AFTER DESEGREGATION--WHAT

To the Negro college student of today--especially in the south--
desegregation is the vivid moment of life. To grapple with Jim Crow
directly and personally is real excitement. Most likely it would
involve facing police, court-trial and jail. It might also include winking
at the disapproval of a cautious Dean or an ultra-conservative college
president. For once, it could be possible to instruct one's own parents,
instead of the other way around.

There are no evenings quite like those spent in the student
council office hammering out strategy or putting together the slogans
for tomorrow's picket line. Sacrifice and daring, action and the common
cause--these make a heady mixture for idealistic youth.

The dynamism of the student movement can be understood only
if we realize that it is part of a revolt of all youth--Negro and White--
against a world they never made; a revolt not alone to achieve
desegregation but a social order consistent with the high principles
on which the nation was founded. Youth has moved out to take over
leadership from what it perceives to be faltering hands. Negro youth
has surged into a vanguard position because it has the most desperate
need and has been gripped by a sense of destiny.

The Negro student knows he is not alone but is fortified by support
of tens of millions of white and Negro citizens of all ages, of all classes,
of all political persuasions. He is deadly serious and fiercely determined,
He is not engaged in a lark nor superficially thrilled by the excitement and "kicks" of a moment. He is a part of a world-wide thrust into the future to abolish colonialism and racism; to replace institutionalized handicap with free opportunity.

These are the moods and thoughts of Negro students--and many white ones--as I meet and talk with them from Washington to Houston, and in many Northern cities, too.

Many students and their elders temporarily away from the potholing struggle, pause in reflective moments to ask what will be the shape of things after desegregation is accomplished. These youthful partisans of today, know that the battle of desegregation will not last forever. Actually, one of its greatest attractions is the bright promise of triumph.

For example, lunch counter victories have been astounding and though school desegregation has been slow, federal judges, such as the Honorable Skelly Wright of Louisiana, and the Honorable W. A. Bootle of Georgia, are becoming less patient with recalcitrant school boards and politicians. Negro voter registration is on the upswing. At least in the urban South, public opinion, on the whole, is beginning to accept the inevitability of compliance with "the law of the land" as determined by the United States Supreme Court. Throughout the nation the trend toward equality is increasingly favorable. And almost everywhere in the world the tides roll forward against colonialism and racism.

Accordingly, students who now mass their sit-ins, kneel-ins (churches), stand-ins (theatres) and wade-ins (beaches and swimming pools)
are confident that at least the main campaigns in the desegregation struggle will be won before the end of the current decade.

And so, many bright young men and women, in their quiet moments, are asking themselves about life after college—especially after the big exciting hand-to-hand struggle with Jim Crow is done.

Almost all of them realize that the new frontier will be "integration" rather than "desegregation" and this makes quite a difference. The latter means the removal of legal and customary barriers that have separated individuals and groups. These are mostly tangible and external such as laws and "For White Only" signs. In a word, desegregation is the opening up of public facilities and services to everyone.

On the other hand, integration is much more subtle and internal, for it involves attitudes: the mutual acceptance of individuals and groups. Desegregation usually precedes integration, the former making the latter possible. But this is not automatic. Once the laws between them have been struck down, both Negroes and Whites will still need to win friends across the invisible, though nonetheless real, psychological color line. Such a challenge will be more difficult and less glorious.

Many Negro students are aware, at least in a preliminary fashion of the shifts that they themselves will have to make in a society that will be unsegregated and yet not really integrated. However, the question remains: Will Negroes generally find it as easy to give up their own prejudices as it now is to demand their rights of others? Will the same forthrightness be shown in admitting whites to Negro
clubs, fraternities and other voluntary associations that is now being shown in pressing for admittance to restaurants and theatres.

Moreover, after the fight has succeeded in unlocking the doors to rights and opportunities, there will be the very real obligation to "deliver the goods," that is, to behave well and perform excellently.

As the color differential fades, so will the racial point of view. Less and less will it be possible to speak with accuracy of Negro newspapers, Negro churches or the Negro vote. More and more, economic, social, and professional status will be more decisive in determining a man's orientation than the color of his skin.

Some may well ask whether students are gaining from the present movement the necessary resources and insights to make the psychological shift from a desegregated to an integrated society. Are studies being neglected? Will half-trained graduates typify this generation? Are deeper lessons of race relations being absorbed or is a simple "race against race" conception dominating immature minds?

There is undeniably a risk that some students will stumble into error. No movement of essentially revolutionary quality can be neat and tidy. Yet I am confident that the Negro college student, who is today in the thick of the desegregation fight will successfully make the transition to the campaign for integration and its consequent responsibilities. I have special reasons for my faith.

The public may have noticed that the student movement is based on broad principles. It has never advocated justice for Negroes as such; rather justice for all men, Negroes included, of course. The students
realize that the festering sore of segregation debilitates the white man as well as the Negro. Therefore, the removal of this unjust system will create a moral balance in society which will allow all men, Negro and white, to rise to higher levels of self-completion. In workshop after workshop they have been inbused with the principle that the problem is not a purely racial one, with Negroes set against white; rather, it is a tension between justice and injustice. Therefore, their resistance is not aimed against oppressors but against oppression. The students have opposed "Black Supremacy" as vigorously as they have stood against "White Supremacy." They are not in any sense seeking to rise from a position of disadvantage to one of advantage, thereby subverting justice; rather, they are seeking to achieve democracy for everybody. They have gone out of their way to enlist whites in their ranks so that the movement itself would symbolize the society that they hope to bring about.

