

## The Weather

Today—Partly cloudy, high near 60, low in low 40s. The chance of rain is near zero through tonight. Monday—Increasingly cloudy, high in mid 50s. Yesterday—10 a.m. AQI: 10; temp. range: 88-47. Details on B2.

# The Washington

101st Year . No. 118

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SUNDAY, APRIL 2, 1978

# After Dr. King: Strong Currents

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Washington Post Staff Writer

When Martin Luther King Jr. was killed, his army of conscience disbanded. The banners fell, the movement unraveled, his apostles departed in different directions.

But King's death did not, as many assume, leave a void. He left strong currents of social change, an upward thrust by black people which is still working powerfully.

If anything, King seems larger today, a decade later. His legacy was more profound than either his critics or followers imagined, when he was assassinated in Memphis, 10 years ago Tuesday.

He was only 39. His almond eyes were benign, as pacific as his nonviolent philosophy, but his voice was heated with Christian outrage. His genius was in locating the moral fulcrum of white America's racial guilt and applying leverage.

"If Dr. King were around today," said John

Lewis, one of the disciples, "he would be pleased and gratified at some changes that have occurred. . . . On the other hand, he would be quite disappointed."

So much has changed. So much has not changed at all.

Today, nearly a third of the black population remains at the bottom. A fourth of black people are dependent on government welfare.

Yet, in the last decade, millions of blacks climbed to the middle and upper rungs of America's economic ladder. The number of black families earning more than \$15,000 a year has tripled, from 9 to 28 percent, moving upward faster than white families.

Black youths still confront staggering unemployment in the big-city slums, where drugs and street crime are the operative alternatives.

This familiar portrait of despair only tells half of the story. The other half is that young black people have achieved extraordinary



**THE LEGACY OF THE DREAM**

educational gains in the last 10 years—nearly closing the historic gap with whites.

A black youngster who reaches maturity in 1978 has nearly the same chance of going

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## of Social Change

to college as a white child—a social change which could be as meaningful for the future as the GI Bill was after World War II.

These days, black political leaders feel a seasonal chill in racial politics—disappointment with the president they helped elect, a fear that white America is backing away from its commitments to the black minority.

Yet the last decade also produced the greatest political ascendancy for blacks since Reconstruction. From 100 or so black elected officials in 1964, the nation now has 4,300—most of them in the South, where black people were excluded from voting 15 years ago.

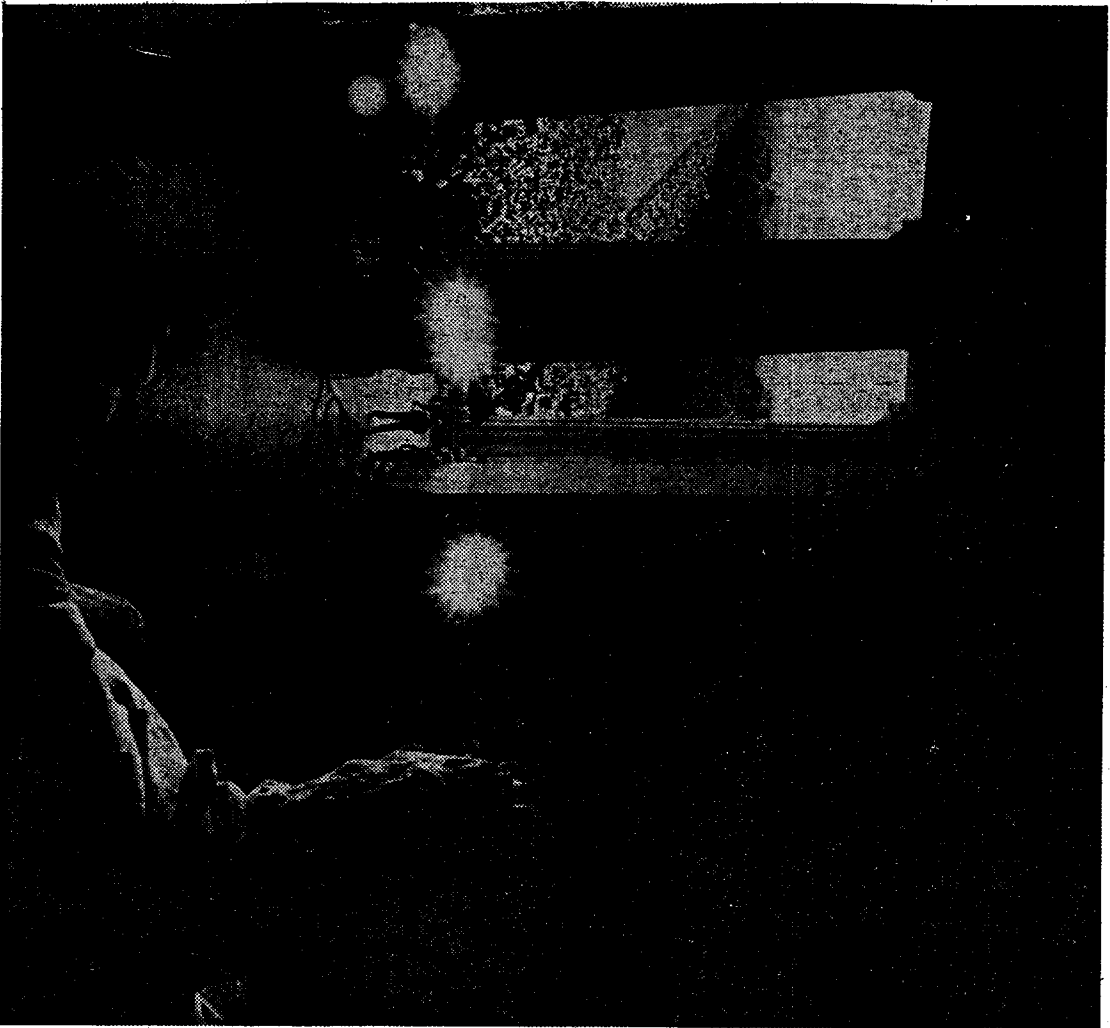
So those who marched with King, ordained ministers who shared his “prophetic vision” of peaceful change, are both pleased and despairing in 1978, as they believe Dr. King would be. Disappointed by the millions left behind in poverty, surprised by sudden progress on other fronts.

