level may prove effective, and by what means time-proven rules governing community organization may be applied to this area of activity.

As implied earlier, the task of forming a functioning organization has been accomplished on all levels of life by building around an objective, and by applying methods which provide a common interest. The greater the emotional blockings and the higher the intellectual barriers, the narrower is the field of common or mutual interest. How well we are able to evaluate the emotional factors, again, is a test of our own objectivity. For instance, the Jewish schol-

ar and the Gentile scientist, whose one major barrier may be religious prejudice, have much more in common than the Scotch-Irish industrialist and the Scotch-Irish labor leader, between whom lies a broad abyss of class, caste, economic conflict, and all their evil by-products. The latter two can be brought together, as they are in increasing measure today, by a concern over their mutual security against each other in a peace-time economy, and in mutual protection against common enemies in a war economy. It would be foolhardy indeed to call them together for Sunday afternoon recitals as a measure of achieving mutual appreciation, or to embark upon a coöperative program intended to provide a cure-all for society's ills.

The area of common interest between the Negro and white communities seems to many persons in both groups to be severely narrowed. The field of interest is not at all restricted; but the choice of workers in that field is seriously limited because of the existing pattern which has left its livid imprint upon the emotional lives of otherwise decent, upstanding, neighborly people. Most of those who are available are not themselves entirely free of restraint, making it more necessary that tact and patience be employed in service that brings gratification without extending them beyond their limits. I believe all of us have known the white associate who believes in employment opportunities for Negro workers, but who will balk at the thought of removing restrictive barriers in restaurant, theatre, or residential areas. I am sure we all have known the Negro who has a practical

outlook on the race situation, but who will decline to waste time in pointless discussions with white persons whose sincerity he questions.

In such situations, too frequently there has been the tendency to adopt the "all or nothing attitude." By charging the white person with insincerity because he holds some reservation, and the Negro with fear, inferiority, or antagonism because he is impatient with vacillation, both are discarded and we have lost values which cannot be measured by failing to find that practical, active program which would have afforded both an opportunity to re-appraise themselves and their attitudes.

In the immediate past, the term "interracial committee" has carried a connotation of cloying paternalism and purposeless posturing. Yet, we cannot question the sincerity of purpose or quarrel with the motives which have inspired many such movements deserving this description. Earnest people striving courageously against the artificial confines of our bi-racial social system were themselves reduced to a state of blindness, so that they stumbled through a tortuous maze of Dunbar poems and Burleigh-arranged spirituals, and waded through oceans of tepid tea, with the hope of reaching an objective which might have been found at the end of a direct, well-travelled path. Here we found completely discarded every common-sense approach to a problem. Instead of a studied plan, there was aimless drifting; instead of living Life, members of both groups entered upon a stage, played a brief, ill-fitting role, and made a grateful exit; instead of naturalness and productive effort,

there were pretense and empty idealism.

Or, the other alternative which too frequently has occurred has been the urge to employ the organization as an omnibus, a cure-all; urging it to rush blindly into all conflict areas. The obvious result is that of irritating both individuals as their fears and suspicions are sharpened by providing too many potential and real areas of conflict. Both are likely to carry away from such an experience more deeply fixed emotional scars than were present at the outset.

On the other hand, our personal knowledge of Mr. White (let us call the one) made us know him as one who believed firmly that skilled Negro workers were entitled to work in any place where such skills were employed—and would fight a buzzsaw in registering his conviction. Mr. Brown, among his many pet theories, believed in this same program with all his heart. Here was a valuable combination which shared its common interest in high enthusiasm and rare teamwork. Our mistake occurred when we urged the interracial group to take up the cudgel against the restaurant which refused service to a Negro.

The situations described are purely hypothetical, but most of us can recall their parallels somewhere in our past experiences. I present it to illustrate my point that our planned interracial program must have its specific objective, which must of necessity be the common denominator of the interests of the people involved; and that the urge to thrust upon the group the burden of all our social

ills is bound to end in disaster because we deliberately intrude upon what we know to be forbidden ground. Impatience, thoughtlessness, and lack of skill have caused many such difficulties.

In both instances, the common factors appear to have been, first, the failure to measure carefully the capacity of the composite membership, and secondly, the need for shaping and defining a program that would tax that capacity to the point of challenge, and no further.

