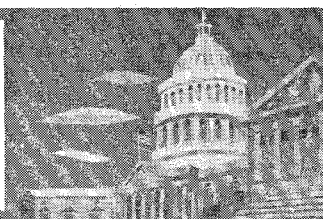


State of Affairs



Where Good Men Don't Count

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA.

FEW PLACES in the world, I find, are more daunting to a reporter who also wants to reach conclusions than the Deep South—and Alabama in particular.

I arrived here a few days after the march from Selma to Montgomery, and tension was still high. Extremists who in the past had limited themselves to intimidating Negroes went further this time: bombs were planted in the homes of the Mayor and of City Council members, and various whites who were known to be on the moderate side got threatening telephone calls. The *Birmingham News* warned: "Terror is stalking the streets." The city, as I sensed in talking, among others, to moderate whites and Negro leaders, was loaded with apprehension.

It is an atmosphere that is soul-searing—where good men would like to follow their best instincts, where realists would like to do what seems to them the obvious, the necessary, the inevitable and yet cannot. They are confronted with a majority who cannot accept even concrete facts because their minds are devoid of logic, who refuse to see the writing on the wall. They are blind romantics who believe in Governor Wallace as their savior, when what he is achieving is acceleration of the very thing they are trying to stave off—the accretion of the rights of the Negro.

It is, of course, not easy to sweep away a long and deeply rooted history. I have talked to cultivated men, educated in the best schools in the East, who nevertheless cannot adjust their minds to the inevitable changes. One of them even went as far as to say that on his visits to England he had purposely never gone to Bristol. On the basis of taste for scenery this would be quite understandable, but his reason was that this harbor city was the main entrepôt in the days of the slave trade. My acquaintance is a man of great influence in the so-called power structure. To so many of these local leaders segregation is a religion not to be tampered with. The objective of these business leaders is not to facilitate progress, but to make as limited a number of concessions as possible to avoid trouble. Many of them are quite enlightened and forward-looking, but they are afraid to take initiatives because of reprisals. These can range

from losing clients to threats or even bombs. Even a charitable contribution to the family of a slain civil rights leader can become a danger to one's personal security or one's business interests.

Although I found everyone cordial and willing to talk, most people emphasized that they would not like their names mentioned, or to be described in any way that would make identification easy.

And yet this is a very different Birmingham from the one Bull Connor and his howling police dogs made notorious throughout the world. Mayor Boutwell is a vast improvement on his predecessor, even though, caught between the Scylla of white resistance and the Charybdis of Negro pressures, he has not done much to establish himself as a real leader. He and the City Council, which now has a hesitant five-to-four majority in favor of moderation, have done something to improve communication between whites and Negroes, if not to better the conditions of the Negro's existence.

Yet there is progress. Hotels, restaurants, sport arenas, and theaters are desegregated. What at first seemed a frightening thought to many has turned out to be quite tolerable because, in fact, Negroes make little use of these newly won privileges and when they do they are quiet and unobtrusive. They find that hotels and restaurants cost more than they can afford, that the films in their old Negro movie theaters are equally good (or bad), and indeed cheaper, and that the atmosphere is more congenial. As one of the Civil Rights leaders put it to me, their own cultural isolation has gone on for so long that they feel uncomfortable outside their own environment.

There are still no Negroes in the police force or among the firemen, but I found it difficult to discover whether this was not the fault of both sides. There is certainly no rush to meet this demand by the city or by the chief of police nor, really, among the Negroes themselves. It is probably true that the examinations they are subjected to are more stringent than those for white applicants. But, as one Negro student explained to me, he would never want to enlist in the police force—first, because with the same qualifications he could

get a much better job with more money; and second, because life for a handful of Negroes among white policemen who really hate them would be, to say the least, very uncomfortable.

Quietly, without being prodded by demonstrations or petitions, the public transit system has employed half a dozen Negro bus drivers. Nobody has objected and there have been no incidents. To an outsider the hiring of a handful of bus drivers may seem trivial, but to anyone familiar with Birmingham this is another sign of progress.

