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# "And So We Moved Quietly": Southern Methodist University and Desegregation, 1950-1970

Scott A. Cashion

*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

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"AND SO WE MOVED QUIETLY": SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY  
AND DESEGREGATION, 1950-1970

"AND SO WE MOVED QUIETLY": SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY  
AND DESEGREGATION, 1950-1970

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in History

By

Scott Alan Cashion  
Hendrix College  
Bachelor of Arts in History, 2002  
University of Arkansas  
Master of Arts in History, 2006

May 2013  
University of Arkansas

## **ABSTRACT**

Southern Methodist University was the first Methodist institution in the South to open its doors to African Americans in the early 1950s. There were several factors that contributed to SMU pushing for desegregation when it did. When SMU started the process of desegregation in the fall of 1950, two schools in the Southwest Conference had already admitted at least one black graduate student. University officials, namely then President Umphrey Lee, realized that because other schools had desegregated, it would not be long before SMU would have to do the same. Lee started the path towards desegregation in 1950, and it continued through the presidency of Willis Tate until 1970 when SMU was no longer lily-white.

This dissertation is approved for recommendation  
to the Graduate Council.

Dissertation Director:

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Dr. Charles Robinson

Dissertation Committee:

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The process of completing this dissertation has been a long and often difficult road. There have been many people along the way that deserve mention in helping see me through to the completion of this project. My friends and colleagues are too numerous to mention by name, but without them also spurring me on along the way it would have been more difficult to finish. Most of them are also doctoral students going through the same ordeal as myself, so therefore they prompted me on what to expect, and have always been there for me when I needed a lift. My dissertation advisor, Dr. Charles Robinson, has constantly given me advice on how to research and write a dissertation. Because of his guidance I have become a better writer and historian. When it comes to research, I would not have been able to complete this project without the assistance of Joan Gosnell, head archivist of the DeGolyer Library at Southern Methodist University. Anytime I needed a newspaper article or something specific from the archives and could not make it to Dallas, she was willing to send it to me. I would be remiss not to mention Timothy Binkley, who is the archivist at the Perkins School of Theology, also on the SMU campus. He was also willing to send me information, even assist on the actual research when I could not get away to do so personally. Without the help of those mentioned above, it would have been extremely challenging to write this dissertation.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Mike and Paula Cashion. Without them I would not have been able to complete this project. They have been with me from the beginning, and continually encouraged me when I felt like giving in. They taught me to persevere throughout the good times and the bad, and for that I am grateful.



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## Introduction

And SMU/PST was two steps ahead of its city and region. The position of being one step ahead was occupied by the Methodist Church, whose members could be found among both the laggards and the leaders. Methodist women in their "Society for Christian Service" had been studying better "race relations" for quite some time, and the Church as a whole had developed a pretty good case of guilty conscience about the "Negroes," mixed in with a longtime reluctance to change. Many faculty and students at SMU and nearly all at Perkins were ready (and this time, it is the correct word). On balance, just maybe, the right time and place. There was a pretty good chance that desegregation could succeed.<sup>1</sup>

Merrimon Cuninggim served as the dean of the Perkins School of Theology in the early 1950s when Southern Methodist University decided to open its doors to African American students. The above quotation is credited to Cuninggim in a pamphlet he wrote in 1994 that recalled his effort, as well as that of others at the university, to bring about desegregation fully two years before the *Brown* decision was handed down in the federal court. One might ask why a private church-affiliated school such as SMU would worry admitting of blacks at a time when it was not necessary for them to do so. It is because of men like Cuninggim and Umphrey Lee (then the president of the school) that made this happen when it did. Lee was able to go to the SMU Board of Trustees as early as 1950 and argued to change the school's admissions policy bylaws that restricted African-Americans from attending the university.<sup>2</sup> The board conceded without much of a fight and it is important because SMU was the only school in the South of its kind to do so that early. The exact opposite happened at the

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<sup>1</sup> Merrimon Cuninggim, *Perkins Led the Way: The Story of Desegregation at Southern Methodist University* (Dallas: Perkins School of Theology, 1994), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Cuninggim, 8.

Methodist Church's other two major institutions of higher learning in the South, Duke University and Emory University. Neither of these schools' presidents was able to convince their board of trustees to even consider the idea of admitting black students until the early 1960s. Duke admitted its first black student in the fall of 1961 and Emory the fall of 1962. The main reason why for this is that at both Duke and Emory the board of trustees was adamant against the idea of changing the status quo, and for them the status quo was an all white institution.<sup>3</sup> SMU, by contrast started the process of desegregation fully a decade before.

There have been numerous works on the desegregation of the South's public institutions of higher learning. While this is not an exhaustive list several of the important studies include E. Culpepper Clark's 1993 piece *The Schoolhouse Door* that followed the path of Autherine Lucy and her efforts to attend school at the University of Alabama despite the wishes of the school and the state government. A few years before Culpepper's book came out sociology professor Gordon Morgan produced *The Edge of Campus* which provided a first-hand account of the process of desegregation at the University of Arkansas. Robert Pratt contributed to the literature in 2002 with his book *We Shall Not be Moved* that traced the paths taken by three African American students attempting to break the color line at the University of Georgia. In 2006 Dwonna Goldstone published her book *Integrating the Forty Acres* and focused her attention on the efforts of the University

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<sup>3</sup> Melissa Kean, *Desegregating Private Higher Education in the South: Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 185 and 193.

of Texas to overcome the color line. One of the most recent additions to this growing literature is Charles Eagles' 2009 book *The Price of Defiance* which described in great detail how difficult it was for The University of Mississippi to admit James Meredith in the early 1960s.<sup>4</sup>

While there have been plenty of books about the South's public schools and desegregation, much less has been written about the region's private institutions and how they handled the matter. There are numerous institutional histories of the region's private colleges and universities but very few that are devoted just to desegregation. One of the few of note is Melissa Kean's 2008 book *Desegregating Private Higher Education in the South*. Kean's work provides an in-depth look at what she considered the South's five elite private schools: Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt. While Vanderbilt was the first of these five schools to desegregate in 1953, Kean shows how each school was hindered in their progress to desegregate by the reluctance of the board of trustees to break with tradition and be leaders in admitting black students. This work also provides a model on how to write a similar story of SMU, and is also important in that she did not include SMU in her study because of the relative ease with

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<sup>44</sup> E. Culpepper Clark, *The Schoolhouse Door: Segregation's Last Stand at the University of Alabama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Charles Eagles *The Price of Defiance: James Meredith and the Integration of Ole Miss* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Dwonna Goldstone, *Integrating the Forty Acres: The Fifty Year Struggle for Racial Equality at the University of Texas* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006); Gordon Morgan, *The Edge of Campus: A Journal of the Black Experience at the University of Arkansas* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1990); Robert Pratt, *We Shall Not be Moved: The desegregation of the University of Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002).

which the SMU Board of Trustees accepted the inevitability of desegregation and forged ahead of the others.<sup>5</sup>

Even less has been written about SMU's desegregation than these other schools despite it being the first major Methodist institution in the South to do so. There are several books and articles that mention the university's efforts in this regard, but these only mention the role of the Perkins School of Theology's attempt to do so in 1952. The overall university experience of desegregation at SMU has not been studied. SMU never experienced any major problems, at least publicly, with desegregation as other schools. Even though this is the case, it does not mean that the story should not be told. The intention of this study is to tell the entire story of SMU's desegregation from Perkins, to the overall student body, to the athletic programs, and any other aspect of the university in this regard.

This study will be broken into six different chapters, each that will explore some aspect of the university's efforts to open its doors. The first two chapters will focus mainly on the Methodist Church and the city of Dallas. Understanding the story behind both of these entities will help show how different Southern Methodist University actually was. *Chapter One* will offer an in-depth look at the policies of the Methodist Church to keep the church structure segregated at a time when the civil rights movement called for an end to such segregated structures. The church brought together several

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<sup>5</sup> Melissa Kean, *Desegregating Private Higher Education in the South: Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

branches to bring an end to a separate church for whites and blacks, but within that united church the church created the Central Jurisdiction to keep African Americans from having a real say in religious matters within the church. It would not be until 1968 that the United Methodist Church was created formally ending the Central Jurisdiction and a segregated church structure. By 1968, SMU had desegregated virtually every aspect of the university so this first chapter will be important in showing how the school was breaking from the tradition of the church.

*Chapter Two* will discuss the city of Dallas and its continued efforts to remain a segregated Jim Crow city well into the twentieth century. Dallas was a classic southern city in its racial policies during this period. African Americans were given menial jobs, little access to good schools, and even less access to the political order in Dallas. Well into the twentieth century (at least until the 1950s) African Americans in Dallas feared the threat of physical violence against them or their families. This is just as important to show as the story of the Methodist church because it shows once again how different SMU was when it started to desegregate in this hostile setting.

*Chapters Three and Four* focus on the earliest attempts by Southern Methodist University to open its doors to African Americans in the early 1950s. The Perkins School of Theology tried to desegregate under the deanship of Eugene Hawk in 1951. However, Hawk, was not very enthusiastic about the prospect of black students entering the school that year. He was not the only one, as there were

other administrators and several influential boosters that felt the same way. *Chapter Three* describes the haphazard efforts by Hawk to bring black students to Perkins in 1951. By the end of the fall of 1951, the two black students enrolled had both failed. It is not until Cuninggim was brought in as dean in the summer of 1952 that true desegregation of Perkins would take place. One of the first things Cuninggim did as dean was enroll five black men into Perkins during the fall of 1952. All five graduated on time without much incident, due in no small part to Cuninggim's leadership. *Chapter Four* will look at Cuninggim and his role in achieving desegregation in the school of theology as well as the five men he brought in to achieve this goal.

*Chapter Five* will trace the continued effort of desegregation effort at SMU post 1952. By the time the initial five blacks graduated from Perkins in 1955, other areas of the university began to bring in their own black students. The law school started the process in 1955. Paula Elaine Jones became the first black undergraduate at SMU in 1962. Jerry LeVias was not only the first black football player to receive a scholarship at SMU, but in the entire Southwest Conference. When LeVias left SMU in 1969, most departments at the university had at least begun the process of removing racial barriers, and those that had not would do so by the end of the 1970s.

While desegregation went relatively smoothly at SMU, this does not mean that African-American students on the campus did not see room for improvement. *Chapter Six* explores this topic with the creation of BLAACS, the Black League of Afro-American and African College Students

in 1967. This group staged a protest in 1969, briefly taking over the president's office, in an effort to demand better conditions for black students, faculty, and staff on the campus. While the protest was very short, and nonviolent the organization did get the university's administration to look at the problem further and make some changes. This chapter is important because it shows that while SMU did not have very many problems with desegregation, there was some dissension among the black students at the progress being made by the school and its administration to fully make them a true part of the university.

As a private, church backed institution it did not have to voluntarily open its doors to African American students in 1952 but it did. There were people on campus like Merrimon Cuninggim, Umphrey Lee, and others who felt compelled to get out ahead of the situation and bring blacks to SMU. The school did so at a time when the Methodist Church as well as the city of Dallas was struggling with their racial pasts. Neither the church nor the city was ready to do what SMU did in 1952, and this is what makes the story so intriguing. It is a story that has been largely forgotten, save the story of the Perkins School of Theology in 1952. Hopefully this study will help tell the entire story of what took place at an important southern, Methodist institution.



## Chapter One From Central Jurisdiction to Unity

It was the Church which created the Central Jurisdiction. It was the Church which accepted the principle of segregation. It is therefore, the Church which should be given the opportunity to speak against segregation and to express its opinion upon segregation, against segregation and in favor of abolishing the Central Jurisdiction and placing the Conferences now within the Central Jurisdiction in the remaining Jurisdictions under the Plan of Union.<sup>1</sup>

Chester A. Smith, a member of the Methodist General Conference from New York, made the statement above during the 1956 General Conference of the Methodist Church. It is clear that as late as 1956, and in fact well before and beyond, the Methodist Church was struggling with how to deal with segregation within the church's overall structure. In 1939, northern and southern branches of the Church united creating the Methodist Church. Within this structure, the Central Jurisdiction was created which allowed for legal separation of whites and blacks within the overall church organization. Black Methodists were only allowed to participate in the Central Jurisdiction. When the Methodist Church was created as such in 1939, there were approximately 308,000 African American members in the church. This was the largest number of African Americans in any protestant church that had a white majority in the United States. Despite this, they were still segregated into the Central Jurisdiction. The Central Jurisdiction was created to keep

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<sup>1</sup> *Journal of the 1956 General Conference of the Methodist Church* Held at Minneapolis, Minnesota April 25-May 7, 1956 edited by Lud H. Estes, Secretary General Conference (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House), 467-468.

white and black Methodists separate and this was important for whites in the church, particularly those that lived in the Southeast.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the efforts of men and women like Chester A. Smith the church maintained segregated conferences for blacks and whites for nearly thirty years. It would not be until 1968 that the Central Jurisdiction, and the segregation that it established, would formally come to an end.<sup>3</sup> In the meantime, the Church struggled with how to deal with the problem. As the Civil Rights Movement emerged and began to blossom by the late 1950s and 1960s, white Methodists, especially those in the South, had to decide whether to hold on to the segregated structure or to further the goals of the overall church. While many held to the ideal of segregation as long as they could, the writing was on the wall that the Methodist Church would eventually have to change its ways or lose members, particularly those of color outside the borders of the United States. Methodists prided themselves on their missionary work outside the country and for this to work the Central Jurisdiction would have to go. Little did men like Chester A. Smith know that it would take so long for this to happen.

From the time the Methodist Church created the Central Jurisdiction in 1939 there were people within the church that made it their mission to get rid of the segregated structure. Each General

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<sup>2</sup> Peter C. Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race, 1930-1975* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 195. Murray notes that the last meeting of the Central Jurisdiction took place in 1967 in Nashville. The following year the General Conference of the Methodist Church convened as the United Methodist Church which included the members of the Central Jurisdiction.

Conference, which met every four years, from 1944 until the late 1960s debated the issue in some form. Even though the world was focused on war, the members of the 1944 conference still took the time to expound on the inequities of racism within the church. The General Conference of 1944 stated in its opening address, "We look to the ultimate elimination of racial discrimination within the Methodist Church. Accordingly, we ask the Council of Bishops to create forthwith a Commission to consider afresh the relations of all races included in the membership of the Methodist Church and to report to the General Conference of 1948". While this seemed to be a step in the right direction, the idea of creating a committee to study the issue would be a means of dodging the issue rather than actually finding ways to end segregation within the church. Peter Murray noted in *Methodists and the Crucible of Race* this when he stated, "During the early 1940s, the Methodist Church did relatively little regarding civil rights. After the struggle for unification, a movement to make sweeping changes in the jurisdictional system, especially regarding its racial structure, had little prospect for success". While there were people within the 1944 General Conference that wanted to end segregation in the church, there were other more pressing problems, like keeping the newly unified church together. Pushing the racial issue at that time would not have helped do that.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>*Journal of the 1944 General Conference of the Methodist Church* held at Kansas City, Missouri, April 26-May 6, 1944 edited by Lud H. Estes, Secretary General Conference (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House), 729. Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 56.

It is not much of a surprise that the Methodist Church did not make racial policies more of a priority during the mid-1940s. The world at large was at war, and this undoubtedly was on the minds of most in the United States including the church. It is important to note that despite this the church did take a step towards at least acknowledging there was a problem that needed to be fixed by subsequent general conferences.

The fact that the 1944 General Conference looked at race at all is indicative of the already changing landscape in the United States in regards to the issue. By 1944, A. Philip Randolph's threatened march on Washington had already compelled President Roosevelt to sign executive order 8802 calling for the creation of the Fair Employment Practices Committee. He also agreed to give a certain percentage of defense plant jobs throughout the country to African Americans, thus giving them an economic opportunity many had not had to that point. By 1944, the idea of the "Double V Campaign" was also well entrenched. This started in 1942 when an editorial was sent by African Americans to the *Pittsburgh Courier*, one of the most respected black newspapers in the country at the time. The basic notion of this campaign was victory abroad and victory at home. The victory abroad referred to winning the war against totalitarianism and Nazism. Victory at home was to end racism here in the United States. Black men were serving in great numbers in the war and felt that in return for this they should be given more respect and equality at home. Members of the

Methodist Church would have been aware of both of these events by 1944.<sup>5</sup>

Not much had changed by 1948. Still, there was more talk about the idea than action in 1948. Murray writes, "The 1948 Methodist General Conference spoke more candidly about racial problems, but it took little action within its own house". The Methodist Women's Society of Christian Service admitted, "Our accomplishments in inter-racial cooperation between Negro and white groups during the past quadrennium have been slight indeed". Women, like those in this society, continually tried to get the male dominated church structure to look at the inequities of the church in regards to race. They would ultimately play an important role as a counter to the men who wanted to keep segregation going strong in the church.<sup>6</sup>

The racial backdrop of the United States had changed by 1948. Two major color barriers had been broken by 1948. The first was major league baseball which opened its doors to blacks in 1947. Jackie Robinson became the first African American to play in the majors when he suited up for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. The second major color barrier broken by 1948 was the military. President Harry Truman signed executive order 981 in July of 1948 officially desegregating the US military. Before this African Americans that served in the military did so in segregated units with white officers. The writing was starting to appear on the wall by 1948 that the Jim Crow era was nearing its end, yet the Methodist Church did nothing to set an

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<sup>5</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 53-54.

<sup>6</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 59-60.

example and lead this movement. 1948 was one of a number of times the church could have stepped up and taken this leadership role and it failed to do so.<sup>7</sup>

Reverend Edgar A. Love of the Washington Annual Conference of the Central Jurisdiction tried to turn the words into action at the 1952 General Conference. He offered up an amendment in a report titled "The Methodist Church and Race" where he wanted "Methodist institutions including local churches, colleges, universities, theological schools, hospitals and homes, take steps immediately to open their doors to all people alike, without distinction as to race, creed, or color".<sup>8</sup> This was the first time that someone within the General Conference had actually called for concrete change. Even so, the Love initiative as it was called was very controversial and caused much debate during the 1952 General Conference meeting. There were those that came out in favor of adopting the initiative and there were those that were strongly in favor of getting rid of it. One of the strongest voices of opposition came from Charles Parlin of Newark, New Jersey, who was the Chairman of the General Standing Committee on the State of the Church. When he was given the floor to speak to the General Conference he opined, "Should this amendment carry it would require reharmonizing the whole Discipline. We would be completely out of order in my opinion, if this amendment went through. It would throw the whole thing into utter confusion". In the end, Parlin won out and

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 67.

the amendment was defeated. For many this was simply going too far for the Methodist Church in 1952.<sup>9</sup>

Love and Parlin represented the major arguments within the church for and against segregation in 1952. Love was an African American who was a part of the Central Jurisdiction and therefore knew how segregation created inequality, in society and within the church as a whole. The way to end that was to get rid of segregation, and Love was trying to push the Methodist Church to take a role in leading the way with his initiative in 1952. He wanted the church to take an active role in ending racial injustice, yet the church stood idly by and let other organizations take the lead. Parlin on the other hand was not as convinced that the church should follow this path in 1952. This was not necessarily due to a lack of understanding of the issue, but concern for how it would affect the church at large. Parlin was a yes man to the Methodist Church and he simply did not feel that church should take the risk at that time because it would cause a lot of problems in reorganizing the church structure. This in essence is the argument the church was struggling with at the time; integrate at the request of men like Love who had intimate knowledge of the Central Jurisdiction, or stay the course for the sake of church structure.<sup>10</sup>

One part of Love's initiative that did get a second look in 1952 was that of desegregating Methodist seminaries. Towards the end of

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<sup>9</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 68. Journal of the 1952 General Conference of the Methodist Church held at San Francisco, California, April 23-May 6, 1952, edited by Lud H. Estes, Secretary General Conference (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House), 650.

<sup>10</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 67-68.

the conference, there were several memorials put forth from theology students at Duke and Emory that asked the General Conference to "urgently recommend that all Methodist Schools of Theology admit qualified students without regard to race or color. The Committee voted concurrence except in those instances where State laws would force an undue hardship upon the institution involved". Despite Edgar Love trying to remove the last part of this statement from the vote, it allowed for a loophole in North Carolina and Georgia that made it where neither Duke nor Emory took action to remove their racial barriers. The church knew that Duke and Emory would not do so because of laws in both states and according to Peter Murray, "The church, in effect, declined to put any pressure on these two divinity schools to open their doors to African American applicants". One bright spot for the Methodist affiliated seminaries was SMU which adhered to this memorial and admitted its first African American students in the fall of 1952. This was not a problem for SMU because of the actions taken by university president Umphrey Lee in late 1950. In November of 1950, Lee convinced the Board of Trustees at SMU to change the school's bylaws to ensure there would not be a problem with desegregation when the matter arose. Little did he know it would happen so quickly thereafter.<sup>11</sup>

Southern Methodist University was not the first southern institution to integrate by 1952. It was simply the first Methodist

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<sup>11</sup> *Journal of the 1952 General Conference of the Methodist Church*, 1212. Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 68. Merrimon Cuninggim, *Perkins Led the Way: The Story of Desegregation at Southern Methodist University* (Dallas: Perkins School of Theology, 1994), 8.



affiliated school in the South to do so. It was also one of the first to do so without the threat of litigation. Several court cases had come out by 1952 that forced universities in the South to open their doors to blacks including *Sipuel v. Board of Regents* in 1948, *Sweatt v. Painter* in 1950, and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma* in 1950. The *Sipuel* case came out of the University of Oklahoma and while it did not end segregation it put the onus on the state to provide a truly equal education for African Americans that wanted to attend law school in the state. The *McLaurin* case was also from Oklahoma and officially opened the doors of the University of Oklahoma to African American students. The *Sweatt* ruling was a similar decision out of Texas that called for ending segregation at the state's major institution, the University of Texas in Austin. The difference put forth by the Love memorial at the 1952 Methodist General Conference is that the University of Oklahoma and the University of Texas were public institutions being forced to desegregate by the courts. SMU was simply adhering to the Love amendment of its own accord.<sup>12</sup>

When the *Brown* decision came out in 1954 the Methodist Church had a difficult time dealing with the ruling. The Church did have legal segregation written into its constitution with the Central Jurisdiction and many were not sure what to do. While there was no General Conference in 1954, the Council of Bishops did meet in November to decide how to approach the issue and whether or not the church would make a formal statement in regards to the case.

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<sup>12</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 60-61.

Congregants within the Central Jurisdiction praised the ruling, while southern members of the church were not as optimistic. In December of 1954 nearly three hundred Methodist ministers and laymen met in Birmingham, Alabama, to create the Association of Methodist Members and Laymen. Their intended goal was to defend segregation within the church, as well as convince as many Methodists as they could to not push for change in the jurisdictional system at the 1956 General Conference. However, for many Methodists the problems with race within the church went well beyond the Central Jurisdiction and this was discussed thoroughly at the next General Conference in 1956. When the conference opened in Minneapolis in April of 1956, race relations and the Central Jurisdiction was one of the most important agenda, and this would be the most important decision the conference had faced since unification in 1939.<sup>13</sup>

By 1956, the civil rights movement was truly beginning to take shape so it is not a shock that the Methodists were at least nominally taking this into account in the General Conference of that same year. The Montgomery Bus Boycott had taken place in late 1955 and continued through much of 1956. This was one of the galvanizing moments in the early movement and proved that African Americans were now ready en masse to fight the system. At the same time, 1956 was the start of the massive resistance movement among many southern whites in which they tried to keep Jim Crow alive. One way they did this was to create the Southern Manifesto, a document designed to create a way to

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<sup>13</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 70, 73, 78, 80.

legally resist *Brown*. This dichotomy would play itself out in the Methodist General Conference in 1956.<sup>14</sup>

Debate raged almost from the beginning of the General Conference, due in large part to the introduction of Amendment IX, a constitutional amendment that allowed for gradual desegregation to take place within the Methodist Church. The General Conference wrote and submitted the amendment to all conferences for ratification. The amendment had three major parts all which called for some form of desegregation with the onus being placed on local churches. According to Peter Murray, "The first part permitted local churches within the Central Jurisdiction to transfer into annual conferences of regional jurisdictions. The second part streamlined desegregation by permitting entire annual conferences of the Central Jurisdiction to transfer into the regional district." The third part of the amendment said that when a quarter of the Central Jurisdiction's membership had transferred into regional jurisdictions then a bishop within the Central Jurisdiction would transfer to the regional jurisdiction with the most members from the Central Jurisdiction. While this would not end segregation, it was a start, and Amendment IX was looked on in a quite favorable way by the General Conference because it called for limited action and did not threaten any one jurisdiction specifically.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 80-82. David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: Morrow and Co., 1986) 58-62.

<sup>15</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 84-85.

W Sproule Boyd, a minister of the Northeastern Jurisdiction from Pittsburgh, was one of those that fought to get the amendment passed. Boyd was the pastor of the Franklin Street Methodist Church in Johnstown, Pennsylvania and was active in the NAACP in the state. In 1956 he received the Civil Rights Award of Pennsylvania from the state director of the NAACP. With this in mind, it is not a surprise that he would be interested in helping get Amendment IX passed. When Boyd addressed the General Conference he referenced the fact that the Methodist Church had six jurisdictions only one of which was based on race. This was clearly the definition of segregation and the church should at the minimum acknowledge this fact. The adoption of Amendment IX according to Boyd, would allow that to happen if nothing else.<sup>16</sup>

For Boyd, the only way the Church would be able to move forward in race relations was to pass Amendment IX. Others felt the same way and the amendment passed the 1956 General Conference with well over the two thirds vote needed to send the amendment out for other annual conferences to ratify. Many Methodists stressed that Amendment IX would be implemented on a voluntary basis and this would lead to a lasting idea in the church-voluntarism. Local churches could desegregate if they wanted based on Amendment IX, but it was not mandatory and this put a number of people at ease over the passing of the amendment. Of course the idea of voluntarism provided an

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<sup>16</sup> *Journal of the 1956 General Conference of the Methodist Church*, 413. James W. Ivy, editor, "Branch News," *The Crisis* Vol. 64, No. 2 (February 1957): 113. This is the only reference I could find to Boyd's role in the church, but winning this award in 1956 clearly indicates he would have approved of Amendment IX.

interesting conundrum for many African Americans within the church. While the plan called for voluntary desegregation within the church's jurisdictions African Americans had not volunteered for the Central Jurisdiction. At the same time, those in favor of the amendment felt that it would give the opportunity for at least limited integration without the possibility of losing church members, particularly those in the South.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the overwhelming support for Amendment IX there were some within the general conference opposed to the initiative. Oddly enough this opposition came from people within the Central Jurisdiction as well as from a few liberal whites in the church. The argument they gave was that simply getting rid of the Central Jurisdiction was not going nearly far enough. For those opposed to Amendment IX, like Reverend C. Anderson Davis of Tennessee, ending the Central Jurisdiction was only part of the problem and this amendment did not address other issues of segregation within the church, therefore it should not be passed. This is evidence that at least some African Americans within the Central Jurisdiction did not want tokenism. Rather, they wanted true equality within the church but in 1956 they would not get this.<sup>18</sup>

After Amendment IX was passed the General Conference moved to create a commission to study how to make the process of desegregation more of a reality. The Standing Legislative Committee on Conferences addressed the issue by endorsing the creation of a commission to study

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<sup>17</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 86, 114-115.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 85-86.

and recommend action in regards to the current system of jurisdictions within the church. The main goal of the commission was to study the strengths and weaknesses of the jurisdictional system and to report on ways to make it better (or less segregated). The committee of 70 members was called the Commission of Seventy. The 70 members included 46 people from the various jurisdictions, 12 Bishops of the Church, and 12 laymen. This was done to provide a cross section of the church in the hopes of finding answers to the race problem within the Methodist structure.<sup>19</sup>

Racial practices in the Methodist Publishing House were also addressed at the 1956 General Conference. The Methodist Publishing House was the largest religious publisher in the United States and one of the largest employers in all of Nashville, Tennessee. Prior to 1956, accusations of discrimination and segregation were brought fourth against the publishing house. The General Conference of 1956 tried to rectify the issue by encouraging the Methodist Publishing House to further end segregation in its employment practices and provide equal opportunity to people of all races in all levels of its organization. For the Methodist Church this was one more step, albeit a small one, toward better race relations in the overall structure of the church.<sup>20</sup>

The findings of the Commission of Seventy were the first racial issues discussed at the 1960 Methodist General Conference. In an

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<sup>19</sup> *Journal of the 1956 General Conference of the Methodist Church*, 498-500. Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 86-87.

