Interrmarriage Fear Is 'Straw Man'  

By DENIS ASHTON

It has always been "jam every other day" for the American Negro. The white Southerner's attitude has traditionally been one of paternal concern for the Negro's readiness to enter white society and congenital deafness to his pleas. Even after his equality was established by proclamation, the Negro was told that his total integration must wait. He has been waiting almost one hundred years.

Initially, integration's postponement by the maintenance of equal but separate facilities was justifiable. The post-Civil War Southern Negro was, as a class, uneducated and unprepared for immediate assimilation into Southern society. Statistically, segregation made sense.

BUT THE NEGRO has waited, conditions have changed, and today the Southern Negro no longer represents a single class, either socially or economically. Black skin and indifferent scholarship are no longer synonymous. Separation of the races has lost its statistical justification, and has become prejudice. The Negro is ready to be judged as an individual.

What, then, is the opposition to integration? Strangely enough, many insist that their greatest fear is of racial intermarriage, despite the number of cities where two races — white and Mexican, white and Oriental, and white and Latin American — share both jobs and public facilities without intermarrying.

EVEN STRANGER, no Southerner will admit the possibility that either he or a member of his family might marry a Negro. And yet this possibility seems to him much more threatening than the possibility that one of his children might marry a white alcoholic.

His fear is unreasonable and his argument is a straw man which tries to hide the basis for his opposition to integration: his continued association of color and social class. After that association has lost its validity both as a basis for individual judgment and as a basis for public policy.

UNFORTUNATELY, ungrounded fears and prejudice are not the only difficulties the Negro faces. The ruffled tempers caused by Northern holier-than-thou heckling has all too often found final expression in further racial injustice. But neither the North's superciliousness nor the growing racial intolerance in the larger Northern cities justify continued injustice.

A great many of the cries directed at Northern critics of segregation have the ring of a guilty conscience.

NOR DOES A NATURAL opposition to the use of force in integrating change the facts. Integration is now a part of our nation's law. The Southerner who thinks that he can make the law go away by ignoring it is in for a shock. The law has been and will be enforced.

However, no one can reasonably expect an overnight resolution of a century's problems. In some parts of the South, real social economic problems still exist. They will need special solutions. But by and large the Negro has waited long enough; he is tired of waiting. A substantial proportion of the Negro population is ready to receive its promised equality. Continued suppression of the ambitious and gifted Negro will only slow his progress and the progress of his race, increase his frustrations, and multiply the strength of the measures he feels obliged to take to improve his lot.

He has been judged as a class too long. He deserves an end to an injustice which is at best an injustice by default. He deserves The Chance.