

THE MONTHLY REVIEW

~~Room 808~~ ~~Box 155~~ ~~Plainfield, N. J.~~

~~Telephone~~ ~~Plainfield~~ ~~6x472W~~

217 West 13th St
New York City

October 17, 1934

Dear Dr. Ruthven:

An alumnus of the University of Michigan, and a former member of its teaching staff, I wish to protest against the University's action in barring Willis Ward, student athlete, from participation in the football game against Georgia School of Technology on October 20, simply because Mr. Ward is a Negro and the opposing school is a southern institution. This action is contrary to the traditions of freedom and equality handed down - at least in our books - in our schools and in the University itself. It is directly contrary to the spirit of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. It is contrary to any real sense of fair play, to any genuine standard of human courtesy. The assertion of Mr. Ralph W. Aigler in his letter to the League of Struggle for Negro Rights that the insult to Willis Ward was one of "the customary courtesies which well-bred hosts are expected to display toward their guests" is monstrous. Not only is it monstrous in itself, but it is reactionary in the highest degree when viewed - as it should be - as a part of American treatment of the Negro, a part of "the segregation, discrimination, humiliation and the innumerable sufferings and lynchings forced upon the Negro people by the rapacious white rulers." This, as the League of Struggle for Negro Rights correctly observes, is precisely what the University of Michigan's 'customary courtesy' amounts to in the Willis Ward case.

Michigan is one of the states through which the underground railroad passed before the Civil War, by means of which many slaves secured liberation. The terms of founding of the University of Michigan implied a spirit of freedom and democracy entirely the reverse of the action which the university now takes. I confess to a feeling of burning shame that the university in which I spent ten years of my life should be guilty of such crass discrimination.

For two years I was Faculty Advisor of the Negro-Caucasian Club at Michigan, a club organized to fight for social and other equality for Negro students. In the name of this club, and of the progressive students in other campus organizations that have since been formed, I call upon you to reverse the action taken in the case of Willis Ward. It will not do to leave this matter to the Athletic Association or to Mr. Aigler. This matter that involves the honor of the university, and in fact of our whole supposedly democratic civilization. It is up to you as the chief responsible officer of the University to take definite action.

Very truly yours, Editor.....Joseph Koven
Managing Editor.....Oakley Johnson
Art Editor.....Theodore Schell
Technical Editor.....Ann Laine
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Gilbert Douglas

Oakley Johnson

OJ:TB
Alexander G. Ruthven
President of the University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Mich.

320 Hutchins Hall
October 22, 1934

Mr. Oakley Johnson
The Monthly Review
217 West 13th St.
New York City

Dear Sir:

Despite your insistence President Ruthven has sent your letter of the 17th inst. to me.

Although I have been connected with the committee in charge of athletic matters for over twenty years, never before, at least during that time, had there been any occasion in making a football schedule to consider the probable personnel of the team for the succeeding season. The game with Georgia Tech was arranged and a contract made without anybody on the Athletic staff, the coaches or any member of the Board in Control of Physical Education, remembering that a racial question would arise because of the presence of Willis Ward. It happened that I was in the Southwest from shortly after the first of December until after June and therefore did not personally participate in the making or the approval of the football schedule for this fall. To be very frank, however, I have no reason to think that my memory would have been any more alert than was the case with my colleagues and associates. These facts explain, though they do not of course justify, the scheduling of the game.

That there is a deep-seated Southern prejudice against football games with teams containing Negroes, we of course must

#2 - Mr. Oakley Johnson

admit. I think the Southern attitude has been gradually changing and I believe they do compete in track meets against Negro participants. I think in the ordinary course of events their objection in games like football would gradually disappear. Prejudices may sometimes be likened to stone walls. They may in time disintegrate, or indeed be taken down piece by piece. I have never suspected that it would be an effective way of getting rid of such obstacle to buck one's head against it.

Much of the agitation, as in your case, has been perfectly sincere with the genuine desire to further the cause of Mr. Ward individually and his race generally. To my mind, one of the most pathetic features of this whole situation has been ^{that} the agitation may have a tendency in exactly the opposite direction from that which it was desired to accomplish. This, I think, would be a very distressing result.

Yours very truly,

RWA/hh

RALPH W. AIGLER