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Atlanta's Mayor Speaks

On rare occasions the oratorical fog on Capitol Hill is pierced by a voice resonant with courage and dignity. Such a voice was heard when Mayor Ivan Allen Jr. of Atlanta testified before the Senate Commerce Committee in support of President Kennedy's bill to prohibit racial discrimination in stores, restaurants and other public accommodations.

On the basis of the very substantial accomplishments that his city of a half-million, the largest in the Southeast, has made in desegregating publicly owned and privately owned facilities, he might have come as a champion of "states' rights" and of the ability of localities to banish discrimination without Federal law. Certainly, he would have had much more warrant to espouse that view than the Barretts, the Wallaces and the other arch-segregationists who raise the specter of Federal "usurpation" as a device for keeping Southern Negroes in subjection.

But Mr. Allen was not in Washington to boast. He was there to warn that even in cities like Atlanta the progress that had been made might be wiped out if Congress turned its back on the Kennedy proposal and thus gave implied endorsement to the concept that private businesses were free to finish the job started with the Emancipation Proclamation a century ago: "Now the elimination of segregation, which is slavery's stepchild, is a challenge to all of us to make every American free in fact as well as in theory—and again to establish our nation as the true champion of the free world."