<sup>20</sup> *Journal of the 1956 General Conference of the Methodist Church*, 1672-1673. Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 87.

address titled, *The Jurisdictional System and Racial Brotherhood*, the 1960, conference stated, "Without prejudging your actions on its proposals, we wish to commend the general method and spirit of the report and to say that, in our considered judgment, your dealing with it is the most urgent specific obligation of this Conference." Many Methodists at the 1960 General Conference saw the writing on the wall. The Church realized that by 1960 the reports of the Commission of Seventy presented at the conference "may have a more immediate and far-reaching effect upon the unity and the vitality of The Methodist Church in America and beyond, in our mission and our impact on the world, in the immediate present and the longer future, than any other you will take in this Conference". The time for action had come and many at the Conference were now more willing to take a stand.<sup>21</sup>

Chester A. Smith of New York was one of these men that wanted to take a stand at the 1960 General Conference and in the process created a firestorm. He wanted to amend a statement by the Commission of Seventy to get Methodist institutions of higher learning to further look at their racial policies. Smith specifically wanted the church to quit giving money to Duke University's seminary as well as any other Methodist seminary that did not admit African American students. Raymond E. Balcomb, a minister on the Commission of Seventy, took Smith's idea even further by saying that each Methodist institution that received World Service funds should be required to report

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<sup>21</sup> *Journal of the 1960 General Conference of the Methodist Church, Held at Denver, Colorado, April 27-May 7, 1960*, edited by Leon T. Moore, Secretary General Conference (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House) 204, 206, 208.

annually on their racial policies and practices. Smith proposed to the general conference that as long as Duke continued to remain segregated the university should get no money from the Methodist Church or any of its affiliate organizations. Smith explained the necessity of his proposal by stating, "We have this great institution refusing to admit into its School of Theology men who want to study for the ministry, but who are refused admission into the School of Theology because they are Negroes". After noting how fine an institution Duke was he went on to assert, "I say that in order to put the stamp of approval upon such a position as the trustees of that institution uphold and maintain, we should express our grave disapproval of what they are doing by refusing to give them one dollar of our money from our Church or from our World Service receipts".

After Smith spoke to his resolution, there was much debate about the issue at hand. Some in the crowd were in agreement with Smith while others did not believe that this was the proper approach to this specific situation. Thurman L. Dodson of the Washington Conference was in favor of adopting the amendment, telling to the General Conference about the amendment he declared, "It seems high time for he General Conference if it believes what it says to take a stand for Christ, because I am certain that all the money that goes into this Church, certainly we ought not to use it to uphold segregation practices". Edwin L. Jones of the Western North Carolina, SE Jurisdiction, opposed the amendment, questioning the right of the church to act as a police power on this matter. The church should not



be compelled to coerce Duke, or any other Methodist affiliated institution for that matter, when it came to ending segregation in its institutions. Another person against the amendment was Norman L. Trott of the Baltimore, NE Jurisdiction. Trott begged to look at the issue in a different light. He felt it was not right to deny funds to future ministers of the Church simply because they went to an institution that practiced segregation. When he spoke to the general conference he tried to show that if you starting taking away funds from Duke then you would be depriving the theology students already at the school of financial support. This would be bad for the Methodist Church because it would dispossess the church of much needed leadership in the form of ministers trained at Duke. In the end, men like Trott and Edwin Jones prevailed, and the amendment proposed by Smith was not adopted. But it did not come without much debate and clearly the General Conference of 1960 was willing to work toward a solution to the segregation problem in a way the General Conferences of the past had not.<sup>22</sup>

It must be noted that the amendment to pull funding from Duke's theology school was introduced by Chester A. Smith of New York. In the general conference's debate on whether to pass the amendment or not virtually to a man those in favor of the amendment were from the North and the West, as well as other countries like Argentina. Those opposed were from the South. There are a few exceptions to this, but overall the trend holds along regional lines. People in the North

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<sup>22</sup> *Journal of the 1960 General Conference of the Methodist Church*, 481-489.

that supported the amendment were doing so out of blind faith that any end to segregation was a good thing. This was not always the case as those from the South that were opposed to the amendment tried to show with disapproval of the amendment.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to finances tied to racism, the 1960 General Conference continued to debate the existence of the Central Jurisdiction. Even with sustained debate, nothing was resolved in 1960 in regards to ending the Central Jurisdiction immediately. The General Conference adopted *Recommendation No. 10* as Amended on May 5, 1960. This recommendation stipulated that the Church had originally agreed to create the Central Jurisdiction and for the time being would have to live with that fact. If the church did not, many African American Methodists would be left out of Annual Conferences and the Church did not want to see this happen. The goal was to have a completely inclusive church and this could not be achieved in 1960 by ending the Central Jurisdiction.<sup>24</sup>

Ending the Central Jurisdiction was not enough for a number of members of the 1960 General Conference. Racism in the Methodist Church went far beyond the lifetime of the Central Jurisdiction according to men like James P. Brawley, president of Clark Atlanta

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> *Journal of the 1960 General Conference of the Methodist Church, 1694-1695. Recommendation No. 10* wanted to show that if you tried to legislate the immediate end of the Central Jurisdiction it would be harmful to the church, especially the Negro members of the church. Without the Central Jurisdiction many life-long members would be without full fellowship in a local church or an Annual Conference. In essence they would have no home within the church without the Central Jurisdiction.

College in Atlanta. Brotherhood should be the main focus and until that was achieved the end of racism within the Methodist Church would not be complete. Brawley asserted that simply ending the Central Jurisdiction was not the answer. He called on the 1964 General Conference to declare "in unequivocal terms that the entire Church and all of its institutions...shall be desegregated and no one shall be denied admission because of color or racial identity". This would only be achieved if all Methodist churches, from the local level to the national level, practiced racial inclusiveness. Brawley recommended, "creation of racially inclusive churches, cross-racial appointment of ministers, and desegregation of women's ministerial, and youth groups". The stage was now set by 1964 to not just end segregation with the Central Jurisdiction but end all racist practices within the entire Methodist Church power structure.<sup>25</sup>

It is not a shock that the 1960 General Conference was a little more concerned about ending racial structures within the church than earlier ones. Segregated structures, including those in public schools and lunch counters to name a few, were starting to fall across the country and the church did not want to be left behind in this matter. While it was too late for Methodists to lead the way in opening doors, they could at least follow. The church did not want a public spectacle like what had happened in 1957 in Little Rock. Even so there were ministers willing to speak out on the subject of school desegregation. This included some twenty Methodist ministers that

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<sup>25</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 131.

supported the idea of public school desegregation openly. It was this line of thinking that made it possible by 1960 for Methodists at the General Conference to take on the issue with a little more urgency.<sup>26</sup>

Bishop Gerald Kennedy continued Brawley's line of thinking when he opened the 1964 General Conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with the Episcopal Address. Kennedy was a well-known Bishop throughout the Church, due in no small part to the fact that he had been on the cover of *Time Magazine*, and he wanted the Church to end segregation and for people within the Church to quit trying to justify it through Scripture. He noted in the Episcopal Address, "It is, therefore, most disturbing to see Methodists trying to justify segregation on the basis of weird interpretations of the Scriptures". He went on to say that, "We believe that this General Conference should insist upon the removal from its structure of any mark of racial segregation and we should do it without wasting time". Finally, in his closing remarks on segregation Bishop Kennedy stated emphatically that, "We believe that this General Conference should be able to say when it adjourns the people called Methodists, by the grace of God, have moved forward toward removing segregation". Finally, it seemed that the Methodist Church was on the verge of moving forward in the process of ending segregation throughout the Church in a meaningful way.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 100.

<sup>27</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 154. *Journal of the 1964 General Conference of the Methodist Church, Vol. I*, Held at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, April 26-May 8, 1964, Edited by Leon Moore, Secretary General Conference (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House) 205.

One new development at the 1964 General Conference was the presence of more than 1,000 Methodist youth, both African-American and white, who came to the conference on May 2, 1964 to protest the continuation of the Central Jurisdiction. Several of the bishops at the Conference met with the youth, while several others brushed it off as a publicity stunt. Nonetheless, the demonstration shows that the youth of the Church were ready to get involved in a way they never had before. It proved that the concern over racial segregation within the Methodist Church was not just being discussed by the members of the General Conference, and that the youth were ready to respond in a way that would actually produce change. The civil rights movement was in full swing by 1964, and by that time protests were a normal part of the movement. Methodist Youth were now ready to follow that same path in an effort to affect change.<sup>28</sup>

Inside the conference James Brawley recognized that what the Methodist youth were doing was part of an ever changing landscape in America. African-Americans would no longer sit idly by and those within the church were no different according to Brawley. The time had come for the Methodist Church to finally move forward from its racist, segregated past. Brawley noted in an address to the General Conference

In the beginning, there was a reluctance, hesitation, inhibitions and frustrations, but now these psychological frustrations have grown to impatience which gives tremendous urgency to what we do at this General Conference and in the immediate weeks and months ahead. There is a revolution carried on by a New American Negro in every section of this country, South, North, East and West.

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<sup>28</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 156.

This is a revolution born of conditions too long ignored by both church and state. This revolution gives all Negroes everywhere a new sense of kinship and unity, and links them with a growing group of kindred spirits in a universal struggle for freedom, dignity, and equality. This is a new spiritual encounter for the church.

The Methodist Youth demonstrating outside the Conference were a part of this revolution and a part of this growing group of kindred spirits. This provided the perfect opportunity for those within the conference to realize what Brawley, and the youth, were trying to tell them and make a real move to end the Central Jurisdiction as well as all other racial barriers within the Methodist Church.<sup>29</sup>

The question still remained how the General Conference would do that. The first step was to remove financial impediments caused by segregation. Two separate funds were created in order to take care of minister salaries and pensions once the segregated annual conferences began to merge. This was a step the church had never before taken. The amendment to create these two funds was proposed by Charles S. Scott of the Central West Jurisdiction and amended by Edwin E. Reeves of the Southern California Jurisdiction. Neither was from the South, and provides yet another example of people from outside the region pushing for change within the church. After numerous debates on the issue Reeves' amendment was passed and both funds were established by the General Conference of 1964. The first real step had now been

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<sup>29</sup> *Journal of the 1964 General Conference of the Methodist Church*, 284.

taken by the General Conference to end segregation and the next step was to fully abolish the Central Jurisdiction.<sup>30</sup>

The abolition of the Central Jurisdiction became imperative by 1964 and beyond because the Methodist Church was planning a merger with the Evangelical United Brethren Church. The EUB Church was a 750,000 member Midwestern denomination with a German background. It was similar in doctrine and polity to the Methodist Church so in this regard the merger made sense. Methodists viewed it as a way to boost membership without having to radically change the doctrines of the church. The merger was to take place during a special session of the General Conference in 1966, and people within the Methodist church feared the merger would not happen if the Central Jurisdiction was allowed to continue. The thought was that, "The EUB Church might reject union if its leaders perceived that the Methodist Church was not making sufficient progress on racial practices". Sufficient progress on racial practices at this point meant completely ending the Central Jurisdiction and not allowing it to be a part of the merger. Since it was a church of German origin, there were almost no African Americans among its membership. Despite this, the EUB was a church that had opposed racial discrimination over the years and would not compromise that for the sake of the merger. The Methodist Church needed the new members the EUB Church would provide so the 1964

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<sup>30</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 158. *Journal of the 1964 General Conference*, 320-327.

General Conference needed to act in a manner that would finally end the Central Jurisdiction.<sup>31</sup>

With the merger in mind the 1964 General Conference laid out a plan to formally end the Central Jurisdiction, thereby, leaving it out of the merger. William Astor Kirk of the West Texas Jurisdiction spoke before the General Conference with the idea of leaving the Central Jurisdiction out of the merger with the EUB Church. He noted in his address, "That the Methodist Church record its judgment that the Central Jurisdiction structure of the Methodist Church not be made a part of the plan of merger with the Evangelical United Brethren Church". It did not make sense to Astor to bring the Central Jurisdiction into a new church. The merger would allow for a clean slate of sorts, to start anew without the segregated structure of the previous church. Astor felt that the church was contradicting itself by bringing this structure into the merger while at the same time asking men like himself, those within the Central Jurisdiction with leadership responsibility, to end the race based jurisdiction.<sup>32</sup>

In the end the motion to merge was adopted by a vote of 464 to 362. While this is a margin of 102 votes, it does not exactly provide a mandate for the merger. It seems evident that a good number of people did not want the merger to take place because it would end the Central Jurisdiction. However, the merger with the Evangelical United Brethren Church would take place as planned and the Central

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<sup>31</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 159, 186-187.

<sup>32</sup> *Journal of the 1964 General Conference*, 529-537.



Jurisdiction was on its way to being completely abolished when this new united Church was formed.<sup>33</sup>

As the 1964 General Conference was winding down those in attendance created a statement of principles that would guide the church in years to come. This included that the aim of the church was to be an inclusive church in an inclusive society. This included racial inclusiveness. Pastors in the church were called upon to make sure their local worship services were open to all races and that anyone, regardless of color, would have equal opportunity on the local level in the Methodist Church. The statement of principles asked the church as a whole to practice fair employment policies and render services to the public without discrimination. Even though the church had a past full of racial indignation, it did not mean that the present day church should continue down that path. Methodists should work to end segregation within the church but in society at large as well. This included all public and Methodist schools that still clung to the idea of separate but equal. Clearly the ending of the Central Jurisdiction was now not enough for the Methodist Church. Since that was in the process of being achieved, Methodists at the 1964 General Conference wanted to completely end segregation within the entire church and this statement of principles was the first step towards that goal.<sup>34</sup>

In 1966, the Methodist Church held a special session of the General Conference to finalize the merger of the church with the

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Journal of the 1964 General Conference*, 1269-1272.

Evangelical United Brethren Church. In order for this to occur, the church would have to end the Central Jurisdiction once and for all. A progress report from the 1964 General Conference was read during the Episcopal Address of this special session in regard to that matter. The progress report was meant to ease the minds of those in the EUB Church about the upcoming merger with the Methodist Church. It noted the headway the church had made between 1964 and 1966 to end segregation as well as to continue to do so after the merger in 1968. The merger was predicated on the fact that the progress report was put into effect. It is highly likely that members of the EUB Church would have backed out of the deal if they did not feel the Methodist Church was acting in a manner that would soon see the end of the Central Jurisdiction.<sup>35</sup>

1968 was the target date for ending the Central Jurisdiction. The landscape of the United States, and the Civil Rights Movement, was vastly different by 1968. Many racial barriers had been taken down and others were on their way to the ground by this date. The civil rights movement had become much more militant by this point with groups like the Black Panthers creating the Black Power Movement. No longer did African Americans sit idly by, or protest like Dr. King. Those in the Methodist Church knew the Central Jurisdiction had to be ended because of the merger with the EUB Church. With this in mind, it only makes sense that 1968 would be the date to do so. Joseph E. Lowery of the

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<sup>35</sup> *Journal of the 1966 Adjourned Session of the 1964 General Conference of the Methodist Church Vol. III, Held at Chicago, Illinois, November 8-11, 1966*, edited by J. Wesley Hole, Secretary General Conference (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House) 2537-2538.

Central Alabama Jurisdiction made this very clear when he stated, "When we began these discussions, members of the Central Jurisdiction Advisory Councils insisted that 1968 should be the terminal date for segregated structures in the Methodist Church". He went on to say, "It was our feeling that both the spirit and letter of action taken in the 1964 General Conference would be served by the elimination of segregated Conferences by '68".<sup>36</sup>

There were still those within the church that did not agree with setting a hard date. Men like George Atkinson from California believed that the Central Jurisdiction would be ended by 1968 but "we don't think you can do it by forcing it". He compared the Central Jurisdiction to a marriage and said a forced marriage has very little chance of success. Atkinson and others felt that Lowery was trying to force the issue to end the Central Jurisdiction by 1968, but also said that if given time it would be ended by that date.<sup>37</sup>

By the end of the special conference in 1966, the Methodist Church had adopted a new statement of purpose in regard to ending racism in the church. The report was titled *Resolution for the Elimination of Racial Structure and the Development of Greater Understanding and Brotherhood in the Methodist Church*. By adopting the resolution every level of the church structure agreed to eliminate all forms of racism within the church as quickly as possible. This

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<sup>36</sup> *Journal of the 1966 Adjourned Session of the 1964 General Conference*, 2602. Lowery was a prominent civil rights leader and would later become the head of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 2604.

contradicted previous statements made by the church as it had taken nearly thirty years to get to this point. The resolution sought to make it where no new annual conferences of the church would have a jurisdiction based solely on those from the Central Jurisdiction. All levels of the church organization would resolve to fully end racism within its structure by 1972 at the latest if not before. This goes well beyond the Central Jurisdiction which would stick to the 1968 target date. As had been mentioned before just ending the Central Jurisdiction was not enough as the racism in the church was at all levels, not just geography of the annual conferences. Once the resolution was put forth the Methodist church finally had a formal plan in place to end racial discrimination within its structure at every level.<sup>38</sup>

The Central Jurisdiction met for the last time in Nashville, Tennessee in August of 1967. The church was finally moving in the right direction in regards to racism within its organization. African Americans at this last meeting were cautiously optimistic for the future. One obstacle to creating an all-inclusive church had been removed, but this did not mean that the church was free of racial strife. African-American Methodists, "wanted inclusiveness to create a brotherhood that truly transcended all racial barriers".<sup>39</sup>

The ending of the Central Jurisdiction was just the first step in creating this inclusiveness and the General Conference of the newly

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<sup>38</sup> *Journal of the 1966 Adjourned Session of the 1964 General Conference*, 3076-3079.

<sup>39</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 195, 199.

united church in 1968, as well as those to follow, continued to struggle with how to make the church truly united. Murray noted when he wrote, "This building of an inclusive church would not be easy, and it would require the church to be more aggressive in fighting racism in American society. Without true inclusiveness, the United Methodist Church would be a church without racial structures but with little genuine fellowship". This genuine fellowship and racial brotherhood would truly be an accomplishment for the Methodist Church as no other large American church had achieved the type of racial brotherhood the Methodist Church now sought.<sup>40</sup>

The General Conference of 1968 would be the first conference of the newly created United Methodist Church. While the Central Jurisdiction had been formally ended, the United Methodist Church still had many problems to fix when it came to the issue of race, and the 1968 General Conference would begin to address those problems. The first was the remaining racial structures in the church, especially the segregated annual conferences in the Southeastern and South Central Jurisdictions. The second would be the idea that the newly created church needed to further promote interracial harmony and fellowship among all Methodists. African American Methodists feared that they would be ignored by their white brethren within the church and that tokenism would replace exclusion. Once the aforementioned had been achieved, the church would then try to make itself an agent for racial change within society. This would prove incredibly

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<sup>40</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 199.

difficult as many Methodists did not see themselves as harbingers of change within overall society. Nonetheless, a number of Methodists felt that pushing for that change in society was the most important of all of the racial problems confronting the new church and worked tirelessly to this end.<sup>41</sup>

The notion of the United Methodist Church becoming an organization for social change was brought forth during the Episcopal Address of the 1968 General Conference. The bishops asserted that the Methodists should take a trip to the impoverished areas of the cities and decide whether or not they have done enough as Christians to right these wrongs. The Episcopal Address read as follows

Having the miracle of Christ-like sight and hearing performed, may we suggest that members of the fellowship walk humbly through the depressed sections of any great city of the world. Visit the schoolhouse, the local market, the apartment house, the neighborhood where our brothers dwell. Then, decide, whether we, members of the fellowship, have done justice, whether we have shown loving kindness, whether the expectations which our proclamation of the Good News has lifted could possibly be realized in these neighborhoods. Ask yourself, "Is this the realization of Christ's dream? Is this the City of God?" An honest answer would reveal whether his spirit, his mind possesses us; whether we have been his obedient servants.

The idea is that if Methodists truly considered doing this they would realize that they had not done enough to help social change within the country and hopefully seeing the impoverished areas would help them get more involved.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 200-201.

<sup>42</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 204. *Journal of the 1968 General Conference Vol. I*, Held at Dallas, Texas, April 21-May 4, 1968, edited by Emerson D. Bragg, J. Wesley Hole, and Charles D. White (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House), 231.

Ending all the segregated annual conferences left over by the abolition of the Central Jurisdiction was crucial in order for the church to truly achieve the inclusiveness and brotherhood it sought. The general conference of 1968 made this clear stating, "In the United Methodist Church no conference or other organizational unit of the church shall be structured so as to exclude any member or any constituent body of the church because of race, color, national origin, or economic condition". Organizational units were defined by the General Conference as, "the structures into with the Church was constitutionally organized as set for in Division Two, namely Conferences (General, Jurisdictional, Central, Annual, District, and Charge), the Episcopacy, and the Judiciary".<sup>43</sup>

In addition to ending the racial structures, the General Conference of 1968 also wanted to raise the pensions and salaries of those previously in the Central Jurisdiction. This was a major concern for the last of the segregated conferences and a hurdle the General Conference needed to address. According to Peter Murray, "The national church had to accept more of the financial burden for mergers to take place in the Deep South because it had ignored very low pensions and inadequate minimum salary scales in the Central Jurisdiction for years". Once the conference was over, the new church began to end the last of the segregated conferences within the church. This would rely heavily on the local populations of the churches, and

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<sup>43</sup> Journal of the 1968 General Conference, 967-68, 971-972. Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 206.

while this would be difficult at times the segregated local conferences would eventually all be ended within the new church.<sup>44</sup>

1968 was a pivotal year for the Methodist Church. This was the year the Methodist Church merged with the Evangelical United Brethren Church, but it was also the year the Central Jurisdiction was ended for good. The Central Jurisdiction had been created in 1939 and every General Conference from that point until 1968 tried to find a way to end it. This finally occurred with the merger in 1968. While the new church still had its racial problems, by 1968 it was well on its way to completely eradicating racism within the structures of the church. It had been a long road with many bumps along the way, but the United Methodist Church was closer than it had ever been by 1968 to being truly united in racial attitudes and brotherhood.

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<sup>44</sup> Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 207-209.



## Chapter Two Desegregating the Dallas Way

Dallas is a good city and we want to keep it that way. We need all of our citizens to accept their civic and their personal responsibilities and stand up and be counted for law and order. We need your help. As your mayor and speaking for your city council, we pledge our assistance in this program and earnestly hope to have yours. Together we will show America the Dallas Way.<sup>1</sup>

The idea of the "Dallas Way" is as old as the city itself. It came about in the 1840s as a way to promote the city as one of cooperation, hard work, and civic conduct. The concept continued to grow along with the city into an idea that "people should obey the law in a spirit of enthusiasm, cooperation, faith, courage, vision, perseverance, hospitality, and brotherly love." While this model would be used in all facets of life in Dallas, it especially rings true of the civil rights movement in the city. It provided Dallas a way for peaceful, albeit slow at times, desegregation in all aspects of public life in the metroplex. For the most part, Dallas adhered to this model when beginning the process of desegregation. The city did not experience the riots and upheaval of many areas of the South during the civil rights movement. Desegregation, according to William Brophy, "was a result of hard work and excellent communication between the city's black and white communities." This was the essence of the "Dallas Way" and numerous other communities throughout the region took notice and had their own versions of this model. Greensboro had "Civility", Atlanta was the "City too busy to hate", and Tampa had the "Tampa Technique". All of these cities were using some version of the

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<sup>1</sup> Mayor Earle Cabell, *Dallas at the Crossroads*, Film Commissioned by the Dallas Citizens Council in 1961 and produced by Sam Bloom. Found on Youtube.

"Dallas Way" to promote peaceful race relations and for the most part it worked. The "Dallas Way" made for peaceful civil rights transitions through the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>2</sup>

In order to keep the city under control and follow the "Dallas Way", Dallas businessmen formed the Dallas Citizens Council.<sup>3</sup> The council was created in 1937 by R.L. "Bob" Thornton and would control politics and business in the city for decades. Thornton was born in 1880 and grew up poor in rural central Texas. As a child he did everything from pick cotton to clearing brush so he was instilled with a drive and hard work ethic from his earliest days. By the early 1900s this determination helped him become a banker in Dallas and eventually the president of Mercantile National Bank. He was made president of the Texas Bankers Association in 1924 and eventually the president of the Dallas Chamber of Commerce in 1933. It was from this position that the idea of the Dallas Citizens Council began to take shape. With Thornton at the helm, the DCC included real estate magnates, department store owners, bankers, manufacturers, insurance company executives, and owners of utility and media outlets. The group came up with a strategy that would serve the entire city saying

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<sup>2</sup> Brian D. Behnken, "The 'Dallas Way': Protest, Response, and the Civil Rights Experience in Big D and Beyond", *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 111, No. 1, (July 2007), 3-4. William Brophy, "Active Acceptance-Active Containment: The Dallas Story" in *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation* edited by Elizabeth Jacoway and David Colburn (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 146.

<sup>3</sup> This organization is not to be confused with the citizens councils created to resist *Brown vs. Board* (which had a chapter in Dallas). Rather this is an organization created by Dallas' big business owners to instill the values of the Dallas Way and keep business steady in the city. In order to do this they had to begin to negotiate with the black community to get at least token integration in exchange for them not causing racial strife.

that what was good for the business community in Dallas was good for all of Dallas. This included the black community. In other words, it was to the advantage of Dallas' black citizens to keep the business community happy and the way to do this was to not cause a stir with racial issues. If the black community would bring its concerns to the DCC, in a nonviolent way, the business leaders in turn would help desegregate the city. While this would take time, often decades, and only provide nominal racial change in the city, many of the black elite bought into the plan and began negotiating with the DCC on a regular basis to help bring what change they could to Dallas. They felt this was the only way that they would achieve any change, and at the time even small differences in the city's thinking on racial issues were welcomed.<sup>4</sup>

One way the Dallas Citizens Council started the negotiation process was to create a biracial committee to look at the city's racial problems and figure out ways to solve them peacefully. The Committee of 14 as it was called was created in 1960 when then Mayor Bob Thornton (founder of the DCC) had a meeting with several key members of Dallas' black community to talk strategy. Thornton told those in attendance that if they wanted to push for change they needed to get the DCC on board because "these guys have power". The committee consisted of seven leaders from both the white and black

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<sup>4</sup> Phillips, *White Metropolis*, 13. W. Martin Dulaney, "Whatever Happened to the Civil Rights Movement in Dallas, Texas?" in *Essays on the American Civil Rights Movement* edited by W. Martin Dulaney and Kathleen Underwood (College State: Texas A&M University Press, 1993), 78. Mark Rice, "R.L. Thornton: Embodying the Spirit of Dallas", *Legacies: A Historical Journal for Dallas and North Central Texas*, Vol. 24, No. 1, (Spring 2012), 16-19.

communities, and these 14 men would significantly bolster the chances of peaceful desegregation in Dallas. The black members of the Committee of 14 included George Allen, president of Great Liberty Life Insurance Company; W.J. Durham, one of the most prominent black attorneys in Dallas; Reverend E.C. Estell, president of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance; C.J. Clark, undertaker and spokesman for various fraternal organizations; Reverend B.E. Joshua, president of the Baptist Ministerial alliance; E.L.V. Reed, a tire dealer; and A. Maceo Smith, a leading black businessman and one of the most prominent Negro leaders in Texas. The white members of the committee were James Aston, president of the Republic National Bank; Carr P. Collins, Sr., president of Fidelity Life Insurance Company; Karl Hoblitzelle, chairman of the board of the Republic National Bank; W.W. Overton, board chairman of the Texas Bank and Trust Company; John Mitchell, cotton machinery manufacturer; Julian Scheppes, wholesale liquor dealer and a leading Jewish layman; and C.A. Tatum, president of the Dallas Power and Light Company. It should be noted that the black members of the group were chosen by the black community.

