

REBELLION AGAINST RACIALISM

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It is significant that the revival on the American campus of extra-mural activity challenging the *status quo* should stem from Southern Negro students. The concern for off-campus problems had never been as keen among American students as among those in Europe, Asia and Latin America, and such as existed had atrophied during the era of McCarthyism. Complacency ruled the American campus. Security became the chief concern of students.

This apparent indifference to vital political and civic problems came to an abrupt end on February 1st when four students of the all-Negro North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College at Greensboro, in defiance of long-established custom, sat down at a lunch counter in Woolworth's variety store and asked for service. They sat for an hour, until the store closed, and still were not served.

Woolworth's, like other stores in the region, solicits and welcomes Negro trade unsegregated at every counter except where food is served and obeisance duly paid to the Southern taboo against Negroes and whites eating together. In Southern cities generally, it is impossible for a Negro shopping downtown or on any business that takes him out of the Negro ghetto to sit down for a snack or a meal or even a glass of water at a lunch counter or in a restaurant patronized by white persons. In some places he may be served standing up but not sitting down. There are seldom eating places in the heart of the city open to Negroes. Accordingly, they must go thirsty and remain hungry until they return to the restricted Negro area.

For the most part there are no laws in the South or elsewhere requiring the exclusion of Negroes from public eating places. It is merely a practice embedded in custom. Such laws as exist are of questionable constitutional validity. On the other hand, there are no laws in the South, such as have been enacted in 26 Northern and Western states, forbidding racial discrimination in places of public accommodation.

The present revolt, started in Greensboro, spread rapidly to other cities in North Carolina and to other states until, in one form or another, it encompassed every state in the U.S. where the pattern of racial discrimination in public facilities prevailed.

Within a month there were "sit-ins" and other demonstrations against discrimination at lunch counters, public libraries, art galleries, and election polls in a score of cities. Negro college and high school students, sometimes aided by young white collegians and Negro adults, conducted the non-violent demonstrations against racism.

By the end of April, protest demonstrations at lunch counters, on the beach or in public institutions had been conducted in 58 cities across the South, with repeat performances in many of them. Principally, the demonstrations were directed at such chain variety stores as F. W. Woolworth, S. S. Kresge, S. H. Kress and W. T. Grant. Local stores and state and regional chains were also subject to the "sit-ins", as were the lunch rooms of such public buildings as courthouses and state capitols.

The non-violent passive resistance demonstrations were met in a variety of ways by the store managers, the police and the public. In most places, the lunch counters were closed once the Negro students occupied the seats. In some instances the stores were cleared and closed. This procedure was followed particularly where there had been false alarms of hidden bombs or where white hoodlums precipitated or threatened violence. The Negro students and the few white allies who joined them in the demonstrations were subjected to abuse and even attacks by teenage and adult white hooligans. The demonstrators never retaliated, while police arrested no more than a handful of the hoodlums.

More than 1,300 demonstrating students, however, including a score or more of young white men and women, have been arrested and fined a total of \$103,400. A few of these have resolutely refused bail and payment of their fines, preferring to serve their sentences as an expression of their determination to continue the struggle. Not only have they faced the abuse of private citizens, but also that of the police. Tear gas, fire-hose, and police dogs have been used in efforts to break up the demonstrations.

In most instances bail money has been raised and lawyers provided by local citizens or units of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People or directly by the NAACP Legal Defence and Educational Fund. Charges against the students ranged from disorderly conduct and trespass to a conspiracy to obstruct trade (Nashville, Tenn.). The state legislatures of Georgia, Mississippi, Arkansas and Virginia hastily enacted new trespass measures, making it a misdemeanour for anyone to refuse

to leave an establishment when ordered out by the owner or manager. Similar laws already existed in some of the other states.