John Lewis, now associate director of Action, thought King “would be pleased, on the one hand, that there is less racial fear, less racial hostility, on the part of blacks toward whites and on the part of whites toward blacks. But he would be disappointed to see that, for the most part, we are still two societies, one white, one black.”

The Rev. Andrew Young, who went from civil rights to Congress to his post as U.N. ambassador, feels King would be “thrilled” by the changes across the South and in his own hometown, Atlanta, where a black mayor governs, but terribly disappointed by the racial divisions which persist nationally.

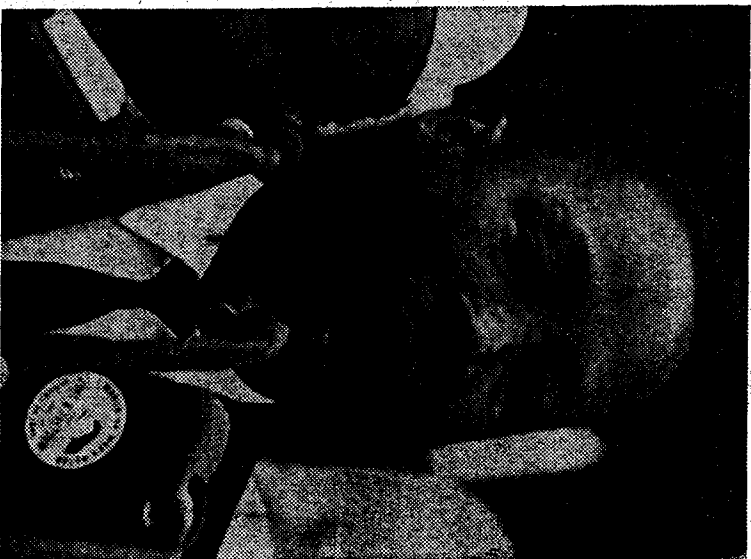
“Things have probably come much further than he might have expected in the Deep South,” Young said, interviewed last week in Nigeria. “The South has come to grips with its traditional racism very well.

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*Abraham Lincoln's statue looks out across a crowd of 250,000 who marched on Washington in 1963, left. Below, Dr. King delivers a civil rights address at the Lincoln Memorial that year. At right, Dr. King's funeral cortege in 1968.*





United Press International

## KING, From A1

But you can not say that for the North."