The natural question to arise would be, "How then may we utilize the talents and energies of both the progressive and the more hesitant people in programs having such limitations?" My answer would be, by simply following the rules of community organization which apply outside the interracial sphere; by departmentalizing the community problems to which you wish to give attention, and mobilizing Negroes and Whites on the basis of their social stature. Housing enthusiasts, white and colored, share that particular passion even though having violent disagreements in other areas of thought. Anti-segregationists, regardless of color, can be of tremendous value when directed toward certain flagrant conditions; yet they could completely block the first move for local housing developments by the untimeliness of their crusade, if drawn into the planning stage of such a community enterprise. Direct actionists, however commendable their purpose, can ruin irreparably the carefully laid plans of arbitrators. Conciliators, on the other hand, usually send the blood pressure of actionists to the bursting point by

their cautious, fearful, delaying tactics.

In the national scene three splendid examples of interracial action are provided to accommodate the advocates of the several types of control and method just outlined. A great many whites are bewildered and misled by what appears to be needless duplication and waste of effort; and far too many Negroes, consciously or unconsciously, create minor areas of conflict by insisting that each assume the role of the other. I refer to the National Urban League, the NAACP, and the National Negro Congress.

The League, with its objective, scientific approach attracts the socially-minded elements of both races who see an ultimate solution of racial problems in the creation of enlightened self-interest, and through the universal application of socio-economic remedies. The NAACP appeals to the more militant, equalitarian point of view, and to champions of civil liberties. These, too, pursue a course of enlightened self-interest, seeing the abrogation of civil rights affecting one group as a constant threat to themselves through other groups. The Negro Congress, attracting popular front and direct action advocates, provides an outlet for the less restrained, more impatient, mass pressure adherents. Although the ultimate objective of each is exactly the same, membership is drawn from the elements of both racial groups, to whom the organization represents a medium of expression for their interests, associations, and methods. Each has its particular job to do in the accomplishment of the whole task, and no conflict between the three

could or should occur as long as each holds to its course. So, on the local level can such departmentalization be achieved.

I have said that the job of achieving interracial coöperation contains no great mysteries; that it is the old problem of attaining good human relationships. It is my conviction that the basic principles guiding the formation of community organization and group-work activities apply in every respect to this area of operation—that is, if they are permitted to apply. The conscious or unconscious urge to surround the task with a cloak of mystery is that which has caused many failures. Naturalness in attempting interracial work too frequently is tampered with by those wiser persons who presume to know all about the so-called "race problem"; who create new rules with which to cope with their particular concept of this phenomenon of industrial civilization; and who prevent the operation of techniques which group-work experience has proven to be effective.

I believe that there are certain fundamental landmarks which apply to the area of interracial action with even greater emphasis than is true in community organization generally:

1. *We must be purposeful.* I am convinced that more harm than good has been done by the traditional "interracial committee" to which I have made reference—perhaps too facetiously. Here we usually discovered neither purpose nor goal, and it was impossible for anyone to penetrate the veneer of frigid formality and aloofness which inhibited

most members of the group. People do not become acquainted in such an atmosphere; rather, they are inclined to become further confused by the strangeness which artificiality has imposed upon each. Purposefulness presents an objective. Interest in the objective induces people to lose themselves and their self-consciousness in the common task.

2. *We must be sincere.* An organizer who is not possessed by a conviction will not be able effectively to overcome the suspicions which have been acquired in current racial attitudes. Conviction, of necessity, requires unassailable knowledge of the facts in the situation.
3. *We must be practical.* In every group there will be the advocates of an all-out crusade; and there will be those whose fears will cause them to shrink from any direct action. Calm judgment is required to maintain an even balance and to steer a practical course between these conflicting urges.
4. *We must be scientific.* I mean, by this, an adherence to basic principles of community organization, with application of the wealth of knowledge amassed by social-scientists in the realm of human behavior. We must keep in our consciousness—in facing any situation—that we are dealing with human beings and human superstitions. Beware of him who would forsake science for rule-of-thumb methods.

In considering the question of or-

ganizing procedure, I am inclined to favor the selection of a general objective as the first step, with personnel mobilized around the objective, in the second step. For the reason that emotional elements are more compelling in the interracial area than generally applies to other organizational ventures, it would appear that the hazards are minimized when prospective recruits are made aware of services which will be exacted of them. Obviously, the efficacy of the attraction will depend upon the nature of the objective. Is there purposefulness there? Will the program assume the formlessness of the old "cultural appreciation" effort? Will it propose to attack the entire area of racial restriction, exclusion, and conflict? Shall it be a temporary gesture for expediency's sake, which shall employ words only as tools to achieve good will, and to avert open conflict in the community? Or, shall it become a consistent and clearly-defined approach to community discipline, through utilization of the constructive forces, whose aid will be required to remove or minimize the causes of tension? Here again, as in the realm of general community organization, the definition of a clear-cut program, directed toward a specific goal, will eliminate much doubt, hesitation, and confusion in attracting recruits.

