

#### THE CORE WAY

CORE's way is disciplined, non-violent action directed against the color line; the letters stand for a vigorous young organization, the Congress of Racial Equality.

#### Helen Buckler .

In the late summer of 1941, sixteen boys - twelve white, four Negro - purchased tickets at the entrance gate of a large outdoor swimming pool in Cleveland. The Negroes were not refused. The management's methods of discrimination were more subtle than to break outright the Ohio State Civil Rights Law. The youths put on their swimming trunks and went out to the pool where a large number were enjoying the cool water. As the sixteen plunged in, up went a cry of "Nigger"! All previously in the pool got out and stood, ominously, on the bank. The newcomers continued to swim about.

Presently the management's tactics were divulged. As one of the Negro lads stood on the edge of this pool, a "toughie" approached and shoved him. The Negro chose to take it as an accident and only smiled at the White fellow. Finding he had not provoked a quarrel and not wishing to lay himself open to arrest by more overt action, the toughie shrugged his shoulders and departed. The sixteen, when they had finished their swim, clambered out to sun themselves, still surrounded by the potential mob. Again a Negro lad was shoved. He smiled and extended his hand to the white fellow who was so surprised that, caught off guard, he shock the proffered hand. No hostlities developed.

Later, as the group left the park, police, called by the management, took their names and admonished them not to return. When the boys pointed out that, as they understood it, the law said all people had the right to enjoy public facilities, the police asked: "Who are you, communist?" "No, Christians," answered the boys. "Then," a policeman demanded, "why are you coming here trying to stir up trouble?"

Trouble, felt the youths, who had been doing some thinking on the matter, had been going on for a long time. They suspected that crowds might be led toward tolerant action as well as away from it, if some would only concern themselves about the matter.

Two weeks later they returned to the park. This time they sent in an "advance guard" of white boys to mingle with those in the pool, enter into their play and establish comradeship. Later, when the mixed group entered the pool, the taunting cry went up again. As before, boys started to leave the water. "What's the matter?" the advance guard asked their new companions. "Look, Niggers," came the reply. "Aw, heck, what's the diff? Come on, have fun. They've got the right to be here anyhow." Hardly anyone left and the whole crowd swam on emicably without incident.

Some months later, in Yellow Springs, Ohio, site of Antioch College, white students, taking seriously some of the discussions in their sociology classes, invited Negro students from nearby Wilberforce University to go with them to a movie. Instead of remaining in the segregated section at the back of the movie house, the Negroes went forward with some of the white students. The manager asked the Negroes to move, Without a word they shifted to prearranged vacant seats beside other white friends, seats scattered all over the front of

the house. They kept on moving. The manager could not be everywhere at once. Finding that most of the audience was quite neutral, he finally gave up, and another Jim Crow custom that had no actual validity in popular demand melted away.

#### Restaurant Experiment

In Chicago, late one night in the spring of 1942, two men, one white, one Negro, entered a small, but well set-up coffee shop in a good residential neighborhood. They asked for a cup of coffee and were refused service. Several ensuing interviews with the management failed to dislodge the policy of discrimination, which was said to be due to the unwillingness of patrons to eat beside Negroes. The management, asked how it knew patrons felt this way, admitted that the question had never been put. It was suggested that the management try serving Negroes for a short period, and if the trial resulted in loss of business, the loss would be made good. The management refused to experiment.

After several weeks of such efforts, during which the management had put up a sign reading, "We reserve the right to seat our patrons where we choose," a group of twenty-one persons entered the coffee shop in the late afternoon. Among them were university students, business and professional people, men and women, a young minister or two. The majority were white, but included in the group were Negro men and women. All were well mannered and quiet. They distributed themselves in the coffee shop, some at the counter, some in the booths. Since the shop could seat only forty, the newcomers fairly wall filled the place.

The management immediately asked the Negro men, who had seated themselves at the counter, to descend to the basement where, it was said, Negroes were served. They refused, saying they wished to sit with their friends. The management then tried to persuade two Negro women, who had entered a booth with white friends, to move to a booth in the rear of the shop. They too, refused. Whereupon the management telephoned for the police.

