



Martin O. Weddington Papers.

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System's Change, The Perrennial Challenge of Prince Hall Masons

Brethren, "These are the days that try men's soul's!" The whole dramatic scene on CBS TV which followed President Nixon's Monday night speech was a reminder to me of what Alan Nevins has called "the explosive excitement of history". When have you seen Eric Sereried at a loss for words to describe the meaning of events? We are living in an age of change and flux when words like "never", "permanent", "final", "irrevocable", "ultimate", and "status quo" are being replaced by words such as "process", "change", "revolution", "breakthrough", "open-ended". Ours is a time when institutions are finding the going tough, whether they be Nations or Universities, or churches or fraternal bodies. Ad Hoc coalitions are blossoming either along side of them or are taking their places. It is a time when ethical decision, the wisdom of previous generations handed down, is today being wrought---being formed in the severe tests of action and involvement. I'm saying we live in a volatile period of history. How often do we read or hear about things being programmed in this technological age? It's part of what is commonly called systems analysis. Systems analyst's is a growing profession. Not too long ago, however, a society of systems analysts convened in Chicago and after days of deliberation they concluded that the only system upon which their programming broke down was the human system---man himself. So while we can't predict what the Administration is going to do in and about southeast Asia, we can can a look at those systems at work in our society with a view in mind of how they affect black America. This, I feel is in keeping with our heritage for there is no doubt in my mind that Prince Hall worked unstintingly as a change-agent to foster the betterment of our ethnic group.

Theroetically speaking, systems develop to provide for the general welfare of all the people of the nation. In any nation various systems develop to provide for it's, survival, maintenance and growth and to enhance its life. Therefore there are educational, cultural, political, economic legal, social, governmental, and other systems. All of these systems are supposed to promote the general welfare of all of the people of a nation.

But actually, many of these systems constructively serve only certain groups OF THE NATION and in fact negatively affect other groups. For the sake of explanation, lets think of two groups in our country, the "ins" and the "outs". The "ins" are those whose interests and needs are met by the systems. The attitudes of the groups with power-the "ins"- determine the nature of many of the systems in such a way that the systems tend to protect, entrench, and validate these attitudes and groups.

On the other hand, the "outs" are those whose interests and needs are not met by the systems. The "outs" are rejected by the systems and are thus deprived of their benefits.

Listen! When the "ins" see the "outs" they tend to find the causes for their rejection not in the systems but in personal characteristics of the "outs": laziness, immorality, stupidity, lack of motivation. This locating of causes of failure in personal characteristics of the "outs" serves to rationalize the existence and make-up of the systems and also to enhance the egos of the "ins", for they give credit for their success not to the systms from which they benefited, but to their own industriousness, intelligence, morality and motivation----(you know, the self-made man myth).

Unfortunately, the "outs" support the systems in many way. Through powerlessness (inability to threaten them), through fatalism (acceptance of the status quo as inevitable), or through apathy (indifference to efforts to break through and change the systems). So what does this do? It provides the "ins" with people fbr whom they can do good things, thereby enhancing their own egos.

But the "outs" can respond in other ways. All too often they find a way to receive the benefits of the systems through either unusual efforts to break through them or by accomodating themselves to them, as the Jews did in Babylonia to use a Biblical example.

The other response is the response of progressive black America. WE refuse to accept our situation as inevitable ----- we don't blame our failures on ourselves but on the systems -- we refuse to accomodate ourselves to the unjust systems and their humiliating demands, but try to change the systems. Som even believe that the systems will not change, and therefore seek to destroy them.

But systems are not static; they do change. They change as a result of one or a combination of two factors: Systems change in response to external power. This amy be the power of numbers; the power of wealth; or the power of boy-cots, strikes and demonstrations. For instance, the sheer number of the outs caused by the great Depression forced certain changes; the great strikes of the early part of the 20th century culminated in decisive changes in the system of labor-management relations; civil rights demonstrations in the early 60's brought about certain legislation changes.

The other factor is that of attitudes. Systems change in response to changes in the attitudes of the "ins" who, for the sake of conscience or other motivaing factors desire to alter the systems so they benefit greater numbers of people.

Listen! Systems should be judged on the basis of their effects on the masses, and on the minorities.      ~~~~~

Now lets' take a look at some contemporary systems in our society. Many of them actually serve primarily middle and upper class Americans. There are literally millions of people who are not being equally benefitted by many of the systems; these millions include the poor, most black people, many youth and aged, American Indians and Latin-Americans, and others. So the

"ins" who make up the majority of the nation, look at the "outs and blame their misfortune on their supposed lack of intelligence and motivation, laziness, immorality or poor family background. Then proceed to try to change the "outs", but not the systems that have produced them.

If there is to be a lessening of the number of the "outs"--- if there is to be an inclusion of minorities into the mainstream of American life--- if there is to be a future America, there must be changes in the systems for the "outs" are a product of the systems and not of their own personal failures or inadequacies in character and personality.

Witness, if you will the typical educational system in America which is developed on the basis of certain assumptions such as: that the children will come from complete families; that they will begin school with certain basic verbal and manual skills; that they have proper nourishment, that their common language is standard english; that they are future oriented; that they are mentally and emotionally normal; and that non-white children are inferior to white children.