According to A. Maceo Smith, who was perhaps the most important black member of the Committee of 14, "What made the committee a useful tool is that we were talking with the people who were able to do something". This also gave the committee an air of respect in the black community. When Roy Wilkins, Executive Director of the NAACP, met with the Committee of 14, he came away impressed asserting, "If this sort of thing had been done throughout the country—people willing

to sit down together and talk about the problem—we would have a different picture now”.<sup>5</sup>

The first thing the Committee of 14 did in its initial meeting was come up with a list of goals to accomplish in Dallas. Smith led the way in challenging the organization with six objectives to help desegregate the city of Dallas. The first was to provide integrated food services to the city. The second was to provide integrated public accommodations. Neither of these was new, as black leaders like Smith and others had been trying to accomplish these goals for years. The third goal was to provide equal employment opportunities for Negroes at City Hall. The fourth called for the removal of racial designation signs from all public places. The fifth goal was to provide integrated seating accommodations at sporting events and other public places and the sixth goal was to open accommodations in hotels and motels. This would indeed be a challenge to the Committee of 14 to accomplish all six of these goals, but they began working on each one as quickly as possible after the first meeting.<sup>6</sup>

While A. Maceo Smith's work with the committee was important to furthering black rights in Dallas, this effort started well before the group was formed in 1960. Originally from Texarkana, he graduated from Fisk University in 1924 and obtained a masters' degree from New York University in 1928. Smith came to Dallas in 1933 and immediately

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<sup>5</sup> Brophy, "Active Acceptance-Active Containment: The Dallas Story", 140. "Leader Recalls Evolution of Battle: Smith's Civil Rights Fight Had Bleak Start", *Dallas Morning News*, May 3, 1973, 14 (author not given).

<sup>6</sup> Theodore M. Lawe, "Racial Politics in Dallas in the Twentieth Century", *East Texas Historical Journal* Vol. 46, Issue 2 (2008), 35.

helped to resuscitate the Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce as well as the local chapter of the NAACP. He said the DNCC was needed "because at that time there was little or no involvement of blacks with the ongoing of the city, you had your little thing on this side of town, while white folks were on the other side of town and the twain didn't meet". This sounds very similar to his position in later years with the Committee of 14. Smith was already setting up the idea of more black involvement with the workings of the city by bringing back the Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce.<sup>7</sup>

Politics, more specifically black political participation, quickly became a concern for Smith after he came to Dallas. In 1933, right after coming to Dallas, Smith helped create the Progressive Citizens League. This organization provided African Americans the opportunity to register to vote in Dallas by paying their poll taxes if they could not afford to do so. He also assisted in organizing the Progressive Voters League in the city in 1936 to get blacks more involved in voting and the political process. It was organized right after Ammon Wells, an African American man, ran for the state House of Representatives and came in 6<sup>th</sup> out of 60 candidates. Wells garnered 1,001 votes while the winner polled 1,844 votes and Smith, as well as Maynard Jackson (leader of the PVL), felt that if there had been more black voters registered Wells probably would have won the race. By joining the Progressive Voters League, black Dallasites were adhering

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<sup>7</sup> Phillips, *White Metropolis*, 70-71, 112. "Leader Recalls Evolution of Battle" *Dallas Morning News*, May 3, 1973, 14.

to the "Dallas Way" because they were fulfilling their civic duty and acting responsibly as put forth by the Dallas Citizens Council.<sup>8</sup>

Once the PVL was formed, Smith and Jackson came up with a five point program to help blacks in the city. The program indicated that Smith and Jackson were actively pushing for change in Dallas. The first of the five points was to get African Americans hired as policemen. Second they wanted an adequate public housing program put in place to allow blacks access to affordable housing. The next part of the program focused on getting a recreational center for blacks that was run by blacks and fourth they wanted a new high school built for African American students. Finally, they wanted to increase African American employment in the city government of Dallas. These issues were brought to the forefront during the 1937 Dallas city council elections. By this point the PVL had gained enough influence that it was crucial in deciding five out of the nine seats. This was important to Smith because it took away some power of the Citizens Charter Association which had been winning or at least controlling elections for decades. Smith noted the 1937 election was unique because it was the first time the white CCA had not completely dominated an election. The group had never gotten a complete majority but came close most years, and controlled the seats that they did not win. With more blacks voting in 1937 even this came to an end, and the power of the CCA was somewhat broken. Not long after, the ideas coming from the five point program were put into place in various

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<sup>8</sup> Phillips, *White Metropolis*, 113. Dulaney, "Whatever Happened to the Civil Rights Movement in Dallas, Texas?" 71-72.

ways. Lincoln High School, a new black high school, was a product of the PVL's influence in this election. Also, blacks gained access to Wahoo Lake recreational center and employment in city government increased by 300 to 400 per cent.<sup>9</sup>

The late 1930s was also the time that A. Maceo Smith, Maynard Jackson, and an African American woman named Juanita Craft helped revive the NAACP chapter in Dallas.<sup>10</sup> The chapter had been defunct since the 1920s, but Smith and company held the group's first meeting in years in 1936. Smith quickly rose through the ranks to become the state secretary of the Texas State Conference of Branches of the NAACP. Because of his position statewide as well as his prominence in the Dallas chapter, Dallas would become the epicenter to help end the white primary, not just in Dallas but throughout Texas. Dallas at the time was typically southern in that it was dominated by one-party Democrat politics. In a one-party state, essentially the only vote that matters is the primary vote, and blacks were disfranchised from this vote. Smith and others in the Dallas chapter of the NAACP wanted to change this by getting rid of the white primary. They had been trying to do this since 1937 when they put a case through the courts that eventually made it to the Supreme Court and failed (which Smith recalls only briefly in an interview years later). Despite the setback Smith continued to use this as the means of ending the white

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<sup>9</sup> Theodore Lawe, "Racial Politics in Dallas in the Twentieth Century", 30-31. "Leader Recalls Evolution of Battle" *Dallas Morning News*, May 3, 1973, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Craft is a woman that would become heavily involved in the NAACP in Dallas especially with the youth movement of the 1950s. Her role in that endeavor will be explained further in the chapter.



primary. In 1940, the Dallas NAACP got a dentist from Houston named Lonnie Smith to be the plaintiff in a new case designed to get rid of the white primary. The dentist was chosen because he had been denied a ballot in Harris County's Democrat party primary in 1940, and the NAACP took action against this. Thurgood Marshall and local attorney W.J. Durham (a member of the Committee of 14) were the lead prosecutors in the case which made it all the way to the United States Supreme Court. While this was early in Marshall's career he would go on to be a champion of the civil rights movement first as chief legal counsel for the NAACP and then as the first black man to be Supreme Court Justice. Marshall was the main litigator that helped win the *Brown* case so it is fitting that he would be helping to fight the white primary in Dallas at this early stage. It took four years but the white primary system was finally defeated in the case. While A. Maceo Smith was not involved directly in the legal proceedings, he worked diligently to see this case won. His dealings helped open the door for ending the white primary throughout the South, and he made note of this when he recalled the decision years later Smith remembered that "In 1944 on April 4 we had a sweeping decision against the white primary. It opened up the primary throughout the South. This started right in my living room. We prepared the strategy there, and we financed the case here in Texas".<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Dulaney, "Whatever Happened to the Civil Rights Movement in Dallas, Texas?", 72-73. "Leader Recalls Evolution of Battle" *Dallas Morning News*, May 3, 1973, 14. Linda Greenhouse, "Thurgood Marshall, Civil Rights Hero Dies at 84", *New York Times obituary*, January 25, 1993.

The next thing Smith and the local chapter of the NAACP did was fight to equalize teacher pay in Dallas. This was actually done through the efforts of an umbrella organization created in 1942 called the Dallas Council of Negro Organizations. The DCNO consisted of all the major African American organizations in the city including the NAACP, the PVL, the Negro Chamber of Commerce, as well as 20 other major black organizations in the city. Even so the NAACP took the lead with this organization and found a young teacher named Thelma Page to be the plaintiff in the case. Smith personally told her that if she got fired from her job that the NAACP would pay her salary for a year. The case was filed in November of 1942 as *Page v. Board of Education, City of Dallas*, once again with W.J. Durham as lead counsel. The case did not last long as a ruling was handed down in February of 1943 to grant pay raises over the next two years until salaries were equalized. City leaders did not want a long drawn out trial because it could hurt the city's image. According to Smith, "The case never went to trial. When the evidence we had built up was presented to Judge William Atwell we got a consent decree equalizing salaries".<sup>12</sup>

Smith and the Dallas NAACP also got involved in the case to desegregate the University of Texas beginning in the late 1940s. Smith recalled years later that a group of men that included Thurgood Marshall, Carter Wesley publisher of the *Houston Informer* newspaper, Charley Thompson of Howard University, and a few others (not named)

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<sup>12</sup> Dulaney, "Whatever Happened to the Civil Rights Movement in Dallas, Texas?", 74. "Leader Recalls Evolution of Battle" *Dallas Morning News*, May 3, 1973, 14.

were sitting on his front porch in Dallas drinking whiskey when they came up with a plan to put a case through the courts to test segregation in higher education in Texas. Originally Wesley wanted the group to file suit to make Prairie View equal to Texas A&M, but Marshall's ambitions were bigger than that because he opined, "No we ain't fooling with that, we're going to file this against the University of Texas". Thus was born the case of *Sweatt v. Painter* in which Smith and the Dallas NAACP chapter filed suit against the University of Texas to open its doors to black students. Before the case was heard the state tried to be proactive and build a law school for Heman Sweatt in the basement of the capitol building in Austin. He refused to attend so then the state of Texas built a separate law school in Houston and again he refused. Eventually the case that was started on Smith's porch over a glass of whiskey made it to the U.S. Supreme Court. It is clear Smith was proud of his involvement when he remembered years later, "We filed and carried the case of *Sweatt vs. Painter* to the United States Supreme Court, and the court in 1950 declared segregated public education illegal, and that was the forerunner of the *Brown* case".<sup>13</sup>

While the *Sweatt* case did not directly involve progress for blacks in Dallas, it is clear men like Smith and the Dallas chapter of the NAACP were heavily involved the matter. The group was also working towards gains in the city itself during this time as well. African Americans served on juries in Dallas in 1941 for the first

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<sup>13</sup> "Leader Recalls Evolution of Battle" *Dallas Morning News*, May 3, 1973, 14.

time in 50 years. In 1946, African Americans won their first precinct chairs in the Democratic Party and participated in the Dallas County Democrats county convention for the first time. That same year 14 black police officers were appointed to patrol the city's black neighborhoods. There were other small gains in the 1940s such as the employment of black postal workers, work in the defense plants, and access to Wahoo City Park.<sup>14</sup>

Despite these gains, blacks in Dallas still lacked equal treatment. There was still inadequate housing for blacks, segregated schools, and segregated public facilities all of which would take years to bring down. Smith and the NAACP began to look into these local issues. One of the first hurdles they tried to change involved housing. This would be a difficult task because there was very little in the way of adequate housing, and what was there, proved to be shoddy at best. According to Smith, "At the time of the beginning that I am telling you about, the only housing blacks could get was hand-me-downs or boxes that they nailed together themselves". The Federal Housing Authority was not financing any black housing. Banks were making ten year loans with incredibly high interest rates that could not be paid. New houses were out of the question because the banks would not finance those in the slum areas. Couple this with the fact that in the 1940s, there were a number of bombings that were designed to discourage blacks from settling in white areas. Smith used his influence to gain an audience with what he called the "top-

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<sup>14</sup> Dulaney, "Whatever Happened to the Civil Rights Movement in Dallas, Texas?", 74-75.

level leadership of Dallas". A committee was created within the Dallas Chamber of Commerce to investigate the bombings. Then chamber president, Bob Thornton, called together a blue-ribbon grand jury, but no one was ever brought to justice. Although the responsibility for the bombings was never solved, city leaders dealt to some degree with the issue of housing. Projects were built to give blacks more access to housing, though they remained segregated for years to come.<sup>15</sup>

Public school desegregation became a hotbed issue in Dallas after the *Brown* case was handed down in 1954. The NAACP, as well as the Committee of 14 began looking into desegregating Dallas' schools as early as 1955. Twenty-eight black students attempted to integrate all-white schools that year, but school authorities denied them entrance. The NAACP filed suit against the school board, but the case was continued repeatedly in order to delay desegregation of the school system. This failed attempt to integrate the schools in Dallas led to a backlash among the white community. Numerous whites formed the Texas Citizens Council of Dallas which vowed "to fight to the end to maintain segregation in Texas schools". This is the start of the massive resistance movement in Dallas that was sweeping the South after the *Brown* decision. The idea behind the citizens' councils was to use any lawful means they could to block *Brown* from being implemented throughout the South. The Texas Citizens Council of Dallas was led by Texas Attorney General John Ben Sheppard who not only wanted to keep segregation in Dallas schools but also completely

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<sup>15</sup> "Leader Recalls Evolution of Battle", Dallas Morning News, May 3, 1973, 14. Dulaney, "Whatever Happened to the Civil Rights Movement in Dallas, Texas?", 75-76.

remove the NAACP from the city. He actually achieved his goal, albeit for a brief time, when the NAACP in Dallas ceased operation from September of 1956 through May of 1957. The main reason for this was retaliation against the organization for the desegregation law suits. The records of the Dallas chapter were confiscated and this in essence crippled the organization. Smith was forced to resign as state executive secretary of the NAACP, and the local chapter had to break ties with the national entity. The NAACP in Dallas did not really regain its former strength that had been built by Smith and others until 1959 when a lady named Minnie Flanagan was named president. She was able to bring the group back from the brink of extinction by linking it to the sit-in movement in Dallas.<sup>16</sup>

The goal of lessening the influence of the NAACP in the city was furthered in 1957 by the Texas State House of Representatives. It passed a bill saying no state or local agency could hire NAACP members and this included teachers, which was a tactic used in other states throughout the South as well. Ten other segregation bills were passed most of which were designed to delay integration further unless a local option vote was taken where a majority of people voted to open the schools. None of the bills were viable in the long run, but they showed the willingness of the state legislature to do whatever it could to block integration. Texas had a state law in place that required locals to vote on school desegregation, and schools could lose funding if they attempted to violate this rule and open the doors

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<sup>16</sup> Lawe, "Racial Politics in Dallas in the Twentieth Century", 34. Dulaney, "Whatever Happened to the Civil Rights Movement in Dallas, Texas?", 76-78.

to black students without going through the proper channels. Dallas schools could lose \$1.5 million in state aid as well as lose accreditation if they tried to desegregate without a majority vote. The school superintendent and board members also could be fined up to \$1,000 for the same offense.<sup>17</sup>

The issue of desegregating the schools would continue into the 1960s in Dallas. The citizens of the city adhered to the "Dallas Way" by acting on their civic duty and upholding the letter the law. In order to move forward with desegregation a referendum vote needed to be held and this occurred in August of 1960. The vote was 4-1 (30,234 to 7,416) against integration. Even though the *Brown* decision had been handed down six years earlier, it is apparent that the white citizens of Dallas were not ready to have their children attend integrated schools.<sup>18</sup>

The NAACP forced the school board to develop a desegregation plan in 1961 by winning a case in the United States Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. The ruling compelled the school district to implement a plan that called for gradual integration starting in the first grade and moving each year after 1961 to a new grade until all grades were desegregated in the Dallas schools. In August of 1961, 18 African Americans enrolled in previously all-white elementary schools throughout the city and played a major role in ensuring a peaceful desegregation process in the schools. According to Dennis Hoover, a

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<sup>17</sup> "House Adopts NAACP Bill", *Dallas Morning News*, March 29, 1957, 11 (no author cited). Sue Connally, "U.S. Court Ruled out of 'Mix' Row", *Dallas Morning News*, May 24, 1958, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Dulaney, "Whatever Happened to the Civil Rights Movement in Dallas, Texas?", 77-78.

journalist who covered desegregation of the schools for the *Dallas Morning News*, "Early in 1960 the DCC saw ultimate desegregation as inevitable. It vowed that for the well-being of Dallas the strife of a Little Rock or New Orleans must be avoided, absolutely". Hoover pointed out that the DCC repeatedly made note that if the new "stair step" program of desegregation was to work in Dallas, it was because the citizens of the city obeyed the law and abided by the "Dallas Way". Hoover noted that the good people of Dallas "agree with the DCC's central tenet. This is: whether you favor desegregation or not, good citizens obey the law".<sup>19</sup>

This idea of being law abiding citizens in regard to desegregating the schools was driven home further by a film released by the DCC in 1961 titled, *Dallas at the Crossroads*. The film, along with a pamphlet of the same name, was distributed all across the city to thousands of organizations to help get the word out that good citizens should accept the law that the schools would be desegregated and do so without causing a ruckus in the city. The 22 minute film was produced by Sam Bloom and narrated by Walter Cronkite and included a number of Dallas' prominent citizens (presumably most if not all were members of the DCC) advocating that Dallas obey the law or face the consequences. According to Cronkite, "Other cities have faced, and faced recently, the same problems of change which Dallas now faces. They have met these problems with violence. The face of violence is the face of hate, unreason, cruelty, personal, and civic

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<sup>19</sup> Dennis Hoover, "DCC Works for Peaceful Mixing", *Dallas Morning News*, August 6, 1961, 1.



irresponsibility". This reasoning permeates the film, and it almost seems like the business community was trying to shame miscreants in the city into abiding by the law and allowing desegregation to occur without violence. In order for the city to move on with desegregation, it must do so by adhering to Dallas Way, and this could only be achieved by following the letter of the law.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time school desegregation was taking place in Dallas, the DCC and the Committee of 14 began planning for the desegregation of lunch counters and other public facilities in the city. Once again it was in the best interest of the DCC for things to go smoothly, so they began negotiating with black leaders in the Committee of 14, as well as others throughout the city, to achieve this as quickly and quietly as possible. The DCC made note of this in a pamphlet put out in the early 1960s that stated, "Restaurants, theaters, increased use of department store facilities, hotels, churches—all are likely targets. Here, as with the schools, the problem may ultimately have to be resolved by law". Starting in 1960 the Committee of 14, as well as the DCC, began to negotiate with several downtown Dallas stores to look at the possibility of opening the lunch counters. Several stores in Dallas, including Woolworth's and Walgreen's, desegregated their lunch counters without incident in 1960. In April 1960, two Southern Methodist University theology students were served at HL Green Department store without incident as well. The Green store was chosen because it was a national chain. The store was not given advance

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<sup>20</sup> Phillips, *White Metropolis*, 157. *Dallas at the Crossroads*, Film commissioned by the Dallas Citizens Council and produced by Sam Bloom, 1961, Found on YouTube.

warning that it had been chosen for an integration attempt. Even so there was not a problem at the Green store as Reverend Richard Stewart, then one of the theology students, recalled years later. This was mainly because the university backed the students as did the town of Dallas. Allen Madison, a boy of 14 at the time, that was also involved in bringing integration to the Green store recalled that, "Not many people in town even know that happened. This is undoubtedly due to efforts of the DCC and the Committee of 14 working behind the scenes to assure that there would be no violence involved in this encounter. The businessmen of the DCC wanted it this way--no attention, no violence, and thus no possibility of loss of business due to exposure. According to Joe Goulden, then a reporter for the *Dallas Morning News*, "Dallasites knew the sit-ins had damaged the images of other cities. They were determined not to suffer the same fate. The DCC decided they were not gonna have racial strife in the city of Dallas".<sup>21</sup>

Despite the fact that several stores had desegregated their lunch counters by 1960, there were a good number that had not. Because of this the Dallas Community Committee, an offshoot of the Committee of 14 run by Reverend E.C. Estell, called for a boycott and picket of downtown stores in order to get them to open their lunch counters to African Americans. The first picket started in October of 1960, and

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<sup>21</sup> Hoover, "DCC Works for Peaceful Mixing", *Dallas Morning News*, August 6, 1961, 1. Phillips, *White Metropolis*, 156. Joe Goulden, "Negro Students get Service at Lunch Counter", *Dallas Morning News*, April 27, 1960 (page not given). Eliot Kleinberg, "Dallas Blacks Recall Integrating Diners", *Dallas Morning News*, April 27, 1985 (page not given).

included a cross-section of the African American community in Dallas. It continued each day of the week with a different group every time. One day it was the lawyers who picketed. The next it was black businessmen and professionals. Then it was the ministers, and yet another day it was the beauticians as well as people in similar occupations. The *Dallas Express*, the city's main African American newspaper, took out a full page ad in May of 1961 where more than 300 women of color signed a pledge to not shop in downtown stores that were not desegregated. The ad, combined with the picketing, worked. On July 26, 1961 business establishments in downtown Dallas were to remove their discriminating signs, symbols, practices, and extend service to all customers regardless of race. To dramatize this event, the Committee of 14 arranged for 159 African Americans to walk into 49 downtown lunch counters and restaurants to be served without incident. This in turn prompted the Dallas Community Committee to call off its boycott. The boycott only lasted two months but it created tension in the black community as to the direction the civil rights movement should take in Dallas. The boycott ultimately provided limited success that was seen merely as tokenism. Several lunch counters still refused to serve African Americans. Bus stations, Parkland Hospital, and the Texas State Fair still continued their policies of racial discrimination well into the 1960s. Because of this, the Committee of 14 decided to abandon the idea of direct action and go back to the negotiating table with the white businessmen of the Dallas

Citizens Council. In doing so they would continue on with the notion of desegregating through use of the Dallas Way.<sup>22</sup>

The idea of direct action in Dallas did not actually begin with the downtown boycott and picket. Rather, it had started in the 1950s with a theater and the state fair. The concept was started by Juanita Craft, a key member of the NAACP chapter in the city. She was in charge of the Dallas Youth Council of the NAACP and got teenagers to picket a theater as early as 1955 for its discriminatory practices. The theater picket did not work but laid the groundwork for other direct action protests to occur because Craft provided an infrastructure with the NAACP Youth Council that would be the basis for other protests to come. The most notable one was waged against the Texas state fair which also occurred in 1955 at the request of Craft and the Dallas youth Council. The fair was held annually in Dallas but blacks could only attend on Negro Achievement Day which was just one day out of the sixteen at the fair. The youth of the NAACP began picketing in 1955 at six of the eleven gates open to the public. The young protestors held signs that voiced their discontent with sayings like "This is Negro Achievement Day at the Fair-Keep Out", "Racial Segregation is Un-Clean, Un-American, and Un-Moral-Stay Out", and "Don't Sell Your Pride for a Segregated Ride-Stay Out". They also passed out handbills that claimed visiting the fair on any other day

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<sup>22</sup> Dulaney, "Whatever Happened to the Civil Rights Movement in Dallas, Texas?", 79-82.

other than Negro Achievement Day would bring blacks, "humiliation and disgrace".<sup>23</sup>

The picketing was brought about by a condemnation of the fair by the Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce which said that there were several midway rides blacks were banned from, as well as eating places at the fair, even on Negro Achievement Day. This was met with compromise by then Mayor R.L. Thornton, who was also president of the fair. The midway rides would be opened immediately to people of all races, but "moral and legal commitments" would prevent any policy change in the Fair Park restaurants. James H. Stewart, executive vice president and general manager of the fair, was miffed by the fact that blacks were picketing the fair at all. He noted that, "It is particularly ironic and difficult to understand (the picketing) in view of the fact that the State Fair of Texas has been a pioneer in making available to Negroes, through its 16-day run, facilities that are not open to them anywhere else in the state". Thornton tried to accommodate black demands at the fair, which should not be surprising since he was a founding member of the Dallas Citizens Council. However, his acquiescence could only go so far as he was bound by state law which would not allow any further integration in a public facility. While the protest did not end segregation at the fair completely it did bring whites to the negotiating table which is yet another example of abiding by the Dallas Way. After the picketing at the fair, Thornton arranged several meetings with black leaders

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<sup>23</sup> Behnken, "The Dallas Way", 6-7. Francis P. Raffetto, "Negroes Ignore Fair Picketing", *Dallas Morning News*, October 18, 1955, 1.

including Juanita Craft and George Allen, a prominent African American businessman, to discuss integrating public facilities. These meetings resulted in a plan to send black patrons to downtown stores to test segregation, and though it failed it did open the door for what would come in the 1960s as previously stated.<sup>24</sup>

While Craft did not get what she wanted fully accomplished in the 1950s, the idea of desegregation would become more of a reality by the early 1960s in downtown Dallas. By the end of 1963 blacks were being hired as retail salesmen, cashiers, checkers, and customer contact employees in a broad spectrum of stores in the city. This included major stores as well as those as small as shop size and it occurred city-wide, not just in black communities. Some 150 businesses including department stores, food chains, and apparel stores cooperated with the hiring of black employees. Once again this happened without incident, and according to *Morning News* reporter Dennis Hoover, "It is the most conspicuous facet of a *deliberate and persistent* effort by Dallas business and civic leaders to open new employment vistas for Negroes throughout industry generally". This was yet another item on a long agenda of the desegregation plan for Dallas put forth by the DCC. A spokesman for the DCC noted, "All along it has been recognized that the process of school, restaurant and other desegregation was leading up to a question of pure economics—helping Negroes to gain the financial means to utilize their new freedoms. Expanded economic opportunity for Negroes is

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<sup>24</sup> Behnken, "The Dallas Way", 7-10. Raffetto, "Negroes Ignore Fair Picketing", *Dallas Morning News*, October 18, 1955, 1.

inevitable". Of course, expanded economic opportunity for Negroes in Dallas also meant expanded economic opportunity for the business owners in the city. The idea of business profit, or lack thereof, always fueled the process of desegregation in Dallas. If the city looked good by hiring black employees, then the business leaders looked good and would continue to attract new investors. This was the goal all along and the DCC spokesman noted this when he stated, "The effort has been intricately planned and skillfully executed, as have all of Dallas' major desegregation moves". This is what made Dallas the envy of other cities throughout the South. While some had picketing and rioting, Dallas moved forward peacefully and quietly for the most part. The DCC spokesman made this point clear when he said, "If and as problems arise they are nipped in the bud. This, too, is part of Dallas' envied pattern in race relations".<sup>25</sup>

By the time the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, Dallas had nearly completed the task of breaking down racial barriers in the city. By this point, "the city unobtrusively has integrated parks, pools, hotels, food services, theaters, etc., with few exceptions". The city was not completely integrated in public accommodations but it was pretty close. Many in Dallas felt that the passage of the Civil Rights Act would not really have much of an impact on the city. This was the definitely the case with city councilman George M. Underwood Jr. who told the *Morning News* in June of 1964, "I think the civil rights law passage will go practically unnoticed here, we are so

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<sup>25</sup> Dennis Hoover, "Dallas Stores Hiring Negroes as Retail Salesmen, Cashiers", *Dallas Morning News*, December 12, 1963, 22.