The Rev. James M. Lawson, a Memphis minister and theoretician of nonviolence in King's movement, now pastor of an affluent black congregation in Los Angeles, believes King would understand that racism has receded since Alabama's Bull Connor turned the dogs and fire hoses on black demonstrators — but racism didn't go away.

"I'm sure," said Lawson, "he would still see this society as a giant chained by its own fear and by the shackles it has forged for itself through violence and greed and racism."

Still, Lawson declared: "The legacy is a different conscience, a reawakened, a disturbed conscience, like America did not have in the '40s and '50s. It's one of the reasons nobody is willing to say today, 'I'm a segregationist.'"

For many Americans, the ambivalent results are more than disappointing. Martin Luther King's oratory, his evangelical style, aroused millennial expectations among blacks and whites, a feeling that the "Promised Land" really was at hand. Laws were enacted; justice would triumph in the stroke of the president's pen.

One thing everybody has learned, since King's death, is that there will be no millennium either on the issue of racial equality or on the elimination of poverty amidst America's plenty.

American society doesn't change in that fashion. But America did change.

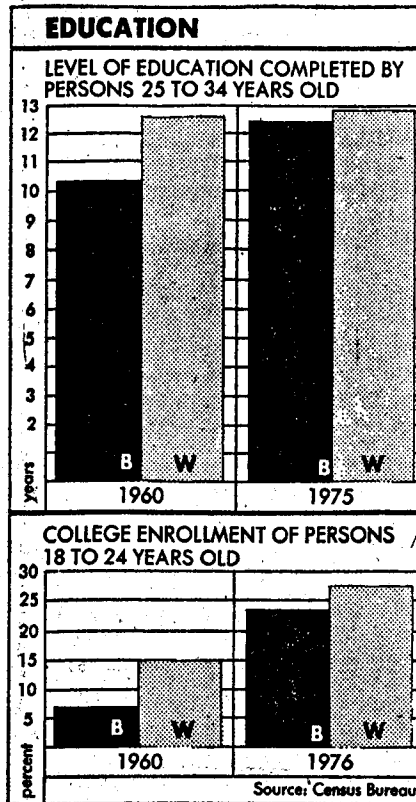
In the historic march that King led to the Lincoln Memorial in summer of 1963, the biggest banners proclaimed the purpose: "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom." This slogan was neat shorthand for parallel objectives which united blacks of every economic level.

For the poor, the bottom half who lived on welfare or stoop labor or random economic hustling, the "jobs" meant most. They hoped for a new economic deal—decent pay for humble work, better opportunities for substantial jobs, a better chance to get off the bottom rung.

"Freedom"—the striking down of racial barriers—was a goal more relevant to the striving black middle class. It stood for total eradication of the segregationist tradition — in schools and colleges, in public places, in business and government—so that black men and women could share, too, the good life which America promises to the talented and ambitious.

When King was killed, it was as if that banner were torn in two. The solidarity he created became, increasingly, strained by separate goals that yielded quite different results.

One half of the banner stayed aloft,



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and its promise was significantly realized. The other fell to the ground, symbolically trampled in the muddy confusion of Resurrection City, that bitter encampment where poor people gathered in the summer after King's death, where his coalition was not born again, but torn asunder.

"King was shot down just at the time he was beginning to move more severely into structural economic changes," Lawson said. "He was talking about it earlier, but he really hadn't gotten into it. The movement was really working on those changes which were most easy to achieve—pulling down the segregation signs. In a way, that was necessary first, but that was not the hardest part."

Most of the "freedom" agenda was fulfilled. The barriers were struck down in law, if not always in popular usage, and the effect has been dramatic: hundreds of thousands of young black people are now rising up through ranks where they were once excluded.

One of five black men now holds a white-collar job, more than double the number in 1960, approaching 1 million.

Five percent are now managers and administrators, nearly doubled since 1970. In some regions, young black people are approaching income parity with whites of similar age and family structure.

These changes are usually lost in the political dialogues, obscured by overall medians which show zero change and by the continued bedrock poverty which engulfs nearly one-third of the black population. These

gains, however, are signals of improved opportunities.

For the entire nation, according to U.S. Census studies, the racial income gap between husband-and-wife families, under 35, is closing steadily. In 1959, the young black family earned 62 percent of the white family's median income. By 1969, it earned 80 percent. In 1976, it earned 88 percent.

These gains for "whole families" were strong in every region, including the South. In the North and West, these black families have reached virtual equality—earning 98 percent of the white family's median income.

