

CONFIDENTIAL

May 12, 1950

To Members of the Board of Trustees
of Centre College of Kentucky

Dear Friends:

Senate Bill No. 100 approved by the Legislature of the Commonwealth of Kentucky and signed by the Governor March 21, 1950, modifying bill KRS 158.020 (the Day Law) by permitting institutions of higher education, public or private, to accept Negro students "provided that an equal, complete and accredited course is not available at the Kentucky State College for Negroes" raises a question which sooner or later must be answered by the college authorities, which means, in the first instance, the Board of Trustees. As a matter of fact, one Negro student has written applying for entrance in our summer school, at which time undoubtedly courses will be taught which will not be available this summer at Kentucky State College, so that the issue has been raised already. Thus in the face of a new social attitude made concrete by this legislation it would seem to me necessary for the trustees to give very careful consideration to the course they deem best to follow in the question of whether or not the college should open its doors to Negro students.

My own attitude is known to most, if not all, of the trustees. Experience extending now over almost a century has given ample demonstration that with segregation the Negro is not going to receive equal educational opportunities. Economically a dual system of schools places a tax-burden upon the state which it cannot bear if good schools are to be provided for all, with the result that schools for white children are poorer than they need be, and those for Negroes generally somewhat poorer. From the Christian point of view that God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" and that Christians are enjoined to "teach all nations," it seems to me impossible to advocate anything but non-segregation.

The whole matter is particularly crucial these days by reason of the fact that segregation of the Negroes in our democracy is being made a particular point of attack by Communism. Therefore everything that is done to give a practical demonstration of our American faith in the dignity of every man, woman, and child, regardless of class, race, religion, or color, weakens the inroads of Communism, and in the final analysis makes World War III less likely.

The matter is one of particular concern to the colleges and universities because if this problem is to be solved it will be best done by a gradual evolution, rather than an explosive revolution, and certainly no group is better able to begin this evolutionary process than the educated privileged groups of both races at the level of higher education. Among such groups sympathetic understanding is bound to be more easily attained.

The trustees will be interested in knowing the results of a poll taken by one of our faculty among our faculty members more than a year ago before this new legislation of the State Legislature was approved. Twenty-six faculty members replied to the questionnaire. Fifteen were in favor of accepting Negro students

in Centre College. Of these fifteen, eight were born in Kentucky (3), Texas (3), North Carolina (1), and Missouri (1). Seven opposed accepting Negro students. These were born in Kentucky (3), Tennessee (1), Georgia (1), Pennsylvania (1), and Wisconsin (1). Four were in doubt as to the wisdom of the move at the time of their reply. One from New Jersey said that he approved, but "Centre may not be ready at this time;" one from Texas suggested admitting Negroes on "a limited basis;" one from "the U. S. A." said he did not believe "Negroes would be happy at Centre;" and one from Kentucky said he did not favor segregation, but still did not believe that Kentucky was ready for non-segregated schools.

This faculty poll points up one thing which should be emphasized, and that is that it would be unwise in my opinion to make a decision one way or the other in this matter which was not clearly supported by a decisive majority (at least 75%) of the trustees, the faculty, and the congregations of the Presbyterian Churches of both Kentucky Synods. In this connection, I understand that the matter of accepting Negro students in our Presbyterian colleges in Kentucky is to be brought up at one of our Synods, if not both, at the meetings to be held in September.

Because I believe that any decision requires such a clear majority from all these groups, I believe that it would be unwise for any decision of the trustees to be made public at the present time.

The college must face one inevitable fact regardless of which decision is made, whenever that decision is announced, and that is that there will be a vociferous minority which will make itself evident in either case. Those on the side of civil rights will level their attacks against us if a decision contrary to this permissive legislation is announced. On the other hand, those who favor segregation will certainly not withhold their attacks should the decision be made to receive Negro students.

This letter is being sent to all the members of the Board with the request that the Executive Committee members in particular be prepared to give this topic their careful thought and be prepared to make some recommendation at a subsequent meeting, either that of May 19 or later.

This letter is being sent only to the members of the Board, and it will not be discussed by me with anyone other than members of the Board prior to their decisions pertaining to this matter. The reasons for this, I believe, are self-evident.

Sincerely yours,

Walter A. Groves
President

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