The legal right of the students to stage "sit-in" demonstrations has not been firmly established. Charges of trespass against 43 Negro students for demonstrating on company-owned sidewalks in a Raleigh (North Carolina) case were dismissed on April 22nd on the basis of a United States Supreme Court decision which held that the owner abrogated absolute control over such property once he opened it to public use. Out of the pending cases will come, almost certainly, a test of whether an establishment, having invited a customer in for general purchases, can legally charge trespass when the customer seeks a service denied him solely on account of his race. The 350-year-old case of the six carpenters in an English suit is cited in defence of the students against trespass charges. The store owners and law enforcement officers are depending upon a recent federal district court ruling in a Baltimore case that "a restaurant has the right to select its clientèle and make the selection on the basis of colour if it so desires."

The students, however, are not so much concerned with legal as with moral rights. Their objective encompasses much more than the right to sit down at a lunch counter for a sandwich and a cup of coffee. Their real goal is the establishment of respect for the dignity of the Negro as a person, entitled to all the rights accorded his fellow human beings. This goal, they fully realize, is unattainable within the framework of segregation. At the heart of the movement is discontent with the whole *status quo*. The students, belying the claims of many Southern white politicians and editorialists that Negroes are satisfied with their position in Southern society, reject not only the philosophy of segregation, but the practice as well. They are refusing to cooperate any longer with a system they consider undemocratic and un-Christian, cruel and degrading.

Theirs is a revolt against a rigid caste system which relegates Negroes to an inferior position, permitting escape neither to the individual on a merit basis nor to the masses on any basis at all. Segregation is the instrument through which the system has been maintained. Indeed, the maintenance of the system, and not separation of the races, is the primary purpose of compulsory segregation. Within the framework of caste, Southern whites and Negroes have been by tradition intimately associated with one

another. The Southern white woman who entrusts her children to the care of a Negro nurse commonly rebels at the idea of her children going to school with the children of the very black nurse who so closely and for so long looked after them.

The "sit-in" demonstrations dramatize the students' rejection of this archaic system, while the demonstrators assert both their Americanism and their essential humanity. Their impatience is born of the conviction that they have already had to wait too long for rights justly due to them. Nothing less than recognition of their full citizenship rights will still their demands.

It is this conviction which has given to the movement the colour of a crusade. The students are prepared to pay whatever price the victory entails—abuse, violence, expulsion, imprisonment. They are not prepared to compromise on the principle of the oneness and equality of all humankind. They scorn laws and customs which set them apart from other human beings of whatever origin. They refrain from hate and retaliation under extreme provocation. They affirm their dedication to the basic principles of political democracy and the teachings of their Christian faith.

The manner in which they have conducted their campaign, their dependence upon non-violence, their poise and their courage, have won for the Southern Negro student surprising support even in the South. Students from Southern white colleges as well as white students attending predominantly Negro colleges have participated in the "sit-ins" and given moral and financial support to the movement. Certain Southern newspapers have indicated the moral justice of the students' position. *The Daily News*, published in Greensboro, N.C., where the present movement began, observed that ". . . the only sensible course is to find some way to serve all those customers who want to be served" and called for counsel "to help North Carolina dispose of this sometimes ridiculous controversy over where and how people have lunch."

The Richmond (Va.) *News Leader*, a strongly pro-segregation newspaper and originator of Virginia's "massive resistance" to public school desegregation, commented:

"Many a Virginian must have felt a tinge of wry regret at the state of things as they are, in reading of Saturday's 'sit-downs' by Negro students in Richmond stores. Here were the colored students, in coats, white shirts, ties, and one of them was reading Goethe and one was taking notes from a biology

text. And here, on the sidewalk outside, was a gang of white boys come to heckle, a ragtail rabble, slack-jawed, black-jacketed, grinning fit to kill, and some of them, God save the mark, were waving the proud and honored flag of the Southern States in the last war (the Civil War) fought by gentlemen. Eheu! It gives one pause."

