

Blacks in white Vancouver



By WILLIAM R. DEITZ

About 100 sleepy Vancouverites were startled awake Thursday night February 25, by the revelation that not all is cozy and bright regarding the plight of minority groups in that Washington city. A panel of young and articulate blacks, representing the thought of college and high school students and the working sector, conducted a discussion of the woes of "being .. black in white Vancouver."

The whole idea was dreamed up by Mrs. Jean Lacey who directs the Vancouver chapter .. of the YWCA. (Is it well to note here that the national YWCA has established as its first priority .. the elimination of racism in America.) With a missionary--zeal, Mrs. Lacey had bought the group together the evening before to outline the various areas to be covered in the next evening's presentation. This writer was asked to serve as moderator--for the discussion, and my role was to be a relatively neutral one--I use the term "relatively" because, being black myself, it is impossible for me not to be impossible for me not to identify with these young people.

Nyway Mrs. Lacey told the group not to pull any punches, to "tell it like it is," although .. some group members expressed doubts that the talk approach --

would do any good. "We are just too tired of being pushed around to take it any more," one of the panelists said.

Their gripes? Nothing new we "sophisticates" in Portland. Intolerable housing conditions in which prospective renters are subjected to indignities including outright refusal on the part of landlords to rent to them "because they are black." The lack of "relevant" (an over-worked but none-the-less meaningful term) education for balck at Clark College in Vancouver. (In an apparent effort to acquiesce to some of the black students' demands, Clark College has begun to offer a course with the ludicrous title.. "The Contribution of the Negro to Jazz" which, of course, is akin to offering a course titled "The Contribution of Einstein to the Theory of Relativity." He discovered it! Just as the American Negro discovered jazz, refined it and watched white imitators, backed by the might power of the established order, attempt to snatch it away from them).

They spoke of the inability of white parents to think of small--children as children if they have black skin, transmitting their narrow view of blacks to their own children. As one panelist and mother put it "I'm tired of seeing my children hurt because other children won't play with... them because they are black. My children don't have any hangups about playing with other children no matter what their color, why should other children have hangups about my kids?"

To a man and woman the five panelists also complained bitterly about their parents' failure to recognize that their so-called -- "positions" within the white community are actually nothing, since the whites, with impunity, can in various ways "come down on their parents any time they want to." This makes for a situation in which freedom of expression by black adults is

curtailed for fear of upsetting the applecart, the cart is already leaning precariously from the steep incline it is sitting on at the time-- with you in it.

The young people didn't condemn their parents for the parents' fear, they just complained that too many black adults in Vancouver seem content with a situation that, to the young, -- smacks of little more than involuntary servitude. And the panel discussion.. sparked a counter-discussion-- from the audience. Gradually blacks in the "ever-thirties"-- bracket began standing up to explain their feelings about racism in Vancouver. Some defended the "progress" the city has made in dealing with the "black problem," while others were quick to point out that there is no "black problem" in Vancouver that it is a "white problem" that must be faced up to by whites or no real solution will be forthcoming.

As one black teacher pointed out: "When my little students come to me I give them love and understanding no matter... what their color. They come to me for security and comfort and I give what I can unsparingly. My children like me as a person and I like them as the individuals they are. It is too bad their parents can't respond the same way."

It is ironic that the feeling that surfaced in Portland several years back, the feelings of helplessness and rage at the indignities of being considered.. "inferior" by those whom you know yourself to be superior or equal to, should now surface in the placid community which is Vancouver. After all, hadn't... Vancouver been forwarded-- years ago, by the experiences across the rest of America? Apparently Vancouverites feel "they have a good thing going" and that all is pleasant in the town. They, as did those who turned out for the panel discussion, may be in for a rude awakening.

It is time for whites in-- Vancouver, as well as the rest of the country, to realize that blacks are not only justified in what they are saying when they talk about the rights to "life, liberty and pursuit of happiness" on an equal plane with whites, but that they are SERIOUS about what they are saying. After all, the Constitution of the U.S. and the Declaration of Independence are more than just words. They are documents with a.. special meaning for the oppressed -- especially for the oppressed here in America.

Victory for Oregon

Oregonians have been assured a north-south rail passenger Transportation Secretary John A. Volpe.

"This is a tremendously important victory for Oregonians and the entire West Coast," Senator Packwood said after a special briefing for Congressmen on the National Rail passenger Corporation (Railpax) plan Jan. 28.

"There will be a direct route stretching from Seattle through Portland and other major cities to San Diego. And, in addition, Portland will serve as an intermediate point in the east-west track from Chicago to Seattle," he said.

This means that an Oregonian wishing to travel from Portland going to Seattle, though he may have to switch trains at Spokane before going directly to Chicago. However, if Portland had not been in the system, you might have been lucky if a passenger train was still running in Oregon.



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