

NJ - Civil Rights

FROM: Office of the Governor

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REMARKS OF GOVERNOR RICHARD J. HUGHES
AT STATEWIDE CONFERENCE FOR
ALL MUNICIPAL CIVIL RIGHTS
COMMISSIONS IN NEW JERSEY
RUTGERS - THE STATE UNIVERSITY, NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY
MAY 22, 1965

With the fantastic growth which this country ~~has~~ experienced in the past 100 years, and with the corresponding growth of big business, big government, big labor, and big social institutions, we sometimes lose sight of the fact that in the area of human rights the basic power to do good and effect change resides in local leadership.

Today we have the opportunity to redress the trend toward too much centralization, if we but accept our individual and collective responsibilities for local action thrust upon us by the civil rights and civil opportunities revolution which we are now passing through.

That is why I, as Governor, have come before you today, the representatives of the growing numbers of local civil rights commissions in New Jersey, to reaffirm my faith in home rule and local responsibility, and to tell you something you already know: that the practical and educational efforts of community officials and civic minded leaders like yourselves, with ethical commitments to equality, hold the greatest potential for pushing human rights forward in this State.

You who speak for major segments of your communities; you who know the old myths which have prevented some of your own towns from moving forward at their full potential; you who are the recognized leaders now functioning with the delegated powers of your Mayor or City Council hold in your hands the keys not only to progress, but to retrogression. For if you succeed, we will all succeed. And if you fail, then we are all going to fail.

Those who say that a sufficient number of laws and court decisions will eliminate discrimination are only partly right. Laws act as moral guides to decent social behavior. They regulate human actions, but they do not necessarily change human attitudes.

We have seen the positive effects of laws against discrimination in our own State in employment, labor organization membership, in housing, education and access to public accommodations.

But, beyond law, where shall the responsibility lie for the development of man's conscience? Shall the State arm itself with a vast thought police and swoop down upon the would-be offender who harbors prejudicial or other undesirable thoughts,

fine him or thrust him into jail, as is done in some other political systems foreign to our ways?

Would that cure the evil? I think not.

We all believe, and rightly so, that such activity by a state smacks of totalitarianism.

Let us also not think that purely legal or juridical means make people love one another. They may make people ~~respect~~ the rights and property of others, but our efforts must go farther, to education.

Education is basically your job. And education doesn't just mean holding brotherhood programs or awarding plaques. It means getting into the modern civil rights era by actively working at the grass roots for better understanding and observance of the State Law Against Discrimination. It means making better known the voluminous information on the positive contributions of minority groups to American history. It means local discussions within the Commission of real or alleged civil rights grievances, recognizing that some of those grievances may be based on past events rather than present facts. But you must work to dispel the myths held both by the majority community as well as the minority community.

On occasion your work may entail suggesting, through the Mayor or the local governing body, that the local board of education or housing authority plan to avoid future problems of racial imbalance. Your Commission may be called upon to serve as a civil rights aid in the local anti-poverty program. And you should certainly try to see to it in your community that people simply come to know one another better by visiting across racial, religious and ethnic lines. Visit each other's churches and synagogues, an effort in keeping with the new ecumenical spirit pervading the world today.

In short, you are in the vanguard of the civil rights movement not because it is an easy task, but precisely because it is difficult and the road is hard and long. For if the forces of good do not lead, then who will? It was a wise man who said: "For evil to triumph, it is only necessary that good men do nothing."

The passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 was the culmination of 100 years of effort. It was also a beginning of a new era, not just in the protection of the natural rights of Americans, but a guarantee of those daily human rights which make an American.

I join you and your friends and colleagues in that effort. My record as Governor and that of my administration is public and committed to our common cause. No one man, be he President or Governor, can do this alone. That must come from the people, and it is in this effort that I seek your help.

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