Meanwhile, though food had been placed before the whites in the group, they would not eat unless their Negro companions were served. All maintained an unruffled demeanor. Some read, others, chattered quietly. Two police officers arrived. Apprised of the situation, they declined to have anything to do with it, since there was no disturbance whatever. Asked by the management if they would not eject the group on the grounds that the coffee shop reserved the right to seat its patrons where it wished, the officers replied, "There is nothing in the law that permits us to do that," and they left. After an hour the management, seeing that this new style sit-down strike was costing business, capitulated and served the entire twenty-one.

How did the general public react to this experiment to secure racial equality as guaranteed by law? Those who entered late seated themselves beside the Negroes at the counter without any fuss. As customers took in the situation, they lingered with interest to see the outcome. One elderly gentlman who, with his wife, had been present throughout, approached members of the group in the street afterward and said: "I had no idea there was discrimination here in Chicago. I thought that was what we were fighting against in the war. Good luck to you!" A woman patron asked to join the group in any further endeavors to break the color bar. Subsequent visitors to the coffee shop found the management amiably serving all alike -- nor did there appear to be any fall-off in business.

# A New York Skating Rink

In Syracuse, early in 1943, two young men, a white and a Negro, applied for tickets at the window of a large downtown roller skating rink. The clerk stated there was a capacity crowd. The boys stood aside, watching others arrive and be admitted. They pointed out the fact to the clerk, who maintained these new-comers had had reservations. The young men asked the next prospective customer if he had a reservation. When he said he had not, they took his name and address for evidence. He was not refused a ticket. When the two approached the clerk, a third time, she grew flustered and called the manager. Irritated, he thundered that no Negro or Italian had entered his rink for twenty years. The two young men left.

Later, a committee presented its plea for non-discrimination with the confident assumption that the manager would want to comply with it. They were quiet end calm, but firm. They showed they knew the law and had collected concrete evidence that it had been broken. The manager gave the usual argument that interracial attendance would lead to rowdyism. After forty minutes discussion, he agreed to a trial period of non-discrimination. No difficulties have ensued and the New York Civil Rights Statute is now observed by that rink.

## THE PEOPLE BEHIND IT

A few score more such incidents could be cited, from New York to Seattle. In each case individuals, frequently young college students, sometimes business and professional people or religious workers, had begun by looking at discrimination in a new light. They saw the absurdity of practicing at home a doctrine of racial superiority that was being combated abroad. They saw, too, their own guilt in acquiescing in the refusal of public services to Negroes --- hotels, hospitals, theaters, residences, schools. They concluded that they must act as well as talk, that temporizing would no longer do.

These conclusions seem to have cropped up after field trips by James L. Farmer, graduate of the School of Religion, Howard University, and former race relations secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Groups formed, some of the members being from the Fellowship of Reconciliation but not all. Later the spontaneous and isolated groups united to form the Congress of Racial Equality with headquarters in Cleveland. The national body now has held its third convention.

So far the organization's national treasury is a nominal one. Postage, mimeographed material, cheaply printed handbills are covered by small local contributions. Legal services, seldom required, have been contributed by members or their friends. Leadership is voluntary. CORE's executive secretary is George M. Houser, an ordained Methodist minister, who has become race relations secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation which contributes about a third of his time to the project.

Today nine groups are affiliated in New York, Syracuse, Cleveland, Columbus, Oberlin, Detroit, Chicago, Kansas City, and Denver. Others are working on the program in Washington, D.C., Flint, Michigan Indiapolis, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Seattle. All are vigorous, hard-hitting local COREs who hope to send over the country a tidal wave of public conscience about our cynical double standard of first and second-class citizenship, of foreign and domestic policy.

An unusually rigorous discipline is maintained. COREs are committed to direct but non-violent action. They are committed not to compromise with racial segregation, but to use constructive, not destructive approaches to the situation. Groups, all interracial, submit to caraful training. They do not enter upon negotiation that promises difficulties until they are sure that all members will be able to "absorb possible violence without retaliation." A two-months training school for CORE workers from all parts of the country was held in Chicago last summer.

