

*United States
needs time
to heal discords
of a decade*

pears from a friendly nearby capital, the United States still shows the wounds of a traumatic period but has in some respects recovered well from them. In others it gives reason to question how long recovery will take rather than whether it will occur. No country, no matter how strong fundamentally, can undergo the discords that wracked the United States for nearly a decade without injuries that need time to heal.

Still imperfectly knit

The Americans are a multi-group people of widely differing racial, national and religious backgrounds, still imperfectly knit into a cohesive whole after 200 years. The first President, George Washington, knew how great the need for a unifying process would be when, in his farewell address, he carefully avoided referring to a federal union and spoke instead of a "national union". Many of the worst discords have stemmed from the great variation in American origins and from resistance to the unifying process: the increasingly angry disputes that preceded the Civil War; the war itself, fought so tenaciously that history recognizes it as the first of the total wars in a century torn by them; the spread of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s until its membership climbed into the millions; the struggle of the 1960s over civil rights. But simultaneously there has existed the commitment to egalitarianism that has distinguished the American experiment from its beginnings. There has also been, and exists today despite the decline in the strength of religion, the powerful impact of Protestantism in its most Puritan form — its influence to be distinguished from the sects that were outgrowths of Catholicism rather than rebellions against it.

Beginning with the civil rights movement of the early 1960s and the closely-related urban problems in the North, the United States was subjected to a succession of bitter controversies for most of a decade. The dispute over Vietnam divided a nation where the riotous cry "Burn, baby, burn!" was always shrill and intense. Watergate did deep damage to confidence in the political process but perhaps raised faith in some members of the judiciary and clearly brought "the media" new esteem. Polls that a year or two ago showed Walter Cronkite the most trusted figure in the country still show that the news organizations are the only major institutions with increased credibility. More or less simultaneously with the great controversies, the "youth rebellion" created a "generation gap" and brought often violent campus

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unrest. The use and acceptability of drugs spread. New and easier attitudes towards sex became widespread. A vigorous challenge towards authority developed among intellectuals. The new respect the news media enjoyed was accompanied by their own adoption of a more clear-cut opposition role. For many, the women's movement was deeply disturbing, especially after it became difficult to ridicule. "Consumerism" developed powerful challenges to even the most firmly-entrenched industries. Lesser combinations of such discordant forces would have strained the social fabric of any nation. The full force of them was a rigorous test of the strength of America, material and psychological.

Black-white relations

Somewhat surprisingly, there is evidence suggesting that the most recent changes may be healthiest in the area that involved the deepest passions a few years ago — relations between blacks and whites. To an outsider, as no doubt to many Americans, the progress is undeniable, though the troubling question remains: Which way should the emphasis lie? On the change since the hot summers of mob violence, when block after urban block was burnt, many still not rebuilt? On the magnitude of the continuous problem? On the rise in the tolerance level among educated sophisticated and prosperous groups in both races, in the hope that new attitudes will seep downwards? Or on the great continuing problems of accommodation physical and psychological, at the levels where economic uncertainty reinforces suspicion and hostility? New opportunities go beyond "tokenism"; formidable problems of education and training remain to be met before opportunities can be fully grasped. Meanwhile, among non-whites, unemployment last year ranged from 13 to 47 per cent. Among whites, the incidence of joblessness was from 7.4 to 8.5 per cent. America, like Rome, was not built in a day — not even in two centuries. Yet few would deny that voting freedom, to choose an example from this year, will have changed so much in November as to be different in kind, not merely degree, from the election that brought John Kennedy to power.

The problems of the great American cities have been intensified by racial strife but it would be mistaken to attribute all of their difficulties to that one cause. The movement to suburbs, with deadening effects on urban centres, occurs in single-race communities as well: the prosperous flee the poor regardless of race when property values are threatened. The search for clearer air is triggered by pollution from