

Campus Life

(Editor's Note: "Campus Life" is a new column to appear each week. It deals with important issues in the world today as they relate to the Bucknell student body.)

by Ronald Unger

COLOR, RELIGIOUS AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AT BUCKNELL?

I'm sure that few if any of you who read this column consider yourself bigoted or prejudiced. I'm sure each and every one of you adheres in some form or another to the principles of personal integrity and personal equality. Yet every day in every way a great majority of the students on this campus are giving support to those concepts which purport segregation and racial, religious superiority by setting up certain undemocratic standards for selection into a group.

We "like to believe" as Americans living in a land of the free under Democratic morals and principles that we are truly Democratic. Moreover, we as students at Bucknell University, a Christian institution, sincerely "like to believe" that our campus presents a picture of "little Democracy" at work.

Our belief is founded in the strong faith of all free institutions—the faith that says men are entitled to certain rights as human beings regardless of inherent capabilities. None of us are naive enough to think that "equality, fraternity," and justice as individuals" applies to inherited capabilities, but rather to social and moral equalness.

Unfortunately for Bucknell, what we should "like to believe" and what is the "truth" are two relatively incompatible points. The truth of the matter is that with the exception of a few isolated cases, the fraternities on this campus actively propagate the concept of racial and religious segregation.

Any individual who belongs to an organization which actively promotes and "lives by" the concept of discrimination on the basis of race, religion, or color is supporting that concept himself, regardless of personal feelings.

In order to be fair and to obtain a fuller picture of this practice of discrimination it is proper to look at the reasons for its continuance at our institution. The first point, to my knowledge, made by those who advocate the present fraternity system is that the Southern fraternity groups would secede from the organization if the national organization advocated and demanded that every fraternity place a "nonsectarian" clause in their constitutions.

Second, it is often said and with considerable validity that a more cohesive homogeneous organization is formed when people are of "your own kind." Finally, it is said that no group or individual in our Democracy has the right to tell another group or individual how he or she should conduct affairs not pertaining to the former.

Insofar as the first point is concerned the National Interfraternity Council at its Washington Convention on November 26, 1949 recommended "that member fraternities that do have selective membership provisions consider this question in the light of prevailing conditions and take such steps as they may elect to eliminate selectivity provisions."

In other words each individual fraternity has been given the right to make its choice as its conscience so dictates. The policy of a particular chapter—one at Bucknell for example, should not effect the attitudes and policies of member chapters in Nashville, Atlanta, Richmond, etc.

Concerning the second argument, it is true that certain advantages accrue out of associating with people of similar religious and cultural backgrounds. However, it is this writer's firm belief that whatever advantages can be obtained from sectarianism, we can all be immensely better citizens, better "Democrats," and more understanding human beings by living as we preach. This is a Christianity which ensnares all races, creeds, and colors both in our prayers in church and our every day living. Question yourself! Do you believe that as one individual you have the right to prevent another individual from obtaining a happy life here at Bucknell because he happened to be born a different color, or was conceived in a different racial and religious background.

As for the final point. Yes, it is true that nobody can force a group or an individual to do something against his will. It has not been my intention to promote the belief that if we pray to God to enable us to live the "good life," then we must promote that "life" ourselves.

In closing, I should like to present this article as a personal challenge to you the reader. If you do not accept my contention, then write me your reasons why. If you do accept, write me and tell me why also. I promise you that as many letters as space will be printed both pro and con. This is your column. This is a vehicle of expression, don't ignore it.

ED. NOTE: Columnist Unger's views do not necessarily represent those of this paper. It is hoped that someone will answer his fraternity condemnation. Address comments to Ronald Unger, The Bucknellian, Lewisburg, Pa.