On Race Issue: Will Luther Act or React?

During the last few weeks the usually serene face of Luther College has been disturbed by a rude awakening. In a series of incidents involving property damage and personal abuse racism and prejudice have come into our lives. They have come into the open with all their ugly results.

Some of our so-called intelligent college students have exhibited all the petty and ignorant acts of childish abuse that indicate all the degradation of prejudice that has been polarizing our country.

No longer has Luther been an insulated community shut off from the more profound conflict that exists in this country. Our campus has become a microcosm of the ugly state of society and has shown that students here too know what it really means to be a part of the enlightened outside world.

The question that comes up now is, are we strong enough, do we have conviction enough to face the reality of racism and fight it with all that is degrading to thrive and grow.

Luther faces the same demands and risks. We now have the chance to demonstrate to ourselves and to the rest of the world that we are men, each and every one of us, and refuse to let ourselves follow the dehumanizing and shameful example of this country.

How we face this issue will determine to us and to everyone what kind of people we truly are, whether strong enough to face racism and fight it or weak pitiful excuses for men. For men, especially Christian men, there is only one way to go, fight, all that is degrading and revolting before it manages to contaminate us as it has contaminated society.

There is now movement afoot to organize a black student union here at Luther. Such an organization can be beneficial for both the Negro students and the white. It can also be the cause of considerable conflict on campus.

The union could offer the Negro student a chance to mold a unit in which the Afro-American culture and heritage can be relevant to the Negroes and the white community. It can offer the Negroes a common basis of identity and unity. No longer would they be forced to mold themselves to the precepts of the middle-class white Americans, they would be able to grow and be proud of their heritage. They can have a basis to exist on this campus and throughout the country as free men and women who can choose their own identity and live their lives on their own terms.

They too can have a power structure on which to base their lives. They would no longer have to submit to the culture and background and power of the white community. With such an organization they could form their own real and legitimate existence. They can say that their background and culture is just as valid and just as important as any other. The white community would then be confronted with a group of people who aren’t going to be, or have to be, molded by the precepts of another segment of society.

Up to now the Negro students here have been forced to conform to the molds that the white community has imposed upon them. By sheer lack of numbers they were forced in many cases to negate their own beliefs and background and accept those of others in order to be acceptable. Acceptable, not as they are or on their own terms as free men with legitimate identity, but as men bent to fit the culture and beliefs of a different people.

With a sufficient number of Negroes here now they can group together and foster their own lives on the basis of their own choice and culture. They can say to the others that they don’t have to conform to others’ standards because they have their own which are just as real and just as valid. Such a climate can be very healthy and be a cause for learning and growth of all concerned.

Out of the confrontation of differences can come real progress and freedom for all rather than the stifling atmosphere created when a man cannot be a man on his own terms but must conform to what others dictate as norms of attitudes, beliefs and conduct. They can have the choice to live as the have grown, with their own culture.

If such a union was allowed or persecuted then this campus would be thrust into stagnation where one way of life is praised, preached, and forced on all, thereby freeing all students into a mold in which they cannot escape or change. It would say that one way of life, one set of attitudes and beliefs is the only one possible and were to anyone foolish enough to try and differ from the “rules”.

In such an atmosphere any individual spirit or freedom would be completely stifled and this school would not produce a generation of free thinking individuals with differing ideas from which to choose but would produce a generation of yes men without any new ideas or freedom of mind or body. We would help produce a nation of ignorant sheep and monkeys that all conform to one way of life thereby stagnating growth and progress.

The black union organization faces the same dangers as those mentioned above of sacrificing the individual and free thinking by too firm insistence on the strength and unity of the group. If in their quest to build a strong union and organization they force the Negro students to give up their individual freedom for the maintance of the group then they have failed to accomplish the freedom to exist as men that they seek.

The danger exists that in attempting to put together a strong union the