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"AT A MOST UNCOMFORTABLE SPEED": THE DESEGREGATION OF THE SOUTH'S PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES, 1945–1964

by

MELISSA FITZSIMONS KEAN

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

“At a Most Uncomfortable Speed”: The Desegregation of the South’s Private Universities, 1945–1964

by

Melissa Fitzsimons Kean

This dissertation traces the debate about desegregation on the campuses of five elite private universities in the South from the end of World War II to the early 1960s. The presidents of Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt, charged with leading these schools to national prominence, quickly grasped that postwar realities—including pressure from federal grantmakers and national philanthropic foundations—would require some measure of racial change if the schools were to advance. In the interest of progress the presidents were willing to accept limited participation by “exceptional” blacks in the life of the university. The critical issue in their eyes was who would control the process of racial change. While acknowledging, some more grudgingly than others, that “outside” pressure for desegregation should be heeded, the presidents insisted that the pace and manner of loosening racial restrictions must remain the decisions of educated southern whites.

Many powerful trustees and alumni staunchly opposed even this. These traditionalists strongly defended southern racial customs and fought any attempts to alter them for any reason, even the advancement of the schools they served. With varying degrees of energy and success, the presidents mediated between the proponents of progress and tradition, trying to avoid open conflict while gradually improving each school’s academic quality.
Only Vanderbilt took steps towards opening admissions, allowing black graduate students to enroll in its School of Religion beginning in 1953.

The debate over the place of talented blacks on these campuses remained subdued until 1954, when *Brown v. Board of Education* and the growing grass-roots civil rights movement brought increased turmoil to the South. Although many trustees vowed not to bend to this pressure, the costs of maintaining segregation on campus became too high to bear. By the early 1960s, snowballing loss of faculty, student discontent, and above all, the threat of a funding cut-off by the federal government and the foundations led all these schools to abandon segregated admissions policies.
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and concern for that institution. Gary Hauk at Emory helped provide perspective on that institution's history. The most important person I met in the course of this work was Judson C. Ward, now dean of alumni at Emory. Dr. Ward was not merely helpful to me—although he was extraordinarily helpful. He also showed an unflagging honesty coupled with a generosity of spirit that I hope is mirrored in this work and that I hope I can emulate in my own life.

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Bibliography
Introduction

On each of the campuses of the major private research universities in the South—Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt—there is a myth about the school's actions during the Civil Rights era. At all these universities many will assert with pride that this school, unlike the public universities that had to be compelled by the federal government, voluntarily opened its admissions to black students in the early years of the 1960s. In the sense that there was no direct legal or physical compulsion of open admissions, this is certainly true. No federal court ordered these schools to admit black students; no troops or marshals arrived to enforce desegregation. However, the implication of a willing choice freely made suggested by the word "voluntarily" is quite misleading. The desegregation of the private universities in the South was in fact accomplished by coercion—by northern foundations, professional academic associations, accrediting bodies, faculties that began to vote with their feet, divinity students and professors who felt called to oppose racial oppression, alumni who withheld contributions, and, the final straw, by new federal rules for grant recipients. And ultimately, behind all these pressures was the power of the grass-roots civil rights movement, led by southern blacks themselves, which created a national crisis of conscience and brought places like these schools under the close scrutiny of the entire nation. But before desegregation came there were fifteen years of debate about the place of the schools in the region and the nation as well as about the place of blacks in the schools.

In the decades before World War II these schools had all begun a transformation from sleepy, often isolated undergraduate colleges into new style research universities patterned after elite schools in the Ivy League, Stanford, and the University of Chicago. 1

1George B. Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 1913–1945 (Baton Rouge, 1967), 263–66. There are several good histories of the development of higher education in the
Their leaders understood that American higher education was changing and saw that they had a new opportunity to build nationally prominent universities in the South. Their efforts to make reputations outside the region, focused mainly on the development of graduate programs, were in many ways astonishing, requiring vision, commitment, and resources almost beyond imagining. At the same time, these schools remained committed to their role as leaders of the South and protectors of southern traditions, including segregation. The presidents and trustees took seriously and cherished their identity as southerners and believed that the private southern universities had an obligation to maintain their southern character and to lead the region in its drive to catch up economically to the rest of the country.

Any conflict between the two goals of national prestige and regional leadership remained below the surface until World War II. After the war, however, tensions began to appear. The very heart of the problem was segregation. In the wake of a war fought in part against Nazi racial ideology, the oppression of American blacks became increasingly unacceptable to larger numbers of American whites. Even more pressing, as the 1950s were born, the threat of Soviet communism made segregation particularly troublesome. As the defense of American institutions as more democratic, efficient, and virtuous than their Soviet counterparts took on the hallmarks of a crusade, a glaring flaw like segregation became a weakness in the fight against Soviet domination. Segregation flew in the face of the American creed of equality of opportunity, relegating an entire group of Americans.

United States, but they focus heavily on northern institutions. See, for example, Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (Athens, Ga., 1990) and Laurence R. Vesey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago, 1965).

people to second-class status by birth. Southern blacks, no matter what their abilities, were denied the chance to advance socially or economically, denied even the right to participate in American democracy. The rest of the nation and a few scattered individuals in the South saw this deviation from mainstream liberal beliefs as dangerous, in no small part because it allowed the Soviet Union to use the mistreatment of American blacks in the propaganda war for the loyalties of Africa and Asia.3

But the system of racial segregation that had been installed in the aftermath of Reconstruction was firmly entrenched in the South. To many in that region, including the older alumni and trustees of these schools, it seemed timeless, natural, and right. As wide and deep changes began to transform the South’s economy and demographics, though, anxiety about the continuity of traditional institutions, including segregation, began to rise.4 In the eyes of much of the white South any challenge to enforced racial hierarchy constituted an attack on their America and the stability of their society. Any calls for change could only, they believed, be explained as attempts by the Soviet Union to destabilize and weaken the United States. In short, while the federal government and most of the nation saw segregation as a growing embarrassment and a hindrance in the

3 There is no comprehensive work on the impact of the Cold War and McCarthyism on universities in the South. Ellen W. Schrecker touches on some southern schools, particularly Tulane, in No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities (New York, 1986), 242–44. Clarence Mohr and Joseph Gordon, Tulane: The Emergence of a Modern University, 1945–1980 (Baton Rouge, 2000), chapter 2, contains a thorough analysis of right-wing attacks on Tulane and the response of the administration. Paul Conkin, in Gone With the Ivy, 502–14, has a very good discussion of the problem of academic freedom in an era of political hysteria. Conkin makes clear the identification in many southern minds of “communism” with anything they didn’t like, including efforts to bring about any semblance of racial equality.

war on communism, in the white South anti-communism meant a defense of segregation.

On the campuses of Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt after the war, the sense of transformation was palpable. A rash of new building quickly made the schools nearly unrecognizable to nostalgic alumni. The federal government poured money into research as never before and several national foundations made the improvement of southern higher education a prominent goal. Successful fund raising and sustained focus on improvement led to the dramatic growth of new and better graduate and professional schools, which some even feared were beginning to dominate the campuses.5 The student body too was changing, as the use of standardized testing began to improve its quality and recruitment efforts increased its geographical diversity. The small, tightly knit regional and local institutions, focused on classical education and undergraduates, had evolved into legitimate, though still minor, research universities. They now competed with universities throughout the nation for resources, faculty, and students.6

At the same time, efforts to bring change to race relations began to have a real impact on these campuses. Some of the new pressures were distant and faint. The Truman Administration, for example, proved unwilling to turn its back on American blacks, and

5 Graduate education in the South was still woeful compared to other regions. The Carnegie Foundation calculated that in 1950 in the eastern region, with a population of 44,900,000, there were 2,932 earned doctorates awarded. In the Mid-West, with 40,000,000 people, there were 2,317 doctorates awarded. In the South, with a population of 31,800,000, only 317 doctorates were earned. This state of affairs provides part of the explanation for the high level of major philanthropic interest in southern higher education throughout the 1950s. See the Annual Report of the President of Tulane University, 1950–51 (New Orleans, 1951), p.47 and President’s Report to the Board, December 11, 1951, University Archives, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University.

began a series of minor but real loosenings of racial restrictions in the federal government. The NAACP's lawyers produced a steady stream of successful challenges to segregation in public higher education. The Truman Commission on Higher Education began the era with a ringing condemnation of the principle of segregation and a call for broader democracy in American schooling. Other changes were far more immediate. National professional organizations and accrediting bodies, both critically important in the drive to improve instruction and build reputation, grew reluctant to tolerate racial discrimination in their membership. The painstakingly recruited faculties, now often including many northerners, began to speak out against the color bar. Theology professors and students alike became increasingly vocal about the immorality of banning blacks from their schools for no reason other than their color.

Opponents of desegregation on campus fought these changes, basing their objections on the sanctity of southern tradition. The force of this stance would weaken over time, as the South was pulled inexorably into the American mainstream. The schools' own success in recruiting faculty and students from other regions, the growth of industries and urbanization in the South, demands for national unity in the Cold War—all meant that discrete regional traditions could no longer exist in isolation. The power, and the desire, of individuals and institutions outside the South, as well as previously weak groups within it, to influence policies and events on campuses was increasing enormously. 7

In the late 1940s and early 1950s the presidents of these private southern universities tried to negotiate a path through all these clashing needs and desires while pursuing the

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7 The "outside" pressures were not always a simple product of commitment to American ideals, however. Not only were motivations complex, but the very notion that the South existed as a region apart, deviant and problematic, is a complicated one with a long history. A series of recent essays that suggests some of this intricacy is Larry J. Griffin and Don Doyle, eds., The South as an American Problem (Athens, Ga., 1995). On the rise of new pressure on racial issues during the early part of this period see John Egerton, Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South (New York, 1994), especially 409–16.
two overarching institutional goals of national prestige and regional leadership. During this era most of the race-related controversies that arose at these schools did not involve the problem of whether to admit black students, although that question did fester for nearly a decade and a half after the war. Rather, as thoroughly segregated institutions, these schools now constantly faced a whole range of new and troublesome situations that complicated their "Negro problem." The changing position of blacks in American society was increasingly bringing the private southern universities into contact with new and different blacks—not the cooks and janitors that they had always known, and sometimes loved, but chemistry professors, university librarians, and college football players. What to do about these "new" kinds of blacks was the argument at the private universities.

Although the precise circumstances surrounding the debate were new, the essence of the argument can be traced back as far as George Washington Cable. Cable, writing in the 1880s as segregation was being fashioned, argued repeatedly that the arbitrary imposition of a line based on color was immoral, both unfair to the refined black middle classes and a betrayal of the South's own heritage of class hierarchy. Asserting the reasonableness and morality of a society based on class distinctions that recognized individual achievements, and condemning one based on the utterly arbitrary distinctions of color, Cable asked supporters of rigid racial segregation: "then tell us, gentlemen, which are you really for, the color line, or the line of character, intelligence, and property ...?"

The answer that Cable received from the white South, most famously in a published

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rejoinder from Henry Grady, was somewhat confused but unmistakably hostile. While the white elite was prepared to tolerate some measure of black progress, as its embrace of Booker T. Washington indicated, there were also clear indications of a determination to retain white supremacy no matter what black southerners could accomplish.\(^9\) In fact, the rise of the black middle class was in large measure responsible for the intensifying white insistence on segregation. Without slave status to mark them as inferior, blacks, especially successful blacks, needed to be set apart in other ways. Thus, there was always the insistence that no matter what a black accomplished or owned, no matter how he dressed or how much she had learned, he was still inferior and deserved to be kept apart from whites of any class.\(^10\)

This, in a nutshell, was the argument that would play out at the private southern universities over the decade and a half that followed World War II. One side was dominated by those with the greatest concern for national reputation and included many faculty members, many students, and several of the presidents of these schools. Stressing the vast amount of black progress since Reconstruction and the South’s desperate need for able leaders of all races, they argued that “exceptional” blacks ought to be treated as exceptions and a few able blacks could be accommodated on campus.\(^11\) Critical to this

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\(^10\) Gaston, *New South Creed*, 132–35, 140–50 discusses the tension in Grady’s arguments between the acknowledgment of the possibility of increased black influence through merit and the stated determination to retain white dominance in any event.

\(^11\) The rise of black middle and upper classes, and the inflammatory impact of that rise on white opinion, has been well studied. The most recent work is the excellent Kevin K. Gaines. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, 1996), but also important are E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie: Rise of a New Middle Class* (New York, 1957) and Willard Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880–1920* (Bloomington, In., 1990).

\(^12\) The treatment of “exceptional” blacks as exceptions rather than as blacks was at the heart of the admissions policies of the northern elite universities at this time, where they
position was a complete commitment to white elite control of the process of black uplift. The pace and scope of racial change, these men argued, must rest on the judgment of the educated white elite in each locality. Outsiders, northerners in general and the federal government in particular, did not understand that disaster could result from pushing too hard or at the wrong time. Black progress was possible, but only the educated white men of the South could decide how and when.

The other side, including many alumni, a few older faculty members, and most trustees, were more concerned with local traditions than with joining the national mainstream. More fearful of their neighbors’ anger than the disapproval of northern foundations or the condemnations of academic societies, they remained convinced that racial separation was both necessary and proper and demanded that black students, no matter how talented, be kept in their own schools. No one at all was interested in the mass of poor, ill-educated black southerners or, for that matter, similarly situated white southerners. This debate was solely about the place of the black elite in southern society and in the elite southern universities.

Before the Supreme Court’s 1954 decision in Brown v. Board of Education, this debate took place in an atmosphere free of urgency. Although pressures for change in campus race relations were growing and the presidents of these schools were growing increasingly concerned, the pressure was still sporadic. The men who led these schools, both administrators and trustees, retained a sense of control, a sense that they had matters in hand. Even as the South was being transformed around them, they believed that there was plenty of time to make decisions.

were admitted but in tiny numbers. See Marsha Graham Synott, The Half-Opened Door: Discrimination and Admissions at Harvard, Yale and Princeton, 1900–1970 (Westport.
But by 1950 the social, demographic, and economic changes in the region had already begun to erode the southern elite’s sense of control. As the decade wore on, escalating tensions with the Soviet Union, the outbreak of the Korean War, and fears of domestic treason further ate away at the entire nation’s confidence. When the Supreme Court handed down its 1954 decision in Brown v. Board of Education the calm sense of mastery of the South’s future that had allowed discrete, unhurried debate about the proper place for the “exceptional Negro” on campus was utterly destroyed.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, as the social and political atmosphere of the region became one of crisis, the notion that southern racial change could be quietly controlled by a small group of elite white men became untenable almost overnight. The rise of the grass-roots civil rights movement and the massive white resistance that accompanied it cut to the very heart of the philosophy, taking control out of the hands of the elite and denying its authority to make decisions for the entire region. There was now unremitting pressure on these universities, accompanied by intense media interest that made every move an occasion for criticism from someone. While tension had been growing between the two goals of regional leadership and national prominence since the end of World War II, only now did they come to seem completely incompatible. Simply put, there was no longer any way for these schools to please both the white South and the rest of the country.

In response, the recalcitrance of the boards seemed only to grow. At times, it seemed that some trustees were willing to sacrifice the gains their schools had made in order to keep the schools white. But in the end these trustees were a minority. When the major foundations and the federal government made it clear in the early 1960s that segregated

Conn., 1979).
universities would no longer receive desperately needed funds, the boards, usually under the prodding of the president, simply capitulated.

What they would not do, however, was admit that they had capitulated. Repeatedly, trustees and administrators claimed that they had not been compelled to change but had done so voluntarily. They insisted that their authority remained perfectly intact and that no yankees, blacks, or federal bureaucrats had any power over them. Over the decade and a half of struggle with this issue their idea of compulsion, once exquisitely sensitive, had narrowed to include only court orders and military force. Thus, they could and did maintain with a straight face that their schools had volunteered to admit blacks, despite a decade and a half of gymnastic efforts to avoid exactly this outcome.
Chapter 1
Guiding Post-War Changes

The presidents of Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt, charged with leading these schools into the post-war future, stood at the center of the controversy over race on campus. They inhabited both the national academic world as well as the world of the local elite, with its private clubs and close-knit social scene. They had the broadest view of the new landscape, the clearest understanding of the forces that would shape the future and as well as the pressures to hold fast to tradition.

But they could not single-handedly guide change on campus. The energy and commitment of faculties, the quality of students, the vision of trustees and administrators, the active interest of alumni, the support of financial backers—all were and remain critical factors in the ability of a president to move a school forward. While their relative importance varies over time, none can be ignored. Alexander Heard, chancellor of Vanderbilt from 1963 to 1982, summed this up. “The administrative head of a university,” he said, “is an inheritor of vision and mission, the temporary pilot of a well-launched vessel, the beneficiary of the momentum of predecessors and colleagues. He is only partly the author of his institution’s fate. He may, in fact, more importantly, be the stimulator and tolerator of initiatives in others. He must surely be the opportunist and the entrepreneur. Perhaps he is most decisive in setting style, in providing a grid of standards through which the old and the new must pass.”

The men who led Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt after World War II

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inherited strong traditions. Each of these schools was deeply proud of its roots. The faculty, administrators, trustees, and alumni all revered the founders and early leaders of their institution and the philosophical foundations they had laid. In particular the trustees, who had often known the giants of the past during their own days at school, took these principles—the nurturance of undergraduates, a commitment in the denominational schools to Christian education, leadership in the South—as guideposts for the development of the modern institution. Other ideals were often unspoken but exercised no less influence. Notions of the campus as part of the web of private institutions controlled by the local elite, as a place for their children to meet and mature under the guidance of wise old professors, endured among alumni and trustees long after World War II. even as American higher education was completely transformed. As the years passed, these prominent older graduates felt buffeted by rapid, dislocating change, as the South, and the schools, they had known as boys disappeared.

The presidents of these five schools, all but one (Rice’s William V. Houston) also sons of the rural South, saw in the post-war world a chance to fulfill the founders’ aspirations in new ways. They focused on the attainment of true academic excellence, while still retaining the ideal of regional leadership. They seized the opportunity presented by massive postwar federal research funding and continued philanthropic interest in southern education, enabling these schools to leap forward in research and teaching. As they succeeded, all the schools became far more cosmopolitan and complex places, with labyrinthine bureaucracies, faculties and students recruited from around the country, and an increasingly sophisticated outlook on their place in the nation.

To the trustees—locally powerful businessmen, bankers, attorneys, sometimes
clergymen, almost always alumni of the schools who they serve—this was not an
unalloyed good. These usually older men saw their school as part of their private domain.
a place for their children and their friends' children to make important social and business
contacts in a safe and supportive environment. They did value academic excellence and a
strong national reputation, but usually with less fervor than they valued a good football
team. Admissions, they believed, should be guided by strict standards, not exclusively
academic, and should include the same kinds of standards that operated at the country
club.

Thus, there was a growing gap between the perceptions of the presidents (and most of
the faculty)—who understood the important changes in higher education as well as the
changes in the social and economic climate of the nation and the South—and the
perceptions of the trustees— who saw no reason to abandon a system that had given them
happy and successful lives and that all their friends approved of on moral and social
grounds. But, as Heard pointed out, successful university presidents must be adept at
balancing the interests and desires of a variety of constituencies. In the post-war period,
this problem was acute. The era began with intimations of change, and that change soon
became faster and deeper than anyone imagined. The presidents of these institutions
struggled to persuade the trustees, who held the final decision, to accept new curricula, a
new emphasis on graduate studies, and an atmosphere of intellectual openness that many
of them found suspect and even anti-American at times. They also struggled to reconcile
the trustees to new patterns of race relations.
Harvie Branscomb, chancellor of Vanderbilt, was the most successful of these men in finding a path through this thicket of conflicting demands. Convinced that segregation’s days were numbered, eager to gain Vanderbilt a national reputation, and committed to regional progress, Branscomb spent the postwar years steadily working, often behind the scenes, to change the university’s relationship to the black community.

Branscomb was born in Huntsville, Alabama, in 1894. He spent his youth in various rural Alabama towns where his father, a Methodist minister, led congregations. He earned his BA from Birmingham College in 1914. It was, Branscomb later noted, “a useful institution, struggling to become a superior one,” but while he attended it remained the “kind of college where lunch was sometimes late because we had to wait for President Simpson to come out from town on a street car with the bread under his arm.”

The contrast must have been staggering when Branscomb won a Rhodes scholarship and arrived at Oxford. He spent three years there, excelling as a tennis player and earning a distinguished MA in biblical studies.

Branscomb left Oxford to serve with Herbert Hoover’s Belgian Relief Commission. returning to complete his examinations. He came back to the United States in July 1917. After trying and failing to join the Air Force, Branscomb went to work for the Army YMCA at Camp Wheeler in Macon, Georgia. There he became acquainted with Will Alexander, who ran the YMCA’s pastoral and social service efforts at southern army camps, and was influenced by Alexander’s progressive ideas about racial justice in the South. Shortly thereafter, Branscomb entered the army briefly before returning home in

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[2] Transcript of Swint Tapes (first draft of Branscomb’s memoirs), Box 20, Centennial Record Group, VUA. Birmingham College, affiliated with the Methodists of northern Alabama, later merged with Southern University, run by the Methodists of southern Alabama, and became Birmingham-Southern.

1918.

In 1919 Branscomb took a job as a philosophy instructor at the infant Southern Methodist University in Dallas, moving to its School of Theology as an associate professor the following year. He saw the post-WWI period as an opportunity for change and viewed teaching theology as a unique chance to influence the course the South would take. With the region “facing in the next decade a choice of roads, reactionary resistance to change or acceptance of new ways of thinking and acting,” Branscomb believed that the education of the South’s next generation of ministers was critical. “No progress in the South could be made,” he believed, “without the major Protestant churches . . . going along.”

Branscomb remained at SMU, with a year off to complete his course work for a Ph.D. in theology from Columbia University, until 1925. He also met his wife, a Texas native named Margaret Vaughan, during his years in Dallas. In 1925 Branscomb was fired from his position at SMU for a too-public defense of a colleague who was dismissed for liberal theological teachings, but Branscomb already had in hand a job offer from the Duke University Divinity School. He arrived at Duke at the age of 30 and remained there for twenty-one years, leaving only to finish his Ph.D. dissertation in 1927 and for a year of study in Europe in 1931–32. In 1944 he became the Dean of Duke’s Divinity School. He left that position in 1946 to take the chancellorship at Vanderbilt, where he served until 1963.

Before the Vanderbilt Board of Trustees settled on Branscomb as the school’s new chancellor, they approached President Rufus Harris of Tulane. In removing his name from consideration, Harris suggested that his temperament was perhaps wrong for Vanderbilt. “Character, personality and temperament[sic] prescribe generally one’s way of

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4 Transcript of Swint Tapes, Box 20, Centennial Record Group, VUA.
5 Harvie Branscomb, Purely Academic: An Autobiography (Nashville: limited ed. printed by Vanderbilt University, 1978); Conkin, Gone With The Ivy, 449–52.
getting things done, and I do believe that mine would scarcely be effective or proper in concluding the issues and adjustments that appear to me to be necessary at Vanderbilt. . . I am made aware that it will take a gentler hand than mine to do this."

While it may be true that Harris's somewhat outsized personality would not have worked well in sedate Nashville, if Vanderbilt's trustees believed that they were getting a "gentler hand" in Harvie Branscomb they were greatly mistaken. Branscomb was a keenly intelligent man, strong willed, energetic, self-confident, and an astute politician. He had a powerful vision of what a great southern university could be and a powerful conviction that he was the man to build one. From the moment he arrived on the Vanderbilt campus, Branscomb resolutely pursued what he believed to be the school's best interests with any means at his disposal, often to the discomfort of the trustees and alumni who frequently fought change almost as fiercely as Branscomb sought it.

Vanderbilt University was established, after several false starts, in 1873. It was organized by the Methodist Church, led by the powerful Bishop Holland McTyeire, but funded largely by Cornelius Vanderbilt. A bumpy beginning gave way to a period of vigorous growth and steady improvement in quality. But by the early 1900s Vanderbilt's ties to the Methodist church became a hindrance to the school's growth. The church leaders who controlled the board were increasingly unhappy with the movement towards a broader, more secular institution that accompanied Vanderbilt's strides in quality. At the same time, the church did not provide Vanderbilt with adequate funding, forcing the administration to go outside for money, and non-Methodist funders were wary of the school's strong denominational ties. The result, in the middle of the 1910s, was a bitter legal battle that ended with the severing of official ties between the church and the university. By the 1930s, Vanderbilt was on fairly solid footing, due largely to huge

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6 Rufus Harris to F.C. Rand, July 3, 1946, Box V-11, James G. Stahlman Papers, VUA. In general, the selection process that brought Branscomb to Vanderbilt was clumsily handled and reflected some long-standing divisions among the trustees. Conkin, Gone With the Ivy, 440-44.
grants from the Carnegie Foundation, the Vanderbilts, and the General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation. Still, the school remained, in Paul Conkin’s words, a “thoroughly conventional” regional institution. It struggled with academic quality and with the balance between its powerful, northern funded medical school and the rest of the university. The depression and World War II kept Vanderbilt from more than incremental growth in size and quality. 7

When Branscomb arrived as its new president in 1946, he had a difficult job ahead of him and what he had to work with did not look promising. Vanderbilt was too small, had woefully inadequate facilities, and was in a deteriorating neighborhood. It lacked any really prominent faculty members outside the medical school. Without even minimally adequate housing, it had become almost a streetcar college. Half of its students came from Nashville, two-thirds from within the state. Its enrollment in the fall of 1946 of about 3,000, swollen with returning veterans, was more than 50 percent larger than ever before. Worse, in spite of the fact that Vanderbilt had no debt, its finances were in awful shape, with an acute shortage of income. Unrestricted gifts for the year following the war totaled only $8,358, despite four high-pressure fundraising campaigns in the previous eight years with another one in progress when Branscomb arrived. Still, Branscomb took the job with a sense of anticipation, “convinced that the time had come to establish a great university in [this] part of the South . . .” 8

Once installed as chancellor, Branscomb wasted no time in getting on with the work. He gave his first speech only days after his inauguration in October 1946 at a Nashville Rotary Club meeting and soon set out on the road, speaking to Vanderbilt alumni groups in Washington, New York, Chicago, St. Louis, and finally Memphis. He highlighted the same themes in every city. First, he stressed the critical role of higher education in preserving the “American democratic ideal.” No democracy, he declared, can survive

7 This brief account is distilled from the early chapters of Conkin, Gone With the Ivy.
8 Branscomb, Purely Academic, 111–14; Conkin, Gone with the Ivy, 444.
without a moral basis. "This is the critical issue which directly involves the university," he said, and "Vanderbilt stands firm, and will continue to stand as a great exponent of the liberal tradition which has been the creative force in the western world." Second, Branscomb argued that postwar realities were beginning to join Vanderbilt's goals of regional and national service. While Vanderbilt would certainly remain a school with a southern identity and retain a leadership role in southern education, Branscomb explained that the South was now closer to the rest of the United States economically, politically, and even culturally than it had been in a century. He expected it to grow even closer in the years to come. Thus, Vanderbilt had an obligation to expand its circle of influence and to make a national contribution.\(^9\)

This argument wound its way through Branscomb's thinking over the next two decades. Progress, both for Vanderbilt and the South as a whole, meant movement towards the national mainstream. In Branscomb's eyes, though, this movement must be mutual, with other regions accepting the contributions of the South to American progress. A real respect for southern tradition was almost a precondition for change, as the region's economic growth, political health, and social progress depended on accepting the South's strengths as well as its weaknesses.

At Vanderbilt, though, the most immediate problem was not the region's place in the nation, but money. If the university were to become more than a good regional school, it would have to secure a lot more of it. Branscomb first reorganized Vanderbilt's financial administration. More aggressive investment strategies in a bull-market era and a concerted effort to spur alumni giving helped the school increase its income, as did the tuition revenues that accompanied the growth of enrollment. But it was outside funding

\(^9\) While asserting that "we will be blind... if we continue to think only of Southern issues in regional terms," Branscomb contended that the university had a special contribution to make, based on southern traditions, "one which grows out of her special background and heritage." Speech to Nashville Rotary Club, October 7, 1946, Box 5. Branscomb Papers, VUA; Clippings from *Nashville Tennessean*, November 5, 6, 1946. Box V-28, James Stahlman Papers, VUA.
agencies that provided the real boost. Almost immediately Branscomb began energetically to seek support from the federal government and private foundations. Success came quickly. In 1949 the GEB gave $1 million to endow the Graduate School, a key component in Branscomb’s drive for national prestige, with another $200,000 to follow over a five-year period. This success continued through the 1950s and 60s, providing much of the money to build the university Branscomb envisioned.¹⁰

Race relations at Vanderbilt upon Branscomb’s arrival seemed simple. He noted in his memoirs that in 1946 he was told that “no black man had ever been on the Vanderbilt campus except in a menial capacity.” He judged this, correctly, to be not strictly accurate but understood it as a statement of the school’s broad official attitude.¹¹ Nashville in the 1940s was a thoroughly segregated city, and the separation of the races was so ordinary as to require no comment on campus. All, however, was not as it appeared. Even before Branscomb assumed Vanderbilt’s chancellorship from fellow Alabamian Oliver C. Carmichael, serious fault lines had begun appearing in the university’s stance towards Nashville’s black community. Beneath the rather placid surface of Nashville race relations, some Vanderbilt faculty members were involved in inter-racial ventures with the city’s black institutions that had begun earlier in the 1930s and 40s. Alumni, trustees, and most students viewed this involvement with profound suspicion. These fault lines would widen and deepen during Branscomb’s tenure.¹²

Branscomb’s position on race relations was complex. Although he rarely advocated change explicitly on the basis of Christian principles of justice and equality before God, Branscomb was offended by the unfairness of segregation to a certain segment of

¹⁰ Branscomb, “Where Would The Money Come From,” A brief paper prepared in July 1970 for the Vanderbilt Centennial History Project, Box 20, Centennial Record Group, VUA.
¹¹ Swint transcript, Box 20, Centennial Record Group, VUA. Certainly, there had been very few black men on campus in other than a menial capacity.
southern blacks. His experiences in England and back in the United States with the YMCA after World War I, coupled with his strong Methodist faith and upbringing, had done much to shape his belief that southern blacks must be allowed to rise as far as they could. His devotion to southern progress led him to scorn segregation's waste of black talent, a cardinal and unaffordable sin in a still backward region. Without question, however, Branscomb believed that changes in the practice of segregation could only happen slowly and only “at this level of the exceptional Negro.” He showed real personal discomfort with lower-class blacks, even suggesting that he believed there were limits to their ability to grasp basic concepts of health and hygiene. Branscomb specifically rejected the mixing of blacks and white children in the public schools on the ground that most blacks had capabilities so much lower than even poor whites that it simply made no sense. “Opportunities,” he wrote, “must be given in some sort of relationship to capacities to use them and the mixing of populations must be on some general levels of approximately equal and similar social backgrounds and mores.”

But the treatment of educated, middle-class blacks seemed unreasonably harsh to Branscomb. He identified the source of this problem in the South’s history. "We have

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13 His father, Branscomb later reported, was an early model, being “slightly more liberal on matters of race than most other citizens.” Branscomb’s father put this attitude into practice, inviting the black ministers of the city, few of whom chose to attend, to the weekly “Preacher’s Meeting.” Swint transcript, Box 20, Centennial Record Group, Box 20, VUA.

14 Branscomb to Daniels, September 3, 1948, Box 101, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUA. Branscomb’s personal discomfort with racial mixing was never more evident than in a 1954 episode in which he discovered that Vanderbilt ROTC boys were sharing barracks space with blacks from Ohio at Fort Campbell. Although assured by the students that it was all right with them, Branscomb was clearly upset as he wrote of his anger and “sense of surprise and almost shock” at the situation. Branscomb to James A. Simpson, September 17, 1954, Box 101, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUA.

15 Branscomb’s understanding of the origins and meaning of segregation was certainly naive, but he never seemed to have given it any serious thought. This understanding was generally accepted in the 1940s and into the 1950s, remaining largely unchallenged by mainstream white historians until C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow (1955; reprint, New York, 1974). See also John T. Cell, The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South
had two patterns of dealing with Negroes in the South,” he wrote. “The first was the slavery pattern, the second the one which grew up under the unrealistic idealism and sheer cynicism of the carpetbaggers. This second pattern was worked out to deal with an uneducated inexperienced race which had just been released from slavery.”

Current racial unease, Branscomb argued, resulted from the fact that many southern blacks no longer resembled those “uneducated inexperienced” freedmen of the Reconstruction era. Rather, the South now had “many Negroes of education and ability equal of other citizens.” For the good of the entire region, it was now crucial that these people be accommodated and even encouraged. “The South,” Branscomb declared, “must have ways of enabling the educated Negro to take his place in and make his contribution to the work and advancement of the South.”

Branscomb understood that his belief in racial progress put him at odds with the traditionalists on the Vanderbilt board. “The race issue,” he wrote in his memoirs, “was one from which I anticipated trouble when I came [to Vanderbilt]. I regarded myself as liberally inclined, and I had traveled around enough to know that this issue would have to be met. The country had assimilated European nationals and accepted Orientals and other Asians. The black man was the exception, an exception which placed a heavy burden particularly on the South. Dual educational systems, medical care systems, etc., were


16 Harvie Branscomb to Jonathan Daniels, Sept. 3, 1948, Box 101, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUA. Daniels was editor of the Raleigh, North Carolina *News and Observer*. He was closely associated with the New Deal in his home state and was a close friend of Frank Porter Graham, another prominent southern liberal and President of the University of North Carolina. See Charles W. Eagles, *Jonathan Daniels and Race Relations: The Evolution of A Southern Liberal* (Knoxville, 1982) and John Kneebone, *Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race, 1920–1944* (Chapel Hill, 1985), which discusses Daniels and four other prominent journalists. At about the same time Branscomb made this same argument, stressing the presence of educated blacks in the South and the need for them to “render the largest possible service” to the region, in a statement given to a *Nashville Banner* reporter. Branscomb to Mary Jane Brooks, September 20, 1948, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUA.
exorbitantly expensive, and the cleavage between the races led to injustices and cruelties. I remember thinking that the inclusion of Negroes in the educational services which Vanderbilt would bring to the South might well be an issue on which a break with the institution’s constituency could occur.  

From Branscomb’s perspective there was everything to gain and nothing to lose from going along with new pressures for racial change. It would, in his opinion, reduce sectional antagonisms, improve chances for southern economic progress, and, most important, keep Vanderbilt in a position to benefit substantially from federal and philanthropic largesse. The cost would be the admission of a few exceptionally talented children of the black middle class, really, he judged, no cost at all.  

There was a critical qualification, though. Branscomb could only accept the gradual breakdown of segregation if the process was controlled by the southern white elite. He believed that only educated southern whites, who understood both the power of southern tradition and the need to change, had the mature judgment to safely steer the course. Only they possessed a practical sense of how much (actually, how little) change the white South would peacefully accept. Practicality thus counseled slow, cautious movement toward a gradual reconciliation of progress and tradition. In Branscomb’s view anyone who pushed an “idealist agenda” was dangerous, because idealism clouded judgment and put principal ahead of a “realistic” assessment of danger. Thus northerners, the NAACP, “militant” black students, and overeager white ones all blocked progress by advocating it too strongly, setting off a defensive reaction among white traditionalists. These groups, in Branscomb’s opinion, were the enemies of racial conciliation. “The more I travel north and south,” he wrote to Vanderbilt professor Donald Davidson, “the more I am convinced

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17Branscomb, Purely Academic, 153.
18No federal agency or major private philanthropy had yet made desegregation a requirement for funding, but the handwriting was on the wall. Branscomb’s many personal relationships with administrators at the large foundations allowed him to see that they were not going to abandon their concern about segregation and that this would someday result in restrictions on money.
that the only hope for reaching a sensible solution to [the race] problem lies with the intelligent white men of the south . . . ." Interestingly, he seems never to have noticed that the least practical agenda of all was the one pursued by the mass of southern whites who refused to alter traditional racial segregation.  

Branscomb, who had an almost messianic compulsion to explain himself, explained his approach in a 1949 letter to Joseph W. Holley. Holley, the founder and longtime president of a black college in Georgia, Albany State, had sent the Vanderbilt chancellor a copy of his new autobiography, You Can’t Build a Chimney From the Top.  

Branscomb replied with high praise and agreement with Holley’s arguments: “We are living in a critical time in which I believe that the progress of the Negroes in the United States is being greatly accelerated. It is extremely important that this progress not change into the form of a conflict between the ideal and the practical. The most important thing, it seems to me, is to preserve that attitude of good will and cooperation which you have personified so fully, to preserve every forward step adding to them steadily as time goes on. It is a situation in which character and ability to take advantage of every situation are

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19 Branscomb to Donald Davidson, March 25, 1948, Box 154, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUA. Praising a New York Times article on southern racial problems. Branscomb expressed this stance succinctly. This article, he wrote, “will be a source of encouragement to those individuals who feel acutely the need for change of sentiment in certain areas but who are realistically conscious of difficulties of bringing that about, particularly in an atmosphere of criticism and fret from outside the region.” Branscomb to Arthur Krock, September 13, 1948, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUA.

20 Joseph W. Holley, You Can’t Build A Chimney From the Top (New York, 1949). Holley was a larger than life individual, dedicated to the education of young black Georgians, who very nearly built Albany State College with his own hands. Holley’s basic philosophy was reminiscent of Booker T. Washington’s, a message of racial bootstrapping that was ultimately dependant on the willingness of whites to allow the black race to bring itself up. This thinking found an avid supporter in Harvie Branscomb, a white man who, apparently without any irony or ambiguity, wished southern blacks only the best in their efforts at self-improvement. On Washington see Louis Harlan, Booker T. Washington: The Making of A Black Leader (New York, 1972) and Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901–1915 (New York, 1983); Gaines, Uplifting the Race, 62–63, 90–97.
the primary requirements for leadership."

There was real tension between Branscomb's desire for change and his caution about offending traditional southerners among the university's constituency. This is most apparent in a 1949 draft proposal for the establishment of a Graduate Center at Vanderbilt. Amid the general plans for the growth of graduate education at the university Branscomb considered the relationship of such an effort to the graduate education of blacks. He concluded that existing black colleges, underfunded and inadequately staffed, were unable to provide top quality graduate education to the most talented southern blacks and that state institutions, currently all white, would likewise fail them. This situation, he argued in his draft proposal, was grossly inefficient and harmful to the region as a whole. His tentative solution was uncharacteristically ambitious: a proposal for a graduate school to be operated by Vanderbilt but separate physically and organizationally from the rest of the campus, which would admit the very best students in the region irrespective of race. This bold step would, Branscomb argued, "eliminate the social and psychological barriers to planning the most effective system of higher education for all students which the resources of the region can support."22

Branscomb was, of course, far from innocent about the potential reaction to such a proposal. He laid out in the draft proposal exactly what he expected to happen: "It must be anticipated that such a move would involve - unless compelled by legal action - resignations from the governing board, the reduction of enrollment at the undergraduate level, and quite possibly a lawsuit enjoining the action." While he thought that "such unhappy and strife-laden consequences" were unavoidable, Branscomb also believed that they could be kept to a minimum. Acknowledging the difficulties posed by the actual

21 Branscomb to J.W. Holly [sic], March 8, 1949, Box 212, RG 300, Chancellor's Office Papers, VUA.
22 "Tentative and Confidential Memorandum on the Establishment of a Graduate Center in Vanderbilt University," Harvie Branscomb, December 1949, Box 4, Branscomb Papers, VUA.
physical presence of black students, who were still seen as “unclean” no matter what their intellectual abilities, Branscomb proposed following the pattern of German universities, which assumed no responsibility for the housing and social aspects of students’ lives.  

In any event, Branscomb felt that if such a project were launched “on a scale broad enough to capture the imagination,” it could be effected without serious damage to Vanderbilt and could in a single stroke change the future of southern race relations. He saw it as a path for others to follow in solving the problem of higher education for southern blacks as well as other racial problems in the region. Further, he was certain that the rest of the country would take this as a sign that the South was willing to make real steps to begin dismantling segregation and a lessening of intersectional bitterness would follow.  

Branscomb sent copies of this preliminary proposal on a confidential basis to O.C. Carmichael, his predecessor as chancellor who was now president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and Robert Calkins at the General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation. Both returned lengthy comments. Carmichael in particular was enthusiastic, arguing that based on the easy desegregation of the law and medical schools at the University of Arkansas, “there will be more praise than blame for the action throughout the south.” Still, Branscomb abandoned the plan. He apparently never submitted it officially to any funding agency and never even developed it into a formal proposal.

His reasons for dropping it are clear. Such a plan would have to receive the blessing of the Vanderbilt Board of Trustees, a blessing that Branscomb must have judged would not be forthcoming. This judgment was accurate. When Branscomb began his tenure at Vanderbilt in 1946, the board had thirty-two members, plus the chancellor. Of those

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23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Carmichael to Branscomb, January 3, 1950, Box 4, Branscomb Papers, VUA.
thirty-two, seventeen were at least 65 years old and ten of those were at least 70. The term of office was eight years, at the end of which all were regularly reelected. These were the men who had chosen Branscomb as the new chancellor, and he both liked and respected them.26 They were all alumni and all devoted to Vanderbilt. They were also, he noted, “fine men who belonged to that second generation after the War Between the States, men who had worked hard and achieved positions of prominence and, in several instances, of affluence.”27 The trustees may have loved Vanderbilt, but they “had reached the age when most of them preferred to relax and enjoy the pleasant things their years of labor had brought.” “It was plain,” Branscomb wrote in 1970, that “the Board needed an infusion of new ideas, the addition of some younger men, and greater contacts with the national forces so important in the development of any university.”28

In 1947 two new trustees were elected, one of them Henry Alexander, who was to become the chairman of J.P. Morgan. Branscomb was happy with this choice, but he worried about the opposition that arose within the Board to the addition of another New York banker, even a Vanderbilt graduate.29 In what may well have been the shrewdest political move of his career, Branscomb now set out to convince Harold S. Vanderbilt to join the Vanderbilt Board. Harold Vanderbilt was, of course, enormously wealthy, but it was not primarily for his wealth that Branscomb sought him out. Branscomb in fact surprised Mr. Vanderbilt by not asking him for money at all in the course of making his initial overtures. Rather, the chancellor was interested in Harold Vanderbilt for his

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26 See Conkin, Gone With The Ivy, 440–44 for a discussion of the divisive search for a replacement for Carmichael. One aspect of the division was suspicion of the northern trustees, including board president Frank Rand, by the southerners, led as usual by James Stahlman.
27 Branscomb, Purely Academic, 183.
28 Ibid.; Harvie Branscomb, “Strengthening and Enervating the Board of Trust,” Box 20, Centennial Record Group, VUA. This is an early draft of Chapter XV of Branscomb’s memoir, Purely Academic. While the published memoir is quite similar, and makes the same general points, the draft version is often more frank.
29 Ibid.
general outlook, which was infinitely more sophisticated and cosmopolitan than that of the local Nashville trustees. Branscomb could not have been unaware either, of the vast influence that Harold Vanderbilt’s name and stature would have on the actions of the other trustees. When he was able to get Vanderbilt on the Board, in early 1950, Branscomb secured his own ability to gain approval for the changes, racial and otherwise, that were necessary for the university to move forward.\textsuperscript{30}

In 1949, however, the Vanderbilt board was still dominated by its Nashville faction—conservative, traditional, and led by the outspoken James Stahlman, who had vowed to oppose any effort to break down the color line on campus. Branscomb thus decided against a bold stroke on race relations and instead adopted a strategy that would become a successful pattern for inducing step-by-step change. Branscomb began presenting his trustees with tiny “difficulties” that could easily be avoided by relaxing segregation policies on campus without actually giving up a commitment to segregation. The board, while generally against racial change, could be induced to make adjustments in Vanderbilt’s racial stance when Branscomb could make the case that to do so would be reasonable and prudent and to fail to do so would be damaging.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{30} Branscomb tells the story of how he and other trustees convinced Harold Vanderbilt to join the university’s board in \textit{Purely Academic}, 185–90. The correspondence is in Box 6, Branscomb Papers, VUA. Even after Vanderbilt was on the board, Branscomb carefully maintained a close relationship with him. Branscomb regularly had Vanderbilt as an overnight guest at Branscomb’s Belle Meade home, talking over many contentious issues with him in private before he officially brought them before the trustees. Branscomb nowhere discussed explicitly Vanderbilt’s role in bringing about racial change at the university, but suggestions of his critical importance abound, often in the files of the other schools. For example, in gathering information for a study of desegregation in 1955, Dean James Cleland of the Duke Divinity School talked to Branscomb about how he had done it at Vanderbilt. Cleland related the conversation in a memo, and stressed that Branscomb had convinced the board to move only with “the able backing of one prominent and effective Northern member of the Board.” James T. Cleland to Marcus E. Hobbs, June 29, 1955, Box 5, J.T. Cleland Papers, DUA.

\textsuperscript{31} Almost from the moment Branscomb set foot on campus he began signaling that changes in relations with Nashville blacks were afoot. Quietly reversing long-standing policy, for example, Branscomb indicated very early in his tenure that Fisk faculty would be welcome to attend events at Vanderbilt’s Neely Auditorium. The Fisk professors never
"Taking advantage of situations as they arose," as Branscomb wrote to Holley, became his standard procedure on racial issues. Branscomb was always careful to raise these racial issues on his own terms. While his general strategy during these years was to wait for relatively minor issues to present themselves and then use them to induce minor changes, he sometimes chose to avoid bringing such small issues to the board. For example, when approached in January 1949 by the Tennessee Philological Association, which was about to invite language and literature teachers at the state's black colleges to join, about the possibility of someday scheduling a meeting at Vanderbilt, Branscomb simply put off deciding. Since the Association did not yet actually have black members, he wrote, the issue of how Vanderbilt would handle such a meeting had not yet arisen and so Vanderbilt did not have to establish a policy.\footnote{Wherever he saw no real gain to be made, Branscomb shied away from drawing attention to delicate racial matters.}

Explaining why he did not want Charles S. Johnson, the president of Nashville's prominent black college, Fisk, and his personal friend, to join the heads of the other local colleges on the podium at a University Center event, Branscomb wrote that granting Johnson any "special prominence" was sure to "create a misimpression." He went on to explain that Vanderbilt has "tried to be as helpful as we can to the Fisk and Meharry [the city's black medical school] faculties, and have occasionally had one of them take part in a conference or program where there were specific reasons why they should be present. Where there are not such reasons, we have tried to avoid bringing them in unnecessarily."

showed up, and Branscomb understood their request as a simple test of his attitude. \textit{Purely Academic}, 153. A similar request, also apparently exploratory, was unceremoniously rejected soon after O.C. Carmichael became chancellor. Though it was addressed to the head of the Vanderbilt Student Union, he apparently consulted the chancellor in making his reply and the correspondence is found in Carmichael's files. William A. Griffey to Byron Anglin, Nov.4, 1937; Anglin to Griffey, Nov.8, 1937, Box 174, RG 300, Chancellor's Office Papers, VUA.

\footnote{Branscomb to Gerald E. Wade, January 28, 1949, Box 212, RG 300, Chancellor's Office Papers, VUA.}
By the same token, if Branscomb saw the possibility of making an important step, he would discreetly let it be known beforehand that he would support a move. In correspondence with the head of the Vanderbilt Medical Society, Dr. James Ward of the Medical School, Branscomb noted that he had heard discussion about the possibility of the Society inviting members of the Meharry faculty to the group’s scientific meetings. Although he suggested that it would be better if such attendance were on “some informal and non-publicized basis,” Branscomb directly told Ward that whatever the Medical Society chose to do, he “would be prepared to defend the Society’s action in case there should be any difficulties concerning it.”

Branscomb began his real attempts to move Vanderbilt off center in racial matters in early 1948. At the board meeting in February of that year Branscomb directly addressed the problem of race relations. He began by pointing out that while this was not a new problem in the South, it had recently become a matter of “new prominence” in higher education. Branscomb then ran through a list of recent events that seemed to portend change. The newly issued report of the Truman Commission on Higher Education, federal court decisions in Missouri and Oklahoma, and a possible call by the Association of American Colleges for the elimination of segregation all signaled increased pressure that could not leave Vanderbilt untouched. Branscomb was careful to make certain that the board understood that he was not in favor of any dramatic changes in race relations.

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33 Branscomb to C.A. Craig, October 17, 1949, Box 212, RG 300, Chancellor’s Office Papers, VUA.
34 Branscomb to Dr. James Ward, November 9, 1949, Box 212, RG 300, Chancellor’s Office Papers, VUA.
35 This is an early example of a classic Branscomb strategy: carefully preparing the trustees for some future action. There was, he wrote to Emory’s White, no particular incident that required him to go before the trustees to discuss race relations on that particular day. Rather, he anticipated that they day would come when some such incident would arise and he wanted to have already laid the groundwork when it did. Branscomb to White,
He flatly stated his agreement with those who dissented from the Truman Commission's call for an end to segregated higher education, and he reassured the trustees that “[segregation] has been the policy of the leading educational institutions of the South, and it remains the cardinal principle of the policy we are trying to carry out at Vanderbilt.”

Still, Branscomb argued that for reasons of both principle and practicality Vanderbilt could not maintain “a purely negative position.” In a rhetorical maneuver that began to suggest his strategy for dealing with outside coercion on race, Branscomb suggested to the trustees that the way to resist this growing pressure was to remain true to the true southern tradition. That tradition, he argued, was not one of opposition or hostility to southern blacks but rather one of care and “helpfulness.” Being “helpful to the Negro institutions in our City, and to the needs of the individual members of those institutions,” Branscomb explained, “has always been the attitude of the best southern leadership. We would, it seems to me, be false to our position if we repudiated it under present conditions and pressures.”

Branscomb’s understanding of what “helpfulness” to blacks meant in this context was fleshed out by his description of a recent series of events involving the needs of local black institutions. He described a narrowly constrained situation that called for a minor accommodation to solve a specific problem. He noted that the librarians at the local black colleges, Fisk and Tennessee A&I, had requested permission to consult the Library of

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36 February 1948 Report to the Board of Trust, Box 212, RG 300, Chancellor’s Office Papers, VUA. Branscomb sent a copy of this report to his Goodrich White at Emory and to Rufus Harris at Tulane. At times, the presidents of these five schools tried to craft common solutions to problems of race relations on campus. The most organized attempt was at the October 1952 inaugural meeting of the Council of Southern Universities, comprised of Tulane, Duke, Rice, Emory, Vanderbilt, and the state universities of Virginia, Texas, and North Carolina. Although the private schools acknowledged that they would have to do something about segregation, they were defeated in designing a common strategy by the “diversity of problems” that they faced. Minutes of the Council of Southern Universities, October 24, 1952.

37 Ibid.
Congress catalogue held by the Joint University Library at Vanderbilt. Branscomb reported to the trustees that he had urged the black schools to purchase the recently printed edition of the catalogue, but allowed them to use Vanderbilt's catalogue until their set arrived and anytime thereafter when the bound set could not furnish the information that they needed. This solution, he explained, held to his two main principles. "to endeavor to be helpful, and yet not to establish regular recurring inter-racial patterns." The board agreed.  

Branscomb closed this report with an argument that went to the heart of his strategy for controlling and managing racial change. "[W]ise southern leadership," he argued. "has felt that one of the essentials for the handling of this problem has been the encouragement and support of those temperate and realistic leaders of the Negro race who were willing to face the realities of this problem." By working with "the best type of Negro leadership," men who were "endeavoring to lead their race along the slow path of hard work, educational advancement and moral improvement," Vanderbilt could prevent worse problems. Give-and-take with reasonable black leaders, who understood that they were junior partners and who would accept small accommodations benevolently granted, would help ensure that unreasonable demands for deep change would not present a threat. Failure to encourage these leaders, failure to make the "realistic" small concessions that would help them lead their race forward, Branscomb argued, would only weaken them and, in the end, "play into the hands of the radical and revolutionary" black leaders.  

Branscomb apparently convinced his trustees that such minor matters could be dealt

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38 Branscomb avoided mentioning what the trustees certainly understood, that the Joint University Library, a cooperative venture involving Vanderbilt, Peabody, and Scarritt colleges, was funded by the GEB, an organization with a powerful commitment to black education. Apparently wanting to avoid any suggestion of coercion, Branscomb never mentioned that permission for black librarians to consult catalogue could hardly be refused without running the risk of angering one of the most important funders of southern higher education.

39 Ibid.
with flexibly. But on the issue of black admissions to Vanderbilt the trustees remained immovable. A final, ironic conclusion to the story of Vanderbilt's race relations in the late '40s was reached in late May 1949. Both the admissions office and the chancellor's office received copies of a request for admission to the School of Law from a black veteran, Robert Williams. This friendly and honest letter caught Branscomb's attention and he approached the university's counsel, board member Cecil Sims, for a legal opinion as to whether Mr. Williams could be enrolled. Sims replied almost immediately: "In answer to your recent inquiry, you are advised that Tennessee law especially forbids the attendance of white and colored persons in the same school, academy, college, or other place of learning." Branscomb, perhaps sensing an opportunity to begin softening the board's attitude, approached the Executive Committee with the application, arguing that while Williams must be notified that his application could not be considered, the words "at this time" ought to be appended. The Committee overruled him.\footnote{Robert E. Williams, Jr. to Vanderbilt Chancellor's Office, May 25, 1949; Branscomb to Cecil Sims, June 15, 1949; Sims to Branscomb, June 15, 1949, Box 212, RG 300, Chancellor's Office Papers, VUA; Branscomb, Purely Academic, 154. Sims's letter explaining Tennessee law is important. He cites both an unambiguous statute, Section 11395, et seq. of the Code of Tennessee, and a judicial opinion upholding that statute. State v. Witham, 165 SW2d 378, informing Branscomb in no uncertain terms that it was against the law to enroll blacks at Vanderbilt. Branscomb and the board later chose to disregard this.}

II

In May 1948 Harvie Branscomb sent a copy of his February statement to the trustees on race relations to his friend Goodrich White, who was president of Emory University. White received it with approval and wrote to Branscomb that "I have read this statement with very great interest and appreciation and find myself in thorough accord with the
general principles you state.” At first glance, White’s agreement with Branscomb seems odd. Where the Vanderbilt chancellor worked hard to convince the trustees to accept minor loosening of racial restrictions, White never urged the Emory board to take a single step in that direction. Quite the contrary, his position on segregation in general and at Emory in particular led him to ignore pressures for change on campus for as long as possible. Fearing, as did Branscomb, a severe southern white backlash in the face of prodding on racial matters, White judged, unlike Branscomb, that the balance of change and tradition had to be found closer to the side of tradition. Thus, White supported a more nuanced and “fairer” segregation, one that provided better opportunities for able blacks within black institutions. Still, underlying these different approaches was a fundamental agreement. White and Branscomb both believed that the only appropriate people to decide where such a balance lay were men like themselves, the “intelligent white men of the South.”