But what will be the committee's function. In other words, how specific may the organizers be in predetermining the committee's scope? The answer to the question will be found in programs operating in our communities at the moment, even though they may not be interracial in character. For example, you and I

see the need for attention of a citizens' group to a particular, local situation. It may be some defection in the public school system; or it may be a weakness in local political administration. We organize a committee and attract to that committee the individuals who would have a like interest in the problem. The challenge is there—and a committee is mobilized around the challenge and the job to be done. It isn't likely, however, that we will attempt to employ the organization to remedy all the evils existing in our community, because our judgment makes us realize that the wider the scope of responsibility we dare assume, the fewer will be the people who will see eye-to-eye with us on the several issues involved, and the weaker our organization is likely to be. In race-relations, as in other problem areas, the "omnibus" type of organization has little chance to achieve real success.

The "all-or-nothing" advocates, however, will object to this proposal by saying that discrimination in the use of public facilities is a symbol of the whole problem, and exclusion of these areas of study and work would be a retreat before the forces of reaction. Not at all! There is nothing to prevent the formation of a second group whose avowed function would be to remove these restrictive barriers. To such a group, obviously, would be attracted individuals whose interests lie in that direction, and being fearless and like-minded on the issues involved, presumably could function with a minimum of friction and a maximum of effectiveness. It is entirely conceivable that a given community might well support sev-

eral interracial committees, each functioning in a specific field of interest, each attracting to its membership individuals who find in the committee objectives outlets for their primary interests. The important thing, here, is that there be close coördination of the work of the several committees. After all, is not this the philosophy of organization in the professions of social work—of medicine—of education? Have we not seen the need for specialization in every service intended to meet the needs of human beings?

In the city of Newark, New Jersey, such a program of specialization is working to excellent advantage, in the well-coördinated activities of three citizens' groups, whose programs supplement the work of the Urban League, the Congress of Industrial Organization, the Conference of Christians and Jews, two politically-created bodies—the N. J. Welfare Commission and the N. J. Goodwill Commission and others. The oldest of these three groups is the Newark Interracial Council, which after several years of operation as an "omnibus" type of organization decided to concentrate upon the task of securing hospital facilities for Negro professionals. During those early years, it had swayed from project to project experiencing high membership turnover in the process and losing prestige in the larger community. For the past six years, it has given itself almost exclusively to this specific task, attracting to its membership white and colored citizens who felt that the exclusion of Negro doctors, nurses, and trainees from local hospitals was affecting the future of

the entire community. In the latter process, it has won an enviable reputation for courage and consistency. Only recently has it won its first victories, with the admission of Negro staff physicians to one hospital, a nurse-trainee to another, and staff nurses to three institutions. Meantime, a spirit of kinship among its members have been welded, and racial identities have been forgotten.

But we needed reform in our public-school system, in which there had never been more than eleven Negro teachers in a community of nearly 500,000 souls, 10% of whom are Negro. We considered it unwise to swamp the Interracial Council with a task of this magnitude in view of its current commitments. The community was combed for individuals whose primary interest was Education but whose racial views were liberal. Our immediate objective was that public-school teachers now in the system be exposed to a program of interracial and intercultural training, to minimize the dangers of racism and intolerance appearing in the schools. Italians, Catholics, Jews, Protestant, Anglo-Saxons, and Negroes joined hands to promote the major plan and deliberate upon the secondary plan for the integration of Negro teachers.

This committee has achieved its first goal by enrolling twenty-five public-school teachers in the first course on Intercultural Education ever offered by our Teachers College. We have presented to the Board of Education, which has approved them in principle, a list of recommendations including in-service training courses for all teachers; review and elimination of unsatisfactory text-

books; preparation and use of a syllabus on intercultural relationships for classroom use, and an increase in the number of Negro teachers, particularly on the secondary level and in guidance and counselling. The recent addition to the Board of Education of its first Negro member has given us a strong, influential ally that promises well for our plans.

As a wave of race-rioting descended upon the country, another challenge was accepted. Although there has been no evidence of subversive activity in our community, points of friction are noticeable where Negro and Italian youth were in proximity. Our daily press is fairer than average; our Negro press is militant as the average; and our police force as tough as the average. An organization accepting responsibility for easing of these tensions must be calm and objective, broadly representative of the leadership of groups most likely to be involved in local clashes, and possessing sufficient influence or prestige that its findings and recommendations would be heard.

