

FOR MEMBERS ONLY (F.M.O.): FROM MODERATION
TO MILITANCY?

There were two of us in 1939--both females who commuted daily because campus housing wasn't exactly conducive to "us."

I'm told that things were different in 1949 though:

"I commuted to Northwestern while I was working on my Master's, but there were about five of 'us' living in the dormitories then," says Vernon Jarrett, visiting professor of Afro-American History.

The years 1959 to 1966 marked a new era: 26 living on campus--all of "us" athletes, except for three or five coeds.

And today, with about 300 now attending, convenient housing arrangements all over campus, and more than enough coeds (3 to 1) for each of "us" who happen to be males, one might be tempted to say that Northwestern University has really come a long-long way in its recruitment and treatment of black students.

Yes, one might assume that "things" are better at Northwestern based on these statistics. And then again, one might not make this assumption--if he knew the full story...

"Northwestern University recognizes that throughout its history, it has been a university of the white establishment, ..

"...A few years ago, the Northwestern Administration became increasingly concerned with the problems of doing something to improve race relations and to provide educational opportunities in greater measure than ever before for the black people in its community....(In 1966, Northwestern began a special program of recruiting black, Chicago area high school graduates who were qualified to attend NU but lacked the necessary finances. The program was labeled NUCAP--Northwestern University Chicago Action Project. The thirty-five freshmen in that class along with the twenty-five black students still remaining at NU brought the total black enrollment at NU to 60 in 1966. With this increase in the black student population, NU began publicizing the "fact" that it was no longer a racist institution, and that indeed, it was more integrated than most other universities in the country).

"...According, we cannot be complacent with institutional arrangements that ignore the specific problems of black students. An important and difficult problem is that of an essentially white leadership coming to understand the specific needs and feelings of the black students as well as the difficulties arising because the black student does not regard the white university authorities as capable of appreciating all of the nuances of his decidedly separate culture." (From the draft agreement between the Northwestern University Administration and For Members Only, May 4, 1968.)

The above quotes were the basic premises upon which For Members Only (F.M.O.), The Black Student Alliance, was established at Northwestern University.

"F.M.O., as an organization, seeks to provide a basis of unity for black students in the Northwestern community. It functions under the premise that black students must unite both politically and socially with the goal of educating themselves in the ideals of black collectivity and thought.

"F.M.O., then, seeks immediately to provide a social, cultural, and intellectual outlet for the black students of the Northwestern community, and ultimately, to build in black students a consciousness and to develop within them a identity which will define for them their respective roles in relation to black people as a whole, as well as to that society for which they are a part." (Preamble to the F.M.O. Constitution).

Originally, F.M.O. had no constitution nor any set ideals. It was a social organization formed by two moderate (as opposed to militant) black Northwestern juniors--Herman Cage and Wayne Watson. Since the club's formation in August, 1967, however, a minority of black students have realized that Northwestern was making itself a good name by admitting more and more black students, but at the same time, NU was allowing these same black students to be subjected to deplorable treatment on campus. This minority gained authoritative positions within the organization and revamped the once moderate social club into an influential, militant campus alliance for the good of all NU blacks.

The militancy of F.M.O. grew partly from racial insults upon black students and visitors early last year; partly from the manhandling of a black coed by a group of fraternity men; but mainly from Northwestern University as a whole.

On several occasions last year, Sigma Chi Fraternity members (all white; mainly "jocks") threw full cans of beer and balloons in which they had urinated, at passing black students. These throwing sessions were usually followed by loud racial slurs.

On another occasion, several of the Sigma Chi's attempted to "turn out" a fraternity party to which a few black students had been invited. Several black students were arrested in the ensuing melee, while the whites who initiated the brawl remained free. F.M.O. swore never to tolerate this again.

By the same token, a coed I'll call Mae, was walking from her late Friday evening class when a group of Fiji fraternity men, dressed in grass skirts, beads, and "head bones" for a weekend party, approached her, proceeded to pat her buttocks and breasts and make snide comments about the "oversexual nature of black women."

In return for this insult, Mae was sent a dozen roses and an apology note from the fraternity president--only after the black men at NU had threatened to take "an eye for an eye."

Northwestern University as a whole was the most influential factor which prompted F.M.O. to adopt its militant ideal. When the incidents were reported to the proper university officials, black students were told in so many sympathetic words:

"That's too bad. Gee, we're sorry you've had people arrested without reason and that some of your people have been insulted. We'd like to be of some service to you, but there's just no conclusive evidence that we have to go on. We just can't help you."

Maybe God really does "help those who help themselves" so F.M.O. didn't sit around and wait for miracles. It decided to act in its own behalf. The stern militant "Let's get ourselves together" type rhetoric was voiced more vehemently than ever at the next official

F.M.O. meeting that week:

Eric: We got to get our wigs together brothers and sisters! Partying and having a good time is o.k., but the revolution is going to come and you brothers and sisters better be together or you will be the first to go. It's quite obvious to me that the MAN don't give a damn about us except for the money the government is giving him to bring us here.

Marianne: That's right! If you keep fooling around, these honkies here and everywhere else will be beating our asses, You see what those damn honkies in Sigma Chi did to our black brothers not long ago, not to mention those fuckin' Fiji who felt all over Mae. You all had better wake up before it's too late!

John: You can do anything you want to. You think that you are an individual. We.., I just want to tell you that you're wrong! We've been oppressed as a group, and we'll have to defeat our white oppressors as a united group. A people bound together through a hate for a common enemy. The MAN ain't doing you no favor. He's using you to get money from the Federal government, but he won't protect his interest as long as it keeps on paying dividends. You better get hep, brothers and sisters!