And yet into the system built on these assumptions enter millions of children who come from broken homes; do not have the expected verbal and manual skills; are undernourished; speak a ghetto-dialect; are present oriented; lack a sense of self-esteem and respect; and are non-white. Such children are likely to fail and millions of them do.

Society sees them fail and blames them, whereas it should change the system (size of classes, curriculum, special aid for special needs, this is what busing is really all about). The systems must be changed to meet the needs and characteristics of the children it is supposed to serve.

Witness again the cultural system. It is supposed that American culture has developed over the years on the basis of certain fundamental beliefs and assumptions, such as, that America is a true melting pot and all of its



people have equal opportunities for self development and expression. The truth is that most of American culture has developed on the assumption of white supremacy, and as a result, unlimited biases permeate this culture. I'm sure that many of you have seen the Bill Cosby film, "Black History, Lost, Strayed or Stolen." However, the "ins", when confronted by this "I am not a part of this American culture" attitude of blacks, blame us blacks and not the cultural system that has produced us.

Witness the Political system---voting, party participation, running for public office----these are theoretically for the benefit of all Americans. Yet the system is such that it mitigates against black people. We get attention at election time for manipulation and buying votes while the Administrations are not generally sympathetic to the needs of black people. Black people have been disenfranchised by law and custom, and consequently are not politically sophisticated. Many people blame the lack of interest on indifference and apathy; it is to be blamed on these, but I'm saying that the system itself inculcated these attitudes in blacks and poor whites.

Witness the legal system. Witness all the rhetoric about "law and order". We are supposed to be ---a nation under law insuring "with liberty and justice for all." But since the first black men were brought to this country until this very day there has been a deliberate withholding of legal rights, privileges, and protection from black people and other minorities. At every level of government, blacks and other minorities have been deprived of equal status before the law.

There are many results from this, but one is the disrespect for law---which mirrors the disrespect of the majority group in denying equal protection of the law to minority groups. And yet, there is a strong tendency to blame this attitude toward law on personal characteristics and not on the legal system itself.

Witness finally the American economics system which is supposed to benefit all citizens. But let's face it. It has in fact, incorporated within itself certain attitudes, practices, laws and customs that have successfully prevented millions of people, black and white, from enjoying the full fruits of our abundant economy: deliberate racial discrimination in hiring, advancement and firing; the denial of business opportunities and commercial financing to black people; exclusion from the decision-making processes; the maintenance of large segments of the economy on the basis of low wages including agriculture, many service occupations, domestics, and certain government jobs. As a result, the disadvantaged don't make enough money to lead a normal life. And black people, no matter how well educated, on the average, make only one-half as much as the equivalently educated whites. And yet American society blames poverty, unemployment and lack of motivation on the people being hurt and not on the economic system.

In January of this year, the Congressional Black Caucus, sensitized to the need for dealing with the economic plight of black Americans called together one of the coalition groups I referred to earlier, for the National Black Enterprise Conference at Morgan State College. One of the participants, Dan Mitchell of Mound Bayou Miss. is quoted in Black Enterprise as having said----"that we must begin to build institutions as opposed to concentrating on funding programs." Programs, he noted, "are funded on an annual basis and there is no prospect of longevity." The consensus of the Conference was that an effective assault on the economic inequities faced by black people would require a national program-----.

I'm suggesting to this Conference that there is something radically wrong with many of the systems. I'm suggesting that the systems cannot continue as they are. There must be a change in the systems and we must be a part of affecting the change if the United States is to avoid a violent revolution or in preventing that become a fascist, totalitarian state.

How does all that I have said relate to this Conference of Grand Masters? IT DOESNT in any meaningful way unless and until the questions of structure and purpose are satisfactorily resolved. If this august body of sovereign Grand Masters, Past Grand Masters and Cabinet Officers cannot arrive at consensus on the desirability, profitability, and feasibility of developing a unified, national, systems-change-oriented organizational thrust into community life in this nation, then it, like other organizations with rigid, inflexible disciplinary persuasions, will always be remembered as somewhat of an exclusive non-entity on the horizon of contemporary life.

*THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF DR. J. W. DAVIS ARE TIMELY AND GERMANE TO WHAT I'M SAYING.*

Given structure, there are unlimited means of program impact. The O I C support effort was one. Indulge, if you will, one other small example of how this body can become a vital link in affecting change in the econmic well-being of black America. I've heard that the late brother Amos T. Hall was the prime mover behind the publication of the Prince Hall year Book. That book, used properly, and with only minor changes in it's format can become a contact sourcebook, not only for unlocking unlimited job opportunities for black Americans, but also for involvement of Prince Hall Masons in decision-making relative to the economic development of communities where we live. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is increasingly being implimented due largely to the number of blacks who now hold Compliance position with the Federal Govt. I have found in case after case that the Yearbook is the only source for contacting a black community representative to get an opinion and reaction to an economic development project. The opinion of a Worshipful Master or a Secretary or a brother can be a crucial factor in the decision to approve or deny federal money. I'm suggesting that we cultivate this vehicle by continuing the production of and enlarging the distribution of the Yearbook.

TO BE RELEVANT OR IRRELEVANT, that is the question which begs our attention!