

JOHN H. WHEELER
COUNSELOR AT LAW
P. O. BOX 1932
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA

February 12, 1960

The Honorable Luther H. Hodges
The Governor of North Carolina
Raleigh, North Carolina

Dear Sir:

At last night's meeting of the Durham Committee on Negro Affairs, the body adopted unanimously, the attached statement with reference to the 'sit-down' demonstrations conducted in variety stores throughout North Carolina by Negro students.

The Committee also instructed me as its Chairman to transmit to the Daily Press, various state officials and presidents of Negro Colleges, the full text of this statement.

Sincerely yours,

J. H. Wheeler
J. H. Wheeler, Chairman
Durham Committee on Negro Affairs

JHW:p
enclosure

RECEIVED
FEB 15 1960
GOVERNOR'S
OFFICE

Although the Durham Committee on Negro Affairs was unaware officially or unofficially, of plans on the part of North Carolina College students to stage a 'sit-down' protest against discriminatory practices at the lunch counters in Woolworth and Kress Stores, certain facets of this matter have caused the Committee to take the position that it is entirely appropriate for it to make a statement in support of the orderly and dignified manner in which these students have sought to make our state and nation fully aware of a pattern of discrimination which hinders the development of wholesome relations between the various racial groups which compose the American citizenry.

The appropriateness of this statement is heightened by the fact that portions of the daily press, certain public officials and other highly placed persons within the state have called upon the responsible Negro leadership (including college presidents) to use its influence to halt activities of Negro students and their white counterparts who have joined the movement. It is our opinion, that instead of expressing disapproval, we have an obligation to support any peaceful movement which seeks to remove from the customs of our beloved southland, those unfair practices based upon race and color which have for so long a time been recognized as a stigma on our way of life and a stumbling block to moral and economic progress of the region.

Approximately two years ago, the Durham Committee on Negro Affairs conducted a survey of the 5¢ and 10¢ stores located in Durham. This survey indicated that between fifty and sixty per cent of the persons entering the Kress, Silvers and Woolworth stores, were colored people. Obviously, the students' protest is against a system which solicits and accepts the trade of Negro patrons while denying them employment opportunities and the use of dining facilities which are usually offered for the exclusive convenience of white and foreign patrons. This protest appears to recognize that although

many thoughtful Southerners believe such practices to be morally wrong and economically unsound, the South as a whole, has not achieved sufficient maturity to move voluntarily toward eradicating such injustices as long as any vocal segment of the white population expresses its opposition. This protest also recognizes the historic failure and frustration of numerous efforts by Negro groups to negotiate changes in the present pattern through persuasion and conference. This view is adequately supported by a review of the important advances which have been made in the field of civil rights, almost all of which have occurred against the backdrop of litigation and mass protest.

Unfortunately, or fortunately, Negro students throughout our land have been taught in both public and private schools that they hold a citizenship status which is equal in all respects to that of every other American. It is commendable that in the face of obvious attempts to indoctrinate them to the contrary, they now emerge as a vital and strong group of stalwart citizens whose image of themselves is such that they are determined to accept no longer, the inferior status which the South still seeks to thrust upon them.

The Negro citizens of our community hope for successful negotiations between student leaders and representatives of the various stores affected. We are also hopeful that these negotiations will lead to formation of fair employment practices and an enlightened policy providing for a cordial invitation to all patrons to use the dining facilities without being segregated according to race. It is reasonable to expect that the giant corporations of our country will find themselves in position to furnish leadership in matters of this kind. In like manner, it is reasonable to expect that our State Officials will recognize their responsibility for having North Carolina live up to its reputation of being the enlightened, liberal and progressive state which our industry-hunters have been representing it to be. Indeed, it is urgently necessary that we shall prove ourselves to be, in fact, what we have

been saying we are when talking to those corporations which we have invited to establish new factories within our borders on grounds that there is in North Carolina a climate of racial tolerance and understanding which will enable personnel coming from other sections of the country to live in an atmosphere consistent with the American ideals of freedom and equality for all persons.

In conclusion, we commend these students for the dignified manner in which they have demonstrated the kind of poise and maturity which have enabled them to smile while being cursed, showered with eggs, and threatened with physical violence by irresponsible elements of our various North Carolina communities who would do well to acquire some of the qualities of good citizenship and understanding which have been shown by those who protest.

RECEIVED
FEB 15 1960
GOVERNOR'S
OFFICE