

Into Sharp Focus

The so-called movement of Negro college students against the "white only" service policy at a downtown lunch counter brought the problem of race relations again into sharp focus.

Another obvious fact is that the "sit down" demand for service, which went unheeded, served the cause of race relations badly. While the incident was without violence, it was nonetheless an attempt to force an issue by public demonstration. Furthermore, it is the sort of incident that an overt act may turn into something serious.

If the organizers of the movement were after publicity, they gained their purpose. Unfortunately, a thing of this sort cannot be ignored by the press and other media. In the absence of accurate reporting of what happened, there would have been all sorts of wild and unfounded rumors. As it was, distorted versions of the incident were heard in the downtown section.

And regardless of publicity given to the Negro students' march on the store and its lunch counter, there would still be the problem of dealing with the development. While the problem is the immediate concern of the store ownership and management, it cannot be ignored by the community. The store, like all similar places of business, must consider the wishes and interests of all its customers and patrons. We would think, too, that there are legal questions involving the rights of the public to be served and of a place of business to decide whom it will serve.

Undoubtedly, the students' "sit down" demand for service at the lunch counter will be cited by some persons as evidence that the Negroes are pushing for social privileges as well as legal rights. There have been other indications of that purpose.

One of the student leaders of the movement was quoted as saying that adult Negroes "have been complacent and fearful," and "it is time for someone to wake up and change the situation . . . and we decided to start here . . ." Then, the president of the local chapter of the NAACP, denying his organization had prior knowledge of the movement, said the NAACP is 100 per cent behind it and prepared to back the group "if any legal action arises." All this points up the significance of this development.

And, again, it is apparent that Greensboro has been picked as a testing ground for race relations. The statements quoted above make it clear that the Negroes are anything but passive about the matter. The white leadership of the community can ill afford to be passive and indifferent under the circumstances. There is a dangerous vacuum in the relations between the races in Greensboro, we fear.