

A TIME FOR LEADERSHIP

(An editorial)

Columbia Progress, 19 August 1965, front page

A statement that Columbia and Marion county have not been affected at all by the turmoil in neighboring areas would be based upon wishful thinking. We have been affected in some degree, if only in our thinking.

We are fortunate indeed that here, members of both races have, so far as we know, behaved like the good citizens, we believe them to be. There has been little or no friction so far as we know and no flagrant "incidents" worthy of recognition as such directed at local residents.

We know that workers from outside Columbieland have been discouraged by leaders of the Negro community and we commend these leaders for having the confidence they have had in local white leaders. They felt that at the proper time, these leaders would come out for strict law enforcement, and that the "laws of the land" would be recognized and enforced even though some of them are not popular locally.

Until this week there was a vacuum. This area needed leadership. White people were reluctant to take the lead. Negroes, knowing that their best friends were here, where they grew up, did not lead out on a program of force in spite of suggestions from outsiders.

Communications are still open here between the races. Let's keep it that way. Columbia is fortunate to have a young and very capable mayor, who is working untiringly with all citizens who have problems. This can be said too, for the sheriff and other officials.

Under the leadership of Mayor McLean, local people this week are signing a "Statement of Beliefs", which will appear in this issue of the local paper. Publication of this statement is proof that local leaders feel that it is time to go on record for rigid law enforcement, regardless of who might be involved.

We needed sound sensible leadership. Now we have it in the group who signed the Statement and the hundreds of others who did not have an opportunity to sign, but who endorse the statement. It is impossible to reach everyone in a couple of days. In the rush to make this week's paper, we are confident that the workers tried to get the owners of local firms to approach employees. You can rest assured that many more than the 100 odd, whose names are on the statement would readily subscribe to the points made in the Statement.

We believe that Marion county is unexcelled in the potential opportunity it offers its people and the mutual respect for each other, which prevails among all of its citizens irrespective of their creed, race, or origins. It indeed appears that, when all around us there is turmoil, our county is in a way since the peace and prosperity. This is a credit to every citizen of Marion county and for this we are thankful and proud.

This relationship among all our citizens is not the product of chance, but is the direct result of a county of good Christian, law-abiding people. It is a problem to us if there are now circumstances which could threaten to destroy all that has been gained in several generations. We cannot stand by and let that happen.

As citizens we should concern ourselves with the future of our community and do everything within our power to guarantee its future prosperity.

We may not approve a law, but we should abide by it until it is declared unconstitutional by our duly authorized courts. In the meantime, we should leave the enforcement of the laws to the duly authorized law enforcement officers -- never taking the law into our own hands.

Changing a way of life is always hard, and takes time, but if people of good will are given the opportunity, they will find a solution to almost any problem one can imagine. That our problem here in Marion county will take time, patience and understanding on the part of all our citizens, is the fact that must be faced. There is no reason for unpleasant instances -- changes can be, and we predict will be, made in an atmosphere of trust and understanding.

We have every reason to be proud of our past, and we should look forward to a great future.

We sincerely believe that such a future is possible under existing laws of the nation though we do not at times agree with them personally, we intend, nevertheless to obey them and we humbly and prayerfully urge all citizens to do likewise.

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