Goodrich Cook White, president of Emory University from 1942 to 1957, was born in 1889 in Griffin, Georgia. He received his AB from Emory in 1908, at the age of eighteen, when it was still Emory College and still located in Oxford, Georgia. A fraternity member and a fair athlete, White was more noted for his academic achievements and skill as an editor and a debater. With the exception of the first six years following his

41 Goodrich White to Branscomb, May 20, 1948, Box 17, Goodrich White Papers. Emory University Archives, Special Collections, Robert Woodruff Library, Atlanta, Georgia (hereinafter EUA). The circles of southern higher education in this era were small ones. The presidents and other administrators of all these schools were quite well acquainted with each other, and some were close personal friends. They met regularly at meetings and conferences, corresponded about important issue, gave and solicited advice, and tried to work together on common problems as much as possible. The ties of friendship and loyalty were strong and tangle. Hollis Edens, for example, led Duke but maintained especially close relations with the leadership at Emory, where he had been both a student and an administrator. Fred Cole, academic vice-president of Tulane, was the brother of Taylor Cole, provost at Duke. These sorts of ties created an intricate grapevine whereby substantive ideas could be circulated along with gossip and job offers.

42 For a thorough look at White’s years at Emory see Sam M. Shiver and Robert F. Whitaker, “The 14th President’s 15 Years,” Emory Alumnus (April 1957), 5–23.
graduation White spent his entire adult life affiliated with Emory. He first worked for the Methodist Publishing House in Nashville, then received his master’s degree in psychology from Columbia University in 1911 and two years teaching English at Kentucky Wesleyan and one teaching psychology at Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia. In 1914 he returned to Emory as an associate professor of “mental and moral science.” just as the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, voted to establish a new university, which would be formed around Emory College and the Candler School of Theology. In 1915 he married Helen Chappell, the daughter of Emory trustee and Methodist leader E.B. Chappell. During World War I White served as a lieutenant in the psychological division of the Army Medical Corps. In this capacity he administered intelligence tests to southerners, both black and white, in an effort to identify those who were unfit for military duty. This effort would yield results that deeply puzzled the analysts who would spend years trying to explain them away: many black soldiers from the North scored higher than southern white farmers. These results apparently fascinated White, who kept his original copies of some of the early reports in his files.43

After the war White returned to Emory, now relocated in Atlanta, where he steadily rose in the university’s administration. He was appointed Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences in 1923 and Dean of the Graduate School in 1929, taking a leave of absence to earn his doctorate in psychology from the University of Chicago in 1927. White held both positions concurrently until 1938, when he resigned as Arts and Sciences dean upon his appointment as the university’s vice-president. He retained that post, as well as the

deanship of the graduate school, until he became Emory’s president in 1942.\footnote{Biographical files, EUA. White served as Emory’s president until he retired in 1957. He was succeeded by S. Walter Martin, another Georgian and an historian, who came to Emory from the University System of Georgia.}

White was in many ways the most personally conservative of the presidents under consideration here and the one least inclined to press for change of any kind. Fiercely devoted to Emory, he led a school that was not as prestigious or as academically advanced as Duke, Tulane, Rice, or Vanderbilt, and one whose horizons at this time were set somewhat lower. Emory University began its existence in 1838 as tiny Emory College, located about forty miles from Atlanta in Oxford, Georgia. Established by the Georgia Methodists, the school slowly became a good regional college, with a classical curriculum and a strong commitment to Christian education, by the time of the First World War. The year 1914 marked the major turning point in the history of the small college. In the aftermath of the split between the Methodist Church and Vanderbilt University, the church turned its attention to establishing a new Methodist university in the southeast. Strongly influenced by Bishop Warren A. Candler and his brother, Coca-Cola founder Asa G. Candler, a church commission decided to locate the new school in Atlanta, with Emory College forming its undergraduate core. A gift of $1 million from Asa Candler helped the transition, and this time the churchmen carefully drafted the charter to ensure that Emory University would remain in their hands.\footnote{Thomas H. English, Emory University 1915–1965: A Semicentennial History (Atlanta. 1966), 3–18. Emory College completed its move to the Atlanta campus in 1919.}

The new university grew steadily, opening a School of Theology, a medical school, a law school, a school of business administration, and a graduate school as well as expanding and improving the undergraduate faculty. Finances, while also improving, were a chronic problem, and the depression hit Emory particularly hard.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, chapters three and four.}

By the end of World War II, Emory was still a struggling university. In particular, it was hampered by the fact that until 1946 it offered no work at all toward the doctorate
and only limited work at the master's level, which had been suspended during the war. Although the postwar boom on campus quickly propelled the school towards a major expansion of its graduate program, including the addition of Ph.D. instruction, Emory began this era far behind its peers.\textsuperscript{47} Emory was also still officially, and quite tightly, tied to the Methodist Church, as Duke and Vanderbilt no longer were. The influence of the Methodist hierarchy on the board of trustees was strong, as was that of the Atlanta business elite, which maintained throughout this era a firm grasp on the politics of the city and the state.\textsuperscript{48}

Goodrich White spent his boyhood in a county seat town in middle Georgia at the turn of the century. In 1959 he wrote a biographical sketch, possibly a draft for a speech, in which he reminisced about the world of his youth, a world he described as “closer in time

\textsuperscript{47} Emory began offering the Master of Arts and Master of Science degrees in 1919. In 1941 a Master of Arts in Teaching was added. In 1944 Goodrich White, who had headed the graduate school from 1929 until 1942, reported to the Emory trustees that he believed Emory was capable of offering doctoral work in a small number of fields—biology, chemistry, history and English. White called in Dumas Malone as a special advisor on this project and Malone submitted a report in July 1945. Arguing that the question of the future of the Graduate School was “inseparable from the larger one of creating at Emory a university in the true and full sense of the term,” Malone concluded that it was now feasible for Emory to develop doctoral programs “worthy of a great region.” Malone. “Report to the President on the Development of the Graduate School,” \textit{Bulletin of Emory University}, XXXI (October 1, 1945).

\textsuperscript{48} English, \textit{Emory University}. On the Atlanta business establishment and its hold on power see Floyd Hunter, \textit{Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers} (Chapel Hill, NC, 1953) and Calvin Kytle and James Mackay, \textit{Who Runs Georgia?} (Athens, Georgia, 1998). Kytle and Mackay, after interviewing members of virtually every group involved in the state’s political process, concluded that Georgia’s large corporate interests, based in Atlanta, had mastered that process to such an extent that they were the \textit{de facto} rulers of Georgia. Their study was performed in 1947 but remained unpublished until 1998. Hunter, focused on the city of Atlanta, found that a mere forty people, nearly all businessmen (although he did include four government officials), effectively ran the city. Ivan Allen, Jr., mayor of Atlanta for most of the sixties, later echoed these findings, claiming that the power structure in Atlanta included “the leaders of the top fifty or so businesses in the city.” These were all rich men, and all were “white. Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, Atlantan, business-oriented, non-political, moderate, well-bred, well-educated, pragmatic, and dedicated to the betterment of Atlanta.” Ivan Allen, Jr., \textit{Mayor: Notes on the Sixties} (New York, 1971), 30–31.
to the Georgia of Longstreet’s Georgia Scenes than to the Georgia—at least to the Atlanta—of to-day."" It was a world of cotton tenancy and sharecropping, with a mill village literally across the railroad tracks from town, and Saturdays spent around the courthouse square. White himself grew up in town, working at a general store and happily attending school, at which he excelled. His family lived in a tight circle that revolved around the Methodist Church, where his grandfather was pastor.

It was also a world of racial segregation. “Jim Crow,” White wrote of his boyhood, “was in practice an established fact, whether by law or otherwise.” Although blacks had not yet been completely disfranchised, White considered that “during these years the Negro had been ‘put in his place’ and it was pretty well assumed that he would stay there. It was hardly necessary to feel contempt for him.” That place was clear: “There were two ‘nigger towns.’ I knew where they were, but that was about all. There were Negro schools and Negro churches. That they were any of my concern was never suggested. We saw Negroes every day. They worked in the kitchens and in the yards and gardens; as nursemaids; as porters and waiters in the two small hotels; they drove the drays.”

Despite White’s recollection of one Sunday afternoon lynching, which apparently greatly disturbed his grandfather, for a young boy these arrangements were simply beyond questioning. “The Negroes’ status was fixed,” he explained, “and as far as I knew there was no ‘race problem.’”

As president of Emory, White’s perceptions of Georgia’s racial arrangements and the possibility of their adjustment were also shaped by that state’s political situation in the 1940s. Georgia politics was complicated. Thoroughly controlled by the Democratic party, the state still saw intense competition between the party’s two main wings, although there was little of substance to distinguish those factions during the 1940s. Both propounded a

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49 In two rough drafts, White reviewed the then current historical literature on the era of his youth in the South and compares his own childhood experiences with the work of several historians. Box 31, White Papers, EUA.

50 Ibid.
support for economic growth and the modernization of the economy brought about by the increasing presence of big business, coupled with resistance to any social change that would upset the traditional order. This contradictory stance led to serious conflict in later years, but even in the 1940s it brought race to the forefront of politics.  

Long before segregation became critical in the politics of other southern states. Georgia’s gubernatorial contests revolved around race. The “county unit” system of elections, which gave disproportionate political strength to rural counties, prevented politicians from simply courting the support of the powerful commercial interests in Atlanta. Although this support was critical, so were the votes of the rural, traditional, and increasingly frightened counties of south Georgia. Racial demagoguery and a fervid insistence on maintaining southern traditions in the face of perceived federal encroachments was directed at gaining the votes of the rural “wool hat boys.” Still, while businessmen in Atlanta may well have felt distaste at the vigor and style of the invective, they were unoffended by the core of this message.

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52 The county unit system created a sort of state-level electoral college. Each county had two, four or six votes, determined by population. Those votes were delivered as a unit to the candidate who garnered the most popular votes in the county. This system was designed to prevent urban areas from controlling the state, and it did so very effectively. Biased against the most populous counties from the beginning, that bias grew larger in lockstep with the growth of the cities. See Key, Southern Politics, 117–19; Numan Bartley, The Creation of Modern Georgia (Athens, Georgia, 1983), 161, 166 and 202–03 for how the county unit system thwarted coherent politics in the vitriolic 1946 election. Earl Black points out that Georgia was unusual within the South in the extent to which race was a campaign issue in the 1940s in Southern Governors and Civil Rights (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 29.

53 Even in the late 1940s, the presence of a large, educated, and prosperous black community in Atlanta moderated white racism through its ability to exercise limited political power. See Jack L. Walker, “Protest and Negotiation: A Case Study in Negro Leadership in Atlanta, Georgia,” Midwest Journal of Political Science 7 (May 1963), 99–124. In 1949, for example, black Democrats and Republicans united to form the Atlanta Negro Voters League in order to maintain what leverage the black community possessed. Clarence A. Bacote, “The Negro in Atlanta Politics,” Phylon 16 (4th Quarter, 1955), 349.
As early as 1942 Ellis Arnall made race a campaign issue in gubernatorial politics when he defeated incumbent Eugene Talmadge, helped in part by Talmadge’s heavy-handed attempts to purge the faculty of the University of Georgia of “integrationists” the year before. Talmadge’s actions resulted in the loss of accreditation for Georgia’s colleges, a blow to the state’s reputation and a threat to business.\(^54\) Thereafter, the key issues in politics at the state level were race and segregation. The 1946 Democratic primary, the only election that counted, was a three-way contest that pitted two progressives against the traditionalist Talmadge. The campaign was a savage one, fought largely over the issue of white supremacy. Talmadge seized on the recent Supreme Court decision, *Smith v. Allwright*, which invalidated the white primary, to conjure up images of federal tyranny and black rule. Talmadge’s victory, though followed almost immediately by his death, set the tone for Georgia politics well into the 1960s. His son Herman became governor in 1948, again campaigning on a promise to reinstate the white primary, raising the specter of miscegenation and intimidating black voters away from the polls. This series of divisive elections did much to keep racial fears at a boil

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\(^54\) Ellis Arnall, a lawyer from Newnan, Georgia, the same town where Goodrich White was raised, was a classic progressive reformer. As governor he not only repaired the damage done by Talmadge to the state’s system of higher education, he also passed structural reforms to keep the Board of Regents and the State Board of Education free from direct political interference in the future. He also undertook reform of the penal system, forced changes in the discriminatory freight rates charged by railroads, and oversaw the development of the modern structure of Georgia’s government, chairing the commission that drafted a new state constitution. His commitment to including as many Georgians as possible in the political system and his acceptance of the federal court’s decision to abolish the white primary, however, were more popular at the national level than within Georgia. See generally Harold P. Henderson, *The Politics of Change in Georgia: A Political Biography of Ellis Arnall* (Athens, Georgia, 1991) and, for a clear exposition of the economic changes and social turmoil that helped create the political confusion of the 1940s in Georgia, Randall L. Patton, “A Southern Liberal and the Politics of Anti-Colonialism: The Governorship of Ellis Arnall,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 74 (Winter 1990), 599-621. Arnall gives his own interpretation in *The Shore Dimly Seen* (Philadelphia, 1946).
throughout the 1940s and beyond.55

Goodrich White's statements and actions while he was president of Emory reflected his perceptions of these political realities in Georgia. They also reflected his own personal beliefs about southern race relations. White had developed over time a complicated relationship to his own, and to the South's, past. He was not nostalgic and did not pine for the region's "glorious heritage," which as an adult he came to suspect had never existed. In his brief 1959 memoir he declared that the persistence of the social and psychological characteristics of his small town southern upbringing was "a continuing source of regret." The experiences of his later years would bring an acute awareness of the limitations of this early way of life, including a keen perception of the unfairness of segregation. By the time he wrote this sketch at the end of the 1950s, White, who as a child knew nothing of the "race problem," said, "The Negro has been the problem of the South throughout virtually its entire history. The problem cuts across every aspect of our life . . . ." In one particularly direct passage White revealed his own confusions about race and the South's relation to its traditions and to the rest of the country:

There have been times when I thought -- perhaps it was only wishful thinking -- that the South was well on the way to mastery of its [race] problem and the attainment of maturity, properly cherishing whatever is admirable in its past but not trying to live in it and on it, facing the issues of the day as Americans, divided perhaps among ourselves but not always having our positions brought to the test of whether or no they are properly 'Southern'. But I can no longer delude myself or even cherish the hope. We have been set back -- how many decades I do not dare to say. I would like to get off the defensive. I find it very hard to be patient

55 *Smith v. Allwright*, 321 U.S. 649 (1944). On this case see Kluger, *Simple Justice*, 235–37. On Georgia's 1946 and 1948 elections see Harold P. Henderson "The 1946 Gubernatorial Election in Georgia," (M.A. thesis, Georgia Southern College, 1967) and Bartley, *Creation of Modern Georgia*, 197–207. Robert Mizell, longtime Emory administrator and confidant of Coca-Cola president Robert Woodruff, summed up the racial situation in Atlanta in February 1946: "Not since the Atlanta riots some forty years ago has the race question been such an inflammable issue as now." Robert C. Mizell to John A. Griffin, February 8, 1946, Box 2, Robert C. Mizell Papers, EUA. Like White, Mizell worked vigorously to improve black higher education in Atlanta. Morris Brown College was his particular interest.
with the haters of the South—or even with those who, personally tolerant and sympathetic, or at least polite, utterly fail to understand. Often defense is extremely difficult. And it is hardest of all to satisfy my conscience and to define the fine line between patience, wisdom and justifiable prudence on the one hand and cowardice on the other.\textsuperscript{56}

This fine line was the one that White chose to walk as president of Emory. His attitude toward any racial change was one of extreme caution. White quite clearly believed that segregation as practiced sometimes led to harsh injustices. Surrounded by able and accomplished black men and women in Atlanta’s black universities and colleges as well as in the city’s growing black business class, he could not ignore the unfair treatment that was often meted out to them in the name of tradition.\textsuperscript{57} Believing himself constrained by political circumstances, by the heavy weight of tradition, and by demagogues’ manipulation of tradition, however, White chose the most cautious path towards reform. He personally believed that the best hope for black progress lay in the improvement of their segregated institutions rather than in the breaking down of the color line. Throughout his adult life, White worked to help various black institutions, predominantly Clark College. This, he believed, was the only change that white Georgians would accept.

Although there are few indications that the issue of race relations was a pressing one on the Emory campus in the years following World War II, from time to time it did arise. These occasions were never due to the deliberate choice of the president, and he did not view them as opportunities to induce gradual change. White did not push the Emory trustees to change, ever. Rather, he responded when circumstances demanded it and his responses were wary. They underlined his understanding that southern race relations were a “problem,” his belief that those who did not grow up in the South could only “fail to

\textsuperscript{56} Goodrich White, draft of reminiscences, Box 31, White Papers, EUA.

understand," and finally, his fear that any progress towards mastering the problem would be destroyed by too much pressure for change, which would certainly ignite a political backlash, possibly even a violent one.

It was in the course of his service on President Truman’s Commission on Higher Education that White articulated his views on this matter. This group was organized in the summer of 1946 to begin a formal reexamination of the “objectives, methods and facilities” of the American system of higher education “in light of the social role it has to play” in the wake of the war. Charged with producing recommendations on a wide variety of subjects, the group quickly split up into subcommittees. In October 1947 the subcommittee on “Equalizing and Expanding Individual Opportunity,” chaired by Milton Eisenhower, presented its draft report to the full Commission, calling firmly for the complete elimination of segregated higher education in the South.  

58 Harry Truman, “Letter of Appointment,” reproduced in the Commission’s report, Higher Education for American Democracy: The Report of the President’s Commission on Higher Education (Washington, DC, 1947). This letter contains the committee’s charge, including a list of specific topics to be addressed: “ways and means of expanding educational opportunities for all able young people; the adequacy of curricula, particularly in the fields of international affairs and social understanding; the desirability of establishing a series of intermediate technical institutes; the financial structure of higher education with particular reference to the requirements for the rapid expansion of physical facilities.” White gave a speech to a meeting of church-related colleges in July 1948 in which he explained the workings of the Commission in great detail. He made clear that the report was no “rubber stamp,” but that every section had been thoroughly debated and redrafted repeatedly both in sub-committee and by the entire Commission. In the main, however, this speech dealt with the place of private denominational colleges, including the newly critical issue of public aid to private schools, in the plans for broadening the availability and quality of higher education set forth in the Commission’s Report. Goodrich White, “Speech to Meeting of Church Related Colleges,” July 26, 1948, Box 25, White Papers, EUA.

59 White claimed that he sat silently through the discussions on this topic because he did not want to engage in a fight that he could not hope to win. He did not finally speak up until it was time for the Commission to approve the sub-committee reports, and even then he wanted to keep as low a profile as possible. He wrote George Zook, the chairman of the Commission, that “I have no wish to try to persuade the Commission to change its mind. That would be futile... I have kept silent during the discussions of this issue, though at times smarting under an occasional utterance, because of a sense of the futility of any protest. I now simply wish to be recorded as dissenting.” White to George F.
White felt compelled to object publicly. In a dissent to the Commission’s recommendation and in the correspondence generated by that dissent, he laid out several reasons for rejecting the judgment of the group. First, White argued that the people making this recommendation were simply not qualified to do so. The northerners who dominated the Commission, he believed, were unable to put aside democratic ideology long enough to understand that the South was different and needed special handling.

White saw the Commission’s desire to eliminate segregated higher education as zealous, as the refusal to acknowledge the practical limitations of the generally laudable principles of democracy and equality. In both his initial letter of protest, directed to the chairman of the Commission, and in the dissent itself, he made this plain, arguing that the recommendations, while inspired by “high purpose and theoretical idealism,” were “wholly doctrinaire positions which ignore the facts of history and the realities of the present.” A lack of experiences with those southern “realities,” White believed, led the Commission members to sunder common sense from theory. In a letter to Arthur H.

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Zook, October 27, 1947, Box 17, White Papers, EUA.

60 White to George F. Zook, Oct. 27, 1947, Box 17, White Papers, EUA; Higher Education for American Democracy, 29.

61 Both Rufus Harris and Harvie Branscomb echoed resentment of pressure from outside the region in letters to White at this time. The Association of American Colleges was debating a resolution condemning segregation in southern higher education in the wake of the Truman Commission report, and a vote had been narrowly avoided by the strategy of authorizing a committee to study the problem. Guy Snavely, Executive Director of the Association and former President of Birmingham-Southern College, had approached both Harris and Branscomb to serve on that committee. Both refused. Branscomb, in a letter to White, explained: “I refused to go on Snavely’s minority rights committee. I wrote him that I saw no value to be gained in having the majority of that committee, with their minds already made up, ignoring the position of a minority of the schools of the country. This in the name of minority rights.” Branscomb to White, May 17, 1948, Box 17, White Papers, EUA. Harris sent White a blind copy of his letter to Snavely declining to serve. He was, if anything, more emphatic: “I feel that it would be fruitless to accept assignment on this Commission since the basic principle of segregation is not accepted by the Commission. The vote on a matter touching segregation would always be ten to two or nine to three. I have no desire to be a whipping boy for a hostile press, nor do I wish to lose my usefulness here in my own section.” Harris to Snavely, April 20, 1948. Box 17. White Papers, EUA.
Compton, chancellor of Washington University in St. Louis, White expressed his gratification that Compton, a fellow southerner who led a border state school, would join him in his dissent from the sub-committee’s report. White was happy but apparently not surprised that Compton, President Lewis Jones of the University of Arkansas, and Douglas Southall Freeman, those “members of the Commission who are really in position to understand the problem through firsthand acquaintance with it.” shared his beliefs about the impracticality of living without segregation in the South.62

White argued that as a practical matter the South needed to maintain segregation, and objected strongly to “the joining together of ‘discrimination and segregation’ and the sweeping and unreserved condemnation of both.”63 Still, in his dissent he acknowledged that for southern blacks “gross inequality of opportunity, economic and educational, is a fact” and that “as rapidly as possible conditions should be improved, inequalities removed, and greater opportunity should be provided for all our people.”64 The heart of White’s objection to the Commission’s recommendation, then, was not that they wanted to improve conditions for southern blacks, but that they proposed to do so by the immediate elimination of segregation. Timing, he argued, was everything and moderation the only reasonable course. “There are men of good will in the South,” he wrote to Zook, “who are concerned about inequalities and injustice and who are working quietly and persistently... to strengthen existing institutions of higher education for Negroes ... These men are sometimes (and this applies to some of our Negro leaders) subject to attack by extremists on both sides of the issue. It is my own conviction that their patient and persistent ‘gradualism’ is the only way to accomplishment without conflict and tragedy.”65

62 White to Arthur H. Compton, December 2, 1947, Box 17, White Papers, EUA.
63 White to George Zook, October 27, 1947, Box 17, White Papers, EUA.
64 Higher Education for American Democracy, 29.
65 White to George Zook, October 27, 1947, Box 17, White Papers, EUA. White’s insistence that the good works of well-intentioned southern whites would take care of the problem was not terribly persuasive to the other Commission members. While the
White had a sense of foreboding about the pressure that was building on the race
issue in higher education, and he expressed it to virtually every correspondent he had at
this time. For example, to James Dombrowski, head of the Southern Conference
Education Fund (SCEF) and a 1938 graduate of Emory, White lamented the methods and
positions on segregation taken by the SCEF and stated again that “I feel very definitely
and positively that the agitation of this question is really a tragic mistake.” In a letter to
the president of Centenary College, Joe J. Mickle, White stressed his fears of what might
happen if outside interference in southern race relations were to continue. He wrote that
“[t]he whole issue is a very live one and I am afraid that the situation is becoming
ominous. My chief concern is that the progress we have made and the efforts which are
being continued to improve conditions are put in jeopardy. Beyond this we may be facing
truly tragic possibilities. I am deeply concerned and troubled over the whole
development.” In 1947 White’s dark sense that the situation was becoming “ominous”

patience of southern gradualists could not be questioned, their persistence was another
matter. Despite White’s efforts to avoid committee discussion of his objections, the
subject was raised at the next meeting. The members of the Commission argued
forcefully that the principals of democracy and equality under the law required them to
challenge the practice of segregation in higher education. Failure to do so, they argued,
would be “unfair and an insult to the whole of the South -- Negro and white.” They
believed that the Commission would be “derelict in its public duty if it fails to take a
strong stand in opposition to the legal segregation of the Negro.” The Commission, it was
pointed out, “is obligated to take a stand on what it believes to be right.” Report of the
Commission Meeting, Nov. 3–4, 1947, Box 17, White Papers, EUA. Interestingly,
although three other Commission members (out of 27) joined White in his dissent none of
the other three attended this meeting. As he plaintively remarked in describing the scene
to one of the other dissenters, “No one present stood with me.” This included two other
southern members, F.D. Patterson, president of Tuskegee, and more surprisingly, O.C.
Carmichael, former Chancellor of Vanderbilt. Carmichael’s refusal to dissent is explained
by his new position in New York as head of the Carnegie Foundation for the
Advancement of Teaching. He would go on to become president of the University of
Alabama, his home state, where he would face racial difficulties that were probably
unimaginable in 1947. See E. Culpepper Clark, The Schoolhouse Door: Segregation’s
Last Stand at the University of Alabama (New York, 1993), 23–25 and generally.
66 White to James A. Dombrowski, December 30, 1947; White to Joe J. Mickle, January
20, 1948, Box 17, White Papers, EUA. Dombrowski, although radical in his politics, was
a personal friend of several of these presidents. An affable man, he wrote frequent warm
was, from his perspective, apt. The pressure to abandon segregation, as he feared, was not
going to stop. It cannot have escaped his notice that his northern colleagues on the Higher
Education Commission used the opportunity provided by his formal dissent to strengthen
the report’s condemnation of segregation.67

On the Emory campus, White dealt very cautiously with racial matters. Throughout the
late 1940s segregation was thorough at Emory. Blacks remained on campus as menials or
as entertainers at fraternity parties. There were apparently no professional meetings held
at Emory that required special arrangements for blacks—Emory did not hold any
professional meetings that might include them. The school, though, did not remain
completely isolated from the currents of change that were beginning to swirl in the South.
On rare occasions blacks spoke on campus, always at the chapel or the Candler School of

letters to them, but nearly always managed at least one prod for racial change at their
schools. A solid biography of Dombrowski is Frank T. Adams, James Dombrowski: An
American Heretic, 1897–1983 (Knoxville, Tn., 1992). He is also a principal figure in
Anthony Dunbar, Against the Grain: Southern Radicals and Prophets, 1929–1959
(Charlottesville, 1981). On the Southern Conference Educational Fund, see Irwin

67 After White announced his intention to dissent, “it was agreed by the Committee that
“since it is no longer necessary to include the viewpoint of the minority in the body of the
Report, it would be possible to strengthen the statements on segregation. It was agreed
that this be done.” Report of the Commission Meeting, November 3–4, 1947, Box 17,
White Papers, EUA. White received only a few letters from alumni and other members of
the community after the report was published. Interestingly, he tended to fashion rather
long replies to those who disagreed with him, attempting to explain his stand. To one
alumnus, a doctor in Montgomery who wrote that after much thought he found White’s
dissent “difficult to reconcile . . . with the ideals of democracy,” White wrote a long letter
explaining that attempts to find the “ultimate solution” to racial problems would only
make solutions more difficult to come by. White also reminded his critic that he had
“over the past several years given much time and effort to work in behalf of institutions
for the higher education of Negroes, of whose board of trustees I am a member.” To those
who wrote in support, however, White’s replies were short, nearly curt, and revealed
more than a little discomfort with the company in which he found himself. “Thank you
for your letter of December 18 which I have read with interest” was his entire reply to
one correspondent who praised the Emory president for his stalwart defense of white
supremacy. Nace Cohen to White, January 30, 1948; White to Cohen, February 4, 1948;
White to DePriest, December 29, 1947, Box 17, White Papers, EUA.
Theology.68 In 1945, for example, Dr. Rufus Clement, President of Atlanta University, was invited to address a forum called "What Next in Race Relations" sponsored by the Emory Inter-faith Church Night program. By the late 1940s a few blacks applied for admission, although their applications were not considered.69 A few times during this era the student newspaper, the Emory Wheel, editorialized in favor of limited changes in race relations on campus. In February 1948, for example, the Wheel editor wrote that "Emory could show it is one of the South's more liberal private universities by aiding the Southern Negro's adjustment by the restricted admission of Negroes to some of its schools."70

Also in February 1948, the Freshman Emory Christian Association invited Reverend Harrison McMains, a local white minister who was active in interracial church activities, to speak on "The Teachings of Jesus as Applied to Race Relations." This led in turn to an invitation to the dean of Morehouse College, a black man and an economist, to discuss Christianity and labor relations. In the course of that evening, several ECA members remarked that they had never met a black college student and the group agreed that they would like to invite Morehouse students to the next meeting. The sensitivity of a dinner

68 Thomas English, Emory University, 212; Emory University Advisory Committee on Religious Life, Minutes, December 15, 1933, EUA Ms. Box 17. Sometime in 1936 or 1937 the Reverend Raymond Henderson of the Wheat Street Baptist Church addressed the faculty of the theology school, delivering a powerful speech entitled "A Plea for A Prophet." Henderson asked the assembled theologians to take on the task of bringing justice to black Christians in the South. They did not do so, but over time the theology school would become a persistent source of internal pressure for racial change at Emory. Raymond Henderson, "A Plea for A Prophet," undated, EUA Ms. Box 17.
69 Program, "Announcing a Series of Forums on Human Relations," Fall Quarter 1945. EUA Ms. Box 17a. Lucy Randolph Mason also spoke in this series. Apparently the Emory students did not react unfavorably to the presence of these speakers, as happened at Vanderbilt. The existence of the admission applications made by blacks was not made known at the time they were received and no explanation for the failure to consider them was offered. Dean J. Gordon Stipe of the Graduate School merely noted that "While Emory has no racial clause of any kind in its admissions regulations, it has, as a private institution, the prerogative of accepting or rejecting any application." Emory Wheel, October 19, 1950; Atlanta Journal, February 15, 1950.
70 Emory Wheel, February 28, 1948.
meeting with blacks was apparent even to freshmen, though, and after a series of consultations with several levels of the Emory administration (including the assistant to the president), they decided not to issue the invitation.\textsuperscript{71}

The mere prospect of such an event, though, was enough to light a fire under one alumnus who got wind of it. John A. Dunaway wrote a scathing letter of protest, expressing strong agreement with White’s dissent to the Truman Commission Report and implying that the president was a hypocrite if he allowed mixed meetings on campus. “I do not think . . . that we ought to do anything at Emory which would tend to break down the barriers which tend to prevent the intermingling of the racial bloods,” he wrote, “and I am firmly of the opinion that social dining together of the races will tend to break down these barriers quicker than anything in the world . . . If Emory’s present policy is to destroy this barrier or to weaken it in any wise, I am ready to give my diplomas back to Emory University and forget that I ever went to the institution . . .”\textsuperscript{72}

Dunaway also complained emphatically to trustee Henry Bowden, who sat on the board’s executive committee. Bowden suggested that Dunaway, a lawyer, prepare a synopsis of Georgia segregation law “in order that Emory might conform fully. . . .” Interestingly, there was very little to report, and nothing whatsoever that would prevent the sort of meetings that Dunaway found so offensive. It is impossible that Bowden, a sophisticated and canny attorney, did not know this already. Nonetheless, Dunaway insisted that segregation in Georgia was “not a matter of written law” but rather “inherent in our background and training.” In the end, after receiving a mild scolding from White’s assistant Boisfeuillet Jones, Dunaway relented, claiming that he was merely concerned

\textsuperscript{71} Memo, Boisfeuillet Jones to Goodrich White, February 21, 1948, Box 6, Mizell Papers, EUA.
\textsuperscript{72} “In re: Emory Christian Association Racial Equality Meeting set for Monday, February 23, 1948,” John A. Dunaway to Goodrich White, February 20, 1948, Box 6, Mizell Papers, EUA.
with Emory’s reputation.73

In this case, where the students who began the episode did not mean to upset anyone, White was willing to defend, however obliquely, their right to hear whatever speakers they chose. He was much less patient when students seemed deliberately provocative on racial issues. In March 1948 the Emory University Wallace for President Club passed a “Resolution on Discrimination in Education” urging White and the trustees to give “careful consideration of the admission of Negroes to the University on all levels.”74 In response, White emphasized his commitment to black progress, citing his service on the boards of three black institutions and his “many real friends among the Negro educators.” He then chastised the group for making a fuss, arguing once again that “peaceful and practicable solutions are being incalculably delayed by the pressure tactics now being resorted to.” Finally, White got to the bottom line: “It is obvious that, holding these convictions, I shall not recommend the admission of Negroes to Emory University.”75

At the same time, however, President White did act on his belief that enlightened whites ought to work to advance the black race within the bounds of segregation. He served for years on the board of trustees of Clark College, a black undergraduate college


74 Campus supporters of Henry Wallace’s 1948 bid for the presidency were a thorn in the side at all these schools. The heads of these institutions saw their often vocal support for Wallace as a magnet for unwanted outside attention at a time when failure to conform to political orthodoxies could be extremely dangerous. For Wallace’s political philosophy see Graham White and John Maze, Henry A. Wallace: His Search for a New World Order (Chapel Hill, 1995).

75 Emory Wheel, January 27, 1948; February 28, 1948. The “Resolution” language is found in “A Brief Documentary Account of the Integration of Emory University.” This is a collection of copies of key documents in Emory’s move to open admissions, gathered from many sources. Norman Smith and his colleagues in Emory’s Development Office compiled it in 1966. EUA Ms. Box 10. Copy of letter from White to Robert A. Young, April 1, 1948, Box 22, Rufus C. Harris Papers, Tulane University Archives, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Library, New Orleans, Louisiana (hereinafter TUA). White sent copies of all the correspondence surrounding this incident to both Harris and Harvie Branscomb.
in Atlanta, and assisted various other black institutions in the area on a more limited basis. In 1947 Emory donated a piece of land adjacent to its teaching hospital, Grady Memorial, for a new, desperately needed black hospital. Emory’s medical school also pledged to take responsibility for training black residents and interns at that facility, which would remain segregated. Unsurprisingly, they reneged on that commitment when the complications of maintaining segregation in the setting of a teaching hospital ward proved to be more than they could deal with.

In his work at Emory and more especially with the Commission of Higher Education, Goodrich White thus employed many of the same arguments that Harvie Branscomb made to the Vanderbilt trustees, but to a different end. Where Branscomb was trying to induce the board to support real, though minor, changes in race relations at Vanderbilt, White was attempting to stop pressure for changes that he did not feel white southerners would tolerate. It is important to note here that the arguments themselves will fairly bear these different uses. The heart of both Branscomb’s and White’s vision of how racial change might be possible in the South was the continuation of white elite control of the process. This is the linchpin of the entire scheme. Without the judgment of men like

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76Biographical files, Goodrich White, EUA.

77Emory’s Grady Memorial accepted only indigent black patients, who were segregated in a small wing, and did not admit any black doctors for residence or training. Medical care for non-indigent blacks in Atlanta was in desperately short supply, as there were no facilities at all for black physician training in the South outside Meharry in Nashville and Howard in Washington, DC. David Andrew Harmon, Beneath the Image of the Civil Rights Movement and Race Relations, Atlanta, Georgia, 1946–1981 (New York, 1996), 67–68; Lorraine Nelson Spritzer and Jean B. Bergmark, Grace Towns Hamilton and the Politics of Southern Change (Athens, 1997), 115–31. At various times during the late 1940s into the 1950s Emory tried to work out some way to help with the training of black doctors. The logistical problems were overwhelming. Discussing the problem in 1950, Dean Hugh Wood of Emory’s medical school wrote Hughes Spalding, chairman of the Grady Memorial Authority. Wood fretted about “complications and incidents which might be embarrassing to all concerned,” arguing that “such incidents, if allowed to occur, would probably hinder the goal we hope to achieve, which is better graduate and postgraduate education for the negro physician.” R. Hugh Wood to Hughes Spalding, August 4, 1950, Box 5, Mizell Papers, EUA.
themselves, they believed, there would certainly be some fatal misstep. It was thus up to the exquisitely tuned discretion of each man to decide when to go and when to stop, and everyone seemed to understand that this would be different in different places. What went largely unacknowledged was that one of the most critical variables from place to place was the willingness of the president to challenge the trustees and push for racial change on campus.

III

The roots of Duke University reach back to Trinity College, an isolated, tiny Methodist school for men in the North Carolina piedmont. Founded in 1839 as a one-room school, Trinity struggled to survive. It nearly folded more than once before American Tobacco Company owner Washington Duke and his sons Ben and J.B., devoted Methodists, took an interest in the late 1880s. Contributions from the Dukes allowed Trinity to move to Durham in 1892, and their steady giving helped make it possible for the school to steadily improve. By World War I, under President John Kilgo and then President William Preston Few, Trinity had become one of the South’s foremost liberal arts colleges.\(^7\)

After the war, the school’s growth continued, still funded by the Dukes, whose holdings now included the Duke Power Company. President Few strongly believed that the school had the potential to become a major university, and when in December 1924 James Buchanan Duke created the $40 million Duke Endowment, Few found the means to make it happen. The new Duke University was to receive about a third of the Endowment’s annual income in addition to an initial $6 million gift. For many years this

annual contribution made up almost half of the university’s budget.\textsuperscript{79}

Few and J.B. Duke understood that they were undertaking the creation of a national university, with Trinity to continue as the school’s undergraduate college. It was a massive job, complicated by the fact that even the endowment money was not enough to pay for the vast expansion in offerings that the school planned. But the indefatigable Few steered the school steadily forward—building a medical school, a law school, a divinity school, and greatly expanding and improving the arts and sciences curriculum—until his death in 1940. Still, at the heart of Few’s vision remained a commitment to the careful education of undergraduates as well as a dedication to the South’s religious tradition. He regarded these as correctives to the problems of northern universities.\textsuperscript{80} Few was succeeded by Robert Flowers, who came to Trinity College as a professor in 1891. Flowers was well loved and had served closely with Few for his entire career. But he was an old man, and Duke began to drift badly. The problem only became worse in the uncertain environment after World War II.

In Durham, North Carolina, Duke University’s new president, Hollis Edens, faced an immediate test of his willingness to push Duke’s board on racial matters. State politics played a major role, as did the president’s personal disinclination to push the trustees hard on anything. Edens, though, after initially refusing to approach the board with the issue, would very slowly come to a position in between Goodrich White and Harvie Branscomb. Edens was willing, when he judged the time was right, to raise issues involving race with the Duke board. He was far more passive than than Branscomb, though, and remained unwilling to maneuver and persuade the board to make the changes


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that he himself came to understand were inevitable.

Hollis Edens was, like Harvie Branscomb, the son of a Methodist minister. Born in 1901 in the parsonage at Willow Grove, Tennessee, Edens worked hard to get an education. In 1930, at the age of twenty-nine, he earned his bachelor’s degree from Emory University. He earned an M.A. in 1938, and remained at Emory as associate professor of history and head of the university’s Valdosta campus until 1942, while also beginning doctoral work in public administration at Harvard. Edens continued his rise in the Emory administration, moving to the main campus and serving variously as acting dean of the business school, associate dean of the undergraduate division, and dean of administration. In 1947 he was appointed vice chancellor of the University System of Georgia, leaving there only a year later to become the associate director of the influential Rockefeller-backed General Education Board in New York. After brief service in that position he came to the attention of the Duke University trustees. In 1949 they selected Edens for the top job at Duke.81

After the passive leadership of the previous few years, Hollis Edens hit the Duke campus like a breath of fresh air—he was only forty-eight years old, handsome, charming, and warm if somewhat reserved. Edens had a young man’s energy, administrative experience, and contacts throughout the philanthropic community. The Duke community met his arrival with enthusiasm. Edens worked hard to forge strong ties with the alumni and the Durham community. He also cared deeply about Duke’s historic, if now unofficial, ties to Methodist Church and attempted to strengthen them.82

Edens arrived in Durham at a time when Duke was reasonably well off relative to its peers in the region. Still, Duke was struggling with increased postwar enrollments,
inflation that ate into its endowment, low salaries, a poor physical plant, and inadequate academic offerings, particularly at the graduate level. Yet, in respect to other southern schools the university was on fairly solid ground academically. In 1949 Duke offered work leading to the doctorate in twenty fields, with plans to add a twenty-first the following year. It also supported three professional schools: law, forestry, and medicine. Graduate Dean Paul Gross related a conversation with Robert Calkins of the General Education Board in October 1949, in which they discussed the likelihood the university would soon receive a sizable grant for further development of graduate studies. Calkins, reported Gross, believed that “the status of Duke as a graduate school is considerably beyond that of any other institution in the south” and that the university was ready to “take the next step of becoming first rank, at least in a number of graduate fields, nationally.”

In spite of this relatively strong position, Duke’s leadership was well aware of its still formidable problems. In a survey completed that year, they indicated that in terms of graduate education, “relative to other sections[,] the South is in a weak position.” A specific list of their own problems followed, focusing on the heavy teaching load and low pay of faculty and the tiny stipends offered to graduate students, which made it difficult to compete with universities in other regions, along with a lack of funding for research and new facilities. Duke had always had something of a reputation as a wealthy

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83 Durden, The Launching of Duke University, 464–67. Duke’s total enrollment by 1946 was its highest ever, 5,121, of whom 2,527 were undergraduate men and 1,000 were undergraduate women. Sixty percent of the incoming freshmen were veterans. Loss of faculty members and a growing inability to recruit outstanding new professors became a serious problem after the war, although certainly not one unique among southern private universities. Finding the money to increase salaries would become a preoccupation of administrators concerned with improving institutional quality and reputation at each of these schools.


85 “Information About Graduate and Professional Offerings in the South,” summer 1949, compiled by Dean of the Graduate School Paul Gross, Edens Papers, Box 7, DUA. The
institution, and it was generally assumed, not least by its alumni, that the Duke Endowment could more than adequately provide for the school’s financial needs. This may have been true before the war, but it quickly became clear in the postwar years that the Endowment could not continue to fund the kind of steady growth in quality that it had in the past. By 1947 the trustees hired a fund-raising consulting firm to help raise money. Their November 1947 report to the board contained a laundry list of pressing, and expensive, needs: new dormitories; classrooms and laboratory space; recreational facilities; basic maintenance that had been neglected during the war; higher salaries, fellowships, and stipends; and finally, money for research. Paying for and directing these improvements would become a pressing concern of Duke’s new president throughout his tenure.86

Race relations at Duke after the war were much the same as those at Emory and Vanderbilt. Individual faculty members, particularly in the Divinity School, often had informal contacts with their counterparts at black schools, but there was little official interaction. (One exception was that when Harvie Branscomb became dean of the Divinity School in 1944, its chapel services were opened to black ministers, who were

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86 Preliminary report on the financial needs of Duke University, Kersting, Brown & Co., November 21, 1947, Box 29, Flowers Papers, DUA. In this report Kersting, Brown touched on two points that were then novel and controversial, and that would prove to be of lasting importance in higher education. First, they noted, in a separate section, that the University would have to become adept at public relations and controlling its image as it sought new sources of funding. Second, they stressed that Duke should continue its research relationships with the federal government and with industry, but not at the expense of “pure or fundamental research.” It should rather be Duke’s objective to “help close the wide gap that now exists between industry and education.”
sometimes invited to participate.)\textsuperscript{87} Otherwise, segregation on campus was routine, but not total. Black researchers were allowed to use the Duke library, but they had to use scarce segregated toilet facilities while on campus. The black staff members also had to use these inconveniently located restrooms and were not allowed to make use of campus food services. Both the auditorium and football stadium had separate black sections.\textsuperscript{88}

Hollis Edens proved, ultimately, to be more active on racial issues than Goodrich White though far more reticent than Harvie Branscomb. Some of this reticence reflects Edens’s personality. He was a very formal man, and he was at all times conspicuously deferential toward the Duke trustees. In the years to come, Edens’s personal ambivalence about desegregation, and, in fact, about all the changes that were taking place in the nation and the region, would become apparent. Still, unlike Goodrich White, in his reports to the board during the late 1940s Edens continuously kept them informed of the rumblings for change that were being heard. Yet, unlike Branscomb, Edens waited until 1953 to ask his trustees for any specific action about race relations.

Here, part of the explanation is to be found in the composition of Duke’s board of trustees. Like the Vanderbilt board, the vast majority of the trustees were alumni who still lived in the South. Many were leaders in the tobacco, textile, and lumber industries. What was different from Vanderbilt, though, was the leadership of the board. In 1929 Willis Smith, a graduate of Trinity College and the Duke University Law School and a Raleigh attorney, joined the Duke board. In 1946, as he became increasingly prominent and influential, his peers elected him to the chairmanship. At the time, Smith represented a powerful new wave at Duke, taking control of fund raising, hiring outside consultants, and beginning the nationwide search that would bring Hollis Edens in as president. Smith

\textsuperscript{87} Branscomb, \textit{Purely Academic}, 101. It appears that the blacks who attended chapel services were seated separately. Minutes of the Divinity Faculty, June 1, 1949, Divinity School Papers, DUA. Branscomb left this position in 1946 when he took up the chancellorship at Vanderbilt.

was fully prepared to take advantage of any and all opportunities for Duke to advance in its reputation and in the quality of scholarship and education that it could provide. Smith, however, had political ambitions. While serving as the president of the American Bar Association he entered North Carolina politics in the 1950 race for the Senate. His opponent in that race was Frank Porter Graham, who had been president of the University of North Carolina for nineteen years before his appointment in 1949 to fill a senatorial vacancy. Chosen by Democratic governor Kerr Scott to fill that seat, Graham was beloved in the state, but as a genuine economic and racial liberal remained vulnerable to charges that he would not represent the wishes of most North Carolinians. This provided Willis Smith with an opportunity to reach the Senate. The campaign, actually a Democratic party primary, was one of the most intense in the history of twentieth-century North Carolina. Although Smith apparently did not relish it, his staff ran a campaign characterized by both red-baiting and race-baiting, suggesting that Graham would promote interracial sex and marriage and that his left-wing associations rendered him unfit to hold public office. Graham was certainly no Communist, although he belonged to organizations that probably had communist members. His racial stands, though outside the mainstream, were of the same moderate and gradualist stripe as most other southern liberals. In threatening times, though, this was enough to make Smith's charges carry weight and he was elected in a close race.89 With Willis Smith as the head of his board, then, Hollis Edens was hamstrung on racial matters at Duke.

At about the same time that Smith was beginning his plans for the Senate run, President Edens had an important racial matter come before him. His response to it reveals the sensitivity to the practical politics of the situation that characterized Edens's

actions throughout his administration. In the spring of 1948 the Divinity School student body circulated a petition requesting the consideration of an admissions policy that would allow blacks to enroll as day students in the Divinity program. In this brief petition the students laid out their argument for limited desegregation citing a mix of moral and practical reasons for their request. They noted that blacks in the area lacked other opportunities to receive the kind of ministerial training that Duke offered and asked for the administration to give the issue “serious consideration.”  

The students then sounded a theme that would be heard over and over in the next decade: they themselves were being denied something that they wanted. “We are now a part of a segregated Divinity School community,” they complained, “which does not afford us opportunity for understanding and appreciating Negro Christians preparing for the ministry.” They stated their desire for “the fellowship, stimulation, and fuller Christian cooperation we feel would exist here if Negro students were to join us in our common Christian study as ministers of the Gospel.” Thus, while there was undeniably concern about unfairness to blacks, the issue for the Divinity students was at least as much about themselves. This reflected a pattern, set by the leaders of the institutions themselves, of various groups within the universities making a case for the admission of blacks based not solely on the needs of the excluded African-Americans but on their own needs as well. The issue, they would contend, was not “about” blacks, but rather “about” something else altogether. This was clearest at the highest levels, where the real issue was the ability of the schools to reach their goals and the treatment of blacks was a means to that end. The use of this kind of argument cascaded down to other constituencies as pressure began to squeeze various groups on campus, and it became clearer that failure to desegregate could have a variety of harmful consequences to whites, not just to blacks.

The Divinity students also demonstrated a keen appreciation of what kinds of things

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90 Petition, May 1948, Box 21, Edens Papers, DUA.
91 Ibid.
concern university administrators. In particular, they clearly understood the need to keep a low profile in matters involving race. They first stressed that limited admissions of black religion students was not novel. "[O]ther seminaries in the South have already admitted Negro students, so this step would not be an innovation in the region," the petition declared. Also, the students understood that any action in this regard would have to be severely limited. They clearly stated that they only meant to include the Divinity School, and that any change would not affect "general university policy." Further, they were asked only for the admission of black day students, an implicit acknowledgment of the difficulties caused by too much physical proximity of black and white students. 92

One hundred and seven students in the Divinity School signed this petition and presented it to their dean in May. 93 The faculty then formed a committee to study the question. This committee circulated a questionnaire that revealed the Divinity School faculty was nearly unanimous in its support for opening admissions to the school to black students. Thirteen of seventeen full-time faculty endorsed this idea, one was undecided, and only three opposed it. Still, there were serious concerns about how such a change might be implemented, what sorts of problems it would create, and even whether it might be detrimental to the interests of the university as a whole. 94 The committee also met with the university's legal counsel and with the vice president in charge of public relations.

92 Ibid. A deep-seated fear of the physical presence of blacks, especially during eating, sleeping or washing, permeated the arguments made by the opponents of desegregation, and was even common among those who tried to initiate change. See Mary Douglas's classic Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (1966; reprint, New York, 1991). Even after these schools allowed black students to enroll, there were frequently battles about blacks living in the dorms, or using the swimming pool, or eating in the cafeteria with whites.

93 Thirteen students in the Graduate Department of Religion also signed the petition, and fifty members of the campus pre-ministerial fraternity signed a separate petition to the same effect. Petition, Box 21, Edens Papers, DUA.

94 Minutes of the Divinity Faculty, March 23, 1949, Divinity School Papers, DUA. The Committee on the Admission of Negroses questionnaire revealed that although only one professor would personally object to teaching blacks, as many as six feared that even limited black enrollment could harm Duke.
Although neither could point to anything in North Carolina law or in the language of Duke's charter that would specifically prohibit the enrollment of black students, they were not entirely encouraging. They pointed out that despite the lack of language in the charter about blacks, segregation was assumed to be intended in that document and would be adhered to unless a different policy were explicitly adopted. They also noted that the authority to make such a change was not vested in the Divinity School or its admissions committee but with the university's board of trustees, which had not yet been presented with the question.  

In the end, though, there were two major issues that continued to trouble the religion professors. First, the potential for humiliation of black divinity students because of Duke's extensive limits on the use of its facilities by blacks was quite significant. Second, they were uncertain about how the region's black theological schools would react to the possibility of a white school's drawing off their students. Because of these concerns the faculty voted against the immediate delivery of the student's petition to the trustees. Instead, they requested that the head of the new committee, Waldo Beach, study these issues in greater detail. That these particular issues should have stopped the progress of the petition through the administration seems almost bizarre. They were, after all, entirely speculative. The very real political problems, suggested by the school's attorney and head of public relations, that would be involved in getting the board to admit blacks were completely ignored, while the divinity faculty focused its attention on the possible embarrassment of non-existent students and the possible harm to black divinity schools.

Beach set about his task, though, and sent letters to the heads of some of the most important black theological schools in the area, asking them confidentially about these

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95 An account of these meetings is in the report of the committee to the divinity school faculty, June 1, 1949, Box 21, Edens Papers, Box 21.

96 Ibid. Beach recommended that the Dean, Harold Bosley, bring the petition to the board of trustees as soon as possible.
two matters. To a man, these black educators expressed their support for the admission of black divinity students to Duke. They had no fear that their own institutions would be undermined and little hesitation about sending black students to a school that still remained segregated to a large degree. Although this latter was somewhat troubling, the consensus seemed to be that “to ask all the doors to open (or all the barriers to fall) at once appears . . . somewhat utopian.” Beach also sought the advice of the heads of some other southern theology schools that had already admitted black students. He queried these white educators about how black students were treated on campus and how well qualified they were. In these letters Beach seemed more aware of what kind of information he might need to convince the Duke board to allow black day students to enroll in the program in the first place. He specifically asked each man about whether any unfavorable publicity had resulted from the enrollment of blacks. “It is on this question, of course,” Beach noted, “that our university administration is rightly skittish . . . .” The encouraging response was that there had been little publicity of any kind, and what there had been was generally favorable.

