

Mississippi Editor Gives Moderate View on Integration Problem

(Editor's note: Mississippi editorials with three voices. The segregationists and the integrationists have been heard from. In the following dispatch, a noted Mississippi editor speaks his views on behalf of the men in the middle, the moderates.)

By HARRY RUTHERFORD
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Thoughtful Mississippians today are searching their souls for a solution to the Ole Miss crisis and to others which

they feel will follow as integration spreads to public schools.

They wish they had the answer to the deep-rooted cause of the riots which rocked the university when Negro James Meredith sought to register under the protection of 700 federal marshals.

But they know the answer to the real problem — the problem far deeper than color of skin — lies beyond their immediate reach. They fear it also lies beyond the joint reach of state and national capitals even if by miracle

both should drop their cynical political approach and seek the common good of Mississippi whites and Negroes.

Even amid growing determination to preserve law and order, there is growing frustration among Mississippi's responsible leaders.

In Jackson they see a governor wed to violence without indication that he would use the Highway Patrol, the state's only adequate police force available to rural areas, to maintain peace when integration of public schools begins.

In Washington they see a federal government which builds tension with every move, snatching away the tools which responsible leaders might use to work their state out of its long-term crisis.

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Mississippi in the aftermath of the Ole Miss riots finds itself under strong and consistent federal pressure to yield unlimited political voice and unrestricted personal association to a group which in many counties of the state represents an overwhelming majority, yet in no way is prepared to take over management of government and schools.

Concerned Mississippians today are speaking out in agreement that law and order must be maintained at all costs, that there must be no repetition of the emotion-packed rioting of Sept. 30.

The color of this group happens to be black. But it is doubtful if that fact lies at the heart of the integration problem for more than 10 per cent of those who strive to prevent the Negroes' emergence to a dominant role.

Behind the Ole Miss crisis — and ahead of Mississippi for 20 years to come — lie facts for which the state's thoughtful business, civic and church leaders provide an almost insurmountable obstacle.

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The reason behind the crisis is simple. The sincere leader strives to lift his community and its people to a higher level of personal development.

But beyond that point even the most sincere leaders — each the personal friend of Negroes by the score — can hardly go.

For there are no supporters of unrestricted compulsory integration among Mississippi's leaders who oppose Gov. Ross Barnett's call to violence, any more than there are among the governor's disciples.

The reason behind the crisis is simple. The sincere leader strives to lift his community and its people to a higher level of personal development.

And thoughtful Mississippians are convinced that this is impossible if, through unlimited vote by those who can't read and unrestricted integration, they give control of local government and school to the state's Negroes.

In some counties half the Negro men who would be running affairs under such circumstances have no more than a fourth grade education.

In the typical delta county of Tunica there are 803 Negro adults who have never entered a school door — and only 134 who have completed high school.

In neighboring Sunflower county there are 8,842 Negro adults who got no more than a sixth grade education, compared with 3,400 who pursued their studies further.

Even congressmen from regions outside the south sought this year to require a sixth grade education for voting. Yet Mississippi leaders see its admittedly abused educational standards for the ballot being topped with all possible speed by the Justice Department, leaving many counties open to rule by persons — white and colored — of sixth grade education or less. In fact, approximately half the Negro men in the state have no more than a fourth grade education.

Attendance Is Rising
Today, it is true, Negro school attendance is rising. Colored students in most counties attend newer and better buildings than are available to whites. And Negro teachers in many counties receive higher pay than whites. But as of today there is in Mississippi only one Negro adult out of 25 with a high school education. In some counties the ratio is one in 50 or 60. And the white adult knows only the educational and cultural standards of today's Negro adult — not that of youngsters who may follow.

Hence, the thoughtful leader in counties of heavy colored population, however interested in the welfare of Negroes of his community, tends to ask himself:

"Am I justified in turning over the government of my country to people a majority of whom do not even have a sixth grade education? Am I justified in throwing open schools without the safeguard of pupil assignment and transfers?"

"Can I risk the still further reduction of my state's educational standards, which already are critically low?"

