Editorial

IN THE FACE OF PUBLIC OPINION

Throughout the history of this country, the question of the Negro in American life has been handled sufficiently so as to create a plethora of legal, constitutional, and moral problems which have essentially placed him in an ambiguous position. That position is currently in the news. And when the subject of segregation in public schools is finally decided by the United States Supreme Court, it will undoubtedly be considered as the most important in a half century.

The problem probably finds greater tenazity in the South than in any other section of the nation. At least five states and the District of Columbia are officially opposed to any changes in the traditional discriminatory system and both Georgia and South Carolina have indicated intentions of circumventing the decision of the court.

In spite of these public protestations, the Red and Black, University of Georgia student newspaper, flatly refused to become party to the bigotry of its elders and firmly declared itself in favor of abolishing segregation. In an editorial condemning the Georgia governor's stand (Herman Talmadge) they accused him of opposing efforts "to give the Negro a chance to get an education equal to the white man's." "It is plain," they said, "... that continued segregation and suspension can, and will, cause the death of democracy by the hands of the very leaders." This enlightened attitude is fortunately not limited to the editors of the newspaper. Miami University (Ohio), University of Louisville (Kentucky), and Washington University (St. Louis) have all moved to accept Negroes. Their student newspapers have furthermore pressed for the education of the communities in which they are situated, in order more thoroughly break down the racial barriers. Steps have been taken to boycott public shops and hotels which fail to serve men of all races. Even Duke University, in the heart of North Carolina has indicated, via a student poll, that the great majority of students would favor non-segregation; and this, in a state where these views might not easily enhance the popularity of the institution.

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The forthright stand of the Red and Black is, however, in many places cloaked in ramifications which involve much more than a statement of opinion. The principles at stake are a suppression of independent thought and a censorship of a college press, as well as an affirmation of the democratic beliefs of equal opportunity. For the editorial staff of Red and Black was immediately attacked by the publisher of the Augusta Courier, to whom they responded, "If we yield, we commit not only ourselves but all future staffs to a Quisling position." The Courier, however, went further to declare the newspaper to be the property of the university and not the student body. Their argument was accepted by the editors who voted to withhold further funds from the paper until its stand against segregation, and, therefore, opposition to the expressed position of the state of Georgia, was clamped. This action is alarming as it is narrow-minded. It contradicts the very principles which have given this nation vitality and strength. The criticism and disdain by an imposition of orthodoxy is to destroy freedom and creativeness. The Red and Black is to be commended for its brave stand. We can view the actions of the Augusta Courier and the University of Georgia regents only with contempt. But before we develop for ourselves a "holier than thou" attitude, we can well pause for an evaluation of our own position. For here in New England and the University of Georgia restrictions are not so tenaciously held, and where aversion to discrimination is publicly proclaimed, college organizations and fraternities still cling to the old guard. Their outmoded restrictive clauses still exist.

. . . and inaction

That two fraternities here at the Institute choose to retain their discriminatory clauses, and at least four others have written, or "gentlemen's" agreements, is sufficient cause for us to be ashamed of our inaction and timidity in the face of the progress being made by some southern schools.