

# worldview

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## THE PROBLEM OF RACE

Thirty years ago, at the dawn of the great Depression, the major domestic problem in the United States was the problem of economic injustice. The challenge given to that generation was to gain some minimum of social security for millions of underprivileged Americans. It accepted the challenge and, in a decade of great strife, laid at least the foundations of economic justice in America. The "good society," of course, still eludes us, and a disgraceful number of our citizens are still ill-housed, ill-clothed and ill-fed. But on the basic issues the battle was won, and most Americans today enjoy a measure of economic security they did not dream of in 1929.

In 1959 the major domestic problem in the United States is even more vexing, even more heartbreaking, than was the economic problem of the Depression. It is, of course, the problem of racial injustice. This is an old problem in America and for generations it was conveniently obscured. But now we are forced to face it, and the challenge given our generation is to gain some minimum of racial justice, of racial equality, in our land. The struggle has begun, and for the next decade or two we can expect it to be our chief domestic concern. And although we cannot expect that, through the struggle, we will achieve the "good society" and eliminate all traces of racial prejudice in the United States, we can perhaps hope that we will at least achieve those minimum objectives we won in the economic revolution of the thirties—the elimination of built-in inequality as a legally sanctioned part of our national life and the guarantee of the basic securities and opportunities to all Americans, regardless of race.

This domestic problem is made the more pressing because of the fact that it is not really "domestic" at all. In the complex, interrelated world of the mid-twentieth century, the distinction between "foreign" and "domestic" problems becomes ever more unreal for the United States. All of our domestic actions have some measure of international consequence, and this is nowhere more true, or more serious, than here, in the

area of race. The era of the "white" man's hegemony has ended, and the "colored" peoples are rising to demand and secure those rights which for so many centuries have been denied them. The measure of any nation's leadership in the coming decades will be its creative response to this fact. And the beginning of the measurement must be how it responds to the problem of racial justice within its own borders. No country which, in its laws or in its mores, sanctions racial discrimination at home can expect to shape the course of history abroad.

From the standpoint of both our own domestic problem and the world scene, one of the most encouraging events in recent history is the admission of Hawaii to the Union as its fiftieth state. Last month the people of this territory voted overwhelmingly in favor of statehood. Commentators throughout the country have congratulated Hawaii. It would perhaps be more appropriate if we in the continental United States congratulated ourselves.

The admission of Hawaii to the Union was for years furiously opposed by those who clung to the myth of a "white" America. The reason, of course, is that the population of the Hawaiian Islands is only twenty-five percent "white." The majority of the population is native Hawaiian, Chinese and Japanese. But in these islands some measure of the racially "good society" has been achieved—a much greater measure than has been known anywhere else in the United States. Racial discrimination is almost unknown in Hawaii; relations between the various races are as good, probably, as they can ever be in a world where the hearts of men are still corroded by hatred and fear. This new state can set an example for the rest of the nation.

One political commentator has written that Little Rock was the white supremacists' Gettysburg, and Hawaii is their Appomattox. We must hope this is true, if we are to hope for the moral leadership of America in the future at all.

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