

Levi Pennington

People

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Levi Pennington To Ruth Haefner, December 20, 1965

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December 20, 1965.

Ruth Haefner,
4242 N. E. Failing,
Portland, Oregon. 97213.

Dear Friend:--

Your Christmas-New Year's letter and the "treatise" on "Sanity, Silence and Social Justice" certainly have given your friends adequate material for good, hard thinking.

There is an old proverb -- well, I do not know how old, but I have known it for more than half a century -- which says, "If the answer is easy, it's wrong." Personally I am sure that is true in the matter of justice to the negro -- and it might be well to keep in mind that white folks deserve justice, too.

It is not generally known, I think, that many of the hotels in Atlantic City, including some of the biggest ones on the Board Walk, the Denis, the Traymore, the Marlborough-Blenheim and perhaps others, are owned and run by Friends. (I'm speaking of the situation some decades ago, and there may have been changes by this time.) I became quite well acquainted with the owner of one of these hotels, and was surprised to hear him say, "We do not cater to Jews." He went on to explain that Atlantic City is so close to New York that if a hotel on the Board Walk sought the patronage of Jews, the hotel would be simply taken over by rich Jews from the metropolis, as the Marlborough-Blenheim was at that time. Under the circumstances he felt that he had to make a choice between running a Jewish hotel or one that was non-Jewish, and he chose the latter. There was a case where segregation of a sort was practically forced on my friend. What would you have done, run a Jewish hotel, or one that was non-Jewish?

I try to think of a sudden and complete integration of schools in the south. What should be my answer if a good white Friend who is a friend of mine said to me this? "If we segregate suddenly and completely here, it will mean that into the first grade with my child will enter more negroes from the under-privileged section of the city than there are white children who have had more privileges, ^{negroes} and who are two grades behind my child in the things that a child should know before entering school. My child will inevitably ^{have} less effective education than would be received under the conditions that have existed." What should I say to this parent?

Many thoughtful negroes insist that educational integration is impossible unless and until housing can be integrated, and this is made extremely difficult by discrimination among real estate dealers; and by the fact that many negroes definitely prefer to live in a negro district rather than in an area where the great majority of the people are white. What can be done about that? Is there real hope that transporting negro children to predominantly white schools is going to be successful?

Well, anybody can ask questions. We must, and the must has moral, religious, socialological, economic and other phases, bring about a better condition for the negroes, and we must in some way secure the cooperation of the negroes themselves. There are plenty of difficulties that can be seen now, and more will develop before the problem is solved, and that will not be this year nor next. But there are things that can be done and must be done. Political rights are not the only ones of which the negro and other minority groups have been too long deprived.

Thanking you for the privilege of reading your good letter and the other material that you included, I am

Sincerely your friend,

Levi T. Pennington.

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