completely integrated now. I doubt there will be any awareness of any difference in our lives. Changes are being made smoothly right now". Councilman R.B. Carpenter Jr. had much the same assessment, but also reinforced the idea of the Dallas Way when he was quoted as saying, "I believe the only thing we can do is go by the letter of the law. Some more places will have to integrate. But most have already done so. What's left?". Negro leaders were praised in these effort just as much as white leaders. Robert Cullum, president of the Dallas Chamber of Commerce, stated to the *Morning News*, "We must give high credit to the good citizenship of our Negro community. They have responded in a fully responsible way to remarkably cohesive and unselfish leadership". He continued by giving credit to the idea of the Dallas Way as well. According to Cullum, a businessman by trade, Dallas "has a promising situation—we are ahead of the law writers, will attend to life within the full spirit of what the law wants to do". Cullum's statement was the embodiment of the Dallas Way. The city would abide by the law, as it had with all others with few exceptions, for years. Just because a new civil rights bill was being passed, it did not mean Dallas would have to change. The city was well ahead of the curve, and Dallas would continue on as usual.<sup>26</sup>

SNCC, as well as other more radical protest groups, came to Dallas in the 1960s intent on accelerating the sometimes slow-moving change brought forth by A. Maceo Smith and other black leaders in the Committee of 14. However because of the influence of Smith, as well

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<sup>26</sup> "Few Changes Seen After Rights Bill Ok'd" *Dallas Morning News*, June 28, 1964, 15 (author not given).



as the influence of the DCC and the Committee of 14, the direction of the movement never really changed in Dallas. According to Kevin Merida of the *Morning News*, "Black militants in Dallas found it difficult to press aggressively for change". There was an incident in Dallas in 1968 that brought the city as close as it would come to chaos during the civil rights movement. Ernest McMillan and Matthew Johnson, local leaders of SNCC in Dallas, were sentenced to ten years in prison for leading a food-smashing raid on a white owned South Dallas grocery store. They led the raid because the store did not have any black employees and their prices were higher than other stores while the quality of their products was lower. The penalty was stiff for damages that only amounted to a little over \$200, but after this SNCC would have a hard time gaining traction in Dallas. McMillan and Johnson, "represented the new, unwelcomed black power movement". Dallas was used to peaceful negotiations in regards to racial changes in the city, and the incident of 1968 was an anomaly that proved that this is how things would continue. The grocery store incident had occurred during the summer of 1968 when tensions were still high after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and it would be one of the few incidents of this nature in Dallas. The Committee of 14 and the DCC had done too much to see this change. James Smith, President of the Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce in the early 1960s told Merida that "C.A. Tatum (president of the Citizens Council) and the 14-man committee had detoothed the tiger, so to speak". While the changes may not have always come as quickly as some wanted, the DCC and the Committee of 14 had been the voice of reason for years and this would

not change because of one episode of violence at a time when tensions were high.<sup>27</sup>

When looking at the rights movement in Dallas it is easy to make comparisons to other cities, notably Houston and Atlanta. The reason for this is that the businessmen in all three cities did what they could to make it seem like there were no racial problems in these areas. Business leaders in Dallas, Houston, and Atlanta knew that if there was racial strife in the city, entrepreneurs were less likely to invest in the city. Like Houston, Dallas tried to dilute its "southernness" and become more of western city. This was done in order to prove that there were no racial problems in Dallas. This idea can be taken all the way back to Reconstruction in Dallas because the business moguls knew that if they did not steer the city away from racial violence then there would be no one willing to invest in the city. Dallas desperately wanted to become a financial hub and this could not be achieved in a city with internal racial turmoil. Dallas mirrors Atlanta in that both cities were built by the railroads, and also like Houston, Atlanta tried to make big business the order of the city, not racial violence.<sup>28</sup>

One parallel that can be drawn between Dallas and Atlanta was that Atlanta also had a biracial organization similar to Dallas' Committee of 14. Like Dallas, Atlanta's interracial coalition

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Phillips, *White Metropolis: Race, Ethnicity, and Religion in Dallas, 1841-2001* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 14-15, 46-47, 58. Alton Hornsby, "A city that was too busy to hate: Atlanta businessmen and desegregation" in *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation*, 121-122.

maintained an air of civility in dealing with the civil rights movement. The goal was the same in both cities-economic growth-and this could only be achieved in Atlanta (and Dallas) through the work of negotiation on behalf of the white and black communities in regards to civil rights. Businessmen in Atlanta promoted the idea of racial harmony by appealing to civic pride just like in Dallas. Peace was kept in racial matters and thus the city prospered economically. Black leaders in Atlanta went along with this despite the fact that they knew more racial change needed to occur in the city. The same can be said for Dallas' black community beyond the Committee of 14.<sup>29</sup>

The Progressive Voters League of Dallas is similar to the Atlanta Negro Voters League which was made up of black preachers, professors, lawyers, and businessmen in the city. A.T. Walden, Atlanta's version of A. Maceo Smith, was the leader of the organization and was seen as the New South's first black political boss. He used the influence of the Negro Voters League to gain favor with the white leadership of Atlanta's city council much the same way Smith did with the PVL in Dallas. Walden bargained with white politicians offering black votes in exchange for favorable race relations in Atlanta. Atlanta's business community liked this because it kept race tensions down and profits up as a result and the city developed a reputation as an "oasis of tolerance" in regards to southern race relations.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> David Andrew Harmon, *Beneath the Image of the Civil Rights Movement and Race Relations: Atlanta, Georgia, 1946-1981* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), viii, 309-310.

<sup>30</sup> Hornsby, "A city that was too busy to hate", 124.

School desegregation provides another example where a similarity to Atlanta is noteworthy. Like Dallas, Atlanta also decided to put forth a plan to open the schools to black students in 1961. Also like Dallas the city expressed a willingness to do so peacefully. The *Atlanta Constitution* voiced the opinion in January of 1961 that the year was critical for the city, and expressed the hope "that the schools can be preserved and the children spared such experiences as we've witnessed in New Orleans". This provides a direct link to Dallas as the video aforementioned wanted to do just this. Atlanta's mayor, William B. Hartsfield, espoused the same sentiment as Dallas mayor Earl Cabell when he called for "cool-headedness and common sense to solve our problems and to preserve the city's reputation...Mobs, lawlessness, and terror won't change the courts". Clearly Atlanta was thinking very much along the same lines as Dallas as the city did not want to hurt its business reputation. A violent struggle for desegregation in the schools would result in loss of business and the power structure in neither city wanted that, thus the call for law and order. In January of 1961 Atlanta businessmen issued a statement saying that, "disruption of our public school system would have a calamitous effect on the economic climate of Georgia". Meanwhile, the fight to desegregate the University of Georgia was also taking place. Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes entered the campus in Athens in the fall of 1961 through the help of a federal court order. According to Alton Hornsby, this actually "saved" the public schools from having to desegregate quicker. Legislators in the state were willing to keep segregation intact in the public schools until court order and this

did not come until the UGA ruling in 1961. However, once the ruling was handed down the university began desegregating and thus so did the public schools in Atlanta. On August 30, 1961 nine black students who had survived the rigorous testing and other procedures to qualify for transfers entered schools in each of Atlanta's four quadrants without incident. Desegregation in Atlanta's schools had become a token reality, peacefully, just like in Dallas.<sup>31</sup>

While there are numerous similarities in the civil rights experience in Dallas and Atlanta as aforementioned, this ends by the mid to late 1960s. By this time various southern cities appeared to be coming apart at the seams, and Atlanta was one of those on the brink of chaos. The Civil Rights Movement had become more militant with the emergence of more vocal, violent protest groups and cities like Los Angeles were literally and figuratively on fire because of incidents like the 1965 Watts Riots. The quiet, nonviolent protests of King and the early leaders of the movement were becoming less frequent. The sit-ins were replaced by riots. This happened in Atlanta where schools and churches were bombed. The city experienced revolt in a black neighborhood in 1966. People in Dallas feared the same would happen to their city because of the close ties to Atlanta.

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<sup>31</sup> Hornsby, "A city that was too busy to hate", 125-126, 131-132, 136. The article from the *Atlanta Constitution* was quoted in Hornsby's article on page 125. Columbia, South Carolina was a city that waited to desegregate its public schools until after the University of South Carolina had done so. It was not really done as a delay tactic like in Georgia but does show that the city wanted to make sure that there would be no problems, and once the university desegregated quietly, the public schools followed. For more on this see Paul Loftus Jr.'s essay "Calm and Exemplary: Desegregation in Columbia, South Carolina" in *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation* edited by Elizabeth Jacoway and David Colburn.

However, this would not be the case in Dallas because the business leadership had worked for decades to ensure that would not occur. They men involved with the DCC continued to lead the way in Dallas and did not let the violence engulf Dallas. There was one near riot but it remained localized and never reached the point where things would get out of hand. Atlanta could not say the same and the city became more militant at a time that Dallas remained calm.<sup>32</sup>

The Civil Rights Movement in Dallas never reached the fever pitch that it did in many southern cities. It was, for the most part, a peaceful and quiet period that was made possible through negotiation. Business leaders in Dallas did not want to see their city engulfed in racial conflict, so they sought out negotiation with the black community. They came up with the idea of the Dallas Way and this became the norm even for the Civil Rights Movement. This meant following the letter of the law, and doing what was right for the city as a whole. If this meant opening the doors of the city to African Americans so be it. It was beneficial to the city to desegregate quietly and peacefully because it was beneficial to the businessmen. The Dallas Citizens Council led the way in regards to adhering to the Dallas Way. They formed a biracial group, the Committee of 14, to help lead the city through a negotiated desegregation plan. They acquiesced when necessary and brought racial change to the city, albeit slowly at times. But no matter how long it took, the goal

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<sup>32</sup> Kevin Merida, "Quiet Diplomacy Helped Dallas Begin Desegregation", *Dallas Morning News*, February 24, 1985 (page not given).

remained the same. Desegregate, through negotiation, to avoid the trials and tribulations of other cities and live by the Dallas Way.

### Chapter Three

#### *Before its Time: The Desegregation of Perkins School of Theology*

I don't like this proposal. It goes against what I've always believed. But I can tell which way the wind is blowing and I'm going to vote for it.<sup>1</sup>

An unnamed, but influential Board of Trustees member at Southern Methodist University made the above comment before voting in November 1950 to change the school's bylaws. This was an important vote because it would remove restrictions on admitting people of color and would open the door for African American students to attend SMU as regular students. This was a big step for a private, church affiliated school in 1950. The mere idea of actually changing the bylaws, let alone allowing blacks to enter SMU, was something that the other major private schools in the South were not even contemplating at the time. The others, namely Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt held out as long as they could in regards to starting the process of desegregation. So, in this respect Southern Methodist University was before its time. While the university did not open the doors in all of the various schools in 1950 to African Americans, the door was cracked open with the board's decision of that year. There were many people that were instrumental in this monumental decision and the subsequent admission of blacks in the coming years at SMU, including university president Umphrey Lee, Board of Trustees chairman A. Frank Smith, and Bishops William Martin and Paul Martin (no relation) among countless others. Perhaps the most important, though,

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis Howard Grimes, *A History of the Perkins School of Theology* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1993), 110.



was Merrimon Cuninggim. Cuninggim became the dean of Perkins School of Theology at SMU in 1951, and it was his leadership from then until the early 1960s that truly helped bring about the desegregation of the School of Theology at the university. Despite the fact that desegregation at Perkins was smooth and quiet for the most part, there were problems with, and detractors of, the experiment. When opposition did rise, it was Cuninggim that stuck to his convictions and kept the process going without it completely coming apart at the seams. Black students had attended classes at Perkins sporadically prior to 1950. As early as 1946 Dean Eugene Hawk, spurred on by faculty prodding, arranged noncredit afternoon classes for black ministers who wanted more training as provided by the School of Theology at SMU. Dr. Hawk was quick to point out that "these Negroes are not enrolled in SMU, they pay no fees, they get no college credits. Our instructors handle these classes outside their regular schedules". Two years later, in 1948, school administrators allowed African Americans to sit in on regular classes with white students. Neither instance raised any controversy.<sup>2</sup>

While there was no opposition to these incidents in 1948 at Perkins, there was definitely confusion. In April, the Conference on Christian Action for Human Rights made a mistake when it stated that SMU allowed admittance to black students in the School of Theology. This was not true, and Dean Hawk made sure everyone knew it by issuing an immediate denial. Despite this, Hawk began receiving letters

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<sup>2</sup> William R. Simon, "Breaking the Color Bar at SMU", *Legacies: A History Journal for Dallas and North Central Texas*, Vol. 24, Issue 1 (Spring 2012), 34.

commending SMU for its imagined racial progress. Methodist pastors in Texas led the way in praising SMU. Reverend J. Troy Hickman of San Marcos wrote to Hawk and was "glad your institution is already doing something definite for Negro leaders in the church. Many Perkins ex-students who are now in the ministry are delighted with the progress made there since our time". Reverend Seaborn Kiker echoed this sentiment from his pastorate in Falfurrias, Texas when he wrote, "It was gratifying to me to learn of the good service our School of Theology has been rendering the Negro brethren...Any door that can be opened to them...is a great service to the church". However, SMU was not quite as racially progressive as these ministers thought. It would still be a few years before blacks were admitted as regular students at Perkins.<sup>3</sup>

Not all of the commentary Dean Hawk received in 1948 was positive. His worst fear, and indeed that of the Board, was that a school like SMU was not ready to cross the racial divide that existed in the South. Doing so would break the bonds of white supremacy that were still very much alive even in Dallas in the late 1940s. Race mixing was not something people in the church at large and the community wanted to see at SMU in 1948. A letter from Allen Green to Hawk illustrated this point quite clearly. Green wrote in his letter, "I'm in favor of helping the negroes all we can but let's keep them segregated. It is no good for races to mix. I hope that you will continue to enforce segregation. Not one true southerner wants a mixture of races". The fear was that if you allow the races to mix,

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

even if it is just in school, then you are moving in the direction of social equality. One segregationist leader warned about the "serious problems that are sure to arise if we abandon our segregated school system—such as integrated social events, integrated restroom facilities and showers, drama classes and more...". Another put it more bluntly stating "when we come right down to it, that's what this is all about: a nigger a-marrying your sister or your daughter". Numerous whites in the South, including those in Texas, felt the time had not yet come for this to happen.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the white supremacy argument presented to Dean Hawk, Southern Methodist University continued to move forward, not backward, between 1948 and 1950 in race relations on campus. Once again, the faculty began clamoring for more change. The post-World War II era was a time when social mores were altered, and faculty members at SMU wanted to help facilitate that at Perkins. The Church and the public responded well to what had already taken place so it was now time to move forward again. Prior to the Board meeting in November of 1950, the faculty of Perkins asked Dean Hawk to present a plan to the Board of Trustees to allow blacks to enter the School of Theology as regular students. Enter Umphrey Lee. He went to the Board of Trustees in November of 1950 with the idea that they should change the charter of SMU to allow for the entrance of blacks. Lee knew the possibility was coming in the near future, and "wouldn't it be wise, he reasoned to get rid of the restrictive wording in the By-Laws? Then, when and if desegregation comes, we won't have to suffer through the argument in

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 34-35.

the Board". Merrimon Cuninggim provided a first-hand account of how things went in Dallas and said of Lee's decision in 1950, "Part of Lee's facing the desegregation question so early was genuine statesmanship. He knew it was coming, and he knew that, when it came, it would create grave discord; so he wanted to settle the matter in advance, if possible". By this point Silas Hunt had already been admitted to the University of Arkansas in 1948, Ada Sipuel was enrolled at the University of Oklahoma that same year, and Heman Sweatt won in the courts to allow him to attend the University of Texas in 1950. The precedent had been set by these actions. While these cases dealt specifically with public institutions, it appears to be an impetus for why Lee went to the Board in November of 1950 and his proposal was passed without much fanfare. The way was now open to bring in African Americans as regular students at Perkins.<sup>5</sup>

Just the idea of changing the school's charter to eventually allow black student to enter SMU was more than what the other major private schools in the South were willing to do in 1950. Melissa Kean, author of *Desegregating Private Higher Education in the South*, noted in her book that, "Before the schools bowed to the inevitable, though, each one endured nearly two decades of internal argument about how best to respond to these demands for change". The trustees at Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt fought throughout the 1950s and early 1960s to keep the lily white status quo at their universities. This was not the case at Southern Methodist University.

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<sup>5</sup> Merrimon, Cuninggim, *Perkins Led the Way: The Story of Desegregation at Southern Methodist University* (Dallas: Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, 1994), 8-9.

The debate about allowing blacks to enter had already been settled by the Board's decision in November of 1950. This is not to say that there would not be opposition at SMU, but it would be about other matters in regard to black students at the school, not the actual admission of these students.<sup>6</sup>

Lee's decision to change SMU's bylaws to allow for blacks as regular students coincided with his effort to make the theology school more nationally known. He wanted to upgrade the facilities, the faculty, and even the dean of the school. In Lee's opinion all of these changes would enhance the image of Perkins. One of the first things Lee did was search for a new dean for the Perkins School of Theology. Hawk was not the person Lee envisioned to lead Perkins to national prominence. Bishop Lee probably shared the opinion expressed by John W. Hardt about Hawk when he declared, "There was a feeling, I believe that Hawk wasn't an academic, and he had done about what he could do...it was time for him to move on". Hawk had been an able administrator, but he was not the visionary figure Lee needed in his quest to make Perkins great. Instead, Lee chose Merrimon Cuninggim. Lee and Cuninggim began talking in December of 1950 about the possibility of Cuninggim becoming the dean. Cuninggim had the academic credentials as well as the preaching background that Lee felt was necessary to move Perkins forward. Cuninggim's list of academic achievements was very impressive. In 1931, he received a Bachelor's of Arts from Vanderbilt University. He followed this in 1933 with a

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<sup>6</sup> Melissa Kean, *Desegregating Private Higher Education in the South: Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2008), 1-2.

Master's of Arts in English from Duke University. His next two degrees came from Oxford where he received a B.A. in 1935 and a diploma in theology in 1936. These degrees came while studying at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar for three years. His final two degrees came from Yale in 1939 and 1941 respectively and included another Bachelor's Degree as well as a Ph.D. in religion and education. In addition to the degrees, Cuninggim was an ordained priest of the Methodist Church.<sup>7</sup>

Cuninggim's professional record was as impressive as his list of degrees. Prior to coming to SMU he had been director of religious activities at Duke from 1936 to 1938. He taught religion at Emory and Henry from 1941 to 1942 and at Dennison College from 1942 to 1944. In addition, Cuninggim served as a chaplain in the Navy while aboard the battleship *Tennessee* from 1944 to 1946. From 1946 to 1951 he taught at Pomona College in Claremont California. It was during this time that he also served as chaplain for the Associated Colleges of Claremont from 1948 to 1950.<sup>8</sup>

While Cuninggim's time as an ordained priest and a chaplain was important, it was his academic pedigree that caught Lee's eye. Lee was looking for someone who was an educator first that also had a religious background and Cuninggim fit this description very well. The previous deans at Perkins had been clergymen first and educators a distant second, but Cuninggim was the opposite and, thus, was the perfect person to change SMU's School of Theology into a nationally

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<sup>7</sup> Simon, "Breaking the Color Bar at SMU", 37. Grimes, *A History of Perkins School of Theology*, 92.

<sup>8</sup> Grimes, *A History of the Perkins School of Theology*, 92.

known entity. The school had new buildings and a new endowment, and Cuninggim could provide the leadership that would take Perkins to new heights. Cuninggim was hired in January of 1951, and started that summer.<sup>9</sup>

When Lee decided to hire Cuninggim as the dean of the Perkins School of Theology, Cuninggim was adamant that he would not take the position unless Lee allowed him to desegregate. In Cuninggim's own account of the meeting that he had with Lee prior to his hiring he recalls, "Among the many things I asked Lee, whom I had long known and admired, was this: How soon would the way be open for admitting Negroes into the regular student body?" Lee responded, "The way is open now. You can start working on it the day you come". This gave Cuninggim the assurance he wanted. Cuninggim took the position as dean of the Perkins School of Theology in the summer of 1951 and immediately began laying the groundwork for opening the school's doors to African American students.<sup>10</sup>

In order to fully understand the ramifications of Cuninggim's position on the issue of race, it would be appropriate to look at his upbringing. He was born in Dallas in 1911 and grew up in academia. Early in Merrimon's life his father, Jessie Lee Cuninggim, was a professor at what was then called SMU's School of Theology. In 1921 Jessie Lee became President of Scarritt College, a small Methodist

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<sup>9</sup> Grimes, *A History of the Perkins School of Theology*, 93.

<sup>10</sup> Cuninggim, *Perkins Led the Way*, 9. Merrimon Cuninggim, *Memorandum on the Negro Problem*, Perkins School of Theology, SMU, September 1, 1953, 1, found in Merrimon Cuninggim Papers, Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.

college in Nashville, Tennessee. It is here that the young Cuninggim was introduced to the idea that blacks deserved an equal chance at education. While president of the College, Jessie Lee Cuninggim worked with Fisk University in order to provide an opportunity for blacks to be trained at Scarritt. Merrimon Cuninggim recalls what his father had done at Scarritt, and it definitely helped shape his ideas for the future. It would be his modus operandi his entire academic career to help blacks get this equal chance as much as possible, and he carried this over with him as dean of Perkins. Cuninggim explained that "as a son of my father who had worked for better race relations all through his career at Scarritt and elsewhere I wanted no part of the job at Perkins unless the way was open for Negroes to be admitted to the school as regular students."<sup>11</sup>

African Americans started attending SMU as regular students in January of 1951. Since Cuninggim agreed not to take over the deanship until the summer of 1951, this occurred while Hawk was still dean. Two black men, ministerial students who graduated from Samuel Huston College in Austin and Jarvis Christian College in Hawkins, entered the theology school in early 1951. When this occurred, Perkins became the second voluntary postgraduate seminary desegregation in Texas. The first was Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, a small school

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 9, 30. Simon, "Breaking the Color Bar at SMU," 37. *Letter from Merrimon Cuninggim to Dr. Charles Braden, August 7, 1964, 1*, found in Merrimon Cuninggim Papers, Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.



with only 100 students, so breaking the color line at Perkins, "was more influential because of the size and prestige of SMU".<sup>12</sup>

Dean Eugene Hawk implemented a strict, straightforward interpretation of the board's November ruling in regards to what these few students could and could not do while studying at Perkins. Hawk felt that the students should be allowed to take classes at Perkins and nothing else. The black students were from Dallas, so they had no need to live in the dorm. That made the situation easier because Hawk would not have allowed it anyway. He wrote in a letter that, "They [the black students] do not eat in the dining hall nor occupy the dorms. The understanding with the Board of Trustees is that they will not share the living or eating facilities". When Lee was asked about his take on blacks being regular students, he spoke in vague terms. Lee was asked specifically about meals and rooms and he often replied, "that when and if Negro students were to be admitted, proper restrictions would be placed on their activities". When Lee discussed the matter with Cuninggim, his answer was different. Lee told Cuninggim on numerous occasions that he would support Cuninggim's promise to allow black students as regular students with no restrictions. Numerous Board members agreed with Hawk on the interpretation of the change in the bylaws. They left the board meeting in November believing, "the sole intention was to let the Negroes come and sit in the back of classrooms". The Board minutes from the meeting were entered on November 10, 1950 and included the

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<sup>12</sup> Simon, "Breaking the Color Bar at SMU," 37. Cuninggim, *Memorandum on the Negro Problem*, 1. "SMU Accepts Two Negroes in Theology", *Dallas Morning News*, January 9, 1951, 1.

statement that the administration would be "given power to act if, as and when it seemed timely and proper".<sup>13</sup>

The student reaction to the new members of the 1951 Perkins family was decidedly better than Hawk's. Marion McMillan was one of the first black students in 1951 and was described by his peers as "a kind of happy-go-lucky guy and easy to get along with". He had an outgoing personality and numerous white students enjoyed eating with him and spending time with his family at his home in Dallas. Despite McMillan's demeanor, his academics were not up to par. His career, along with that of the other two black students at Perkins, did not last past the first semester. This brought an end to the first experiment of black regular students at SMU.<sup>14</sup>

With the failed attempt at desegregation under Hawk, it would be up to Cuninggim to bring success to the endeavor. He was charged with creating a national name for the school and this included bringing in highly acclaimed faculty. Cuninggim started working on this goal as soon as he took over the dean's chair in the summer of 1951. When he brought on new faculty members Cuninggim made sure that they held similar views to his on the race question. This is seen in the hiring of Cuninggim's good friend Albert Outler, who was at the time a professor of theology at Yale. One of Cuninggim's selling points to Outler was that he could help him bring black students to Perkins. He told Outler, "As Southerners we'll have a great chance to work on desegregation; Lee says we can admit Negroes as regular students right

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 36-37.

<sup>14</sup> Simon, "Breaking the Color Bar at SMU", 37-38.

away". This was incentive enough to get Outler to leave Yale for SMU and the national reputation of Perkins was already taking shape.<sup>15</sup>

It is important to point out part of Cuninggim's statement to Outler as crucial to his understanding of desegregation at SMU. Cuninggim told Outler that Lee said they could admit blacks as regular students to the university. This took on a very different meaning for Cuninggim than it had for Hawk. Regular students could live where they wanted and take part in any activity that they pleased. This was what Cuninggim envisioned for the black students at Perkins. However, the Board as well as members of the Methodist Church did not necessarily see eye to eye with this interpretation. Leaders of the University, notably Hawk and benefactor J.J. Perkins, were not comfortable with giving black students full access to the school, and Cuninggim freely admitted had he known that was the case he would not have come to SMU and for that matter neither would Outler.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the setback of a failed experiment, Cuninggim was determined to make this happen by the fall of 1952. He made it his personal mission to do well in this undertaking and worked tirelessly to accomplish this goal. He wrote letters to Negro educators to inquire about their students' interest in SMU. He also visited a number of the "stronger" black colleges across the South to personally drum up support for Perkins in this regard. This effort worked as Cuninggim was able to attract five black students from three different denominations to SMU in the fall of 1952. They were each from

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<sup>15</sup> Cuninggim, *Perkins Led the Way*, 10. *Letter from Merrimon Cuninggim to Dr. Charles Braden*, August 7, 1964, 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* Cuninggim, *Memorandum on the Negro Problem*, 1.

different states: Arkansas, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas. He was proud of this accomplishment because it was not seen as tokenism. When most southern schools went through desegregation they found one suitable candidate to begin the process. But Cuninggim purposefully chose five young men with varying backgrounds to desegregate the Perkins School of Theology. They were John W. Elliot, James A. Hawkins, James V. Lyles, Negail R. Riley, and Cecil Williams. These five men would pave the way for a new beginning at Southern Methodist University.<sup>17</sup>

When the five black students started class at Perkins in the fall of 1952, Cuninggim made the decision to keep it quiet from the media. He insisted that there be no public announcement of the new students, and the university adhered to this idea. SMU wanted the process to go smoothly and quietly and this is exactly what happened in the public eye. Cuninggim claims that neither side wanted to get the story out. He referenced this in his pamphlet, *Perkins Led the Way*, when he wrote, "Those that would have stood in the doorway didn't want their fellows to know they had failed. And those of us who helped to open the door didn't want to shout, for self-protection, or timidity, or distaste for boasting. To have played Little Jack Horner would have been self-defeating". Desegregation at Perkins was allowed to go on without much outside interference because of the very quiet way in which it was implemented.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Cuninggim, *Perkins Led the Way*, 10.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

SMU was poised to start anew with the promise made in 1950 to bring in blacks as regular students in the fall of 1952. Just like when the board made the decision in November of 1950, SMU was years ahead of the other major private schools in the South in this regard in 1952. Nothing had changed since 1950 at Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt. The board members, as well as the presidents of each of these schools, stuck to their convictions that their schools would remain all white in the early 1950s and indeed into the foreseeable future. Even in the event that one, or more, of the presidents of these institutions wanted to push for change, they were not willing to do so as early as SMU. There were factors at each of these other private, southern schools that made desegregation too difficult of a policy to implement.