On June 1, 1949, over a year after the students presented their petition, the committee led by Beach submitted its final report and the faculty met to decide on the next step. The report itself was a cautious document that addressed the earlier concerns of the group. While it did not dismiss those concerns entirely, it did conclude that on the whole “the areas of possible difficulty and embarrassment are not so great as to outweigh the values that would be achieved in the admission of Negroes.” The committee also concluded that

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97 Beach wrote to Benjamin Mays of Morehouse, John Satterwhite of Livingston College in North Carolina, and Neal Hughley, Beach’s personal friend, of Durham’s North Carolina College. All these letters and responses are in Box 21, Edens Papers, DUA.  
98 J. Neal Hughley to Waldo Beach, April 23, 1949, Box 21, Edens Papers, DUA.  
99 Waldo Beach to Eugene Hawk, April 12, 1949, Box 21, Edens Papers, DUA. In addition to Hawk, Dean of the Perkins School of Theology at SMU, Beach wrote Benjamin Lacy of the Union Theological Seminary in Richmond (which began admitting blacks in 1935) and Harry Richardson of Atlanta’s Gammon Theological Seminary, who apparently did not reply. All of these are also in Box 21, Edens Papers, DUA.
"the number of Negroes who might qualify for admission would probably be very small, perhaps at the most two or three students in any one year. In the interests of gradualism . . . it would seem desirable that the number be thus limited." 100 In the end, though, the idea of submitting even this careful, restrained recommendation to the Board of Trustees was simply too much for the school's faculty. Fearful of a direct challenge to the board, most of the group preferred to take some less provocative action. After considerable discussion a new committee was formed, this one led by future dean Robert Cushman, to draft a statement that would instead recommend the creation of yet another committee, this one composed of divinity school faculty, administrators, and trustees, to study the question together.101

Written overnight, Professor Cushman's statement was extremely well crafted. He managed to be both idealistic and politically astute, and this document was obviously designed specifically to persuade Duke's new president to bring the matter to the board.102 Cushman began with an appeal to the spirit of Duke's finest hour, the refusal of the Trinity trustees to fire John Spencer Bassett in 1903 for his unpopular opinions on racial issues:

This faculty entertains the conviction that the purpose and intent contained in the student petition . . . is in accord with the high idealism and courageous actions of Trinity College, now Duke University, which have been manifest here for nearly a half century. This institution rightly takes satisfaction in holding a place in the forefront of those universities which have dared to stand firmly for the right in many areas of contemporary controversy. . . . It is nationally and even internationally known for the great stand which it has made for academic freedom. It would be natural and in accord with its tradition, its cosmopolitan constituency, its honorable past, and its reputation for devotion to right – irrespective of the consequences – that Duke University should be in the vanguard

100 Report of the Faculty Committee, Box 21, Edens Papers, DUA; Minutes of the Divinity Faculty, June 1, 1949, Divinity School Papers, DUA.
101 Minutes of the Divinity Faculty, June 1, 1949; June 2, 1949, Divinity School Papers, DUA.
102 Recommendations of the Divinity School Faculty, June 2, 1949, Box 21, Edens Papers, DUA.
of those institutions which make a definite stand for a more equitable relationship between the races.\textsuperscript{103}

Cushman then cited the Methodist \textit{Discipline} of 1948, which called for all church-related institutions to evaluate policies based on racial discrimination, and finally, the "Christian gospel, that, in the Church, as the Body of Christ, there are no distinctions of persons nor any barriers between brothers under God." The statement asked only for the appointment of a joint committee.\textsuperscript{104} Dean Bosley transmitted this document, along with the original student petition, to President Edens two days later, on June 4, 1949.\textsuperscript{105}

Hollis Edens’s reply must have been a painful anticlimax for the Divinity School. In a very brief letter later that June, the president simply dismissed the matter. First he acknowledged all the careful work that had gone into producing the “thoughtful and tactful” approach of the faculty and assured Bosley that he understood their “attitude in wanting to work toward ‘a more equitable relationship between the races.’” But, Edens concluded, “[a]t the same time 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

\textsuperscript{103} Recommendations of the Divinity School Faculty, June 2, 1949, Box 21, Edens Papers, DUA. The “Bassett affair” has been described and analyzed from all angles. The best account of the events is in Earl W. Porter, \textit{Trinity and Duke, 1892–1924: Foundations of Duke University} (Durham, NC, 1964), 96–139. See also Robert Durden, \textit{The Dukes of Durham, 1865–1929} (Durham, NC, 1975) 117–21 for the affair from the perspective of Ben Duke. William B. Hamilton, ed., \textit{Fifty Years of the South Atlantic Quarterly} (Durham, N.C., 1952), reprints both Bassett’s provocative article and the statement of the Trinity trustees in retaining him.

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{105} Harold A. Bosley to Edens, June 4, 1949, Box 21, Edens Papers, DUA. In his accompanying letter he stressed the “serious and thoroughly responsible discussion” that had taken place, and made clear that the faculty understood well the “magnitude of the task” they were asking the university to consider. Still, in spite of the difficult and “troublesome” nature of the problem, Bosley wrote, “we could not, in good conscience, refuse to consider the student petition, nor could we reach any more temperate position in our search for an answer.” It is difficult to imagine what a more temperate position could be.
admitting negroes to the Divinity School.”  

Edens never brought this petition before the board, at least not officially. It does seem likely, though, given his habitual deference to the trustees, that he had some unofficial discussions with some board members. Still, given the fact of Willis Smith’s leadership of the trustees, Edens’s response to Bosley was undoubtedly true. No good, for either blacks or Duke, could possibly come from raising this question with the Smith-led board. Even in the unlikely event that Smith had wanted to admit black divinity students, the race-baiting he had engaged in during his campaign for the Senate would have made such an action politically impossible. Worse, it was conceivable that Smith might decide at such a prompting to tighten Duke’s heretofore unwritten rules about how and when blacks were allowed on campus at all. Such a move had the potential to rob the administration of all flexibility in making accommodations for the occasional black visitor and pave the way for potentially disastrous incidents.  

In the late 1940s at Duke the

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106 Edens to Bosley, June 24, 1949, Box 21, Edens Papers, DUA. Jorge Kotelanski, in his excellent senior thesis, attributes Edens’s abrupt reply to Dean Bosley to the fact that here was a bad blood between the two. While that is accurate, examination of Edens’s entire correspondence reveals that the president, who wrote in a very formal style, was abrupt with nearly everyone except very close friends. Kotelanski, “Prolonged and Patient Efforts: The Desegregation of Duke University, 1948-1963,” (Senior Thesis, Duke University, 1990).

107 In one area the board proved to be more flexible. In 1950, the trustees allowed the Duke football team to play the University of Pittsburgh, at Durham, even though the Panthers had a black player. They received national publicity for this action, as NBC Sports congratulated Duke and President Edens in particular for their “democratic” decision. Jack Lightcap to Ted Mann, September 26, 1950, Box 16, Edens Papers, DUA. Lightcap wrote Mann, Duke’s Director of Publicity, that the people at NBC in New York “felt wonderful about your stand in the matter” and enclosed a transcript of an October 3 broadcast that praised Duke heavily. Eden’s explanation for this decision had less to do with democracy than with the demands of the alumni for athletic glory. In a letter to Duke Alumni Affairs director Charles A. Dukes, Edens notes in response to an alumni complaint that “this is a matter which is beyond our control if we are to play intersectional games as so many of our alumni have urged us to do.” Edens to Dukes, October 10, 1950, Box 36, Edens Papers, DUA. Once again, the issue was presented
issue was simply best left alone, and so the pragmatic Edens did so. What his own
opinions on desegregation might be were still unknown.

IV

From its beginnings Tulane University was an urban school, located in New Orleans,
with a bent towards professional education. The university was created in 1884 when a
$2 million gift from Paul Tulane was combined with the assets of the defunct University
of Louisiana deeded over to the school by the state legislature. Tulane thus began life
with an undergraduate college for men, a law school, and a medical school. In 1887, Mrs.
Josephine Newcomb funded the establishment of an undergraduate college for women at
Tulane. The school added other professional schools in architecture, engineering,
business administration, social work, but through the 1930s and 1940s put little emphasis
on graduate education or faculty research in the sciences and humanities. Tulane's vision
was rather limited, as it sought to serve the social and professional needs of New
Orleans's upper classes rather than strive for standing as a national research university.

This began to change, though, after the arrival of Rufus Carrollton Harris as Tulane's
president in 1937, and especially Harris spotted the opportunities for rapid expansion

starkly. If Duke were to gain glory in the eyes of the nation, it would have to accept the
nation's standards on race. Highlighting the extent to which minor racial issues were
invested with deep, and often contrary, meanings was Duke's mailbox after this game
was played. Edens heard from James Dombrowski, the omnipresent director of the
Southern Conference Educational Fund, who expressed his great pleasure at the game
(and, as ever, nudged Edens to take more steps). Dombrowski to Edens, October 20,
1950, Box 12, Edens Papers, DUA. Trustee Chairman Willis Smith, in the midst of his
intense runoff campaign against Frank Porter Graham, received a note from a supporter
who also rejoiced that this game had been played. His reason, though, was that he
believed Smith could use it to disprove allegations, certainly true, that Smith was a racist.
Robert Deaton to Smith, October 2, 1950, Box 132, Willis Smith Papers, Duke
University Special Collections, Perkins Library, Durham, North Carolina.
after World War II.\textsuperscript{108}

Like Harvie Branscomb, Harris was a man with powerful convictions, a large personality, and boundless self-confidence. Born in 1897 in Monroe, Georgia, a small town in between Atlanta and Athens, and raised a devout Baptist, Harris graduated from Mercer University in 1917 with a major in Latin and Greek. He served in Europe in World War I and was awarded the Purple Heart after surviving a gas attack. Upon his return from the war he attended Yale Law School, earning his LL.B. in 1923 and his JD in 1924. After graduation Harris immediately returned to Georgia to take up the reins as a professor and dean of Mercer’s Law School, a post he held until 1927 when he was invited to come to New Orleans and become dean of Tulane’s struggling law school. He did so, reinvigorating the school and tripling its full-time faculty by the time he left it to become president of the university in 1937.\textsuperscript{109} Harris was an ambitious man and quite certain of his own abilities. He had a biting wit, a decisive nature, and many loyal friends. Harris remained close to the Georgia political scene, in addition to Louisiana’s, throughout his tenure at Tulane and continued to spend as much time as possible in his boyhood home of Monroe, returning for several weeks each summer and at Christmas.

During these years at Tulane, Harris staked out a position on race almost identical to that of Branscomb. Personally uncomfortable with what he perceived as the unjust treatment of able blacks caused by rigid segregation, he understood that change was coming whether the white South wanted it or not. Still, Harris firmly held that racial change had to be “realistic”—that is, it had to be slow, limited, and carefully controlled by mature, enlightened whites. In a 1948 letter to J.W. Holley, the president of black


\textsuperscript{109} Biographical Files, TUA; Dyer, \textit{Tulane}, 208–09.
Albany State College with whom Branscomb had also corresponded, Harris laid out his position, arguing that "the Negro has been unfairly treated in some respects," and that, for the good of the entire region, "we should all work together to improve the lot of the race." Harris embraced, as did Branscomb, the idea that the white South ultimately meant well and would in the end accept the contributions of elite, educated blacks. The problem, both seemed to believe, was that southern blacks had not been able to cultivate their talents to the degree necessary for whites to realize their worth. The solution to the region's racial woes, then, was to provide able blacks with the resources they needed to thrive. "I feel," wrote Harris, "that if the Negro is given educational and economic opportunity, social unfairness largely will take care of itself." \(^{110}\)

Harris was active in racial matters throughout his career and kept a fairly high profile on these matters, even if not always intentionally. In 1941, as chairman of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, he was closely involved with the revocation of the University of Georgia's accreditation after Governor Eugene Talmadge's purge of faculty and administrators he considered "soft" on integration. \(^{111}\) In 1943 Harris found himself alone

\(^{110}\)Harris to J.W. Holley, January 15, 1948, Box 99, Herbert Longenecker Papers, TUA. Harris answering a letter from Holley, who wrote "to congratulate you and the other southern college presidents on your protest against the plan of the President's Committee on Education [Truman's Commission on Higher Education]." Holley objected to the Commission's "radical" proposals on the grounds that they were "too Utopian for the present." Holley also sought Harris's advice on his new job as head of a Georgia program to equalize black educational facilities in the state. Holley to Harris, January 6, 1948, Box 99, Longenecker Papers, TUA.

\(^{111}\)Governor Eugene Talmadge purged several faculty members and administrators at the university, and then several members of the Board of Regents who objected, because he deemed them "foreigners" (that is, they had been born or educated in the North) who were "soft" on the "Negro issue." The Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools withdrew accreditation. (The chairman of the investigating committee was O.C. Carmichael, then chancellor of Vanderbilt.) Talmadge argued that the issue was not about
on the Louisiana State Board of Education in recommending higher salaries for black teachers in the state’s segregated schools. His willingness to spend time and energy in the service of black advancement was constant. Even in declining, because of a previous commitment, an invitation to speak to the Louisiana Colored Teachers’ Association in 1946. Harris volunteered to speak at the next meeting and asked the association’s president to call on him if he could help in any other way.

Harris believed that he had a realistic opportunity at Tulane to create an important national university, and he had the tenacity and drive to seize that opportunity. Although he would at various moments come to despair over the difficulties involved, and more than once contemplate leaving for another job, throughout the 1940s and 1950s he held firm and made the school far stronger when he left than when he came. Tulane on Harris’s arrival was in dire financial straits. Faculty salaries were far too low, the physical plant was inadequate, the graduate program underdeveloped, the student body too local, and money far too short. Extremely conservative management of the endowment left Tulane slipping behind the other southern private universities, with resources that did not

academic freedom, but rather about Negroes and liberals. Harris came in for a great deal of criticism as being himself “soft” on the Negro issue, but he held his ground. The matter became a campaign issue in the next Georgia governor’s race, and Talmadge was defeated by Harris’s ally and friend Ellis Arnall, who immediately began working with the Southern Association to restore the university’s accreditation. Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia*, 193–95; Thomas G. Dyer, *The University of Georgia: A Bicentennial History, 1785–1985* (Athens, GA, 1985), 225–40; James F. Cook, Jr., “Politics and Education in the Talmadge Era: The Controversy Over the University System of Georgia, 1941–42” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Georgia, 1972).

112 *New Orleans Times Picayune* July 1, 1943.

113 Harris to J.K. Haynes, November 23, 1946, Box 33, Harris Papers, TUA.

114 In addition to his flirtation with Vanderbilt in 1946, Harris indicated interest in the Duke presidency before Edens got the job. Harris to O.C. Carmichael, March 31, 1948, Box 55, Harris Papers, TUA. Later, he even talked with Branscomb about becoming the head of Vanderbilt’s law school.
even approach adequate for the kind of growth and improvement that Harris envisioned. Even after relatively successful fund-raising campaigns in the late 1940s, it was only large infusions from the federal government and the big northern foundations, the General Education Board and the Ford Foundation in particular, that allowed Tulane to make real improvement.\footnote{116}

Harris, however, was not entirely comfortable with the new relationship between the federal agencies and private higher education. In a 1949 letter he expressed his growing qualms:

I have been troubled by federal aid to education. There is much agitation in my mind because the needs of education are so great, and I do not like that way of responding to those needs. The choice seems a tragic one to me for there seems no other way for education to look, and yet I believe that such aid likely will compromise further our ideals both of government and of education . . . [T]here is a frightening association between subsidy and decadence in my notion of ideal values in education.\footnote{117}

Harris’s fears about the new relationship between the universities and the federal government would be born out with a vengeance at Tulane, and soon.

In the late 1940s the political environment that surrounded Tulane was explosive, and the university seemed to find itself at the center of serious controversy time and time again.\footnote{118} Faculty involvement with the interracial Southern Conference for Human Rights was a primary stimulus for the new mood among Tulane’s students and staff.

\footnote{115} On faculty salaries, L.J. Buchan to O.C. Carmichael, June 25, 1946, Box 27, Harris Papers, TUA; \footnote{116} Ibid. Tulane got early notice of the federal government’s postwar spending plans. In 1943 Harris received a letter from a colleague who was serving as Staff Director for the U.S. Senate Sub-Committee on Wartime Health & Education. It said “I might tip you off now that there is going to be a rather heavy post war building program sponsored by the federal government to head off unemployment. This is in the early stages of formulation. It may be that by getting your oar in soon, you can get a building for Tulane. . . . I know the ropes a little better now and may be able to really do something for you when the occasion arises.” Randolph Feltus to Harris, August 20, 1943, Box 28, Harris Papers, TUA. \footnote{117} Harris to John R. Miles, January 13, 1949, Box 28, Harris Papers, TUA. \footnote{118} William V. Moore, “Civil Liberties in Louisiana: The Louisiana League for the Preservation of Constitutional Rights,” \textit{Louisiana History}, 31 (Winter, 1990), 59–81. The
Welfare (SCHW) and with the 1948 presidential campaign of Henry A. Wallace fueled the fire of high-profile right-wing attacks on the university. President Harris spent much of the latter part of the decade on the defensive, and his vision of a commitment to free inquiry at the heart of American higher education would emerge in tatters. Several Tulane faculty members had ties to the SCHW, which had moved its headquarters to New Orleans in 1946, and some participated in its conference there in November of that year and in various other educational activities under its general auspices. This in itself caused only a little stir, but the organization was becoming the focus of attention of a New Orleans group called the Young Men’s Business Club, which was determined to expose and destroy Communists and communist sympathizers in the area. Tulane’s troubles began to escalate in 1947 when the SCHW invited former Vice President and Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace to speak in New Orleans. He spoke three times, once to the SCHW, once at Dillard University, one of the city’s black colleges, and once on the Tulane campus. In response to the negative publicity that followed, Harris set out a defense of academic freedom in a published letter to alumni. This letter strongly asserted

Louisiana League for the Preservation of Constitutional Rights, still supported by several prominent Tulane administrators and faculty members, continued its activities throughout the 1940s. By 1946, the League felt comfortable enough to invite black New Orleans civil rights lawyer A.P. Tureaud to become its legal advisor, but this is no way signaled a significant change in their cautious stance toward racial issues. The League’s careful avoidance of any issues or allies that might carry any hint of communism or racial integration kept it largely out of the spotlight. Louisiana League for the Preservation of Constitutional Rights Bulletin, November 26, 1942, Box 33, Harris Papers, TUA gives a clear picture of the kinds of very specific civil liberties issues and incidents that concerned the League into the 1940s.


Harris received several letters complaining about Tulane professors teaching at SCHW institutes. He defended the loyalty of the professors as well as their right as a citizen to speak before any group that wanted to hear them. Walter M. Carter to Harris, October 3, 1947; Harris to Carter, October 8, 1947, Box 22, Harris Papers, TUA.
that free inquiry was the cornerstone of American democracy. However, Harris did feel compelled to forswear any approval of Wallace or the SCHW, which ought to have been irrelevant.\footnote{The letter is Harris to E. Clagett Upton, printed as Letter From Tulane, Box 43, Harris Papers, TUA. Mohr and Gordon point out that the letter is drawn from a presentation Harris made to the Tulane board and that it was toned down, in effect made more apologetic, for public consumption. Mohr and Gordon, Tulane, 80–82.}

Harris was not really thrown back on the defensive, though, until a long-time Tulane law professor, Mitchell Franklin, agreed in 1948 to run Wallace’s presidential campaign in Louisiana. Although Harris went so far as to warn Franklin not to take the position, the damage was done. Much of the Tulane constituency identified Wallace with socialism and integration, and they abhorred both. Tulane alumni and board members were furious that the university continued to employ a man who would bring it into this kind of disrepute, again forcing both Harris and the law dean, Paul Brosman, to a defense of intellectual freedom on campus.\footnote{Bartley, “The Southern Conference and Post-World War II Southern Politics,” 191–93; Paul Brosman to Florence Dymond, February 19, 1948, Box 29, Harris Papers, TUA.} Still worse was to come. The anticommunist Young Men’s Business Club had alerted Louisiana congressman and member of the House Un-American Activities Committee, F. Edward Hebert, of Franklin’s activities. Hebert attacked Franklin from the floor of the House, and, during questioning in the Alger Hiss case, went so far as to declare of Tulane that “there are more Communists who infest that place than Americans.”\footnote{Hebert quoted in Mohr and Gordon, Tulane, 85–86. Ironically, the Tulane history department is now housed in Hebert Hall.} Hebert also named several other Tulane professors who he considered subversive. The link between support of racial equality and charges of disloyalty was clear in this list, which named one professor because of his activities with the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA). Hubert Humphrey, Joseph L. Rauh, and others had organized the ADA in 1947 from within the Democratic Party specifically as an anticommunist liberal
organization. Hebert declared this group subversive based on its forcing the inclusion of the civil-rights plank in the 1948 Democratic Party platform, a plank that he claimed was "almost word for word similar to Josef Stalin’s ‘All Races’ provision of the Russian Soviet Constitution."

Forced to respond, Harris objected to Hebert’s characterization of Tulane faculty as Communists. The congressman issued a sharp rejoinder that illustrates exactly the box that was built around advocates of civil rights by organized anticommunism. Hebert claimed that he had never actually said that the faculty members were members of the Communist Party, only that their "so-called ‘liberal’ activities have taken the Communist line." Rather than Communists, Hebert suggested, they were most likely "dupes."

Although he agreed with Harris that the ADA was "vocally anti-communist," Hebert still condemned this group and its supporters at Tulane because no matter what their rhetoric "in practice they adhere and advocate the very thing which Communism stands for," again explicitly equating support for civil rights with support for Stalin and the Soviet Constitution."

Harris was in an incredibly difficult spot. He could not afford to allow Tulane to be

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124 On Hubert Humphrey, the formation of the ADA, and the 1948 Democratic Convention fight over the civil-rights plank see Robert Mann, The Walls of Jericho: Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, Richard Russell and the Struggle for Civil Rights (New York, 1996), chapter 1. The ADA New Orleans chapter, headed by Tulane professor William Kolb, was singularly ineffective. Too sensitive to white fears of integration, it was never bold enough to attract any real following among either whites or blacks and folded by 1950. Adam Fairclough, Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915–1972 (Athens, GA, 1995), 141.

125 Mohr and Gordon, Tulane. 89. The actual plank that was proposed by the ADA at the convention is as follows: "The Democratic Party commits itself to continuing it efforts to eradicate all racial, religious, and economic discrimination. We again state our belief that racial and religious minorities must have the right to live, the right to work, the right to vote, the full and equal protection of the law, on a basis of equality with all citizens as guaranteed by the Constitution. We again call upon Congress to exert its full authority to the limit of its constitutional power to assure and protect these rights." Reprinted in Mann, Walls Of Jericho, 14.

126 Harris to F. Edward Hebert, January 11, 1949, Box 49, Harris Papers; Hebert to Harris, January 19, 1949, Box 22, Harris Papers, TUA.
identified as a haven for subversives. It was difficult to predict exactly how much harm could come from such a thing, but the harm could well be great. Not only federal money, but funding from all other sources, the support of alumni, and the retention of faculty and students was potentially at stake.\textsuperscript{127} On the other hand, other arms of the federal government and the major philanthropies were beginning to push for an end to racial segregation in higher education, suggesting that funding might be denied to segregated institutions in the future. Thus, Hebert’s claim that any attempt to modify southern racial practices amounted to providing aid and comfort to Stalin left the universities exposed to the threat of funding losses from all sides. In a letter to alumni, Harris again expressed his strong belief that freedom on campus was necessary to preserve democracy, but by this time circumstances were so treacherous that his defense of academic freedom was seriously diluted by apologies and assertions that Tulane did not and would never in the future harbor Communists.\textsuperscript{128}

This was the atmosphere, then, when in February 1949 several Tulane students and faculty members, many of them associated with Henry Wallace, attended an interracial party at the French Quarter apartment of one of the students. Students from Xavier and Dillard, local black colleges, also attended. The party came to the attention of Tulane officials and of everyone else in the city after it was raided by the police and sixty-five people were arrested for disturbing the peace. Harris dedicated his next \textit{Letter from Tulane}—an occasional single-paged publication sent to Tulane parents, highschool principals, the university’s faculty, and others—to a discussion of the school’s, and his

\textsuperscript{127} The alumni were already nearly hysterical. They had begun to circulate a petition that called for direct supervision of all courses taught at Tulane and all literature distributed there, the monitoring of all campus organizations for subversive intent, and the immediate firing of all faculty members who expressed dissatisfaction with “the American form of government.” Petition, n.d. (May, 1948), Box 29, Harris Papers. TUA.

\textsuperscript{128} Harris to Mrs. George M. Snellings, June 5, 1948, Box 29, Harris Papers, TUA. Harris asked Snellings, a lawyer and a former student of his who would serve on the Tulane board, to circulate this among Tulane alumni.
own, view of the matter.

This letter was a carefully worded document whose purpose and genesis are deeply revealing about the early postwar arguments about desegregation used by Harris, Branscomb, and White.\(^{129}\) Here, in an environment of rather extreme political danger Harris was trying to thread a needle. He needed to mollify an already hypersensitive community, including everyone from faculty to local Tulane graduates to the United States Congress, while still leaving room for progress on race relations, without which Tulane’s future as a nationally important research university was in doubt. To this end, he meticulously combed through the statements that Harvie Branscomb and Goodrich White had already made on the issue of how to handle racial change, which themselves had been meticulously crafted, to find the right words for this situation.\(^{130}\) This was supremely ironic. Harris, who wanted racial change, was using arguments that Branscomb had written to induce Vanderbilt’s trustees to allow change in order to calm the fears of opponents of change at Tulane. The fact that this worked also demonstrates how far from radical Branscomb’s arguments really were. More amazing, Harris seamlessly blended Branscomb’s 1948 Report to the Vanderbilt board, which argued for change, with White’s dissent to the Truman Commission Report and his letter to the Henry Wallace supporters at Emory, which argued against change, starkly displaying that the same concern was central to all these men. What mattered, in the end, was that they themselves, elite educated white men, would have the final say as to what would change

\(^{129}\) This letter first appears as a typed document dated February 21, 1949, Box 29, Harris Papers, TUA. It was later published as “A Letter From the President,” Letter from Tulane, June 1949. The students who attended the interracial party were mostly members of the Young Progressives of America, the youth wing of Henry Wallace’s Progressive Party. Fairclough, Race and Democracy, 140–41. In the aftermath of the arrests, they were all interviewed separately by their deans, who then sent detailed written reports to Harris.

\(^{130}\) Harris had copies of all the relevant documents from Branscomb and White in several places. All of them are gathered together in Box 42, Harris Papers, but most also appear in other files.
and when it would change. The real issue was who was in charge.

In the letter Harris roundly condemned the students’ behavior, even as he acknowledged that they had not engaged in the “rowdyism or misbehavior” with which they had been charged. His complaint was a familiar one—that by engaging in provocative behavior, no matter how well intentioned, the students made racial progress more difficult. Harris explained, in language that came directly from White’s April 1948 letter to the head of the Emory Wallace Club, that such delicate matters ought to be left to “the men of good will of both races in the South...who are willing to work patiently and quietly at the racial problem in an effort to find practicable solutions without strife and conflict....”\(^{131}\) Harris also took sentences from White’s dissent to the Truman Commision Report, altering them only slightly: “I disagree with the theoretical idealism of many persons who feel that democracy can be achieved only by imposing laws which would level the masses. To ignore the facts of history and the realities of the present will not contribute constructively to the solution of difficult problems of human relationships.”\(^{132}\) Again, practicality, rather than a commitment to such abstractions as equality and democracy, was seen as the only way to bring about change. Harris outlined what sort of progress he had in mind by using the words of Harvie Branscomb’s 1948 report to the Vanderbilt board:

> Since the close of the War Between the States most educated Southerners have felt one of the essentials for handling of the race problem has been the encouragement and support of those temperate and realistic leaders of both races who are willing to face the realities of this problem. We should not hesitate to recognize, encourage and assist those individuals who are endeavoring to lead all

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\(^{131}\) Harris wrote White in April 1948 asking for a copy of all White’s statements on race relations in higher education. White happily complied. This correspondence and all the copies are in Box 22, Harris Papers, TUA.

\(^{132}\) Harris removed language that was specific to the context of the report and added some words of his own. Where White disagreed with the theoretical idealism of the “Commision’s recommendations,” Harris disagreed with the theoretical idealism of “persons who feel that democracy can be achieved by imposing laws which would level the masses.”
Americans along the slow path of hard work, educational advancement, and moral improvement which are the only roads of progress for any race.\footnote{Harris asked Branscomb for a copy of his statement to the Vanderbilt board. Harris to Branscomb, April 24, 1948, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUA. The copy is in Box 22, Harris Papers, TUA. Here, Harris changed only two words. Where Branscomb discussed individuals leading “their race” along the slow path of improvement Harris substituted “all Americans.” Branscomb, not surprisingly, wholeheartedly approved of this \textit{Letter From Tulane}. Branscomb to Harris, February 5, 1948, Box 42, Harris Papers, TUA.}

Harris thus reflected and helped spread the growing consensus about racial progress among the leaders of southern private higher education. Calls for any bold steps, or even attendance at a gathering with black students, were depicted as a certain way to impede change; and the opponents of change could take heart from the assurance from Tulane’s president that “temperate and realistic leaders” would remain in control of the progress down a “slow path” of improvement. He did not deny that change would come, or even that change was necessary, but he attempted to downplay these facts and to soothe the fears of those who opposed it.

Even apart from this one rather spectacular incident, problems with race relations continued to come up on the Tulane campus itself. In these situations, which largely arose outside the glaring spotlight that made the interracial party episode so perilous, Harris behaved quite differently, pushing the board to make accommodations rather than attempting to calm fears of integration and subversion. Even here, though, great care was taken to avoid pushing too hard. In February 1948, as New Orleans was preparing to host a foreign policy forum, faculty members suggested that Tulane use the opportunity to host a student forum. The problem of whether to invite delegates from black colleges inevitably arose, and the proposed solution is revealing. After much discussion it was agreed that blacks should be included, but only blacks from the local colleges, Dillard and Xavier. These students would be ideal, as the sensitive problem of housing would be avoided and, as locals, they “could be expected to behave properly.” To avoid
embarrassment, no mention of segregation was to be made at any sessions.\textsuperscript{134} It appears that this meeting never took place, but the issue continued to come up.

A year later, in the fall of 1949, the president of Dillard, along with a prominent rabbi, asked for permission to use Tulane’s McAlister auditorium, on an integrated basis, for a speech by black political scientist Ralph Bunche.\textsuperscript{135} Harris approached the Tulane board about the matter, and they refused permission. Harris took the opportunity to warn the board that this was something that they were going to have to deal with soon, probably within the next ten years, and it was time for Tulane to begin thinking about its own role in the process of racial change.\textsuperscript{136} October 1949 also saw a speech scheduled at Tulane by Ralph McGill, the editor of the Atlanta Constitution, cancelled and moved next door to Loyola University because of Tulane’s refusal to allow black Dillard and Xavier students to attend.\textsuperscript{137}

Harris was increasingly troubled by these situations. At the December 1949 board meeting he discussed the most recent incident, and one that he warned them was likely to recur. Tulane had the opportunity to host a national meeting of social workers and was compelled to turn it down, as faculty members from Fisk, Atlanta University, and other black schools were to attend. Black membership in professional and scholarly organizations, Harris told the board, was only going to increase and Tulane would simply have to work out some way to cope with this. He then went on, disclaiming any desire to tell the board what it ought to do, but pointing out that the national philanthropies, the federal government, and the national scholarly bodies were all intent on doing whatever

\textsuperscript{134} Minutes of Dean’s Meeting, February 5, 1948, Box 1, Harris Papers, TUA.
\textsuperscript{135} At the time, Bunche was a senior official of the United Nations. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950. See Brian Urquhardt, Ralph Bunche: An American Life, (New York, 1993).
\textsuperscript{136} Minutes, Board of Administrators Meeting, October 18, 1949, TUA.
\textsuperscript{137} Harris to Fred Cole, October 27, 1949; Cole to Harris, October 31, 1949; George Simmons to Cole, October 30, 1949; Harris to Cole, November 1, 1949, Box 5, Harris Papers, TUA.
they could to help eliminate segregation and providing the administrators with a laundry list of all the quiet desegregation that had already taken place in the higher education in the South without any major problems. Still, the Tulane board was unwilling to make any changes at all. Harris was beginning a pattern that would continue through the 1950s of coming to them time after time with the latest problem that an inflexible stance on segregation had caused the university.

V

The Rice Institute, later Rice University, was different from these other four schools in almost every important way. Rice was tiny compared to the other schools, and has remained so even to today. Unlike the others, it had no medical school, no law school, no school of theology. For decades, it had only skeletal offerings in the humanities and social sciences. It was also born later, a school of the new century rather than the old one. In 1891, Massachusetts-born businessman William Marsh Rice signed an indenture establishing an “Institute for the Advancement of Literature, Science and Art” in Houston, the city where he had made much of his fortune. But the Rice Institute did not begin holding classes until 1912, and its character was shaped less by southern tradition and the desires of local elite than by the bold and expansive vision of its first president, Edgar Odell Lovett. Lovett, formerly a professor of mathematics at Princeton, planned from the very beginning that Rice would be a university to rival the best in the world. He pursued excellence with a passion and understood that the future of higher education lay in graduate training and research. He also made certain that Rice hewed to far stricter academic standards than its peers. Lovett immediately began recruiting a faculty of real

138 Minutes, Board of Administrators Meeting, December 13, 1949, TUA.
distinction. He also insisted on strict admissions requirements, and refused to coddle students, or their parents, who were often surprised and disconcerted at the difficulty of the Rice program.\textsuperscript{139} Rice was also quite firmly, almost aggressively, secular. Here, there was no commitment to retaining the influence of the South’s religious heritage. Similarly, the social aspects of student life were played down by the school’s leadership. The fraternity and sorority life that played such a large role on the other southern campuses, mimicking the social world of the student’s parents, was absent.\textsuperscript{140}

And yet, whenever the presidents or trustees of the Duke, Vanderbilt, Tulane, and Emory discussed their peer group, they always included Rice. Almost from its birth, its powerful leadership and commitment to real academic excellence marked it as one of a small group of southern colleges that had the breadth of vision and the resources to become an important national university. Under Lovett’s guidance, Rice matured rapidly. It awarded its first doctorate in 1918. But, despite growth in the faculty, student body, and physical plant, Rice remained essentially a regional college, although a highly respected one, until the end of World War II.

The Rice Institute began the post-war era in a significantly different position than the other private southern universities. Although Rice had, of course, experienced many of the same wartime difficulties as these other schools, from loss of faculty to delayed maintenance to a campus overrun with military trainees, it was able to attack its problems

\textsuperscript{139} Fredericka Meiners, \textit{A History of Rice University: The Institute Years, 1907–1963} (Houston, 1982), chapter one, describes Rice’s opening ceremonies, which were attended by many of the world’s most prominent academics, an indication of Lovett’s ambitions for the school. Pages 48–49 include discussion of the school’s high standards.

\textsuperscript{140} Meiners, \textit{A History of Rice,} 15–16, 51.
from a far more comfortable financial position. Rice was also still much smaller than the other schools, with annual enrollments typically around 1,300, and still dominated by its strong science and engineering departments. It had no professional schools, and only a rudimentary graduate program. The war clearly demonstrated what the Rice’s 1945 long range plan called “the vital contribution of broad scientific training to national security and the general welfare,” and as a predominantly scientific and technical school, Rice stood to benefit a great deal from the government’s continuing support of such research.

Most important, Rice had been the beneficiary of several financial windfalls during the war years. First, the nephew of the school’s founder died and left a bequest to the university of more than $2 million. Second, properties owned by Rice in Louisiana were found to have significant oil and natural gas deposits. Third, and by far the most significant, the Institute acquired a 35 percent interest in the Rincon Oil Field in Starr County, Texas, which would nearly double the school’s average annual income. These three developments also doubled the school’s assets within the brief span of five years.

Rice trustee Harry C. Weiss, president of the Humble Oil and Refining Company, regarded the Rincon Oil Field purchase as “the most important financial event in the recent history of Rice.” The board’s handling of this acquisition, though, reveals the deep conservatism of that group, a conservatism that would endure throughout the 1950s and

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141 For Rice during World War II see Meiners, History of Rice, 134–35. The chairman of Rice’s Board of Trustees, J.T. Scott gave a very upbeat assessment of Rice’s financial position in the spring of 1945 in a speech to the Rice faculty, April 10, 1945, Box 36, Edgar O. Lovett Papers, WRC.
142 Report of the Survey Committee of the Board of Trustees, April 11, 1945, Box 36, Lovett Papers, WRC. The number of graduate students was historically quite small, never reaching 100 in any single year.
143 A Long Range Program for Rice Institute, July 30, 1945, Box 36, Lovett Papers, WRC.
1960s. The opportunity to invest in this field came to the trustees by chance. A Rice alumnus, Harris County Judge Roy Hofheinz, had before his court a complicated estate case that involved the Rio Grande valley property. Hofheinz understood that a deal involving Rice, which was not subject to the steep corporate taxes that were burdening the field, could work to the benefit of all parties and could prove to be a financial boon to the Institute. Rice need only provide an initial payment of one million dollars in cash, half of which was quickly raised by friends of the school. Thus, in order to complete the deal they would have to borrow about half of the purchase money.

Rice’s charter, however, included provisions forbidding the trustees to incur debt and limiting their choice of investment vehicles. The cautious trustees, fearful of potential legal consequences, filed suit in district court seeking authorization for the venture. The court quickly agreed, and the Rincon oilfield proved to be almost phenomenally profitable for Rice. The income generated by this investment was crucial to Rice’s postwar expansion, allowing for increased faculty salaries, the hiring of more faculty, and growth in course offerings. It would also reduce the level of financial worries on campus generally, allowing Rice to develop a certain detachment from the currents that shifted around it in the late 1940s and 1950s. Both this sense of detachment and the continuing caution and conservatism of its trustees would inhibit change throughout those decades.

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144 H.C. Weiss, “Rice Looks Forward,” address before The Association of Rice Alumni, November 9, 1945, Box 36, Lovett Papers, WRC. Weiss was a native of Beaumont, Texas and one of the organizers of the Humble Company. He graduated from Princeton, and also sat on Princeton’s board of trustees, Biographical Files, WRC. There is no in-depth study of the important Rincon transaction, but it is discussed briefly in Meiners, A History of Rice University, 137-38 and in Kerri D. Gantz, “On the Basis of Merit Alone: Integration, Tuition, Rice University, and the Charter Change Trial, 1963-1966”, (M.A. thesis, Rice University, 1991), 79–81.
By the end of the war Rice's President E.O. Lovett was an old man. He had informed the trustee's of his intention to retire several years earlier, but the outbreak of the war had made finding a replacement impossible. Thus, while Lovett certainly remained a shaping influence, the future of Rice now lay in the hands of its board as they searched for a new president. Weiss and the rest of the Rice trustees had a good grasp of the Institute's practical position, since they had formulated a broad strategic plan for its immediate future. In 1945, anticipating the end of the war, they had adopted a long-range development program that revolved around substantial new building, including a library and a president's house, an increase in the number of faculty, and better faculty compensation. The plan also envisioned the development of broader course offerings, while retaining a commitment to scientific and technical education, and indicated support for expanding the graduate program, especially in science. It explicitly stated the intention of the trustees that Rice remain small, providing "especially good training for a limited number of students." The trustees anticipated a transition period of about two and a half years, but expected by 1948 to be able to begin implementing this plan.

145 Charter of the William M. Rice Institute for the Advancement of Literature, Science and Art, WRC. The relevant language, found in the ninth clause of Article II, states that the trustees are "expressly forbidden ever to permit any lien, encumbrance, debt or mortgage to be placed upon any of the property, or funds, belonging now, or that may hereafter belong to the said Institute; . . . that the entire property of the Institute shall always be kept free from debt."
146 Minutes of the Rice Board of Trustees, April 23, 1941, Office of the Treasurer, Rice University.
147 A Long Range Program for Rice Institute, July 30, 1945, Box 36, Lovett Papers, WRC.
148 Two facts were critical in allowing Rice to limit its enrollment at a time when other schools were flooded with returning veterans. First and most important was its rosy financial picture. Second was the provision in Rice's charter that prevented it from
The board, however, was under no illusion that it knew how to direct the its own general plan. When Harry Weiss addressed Rice’s alumni association in November of 1945, he detailed the board’s vision for the Institute’s future in the broadest possible terms. Like Tulane’s Harris, Weiss argued that the universities had a duty to “take stock of their role in the community and set forth on a course that will add to the progress and welfare of humanity.” Unlike Harris, Weiss had no firm notion of what that course might be. As a trustee his job was to help select someone who could lead Rice down the path to its postwar future. A new president would have to be installed to vigorously carry the program forward.

The man the trustees finally chose to succeed Lovett was William V. Houston, a physicist at the California Institute of Technology. Significantly, Houston was a northerner. He was born in Mount Gilead, Ohio, in 1900 and remained in Ohio throughout his boyhood. A strong commitment to and love of science, a love he attributed to the gift of a crystal radio set when he was a boy in Ohio, characterized Houston above all. He pursued scientific learning all his life, graduating from Ohio State University in 1920, then leaving for the University of Chicago, where he received the master’s degree in charging tuition. Well funded and with no gain to be had from increasing admissions, Rice was able to keep its student body to a manageable size.

149 Weiss, “Rice Looks Forward,” November 9, 1945, Box 36, Lovett Papers, WRC.
150 The search for Rice’s second president had been a long one. Lovett had announced his intention step down just before the outbreak of the Second World War, and a somewhat sporadic search had taken place during the war years, hampered by the preoccupation of the nation’s scientists, from whose ranks candidates would be sought, with the war effort. By the close of the war, a more intensive search, led by a committee of three trustees, began. Trustees George R. Brown, Benjamin Botts Rice, and Harry Weiss sought out candidates in the traditional manner, relying on word of mouth and the recommendations of their friends and colleagues. Several leading candidates withdrew from consideration before the trustees settled on Houston, and Houston initially turned down the opportunity. A critical factor in his acceptance was the assurance that he would be able to continue his own scholarly work.
in 1922. He married Mildred Harriet White in 1924 and finished his Ph.D. in physics at Ohio State in 1925. Houston became, upon graduation, a National Research Fellow at Cal Tech where he remained as a professor and then as department chair until he assumed Rice’s presidency in 1946. 151

Houston remained through the years a dedicated and distinguished scholar. He studied in Germany on a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1927, working with Warner Heisenberg and others on the development of quantum theory. During World War II he was on leave from Cal Tech to work at Columbia University’s Division of War Research. While there he conducted studies that proved critical in improving the effectiveness of America’s undersea warfare capabilities, including the development of the first homing torpedo. For this work Houston was awarded the U.S. Navy’s Medal of Merit. Other work included pioneering efforts in atomic spectroscopy and solid state theory. 152 Houston’s interest in his research never waned. He accepted the Rice presidency on the understanding that he would also be named a professor of physics and would be allowed to continue running his lab.

In an early address to the Rice community, Houston laid out his plans for the Institute’s future. These plans closely followed those set forth in the long-range development plan adopted by Rice’s trustees in 1945. Houston outlined his support for the building program, for keeping enrollment low until the faculty could be expanded, and for working assiduously to recruit more and better faculty. Above all, though, Houston was concerned with the state of the graduate school. He himself set about the tasks that would be required to build a first rate research program, designing the first

151 William V. Houston, Biographical File, WRC; Biographical Sketch, Papers of William Vermillion Houston, WRC.
graduate bulletin and recruiting poster and announcing the availability of generous stipends and the remission of fees for new graduate students.

President Houston did not deal with matters of race relations at all. The issue must certainly have arisen, but neither the exceptionally discreet board meeting minutes nor any other file records discussion of racial matters before the late 1950s. A good part of the explanation is certainly that Rice had few of the things that pulled Duke, Emory, Tulane, and Vanderbilt into contact with racial problems. It was by far the smallest of these schools, and the one most focused on engineering and science. It was ambitious, but it lacked the size, diversity and broad scholarly firepower that made a place like Duke believe that it was but inches away from becoming the Harvard of the South. It had no law school, no divinity school, and no medical school, divisions that often became the focus of pressures to change at other schools. After its Rincon oilfield deal Rice was also in better financial condition than the other schools, and thus less dependent on the good will of northern philanthropies. In addition, Rice’s President Houston was the only northerner among these presidents and his lack of familiarity with southern racial customs may have led him to defer more completely to his board on these matters. He also lacked the longstanding personal ties that the other presidents shared. Above all, Rice’s charter contained clear language to the effect that the school was to be for whites only. 153 The school’s board had previously shown itself to be extremely cautious about

152 Ibid.
153 Charter of the William M. Rice Institute for the Advancement of Literature, Science and Art, WRC. Article II of the Charter begins with a recitation of the purposes of William Marsh Rice’s gift, including “the maintenance of an Institute for the Advancement of Literature, Science, Art, Philosophy and Letters,” noting that these benefits are to be given “free for the white inhabitants of the City of Houston and the State of Texas.” Like Rice, Tulane’s charter contained racially restrictive clauses, but
violating the charter language in any way, taking rather extreme steps to ensure their compliance even when a financial windfall was at stake. In the late 1940s it would have been difficult to imagine the kinds of social changes that would force a conservative southern board to challenge its own charter on the issue of race.

But even at Rice the issue of racial change could not remain dormant forever. In late 1948 the editors of the student paper, the *Thresher*, decided to stir the pot. Editorializing on the need to end segregation and to base admissions to Rice solely on merit, *Thresher* editor Brady Tyson began a dispute that ran for several months, drawing in first the local Houston papers and then others around the region.\(^{154}\) Letters to the editor arrived from Governor Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, the Executive Secretary of the Houston branch of the NAACP, James Dombrowski of the Southern Conference Educational Fund, the editor of the University of Texas’ *Daily Texan*, and a host of concerned Texans on both sides of the issue.\(^{155}\) President Houston left the student paper alone for quite a while. Finally, in mid-February 1949, the controversy still brewing, he sent along his own letter to the editor. In a very brief note Houston merely stated some facts and let them speak for themselves. “[I] have concluded,” he wrote, “that some of THE THRESHER staff, as well as most of your correspondents, must be unaware of the provisions of the

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\(^{154}\) The controversy began in November 1948 and continued in the pages of the *Thresher* until February 1949. All the newspapers in Houston, both black and white, as well as other papers throughout the state covered the story.

\(^{155}\) The letter from Bill Smith, the editor of the *Daily Texan*, appeared on January 19, 1949. In it, Smith was very supportive of the Rice editor’s stand on beginning racial change, but also echoed, in his own way, the cautious rhetoric of Branscomb, White, and Harris. “I don’t hold with the hot headed type of individual who thinks it can be done tomorrow,” Smith wrote. “He’s as dangerous as a KKK member, but I believe it will be the calm, plodding type of individual who will in the not too distant future show Texans what they do to themselves by their hatreds.”
Rice Institute charter. The Rice Institute was founded and chartered specifically for white students. The question of the admission of negroes is therefore not one for administrative consideration, and the discussion in this connection is entirely academic.” The contents of this letter were reported a few days later in the New York Times. ¹⁵⁶

President Houston’s appeal to the authority of Rice’s charter brought a quick, though by no means permanent, end to this small tempest. Though the discussion soon tailed off, however, the challenge would not be withdrawn. The Thresher would continue reprinting, without comment, editorials from other student newspapers on the topic of race relations on campus. ¹⁵⁷ Other indications that the issue would not be so simply disposed of came from outside the Rice campus. The student paper of Texas Southern University, Houston’s black school, astutely pointed out the flaw in President Houston’s reasoning. The “students at Rice,” the TSU Herald noted, “have not attempted to attack the legality of the situation, rather the morality . . .”¹⁵⁸

In many ways, this skirmish at Rice illustrates what would come to be a constant and severe problem for the presidents of the South’s flagship private universities. Again and again in the years to come some racial controversy would arise on campus, often but not always brought on by students, and would come to the attention of the larger community, quickly snowballing into a major matter of public attention. The press, first local and then national, seemed to actively seek out stories with racial angles, often playing them up as

¹⁵⁶ Houston to Brady Tyson, February 14, 1949, Rice Thresher Files, WRC. This letter was printed in the Thresher on February 19, 1949. The New York Times included a small story on this incident in its February 20, 1949 issue, noting that questions about admitting Negroes to Rice had received an “abrupt answer.” It was also, of course, given more space in the local newspapers.
¹⁵⁷ For example, on March 2, 1949, the Thresher reprinted an editorial from Texas Tech in Lubbock which approved of a University of Missouri student body poll that overwhelmingly supported the admission of qualified black students.
much as possible. For the men who were trying to run the universities, any coverage at all
would only make their job with the boards more difficult. As opinion became more and
more polarized and communities became quick to anger, publicity could only result in
controversy, for no matter what had happened someone would be upset. Conservative
board members and alumni were frequently angry over stories that indicated any support,
by students, faculty, or the administration, for any relaxation of traditional segregation.
At the same time, publicity that suggested racial recalcitrance was also embarrassing, as
the major foundations were already looking for progress in race relations on the
campuses to which they sent money. The heads of all these universities realized that they
desperately needed to avoid drawing any attention to either changes or the lack of them in
any school policies that had anything to do with segregation.

Unavoidably, though, controversy came. Rice’s episode in 1948 and 1949 with the
*Thresher* debate over segregation was exceptional only in the ease with which it was
ended and its head-on confrontation of the issue of black admissions itself. A single
editorial in the newspaper of a small southern university suggesting that the admission of
black students ought to be considered set off a chain reaction that resulted in
 correspondence from the Governor of South Carolina and heads of national organizations
and stories in newspapers around the country. Under most circumstances, embattled
presidents did not have the kind of trump card that President Houston possessed, but they
quickly developed a variety of tactics to minimize the damage from press coverage of
their racial debates and incidents. The use of a particularly gymnastic double-talk, in
which the president would appear to agree with whomever he was writing to, while never
actually stating his position, was one such common tactic. Another was the careful

*Texas Southern University Herald*, “Is it Sentiment or Law?,” February-March 1949.
cultivation of newspapermen, both publishers and reporters, who could be counted on to help out in a public relations emergency.

In the late 1940s, however, this problem was still minor. Nothing had yet occurred to draw the wrath of large segments of the community. Pressures to give way on racial matters were still sporadic, still minor enough to be ignored or downplayed or simply dismissed. What changes were taking places on these campuses were small adjustments, flexible adaptations that were often so small as to be all but invisible to the general public. But the forces that brought on these small changes were still in motion, and they would not stop as the new decade opened.
Chapter 2

"The sense of security which once was present no longer exists"

As the 1950s opened, the pace and seriousness of change began to press on the South with new intensity. Events far outside the region had a major impact inside it. The victory of the communists in China and the beginning of the Korean War frightened many Americans, bringing into sharp focus the global challenge to American power. Accompanying this external challenge was the rise of a more militant and aggressive anticommunism within the United States focused on the perceived threat of subversion from within. In the South, other profound shifts took place. Wide and deep change spread through the South's economy, demographics, and culture.¹ New manufacturing industries entered the region, drawing agricultural workers to rapidly growing cities. By 1950 there were thirty cities in the South with 100,000 or more people; ten of those had at least

¹ See Numan V. Bartley, The New South, 1945–1980 (Baton Rouge, 1995), especially chapter 4. Bartley begins this chapter with an especially apt quote from a southern journalist's analysis of regional change in the early 1950s. Noting both the extent of change and the resistance to it, the writer saw "two Souths which exist side by side in each Southern state, but which are as different as Chicago and Bangkok." Bartley, New South, 105. The early 1950s were a time of substantial but still erratic change, transforming southern cities but often leaving smaller towns and rural areas with much of the older South intact. These changes were so noticeable that there is a large literature of contemporaneous or near-term assessment of the region's growth. See, for example, Allan P. Sindler, ed., Change in the Contemporary South (Durham, N.C., 1963), a collection of conference papers from a 1962 meeting at Duke on "The Impact of Political and Legal Change in the Postwar South." William H. Nicholls of the Vanderbilt department of economics produced several good studies of regional change during the 1950s and 1960s, including Southern Tradition and Regional Progress (Durham, 1960). Nicholls succinctly addressed in this work the corrosive effects of industrialization and urbanization on the southern tradition. Another interesting piece that directly addresses the impact of the changing southern economy on racial tradition is J. Milton Yinger and George E. Simpson, "Can Segregation Survive in an Industrial Society?" Antioch Review 28 (March, 1958), 15–24. See also James W. Silver, Mississippi: The Closed Society (New York, 1963).
250,000. The region’s population as a whole had increased by nearly 4 million since 1940, although the gain in black population was minuscule because many rural blacks had left for the North. In 1950 Harvie Branscomb delivered an address on the occasion of Vanderbilt’s seventy-fifth anniversary that spoke of these changes with both pride and hope:

> The South is no longer the nation’s acute economic problem, though we are far yet from attaining the average individual income of the nation as a whole. The progress in this part of the United States within the last two decades has been impressive. The farms are being mechanized; the one crop system is gone. More and more power dams are being built on our rivers. Industries are springing up. Barge lines now move up the Tennessee and the Cumberland. Vast installations of government are now coming into the region. One only has to drive across the country to see that the physical form of the old South has ceased to be, and that the new South which we have talked about so long is in process of realization.

On the campuses of Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt the sense of transformation was palpable. The surge of new building that began in the wake of the war now made the schools nearly unrecognizable to nostalgic alumni. Successful fund raising and sustained focus on improvement led to the dramatic growth of new and better graduate and professional schools, which some even feared were beginning to dominate the campuses. The students too were changing, as the use of standardized testing improved their quality and recruitment efforts increased their geographical diversity. The small, tightly knit regional and local institutions, focused on classical education and undergraduates, had evolved into legitimate, though still minor, research universities. They now competed with universities throughout the nation for resources, faculty, and

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2 Nicholas Lehmann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York, 1991) discusses the outpouring of blacks from the rural South to the urban North from the 1940s through the 1960s.

3 Seventy-fifth Anniversary Speech, October 21, 1950, Box 5, Branscomb Papers, VUSC.
students. In the same 1950 speech, Branscomb expressed his belief that the changes in the region would only enhance the ability of the universities to grow and to provide leadership. The new South that was being born, he said,

will be able to build educational institutions of the first rank. The resources for a great university in this region are now to be found at home. . . . There is almost daily evidence that the thoughtful leaders of the country believe that sound foundations have been laid here for a great university and that this is the proper location for one. This is the meaning of the recent election of Vanderbilt to the Association of American Universities. It did not mean that our advanced teaching and research had reached its full or proper limit. It did mean a verdict by our peers that the graduate school . . . is sound and worthy, and that we should be called upon to represent and strengthen scholarship and science in this part of the country.  

Change was also astir in American race relations. The front page of the July 18, 1950 New York Times carried the announcement “No Scientific Basis for Race Bias Found by World Panel of Experts,” a reflection of the replacement within the world’s scientific community of rigid views of racial hierarchies by cultural and social explanations of differences. Changes were also taking place in southern race relations, often beneath the surface of daily life. While much seemed the same—schools, parks, and transportation all

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4 Graduate education in the South was still woeful compared to other regions. The Carnegie Foundation calculated that in 1950 in the eastern region, with a population of 44.9 million there were 2,932 earned doctorates awarded. In the Mid-West, with 40 million people, there were 2,317 doctorates awarded. In the South, with a population of 31.8 million only 317 doctorates were earned. This state of affairs provides part of the explanation for the high level of major philanthropic interest in southern higher education throughout the 1950s. See the Annual Report of the President of Tulane University, 1950–51 (New Orleans, 1951), 47 and President’s Report to the Board, December 11, 1951, TUA.

