

Responsibilities At The Lunch Counter

(An address by the chancellor of Woman's College to the study body in the wake of the recent lunch counter disturbances in Greensboro has attracted widespread attention. Governor Hodges praised it and distributed copies to the heads of other state institutions. Others in the state criticized it as a suggested abridgment of campus freedom. Here is the speech.)

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I shall talk about the rights and responsibilities of college students in relation to the larger implications of the sit-down demonstration at the five and ten. The action taken by students—reportedly from five local colleges—must be weighed in the light of several major concerns upon which I shall comment briefly. Yet I believe a rational analysis of the situation requires recognition of each of them.

(1) Concern for the feelings of discrimination and injustice which are deeply experienced by some of the people involved. It is never good in American democracy for people to have these feelings.

(2) Concern for the danger of physical violence and destruction of property which faced the students and institutions involved.

(3) Concern that recent progress in race relations may be set back many years unless the impasse is resolved on a basis acceptable to all responsible elements in the community.

(4) Concern for the economic welfare of thousands of Kress, Woolworth and other stores and their employees across the country.

(5) Concern for the reputation of Greensboro and North Carolina at a time when forward progress in all areas is a reality. On balance and in view of the



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inevitable movement through the week to the verge of physical violence and property destruction, one must seriously ponder the question: "Was the sit-down demonstration, even though passively conducted, a wise move given the objectives of the participants?" My answer must be an unequivocal "No."

At the beginning of the sit-down demonstration, the question which must have occurred to each of you, and it certainly did to me, was whether a college student has the right to participate in a passive resistance movement to achieve a lawful end. A college must consider the matter of academic freedom of students as well as of faculty. However, this concern quickly gave way to the question of the wisdom of students becoming involved in a situation which, if unchecked, would surely result in violence and bloodshed. How nearly violence was skirted can be known only by those who visited the two stores on last Sat-

urday morning. Spurred by the danger of violence, we took steps to establish lines of communication between the parties involved. A meeting was arranged between management of the two stores, students of four of the colleges, and administrative representatives of three of the colleges. Student participation from four colleges was extensive in two long negotiation sessions. There can be no doubt that these opportunities for free and frank exchange of factual information and points of view helped to bring rational consideration into the picture.

Fortunately the A. and T. students voted to delay further demonstration to allow an opportunity for the stores to engage in calm study and unhurried decision. The stores decided simultaneously with this student action to close their food counters temporarily. Thus, the immediate volatile situation was ended.

Co-operative Effort

I sincerely believe that by co-operative effort of all parties concerned the best possible solution to the current problem will be evolved. It appears prudent in the future for each of us, no matter how strong our feelings or in which direction they may be inclined, to give thought to the type of action which will best serve the ends we desire to achieve.

I have spent most of my life as a social scientist studying human behavior and community processes. How does it look under the social scientist's microscope?

In a place and at a time when tangible progress is being made in leveling many of the unequal places in democracy, I believe the common cause of better race relations has been set back by the events of the week. Rumors of all sorts are rife on our

campus and in the community. The tensions that have been generated now threaten the good relations that have existed between segments of our population. The good will of substantial elements in the community has been jeopardized to the cause of improving race relations. Greensboro and the state, while historically and distinctively different from some parts of the South, have suffered widespread adverse publicity. All of this might have been avoided had negotiation been attempted in the first place.

Student Responsibilities

And now, what are your responsibilities as students of the Woman's College in a controversy such as this?

First, it should be clear that in this college there should never be any effort to tell you what stand you should take on controversial issues or how you should assert your inalienable rights as individuals and as citizens. Student compliance with the law, prescription of social and moral behavior, and the physical safety of students are matters under the control of the Student Government Association and the college administration. Concern for physical safety would have led us to action last Saturday had any of our students been then active in the demonstration.

But your responsibility as students of Woman's College goes beyond personal considerations. Your class jacket is a symbol of the college. On and off the campus you represent this institution. Your actions bring credit or discredit to the college. You are not living in a social vacuum unencumbered by duties and responsibilities. The results of your actions may affect many others in a kind of chain reaction as has been painfully demonstrated last week. There is no blinking the fact

that participation in this demonstration by several of our students, no matter how high their motives, definitely resulted in increasing the inflammatory quality of the situation. In a state proud of its tradition of lawful action and far-sighted legislation, it is tragic to move toward open hostility, hatred and conflict as a way of resolving difficult points at issue. Participation by only a handful of our 2,400 students did something to change the character of the situation, at least in the view of a rather large segment of the public.

Search For Guide Lines

And so, you see, your every action as an individual must be considered in a social and institutional context. You must each search out in advance the series of unanticipated consequence of any action which you may contemplate. Somewhere between putty-like conformity on the one hand and irresponsible, martyr-like revolutionary action on the other, each individual must find for himself or herself the best way of meeting any controversial situation. This search for intellectual, moral and social guide lines is not easy. But this is what you as students and we as faculty are about in our common search for a liberal education. Now, as well as after you leave college, you have the responsibility of finding your place in the life of the community.

I strongly urge each of you to weigh carefully the probable consequences to yourself, to the college and to the community of any action that you may contemplate. More 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 future. It is only in an atmosphere free from pressure and emotionalism that a fair and just solution may be found.