LEFT-OVER FROM THE SIXTIES

Early in the decade it was said that those of us who were active during the 60's and still continue the same activities today are "left-overs," "hangers-on," out of touch with present reality, to be pitied more than scorned, because our efforts were futile.

All of that critique was negative stuff to absorb, and then along came Clarence Pendleton to call us "new racists"! Racism does take new forms today, but let's not put all the old activists into a useless category. We don't need any "new" racists, because we've still got plenty of the "old" ones hanging on and around! So I quickly dispensed with that bit of demagoguery.   .

As far as being called a "left-over" from the sixties, I've decided to claim that title gladly! It reminds me that some very good things did happen in the sixties, and some off those things still need to happen today. It, reminds me that we need some "sixty-left-overs" precisely because there is still a lot of racism also "1eft-over."

The racism that is "left-over" is not only "left-over" from the 1960's, but from the 1860's, the 1760's and the 1660's at least. So you see the genesis of my thought is much more antique than the name-callers realized. The agenda that is "'left-over" for this nation is an historic one, racism is "left-over" because we've never yet really dealt with it as a nation as a people.

Racism is "left-over" from the 1960's. There were advances in voting rights, but "1eft-over" racism means that those advances must be vigorously guarded or they are quickly eroded by administrative or legislative acts. There were advances in employment for people of color, but "left-over" racism has founded ways to subvert those advances and to keep a defined place at the top of most everything for whites only. There were advances in access to education, but "left-over" racism means that today decreasing percentages of students of color on our campuses are subjected to verbal, physical, and psychic abuse. There were advances in the sixties in some parts of the criminal justice system, but "left-over" racism today reinstitutes a death penalty, which by virtue of the way the whole system functions is bound to be discriminatory toward people of color particularly and poor people generally. Myrdal's warning that race was this nation's primary problem predated the sixties, but it remains to remind us that there is a great "left-over" agenda indicating an inability or unwillingness to dig at the roots of the problem: racism.

Racism is "left-over" from the 1860's. Racism was "left-over" in large doses by the failure of the nation to enforce the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments which so rapidly came after the Civil War. Racism was "left-over" when President after President in those late decades of the last century treated the problem primarily as a political one rather than as a moral one, and proceeded with caution rather than conviction. Racism was "left-over" when "states' rights" was given priority over the right of newly freed citizens. "Left-over" racism occurred when we invented new post-Reconstruction ways to control the formerly enslaved Africans. It happened too when we decided as a nation first to exploit and then later to exclude Asian people. The nation had an opportunity to "Reconstruct" the dream, but it fell flat on its collective white face. Racism was "left-over."

Racism is "left-over" from the 1760's. Racism was a "left-over" after the founding of our nation. It was "left-over" when references to it were deleted from the Declaration of Independence. It was "left-over" when our founders postponed an end of the slave trade in the wording of the Constitution, and also defined the enslaved Africans as each one "three-fifths" of a person. Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and other great leaders of the time knew that we were postponing something which would finally come back to haunt us, but they chose to "leave it over." The 18th century also gave birth to "scientific" studies called phrenology and physiognomy, classifying people by facial angles and skull measurements; even

when investigators denied any racial applications for their findings, they were frequently used in the new colonies to buttress assumptions of white superiority. The "left-overs" from those studies became a racist legacy in anthropology for years, and still live in many hearts and minds today.

Racism is "left-over" from the 1660's. By this time in our history slavery was rapidly becoming institutionalized; indentured servanthood was being replaced by a more permanent "arrangement." We had decided that enslaving native peoples was not going to work, so we proceeded on a course of driving them from their land, alternated with various forms of cultural genocide. Africans were better candidates for slavery, so on their backs we built a nation, and the economy of both North and South became dependent upon the "peculiar institution." There were people in the fledgling land who knew then that we were wrong-headed morally and economically, but as a new people we nurtured the evil thing, and racism grew as a cancer in the body politic. It was "left-over"…

The "left-overs" are abundant. Every time in our history when we have failed to deal with racism, it has been "left-over." "Left-over" for the next generation to take care; "left-over" for some laissez-faire doctrine to work out; "left-over" on the assumption that human beneficence would simply allow the ugly monster to wither away and die of its own accord.

Racism does not die by itself. Untreated it will flourish and grow. It will always be "left-over" until the day when we make sure that there is nothing there to be "left-over"!

Because racism is "left-over" from the past, it is good to have some "left-over" and new anti-racist activists on the scene. For one, I am "left-over" from the sixties, and proud! I'm going to keep reminding myself and others that until we determine to uproot racism in some massive and foundational ways, it will continue to be "left-over."

By Horace Sheldon