5 Ibid.

6 The story was about a UNESCO report on the state of scientific thought about race. By 1950 scientific racism was very nearly dead and the kind of testing done by Goodrich White during his military service in World War I was thoroughly repudiated. Elazar Barkan, The retreat of scientific racism: Changing concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars (Cambridge, 1992), 341–46. Barkan argues that the death of scientific racism was caused by politics more than by science, tracing it to revulsion with Nazi racial theory.
remained segregated and southern blacks were kept in mostly menial occupations—within the region's black communities a new resolve to fight their demeaning treatment was emerging. By the summer of 1951 the five cases that would later be consolidated as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* had all been filed. A little more than a year later lawyers argued these cases in front of United States Supreme Court. The maintenance of segregated primary and secondary education became a matter of serious concern in much of the white South. At the same time, the desegregation of the region's public graduate and professional schools, also brought on by the NAACP's legal challenges, continued at a steady pace.

All these changes created a feeling of disorientation in many white southerners. The scope and pace of the transformations was more than some people could absorb.

Something of this state of mind can be seen in a speech Hollis Edens gave in early 1950 to the Men's Fellowship Club of the Main Street Methodist Church in Gastonia, North Carolina. Clearly troubled by new challenges facing the country and the region, Edens spoke of the rapidly changing world. The *Gastonia Gazette* reported his remarks: "Time

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8 *Sweatt v. Painter*, 210 S.W. 2d 442 (1947), 339 U.S. 629 (1950) and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education* 339 U.S. 637 (1950) should have settled the issue of black admissions to most, if not all, public graduate programs but it did not. See John Hubbell, "The Desegregation of the University of Oklahoma, 1946–1950," *Journal of Negro History*, 57 (October, 1972): 370–84. Many southern universities chose to open admissions to each graduate division or course of study only when forced to by a specific plaintiff seeking to enroll. For example, the NAACP had an early victory at the University of Maryland's law school in the 1936 case of *Pearson v. Murray*, 169 Md. 478, 182 A. 590 (1936). But the university fought a rear-guard action for over fifteen years, forcing black plaintiffs to sue for entry into each department. Most public universities accepted the inevitable with more grace, however, and a Southern Regional Council study revealed that by 1955 between 750 and 800 black students attended
ceased to march 60 years ago, Dr. Edens said figuratively, and 'now it catapults.'” His remedy for the unsettled state of the nation and the world was a “doubling back” to “fill the pockets that were left open in that march of civilization.” The role of education was a critical one in this scheme. Edens declared that “we need to go back to teaching our young people more history—the history of this country and the history of other nations. We must teach them of the rise and fall of other civilizations, so that they won’t easily surrender the tenets that our forefathers held to.” This impulse to turn back in the face of change, to hold fast to tradition, would provide a counterpoint to the forces that pulled the South and its private universities away from its past and toward the rest of the nation. At these institutions the two currents, rapid change and devotion to tradition, would create growing tension throughout the 1950s. Even Harvie Branscomb and Tulane’s Rufus Harris, the two of these presidents most willing to see changes as opportunities, repeatedly invoked the importance of tradition. In his seventy-fifth anniversary address Branscomb said: “I said that I cannot foretell the future, but some things about our future are determined by our past.”

In campus race relations, pressures for change became unremitting. The Association of American Law Schools pressed the southern schools on discriminatory admissions policies, threatening to withhold accreditation from segregated institutions. The theology schools experienced more turmoil over the issue of racial exclusion. Students and faculty actively questioned the morality of excluding blacks from religious training, as applications from qualified blacks arrived, and other divinity schools in the South repealed their restrictions. Letters from alumni and community members who supported universities that had previously been segregated. See Guy B. Johnson, “New Ways on the Campus,” New South, 10 (February, 1955): 1–10.
racial change began to arrive, along with letters that opposed it. Increased public attention to these schools’ refusal to admit black students was now inevitable, brought on by the NAACP’s legal victories and heavily publicized episodes of conflict at other schools. While the courts had not taken any direct action against private universities with racially exclusionary admissions policies, the time was rapidly approaching when some sort of public justification of such policies would be demanded. The press stood ever by, waiting for stories of any action or any failure to take action on racial issues.

Harvie Branscomb and Rufus Harris responded to this tension with active attempts to find areas of principled agreement between those who insisted on change and the traditionalists who opposed it. For them, the pace of change and the growing intensity of the insistence on relaxing segregation were something of a blessing. If quick-witted enough, they could exploit and even manipulate situations in order to move towards removing the racial restrictions that impeded their goal of national prominence. Branscomb proved more successful, convincing the Vanderbilt board to accept a principled, though minor, modification of its segregation policies. Harris had a more difficult time. He coaxed Tulane’s board members toward action, only to have them finally balk.

William Houston at Rice, Goodrich White at Emory, and Hollis Edens at Duke responded to the pressures and tensions by trying to avoid alienating either side rather than by attempting to mediate between them. Throughout this era they evaded the issue of race as much as possible, watching and waiting, dealing with occasional student or faculty discontent as it arose, but keeping away from any suggestion of real change. Although they certainly understood that large forces operating on a national scale were

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9 *Gastonia Gazette*, February 4, 1950, Box 10, Edens Papers, DUA.
irresistible and that racial change would come, they remained passive, seemingly frozen. At Rice, William Houston presided over a small, largely technical institute that did not attract the kinds of pressure that slowly built at the other schools, and so he easily avoided dealing with the issue of race at all. Edens and White, though, were increasingly called on to deal with racial incidents and issues. Edens, hampered in his ability to maneuver by the presence of board chairman Willis Smith, was freed by the Smith’s death in 1953 to approach the trustees about change; but he could not overcome his own uncertainty and make a real push. White, committed to the idea of gradual black improvement within a segregated society and limited by a powerful board chairman who believed strongly in the color bar, avoided the topic as much as possible. For these men the seemingly unending volleys of challenge must have been torturous. From every direction came questions about discriminatory admissions policies, questions that were unanswerable without giving offense to someone. From every direction, no matter which way they turned, came opposition, resistance, and objection. The sense of control and the confidence that the South’s educated white men would direct whatever change occurred seemed to have evaporated. The result of their timid behavior, for all the schools save Vanderbilt, was a creeping loss of the regional leadership role that had been such a cherished part of the schools’ identity.

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At Duke, the decade began with few signs that relaxation of racial restrictions might be impending. Hollis Edens was a cautious man, had a board that was chaired by now-Senator Willis Smith, and was unnerved by the amount and speed of change, racial and
otherwise, that had come to the South. His unease in the face of seemingly unpredictable change coupled with the extremely conservative nature of the Duke board made Edens a hesitant leader in the early 1950s. Unlike Harvie Branscomb, who used nearly every racially pregnant incident as an occasion for nudging the Vanderbilt board towards desegregation, Edens chose to evade the issue. Letters from alumni urging racial change were met, not with discourses on strategy and the history of southern race relations, but rather with a fog of banalities that could not mask the total lack of content in Edens’s response. He wanted, it seems, to avoid being pinned down on anything, even the most obvious fact that Duke did not admit blacks and had no plans to do so in the near future.

Although Edens understood well enough the forces that were bringing pressure to bear on traditional southern racial arrangements, he made no effort to reconcile the highly traditional Duke board to the inevitability of change. Avoiding controversy, not positioning Duke for principled moderate change, was the driving force behind Edens’s thinking and behavior in the early 1950s.¹⁰

Some of the most interesting examples of Edens’s obfuscation are found in the Duke president’s responses to blacks who applied for admission. In May 1950 he received a letter from Virgil C. Stroud, a black veteran, inquiring about the possibility of attending

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¹⁰ There was no way for Edens to avoid the intrusion of racial change. Reminders of the growing tension and turmoil appeared, unbidden, in his office on a regular basis. For example, in November, 1950, the Yale University News Bureau sent him, as a courtesy, a copy of a talk given on the radio by the Dean of Yale’s Divinity School, Reverend Liston Pope. Pope, a graduate of Duke, used this address to proclaim that “a bloodless but extremely effective revolution in race relations” was “sweeping the U.S.” Pope included a list of changes that contributed to this “revolution,” ranging from black major league ballplayers to the role of Ralph Bunche in international affairs. Edens received this report with characteristic terseness. “We are always interested,” he wrote, “in what our graduates are doing. . . .” Richard C. Lee to Edens, November 16, 1950; Edens to Lee, November 18, 1950; News Release, Yale University News Bureau, October 23, 1950, Box 59, Edens Papers, DUAA.
Duke as a graduate student in the Public Law and Government program. Carefully explaining that he was a family man with a job at North Carolina A&T, a black college in Greensboro, Stroud appealed to Edens for the opportunity to advance his education without having to leave the state. He also stressed that he understood “the conditions involved” and told Edens that he “would appreciate a direct and frank reply from you.”

Edens’s reply, while it certainly got the point across, was far from direct. He managed to tell Mr. Stroud that he could not be admitted without ever actually saying that Duke did not admit blacks. “[Y]ou perhaps are familiar with the past history of Duke University and its policy concerning requests similar to yours,” Edens noted. “There has been,” he continued, “no change in policy.” He did suggest that Stroud contact the newly accredited law school at Durham’s black school, North Carolina College.

In the fall of 1951 a group of Duke Divinity School students formed a social action committee to study segregation in southern theological education. The committee produced a brief report, which it presented to President Edens in November. This “Summary of Social Action Study” began with a clear and strong moral statement. “Although we have participated in a segregated society throughout most of our lives,” wrote the students, “we have come to view segregation as sinful . . . We believe that segregation in theological education vitiates our unity in Christ and obscures our dedication to a common task. We believe the exclusion of students from the Duke Divinity School on the basis of race alone to be contrary to the teachings of Jesus and the

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11 Virgil C. Stroud to Edens, May 26, 1950, Box 29, Edens Papers, DUA.
12 Edens to Stroud, May 30, 1950, Box 29, Edens Papers, DUA.
13 The Divinity School program took three years to complete, so the students who petitioned Edens in 1948 had already graduated. This was a completely different group.
dictates of the Christian conscience.”¹⁴ The report followed this forthright position with a concise review of changing southern conditions that, the committee argued, made it desirable for Duke to begin changing as well. The desegregation of over twenty private schools in the region and all but three of the private seminaries, in addition to the growing court-ordered desegregation of public institutions (including the University of North Carolina’s graduate school), they clearly saw, was leaving Duke behind. They noted that there was no legal impediment to the admission of black students to non-tax supported schools. “We believe,” the students concluded, “that the Divinity School as a part of a private institution with a professedly Christian purpose is in a crucial position to take voluntary steps of change on this problem in keeping with the legally effected change in state institutions and with the majority of theological schools in the South.”

Just as in 1948, this committee asked Edens to appoint a new committee made up of trustees, the faculty and administration of the Divinity School, and members of the Divinity School student body to further study the issue.

The students then met with Edens to discuss the problem of racially restricted admissions. The brief correspondence that followed gives some hint of how Edens regarded the problem during this period, making clear that he understood the stakes and that he saw virtually no possibility of change at the time. Robert Regan, president of the Divinity School student body, wrote Edens, acknowledging that the students’ “impatience at prevailing racial segregation” at Duke led them to seek change “sooner than you deem necessary.” But, Regan continued, the students also were encouraged that their discussion

¹⁴ “Summary of Social Action Study,” November 6, 1951. The students relied on official Methodist documents to bolster their argument that segregation was immoral. They quoted from The Discipline of the Methodist Church, 1948, section 2020: “We believe
with the president revealed that Edens was “essentially in accord with us in recognizing the acuteness of the problem at this time and that you will be discussing this problem with the trustee members as you come in contact with them.”¹⁵ In his reply to Regan, Edens expressed gratitude for the students’ cooperative attitude and his willingness to continue the discussion. At the same time, however, he did not withhold from them his assessment of the situation. “[H]onesty compels me,” Edens wrote, “to tell you in advance that I do not anticipate any change in this policy at this time.”¹⁶

At about the same time, Edens received another application from a black man. The Reverend R. Irving Boone, pastor of the Central Baptist Church in Wilmington and chairman of the executive board of the General Baptist State Convention, wrote Edens asking to undertake graduate study at Duke’s School of Theology. Boone was a graduate of Shaw University and had also attended Union Theological Seminary. His respectful letter took pains to make Edens understand that he meant to make no trouble. His pastoral duties, he explained, made it difficult for him to go too far from home and he wanted nothing from Duke except the opportunity to study. “My only interest,” he told the president, “is to take the regular courses . . . The matter of housing need not at all enter into the picture. I can readily make arrangements for living accommodations over in Durham . . .”¹⁷

Edens politely rebuffed Reverend Boone, again without any direct statement of Duke’s racially restrictive admissions policy. To a significant degree Edens’s response

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¹⁵ Robert Regan, Jr. to Edens, November 16, 1951, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.
¹⁶ Edens to Regan, November 19, 1951, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.
¹⁷ R. Irving Boone to President, Duke University, September 21, 1951, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.
was due to the presence of Willis Smith, elected to the U.S. Senate in a blatantly racist campaign, whose leadership of the Duke board allowed little room for loosening racial restrictions. To some degree, though, it was also due to Edens himself. As always, Edens tried to serve the board rather than lead it. He did not see applications from qualified blacks as opportunities to prod the trustees into controlled change. Far from attempting to find situations where some reconciliation of tradition and change might be possible, Edens strove to maintain a calm neutrality and to do efficiently whatever the board directed.

Another division of the university became embroiled in racial controversy during the early 1950s when the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) began discussing withholding accreditation from law schools that practiced racial segregation. As early as 1948 the AALS expressed the conviction that racial restrictions in legal education had to end. At its annual meeting in 1950 the membership passed a resolution stating that the association opposed "the continued maintenance of segregation or discrimination in legal education on racial grounds, and asserts its belief that it is the professional duty of all member schools to abolish any such practices at the earliest practicable time." At the same meeting the Yale Law School proposed an amendment to the association’s articles that would make nondiscrimination in admissions a requirement for membership.

This so-called Yale Amendment was met with surprise at the Duke, Emory, Vanderbilt, and Tulane law schools, and the administrations of these schools reacted with

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19 The amendment read as follows: “No school which follows a policy of excluding or segregating qualified applicants or students on the basis of race or color shall be qualified to be admitted to or to remain a member of the Association.” (This was modified to include a two year grace period.)
varying degrees of anger. 20 Edens sent a letter to the association's Special Committee on Racial Discrimination that had been constituted to investigate the issue. 21 This short statement demonstrates the narrowing scope of Edens's conception of the university's role in southern society. Activism in promoting the progress of the South was gone, replaced by a defensive argument that Duke's job was only the instruction of individual students. Arguing that segregation had nothing to do with the quality of a law school, Edens wrote: "I believe that accrediting agencies should be concerned with the kind of work carried on in a school. They are treading on dangerous ground when they concern themselves with administrative policies that have nothing to do with the quality of work done within the institution . . . . It is absurd to assume that this perplexing question [segregation] has anything to do with the kind of instruction a school offers . . . ." 22

Dean J.A. McClain of the Duke law school followed Edens letter with a blistering reply of his own, based on Edens's reasoning but supplemented with an extended and accurate condemnation of anti-Semitism at northern law schools. 23 Hollis Edens actively endorsed Dean McClain's comments, sending them to the trustees with a note that

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20 Correspondence on this issue continued between Edens, Branscomb and Harris throughout the several years of the Association off American Law Schools controversy, both about the specific issue of law school desegregation and about the general issue of the power of accrediting bodies to demand desegregation at all. Edens to Branscomb, May 8, 1951; Branscomb to Edens, May 18, 1951, Box 7, Edens Papers, DUA.
21 The association's president, F.D.G. Ribble of the University of Virginia School of Law, appointed the committee of five. Headed by Elliot Cheatham of Columbia, this group also included representatives from Harvard, the University of Southern California, the University of Illinois, and the University of Texas. (Cheatham had taught at Emory's law school early in his career.)
22 Edens to Dean J.A. McClain, April 17, 1951, Box 25, Edens Papers, DUA. This letter was included as part of Duke's response to an AALS questionnaire.
described them as “setting forth our views” on the matter. Ever the pragmatist, Edens pointed out to the board in December of 1951 that the AALS threat was not yet concrete. “It is hardly probable,” he wrote, “that developments will reach a critical stage this year, but this is a sample of the increasing pressure which we may expect in the years ahead.”

Edens was right on both counts. The committee report to the AALS annual meeting in December 1951 argued that segregated law schools should not be forced out of the association, but this did not settle the issue. The AALS would continue to debate segregation, with varying degrees of intensity, over the next several years. While the threat of lost accreditation was never really imminent, the problem remained a live one for Duke’s law school and for the Duke board throughout the early 1950s.

Other racial issues besides admissions arose on a regular basis during these years. Here too Edens approached matters with deep caution and an unwillingness to rock the boat in any way. A particularly revealing incident took place in early 1950. Two interns at the Duke hospital wanted to purchase lots owned by the university. They were veterans and thus able to buy the land on very favorable terms under the G.I. Bill. They were held up only by a racially restrictive covenant contained in the deeds. This restriction made the purchase of the land with federal funds impossible. The interns approached Duke about

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24 Edens also made it something of a personal crusade to try to rein in the power of accrediting bodies, becoming in 1953 the chairman of the National Commission on Accrediting, a platform that he used to argue for the elimination of many accrediting bodies. Interestingly, while they understood and to some degree sympathized with Edens’ position. Harris and Branscomb both opposed the idea of eliminating national accreditation for professional schools, fearing that it would further isolate the South and end up doing more harm than good to their schools’ reputations. Box 22, Edens Papers, DUA.

25 Report of the President to the Board of Trustees, December 1951, Box 30, Edens Papers, DUA.
removing the restrictions, and their request passed through several layers of
administration before finally landing on Eden’s desk in April.\textsuperscript{26}

The United States Supreme Court’s 1948 decision in \textit{Shelley v. Kramer} would seem to
decide this issue. In that case the court definitively declared racial covenants in deeds
unenforceable. The restrictions on the Duke deeds were thus legally meaningless—it did
not matter if they were there or not.\textsuperscript{27} But Edens did not conclude that the restrictive
clause could be removed or ignored. Rather, on the advice of Duke’s business office, he
focused on a Missouri case working its way through the courts that challenged the
Supreme Court’s reasoning in \textit{Shelley}.\textsuperscript{28} Although he surely knew that the Supreme Court
was not going to reverse itself, Edens used this as a justification for retaining the racial
ban. The existence of the slimmest reed of doubt anywhere in the American judicial
system, apparently, was enough for Duke to declare the issue unsettled and to refuse to
make a change.\textsuperscript{29} It “seems we are bound by the covenant which appears in other deeds in

\textsuperscript{26} E.C. Bryson to Edens, April 20, 1951, Box 7, Edens Papers, DUA.
Only: The Supreme Court, the NAACP and the Restrictive Covenant Cases} (Berkely,
1959).
\textsuperscript{28} The Missouri case was \textit{Weiss v. Leaon}, 359 Mo.1054, 225 S.W. 2d 127 (1949). The
Missouri Supreme Court tried to evade the clear intent of \textit{Shelley} by ruling that while
courts could not enforce racially restrictive covenants they could award money damages
where existing covenants were violated. This decision was roundly criticized in the law
reviews for the transparency of its attempt to avoid the plain meaning of the Supreme
Court decision. For example, see \textit{Harvard Law Review}, LXIII, (April, 1950), 1062–64.
Similar judgments in several other states resulted in the United States Supreme Court
decision in \textit{Barrows v. Jackson}, 346 U.S. 249 (1953), which made clear that courts could
not enforce restrictive covenants by any means whatsoever, including damages awards.
\textsuperscript{29} Edens to Bryson, April 21, 1950, Box 7, Edens Papers, DUA.
the same area," Edens concluded, "and I doubt that we would have a legal or moral right to change the deeds on subsequent sales."^{30}

Letters from alumni and other community members unhappy with segregation at Duke trickled steadily in. Edens replied to them all with a smokescreen of platitude and misdirection. In the summer of 1951, for example, a Duke alumna wrote Edens about the ongoing fund drive. While she was grateful for all that the school had done for her, her contribution awaited Edens's reply to one question: "[w]hat steps has Duke taken – or is it planning to take – to assume leadership in the South in admitting negro students to its student body?" Unable or unwilling to simply answer the question, the president responded with a string of non sequiturs. "The question you raise," he wrote, "involves a problem of tangled human relations which apparently cannot be solved quickly and easily. It will require patience and mature judgment. It is easier to crystallize one's personal attitude in the matter than to obtain a workable solution in society . . . I wish I could point to a clear solution of the problem which confronts us."^{31} To the director of the Methodist Student Movement of North Carolina, who had written urging the end of segregation in Methodist schools as "a great witness to Christianity," Edens replied: "It is difficult to judge the proper timing in the hesitant steps of social progress. A University is

^{30} Edens to Bryson, April 24, 1950, Box 7, Edens Papers, DUA. The two interns refused to simply acquiesce. They continued to argue that the 1948 Supreme Court decision in which made racially restrictive covenants unenforceable meant that Duke's refusal to omit the covenant from the deeds was pointless, serving no purpose other than to keep them from buying the property. The university, though, would not move. Bryson to Edens, April 27, 1950, Box 7, Edens Papers, DUA.

^{31} Anna G. Douglas to Edens, June 29, 1951; Edens to Anna Douglas, July 3, 1951, Box 12, Edens Papers, DUA.
a highly complex organization and changes in pattern of thought and activity will have to come slowly."

Edens was more forthcoming with another alumna, Helen Mercner Morrison. Perhaps something in Morrison's letter, which combined moral arguments, concerns about international politics, and a heartfelt appeal to Duke's leadership role in the South, struck a chord with the president. In any event, his reply to her was a fairly detailed analysis of his approach to the problem of segregation at Duke. First, he noted that the opening of state schools to black students, which she had praised, was undertaken only "in compliance with the orders of the Supreme Court of the United States." This point was important, he continued, because the state schools, forced to desegregate by the government, never had to take the initiative to change. "[A]n action," he argued, "in compliance with the law of the land is much simpler than a voluntary action initiated by the institution." Duke, he implied, had the harder road because it would have to make its own decisions. It had not altered its policy on this question, he admitted, "and it would be impossible for me to predict how soon change will take place. It is a complicated problem involving some prejudices and many practical considerations."

The president continued with what is the clearest expression of his own views on the elimination of segregation. The near abandonment of any commitment to regional leadership is evident here too: "In all such matters I am a 'gradualist,' which is a hated word in many quarters. It is my firm conviction that Duke University can and should admit negroes only when the community and constituency are prepared for it. We have

32 Reverend W.M. Wells to Edens, February 17, 1953; Edens to Wells, February 20, 1953, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.
33 Mrs. Robert H. Morrison to Edens, October 8, 1953; Edens to Morrison, October 13, 1953, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.
an obligation to foster social progress, but we have a larger responsibility for maintaining an intellectual atmosphere where all controversial subjects can be debated.” He closed with an invocation of the Bassett affair. “Duke University,” Edens proclaimed, “is proud of the fact that at no time in its history has it attempted to curb the thoughts and actions of its teachers and graduates.”

By 1952 the faculty openly and frequently discussed the issue of black admissions. In a December 1952 meeting of the University Council, an advisory group chaired by Edens, the question was raised during a discussion about broad planning for the university. Edens remarked briefly on goals for the size and scope of Duke in the near future, including stabilizing total enrollment at about 5,000, finishing the school’s building program, and recruiting students from a wider geographic area. He was quite specific in his discussion, quoting facts and figures, until asked about the possible admission of blacks. Then, Edens returned to the sort of shapelessly murky statements that distinguish his comments on race. Noting the obvious, that the trustees and executive committee of the university “are aware of and are informed on the problem to date,” Edens assured the council that they were thinking about the issue, which was complicated.

34 Edens to Morrison, October 13, 1953, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA. Morrison was not especially satisfied by Edens’s reply. A year later, after the New York Times article on segregation, Morrison wrote him again. She respectfully held to her previous positions, arguing again that Duke should lead the South rather than wait for change to be forced on it. “If this sounds too idealistic,” she observed, hinting at a role for education that Edens seemed to reject, “it is the fault of the university, for its professors of history and religion and economics have so shaped this mind.” Morrison to Edens, May 4, 1954, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.

35 The University Council was formed and approved by Duke’s board in 1952 as part of a revision in the school’s bylaws. It was the first real attempt at Duke to take faculty opinion into consideration in matters of university policy, but it remained a very small (13 members plus the president and the vice president of the educational division) advisory group with no real teeth which never was able to truly represent the views of the
and thus "should be most seriously examined." 36 Two months later, in January 1953, Edens cut off discussion of the issue in this forum. He told the council that "discussion of the admission of Negroes to the University was not indicated for the immediate future . . ."

Edens did take notice of the incipient problem of faculty unhappiness with segregation. He, along with the other presidents discussed here, began to use his wide network of personal and professional contacts to screen job candidates for racial attitudes as well as for accomplishment and potential. For years this network had been the means of recruiting talented new professors to these schools, and the matter of whether a man would "fit in" in the South had always been relevant information. As the leading southern universities began to compete for the best faculty in the country, rather than the best in the South, both the quality of the people and their willingness to go along with southern racial arrangements became more pressing considerations. At the level of deans, this criterion was even more important. Concerned with finding a new head for the Duke Divinity School before the fall of 1950, Edens called on his friends for suggestions and advice about particular candidates. Writing to his close friend from Emory, Ernest Colwell, who was then serving as president of the University of Chicago, Edens asked for comments on one appealing prospect. Although "a man of great talent in many fields," Colwell responded, this man would not be suitable for Duke. The problem, Colwell wrote, was that he "holds an inflexible position on the matter of race relations. I

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36 Minutes of University Council of the University Faculty Meeting, December 10, 1952, Box 35, Edens Papers, DUA.
37 Minutes of University Council of University Faculty, January 21, 1953, Box 35, Edens Papers, DUA.
remember he said to me some years ago, "I could never again live south of the Mason and Dixon Line because of the way the Negro is treated." Thus ended the man's candidacy.\footnote{Edens to Ernest C. Colwell, June 22, 1950; Colwell to Edens, June 27, 1950, Box 10, Edens Papers, DUA.}

But such screening could never be completely effective, nor could it do anything to shield the more traditional members of the Duke community from the changing opinions of faculty who were already on campus. Many professors now came from outside the South and many were involved in their discipline's professional societies, which were national in scope. By the early 1950s some of the Duke faculty were growing anxious and embarrassed about the increasing isolation of segregated institutions. Many also remained committed to the idea of Duke as an important leader in the southern region. At least some of the Duke faculty contested at the deepest levels Edens's understanding of the meaning of the Bassett case and the role of Duke in fostering social progress. In 1952 William B. Hamilton, a long-time member of the history department, gave a talk to the local chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP).\footnote{Edens to Ernest C. Colwell, June 22, 1950; Colwell to Edens, June 27, 1950, Box 10, Edens Papers, DUA.} In his conclusion he expressed a vision of the university as a leader of the South, indeed, as an institution with an abiding responsibility to lead. Hamilton explicitly linked this duty to the notion of academic freedom that was defended by the Trinity board in the Bassett affair. "In respect to freedom of expression," Hamilton told the AAUP, "we at Duke draw our strength from the past of our own institution. . . We must remember, as we exercise our function of leadership here, that Trinity College and Duke University have based their self-respect, their reputation, and their hope of greatness not on subservience to surface currents of public opinion but on principles that frequently seemed in conflict
with some strata of the society around them. This institution grew rich and powerful not by trying to follow, but by boldly leading."^{40}

Bold leadership, though, was in short supply during the early 1950s. Edens continued to discuss racial matters with the trustees in his usual oblique way. In February 1952, for example, his report to the trustees included a short and upbeat assessment of the state of the campus. In spite of this favorable report, Edens concluded with a vaguely ominous warning, making certain that the trustees understood that Duke could not remain isolated from the currents of change that were roiling around it. His sense of trepidation and vulnerability were palpable. "I scarcely need to remind you," he cautioned, "that the impact of national and international developments continues to bear heavily on universities. The sense of security which once was present no longer exists. Doctrines that frighten us are abroad in the land. Minority groups everywhere are pressing for recognition. The conflicting viewpoints represented in these issues present problems which we must meet almost daily."^{41}

President Edens saw the wave of change approaching and understood that Duke would have to deal with it. And yet he still misunderstood how far the changes had already come and how quickly they would advance. He foresaw "a long trial ahead," one that would require "infinite patience" to endure.^{42} His determination to go slow even in the face of escalating pressures was even more evident in his next report to the trustees in

^{39} Hamilton was a Mississippian, who received his doctorate from Duke in 1938 and returned to teach there after five years in the public schools of Jackson. Durden, *The Launching of Duke University*, 137.
^{40} William B. Hamilton, "The Past and Future of the Duke University Chapter of the American Association of University Professors," a paper read to the chapter on November 21, 1952, Box 1, Edens Papers, DUA.
^{41} Interim Report of the President to the Board of Trustees, February 27, 1952, Box 30, Edens Papers, DUA.
May 1952. Emphasizing that true understanding of a problem comes slowly, that it
“cannot be hurried any more than friendship or love or prayer can be hurried,” Edens
argued that the movement of an educational institution must also be deliberate. “Such a
philosophy must be maintained at Duke somehow,” Edens seemed to plead, “in spite of
kaleidoscopic change and hurried national and international movements which seem to
catapult us along at a most uncomfortable speed.”

Still, in spite of the president’s obvious discomfort, his concern for the university’s
reputation and continued growth led him finally in February 1953 to approach the board
directly about the consequences of Duke’s racial policies. Edens told the trustees that the
daily problems caused by segregation were beginning to multiply. Whether caused by
“normal and unpremeditated incidents” where “tactful and even generous” treatment
would be called for, or by those with “vicious motives,” these incidents forced the
university to “operate in a glass house of publicity.”

Willis Smith died in the late summer of 1953, and his death opened up at least the bare
possibility that the Duke board of trustees could accept some relaxation of its segregation
policy. At the February 1954 board meeting, the first without Smith, Edens took his first
small steps toward advocacy of limited change in Duke’s racial policies. In his report to
the trustees Edens, while always retaining his tone of deference and respect, built a case
for initiating desegregation in the Divinity School. He began by declaring his reluctance
to deal with the issue of segregation at all. “I raise [this issue] again,” he told the board,
“not because I desire to agitate the question but because it is ever present whether I will it

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42 Ibid.
43 Report of the President to the Board of Trustees, May 31, 1952, Box 30, Edens Papers,
DUA.
or not." He discussed recent events on campus that had brought the problems of segregation to his doorstep, foremost among them the annual meeting of the National Physics Society. During the planning stages of the conference, someone realized that there were black physicists in the group. Duke, Edens went on, then "had to decide whether to suffer the embarrassment of refusing to entertain on our campus this national meeting of scholars or work out an acceptable plan which would not embarrass the negroes." Duke was able successfully to hold the meeting, but, as the president pointed out, they were lucky that it had worked out. He warned the board that these kinds of problems would continue. These, Edens insisted, were "genuine problems of academic life" rather than false issues that had been whipped up by "troublemakers and cause-serviving religious fanatics." With unusual forthrightness, Edens informed the board that "[w]e are less embarrassed now by professional agitators and planted problems than by the stream of events."\footnote{Report of the President to the Board of Trustees, February 1953, Box 30, Edens Papers, DUA.}

The president continued building his case with a recitation of some of the many changes that had recently taken place in southern higher education. By this time, the public universities in all but four of the seventeen southern and border states had begun admitting blacks at either the graduate or undergraduate level, some under court order and some voluntarily.\footnote{Report of the President to the Board of Trustees, February 24, 1954, Box 30, Edens Papers, DUA.} A clear trend, Edens noted, was also developing among the private institutions, especially in seminaries and divinity schools, towards some opening of admissions to blacks. Baptists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Disciples of Christ,\footnote{Southern School News, January, 1954. The exceptions were Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia.}
Methodists, and Presbyterians had all admitted black students to at least some of their seminaries. Among southern universities with graduate programs in religion only Wake Forest and Emory joined Duke in refusing black admissions.\textsuperscript{47}

After demonstrating the extent of the movement away from strict segregation, Edens disavowed any intention of telling the trustees how to handle the matter. "Now," he told them, "I do not know what the position of Duke ought to be in this matter." Edens was, though, willing to venture a tentative suggestion. First, he established what he did not want. "Certainly," he said, "I cannot foresee the necessity at any time in the foreseeable future of admitting negroes at the undergraduate level. Neither do I think it would be wise to admit negroes into all of the graduate and professional schools now." However, Edens volunteered, "[i]f I were called upon to name the spot where one or two negroes could be placed in Duke University with the least amount of friction I would suggest the Graduate Department of Religion . . ." \textsuperscript{48}

Not surprisingly, Edens tried to explain the need for action in a way that minimized the importance of outsiders. While acknowledging that outside pressure was at work, he affirmed that the Duke trustees possessed the authority to respond to that pressure in whatever way they chose. It was concern for that independence, Edens suggested, that led him to advocate serious consideration of movement toward desegregation. His greatest worry, he said, was "how best to prevent Duke University from being maneuvered into an embarrassing position either by delaying too long or moving too swiftly."

\textsuperscript{47} By this time Vanderbilt had admitted Reverend Joseph A. Johnson to the School of Religion.
\textsuperscript{48} Report of the President to the Board of Trustees, February 24, 1954, Box 30, Edens Papers, DUA.
Even this hesitant recommendation seemed to compel Edens to spell out once more for the board his own distaste at having to bring this matter before them. "Now, I wish to hasten to say again," he stressed, "lest you think I am pressing the question, that I have no desire to precipitate the problem unnecessarily. We would be more comfortable if we could maintain our position of leadership and respectability and still preserve the status quo. Nevertheless, I do feel it my duty to tell you that I think we should review our situation soon to determine whether or not we should make some small gesture toward de-segregation."\footnote{Ibid.} The board, however, chose to take no action, and Edens chose not to press further.

Word of Edens's new willingness to approach the Duke trustees, even so cautiously, about the possibility of some change in the school's racial policies soon spread on campus. In April 1954, he received a letter from Divinity School professor Waldo Beach, a strong proponent of desegregation and a key figure in the preparation of the religion faculty's 1948 petition on that subject. Beach told Edens that the Divinity School dean, James Cannon, had read part of Eden's report to the board in a faculty meeting. "I simply want to indicate to you personally my own hearty approval of both the intention and tone of your treatment of a difficult issue. As you know, it has long seemed for many of us on the Divinity faculty a matter of acute embarrassment that Duke University has maintained its policy of segregation where it might have voluntarily assumed a position of Christian leadership on what seems a fairly clear moral issue." Beach continued with an observation that went right to the heart of Edens's strategy of avoiding trouble for Duke by not publicly engaging the issue at all. This avoidance, Beach suggested, might no longer be possible, and in any event might not serve the school's interests. "Measured by
the criterion of national prestige," he wrote, "the real danger now is not that Duke University will move too fast but that it will move too slowly. I am very glad that you are pointing the Board of Trustees to the necessity of action since at this juncture of events neutrality is in a sense impossible, and 'not to choose becomes a form of choice.'" 50

Through the early 1950s Duke failed to choose. Although racial incidents continued to multiply on campus and racial considerations had to be increasingly factored into decisions, Edens's strategy of careful avoidance and neutrality changed little. As long as the matter was not forced, this strategy kept Duke out of real trouble. But by the time of President Edens's next report to the trustees, delivered in June of 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* had been decided. It would now become much harder to avoid a definite choice.

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50 Waldo Beach to Edens, April 9, 1954, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA. Beach also commented in this letter on Edens's rhetorical approach. "The manner in which you raise the question seems to me wise, gracious, and politic, certainly one at which no offense could be taken, even by those of the Board of Trustees who conscientiously would oppose any change of policy." The director of Duke's news bureau, Earl W. Porter, however, pointed out to Edens the problem with his rhetorical style. In response to inquiries from the education editor of the *New York Times*, Porter advised Edens to reply with a simple, direct statement of Duke's policy of excluding blacks. To make any other comment at all, he argued, could result in three things, all of them bad. Either Duke would be "linked with those who are definitely leaning toward admittance; with those who are defending staunchly the status quo—or, if we made a general statement it would have to be so vague and so general that in our attempt to avoid identification with either of the extreme views its very transparency would embarrass us." Earl W. Porter to Edens, January 21, 1954, Box 39, Edens Papers, DUA. Edens followed Porter's advice and wrote a brief, clear letter stating simply that Duke University did not admit Negro students. Porter would leave this position in 1956 to become Edens's assistant. He served in this capacity while also doing graduate work in history. His doctoral dissertation was published as *Trinity and Duke, 1892–1924: Foundations of Duke University* (Durham, N.C., 1964).
As the decade opened at Vanderbilt, Harvie Branscomb had already made his choice. Throughout 1951 he discussed broad issues of racial change with the trustees, regularly keeping them informed of the continuing and largely uneventful desegregation of the public graduate schools in the South, including the University of Tennessee.\textsuperscript{51} He carefully planned his messages, attempting to steer the trustees in the general direction he wanted before he came to them with a pressing issue. Through 1951, though, he did not ask the board for any specific changes in Vanderbilt’s admission policy. In November of that year he responded to inquiries from Johnson C. Smith University, a black college in North Carolina, with a brief letter indicating that the topic of racially restrictive admissions standards “has not been officially discussed” by Vanderbilt’s trustees.\textsuperscript{52}

By early 1952, though, Branscomb had developed a greater sense of urgency. In the spring and summer of that year the issue of admitting black students to the School of Theology of the University of the South (Sewanee) had nearly torn that institution apart. Front-page headlines chronicled the near disintegration of the school, as almost its entire theology faculty resigned in protest over the board’s refusal to allow even small steps towards open admissions.\textsuperscript{53} Although he knew well that the possibility of a similar incident at Vanderbilt was remote, Branscomb characteristically acted to head off any potential problem and to use Sewanee’s troubles as a wedge to open up Vanderbilt’s theology program. He began preparations for a discussion of the issue at the fall meeting of the trustees.

\textsuperscript{51} Branscomb, \textit{Purely Academic}, 154; February 1950 Report to the Board of Trust; Minutes of Board of Trust Meeting; April 1952 Report to the Board of Trust; Minutes of Board of Trust Meeting, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
\textsuperscript{52} T.E. McKinney to Branscomb, November 15, 1951; Branscomb to McKinney, November 30, 1951, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
\textsuperscript{53} The unfolding of events at Sewanee in 1952 and 1953 are discussed in Donald Smith Armentrout, \textit{The Quest for the Informed Priest: A History of the School of Theology} (Sewanee, TN, 1979), 279–309 and, in the context of the history of race relations within the Episcopal church, in chapter two of the excellent study by Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr. \textit{Episcopaliains and Race: From Civil War to Civil Rights} (Lexington, KY, 2000).
In confidence, Branscomb asked Jack Benton, dean of Vanderbilt’s School of Religion, to research which southern divinity schools had begun admitting blacks and to prepare a detailed study before the October meeting. His main concern, Branscomb wrote, was that “the list is accurate and not based on hearsay.” Benton sent inquiries to fourteen southern seminaries and received responses from twelve. All of the twelve reported that they permitted interracial meetings in seminary buildings, sometimes with the requirement that the meeting be sponsored by the school. Overwhelmingly, these schools also allowed blacks to be admitted as regular students who attended classes with white students and received the regular seminary degrees. Only Emory University’s Candler School of Theology and the Duke University Divinity School still refused to enroll black students. Dean Benton also inquired about the more sensitive matters of social discrimination against the black students on the campuses that admitted them. Here, the results were more mixed. In eight of the ten seminaries that admitted blacks, they were allowed to eat with other students in seminary dining rooms. In six, they were allowed to live in regular university housing. Finally, in five schools blacks were “accorded the same educational and social privileges as white students without discrimination.”

The American Association of Law Schools’ study of segregated legal education and the debate over the Yale Amendment was another concern that Branscomb planned to

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54 Branscomb to Benton, June 11, 1952, Box 159, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
55 Benton to Branscomb, September 24, 1952, Box 159, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC. The twelve schools that responded to Benton’s survey were Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, The College of the Bible in Lexington, Kentucky, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Phillips University College of the Bible in Enid, Oklahoma, Perkins School of Theology at SMU in Dallas, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Brite College of the Bible in Fort Worth, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Austin, Texas, Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, the Candler School of Theology at Emory, and Duke University’s Divinity School. Vanderbilt’s board was already well aware that Scarritt College for Christian Workers, just across the street from Vanderbilt, had also recently begun enrolling black students.
bring before the Vanderbilt board in the fall of 1952. Like Edens and McClain at Duke, Branscomb was unhappy with the AALS pressure. His response, however, was more measured. Rather than attack the association’s jurisdiction over racial matters (which he privately disputed), Branscomb, recognizing that there was no immediate threat, chose to use restraint. Vanderbilt’s communications with the AALS were minimal statements of the school’s admissions policy and firm but polite protestations that the university could handle this problem itself.\(^{56}\) Even without the need for any critical decisions, Branscomb still wanted to outline these developments for the board, in anticipation of the day when decisions would have to be made.

By September, however, yet another outside event contributed to Branscomb’s sense that the time had come to push Vanderbilt’s board towards easing racial restrictions on campus. This event would, in fact, force Vanderbilt’s hand and move the issue of desegregating the School of Religion to the back burner. Early in the fall Scarritt College president Hugh Stuntz wrote Branscomb with the news that two black graduate students would begin attending Scarritt that semester and asked whether this would require the

\(^{56}\) Branscomb, law dean Ray Forrester, and board member and university attorney Cecil Sims decided in 1951 to “not make any formal reply or take a position” in response to the AALS actions. Branscomb to Forrester, November 20, 1951, Box 121, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC. Vanderbilt’s response to the offer of a conference from the AALS special committee on racial discrimination was succinct. Branscomb replied that if the committee wanted to visit the law school “we should be happy to extend them every courtesy and hospitality, but they cannot be of any assistance to us in working out this long-standing problem.” Branscomb to F.D.G. Ribble, January 30, 1952, Box 121, Chancellor’s Papers, RG 300, VUSC. Although Branscomb was taking a “wait and see” attitude towards the entire matter he was already considering what Vanderbilt might do if the issue were forced. “If we are forced to make that choice,” he wrote in a note to Forrester, “I might be compelled to say that in my judgment we would lose more by bowing to an outside directive on this point and remaining in the Association than by withdrawing and endeavoring to handle the problem, which this action is attempting to force, in the ways in which I am confident we can handle it.” Branscomb to Forrester, December 16, 1951, Box 121, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC. Above all, Branscomb wanted to avoid an open fight on this issue, realizing that whatever the outcome Vanderbilt would be worse off. Chancellor’s Statement to Closed Session Meeting of the Board of Trust, October 10, 1952, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
termination of the exchange arrangements of the Nashville University Center. 57 Under the terms of this agreement, which had been in place since 1936, the blacks who enrolled at Scarritt were also eligible to take classes at Vanderbilt and at Peabody Teacher’s College. This issue, unlike the admission of black graduate students in theology or sanctions from the AALS, was not a potential problem but a real one. It would have to be decided by Vanderbilt’s trustees immediately.

At the board meeting in October, then, Branscomb brought several racial issues before the Vanderbilt trustees—the possibility of admitting black graduate students to the School of Religion, the incipient threat to the accreditation of the School of Law based on its discriminatory admissions policy, and the proper response to the desegregation of Scarritt College. 58 In his 1978 autobiography, Purely Academic, Branscomb claimed that he presented the Scarritt matter to the trustees as a simple issue of upholding contractual obligations and then merely asked them to live up to the agreement. They unanimously consented, he reported, “without passion or obduracy.” 59 While there is likely much truth in this account, it is also likely that the chancellor was required to marshal convincing arguments in favor of this decision.

Branscomb was able to offer something of a grab bag of justifications. The clearest expression of his reasoning on this matter is found in a letter to an angry alumnus, who

57 Branscomb to Hugh Stuntz, October 15, 1952, Box 228, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC. This is Branscomb’s reply to a letter from Stuntz, which must have been written in early September.
58 A fourth issue related to racial policies was also discussed at the meeting, but oddly, was brought before the board at the request of Tulane’s President Rufus Harris. Branscomb told the board that “I have received a telephone call from the President of Tulane University stating that he had discussed this matter [black admissions] with the trustees of his institution and that he was instructed to inquire whether Vanderbilt University would be disposed to act either with Tulane in admitting a few negro students to their Graduate School or in acting jointly with a larger group which might include Duke University and Rice Institute.” The Vanderbilt trustees declined. Excerpt from Closed Session of the Meeting of the Board of Trust, October 10, 1952, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
59 Branscomb, Purely Academic, 155; Conkin, Gone with the Ivy, 541–42.
telegraphed Branscomb objecting to the decision and demanding that ties with Scarritt be severed. In a long reply, Branscomb argued that the costs of failing to allow the two black students to attend classes were simply too high to pay. It was not possible to expel Scarritt from the University Center, he noted, and it would be foolish for Vanderbilt to withdraw. If this were done, he argued, "we would have to relinquish our part of the ownership of the Joint University Libraries and all books purchased since the signing of the indenture. My guess is that the property involved in this is worth now from three to five million dollars. Do you think the two negro girls in Scarritt College are worth that? Frankly I do not." 60

Branscomb continued on in the same vein, taking up what at first seemed to be a moral argument and then turning it into an accounting of the high cost of opening Vanderbilt up to charges of religious hypocrisy. Referring to the fact that the students involved were graduate students in religion, Branscomb noted that:

The School of Religion is dedicated to the teaching of Christianity and the training of preachers, missionaries, and other workers in the Christian faith. It sends its missionaries to Asia and Africa to preach the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. I agree with you that one can believe in this principle, and at the same time recognize the acute social difficulties in the situation. On the other hand when these students who are involved in this action are residing at Scarritt College, return to Scarritt for their meals, get no credit toward a degree at Vanderbilt University, cannot belong to our alumni association, have no claim on our physical facilities, can we say that we will spend millions of dollars to send missionaries abroad but refuse to let these two students sit in a class room in America and hear a professor expound the principles of the Christian gospel? 61

Branscomb also pointed out that the furor over Sewanee's refusal to admit black students to their School of Theology had painful consequences for that institution,

60 The telegram came from a recent Vanderbilt graduate, Richard Burrows, Jr., and in two lines simply objected and asked for ties with Scarritt to be broken. Branscomb, with typical zeal, responded with a two page letter detailing the reasons for the decision. Branscomb to Burrows, February 16, 1953, Box 212, Chancellor's Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
including the resignation of nearly the entire theological faculty and national outcry against the school. He implied that a similar fate would befall Vanderbilt were it to remain recalcitrant. Again, Branscomb specifically avoided taking a moral position. “The point of this,” he wrote, “is not that Sewanee is right or wrong. It is not my business to try to answer that. I am suggesting, however, that on practical grounds as well as those of fundamental doctrine of Christianity, our Trustees have felt that this action is the only one we can take in the basic interest of Vanderbilt University.” Finally, Branscomb closed with a geo-political argument. “I can whole-heartedly defend [this action] first of all in the interest of Vanderbilt University, and secondly, from the standpoint of the principles involved which have world-wide implication in the present struggle against communism.” 62

Branscomb made all of these arguments at the October 1952 board meeting, though less colorfully. He convinced the trustees to allow the University Center agreement to stand, thus opening the possibility of black students taking courses at Vanderbilt. They took no action on the AALS matter and reserved judgment on admitting black students to the graduate program in religion.63 Again, all of Branscomb’s arguments, even those

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61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 On the same day that Benton sent Branscomb his report on the desegregation of southern seminaries he also sent along a resolution of the faculty of the School of Religion. Unanimously adopted only the day before, with all members present and voting, this resolution simply conveyed the conviction of Vanderbilt’s Religion faculty: “that if the practices of this School are to be in accord with the Christian gospel the fellowship and instruction of the School should be open to qualified students without reference to their race or color.” Branscomb, Purely Academic, 154; Benton to Branscomb, September 24, 1952, Box 159, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC. “I am transmitting this resolution to you,” wrote Benton to the chancellor, “for your information and use in whatever manner seems best to you.” Branscomb presented both documents to the board, urging them to take this step at the same time they decided the Scarritt issue. The trustees, though they did not act at this time, agreed that when dean
made in favor of desegregating the School of Religion, were based on the potential costs of failing to change rather than on morality. Branscomb argued very explicitly that the price for refusing to make what he considered small adaptations would be prohibitively high. The example of Sewanee, the impact of resistance to segregation in the learned societies, and a restiveness within the theology faculty all pointed to the conclusion that something needed to be done. Finally, Branscomb appealed to the most clearly "practical" need of all:

Among the honest and sincere proponents [of desegregation] are a number of important national philanthropic foundations. Some of these, for example our good friends in the General Education Board and the Carnegie Corporation, have not made this an issue in their grants. The Ford Foundation appears to be doing so, although they have not been explicit in this matter. Nevertheless, one of our good friends in the Carnegie Corporation, an alumnus of this University, has told me quite frankly that he believes that within five years no national foundation will be in a position to make grants for general support to institutions practicing segregation.64

These considerations would remain Branscomb's standard weapons when arguing for racial change in the future. He was willing to give tactical ground on the morality of segregation in order to have his "realistic" positions carry the day. But Branscomb would admit no conclusion other than his own when it came to professional judgment about what was best for Vanderbilt's progress and development. Here, he must have understood, angry alumni, community members, and even trustees were at a profound disadvantage. Everyone could have an informed opinion on matters of faith and religious practice (or could at least believe that their opinion was as valid as any other); but when it

Benton had a "properly qualified negro student" the case should be presented to the board for serious consideration. Minutes of Meeting of Board of Trust, October 10, 1952, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.

64 Chancellor's Statement to Closed Session of the Board of Trust, October 10, 1952, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, VUSC. Branscomb admitted that he did not know if the
came to managing a research university, all opinions were obviously not equal.

At some level, though, Branscomb realized that his calm and reasonable calculations of the costs and benefits of token desegregation at Vanderbilt were far from neutral. Other people could make those calculations in a very different way. While to him two black students in a Vanderbilt classroom were obviously not worth the loss of millions of dollars and credibility with northern patrons, to others in the community and on campus even the smallest crack in the edifice of institutional segregation represented a real threat, an exception to the rules that would ultimately bring the rules crashing down. To them, quite reasonably, Vanderbilt’s action would seem a calculated betrayal of southern tradition, done for the approval of northerners in exchange for money.

Fearing just this sort of backlash from alumni, southern contributors, and the local community, Branscomb and the board agreed that they would not announce that black Scarritt students were eligible to attend class at Vanderbilt. However, much of the benefit of the decision would be lost if the foundations were unaware of the change. So, according to Branscomb, “we did let it be known in certain quarters that this had been decided...”. 65

It did not take long, however, for news of the board’s action to become public, and in a manner guaranteed to heighten tensions. On February 12, 1953, the Very Reverend James A. Pike, dean of the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine in New York, issued a statement refusing an honorary degree from the University of the South. Pike’s public rebuke of Sewanee for its continuing resistance to the admission of blacks to its School of

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65 Branscomb to Rev. James Pike, March 16, 1953, RG 300, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, VUSC.

reports about the foundations were true, but still argued that they indicated the general direction of developments.
Theology included, by way of contrast, praise of Vanderbilt for its handling of the matter with Scarritt. The *Nashville Tennessean* accused Branscomb of a cover-up, and the incident nearly exploded.

Branscomb stemmed the trouble with a statement of his own to the *Nashville Banner*. He began with a complaint that the issue had ever been made public, a complaint perfectly in character with his wariness about any newspaper coverage of racial issues or incidents. The board’s decision not to release any statement on their October vote was “admirable,” he insisted, “since such statements usually lead to misunderstandings.” Only the publication of “[c]ertain unauthorized statements” (that is, the Pike statement) led to the reversal of that decision. Branscomb emphasized the narrowness of the issue and the fruitfulness of the University Center arrangement. He also made a brief, and rare, appeal to Christian morality. “The particular point determined was permission for these students to take courses in the Vanderbilt School of Religion. The Board voted without dissent that this should be done. We felt that this was right both because of the values of the Scarritt-School of Religion relationship, and on its merits. The School of Religion studies and teaches the Christian Gospel. Christianity is not the sole or private possession of any one race or nation, as every missionary movement since the dispersal of the first apostles to the far corners of the earth has witnesses. We were not willing in this simple issue to vote against this principle.”

Apart from a bit of angry correspondence, this ended the public debate. The Vanderbilt trustees, unhappy about the incident, admired Branscomb’s steadiness in

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66 Pike’s statement was printed in the *New York Times*, February 13, 1953. He apparently learned of Vanderbilt’s decision from a faculty member in the School of Religion.  
handling the negative public attention in a calming fashion. Board member James Stahlman, in one of his more insightful observations, wrote Branscomb approvingly that “[y]our ability as a figure skater, on very thin ice, puts you in a class with Dick Button and entitles you to consideration for a spot on the Olympic winter sports team . . .” 69

As accomplished as Branscomb’s public relations maneuvers were, however, his correspondence with the Reverend Pike was more revealing. The two exchanged several letters in which Branscomb displayed a startling willingness to ignore state segregation laws. 70 In a letter that explained the details of the Scarritt decision, Branscomb acknowledged that there was a potentially serious legal problem with continuing the exchange arrangement. “We recognized,” he admitted, that “we might be legally enjoined on this matter, since we are teaching them [black students] in the same classrooms with the other students. If so, and I now express my own judgment and not an official action, we would accept any suit and appeal it to the United States Supreme Court for decision.” Branscomb elaborated on this position in a second letter to Pike. “Those who cite Tennessee law,” wrote Branscomb, “are, I think, appealing to a very dubious authority. In the light of the Supreme Court rulings, it is very doubtful whether this Tennessee Act is still law. On that point, the courts simply have not made a formal ruling, and our own attorney, also Sewanee’s attorney, has advised me that if we do have a suit and we appeal

68 Statement released for publication to the Nashville Banner on February 13, 1953 by Chancellor Harvie Branscomb, Box 159, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
69 Stahlman to Branscomb, Box V-2, February 25, 1953, Stahlman Papers, VUSC.
70 Branscomb first noted the legal problem in his remarks to the board in October 1952. “It is my understanding from our legal counsel,” he said, “that laws still stand upon the statute books of Tennessee requiring a completely dual system of education . . . I doubt, however, that it is practical for us to avoid the problem by pleading this legal situation. The public is not likely to be convinced that what is legal in Knoxville [where the University of Tennessee had begun desegregation] is illegal in Nashville.” Chancellor’s
it, he feels confident that the Supreme Court would declare the Tennessee law no longer binding.” He concluded with a statement that must have haunted him later: “I see no moral strength in the argument that we are bound to abide by the established local but probably invalid ruling.”