Going Only So Far
Faced with such a dilemma the thoughtful Mississippi leader today is going only so far. He is speaking out in opposition not only to rioting such as that which blackened the Ole Miss campus but against violence and lawlessness in any form at any time.

Beyond that, however, he does not see how he can invite unlimited compulsory integration which, under current trends in federal policy, would apparently swamp rural white schools with colored children.

In major cities, segregation by residential neighborhood tends also to segregate the classroom.

Only Negroes with money, ability and education move out into the white residential areas where they are eligible to attend white schools.

But in some rural Mississippi areas the number of Negroes who got no further than the fourth grade is larger than the total white population. And for the latter to surrender their schools to such a majority regardless of color is a move a thoughtful community leader does not voluntarily make.

Hence Mississippi's responsible leaders face a dilemma for which they see no immediate solution and from which they fear continued tension and possible outbreaks of violence.

If the federal judiciary and the White House leave them such tools of government as reading qualifications for voting, reasonable specifications for pupil allotment, limited control over student transfers, and a grade-a-year integration plan, then business, civic and church leaders who understand the trends of the times can possibly win the battle for law and order.

Continuing Pressure
But in the face of continuing pressure for what many whites consider a demand for total and immediate surrender to untrained and uneducated Negro "management," the tension of the Ole Miss crisis is likely to be repeated many times in Mississippi as integration moves down to the public school level.

And with the highway pattern in effect demobilized for duty in such situations — if it was ever intended to handle them — the chances of explosion are high.

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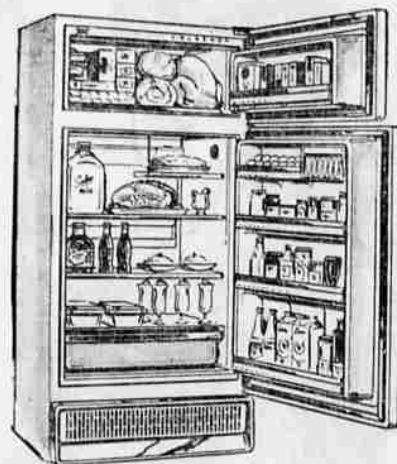
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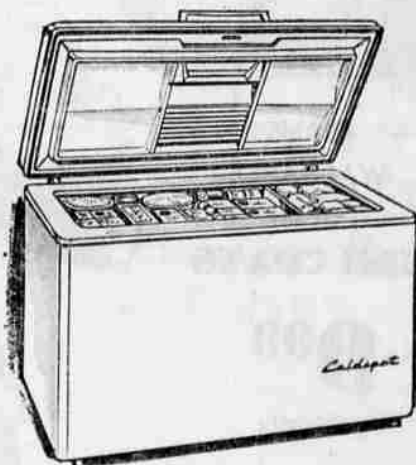


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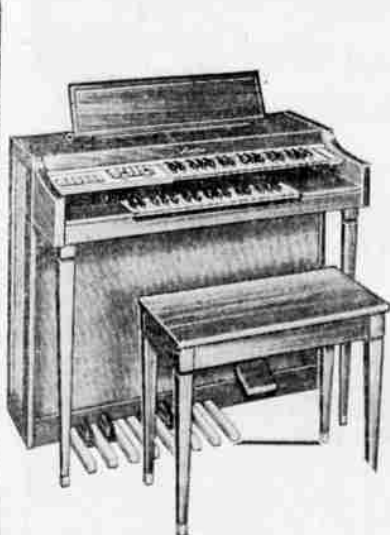


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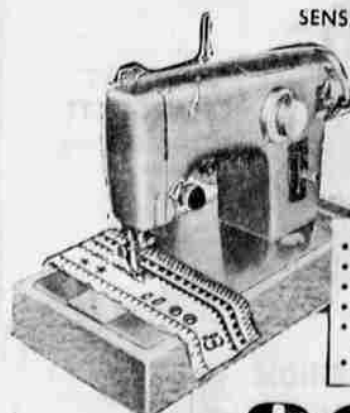
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