

A RESOUNDING CRY

Valorie Dickerson, Carroll College

"Rest at pale evening a tall, slim tree
Night coming tenderly ... black like me."
(Words by Langston Hughes from "Dream Variations")

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I hold in my hand a pill. A small, diminutive pill from the University of London. This pill can change the pigment of my skin. If it were not for the color of my skin, there would be no need for a pill; there would be no problem. Admit it! None whatsoever.

I am standing here speaking to you formally but relaxed. I am an eighteen year old girl, and I am free; yet, I am forced to question my freedom, not because I want to, but because I am unable to exercise rights which should belong to me as a free person.

Freedom permits the individual to pursue rights, but the Negro must be content to have rights without true freedom. All here would agree that the Negro possesses the rights of citizenship, asylum, and security. You nor I deny these principles, but if one cannot exercise these rights, is this not more effective than denying their existence? Freedom begets good citizenship. How can the Negro child be expected to be a first rate citizen if schools are closed or of low caliber? How can the Negro man be expected to be a first rate citizen if he cannot vote? How can the Negro people be expected to be first rate citizens if their dignity is denied them?

Since these social imbalances cannot be brought into their proper perspective, wouldn't it be phenomenal if the world renowned researchers could develop a pill to eradicate the color myth? We should be ashamed that the society in which we live should have such alien thoughts. What is the result of this color myth? Visualize the gleam of distorted faces, pulsing with hatred, and yeilding to no one. This is the anger of the mob. Picture signs, placards, and turbulent students, frenzied by mass hysteria, and surrendering to authority with complacent triumph. This is the misinformed generation. Perceive the target, the unfortunate recipient of this madness, a discredited human being. The Negro.

I ask you, what is the time? The 1800's you say! Are we blind to those around us? Are we ignorant of our nation's position? We're sitting on a bomb, and the time is running out. Yes, yes, this is the twentieth century, strangely enough. This is "Our Town", U.S.A., 1965! This is the time to make equality for all men a reality in fact.

In the vast majority of cases, prejudice against the Negro is only color deep. Perhaps the segregationist, by his distorted mentality about color, would even

urge us to drain the color from our American flag, leaving it white, the absence of color, and hoist it high upon the mast of reality as a symbol of surrender to immaturity. Ignorance and prejudice. The opposition, the segregationist, must be made aware that his pressure has too frequently forced society to accept the Negro doctor as an equal only when he is considered twice as competent as the white. The opposition, the segregationist, must be made aware that this same fact applies to the Negro lawyer, and indeed, the Negro himself. For society accepts both as equal only after a vigorous demonstration of competence and citizenship above the national norm. This is not right. The Negro is not asking for a "privileged" citizenship, but an acceptance and position common with all Americans.

Is it necessary that mankind develop a pill to eradicate color and destroy prejudice? This pill, an experimental object as yet, can combat the prejudice against the Negro. Pressure from the segregationist has often caused hatred, but on the other hand, Negroes and misguided civil rights groups have frequently caused pressure by ill-timed demonstrations. I do not agree with the unjust pressure of the opposition, or that of the Negro. Remember two pressures do not make a civil right! Malcolm X advocates that the Negro people carry shotguns to protect and enforce their civil rights. No! I do not agree. As a Negro, I feel that we have been misrepresented by a fanatic, and too many others like him who have unfortunately received attention at the wrong time. Fear and hatred breed fanaticism, which is found on both sides of the color barrier. It is only through knowledge and love that service, respect, and admiration are acquired. Yes, prejudice against the Negro is only color deep.

This is my war. This is my kind of war, a war I must fight for my race. I speak for the Negro people, my people. I know the suffering. We have evolved from slavery and ignorance, fighting for those rights which we are entitled to. We cannot --- we will not have them plucked away because of public apathy.

This is your war. This is also your kind of war, the war against another man. Today's racial prejudices are affecting each man, woman, and child. It's malignant fingers envelop the mind, diseasing right reason, and causing a mishapened opinion. Civil rights, segregation, and equality are not isolated movements. Yes, they concern every town and city within the borders of each of our fifty states. Compare these two incidents: the mob violence of Birmingham or Harlem, resulting in death -- to that of brutal, undeniable refusal to be served at a lunch counter. Perhaps the comparison seems unbalanced, the former example without a doubt, more inhuman. Undoubtedly, the Birmingham case is more cruel, but my experiences still remain and are not all overcome. Being accepted -- yes --, with the stipulation that "she acts like a white!" To sit in a restaurant and be "kindly overlooked" has been and will be continued to be experienced by, not only myself, but an overwhelming majority of Negro students in the United States of America.

Ladies and gentlemen, wonder about my doubts on freedom. Worry about the doubts of your own children, when they begin questioning the puzzle of the color barrier.

I hold in my hand a pill. A small, diminutive pill from the University of London. This pill can change the pigment of my skin. It could change the attitudes of Americans. It could change our tomorrow ... Tell me, should I take it? Should we solve our problems with pills? Perhaps the scientist could then perfect a pill for the Jew, the Catholic, the Oriental, the Republican, the Liberal ... The Minority ... a pill which would alter us all, which would conform us to the standard pattern of a white, liberal, conservative, Anglo-Saxon, American, Agnostic.

"Rest at pale evening a tall, slim tree
Night coming tenderly ... black like me."