Branscomb’s reasoning here, it should be noted, was precisely the opposite of Hollis Edens’s assessment of the moral demands of segregation law. Branscomb seized on the rapidly changing legal status of segregation in order to argue that Tennessee law was probably unconstitutional and thus there was no moral compulsion to obey it. Edens, though, insisted that even in the face of a Supreme Court decision to the contrary, the slimmest possibility that racially restrictive covenants might be legal forced Duke, as a matter of morality, to retain one on their property. The difference is probably less one of legal philosophy than of goals and strategies. Edens did not want to change and almost certainly could not have led the Duke board to change in the early 1950s even if he had wanted to. Thus, where there was any way to avoid action, Edens found it. Branscomb, on the other hand, wanted to change, wanted badly to move Vanderbilt off dead center and toward its goal of becoming a major national university. This, more than anything else, accounts for his willingness to ignore state law.

This position would be tested again at the next meeting of Vanderbilt’s board on May 1, 1953. Again, Branscomb’s pragmatic arguments succeeded in bringing the trustees to

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Statement to Closed Session Meeting of the Board, October 10, 1952, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, VUSC.

71 Branscomb to Pike, March 16, 1953, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC. Branscomb indicated that Vanderbilt’s lawyer indicated his confidence that any legal challenge that might arise would result in the overturning of the Tennessee law requiring segregation in the classroom. The first time Branscomb inquired about the possibility of opening admissions to black students, five years earlier, Vanderbilt’s attorney responded firmly that Tennessee law made it impossible.
accept a modification of the school’s segregation policies. Dean Jack Benton of the
School of Religion had approached the chancellor in April with an exceptionally well-
qualified black applicant. The Reverend Joseph A. Johnson was president of the Phillips
School of Theology, run by the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in Jackson,
Tennessee. 72 With degrees from Texas College in Tyler and the Iliff School of Theology
in Denver, Colorado, Rev. Johnson had already been admitted to graduate study at Yale,
the University of Chicago, and Union Theological Seminary but he preferred to attend
Vanderbilt in order to be near his wife and three children. Benton’s letter to Branscomb
took pains to convey that Johnson was not one to cause problems for the school. “He is,”
wrote Benton, “a mature man of 39, a fine person, and a man of poise and good sense. He
is a Southern man with complete understanding of the social patterns that prevail in the
South, and I believe he would adjust himself with complete sincerity to our situation.”
Further, announced the dean, addressing possible concerns about any racial activism,
“[I]n conversation with him he said ‘I have no interest in publicity and I do not seek
entrance at Vanderbilt for any reason except that I want to know more about the New
Testament, so that I can teach it better.’” Benton concluded with an irreducible statement
of the issue: “Our only reason for not accepting him at once is that he is a Negro.” 73

Branscomb approached the trustees with Benton’s letter and after considerable debate
the board unanimously approved his admission. 74 This action provided the occasion for

72 Johnson later became a member of Vanderbilt’s Board of Trustees.
73 Benton to Branscomb, April 28, 1953, Box 159, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300,
VUSC.
74 Minutes of Meeting of Board of Trust, May 1, 1953, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office
Papers. RG 300, VUSC. A congratulatory letter to Branscomb from trustee John J. Tigert
after the vote indicated in a very understated way the seriousness of the decision as well
as the existence of division on the board on spite of the unanimous vote. “I hope the
Board Meeting met your expectations,” Tigert wrote. “I have never seen them so
single most critical decision about Vanderbilt’s racial policy for the immediate future. At the October 1952 meeting, when the board dealt with the Scarritt matter, the trustees asked Branscomb to articulate exactly how far he proposed to go down this path. The general policy that he offered was simple and shrewd. Vanderbilt, he argued, should admit extremely well qualified black students to those programs that were unavailable to them at black institutions in the area. Given the presence in Nashville of Fisk, Tennessee State, and Meharry College of Medicine the number of such programs was very small, consisting only of graduate departments of religion, law, and a few academic subjects. With their decision to admit Reverend Johnson, the trustees endorsed this general strategy.75

This plan met all of Branscomb’s needs—it helped the local black elite, it would keep the actual number of blacks on campus quite low, Vanderbilt did not have to accept anyone it did not want, and it could be fairly said to the funding agencies that the school did not deny opportunity to qualified Negro youth in the Nashville area. Most important, Branscomb also believed that the more traditional members of the Vanderbilt community, as well as the larger southern community, could accept this formulation.

Here, the difference between Branscomb’s approach and Edens’s is exceptionally clear. Edens, like Branscomb, tried to occupy the middle ground, but for very different

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75 Minutes of Meeting of Board of Trust, May 1, 1953, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
purposes. The two were faced with a nearly identical situation—a qualified black minister seeking admission to the school’s graduate program in religion and a faculty asking for desegregation of that program—but their responses were dramatically different. Edens tried his best to avoid change and avoid giving offense to either side in the debate. The Vanderbilt chancellor used the application from a qualified black man as a tool to chip away at segregation on campus at its most vulnerable point. Positioning himself between the forces that demanded change and the forces that demanded the upholding of tradition, Branscomb insightfully identified instruction for the Christian ministry as an area of possible compromise. He worked to persuade the trustees that this adjustment was one that they could make in good conscience.\textsuperscript{76} His role was essentially that of a mediator—he found a place where even the most tradition-bound board members could conceive of making an exception and showed them how doing so would work in the best interests of Vanderbilt, the South, and southern blacks all at once.

The limits of Vanderbilt’s new policy, however, were undeniably stark and the amelioration of injustice only very minor. The carefully crafted prescription for admitting blacks to Vanderbilt, while it benefited the Reverend Johnson, excluded far, far more qualified students than it included.\textsuperscript{77} Nonetheless, by treating an “exceptional” black man

\textsuperscript{76} The editor of the \textit{Vanderbilt Alumnus}, Robert McGaw, acknowledged this reasoning in a 1956 article, an attempt to explain the university’s stance towards desegregation in the aftermath of heated controversy over the removal of racial bars to entry in the law school. “The first cases, in 1952-53,” he wrote, “involved religion, and therefore were easier for almost everybody to accept and even approve.” Robert McGaw, “A Policy the University Can Defend: ‘in the South and in the North, in the present and in the future,’” \textit{Vanderbilt Alumnus} (November–December 1956).

\textsuperscript{77} This is strikingly demonstrated by a case brought to Branscomb’s attention just before the May 1953 board meeting. In February, Professor William Nicholls, an economist, asked the chancellor for his help in getting a black student admitted for doctoral study. Mr. Percy R. Luney, the first black to attend the University of Kentucky, was about to complete his master’s degree in Agricultural Economics and because of his desire to
as an exception rather than as black, Vanderbilt took the first real step towards the
destruction of segregation on campus. The simple idea that any black man could be
“qualified” to attend Vanderbilt contained within it the seed of an entirely new
conception of merit.

The trustees were understandably nervous. Taking a lesson from the earlier uproar
over the Scarritt matter, this time the board made a public announcement of the new
policy. In the end, there was little reaction, although some alumni grumbled.\textsuperscript{78} On
campus, active disapproval seemed limited to only one or two faculty members, most
notably Donald Davidson of the English department. Davidson wrote the chancellor with
his “emphatic protest” against the admission of Johnson. Although Branscomb dismissed
Davidson as a “prima donna” who “seems to have soured on the world,” charges that
contained some truth, Davidson’s letter went directly to the heart of Branscomb’s

\textsuperscript{78} Branscomb to Warren P. Norton, April 7, 1953, Box 203, Chancellor’s Office Papers,
RG 300, VUSC.
arguments. It demonstrated how differently the price of desegregation could be calculated by someone who held a different set of principles. 79

Davidson insisted that the justifications for the admission of the black student were “spurious and indeed absurd” and was adamant that traditional southern race relations should be retained precisely because they were traditional. In Davidson’s mind, and in the minds of many other southerners, the simple physical presence of blacks alongside white students was objectionable, a violation of whites’ right to choose their associations and even a threat to their safety and health. No “practical” considerations about the usefulness of the University Center, about funding from foundations or the federal government, or about Vanderbilt’s reputation outside the South, in this view, were even relevant to the issue. The issue was the violation of tradition: blacks being treated as if they were white. Davidson understood that the heart and soul of segregation was the refusal to make exceptions. Vanderbilt’s decision to admit Johnson, then, struck at the very center of southern tradition. Johnson, “no matter how plausible his ‘qualifications,’” should not be admitted to Vanderbilt because Vanderbilt was for whites.

The legalities of the situation were also beside the point. Davidson deplored the action of the board and the administration even as he acknowledged that the admission of blacks might be declared legal by the courts. The problem, he accurately observed, was that the admission of Johnson seemed “clearly and obviously contemptuous” of the “customs, and

79 Branscomb clearly considered Davidson a nut and an irritant, but believed him to be largely harmless. “I am willing,” he wrote, “to have Professor Davidson blow off within our own organization, and to say pretty much what he wants to, and pay no attention to it. If he goes outside with his criticisms and attacks that would be another matter, but thus far I know of nothing serious along this line.” Branscomb to N. Baxter Jackson, September 23, 1953, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC. Davidson, in turn, did not particularly care for Branscomb. This only continued a rather long history of
deeply ingrained sentiments of the State of Tennessee and other Southern states, relating to the separation of the white and negro races."  

As to the moral issue, Davidson was equally clear in his rejection of Branscomb's reasoning. "I know of no tenet of Christian belief, " he wrote, "that requires the education of whites and negroes to be conducted in the same institution. As a professing Christian, I am obliged to regard the invocation of Christian principles in this case as an unworthy exploitation of our sacred religion for purposes that are certainly not religious . . . " In the end, though, Davidson could only object. As a faculty member, and an isolated one at that, he had no power to influence in the slightest way a board decision that he believed "to a lamentable degree is scornful of the public interest in the University as well as of the more intimate interests of students, alumni, and friends."  

Although Davidson was far from alone in his sentiments, much of the reaction to the Johnson decision was positive. Branscomb, responding to a letter of approval, felt confident that the path the board chose in 1952 and 1953 was not only the best course for Vanderbilt but also the one most likely to be accepted by all concerned. "We must decide what we think is right," he wrote, "and rely upon the Vanderbilt family to support us in
that." In the atmosphere that still prevailed in the South in the early 1950s this was a reasonable stance. While there was increasing unease over racial issues in the region, and a growing sense of anger at rapid change, it still seemed that white southern leadership, if vigilant and active enough, could exercise some degree of control and that with some minor accommodations the pace and direction of change might be wisely guided. No one doubted in 1953 that Harvie Branscomb directed Vanderbilt’s course.

III

Tulane in the early 1950s was expanding steadily. The school had notable success in raising money from the federal government and foundations. This money helped with the growing problem of maintaining adequate faculty salaries and teaching loads and allowed the expansion and improvement of the graduate school. This outside support was critically important to the university, which remained in constrained financial circumstances. It was also, according to President Rufus Harris, “a clear recognition of the leadership Tulane had attained in the region.”

Harris’s stance on changing campus racial policies during the early 1950s was aggressive. He expressed his thinking about changing race relations in the South and in southern higher education in a statement he wrote to the Atlanta bureau chief of Time

83 Branscomb to Warren P. Norton, April 7, 1953, Box 203, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
84 In 1951 the General Education Board gave Tulane $1,200,000, to be matched 1:1, for the improvement of its graduate programs in the social sciences. President’s Report to the Board, April 10, 1951, TUA. Harvie Branscomb of Vanderbilt was a member of the GEB board, and wrote Harris after the vote to offer his congratulations on the approval of the grant. “I am sure,” Branscomb wrote, “that this will mean as much stimulus to your institution as a similar grant to Vanderbilt made a year ago. Of course, you are also going to have the great fun of raising that money . . . .” Branscomb to Harris, April 7, 1951, Box 28, Harris Papers, TUA. Also in 1951 Tulane received a similar grant, $300,000 for the improvement of salaries for graduate teaching, from the Carnegie Foundation. President’s Report to the Board, April 10, 1951, TUA. Duke and Vanderbilt received identical grants.
85 President’s Report to the Board, December 11, 1951, TUA.
magazine. Here Harris expressed his deep concern for regional advancement, singling out the improvement in instruction and the growth of regional cooperation among institutions of higher education as the most important developments of the previous decade. These changes were critically important, he believed, to improving the quality of life in the South by keeping talented and ambitious students in the region and by reducing expensive inefficiencies and duplicative offerings. In the same statement Harris identified the "admission of Negroes to many state and some private institutions of higher education" as the most important event in southern education. Noting that although this event took place "under pressure and with dire predictions of revolt, no insoluble problems have arisen, and, on the whole, there have been satisfactory relationships between white and Negro students." This "more realistic pattern of race relations," Harris believed, suggested that not only was the region maturing but that it might also assume the mantle of leadership in race relations nationwide.\footnote{Harris to William S. Howland, September 9, 1953, Box 42, Harris Papers, TUA.}

On campus, there seemed little reason for such optimism. Tulane’s board of administrators demanded a high level of control over the presence of blacks on campus. At the same time, contacts between Tulane professors and students and those of the city’s black colleges increased, as did the number of blacks coming on to campus for events. This created an enormous number of headaches for Harris, who was forced to approach the board time and again with requests for policy adjustments. Although the board rarely granted these requests, by 1953 the problems were severe enough that they began to consider making a real shift.

This consideration, though, was complicated by the president’s rocky relationship with the new chairman of the board. The year 1950 saw the death of the longtime president of the board of administrators, Esmond Phelps. Phelps, the son of a former Tulane board member, received both his undergraduate and law degrees from Tulane and
had served as a board member himself for more than 35 years. He had been president of that group since 1926. When he died, Rufus Harris lost a warm personal friend. He also lost Phelps’s balanced judgment and calming influence on the board. Worse, the choice of Joseph Merrick Jones, a prominent and powerful New Orleans attorney, as the new head of Tulane’s board was a disaster for the president.\textsuperscript{87} Less judicious and less well disposed to Harris, when Jones was elevated to the board’s chairmanship there was an almost immediate surge in tension. Moreover, the Tulane board was far more involved in routine matters on campus than most other boards. It was heavily dominated by New Orleanians and met monthly, rather than the more typical quarterly or even semi-annually. This close involvement with the university’s affairs created even more tension between Jones and President Harris, as the opportunities for annoyance and irritation were so numerous.\textsuperscript{88} Another area of serious conflict was opened up by Jones’s avid support of Tulane athletics. This enthusiasm often brought him and other “boosters” on the board into conflict with Harris, who tried throughout his presidency to downplay big-time sports.\textsuperscript{89}

In short, Harris, whose thinking on desegregation and its importance to Tulane’s future closely resembled that of Harvie Branscomb, began to lose effective control of his board just as Branscomb gained control of his with the arrival of Harold Sterling Vanderbilt. Although there would be a brief period of good relations and Harris would always have allies on the board, he spent the rest of his tenure at Tulane treading very

\textsuperscript{87} Jones’s election was announced in the \textit{New Orleans Times-Picayune}, December 13, 1950. Harris later claimed that he was too distraught over the death of Phelps to influence the choice of the new chairman.

\textsuperscript{88} The discomfort of the relationship between Harris and Jones is palpable in the documentary evidence. Even the most ordinary correspondence can be painfully formal, even strained. The board minutes reveal that Harris frequently had to consult the board about things that would have been routine administrative matters at the other four schools. From time to time Harris, probably out of desperation, sent copies of articles about the proper role of governing boards in educational institutions to the trustees. Harris to Jones, December 30, 1952; April 9, 1954, Box 14, Harris Papers, TUA.

\textsuperscript{89} Mohr and Gordon, \textit{Tulane}, chapter 3.
carefully around Jones, who often chose to treat him as an employee rather than as a partner in managing the university’s affairs.

During the early 1950s pressure to change Tulane’s racial policies came from several directions. Most persistent was the growing insistence of academic and professional societies that they would no longer condone segregation. The Association of American Law School’s proposal to exclude segregated schools from membership threatened Tulane’s Law School, like its counterparts at Duke, Emory and Vanderbilt. Tulane’s response, like Vanderbilt’s, was far less strident than Duke’s. Tulane’s law faculty voted against the Yale Amendment as well as the original AALS resolution that declared non-segregation an objective for member schools, but the group exhibited a wide range of views. Acting law dean C.J. Morrow described their discussions in a brief letter to Harris in April 1951. “Opinions ranged,” he wrote, “all the way from approval of segregation generally to disapproval of segregation both generally and at Tulane.” Morrow continued, getting to the heart of the law school’s political judgment: “In short, several of the faculty disapprove segregation in principle, but recognize that Tulane cannot abandon the practice for a variety of reasons. All of us know that there are legal problems as well as local public relations problems involved.” And, all but one were able to agree that Tulane’s admissions policies should not be the concern of the AALS. Harris scrupulously kept this matter in front of the board as developments occurred.

Insight into Harris’s thinking and his own political situation can be gleaned from correspondence between Monte Lemann, a prominent local attorney who taught at

90 Minutes of the Meeting of the Full-time Faculty of the Tulane College of Law, November 20, 1950; December 8, 1950, Box 30, Harris Papers, TUA.
91 Morrow to Harris, April 13, 1951, Box 31, Harris Papers, TUA. Morrow was acting as dean in the absence of Paul Brosman, who was on leave. Brosman, an extremely able administrator and close aid to Harris would soon leave Tulane permanently. He was replaced in 1952 by Ray Forrester, who had been dean of Vanderbilt’s law school
92 Law professor Mitchell Franklin, a focal point for some of Harris’s earlier problems with accusations of communist influence, resolutely supported the Yale Amendment in faculty meetings. His was the only dissenting vote at this meeting.
Tulane's law school, and Edmund Cahn of New York University Law School, a member of the AALS's investigating committee. While Lemann also took the position that the AALS did not have the authority to force schools to adopt any particular admissions policy at all, he did make clear his own, and Harris's, sympathy for the association's underlying goal:

I agree with you entirely that racial segregation is on its way out, at least on the graduate school level. In another two generations it may be out all the way down the line. If the decision were left to me and to President Harris, the Tulane Law School would not I think oppose the resolution of the A.A.L.S. but President Harris is governed by the rigid instructions from his Board, many of the members of which are not yet in accord with the ideas that you and I and indeed most of the graduate students themselves today entertain. Many of the older men in the South have not yet forgotten the evils of the reconstruction days, especially in sections where Negroes (then largely illiterate) were in the majority.\(^\text{93}\)

Whatever Harris's personal inclinations he was indeed governed by the board.\(^\text{94}\) The letter that he wrote to the AALS outlining Tulane's position on the Yale Amendment reflected this reality. In contrast to Dean McClain of Duke, Harris was both brief and temperate: "Tulane University does not admit Negroes. This policy has been in effect throughout the University's lifetime. There may be legal as well as other obstacles to such admissions. This conclusion has been considered constantly and there is no immediate likelihood of it being changed."\(^\text{95}\)

In 1952 the racially restricted admissions policy at Tulane's medical school also drew comment from a professional organization. The National Committee Against Discrimination of the Association of Interns and Medical Students approached the dean

\(^{93}\) Lemann to Cahn, July 10, 1951, Box 31, Harris Papers, TUA.

\(^{94}\) Harris's own attitude reflected, like Branscomb's, a desire to be "helpful" to the black community where he could. In 1953, for example, Harris worked with A.W. Dent, the president of New Orlean's black college, Dillard, to place duplicate library books from Tulane in Dillard's weak collection. Dent to Harris, July 15, 1953; Garland Taylor to Harris, July 23, 1953, Box 28, Harris Papers, TUA.

\(^{95}\) Copy of Harris to Cheatham, May 2, 1951 in President's Report to the Board, May 8, 1951, TUA.
of the medical school with a series of questions about Tulane’s policies towards black
applicants and urged attention to the special responsibilities of the medical schools to act
as leaders in dealing with the shortage of black doctors. Although no response to the
inquiry survives, Harris did bring the matter up with the board, noting simply that
"[a]ttention to the fact of exclusion of negroes from enrollment in the university is kept
alive in many ways and will continue so."\textsuperscript{96}

Another related issue that arose repeatedly was the attendance of blacks at Tulane
events. Harris outlined the procedure for handling this to the board several times during
the early 1950s. "When calls are received over the telephone, the office tries to
discourage in a polite way those Negroes making inquiry about admission to campus
events. It is explained that we do not have the necessary facilities for mixed meetings. If a
Negro does come to an auditorium, we have a competent doorman who escorts him to a
place where he is immediately understood to be segregated. If such a person should insist
on sitting where he pleases (no such incident has yet occurred), the doorman is instructed
to allow him to do so."\textsuperscript{97}

But by late 1953 this policy was the source of an increasing number of difficulties.
Some of these were fairly minor problems of community relations. Tulane’s McAlister
Auditorium was frequently the site of general cultural and religious events that drew
black New Orleanians. Concerts, lectures, and special programs such as the jubilee
celebration for New Orleans’s Archbishop Rummel in 1952 attracted many black patrons.
Every year local blacks attended the Easter sunrise service at Tulane’s Newcomb
College, which caused no dilemmas in fair weather, "when they are seated together in the
open and are at once considered to be segregated," but which did become a problem
when rain forced the service indoors.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{96} President’s Report to the Board, June 19, 1952, TUA.
\textsuperscript{97} President’s Report to the Board, December 9, 1953, TUA.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
Other problems caused by the official policy of excluding blacks from public events on campus had the potential to damage the university's academic reputation or its ability to provide its students with a fully rounded college experience. Harris outlined some of these problems at a meeting of the board in December 1953 in order to try to convince the administrators of the need for a change in the policy. The New Orleans Association of Commerce asked Tulane to sponsor and conduct a Ford Motor Co. museum of scientific exhibits on the campus in early 1954. "This is an important exhibit," Harris told the board, "But the museum was unwilling that we conduct it without admitting Negro children as well." Worse, "[o]wing to the present rules of the University, the student International Relations Club had to decline the sponsorship of the annual convention of the southern student International Relations Club. . . . the students were denied the credit for leadership in the [organization] which would have come to our Tulane group had the meetings been held on the Tulane campus." This experience, the president continued, had become common in trying to arrange other student meetings as well, especially the regional conventions of student religious groups. "It is increasingly difficult to explain to the modern student," Harris said, "that mixed meetings are not possible when the purpose of such meetings is as serious as religion."

Harris did not mention in this statement, although he may well have touched on it in discussion at the meeting, the increasing frustration of Tulane's faculty with the policy of excluding blacks from campus gatherings. The pressure on Tulane's law schools from the AALS was only one manifestation of the growing desegregation of the professional

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99 *Ibid.* The issue of black attendance at meetings was being debated on the Tulane campus as well as in the board room. The student newspaper editorialized in favor of change, using many of the same arguments as Harris: "This problem must be met, and soon; for the university is increasingly faced with requests from New Orleans Negroes to attend public gatherings such as symphonies and lectures. If Tulane University takes the resins of leadership in this area—as it properly should—it will not advance alone . . . We, too, can help put back the "universal" in university, and stand proud before the nation." *Tulane Hullabaloo*, December 11, 1953.
associations that were at the center of the academic disciplines and the administration of higher education. In 1952, for example, there was a joint meeting of black and white representatives from the region’s institutions of higher learning at the Southern Association of Colleges and Universities (the regional accrediting agency) gathering in Memphis. This was interpreted by the association’s membership, including the Tulane delegates, as a definite step towards merging the two sections. The faculty increasingly recognized that the learned societies were no longer going to expose their black members to meetings in segregated facilities and was aware of the increasing rarity of totally segregated universities. In February of that year the dean of the graduate school, Roger McCutcheon, proposed that “it would be appropriate for the University to take some positive action on a policy of permitting professional meetings to be held on campus without regard to the presence of Negroes in the group and with no attempt at segregation.” McCutcheon’s suggestion was met with the approval of the other deans, who “agreed . . . that the University is being avoided by some organizations because of this problem.”

Finally, Harris asked the board to adopt a clear policy of allowing blacks to attend public meetings on campus. He stressed that in his opinion this would solve these several problems without giving rise to new ones. “I believe this should be done quietly and without publicity. I do not believe any incident will occur, but if it should I feel that it could be met if the Administrators would be willing to support the university administration in a statement to anyone who may complain that the University had decided to permit members of other races to attend cultural and religious meetings on campus.” Harris also addressed the issue of dining and bathroom facilities, a perennial concern of white southerners confronted with the possibility of desegregation. Here, Harris was surprisingly relaxed. “If those in attendance at such [mixed] meetings are

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100 Minutes of Academic Dean’s Council, December 4, 1952; February 5, 1953, Box 1, Harris Papers, TUA.
using the cafeteria,” he proposed, “either at a banquet or as a group, the colored members of the group could be permitted to join them. In the use of toilet facilities, one booth in the rest rooms could be marked for colored.” The board, however, was not willing to go along with such a relaxed policy. They refused to change Tulane’s rule against integrated gatherings. The problem would continue to fester in the coming years. \(^{101}\)

At the same meeting where the board discussed black attendance at Tulane events, Harris explained another, more ominous pressure to drop segregation. “Mr. Winthrop Rockefeller recently told one of our solicitors,” Harris pointed out, “that he would not contribute to Tulane’s Endowment Fund since the university would not admit Negroes.”\(^{102}\) Although this was a matter of Rockefeller’s personal contribution, Harris surely knew, and the administrators could not fail to understand, that the threat of lost foundation support was real. Given Tulane’s dependence on the major foundations in its drive to become a national university, loss of that support would be catastrophic.

Another kind of problem came from the school’s involvement with the federal government. By 1950 Tulane’s medical school in particular was receiving many research grants from the federal government. These contracts could only be signed by the president, and when he left New Orleans for the summer he discussed with the board the possibility of authorizing Dr. Clarence Scheps, the comptroller of the university, to sign for him. After some debate, it was agreed that he could do so, but the administrators had some words of caution: “[T]he most pertinent considerations to be kept in mind by the President of the University, the Comptroller and the Secretary of the Board are to avoid financial liability against the University for performance or non-performance of the

\(^{101}\) The refusal to relax this policy was made more complicated by the fact that Loyola University, adjacent to the Tulane campus, voted in favor of the Yale Amendment. In fact, Loyola had already begun admitting black undergraduates and several enrolled in the fall of 1951. President’s Report to the Board, December 11, 1951, TUA. “The position of the Roman Catholic Church,” Harris noted, “seems to be one of non-segregation. This attitude of course makes our own more difficult.”\(^{101}\)

\(^{102}\) Ibid.
contract and commitments which might contravene the University’s policy on matters of race.\textsuperscript{103}

Harris’s position on the need for federal funds at Tulane was clear. “From time to time,” he wrote, “I receive some violent expressions on the part of our alumni and friends against the University ‘seeking’ or ‘accepting’ Federal funds or support. It is not my opinion that most of these persons mean exactly what they say when they state that they desire none of them. Some of them have requested a declaration from the University regarding such funds and imply that if we seem to favor them they will have nothing more to do with us. The reason I state that I am not sure that they feel the way their words imply, is that we would be in a bad way already without such funds.” The inclusion of nondiscrimination clauses in a growing number of federal contracts sent unmistakable signals that this source of money was also endangered.\textsuperscript{104}

Another important involvement with the federal government arose in January 1952 when the university established the Tulane Center at the Pensacola Naval Air Training Center. This was a cooperative venture, begun at the request of the Navy. Tulane offered regular college courses, provided full-time teachers, and awarded credit toward Tulane degrees. The Navy provided all other facilities. Inevitably the matter of enrollment of black naval personnel surfaced. The navy, of course, was integrated and there were black sailors interested and eligible to take the classes that Tulane offered. According to John Dyer, the director of Tulane’s University College, which was responsible for the administration of the Pensacola campus, the university managed to accommodate these men. In a letter written in 1961 to Harris’s successor as Tulane’s president, Herbert Longenecker, Dyer described a clever response to this situation. The issue arose, Dyer wrote, at the start of the center’s third semester:

\textsuperscript{103} President’s Report to the Board, October 10, 1950, TUA.
\textsuperscript{104} President’s Report to the Board, TUA.
After a series of discussions between Tulane authorities, the Naval Air Station and the Bureau of Naval Personnel, a plan was evolved which permitted negroes to take courses with the understanding that they could not receive credit for these courses at Tulane. As I recall it, they did fill out an enrollment form, but this enrollment form did not become a part of Tulane's official records. That is to say, their records were kept in a separate file in the Naval Air Station's files. It was provided, I believe, that in case a negro wished to transfer any credits earned by him, that this transfer of credits would be from the Naval Air Station program and not from Tulane's Center there.\textsuperscript{105}

Somewhere around a dozen black students attended classes at the center, and "sat in classes with the white naval personnel."

According to Dyer, this arrangement was never committed to writing. Further, while Dyer was clear that Harris approved the plan, he was unsure whether it had ever been reported to the Tulane board. While there was much discussion of other aspects of the program, there is, in fact, no evidence in Harris's written reports or in board meeting minutes that black enrollment was ever officially discussed. Still, it is inconceivable that Harris would have taken such a step without consulting anyone. Most likely he did talk the issue over privately with some members of the board and they agreed to keep the arrangement quiet. The Tulane Center at Pensacola was a major success for the university, cited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Universities as a model for off-campus instruction, until financial constraints at the Naval Air Station led to its closing in 1955.\textsuperscript{106}

Although the board was apparently unaware of this particular situation, the continuing racial ferment on campus combined with Harris's aggressive advocacy of change led the trustees to begin considering the possibility of loosening racial restrictions. The


\textsuperscript{106} Dyer to Longenecker, August 24, 1961, Tulane University Archives Vertical Files, TUA.
immediate occasion for this consideration was an application for admission from a well-qualified black man.\textsuperscript{107} In April 1952 Mack J. Spears, a school principal who already held a BA from Dillard and an MA from Xavier, applied to enter Tulane’s graduate school. While the board informed Spears that it could not admit him “at this time,” new board member and former Harris law student Marie Louise Snellings agreed to produce a report on the board’s legal options on desegregation in light of Tulane’s racially restrictive charter.\textsuperscript{108} From this point on, legal considerations became the focal point of board discussions about segregation and the board’s Legal Committee was the center of debate.

Marie Louise Snellings distributed her seventeen-page report on April 8, 1953. Most of this document was taken up with a detailed review of the gradual breakdown of segregation that had taken place in the South. She discussed the NAACP legal victories in public education, voting rights, housing law, and transportation. She analyzed cultural issues as well, devoting several pages to a summary of Gunnar Myrdahl’s \textit{An American Dilemma}. Finally, in a brief conclusion Snellings stated flatly that there were no legal bars to a decision to desegregate Tulane while at the same time there was no legal compulsion to do so. Two considerations led her to this conclusion. First, there were certain linguistic ambiguities about the racial restrictions in the set of legal instruments that made up Tulane’s founding documents. Second, the status of the university as private was also ambiguous. Its origins were as a public institution, the University of Louisiana, but the assets of that school had been given by the state to the Tulane Board of Administrators in 1884. Tulane still had some arrangements of governance and financing

\textsuperscript{107} Perhaps because of its location in a more complicated and cosmopolitan city, Tulane received a fairly steady flow of applications during the early 1950s from area blacks. These were all referred to Harris, who replied with a short, polite statement of Tulane’s exclusionary policy. There are nearly a dozen responses to these applications collected in Box 99, Herbert Longenecker Papers, TUA.

\textsuperscript{108} Minutes, Board of Administrators, May 12, 1952, TUA. Paul Tulane specified that the gift from his estate be used for “the promotion and encouragement of intellectual, moral and industrial education among white young persons in the city of New Orleans, State of Louisiana . . . .” Tulane University Charter, reproduced in Dyer, \textit{Tulane}, Appendix I.
that, as Snellings pointed out, gave the university “certain public aspects.” Snellings concluded that these considerations left Tulane free to determine its own position on admitting black students.\footnote{Marie Louise Snellings, “The American Negro, Yesterday and Today,” Box 99, Longenecker Papers, TUA.}

The board, however, was not yet willing to make such a determination. Segregation on campus was becoming more difficult to maintain. Further, efforts to maintain it were beginning to threaten Tulane’s ability to raise funds and to advance its reputation. Despite the appearance of these problems, though, it still seemed that things were progressing well and that there was plenty of time to survey the situation before a decision would have to be made. The Board of Administrators was ready to talk about the possibility of change but it was not ready to act.

\section*{IV}

At Emory, the early 1950s were years of relative calm in race relations. Most of the energy of the school’s administration by far was directed towards fundraising and the expansion of the graduate program. In 1951 Emory had received a $7 million grant from the General Education Board, primarily for the improvement of graduate studies. This grant, however, was conditioned on the university raising an additional $25 million for the same purpose and progress was difficult and slow. Still, Emory pressed forward. By 1955, nine departments offered the doctorate, and forty-five Ph.D.s had been granted since the approval of the first program in 1946. The university was excercising great care in approving new programs, attempting to ensure that an Emory degree would be worthy of respect.

In keeping with Goodrich White’s stated beliefs about the proper—slow—pace of
racial change in the South, Emory took no steps towards loosening racial restrictions in admissions or in any other aspect of campus life during these years. The 1950 academic year saw some interest in the student newspaper, the *Emory Wheel*, in race relations on campus. On January 27, 1950 the paper ran an editorial entitled “Negroes Should Be Admitted to Grad School on Limited Basis.” In this piece, editor Reese Cleghorn argued that the “separate but equal” standard in southern education was seriously flawed. First, Cleghorn pointed out the total failure of Georgia to fund equally black and white education at all levels. He continued with a litany of the malign economic and social results of the failure of the South to adequately educate its black citizens. Ending with a call for Emory to lead the way to a more equitable and sensible future, Cleghorn concluded that “Emory students by and large would not object to having a few Negroes sit in their classrooms. Nor would faculty members or financial benefactors. This is one chance for Emory to prove her reputation as a progressive institution. It is a chance for Emory to show her practicality.”\(^{110}\)

In October, though, the new editorial staff of the *Wheel* sounded a very different note. Questioning the wisdom of court-ordered desegregation of the South’s public graduate schools, and calling into doubt the reasoning of the January 27 editorial, the paper took a stance of concern for the black students admitted under these circumstances. “We wonder,” said the editorial, “if the intolerance and prejudice which exists, and unfortunately it does exist in the South, will not make a living hell of the life of those Negroes who are admitted to Southern graduate schools.”\(^{111}\)

Although Emory’s official records give little indication of the kind of turmoil that was

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\(^{110}\) *Emory Wheel*, January 27, 1950.

\(^{111}\) *Emory Wheel*, October 12, 1950.
arising in the religion departments of Vanderbilt and Duke, there are hints that similar currents were felt at the Candler School of Theology. In 1951, the Student Council of the theology school wrote the board about the “problem of racial discrimination in our School,” arguing that “[t]he problems of our age demand forthright, determined, and courageous action in accordance with the principles of Christ. We cannot fail the expectations of our God nor miss any opportunity for the highest in human achievement.” The same week that the editorial opposing the admission of blacks to graduate school appeared, the Wheel also carried a story about an application from a black man to the theology school.

Throughout these years President Goodrich White’s formal reports to the Emory board of trustees contain no mention of race, not even of the AALS pressure to desegregate the law school. This is not to say that the topics were never discussed, for some aspects were simply unavoidable. However, no available records indicate who framed the response to the AALS or what it was.

A few other sources, though, suggest what the school’s official stance might have been. The attitude of the board’s chairman, Charles Howard Candler, was critically important. Candler was the son of Asa G. Candler, founder of Coca-Cola and chairman of Emory University’s trustees from the day the board was organized in 1915 until his death in 1929. He was also the nephew of Methodist Bishop Warren Akin Candler, who was instrumental in the creation of Emory University and served as the university’s first president. The younger Candler assumed the leadership of the board upon his father’s

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112 Ernest Cushman, Jr. to Robert C. Mizell, October 22, 1951, Box 5, Mizell Papers, EUA.
113 The records of the law school are uncatalogued and in storage. AALS records are available, but cannot be used to refer to any specific school.
death and held it until his own in 1957.\textsuperscript{114} He was an extremely generous donor to Emory and was very active as board chairman. Candler, though, ruled the board with an iron hand and brooked little opposition.\textsuperscript{115} His successor as chairman, Henry Bowden later described, in perhaps overly polite terms, how the board had worked under Candler: "At meetings of the Board when he would announce something that had been done he would ask if there were any questions about it or differences of opinion. In most cases there was a solemn nodding of the head in acquiescence. Committees reported but there was seldom any heated discussion. They knew that his long experience and judgment would protect Emory's interests."\textsuperscript{116}

Candler's thinking on racial matters can only be characterized as conservative. Even the smallest breach of Atlanta's etiquette of segregation offended him, and he saw no reason to keep his unhappiness to himself. A conference on "The Churches and World Order" scheduled to be held at Emory's Glenn Memorial Methodist Church in April, 1953 presented one occasion for Candler's wrath. By 1953 the presence of a few non-menial blacks on campus was generally accepted and student and faculty contact with their counterparts at the city's black colleges were fairly routine. The pastor of the Wheat Street Baptist Chuich, Dr. William Holmes Borders, for example, spoke at vesper services

\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Emory Alumnus}, December, 1957. The Candler family association with Emory began even earlier. Asa Candler's brother, Warren Akin Candler, graduated from old Emory College in 1875 and assumed its presidency in 1888. He held that post until 1898 when he was elected a bishop in the Methodist Church. English, \textit{Emory University}, 6–7. For more detailed discussion of Emory's early days see Henry Morton Bullock, \textit{A History of Emory University, 1838–1936} (Nashville, TN, 1936).

\textsuperscript{115} In 1947, for example, Candler donated half of the stock of the Asa G. Candler Company, essentially a real estate concern, to the university, increasing the school's endowment by about $5 million. English, \textit{Emory University}, 76. He was also known as a "hands-on" chairman of the board. \textit{Emory Alumnus}, December, 1957.
in the Alumni Memorial building during Brotherhood Week in February. In October, the Emory Wesley Fellowship sponsored a weekend retreat with delegates from six colleges, including Morehouse.117

It isn’t clear why Candler would object to the April church conference and not to these other events. Most likely, he simply never became aware of them. But someone took the trouble to send him a brochure announcing the conference and when he discovered that the organizers planned to welcome “all persons, regardless of race,” Candler fired off an angry and vaguely threatening letter to Goodrich White. “This sort of thing naturally disturbs me and some of your other associates who are concerned about the effect such things may have on our relationship with the church [Glenn Memorial] and with Emory,” he complained. Candler concluded the note with instructions to cancel the conference and to prevent “any such function” in the future.118

Despite Candler’s warning, White refused to cancel the meeting. While promising to look into the matter in detail, White wrote the board chairman with barely cloaked irritation and in the clearest possible terms that he would not deny permission for the conference just because Candler wanted him to. Attempting to keep a minor event from becoming a major source of trouble, White snapped back: “At present I must say that I

116 Henry Bowden, “The Christian University in a Scientific Age (A Board Chairman’s View),” speech given to Emory faculty group, April 5, 1959, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA.
117 Emory Wheel, February 5, 1953; November 5, 1953. The very same week as the conference at Glenn Memorial was to be held, the Georgia Student Christian Conference met at Paine College, with eighteen Emory delegates present. Black and white students “roomed, ate, and square danced together without racial discrimination,” said one Emory attendee. This body voted to condemn segregation as un-Christian. A few of Emory’s representatives were faculty members, including Jack Boozer of the School of Theology and the university’s Director of Religious Life, Sam Laird.
cannot, on my own initiative, take any steps looking to the cancellation of this engagement. To precipitate an issue over this meeting would, in my judgement, be unwise, unjustified, and hurtful.” Nonetheless, White acknowledged where the ultimate authority lay. “I am, of course,” he wrote, “subject to orders; and if I am instructed by the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees to cancel the arrangement for the use of Glenn Memorial for this meeting I will do so. My future course in such matters, as long as I am in office, will conform to any instructions the Executive Committee gives me.”

Later the same afternoon White drafted a longer letter to Candler, which he apparently decided not to send. He opted instead to bring the matter up when the Executive Committee next met on April 16th. The letter, though, reveals the state of the president’s thinking on racial matters as they affected Emory at this time. Typically, White’s reasoning was cautious but far from reactionary. He began with a defense of the conference that was at the heart of the immediate issue. White first pointed out that the conference was scheduled at the request of Dean H.B. Tribble of Emory’s School of Theology, but that despite a close relationship with the university, the pastor of Glenn Memorial Church had always been free to schedule what he saw fit without the approval of Emory. He also noted that it would be “discourteous and embarrassing” for Emory to force the cancellation of the event, which sponsored by some of the most prominent and respectable Protestant organizations in the city. He stressed that there was to be no

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118 “First Atlanta Conference on The Churches and World Order, April 6-7, 1953”; Charles Howard Candler to Goodrich White, March 26, 1953, Box 1, Robert F. Whitaker Papers, EUA.
119 White to Charles Howard Candler, March 30, 1953, Box 1, Whitaker Papers, EUA.
“social intermingling” between blacks and whites at the event—that is, no “housing or meal service” was to be provided.  

Finally, White described his own stance on interracial activities at Emory in general, a characteristically amorphous attempt to avoid alarming, upsetting, or embarrassing anyone rather than a firmly held position derived from principle. Fittingly, he avowed his own distaste at having to deal with the matter at all. “I have wanted,” White declared, “to avoid agitation of the ‘race question’ as it affects Emory.” Circumstances, though, forced White to deal with the matter more and more frequently. His method was to scrutinize each situation on a case-by-case basis, rejecting some meetings and allowing others. “I have quite recently vetoed two proposals for large meetings under the University’s auspices because some of the conditions would have violated established and necessary conventions. Some time ago I had to turn away the Judicial Council of the Methodist Church, which wished to meet at Emory, because a Negro is a member of the group. This, you know, is in effect the Church’s ‘supreme court.’” On the other hand, White admitted that he had authorized “occasional, relatively small” interracial meetings, “religious or professional in character,” on the Emory campus.  

The basis for White’s decisions in these cases is obscure. What is clear is his sense of being caught in the middle. “I have tried to act wisely and firmly in the interest of the University, despite criticism and the implicit charge of ‘cowardice’ in some instances and ‘going too far’ in others.” White pressed this point with Candler, probably uselessly, by trying to explain that opinion on campus was almost totally opposed to that of the board chairman. “It is a fact,” White insisted, “that there are many of our own people, faculty

120 White to Charles Howard Candler, March 30, 1953, Box 1, Whitaker Papers, EUA.  
121 Ibid.
and students, who wish to go further in ‘race relations’ than I think wise. These people are not ‘radical’ and agitators. Their position is based on sincere conviction as to the proper Christian attitude.”\textsuperscript{122} Thus, White sat between the board, unwilling to alter traditional racial patterns, and the faculty and students who wanted change. In spite of his contention that his position on the matter was “reasonably clear,” White was unable or unwilling to articulate any clear prescription for deciding when some flexibility was appropriate and when it was not. Examination seems to yield only the principle that if proposed contact between blacks and whites could be accomplished without attracting attention or controversy to Emory, then it was acceptable. What White seemed to want above all was the ability to deal with these issues as they arose with no pressure or interference from either the board or the faculty. Whatever the mysterious reasoning for his decisions, the president believed that he knew how to make these decisions and that interference would lead only to that which he most wanted to avoid: public controversy. He was probably right.

V

At the Rice Institute the early 1950s saw continued growth and development but little discussion of racial issues. By 1950 the school had largely met the goals of its 1945 long-range plan. Its endowment had grown to over $30 million. New buildings dotted the campus, including, for the first time, an adequate library. Enrollment was still around 1,500, including just over 150 graduate students. The faculty numbered 114, many of them nationally prominent. And, as the faculty grew, Rice’s graduate program also expanded, although in 1950 the doctorate was still was offered only in science and

\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Ibid.}
engineering disciplines. This expansion continued throughout the decade, fueled by successful fundraising and an active board and administration. Rice remained a small school and it continued to have problems keeping faculty salaries competitive. Still, while Rice was not rich, it was in a solid financial position.123

There were also changes in the composition of Rice’s board. In 1949 the seven-member board of trustees voted to expand, creating an eight-member board of governors to advise and help with the work of overseeing the Institute’s affairs. In 1950 chairman Harry Hanzsen died, and Houston businessman George R. Brown was named his successor.124 (The Rice trustees would remain remarkably stable over the next decade or so, with only two changes in membership between 1950 and 1963.) The selection of Brown, a sophisticated businessman with a national outlook and close ties to rising Texas politician Lyndon Johnson, was a critical one for the future of Rice. Brown’s leadership of the Rice board would be central to the school’s growth in quality and prestige throughout the next two decades.125

The city of Houston had changed dramatically over the course of the previous decade. Explosive economic growth took place during the 1940s as the petrochemical industry became firmly established in the area. Industrial employment soared, wages surged upward, and rapid urbanization changed the face of Houston almost overnight. By 1950

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124 Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Volume 15, February 15, 1950, Rice University.
125 On George R. Brown see Joseph A. Pratt and Christopher J. Castaneda, *Builders: George and Herman Brown* (College Station, TX, 1999). Chapter Eight, “Building Universities,” contains an extended discussion of George Brown’s contributions to Rice as well as his brother Herman’s role at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas. George Brown was one of the founders of Brown & Root, a powerful construction firm that had global operations. His business holdings, though, were varied and came to include Texas Eastern, an oil and gas concern. See Christopher J. Castaneda and Joseph A. Pratt, *From Texas to the East: A Strategic History of Texas Eastern Corporation* (College Station, TX, 1993). Several biographies of Lyndon Johnson touch on his relationship with the Browns. Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times* (New York, 1991) and Robert Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power* (New York, 1982) both discuss Brown’s financial help in Johnson’s campaigns.
Houston was the sixteenth largest city in the United States, with a population of almost 600,000, and the largest city in the South. About 125,000, over 20 percent, were black.

In Houston, the 1950s were a time of nearly hysterical fears of communist activity. Several right-wing organizations closely monitored the city's schools and other organizations searching for evidence of subversion. School board candidates ran on "anti-UNESCO" platforms, vowing to "save the schools from Socialism." Again, this fear and hatred of communism was frequently linked to fears about changes in traditional racial patterns. In February 1952, for example, Dr. Rufus Clement, a prominent black educator who had been president of Atlanta University for fifteen years, was invited to Houston's First Methodist Church to speak on Race Relations Sunday. This news was received in Houston's organized anticommunist circles with horror. For days before Dr. Clement was to speak, these groups organized protests, distributed materials claiming that Clement was an active member of communist front organizations, and threatened to disrupt his talk. Clement's history, however, contained nothing that could reasonably give rise to the belief that he was a communist or communist sympathizer. On the contrary, he was an extremely conservative man, the epitome of Harvie Branscomb's "responsible Negro leadership." The only reason to suspect Dr. Clement of subversive tendencies was, apparently, the fact that he was a black man speaking to a white audience. The controversy reached as far as Duke, where Hollis Edens was approached about Clement's reputation. Edens vouched for Clement's loyalty and character, calling him "a

126 The frantic political atmosphere in Houston during the 1950s is chronicled in Don Carleton, Red Scare: Right-Wing Hysteria, Fifties Fanaticism, and Their Legacy in Texas (Austin, TX, 1975). Carleton makes clear the link between radical anti-communism and the commitment to segregation. For example, see his discussion of the Houston School Board's decision to investigate deputy superintendent George Ebey in 1953. Pp.201–204. William Henry Kellar, Make Haste Slowly: Moderates, Conservatives, and School Desegregation in Houston (College Station, TX, 1999) explores in detail the politics of the Houston School Board and the close connection between radical anticommunism and resistance to desegregation in Houston.

127 The Rice Thresher was fascinated with these developments and in 1952 began a series of articles on UNESCO and its opposition in Houston. October 22, 1952.
gentleman of the highest order,” and stating that “I have never heard his character or reputation questioned.” This kind of active, radical anticommunism that characterized the city of Houston during the early 1950s was undoubtedly one factor in the near total lack of involvement with racial issues on the Rice campus.

Of greater importance, however, was the nature of the Rice Institute itself. Rice was still by far the smallest of these schools and through this period was heavily dominated by scientific and engineering departments that focused on educating undergraduates. While the graduate program was steadily growing, it too was dominated by hard sciences and engineering, programs that attracted few blacks at the time and that were unlikely to produce research that challenged the community’s social or racial beliefs. Even more important, Rice, an almost aggressively secular institution, did not have a school of religion or theology. Thus, one of the major strains of anti-segregation thought, Christian morality, had no institutional presence at the school. There was no way to force the issue to the attention of the administration and the trustees. Whatever the private beliefs of faculty members, there was no dean of theology to approach the president about admitting black students and no divinity school student body to petition for change.  

128 R.A. Childers to Hollis Edens, February 19, 1952; Edens to Childers, February 21, 1952, Box 9, Edens Papers, DUA; Carleton, Red Scare, 142–46. Another black Atlantan, Dr. Benjamin Mays of Morehouse University, neatly summed up the connection between protesting racism and being branded a communist: “For many decades the South has tried to make the world believe that the Southern way of life (the segregated way) was acceptable to Negroes. They trumpeted loud and long that Negroes were happy and satisfied with apartheid, Southern style, and that whenever a Southern Negro complained it was not really he who was speaking but, instead, he was being ‘used’ by white Yankees or by Communists.” Benjamin E. Mays, Born to Rebel (New York, 1971), 209.

129 Rice never had any denominational ties, and, as a scientific and technical institute remained largely unconcerned with the teaching of religion during these years. This is not to say that there was no religious presence on campus. Like all the other schools considered here, during the 1950s Rice had an annual Religious Emphasis Week, which brought a series of speakers from several faiths to campus for organized discussions with students. Denominational student organizations also had a significant presence. Still, the Institute was hardly a haven of faith. This sometimes troubled the trustees, Newton Rayzor in particular. At a 1951 meeting of the Rice board Rayzor told his colleagues that “he had attended several open forums at Rice where such topics as "Is There A God" and
Finally, Rice did not have a law school. As much as the theology schools, by the early 1950s the law schools of the private southern universities were lightning rods for challenges to the racial status quo. In part, this was due to the NAACP’s strategy of using the courts to break down traditional patterns of segregation.\footnote{See for example, Kluger, *Simple Justice* and Mark Tushnet, *The NAACP’s Legal Strategy Against Segregated Education, 1925–1950* (Chapel Hill, 1987).} This strategy placed lawyers at the heart of the battle over race relations and made American constitutional law another major strand of anti-segregation thought. The argument over the meaning of equal protection was naturally a subject that would be discussed in the curriculum of the region’s private law schools. More immediately, the threat from the American Association of Law Schools to withdraw accreditation from segregated schools forced the other private southern universities to debate the issue of discriminatory admissions policies internally. Rice, lacking a law school, was protected from this current, one which pulled the other schools into the thick of conflict.

Rice was not totally sheltered from the problems of changing race relations, however. President William V. Houston’s awareness of the issue of easing racial restrictions is seen in his work with the Council of Southern Universities. This council was established in October 1952 as a forum for the heads of the region’s most prestigious institutions to
come together to consider their common problems in an intimate setting.\textsuperscript{131} It was a small group, comprising at its first meeting Duke, Emory, Tulane, Rice, Vanderbilt, the University of Texas, the University of North Carolina, and the University of Virginia.\textsuperscript{132}

As a member of the council’s executive committee, William Houston helped prepare the agenda for the first meeting. High on the list of topics was segregation. The tentative agenda proposed a discussion of “[t]he possibility of a working understanding among our constituent institutions, especially the private ones, with reference to the problem of possible future enrollment of negroes at the graduate and professional school level.”\textsuperscript{133} The meeting did include “extensive discussion” of the admission of black students to the private schools. In particular, the president’s were interested in the possibility of some sort of joint resolution, a notion that must have been attractive to many, providing as it would some political cover. After much discussion, however, the members decided that because of “the diversity of problems, it appeared impractical to make any general statement at the present time . . . .” They also “agreed that the five private institution members of the Council should undertake to keep each other informed with respect to developments along this line.”\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{131} At about the same time the Council was formed Joseph Jones, the chairman of the Tulane board, wrote the chairmen of the Rice, Emory, Duke, and Vanderbilt boards suggesting that they too meet to discuss their common problems. His suggestion was not met with any enthusiasm, and such a meeting never took place.

\textsuperscript{132} Branscomb, typescript, “Some Dates,” Box 20, Vanderbilt Centennial History Project, VUSC.

\textsuperscript{133} “Memorandum to the Members of the Council of Southern Universities [n.d., fall 1952], Box 10, Edens Papers, DUA. The list of attendees at this meeting includes Harvie Branscomb, William Houston, Goodrich White, and Rufus Harris. Hollis Edens could not attend, but sent Duke vice president Paul Gross in his stead. Edens too would be a regular attender in the future. Logan Wilson, a vice president at U.N.C. who was present as a representative of that school, had spent years working with Harris, mainly as dean of Sophie Newcomb, Tulane’s women’s college. Lewis Hammond from U.Va. and chancellor James Hart from the University of Texas were also at the meeting and were also very well known to everyone present.

