

# Of Civil Rights And Civilities

The civil rights turmoil in the U. S. Senate is matched in ferocity only by the crisis of civilities in the South.

But there is a decided difference in the atmosphere in Washington and the atmosphere below the Potomac: A good many of the men of the Senate are playing an election year game, and all of them know it.

The inflammatory racial spirit being goaded and agitated on every side in the South's lunch counter protests is no political game—and here also the principals know it.

In the U. S. Senate, Lyndon Baines Johnson, the Texas high mogul of manipulation, deftly pulls the strings of his own election year presidential hopes. But in Montgomery, Ala. (as many watch with chilled spines), Rev. Martin King addresses an almost frenzied hymn-singing congregation, and with great moral fervor a colored student announces in slowly emphasized words: "Tomorrow morning . . . at 9 o'clock . . . we . . . will . . . march."

In the U. S. Senate Southern strategists, alarmed by the Dirksen civil rights bill, try to hold it in abeyance in hopes a moderate House bill will beat it to the draw. The Dixie delegation knows well that it fights a rear-guard action. A civil rights bill is in the stars this election year.

But many Americans may ultimately join many Southerners in concern if the zeal of the political-battle forces on the nation a new law which injures more human rights than it protects. That danger lurks in the Dirksen bill. It might well make a federal crime of the free expression of opinion opposing a federal court order in school desegregation.

But the graver danger lies in the fanning of race hatred all over the South. The issue no longer concerns civil rights (such as school attendance or use of pub-

lic facilities); it concerns civilities—the right of businesses to invite their own customers and the fairness of business practices.

It is true, as Martin Luther King said in Alabama, the lunch counter sit-downs have confronted the white South with a problem it does not know how to deal with. Rev. Mr. King suggests that the white South should turn to the Bible and there it will find the answer. But unfortunately most of the principals in this interracial showdown will not turn to the Bible; they will turn to bludgeons, or perhaps something worse.

Somewhere a Southern community must find a way to deal with civilities as well as civil rights. Such an answer will not be found while the management is under the gun. It will be found only where both sides are able to sit down and work out an answer unimpeded by the threat of force or the worry of economic reprisal.

Greensboro, we think, can come closest to this ideal. It has a fine committee willing to attack the issue head-on with patience and restraint. It has a community divided, of course, on many aspects of the problem but perhaps dominated by feeling of the need of moderation and give and take rather than inflexibility and closed minds.

Certainly it is no easy thing to distinguish between civil rights and civilities, property rights and human rights. But hard and sober thinking is necessary on both sides.

What happens in the U. S. Senate or what happens in South Africa may not be nearly so important as what happens in our community. We must somehow find a path through the current difficulty and a just and honorable pattern of behavior for all men and women, of whatever color or creed, inexorably bound up in the crisis of commerce and conscience.