The long-range significance is obvious: as these younger black families mature and age, replacing older black families who suffered irreversible discrimination in their working lives, the overall level of racial equity should rise with them.

And yet it hasn't risen in the last decade. The median income gap for all black families, young and old, whole and separated, is still 59 percent of white incomes—the same as 10 years ago. The racial gap on unemployment, aside from minor fluctuations, remains unchanged—blacks suffer twice as much when the economy slows down and people can't find work.

A rough explanation lies in the drifting apart of these two economic worlds of black people. Incomes at the bottom have remained even or even gone down a bit, while the others prospered. Life at the bottom is, increasingly, described as a single-parent family, usually a woman trying to raise her children and to work, who moves on and off public welfare:

The most ominous fact is this: two out of every five black children are growing up in homes without a father present, at least in legal terms. The black woman as sole provider represented 27 percent of all black families in 1969. By 1977, female-headed families were 37 percent, compared with 11 percent among white families.

But the familiar stereotype of the black welfare mothers, haplessly bearing more children, conflicts with competing realities. For one thing, the birth rate among all black women is declining, just as it is among whites.

More to the point, one of the striking and largely uncelebrated stories of the last decade is of the rising fortunes of black women in the job market—including some of those single mothers who used to be bound to a welfare check.

Among all women who work, full-time, white and black, wages and salaries are now quite close to equality, nationwide. Black women in 1976 earned 93 percent of white women's median income. In the North and West, black women actually earned slightly more—102 percent of white women's median income. Black men suffer from a much greater disparity (72 percent of white male incomes) and, of course, all women workers suffer in comparison with all men.

The equity between white and black women may be partly an accident of history. Black women have always de-

pendent more on jobs, so they were in the labor market ahead of many white women, in a better position to demand equal treatment.

But black women have also improved their occupational status dramatically. In 1964, one-third of the black women who worked were scrubbing someone else's floors or cooking their meals—as servants in white homes.

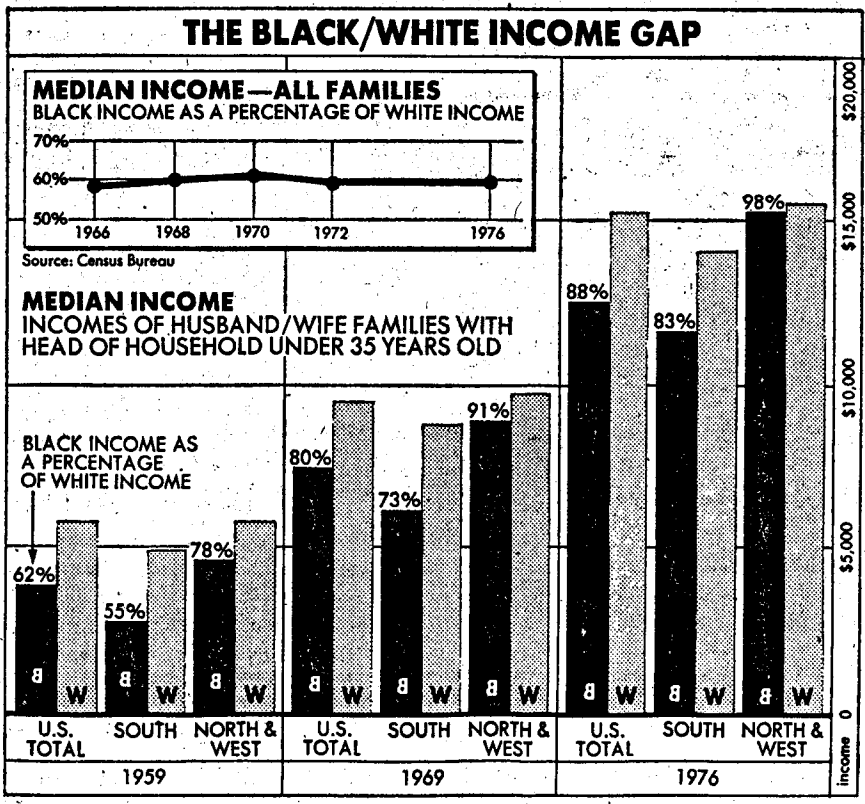
By 1976, black women serving in private households had decreased from 33 percent to 11 percent.

