

1968

ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF THE SPEECH BY GOVERNOR AGNEW TO THE SO-CALLED MODERATE CIVIL RIGHTS LEADERS ON THURSDAY, APRIL 11<sup>th</sup>, AS I WOULD SEE IT FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THESE BLACK LEADERS

"Hard on the heels of tragedy comes the assignment of blame and the excuses. I did not invite you here for either purpose."

This is what he said, but he did the exact opposite. He did blame them and this was the terrible insult. These were the people who have worked so hard and for so long to prevent the very things that happened this week.

"If you'll observe, the ready mix, instantaneous type of leader is not here. The circuit-riding, Hanoi-visiting type of leader is missing from this assembly. The cat-calling, riot-inciting, burn-America down type of leader is conspicuous by his absence. That is no accident, ladies and gentlemen. It is just good planning."

Who is he talking about? They should have been identified and should have, in the good-old American tradition, the right to defend themselves against his accusations. He probably is talking about Bob Moore, Walter Lively, Danny Gant, Stu Wexler, Tim and Irving Conway, Dino Prettyman, etc. - representing S.N.N.C., C.O.R.E., U-J.O.I.N., C.I.G., etc. I know every one of these men personally--some I know quite intimately. Tim Conway and his group were in our Rectory 2 a.m. Sunday morning getting something to eat. They worked with us all week trying to "cool it" and giving relief to the victims. Walter Lively was around doing the same thing. I saw him on one such occasion Sunday night on Pennsylvania Avenue. This is why all the black leaders fell in strongly behind them.

"Some weeks ago, a reckless stranger to this city. . . characterized the Baltimore police as 'enemies of the black man'."

Governor Agnew is apparently referring to Bob Moore of SNCC. Bob Moore is not a reckless stranger. He is a native of the city and has been responsibly active in civil rights here for many years. I am not sure of his present philosophy. He has a right to defend himself. When he spoke about the police he was simply speaking out the sentiments of many black people who, through the years, have suffered so much more than most of us can understand. This is why there was a storm of censure from the black people against those who reacted in opposition to the statement. Our people want law and order but they want a "law and order society" that does not discriminate and demean their dignity. I do not



agree with the statement, but I do not believe it was uttered "to attract attention and to inflame" as the Governor claimed. What he said was not "only the opinion of those who depend upon chaos and turmoil for leadership." This last phrase in itself is a broad condemnation, and I don't know who is being referred to by these words.

"And you ran. You met in secret with that demagogue and others like him and you agreed. . . that you would not openly criticize any black spokesman, regardless of the content of his remarks. . .you were intimidated by veiled threats. . .you were stung. . .by epithets like "Uncle Tom."

Who ran and met in secret and with whom? Who was intimidated and stung? Was it Judge Watts, Judge Cole, Mrs. Juanita Mitchell, Judge Hargrove, Dave Glenn, Sam Daniels, Rev. Frank Williams, Rev. Vernon Dobson, Mrs. Victorine Adams, Councilman Douglass, Mr. Charles Tildon? It was these people and others like them that formed the audience to which he was speaking. The Governor emphasized this in the beginning. What specific meeting is he talking about? And just who did attend? The above statement is terribly unjust.

"Now many parts of our cities lie in ruins. . .Those fires were kindled at the suggestion and with the instruction of the advocates of violence."

How sure can the Governor be? The Mayor seems to agree. General York says, "No". It is not easy to know just how much might have been from planning? Perhaps some, perhaps none.

Governor Agnew misses the most important point of all. We want to put the blame where it really belongs. Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown are not the real culprits. All of these men to whom Mr. Agnew was speaking condemn any preaching of violence, burning, looting, etc., They know it is futile and fatal. The real revolutionaries are the people responsible for the kinds of conditions in the ghetto that breed frustration, violence, riots, etc. These are the ones who should be blamed for what happened in Baltimore this past week. The black leaders are not even interested in naming names and sitting in judgment on individuals but they do want to get down to the root causes. They want to treat the diseases, not the symptoms. Are they to be condemned for this kind of thinking.



"It was no accident that one such advocate appeared at eight separate fires before the fire chief could get there."

