

April 15, 1968

MR 394
Appendix I

UNIVERSITY DISCIPLINE COMMITTEE STATEMENT

On the evening of Friday, December 2, the Sigma Chi Fraternity held its Roman Toga Party and, at the same time, a group of black students held a birthday party for a second year student in the basement recreation room of Sargent Hall. Northwestern black students and a number of their friends from Chicago were invited to the birthday party.

At some point during the birthday party, some of the participants left Sargent Hall and discovered the party in progress at the Sigma Chi house. Thereupon, one or two black students and four or five non-student guests from the birthday party entered the Sigma Chi house. Apparently at the time the dance was in intermission, though the band was playing, and most of the members and their guests were downstairs having refreshments. A few pledges and their dates were on the main floor and received the Negroes without hostility, although the Negroes' presence was immediately reported to those downstairs. Almost immediately a number of fraternity members appeared and asked the Negroes to leave. Just how courteously this was done initially remains a question but it was not long before the Negroes, who apparently did not respond at first to the invitation to leave, were ushered out of the house with some degree of force. This no doubt stimulated a latent animosity, and verbal brickbats led to fisticuffs as the group migrated off the fraternity house porch toward the Sargent Hall parking lot. At this point genuine fighting started, apparently precipitated by a Sigma Chi pushing a black student against an automobile, either as a gratuitously aggressive act or in response to what was perceived as a threatening gesture made towards a fellow member by one of the Negroes.

The fight that ensued was, of course, perceived differently by the white and the black participants. Each group saw the other as starting it. The Sigma Chis claimed a number of Negroes carried bottles, both broken and unbroken, while none of the Negroes questioned later recalled seeing any of their group carrying weapons. No one saw a member of Sigma Chi stabbed. Indeed, this student said he was unaware he had been stabbed until sometime after it had happened.

Both groups claimed there had been no drinking of alcoholic beverages at their respective parties, though each claimed that members of the other group acted as if they had been drinking. Neither group, however, denied the possibility that some of their members might have had something to drink before attending the parties in question.

The melee resulting in the injury of the fraternity member ended with each group of combatants withdrawing. The Sigma Chis busied themselves getting their injured man to the hospital and taking dates home while most of the black students either left the scene temporarily or gathered in small groups near the entrance of the Sargent Hall parking lot where by this time others had gathered to see what was going on.

Soon after a member of the campus security force arrived at the parking lot, a Sigma Chi member attempted to drive his car out of the parking lot and found his passage blocked at the entrance by the security patrol car. The student got out to ask the officer to move his car and either precipitated or responded to an act of hostility involving some of the assembled Negroes. This caused a scuffle with one of the black students during which the Negro

was hit in the mouth and after which the fraternity man was struck on the head with a stick or pipe by an unseen assailant. The resulting wound required hospital treatment.

While the security officer was present at the time and not far away from this incident, he reported not seeing it occur as his attention had been drawn elsewhere at the moment.

About this time the Evanston police arrived and began to control the situation by asking the crowd, which by this time had been swelled by onlookers to more than 100, to disperse. The blacks resented the presence of the police and verbally resisted the police interference. They perceived that the police were dispersing the black students but paying little attention to the whites. Two of the Negro guests appeared to the police to be ignoring requests to disperse and were, therefore, arrested and escorted across Sheridan Road to a police cruiser where they were searched and, according to eyewitness reports, one was hit across the back of the lower legs with a night stick. Both youths were later charged with "mob action" and one was also charged with "resisting an officer," as he had attempted to prevent his companion from being hit.

The two men were put in a squad car and driven to the police station, where a good many of the participants of the fight went either to make statements to the police or to try to arrange for the release of the arrested men.

The preceding summary was derived from statements made by the participants in the incident two or more days after it occurred and, therefore, attempts only to approximate the general outline of the episode as it unfolded. Everything happened very quickly and the participants' perceptions of what actually transpired were distorted.

The principal points of disagreement in perception between the two participating groups might, however, be itemized as follows:

(1) The status of the fraternity's party. The Negroes said all Sigma Chi parties are known to be "open" parties, while the members of the fraternity maintained it was a "closed" party.

(2) Why the Negroes entered the fraternity house. The Negroes claimed they had been invited to enter, while Sigma Chis maintained the Negroes entered without invitation on the heels of an entering fraternity member.