When Harvie Branscomb arrived at Vanderbilt in 1946 he was told, "no black man had ever been on the Vanderbilt campus except in a menial way". Branscomb was chancellor at the university from 1946 to 1963, and the attitude towards race relations did not change much in his time at Vanderbilt. Despite the fact that Branscomb did not personally like segregation, in Nashville, or on campus, there was not anything he could do about it because "changes in the practice of segregation could happen only slowly and only at the level of the exceptional Negro". Branscomb treaded with caution in his early years at Vanderbilt and he had a hard time reconciling what he wanted to do and what he could do at the school. He wanted to alter the racial policy at Vanderbilt, but it was going to be hard for him to get the Board of Trustees to accept that change. In the end the board won

out, and Vanderbilt kept the status quo throughout the early 1950s and remained an all-white segregated campus.<sup>19</sup>

Goodrich White at Emory University took a different path than Branscomb at Vanderbilt. White was President of Emory from 1942 until 1957, and Chancellor from 1957 until 1979, and he did not urge the board to take any measures towards the desegregation of the university until the early 1960s. More than anything, White feared the volatile nature of Georgia's racial politics and was concerned about a white backlash in the state if he tried to convince the Emory board to change its stance on segregation. Instead, White worked to expand opportunities for blacks within the confines of segregation. According to Melissa Kean, "Rather than attempt to break down the color line at Emory, White turned his attention to the improvement of Georgia's segregated institutions". While there were black workers, entertainers, and occasional speakers at Emory, the academic side of the school remained lily white and segregation thorough throughout the early 1950s as well.<sup>20</sup>

Duke University was similar to Emory and Vanderbilt in barring black students. One difference, however, was that Duke did make it possible for black researchers to work on campus. There were also some black staff members, all of whom were relegated to using

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<sup>19</sup> Kean, *Desegregating Private Higher Education in the South*, 16-18. Vanderbilt allowed one black student, a Reverend Johnson, to take graduate classes in religion in 1953, but only because the black schools in the area did not offer the courses he needed. It was not until the law school admitted its first black students in 1956 that the barriers truly began to fall at Vanderbilt.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 24, 29, 33. Emory's Board of Trustees voted to admit black students in November of 1961 and the first black student was admitted in the fall of 1962.

segregated facilities. The auditorium and football stadium had black sections as well. Duke Divinity students tried in 1948 to get the board of trustees to consider allowing blacks as day students to that specific division of the university. By the time Hollis Edens became president of Duke in 1949, the divinity students had circulated a petition to attract the attention of the board on this matter. In a brief letter to faculty members of the Divinity School, Edens wrote that, "I do not think that the interests of either the negro race or of Duke University will be served at this time by raising for discussion the question of admitting negroes to the Divinity School". The petition was never presented to the board in 1949, and it would be many years before the matter was brought up again. Duke, like Emory and Vanderbilt, would remain segregated for the time being, and the issue would not even be discussed with their prospective boards until much later.<sup>21</sup>

Rufus Harris, president of Tulane from 1937 until 1959, took much the same approach to the race question as Harvie Branscomb did at Vanderbilt. While Harris was personally offended by the treatment of blacks in a segregated society and saw the writing on the wall, he also felt that change had to be "realistic"—by which Harris meant slow and methodical. Harris even stated that "temperate and realistic leaders would remain in control of the progress down a slow path of improvement". The Board of Trustees at Tulane would manage the pace

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 37-41. Duke's Board of Trustees met in March of 1961, and voted to allow qualified black students to the graduate and professional programs of the University beginning in September of that year.

of change, and they were not willing to modify their policy on black students throughout the decade of the 1950s. The Tulane board comprised "a group of powerful, local men who prided themselves on not bending tradition for anyone".<sup>22</sup>

Arguably Rice University was the most recalcitrant of the southern private schools in regards to race relations. William Houston was the president of Rice from 1946 to 1961, and there was very little said, let alone done, about segregation during his reign. There is nothing from the Board meeting minutes or any other records at Rice that even mention racial matters before the late 1950s. In addition, the school's charter stated clearly that the Rice was for white students only. President Houston made this well known in 1948 when the *Thresher*, the school's student newspaper, began editorializing about the need to end segregation and base admissions on merit. In February of 1949 Houston sent a letter to the editor of the newspaper that stated very plainly, "I have concluded that some of THE THRESHER staff, as well as most of your correspondents, must be unaware of the provisions of the Rice Institute charter. The Rice Institute was founded and chartered specifically for white students". It was evident in this statement that this would not change anytime soon at Rice.<sup>23</sup>

It seems that while a few of these aforementioned presidents may have been willing to move forward, albeit slowly, with race relations

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 42-43, 48-49. Tulane admitted its first black student in the fall of 1963 after a battle in the courts forced the issue.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 54-55. Rice admitted its first black student in 1966, after a court-ordered change to tuition and the school's racial policy.



at their various institutions, it was their prospective Boards of Trustees that presented problems. Umphrey Lee did not have this problem at Southern Methodist University. The Board had already changed the bylaws to admit Negroes when the time came. There had initially been some resistance but Lee's proposal passed in the end. Lee knew that desegregation was coming and got out ahead of the problem. This by no means indicates that Lee was a visionary. His biographers called him a "committed gradualist" when it came to race relations. He did not, however, like the idea of being forced to desegregate by court order, so he made sure that SMU did so before this happened. Lee was a realist and when he saw that things were about to change he began pulling strings within the board to work towards a peaceful solution. This is the reason for the 1950 decision, and the subsequent admission of the five black men in the fall of 1952. There would be successes and failures with desegregation at Perkins between 1952 and 1955, and Merrimon Cuninggim would guide every decision. If there were to be more successes than failures it would be up to Cuninggim to achieve them.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Winfred T. Weiss and Charles S. Proctor, *Umphrey Lee: A Biography* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 176.

**Chapter Four**  
***The Continued Effort at Perkins: Merrimon Cuninggim and  
Desegregation***

Perkins was never the same after Merrimon Cuninggim came. He recast the mission of the school; and it was his vision, supported by Umphrey Lee, which brought the first African-Americans to SMU.<sup>1</sup>

If there was a visionary in the story of the desegregation of Perkins it was Merrimon Cuninggim. He set out in the fall of 1952 to keep his promise to John W. Elliot, James A. Hawkins, James V. Lyles, Negail R. Riley, and Cecil Williams that they would be regular students of the university now that they were enrolled at Perkins. He called them into his office on the first day of class to discuss what being regular students meant. Cuninggim recollected that the students had reservations about how the process was going to work, and he wanted to reassure them that they would have all the privileges of university life as regular students at SMU. He told them that, "regular students make their own decisions about where they go and what they do. So you will have that privilege too". Thus, Cuninggim began a series of conversations that he would have with the five black students during their time at Perkins, and it was the first assurance of many he would hold true to for the next three years.<sup>2</sup>

Later in the initial meeting with the five black students Cuninggim told them he would help them deal with any problems that would arise. He told the students that anytime something came up he

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<sup>1</sup>*The Dallas Morning News*, November 5, 1995, obituary by Joe Simmacher.

<sup>2</sup> Merrimon Cuninggim, *Perkins Led the Way: The Story of Desegregation at Southern Methodist University* (Dallas: Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, 1994), 11.

would tell them about it and sit down with them to discuss how to handle it. Cuninggim would give them his own personal advice on how to deal with each problem, but would respect their wishes when they made a decision. The final solution to issues on campus would be theirs and theirs alone. They talked with Cuninggim at length in this first meeting about what complications could arise and how they would deal with each situation when it did.<sup>3</sup>

The idea of letting the black students decide their own path at SMU was something that a lot of schools would not have been willing to do. Cuninggim was giving them a say in what went on in their lives. SMU was not bringing about desegregation by fiat or administrative rule. The Board did not step in and tell the five blacks what they could and maybe more importantly, what they couldn't do. Cuninggim truly wanted to help, and in the process in fact did treat the five men as regular students. It was a controversial move that would cause problems—as well as heartaches—for Cuninggim in the coming years. However, it was his conviction to do so and Cuninggim stuck to this as much as he possibly could while the five men were at Perkins. There were some tense moments where Elliot and the other four had to make difficult decisions that went against their personal beliefs. But Cuninggim was doing his part to keep his promise that they would be regular students of Southern Methodist University.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 11-12.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from James A. Hawkins to Merrimon Cuninggim, August 6, 1953; Letter from Negail R. Riley to Merrimon Cuninggim, October 14, 1955; Letter from James Lyles to Merrimon Cuninggim, October 20, 1955; Letter from Cecil Williams to Merrimon Cuninggim, October 22, 1955; Letter from John W. Elliot to Merrimon Cuninggim, October 26, 1955.

One of the first situations that Cuninggim discussed with the pioneers was what to do about eating on campus. He reassured them that there would not be any problem in the cafeteria at Perkins. However, this may not always be the case in other eating facilities on campus. He pointed out to them that if they were to go to the student union and try to eat that there was a possibility they would not be served. As a result, the black students agreed, at least for the time being, that the only place they would dine would be in the cafeteria at the school of theology. Cuninggim did not foresee problems in the Perkins cafeteria. The five black men disagreed. The kitchen staff was all black and did not take too kindly to "these uppity young-uns comin' in here and pretendin' to be regular students". Cuninggim personally went to talk to the kitchen staff and told them that they were in fact regular students and were the first in a long line to come.<sup>5</sup>

Another potential concern that came up in Cuninggim's first meeting with the five black students was the issue of their attending SMU's home football games at Cotton Bowl Stadium. Cuninggim approached the people at the stadium and raised the question. The Cotton Bowl representatives responded that the stadium had a Jim Crow law, but it would not be a big deal for the black SMU students to sit in the Negro section. Cuninggim then asked that since the blacks were regular students what would happen if they sat in the student section.

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All five letters were found in *Black Seminarians at Perkins: Then and Now*, Introduction by Harry S. Wright, Jr. (Dallas: Southern Methodist University, 1994).

<sup>5</sup>Cuninggim, *Perkins Led the Way*, 12.

The Cotton Bowl representatives responded that they would not do anything because "you can bet we don't want to raise the problem". The answer was sufficient for Cuninggim because he was certain that the problem would not be made public by either side. An important component to the success of the mutual discussion experiment was discretion, which became Cuninggim's mantra with the Perkins students. He was successful in getting things done for the new students, because he negotiated behind closed doors. After the Cotton Bowl reps gave the nod of approval, the SMU Athletic Department was contacted and responded very well to the situation. The athletic department set aside five tickets in the middle of the student section for the Perkins students, and did so without them having to enter a drawing for the seats like most students. The athletic department then set aside an additional twelve to fifteen seats around the black students so they could be surrounded by people sympathetic to their cause. The five students attended the first home game in the fall of 1952, and they were treated with respect and encountered no problems in Cotton Bowl Stadium the entire year.<sup>6</sup>

Seating was not the only thing the athletic department had to deal with in the fall of 1952 in regards to the new black students. Shortly after the fall term began, the question of whether they would play intramural sports was brought to the attention of intramural representatives of the athletic department. Originally, the black students were not the ones who brought up the issue. Rather, it was the white student responsible for putting together Perkins' intramural

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 14-15.

teams. This student (unnamed) took it upon himself to go to the SMU Athletic Department and demand that the black students be allowed to play intramurals immediately. An athletic department representative said they would have no problem with the black students playing, but advised the student to check with the faculty senate just to be certain. No one in the senate had a problem with allowing the blacks to participate in intramural sports, but they tabled the motion in order to discuss it with administration first. Word got back to Cuninggim, and he called the Intramural Director, Matty Bell, a close personal friend. Cuninggim told Bell that since the blacks were regular students they would be participating in intramurals. Cuninggim wanted to warn Bell so he could notify his umpires and referees in advance that black students would be participating in intramurals. Bell, who was also the athletic director, told Cuninggim that he was glad that "you're treating it normally; no point in making a big scene is there?". The matter was settled, and the black students participated in intramurals from the time they entered Perkins. Elliot and company decided not to take part in intramural football because of the physical contact associated with the sport. The five black men did play baseball, and there was one "incident" associated with the Perkins baseball team that could have caused a problem. One of the black students decided to play catcher, and in one game in the spring of 1953 there was a play at the plate. The black catcher blocked the plate, tagged the white runner, and he was called out. Nothing happened as a result, and Cuninggim wrote in a letter to Charles Braden that "as a result (of the play) there developed a

magnificent, interracial, healthy rhubarb". This proved that blacks and whites could get along, even when minimal physical contact occurred, without a racial dilemma occurring in the aftermath.<sup>7</sup>

Not all the decisions came as easily in that first meeting, or subsequent meetings, with Cuninggim. While the new theology students would have liked to do everything, just like other regular students, there were a few things they avoided in order to keep their problems to a minimum. One thing the black students avoided was swimming in the university pool. Negail Riley described the situation to Cuninggim in a letter he wrote in October of 1955, which was right after he had graduated from Perkins. Riley's assessment was that swimming in the pool would be a step back in the desegregation process. Family Swim Night at SMU was open to the public, and Riley et al. knew that this might cause a problem. Riley opined to Cuninggim that, "We saw very frankly into the nature of much of the prejudices of the whole area. To swim or not to swim was the question. The decision to swim would have been retrogressive, especially since Family Night was the program of the larger community that did not have a unanimous benignant attitude". Sacrifices, like not swimming in the university pool, were made so that desegregation as a whole could work. While Cuninggim may have steered Riley and the

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<sup>7</sup> Cuninggim, *Perkins Led the Way*, 17. Letter to Charles Braden from Merrimon Cuninggim, August 7, 1964, found in *Merrimon Cuninggim Papers*, Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.

others into this decision he let them decide, and they chose to do something for the betterment of the entire process.<sup>8</sup>

When decisions had to be made between Cuninggim and the black students, all six men discussed the issue, and generally came to an agreement about how to deal with the potential problem. There was one episode where the blacks and Cuninggim deviated from the consensus model. In March of 1955, the last semester for the five at Perkins, James Lyles and Cecil Williams decided to take part in an NAACP Youth Council protest against the segregated Melba Theatre in downtown Dallas. Cuninggim advised them not to get involved in the protest, because it would bring unwanted attention to what was happening at Perkins. Lyles and Williams did not listen, and participated despite Cuninggim's warning. Lyles recalled in an interview with William R. Simon years later that, "That was the closest we came to open conflict with Cuninggim. That was the only time we really stood our ground. We said we reserved the right to participate because we felt it would be a violation of our conscience not to do so". Even though Cuninggim did not like Lyles' and Williams' decision, he did not forbid them from participating. If the black students were truly allowed to make their own decisions, Cuninggim had to allow them to get involved in the protest if they wanted.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Letter from Negail R. Riley to Merrimon Cuninggim, October 14, 1955, found in *Black Seminarians at Perkins: Then and Now*.

<sup>9</sup> Simon, "Breaking Down the Color Bar at SMU", 42. Merrimon Cuninggim, "Integration in Professional Education: The Story of Perkins, Southern Methodist University", 113, reprinted from *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Philadelphia, March, 1956, found in *Merrimon Cuninggim Papers*, Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.



The mutual decision making process between Cuninggim and the five black students usually worked very well with little outside interference. There were a few instances when other university officials tried to step in and take over the process. The list included Umphrey Lee, Eugene Hawk (who had been made vice president after Cuninggim took over as dean of Perkins), and benefactors like Joe Perkins to name a few. Lee understood the process that Cuninggim had set up better than most, and gave his support to that technique as much as possible. However, Lee tried to "assist" Cuninggim in the decision making process in November of 1952. As aforementioned, the black students had agreed to only eat at the Perkins cafeteria. The only time one of the students strayed from eating at Perkins was on a Sunday when he was on campus (which was actually pretty rare as they had obligations with local churches in Dallas that usually kept them busy all day). The Perkins cafeteria was not open on Sundays, and one of the black students (which one was not mentioned), was invited by a white student to accompany him to a University dining hall. While in the dining hall, the two Perkins students sat down with a white undergraduate female that they were both acquainted with from a Methodist youth conference. The white girl had never ever eaten with a black person before, and she wrote home to her mother where she expressed her delight about the experience. She penned, "I had lunch today with a black student from Perkins, and it was a wonderful experience..." The mother was appalled at her daughter's "wonderful experience", and she contacted President Lee to discuss the matter. Lee sent word to Cuninggim that he had to tell the black students they

could not dine anywhere but the Perkins cafeteria. Cuninggim replied to Lee that he could not do so in good conscience because of his promise to the blacks that they were to be treated as regular students. The cafeteria incident caused tension between Lee and Cuninggim, and could very easily have led to Cuninggim's termination. Even so, Cuninggim did not back down.<sup>10</sup>

The tension led to a meeting between the President and the Dean. Lee was concerned because he had received some serious objections from the mothers involved. The mothers' objections threatened to put an end to the Perkins experiment, and Lee wanted Cuninggim to understand the ramifications. Cuninggim went into the meeting with the mindset that he would respect Lee's decision. If Lee decided to tell the black students they would not be able to eat anywhere but the Perkins cafeteria, then that would be the decision. Cuninggim simply said he would not do it because of his pact with the students. Both men asked the other questions about how things would go with the cafeteria situation. Lee wanted to know what the young men would decide, and Cuninggim wanted to know if Lee would uphold the black students' decision no matter what they chose. Both Lee and Cuninggim were satisfied with the answers they got in the meeting, but Cuninggim was particularly pleased with "knowing that Lee both approved of the method in principle and was willing to allow it to be used even in a most awkward circumstance". Lee was happy knowing that Cuninggim had assured him that more than likely the Perkins students would agree to eat only at the cafeteria in the theology school. When Cuninggim

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<sup>10</sup> Cuninggim, *Perkins Led the Way*, 15-16.

presented the problem to the black students, they "realized how silly it would be to let our experiment founder on some inconsequential liberty". They agreed to eat only at the Perkins cafeteria until the rest of the University was ready to fully accept them. Lee and Cuninggim both walked away from the meeting with the notion that the desegregation experiment would not be brought down by a minor issue.<sup>11</sup>

The aforementioned dining hall problem was important because it showed that Cuninggim and Lee were willing to talk out any potential problems. The situation did not always go so smoothly when other university officials got involved. The most volatile issue for the five black students was housing. When they arrived in the fall of 1952, four of the five were put in the dorms, and initially this did not cause a stir. However, by the spring several of the black students expressed interest in rooming with whites. No one forced integrated housing on the black students. Several of the black men had been asked by white classmates at Perkins to room with them. When word got to the Board of Trustees about the new arrangement, the members were not pleased. The Board felt they had not been asked for permission to allow the black students to be housed in the dorm. The Board certainly had not approved any of the five rooming with whites. When Lee went to the board in 1950 to get them to change the bylaws, the question of living quarters inevitably came up. When asked what he was going to do about rooms and meals Lee responded, "Oh, that won't be a problem". A handful of influential board members (none of them named) took Lee's comment to mean that blacks would not be allowed in

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

the dorms or room with whites. When the Board found out the living arrangements for the black students in 1953, they began to backtrack on what they had promised the black students. More specifically, the Board began speaking of what they had not promised. The members of the Board had agreed to admission and nothing more. They felt betrayed, because Lee and Cuninggim had gone behind their backs to allow the students in the dorm without permission. The matter had to be dealt with, and would be put to a vote in the upcoming board meeting in May of 1953.<sup>12</sup>

As the board meeting drew closer, the members that wanted the students removed from the dorm purposely kept Cuninggim out of the loop. Since he was not privy to the back channel dealings, Cuninggim was forced to use his own connections to resolve the matter in a way that was beneficial to the black students. Because Lee did not want a fight, he was caught in the middle. He could agree with the board and allow them to vote on the issue, but that decision would more than likely result in the black students' removal from the dorm. If Lee sided with the board it might even lead to expulsion for the black students. The other possibility for Lee was to continue to let Cuninggim proceed with the idea of mutual consultation, but that path would alienate the board.<sup>13</sup>

The opposition began to form behind closed doors, and included several of the conservative businessmen on the board. The decision to question Cuninggim's method was not done just by the board. Rather,

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid, 9, 19.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, 19.

the ringleader among those dissatisfied was former dean of Perkins, Eugene Hawk. While it had been several years since his removal as dean, Hawk still harbored bitter resentment that he had been removed without even being contacted. At first, Cuninggim did not know that Hawk was involved, but when he found out, Cuninggim surmised that Hawk was not mad at him per se, but at Lee because it was Lee that had gone behind Hawk's back and hired Cuninggim in the first place. The issue of the black students being in the dorm was the perfect opportunity for Hawk to embarrass Lee. After all, Lee had given a less than definitive answer to what the role of the new black students would be when he had the board change the bylaws in 1950.<sup>14</sup>

Hawk sought to use the dorm question to his advantage with the upcoming board meeting in May of 1953. He started to whisper to several of the board members that their authority had been usurped by Cuninggim and Lee. The situation quickly became an attack on Cuninggim, and by extension Lee. The Board did not like the fact that Cuninggim was making decisions for the black students without their consultation. Furthermore, Cuninggim could remove the students from the dorm, and the problem would be solved. However, the blacks wanted to live in the dorm, and Cuninggim felt they should have that choice whether the board approved the verdict or not. If the board made

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<sup>14</sup>Letter to Charles Braden from Merrimon Cuninggim, August 7, 1964, found in *Merrimon Cuninggim Papers*.

decisions by fiat, then there would be no point in the students conferring with Cuninggim when problems arose.<sup>15</sup>

Cuninggim began to worry that Hawk was going to get his way, and the board was going to rule to remove the black students from the dorm. Cuninggim could not let Hawk win, so he began conferring with his own group of friends on the board to figure out a solution. Cuninggim's cohorts included Bishop A. Frank Smith, chairman of the board, Bishop Paul Martin, chairman of the Board's Committee on the School of Theology, and Bishop William C. Martin, Resident Bishop in Dallas and President of the National Council of Churches. The School of Theology Committee decided to meet the night before the scheduled board meeting to solve the problem. In the meeting, Smith, Martin, and Martin tried to get Cuninggim to back down and place restrictions on the black students. Smith tried to at least convince Cuninggim that he should tell the black students they could not room with whites. When Cuninggim got home from the meeting, he told his wife that if Smith did not change his mind he would have to start looking for a new job. When the meeting was over, nothing had been decided. However, Smith called Cuninggim the next morning to arrange a meeting in his hotel room. When Cuninggim got to the meeting, Smith told him that the Committee would "handle the matter". Once the board met later that morning the issue was not even brought up. While this did not necessarily end the fight, things went on as they always had at

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<sup>15</sup> Cuninggim, *Perkins Led the Way*, 19-20. Letter to Charles Braden from Merrimon Cuninggim, August 7, 1964, found in *Merrimon Cuninggim Papers*.

Perkins. The black students stayed in the dorm, and continued on with their normal everyday activities.<sup>16</sup>

While many involved thought that the board's lack of action on the subject at the May board meeting was the end, it really was just the beginning. Hawk and others that wanted to see restrictions placed on the black students felt that the reason they had not gotten a response from the board was because they had failed to get the support of Joe Perkins, the main benefactor and namesake for the school of theology. The university could not afford to lose the money he gave. Hawk wrote a letter to Perkins in the summer of 1953 telling him about the situation at hand. Originally, no one told Cuninggim who sent the letter, but it was Mr. Perkins himself who eventually told Cuninggim that Hawk was behind the scheme. Once Perkins was notified, he began expressing his concern about the situation to the board. He sent a letter to William Martin on August 17, 1953 where he told Martin that this was a matter of "extreme importance and it should not be delayed any longer". Perkins also alluded to the fact that he may go elsewhere with his money if the present conflict was not resolved quickly. Perkins mentioned directly in his letter that, "My interest and zeal in SMU would suffer a very severe heart attack if this is not straightened up in the very near future". Perkins wrote a scathing letter to Cuninggim on August 27. He made it very clear to Cuninggim that he had become quite disturbed about the "Negro question in connection with the University". Perkins also made it clear that

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Cuninggim had overstepped his bounds, and that the board had never approved or authorized letting the black students into the dorm.<sup>17</sup>

The situation was compounded in the summer of 1953 by the fact that Cuninggim's main supporters were all indisposed by illness or travel. According to Cuninggim's personal account of the situation, "In the early summer of 1953 three things happened to help their cause, one to each person who they thought stood in their way". Lee had a debilitating heart attack that eventually caused him to step down as president. Bishop Smith's wife was deathly ill, and he had to stay close to her in Houston. Bishop Paul Martin was overseas on church business. Cuninggim was left to fend off the wolves by himself. Hawk especially felt that since Lee, Smith, and Martin were out of touch the time was ripe to strike. It was during the period where the aforementioned men were gone that Hawk sent his letter to Joe Perkins. If Perkins bought into Hawk's line of reasoning, it could ruin the university financially. Cuninggim did not know what to do, and told Charles Braden in a letter years later. Cuninggim quipped to Braden, "Though nobody wanted to buck Mr. Perkins, nobody wanted to tell me to get the Negroes out of the dormitory or to issue the order over my head."<sup>18</sup>

When University officials heard of Perkins' letter, they had to act. They tried two things to keep the situation under control.

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<sup>17</sup> Letter to Bishop William C. Martin from J.J. Perkins, August 17, 1953. Letter to Merrimon Cuninggim from J.J. Perkins, August 27, 1953. Both letters were found in the body of the letter from Cuninggim to Charles Braden, August 7, 1964 which was found in the *Merrimon Cuninggim Papers*, Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Cuninggim, *Perkins Led the Way*, 20.



First, they wanted to keep Joe Perkins calm so he would not press for board action before Paul Martin got back from his trip. If the board had acted before Martin got back, then the outcome probably would have been radically different. Secondly, university officials tried once again to get Cuninggim to remove the blacks from the dorm, and possibly even the school all together. Frank Smith sent an urgent letter to Mr. Perkins persuading him "to let this matter ride as is until the return of Bishop Paul Martin which will be late fall". The second request was not as easy to accomplish. Cuninggim, who was out of town on business, called the school and told university officials that under no circumstances should the black students be removed from the dorm and nothing was to be changed. Cuninggim had some time to think about the situation before he got back to SMU. Before he got back to Dallas, Cuninggim wrote his "Memorandum on the Negro Problem" where he outlined every step and precaution that had been taken since Lee had the bylaws changed in 1950.<sup>19</sup>

When Cuninggim got back to campus, he had meetings with several university officials, including one with Dr. Hosford and Willis Tate, who were jointly acting as president in Lee's absence. In each meeting, Cuninggim produced his newly written memorandum and read it to those present. Each time he read the memo, university officials came away convinced that Cuninggim's methods were working. During the meeting with Hosford and Tate, Cuninggim recollected that both men responded "Well, we are with you" after he read them the memo.

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<sup>19</sup>Letter to Charles Braden from Merrimon Cuninggim, August 7, 1964, found in *Merrimon Cuninggim Papers*.