It is the procedure to try to understand the persons with whom they are dealing and what influences their actions, then to act confidently so that no one will retaliate on the level of fear, to talk factually, never vindictively, to express courtesy and friendliness at all times. In other words, to use means harmonious with their ends. This relatively unexplored method of non-violent direct action, they feel, may develop a really powerful technique for dealing with social conflicts.

In a campaign to open certain restaurants in Chicago to white and Negro alike, the local CORE has carefully evolved a detailed procedure. First of all, members are informed what to expect in the way of discrimination. It may mean, they are told, outright refusal of service or even forcible ejection; it may mean being seated in an obscure corner; or being served small portions or food not fit to eat; it may involve being overcharged. CORE outlines certain helpful hints:

"Be confident," they say, "and assume you will have no trouble being served; dress neatly and appropriately; be observant at all times, watch the reactions of customers and capitalize on sympathetic responses; tip your waitress and always pay your bill, even when overcharged, though calling attention to the fact. If served inferior food, take away a sample of it for evidence, in case it is decided to call a court case. If no difficulty is encountered, express appreciation for courteous service to the cashier."

CORE campaigns are based on careful planning. Every step is worked out in advance, and unforseen on-the-spot decisions are made by a leader chosen before-hand, whom all have agreed to obey. Where service is refused or is poor, the follow-up is to attempt negotiation first. This is done through personal contact and by an interracial committee. If repeated negotiation fails, action then moves into passing out leaflets, picketing, talking to patrons, sit-down strikes. If all this fails the law may be appealed to in any of the twenty, two states\* where a civil rights statute is on the books. But this is resorted to only when all other efforts fail and is not considered the most satisfactory solution. Usually they do not fail.

\*California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin.

## Tough Going

In a Chicago restaurant, a place seating about four or five hundred people and having a big balcony, the manager, a prominent church-goer whom we shall call Mr. X, had refused to serve a white minister and his Negro friend. Repeated afforts at persuasion failed. Then handbills were prepared and distributed on the street to patrons of the restaurant.

"In a democracy," read the first, "should all people be able to choose where they wish to eat?" Mr. X "states that his patrons uphold his policy of refusing to serve Negroes. We refer the question to you."

The mext handbill said: "X's discriminates. Is this lawful?" and quoted from the Declaration of Endependence and the Illinois State Law, Criminal Code 38, ending: "Racial discrimination and intolerance wherever they exist underwines the foundations of democracy. No nation which is guilty of treating unjustly any sagment of its people can be a potent force in a just and durable peace." A coupon was attached which carried the request to "tear off and leave with the cashier when paying bill." It said: "To the Management of X's: I believe in 'freedom and justice for all'...and protest at finding them mocked by undemomentatic practices."

A Sunday flier carried quotations sgainst discrimination from Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish churchmen. "Is religion for Sunday or every day of the week? Is religion what you say, or what you do?"

Students and workers gave up their lunch hours to stand in all sorts of weather handing out leaflets which recounted the history of attempted negotiations and answered such hypothetical questions as Why Pick on X's; Who is Behind These Leaflets; What You Can Do About It. Many patrons tore off the coupons on the fliers and registered their protest with the cashier. Others came to the offices of CORE to report winitar cases of discrimination, or to ask to join in the effort to "secure democracy on the home front.

# Sitdown Strike

Attempts continued to be made by whites and Negroes to be served in Mr. X's restaurant. Once they found egg shells in the sandwiches served them; another time garbage. Finally after months it was decided that a sitdown strike would be necessary.

At the dinner how on the date chosen, shock troops of three and four whites entered the restaurant at intervals until about fifty were sitting at contered tables on the main floor. Then a mixed group of two whites and seven Wagnest entered. They were left standing in line while whites who came after them were promptly seated. They continued to stand. At the end of a half hour, Mr. X gave the order to seat them, which was done at a rear table where silver and dishes were heaped in disorder. Ten more CCRE members arrived, all Negroes except one; they were kept standing an hour and a half.