Then there is a factor that may have escaped public notice. So much attention has been given to the movement's emphasis on non-cooperation with evil, that is, with Jim Crow laws and customs, that not much light has been shed on its cooperation with good, that is, its constructive program. This constructive program is a basic part of any genuine non-violent movement, for non-violence is essentially a positive concept. Its corollary must always be growth. Without this broad range of positive goals, non-cooperation ends where it begins. The students have revealed an amazing degree of understanding concerning the need for such a constructive program. So, on the one hand, they apply
non-violent resistance to all forms of racial injustice, including state and
local laws and practices, even when this means going to jail. On the other
hand, they see the need for imaginative, bold, constructive action to end
the demoralization caused by the legacy of slavery and segregation, inferior
schools, slums, and second class citizenship. Certainly the creative
thrust of the student’s non-violent struggle will in itself help end the
demoralization; but they realize that a new frontal assault on the poverty,
disease, and ignorance of a people too long ignored by America’s conscience
will make the victory more certain.

In admitting that there are lagging standards in the Negro
community which must be improved through a constructive program, the
students are not in the least giving aid to the reactionaries who argue
that the Negro is not ready for integration. The only answer that one can
give to those who would question the readiness of the Negro for integration
is that the standards of the Negro lag behind at times not because of an
inherent inferiority, but because of the fact that segregation and discrim-
ination do exist. There is no more tortuous logic than to use the tragic
effects of segregation as an argument for its continuation. The fact
that so many Negroes have made lasting and significant contributions
to the ongoing life of America in spite of such crippling restrictions is
sufficient to refute any argument of his unreadiness.

Yet, the students have not allowed the fact that they are the
victims of injustice, economic deprivation and social isolation lull them
into abrogating responsibility for their own lives. They seek to make
the lagging standards the basis for creative reconstruction. Their
contest with segregation is merely the preliminary task of clearing away the obstacles to self-fulfillment to the release of human energy and talent for the goal of all. They seek to tear down what is restrictive, corrupting and inhibiting in order to build a society in which men may work and live in harmony with nature and each other. They believe in man's creative potential and the whole movement is dedicated to the proposition that if the Negro could but free himself of the frustrations of an unjust social order, the achievements of the human mind and heart would be limitless.

But more than anything else, the type of education that the students are gaining as a result of this movement will assure a meaningful transition. The overwhelming truth penetrating through the whole fabric of this extraordinary youth movement is the fact that the Negro student is gaining a double education. Indeed, the answer to the quest for a more mature, more educated American to compete successfully with the young people of other lands may be present in this spontaneous, new movement.

The Negro youth is learning social responsibility; he is learning to earn through his own direct sacrifice and effort the result he seeks. There is no one to coddle him—to make him soft, pliable and conformist. He cannot be an uncreative organization man nor a mechanical status seeker. His experience is as harsh and demanding as that of the pioneer on the untamed frontier.

For those who falter and weaken, the penalty is immediate failure in wide public view. On the other hand, serious, planned action
produces equally immediate victory and acclaim. Because this struggle is complex, especially pursued in a spirit of resistance and non-violence, there is no place for the frivolous or the rowdy. Knowledge and discipline are as indispensable as courage and self-sacrifice.

Hence, the forging of priceless qualities of character is taking place daily and monthly as the struggle for a goal of a high moral end is pursued. What will this mean to the future? There will come from this cauldron a mature man, experienced in life's lessons, socially aware, unafraid of experimentation, and most of all imbued with the spirit of service and dedication to a great ideal. Does America need such men and women? Asking the question answers it.

Often in the past educators have pondered the paradox that the academically brilliant student with superior grades failed frequently to realize the bright promise of his student days. More scholarships, more degrees, more training turned to dross as life's demands found them wanting in ability to relate to associates, to motivate and to lead. The answer is in the one dimensional quality of learning. To learn for one's own advancement alone is inevitably self-defeating. To learn in order to become an instrument of social advancement has always been a keystone of achievement. It is this quality at the heart of the student movement today which guarantees the additional dimension of wisdom accompanying knowledge.

A new generation of Negro graduates schooled in life's tensions and changes will emerge on tomorrow's stage. Not a hot-house product, not a privileged elite, but an outgoing, though serious, person who will
confront a world he not only understands but has helped to shape.

This is the double education most students will acquire and, in turn, contribute to his fellow-man who has already been his comrade-in-arms - white and Negro, rich and poor.

To face the awesome challenges of automation, space conquest, economic security and world peace, nothing less than the doubly educated man is indispensably necessary. I am both proud and confident that the Negro student of today is on his way to becoming that person. He will give to the nation a leadership ability and dedicated performance which will make the old myth of the inferior individual an ugly memory which will be difficult to recall in the luminous presence of his effective and creative performance.