Who is Governor Agnew accusing now? Is it Walter Lively? The paper said five fires. Walter himself told me it was two and that he was helping people. They urged all of us who were civil rights leaders, ministers or priests, to get out with the crowds and try to cool it. Some did. I have known Walter for a number of years. He has always been a responsible leader. Most all of us respect him. What right does the Governor have to stand and condemn a man on hearsay evidence. I was not with him Saturday night but I must make my judgement from what I know of the man. I may not agree with everything he says or does, but I have always found him honest, open and decent.

"I readily admit that this equal opportunity has not always been present for Negroes - that it is still not totally present for Negroes. But I say that we have come a long way."

The Governor just does not understand. How does he know the Negroes have come a long way. A few have! He is trying to teach these black leaders when he should be asking them to teach him. The masses of black people have hardly moved at all.

"Tell me one constructive achievement that has flowed from the madness of the twin priests of violence, Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown."

All of the people to whom Gov. Agnew was speaking do repudiate the violence that these two preach. However, these twin priests of violence have accomplished some constructive things. They have aroused many black people to an awareness of their problems and they have stirred them up to want to do something about the problems. They have made America listen to a whole lot of moderate people they would not be listening to unless Stokely and company had them scared. They have helped to unit black people like they have never been united before and this is very constructive.

#### QUOTED STATEMENTS FROM CARMICHAEL, BROWN AND DIXON

I am sure all of the people to whom the Governor was speaking repudiate the thinking expressed in these statements. It is an insult to infer otherwise.

"I call upon you to publicly repudiate, condemn and reject all black racists. This so far you have not been willing to do."

I doubt whether there are any black racists. It is hard enough trying to convince a black man that he is just as good as a white man, much less trying to convince him that he is better.



These people to whom the Governor was speaking have spent their whole lives repudiating all that he is ranting against. Many of them spent the week trying to do what they could to stop the violence and to aid the victims. Their entire lives have been a public statement in their belief in what is right and just. This kind of rebuke is absolutely wrong and uncalled for.

These black leaders know why Stokely and the others are so frustrated. It is hard not to be sympathetic. They do not agree with his conclusions or his plan for redress but they do agree with much of his analysis of the problems.

"I SUBMIT THAT THESE MEN AND OTHERS LIKE THEM represent a malignancy out of control; that will lead us to a devastating civil war."

These men like Stokely do not represent the malignancy. They are a reaction to it. White racism is the malignancy. The Governor has to come to realize this.

"I submit to you that there can be no winner from such a conflict and that the heaviest losers will be the Negro citizens of America."

We all know this!

"That target will be realized when every man is judged on his own individual merit."

This is all the black people have ever asked for.

"Divisiveness and the doctrine of partheid are impenetrable barriers between us and that target."

We all agree on this and wish the Governor would not keep dividing us.

"I am sure that these remarks come as somewhat of a surprise to you; that you expected nebulous promises and rationalizations and possibly a light endorsement of the Kerner Report. This I could not do."

We hoped for deep insights into the real problems of the city. It is an insult to even intimate that we wanted nebulous promises and rationalizations. We did not expect to be blamed. We certainly hoped that he would endorse the Kerner Report. If he cannot, then he should tell us why.

"Blind militancy must be converted into constructive purpose."

Amen! We all believe this strongly. This is why we do not want to cut ourselves off completely from any segment of the black community. We want to harness and channel every source of energy.



"This cannot occur so long as you or I condone or cling to racism, black or white."

Why does he keep insisting that we believe in racism of any kind.

"I believe you represent the views of the overwhelming majority of Maryland's Negro citizens - responsible, hard-working, decent people who are as horrified by the events of the past days as you or I."

This is true but this isn't what he has been saying about us through the whole statement.

"My greatest fear is this polarization of attitudes as an aftermath of violence."

The Governor is the one person in the community who has done an almost unbelievable job of doing just this.

"I will need your vision and your voice."

This is the first time he has even asked for our ideas and the request is rather vague.

"Let us begin to rebuild now. . . Let us work together not as black and white - but as responsible citizens of Maryland who uphold the law; as concerned citizens who are united in their dedication to eliminate prejudice and poverty or any conditions which create hopelessness and despair."

What does he think we have been doing. This is our whole creed.

"The fiction that Negroes lack any opportunity in this country is dissipated by the status of those in this room."

It is hard to believe that the Governor could make this statement. It shows how terribly uninformed he is. It is very, very untrue.

Rev. Henry J. Offer, S.S.J.  
The Day Before Easter, 1968