Cuninggim was allowed by Bishop Smith to read his memorandum at the Faculty Pre-school conference in mid-September, and after reading it he gained the support of nearly all the faculty (most of which agreed with him anyway). Once Paul Martin got back to the United States, he had a meeting with Joe Perkins to try and convince him that based on Cuninggim's memorandum, things needed to move forward not backward. The meeting went well, and despite the fact that Perkins still was not completely comfortable with the situation he relented. More importantly, Perkins agreed to continue giving money to SMU. In the meeting Perkins asked Paul Martin directly if the matter was not settled amicably would it hurt the university. Martin replied that it would, and Perkins seemed to change his tune a bit. He told Martin, "That is the only consideration. The University must rise above any hurt feelings that can develop. The School of Theology is our first love". The image of Perkins, and SMU, needed to be protected and Perkins backed down. Perkins' wife, Lois, was present at the meeting and after hearing her husband speak on the subject she stated, "I don't agree with my husband on this particular matter. And if he had shared with me the letter from Dr. Hawk last summer, we would never have had any trouble". Lois Perkins was on the same page as Cuninggim. She was "indeed a heroine of the story" according to Cuninggim. Her social conscience as well as her work with various women's groups within the Methodist Church made her more aware of the plight of blacks particularly those at SMU. Mrs. Perkins stating that there would have not been a problem had she been consulted is an

oversimplification of the issue, but provides context on how delicate the situation was in the summer and fall of 1953.<sup>20</sup>

As the summer came to a close, Cuninggim had a meeting with Negail Riley, James Hawkins, Jim Lyles, and Cecil Williams. The meeting lasted hours, and was focused on the black students living in the dorm with whites. Eventually, they decided that it would be best for them not to room with white students for the time being. The four men sent a letter to Bill Berner, housing director at SMU, presumably at the end of the summer of 1953 stating that they would not room with white students that fall. But they stated, "In light of the situation, we regard our decision as a retreat; although we accept it, we realize that it is a compromise that should not have to be taken".<sup>21</sup>

Once the housing hurdle had been cleared, there were no other major incidents in regards to the five black men at Perkins. Before they left in 1955, a few other black men came to study at Perkins, and the process continued without much problem. All five graduated on time in the spring of 1955. Once again, the university chose not to publicize their graduation. There was not even a mention of the black students graduating in the University Commencement program. The five men did, however, receive much applause from the crowd as their names

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid. Norman Spellman, *Growing a Soul: The Story of A. Frank Smith* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University, 1979), 330. Howard Grimes, *A History of the Perkins School of Theology* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University, 1993), 115. Grimes was a professor of Christian Education at Perkins during the desegregation process and was good friends with both Cuninggim and the Perkins family.

<sup>21</sup> Letter to Bill Berner from Negail Riley, James Hawkins, Jim Lyles, Cecil Williams, date not listed. This letter was found in the body of Cuninggim's letter to Charles Braden, August 7, 1964, *Merrimon Cuninggim Papers*, Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.

were called. By 1955 they were participating in nearly every activity across campus, and it had been a good experience. According to Cuninggim, "It was almost altogether positive. The ready acceptance of the step by the overwhelming majority of students and faculty was patent for all to see. As the word got around the country, largely by the academic grapevine, it made SMU look good nationwide". This is not surprising, because it is why Umphrey Lee had taken a chance and hired Cuninggim in the first place.<sup>22</sup>

When the Perkins experiment came to an end, the first five black graduates expressed their gratitude to Cuninggim for giving them the power to decide their own futures at SMU. Several sent him letters while still at Perkins, while a couple sent them after they graduated. James A. Hawkins wrote Cuninggim a letter in August of 1953, right before the start of his second year, and summed this attitude up well. He wrote to Cuninggim, "The means of our keeping each other informed on problems that arose, sharing in the discussions, and eventually the solution of them proved to be one of the important steps we took last year". Hawkins was very appreciative that Cuninggim gave them a voice in the matter. He noted this in his letter by stating, "I must give you praise for letting us decide in the final analysis the steps we should follow. I, along with the others, am truly grateful to you for this". Riley, Lyles, Williams, and Elliot all made similar statements

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<sup>22</sup> Cuninggim, *Perkins Led the Way*, 27.

in letters to Cuninggim in October of 1955, the semester after they all graduated from Perkins.<sup>23</sup>

The desegregation of Southern Methodist University was handled quietly and without much problem. Desegregation started when Umphrey Lee decided to get the board of trustees at the school to change the bylaws to allow for blacks to come to SMU as regular students. The admission of blacks came to fruition under the leadership of Merrimon Cuninggim, as well as others like Lee, Bishop Frank Smith, and Bishop Paul Martin. SMU desegregated at a time when no other southern private school, let alone a Methodist school, was even thinking about the idea. While Lee and others played a role in breaking down SMU's racial barriers, Cuninggim is the one that deserves the lions' share of the credit. Cuninggim's obituary in the *Dallas Morning News* summed up his leadership at SMU noting, "Merrimon took over the leadership in a very shrewd way, of the desegregation of Perkins. He fought the battle with a real keen sense of Southern diplomacy". The quote sums up Cuninggim's importance to the school of theology, as well as the university as a whole. He made Perkins into a nationally known school, and raised the level of academics at SMU. In the process, he opened the door for African American students at SMU as well as other private institutions in the South. And he did so two years before *Brown*. SMU was not forced by court order to desegregate, and Merrimon

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<sup>23</sup>Letter from James A. Hawkins to Merrimon Cuninggim, August 6, 1953; Letter from Negail R. Riley to Merrimon Cuninggim, October 14, 1955; Letter from James Lyles to Merrimon Cuninggim, October 20, 1955; Letter from Cecil Williams to Merrimon Cuninggim, October 22, 1955; Letter from John W. Elliot to Merrimon Cuninggim, October 26, 1955.

Cuninggim can be seen as a visionary for his role in accomplishing that goal.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Cuninggim, *Perkins Led the Way*, 1.

**Chapter Five**  
***Forging On...Gradually: Desegregation at SMU after Perkins***

I explained to the trustees that I was assuming they expected me to deal with desegregation or integration and that unless I was instructed otherwise, I would deal with it at the pace I believed best. And so we moved quietly.<sup>1</sup>

When Willis Tate became president of Southern Methodist University in 1954, desegregation was already underway at the school. However, the Perkins School of Theology was the only department at SMU that had black students. One of his duties as president was to oversee the continued effort of desegregation of SMU's colleges and school. Tate's quotation above shows how he planned on forging ahead with the process of bringing more black students to the university. Like Cuninggim before him, Tate felt it was best to proceed quietly and deliberately. He did not feel that SMU should rush into any rash decisions and open all of its doors immediately. Tate preferred to follow the model of other schools in Texas, namely the University of Texas in Austin, in regards to further desegregation measures. By the time Tate became president in 1954, SMU's fervor for being a leader in desegregation had waned. The school was successful in breaking down one barrier, but it did not hurry to break down others. Full integration at SMU did not come until later, as it did at UT. While Texas admitted its first black graduate student in 1950, the first undergraduates were not admitted until 1956. Subsequently, Texas did not go beyond the academic programs until the 1960s. SMU did the

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Willis Tate by Gerald McGee, "On the Ups and Downs" in Johnnie Marie Grimes, *Willis Tate: Views and Interviews* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1978), 167.

same, and would also not have black students in all of its colleges until the 1960s.

While the spring of 1955 marked the end of SMU's first successful foray into desegregation, the "second step toward integration" was started then as well. When the Board of Trustees met that term, the members agreed to admit "qualified" Negro students to evening classes in the law school. By 1955, several schools in the Southwest Conference had black law students, including the University of Arkansas and the University of Texas, and SMU made the decision to join their ranks. The first black student was admitted to the Dedman School of Law in the fall of 1955. She was Mrs. Ruby Braden Curl, a teacher at Carver Elementary School. Curl was a 1944 graduate of Samuel Huston College in Austin, Texas with a degree in social science. Prior to entering SMU, Curl had been a teacher in the Dallas school system for nine years, with her last at Carver. Curl wanted to go to law school so she could use her legal training to work with juveniles. While Curl is in the 1956 SMU yearbook, the *Rotunda*, she does not appear in any subsequent yearbook. It seems that she only attended the law school for one year. Several other black students followed a similar path. Elmer Richard Medlock from Dallas was listed as a first year student in the 1957 *Rotunda*, but not was not in subsequent editions. Earldean V. Robbins, also from Dallas, appeared in the 1959 yearbook but also does not appear to have finished more than that first year. Curtis Pearson was listed as a second year student in the 1960 *Rotunda*, but has no mention the following year. The 1960 yearbook does provide some insight into what appears to be



the first black graduate. Richard A. Strecker was listed in the 1960 yearbook as a first year law student. Four years later his name appeared in the 1964 SMU commencement booklet having earned his bachelor's in law. Once he was added to the alumni directory the bachelor's had been changed to a J.D. of law as SMU had changed the title of the degree to coincide with other schools doing the same. Presumably he is the first black graduate of the Dedman School of Law at SMU.<sup>2</sup>

SMU now had two schools that were desegregated, the Dedman School of Law and the Perkins School of Theology. However, there were no plans, at least in the immediate future, to add any other departments to the list. In fact, Tate stated in the same article announcing the entrance of Mrs. Curl to the law school that he did not "know of any further plans for integration in any other schools of the university". The Board was scheduled to meet in November of 1955, but Tate was not sure if they would be discussing any future desegregation plans. Nothing changed as late as 1958, when SMU student president David Musslewhite told fellow delegates to the Student Conference on National Affairs that he saw no reason for SMU to integrate the

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<sup>2</sup> "SMU Accepts Negro for Law School: Qualified Applicants Will be Admitted in Evening Classes", *Dallas Morning News* July 17, 1955. "SMU Law School Grants Admission to Negro Student", *Dallas Morning News*, May 26, 1955, 3. 1956 *Rotunda*, SMU Yearbook, 490; 1957 *Rotunda*, 161; 1959 *Rotunda*, 307; 1960 *Rotunda*, 467. All yearbooks accessed at memories.smu.edu. Southern Methodist University, 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Convocation, Commencement Exercises and Conferring of Degrees, June 1, 1964, *Southern Methodist University Convocation and Commencement Records*, box 9 folder 3, Degolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas. SMU alumni directory, 744, the data company, 2005.

graduate school at the present time. Musslewhite was adamant that "there's no reason to integrate just for the sake of integration".<sup>3</sup>

Despite Musslewhite's statement in 1958 and the fact that SMU had only desegregated the law school and school of theology, the university was similar to numerous schools in Texas. According to Richard Morehead of the *Dallas Morning News*, thirty five schools in Texas had blacks by 1958. At least twelve additional institutions of higher learning had desegregation policies by that point, but did not have any black students. Several others, including Texas Christian University and Baylor University, were like SMU in that they had desegregated their graduate programs. However, none of the three major Protestant affiliated schools, SMU included, in Texas had opened the undergraduate doors to blacks in 1958. By 1959, three colleges in Dallas had black students. In addition to SMU, Southwestern Medical School of the University of Texas and the University of Dallas had black students enrolled in January of 1959. Most colleges in Texas had desegregated by 1960. Morehead notes that more than forty colleges and universities had black students in the state in the summer of 1960. The next step was to open the doors to black undergraduates.<sup>4</sup>

Even though Southern Methodist University had desegregated all of its graduate programs by the early 1960s, the undergraduate school was

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Richard Morehead, "College Students Favor Gradual Integration", *Dallas Morning News*, December 12, 1958.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Morehead, "35 Schools Lower Ban" *Dallas Morning News*, March 23, 1958. Richard Morehead, "Three Dallas Institutions Accepting Few Negroes", *Dallas Morning News*, January 7, 1959. Richard Morehead, "Integration Now the Rule in Most Colleges", *Dallas Morning News*, July 7, 1960.

still lily-white. Pressure started mounting, from inside and outside SMU, to get the school to break down yet another barrier. The campus held Ministers Week in February of 1961, and delegates were greeted with student appeals to bring in black students as undergraduates. The students also urged the participants of Ministers Week to persuade Methodist hospitals to provide equal treatment to black and white patients. The "protestors" displayed placards outside the entrance to McFarlin Auditorium (where the ministers were meeting), and distributed a mimeographed sheet signed "The Policy Committee". The same group was believed to be responsible for a sit-in at University Pharmacy prior to urging the ministers to further desegregate the campus. The only student to be identified specifically was Charles Merrill from the Perkins School of Theology. He noted that what the students did was not a demonstration, but rather, "It is primarily an appeal to the Methodist Church and its principles".<sup>5</sup>

In October of 1961, an unofficial poll of nearly one-fourth of the student body at SMU indicated that students favored the integration of the undergraduate level at the school. The following year, in May of 1962, the North Texas Methodist Conference urged the trustees of SMU to "integrate all its facilities as rapidly as possible". Delegates to the annual meeting unanimously adopted a resolution that called for the integration of all Methodist institutions in the area. The conference also agreed to assist schools financially that were encountering difficulties in moving

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<sup>5</sup> "Desegregation Appeals Greet Visitors at SMU", *Dallas Morning News*, February 9, 1961.

towards integration. SMU was now being asked to join the ranks of the University of Texas, Texas Tech University, and the University of Arkansas as the only schools in the Southwest Conference that allowed black undergraduates in 1962.<sup>6</sup>

SMU did join the aforementioned schools in the fall of 1962. The Board of Trustees took the poll into consideration during its next meeting, but did not make any official changes to university policy regarding desegregation. It seems the only decision needed on the matter was the one made by Umphrey Lee in 1950. With this being said, Paula Elaine Jones enrolled on Friday September 14, 1962 as a full-time undergraduate at the school. Miss Jones was the first black student to attend SMU on the undergraduate level, and she helped the university "complete the full desegregation of all educational facilities". Jones registered in the SMU coliseum with the other incoming freshmen, and she did so without incident. The university followed that same pattern when it brought in the first black students at Perkins in the early 1950s, as well as at the law school and other graduate programs. There is another way that Jones' entry into SMU followed a well-established model, and that is the fact that she was a great student. She attended the Harwood Girls School in Albuquerque, New Mexico where she was a "straight A" student that graduated with honors. All students admitted to SMU were held to a high academic standard according to President Tate. He stated to the *Dallas Morning*

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<sup>6</sup> "Desegregation Appeals Greet Visitors at SMU", *Dallas Morning News*, February 9, 1961. Jack Castleman, "SMU Urged to Integrate", *Dallas Morning News*, May 31, 1962. "SMU Enrolls Negro Girl as Freshman", *Dallas Morning News*, September 14, 1962.

News that "Every student granted admission to SMU is a person of high scholastic personal qualifications. This is the case of Miss Paula Jones". He went on to say, "Each student so admitted will meet extremely high standards of scholarship and character".<sup>7</sup>

The standard for African American students, especially ones that were considered the first in an area, were even higher. Schools like SMU were not going to risk their reputations on a less than extraordinary black student, because the student had to be able to withstand the pressures that came with being the first. Jones was one that could handle the burden, just like the first five had been able to do at Perkins. She came to SMU on a scholarship, and had been offered a similar scholarship by the University of Texas. By having a scholarship, and planning on chemistry as her major, Jones showed that she was ready for the academic and social rigor that would be expected of her at Southern Methodist University. Tate made this clear when speaking of Jones to the *Morning News*. She was president of her class in Albuquerque and is "intellectually and personally qualified to pursue her studies in this university", Tate told reporters. Jones graduated from SMU in 1966 with a degree in speech pathology and audiology, and she became active in several clubs during her tenure at the university as well.<sup>8</sup>

Even though SMU had desegregated all of its schools by 1962, the gap between the first and the last was eleven years. Southern

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<sup>7</sup> "SMU Enrolls Negro Girl as Freshman" *Dallas Morning News*, September 14, 1962, 19 and 21. "Negro Girl Enrolls as Freshman" *Dallas Morning News*, September 15, 1962.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. SMU *Rotunda*, student yearbook 1966, 75.

Methodist University had been before its time in 1950/1951 by opening the Perkins School of Theology to blacks. When Paula Jones came to SMU in 1962, the school was simply following the protocol set by other universities in the Southwest Conference, namely the University of Arkansas and the University of Texas. Silas Hunt came to the University of Arkansas in 1948, and was considered the first black student in the law school. In August of 1955, Arkansas Attorney General Tom Gentry made it clear that the state's flagship institution would have to open its doors to black undergraduates. Gentry's motivation for doing so came on the heels of the second *Brown* decision in May of 1955 which called for schools to desegregate with "all deliberate speed". With Gentry's prodding, the University of Arkansas allowed black undergraduates to matriculate at the school starting that fall. However, by the fall of 1956, there were only eight black undergraduates at the University of Arkansas. More importantly, Arkansas had waited eight years to complete the desegregation of all of its educational units. The University of Texas was only slightly quicker to adhere to *Brown*. A week after *Brown II* was handed down, University of Texas President Logan Wilson announced that the Board of Regents would meet on July 8, 1955 to "define the path the University will follow on undergraduate integration". During the July 8<sup>th</sup> meeting, The University of Texas Board of Regents announced that the school would now accept black undergraduates. While Arkansas had taken eight years, Texas took six. Heman Sweatt was admitted to the University of Texas Law School in 1950, and black undergrads were admitted to UT in the fall of 1956. SMU took a bit longer than

Arkansas and Texas to bring in its first black undergraduate to campus. The school was no longer a leader in desegregation. Rather, SMU was now a follower, simply doing the same thing the two power schools of the conference had done in previous years.<sup>9</sup>

While SMU may not have been a leader in undergraduate desegregation as compared to the public schools of the SWC, it was still one of the first to open its doors to black undergraduates among the major private schools in the South. Emory University did not admit its first black graduate student until the fall of 1962. Tulane's first black graduate student was in the spring of 1963, and Rice University's was not until 1965. The Board of Trustees at Duke University decided in November of 1962 to admit black students to the undergraduate level. Vanderbilt University changed its policy on the admission of black undergrads in the spring of 1962 placing it at best on par with SMU with regards to a desegregation timeline. None of the major private institutions in the South had black undergraduates before SMU. Therefore, when compare SMU to its private counterparts, it was still a leader on the desegregation front.<sup>10</sup>

Now that all the educational programs were desegregated at SMU, it was time for the school to move on to other areas in the process. While SMU desegregated the undergraduate program in 1962, there were

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Robinson and Lonnie Williams, *Remembrances in Black: Personal Perspectives of the African American Experience at the University of Arkansas, 19402-2000s* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2010), 16-17. Dwonna Goldstone, *In the Shadow of the South: The Untold Story of Racial Integration at the University of Texas at Austin*, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Texas, 2001, 74, 75, 84.

<sup>10</sup> Melissa Kean, *At a Most Uncomfortable Speed: The Desegregation of the South's Private Universities, 1945-1964*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Rice University, 2000, 343, 361, 387, 410, 433.

no black athletes, faculty members, or student organizations. SMU made the first step in that direction in December of 1964. President Tate announced a new program that would bring in twenty five students from Bishop College, an all-black undergraduate institution in Dallas, starting in January 1965. The black students were to take classes at SMU that were not offered at Bishop. Tate called the new phase a "revolutionary pilot program between a white and a Negro institution". Tate felt it necessary to bring in the black Bishop students to encourage them to stay in Dallas for graduate school rather than going north for higher degrees. The Bishop students were each slated to take one 3-hour course and attend class three times a week for one hour. While they were not SMU undergraduate students, the university was pushing to further integrate the campus.<sup>11</sup>

Another racial barrier fell at SMU in 1965 when William S. Willis Jr. became the first black faculty member. Willis had attended Howard University as an undergraduate, and eventually obtained his Ph.D. from Columbia University in anthropology in 1955. Despite having a doctorate from a prestigious university, Willis' job opportunities in academia were not great. As late as 1964 Willis had not found a permanent teaching job, so he moved to Dallas hoping to find a position. Willis was given a position in the Sociology and Anthropology Department at SMU. However, the appointment was not solely at SMU. Rather, two-thirds of his time would be spent there, and the other third would be at Bishop College on the other side of

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<sup>11</sup> Carlos Conde, "Negroes to Study at SMU", *Dallas Morning News*, December 18, 1964.



town. Willis would have joint teaching duties at both schools. The job was incredibly taxing with lots of time spent traveling, conflicting class schedules, and meetings at both schools that kept Willis beyond busy.<sup>12</sup>

Willis' joint position at SMU and Bishop College quickly became more than he could handle, to the point that he only stayed with the job for one year. By the fall of 1966, Willis had given up the Bishop position, and only taught part-time as an assistant professor at SMU. In the fall of 1967, he became a full-time assistant professor, and was promoted to associate professor with tenure in May of 1968. Despite the taxing nature of his schedule, Willis felt that he and his wife's "efforts to integrate had been successful to a large extent". The feeling of acceptance did not last long though. He became disillusioned by the fact that he had the largest course load, and was the lowest paid faculty member in the department. Willis became increasingly more militant in his belief that he was mistreated by the Department of Anthropology, and that African Americans in general were not given their due in anthropological circles. Also, white faculty members began causing Willis problems with overtly racist jokes and comments. By the spring of 1972, Willis had had enough and resigned from Southern Methodist University. He sent a letter to Tate, who by that time was chancellor, notifying him that he was leaving his

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<sup>12</sup> Peggy Reeves Sunday, "Skeletons in the Anthropological Closet: The Life and Work of William S. Willis Jr.", in *African American Pioneers in Anthropology* edited by Ira E. Harrison and Faye V. Harrison (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 247-248, 252.

position at SMU. Willis was not happy about his decision, but felt it was necessary for his own peace of mind.<sup>13</sup>

One of the most controversial racial walls also came down in 1965 at SMU. In the summer the football team signed "a wizard athlete from Beaumont Herbert named Jerry LeVias". When LeVias signed with the Mustangs, he became the first black athlete to receive a scholarship from a school in the SWC. The football program was the most visible part of a university, and many were not ready for LeVias to break the sanctity of the gridiron in the SWC. However, he did sign with the Mustangs despite having 92 offers coming out of high school. Even though there were times LeVias wanted to quit, he never reneged on his word to SMU, and he went on to have one of the most illustrious careers in the history of SMU football.<sup>14</sup>

The story of LeVias coming to SMU did not actually start in 1965. Rather, it began with the hiring of Hayden Fry as the new football coach in 1962. At the time, Fry was an assistant coach under Frank Broyles at the University of Arkansas. When SMU contacted Fry, he made it very clear that he was not interested in taking the job in Dallas if they would not allow him to recruit black players. SMU officials told Fry in his first meeting that no school in the SWC had an integrated athletic program, and they were not going to be the first. Fry told SMU in that case he was going to stay at Arkansas, and the meeting ended. Fry was not surprised by SMU's stance, but he was a little disappointed. A few days after the initial meeting, SMU

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 252-257.

<sup>14</sup> Temple Pouncey, *Mustang Mania: SMU Football* (Huntsville, Alabama: Stroud Publishers, 1981), 200, 202.

called Fry a second time and asked if he was still interested in the job. He said if they would let him bring in black players then yes, and SMU once again dodged the subject and told Fry they would get back to him. Not long after, Fry got a third call from the university and they told him that he could recruit one or two black players "with the understanding that they would not only be good players, but also good students and fine citizens". The school told Fry that he would have to screen potential black athletes very heavily, and that the process could take time, even a year or two. Assistant Athletic Director Lester Jordan spoke for the department when he said at the time of Fry's hiring, "We had to be very careful. We wanted to get a man from a cultured background with good scholastic standing". Fry said he understood and took the job as the head football coach of Southern Methodist University in 1962.<sup>15</sup>

Fry's steadfastness on desegregating the SMU football team had its sources early in his life. He grew up in Odessa, Texas which was a town with a great mixture of races, nationalities, and religious backgrounds. Fry had numerous black and Hispanic friends growing up, and he was disturbed by the way they were treated. He did not like the fact that his friends had to sit in the balcony of the movie theater, or that they had to ride in the back of the bus to name a

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<sup>15</sup> Hayden Fry with George Wine, *Hayden Fry: A High Porch Picnic* (Champaign, Illinois: Sports Publishing Inc., 1999), 67, 68. Andrew Boyer, "LeVias Crosses Goal for Ponies, Civil Rightists: SMU Cheers Integration Symbol", from the *Washington Post* and reprinted in the *Daily Campus*, October 18, 1966, 4. The quote from Lester Jordan appears to be the only direct statement at the time from the Athletic Department and can be assumed to echo the sentiment of the Athletic Director Matty Bell as well others in the department at SMU.

few. When Fry reached high school, he was not pleased that his black friends had to play football at a different part of the city. He made a commitment that if he were ever in a position to change the racial make-up of a football team, he would do so. SMU offered him that chance, albeit grudgingly. He would now be able to test the promise he had made to himself in his school days.<sup>16</sup>

Once Fry took the job at SMU, he began the process of finding the right black athlete to break the color barrier in the SWC. He and his staff "quietly started to survey some of the black high schools of Texas, looking at their top players". Fry was not concerned with how long the search might take. Rather, he wanted to make sure they found the right fit for SMU. The more Fry searched, the more he became enamored of Jerry LeVias. LeVias was not big, only 5-8 and 160 pounds, but he was as Fry put it "a great athlete, an exceptional student, mentally tough, and came from a strong family". LeVias' parents and grandparents instilled in him strong moral and religious values, so much so that he carried a Bible in his pocket. Because of his religious devotion, LeVias had been taught not to hate, and that all people were children of God who had been put on earth for a reason. LeVias had never been in trouble on the field or, more importantly, off the gridiron. LeVias was perfect for Fry and SMU. He was exactly what the school, and the coach, were looking for to help bring black athletes into the SWC.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Fry, *High Porch Picnic*, 69. *Jerry LeVias: A Marked Man*, video documentary on Fox Sports Southwest, February 12, 2010.

Hayden Fry searched for two years to find a person the caliber of Jerry LeVias, both on and off the field, to be the first black football player at SMU. But finding him was only part of the battle. Now Fry had to convince LeVias to actually take on the burden of being a trailblazer and sign with SMU. As noted, LeVias was highly recruited out of high school with over 90 college offers, and SMU was the only one to express interest in LeVias that was a predominantly white school with no black athletes. Winning over LeVias would not be an easy task, as there were recruiters sending him letters and making phone calls as early as his sophomore year. LeVias had also made several trips to the University of California at Los Angeles, and essentially was ready to commit when Fry and an assistant coach named Chuck Curtis showed up in Beaumont. When Fry visited with LeVias, he took a very different approach than most coaches. Fry didn't talk much about football with LeVias, or tell him how important he would be to the Mustang program. Rather, Fry told LeVias that he would get a top-rated education from SMU. He talked about the academic prowess of the school, and LeVias came away impressed with Fry's tactics. LeVias said it was the first time that a coach spent so much time talking about education, and "Coach Fry showed an interest in me as a person". Not only did Fry make an impact on LeVias, he had an effect on Jerry's grandmother as well. When she met Fry she told Jerry, "There's something Godly about that man". Fry left Beaumont with a commitment from LeVias, and the process to bring in the first black football player to the SWC was underway.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

When LeVias made his way to Dallas in the fall of 1965 as a freshman, he entered a new world. According to his uncle, Joe Sasser, LeVias experienced culture shock in Dallas. His environment in Beaumont was nearly 100% black, and now he was thrown into almost the complete opposite. SMU was not completely lily-white in 1965, but it was far from being totally integrated. In his first year at SMU, LeVias experienced some minor trouble with whites on campus. Abner Haynes, the first black athlete to play college football in Texas at North Texas State, knew LeVias would have at least some problems. He stated in a Fox Sports Southwest documentary that, "I can assure you being black in Dallas at the time he was going to SMU he could not avoid headaches". Early on, Jerry's father was not too happy with him going to Dallas. He told Fry, "There was too much prejudice...They had just killed the president, and I didn't want them to kill him too". LeVias recalls numerous times where he had small run-ins with his white counterparts on campus. White students did not want to sit next to him in class. LeVias said that tardiness to class was cut down significantly by his presence, because students that were late had to sit by him, and they did not want to do so. The professors were better in that they supported him, but early on in his SMU academic career the students did not want anything to do with him. One time when LeVias was in a Nature Of Man course, a white student raised his hand and asked the professor point blank was it true that "coloreds' brains are smaller than that of whites." The teacher proceeded to chastise the student, and posed to him a scenario where a black child would be given all the advantages in life over a white child. She

then asked the student which one would be more educated. Once the white student had been dressed down, LeVias felt somewhat more comfortable in that particular class. One of the worst things to happen to LeVias while he was a freshman was that he had a white roommate whose mother protested her son living with a black person. The white student was removed at the mother's request, and LeVias lived by himself. While he liked having a larger room to himself, the incident had an impact and was one LeVias never forgot. As LeVias' freshman year continued, he recalled other times where white students acted in similar fashion.<sup>19</sup>

The problems that LeVias faced during his freshman year were not limited to the general student population. Some of his teammates and a few coaches opposed his presence as well. LeVias remembers being spit on in practice his freshman year. He recalls that several assistants did not want to tape him up. The head trainer, Eddie Lane, was the only one who would help Jerry with his injuries when he first started with the football program. LeVias was frequently injured his freshman year due in no small part to his own teammates. Lane kept the infirmary open late because he knew Jerry would be the last one there, and Lane would help him with his injuries. When LeVias would enter the shower all of his teammates would leave, and he was the last one in the locker room. At team meals Jerry would sit down at a table, and everyone there would get up even if they were not finished eating.