\textsuperscript{134} Minutes of the Council of Southern Universities, October 24, 1952, Box 10, Edens Papers, DUA.
With Rice hosting the 1953 gathering of the Council, President Houston again outlined an agenda. Again, "[t]rends with relation to the problem of segregation" occupied a place on that agenda.\textsuperscript{135} And again, the private universities could reach no consensus on how to handle the issue. Although the same problems were arising on each campus (with the exception of Rice)—the AALS situation, the matter of black applicants to the divinity schools—the details were often quite different. In particular, the members focused on "the general attitudes of the boards of trustees" as the key area of difference. (Interestingly, when Houston reported to the Rice board about the activities of the Council of Southern Universities, he focused on the group's efforts to obtain and administer grants and did not mention the discussions of racial matters.)\textsuperscript{136}

Other racial matters that arose at Rice were so minor as to almost be incidental. The construction of a new football stadium, completed in 1950, was the occasion for one board discussion: "The matter of allocating space in Rice's new stadium for a limited number of colored people was also discussed and it was the sense of the meeting that space be allocated if provisions can be made without disrupting present plans."\textsuperscript{137}

Occasionally a speaker would discuss race in a lecture or forum, but no black speakers came to campus. In 1952, for example, Rice assistant professor of history Edward

\textsuperscript{135} Houston to Edens, October 21, 1953, Box 10, Edens Papers, DUA; Houston to Branscomb, October 21, 1953, Box 5, Branscomb Papers, VUSC.

\textsuperscript{136} Memorandum to the Board of Governors with reference to the Council of Southern Universities, September 29, 1954, Box 2, Houston Papers, WRC. Again, Houston may have had personal, off-the-record discussions with individual board members about the racial issues, but there is no official record. Rufus Harris, in contrast, fully informed the Tulane board of the extensive discussion of racial matters. President's Report to the Board, November 12, 1952, TUA. The Council did obtain funds from the General Education Board for graduate fellowships and scholarships in the South. The grant was a substantial one, $2,500,000 over ten years, which represented the liquidation of the GEB. President's Report to the Board, December 8, 1954, TUA. Correspondence between Dean Rusk of the GEB, Harvie Branscomb, Goodrich White, and Logan Wilson, now president of the University of Texas, arranging this grant is in Chancellor's Office Papers, Box 153, GR 300, VUSC.

\textsuperscript{137} Minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting, December 15, 1949, Rice University.
Phillips gave the fall faculty lecture on “The Problem of Race in the World Today.” Phillips was concerned primarily with international affairs and claimed that America had to solve its racial problems “as an example” to Asia and Africa, the two “breeding spots for Communism.”

Rice students generally were not deeply interested in racial issues during the early 1950s, although there were some exceptions. In 1950 the assistant editor of the Thresher, William P. Hobby, editorialized about a cross burning at the University of Texas law school after the enrollment of black student Hemann Sweatt. Speculating that the burning and the “KKK” graffiti painted in red on the law building were in fact the work of the Klan, Hobby hoped that this action represented “the last gasp of the bigoted, hate-blinded cowards who form the organization.” Continuing, Hobby tied this horrible event to Rice and directly challenged the racial status quo and the reasoning of President Houston in the 1948-49 Thresher controversy. Houston quickly ended that controversy, in which Thresher editors argued for the admission of black graduate students, with an assertion of the Rice charter’s unambiguous ban on blacks. Hobby was unconvinced by this technical prohibition. “The question of admitting Negroes to Rice,” he wrote, “was fought out in these columns several years ago. The result of that fight was a temporary victory for those who would maintain segregation. That the victory was temporary is a certain fact—made temporary by the trend of judicial and public opinion which has in the past few years so diminished racial hatred and prejudice.” If Rice would not lead, Hobby implied, it would have to follow: “It will not be many years, we feel sure, before the Rice Institute will admit qualified Negroes, whether under orders from the courts or

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138 Rice Thresher, November 7, 1952.
139 Hobby was a member of one of the most prominent and powerful families in Texas. His father, William P. Hobby, Sr., had been governor of the state in the late teens and early twenties. His mother was Oveta Culp Hobby, secretary of health, education, and welfare in the Eisenhower administration. The Hobby family also owned one of Houston’s major newspapers, the Houston Post. William Hobby, Jr. would go on to become Texas’s lieutenant governor.
voluntarily."\textsuperscript{140} There was no public response to this editorial from Rice students or the administration.

In 1951 the Rice student council voted with only one dissent to instruct the school's delegates to the Texas Intercollegiate Student Association to vote in favor of a resolution allowing black schools to join the organization.\textsuperscript{141} In 1953 a poll, with almost half the student body responding, found that almost 52 percent supported the admission of "properly qualified Negroes."\textsuperscript{142} These episodes, however, had no impact on the thinking of Rice's leadership. Like the 1948-49 \textit{Thresher} controversy, they faded away on their own.

At Rice, then, the campus remained quiet. In spite of the rapid physical transformation of the city and the campus, the pressures to drop segregation from academic life that came from funding agencies and learned societies, and the political turmoil that percolated within Houston, the university remained an island of peace, seemingly untouched by real debate over race. With both the board and the president inclined to leave the matter alone for as long as possible, it was difficult to see what might make them act.

\textsuperscript{140} \textit{Rice Thresher}, October 27, 1950.
\textsuperscript{141} \textit{Ibid.}, January 12, 19, 1951. Some black schools were invited to send unofficial delegations to the TISA meeting at Texas A&M in March 1951. ("Texas A&M hosts have solved the problems," noted the \textit{Thresher}, "of housing and feeding accommodations for Negro delegates." March 16, 1951). There, the Texas Southern University's application for membership was unanimously accepted, "the high point of the convention" according to Rice delegate Bill Hobby. \textit{Rice Thresher}, March 22, 1951. Rice itself hosted the TISA annual convention in 1953, and presumably made arrangements with TSU to host any black delegates that attended. A TSU student, Lloyd Riley, was elected parliamentarian that year, which, according to the \textit{Thresher} "serves as a symbol of recognition of ability regardless of other factors and should not be taken as a lean-over-backwards policy to the Negro race." March 27, 1953.
\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Rice Thresher}, April 24, 1953. The poll was a very general one and included questions on religion, ethics, the balance between humanities and sciences, and the quality of Rice students as dates. There was only one question about race.
Chapter 3
"Straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel"

On January 15, 1955, Rufus Harris wrote to an old friend in his hometown of Monroe, Georgia. Warily, Harris told him:

I watched the old year go out without regret. It went out burdened with fears, hates, scandals, and some bumbling stupidity. It had seen a premium placed on hate as a way of life with organized hate-mongers setting neighbor against neighbor for political gain and scaring the wits out of millions of Americans . . . The new year scarcely will see such a low descent into darkness, I hope. So to 1954 I wanted to say goodbye and good riddance! ¹

Harris was undoubtedly far from alone in his willingness to leave 1954 behind, although his reasons were not likely shared by most of his fellow southerners. The year 1954 was indeed a difficult one, particularly in the South. On May 17th of that year, in the culmination of the NAACP’s legal assault on Jim Crow, the United States Supreme Court unanimously declared state-enforced segregation in public education unconstitutional.² Although the decision was not unexpected, its announcement still shocked many whites in the region. In some southern states, particularly in border areas, political leaders initially reacted to Brown v. Board of Education with restraint and urged upset whites to “wait and see” what the Supreme Court’s enforcement edict would require. This initial moderation, however, was not shared by all. Deep South politicians such as Georgia’s governor Herman Talmadge answered Brown with immediate defiance. Still, an early period of relative calm during the court’s deliberations on how to enforce the decision suggested that the grudging cooperation of southern whites might be forthcoming.

¹ Harris to Arthur C. Mobley, Jr., January 19, 1955, Box 39, Harris Papers, TUA.
These early hopes for peaceful progress on desegregation, though, proved almost wholly misplaced. President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s failure to support publicly the Supreme Court’s decision and the open determination of an increasing number of southern politicians to evade its clear intent made defiance seem reasonable even to respectable middle-class whites.³ The rise of massive resistance transformed the political and social atmosphere of the region to one of crisis. Segregation became the central, almost the only, issue in southern politics and public life. Opposition to racial change was entangled with resentment at “outside” pressure, mistrust of the federal government, fears of “creeping socialism,” and a general disquiet spawned by the enormous social, economic, and demographic changes that had transformed the South since World War II. As Adam Fairclough has pointed out, “between 1944 and 1954 whites had, in fact, accepted a degree of change that would have been unthinkable fifty or even twenty years earlier.”⁴ The *Brown* decision provided a focal point for all the frustration, fear, and

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anxiety that simmered as a traditional way of life was replaced by something new and uncertain.\(^5\)

For the elite private universities in the South this atmosphere severely complicated the struggle to provide regional leadership and attain national prominence. While tension had always existed between these two goals, only after *Brown* did they come to seem incompatible. In the rest of the nation, including prominently the academic community and its funders, interest in southern race relations became newly intense and tended strongly toward condemnation of segregation and insistence on its elimination. Within the South, resistance to *Brown* soon came to mean resistance not only to public school desegregation but also to any move to relax racial restrictions of any kind whatsoever. This presented a deepening dilemma for these universities, which needed support from both sides in order to move forward.

The dilemma was made even worse by increased public attention. Before *Brown* the private southern universities made decisions in relative seclusion. The press was certainly interested in developments on campus but covered largely what the schools asked them to with a minimum of investigation. Their status as elite institutions set them apart somehow from the rest of their communities, just as their campuses—green, shady enclaves—were set off from the cities that surrounded them. Their status as private institutions further shielded them from the direct processes of politics that often intruded on public universities. This insularity had allowed the trustees the luxury of unhurried debate on many issues, including any changes in their established racial policies. Even at Vanderbilt, where Chancellor Harvie Branscomb was more aggressive, the pace of

change was hardly urgent. At the other schools discussion of racial change focused on a vague, far-off future when it was acknowledged at all. There was time, the boards believed, probably decades, to decide on a proper course.

After *Brown* this rather aloof stance was no longer possible. Angry and organized, southern whites exercised new vigilance in defense of racial orthodoxy. They searched out, identified, and denounced even minor deviations from accepted practices wherever they found them, including on the campuses of the region's most prestigious universities. Both inside and outside the South the press grew more keenly attentive, eager to publish evidence of the latest outrage (however defined). The constant scrutiny rendered every discussion of race on campus—whether by trustees, faculty, or within student religious organizations—potentially explosive. In short, the vise that had been slowly squeezing around the South's private universities since the end of World War II tightened dramatically. The old atmosphere of fretful wariness was replaced by something near panic as the true impact of the region's economic and social transformation began to dawn.

The presidents of these schools, trying to deflect pressure from all directions, repeatedly pointed out that the *Brown* decision pertained only to public education and had nothing to do with them at all. But no one was fooled. No matter the specific legal issues involved in the decision, *Brown* had to do with everything. It raised issues that had been quiet before, it shone a light on places that had remained hidden, it forced decisions that had been coaxed along slowly. Just as with the myriad changes that otherwise transformed the South, there was simply no hiding from it. On the campuses student voices were more often heard on the issue. The student newspapers editorialized with
much greater frequency on the merits and demerits of opening admissions to all. Faculties also began to speak out more aggressively, sometimes addressing their concerns directly to the trustees.

But the end result of this suddenly increased attention was, in 1954, to at least briefly halt all movement in the direction of racial liberalization on these campuses. Differences between the most aggressive and the most passive leadership simply evaporated for a time as everyone stopped and waited to see what would happen. Ironically, those who claimed to lead the region chose at this moment of crisis to retreat to the safety of neutrality. Harvie Branscomb, the president most eager to guide his school to a new racial accommodation, stopped pushing for change, at least temporarily. The hardening of positions that followed Brown seemed to him to preclude the kind of compromises that he believed were the best way to move the Vanderbilt trustees. Although Branscomb remained committed to the gradual loosening of racial restrictions at Vanderbilt, he would wait to make his next move. At Tulane, the board reached stalemate. In the days immediately before the announcement of Brown the board’s Law Committee agreed, after long and careful deliberation, that Tulane had the authority to open graduate school admissions to blacks despite the racial restrictions in its charter and also had the authority to refuse to do so. This decision, though, was as far as the board got. The court’s announcement sent them into headlong retreat, and as the environment in Louisiana and New Orleans gradually moved closer to chaos in the years ahead, Tulane would remain frozen with indecision. At Emory, there were still no signs at all of change. Its cautious leadership stood by and watched Georgia respond to Brown with angry defiance. Similarly, the Rice board sat and waited, apparently not even contemplating any steps
towards racial change on campus. Surprisingly, at Duke the usually circumspect Hollis Edens was somewhat emboldened by the crisis. While his statements about racial change to the press and correspondents remained as opaque as ever, Edens spoke to the Duke trustees with new candor. The rapid transformation of race relations throughout the entire South, he argued, made the issue of segregation at Duke seem minor. It might well be time for small changes. This new forthrightness, however, carried no weight. Duke's conservative board listened, but refused to make any changes.

Even in the face of their complete inability to fashion effective responses to the turmoil that surrounded them, these men remained unshaken in their faith that only the southern white elite could solve the region's racial problems. If anything, they believed, their responsibility to guide the region became more pressing after Brown, as the threat of disorder grew. This belief was complicated, though, by the fact that much of the South's white leadership was behaving in irresponsible ways. With racial issues now occupying center stage to an extent not seen since the turn of the century, many white politicians turned to demagoguery in order to gain or keep power. At the same time, the middle-class membership of the White Citizens Councils made massive resistance respectable.

*Responsible* white leaders, then, ought to provide an alternative to the kind of stubborn refusal to change that was sure to provoke head-on, and unwinnable, clashes. As educators these men seemed perfectly positioned to lead in a different way. Clearly, men like Branscomb, Rufus Harris, Hollis Edens, Goodrich White, and William Houston understood the inevitability of desegregation. They stood able to educate the children of the white elite in responsible behavior on this issue. Yet as the momentum of change gathered and old ways of life were swept aside, the leaders of the region's most
prestigious universities seemed wholly unable to lead. Trapped between warring groups, believing that they needed both to survive and advance, none of these presidents could see a way out.

But all the while another change was taking place much more quietly, almost unnoticed, that both revealed the extent to which the culture of these southern campuses had already been transformed and pointed the way to an even deeper transformation. In the years between 1953 and 1957 each of these schools adopted the Scholastic Aptitude Test of the College Entrance Examination Board as a requirement for admission. This requirement struck at the very heart of the traditions upon which these elite schools had been built. Conceived as part of the web of upper-class institutions in each city, the private universities drew their students and their support largely from the upper and upper-middle reaches of local society. Apart from a relative handful of poor-but-worthy ministerial students sponsored by scholarship, most students were there because of who they were—what family they came from—rather than because of what they could accomplish. In the past, particularly before World War II, academic excellence, while welcome when it appeared, was hardly the only or even the main criteria for deciding whether a student ought to enroll. (This was less true at Rice, the newest by far of these schools, which began its existence with high academic standards and tried valiantly to maintain them in a region populated with underprepared adolescents.)

Since the end of World War II, though, there had been slow change in this pattern. As part of the push to attain national reputations all these schools made an effort to improve the quality of their student body as well as of their faculty and curriculum. By the mid-1950s, gains in these areas were impressive and even greater success was envisioned. It
was this success and the hunger for more that made the adoption of national admissions standards compelling to faculties and administrators. These tests, however, while they did a credible job of measuring mathematical and verbal skills, made no discrimination whatsoever as to the high or low birth of the taker. This fact caused consternation among trustees, who served their alma mater precisely because they were members of their city’s upper class and who were concerned about the threat to their own or their friends’ children and grandchildren. Nonetheless, the drive to build the reputation of the institution in the eyes of the nation was far too strong to stand in the way of this innovation. Over some objection, these schools began to put the SAT in place and the definition of “qualified” was changed forever.  

Another brick in the wall of southern tradition was removed, but even as the crumbling began in earnest all eyes remained fixed elsewhere, on the fearful prospect of racial integration.

I

Tennessee received word of the Brown decision with relative equanimity. Governor Frank Clement almost immediately issued a temperate statement, accepting the authority of the court and urging the people of Tennessee to simply wait and see what the implementation decree would bring. Clement’s calm response was rewarded later that summer, when he easily defeated two rivals for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination (tantamount to election even in Tennessee) who made opposition to the decision the

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6 On the SAT, see Nicholas Lehmann, *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy* (New York, 1999). For a shrewder analysis of the changing admissions practices in elite schools see E. Digby Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy & Caste in America* (New York, 1964), especially 335–52. “What seems to be happening, then,” Baltzell argued, “is that a scholastic hierarchy of campus communities governed by the values of admissions committees is gradually supplanting the class hierarchies in local communities which are still governed by the values of parents.” These
cornerstone of their campaigns. Similarly, in the senatorial primary Estes Kefauver sought re-election without taking any real stand on segregation, arguing that it was a local issue that had no place in a race for federal office.7 His opponent, Congressman Pat Sutton, was an outspoken supporter of state’s rights and the separation of the races. In this contest too, appeals to whites’ racial fears were ineffective and Kefauver won by a comfortable margin.8

At Vanderbilt, when the Brown decision was handed down in mid-May the undergraduate student body had already left campus for the summer. The students’ first opportunity to react to it thus came in the fall of 1954. In general, their response was a clear acceptance of the idea that segregation was finished in principle and a willingness to begin exploring practical solutions. Somewhat surprisingly, a significant portion of Vanderbilt’s largely southern-born and conservative student body supported desegregation, at their university if not everywhere. An October poll of ninety-three

7 Kefauver acknowledged that it was theoretically possible for Congress to pass a constitutional amendment that would require segregation in the public schools, but quite reasonably noted that as a practical matter northern opposition would be insurmountable. Southern School News, September 3, 1954.

Vanderbilt students revealed that forty-five percent (forty-two respondents) were in favor of desegregating the school’s undergraduate college, although only twenty-nine percent opposed segregation in general. Their explanations reveal that they too shared the faith in the ability of Vanderbilt’s leaders to control the nature of racial change. According to the Hustler the students were willing to defer to the wisdom of their elders, expressing “full confidence in Vanderbilt’s administrative officials” and the certainty that “the type and caliber of Negro which the administration would let enter the undergraduate school would be suitable fellow students.” Another eleven students refused to characterize their opinions as either definitely for or against segregation, arguing that in some instances they were for it and in others against it. The students offered a variety of reasons for their stances. Christian brotherhood figured strongly in their thinking, as did notions of merit—“people should be educated according to ability and not color.”

It was this notion that was uppermost in the minds of the Hustler editors when they called for the inclusion of Fisk in Nashville’s Joint University Center. The editors acknowledged that most Vanderbilt students were from families that harbored strong objections to desegregation but rejected this as a reason to maintain segregation at Vanderbilt, concluding simply that “eligible persons of all races and creeds deserve the chance to receive top-rate educations.” The editors did take more seriously the possibility that suddenly dropping the racial barrier to entry into Vanderbilt’s undergraduate college could harm both Vanderbilt, which stood to lose money and students, and Fisk, which might well see a decline in its enrollments as its most able students left for Vanderbilt. The solution that they advocated in an October 22 editorial was admitting Fisk into the Vanderbilt-Scarritt-Peabody arrangement that allowed students enrolled at one to take

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9 Vanderbilt Hustler, October 15, 1954.
classes at the others. While at least one Vanderbilt board member supported this idea, it seems never to have been seriously considered.\textsuperscript{10}

Student interest in issues of race continued through the fall. Commenting on a series of campus talks and meetings to discuss segregation, the \textit{Hustler} editors said that "[t]he increasing awareness on this campus that segregation is no longer to be ignored, and that educational institutions must look for some gradual conformation [sic] to the Supreme Court’s doctrine, is indeed refreshing. The plans for a solution to the integration problem are innumerable and will eventually cause some sharp breaks and hot tempers. But at Vanderbilt no voice has growled—as did the irascible Mr. Talmadge—for the policy of immovable opposition."\textsuperscript{11}

Still, while Tennessee whites were willing to wait for the Supreme Court’s enforcement order and Vanderbilt students expressed a cautious acceptance of change, \textit{Brown} left a powerful unease in its wake. Even before the decision was announced Harvie Branscomb became involved in a project that aimed at chronicling its consequences throughout the South. On May 11, 1954, a week before the result became public, he attended the first meeting of the board of directors of the Southern Education Reporting Service (SERS) at Peabody College in Nashville.\textsuperscript{12} The SERS was financed by a grant of nearly $100,000 from the Fund for the Advancement of Education, an agency

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Vanderbilt Hustler}, October 22, 1954. The editors apparently sent copies of the editorial to Vanderbilt’s board members. One, Dan May, responded enthusiastically: "I read your editorial with much interest . . . I happen to be a member of the Board of both Vanderbilt and Fisk and to my way of thinking your diagnosis is excellent." \textit{Vanderbilt Hustler}, October 29, 1954.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Vanderbilt Hustler}, October 29, 1954. Two of the many campus discussions about segregation in the fall of 1954 were a talk given by Vanderbilt’s attorney, Cecil Sims, and a discussion sponsored by the Student Christian Association Senior Cabinet.

\textsuperscript{12} Minutes of the First Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Southern Education Reporting Service, May 11, 1954, Box 222, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
of the Ford Foundation. The grant, made to Peabody for a one-year period beginning in
July, 1954, paid for "the gathering and distributing of objective facts about developments
in education in the South as a result of Supreme Court action." These developments
would be reported in a regular publication, *Southern School News*, which was set to
release its first issue in September.\textsuperscript{13} The SERS board was filled with prominent
southern educators and journalists, mainly white but with a few blacks for "balance." The
black members came entirely from the class that the white elite considered "responsible
black leadership," that is, the junior partners in an elite biracial coalition. In addition to
Branscomb, board members included Henry Hill of Peabody College, Charles Johnson of
Fisk, and other prominent academics and editors like Virginius Dabney of the *Richmond
Times-Dispatch* and Coleman Harwell of the *Nashville Tennessean*.

The press release that announced the gift included a statement by Dabney that
explained the group's purpose. Above all, this statement displayed continued faith in elite
leadership and the firm belief that responsible white leaders would be the ones to see this
problem through to its eventual solution. Dabney also articulated the unshakeable
conviction—indeed, the reason for the publication—that providing "objective facts" to
decision makers was the key to navigating through the crisis. Accurate reports on how
others were handling the change would, in this theory, provide the basis for intelligent
choices everywhere in the South:

We are convinced that a major contribution can be made at this time to the
advancement of education and to the general public interest by an impartial
reporting service which provides accurate and unbiased information
concerning the adjustments which various communities in the southern
region make as a result of the Supreme Court's recent opinion and

\textsuperscript{13} SERS Press Release, July 29, 1954, Box 222, Chancellor's Office Papers, RG 300,
VUSC.
forthcoming decrees in the five cases involving segregation in the public schools.

We believe that the primary burden for making these adjustments rests with the school administrators and other leaders, both public and private, of each individual community . . .

The Southern Education Reporting Service has therefore been established with the aim of assisting responsible local and state leaders, and particularly school administrators, in developing practical and constructive solutions to their own particular school problems by supplying them with objective facts about the developments in other communities. 14

The collection of "objective facts" would become in the next several years almost an obsessive habit among board and faculty committees, as well as the SERS. While the actual "objectivity" of these "facts" should well be questioned, the real problem with this would prove to be even more troublesome. 15 Without a clear set of principles with which assess the importance of any particular "fact," policy making on the matter of race floundered. A barrage of reports and studies that identified issues and described the actions of others did nothing to help decide the right, fair, or even practical course to follow. The trustees ultimately lacked the will affirmatively to choose any alternative at all without first knowing how the political winds would blow. It was not at all clear that the federal government had the will to try seriously to enforce desegregation in the South, and even if it did it was not clear that southerners would allow it to happen. So, in spite of a busy cottage industry that collected "objective facts" for distribution to all interested decision makers, the real decision makers on the private campuses—the boards—sat

14 Ibíd.
15 In a letter to the chairman of the SERS in 1960, Tuskegee president and SERS board member L.H. Foster laid out fundamental criticisms of The Southern School News standards of objectivity. Starting with the refusal of the paper to include news from the black press, Foster went on the note the lack of "a clear and unwavering standard by which it reports and by which it can measure the objectivity of its reporting." Specifically, Foster complained that the fact that public school desegregation was the law
stock still and waited for something to push them one way or the other. Ironically, those who claimed to be the natural leaders of the region were utterly unable to provide the examples that they thought others throughout the region needed to guide their own way.

At Vanderbilt, Harvie Branscomb decided to stop pushing. While he seemed not at all upset personally about Brown, Branscomb’s understanding of the southern situation as unsettled, even deeply tumultuous, is seen in some correspondence with a friend from Alabama. James Simpson startled the chancellor with a note that anxiously raised the possibility of fraternities being forced to accept black members. Branscomb was at first somewhat skeptical, but recalling his recent shock at finding the Vanderbilt Army ROTC unit housed with black cadets at Fort Campbell and his amazement at the white boys’ lack of distress, he admitted that the problem of blacks in fraternal organizations “may hit me at any time.” Mulling over the possibilities, he rejected the notion that college administrators could dictate, as had already happened at a few northern schools, that segregated fraternities would not be allowed on campus. But logical as ever, Branscomb also acknowledged that if a fraternity elected “a colored brother, the university would have no right to interfere.” The slightest lack of certainty crept into his tone as he assessed the situation at Vanderbilt: “At present, unless our fraternities elect someone from Fisk, the problem could scarcely arise, but it would be a brave man today to say where and how this issue may not arise.”

Branscomb explained his thinking about the possibilities for change after Brown in a note to a friend from his days as a Rhodes scholar who was asking for news of the

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of the land was simply ignored by the Southern School News. L.H. Foster to Frank Ahlgren, March 22, 1960, Box 222, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.  
16 Branscomb to James A. Simpson, September 17, 1954, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
chancellor’s activities for an Oxford alumni newsletter. “The Supreme Court decision, “
wrote Branscomb, “is the chief topic of conversation in this part of the country. In the
long run, it will certainly accelerates [sic] a movement which has been proceeding very
rapidly in the last ten years in all sections of the South, but temporarily it has divided
southern people into two camps and made it extremely difficult to make any steps in the
matter of race relations for the time being.”

Branscomb believed that this hardening of positions in the wake of Brown made it harder to mediate successfully between people with differing opinions, skeptical trustees in particular. Yet, interestingly, he also believed the problem would be temporary. Branscomb never really stopped his behind-the-scenes maneuvering for racial change at Vanderbilt, although he did back away from the one opportunity to really press the issue in 1954.

Ironically, the particular issue that arose was one that Branscomb had been thinking about since before Brown—the desegregation of the law school. The absence of any legal training for blacks in Nashville meant that this program was clearly within the bounds he had outlined earlier for deciding where to open admissions to blacks. Further, the continuing pressure from the AALS had kept the matter in front of the university’s leadership for the last few years and the threat of loss of membership was real. With the successful enrollment of Reverend Joseph Johnson and another black student in the School of Religion, Branscomb was eager to admit black law students.

In November, the dean of the law school, John Wade, transmitted two versions of a memorandum to Branscomb, leaving it to the chancellor to decide which one to present

17 Branscomb to Charles R. Clason, July 16, 1954, Box 134, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
to the board. (Clearly, Wade and Branscomb had discussed the matter beforehand.)\(^{18}\) Branscomb apparently chose the longer of the two versions, which went to some lengths to lay out the reasoning behind the law faculty’s request for an end to racially restrictive admissions. This memo took the form of a letter to the chancellor from the dean, but Wade was explicit that the law school faculty had seen it and “unanimously agree[d] with the sentiments expressed.”\(^ {19}\) The letter presented a tightly written but wide-ranging argument for ending segregation in the law school. Truly a *tour de force*, Wade’s argument touched on morality and practicality, compulsion, outside interference, idealism, and the need to retain control of both the institution and the region in the hands of a properly educated elite. It was time now, though, for that elite to include blacks.

Dean Wade began the letter with an invocation of the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown* and a plea for respect for the law, claiming a special responsibility for legal educators. “It seems to us,” he argued, “that the Supreme Court decision should have peculiar significance for a law school. While the narrow holding applies only to state supported schools and not to a private institution like Vanderbilt, we who teach law and seek to instill a feeling of respect and reverence for the law, must be concerned not only with the strict letter of the law but with its true spirit.”\(^ {20}\)

Wade moved next to an appeal to one of Vanderbilt’s most cherished roles—the education of leaders. He wrote that the law school “has consistently regarded its goal as the training not of mere craftsmen in the law, but of real leaders in their community. We think it is well to teach our students by example to meet and to take a position on

\(^{18}\) Memorandum from John Wade to Branscomb, November 11, 1954, Box 237, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.

\(^{19}\) John Wade to Branscomb, November 11, 1954, Box 237, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
impelling moral issues once the bases for reaching a proper judgment have been
determined.” The dean did not hesitate to address the more practical aspects of this
concern as well. Citing the school’s exemplary record in supplying white leadership to
the South, he suggested that “Negroes in the South need leaders too, and will obtain them
from their own race” and that these leaders are likely to come from the ranks of the legal
profession. Wade followed this reasonable observation with a warning: “If these [black]
lawyers attend law school outside the Southern region where they live and practice, their
ideas and leadership may prove more extreme and less realistic than those which would
be produced by the more moderate and better balanced position which we should hope to
inculcate.”\(^{21}\)

Finally, Wade addressed the issue of the American Association of Law Schools’
stance towards segregation. In 1951 the AALS adopted a requirement that its member
institutions must provide “equality of opportunity in legal education without
discrimination or segregation on the ground of race or color.”\(^{22}\) Wade pointed out that
although the AALS had allowed a period of adjustment for non-complying schools to
prepare for change, that “grace period” was likely to end soon. Revealing the importance
to the faculty of keeping membership in the Association, the dean was clear about what
must be done. “It will thus be necessary,” he stated as though no other conclusion were
possible, “for action to be taken sometime soon if we are to retain our accredited status.”


\(^{21}\) *Ibid.* This argument about Vanderbilt’s role in producing lawyers who would become
regional leaders is also found in Branscomb’s 1972 autobiography, *Purely Academic.* He
used it successfully to obtain grants from Northern philanthropists for the improvement of
the law school.

\(^{22}\) Association of American Law Schools, *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting,* December
1951. The AALS proceedings are rather remarkable, and include verbatim transcripts of
floor debate.
Perhaps to make this more palatable to the board, Wade focused on the fact that there was still time to accomplish the change before the compulsion would be obvious. This “action will be far more gracious,” he calmly explained, “if it is taken while it is still voluntary than if it is taken later when it is forced upon us.” Vanderbilt might actually get something in return as well, he argued, if they would just go ahead and act now: “Voluntary action may inure to the credit of the School in many circles of importance and may add to the prestige of the School in the Nation as a whole.” Stressing finally the matter of internal control of the process, Wade ended with this: Voluntary desegregation “affords the opportunity of controlling more completely the details involved in the selection and admission of students.”

Wade stressed the unanimity of the law faculty in all these opinions. This group was certainly motivated by several things. First, the acceptance and approval of the national legal community was important to them. Loss of AALS accreditation would harm the reputation of the school mainly in academic circles; the state bar associations had more to say about whose graduates could practice law. It was the professors, then, rather than the students who would be most hurt by AALS sanctions, embarassed in front of their peers.

The law students, though, also supported the change. An informal poll conducted by the law school newspaper, *Dicta*, found that fifty-three percent favored opening admissions to qualified blacks and sixty-three percent would not object to such enrollment. Wade saw in this acceptance evidence that the transition to a desegregated

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23 John Wade to Branscomb, November 11, 1954, Box 237, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
24 Wade reported the results of this poll in both his letter to Branscomb and in the transmittal memo that accompanied it. Privately, he was disappointed in the results and believed that it would be possible to change many of the “no” votes with an explanation of the reasons for the change.
student body would be a smooth one, a conclusion bolstered by the experience of other southern law schools that had recently integrated. He admitted that some prospective students would not come to Vanderbilt if admissions were opened to blacks but predicted that the number would be small. He also predicted that the number of black students who enrolled would likewise be small, as Vanderbilt’s “high standards, both for prelegal work and for work in the Law School, would be likely to keep the number of eligible applicants low.”

Branscomb, though, in contrast to years past, was reluctant at this time to press the issue with the trustees, who in any case were not prepared to be pressed at this time. He submitted Wade’s memo at their fall meeting but made no general statement about the course of desegregation in the region and did not ask for any specific action on the Law School’s request. Rather, he mentioned the memo in an uncharacteristically tentative way, reflecting his apprehension about trustee opinion after Brown. Branscomb offered only a brief statement that focused not on race, but on the freedom of the faculty to communicate with the board:

The Chancellor stated that several days before the meeting of the Board of Trust he was asked whether the School of Law could present a memorandum to the Board concerning the admission of qualified negro students to that School, and he had replied that any faculty of the University could at any time present any communication to the Board which it wished. He stated that the School of Law was not endeavoring to determine this issue, but only to advise the Board of Trust, the responsible body, of their views on this matter.

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25 John Wade to Branscomb, November 11, 1954, Box 237, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.  
26 Branscomb to David Cavers, February 21, 1955, Box 237, RG 300, Chancellor’s Office Papers, VUSC. Cavers was a Harvard professor, and head of the AALS Committee on Racial Discrimination in Legal Education in 1955. Branscomb told him that “I think I would have succeeded in opening the Law School to Negro students… last fall except for the complications of the Supreme Court ruling… I presented to the Board a memorandum which Dean Wade and I had worked up on the subject, but they would hardly listen to it.”
He asked what disposition the Board wished to make of this document, and it was moved, seconded and carried that it be received and filed. 27

It seems likely that the chancellor intended this approach as a way to gauge the board’s mood without pushing too hard and risking a defeat. Too, it was a way to let them know that they would soon have to face this problem, even if it could be postponed for a while. Despite this retreat and the tone of Branscomb’s remarks in his correspondence, he remained committed to moving Vanderbilt slowly away from racial restrictions. This position, in fact, bore fruit in 1954, when the first black student admitted to the School of Religion, Rev. Joseph Johnson, Jr., received his B.D. degree at the end of the summer session. 28 (The religion school admitted new black students as well, although the partial nature of the changes at Vanderbilt did require some creativity.) 29 The tension that followed the announcement of Brown led to a pause in Branscomb’s efforts, but he would not wait very long to make more changes.

II.

In Georgia the Brown decision hit like a bombshell. Southern School News summed up the situation as follows:

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27 Meeting of the Board of Trust, November 12, 1954, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
28 Dean John Benton to Rev. Joseph Johnson, April 1, 1954, Box 159, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
29 In a letter to one of these students, admitted as a “special student,” Religion dean Jack Benton explained the complexities of the situation. “As you have already learned from others, Vanderbilt is in a transitional period in regard to the admission of Negro students. The School of Religion is authorized to admit students without regard to race or color. But, at present, Negro students may not be accepted into any other division of the University or in the Graduate School. Since you already have your B.D. degree, the most natural thing for you would be – if it were possible – for you to register in the Graduate School. Since this is not possible and since you would not be a candidate for the B.D. degree here, you can be accepted only as a Special Student in the School of Religion.”
Anticipation of an eventual U.S. Supreme Court decision on segregation in the public schools and the knowledge that the ruling would have great impact on the state had laid close to the hearts and minds of all Georgians, white and colored, for several years.

But when the high court decision was announced on May 17, it found all of Georgia’s important state government officials and a great number of Georgia’s white citizens totally unprepared to accept or to follow the Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in the public schools.\textsuperscript{30}

Georgia’s Governor Herman Talmadge had been working to maintain segregation for years in the face of the legal onslaught against it. He based his strategy on “equalization,” believing that racial separation could be preserved by actually providing “separate but equal” schools. In 1951 Georgia implemented a retail sales tax whose proceeds were used to increase teacher salaries, reduce the pay gap between white and black teachers, and provide other benefits to black schools. In 1952 a State School Building Authority helped raise money for school construction.\textsuperscript{31} By 1953 the Georgia legislature began taking action to support the state’s constitutional ban on financing integrated education, setting up a Commission on Education to plan for public schooling “consistent with the state constitution” and passing a proposed constitutional amendment that would allow the state to discharge its educational responsibilities through grants to individual students. This

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Benton also expressed his willingness to help Harwell in any way possible. Benton to Dwight W. Harwell, July 28, 1954, Box 159, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Southern School News}, September 3, 1954.

\textsuperscript{31} In this effort Talmadge either did not understand or chose to ignore the clear implications of \textit{Sweatt v. Painter}, 339 US 634, and \textit{McLaurin v. Board of Regents}, 339 US 637, both decided on June 5, 1950. In ordering the admission of Sweatt to the University of Texas School of Law and the equal treatment of McLaurin on the University of Oklahoma campus the Supreme Court focused on intangibles such as the reputation of faculty, position of alumni, and the general prestige of the school. Under this standard, merely raising black teachers salaries and getting rid of the worst black school buildings could not make black schools “equal” to those attended by Georgia’s white children. Although Roy V. Harris, a Talmadge ally and a long-time power broker in Georgia politics, admitted that the “separate but equal” standard was not long for the world, the day after these decisions were announced Governor Talmadge indicated his
"private school plan" was controversial. Many Georgians, concerned about the quality of their children's education, strongly opposed it. Many others, more concerned about race mixing, supported it.  

The November 1954 election would determine the fate of the proposed amendment. Also at stake that fall was the governor's seat. The September Democratic primary, the real election, was hotly contested, and segregation was the most important issue; the announcement of the Brown decision "built a fire under an already hot Georgia gubernatorial campaign." Nine candidates declared, with only one advocating compliance with the Supreme Court decision. The other eight offered different plans to evade the law and kept the issue at a boil throughout the summer and fall. The eventual winner was Lieutenant Governor Marvin Griffin, a member of the Talmadge faction who ran on a platform of preserving both segregation and the county unit system that kept power in the hands of a rural elite, and whose mandate to do so was strengthened by the easy passage of Talmadge's "private school plan."  

As ever, control of Georgia depended on control of the rural base along with the cooperation of Atlanta's business community. But as the issue of race relations came to supersede all else after Brown, the interests of those two groups began to diverge. In the traditional, rural agricultural counties, any tampering with segregation remained unyielding opposition: "As long as I am Governor, Negroes will not be admitted to white schools." New York Times, June 6, 1950.

33 Mrs. Grace Wilkey Thomas, who argued that Georgia should accept the Supreme Court ruling gracefully, finished last. New York Times, September 9, 1954.
34 Bartley, Massive Resistance, 68-72. Georgia's factional politics were inordinately complex in 1954, with three Talmadge allies as well as several anti-Talmadgites in the gubernatorial race and Talmadge himself unwilling to name his choice for the governor's seat. See Joseph L. Bernd, Grass Roots Politics in Georgia: The County Unit System and
anathema and it took no great effort to whip the white people of these counties into a near frenzy over the possibility of integrated public schools. Atlanta, though, was a different story. The city was more and more dominated by large corporations and had become the largest transportation hub in the South. Atlanta was also home to prominent black colleges, powerful black churches, and their influential leaders. The city’s large black population had a small but real voice in the city’s politics. Relatively smooth race relations prevailed, the product of cooperation between black and white leaders. This cooperation was prompted largely by a shared concern about maintaining a stable environment for business. Thriving Atlanta was led by aggressive entrepreneurs like Coca-Cola’s Robert Woodruff, who cared deeply about continued economic growth and building a national reputation for the city. These things depended on the existence of a good racial climate, which made investment in the area attractive and made Atlanta seem like a good place for executives and employees to live. Whatever their private opinions about blacks, Atlanta’s leaders valued calm more than strict segregation and national influence more than the esteem of south Georgia crackers.

35 The Importance of the Individual Voting Community in Bifactional Elections, 1942–1954 (Atlanta, 1960) for a sophisticated and detailed analysis of Georgia politics in this period. There was a significant black vote in the city, easily large enough to influence local politics. See Donald R. Matthews and James W. Prothro, “Negro Voter Registration in the South” in Allen P. Sindicator, ed., Change in the Contemporary South (Durham, 1963), 119–49; Margaret Price, The Negro Voter in the South (Atlanta, 1960), 1–5. This influence was largely exercised behind the scenes, negotiated privately by leaders of the black community. See Clarence Stone, Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946–1988 (Lawrence, Kansas, 1989), 46–50, 52–55. In 1953, however, Atlanta University President Rufus Clement was elected to a seat on the city’s school board, carrying forty of fifty-eight precincts.

36 Bartley, Massive Resistance, 22–24 discusses the position of what he calls “business conservatives,” urban businessmen who were the major spokesmen for the South’s cities. In Inside Agitators, David Chappell analyzes in detail the ideology of the southern civic-commercial elite and their economic motivations for acting as peacemakers in the civil rights battles of the 1960s. For a specific and cogent discussion of the Atlanta business
This pattern was nowhere more visible than at Atlanta’s most prestigious university. Emory shared with its community the desire for the approval, the embrace really, of the rest of the nation. By 1954 it had made impressive strides in improving the quality of instruction, especially in the critically important graduate school. Emory was still hampered by chronic financial problems, but in April the university received a check for $2 million from the General Education Board, the first payment on a conditional grant of $7 million for the improvement of the graduate program. The year before Emory had begun participating, along with Duke, Vanderbilt, Tulane, and UNC, in a program sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching which provided funds to increase salaries of outstanding professors working in the graduate school and to increase stipends for promising graduate students. Together, these two grants did much to raise the morale and help develop the reputation of the graduate school at Emory.

The enhanced ability to attract and retain prominent professors in an increasingly national job market was not without social side effects. Faculty came to Emory in ever greater numbers from outside the South. Although these faculty members were of primary importance in Emory’s struggle to meet the standards of the broader academic community, they brought northern habits of mind along with their research and teaching skills. By 1954 some Emory professors interacted regularly on an informal basis with the

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37 Report of the President to the Board of Trustees, October 26, 1954, EUA. This grant came with significant matching requirements, which would lead to significant and surprisingly wide-ranging difficulties in the near future.

38 Report of the Dean of the Graduate School, October, 1954, EUA. At Emory, the Carnegie grant allowed the school to retain several prominent faculty members who were being wooed by northeastern schools and helped support several dozen superior graduate students. The other schools reported similar results.
faculties of Atlanta's black colleges. 39 Emory faculty also analyzed the issues that surrounded desegregation more rigorously than the administrators, at least in public forums. One example of this was a symposium on segregation published in the Law School's *Journal of Public Policy*. This was the first really scholarly discussion of the legal, social, economic, and educational questions that were raised by the *Brown* decision and appeared in the spring of 1954, having been in preparation since 1952. Here, professors from several disciplines, many of them from Emory, prodded on a deeper level: "What is the South? What is equality in a democracy? What will it cost to end segregation in schools? What are the problems on the level of the local school boards? What are the social issues involved? The economic issues? The personal issues?" 40 This kind of searching attention to the problems of segregation on the part of faculty would only increase in the future as overt racial discrimination came to be both rare in higher education and ever more important in Georgia's politics.

Emory students were also outspoken in their reactions. Classes were still in session when the *Brown* decision was announced, and the student newspaper quickly moved to make its views known and open debate. The May 20 edition of the *Wheel* devoted nearly the entire editorial page to discussion of the Supreme Court action. "The Court Has Ruled," said the headline, and the editors had strong feelings about the ruling. They accepted that change was inevitable and recognized that segregation was, in effect, finished. They hoped that graceful, if gradual, integration would be possible. But while

39 Most of this interaction seems to have been in relatively small group settings. Examples abound of Morehouse and Atlanta University professors speaking on various race-related topics at Emory. For example, Hyland Lewis, professor of sociology at Atlanta University spoke to the Emory Sociology Club in 1950 on "The Adjustment of the American Negro to White Society." *Emory Wheel*, October 5, 1950.

segregation was clearly “on the rocks,” the manner of its demise was still undecided. Here, the students stressed the danger inherent in the decision, echoing the objections that had long been standard fare for elite white southerners who objected to northern interference in southern race relations. “While progressives are congratulating themselves,” they warned, “Southern demagogues will exploit the situation to the fullest, particularly in the rural areas. Truthfully, little exploitation will be needed. In many parts of the South opinion of the Negro has remained the same since the Civil War.”41 Another article contained man-on-the-street polling of students and faculty. The faculty members and administrators who were interviewed seemed to be of a single mind on the issue. All stressed the rightness of the decision, its “inevitability.” But at the same time, most focused on the need for more time to work things out. Political Science professor Ronald Howell pointed out that because there was no active case before the courts involving Georgia, “there is thus time enough for wise planning directed necessarily towards obedience to the high court’s decision. All will not change overnight.” Floyd Watkins of the English Department was in general agreement: “A large number of years will be needed to put the system into effect. There may be violence in some rural communities.” Not surprisingly, student opinion was divided, with most (apart from a single theology student) expressing some degree of skepticism. There is little evidence to suggest that the new visibility of segregation as an issue among students was anything more than a tempest in a teapot, however. While the growing, but still small, advocacy of dropping the admissions restrictions that kept black students out of Emory had spread beyond the School of Theology and could not have passed unnoticed by the administration and even trustees, there was no reason to believe that it mattered very much. The general apathy of

41 Emory Wheel, May 20, 1954.
Emory students towards political matters, even segregation, was apparent in their failure to turn out for a debate about the best way to preserve segregation. Held in Emory’s Glenn Memorial Auditorium between four of the gubernatorial candidates, the debate was the only time the fall’s political campaign came directly onto campus. “On the whole,” reported the Wheel, “the Emory student body was conspicuous by its absence. The most liberal estimate of the ‘crowd’ was 150, with most of it being made up of outsiders and faculty members.”42 The feelings of most Emory students about the furor over Brown were probably best expressed by Sam Clark, “college senior and man-about-the-Library-steps,” who asked “What effect will the decision have on the Kappa Alpha fraternity?”43

The public reaction of the university’s administration to Brown was limited and muted. In a speech to Emory’s Phi Beta Kappa chapter on May 21, Goodrich White shared his thoughts on the last twenty-five years in higher education. He identified the “beginnings of a break-down of racial segregation” as one of the major trends of those years. White did not engage in any detailed discussion of racial change yet made it clear that he believed the issue would not go away and that it had become in the last several years part of the broad mix of social, political, and economic changes that would demand adaptation from higher education in the future.44

Apart from President White’s brief remarks, there is little evidence of any consideration of the matter at all, let alone any serious consideration of what Emory

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid. Ironically, the only blacks who ever appear in the student papers at these universities during the 1940s and 50s (aside from the occasional story about the retirement of an aged and beloved black custodian) are black entertainers hired to perform at fraternity functions.
44 Phi Beta Kappa Address, May 21, 1954, Box 26, White Papers, EUA.
ought to do about it. In his October report to the board of trustees, Goodrich White made no mention at all of segregation or of the Brown decision. The issue was discussed only briefly at the inaugural meeting of the "Committee of One Hundred," a group of Methodist lay persons, headed by Emory trustee (later chairman of the board) Henry Bowden, which was organized by the university for fundraising and development purposes. This group included Goodrich White, Emory trustees James V. Carmichael and Bishop Arthur J. Moore, and many prominent Emory alumni. In a wide-ranging exchange of views about the university's goals and prospects, someone raised the matter of black enrollment. The notes on the meeting are terse but revealing: "Discussion of Emory's position on admission of Negroes developed the normal objections, as well as the further fact that under the laws of Georgia admission of Negroes would cause the University to lose its tax-free status, which would have a ruinous effect financially."

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45 Report of the President to the Board of Trustees, October 26, 1954, EUA. None of the reports of the other administrative officers mention race at all either.
46 Notes on Meeting of Committee of One Hundred at Emory University, on November 10, 1954, Box 14, Arthur J. Moore Papers, EUA. Bishop Moore was a dedicated Methodist missionary who seemed to be personally committed to bettering the condition of all people who suffered, including southern blacks. Moore's framework for doing this, though, was a cautious one. Fearful of the possible consequences of Brown, he often counseled caution in matters of race relations. This may or may not have been reasonable. In June of 1954, for example, Moore responded to a Methodist colleague in Chicago who had written about the possibility of organizing a conference in Atlanta on "the next step in race relations." "Frankness compels me to say," he replied, "that I think good would certainly come to those who participate in such a meeting, but if it is to be held in Atlanta I doubt the wisdom of too much newspaper publicity. We are struggling with a very explosive situation down here and our people are seriously divided. I am doing my best to maintain a positive, progressive Christian position, but I am also struggling to keep myself so I can have effective ministry to all the Methodists of Georgia." Moore to Dudley A. Ward, June 21, 1954, Box 20, Moore Papers, EUA. Bishop Moore expressed the same concern—that responsible leaders must not outrun the people—in correspondence with Professor Claude Thompson of Emory's School of Theology. Thompson complained, very gently and with all due deference, that a Methodist Planning Conference that met in the fall had banned any discussion of issues likely to produce "discord," that is, segregation. Thompson, a strong proponent of black admissions to
Thus the record is nearly silent, and there is little to suggest that Emory’s leadership felt much pressure about ending segregation on campus. Given the political and social climate, though, this could not be strictly true. The best evidence of the thinking of the university’s leadership at this time is probably the editorial penned by Emory Alumnus editor Randy Fort that led the October issue of that magazine. While Fort certainly had an independent streak and was given a fairly free hand in producing the Alumnus, there is every reason to believe that this restrained piece of writing on such a sensitive issue was discussed with the administration and approved before publication. The editorial suggests something of the quandry that the school was actually in. It weaves back and forth between facts that seem to mean that Emory will have to change and facts that seem to indicate that it won’t, while providing no principled basis for deciding which sets of facts ought to prevail. While Fort’s stated goal was neutrality, the overriding impression that the piece gives is of hazy uncertainty and paralysis of will.

“What’s Emory going to do?” Fort began. “This question had been asked over and over again by Emory alumni—and, for that matter, by faculty members, students, and other friends of the University—since the U.S. Supreme Court’s May 17 decisions on segregation in the public schools.” Fort claimed to take no position on the segregation

Emory and of desegregation in general, was “grieved” by the lack of leadership. “Can we not as Methodist ministers,” Thompson pleaded, “give a needed leadership to our people of Georgia, occupying such a crucial position in America, a leadership declaring a clear and fearless word from the modern prophets of the Lord.” Moore corrected Thompson, who had not attended the meeting, pointing out that no such censorship had taken place and that he had in fact brought Emory theology professor Leroy Loemker to the gathering specifically to address the “church’s responsibility in this racial matter.” He concluded with a plaintive observation that remains true to this day. “I am seeking, with what little courage and insight I possess to give our church in Georgia progressive and wise leadership,” Moore demurred. “I know that my motives are good, but I have to leave my methods to be either approved or criticized by good men like yourself.” Claude
question and to have no special insight into the university’s plans. “Let us say immediately,” he averred, “that we haven’t the remotest idea what Emory is going to do, or whether it is going to do anything.” Rather, he cast himself as a neutral party, dispensing “points of information” to readers who were lacking critical facts. Ever since May 17, he claimed, “practically every leader in the State of Georgia has been admonishing everyone else to approach the H-bomb of segregation calmly and coolly. We shall here take this excellent advice and do our utmost to tackle the question in a calm, cool, and reportorial manner.”  

Fort’s tone throughout was indeed calm, even reassuring, as he outlined five “points of information.” Many of the facts that he related, however, led unmistakably, if subtly, in the direction of change. First, he noted comfortably that the Brown decision did not require Emory, a private school, to do anything at all. This reassurance was immediately offset, though, by the statement of a single hard fact: “At the same time, as much as many among us might wishfully think it, the problem isn’t going to just go away and leave us alone. It must be faced sooner or later, and since May 17 it has looked like sooner.” Fort then went through the roster of formerly segregated schools that had already come to terms with the issue. Eighty-two in all, including substantially more private than public institutions of higher learning, had opened their doors to black applicants in the last several years.  

When Emory finally faced the issue squarely, Fort seemed to imply, the resolution was foreordained.

Thompson to Moore, October 3, 1954; Moore to Thompson, November 4, 1954, Box 20, Arthur J. Moore Papers, EUA.


48 Ibid. The numbers cited by Fort are 49 private schools and 33 public ones. Eight were in the District of Columbia, 19 in the border states (Maryland, Oklahoma, Missouri, and
Fort’s second point was one that seemed, again, designed to soothe fears. It was one about authority. “The president and other administrative officers of the university, the faculties of the University, the students, the alumni—any of these can recommend courses of action or express their opinions, individually or collectively,” he stated, “But the trustees make the decisions.” Those Emory trustees, Fort pointed out, were all “Southerners by birth or rearing, and in almost every case by both.” Of the thirty one current trustees, twenty five were alumni of the University.49

In the third “point of information” Fort returned to facts that muddied the waters. He described here the provisions of Emory’s charter and by-laws that relate to the purposes and beneficiaries of the institutions. These documents make no reference at all to race, stating simply that the sole purpose of the University is “to give, promote, and extend under Christian influence and under the auspices of said Methodist Episcopal Church, South, instruction and education in theology, and in the arts, sciences, and professions, and to encourage and promote research and study in all the branches of learning.”

The editor’s fourth point concerned Georgia’s segregation laws. The critical legal matter for Emory was its status as a tax-exempt institution. This status was granted by a state law that that allowed such exemption only as long as schools that had been “established for white people” remained for the exclusive use of white people (and conversely, that schools founded to educate blacks, or “colored people,” as the Georgia

West Virginia), 7 in Arkansas, 1 in Georgia, 12 in Kentucky, 6 in Louisiana, 3 in North Carolina, 1 in South Carolina, 5 in Tennessee, 14 in Texas, and 6 in Virginia. Only three southern states had no institutions that were integrated in 1954: Florida, Mississippi, and Alabama. Fort pointed out that many of the desegregated schools were small private colleges and theological seminaries. Although he did not mention it, the larger public universities had almost all desegregated under court order.

49 Emory’s board had 33 members at full strength, but at the time this editorial was written there were two vacancies.
code had it, continued to educate only blacks.) The law was unequivocal: the issue now was whether the May 17 Supreme Court decision meant that the law was unconstitutional. If not, disobedience would have catastrophic results. The best estimates put Emory’s potential tax bill at between $2 million and $2.5 million, about half of the university’s annual budget. According to Fort, the consensus of Emory’s attorneys was that the law was unconstitutional but that a test case would have to be mounted before blacks could be admitted without running the grave risk of loss of tax exemption. Fort included in this section another troubling piece of information. The Georgia code did not refer to “negroes” but rather to “colored people,” and by the code’s own definition “colored people” included not only blacks, “mulattoes,” and “mestizos,” but also all Asians and natives of India. He noted accurately that “probably every white institution of higher learning in the state, public and private, for decades has been admitting Japanese or Chinese or Asiatic Indians or all three.”

