

## "KEEP THAT NIGGER RUNNING"

- Invisible Man, Ralph Ellison

(If we don't have time to make decisions about our lives or if we don't have time to implement our decisions - all the so-called freedoms become meaningless and we are, in a sense, powerless. It is not as obvious as being told "Nigger, I'll blow your head off if I see you at the courthouse" or Gov. Reagan's "If Berkeley students don't like the rules they can get out." Bennington is a unique community of committed individuals - with an institutional framework that supports individual and human rights for growth and development. Yet many members of the Bennington community feel trapped by the "system." Why.....?)

The Civil Rights Colloquium at Bennington last weekend raised more questions than it answered. I am an-ex-student, activist in the civil rights movement for the last 5 years, who was invited up from Mississippi to participate in the colloquium. I found many students already involved in social change and others wanting to become more involved. Many more have "their own problems to deal with." This galley is offered in response to a need expressed by members of the community - faculty, students, administration - for further probing.

People here, many, seem to feel that there is some kind of pressure that keeps us niggers running. We know that the old world is gone - extended family, community & continuity are disrupted. Technology, change, insecurity, anonymity are here to stay and spread. We cannot wish for a return of the old world. It is gone and we must prepare ourselves for the new. But the resultant pressure paralyzes some and leave many others feeling that they are never working hard enough.

People who want to do something about the world find they have to sacrifice their "own" work. People who concentrate on their "own" work, sometimes find it hard to be productive. Words like "irrelevant," or "meaningless" or "isolated" recur in descriptions of the Bennington situation.

Statements this week at Bennington:

"When I read Chris Koch's galley about the war I was ashamed to be an American. I wanted to leave the country." Her boyfriend is being investigated by the Selective Service department for his disagreement with American foreign policy and his refusal to implement that policy. He may have to leave the country to keep from betraying his convictions - but then he would be a "draft dodger" and could never return. He is fighting panic. So is she.

"How can you reach Bennington girls? I wrote a galley. No one disagreed. But no one seemed to react." - faculty

"I think dancing should be kicking high and running and leaping. There's nothing wrong with that, is there?" student

"It's stone hard to be black at this school." student

"Yes it's a nice place. I don't think the girls know what they have here." - maid mopping Kilpatrick bathroom

"I don't want to become a bureaucrat as the school grows larger. Students come to me with complaints, bitterness about Bennington. I want to make changes, but I don't know what to do." - administration

"This is the first time I've thought about politics in a while. I started reading last week because I knew I was coming to Bennington for this civil rights thing. I'm the only cat out there in my city probing. I'm alone. I know what needs to be done, but I'm alone." - ex-civil rights activist now teaching in a ghetto school. He's Negro.



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"I'm scared. All my life I believed people could change things and acted on that belief and now I'm beginning to think I was wrong. We're powerless." - student

We have only 2 alternatives.

We can be crushed by this New World - we can suffer alone, feel anguish at being isolated, concerned but unable to act

OR

We can create the New World to meet our needs.

In this world: White People tell Black People what they need.

Men tell women who they are, what's wrong with them, what they need.

Too many parents and administrators and faculty in this world, tell students and children who they are and what they need.

~~NOBODY IS US. NOBODY KNOWS OUR NEEDS BUT US. IF YOU CAN COME TOGETHER AS STUDENTS TO DISCUSS YOUR NEEDS YOU HAVE MADE THE MOST IMPORTANT MOVE POSSIBLE. (SOME FACULTY SAYS THEY WILL JOIN THE DISCUSSION, BUT STUDENTS MUST INITIATE IT) . THE FIRST PROBLEM IS ISOLATION.~~

IF WE COME TOGETHER NOT TO PSYCH EACH OTHER BUT TO PROBE EACH OTHER AND OURSELVES WE WILL HAVE MADE THE FIRST GREAT ACHIEVEMENT: THE REALIZATION THAT WE ARE NOT ALONE, THAT WE SHARE PROBLEMS, THAT WE CAN SOLVE PROBLEMS TOGETHER.

THERE IS INTIMACY AT BENNINGTON BUT NOT ENOUGH LOVE AND REAL CONTACT (COMMITTMENT?) BETWEEN PEOPLE.

IF WE JUST COME INTO A ROOM TOGETHER AND SHARE OUR IDEAS AND EXPERIENCES WITH THE BELIEF THAT TOGETHER WE ARE A MULTITUDE BUT ALONE WE ARE NOTHING-

WE WILL NO LONGER BE ALONE. Then we can go on to define problems and some possible ways of working them out.

THURSDAY AND FRIDAY NIGHTS - from 10:30 P.M. on a lot of us will be talking together in Swan living room (Thursday) and Booth living room (Friday). We need you there to tell us how we can help you deal with the problems that concern you- and so that you can help me and us.

P.S. The McCarthy era has left its legacy even unto us:  
We still believe that to question is subversive, treasonous.

As Some might say, "I love America, and because I love it I must oppose this war" this galley comes from a loyalty to the basic principles of Bennington which must be questioned in order to be sustained.

"ALL THAT IS NECESSARY FOR EVIL TO TRIUMPH, IS FOR GOOD MEN TO DO NOTHING."

- Edmund Burke

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