Where did all the maids go? Mainly, they went to work in offices. White-collar employment for black women has doubled, up to 43 percent. They are clustered, to be sure, at the bottom ranks of that sphere, mainly in clerical and secretarial jobs.

But not entirely. Over 12 years, the number of black women in professional and technical jobs increased from 8 to 13 percent, while white women in the same jobs increased only modestly, from 14 to 16 percent.

The strongest lesson of the last 10 years is the sardonic message which black people already earned during World War II—nothing stimulates equal opportunity in the American job market more surely than wartime and a super-heated economy. The racial gaps narrowed in the boom years of the Vietnam war and many, but not all, widened again during the subsequent recession.

One important trend did not falter—the steady improvement in educational attainment and opportunities for young blacks, men and women.



College enrollment tripled for blacks in the last 15 years, a harbinger of further economic progress.

The opportunities for higher education have been nearly equalized. In 1976, among young people, 18 to 24, 23 percent of all blacks were enrolled in colleges and universities, compared with 27 percent of all whites, though black students were enrolled more often in vocational-technical programs.

This accomplishment poses several explosive political questions: will black enrollments, now so close to parity, begin to recede if the Supreme Court or Congress prohibits affirmative action programs? From the other side of that argument, some white ethnic groups may discover that black participation in higher education is now equal to or better than their own.

The implication of census data on income and education is that once black young people complete college they have a much better chance of closing the income gap with their white peers. But the opposite may be happening to young black people who have barely finished high school and are looking for good jobs.

During the '60s, everyone from the president to local civil rights leaders urged black youths to have faith in the system, to stay in school and get their diplomas.

To a remarkable degree, the young people followed that counsel, and now many of them are bitterly disappointed by the outcome.

One result is a better-educated class

of unemployed, a generation of laborers and service workers with three or four more years of schooling than their forebears had, but not much progress upward. The racial gap in educational attainment among young people has almost closed — but the racial gap in youth employment has widened.

Many explanations are offered, but not solutions that are politically acceptable. The black youth, it is said, got lousy schooling. They have bad attitudes or work habits or worse. But many economists blame the economy, not the unemployed: the country did not create enough of those better jobs which were promised a decade ago. If nothing changes, many black leaders quietly predict a renewal of social disorders in the years ahead.

"In my estimation," said John Lewis of Action, "It's a very dangerous time we're going through. And not just for the people at the bottom. They're in a state of chronic depression. It's dangerous for the whole society."

"Race mixing," as the old segs of the South used to call it, is definitely an increasing feature of American life. This does not mean whites and blacks are holding hands socially or even living in the same neighborhoods, but interracial contacts are much more common today, thanks

largely to the civil rights legislation of the '60s.

The City Council in Selma, where Martin Luther King staged the melodrama that effectively enacted the Voting Rights Act, now has five white members and five black members. Across the South, with pockets of exceptions, the political change is the same: blacks vote and blacks elect. Or blacks can defeat.

"The politics of race is dead in the South," said Lewis, who led voter-registration campaigns under dangerous circumstances for so many years. "It's gone, dead. It won't come back."

If Lewis is right, this alone is historic change. For 100 years, white politicians in the South ran successfully on the platform of racial hatred and white supremacy.

Lewis has personal evidence that things are changed: when the Senate confirmed his appointment to the federal volunteer agency, Lewis' first call of congratulations came from Sen. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina. The former Dixiecrat segregationist is running again this year and working hard to win black votes.

Black mayors have been elected in five of the largest cities—Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Atlanta, New Orleans and Detroit—and in more than 150 lesser ones. Four of the 16 black members of Congress are from southern districts. The Democratic Party, as one political commentator put it, may well be "the most thoroughly integrated institution in America."

Beyond politics, beyond the South, racial integration proceeds much more slowly or not at all. After King's death, southern school systems were thoroughly integrated, but racial isolation is the still dominant reality of northern and western cities. Integra-

tion has increased, but most black school children in the North still go to school in black-majority schools.

If any of the civil rights laws failed totally, it was the Open Housing Act of 1968, enacted after King's death, but enforced hardly at all in the intervening years. Black families, with increased prosperity, are moving in larger numbers to the suburbs and returning to the South, but most census experts think the integration of all-white neighborhoods has been slight, bordering on nonexistent.

One indicator to the contrary is a national poll by the National Opinion Research Center, which asked white citizens if there are any blacks living in their neighborhoods. In 1972, 30 percent said yes. Five years later, 41 percent answered yes.

