

August 2, 1968

The Editor
Iowa State Daily
Room 101, Press Building
Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa

Sir:

Your editorial statement of August 2, 1968, which implies that the Support Group for the Black Student Organization has shifted its emphasis from racism at ISU to de-emphasis of intercollegiate athletics, seriously misunderstands the purpose and program of the Support Group.

To recapitulate briefly, Black students at ISU have charged the university community in general, and the administrators of the university's athletic program in particular, with racial prejudice and discriminatory practices. The Athletic Council has denied that "planned" and "knowing" discrimination exists, whereas other university bodies (Faculty Council, Human Relations Committee and various academic departments) seem to feel that discrimination exists. President Parks supports the position of the Athletic Council, and describes the behavior of the coaches and others accused of discrimination as "exemplary." (There is a subtle point here that is often missed: The Athletic Council insists that Coach Timm and others do not practice "planned and knowing" discrimination. The Black athletes, to my knowledge, did not make this charge; they seem to feel that the accused coaches are just ordinary, run-of-the-mill bigots who do their thing naturally without explicit "plan" and perhaps without even knowing it. The fact remains that the Athletic Council has not answered the charge that Blacks have been discriminated against, but merely insisted there is no conspiracy to discriminate.)

It seems clear that the main obstacle to increased understanding and resolution of the current conflict has been, and remains, the Athletic Council and their chief university supporter, President Parks. Numerous faculty groups have rejected the position of the Athletic Council (by suggesting that discrimination does exist and recommending courses of action that the Athletic Council has rejected). President Parks' position has also been rejected; Faculty Council recently defeated a motion to approve and commend Parks' handling of the current problem.

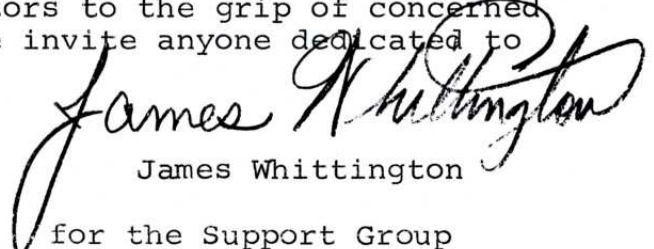
Given these facts, it should be clear why the Support Group has concentrated its efforts on changing the position of the Athletic Council, which has consistently denied that its personnel are discriminating against Blacks. Iowa State apparently has a special kind of discrimination: Everyone agrees that it is present, but it is not practised by real individuals against other real people in actual life situations. Some take security in the fact that discrimination is "difficult to prove." ("You wouldn't take the word of a bunch of niggers, would you?") In a recent Open Letter the Athletic Council expressed pride in itself for having defended its staff members against charges which are "of a nature difficult, if not impossible, to prove outside the processes of the courts." The Support Group is bringing this case to the attention of the Federal Civil Rights Commission, and hopefully court action will ensue. However, we suggest a simpler proof: the resignations of Black

students from the university because of a clear pattern of discrimination which is odious to them. We do not need a court case to determine, for example, that something was rotten in Hitler's Germany of 1934-39; the mass exodus of German Jews, who gave up home, property and country because of legally-sustained persecution, was both testimony and proof. The Blacks leaving ISU are refugees, eloquently testifying to the rottenness of racism in Ames. (The German example calls up other parallels: After their defeat, the conqueror's Nuremburg War Crimes trials held the "good Germans" morally and legally responsible for not protesting and resisting, in the name of human rights, the injustices perpetrated by their government. Most of the ISU community stands condemned by the same principle as guilty by inaction and silent assent to the policies which have driven the Blacks from the university.)

The Support Group has failed in its efforts to keep the Blacks in the university. We regret the departure of those who must leave, and sympathize with those who, for various reasons, must remain to suffer further indignities. The failure hurts, because a lot of nice people will no longer be among us. Those of us engaged in the Support Group effort are further saddened by what we have learned of the university: of the monolithic indifference of most of our colleagues and students, of the stupidity and duplicity of the university administrators, and of the cynical and conscienceless machinations of the power structure of the university. This is most clearly evidenced in the actions of the Athletic Council, which has insisted on protecting a few entrenched bigots at the cost of bringing shame upon the university.

The Committee for Academic Improvement has emerged from the Support Group effort as a group of concerned people who will work to improve the quality of life at this institution for everyone in the university community. We have not abandoned the fight against racism, merely broadened our target to include many other kinds of injustices we find around us. We will continue our struggle against the Athletic Council, which claims to represent the faculty but remains as a bastion of bigotry. Many of us doubt the value of mass spectacle athletics at an institution devoted to higher learning, and will seek support from colleagues and students who share this doubt. As your editorial suggests, "intercollegiate athletics is in desperate need of an intensive evaluation" directed toward restoring athletics to its proper place in a university program.

We emphasize that concerned individuals have not abandoned the struggle against entrenched racism in the university; rather, we have broadened our efforts to include all kinds of injustices, with the goal of improving the quality of existence at Iowa State University. The paradox is that we have been forced to dedicate our time and energies to this effort because the officials charged with directing the university have failed. The much-proclaimed "New Humanism" died on the crosses erected for the Blacks who are fleeing persecution. The torch must pass from the hands of the administrators to the grip of concerned faculty members, students and citizens. We invite anyone dedicated to human rights to join our efforts.


James Whittington
for the Support Group