

June 1, 1981

Earl Raab

THE ARCH-AMERICANS

In 1967, the Kerner Commission issued its famous proclamation that America seemed to be moving towards two societies, one black and one white. It still hasn't worked out that way.

In the first place, the black and the white populations agree on too many basic issues. Almost 9 out of 10 whites and almost 9 out of 10 blacks favor a constitutional amendment to prevent the government from spending more money than it takes in. About 6 out of 10 whites and about 5 out of 10 blacks believe that we should return to the military draft. The same percentage (about half) of both whites and blacks believe that we have to take risks with the environment in order to assure a more adequate energy source.

Almost 9 out of 10 whites and 8 out of 10 blacks believe that the courts are too easy with criminals. More than 7 out of 10, of both whites and blacks, are opposed to making marijuana legal. Indeed, more than half of both whites and blacks between the ages of 18 and 29 are opposed to making marijuana legal. And about the same majority of whites and blacks think that abortion should be illegal as a routine form of birth control.

We sometimes are surprised to find out what people *really* think, instead of accepting the judgement of "spokesmen," or the sensationalized evidence of the media, or the views of seventeen people we happen to come across.

There are other clues to the wrongness of the Kerner Commission prophecy. In 1956 only 5 out of 10 whites believed that white and black children should go to the same school; now, almost 9 out of 10

June 1, 1981
Earl Raab
The Arch-Americans
page 2

whites believe that. In 1958, only 4 out of 10 whites said that they would vote for a qualified black president; now 8 out of 10 whites say they would do so. All manner of negative stereotypes about blacks have dropped steadily. That's a fact.

Of course, it is also a fact that whites and blacks have different perceptions of black progress. About 9 out of 10 whites believe that blacks are better off than they were 10 years ago; only about 6 out of 10 blacks believe that. The perceptions of the blacks on that score has some realistic relationship to their personal experiences. The percentage of blacks living in poverty has been cut in half during those years; those who have "gotten out," know it. But the proportion of blacks in poverty is still three times that of the whites. Those who have *not* "gotten out" have no reason to believe that the situation has improved.

But despite their well-founded anger, the American blacks are still in the mainstream of American attitudes and inclinations. Most of us are not close enough to the mainstream of black America to recognize that. The fact is that American blacks have deeper and longer roots in *this* country than almost any other ancestral group. And they were more thoroughly cut off from their countries of origin than any other "immigrant" group. The black American is the *arch-American*, prevalently embracing star spangled American ideals, aspirations and values.

Understanding the black American as the arch-American is key to understanding the special bitterness of the black American, so long a savaged prisoner in his own home. But it is also key to understanding

June 1, 1981
Earl Raab
The Arch-American
page 3

the special bond between the black American and the Jew - who also, more than most, embraced American ideals, aspirations and values. And it is key to understanding the salvation of American.

The treatment of the Jews has been the sick-society litmus test for Europe. But the treatment of blacks has been the main sick-society litmus test for America. Thomas Jefferson knew it would be, and said so. But it is not just a matter of excising bigotry. We will need the arch-American faith and goals of the mainstream black population in order to carry this country through.