On a statewide telecast, Governor Leroy Collins of Florida indicated that the store owners had a legal right to deny service to Negroes, but questioned the morality of an establishment which solicited Negroes as customers for a variety of goods while rejecting them as lunch room guests.

"As far as I'm concerned," he said, "I don't mind saying that if a man has a department store and he invites the public generally to come into in his department store and trade, I think then it is unfair and morally wrong for him to single out one department and say he does not want or will not allow Negroes to patronize that one department."

The Governor announced the appointment of a bi-racial committee to work on the state level in order to improve race relations. He called upon communities throughout the state to set up similar local committees. His appeal won wide support within the state as well as elsewhere.

Singularly, the only national figure to berate the students has been former President Harry S. Truman who (1) announced belligerently that he would throw them out if they invaded a store he ran, (2) admonished them to "behave and be good citizens while pushing for integration", (3) accused the NAACP of "doing the wrong thing . . . losing friends instead of making them", and (4) charged that the student movement was instigated by Communists. Later he conceded that if he ran a lunch counter there would be no segregation and acknowledged that he had no evidence of Communist infiltration or instigation of the movement.

The students, the movement and the NAACP were less the victims of Mr. Truman's blunt expostulation than the Democratic Party of which the former President is the nominal head. On the basis of his record as President, Mr. Truman proved an effective campaigner in Negro districts during the 1952 and 1956 presidential elections. Present indications are that he will be a liability among coloured voters this year because of his hostility to the student movement.

Even President Eisenhower, a self-proclaimed moderate on civil rights as on other issues, acknowledged the moral justice of the students and gave the movement an approving nod.

In response to a reporter's question at his news conference on March 16th, the President said:

"I am deeply sympathetic with the efforts of any group to enjoy the rights of equality that they are guaranteed by the Constitution. I do not believe that violence in any form furthers that aspiration, and I deplore any violence that is exercised to prevent them—in having and enjoying those rights . . . if a person is expressing such an aspiration as this in a perfectly legal way, then I don't see any reason why he should not do it."

Such other leading political figures as Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller and Senators Hubert Humphrey, John Kennedy and Stuart Symington are on record in support of the students. Also supporting them are organized labour, including the North Carolina State Federation, various religious denominations and organizations, and many political and civic groups.

The movement shook Northern college students, mostly white, out of the lethargy to which they had succumbed under the impact of McCarthyism. The sons and daughters of America's upper classes, students of the Ivy League colleges, as well as the middle class students attending the state universities, municipal colleges and the less expensive denominational institutions across the country rallied to the support of their fellow students in the Deep South. They raised money to help carry on the campaign and to provide scholarships for expelled students, circulated petitions and picketed the non-Southern outlets of the offending chains. A group of 150 students from four New England colleges picketed the White House on April 15th in protest against racial discrimination.

From the outset, the students took fierce pride in the independence of their movement. It was something which they claimed as their own, even though many of the leaders were members of NAACP college chapters and some of other organizations such as CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). It was something spontaneous that they had started; and they clearly intended to keep it within their control. Nevertheless, they needed and sought the support of established organizations.

The NAACP set up state and area co-ordinating committees, helping to publicize and otherwise aid the movement. The SCLC called a regional conference to assist in the co-ordination of the movement. On March 16th, Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, instituted a campaign through the Association's 1,200 local units to withhold patronage from all outlets of those chains the Southern stores of which discriminated against Negroes. He also asked that picket lines be established in front of all the stores, urging consumers not to patronize them.

CORE also called for nation-wide picketing of the stores and launched a campaign to secure 2,000,000 pledges not to patronize the offending chains. Generous support was given by student groups, labour unions, the clergy, and many local organizations.

Because these stores cater primarily for low-income consumers, wholesale withholding of patronage by Negroes alone could prove an effective economic weapon. In communities where Negroes constitute 25 to 30 per cent of the total population, they may well account for 50 per cent or more of the regular patronage, as coloured citizens are disproportionately concentrated in the low-income group. A sustained campaign by Negroes, augmented by sympathetic whites, could mean the difference between profit and ruin.