First we listed the civic, social, labor, nationality, and racial groups whose influences would be needed at some stage in our plan. Then we centered upon individuals who possessed liberal views and who fitted into these several groups. Next by applying the test of our program outline, we eliminated those who could not stand the pressure. When the survivors were invited, they responded almost to the last man.

Today a group of over a hundred people, not more than a dozen of whom are identified with the two groups previously mentioned, are

formed into five active sub-committees and an executive committee. Already they have launched educational programs in industrial plants, reaching labor, supervision, and management alike. Another group has had the temerity to discuss news-angling methods with representatives of the Negro press, as well as with the daily and the language press. A third group is planning its way carefully for an approach to police officials on the training of policemen in attitudes and treatment of minorities; while still another is joining forces with group work and leisure-time programs for teen-age youth who have been at the center of most minor clashes. In these sub-committees have been channelled committee members according to their primary interests and social stature.

One other technique has been employed which I believe deserves mention. From a nucleus of a few all-out liberals have been chosen six whose time and interest are such that they have been assigned to spark each committee. Chairman and secretary were selected on the basis of interest and prestige—the spark plug on the basis of interest and time to devote to the work, plus possession of sufficient tact that will always assure recognition of and subordination to the committee chairman.

Our most recent step has been to form a Coördinating Council whose membership is composed of two elected delegates from each of these three citizens' groups and from eleven other organizations whose programs relate to some phase of intercultural relationships. This Council is a planning, rather than functional body, which

acts as clearing house, referral center, and coördinating agency for its member constituency. Thus, all danger of overlapping, duplication, or competitive waste has been minimized, and the means for instantaneous mobilization of all the liberal forces in the community have been provided for any emergency.

Just a brief moment for consideration of local committee objectives. Each successful interracial effort has as its ultimate aim the accomplishment of the following general results:

1. Exposure to each other of people of both groups, as a means to mutual understanding and respect, and as the one certain method of eliminating racial insularity;
2. Initiation of joint and considered effort toward remedying local conditions which are the sources of suspicion, resentment, and conflict; and
3. Provision of a medium for shaping an informed and positive public opinion, to replace the misconceptions and fears now prevailing.

Among these can be discovered innumerable challenges stemming from specific problems which need remedial treatment. In a group such as this, no argument is needed to emphasize the fact that racial tensions observable today are the surface symptoms of underlying social and economic dislocations. It may require some discussion to convince a few that the treatment indicated by present symptoms must be more than the counter-irritant of lecture or reprimand, more than the sedative of edi-

torial sentimentality. The social illness which almost has reached a chronic stage needs drastic and consistent medication. This is to say that a program that will be meaningful must recognize one or more of the obvious causes for dissatisfaction in the Negro community, as well as those that are responsible for much of the guilt feeling existing in the white community—the two representing the powder and the spark!

Employment discrimination is the greatest, single challenge, followed closely by the universal picture of poor housing. Any clear-sighted, fair-minded citizen could enlist in either cause without losing face or being charged with advocating that fearful though undefinable thing — social equality. Increased health and recreational facilities and revised and adjusted systems of public-school education are restoring confidence and self-esteem in the white and colored citizens of many progressive American cities; but many more show serious need for application of corrective measures. Interpretations and protests directed to newspaper editors on the biased slanting of racial news, and to police officials on the almost universal prevalence of police brutality in minority group areas, can remove many of the most potent irritants in

the average city or town. These are just some of the basic issues in the local scene, and the committee's stature will be measured by the intelligence, the consistency, the diligence, and the dignity with which it tackles any one or combination of these tension-producing factors in the community.

Members of the social-work profession rank high on the list of the Nation's realists. It is going to require the leadership of realists to bring order out of our most confusing and contradictory domestic problem. As realists, we have been aware of the scientific fact that racism is a superstition which has been permitted to weaken our democratic structure. As realists, we must marshal scientific fact to our aid, in order that we may fulfill our obligation to the society we serve. As realists, we know that sentimentality is a poor substitute for progressive action; that sympathy alone cannot serve in the stead of understanding aid; and that paternalism can never supply man's constant demand for justice and fair dealing. Let us not permit emotionalism to blind us to our responsibility; tradition to distort our perspective of the basic issues involved in this problem; nor superstition to impede us in the pursuit of our task.