

IMPLICATIONS OF THE SUPREME COURT DECISION
FOR TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE FROM WITHIN

Introduction. I think it would be appropriate to state that Tuskegee Institute, like all other educational institutions for Negroes, is, at this very moment, faced with grave problems due to the Supreme Court's decision. The solution to these problems is rather intricate. For in addition to the psychological factors involving administration, faculty and students, there is also the problem of re-vamping the curricula and of raising standards.

The Supreme Court in its ruling recognized the evidence accumulated by social scientists, psychologists, educators and others working in the area of human relations over many years--that..."legal separation of people because of race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone."

In order to counteract the unfavorable effects of segregation which was forced upon them, consciously built up through their separate institutions--homes, churches, schools and various organizations, a sense of racial consciousness that created deep pride not only in what their group in America had achieved, but also an appreciation of their historical background extending back to Africa itself. In the matters of desegregation and integration, we are faced with both of these points of view in reconditioning Tuskegee Institute from within, so that a proper balance may be obtained between these two extremes. The responsibility of implementing the momentous decision of the Supreme Court must be accepted by administration, faculty and students.

I.

While the psychological problems face the administration in a more or less degree, the areas of greater concern for it are the curricula to be offered and the standards to be maintained.

From the point of view of the curricula, it might be pertinent to raise this question. Is Tuskegee Institute offering courses of study which some years ago were necessary, but which now may be discontinued or revamped because of the rapid development of such offerings elsewhere?

There was a time when certain types of instruction could only be obtained by Negroes in this section at Tuskegee; and it was important to the group's welfare that the Institute meet this definite need. With integration of Negroes and whites in public schools at all levels, Tuskegee will no longer need to meet the special needs of Negroes as such; but, rather, will have to meet the requirements set up for any institution of higher education (and we are looking at this from the long range point of view).

The Supreme Court's decision stresses the fact that good human relations are most important in a democracy. In this examination of the curricula, the implications of the decision itself, a significant human relations document, must be considered in any plan for curricula revision. We should certainly ask ourselves, are we offering courses that will enable graduates to take their places in an integrated society as citizens and as teachers of other citizens, regardless of race?

As to standards, there were, heretofore, extenuating circumstances for the standards of the schools from which our students came were relatively low. To have enforced rigid standards would have eliminated many of those we were obligated to serve. Problems in this area will be many. Not the least of them, of course, financial.

I think it safe to say that the Tuskegee Institute of the future will operate in the broader phases of education, not as a Negro college in association with other Negro colleges only, but as an American college in association with all other American colleges and in competition with them for students, for faculty members and staff workers as well.

II.

Just as the Institute must move out into an area of unsegregated education, so must students and faculty. The outlawing of segregation in public education has already taken place. All that remains now (and again we are not overlooking the fact that desegregation and integration will be slow processes) are the directives implementing the Court's decision. When these directives are issued, neither Tuskegee nor any other institution will have to wait for the State to remove from its statutes segregation laws in order to admit white students who may wish to enter, or to employ white teachers, who may apply for positions. We can foresee, however, that some reconditioning of students and faculty will be necessary, in order that both of these groups may be able to adjust themselves to a new way of life.

For students, it will be a matter not only of overcoming the inferiority complexes built up over a life-time of segregated living, but also a matter of re-adjustment from the point of view of the great pride of race that has been created by such an organization as the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History and others.

We must also ask ourselves some such questions as these: Are our students ready to extend a welcoming hand to white students, who may seek entry? Will they receive them graciously, as some of the white students were able to do when Negro students first entered southern white institutions? Will they be willing to accept them into the dormitories as roommates, into the cafeteria as table-mates, into the classrooms as fellow students, into their fraternities and sororities and other phases of the college's social life as equals?

We can think of areas where few barriers will be encountered, once the initial acceptance is over. In particular, I have in mind sports as being one

of such areas; for here Negroes and whites have been associating for many years. Can the campus environment be prepared beforehand to the extent that white students will not feel as some Negroes in the past have felt when attending northern universities--cut off from the life of the institution, except in the matter of classroom instruction, and segregating themselves in small groups? Can we prepare our students to practice equality of campus citizenship?

For the faculty, the impact of new conditions is as significant. Not only are we faced with building up higher standards, but we too have been accustomed to operating in a society composed of one racial group comparatively isolated and shielded from the impact of segregation. There may be some who have cherished this apartness, this separateness. Such persons grew up in segregated schools, were taught mainly or wholly by Negro teachers from the elementary schools through college, and, no doubt, studied under white teachers and with white students only in their graduate days--too late, no doubt, for their own comfort.

They found in Tuskegee Institute a social environment which conformed to their conditioning. Here there was no necessity to make adjustment that most Negroes have to do daily in order to conform to what Doyle calls "The Etiquette of Race Relations." We have been unique in this respect.

Can such persons welcome white colleagues to faculty fellowship wholeheartedly; or will a new etiquette result? Negroes rejoiced when members of their race were employed on faculties of white institutions; when Negro students at such institutions received outstanding recognition for outstanding achievements. Can we be just as happy when white teachers come to us and white students achieve outstandingly in our midst? Will our teachers be able to do their best work with white students in their classes?

It would be most disconcerting if students and faculty were unable to extend to whites at Tuskegee the same privileges that Negroes have been demanding for themselves for many years. It would be more than disconcerting if it should be discovered that we really do not believe in the democracy we have so much

wanted to share.

Since the Supreme Court's decision, several Negro colleges have made announcements that they would integrate. Some had begun the process before the decision came. For such institutions, the transition will not be too difficult, for traditionally they have had, almost without exception, an integrated faculty and occasionally white students. For some others, however, it will be almost as difficult to adjust to the idea of equality in all aspects of campus life, as it is for most southern white people to give up their values in terms of white supremacy and superiority of race.

Tuskegee Institute may not have to face these problems for sometime to come; but it is important to consider them now. It would be unfortunate if we, like the South, were caught unprepared.

So well have segregationists performed their task, that the job of desegregation will not be an easy one. To re-condition ourselves to think every one as a human being rather than in terms of his race will take effort and careful planning; but this re-conditioning must be accomplished and quickly.

--Jessie Parkhurst Guzman

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