The most significant success of the present campaign came in Nashville, Tennessee, where six department and variety stores quietly lifted the colour bar at their lunch counters on May 10th. Some 150 students had been harassed and arrested during "sit-in" demonstrations in April. Agreement was reached to open the counters on an integrated basis after negotiations carried on between the merchants, city officials and representatives of the students.

On April 19th, the home of Z. Alexander Looby was wrecked by a bomb. He and his wife narrowly escaped assassination. A member of the NAACP Board of Directors and one of two Negro members of the Nashville City Council, Mr. Looby was chief counsel for the students. Although the city offered a reward of \$10,000 and the Federal Bureau of Investigation entered the case, no clues had been uncovered as of mid-May.

Earlier the variety stores in San Antonio, Galveston, Corpus Christi and Dallas (Texas), had lifted the racial ban. The move came in San Antonio after NAACP groups prepared to stage demonstrations. Community leaders, the clergy and business

leaders settled the issue, negating the necessity for any demonstration. Desegregation of certain lunch room facilities have also been registered in such border state cities as Baltimore, St. Louis, Louisville and St. Joseph, Mo. Partial gains have been reported from Miami and from Salisbury and Winston-Salem, N.C. Elsewhere in the South the old pattern of lunch counter segregation has not been changed.

The "sit-in" demonstrations which have swept the South since February 1st did not originate with the Greensboro students. Two years ago in 1958, youth units of the NAACP in Wichita, Kans., and Oklahoma City launched carefully planned demonstrations at lunch counters in their respective cities. As a result, a Kansas state chain abandoned its Jim Crow policy. In Oklahoma City some 60 establishments which in 1958 barred Negroes now serve them. These demonstrations, however, did not precipitate the arrests and violence which have characterized the present movement. The following year, four members of the NAACP chapter at Washington University in St. Louis, were arrested when they refused to leave an off-campus lunch room which denied service to the three Negro students in the group. But there was no violence, nor the kind of follow-up that stemmed from the Greensboro incident.

Essentially the same conditions prevailed. Dr. King's spectacular year-long bus protest in Montgomery had occurred in 1956. The pace of school desegregation was not appreciably slower in 1960 than in 1958. Civil rights legislation was pending in 1960, but a law had been enacted in 1957, the first civil rights measure passed by Congress in 82 years. The unrest which the "sit-ins" dramatized was as prevalent in 1958 as two years later.

Nor was there any noticeable change in the climate of opinion, among either Southern whites or Negroes, in the 18-month period between August 1958 and February 1960. Over the years, there had been a growing demand on the part of Negroes for the exercise of their citizenship rights; while, among younger and more enlightened white Southerners, a realization has been developing that the old Jim Crow pattern cannot endure. Much of this has been the direct result of work by the NAACP and other anti-discrimination organizations in undermining the legal props to segregation, in expanding the Negro vote and securing the enactment of civil rights, and in sharpening public awareness of the basic issue of human rights.

The difference may be that in 1958 the demonstrations were initiated by high school students during the summer vacation; this year the match was struck by college students during the academic year. The Greensboro incident set practically every Negro campus in the country alight. Suddenly it became vastly more important to "sit-in" than to win the varsity letter or to be crowned "Queen" of the home-coming game. The jailed student replaced the football star as the hero of the campus. Fraternity politics and social activities dwindled into comparative insignificance.

This spontaneous maturing of the Negro college student is rooted in the grim reality of his day-to-day living—the petty, irksome indignities and humiliations. The Negro has always had to live with these. But today's students, some of them veterans of service in the desegregated armed forces, are taking a hard second look at the needless and irrational restrictions imposed upon them. They realize now, more than ever before, the impossibility of finding fulfilment in the corners left to them by segregation. They are no longer willing to crouch. They will settle for nothing less than the rights their humanity demands.

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