Perhaps the most important achievement so far is the various biracial committees and gatherings where white and Negro sit together, talk together, and get used to associating with one another. Most of these meetings are accomplished without publicity—with the local advantage that few people are aware of them but with the disadvantage that Birmingham cannot claim credit for them outside the city. In spite of this, the mayor's own biracial committee, which was formed in the great crisis days two years ago, has been rather inactive. It seems that during a crisis it can help to calm the situation, but in quiet times can do little to advance it.

FOR these reasons progress, in the end, will not come from within, which is why time and again the federal government is forced to intervene. And, however much its actions are resented here, it serves at least as a cover and excuse for those who believe that there must be some gradual progress to relieve the growing pressures from Negroes. Most businesses, for example, have done very little so far to employ Negroes. They confess quite frankly that they don't want to expose themselves to reprisals such as cancellations of contracts or the loss of clients, but that they are waiting until July when the equal opportunities employment clause of the Civil Rights Act becomes operative. To those who challenge them they will then be able to say that they are after all only obeying the law.

There is in fact not likely to be a great rush of job demands, because there is a shortage of qualified Negroes for higher-ranking positions—although some secretaries and junior clerks will probably be added to the staffs of most of the bigger corporations as a token compliance with the law.

Better schooling remains one of the keys to the future. I have talked to a good many white and Negro university students who are determined to leave Alabama.

In the long run the situation that prevails in the state and that stifles whatever is best in such a city as Birmingham cannot be good for the future of either.

—HENRY BRANDON.



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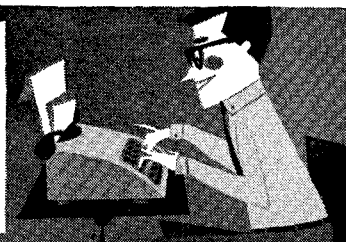
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Top of My Head



The Jonathan Winters of Our Discontent

THIS IS a true story and the names of the vice president and the network have been omitted only to protect the guilty. I'm being that charitable only because the innocent and temporarily injured party turned out to be the heroine. Her name is Carol. The really talented Carol of show business—Channing, that is.

Last summer I was briefly involved in a project that would sign Miss Channing to a network for a series of special hour programs and possibly to a spinoff series of half-hour comedy shows. I met with Miss Channing's husband, the personable and astute Charles Lowe, and we discussed a TV concept that might suit one of Miss Channing's various talents. It was arranged that we would meet with the vice president of the network.

On our way to this meeting I mentioned to Mr. Lowe that this vice president might suggest that while Miss Channing is a big Broadway star, she is not as well known across the country as a TV personality should be to garner great ratings, and I cautioned him not to be too upset because this sort of one-upmanship is par for the bargaining course. Mr. Lowe promised not to be surprised or chagrined or offer to punch anybody's nose.

I've been to hundreds of these meetings and I'm thoroughly insulated against vice-presidential talk, but this man's opening line found me too surprised and too chagrined to speak, much less punch anybody's nose. Our vice president spread himself out, folded his hands behind his head, gazed at Mr. Lowe, and said: "What does Carol Channing want to be when she grows up?" Unquote and verbatim.

When I finally asked him what he meant by that he segued to the more conventional argument that Miss Channing isn't as familiar across the country as the star of a special should be. And as a shining example he cited the fact that he had signed Jonathan Winters to a series of six specials because of his regular exposure on TV on the Jack Paar shows.

At that time Mr. Winters had already appeared in one of those so I asked the vice president how it had turned out. He agreed with the reviews the first special had received. He said it was lousy.

"So," I deduced, "you'd rather have a lousy show with a familiar figure than a good show with an unfamiliar figure." He said he'd rather have a familiar figure in a good show.

Before we got back to Miss Channing we discussed Mr. Winters in some depth. I volunteered the opinion that Mr. Winters is a TV guest and is not of star quality. Mr. Winters's sense of humor is very special and when expanded to an hour tends to run to the violent and macabre. And, more important, it is at its most effective when taken in four- or five-minute doses.