During this time, the fifty whites in the bivance guard refused to est and quietly informed neighboring patrons of what was taking place. Patrons became so interested in this "democracy test" that they lingered to see the outcome.

Mr. I telephoned for the police, who came, say there was no disorder, and left. Then a white woman guest, not a member of the CORE group, asked one of the Negro girls standing in line to share her table. This imapired CORE members already seated to do likewise. In this manner all but two of the Negroes were seated and at this point the hostess ushered there to a table. Spontaneous, unrestrained applicate except the big restaurant.

## Over a Widespread Area

It is not the plan of CORE to enroll large memberships. Groups must be cohegive and extremely well disciplined to carry out such programs. This is best done, the organization feels, by keeping numbers small. Memberships usually run about fifteen or twenty to a hundred, at the most, and are in all cases of both races.

Results are being achieved over a widespread area. In Denver, all movie theaters now admit Negroes to any part of the house. But before victory was won a Negro corporal in uniform was arrested by a MP on the call of the manager when he attempted to sit with a white friend on the main floor. The white friend accompanied them to the police station with a copy of the Civil Rights Statute of Colorado in his pocket. Upon its presentation, the police decided they had no ground upon which to hold the corporal.

In Colorado Springs, the policy of several restaurants has been changed and groups are now at work on movie houses.

In Detroit, an interracial cooperative house and store have been set up.

In Chicago, two interracial cooperative residences, one for young men, another for young women, now exist in otherwise segregated areas. There were friendly talks with the neighbors and no complaining witnesses appeared when the real estate companies attempted to invoke restrictive covenant in court.

In Oberlin, faculty, student and townspeople, finding that there was no piece where a Negro could get his hair cut, formed a cooperative, sold shares, and set up an interracial barber shop which is doing a flourishing, fine quality business.

In Columbus, court action was finally resorted to, which has ended segregation in the big downtown movie houses. Here, it was necessary to bring suit simultaneousely in a multiple number of of instances to show a recalcitrant city administration that its more democratic citizenry meant business. Following upon this success, representatives of practically every independtly owned theater in central Ohio agreed no longer to discriminate. Says a field report, there have been "no complaints by operators showing that any of the white patrons have complained, nor has there been any racial friction or decline in business resulting."

CORE carried on a campaign in several parts of the country against the Red Cross policy of segregating the blood of whites and blacks for transmittal to the wounded. "Give your blood," urged CORE, "but protest this Jim Croy policy." Thousands of leaflets were distributed pointing out that "it's all the same to him (the wounded man) and to science too?" Three hundred seventy-two protesting physicians, the American Association of Physical Arthropologist, and the Journal of the American Medical Association were quoted to the effect that cherical, physical, and microscopic tests have proved that white and Negro blood are identical and that "the segregation of the blood...is therefore not only unscientific, but is a grievous affront to the largest minority in the country."

CORE has collected and publiced statements of employers showing satisfaction with Negro employes. It has tackled discrimination in department stores, barber shops, federal housing, universities, YMCA's. It has issued pamplets listing restaurants which do not discriminate and inviting thoughtful people to patronize them. It is attempting to have restrictive covenants in real estate transactions declared illegal.

Because of its good will approach, CORE has in most cases been able to secure the willing concession of those whose policy it seeks to change. "But we have no failures," points out Mr. Houser, "because we never regard a job as finished until we have won." CORE is eager to leave behind not a defeated opponent but a real supporter of racial justice. Its difference from other movements lies in its belief that education alone is insufficient, that violence is self-defeating, and that withdrawal would be immoral.

CORE members have taken as slogan the words of Henry Thoreau: "What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which i condemn."

Reprinted from SURVEY GRAPHIC, February 1946 for the Congress of Racial Equality 38 Park Row, New York 38, New York

# The CORE Way

CORE's way is disciplined, non-violent action directed against the color line; the letters stand for a vigorous young organization, the Congress of Racial Equality.

HELEN BUCKLER

Reprinted from SURVEY GRAPHIC, February 1946
for the
Congress of Racial Equality
38 Park Row, New York 38, N. Y.

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF WISCONSIN
816 State Street
Madison, Wisconsin 53706

18-18