Finally, the Alumnus editor concluded with a statement about the relationship between Emory and the Methodist Church, and a discussion of that church’s evolving position on segregation. Emory’s bylaws were clear—Emory “belongs to the Methodist Church.” The church had the right to approve the appointment of all trustees and the right to “direct” the administration of the university. The most recent Discipline of the

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50 This was equally true of the other four schools studied here, all of which admitted students of nearly every hue as long as they were from other countries (except black Africans). These admissions were not always without problems. For example, in 1954 the Rice mathematics department made arrangements for a student from Lucknow, India who was doing work towards a degree from the University of Paris to work as a special student with one of its faculty members. While waiving his fees, the Committee on Graduate Instruction also wanted it made clear that “every effort should be made to eliminate situations arising from his color.” Minutes, Committee on Graduate Instruction, September 28, 1954, Box 1, Rice University Graduate Council Papers, WRC.
*Methodist Church*, published in 1952, spoke directly to the matter of racial segregation in Methodist institutions:

Ours is a world church. As such its responsibility is to unite in one fellowship men and women of all races and nations. As Christians we confess ourselves to be children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. This being true, there is no place in the Methodist Church for racial discrimination or racial segregation. . . we propose that the church seek to free itself utterly from racial discrimination and segregation.

Fort concluded with his earlier warning: "this is not a problem which will just fade away and leave us, for too many publics—too many institutions, organizations, and individuals—are interestedly watching and asking questions." These troubling questions, it seems, were ones for which Emory simply had no answers in 1954.

III

At Tulane, it seemed in early 1954 that the Board of Administrators might begin the kind of incremental change in racial policy that had already taken place at Vanderbilt. New Orleans, like Nashville, had significant educational opportunities for black students, although Dillard and Xavier did not enjoy the same reputation as Fisk and there was no medical school for blacks in the city. Still, the potential for the kind of limited relaxation of segregation that allowed blacks to enter selected graduate programs at Vanderbilt certainly existed at Tulane. In particular, the university's School of Social Work seemed a likely place to begin. Area blacks submitted applications for admission to Tulane with regularity during the early 1950s, most to the graduate school, and their numbers seemed to increase by the middle of the decade. All of these applications were seen by President

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51 *Emory Alumnus*, October, 1954.
52 In 1954 Tulane received a particularly troubling application. When registration was held for the second term of summer school, Graduate Dean Robert Lumiansky was
Harris, and most if not all were also seen by board chairman Joseph Jones. Each application was answered with the same basic letter, which carefully explained why it could not be considered and yet managed to convey a seemingly sympathy.\textsuperscript{53} On Monday, April 12, about 100 of the 155-member graduate school faculty attended a regular meeting to discuss the microfilming of doctoral dissertations, summer school, language requirements, and the machinery of the new Graduate Council. Finally, the last order of business was introduced by Professor James Feibleman, chairman of the philosophy department, who requested that “full discussion be given to the problem of admission of Negroes to the Graduate School.”\textsuperscript{54} Although there was a good deal of discussion, there was apparently not much in the way of disagreement. All or nearly all of the comments were “favorable to the admission of colored students.” In the end, Dean Fred Cole made a brief motion: “In view of the great need of all Southerners for opportunities to receive specialized training, the Faculty of the Graduate School recommends that steps be taken to clarify the policy of admission to the Graduate School in order that admission of Negroes might be facilitated.” This motion passed with little dissent.\textsuperscript{55} In later interviews with New Orleans newspapers a spokesman for the faculty revealed the reasoning behind the resolution, reasoning that was very similar to Harvie Branscomb’s at Vanderbilt. The unnamed spokesman cited concern over the lack of

\textsuperscript{53} Applications and correspondence are in Longenecker Papers, Box 99, TUA. The applicants were officially addressed by Director of Admissions Clifford Wing, who expressed, in a meticulously drafted letter, “sympathetic understanding of your desire to secure higher education.”

\textsuperscript{54} Minutes of the Graduate School Faculty, April 12, 1954, Box 28, Harris Papers, TUA.
adequate graduate and professional education for blacks in the area, carefully noting that there was no such difficulty with undergraduate training because of the presence of Dillard and Xavier.56

The graduate faculty gave copies of the resolution to Harris and the editors of the student newspaper, the *Hullabaloo.*57 The students wrote a long editorial that urged support for the desegregation of Tulane’s graduate school. “Negro students should be admitted to Tulane,” the editors succinctly stated. “They should be admitted freely and graciously, as early as possible, before the air is tensed by a Supreme Court order demanding that the color line be dropped.”58 Noting the already significant numbers of black students attending previously all-white graduate and professional schools in the South (in seventeen states that required educational facilities to be segregated over a thousand blacks attended classes with whites), the Tulane newspaper asserted that “the walls are definitely tumbling down. Some places they are being pounded down. Other places the builders are carefully taking them down. We should do that at Tulane and set the pace for the Deep South.”59

57 Dean Cole gave the statement to the editors, reasoning that on a small campus it would leak out anyway.
58 *Tulane Hullabaloo*, May 7, 1954.
59 *Ibid.* The statistics were taken from a *New York Times* survey of southern higher education. The editors noted that schools that had begun admitting blacks included Loyola, mere yards away from the Tulane campus. Blacks had actually been admitted to Loyola as early as 1951. See John Robert Payne, “A Jesuit Search for Social Justice: The Public Career of Louis J. Twomey, S.J., 1947-1969” (Ph.d. diss., University of Texas, 1976) for a chronicle of Loyola’s struggle with racial issues during this period. Tulane’s response to the changes at Loyola was strained. Of particular concern was Loyola’s acceptance of the American Association of Law Schools’ stance requiring the elimination of discrimination in legal education. Elsewhere in Louisiana, the graduate schools at LSU had been ordered to desegregate in 1950 and in the summer of 1954 there were 230 blacks enrolled there. During the regular term their numbers were smaller, but still nearly
The *Hullabaloo* statement and the graduate faculty’s recommendation were picked up by the New Orleans press. Both the *Times-Picayune* and the *Item* ran stories on the faculty vote and the student editorial. As publicity quickly began to expand beyond the city, board chairman Joseph Jones released a statement. Jones stressed that Tulane’s racially restricted admissions policy was already under consideration, in fact had been for some time, and that the faculty resolution did not change anything.

Rufus Harris apparently had been unaware of any movement within the graduate faculty formally to request desegregation. The minutes of the May 20 meeting of the dean’s council meeting make his displeasure clear: “[President Harris] felt it would have been helpful if this matter had been discussed with him prior to the faculty action. In the future he requests that such a course be constantly observed.” Harris’s discussion of the general matter of desegregating the graduate school echoed Jones’s statement to the press. He informed the deans that “the Administrators had been giving careful consideration to the matter of the enrollment of Negro students to graduate study long before the recent resolution pertaining to this was presented by the graduate faculty.” He also asserted that “a committee of the Board had already been appointed and a meeting date set to consider the legal aspects of the matter before getting to other considerations.”

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60 had been enrolled in the spring semester of 1954. *Southern School News*, September 1954.
61 Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, May 12, 1954, TUA. Jones had been contacted by reporters from the national press and the board apparently felt that some statement was needed to bring things under control.
62 Dean’s Council Minutes, May 20, 1954, Box 1, Harris Papers, TUA. The graduate faculty did not take Harris’s advice to heart and would cause him further displeasure when they made statements on racial matters in the future.
While it is certainly true that the subject had come up before, it had been a year since Marie Louise Snellings had submitted her report on the legal issues surrounding desegregation at Tulane. The board had taken no action regarding that report and there is no record of any further deliberations on the matter. It seems rather unlikely, then, that the meeting of the board’s Legal Committee to discuss desegregation of the graduate school a month after the faculty resolution and a week after the *Hullabaloo* editorial, had nothing to do with these events. In any case, on May 13 the committee met in the offices of its chairman, J. Blanc Monroe, to discuss the admission of black graduate students. This discussion turned entirely on the legal ambiguities contained in the university’s founding documents. The 1882 charter included a letter from Paul Tulane reserving the income from his donations for “the promotion and encouragement of intellectual, moral, and industrial education among the white young persons in the city of New Orleans, State of Louisiana ...” The committee noted, though, that the actual instrument of donation (which did not technically include the letter) did not use racially restrictive language at all, and furthermore made clear that the board of administrators had the authority to acquire income from other sources and to use it on whatever terms its donors requested. This was, in fact, exactly what happened in 1884 when the Louisiana legislature gave the Tulane board the property that had previously belonged to the University of Louisiana. On May 13, the Law Committee unanimously agreed that the school’s charter contained no language that would prevent them from educating blacks at Tulane. In the wake of this meeting Joseph Jones prepared a statement and seemed

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47 Administrator J. Blanc Monroe prepared a memorandum that summarizes the discussion of the Law Committee meeting of May 13, 1954, Box 99, Longenecker Papers, TUA.
ready to take action that would allow the admission of qualified blacks to graduate study at the university.  

Unanimous agreement that this course was legally possible, however, did not amount to agreement that it ought to be followed. There were other pressing considerations, not least of which was the Supreme Court decision that was announced four days after the Law Committee meeting. Reaction to Brown in Louisiana was swift and belligerent. The tone of segregationist rhetoric was immediately harsh and remained so, escalating at times in the next several years to a fever-pitch of hysteria and hatred. To contradict in the smallest degree the bitter-end posturings of Louisiana politicians was to risk financial, social, and career suicide. Although the governor, Robert Kennon, seemed inclined to accept the decision, the state legislature was another matter. Led by state Senator William M. Rainach, within three days of the announcement of Brown both the Louisiana House and Senate passed resolutions by overwhelming margins that censured the Supreme Court for "usurpation of power." Within a month, three bills intended to thwart the decision had passed and a new Joint Legislative Committee to Maintain Segregation, with Rainach at its head, had been formed to plan strategy for the fight.  

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66 No copy of this statement survives, but Jones mentioned it at the next meeting of the full board. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, June 9, 1954, TUA.  
67 Kennon, a former judge, was elected in 1952 as a major player in the anti-Long faction and an ally of Republican presidential candidate Eisenhower. Kennon was certainly a segregationist, but saw no realistic possibility of winning a war with the federal government over the matter. Earl Black, Southern Governors and Civil Rights: Racial Segregation as a Campaign Issue in the Second Reconstruction (Cambridge, MA, 1976), 44; Bartley, Massive Resistance, 51; Fairclough, Race & Democracy, 170-71.  
68 Southern School News, September, 1954. With this committee as his platform, Rainach would dominate Louisiana politics for the next several years, refusing to allow any deviation from ultra-segregationist positions in the legislature and effectively killing any public support that might have existed for peaceful compliance with Brown.
holds would be barred in their efforts to beat back the twin menaces of federal intervention and racial amalgamation.

In short, the environment in Louisiana after mid-May was far from hospitable to any movement towards voluntary desegregation, whether or not it was gradual. Given this situation it is probably not surprising that Tulane’s board of administrators soon began to waffle on the issue of admitting blacks to graduate school. Like the legislature, it took them less than a week to react to *Brown*. Marie Louise Snellings, Harris’s closest ally on the board, wrote him on the very day of the decision to express her growing doubts about the wisdom of changing the traditional policy.\(^{69}\) The response of Louisianans to the publicity about the graduate faculty’s resolution and the editorial in the *Hullabaloo* could not have helped. By the time of the June 9 board meeting Harris had received seven letters, of widely varying degrees of literacy, expressing disapproval of black admissions to Tulane. The president was distressed that none “made the distinction that consideration was being given to admission of Negroes to graduate work only, but the idea seemed to be that Negroes would be admitted to any department, including Newcomb College [the women’s college].”\(^{70}\) In the reply Harris drafted to handle these complaints, he carefully explained this point. That it mattered to his correspondents hardly seems likely. In the weeks and years that followed the *Brown* decision, most whites in Louisiana were in no mood to split hairs. The point of segregation was to keep all blacks out. The suggestion that it was acceptable to destroy segregation slowly, beginning with blacks who already had more education than most whites in the state, had no chance of succeeding.

\(^{69}\) Marie Louise Snellings to Harris, May 17, 1954, Snellings Correspondence File, Harris Papers, TUA.

\(^{70}\) President’s Report to the Board, June 9, 1954, TUA.
Little evidence remains to shed light on President Harris’s thoughts during this critical time. Clearly, he desperately wanted the admissions policy changed and no doubt he worked carefully behind the scenes to bring this about. Responding to Marie Louise Snellings’s growing hesitation about changing Tulane’s racial policies, Harris took pains to downplay any suggestion of pressure or urgency. “The Negro admissions resolution of the Graduate Faculty does not constitute any crisis nor seem so monumental to me even yet,” he assured her. Stressing the positive aspects of the situation, Harris pointed out “the ancient Chinese meaning of the word crisis: a dangerous opportunity.” But in closing he again returned to the message that there was no reason at all to act hastily or from a sense of emergency. “I think Tulane’s decision should be unhurried – as usual.”71 He was very nervous, plainly, about upsetting what must have been a very delicate balance on the board, and one that was eroding rapidly after the untimely announcement of the holding in Brown. His remarks to the Dean’s Council on May 20, for example, reveal his anxiety about the faculty abruptly intruding into the discussion without first talking to him. In concluding those remarks Harris hinted at the delicacy of the deliberations. The minutes state that he “expressed the opinion that caution should be observed to avoid any similar resolutions by any other faculty as they would only serve to give a further agitative appearance of pressure upon the Board.”72 This statement stands in stark contrast to Harvie Branscomb’s remarks to the Vanderbilt board and the faculty of the Vanderbilt School of Law about their resolution requesting that the law school be desegregated. In that case Branscomb was able to tell both the professors and the trustees

71 Harris to Snellings, May 21, 1954, Snellings Correspondence File, Harris Papers, TUA.
72 Dean’s Council Minutes, May 20, 1954, Box 1, Harris Papers, TUA. Harris repeated in November this warning to avoid “agitation” about black admissions. President’s Agenda for Dean’s Council Meeting, November 4, 1954, Box 1, Harris Papers, TUA.
that the voices of the faculty were welcome at all times in board meetings.73 No doubt this difference reflects the underlying contrast in the relationship between Harris and the Tulane board and the one between Branscomb and the Vanderbilt board. Branscomb was operating from strength, even during the difficult year of 1954. He was a strong leader who had effective control over the faculty (for example, he certainly knew about the law school’s intent to approach the board and may well have even instigated it himself) and a close working relationship with the board. Harris, on the other hand, was saddled with a board chairman who disliked and disrespected him, who filled vacancies on the board with his cronies, and who was not inclined to follow the president’s lead even when it would be the wise thing to do. Disagreements over other policy issues such as the proper place for athletics within the university also contributed to the disintegration of Harris’s personal relationship with Jones and the erosion of his influence with the board as a whole. His preferences about making changes in the explosive matter of race relations, then, would most likely have carried little weight even though he had powerful reasons for wanting gradual change.

These reasons, the pressures for change that came seemingly from all directions, did not abate after the full board decided at its June 9 meeting to table the issue of desegregation. If anything, the growing southern resistance to Brown triggered a parallel increase in attention from many of the sources of pressure, such as the professional organizations and the philanthropies. By October, for example, Harris was back in front of the board with correspondence from the Chairman of the Association of American Law Schools’ Special Committee on Racial Discrimination. This correspondence indicated that Tulane was now one of only seventeen law schools in the country that

73 See infra pp. 11–14.
retained bars on black admissions. Harris warned the board that "[w]ith only a few
schools continuing to refuse to admit Negroes, the possibility of being dropped from the
accredited list is a very real one."\textsuperscript{74} In spite of Eisenhower's tepid response to \textit{Brown}, the
federal government also demanded compliance with hiring regulations designed to
provide equal economic opportunity for blacks. On September 3, Eisenhower signed an
Executive Order mandating the inclusion of a new nondiscrimination clause in all federal
contracts. By December, various government agencies began sending notice of the new
clause to its research contractors, including Tulane (and the other four private universities
as well.) Tulane's story, which they stuck to here, was that they did not discriminate in
employment, as evidenced by the large number of blacks who worked on campus. Nearly
every one of them was a janitor, gardener, cook, or other service worker. In 1954 this was
enough to satisfy federal requirements, but Tulane's administration and board could not
have failed to recognize that they would not be allowed to get away with this forever.
They also could not have failed to understand that the government had the power to
attach the same conditions to its contractors' admissions standards.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{74} President's Report to the Board, October 13, 1954, TUA. Harris included in this report
the correspondence between Tulane's Law school Dean Ray Forrester and the Chairman
of the AALS Special Committee Page Keeton of the University of Texas. Keeton had
requested that Tulane finally provide what they had been attempting to dodge: "a
forthright statement from you as to the policy that would be followed if a Negro qualified
on all grounds other than color should apply for admission." Forrester still began his
reply with a feint, if not a full dodge, and asserted that the law school was unaware of any
application from a black student for at least the last five years. In the end, though, he gave
Keeton what he wanted. "The University," Forrester admitted, "has had a policy since its
inception of not admitting negroes. That is the present policy. As one school of the
University, it is clear that we cannot follow a contrary policy." Keeton to Forrester,
September 2, 1954; Forrester to Keeton, September 27, 1954. Harris considered this
important enough to send a copy to Joseph Jones even before the board meeting. Harris to
Jones, October 6, 1954, Box 14, Harris Papers, TUA.

\textsuperscript{75} Executive Order 10557, September 3, 1954; Herman M. Roth to Harris, December 31,
1954; Clarence Scheps to Harris, January 21, 1955, Box 99, Longenecker Papers, TUA.
Pressure continued to mount within the university as well. Despite Harris's deteriorating relationship with the board he managed throughout the 1950s to maintain an extremely open environment on campus. His defense of academic freedom during the 1949 attacks by Congressman F. Edward Hebert was heartfelt and earned him the trust of the faculty. Their sense of safety and freedom, even when dealing with the controversial issue of race, is evident in matters that surfaced in the wake of the administrators’ decision to continue the policy of excluding black students. At the October board meeting, Harris passed on to the administrators a letter from the Director of Libraries that discussed the problem of providing research facilities for black patrons. Garland Taylor, the library head, wrote Harris seeking explicit sanction for the apparently long-standing policy of quietly supporting the research efforts of the few blacks who needed access to Tulane’s collection. Taylor seemed quite proud of the fact that “in spite of the limitations which we put upon the complete freedom of our Negro patrons,” at least four of them were able to complete master’s theses based on research done in Tulane’s Howard-Tilton Library. Two recent developments, however, prompted Taylor to seek “assurance of backing from the University in this area of service.” First, through its Urban Life Research Institute Tulane now employed two “professionally trained colored persons... in intellectual work.” As associated staff, Taylor assumed, they were “entitled to have the same library privileges which other members of that staff have. And in absence of specific orders to the contrary the Library expects to give them these privileges.”

For an overview of Eisenhower and equal economic opportunity see Burk, *Eisenhower Administration and Black Civil Rights*, 89–108.

76 Garland F. Taylor to Harris, September 17, 1954, in President’s Report to the Board, October 13, 1954, TUA. The Urban Life Research Institute was dedicated to the sociological study of southern urbanization. The Institute sought outside funding for project research on topics like “Individual and Social Factors Affecting Political
The second item of concern to the library director was closely tied to the debate over admitting black graduate students and strongly suggests the determination of the faculty that racially discriminatory admissions policies be changed. Taylor summarized the problem for Harris:

The second situation relates to an exceptionally well qualified recent Negro applicant for admission to the Graduate School. Admission has been denied him . . . but the candidate’s training and qualifications are such as to make service to him a matter of serious concern to the Department to which he applied and to the Dean of the College. We have accordingly agreed that we will try to assist in the carrying out of a reading program to be arranged under informal graduate faculty direction. It should hardly be necessary to add that the student in question cannot carry out such a program at any other library in New Orleans. It is my proposal to do everything that we can to help in what I think is a real responsibility here.  

In spite of some concerns about the possible “reluctance of some staff members to serve Negro customers” or the chance that patrons might be “offended by the presence of Negro readers in our midst,” Taylor felt that the university “must not flee” from its responsibility. What he wanted was for Tulane to “formally back us in this view.” To fail to do so, he argued, “is to throw staff members to the wolves . . ..” Taylor was quite aware of the racial turmoil that was already gripping New Orleans in response to the Brown decision, but had made his own decision on where it would ultimately lead. “Perhaps it is not timely now to formulate long range policy,” he closed, “but I hope it may be possible to give thought to this also, since the handwriting is upon the wall.”

Behavior in Urban Areas” an “Personality Development of Negro Youth in the Urban South.” In order to gain cooperation from black subjects, the Institute sometimes collaborated with the Dillard sociology department and by 1954 had hired the two black researchers. Box 6, Harris Papers contains several grant proposals and explanatory letters about possible projects.

77 Ibid.  
78 Ibid.
The board, however, was still on the fence about what to do about admitting blacks to the graduate school and was unwilling to make any formal statement on racial policy of any kind. They thus took no action on Taylor's request.\textsuperscript{79} The handwriting may indeed have been upon the wall, but Tulane's board was going to need its Law Committee to conduct another study of it.

IV

At Rice, the \textit{Brown} decision drew no official reaction. There were no reports of President Houston's response in any area newspapers. The trustees and administrators were not spurred to reconsider their stance on admitting blacks. There was not a single mention of blacks at all in any board minutes throughout 1954. The combination of the 1891 charter language that clearly forbade the admission of blacks, the lack of internal pressure for change, and the hostile political climate in Houston and Texas were certainly factors in this passive stance.

In Houston, the election of two moderates to the school board in 1954 momentarily confounded the far-right wing groups that had come to loudly dominate the city's politics but did not end their powerful influence. Even as the most extreme fears of communism seemed to fade among the city's population, the anti-communist extremists, abetted by Houston's upper classes, continued to hold sway.\textsuperscript{80} The Supreme Court's decision in \textit{Brown} was unpopular with whites in Texas, and the preservation of segregation was an

\textsuperscript{79} President Harris, though, was apparently unofficially authorized to bring him a message. While the board was thinking the matter over, Harris told Taylor privately, the library should continue to provide services to blacks on a case-by-case basis and Taylor and his staff could be assured that, in the event of an incident, they would have the backing of the trustees. Harris Addenda, "Negroes-Policy," TUA.
issue (although not the major one) in the state’s 1954 gubernatorial contest. Incumbent Governor Allen Shivers, running for a third term (against Texas tradition), campaigned for the Democratic nomination on a blatant platform of racial prejudice and anticommunism. Despite early indications that Shivers might take a moderate stance towards the court’s decree, a closely fought primary battle led him to both race-bait and red-bait his main opponent, Ralph Yarborough. Yarborough never took a strong position on Brown, stating that he opposed “forced commingling of races in our public schools” but refusing to defy the Supreme Court.\footnote{Southern School News, September 3, 1954; Green, Establishment in Texas Politics, 151–70. Later, Yarborough was elected to the Senate, where he was especially effective and influential on several important committees. After his somewhat waffling start, he became an outspoken supporter of desegregation and was one of a handful of southern} Shivers won reelection, and his use of red scare tactics as governor kept the political climate of the state fearful and uncertain.

At Rice, this febrile political atmosphere would have made any thoughts of removing racial restrictions quite unappetizing. But, in fact, no one there seemed to be having thoughts of that nature. Partly this was the result of the near total absence of concern with the issue from any department or school in the institution. This absence persisted even as the organizational pressures on the other campuses began to spread. For example, the fact that Rice did not have a law school or a theology school greatly contributed to its isolation from critical currents of change that were present on other campuses. By 1954, though, the other schools were feeling pressure from other internal sources as well.

Medical schools and nursing colleges at Emory, Tulane, and Duke were pressed to consider how best to respond in areas where training for black physicians was painfully

\footnote{George Norris Green, The Establishment in Texas Politics: The Primitive Years, 1938–1957 (Westport, CT, 1979), 121–34 discusses the politics of McCarthyism in Texas, with particular emphasis on Houston, where reactionary groups had the strongest foothold.}
inadequate and hospital care for black patients was almost recklessly inferior. But Rice had neither a medical nor nursing school. At Tulane, the School of Social Work became an active center of engagement with racial change as the faculty began to take seriously their responsibility to serve the whole community. Rice, though, had no School of Social Work. In a similar fashion sociology, anthropology, and economics departments in all these other universities became lightning rods for race matters as faculty began to give more and more consideration to the practical aspects and consequences of segregation and to the possible effects of integration. At Rice, the humanities and especially the social sciences had long been neglected; there were no graduate programs in either. There simply was no department of anthropology. Sociology (with one part-time professor) and economics were afterthoughts, appended to the department of business administration, with no prospect of immediate expansion or improvement. Rice remained through the 1950s primarily a technical institute, its curriculum focused almost entirely on science and engineering, areas that neither dealt with racial issues nor attracted large numbers of black students at the time. Thus, even as internal impetus for racial change began to expand outside of theology and law schools at other campuses, at Rice there was still no real source of agitation inside the institution.\footnote{At Emory in particular the problem of care for Atlanta blacks was unremitting, due largely to the grossly inadequate facilities for black health care and the severe shortage of black doctors. This issue was also intertwined with the nearly endless debates about the future of Emory’s health complex and its relationships with other Atlanta institutions. Various suggestions for helping to cope with the problem were offered, with little actually accomplished, throughout the 1950s.}

Financially too Rice remained much less subject to pressure from outside funders to change its racial policy. Although not “rich,” Rice was in reasonably good financial

\footnote{senators who supported the civil rights legislation of the 1960s. See Chandler Davidson, \textit{Race and Class in Texas Politics} (Princeton, NJ, 1990), 29–32.}
shape and, importantly, during the 1950s it began to actively solicit major support from industry. Contributions from northern foundations were quite limited until the end of the decade, and although Rice received substantial research money from the federal government, without a medical school to support even that money was not so desperately needed. Reliance on industry made more sense: given the Institute’s focus on engineering and science, Rice faculty and graduate students were admirably qualified to help businesses solve their practical problems. And this reliance on industry, often local energy companies and almost always businesses with operations in the South, for financial support freed Rice from the fear that failure to desegregate would result in the tap being shut off.  

Rice students, however, expressed growing interest in racial changes even before the Brown decision was announced. In April the Thresher conducted a poll that asked “Do you think Negroes should be admitted to this school on the same basis as other students? Why or why not?” Thirty students indicated approval of opening admissions to blacks and sixteen opposed it. Although the number of responses was low, the comments reflect quite accurately the state of the argument about segregation in 1954. Those in favor of desegregation at Rice stressed the need to “do away with childish, archaic prejudices,” as well as the community’s need for all people to develop to the full extent of their personal potential. “[T]he Negro who is prepared for college and has a sufficient desire to get as good an education as possible,” said one student, “should be given every chance possible

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84 In 1955 the Rice board created the Rice Institute Research Sponsors as a formal organization for its industrial sponsors. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees, February 23, 1955; November 22, 1955, Rice University. Other schools certainly sought and received industry support as well, but the voracious appetites of professional schools,
to be a more valuable citizen." Another reply also focused on desegregation as a benefit to the larger community: "An educational institution should devote itself to personal, national, and cultural improvement. Since increased educational advantages for Negroes is highly compatible with these aims, Rice should definitely admit them." Unfavorable replies, on the other hand, tended to stress personal unhappiness at the prospect of black students on campus. "I don't believe in mixing white and Negroes," one student stated simply. "It would prejudice many people against Rice," according to another, and "there would be much student objection," said a third.85

Student interest in race relations found other outlets. Predictably, religious organizations with a presence on campus were among the most active in creating interracial ties between students. The Council on Race and Education, for example, invited Rice students to three interfaith, interracial services in 1954.86 In one mysterious episode, the Thresher announced that the Rice Forum Committee would sponsor a debate between the Rice and Texas Southern debate teams on the Rice campus, but, without any comment, the black debaters were excluded and the Rice team debated itself.87

Rice students also continued their involvement with the Texas Intercollegiate Student Association (TISA), which had begun admitting black members in 1951 and which also continued to issue statements favoring desegregation. Rice student Louis Israel was the president of TISA in 1954, and he defended the passage of a resolution calling for the end of segregation in colleges. "I personally think," said Israel, "that this resolution does represent the majority of the Rice student body's viewpoint." Israel may well have been

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86 *Rice Thresher*, November 5, 1954.
correct, but the impact of student thinking on the matter remained the same as it has always been. Neither the Rice administration nor its board showed the slightest inclination to even officially notice that there was a problem, let alone take any steps to deal with it. But the growing frustration of the students, best seen in a short editorial that ran right after Rice’s football game with Cornell, unmistakably heralded the coming of the day when the school’s leadership would have to face the issue:

A few weeks ago the Thresher received a letter from the Cornell Daily Sun in which the editor asked if we could help to secure the same sleeping and eating accommodations for the ‘Big Red’s’ negro player, Dick Jackson, which were provided for the rest of the squad.

Unfortunately, we had to reply that regardless of our personal feelings and regardless of the United States Constitution and the Bible, the State of Texas maintains that this athlete is inferior (incidentally, the inanity of this contention was adequately demonstrated on the playing field Saturday night) and not entitled to equality with his white teammates.

Thus again we must hang our heads in shame and say only that perhaps the day will not be far off when Rice and the State of Texas will welcome all men equally. Only then will we be able to be proud that we are part of the Rice Institute, and part of Texas.

V

Two days after the announcement of the Brown opinion, several North Carolina newspapers carried brief stories describing the reaction of Duke President Hollis Edens. Edens’s response was measured and calm. “I believe that the people of North Carolina are reasonable,” he said, “and that they will take the Supreme Court decision in stride.” As to the effect of the decision on Duke, Edens unsurprisingly had less to say. The South’s private institutions, he explained, “appear gradually to be taking care of the problem in their own way and in keeping with their own time schedules.” The president

87 RiceThresher, October 29, 1954.
“did not discuss what approach Duke may be using to the problem, nor did he say what
time schedule may be in operation at Duke.”

Eden’s placid response to Brown was in keeping with North Carolina’s heritage. The
state’s politicians, while no less committed to segregation than their counterparts in the
Deep South, were part of a political tradition that shied away from open confrontation
about race. North Carolinians continued to pride themselves on the smoothness of their
race relations and on the polite “North Carolina Way” of doing business. This was
reflected in the response of the state’s political leaders to the Supreme Court decision.
Although Governor William B. Umstead expressed disappointment over Brown, he also
made clear that “this is no time for rash statement of the proposal of impossible
schemes.” Umstead and Lieutenant Governor Luther Hodges, who became governor
upon Umstead’s death in November, acted instead by appointing committees to study the
problem. On August 4, Umstead appointed a 19-member Special Advisory Committee to
“think through the various proposals and make a study of policy and program.” Hodges,
as head of the State Board of Education, set up a committee of that board to look at

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88 Raleigh News and Observer, May 19, 1954; Durham Herald, May 19, 1954. These
stories are identical. At least one North Carolinian sent Edens a note in response to this
report. Almost comically, he congratulated the president on his statement: “I liked the
tone as well as the words. It was very typical of you.” Indeed it was. George Watts Hill to
Edens, May 20, 1954, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.
89 The profound irony of this non-confrontational stance has been pointed out by several
commentators, including William Chafe, Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North
essays on this topic is David S. Ceeleski and Timothy B. Tyson, eds., Democracy
Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and its Legacy (Chapel Hill, 1998). In an
afterword to this collection Chafe succinctly puts the issue: “No matter how often later
generations of white politicians in North Carolina boasted of the state as a progressive
example to the South . . . their rhetoric politely preserved the same social order that the
white vigilantes built through the violence of 1898.”
possible responses.\textsuperscript{91} In the Democratic senatorial primary that was contested that spring, Kerr Scott, the former governor who had appointed Frank Graham to the Senate in 1949, defeated an opponent who tried to brand him as “soft” on race. Scott represented the more progressive wing of the party, which supported gradual movement towards both racial and economic justice and democracy. North Carolina believed in segregation, but hysterical reaction was simply not its way.\textsuperscript{92}

On the Duke campus, both students and faculty accepted the decision and the inevitability of desegregation, but neither group put real pressure on Edens or the board in 1954. Typical of the reaction of the students was an early October editorial in the \textit{Chronicle} entitled “Time and Tide” about the resistance to desegregated public schools in Maryland and Delaware. Disturbed by the ugly scenes of protest in these border states, the \textit{Chronicle} lamented that this was probably a signal that “the time when the Deep South will be able to forget the tattered dogma of white supremacy is farther away than even the least optimistic would guess.” Still, the editorial concluded, the day would indeed come when formal distinctions based on race would be abolished. “Those who refuse to face this reality are sadly like King Canute when he commanded the tide to

\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{92} Luther Hodges was a businessman who had spent many years outside North Carolina. Back in his home state, he was elected lieutenant governor in an upset after running as an independent. Once in office he proved to be a stalwart of the business establishment wing of the Democratic Party, committed to economic growth and modernization. Hodges was a key player, for example, in the original development of the successful Research Triangle Park between Durham and Raleigh. He also perforce was adamantly anti-union. Bartley, \textit{New South}, 214; Luebke, \textit{Tar Heel Politics}, 72–73, 92–93. For a very readable and comprehensive account of his years as North Carolina’s governor, see his memoirs, \textit{Businessman in the Statehouse: Six Years as Governor of North Carolina} (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1962).
The student editors provide no indication or speculation, however, of how the path from resistance to acceptance might be negotiated.

Traditional racial customs were still followed on campus. Duke’s administrators continued to have some flexibility in allowing interracial meetings, and for the most part, these gatherings tended to be religious ones. The fall semester of 1954 saw the organization of a new student group, the Inter-Collegiate Fellowship for Religion in Life, an interfaith and mixed race organization open to the Duke, University of North Carolina, and North Carolina College communities. The group was founded to discuss the religious grounds for social action, including not only segregation but also academic freedom and personal responsibility for world issues. The group met in the basement of the Duke chapel, at least some of the time.

Members of the Duke faculty remained concerned about racial matters. Sociologist Edgar Thompson, for example, attended an international conference on race relations sponsored by the Ford Foundation in October. Reporting on the conference, Thompson argued that the problem needed to be viewed in a global context. He told the Chronicle that “The Supreme Court ruling on segregation is of worldwide importance in view of America’s need for allies among dark-skinned peoples in other nations,” and that “[g]igantic racial readjustments are taking place also in many other parts of the world today.” Thompson warned that “[t]he Soviet Union is seeking to explo[i]t these changes, with considerable success so far.” However, he added, “Our efforts toward democratizing

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race relations and doing away with second class citizenship in the United States are posing a great challenge to Russia.”

In December, another faculty member, professor of Biblical literature Mason Crum, discussed the Supreme Court decision and its impact in the South in an article in the Methodist weekly, The Christian Advocate. Crum first established his bona fides as a true southerner, discussing his descent from a confederate soldier and a slaveholding minister and his childhood in South Carolina. While acknowledging “the horrors of the Reconstruction period,” Crum held up Booker T. Washington as an example of what blacks could accomplish and expressed his belief that white southerners were now “willing to tackle the problem” of desegregation for their own good as well as for the good of southern blacks. Thoughtful white southerners, argued Crum, had understood for

95 Duke Chronicle, October 5, 1954. Thompson submitted a detailed report on this conference to President Edens, Vice President Paul Gross, and Sociology Chairman Howard Jensen. Thompson was very positive about the experience, which he saw as a giant leap forward in mitigating the “acute parochialism” of studies on race relations. He noted the lack of basic demographic evidence on race around the world, and was particularly interested in the inability of the conference attendees to agree on the meaning of “race” itself. “The conferees themselves were not entirely agreed on a single definition of the word, some insisting upon the original biological meaning of the word, and the larger number accepting the shifting social interpretations, with their varied identification of race as a biological, linguistic, religious, national, or cultural phenomenon. To many the possibility of such a conception of race was itself a significant discovery.” Thompson had planned to suggest the Durham–Chapel Hill area as the site of the next conference, after consulting with Edens, Chancellor House of UNC, and President Charles S. Johnson of Fisk, but planning centered around organization rather than future meetings, so he did not. A Report to President Hollis Edens, Vice-President Paul Gross, and Dr. Howard Jensen, October 31, 1954, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA. Interestingly, at about this time Thompson was being considered for a position as chairman of the University of Alabama’s Department of Sociology and Anthropology. The dean of Alabama’s College of Arts and Sciences wrote to Herbert Herring, the head of Duke’s Trinity College, for his opinion of Thompson, whose work on race may well have raised suspicions: “You know that in matters of this sort a dean has to turn to his friends for help and you know what kind of help a fellow needs. I should be very grateful to you if you would write me a letter about him, in whatever capacity you feel free to do so...” Marten ten Hoor to Herbert Herring, April 8, 1954, Box 2, Herbert Herring Papers, DUA.
years that segregation was insupportable on moral grounds and harmful on practical ones. “But now,” he continued, “that which they knew in their heart was right and just, has been declared so by the highest court in the land. Churches that have been spiritually embarrassed for years have welcomed it.” Echoing Washington’s racial rhetoric, Crum stressed the limits of the Brown decision: “the greatest fear in the South is social equality, or social intermingling. But the Supreme Court decision has nothing to do with personal social relations. It is aimed at equality of opportunity in tax-supported educational institutions.” And this, he claimed, was the only thing that the vast majority of blacks were interested in, despite what was suggested by the attention paid to “the aggressive wing of the Negro group.” In the end, Crum was optimistic. Whites would cooperate, and the removal of racial barriers might be “the first great step in the direction of a new order in the South.”

One hopeful sign was that Hollis Edens’s willingness to discuss internally the manner and timing of Duke’s approach to desegregation was growing. The trustees convened for their year-end meeting a scant two weeks after the announcement of the Brown decision, and Edens used the occasion to make his clearest statement to date on the issue of black admissions to Duke. He began with an overview of the legal environment, noting that the situation had materially changed since his last report in February. While admitting that Brown posed “no immediate problem for Duke University except that of increased pressure,” Edens laid out the unmistakable message that whatever the details of the enforcement decree, segregation at all levels of public education was doomed. He directly

96 The Christian Advocate, December 15, 1954. Crum’s article was also the subject of a long story in the Duke Chronicle, December 17, 1954.
addressed the divided nature of public opinion, which he acknowledged was more important to Duke after the Supreme Court’s action:

There are those who think it would be foolish or unwise for a university of Duke’s national stature to attempt to evade the principle of the Court’s ruling. They think the time will come soon when segregation in privately supported universities will be declared unconstitutional on grounds of tax-exempt privileges. Others hold to the belief that not only will privately supported universities not be affected but that means will be found locally to circumvent the Court’s order in the public schools.97

Adding that there was likely to be local variation in the final outcome, Edens took a clear stand. “[T]o assume that Duke University can remain permanently an island of refuge from the effects of desegregation,” he stated, “would be unrealistic.” The president then proposed a step that was unchanged from what he had suggested at the February 1954 meeting: “some small gesture toward de-segregation in the near future . . ..”98

Edens expressed skepticism toward northern racial practices and gave a hint of the reasoning that would eventually prevail at Duke:

I suppose I should apologize to those of you who are more idealistically inclined for approaching the problem in such a realistic way, but my observation of certain Eastern institutions, Princeton for example, leads me to the conclusion that they have admitted only the principle of non-segregation and that they have become very little involved in the practice. There are reasons for this beyond the desire to admit only a minimum of negroes. The fact is that relatively few negro applicants meet the admission requirements.

This, Edens seemed to suggest, would most likely be the case at Duke should Duke decide to admit black applicants. White supremacy would serve as a natural check on black enrollment even if institutional segregation were banned.

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97 Report of the President to the Board of Trustees, June 5, 1954, Box 30, Edens Papers, DUA.
98 Ibid.
Finally, Edens attempted to put the question of black admissions to Duke's graduate schools into perspective. Given the torrent of changes that had begun to sweep the South, he argued, the refusal to make this small one was pointless and, by implication, likely to be counterproductive.

To those of you who may be alarmed at the trend of my thinking, I would reply that the effect of non-segregation in universities in no longer significant in comparison to the developments elsewhere. The real change is taking place closer to you. More and more negroes are going to grade school and high school, they are serving on school boards, they are getting better jobs and earning more money as they disappear from the homes and kitchens of white employers. They are driving good cars and paying for the best accommodations on non-segregated public transportation. I could continue to spell out the change that is taking place. This is to say that university people generally do not look upon the admission of an insignificant few negroes with the same jaundiced eye as does the average man outside who is being face with more revolutionary changes closer to home. This is to say that we may be straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel if we refuse to admit a few negroes at the graduate level of the University while being overwhelmed by the swift movement elsewhere.  

Duke's trustees were unmoved by this plea, but while they did not act they apparently did not close to door to future action. At the January 1953 meeting of the University Council Edens had stated flatly that "discussion of admission of Negroes was not indicated for the immediate future," but the events of 1954 changed this judgment. By December, Edens decided to have the University Council conduct a detailed study of the university's segregation policies and the policy changes that had taken place at other southern schools. "The preliminary discussion which followed [Eden's announcement of this plan] was largely confined to the question of the admission of negroes to the Graduate School and professional schools . . . Vice President Gross directed attention to the possible effects of a continued policy of complete exclusion on the tax-exempt status

99 Ibid.
of Duke University. With regard to faculty attitudes toward the admission of qualified negroes in the professional schools, Dr. Cleland felt that the faculty of the School of Religion would possibly be unanimous in favoring such admission in that School at this time. Professor Latty believed that the Law School faculty would on the whole be disposed to take the same position. The question will be again placed on the agenda of the January Council meeting for further exploration." By February 1955 at Edens’s behest the Council would set up a committee to study the extent and experience of desegregation in other southern universities.

As 1954 closed, however, Duke was still unmoved. The decision to consider possible policy changes was a hopeful one, but here, as at all the other schools, no one had articulated a principle that would allow collected facts to be weighed appropriately and a judgment made. Too, Edens was still unable to speak forthrightly to off-campus constituencies. In December 1954 Edens received another letter from Duke alumna Helen Mercner Morrison, who had earlier expressed her unhappiness about segregation at the university. “So much has happened since I last wrote you about my concern for the integration problem,” she told Edens, “that I thought you might have some news about what Duke’s position is . . . The day for shilly-shallying has passed. A brave, bold statement of our intention for integration is needed.” Edens, though, had nothing new to tell Mrs. Morrison. In a brief letter he noted that “there has been no change in the official regulations.” He then fell back on the same sort of bland, nearly meaningless rhetoric that had been his standby when discussing anything to do with racial change:

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100 Minutes of University Council Meeting, January 21, 1953, Box 35, Edens Papers, DUA.
101 Minutes of University Council Meeting, December 15, 1954, Box 35, Edens Papers, DUA.
"Undoubtedly, we shall attack the problem at the graduate level when we do move toward a change. I have had considerable conversation with members of my Board of Trustees and members of the University Council concerning this question, but no decisive action had been taken." Thus, while Edens was the only one of these presidents to seize the Brown decision as an opportunity to press his board for change, he found himself in exactly the same position as the others, and exactly the same position he had been in before. The Duke board was not prepared to acceded to any relaxation of segregation on campus.

The South’s response to the Brown decision made negotiating a safe path far more treacherous for Duke, Emory, Tulane, Rice, and Vanderbilt. As race relations became the most important issue in southern politics, room for maneuver vanished. Governors and state legislatures blustered and schemed to thwart the Supreme Court ruling. Race was kept on the front pages of newspapers, with every suggestion of compliance or resistance a story in itself. Positions hardened, anger began to boil, and rhetoric became explosive. Political agitation and a hungry and avid press utterly destroyed the private universities’ sense of isolation. They became increasingly aware of the scrutiny of outsiders and of the weight of their actions in public opinion and discourse.

The decision had a similar effect on students and faculty. Students, although certainly split on the issue and in general more concerned with dances than with politics, accepted the idea that segregation was going to end sooner rather than later. They were a very conservative group, mostly southern and solidly middle class, and remained content to

102 Helen Morrison to Edens, December 1, 1954, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.
103 Edens to Morrison, December 22, 1954, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.
allow this process to work itself out without their participation. An outspoken minority, though, was invigorated and engaged by the decision. This minority would keep the issue of desegregation alive on campus, mainly in the editorial pages of the student newspaper and in the activities of student religious organizations. The faculties at these schools were by and large convinced even before 1954 of the need to end racial restrictions in admissions policies. The Brown decision seemed to cement this position and the turmoil that followed created situations that tested their willingness to remain at their schools.

The boards, though, faced with widespread social turmoil and the possibility of violence, maintained their bedrock caution and resisted change with determination. In general, the trustees had always feared the reaction of their friends, relatives, and business associates to any loosening of racial restrictions on campus. They found in the hysterical atmosphere that followed Brown a confirmation of their good judgement in avoiding change in the past and a reason to avoid change in the future. This position was shared by many older alumni and probably most in the larger community.

The presidents, no matter what their own convictions, spent much energy in an effort to soothe the fears of opponents of desegregation and calm their own boards. Not surprisingly, most of the presidents, even those who favored desegregation, decided that prudence dictated at least temporary inaction. The fact that Brown dealt only with public schools gave them a tool to keep panic at bay and they used it, telling correspondents and trustees over and over that they were compelled to do nothing, that their fate remained in their own hands. To some extent this was whistling past the graveyard and they knew it. But it was also true that they did still have time. For a brief moment there was something like equipoise—every force that pushed for change was offset by a counterforce that
opposed it. What the boards chose to do with that time was to wait, to see how and where
the balance would tip. While they studied alternatives and had committees gather
information, they had no principles to guide them in making a move to one direction or
the other. So they followed rather than led, holding off from small changes while
southern society was transformed around them.
VOLUME II

"AT A MOST UNCOMFORTABLE SPEED": THE DESEGREGATION OF THE SOUTH'S PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES, 1945–1964

by

MELISSA FITZSIMONS KEAN
Chapter 4
Turmoil and Evasion

By the late 1950s the worst fears of the private university presidents seemed to be coming true. Angry whites reacted with violence to the pressing demands of southern blacks for some measure of justice. A now steady stream of highly publicized incidents—the Montgomery bus boycott, the acceptance and then expulsion of Atherine Lucy at the University of Alabama, the ugly mob scenes in Little Rock, the bombing of the high school in Clinton, Tennessee—had the entire region quivering with tension. At the same time, the nation as a whole was growing more determined that segregation end. By this time most of the presidents had grasped the essential political truth about segregation—the South did not have the power to prevent its demise. Under these circumstances, they understood, hanging on to the end could have grave consequences for their institutions. Desperately needed money would be lost, painstakingly assembled faculties would disintegrate, untold opportunities would slip away. Decades of effort to overtake the finest universities in the nation would be wasted as growing national reputations would begin instead to erode.

Ironically, by the late 1950s most of the South’s public graduate schools and many of its public undergraduate colleges had peacefully desegregated. Large numbers of smaller private schools had also lifted the color bar with little or no adverse reaction, either on or off campus. Although there were some noteworthy exceptions, black students were accepted by their white fellows, joined campus government and other organizations
(though not social organizations), and settled in to the real business of education with a minimum of disruption.¹

There was no longer any question of the elite private universities being leaders in desegregation, although many on campus continued to talk as if this were still possible. Rather, the presidents now struggled to prevent disaster, and the struggle was with their recalcitrant trustees and older, often prominent, alumni. Hidebound, wedded to tradition, fearful of racial change, and angrily determined that neither northerners nor blacks would tell them what to do, these men, many a generation older than the presidents, refused to accept the reality of the changes around them. In most cases, they chose not to loosen racial restrictions because they had not yet been forced to. The exception remained Vanderbilt, where another small measure of desegregation was accomplished in the law school. Even here, though, in the fevered atmosphere of the post-Brown South, the explosive reaction of alumni and community members began to drain Harvie Branscomb of his will to move forward. In the late 1950s, as the need for change grew acute, the ability to make changes constricted.

¹ Guion Griffis Johnson, “Quiet Revolution in the South,” *Journal of the American Association of University Women* 52 (March, 1959), 133–36. One of the most interesting exceptions was at the University of Texas, where the administration, under pressure from the Texas legislature, could not seem to simply accept black students as students. In 1957, for example, UT president Logan Wilson (former dean of Newcomb College at Tulane) cancelled the performance of an opera in which the female lead was to be sung by a black student. The university’s vice president for developmental services, L.D. Haskew, sent statements from Wilson and the faculty to many prominent southern educators in an attempt to mitigate the fallout from the cancellation. L.D. Haskew to Hollis Edens, May 24, 1957, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.
By the late 1950s, decades of effort had resulted in significant progress at Tulane University. A visiting committee from the Southern Association of Colleges and Universities reported that the school was “in a state of dynamic ferment,” with enthusiastic faculty members, impressive top leadership, and a commitment to recruiting the strongest possible student body. “There is evidence of a genuine faith,” wrote one member of the committee, “that a university of national importance is being planned and that the development of such an institution will succeed.”

Somewhat earlier, in late 1955 or early 1956, Rufus Harris drafted a short “proposed blueprint” for that development. What he used this for, or whether he ever used it at all, is not clear. Harris’s vision of Tulane’s present and possible future, though, was characteristically clear-eyed. Describing the school’s postwar accomplishments without overstatement, Harris wrote: “Despite great financial handicaps and limitations in all kinds of facilities, we have managed to gather a productive faculty of considerable distinction, to establish more than adequate programs in our various fields of graduate and undergraduate training, and to win a measure of national prestige for the work we are doing.” Looking forward, Harris saw the possibility of true excellence. This depended, in his view, on four things. Raising faculty salaries, adopting national entrance examinations, and scaling back the intercollegiate athletic program were all issues that he had raised before (and all issues that had brought him into conflict with the board.) The fourth matter too was a familiar one—the admission of blacks. On this Harris was succinct:

Whatever the quibbles and dodges now being used in some states to avoid compliance with the Supreme Court ruling against segregation, Tulane

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2 Judson C. Ward, Jr. to Goodrich C. White, May 4, 1959, Box 21, White Papers, EUA. Ward was part of the committee that visited Tulane to help with its 1959 self-study.
should immediately admit qualified Negro applicants to its graduate divisions . . . . Private institutions regularly boast that they are by their very nature the leaders in educational matters and the pioneers in new departures. The whole country knows that Tulane has as yet done no leading in this particular matter. Thus Tulane cannot hope for a place among the best universities in this country until we take this necessary step.³

Harris's argument was sound, but the social and political circumstances in New Orleans in the late 1950s made this "necessary step" all but impossible. The unfolding problem of public school desegregation kept racial issues at the forefront and racial fears and animosities at a boil throughout the late 1950s. The community became completely polarized.⁴

Given the turmoil surrounding it, it is not surprising that Tulane was unable to assume the leadership role that Harris so deeply craved. Instead, with a conservative and narrowly local Board of Administrators in control, Tulane remained mired in indecision. On one hand, Tulane faced quite credible threats of sanctions from accrediting bodies and professional organizations, growing dissent among faculty and students, and the possibility of losing crucial funding from the federal government and foundations. On the other, white New Orleans was stalwart in its opposition to racial integration and anyone who favored it. The aggressive meddling of organizations like the South

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Louisiana Citizen's Council worried board members, and the general state of affairs in the city kept them on edge.

Harris saw this general turmoil as the major obstacle to beginning desegregation at Tulane. The more fretful and uncertain the board was, the more threatened they felt, the less likely they were to defy local opinion and do what was necessary to boost the university's national reputation. Harris thus spent most of the latter part of the decade downplaying pressure so the board could feel secure enough to act. But this was simply impossible. Events began unfolding at such a rapid rate—in the courtroom, in the legislature, in the streets of the South, even in academia—that there was no way to preserve calm in the boardroom. The result was a peculiar mix of boldness and caution from the president, who wanted change but who saw stability as the way to accomplish it. In private correspondence and with allies who shared his beliefs, Harris consistently maintained that segregation had to go, and quickly. With the board he consistently downplayed pressures for action and he tried to get others on campus to cooperate with his program of understatement. Meanwhile the board vacillated, paralyzing itself with unceasing and fruitless legal analyses of the problem. Even after they decided in 1956 to maintain the school's restrictive admissions policy, the issue would not die. Outside pressures kept it alive, and endless worry substituted for action from the hesitant board.

In early 1955 the board's Law Committee was still considering action on the graduate faculty's 1954 request to begin desegregation. Marie Louise Snellings, whose 1953 analysis of desegregation seemed to portend just such changes, had done a complete about-face in the wake of Brown. In a January letter to Law Committee chairman Joseph McCloskey, Snellings outlined her current thinking. Arguing that legal issues did not
control the decision, she instead cited the potentially “endless” problems that she believed would arise from the admission of blacks to the graduate schools. “The changes in policy,” she predicted, “would create a furor in the South, where we have a numerical negro problem. Questions would arise concerning school functions, football tickets, banquets, concerts, and on down a list of situations that loom endlessly.” Snellings was quite aware of how the matter would ultimately be resolved but apparently believed that the Tulane board possessed the power and the wisdom to choose precisely the right moment to act, and she counseled that that moment had not yet arrived. “The trend of events,” she admitted, “is in one direction and we will reach it, in time. I am not temporizing. I do not believe that it is a question of jumping right after Vanderbilt and right ahead of Washington and Lee. I am not in favor of trying to slip by in a crowd, of being clever enough to avoid leadership in the admission of negroes to private institutions in the South, and also to avoid delaying until statutory action or court decision compels us to a change of position.” Guessing that five, ten, or twenty-five years might be required, Snellings concluded that “I believe that at Tulane University, for the present and foreseeable future, we should maintain a watchful policy of observation, and adopt no change in admission policy.”\(^5\) Fellow Law Committee member George Wilson concurred in a letter of his own after reading Snellings’s opinion. Writing to McCloskey, Wilson also recommended that there be no change in policy. “Doubtless, within a period of not many years, we may reach different conclusions on the policy question, but I do

\(^5\) Marie Louise Snellings to Joseph McCloskey, January 6, 1955, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA.
not think that this is the time for Tulane to be instrumental in hastening the end of segregation.”

The following week the Law Committee reported its conclusions to the full board. Dealing specifically with the resolution passed by the Graduate Faculty in May 1954, the committee again stated its belief “(a) that Tulane would have the legal right to admit Negroes to its Graduate School and (b) that Tulane would have the legal right to exclude Negroes from its Graduate School.” Full discussion of these conclusions resulted in nothing that would break the stalemate. The board unanimously decided that the graduate faculty should be advised that “the admission of Negroes in the Graduate School has been under serious consideration for a long time and will continue to receive serious consideration.”

