

Preface to the Vintage Edition

Events since the publication of the original edition of this book have not changed the basic picture here given. If anything, developments of the recent past have dramatized the same issues.

The passage of the Civil Rights Bill, by a margin that clearly serves as a mandate, is the single most advertised event, but it is clearer than ever that, as Negro leaders affirm here, the significance of such legislation, though fundamental, is strictly limited. For instance, troubles in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana, testify that James Farmer was right in predicting, for some parts of the South, the continuing need to fight out the question of civil rights town by town and county by county. As for the North and West, the riots in Springfield, Massachusetts, and in Los Angeles indicate forcefully enough that civil rights can at best affect in only a limited way the relationship of Negroes to the general society. The riots indicate, too, the increasing danger in the split between the Negro middle class and the lower class, and the lack of influence exercised, in such communities as Watts, by the recognized Negro leadership. President Johnson has eloquently articulated the moral of this situation; certain Negro leaders had, of course, articulated it long before.

Many Negro leaders see the Movement as having potential meanings far beyond the horizon of the Negro's situation, as having, in one way or another, something like a "redemptive" function for society at large. In the more restricted way suggested by Bayard Rustin, this would imply political action in conjunction with whites, and already, even in Mississippi, with the clear indication that under Federal protection Negroes are prepared to register, a reorientation and perhaps regeneration of the Democratic Party may be predicted; and the anti-poverty program, as well as certain other projects for social reform, has been, to say the least, stimulated by the Negro Movement. It is too early to know what the full effect of the Negro Movement will be on national politics, social reform, and our international policy, but it is certain that a segment of the leadership has demonstrated the intention of Negroes to enter, and moreover to be felt in, the mainstream of American life.

October, 1965

R.P.W.