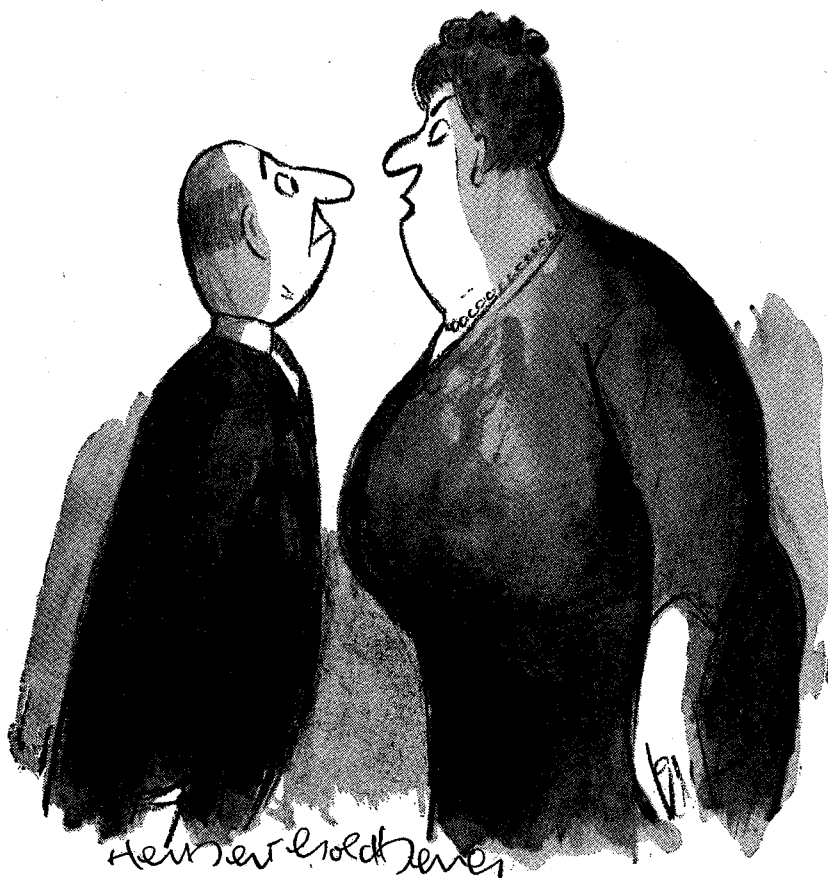
Since Mr. Winters himself is credited as one of the writers of his specials, it is obvious he doesn't realize his own peculiar talent, which is his ability to pick out recognizable little traits in his character vignettes. It is also patent he should bow to a lot of editing by his assistant writers. Everybody at the meeting seemed in agreement, but now

that Mr. Winters has appeared in five specials it is obvious nobody has been able to persuade him to edit and harness his talent.

But, getting back to our conference, the talk then went on to the concept I had come up with, which our vice president didn't like at all—which I hasten to add was his right. I asked to be left out of the talk and called on Mr. Lowe to say a few words in defense of his absent wife. Very quietly he gave a few of her credits, which included holding the records of the Persian Room at the Plaza Hotel and the Empire Room at the Waldorf (both, I may add, are patronized by visitors to New York from across the country). She has been the star of a one-woman show on Broadway that was widely acclaimed by the critics and she is currently the star of Broadway's biggest and most widely known musical hit. End of conference.

But here's the happy epilogue. Fortunately two other vice presidents, Charles Bud Barry of Young & Rubicam and Edwin W. Ebel of General Foods, who didn't want to learn what she would be when she grew up but recognized a hunk of talent when they saw it, signed Carol for some TV specials this year and an eventual half-hour series on a competitive network.

So, for our original vice president, it's Goodbye Dolly. —GOODMAN ACE.



"Don't think all you have to do is apologize."