no way back

Two years ago, college debaters all over America were studying the question: “Resolved that the National Congress of the United States should pass a program of FEPC.” This interest on the part of students in the racial problem is a reminder of the dominance to which the question of race relations in the south has risen.

Needless to say, the National Congress did not pass any F.E.P.C. legislation. The reason as in the case of any proposed anti-discriminatory legislation is the filibustering southerners. It remained for the judicial branch of the National Government to set forth a plan of action to resolve this dilemma which has been with the south since the day the first slave ship docked in Jamestown.

The decision the U. S. Supreme Court handed down last fall, stating that segregation in the public schools is unconstitutional, was the culmination of more than a century of legal attack on segregation in the public schools of the United States. The first contender was a negro girl in Boston, who brought suit because she had been barred from a white school under a local ordinance providing for separate education of the races. Chief Justice Shaw, of the Massachusetts Supreme Court, held that segregation of the races did not in itself constitute discrimination, but schools for both races must be equal.

This viewpoint was also held by the U. S. Supreme Court, and so the situation rocked along for a century. Under the old separate but equal doctrine, this was the legal status of segregation in the public schools:

Segregation required in 17 states and D. C. 
Segregation permitted in varying degrees – 4 states.
Segregation prohibited – 16 states.
No specific legislation on segregation – 11 states.

With this portentous decision upon them, many leaders in the southern states, whether from personal conviction, or for political reasons, issued statements to the effect that they were “shocked” at the action taken by the Supreme Court and that integration, if feasible at all, must be brought about by a gradual process. Herman Talmadge of Georgia said that he would not be responsible for what happened in Georgia if such action were enforced.

Perhaps the most drastic reaction was that of the South Carolina General Assembly, which struck from the code of law in South Carolina any reference to compulsory attendance in the state public schools. If the attitude displayed by these prominent southerners is truly representative of the attitude of their constituents, Talmadge may have been correct in his prediction of disaster in the event that compulsory integration of public schools in Georgia were enforced.

A more careful study of the situation, however, shows that this is not the case. Actually many well-known educators and sociologists believe that integration of public schools will be a step forward in both education and race relations. Lillian Smith, in the New York Times Book Review of February 5, 1950 (before the Supreme Court decision) said:

“Since the Supreme Court ruled in 1950 that the University of Texas must admit negro applicants to its Law School and that the University of Oklahoma may not require its negro students to be separated from white students in the classrooms, more than 2,000 negro students have been enrolled in what once were all-white Southern colleges and universities. The next wall to be cracked is that of segregation in the elementary and secondary schools. Cases have already been carried to the Supreme Court, from South Carolina, for example, as the Supreme Court rules on the succession of cases that will be submitted to it during the next few years, the people of the South, white and negro, will have their attitudes and their loyalties to freedom and democracy tested as never before. The correction of such inequities as exist in Delaware, Maryland, and other northern states, will help the South to meet this test.”

Another indication that racial integration of public schools may be successful, is the fact that already, many southern colleges and graduate schools number negroes among their students.

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Sarah Patton Boyle, a faculty wife at the University of Virginia, in her article "Southerners Will Like Integration," which appeared in the Saturday Evening Post, February 19, 1955, tells of the admission of George Swanson, a negro law student, to the university law school. Swanson was not the first negro to apply, but he was the first to bring suit against the state for admission.

She tells of her experience as she circulated a questionnaire among the people of Charlottesville, in an effort to learn their true feelings concerning the acceptance of negro students into the University of Virginia. She concludes that most people, when they see the situation in its true light, favor integration. She states further, that each white person questioned, feels that he is an isolated star of democracy and tolerance in the midst of a sea of prejudice.

Mrs. Boyle points out that none of the dire predictions of chaos came true, and that the “floods” of letters of protest which were rumored to have descended upon the administration, were in actuality, only one or two. She believes integration in the University of Virginia graduate school to be successful, and believes that southerners will like integration, once they understand its true significance.

Another favorable aspect to the question of whether or not integration in the schools will be accepted in the South is the fact that many students themselves favor integration. In a recent collegiate press association survey, the majority of college students polled said that they “would not mind going to school with negroes.”

Many inter-collegiate groups and associations invited delegates from negro schools to convene with them, thus recognizing the basic equality of the negro students. Negro delegates were present at the 1955 state Baptist Student Union Convention in South Carolina, and took an active part in the convention. Their presence was accepted with a most democratic attitude. Negro colleges were represented in the regional convention of the National Student Association, which included student government officials from the Carolinas and Virginia. One of the Furman delegates has this statement to make concerning the situation:

“The spirit of the group was wonderful, democracy prevailed, and negro students were elected to top positions in the regional group.”

Sociologists point out that children are born without prejudice, and that prejudice, if acquired, is learned from parents and other associates. From the cases and incidents, such as the ones pointed out above, it appears that when adolescents become mature enough to make their own decisions about racial conflicts, they take an un-biased attitude.

Does it not follow that the intermediate group, the adolescent students in the secondary schools, which will be most affected by the Supreme Court ruling, will be willing to accept integration, if the proper attitude of democracy is fostered in the home, in social groups, in the Church, and in the classroom? The solution to the situation, then must of necessity be one of building unprejudiced attitudes in both adolescents and their parents.

That the action has been taken is a fact which all the emotionalism of southern politicians cannot alter with all their oratorical eloquence. It is up to the leaders of the day to lead the way, not backward, by adding to already existing prejudice, but forward by promoting a program of adjustment to the situation as it stands. There is simply no way back to the way things once were.

sounds from the ivory lab

Emulsion, titration,
And neutralization.
Colloidal dispersion,
Electrode immersion.
The drug tyrothricin
And aureomycin
Boron, palladium,
Ruthenium, radium,
Cerium, cesium,
Xenon, magnesium,
Iron, iridium,
Radon, rubidium,
Acetylene, methyl,
And lead tetraethyl.

—FRANCES THOMPSON
twenty-four hours

Twenty four hours—
One thousand four hundred and forty minutes
And all of them squandered
As funeral flowers,
A word here, a wink there
And Night is here again.
I must greet her empty handed
With an idle mind
Even more decayed than the night before.

—MICHIELL CARNELL

homo sapiens

Supposedly a noun
Most often a pronoun,
But inevitably a conjunction.
Sometimes a verb
Rarely an interjection
of a sentence
of a paragraph
of a chapter
of a book.

K.A.S.

thesis 96

Am I a rhapsodist to watch the sky,
Smell odors of pine needles and
Damp earth? But the forest is only
A product of my mind. Infinity
Is near.

A tree is not just a tree; faith not faith
Alone. One man may conceive
Differently than his neighbor. Fear
Not, one day we shall know—
The truth.

—MALCOLM SLIFKIN