The Future of Human Relations in the United States

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There are some things which involve almost as much risk as attempting to project future possibilities—but not too many. Two, however, which run an almost neck-and-neck second, are: 1) interpreting the past; and 2) trying to assess the present.

Although I am not unaware of the terrible risks attendant upon the effort, I will attempt to discuss the future of human relations in the United States. Clearly the most significant and most problematic area of human relations in this country, is predicated upon the concept of race, namely, the black—white relations.

We will begin with a summary descriptive statement of where we have been in racial human relations in this country in the past. Secondly, we will discuss where we are now as one black person reads the situation. Thirdly, we will project some goals for the future which we feel eventuate out of the promise that America claims to be, and some expectations given our past and present responses to conflictual situations growing out of black and white responses to human relationships.

A further introductory word seems in order. The proclaimed separation of church and state in American history must not believe the fact that church and state, or organized religion and political institutions at every level and in every area, have cooperated and conspired in the defining of limited areas of participation in American life by black people. That being the case, it is clear that religious spokesmen, wherever situated, have a peculiar responsibility for and contribution to make toward the clarification of those values which ought to inform our individual and group responses to other persons and groups. This should not surprise us since religious motivations have been a continuing factor in the course of American life.

However often religion has been shunted to the side in the desire to secularize American life, however much religion has been reduced to being a “handmaiden” or “kept woman” of forces of status quo oppression, it is still significant that it was a religious leader (Martin L. King, Jr.) who forced America again to one of its periodic reassessments of the relationship between proclaimed goals and ideals and its institutional and group practices in human relations.

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