Every major sampling of public opinion indicates that, since King addressed the nation with his moral questions, white attitudes on race have become more and more tolerant.

Do you support the principle of racial equality? Only 4 per cent of white America is willing to say no. Do you favor racial segregation? Only 12 per cent say they do.

But there are serious contradictions behind these attitudes. Whites declare, 5 to 1, that they would be willing to send their children to a school whose enrollment is half black. But an even larger majority opposes the kind of busing plans that would make this school integration a reality.

A majority of whites are not opposed to housing integration. But they are opposed to the government intervention which might make it happen.

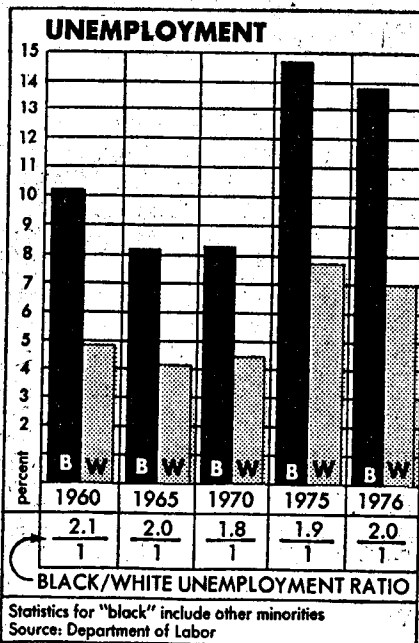
"Race still divides us," said the Rev. Jesse Jackson, another disciple whose organization, PUSH, still confronts the issue with direct-action tactics. "Race still divides our churches, our communities, our schools, our jobs, our country."

According to the public opinion samplings, there is still a hard core of racist opinion among whites, despite the general espousals of tolerance. When whites are asked if they would vote for a qualified black candidate for president, about one-fourth say no. Do they support laws against interracial marriage? Do they believe blacks have less in-born ability? About the same percentage say they do.

Thus, about 25 percent of white America chooses discreet ways of saying they still believe in white supremacy. But this much has changed: in the last 10 or 15 years, the racist group has gotten much smaller, almost by half.

King's legacy as a public leader includes an ironic trade-off with White America. King and the civil rights movement taught a generation of Americans how to penetrate closed political decision-making with direct-action tactics.

When the anti-abortion mothers march around the Capitol, when the



farmers jam the streets with their tractors, they are, consciously or otherwise, imitating the moral theater Martin Luther King staged for the mass audience of television. Sometimes it works, and often it doesn't, but a range of political strategies, now regarded as orthodox and acceptable, was considered outrageous sometimes illegal when King introduced it. But, while white Americans adapt

King's methods to their causes, many black leaders feel rising frustration with their own political action. To them, it seems increasingly fragmented, less effective than their voting strength and 4,300 elected officials would seem to guarantee.

In part, these are tensions produced by success. Black community leaders who become elected officials are no longer available to run grassroots organizations. As some blacks prosper and others remain behind, their political viewpoints drift farther apart.

"One of the things King would have to battle today," said Lawson, "is the acceptance by many, many black folks of the idea of the elite 10 per cent, the notion of a class thing."

Lawson's affluent church parish in Los Angeles is sometimes called the "glitter ghetto," there are so many doctors and lawyers.

"They do a good deal of boasting about the money coming in and their acceptance in certain areas of society," Lawson complained, "or what they think is acceptance. It is very strong; it is a consequence of the success of the '60s."

Meanwhile, the conflict points of racial discrimination have become more subtle and complicated, much harder to confront than Bull Connor was at Selma.

Jesse Jackson is organizing South Carolina blacks to fight the gradual attrition of black school teachers from that state's integrated system. Lawson complains about private "quotas" within corporations which hold back black promotions. But the national debate has focused on white objections to "reverse discrimination" in favor of blacks.

The black political dialogue is now producing a kind of negative-positive debate. Some leaders and social policy thinkers insist that talking about the limited progress will only weaken political support for further action to help the poor. But others reply that to ignore the economic progress of the last decade is to deny the existence of those black men and women who have climbed upward in the white world.

Nobody can find the moral fulcrum which might reunite King's coalition, not among whites, nor among blacks. In that pale mood, Jesse Jackson offered this benediction:

"He would challenge us not to lose the spirit of reconciliation. He believed as long as people are living, they can change. He would never give up on that."