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<sup>19</sup> *Jerry LeVias: A Marked Man*, Fox Sports Southwest. Phone interview with Jerry LeVias Feb. 22, 2010. Richard Pennington, *Breaking the Ice: The Racial Integration of Southwest Conference Football* (London: McFarland and Co. Inc. Publishers, 1987), 83.

None of his teammates invited him to social gatherings, or even out to eat a hamburger after a game. LeVias did not find solace outside the team either because there were very few blacks at SMU in 1965. Fry told Jerry from the start that "there were very few blacks there at the time and that his social life might be hindered". In other words, SMU was a lonely environment for LeVias, even among his so called teammates.<sup>20</sup>

LeVias did not encounter much trouble during his freshman year, because he was not really in the public eye except on campus. Freshmen were not allowed to play on the varsity football team in 1965, so LeVias was not on the field for thousands to ridicule. AS a sophomore LeVias was a focal point of the Mustangs' offense; therefore he became the subject of criticism and hatred. Having a black athlete on the football team as a freshman was one thing. When that black player became a big part of the program, like LeVias did in 1966, the racial incidents became increasingly more likely. According to Temple Pouncey, author of *Mustang Mania: SMU Football*, LeVias only took part in 66 plays his sophomore year in 1966, but he "accomplished more than any other player in the Southwest Conference". As LeVias became a bigger part of the offense, the hate mail and threats poured in even more. LeVias noted that "when I started making a difference in the Southern Methodist University football program and we started winning, that's when people started writing hate letters, hate mail, and phone calls". Harold Jeske, a member of the SMU Athletic Committee from 1966 to 1974, said that there was so much hate mail that came in

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



during that period that the athletic department had a person whose only job was to sort through Jerry's mail.<sup>21</sup>

The hate mail was only part of the ordeal for LeVias. Once he started seeing significant playing time for the Mustangs, there were incidents both on and off the field that were cause for concern. He recalls playing Texas in 1966 where the Longhorns fans and players gave him a hard time during warm-ups. The fans were catcalling, insulting him, and people in the stands were even holding up ropes like nooses. The players spit on him and talked about his parents. Afterwards, Texas' quarterback Bill Bradley went up to LeVias and apologized for his teammates, and Bradley and LeVias remained friends for years after the game. Similar incidents occurred when SMU played Texas A&M that same year. The corps cadets blocked the Mustangs' bus on the way to the stadium, and the players had to walk half a mile to the dressing room. When they came out for the pre-game, someone released a number of black cats on to the field. During the game, Jerry was tackled by a white player from the other team who spit in his face and called him names. LeVias was furious when he reached the sidelines. He threw his helmet, and sat down on the bench away from his teammates. Fry came over to console him, and told him to forget about the game. Not long after the Aggies had to punt, and LeVias told Fry he was going to return the punt for a touchdown. Jerry went out to receive the punt, and he returned it 86 yards for a touchdown. LeVias did not lash out at the player who spit on him. Rather, he

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<sup>21</sup> Pouncey, *Mustang Mania*, 210. *Jerry LeVias: A Marked Man*, Fox Sports Southwest.

struck back the best way he knew how—on the field. The punt returned for a touchdown helped the Mustangs win the game.<sup>22</sup>

The most serious problem in 1966 occurred when SMU played Texas Christian University. Fry had LeVias work out in the locker room, and Jerry thought it was because he was the best player and was receiving star treatment. Just before the game started Fry pulled LeVias aside and told him there had been a threat on his life. Someone had sent word to Fry that there was a sniper in the stands who was going to shoot LeVias. He stayed in the middle of the huddle throughout the game, and ran to the sidelines as fast as he could. Anytime LeVias came near the TCU bench, the coaches moved away out of fear. In the end nothing happened, but Fry and LeVias had to treat the threat as if it were real.<sup>23</sup>

The hate mail, threats, and physical contact took its toll on LeVias, to the point that he thought seriously about leaving SMU during his sophomore year. He told his sister, Charlena, that he was fed up with the abuse, and was going to leave because he could not take it anymore. Charlena told him that their father always told them that if they make their bed hard they have to sleep in it. In other words, Jerry had chosen SMU and had to stick to that commitment. Fry also told LeVias that he is "the symbol of his race and if he quit he will handicap the program for other people". LeVias stayed at SMU,

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<sup>22</sup> *Jerry LeVias: A Marked Man*, Fox Sports Southwest.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

and went on to have one of the most illustrious careers in Mustang history.<sup>24</sup>

LeVias was not the only person at SMU who caught flack for his being on the football team in the late 1960s. Fry was constantly criticized for his recruitment of black players. According to LeVias, there was a gentleman's agreement in the SWC not to recruit black athletes. When he was brought to SMU, the other conference coaches were not pleased with Fry for breaking the unwritten code. Once LeVias left SMU the Mustangs did not win as much, and administrators used the fact that Fry was going to recruit too many blacks as an excuse to get rid of him. Fry was fired in 1972, and LeVias believes one of the main reasons was because Fry had been the first to break the color line in SWC football. Journalists who wrote glowing reports about LeVias' play on the field were the subject of scorn as well. *Dallas Morning News* reporter Sam Blair said the first time he wrote about LeVias' dazzling play against Navy in the Cotton Bowl, he received anonymous threatening phone calls the next day. So, LeVias' time at SMU was not just detrimental to his own wellbeing, but to others as well.<sup>25</sup>

LeVias, Fry, and the journalists who praised his efforts on the field appear to be the only ones who received any ridicule and scorn during his playing days at SMU. LeVias was the Southwest Conference's first black scholarship athlete in football. The football program was

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. "LeVias Makes Clutch Plays Despite Abuse" *Dallas Morning News*, November 20, 1966.

<sup>25</sup> *Jerry LeVias: A Marked Man*, Fox Sports Southwest. Phone interview with Jerry LeVias.

a source of pride for SMU, Dallas, and numerous people of East Texas. People came by the thousands to cheer on the Mustangs each week, and the shock of having to do so for a black player was something they simply were not ready for. SMU was like most southern universities in that the football program was one of, if not the last, area of the school to desegregate. This was mainly due to the nature of the sport and the physicality involved. The possibility of physical contact between whites and blacks was a major factor in keeping the races segregated, and this was extended to the gridiron. If black players were kept off the field, and off the team, the "sanctity" of one of the last all-white areas of a university could be maintained. Since LeVias, "violated" that principle, he was the subject of verbal and physical abuse, death threats, and hate mail. There were other black students at SMU during LeVias' tenure with the Mustangs, but they do not recall having been threatened in the same manner. Anga Sanders, a freshman at SMU during LeVias' sophomore year in 1966 noted, "I'd have to say that our tenure was characterized more by benign neglect than anything else. We were an invisible minority, and little if any thought was given to our feelings about or response to things that were simply accepted at SMU". The invisible minority she was referring to were black students who were not involved with sports teams. She never received any of the ridicule that aimed at LeVias, nor did she recall any other black student mentioning threats like made against LeVias. The main reason was because she, nor other black

students, were never put on as visible a stage as the football team while at SMU.<sup>26</sup>

Jerry LeVias' senior year at Southern Methodist University was his most productive as a Mustang. He led the nation with 80 receptions, was named All-Southwest Conference, and All-American for his play on the field. Off the field, LeVias was named an Academic All-American. At the end of Jerry's senior year, Fry noted that it had been very successful. He stated, "the Jerry LeVias era was over at SMU and integration of the SWC was a success. We had certainly chosen the right person to integrate the conference". As a player LeVias had never missed a game, and he very rarely missed class. LeVias graduated from SMU in the spring of 1969 with honors, near the top of his class. By the time he left the program, SMU had several other black players on the team that would follow in LeVias' footsteps. Rufus Cormier and Walter Haynes arrived in Dallas during Jerry's sophomore year, and both went on to have illustrious careers in their own rights as members of the Mustang football program. The visible racism was gone from the football field once Cormier and Haynes started playing for the Mustangs. Cormier does not recall having any incidents of hatred directed toward him on the gridiron like LeVias. Cormier did not receive death threats, nor have players try to physically hurt him more than was standard in regular game play. By the time LeVias graduated, and Cormier and Haynes were

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<sup>26</sup> Anga Sanders, Personal Email Correspondence, January 10, 2013.

juniors, one of the most visible part of SMU had several black players on the football team, and others soon followed.<sup>27</sup>

When SMU signed Jerry LeVias in 1965, it was the first school in the Southwest Conference to successfully recruit and sign a black football player. Whereas SMU had followed the University of Texas and the University of Arkansas in regards undergraduate desegregation, it was once again the leader on the subject when it came to football. None of the coaches in the conference wanted to be the first to open its program to black players until Fry came to SMU. Baylor Coach John Bridgers echoed the sentiment of all the coaches in the SWC when he stated, "There was no policy, not at all. It was just a reluctance among the coaches to be the first to go out and recruit a black athlete". Fry recalled that he heard numerous head and assistant coaches at the SWC meetings every year say they would never have a black player on their team. It was not until November of 1963 that the Board of Regents at Texas even allowed black athletes to be recruited to Austin. Arkansas complied with the Texas ruling of 1963 to bring in black athletes. However, neither program started with football. In fact, football was the last sport desegregated at both of the power schools of the SWC. No coach at Texas had ever recruited a black player as late as 1967 when Jerry LeVias was in his junior year at SMU. The Longhorns' first varsity black football player was Julius Whittier, and the Razorbacks first was Jon Richardson. Both were freshmen in 1969, and did not play their first varsity games until

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<sup>27</sup> *Jerry LeVias: A Marked Man*, Fox Sports Southwest. Fry, *A High Porch Picnic*, 82. Rufus Cormier Phone Interview, August 17, 2012.

1970. The pair became the "last first black players in the SWC". By that time, Cormier and Haynes were seniors at SMU and LeVias had graduated the previous year. Football provided a forum for SMU to take the lead on the desegregation front once again, at least in the Southwest Conference.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the fact that Jerry LeVias was the first black football player at SMU, he never considered himself a pioneer. According to Richard Pennington, "LeVias insisted that he didn't choose SMU to make any racial statement, but to get an education and to play football". LeVias made the same point personally in phone conversation when he stated, "We never talked about being a pioneer and I think if we had talked about it I wouldn't have gone to SMU". When Fry recruited LeVias he talked to Jerry about academics at SMU and a little about football. He was adamant that LeVias would get a good education from SMU, and that convinced him to sign as much as anything. The fact is, however, that despite his reluctance, LeVias was a pioneer and opened the door for many black athletes to follow at SMU and the Southwest Conference.<sup>29</sup>

Football was not the last racial barrier to fall at SMU. There were no black fraternities and sororities on campus until the mid-1970s, so black students did not have an important social outlet

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<sup>28</sup> Dwonna Goldstone, *Integrating the 40 Acres: The Fifty Year Struggle for Racial Equality at the University of Texas* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 126, 131. Gordon Morgan, *The Edge of Campus: A Journal of the Black Experience at the University of Arkansas* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1990), 155-156. Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 15-16, 114.

<sup>29</sup> Phone interview with Jerry LeVias, February 22, 2010. Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 83.

available to them at SMU. Phi Beta Sigma was the first black sorority at SMU and was chartered in 1974. Not long after, the Alpha Xi Omega chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. was established at the university. Sophomore Rickie Clinton was the first female inducted into the sorority in the spring of 1975. By the fall, several other female students expressed interest in being a part of the historically black sorority. They created an interest group called The Vine Sisters, and were initiated in March of 1976 when the sorority became an official part of SMU. A few months later, in May of 1976, the Nu Iota chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. was started by nine women on campus. Dubbed the "Divine Nine", they started a "legacy of unparalleled community service" at SMU. In 1977 the Nu Kappa Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Incorporated was started on campus by six male black students. A charter was granted in November of 1977, and it was an immediate success despite the fact that there were only 175 black students at SMU in 1977. The chapter went dormant in the mid-1980s but was brought back in the early 2000s.<sup>30</sup>

Student government and politics was one of the last avenues closed to blacks at SMU. As late as 1978, there had never been a black student government president. That changed in the spring of 1978 when the top two offices in student government went to black men. David Huntley, a write-in candidate endorsed by the *Daily Campus* newspaper, defeated Beverly Bell 1,109 to 891 in a run-off for student body president. Huntley originally ran as a candidate for the advisory

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<sup>30</sup> [smu.edu/fsl/fraternities](http://smu.edu/fsl/fraternities). [smu.edu/fsl/sororities](http://smu.edu/fsl/sororities). Both accessed on August 7, 2012.



board to the vice president of student affairs and won "hands down". However, once he won the president position he resigned his advisory board post. Huntley said he did not campaign at all for president in the general election, but once he made the runoff he made a more concerted effort to obtain the office. He was very pleased with his write-in campaign and said it "proved SMU students were more concerned with the best possible candidate for the job than with race". Brett Ledbetter won the student body vice president position, also in a runoff, by a vote of 1,051 to 883 against Ken Mifflin. It was the first time in the history of SMU that the two highest elected student officials were both black.<sup>31</sup>

By the time Willis Tate became president at Southern Methodist University, the school had enrolled its first black graduate students. During his tenure, the institution continued to open more doors to blacks. The Law School was desegregated by the mid-1950s. Black undergraduates started coming to SMU in 1962. The first black professor began his brief career in 1965, which was the same year the Mustang football program signed its first black player. After 1965, other barriers began to fall as well. However, it should be emphasized that SMU was still in the desegregation phase. All the schools and academic programs were open to black students, but the campus was not truly integrated. The start of making African American

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<sup>31</sup> 1978 *Rotunda*, SMU Yearbook, 63, memories.smu.edu. Accessed August 7, 2012. "2 Blacks at SMU Win Runoff", *Dallas Morning News*, April 4, 1978, 47. The article in the *Morning News* does not give a specific reason why the student newspaper endorsed Huntley for president, but Huntley's comment seems to suggest that it is because he was the best candidate for the position.

students feel fully welcome on campus did not come until the late 1960s with the formation of a group called Black League of African American and African College Students.

## Chapter Six

### A Calm Rebellion: Black Student Protest at SMU

This is SMU. It was then and is now. So any type of civil unrest was kind of unheard of because this is a very contained campus, very calm. It's not Berkeley. So we were very calm. We stated the list of demands that we had... And thus the civil rights movement began at SMU because that's when the negotiations started.<sup>1</sup>

Anga Sanders was one of thirty three black students at Southern Methodist University that presented a list of demands to President Willis Tate in the spring of 1969. Prior to the meeting with Tate, the black students had formed a group called the Black League of Afro-American and African College Students (BLAACS) because they wanted their voice to be heard. Despite the fact that the campus had started desegregation as early as 1951, Sanders and the other members of BLAACS, were still a decided minority on campus who felt they were not being treated equally. The thirty-three participants of the organization represented the entire black student population of SMU in 1969, and they wanted SMU to do more to help them feel comfortable on campus. The BLAACS organization was something new for SMU. As the above quotation shows, Sanders was clear on that issue when she gave a speech on campus in 2011 reminiscing about her time in Dallas. SMU had not experienced any violence with desegregation like was the case at the University of Alabama, the University of Mississippi, or countless other schools in the South. Even so, black students like Sanders were not satisfied at SMU. There were very few black students on campus, even fewer black professors, and black workers that were not getting paid enough. These were not the only things on their list

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<sup>1</sup> Anga Sanders speaking at SMU, February 22, 2011. Found on YouTube.

of demands, just the most glaring problems. In order to help alleviate the situation, Sanders and others followed the example of numerous students across the country and created an organization that would raise consciousness among black scholars at SMU. They were not violent and did not break any laws. Despite staging a sit-in outside Tate's office BLAACS presented their demands to him in a scheduled meeting, and were respectful of his authority. The black students involved in the sit-in did not take over the administration building as happened at many college and university campuses across the country. BLAACS simply wanted to be heard and their demands met at a private, mostly white, Southern institution. In essence, they were starting a calm rebellion at Southern Methodist University.

The Black League of Afro-American and African College Students was organized at SMU in the fall of 1968. While black students were a very small minority on the campus in Dallas, it did not mean that they were not aware of the growing social consciousness and student activism occurring among their peers across the country. The formation of BLAACS was a sign of the times, and African American students at SMU "simultaneously recognized the need for a formalized group". By the end of February 1969, the Faculty Senate Committee on Student Organizations at SMU had approved BLAACS as a recognized university organization. The constitution of the group that was approved by the faculty senate contained four major points. The first was to create an outlet for social expression and exchange among black students. The second was to "act as a unified center for the promotion of black creative endeavors". The third goal for BLAACS as

stated by the constitution was to encourage a fraternal spirit among black students. Finally, the organization would provide a way for black students to feel like they were a more significant part of the university (literally and figuratively). All four broad themes outlined more specific problems that were addressed during the group's meeting later in the spring with President Tate.<sup>2</sup>

While general social consciousness and student activism played a role in the creation of BLAACS, neither idea fully explains why the organization was created specifically in the fall of 1968. In order to get a better grasp on why black students at SMU felt the urge to create their group in that particular instance, a look at the social environment on campus is important. Prior to the formation of BLAACS, SMU participated in what was known as Old South Week. The event was put on every year by the Kappa Alpha fraternity and was a week-long celebration of the regalia of the plantation South. During the week, the fraternity held a demonstration at the student center where the confederate flag was flown and a mock slave auction was held. Black students were not fond of the symbolism portrayed by the display, so they went to Dean Howell to ask him to stop the program. He told the black students that there was nothing he could do because the fraternity was part of the university and allowed to have programs on campus. Since the dean would not help them, the black students decided to stop the flying of the confederate flag and the slave auction themselves. During the next demonstration at the student

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<sup>2</sup> Anga Sanders, email correspondence, September 23, 2012. "BLAACS, UCM get Recognition", *SMU Daily Campus*, February 28, 1969, 1.

center, Jerry LeVias, one of the black members of the football team, climbed up to the balcony and cut down the confederate flag. The other black students in attendance pulled out pocket versions of the same flag and proceeded to burn them as the crowd started to chant, "the South will rise again". For all practical purposes, the black students' actions during Old South Week prompted the creation of BLAACS and a more formal organization from which to protest the inequities they faced on campus in Dallas.<sup>3</sup>

When BLAACS became a recognized organization there were a number of white students that came out in support of the group. Gary Dragna, a junior at SMU, felt the growing racial tensions on campus needed to be addressed not just by the black students but by white students as well. Evidence of this manifested itself through a fight in the student center between a few white and black students in early February 1969. Even so, nothing had been done about racism on campus to that point according to Dragna, and if it was to change white students had to be willing to help. Dragna and several other white students got together to create the Organization Against Racism (OAR) to "feel out what the white students felt about Malcolm X Day and to get an interested group of students to work on the issue of racism at SMU". All in attendance were in agreement that they wanted to do something about racism on campus and OAR president Bill White said, "Racism is a white problem". While OAR did not represent the entirety of the white population on campus, it showed that BLAACS had support beyond the thirty three African American members of the group.

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<sup>3</sup> Anga Sanders Speaks at SMU, February 22, 2011.

Members of BLAACS said as much when they "emphasized the importance of the white organization to support the BLAACS in their three major concerns".<sup>4</sup>

With the support of the Organization Against Racism, BLAACS proceeded to draw up a petition voicing their concerns to President Tate. The list of concerns were broken into six categories covering a broad range of subjects including student recruitment, admissions, financial aid to students, curriculum concerns, and faculty to name a few. Max Drazen, co-chairman of OAR, spoke to the nearly 125 member organization and said OAR would be an "active organization to initiate reforms against racial discrimination on campus and to support the demands of BLAACS". Chairman Bill White said OAR would support most of the demands made by BLAACS "not because they help the black group but because their beneficial to the whole student body".<sup>5</sup>

By drawing up a petition to be sent to the president, black students at SMU were following the protocol of numerous campus activists across the country. According to Ibram Rogers, author of the *Black Campus Movement*, "Black campus activists usually wrote out their demands in essay format or as a simple numbered list. At (Historically White Colleges and Universities), they regularly addressed the demands to the president". Southern Methodist University definitely qualified as a Historically White University,

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<sup>4</sup> "Race Relations: Both Sides Trying for Harmony", *Dallas Morning News*, April 27, 1969, 27. Mary Lou Muns, "Students Organize Against Racism", *Daily Campus*, March 4, 1969, 1. Gary Dragna, Letter to the Editor of the *Daily Campus* "White Students React to Malcolm X Tribute" February 26, 1969, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Mary Lou Muns, "Group sets Goals to Fight Racism", *Daily Campus*, March 5, 1969, 1.

and the black students on campus were doing all they could to present their grievances to the administration through the proper channels. The first step in that process was to draft the petition and present it President Tate.<sup>6</sup>

In order to fully understand the petition written by BLAACS that, an in-depth look at each of the demands is imperative. The first issue that BLAACS wanted administrators to address was the idea of a free student union. The group felt that the governing board of the center was not representative of the student body. In addition, BLAACS felt that the student union, "should provide an atmosphere of harmony and be a focal point for every social and ethnic group it represents". Blacks that attended SMU wanted to have more of a say in how the student union was run, and Tate agreed. Of the six problems discussed in the petition and subsequent meeting with Tate, the governance of the student union was the least controversial so Tate capitulated rather quickly.<sup>7</sup>

The second part of the petition from BLAACS concerned the recruitment of more black students and scholarship money for those recruited. The organization saw the university's admission policies as "fair" in providing "equal opportunity for all who wish to come to SMU". However, black students only made up 1% of the total student

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<sup>6</sup> Ibram Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstruction of Higher Education, 1965-1972* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 112.

<sup>7</sup> "SMU Planning to Begin on Replies to Negroes" *Dallas Morning News*, May 4, 1969, 10A. "Demands from Black League of Afro-American and African College Students (BLAACS)", Spring 1969, Box 5, Folder 1, *Protests, Controversies, Campus Disturbances, 1965-1973*, Student Activities Records, SMU 2006.0375, Southern Methodist University Archives, DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University.



body. Also, according to BLAACS, 93% of the total scholarship funds went to white students, with the remaining 7% going to all other students on campus. In order to rectify the situation, BLAACS proposed the creation of a university-funded recruiting committee made up of black students. They also requested that 500 black students be enrolled by the fall of 1969. In order to help achieve this goal, the petition called for a 50-50 split of financial aid to white and black students until "the proper ratio of black students to white students at SMU is achieved".<sup>8</sup>

When black students at SMU made a demand for more of their own on campus, they were following the model of countless others across the country. Bringing in additional black students was very important to groups like BLAACS, and all the other requests centered on this idea. New Mexico State's black students issued a list of demands in April of 1969, and University of Mount Union in Ohio's administrators saw demands brought forth the following March. Black students at the University of Maryland-Eastern Shore presented the administration with a fifty page report documenting changes that needed to take place on campus. More than fifty grievances were given to school officials at Virginia Union. Such demands were often very similar. Black students at Skidmore College in New York felt that they could not get a meaningful liberal arts education without more scholars of color on campus. In addition to increased numbers, black campus activists demanded the active recruitment of black students, and they wanted to

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<sup>8</sup> "Demands from Black League of Afro-American and African College Students (BLAACS)".

be a part of the recruitment process. Students at the University of Arkansas created Blacks Americans for Democracy (BAD) to help with "the issues that mattered the most to students of color on the Fayetteville campus". BAD created its own newspaper, the *BAD Times*, so that black students on campus would receive fair coverage in university sponsored media. BAD plead with university officials to bring more black football players and to black faculty campus. The *BAD Times* wrote articles stressing that the black studies program needed to be increased beyond one course. BAD created more social opportunities in Fayetteville including a choir, drama club, beauty pageants, and dances to name a few. Members of BLAACS wanted to be heard just like black students across the country.<sup>9</sup>

The third topic addressed by the petition was the structure of the Liberal Studies Department at SMU which BLAACS felt was too Anglo oriented. The department was "too white" in the professors it employed as well as in the courses taught. In order to change the dynamics of the department, BLAACS proposed that 20% of the professors employed by Liberal Studies should be black. Courses should also be altered to include the role of blacks and other minority groups in the development of Western Civilization.<sup>10</sup>

All across the country, groups similar to BLAACS were calling for the teaching of more courses relevant to the black experience. In

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<sup>9</sup> Charles F. Robinson and Lonnie R. Williams, *Remembrances in Black: Personal Perspectives of the African American Experience at the University of Arkansas, 1940s-2000s* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2010), 144. Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement*, 112-113.

<sup>10</sup> "Demands from Black League of Afro-American and African College Students (BLAACS)".

addition they wanted these courses to be taught by black professors. Students at Saint Peter's in New Jersey questioned the "validity" of courses taught by white teachers. Black students at San Francisco State thought it was impossible for white professors to teach these courses. Some took it further by demanding that white instructors be fired and replaced with blacks. Students at the University of North Dakota disrupted a black history course in February 1969 saying it should not be taught by a "honkie". In July of 1969, students involved with Stanford's Black Student Union demanded that the new Black Studies Program be "black led and black taught".<sup>11</sup>

The fourth item on the list of demands did not directly involve black students at SMU, but black workers on campus. According to BLAACS, the majority of low-paid workers at SMU were black in 1969. Furthermore, the organization's petition said there was only one black person in a supervisory role on campus as well. There were no contracts or legal commitments regarding pay scales for workers, and there were no guarantees for pay raises either. BLAACS also said workers were afraid to use the proper channels to issue complaints because all the supervisors (except one) were white. Black workers at SMU feared reprisals by their white employers so they did not speak out against the pay injustices. Since the workers felt they could not do anything to change their situation, BLAACS took it upon themselves to include the workers in their list of problems to be addressed by the administration. SMU was not the only school to demand rights for black workers on campus. By the fall of 1969, students at the

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<sup>11</sup> Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement*, 115.

University of North Carolina, Tufts University, and Harvard "fought for the rights of black campus nonacademic workers".<sup>12</sup>

One of the most controversial of the issues presented by BLAACS in the petition was fifth on the list—the creation of an Afro-American Studies program. The demand for the new program was the lengthiest part of the entire appeal by BLAACS, and one they felt could not be ignored. Members of the organization felt that white colleges "white-wash and condition black students" and prevent them from learning about their black heritage or culture. They wanted their black identity to remain a separate part of America, not assimilated into white America. By the same token, the Afro-American studies program should be an autonomous department at SMU, and the program should not fall under the control of other academic divisions. In essence, by attempting to get the administration to create a separate Afro-American studies program, the students in BLAACS were following the model of black pride that was sweeping the country in the late 1960s.<sup>13</sup>

Black students at SMU were not the first to come up with the idea to create a program devoted to the study of their culture and heritage. Rather, it was started by students at San Francisco State in the fall of 1966 to foster "black power, self-determination, black pride, and criticism of white thought and institutions". What started as a notion to raise awareness at San Francisco State quickly evolved into discussions for the formation of a separate Black Studies discipline. By the fall of 1967, several courses were taken out of

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<sup>12</sup> Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement*, 100,115.

