Why Little Concern Over Integration at Rice?

This week The Thresher inaugurates a new feature, designed to give the faculty of the University an opportunity to speak to a wider audience than they normally encounter in the classroom.

A different member of the faculty will “have his say” each week, and he may also take issue with what his colleagues have said in previous weeks. A spirit of controversy is encouraged.

The author of the article below, the first of the series, is Dr. Louis Galambos, assistant professor of history. Dr. Galambos joined the Rice faculty two years ago; he received his Ph.D. from Yale University.

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Why are there no Negro students at Rice? Or perhaps a better question would be: Why is there so little concern among the faculty and students that there are no Negroes at Rice?

Surely the problem of segregation is important to American society today; anyone who reads a newspaper must be aware of this. Surely this is a subject worthy of consideration.

BUT IS segregation a subject of controversy at Rice? No. And if it is, the controversy is remarkably well concealed and thus hardly worthy of consideration. Indeed, in regard to this question and to many others, the most outstanding characteristic of the Rice faculty and student body seems to be the lack of concern, of commitment, on any of the basic issues which face our society today.

In regard to segregation there is, of course, the charter of the University with its provision that the endowment of William Marsh Rice was to be used for “the instruction and improvement of the white inhabitants of the City of Houston, and State of Texas . . .”

BUT ONE NEEDS only to look around at the student body (or for that matter, at the cars with out-of-state licenses parked on campus) to recognize that this is no longer a University dedicated only to the education of the white inhabitants of Houston and the state of Texas. Other states, other nations, other races are represented on campus—but yet, there are no Negroes at Rice.

And even if the charter were an effective bar to the admission of qualified Negro students, would that explain the fact that so few persons at Rice are interested in the issue? Would that explain the lack of petitions, the lack of discussion, the lack of commitment at Rice?

NO, OF COURSE it wouldn’t. And it seems appropriate, then, to ask who is primarily responsible for the existing intellectual environment—an environment which befits a technical institute but not a University. Is it the responsibility of the administration? the faculty? the students?

All three were blamed in the series of informal debates which took place on the campus and in The Thresher last year.

The students are directly involved, but if one is realistic about the value system inculcated by the normal American high school, he will not expect the students to arrive at the University with a strong interest in social and political questions. This is something that it, or should be, learned while the students are here. After four years, the student should have begun to question the old value system; he should at least have begun to wonder, if not to care, about what is happening in the world.

AND THE BASIC questions, I believe, should originally have been raised by the faculty, and especially by the faculty in the humanities. The administration administrates; the faculty’s job is to teach.

The faculty in humanities is, after all, dedicated to the study of society. How can a good humanist fail to care about humanity? If the students at Rice are not interested in humanity, does it not seem logical to look at the faculty in humanities and ask why they have failed to teach the students to care?

And harsh as it may seem, one answer which suggests itself is that they themselves don’t care. They themselves are not particularly interested in segregation, in society, in the humanity that they profess to study.

PERHAPS IT IS too much to ask of the faculty. Perhaps they and the students should be contented with a placid cruise on a smooth lake; it is, we all know, dangerous to rock the boat.

Why should the faculty get involved in this sort of dialogue; isn’t it enough to give lectures and to devise very long assignments? Isn’t it enough to have lunch once a week at the college? After all, does it really matter if there are no Negro students at Rice?