

**Ralph McGill Reports:**

# Nashville Quietly Opens Lunch Counters To All

BY RALPH MCGILL

Nashville, the capital city of Tennessee, has provided all news media with a cud of thought on which to chew. After long weeks of spiritual unease and physical violence, the city's owners of variety store lunch counters beset with passive resistance sit-ins decided to do what they all along had wished to do. That was to open those counters as they had all other sales displays to any customer who entered the doors open to all.

Before so doing they met with city officials and the management of newspapers, television and radio. It mutually was agreed that publicity of any such decision would bring out the organized agitators, the hoodlums and the street drifters who make up mobs. City officials and business representatives asked they be given a chance to proceed without publicity. Media representatives, weighing their obligation of responsibility, agreed. (When the press agencies sent out stories to other cities, one newspaper ran a brief story on inside pages.)

The result was that Negro customers were served coffee, soft drinks and sandwiches as ordered. There were no incidents. In some instances white customers began conversations and said they were glad the issue was settled.

Here we have clearly illustrated two important facts about the pressures in concentrated urban areas. One is that the majority of people want to do what is right. They may not like the idea of segregated lunch counters; nonetheless, it is so preposterous to argue that a customer may buy everything else in a variety store but a cup of coffee or sandwich at the lunch counter, that even the objector realizes that business management can't be expected to so insist. The average Southerner is fair-minded as any other American. Given a chance he will show it.

The second fact of life illustrated by the Nashville story is one which must concern those who provide the public with information. The people have a right to the news. There is a duty to print and speak it.

But there also is a further re-

sponsibility. It is one owed the community and the nation. There is no government control over the press and there must not be. But it is only the witless person in television, radio, journalism or news magazines, who does not understand that an industrial civilization with an exploding population requires new thinking in this field as in all others.

For the most part the press, TV and radio are responsible. But there is always the exception. There is the one who sensationalizes, who deliberately foments excitement, who raises inflammable prejudices and who exploits them for readers or listeners. These are dangerously malignant tumors in the social body of any community.

Television and radio are licensed by the federal government since they use the airways and are given, without cost, save for a license fee, a right to one of the relatively few usable channels. The new chairmen of the FCC quietly is conducting investigations into the more rabid local stations. Because of their unique method of publishing news, TV and radio have perhaps a heavier responsibility.

The printed word is inanimate. But the spoken word has life and sound. The commentator, by inflections, by emphasis, by speaking calmly, or with great excitement, quickly can create emotions where none existed. If we add to this the televised image of a popular figure we have yet another dimension. The impact of TV can be profound. In addition, on radio and TV the news is repeated over and over on many stations throughout the day, creating an accumulated effect.

Nashville has paid a great price. A home has been bombed. The city has been put to great police and court costs. There has been bad publicity. Business has suffered. Racial enmity has been aroused. There was no reason for it. Had the action just taken been initiated at the start, without inflammatory publicity, all the grief, expense and danger could have been avoided. This is true of all other communities.

The majority of Southern people want to do what is right, even if they don't like it.