

Now It's "How" and "When" – Not "Whether"

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IN THE United States of America, the question no longer is whether or not to continue segregated public education. The answer is unequivocal. Segregation in public schools is against the law of the land.

Hear the Supreme Court decision of May 17, 1954:

"We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other 'tangible' factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does . . .

"We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. . . ."

For years prior to the Supreme Court decision, conscience alone had battled segregation of students in public schools. Conscience had the better of the moral argument. The advocates of segregation never could reconcile discrimination and democracy. For the documents of democracy hold no comfort for peddlers of prejudice. Nor could the advocates of segregation reconcile racism and religion. The brotherhood of man, not the doctrine of Jim Crow, is the message of Jesus and the religious leadership of the Western world. Nor could science and segregation be reconciled. The findings of science failed to support Master Race theories. So the conscience of mankind routed segregation on the ideological battlefields of democracy, religion and science. Yet segregation persisted, entrenched in law.

Now in the mid-fifties of the twentieth century, the Constitution of the United States has joined conscience in a powerful alliance. Conscience and the supreme law of the land each say that the public schools are to be open to all on equal terms.

The question of "Whether" is settled, finished, dead. Yes, there will be law suits. But everyone involved recognizes them for what they are delaying actions. The Supreme Court's decree on May 31, 1955, was clear:

"These cases were decided on May 17, 1954. The opinions of that date . . . declaring the fundamental principle that racial discrimination in public

education is unconstitutional, are incorporated herein by reference. All provisions of federal, state, or local law requiring or permitting such discrimination must yield to this principle."

The live questions today are "how and "when." For the Supreme Court added, "Full implementation of these constitutional principles may require solutions of varied school problems. School authorities have the primary responsibility of elucidating, assessing, and solving the problems." The superintendent of one large city system in the South put it poignantly in a conversation with the writer of this editorial who was serving as a consultant on human relations, "All of the past sins of segregation have come home to roost on the already overburdened shoulders of school authorities."

The issue of Educational Leadership which you are reading is about the "how" and the "when." An earlier issue of this magazine (November 1954) considered problems of discrimination in the broadest sense--class, religion, race, nationality, intelligence, etc. The present issue focuses the camera on the specific type of discrimination most often discussed by world opinion--racial segregation in American public schools. How and when is that American minority group, the "tenth man" who happens to be a Negro, to be desegregated and integrated into the American public school system from the nursery school through the graduate school?

Recommended supplementary reading includes *Schools in Translation*, a study of the experiences in desegregation of twenty-four communities. The authors' conclusions point up the central role of educational leadership.

"Where the white community is not strongly opposed or where attitudes are unstructured, confused, and in flux, decisive importance attaches to the policies and actions of school boards and school officials. In such instances these gatekeepers can tip the balance one way or the other in the degree of ease with which the transition is made.

"In general a clear-cut policy, administered with understanding but also with resolution, seems to have been most effective in accomplishing desegregation with a minimum of difficulty

"A clear definition of law and policy by legitimate social authorities may reinforce willingness to conform to the requirements of new situations. . . . Hence the great importance of clarity and decisiveness in early policy and practice in the desegregation process cannot be overemphasized." '

You individually have a responsibility for "how" and "when" since you happen to be an educator and a citizen--free, any color and twenty-one plus. This is your problem. Maybe you didn't want it. It's yours notwithstanding.

"But I'm only a little man. What difference could I possibly make?" Thus the former Nazis explained themselves. But the explanation doesn't go in the U.S.A. In our

country, each person is important. That's why we call it a democracy. The readers of this magazine aren't "little men." They are educational leaders, if the name on the cover is accurate.

On the issue of desegregation and integration, there can be no abdication of leadership responsibilities, no educational evasion.

Maybe you live in one of the Souths. Yes, that's correct not a typographical error--one of the Souths. In regard to school segregation, the Solid South of history has been replaced by at least three Souths. There is the South that is moving officially toward compliance with the historic Supreme Court verdicts: Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Oklahoma, West Virginia.

There is the South that seems to be following a policy of "wait and see": Arkansas, Florida, Tennessee, Texas. There is the South that is actively and officially resisting the decisions: Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia. To make matters even more complicated, there is wide variation in local conditions from community to community in each of these Souths.

The Supreme Court specified in 1955 that desegregation shall proceed through a "prompt and reasonable start," with "deliberate speed" and "practical flexibility," and in "good faith." Obviously, your contribution in the heart of the plantation lands will be different from your contribution in a Southern community with a different tradition. Recognizing local factors, the Supreme Court allowed for what educators call "individual differences."

Yet common denominators for approaching problems do exist in each South and in each community. They include: your steady efforts to work on problems of common concern with people of all races in your community. Your contribution to public opinion through what you say and how you act. Your ceaseless work for better human relations through your daily experiences with young people with fellow educators. Your planning for the transition. In short, your educational leadership. Regardless of which South you happen to live in, there is something you can do on the "how" and "when" of desegregation and integration.

Maybe you live above Mason and Dixon's shattered line. Some who live North, East and West think that their proper place on this issue is in the bleachers, cheering on the men of good will and booing the bigots. The Southern men of good will are not unappreciative of the cheering. But, on occasion, they have been heard to say that some Northern, Eastern and Western bleacherites might well spend some playing time out on their local fields. The man of good will have an understandable and justifiable point, even though the same point has been used by segregationists on the opposing team.

Before writing off desegregation and integration as a regional issue, the Northerner, Easterner, and Westerner might well ask, "What am I doing about residential segregation in my own community? Not George, of 'let George do it' fame. I, personally. Does my local hospital act as though germs had color? How many Negroes with proper

qualifications teach white and colored students in the school I know best? Do Negro supervisors and administrators have responsibilities with teachers of any race?

Our personal responsibility for action on the "how" and "when" of desegregation and integration applies to us as members of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and of affiliated state organizations. What we of ASCD believe is specified on the next page. Don't let the *whereases* and the *be it resolveds* stop you from reading again the forthright resolutions of the 1955 ASCD convention. The position you and the other members of the ASCD took officially as an organization is explicit and unequivocal.

We can translate our words into action. Or they can be inert words on paper. It's up to you.

And when we do translate our resolutions fully and naturally into our behavior as ASCD members, there may be more than one qualified Negro educator elected from Northern, Eastern, and Western states to our board of directors which is composed in all of eighty-five members. (Two Negro members elected to the board now represent one Southern state.) Segregated meetings of some state affiliates of ASCD won't be taking place in cities where other organizations manage to meet unsegregated and integrated.

As to segregation and integration, each of us has unfinished business. There is no exception.

"Whether" is dead. The only moral and lawful questions left are: "How? When?"

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