(3) The manner in which the Negroes were ushered out of the house. The Negroes claimed they were forcibly ejected and pursued out of the house and into the Sargent Hall parking lot, while the fraternity members maintained they asked the Negroes courteously to leave and only became adamant when they refused to depart.

(4) Who started the fighting? Each group saw the other as starting the fighting.

(5) The influence of alcohol. While each group claimed members of the other group had acted drunk or smelled of alcohol, neither group admitted any of its members had been drinking.

The University Discipline Committee views with alarm the violence that occurred at the Sigma Chi House the night of December 2, 1967, and has therefore placed five students—three white and two black—who were most clearly involved in the fighting, on disciplinary warning. The involvement of these students, which has led to this action, is viewed by the Committee with the utmost seriousness.

If the identity of those participants in the fighting who resorted to the use of weapons had been known to the Committee, they would have been most severely disciplined. This community cannot tolerate violence of this kind and achieve its academic purposes.

For this reason it must be stated clearly for all to know, that further racial incidents, including what some might believe to be pranks, will not be tolerated on this campus. Anyone who is involved in any such incidents whether individually or as a member of a group shall be dealt with severely. In this regard all members of the University community are urged to report to the Dean of Students any incident which appears to have racial overtones.

The episode of December 2 involving black students and members of Sigma Chi has caused the University Disciplinary Committee grave concern and much anguish as it has tried to understand and evaluate events that occurred. The Committee has had eight lengthy meetings in consideration of this issue.

Unfortunate as the occurrence of the white-black confrontation was, it would be more unfortunate if the University Community did not search for underlying causes, characterize them and attempt to modify them. The following is an attempt to address this issue and suggest ways to reorient patterns of response which we feel represent the major cause of the affair.

Until recently, the Negro youth who enrolled at Northwestern University faced a totally white culture. Survival meant radical adaptation, since few in the white community were interested in or aware of the Negro's need to maintain his own identity. In fact, it was generally supposed that Negroes aspired to white values and, indeed, if this wasn't the case, why would a Negro want to go to college in the first place? So the Negro student at Northwestern University—and there were only a few—embraced the white culture and was swallowed up by it. He participated in athletics and occasionally pledged a fraternity. But in the main he kept to himself and worked hard to get his degree at the earliest possible time.

But in the fall of 1966 things began to change. A special program brought 35 Negro students to the campus along with 20 to 25 who enrolled through regular channels. This year about 55 more were added as the result of the continuing special program and aggressive recruiting. As the number of Negroes on campus increased and as the Negro community at large grew more skeptical of the possibility of integration, Negro students began to "discover" each other. This gravitational movement tended at one and the same time to provide Negro students with the reinforcement and support

they individually needed to maintain their identity in the overwhelmingly white culture of the University and at the same time it contributed greatly to the sense of frustration and dissatisfaction these students felt. Their getting together and discussing their plight heightened their sense of powerlessness and increased their bitterness towards the University. The impact of such feelings on academic performance should not be underestimated.

The University Discipline Committee is convinced that Northwestern students, faculty and administration can and should recognize its oversight and take immediate steps to recognize Negro students as they seek to become a respected element of the campus community. This will materialize to some degree as the University community responds more aggressively to the pressing social and cultural deficiencies in the campus community, but this task has only just begun and it is imperative that our Negro students are not asked to wait any longer to be accorded the respect and concern which they deserve from this community. It is not integration or separatism which is at the center of the current concern—it is rather for the entire University community to modify institutions and attitudes of racism and recognize the black student's existence, his right to be an individual, and the reasonableness of having his own values and goals respected.

We submit that this objective can be reached and recommend that the following be done to start the University toward this goal.

1. Employ Negroes on the administrative staff in the student affairs area.
2. Press for changes in all social groups and other organizations that will end de facto segregation.
3. Provide black student groups University facilities for meetings and social activities.
4. Include black student representatives on University committees concerned with the character and quality of student life whenever possible or otherwise assure representation of their views.
5. During New Student Week arrange to give incoming black students the opportunity to meet with upperclass black students and black faculty and staff members to discuss frankly and openly their questions and concerns.
6. Convene a series of campus-wide meetings addressed to the problems facing a predominantly white academic community attempting to adjust to the new reality of a multi-racial campus.