<sup>13</sup> "Demands from Black League of African American and African College Students (BLAACS)".

the Experimental College and offered for credit in Black Studies. However, a few courses did not satisfy black students at San Francisco State. They wanted a separate department with a Black Studies degree, and continued to push for that. The following spring (1968), word of the Black Studies Program began to reach other colleges, and black students on campuses across the country decided that they wanted similar programs at their schools. A year later SMU followed suit when BLAACS drafted their petition. By 1969, SMU joined the ranks of schools such as Harvard and Cornell University in the creation of such a program.<sup>14</sup>

The sixth and final demand made by BLAACS in the petition was a two-part item that fell under the general category of Human Relations. BLAACS wanted to see the establishment of a Human Relations Board that would supersede all functions of the present Student Senate at SMU. The board would control all governing bodies on campus and would meet the needs of all ethnic groups on campus, as well as promote better understanding of all people on campus. In a subcategory to the human relations demand, BLAACS also "deem it necessary for the black students on campus to have a 'house' for themselves for the purpose of conducting social affairs and some business affairs".<sup>15</sup>

Once the petition was drafted and sent to university officials, BLAACS requested an audience with President Tate and others to discuss the demands. The meeting was granted and held on Monday April 28, 1969 in Tate's office and included Tate, Vice President-Provost Neill

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<sup>14</sup> Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement*, 93-94, 98.

<sup>15</sup> "Demands from Black League of Afro-American and African College Students (BLAACS)".

McFarland, administrative Vice President Richard Rubottom, Vice President Thomas E. Broce, Dean of Students Joe Howell, and the members of BLAACS. Tate office issued a report of the meeting that said it was conducted in "mutual faith and understanding". Since BLAACS had gone through the proper channels to ask for the meeting, Tate and the other officials were willing to sit down with them and see where changes could be made. While Tate only stayed at the meeting for 50 minutes, McFarland and the other administrators met with the students for five hours. All six demands were brought up in the meeting, and while Vice President Broce said "it would be difficult to fulfill all the requests, the discussions will continue between the students and the responsible administrators who were present".<sup>16</sup>

When Tate left the meeting (after the scheduled time was up), the black students in attendance staged an impromptu sit-in and refused to leave the president's office until their demands were met. Even when Tate threatened to expel them and told them to go back to class, the members of BLAACS did not leave. Anga Sanders, a member of BLAACS, recalled that they told Tate they were not leaving, and that they were there for the duration. Once the president left the other administrators present continued the meeting and started to negotiate the points with the group. Sanders also remembers that after Tate left "We weren't wild, we weren't rowdy, we were just determined

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<sup>16</sup> "Negroes Confront Faculty at SMU", *Dallas Times Herald* April 29, 1969. Judy Wiessler, "Blacks at SMU Present Demands", *Dallas Morning News*, April 29, 1969. Marlyn Schwartz "5-Hour Talk Fails to Meet Black Demands", *Dallas Morning News*, May 3, 1969, 1A and 11A.

because we had a mission, a goal". Others confirmed Sanders' observation. Vice President Broce noted, "There was at no time any kind of confrontation. It was a discussion. These were very responsible students". Tate's widow Marian, who at the time was his secretary, said that the only "damage" done to the president's office was some paper napkins and mustard packets left by the students after they were brought lunch by their friends. The meeting did not turn violent, as was the case at a number of other schools. Even so, rumors started flying that there were 30 black militants that had occupied the president's office at SMU. Sanders said that one girl had a nail file but that was about as serious as it got. Marian Tate remembers taking a phone call from the governor's office asking if the National Guard needed to be brought to campus. She responded that the campus police could handle the situation because it was very much under control. Amidst the rumors, the representatives of BLAACS continued to talk with the administrators present, and they began negotiating the demands on the list. The talks were helped by a local African-American clergyman named Zan Holmes. He had attended the Perkins School of Theology and was in the state legislature at the time of the meeting. Holmes happened to be in Dallas the day of the encounter and rode straight to campus to help. According to Sanders, "Five hours later, with the assistance of Reverend Holmes, we walked out with having most of our demands been met."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Anga Sanders Speaks at SMU, February 22, 2011. Marian Tate, interviewed by Jim Early, October 13, 2000, SMU Video Archive Series, found at [digitalcollections.smu.edu](http://digitalcollections.smu.edu). Marlyn Schwartz, "5-Hour SMU

As far as the Black Campus Movement goes, SMU's sit-in was mild in comparison to others. By February of 1969, schools all across the country were experiencing much worse than the five hour meeting black students had with administrators at SMU. Students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison caused a near riot. Classes were boycotted for two weeks at the University of California at Berkeley. Roosevelt University in Chicago saw a week of classes disrupted when students attempted to get the school to teach Black Studies. Nearly 200 protestors were expelled from Mississippi Valley State University on February 13 because protests on campus had gotten out of hand. Even at Duke University, a private Methodist school much like SMU, protests escalated beyond simply a meeting with the president. Forty-eight black students entered the administration early one February morning and told the clerical workers they had to leave the building. The Duke students proceeded to nail the doors shut, threatened to burn university records if the police were called, and renamed the building "Malcolm X Liberation School". From here they issued thirteen demands including the creation of a Black Studies program controlled by the students, funds for a Black Student Union Building, the building of a dorm for black students, and an end to "racist policies" at Duke. Students at Cornell took the hostile takeover even further in April of 1969 when they were seen brandishing weapons as they occupied buildings on campus. A picture surfaced nationwide showing the armed students, and for the first time the nation was visually exposed to



the violence on college campuses. While these are just a few examples of the more extreme black campus movement, they illustrate that it was happening from coast to coast and all points in between.<sup>18</sup>

Not all campuses exploded in violence as is shown in the example of SMU. Even though the takeover of administration buildings garnered media attention, it was not the chosen path for schools like SMU. SMU's black students were not alone in their peaceful attempt to change policies in Dallas. A number of institutions advocated nonviolent sit-ins like SMU. When this tactic was used it was not hostile. During peaceful protests in campus administration buildings, the normal flow of business was not disrupted. Buildings were not shut down at SMU, nor at Radcliffe College in 1968, to give a similar example. Female students at the college sat outside President Mary I. Bunting's office for seven hours in order to get her to listen to their demands. Bunting eventually came out and promised the students that she would increase Negro enrollment. After the president spoke, the students thanked her, and "left in a festive mood". Students at Radcliffe effected change without resorting to violence. The same could be said about black student at SMU who felt it was better to negotiate with administrations in a calm demeanor rather than take over the campus.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the fact that SMU's "major" incident in the black student protest movement had not turned violent, Mike Morris did not think the meeting had gone as well as others. As chairman of BLAACS, he felt

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<sup>18</sup> Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement*, 1-2, 127-129.

<sup>19</sup> Ropbert Reinhold "Negroes Stage Radcliffe Sit-in; Colleges Act on their Demands", *New York Times*, December 11, 1968, 32.

that the administration did not go far enough to meet the demands. When discussing the meeting with the *Daily Campus* Morris said it was "not what the organization wanted. We were not pleased. We were there for an answer and what happened was more or less a rejection". Despite the fact that Morris was not pleased with the results of the meeting he did mention that negotiations would continue. He did not give any indication that if all of the demands were not met in the manner that BLAACS wanted that they would turn violent. Rather, they would meet with administrators again to "see what they can and can't do".<sup>20</sup>

While BLAACS felt it necessary to stage a sit-in in the administration building to demand better treatment, some did not see it this way. Civil rights leader Bayard Rustin criticized the tactics and the motives used at schools across the country, including SMU, to bring about change. Rustin was quoted by the Associated Press telling an audience in New York that, "In the real world no one gives a damn if you've taken soul courses. They want to know if you can do mathematics and write a correct sentence". Rustin felt that demands made like those by BLAACS at SMU were not practical. The problems emphasized separateness and did not prepare black students for the "real world". The only way for black students to progress was to work with mainstream society not against it. Rustin and others felt that the petitions by groups like BLAACS were working against mainstream society, and according to an editorial in the *Dallas Times Herald*, "If

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<sup>20</sup> Mary Lou Muns, "Negotiations still Underway on Demands from BLAACS", *Daily Campus*, April 29, 1969, 1.

separation is the black students' only goal, they are morally bound to look elsewhere for an education". Administrators at SMU, notably President Willis Tate felt the same way.<sup>21</sup>

Several days after the meeting with BLAACS Tate issued a statement with his initial reactions. He said that he promised the students "clear answers to the requests made". Tate wanted the black students to realize that they would be treated just like any other student on campus. Their personal growth and development would be furthered to the best of the administration's abilities, just like with all other students on campus. If that growth was achieved by saying yes to some of BLAACS demands then Tate acquiesced. If the goals of the black students could not be reasonably attained by the demands then the president said no. Tate made it clear in his statement that while anyone could apply to SMU, they would only be admitted if they met the academic standards put forth by the university. If students did not meet the qualifications, then SMU had a right to deny admittance. Tate noted that, "SMU is no microcosm of society. It is highly selective, both in faculty and in the student body". In other words, SMU would not capitulate to the demand for more black students simply because BLAACS wanted more students of color on campus. The school was only so big and could only offer so much, and Tate was determined not to allow any group, including BLAACS, to circumvent that ideal. Ultimate authority on any decisions regarding SMU were to be made by Tate, the administration, and the

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<sup>21</sup> "Blacks and the Real World", Editorial to the *Dallas Times Herald*, April 30, 1969, 24A.

Board of Trustees and "no special interest group within or without the university can make our decisions for us and certainly there can be no autonomous structures within the university or it would cease to be a university". With several of the demands Tate felt BLAACS was trying to force his hand to make a decision that would only benefit a small portion of the academic community at SMU, and he would not allow that to happen.<sup>22</sup>

Tate's statement to BLAACS in regards to the demands was similar to that of numerous university presidents across the country. Black students did not want to accept a slice of bread, according to Ibram Rogers, because they wanted the whole loaf. Even so, administrators "habitually forced them to accept the slice, arguing the loaf was impossible, too expensive, against the law, reverse discrimination, or the opposition to academic freedom or the values of the colleges". University officials were willing to give in where they could, like Tate, but they also wanted to keep the integrity of the school intact. Oftentimes, representatives of historically white colleges gave in to the call for more black students, faculty, black studies courses, and the like. However, when it came to university control, administrators were not as willing to bend to the demands of organizations such as BLAACS.<sup>23</sup>

The demands made by BLAACS were not completely dismissed by Tate and other university officials at SMU. Rather, there were at least some changes promised on all six issues presented to the

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<sup>22</sup> "BLAACS get Reply" *Daily Campus*, May 2, 1969, 2, 5, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement*, 119-120.

administrators. First on the list was the Free Student Union with more control going to the students. The Student Center Governing Board felt that "the demands of the BLAACS concerning the revision of the Governing Board are pertinent and indeed constitute much needed reform not only in the make-up of the Governing Board but also in its function as a student controlled government body". One way to give the students more power in the union was to allow them to elect representatives to the Governing Board. By 1970 students at SMU were allowed to elect four executive officers and two student members. In addition a graduate student was appointed by the elected president of the Governing Body. Two faculty members were elected by the Governing Body as well as two alumni members. Other members were added ex officio to complete the Governing Board. In essence, the students were given more of a say in how the board was put together. Therefore they gained more power in what the Board did with the Student Center.<sup>24</sup>

Several changes were made to increase recruitment of black students as well as giving them financial assistance to attend SMU. In the summer of 1969 two black students were employed by the university as admissions counselors to assist in bringing more black students to campus. The two counselors were "encouraged to work closely with black students on campus and enlist their aid in recruiting activities". In addition, a black faculty member was invited to serve on the admissions committee to help the two student employees. By the fall of 1969, 50 new black students had been brought in to SMU with more to follow quickly. As for financial aid,

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<sup>24</sup> "BLAACS get Reply", *Daily Campus*, May 2, 1969, 2, 5, 12.

officials at SMU began exploring the possibilities of making funds available to students who would not have been able to attend the university without such help.<sup>25</sup>

Altering the structure of the Liberal Studies Department was the next issue that university officials made recommended changes based on BLAACS petition. Tate and others felt the program should be organized in a way that reflected the "accomplishments, problems, and aspirations of Black people both historically and in the contemporary world. In order to achieve the desired effect, the University College Council recommended revisions to the Nature of Man course as well as the Twentieth Century course at SMU to provide more content relevant to the black experience. The Black and White class was also changed to provide a "more in-depth study of the Black and White situation". In addition the council wanted to employ more black instructors in the department "on a substantial basis beyond the point of tokenism". According to Dean of Students Joe Howell nine black faculty members were added in the fall of 1969 that were "scattered throughout the University College and the School of Humanities and Science".<sup>26</sup>

Black employees at SMU also garnered attention by Tate because of the petition by BLAACs. The first thing Tate promised was to make sure as many employees on campus as possible received \$1.60 per hour which was minimum wage at the time. He noted that the university would take into account merit and length of service of workers in

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Ken Hunt, "Black Courses Readied for Fall", *Daily Campus*, August 28, 1969, 6.

<sup>26</sup> "Blacks get Reply", *Daily Campus*, May 2, 1969, 2, 5, 12. Susan Maxwell, "Black Demands, Part II: Jobs and Classes", *Daily Campus*, September 11, 1969, 2.

regards to pay increases. The university established a review board to also determine financial compensation for all employees and the board would include black workers. Black laborers were given a proper grievance procedure so they would not be afraid to complain about their white superiors. Staff members were made aware on initial employment of the opportunities for their children to take advantage of grants in order to attend SMU. The University also promised to continue to "recruit qualified black persons for supervisory positions, such as those recently hired as Director of Volunteer Services and Building Coordinator of the Student Center". Tate made it clear that there were several blacks employed in supervisory positions including the foreman at the Central Plant and a new officer on the campus security force. Even so, SMU would continue to offer more opportunities for black employees on campus.<sup>27</sup>

Forming an Afro-American Studies program was a big concern for BLAACS, and Tate provided a nuanced response that helped start the department at SMU. The Planning Board of the School of Humanities and Sciences gave approval to appoint a committee that would develop a proposal for Afro-American Studies. SMU committed to modifying and further developing present courses in the curriculum dealing with the subject. Once the program was implemented, it would be under the tutelage of a black director. The coordinator would have input from faculty committees and students involved with BLAACS to help formulate the course work for the program. Finally, according to Tate, "The

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

most suitable academic structure for this enlarged program will be established".<sup>28</sup>

One of the crucial components of the Afro-American Studies program at SMU was that it would be under the leadership of a black director. The person chosen to be in charge of the department was Irving Baker. Former executive vice president of Bishop College in Dallas, he was appointed by Tate in the summer of 1969 to head Afro-American Studies. Baker was the perfect choice because he was familiar with SMU prior to his directorship. He had been a political science professor and in addition to his director duties, Baker was made special assistant to Tate. In other words, he was familiar with both academics and administration of the university, and each would be vital to his success as director of the new program. Tate was not the only one to think that Baker was the right fit to lead the new program. Vice President Neill McFarland also felt this way when he said upon Baker's hiring that, "he is very enthusiastic and quite candid. He's a charming person and at ease and doesn't really have the hang-ups most of us have. I don't care what color he is...he is a great asset to SMU".<sup>29</sup>

Once Baker was added to the staff, he began the process of building the Afro-American Studies program at SMU. Baker quickly developed a degree program proposal that was ready for submission to the faculty in the fall of 1969. He noted that he wanted to achieve

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Irving Baker, Interviewed by Neill McFarland, October 12, 2001, SMU Video Archive Series , #3003, found at digitalcollections.smu.edu. "Staff Adds Baker", *Daily Campus*, August 28, 1969, 2.



two things with the new department. One was the development of new courses that highlighted the black experience and culture. The second thing Baker wanted was to give "a new, inclusive, relevant interpretation to factual material in the various disciplines—history, literature, economics, religion". Practically speaking, the program would raise black awareness which Baker felt was necessary "if students are to have the breadth and scope of the experiences they need for today's society". Not only was this important for black students but for white students as well.<sup>30</sup>

The last demand that Tate negotiated with BLAACS fell under the general category of human relation. The first thing Tate recommended was the creation of a human relations board that would be made up of students from various ethnicities. Tate also endorsed the idea that faculty and administration be allowed on the board as well. In addition to the board Tate acknowledged "the request for a house for social and business affairs for Black students as a legitimate one". Shortly thereafter, university officials began searching the campus for a house that would fit Tate's criterion to help black students transition from an all-black world to the predominantly white one they faced on campus at Southern Methodist University. The house had to be open to all students at all times and follow University regulations.<sup>31</sup>

Tate's concluding statements regarding the petition made it clear that he intended to honor all the commitments he had set forth for each demand. He would constantly review the new policies put in place

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<sup>30</sup> Ken Hunt, "Black Courses Readied for Fall", *Daily Campus*, August 28, 1969, 6.

<sup>31</sup> "BLAACS get Reply", *Daily Campus*, May 2, 1969, 2, 5, 12.

by the administration and make changes as he deemed necessary. One reason Tate was willing to do so is because the students involved with BLAACS went through the proper university channels to get their petition heard. Tate made sure the university community knew this when he stated, "Commendation must be made again of the seriousness and rational conduct of the black students. While free to dissent, they have not once resorted to pressure tactics or disruption to win their points". If violence and disruption had occurred, Tate would have been less willing to negotiate with BLAACS which in turn may have actually precipitated SMU's black protests to become more like that of other schools.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the fact that BLAACS had gone through the correct procedures in presenting their demands, not everyone on campus agreed with Tate's decision to negotiate with the organization. In the fall of 1969 twenty-eight student leaders at SMU voiced their difference of opinion with Tate and the administration saying they "surrendered to imposed threats and deadlines". BLAACS committed "systematic piracy" as university officials stood idly by and did nothing according to the group. Warren Russell, senior history major and president pro tempore of the student senate, feared the administration's negotiations with BLAACS would "cheapen the value of a degree" at SMU. He was perplexed as to why Tate would capitulate to the demands of BLAACS because that is all they were-demands. Russell, and other elected student officials, felt that the petition created by BLAACS was not presented to the people at "the level of its most immediate concern". Rather,

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

they took it straight to the president ignoring student government protocol. Because BLAACS went straight to Tate, he was coerced into giving in to the demands according to Russell.<sup>33</sup>

Tate responded to the charge of the university student leaders, as well as civic organizations in Dallas, by denying that a breakdown occurred in SMU's chain of command. Tate told friends in the community that the academic integrity of SMU had never and will never be compromised because of a group like BLAACS. His mantra to everyone concerned was always, "We are not going to give this University away". In August of 1969 Tate sent out a letter to faculty, staff, and students that said disruption of the University's normal functioning would not be tolerated. Pledges to BLAACS were not made in duress and never would be according to Tate. All students admitted to SMU would be expected to maintain the academic standards of the university. Tate reiterated that the university would not give in to violence like at other schools and he intended to keep it that way at SMU as long as he was president. The *Dallas Times Herald* agreed that "while the educational process at many another American college has denigrated into turmoil and violence, SMU has, for the most part remained serene and at peace. Tate has now come a long way toward ensuring it will stay that way".<sup>34</sup>

Whether there were critics of Tate's plan to negotiate with BLAACS is irrelevant because Tate had already agreed to certain

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<sup>33</sup> Jean Kelly, "Students Attack SMU: Surrender to Negro Threats Charged", *Dallas Morning News*, August 16, 1969.

<sup>34</sup> "SMU's President Eases Public Concern", *SMU Update*, Vol. 1, No. 4, Fall 1969, 1 and 5.

changes on all six demands. Being a man of principle, he was not going to back down on that promise. The petition was SMU's version of the Civil Rights Movement, and it had been offered without violence and disruption. According to Anga Sanders, "The Civil Rights Movement at SMU did not take on the same violent tone as it did as many schools across the country. Yet it was still enough. We may not have been perfect, but we were perfect for SMU". Rufus Cormier was a black football player at SMU during the late 1960s who was also a member of BLAACS. He echoed Sanders sentiment when he said, "There was not a sense that this was a place that was unaccepting or hostile to us. It was a situation where we needed progress, but not a situation where we needed revolution".<sup>35</sup>

The progress described by Rufus Cormier was achieved in part because the Black League of Afro-American and African College Students was willing to participate in a calm rebellion at Southern Methodist University. The organization pushed for change, but it did so within the boundaries of the university structure. Because of the lack of violence, President Willis Tate was willing to bring change to benefit black students at SMU.

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<sup>35</sup> Anga Sanders Speaks at SMU, February 22, 2011, Found on YouTube. Rufus Cormier, Phone Interview, August 17, 2012.

### Conclusion

The University followed a strategy of quiet but positive progress towards making SMU a university open to all who could meet its admissions standards. I believed that we would get more done if we did not debate it or confront people with it.<sup>1</sup>

Desegregation started at Southern Methodist University as early as 1950 when then President Umphrey Lee convinced the Board of Trustees to change the school's bylaws to allow for the eventual admittance of African American students. Little did Lee know that process would begin almost immediately. SMU admitted two black students in the fall of 1951, and the university started down the path towards change. While the two students failed by the end of the fall, and true desegregation did not pick up in earnest until the following year, SMU had begun a process that the university would not back down from in the coming years. SMU started breaking down racial barriers before the Methodist Church with which the school was affiliated. No one expected SMU to lead the way among the Methodist seminaries. The hope was that Duke University and/or Emory University would lead the way in 1952. Rather, it was SMU that became the first Methodist seminary to open its doors to black students. The Church took sixteen more years before it came to terms with desegregation. In the meantime, SMU moved ahead of the Church, as well as the other Methodist seminaries, in regards to race divisions. In addition to this, SMU also began removing the obstacles to equality before the city of Dallas. While desegregation in Dallas occurred quietly and

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald McGee, "On the Ups and Downs", Interview with Willis Tate, in Johnnie Marie Grimes, *Willis Tate: Views and Interviews* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1978), 167.

without many problems, it was years after SMU had already achieved that same goal on campus. Although many individuals helped bring about desegregation at SMU, none were more important in the advancement than Merrimon Cuninggim and Willis Tate. Both received their respective posts at SMU in the early 1950s and worked tirelessly to open the doors of the university to black students. They operated behind the scenes to make sure desegregation would occur at SMU without the fanfare and violence associated with numerous schools across the country. Even when SMU experienced black student protests by the late 1960s, that "disturbance" took on a calm demeanor.

One of the unsung heroes of desegregation at SMU was also one of the most visible figures on campus. When Hayden Fry became the football coach at SMU in the early 1960s, he accepted the job with the promise that he would be allowed to recruit black players. By doing so he advanced desegregation not only at SMU, but also in the Southwest Conference. Fry was willing to be the leader in the conference when other more powerful coaches were not. He grew up in segregated Odessa, Texas and did not think it was fair that his black friends could not play football with him in high school. From then on, Fry swore that if he was ever in a position of power to change that situation he would. SMU afforded that position when they hired him to coach the Mustangs. Once Fry was given the green light he recruited Jerry LeVias, and in doing so changed the course of football in the Southwest Conference.

While Southern Methodist had dynamic leaders to bring about desegregation, the Methodist Church did not. At least none that were

in positions of power until the mid-1960s. The closest thing the church had was Edgar Love, but his initiative to reform the Methodists' organizational structure failed in the early 1950s. Others tried after Love but were not successful, and it was not until the late 1960s when the Central Jurisdiction was finally ended.

Unlike the Church, the city of Dallas did have at least a few dynamic leaders that were willing to bring about desegregation peacefully and quietly. While the process was not started quite as early as SMU, the Dallas Citizens Council ensured that it would be as smooth as possible. The group wanted to keep economic investment high in Dallas, and in order to do that desegregation had to come slowly and without incident. Because of the leadership of the DCC that is exactly what happened. The personalities in the business community of Dallas were similar to those on campus at SMU. In both instances, desegregation came in an organized manner facilitated by leaders that knew how best to control the pace.

During the early 1950s, Southern Methodist University was a small private school. Between 1950 and 1953, when the university started to desegregate, the average student population was just under 8,000. The school was in a city that was not a hub of the civil rights movement. It was affiliated with a church that had just started to formally segregate whites and blacks in 1939. SMU does not seem to fit the traditional model of desegregation that is usually told. There was no court order in 1950 to force SMU to desegregate like at the flagship university in Texas. At some of these schools, federal troops were required to achieve desegregation despite the court orders. No

similar institutions were even thinking about desegregation at the time. When other private universities did start to desegregate, problems with the administration often occurred. Violence and controversy, especially when accompanying an issue as sensitive as desegregation, provided copy. Media coverage was exponentially greater at the University of Mississippi, the University of Alabama, the University of Texas, etc. where bringing in the first black students provided a story. SMU was the opposite in that it quietly admitted black students behind the scenes; therefore it was not as entertaining to the general public.

On the surface, since SMU's desegregation did not provide much news copy, it would seem the story does not need to be told. On the contrary, that is what makes SMU relevant to the desegregation grand narrative. SMU provides an alternative model to that of the large state schools in regards to desegregation. Since it was a private school that did not have to desegregate when it did, the university was able to control the pace and do so quietly. University officials purposely kept decisions on the matter in house so the media could not create a firestorm like at other schools. This is precisely why desegregation went so smoothly at SMU, and why the account should be told. SMU's desegregation is one of peaceful change, perseverance, and university officials taking care of business in an orderly fashion. Total integration did not happen overnight on campus, but by not pushing for too much change too quickly SMU had virtually no problems. The same cannot be said of many of the larger state schools. The courts did not get involved, the cameras were not



flashing, and the students did not riot. While that may not be news worthy, it did allow SMU to ease into desegregation without any outside pressure to do more or less than the school wanted at any given time.

In 1952, Southern Methodist University admitted five black men to the school. The total enrollment of the university at the time was 7,741 so the black students accounted for less than 1% of the student body. In the fall of 2012, there were 702 black students enrolled at SMU a figure that equates to 6.4% of the student body. While the percentage may not be that high, it is a significant increase from the time the university started to desegregate to the present. As a private school SMU continues to maintain high academic standards, but the statistic shows that the school did not turn away from admitting black students once the initial desegregation push had been made. Like desegregation itself, the number of black students on campus has steadily increased over the years to its current enrollment. If you compare SMU's current enrollment of black students to the University of Arkansas and the University of Texas the percentage is actually higher. During the spring of 2013, the University of Arkansas had 1,212 black students enrolled out of a student population of 23,286 or 5.2% of the total of the campus enrollment. In the fall of 2012, the University of Texas had 2,126 black students out of 52,186 which was 4.1% of the total population. The reason these two statistics are important is these are the two schools in the Southwest Conference that desegregated before SMU. Both are public institutions that are significantly larger than SMU. Both had more problems with

desegregation than SMU, not just in admitting the first black students but in getting people on their respective campuses to even allow for the possibility. The small campus of SMU in the 1950s allowed for a better environment to start desegregation. That trend continues to the present as seen in the aforementioned statistics.<sup>2</sup>

Today, there is no direct push for increasing diversity at SMU, but there are certain things in place to recognize the diversity already on campus. The Multicultural Resource Center is designed to promote diversity awareness on campus. In 2012, a Black Alumni of SMU Scholarship fund was developed to give financial aid to a rising sophomore or above that has shown academic success at the school. In order to be eligible for the scholarship, the student has to be a member of the Association of Black Students, which appears to be a similar organization to BLAACS of the 1960s. While SMU may not be actively recruiting black students, there are still entities on campus that tie SMU to its past—a past that saw SMU become one of the first schools of its kind in the South to open its doors to black students.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Bulletin of Southern Methodist University: Administration and Supplementary Information (Catalog Number: Part X) For the 1952-1953 Sessions", Southern Methodist University Archives, DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.  
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