

WCCO - NEITHER FREE NOR EQUAL - July 30, 1947

MAYOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

We in America bear a heavy burden on our conscience because of the bitter fact that millions of our fellow citizens are neither free nor equal in their enjoyment of the blessings of our democracy. Most of us are decent, kindly justice-loving people. We take our conscience seriously. When we are faced squarely with an issue, the great majority of Americans recognize injustice and vigorously oppose it. But nowhere have we so shamefully blinded ourselves to the issues and made excuses for our sins as in our practice of prejudice and discrimination on the basis of race, religion, and national origin.

We often hear people say: "Don't let anyone of that group move into our neighborhood, they'll be happier if they are kept in their own area;" or "those people don't really want an education;" or "they'll be happier if they are kept in jobs that don't involve any responsibility." That kind of talk reveals the speaker's own prejudices and represents an attempt to justify them. By such a rationalization he seeks to remove his feeling of guilt for the injustices he is doing his fellow citizens. He is trying to evade the issue as to whether or not we are going to accord to every individual the dignity and freedom and opportunity to which his character and capacity entitle him.

In Minneapolis, through the Community Self-Survey of Human Relations, we are bringing that issue squarely before all of our citizens, and particularly before those who have policy-making responsibility in the major areas of our community life. We are now about midway through this survey. When it is completed and the issues are clearly presented to the

community, I and the other responsible leaders of this undertaking believe that the good citizens of Minneapolis will take a forthright stand against discrimination and on the side of justice and equality of opportunity.

We have already, as a community, taken a clear and effective stand against discrimination in employment. We are the third city to pass a fair employment practice ordinance, and the first to establish a municipal fair employment practice commission to administer the law. Cooperation with the commission is indicated by the many inquiries received from employers and unions, and by the notable improvement in employment opportunities for minority group workers reported by the special agencies working in this field. Our successful experience may influence the State and the nation to follow our example.

In the field of housing, our Board of Public Welfare has established and effectively carried out a policy of non-discrimination and non-segregation in our veterans' emergency housing projects. This sets the proper pattern for the Public Housing Commission which I am soon to appoint, and for general community policy in the ownership and occupancy of housing accommodations.

Similar progress toward putting our democratic principles into practice may be noted in our neighboring communities in Minnesota, in the State itself, and in other states throughout the nation. The forces of liberalism are on the march and a first objective in the battle to make democracy work must be to overcome racial and religious prejudice and discrimination. I am happy to serve with a growing body of citizens of Minnesota and the nation as a spearhead in this fight which is a first essential step toward establishing just and peaceful relations among the peoples of the world.

You will hear people ask if we are not moving too fast in trying to

change the bad patterns of intergroup relations that too many of us have accepted with smug complacency for the past many years; but I say that we are more than one hundred and fifty years late in according to some of our citizens that equality of civic right and human dignity guaranteed them by our American Constitution. We are plunging headlong down the path of scientific achievement and technical progress, but have been moving at a snail's pace in terms of social organization and good human relations. The giant power of atomic energy threatens to lead us to destruction if we fail to build a social structure which can harness it for the common good. The false and superficial differences between human beings which ignorance and prejudice create shrink into their proper status of insignificance at the base of the mushroom of smoke which rises from the explosion of an atomic bomb.

The way in which we deal with our neighbors and fellow citizens in our own communities will serve as the measure of our capacity to prevent the destruction of our civilization and to gain time to build a sane and peaceful world.

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We Americans live today with an uneasy conscience. We know that millions of our fellow citizens lack that full measure of freedom and equality necessary for human dignity. These millions-- Catholics, Jews, Negroes, Nisei, and others--suffer under the cruel yoke of prejudice and discrimination. Too many of them endure intimidation and violence.

Our conscience--the American conscience--tells us clearly that this is wrong. It tells us that we must do something to right this wrong.

But often we try to evade the clear message of our conscience.

We tell ourselves and others that..."these people really dont want an education".... or"they'll be happier in jobs without responsibility." These are rationalizations. They are attempts to evade the real question.

The real question is: do we or do we not mean business about our American ideals? Are we or are we not going to give to every individual the freedom, the opportunity, and the dignity to which his character and capacity entitle him?

In the city of Minneapolis, through the Community Self Survey of Human Relations, we are bringing that question squarely before all of our citizens. We are now about midway through the survey. When it is completed all the facts and problems will be presented to the people of this community. We believe that then the people of Minneapolis will take a forthright position--a position against discrimination and for justice and equality of opportunity.

We have already, as a community, taken a clear and effective stand against discrimination in employment. We are the third city in the U.S. to pass a fair employment practice ordinance. We are the first city to establish a municipal commission to administer the ordinance.

This commission is ~~already~~ already receiving the cooperation of both management and labor. And even at this early date, special agencies working in the field report a notable improvement in employment opportunities for minority groups.

In the field of housing we have also taken a stand against discrimination. ~~Our Board~~ Our Board of Public Welfare has established and effectively carried out a policy of non-discrimination and non-segregation in our veterans emergency housing projects. We intend to maintain this policy in the Public Housing Commission which I am soon to appoint.

These are but small beginnings, and our work has just begun.

We shall continue this struggle to live up to our ideals--in this city, in this state, and in this nation. In this struggle we are glad to join hands with our neighbor communities of Minnesota, and with other communities throughout the nation.

People sometimes ask me if we are not rushing things. I reply that ~~as believers in the Declaration of Independence~~ we are some one hundred and seventy years late. As believers in the Declaration of Independence, we Americans owe to ourselves, and to humanity, a debt which today, more than ever, demands payment.

Never in the history of man has the time been so short and the task so urgent. On every front our spiritual achievements must keep pace with our scientific achievements.

Only in this way can we build a just and enduring peace.



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