

Florida A&M Head Says White Thinking Must Change

Integration will never work until there is a commitment on the part of whites in control to change their attitudes toward the black and the poor, the president of Florida A&M University declared here Friday.

Dr. Benjamin Perry, a wind-up speaker in the two-day Governor's conference on education opportunities for the disadvantaged, said the present system is only creating tomorrow's welfare cases.

"White people must realize that no longer will they be able to hide their prejudices behind insincere smiles," said Perry. "The establishment needs to change its attitudes from one of tolerance to one of full acceptance of the individual."

Perry said the millions of dollars spent supporting a "pre-doomed" anti-poverty program was a waste of federal resources, and a large number of people it purported to serve were never touched by the trickle of funds filtering down through administrators and bureaucrats.

"Florida," he said, "may be the land of sunshine, but for many the sun is a tyrant. In a state that has 7,801 attorneys only 60 are black. In a state that has vast industry, less than 10 per cent of managerial positions are held by minorities."

Perry noted that the problems of a large, unskilled labor force went unnoticed, "until national television smoked out the eyesore that many of us already knew existed."

The South is headed for more racial unrest, he said, with the return of 10,000 to 15,000 disillusioned blacks each year from the North.



DR. BENJAMIN PERRY
Creating Welfare Cases

Dr. Perry admonished the 1,000 conferees in attendance that Florida cannot stand another 10 years of nothingness. He urged wider educational opportunities for blacks, including:

- A reduction of attrition rates in the universities and revised curricula to meet changing times and serve all members.

- More attention to counseling and guidance at the secondary level.

- Abolishing middle class values in the social structure of higher education.

- Monies for support of black institutions.

- A review of educational programs relevant to the disadvantaged communities.

Perry also called for a commitment by the state government to provide better housing and fair employment practices.

St. Petersburg Junior College President Michael M. Bennett,

another speaker on the final day of the conference, held at the University of Florida noted that not all disadvantaged students are black. Significant numbers are white.

The junior college, he said, is well adapted to "bridging and remediation" of the learning difficulties of the disadvantaged.

Bennett noted that the doors to opportunity were unlocked for blacks in 1954.

"They were invited to come in and sink or swim, with the rest of us," he said. "Several hundred blacks enrolled at my junior college — so we were fulfilling the American ideal of equal opportunity."

Bennett said he realized the emptiness of "equal opportunity" three years ago at a graduation ceremony.

"About 750 graduates paraded across the platform that May evening. Two of them were black. The disparity was just too great to ignore."

Bennett said educators must realize that disadvantaged students are not stupid, they are simply bewildered in a strange environment.

"The disadvantaged," he said, "pose the greatest challenge yet to our educational system."