

The Class Jacket

Editor of the Daily News:

I read in the paper March 11 some lengthy quotations from a speech which Chancellor Gordon Blackwell recently delivered to the student body of Woman's College. Also that Governor Hodges has publicly endorsed this speech and has sent copies of it to the heads of all our state educational institutions. I hope that every citizen of North Carolina will read this speech, ponder its implications and be deeply disturbed.

Clearly, the object of this speech, and of the Governor's action, is to warn students against participation in the current protests against certain discriminatory practices within our social order. Says Chancellor Blackwell, "Specifically, I advise each of you to refrain from any public demonstration in connection with the issue now before the community or any similar issue which may arise in the near future".

I would like to examine the chief argument which is used by the chancellor to support his position, and to examine

some implications of this argument.

Responsibility to the class jacket seems to be the theme of the argument. "Your class jacket is a symbol of the college" says Chancellor Blackwell. Now, no one could deny that statement, but just what does that statement imply? The implication which the chancellor seems to draw is that a student ought never to think or act according to any personal conviction unless that conviction be in harmony with the "official line" of the administration—which is, so it would seem, ultimately determined by the state. What this position implies for freedom in education is quite frightening. The full development of this philosophy would be "thought control" by the state . . . and the end of true education; for true education depends upon freedom, just as freedom depends upon education.

I recognize, of course, that a student is obligated to abide by the official rules of the institution; but the chancellor is going far beyond that in this speech.

Would a student of Woman's College dishonor the "class jacket" by openly expressing sympathy and support for what students in other educational institutions are doing? Might not the jacket, as a symbol of the highest traditions on the campus, be dishonored more by an unconcerned or fearful silence? This must remain an open question; one which each student is free to decide for himself, without pressure from the administration.

In this speech, Chancellor Blackwell is reported to have made this significant statement: "You are not living in a social vacuum unencumbered by duties and responsibilities". How true that is. But is it not also true that one's duties and responsibilities (be he chancellor or students) cannot be limited by the lines which define the campus? Indeed, if our ultimate responsibility does not transcend the educational institution—reaching out to something which we call truth and justice—then we have already undermined the true nature and purpose of such an institution.

I cannot speak for those who are now students in our educational institutions, but I am sure that the students of my generation (some time ago) would not have taken kindly to this advice, under the circumstances. Some of us would have felt that we were being intimidated in regard to a legitimate use of our freedom to think and act. We would have felt impelled to take some action which would affirm our right to think and act as responsible persons.

Personally, my own sympathies are very much with these Negro protesters, most of whom are students. It is all too easy for the white majority to repeat the old clichés: "This is not the time" . . . "this is not the right way" . . . "we are making good

progress", etc. Obviously, our opinions on these matters are not shared by many of the Negro people. So what do we expect them to do? They have waited a long time and they have seen precious little evidence that we are willing to change anything voluntarily . . . without some pressure being brought to bear upon us.

We must recognize that these people have experienced years of frustration as they have watched all sorts of legal maneuvers used to deny them the rights to which they feel themselves entitled on constitutional and moral grounds. This frustration has now found a method of expression which may prove effective in the achievement of their objectives.

But even if it does not, it provides these people an opportunity to express and affirm their dignity as persons. And that, after all, is what this business is all about.

Considering all that has been suffered by these people, we should be thankful that the present protests are almost entirely in the hands of those who are fully, even religiously, dedicated to non-violence.

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