Such comments as these were what caused Kathryn Ogletree, then acting-president of F.M.O., along with graduate students James Turner and John Eracy, to draw up a list of grievances and demands in behalf of the black student body, to be presented to the Northwestern Administration.

A few days later, Kathy called another meeting for the purpose of amending and correcting and/or clarifying the list of demands. After this tedious, time consuming process, in which most of the black community shared varying opinions, many copies of the demands were duplicated and given to every F.M.O. member as well as to all the high ranking university officials.

The demands were as follow:

"We, the Black students at Northwestern have found the academic, cultural and social conditions for us on this campus deplorably limited. In order to counteract the physical, emotional, and spiritual strains we have been subjugated to, in order to find some meaning and purpose in our being here, we demand that the following conditions be immediately met":

1. The university issue a policy statement deploring the viciousness of its 'white racism.'
2. The university increase scholarships and delete the 'required jobs' which are hampering black students from concentrating on academic achievement.
3. The university increase the black student enrollment and abolish its 'quota system'.
4. The establishment of separate living units for black students where we can do 'our thing'--culturally, academically or otherwise, with the greatest ease and freedom from white racism.

5. Expanded studies in blackness be offered at NU so its curriculum won't be totally one sided--that is all European oriented.

6. The university hire us a black counselor with whom we can relate (and one of our own choosing) since whites can't help us with problems which are peculiar only to black people, Indeed, whites are the root of many of these problems.

7. The creation of a black house or student union so that black students can feel as independent on NU's campus as the whites in the dominant fraternities and sororities.

8. The university take a firm stand on open occupancy in the Evanston community and that it use its influence to see that this law, which allows black people freedom of choice to live where they choose, is upheld in every respect.

In "response" to F.M.O.'s list of demands, the NU administration issued the following statements:

"The university deplores incidents which have racial implications, and asserts its determination to prevent any such events and to use its authority to employ disciplinary measures against those who violate the rights of others..."

"At least 50% of those admitted black candidates for admission have attended high schools serving the inner-city. There is no reason to believe that this per centage would change with the university's interest and efforts in this area..."

"While the crises which confront the nation and the university warrant the depth of this concern, it is essential that all members of the university act responsibly and with accountability in helping achieve the objectives of equal rights and dignity for all."

F.M.O. was not at all pleased with the above phrases which they considered more "trickery" than a response to eight specific demands. Not to be appeased by meaningless words, the leaders of F.M.O. again asked the administration to RESPOND to the eight demands. After being "put off" a second and then a third time, F.M.O. as a whole, decided on the tactics it would employ to best get the response it wanted.

The take-over of Northwestern's Business Office located at 619 Clark St. on May 3, 1968 was the means by which F.M.O. accomplished its end.

After the 38 hour sit-in, many F.M.O. members complained that "racism still ran rampant on NU's campus" and "black students are still the campus underdogs." But, F.M.O. had been granted most of its demands to help black better tolerate the stagnant and sometimes "over-moving" life which Northwestern offered them.

Chief among F.M.O.'s concessions for returning the Business Office back to the university was a house (619 Emerson St.) for blacks only and a black counselor for blacks only, whose name just happens to be Paul black and whose office is no doubt located in the Black House, in easy access of his black students.

Also, jobs were deleted as a requirement for black students on scholarship; separate living units were established for black students and several courses with a predominately black content and/or point of view have become commonplace at NU.

Since the May 3-4, 1968 sit-in also, F.M.O. has undergone a complete organizational overhauling to provide for its several areas of campus and community involvement.

Heading the alliance now is a central committee of three:

The Governor of Campus Affairs (presently Clinton Bristow, a junior in Education) handles all matters related to administration, admissions, political, and academic committees. He is responsible for keeping official financial records regarding membership, expenditures, etc., and for maintaining a social calendar of campus events.

The Correlator of Communications (presently Charles Shepard, a senior in Journalism) is responsible for the dissemination of information regarding notice of F.M.O. meetings, dues, and other issues of importance to the black student community. He must also issue official press releases to the campus and local news media and keep an accurate record of every F.M.O. meeting.

The Minister of Communal Affairs (presently Clovis Semmes, a junior in Arts and Sciences) is responsible for the coordination and development of all campus and community projects between black students and the black community. He also conducts research to better determine how F.M.O. can serve its immediate black community and he provides jobs in co-operation with the university when once the usefulness of such jobs and/or projects is established.

Even though FMO chose to officially call the organization, For Members Only: A Black Student Alliance, it is now recognized as an official and reputable campus organization and thus eligible for Student Activity Funds to carry out its plans.

F.M.C.'s official constitution has been ratified by a majority. its active committees (Admissions, Financial-Aid, Afro-American Studies) have been acting as "checks and balances" on the Northwestern Administration since last May to see that the university continues to live up to its "demands".

I feel that just because Northwestern University is far different today than it was in 1939, does not make it any better! My experience has been that the university pats itself on the back because it has changed so "drastically" in thirty years. Black students at NU aren't interested in "drastic" change, we're interested in carrying out our daily lives without any interference from people who seem to dwell on the thought that "white is right," and black has no place in this society.

Well, we in F.M.O. feel that black has a definite place in this society, and whether the white world thinks we are too militant in accomplishing our ideals is the least of our worries. We are an organization founded for the betterment of black students at NU, and we won't settle for second best!

Charles E. Shepard