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Comment

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COMMENT

GEORGE W. BROOKS*

First, I'm struck with the fact that the objectives of the Civil Rights Movement are assumed here to be so limited. Mr. Hill says that the Movement is not a thing in and for itself—rather, it is to be the occasion and the drive for major social change. That may be the case, but there is no evidence of it in these papers. The assumption made throughout is that the Negro has looked at the American establishment, found it good and “wants in.” There is no hint of revolution.

This makes the prospect of settlement rather bright. No really sweeping change in society is being asked—we are merely being asked for a different distribution of the existing supply of goods and services. The issues revolve around *how* we do this. Even here, there doesn't seem to be any really significant dispute except around suggestions like Dean Ferguson's that we should somehow unscramble the discriminatory omelet to find those elements which affect Negroes. This suggests certain practical difficulties to the authors but apparently no more than this. The main point is that all the papers assume that Negroes have not been concerned with making this a better world to live in, but only about making it a better world for Negroes to live in. This agreement about goals gives a good deal of unity to the papers.

Henry Spitz' paper cautiously picks its way through a couple of decades of attempting to discover the problems in the enforcement field. Neither in his paper nor any of the others is there a single criticism of what the Commission has done. But there is a great deal of criticism of what it has not done, of the speed which it has not pursued, and of the energy which it has not shown. We are therefore dealing with a very elusive (and partly political) question of what the Commission ought to have been doing in the last fifteen years and what it ought to do now to make up for what it hasn't been doing in the last fifteen years. The least satisfactory aspect of the proceedings thus far is that, within an area of apparent unity, the authors aren't really talking to each other. If we had had the Hill, Jaffe, Girard and Rabkin papers first, we would have been astonished at the extent to which Henry Spitz's paper fails to deal with any of the issues they raise. But the issues they raise—initiation, confidentiality, etc.—are issues which desperately need enlightenment and which get very little of it here. The gap between issues and responses are, in a sense, built directly into the Girard-Jaffe paper. This paper comes charging out of the corner breathing fire. We are told that we must make major changes, must have a Commission animated by a wholly different point of view, which must concern itself with more than discrimination, even with increasing employment opportunity. But their remedies are curiously mild, and in spite of their protestations, they take very little account of political

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reality. They talk as though it were somehow a responsibility of the Commission to be militant, to go to the Governor and tell him what ought to be done. I suggest to you that if it had been anticipated that the Chairman of the Commission would behave in this way, he would not have been appointed.

I think that the Commission has probably read correctly the political forces in this state, particularly the wishes of the Republican majority in the legislature and in the executive branch of the government, that it has proceeded at the rate, and in the way, which the Republican majority and much of the Democratic minority (particularly that part of it which regards itself as the voice of the labor movement) wants it to proceed. Exhorting the Commission to be braver and more daring is therefore pointless. The Negroes understand this very well. It has been said here that they don't bother with the Commission—which brings me to my last point. In spite of the criticisms of the Commission, the papers all hold to the view (sometimes implicit) that the Commission approach is absolutely indispensable to the solution of problems of discrimination. They are convincing on this point. If so, minority groups make a great mistake in not pressing for more vigorous administration of the Law. It would be much better if Mr. Randolph spent less time pursuing the meagre advantages of an increased minimum wage, and spent a great deal more time pushing the Commission in the ways that Milton Rosenberg suggested he could.