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6 George Wilson to Joseph McCloskey, January 7, 1955, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA. Snellings seems to have distributed copies of her letter to all the law committee members as well as to Harris.

7 Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, January 12, 1955, TUA.

8 Ibid. Also under consideration that day was the Law Committee’s report on a letter that Harris had received from the Tulane-Lyceum Association, a local cultural group that used the Tulane auditorium for concerts and lectures and proposed to accept black members. Stanley McDermott to Harris, December 1, 1954, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA. The Law Committee reached a similar conclusion on this matter: “In permitting the use of its property by the Lyceum Association, the Board could legally either permit or refuse to permit the use of its property by non-segregated audiences of whites and negroes.” In this case, though, where Tulane’s de facto policy already permitted blacks to attend events in McAlister Auditorium, the Board decided that it would not stand in the Lyceum Association’s way. Rather, they decided to simply thank the Association for their consideration and tell them that their membership decisions were of “no concern to Tulane.” Ibid. Marie Louise Snellings also opposed this action in her letter to McCloskey. Allowing blacks to attend Lyceum events, she said, “would provoke comment, inquiry concerning other events, and would raise questions regarding seating, rest rooms, and the like.” Snellings to McCloskey, January 6, 1955, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA. The board also took the rather unusual step of having its chairman, Joseph Jones, send President Harris a “formal, interim report” on the board’s position. Even though Harris was involved in most, if not all, the deliberations on admitting black students Jones notified him by letter that the board was “presently not prepared to alter the policy, but you are assured that this whole matter is now, and will
requesting “a more explicit explanation” or taking further “steps towards expressing its views,” but, most likely in an effort to avoid angering the board, decided to do nothing more.⁹

Despite the board’s reluctance to face the problem, other aspects of Tulane’s racial policy unavoidably came up for discussion. Yale University, for example, wanted to schedule a basketball game with Tulane the following season. Yale, though, had a black player on its team. Despite athletic department’s eagerness to schedule this game, the board refused. Citing their ongoing debate on “the whole broad problem of segregation,” the administrators announced that they “did not feel disposed to act on the matter on a piecemeal basis.” However, at the very same meeting they did decide a related question. President Harris again raised the matter of the attendance of black members of professional societies at meetings on campus. In this case, the board was prepared to act, deciding on an unequivocal policy of allowing such attendance “on a non-discriminatory basis.”¹⁰

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continue to be, until it is resolved finally, the subject of most careful study.” Jones to Harris, February 7, 1955, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA.

⁹ Minutes of Meeting of Graduate Faculty, May 18, 1955, Box 28, Harris Papers, TUA.
Robert Lumiansky had been head of the graduate school since July, 1954 and a member of the Arts and Sciences faculty since 1946. An authority on medieval English literature, Lumiansky had also been a tactical liason officer during World War II, winning the Croix de Guerre and the Chevalier de la Legion d’honneur.

¹⁰ Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, February 9, 1955, TUA. There was some debate after the meeting about what the board had actually decided. A.P. Generes, the board’s secretary, had recorded the minute as “no Board objection would be raised to such [mixed]meetings.” Harris objected to this, arguing that it did not accurately capture the sense of the discussion and that “the mere fact that the Board would not object is not sufficient support for the University to permit the attendance of Negro members at professional meetings on campus.” The language was strengthened accordingly. Harris to A.P. Generes, March 4, 1955, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA.
By the summer of 1955, a year after the *Brown* decision and just months after the Law Committee reported their belief that Tulane was free to act but not compelled to act on black admissions to the graduate school, Board Chairman Joseph Jones suddenly became eager to take “definite action to dispose of the matter.” The reason for this new willingness to finally make a decision seems to have been the discovery of new documents relating to Paul Tulane’s original donation for the school. ¹¹ The Law Committee, of course, would consider the effect of these documents as well as all other relevant legal issues and report back to the board in the fall. At that time, Jones directed, a decision would be made. ¹²

The deliberations, however, took much longer than that. Throughout the summer and into the following fall and winter, the members of the Law Committee wrestled with the question of the legality of desegregating the university. In July, Marie Louise Snellings prepared another lengthy report, this one taking the view, directly contrary to her earlier opinion, that Tulane’s founding documents prevented it from admitting blacks. Snellings ran down a list of deeply damaging consequences that would likely attend a failure to

¹¹ These new documents are discussed in detail in Marie Louise Snellings, Report to the Board of Administrators of the Tulane Educational Fund, July, 1955, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA.
¹² Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, June 8, 1955, TUA. Also at this meeting the Law Committee was authorized to retain special outside counsel to help relieve its rather considerable burden. Harris was in Europe at the time of this meeting, and the administration was represented by the Comptroller, Clarence Scheps, who gave the board an interesting summmary of Tulane’s finances. Scheps told them that “the University operation is dependant, to a very large degree, upon the continuance of federal and foundation grants.” From 1943 to 1954 these sources had provided over $1.5 billion dollars to Tulane (about $900,000 from the federal government), largely for research in the medical school. The “entire operation of the School,” continued Scheps, “is geared to these grants . . . .” In 1954-55 alone, over $125,000 in overhead would come to the university from these grants. Scheps assured the board that this was not unusual, which was correct, but he also assured them that there was “no liklihood in the foreseeable
desegregate and suggested that, if the board decided as a matter of policy that it wanted to avoid those consequences by admitting black students, it should seek a court judgment that would allow it to do so.\textsuperscript{13} Harris answered Snellings with praise for her legal abilities, but he dissented from her views. Though he disagreed with her legal conclusions he told her that “I go along with you on the advisability of seeking a declaratory judgment on our legal rights in this matter, for the University wishes only to do the right thing and we need the matter clarified. Such a suit would serve to settle many pressures upon Tulane. After this judgment is declared, if it permits negro enrollment, it is my opinion that the Administrators then should refer the judgement to the President of the University to advise the faculties of the Graduate and Professional Schools that the matter of University admission qualifications is a faculty job and should be handled administratively by them with the Board’s approval.”\textsuperscript{14} The problem, though, was that the board had not yet decided that it wanted to do this. Without a decision on the policy matter, a lawsuit made little sense.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} Marie Louise Snellings, Report to the Board of Administrators of the Tulane Educational Fund, July, 1955, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA. This document was sent to all the members of the Tulane board. In it, Snellings catalogued, somewhat resentfully, the forces that were pushing for desegregation: coercion by the AALS; possible loss of federal grants “which we need for existence;” possible loss of tax exemptions; and the “trend of legal and political developments in this country.”

\textsuperscript{14} Harris to Marie Louise Snellings, September 13, 1955, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA. Snellings’s response to Harris’s letter seems to indicate that she seriously anticipated a future policy decision to admit blacks and expressed “hope that the Board will seek to clear itself by Court action if they once make a policy decision in that direction.” Marie Louise Snellings to Harris, September 26, 1955, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA.

\textsuperscript{15} This point was made by the dean of the law school, Ray Forrester, who also saw Mrs. Snellings’s report. Ray Forrester to Harris, September 29, 1955, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA.
Meanwhile, as the Law Committee mulled over the legal issues, debate intensified within the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) over its position on segregation. The AALS’s Special Committee on Racial Discrimination announced plans to submit a proposal to the entire body that would make the admission of black students a condition of membership. This proposed shift from open admissions as an “objective” to a “standard” worried Harris, who felt sure it would pass. In spite of indications that the AALS would “soften the blow” by taking no action to exclude a school until it had actually denied admission to a qualified black applicant, Harris was certain that the passage of the resolution would itself prompt an application from such a candidate.16

By November, Harris was feeling some urgency about the possibility of this resolution’s approval. On November 7, 1955, he forwarded copies of the AALS Special Committee’s report to the board’s Educational Affairs Committee and urged them to discuss it at their next meeting.17 In his November 11 report to the entire board he stressed that this matter “must have the earnest consideration of the Education Committee when it meets soon” and asked for permission to invite law dean Forrester to speak with that committee.18 When the committee met on December 13, they reached no conclusion except that the problem “will necessarily require action by [the Law] Committee also and probably action by the whole Board at the Special Meeting to be called to consider the whole policy on Admissions question.”19

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16 President’s Report to the Board, June 8, 1955, TUA.
17 Harris to Joseph McCloskey, November 7, 1955, Box 14, Harris Papers, TUA. McCloskey was the chairman of the Educational Affairs Committee.
18 President’s Report to the Board, November 9, 1955; Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, November 9, 1955, TUA.
19 Agenda for Meeting of the Educational Affairs Committee, December 13, 1955, Box 14, Harris Papers, TUA. Internally, Tulane’s law faculty was divided. In preparing for the annual meeting of the AALS in December, 1955, where the Special Committee’s
The law faculty, after heated debate, had decided to abstain when the AALS voted on the resolution. The Tulane board approved this decision on December 14, 1955, and the AALS vote on the non-segregation resolution was held at its annual meeting on December 28. Unexpectedly, it failed by a narrow margin. Harris, though clearly relieved, emphasized in his remarks to the board that the matter was far from closed. "Dean Forrester reports that the failure of this proposal means no lessening of the Association's purpose and determination as a principle to eliminate segregation in the law schools," Harris pointed out, noting specifically that there had been almost no opposition to a statement reaffirming that principle. The only meaning that the vote did have,

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proposal would be voted on, the faculty met to discuss Tulane's response. Professor Mitchell Franklin moved, and the motion was seconded, that Tulane should support the requirement and vote "yes" on the Committee's recommendation. Arguing that the Brown decision had settled the morality of the issue, Franklin maintained that Tulane had to recognize that it was part of the nation and ought to vote accordingly. Other faculty, angered at the perceived meddling of the AALS, wanted the Tulane Law School to "announce at the Association meeting that it will not accept compulsion or dictation by the Association and that the imperative by the Association be disregarded." Ultimately, however, the school stayed true to form and took neither position. Rather, "following the recommendation of Dean Forrester," the faculty voted to abstain at the AALS meeting. Minutes of the Meeting of the Faculty of the Tulane School of Law, December 10, 1955, Box 31, Harris Papers, TUA. Law professor Mitchell Franklin, who in 1948 was at the center of the storm of accusations that Tulane's faculty harbored subservives, was still under attack by right-wing New Orleanians at this time. The Young Men's Business Club had for over a decade taken as its mission "notifying" citizens of New Orleans "of any subservive activity or organization of which they should be aware." In July, 1956 the group issued a report on the National Lawyer's Guild, condemning it and Mitchell Franklin, who was a member, as "an undesirable influence on our community life" and bringing this to the attention of the media and the State Bar of Louisiana. Resolution adopted by the general membership of the Young Men's Business Club of N.O. in meeting held on July 11, 1956, Box 31, Harris Papers, TUA. Notified of the action by the president of the Club, Harris simply acknowledged receipt of the document. In a letter to Joseph Jones, Harris once again took a firm stance on matters of the freedom of Tulane's faculty: "I feel that the views of the University and the YMBC are so irreconcilable that it would be useless for me or Dean Forrester to make any comment on the resolution..." Harris to Jones. July 25, 1956, Box 31, Harris Papers, TUA.
according to President Harris, was “that we have another year for the consideration of the issue.” 20

Other serious pressures were brought to bear during the fall of 1955. Elizabeth Wisner, dean of the School of Social Work and long a proponent of desegregating that school, explained in a letter to Harris that severe consequences were on the horizon if the change were not made soon. She had recently returned from a trip to Washington, where she met with a number of federal agencies. After carefully describing the substantial dependence of the social work program on federal funding, she reported that those meetings had convinced her that “the question of the admission of Negroes to those institutions receiving grants is going to become crucial and any decision to make this a condition would make it impossible for the Tulane school to operate as an accredited curriculum of any significance.” 21

As time passed and the board still did not act, Harris grew more worried about its willingness to resist the tide of local opinion and became more sensitive to anything that might upset the members. This concern is evident in some frank correspondence with a member of the newly constituted Tulane Board of Visitors. This group of prominent Tulane alumni and friends began to meet annually with the Board of Administrators to discuss policy issues affecting the university. The meeting in March 1955 included discussion of opening graduate admissions to qualified blacks. Dr. Robert Lambert of Greensboro, Alabama took a special interest in this and in November wrote to Harris and

20 Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, December 14, 1955; January 11, 1956, TUA. The resolution required a two-thirds majority vote to pass.
21 Elizabeth Wisner to Harris, November 4, 1955, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA. Wisner also worried about the impact of other southern schools of social work, including LSU, opening admissions to blacks, leading to a drop in Tulane’s enrollment.
Max Lapham, the dean of Tulane's Medical School, about the possibilities for educating black physicians and generally improving health services for blacks in New Orleans.\textsuperscript{22} Harris expressed great appreciation for Lambert's concern, but he also counseled caution about giving any impression of pressure to the board. "I hope," wrote Harris, "that some positive action may be taken. It is difficult to discuss these matters openly when any rumor emanating from executive sessions of the Administrators may well delay further progress. Even the recent interpretation of the law regarding the use of public recreational facilities may be a deterrent to a more favorable action of the Administrators, and I say this because I know each of them so well."\textsuperscript{23} Harris went on to assure Lambert that while the board thought things over, he was able to take small steps on his own, such as quietly opening the medical library to black doctors. Still, Harris concluded, "I know of your great interest in this serious problem and I do hope you know that it is of equally great

\textsuperscript{22} As in Atlanta, health care for blacks in New Orleans was woeful. Flint-Goodridge Hospital, an adjunct of Dillard University, was the only hospital in the city that allowed black doctors in attendance and by the mid-1950s it was in desperate shape. See Tyler, Silk Stocking & Ballot Boxes, 213–19, for the importance of Flint-Goodridge in the struggle for better race relations in New Orleans.

\textsuperscript{23} Harris to Robert A. Lambert, November 17, 1955, Box 63, Harris Papers, TUA. On November 7, 1955 the United States Supreme Court moved the reasoning of Brown beyond public schools, upholding a Fourth Circuit ruling that Baltimore could no longer segregate public recreational facilities and reversing a Fifth Circuit opinion that allowed segregated golf courses in Atlanta. Mayor and City Council of Baltimore City v. Dawson, 350 U.S. 877 (1955); Holmes v. City of Atlanta, 350 U.S. 879 (1955). (Emory trustee Henry Bowden argued Atlanta's case for segregation at both the Fifth Circuit and the Supreme Court.) This action would have upset in particular Tulane board member Lester Lautenschlager, a former college football standout and the director of New Orleans's Recreational Department for many years. New Orleans had gone to great pains to keep black and white recreation separate, and did not cease to do so even after these decisions. Fairclough, Race & Democracy, 152–53.
interest to me. However, I would not like to take any step now that may delay action of
the Administrators which may be broader in its scope than anything I may do by edict.”

At the December meeting of the board, Chairman Jones again indicated his eagerness
to “dispose of the racial question” very early in the next year. That eagerness grew
when in February 1956 he received a letter from Dr. Emmet Irwin, president of the
Greater New Orleans Citizens’ Council, taking Tulane to task for the actions of some of
its faculty, who were “appearing in public or otherwise espousing the cause of integration
of the races.” Jones was apparently troubled by Irwin’s letter, which purported to be a
gesture of good will, meant only to advise the board that “considerable comment is being
made in the community concerning this activity of Tulane people.” Irwin rebuked the
university for allowing faculty members to appear on integrated discussion panels, for
allowing blacks to lecture on campus, and to otherwise “lead the public to believe” that
Tulane supported integration. Special attention was directed at Forest LaViolette, the
head of the department of sociology and anthropology, and the faculty of the School of
Welfare. Anticipating claims of academic freedom, Irwin claimed that “the open
advocacy of integration in the classroom is certainly not considered academic freedom,
but rather as prejudiced teaching advocating integration.” Finally, Irwin stated flatly, “the

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24 Harris to Lambert, November 17, 1955, Box 63, Harris Papers, TUA. Lambert was
willing to wait to act to help black doctors and New Orleans’s Flint–Goodrich Hospital,
but held the rather forlorn hope that “the few - very few, I’m certain – reactionaries on
Tulane’s Board will not delay the liberalization which you and I – along with so many
others – seek to bring about. Time is important.” Robert A. Lambert to Harris, December
1, 1955, Box 63, Harris Papers, TUA.
25 Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, December 14, 1955, TUA.
26 Emmet Irwin to Jones, February 2, 1956, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-
Negroes,” TUA. Irwin also sent copies to prominent board members Darwin Fenner and
Clifford Favrot, as well as to the Citizen’s Council of New Orleans. Jones read Irwin’s
entire letter into the record at the next board meeting. Minutes of the Meeting of the
Board of Administrators, February 8, 1956, TUA.
time has come for each of us to take a stand and if we are not for separation of the races there is but one other category in which we might be placed.”

27 Harris drafted a brief reply for Jones’s signature, but it is not clear if it was ever sent. Harris carefully thanked Irwin for his “courteous” expression of concern for Tulane but made it clear that Tulane employees did not forfeit their rights as citizens. “Expressions and manifestations of differences of opinion on what has come to be, perhaps, the largest social issue of our time,” Harris wrote, “can scarcely be avoided within any group of citizens and scholars.” Draft reply, February 16, 1956; Harris to Jones, February 16, 1956, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA.

The Tulane board met on March 21, 1956, to decide finally which category it preferred. The members dispensed with the regular order of business and devoted the meeting “primarily to the consideration of the admission of Negroes to the graduate schools of the University.” The Law Committee and the Educational Affairs Committee, which had each considered the matter already, stated their conclusions. The Law Committee reported first, and, after a year and at least five detailed analyses of the legal documents involved, the committee had made up its mind. By unanimous vote it agreed that “the admission of negroes at this time would not be free of complications and it, therefore, recommends that there be no change in the policy on that subject at this time.”

28 The Law Committee report, on the other hand, focused on the desire of the graduate divisions to desegregate. These divisions, the committee wrote, “are unanimous in their belief that there is a great need by qualified negro students seeking higher education for the educational opportunity available in the Graduate and Professional Schools at Tulane; that a great service could be rendered in undertaking the advanced education of these qualified students; that their faculties desire to undertake the education

29 Harris’s files contain Mrs. Snellings’s July, 1955 memo and others of varying degrees of detail from Joseph McCluskey, Ashton Phelps, law school Dean Ray Forrester, and J. Blanc Monroe. Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA.
of these students, and that they believe that the students of the Schools involved would accept them if they were admitted." Max Lapham of the medical school also warned the committee of the loss of federal research funds as well as the probable loss of important faculty that would inevitably follow a refusal to desegregate.\footnote{Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, March 21, 1956, TUA.}

In this contest, the desires of the graduate deans and their faculties took second place. The prospect of a legal challenge on a politically unpopular racial change was more than the cautious and largely unsympathetic board was prepared to take on. The explosiveness of the issue, and the incredibly high level of tension, is hinted at by the extraordinary statement of board member Edgar Stern. Stern, instrumental in the creation of Dillard University and active for decades in improving relations between the black and white citizens of New Orleans, felt compelled “to openly deny the charges” that he supported the integration of the races in the public schools. Requesting the floor on a point of personal privilege, Stern acknowledged that he had received reports of “the undercover feeling” that he was promoting school desegregation. “[E]ven though he was confident that the Board members [did] not subscribe to this feeling” Stern wanted to reassure them. This was not an auspicious sign for the desegregation of Tulane.

Indeed, “after full and deliberate consideration” the administrators declared a firm policy on racial change at Tulane. They were against it. They resolved, simply, “that there be no change in the existing policies relative to the admission of Negroes to Tulane.

\footnote{Ibid. The educational affairs committee meeting was attended by deans Lumiansky of the graduate school, Wisner of the school of social work, Lapham of the medical school, and Forrester of the law school. All supported changing the restriction in unambiguous terms. The meeting was anticlimactic, however, as Joseph Jones opened it with a report from the law committee that indicated unpredictable legal consequences might follow from such a move and advising against it. Minutes of Meeting of Educational Affairs Committee, March 14, 1956, Box 14, Harris Papers, TUA.}
University at this time." Although race-related problems bedeviled Tulane throughout the late 1950s, this decision would stand.

Racial incidents on campus, uncontrollable contacts between black and white students, faculty and student agitation, and indications from funding agencies that they would not continue to grant money to segregated institutions multiplied during the last years of the decade. Tulane's faculty in particular grew impatient. In May 1956 the graduate faculty tried a new approach, proposing consideration of "an administrative facility in New Orleans that would provide for non-segregated enrollment in graduate studies." Under the banner of some other entity besides Tulane, they may have hoped, desegregated graduate education might be possible. The Graduate Council, however, quietly killed this idea, deciding that "such a move is not feasible at this time."33

In the fall of 1957 faculty members seized on a recent resolution of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). At its annual meeting the AAUP had endorsed the desegregation of both public and private higher education. Arguing that free access to educational opportunity was a crucial aspect of academic freedom, the AAUP resolved that racial segregation "imperils the right of the teacher to teach, as well as the right of the student to learn." Further, the resolution affirmed the right of every teacher to act individually or within organizations to advance desegregation.34

On December 2, 1957, a memo went out from Dean Lumiansky to the members of the graduate faculty informing them that a meeting would take place on December 10 to consider, among other things, the AAUP resolution on segregation. President Harris was

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32 Ibid.
33 Minutes of a Meeting of the Graduate Council, January 7, 1957, Box 28, Harris Papers, TUA.
also notified of the agenda and quickly responded with a note to Lumiansky. Regarding the proposal that the graduate faculty endorse the AAUP’s statement and make public that endorsement, Harris seemed frankly alarmed. “I would like to say,” he urged, “that in the present situation it is not only not helpful in the local situation but may actually be detrimental to our own hope for an intelligent, dispassionate solution to this problem. It seems apparent that this solution may be reached only after a period during which there is no agitation. Perhaps we have started on such a period and I would regret if any action by the Graduate Faculty would cause its interruption.”

In spite of Harris’s warning, the graduate faculty took the matter up as scheduled. Following lengthy discussion, Professors Abram Amsel and William L. Kolb moved that the AAUP resolution be endorsed. This motion carried, but the closeness of the vote (42 to 30) indicated enough significant division that Amsel and Kolb requested that no formal action be taken after all. None was, but Harris was compelled to report the situation to the board at its meeting the following week.

The threat of expulsion from the Association of American Law Schools also continued during the late 1950s. At its 1957 meeting the AALS overwhelmingly voted to censure schools that still refused to admit qualified blacks. By this time, though, censure had the

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35 Memo to the Members of the Graduate Faculty, December 2, 1957; Harris to Lumiansky, December 9, 1957, Box 28, Harris Papers, TUA. In its May 14, 1957 meeting the graduate faculty agreed to consider the AAUP statement in December, by which time copies could be distributed. Minutes of a Meeting of the Faculty of the Graduate School, May 14, 1957, Box 28, Harris Papers, TUA.
36 Both Amsel and Kolb taught in Newcomb College. Amsel was a psychologist; Kolb a sociologist. Dyer, Tulane, 330, 342.
37 President’s Report to the Board, December 17, 1957, TUA.
38 Ray Forrester to Harris, January 6, 1958, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy – Negroes,” TUA. In a rather remarkable turn of events John Wade, dean of Vanderbilt’s law school, served as chairman of the AALS Committee on Racial Discrimination in 1958. In this capacity he wrote Forrester, asking if there was any way he or the
power to harm Tulane’s law school almost as much as expulsion. Law Dean Ray

Forrester sent Harris a cogent summary of the problem:

A censure has the effect of smearing an educational institution in the eyes of many people and may lead to permanent injury to reputation and standing. Leaving aside the merits of the basic issue of segregation, I do not want the Tulane Law School to receive a bad name nationally, and I feel that even many of our southern friends, although sympathizing with a segregation policy, would still choose to send their young people to a northern or eastern institution where no such national censure would exist. Furthermore, the Tulane Law School is active in a national and international sense and, if it is to continue to occupy this position and to seek to strengthen it in the future, it must face squarely and realistically the implications of the segregation problem.39

Tulane students became more aware of racial problems and had more contacts with black college students during the late 1950s. They also began to show signs of abandoning caution. In the spring of 1958 Tulane students, along with some faculty members, were meeting with their counterparts from Loyola, Xavier, and Dillard at the Dillard University Social Science Club. Harris, reporting this to the board, anticipated objections and cut them off with a short statement: “I know of no effective way of forbidding either students or faculty personnel from attending any professional, cultural, or even social function which they may choose to attend.”40 To the board, though, even minor contacts between Tulane students and black college students were subject to

committee could help the situation at Tulane. Forrester’s reply was of a piece with virtually all of Harris’s answers to such offers: “Under the present circumstances, I do not believe that there is much that any of us can do in the situation. In fact, it is my own conviction that too much activity at this time may actually aggravate the situation rather than help it.” Harris, of course, saw this before it was sent. Wade to Forrester, March 11, 1958; Forrester to Wade, March 14, 1958; Forrester to Harris, March 14, 1958, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA.

39 Ibid. Harris apparently made a few editorial changes and submitted this as part of his next report to the board. President’s Report to the Board, January 8, 1958, TUA.
40 President’s Report to the Board, April 9, 1958, TUA. A note in Harris’s handwriting on his copy of the report indicates that the board apparently went along with this, as long as
question. In 1958 John Stibbs, who was in charge of student activities, ran down a list of those he knew about in a letter to Harris, noting that “contacts between the races at the student level are on the increase most everywhere in the college world.”\footnote{President’s Report to the Board, April 9, 1958, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA.} Harris in turn notified the board of these incidental contacts, which took place at ROTC rifle matches, National Student Association Meetings, debate tournaments, and other similar venues. At times, Tulane students insisted that they would only participate in statewide or regional events if representatives from black colleges were also allowed to attend. Harris urged, and the board apparently agreed, that “it would be unwise to attempt to prohibit contacts with mixed groups as long as they do not involve meetings on our own campus.”\footnote{John H. Stibbs to Harris, March 10, 1958, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes;” President’s Report to the Board, March 12, 1958, TUA.} 

Other aspects of the problem arose from what must have seemed like every direction. Tulane students, for example, appeared in a theater production that held performances at black high schools in New Orleans.\footnote{President’s Report to the Board, March 12, 1958, TUA.} The problem of athletic contests with teams that had black players was growing more difficult as more southern schools admitted blacks.\footnote{John Hubbard to Jack Dailey, February 24, 1958, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA. President’s Report to the Board, March 12, 1958, TUA.} The \textit{Hullabaloo} continued to editorialize in favor of desegregation, sometimes drawing hostile responses from the community.\footnote{Harris to Joseph Jones, January 21, 1955; Jones to Harris, February 11, 1955, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA. In 1957 Colorado State abruptly pulled out of a basketball game it was to have played at Tulane, and the 1958 and 1959 games that had been scheduled with the Air Force Academy were cancelled by the Academy because of Tulane’s segregation policy. Annual Report of the Senate Committee on Athletics, 1958, Box 20, Harris Papers, TUA.} The administration of various national tests, 

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\item no integrated meetings were allowed to take place on the Tulane campus.
\item President’s Report to the Board, April 9, 1958, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA.
\item John H. Stibbs to Harris, March 10, 1958, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes;” President’s Report to the Board, March 12, 1958, TUA.
\item President’s Report to the Board, March 12, 1958, TUA.
\item John Hubbard to Jack Dailey, February 24, 1958, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA. President’s Report to the Board, March 12, 1958, TUA.
\item Harris to Joseph Jones, January 21, 1955; Jones to Harris, February 11, 1955, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA. In 1957 Colorado State abruptly pulled out of a basketball game it was to have played at Tulane, and the 1958 and 1959 games that had been scheduled with the Air Force Academy were cancelled by the Academy because of Tulane’s segregation policy. Annual Report of the Senate Committee on Athletics, 1958, Box 20, Harris Papers, TUA.
\item On January 11, 1957, for example, \textit{Hullabaloo} editor E.S. Evans wrote a bold piece that called for the complete dismantling of segregation. “Yes, integration is coming,” Evans stated. “It cannot be stopped, like it or not. Times change and as they do they crush...
such as the National Teacher Examination, which Tulane undertook with pride, meant that black test-takers sat next to whites in Tulane classrooms. This too brought objections from outside campus.\textsuperscript{46}

Applications from blacks, some with excellent credentials, arrived with regularity during the late 1950s. In most cases Tulane officials simply replied with a standard letter expressing “sympathetic understanding” but refusing to consider the application. (Harris continued to tinker with this standard letter, making his last revision in April 1959.)\textsuperscript{47}

Occasionally, a slipup occurred. In late 1956 Ernest Morial, the first black graduate of LSU’s law school and later the first black mayor of New Orleans, had to withdraw his registration for two classes offered to practicing attorneys in Tulane’s School of Law when he was mistakenly accepted by staff members who did not realize that he was black.\textsuperscript{48} As always, Harris kept the board, and chairman Jones in particular, informed of applications from blacks.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{46} Russel M. Geer to Harris, March 26, 1955, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA.\textsuperscript{47} Letters from blacks requesting admission during the late 1950s were received by several schools, including the graduate school and the school of social work. These letters, along with Tulane’s letters of refusal, are scattered in several file folders in Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA.\textsuperscript{48} Eugene A. Nabors to Harris, October 9, 1956, Box 31, Harris Papers, TUA. Nabors included a newspaper clipping with the story of Vanderbilt’s desegregation of its law school.}
Pressures to resist desegregation, of course, were also increasing, often with a great deal of fury, at the same time. Vocal segregationists like Emmet Irwin of the Citizens’ Council complained, with a vague suggestion of a threat, about blacks attending lectures in Tulane’s McAlister Auditorium. Tempted to respond with barely veiled contempt, Harris instead largely ignored such provocations. After drafting two equally scathing answers to Irwin, for example, Harris sent neither. As unpleasant as these incidents were, however, they were only the tip of the iceberg. The larger and far more dangerous problem was the unaltered opposition of the great majority of New Orleans whites to desegregation of any kind. Irwin’s barely suppressed anger was clear, and his admonition that “there can be no middle road in this all important question, which will determine the future of both our republican form of government and the white race,” certainly rang true in New Orleans in the late 1950s.

Decades of conflict between Harris and the board on this and other issues finally took their toll. The president, not entirely of his own volition, informed the board in late 1958 of his impending retirement. In the fall of 1959, having been given to understand that there would be no role remaining for him at Tulane, Harris accepted the presidency of his

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49 Emmet L. Irwin to Board of Administrators, February 19, 1958; Harris to Irwin, March 12, 1958; Harris to Irwin, March 17, 1958. A letter from Irwin to the board on March 27, 1958 indicates that he never received a reply. Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA.
50 Emmet L. Irwin to Board of Administrators, March 27, 1958, Harris Papers, Addendum, “Policy-Negroes,” TUA.
51 The announcement of Harris’s retirement from Tulane was met with scepticism from those who were more familiar with the internal politics of the school. Hodding Carter, editor of the Delta Democrat-Times in Greenville, Mississippi and a friend of Harris’s, wrote from abroad that “I know there’s more to your retirement than meets the eye. And I’m sorry this happened. You have done wonderful things for Tulane and I know the University will never forget it.” Carter to Harris, May 7, 1959, Box 64, Harris Papers, TUA.
alma mater, Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. From this moment on Harris, freed finally from the constraints of trying to please unappeasable board members, reactionary alumni, restless faculty, and insensible students—though still bound by his love of Tulane—was able to express his opinions openly.

Speaking to the Tulane chapter of the AAUP in December 1959, shortly before his departure from the university, Harris discussed his basic philosophy of higher education. Insisting that the entire purpose of a university is the discovery and teaching of truth, Harris asserted that:

The notion that the university can be whatever the students, faculty, administration, trustees, alumni or public want it to be is a serious error. If it is devoted to discovering and teaching truth, its mission fails unless these groups . . . meet the conditions required of the mission. To the extent the conditions are not met, whatever the cause – whether by irrelevant and distracting student activities, by indifferent faculty members or officers of administration, or by restrictions of public support or trustee interference – to that precise extent the institution is something less than a university may or ought to be. Admittedly, no President can transform the conditions of American college life and the dispositions limiting education. But he can discourage them. The price of such discouragement may be the forfeiture of

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52 For an account of the desegregation of Mercer and Harris’s critical role in that episode see Will D. Campbell, The Stem of Jesse: The Costs of Community at a 1960s Southern School (Macon, GA, 1995).

53 At the request of its Chairman, Father Theodore Hesburgh of Notre Dame, Harris began serving in 1958 on the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. Harris first made certain that Joseph Jones had no serious objections to Harris’s service on the Commission. Objections came from other quarters, though. Marie Louise Snellings, whose husband had refused to serve, wrote Harris about the matter. “In regard to the Civil rights Committee,” she complained, “I am sorry you felt you should serve. . . . Many words, no matter how pretty, cannot alter the fundamental objective and with Tulane in its present position I regret this.” Harris defended himself with a standard argument: “unless we ourselves undertake to work out some of these problems, outsiders who have no real knowledge of our situation will recklessly attempt to do so.” Harris also privately confided his disappointment in Mrs. Snellings’s comments to other friends. Snellings to Harris, February 13, 1959; Harris to Snellings, February 23, 1959; Harris to Monte Lemann and Edgar Stern, February 23, 1959, Box 59, Harris Papers, TUA.
acclaim and popularity, though I suspect he will advance his claim to fundamental respect. Which he prefers is the test of his own character.\textsuperscript{54}

To his everlasting credit Rufus Harris preferred respect to popularity. He made his decisions based on what he believed would enable Tulane University to come as close as it possibly could to fulfilling the true purpose of a university. As soon as Harris understood that the refusal to admit capable students because they were black was hurting Tulane—because it was costly, because it was immoral, because it was simply \textit{beside the point}—he began to advocate ending the restriction. And in the end this advocacy, along with other positions he held for the same reasons, made him profoundly unpopular with the constituency he most needed to do his job, the board of administrators. The administrators, Harris understood, had a different agenda. The pursuit of truth carried somewhat less weight with them. The pleasures of a winning football team, the exercise of personal power, and increased status in the eyes of their peers usually counted for more than the often unpopular and uncomfortable striving for understanding that Harris saw as the very reason for Tulane’s existence. Their neighbors’ displeasure and anger, the threat to their social position, the possibility of traditional racial arrangements turned upside down, and a resentful refusal to capitulate to “outside” pressures for desegregation motivated the board far more than any concern for Tulane’s proper role in its larger communities. Harris’s address to the AAUP contained notes on the role of the trustees that capture in brief phrases the essence of his inability to persuade these people to desegregate the school. “Feel a little sorry for them,” he wrote. “They know so little. Their interference – unwittingly at times. Their EGO.” Finally, and ironically, “most

\textsuperscript{54} “An Informal Discussion of My Personal Concepts of University Purpose, Organization, Operative Practices and Education Philosophy,” December 18, 1959, Box
critical single factor in American Education’s advancement.” Simply, without the agreement of this group nothing could be changed. So, nothing was.

II

In the mid-1950s many, probably most, trustees of Duke University still clung to a traditional vision of their university. In their eyes, the goals of national recognition and leadership in the South contained no contradiction. One alumnus, objecting to the choice of Hodding Carter as commencement speaker in 1955, summed up this attitude succinctly. “I confidently expect Duke to continue to gain in stature among the leading universities of the country, and it is my fervent hope that in so doing it will retain those conservative qualities and traditions which have endeared it to generations of its sons and daughters.”

By the late 1950s, however, the contradiction between maintaining southern traditions and growing in national stature was becoming unmanageable. Conservative traditions were under unrelenting siege across the South and all around Duke. In the fall of 1955 the

65, Harris Papers, TUA.
55 The New Orleans upper class was quite different from its counterparts in Atlanta or Houston. While the New Orleans elite was undeniable successful in business, the city was notable for its lack of the sort of national business values that drove Atlanta and Houston. New Orleans did not seem to hunger for the acceptance of the rest of the country in quite the same way or to value money regardless of its pedigree. More tightly knit and far less open to newcomers than the elites of the more business-oriented cities, the upper class in New Orleans was, with notable exceptions, also less interested in civic improvement and reform. Although the historical corruption of Louisiana politics doubtless played a major role in this apathy, the obsession with Mardi Gras that took up so much energy, time, and money was also a factor. See Phyllis Hutton Raabe, “Status and Its Impact: New Orleans’s Carnival, the Social Upper Class, and Upper Class Power (Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1973); Charles Chai, “Who Rules New Orleans? A Study of Community Power Structures: Some Preliminary Findings on Social Characteristics and Attitudes of New Orleans Leaders,” Louisiana Business Survey, (October, 1971), 2–11.
University of North Carolina, just a few miles down the road, admitted three black undergraduates without disruption.\textsuperscript{57} Duke itself became home to persistent, organized agitation for the elimination of segregation. In October 1955, for example, more than 350 Duke students signed a petition protesting the school’s refusal to allow black students from nearby North Carolina College to attend plays in Duke’s Page Auditorium.\textsuperscript{58} The student newspaper, the \textit{Chronicle}, while still largely focused on dances, student elections, and football games, grew more cognizant of the social changes that were transforming North Carolina. Articles on the progress of integration and editorials favoring it at Duke became common.\textsuperscript{59} Black speakers, nationally prominent men like Ralph Bunche as well as locally important blacks like President Alfonso Elder of North Carolina College, visited campus.

President Hollis Edens, always a realistic man, seems by the late 1950s to have absorbed the nature of the changes in the South and in the South’s relationship to the rest of the nation. The direction of his thinking on segregation, which began to shift after \textit{Brown v. Board of Education}, was now firmly established. His commitment to do what

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\item Eugene H. Brooks, June 28, 1955, Box 7, Edens Papers, DUA.
\item The \textit{Duke Chronicle} ran a series of articles in the fall of 1957 that examined in detail the desegregation of UNC. Despite some moments of discomfort and the opposition of some individual white students the transition was remarkably smooth, even in social and recreational settings. October 1; October 4; October 8, 1957.
\item \textit{Charlotte Observer}, October 30, 1955. Edens received a letter urging him to do something about this situation and suggesting that the petition was the result of “a lot of Communists around Chapel Hill and Durham” who were “actively back of the NAACP” and who were probably “proselyting” [sic] the young Duke students. George F. Crook to Edens, December 12, 1955, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.
\item On December 13, 1955, for example, the \textit{Chronicle} called segregation a “barbaric tradition.” This editorial was perhaps the boldest condemnation of segregation published at Duke in the 1950s, arguing that the school must “rise above the provincialism of Durham,” and demanding an explanation from chairman of the board Norman Cocke. While the \textit{Chronicle}’s editorial stance towards segregation varied in intensity from year
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was best for the university led him to conclude that segregation at Duke should be gradually abolished. As with all things, Edens approached this challenge slowly, by degrees. At their February 1955 meeting Edens merely warned the trustees that the problem of desegregation was “actively before the University, and this Board should be prepared to hear more about it in the future.” He began thinking, though, about possible solutions and gathering information that might be of some help to him in persuading the Duke trustees to adjust to the rapidly changing world around them.

In the late fall of 1955, the University Council, which Edens had authorized in February to conduct a study of desegregation in higher education, reported its findings. After significant research, including confidential conversations with the heads of newly desegregated schools, the committee concluded that the transition had been almost uniformly smooth. All reports indicated that a small number of black students applied, few were qualified to enroll, and when they did they were easily absorbed into the student body. Social difficulties had been few; there was almost no trouble over dining or other facilities. Both students and faculty simply accepted blacks as students. The University

to year, though, from this point on it consistently understood legal segregation to be doomed.

60 Edens’s efforts to help bring about a smoother transition to desegregation also extended beyond the Duke campus, with somewhat more success. For example, he helped craft a proposal for the elimination of a separate category for black colleges within the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, which passed (without any negative votes) at the Association’s meeting in December, 1960. Edens to Donald C. Agnew, December 12, 1956; Agnew to Edens, December 18, 1956; “Action with Regard to Colleges for Negro Youth,” December 6, 1956, Box 67, Edens Papers, DUA.

61 President’s Report to the Board, February 23, 1955, Box 30, Edens Papers, DUA.

62 Minutes of the Meeting of the University Council, February 16, 1955; March 17, 1955, Box 35, Edens Papers, DUA. The study of trends in desegregation was the work of a committee chaired by Dean Marcus Hobbs, which included vice-president Herbert Herring, deans James Cleland and W.C. Davison, ans professor E.R. Latty.

63 The “Report by Committee on Trends and Experiences in Desegregation at Universities in the South” was distributed on December 14, 1955, Box 35, Edens Papers,
Council passed a resolution at its next meeting, asking that “action be taken looking toward the admission of duly qualified Negroes in such areas of advanced study in the University as might be desirable.”

At approximately the same time Edens approached Vanderbilt’s Harvie Branscomb with questions about that school’s steps towards desegregation. Branscomb detailed the board resolutions that provided for blacks to be admitted to those divisions of the university that had no counterparts in the city’s black schools, but he noted that, because of local variations, Edens’s experience might well be vastly different. Edens agreed, although he felt that there might be something in Vanderbilt’s strategy that would be of use to him. Still, he ended the correspondence on a pessimistic note: “We have made no move whatsoever here toward desegregation. I doubt if we can move for quite a while yet.”

Without a doubt the local variation that prevented Duke from moving at that time was the board of trustees. The presence of Harold Vanderbilt, a close ally of Branscomb’s, as the chairman of that board was critically important in mitigating the influence of more conservative local trustees who most likely would have flatly opposed desegregation if left to themselves. Timing was also crucial. Vanderbilt’s board had agreed to a principled basis for beginning desegregation in 1953, before the Brown decision created a bitter
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DUA. Several of the people the committee spoke with, while stressing the relative ease of the transition, still expressed trepidation over the “delicate issue” of the swimming pool. In some cases dining halls or dormitories were kept segregated, but there had been no trouble over this.

64 Minutes of the Meeting of the University Council, January 18, 1956, Box 35, Edens Papers, DUA. The resolution was passed by a vote of eight to four, with two abstentions.

65 Branscomb to Edens, November 11, 1955; Edens to Branscomb, November 16, 1955, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA. The heat generated by the issue of desegregation at this time is indicated by Branscomb’s bold markings on his letter to Edens: “PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL.”
mood of resentment in the South. The situation was far different at Duke. Edens, like
Rufus Harris at Tulane, had the impossible task of persuading the board to desegregate in
an environment saturated with racial hostility and resentment of outside “interference.”
This, nonetheless, he attempted to do.

Unlike Rufus Harris, Edens was a very quiet, calm, and reserved man, deferential to
the Duke trustees and at times almost passive in his dealings with them. Harris’s
defereence to Tulane’s board members was forced and never quite convincing. It was
more strategic than heartfelt, something that the Tulane board could not have failed to
notice. Edens’s manner, though, was thoroughly and persuasively respectful. In the end,
Edens probably simply accepted his role as subordinate to the trustees better than did
Harris, who undoubtedly thought he could run things better on his own. Where the edgier
Harris sometimes seemed scarcely able to disguise his impatience with the Tulane board,
especially on racial matters, Edens’s increased assertiveness on the question of black
admissions was extremely subtle. His personal reticence and dutifulness did not change
to any degree, so he seemed not to be applying pressure at all. In fact, he was.

Although Edens continued, when discussing race, to address those outside the inner
circle of Duke’s leadership with his customary opacity, within that circle his growing
understanding that the university was truly threatened by its failure to change led him
subtly to urge opening admissions. Characteristically, Edens went about the business of
marshalling a case with great caution and presented it with great restraint. His messages
to the board became increasingly pointed but always acknowledged the authority of the
trustees as the final decision makers.
The February 1956 board meeting marked a critical turning point in Edens's approach to the Duke board on desegregation. For the first time, his report to the trustees unambiguously argued for opening admissions to blacks. Although Edens was careful not to force a decision at that time, his careful exposition of the issue could have left no doubt that he believed the change would have to be made sooner rather than later. Still, his concern for avoiding any kind of internal split or loss of support among the trustees guided his presentation of the problem.

Edens began by quoting remarks he had made to the faculty in the fall, remarks that reflect the lack of a vision of a solution to the present racial difficulties. "[A]t present," Edens said, "Duke University and similar institutions have discretionary powers to admit negroes or not to admit them. This poses the problem with which many of you are concerned. The web of opinions, emotions and convictions is complicated, and there are no easy answers. At least this is the opinion of members of the Board of Trustees." Edens continued in the same vein, describing the many "fringe areas of this problem which confront us daily," the kind of "contact between the races in academic, religious and cultural activities" that had been steadily increasing both on and off campus since the end of World War II. The problem, according to the president, was that while these contacts continued to expand, "there is no clear guide" for how to deal with them.66

Edens then carefully laid out for the trustees exactly the problems he was talking about. While assuring them that the faculty and students remained "calm and stable," he also made it clear that they were not "neutral or unconcerned." He briefly mentioned the student newspapers, the Chronicle and its agitation for desegregation, and included the

66 Report of the President to the Board of Trustees, February 29, 1956, Box 30, Edens Papers, DUA.
entire text of the Divinity School's plea for the admission of blacks. He also reported the action of the University Council in calling for the admission of "qualified Negroes in such areas of advanced study in the University as might prove desirable and feasible." Edens saved for last the issue that was really of primary importance: "our dealings with agencies of the Federal Government in accepting contracts for research and other academic programs." Here, he assumed the day would arrive soon when real restraints would be placed on segregated schools receiving federal money and insisted that it was "unreasonable to expect a university of Duke's standing to cut its faculties off from such opportunities and it is becoming increasingly difficult to avoid the segregation question in such negotiations."67

Finally, Edens briefly addressed the prospects for solving these problems. Here, he became conciliatory, downplaying the powerful arguments for change that he had just presented:

Now, it is reasonable to assume that many of you would have preferred that I omit mention of this subject but the responsibilities of my office require that I keep you informed about all major issues which concern the University. I have at present no recommendation to make and I cannot predict when I shall have one... In the meantime, I shall continue to express my views to the Committee as I have done in the past. As a matter of fact, all of you are well aware of the trend of my thinking. I do know, however, that problems of this kind require patience and time. Furthermore, decisions in a Board of Trustees for an educational institution should be by consent and agreement rather than by pressure and majority vote. And private discussions with members of the Board convince me that you are not ready for a major decision on this matter."68

The tone of his statement clearly suggests that Edens was only too aware of deep hostility to desegregation among the members of Duke's board and the probability that even mentioning it would rouse ire in some. The fact that he chose to make it at all, chose

to risk some part of his hard earned good will, testifies to his realization that desegregation was an absolute prerequisite for Duke’s continued growth in national stature.

The response of the board could not have been encouraging to Edens, though it was unusually honest. Following his report, the board engaged in a long discussion of the question of segregation. During this discussion a motion was made and seconded that a special board committee be set up to further study the matter. Before the end of discussion, however, the motion was withdrawn, “the consensus being that the Board Members have knowledge of all pertinent facts, that the President is keeping them informed of all developments, and that the subject is a matter for personal study and thought by each Board Member. It was apparent that the Board did not wish to take any action but that they continue to be alert in studying the question.”69 This was a rare admission, and one that must have thrown cold water on any hopes the Edens might have harbored for a smooth end to segregation at Duke. Rather than give the impression of action by creating a committee to investigate desegregation, these trustees simply acknowledged that no new information could make them change their minds, at least not in the foreseeable future.

Others at Duke grew more insistent that segregation be abandoned. By 1956 the Divinity School was a nearly constant source of pleas for opening admissions to all who qualified regardless of race. Individual faculty members spoke and wrote in opposition to segregation in any number of public venues. Waldo Beach, for example, a professor of Christian ethics who had been involved in the school’s efforts to desegregate since the

68 Ibid.
69 Minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting, February 29, 1956, DUA.
first petition to Edens in 1949, wrote an essay in 1956 for *Christianity and Crisis* in which he discussed the severe polarization of opinion on segregation and the danger that "moderate opinion will remain latent, frustrated, and ineffectual unless soon it can find unified courageous leadership and a public voice." In an attempt to provide some measure of that leadership, seventeen members of the Divinity School faculty issued a statement to the press affirming their "eagerness to admit suitably qualified applicants to regular courses of theological study without restrictions of race." The theologians cited the most recent General Conference of the Methodist Church, with which the Duke Divinity School was affiliated, and its call for the elimination of segregation in its institutions. While acknowledging "deep trouble of spirit," the faculty members looked "hopefully and prayerfully to the proper authorities of the University" for change.

The "proper authorities of the University" were quite unimpressed. The only trustee response came from George R. Wallace, head of a fishery in Morehead City, who expressed sheer annoyance in a letter to Hollis Edens. "Speaking frankly and entirely of my own opinion," he told Edens, "I feel that this action is, to say the least, in bad taste." While he admitted that the Divinity School professors had the right to express their own ideas, Wallace just could not contain his irritation. "I feel that if the gentlemen signing the statement which was made public do not agree with the policy of the institution at which they are teaching and if they are 'with deep trouble of spirit' then they should in good conscience disassociate themselves from such institution and align themselves with one more in keeping with their principles." Edens answered this with a firm and candid defense of the faculty members. No doubt he recognized that Wallace's suggestion

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70 Waldo Beach, "Storm Warnings From the South," *Christianity and Crisis*, March 19, 1956.
described precisely the disastrous events at Sewanee in 1952, and so he tried to quell any really bad feelings. Edens stressed that the professors wrote in good faith and were loyal to the institution: "I think we must respect the integrity of these men who appear to have a genuine concern about the problem . . . I see no desire on their part to create an unseemly spectacle. I am sure we can count on them to support the policies of the Board of Trustees while expressing their own individual convictions."\(^\text{72}\)

The convictions of professors outside the Divinity School were also becoming ever clearer. In April the Duke chapter of the AAUP passed resolutions supporting both the national AAUP policy statement condemning segregation in private higher education and the University Council's call for an end to racially restrictive admissions at Duke. In June the entire faculty also voted, without discussion, to approve the Council's resolution. They also insisted that the resolution be passed on to the board of trustees.\(^\text{73}\)

\(^{71}\) *North Carolina Christian Advocate*, August 9, 1956.

\(^{72}\) George R. Wallace to Edens, August 14, 1956; Edens to George R. Wallace, August 17, 1956, Box 33, Edens Papers, DU.

\(^{73}\) *Duke Chronicle*, April 27, 1956; President's Report to the Board, June 2, 1956, Box 30, Edens Papers, DU. At the June, 1956 board meeting Edens informed the trustees of yet another awkward, but unavoidable, racial situation. The university had contracted with the Atomic Energy Commission to teach a six-week summer course in radiation biology for high school teachers at the Beaufort Marine Laboratory. When the contract was signed, Edens had met with the board's Executive Committee and made certain that they understood the possibility of a black teacher enrolling in the course. When one of the most qualified applicants did in fact turn out to be black, Edens duly reported his acceptance to the board. Because Duke's own admissions policy was not at issue here (the Atomic Energy Commission dictated the standards), this was only of minor importance. Still, fearful of "undesirable publicity and excitement," Edens prepared a plan for dealing with the situation in the event that it became public knowledge. Happily for him it never did. President's Report to the Board, June 2, 1956, Box 30, Edens Papers, DU. Edens's assistant, Earl Porter, wrote Duke trustee Josh Horne, publisher of the Rocky Mount *Evening Telegram*, with a proposed statement to be published in case the enrollment of Joseph Parker, Jr., a black high school teacher from Durham, became controversial. In addition to general background on the course, the statement included a justification for offering it even though the federal government required that there be no segregation: "The University felt that it must cooperate, both because of the urgency of
Despite their focus on coursework and social activities, the issue would not die among students, either. Many seemed now to be constantly debating, circulating petitions, or even writing letters to trustees. The Divinity School student body produced another petition to the board, signed by 150 (of 220) students, asking for desegregation of that school.\textsuperscript{74} The Women’s Student Government overwhelmingly passed a resolution calling for the end to racial restrictions in admissions.\textsuperscript{75} In late 1956 and early 1957 a group of undergraduates organized a campaign to write to each trustee individually with a plea for desegregation in the Divinity School. Over a dozen students participated, but they received answers from only a handful of trustees. Most of these answers were not especially revealing—they politely explained that the matter was always being reviewed the request and because of the vital need for instruction in this field.” A clause to be included only “if needed” reiterated that the admissions criteria—ability and experience—were established by the Atomic Energy Commission and the National Science Foundation, not by Duke. Earl Porter to Josh Horn, June 21, 1956, Box 16, Edens Papers, DUA. The following summer Duke did make public the attendance of blacks at a similar institute on campus. There was no public outcry, but the \textit{ Chronicle} did take the administration to task for its hypocrisy. “Is it only the power of the federal government,” the paper asked, “which can force our policy-makers into sharing the wealth with other qualified students? The threat that the government holds is more forceful than either a feeling generated by religious principles or the fraternity of the academic world.” \textit{Duke Chronicle}, April 19, 1957.

\textsuperscript{74} Arthur C. Thomas to Hollis Edens, December 7, 1956; Edens to Arthur C. Thomas, December 13, 1956, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA. The text of the petition is found in the \textit{Duke Chronicle}, February 22, 1957.

\textsuperscript{75} Polly Price to Edens, May 8, 1956. Like nearly all incidents that involved race, this resolution was reported in the press and drew hostile reaction from the community. One correspondent admitted the women’s good intentions but warned “you could not raise them [black students] to a standard of decency without to some extent being contaminated yourselves.” J.R. Hester to Polly Price, May 11, 1956. As always, Edens defended the students’ right to express their views to any correspondent who complained. One example is at Edens to P.J. Baugh, Sr., June 30, 1956. All these documents are in Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.
by the board—but a few exchanges demonstrate the nearly complete lack of common
ground between supporters and opponents of desegregation.⁷⁶

The letters from the students made the same arguments for racial change that were
made by other groups of students, by faculty, and by alumni who wanted the racial
restrictions in admission dropped—not only at Duke but at all of these private schools.
That is, they argued that Christian morality, notions of democracy, academic freedom, or
reputation demanded that the white South change. Occasionally, but not often, someone
would take notice that there were actual black people involved in the matter, asserting for
example that “colored people should be given their chance to attain a way of life equal to
that of ours.” Even here, though, lurked the belief that few blacks would be affected by
any such change: “I also feel that many of the members of the colored race are not ready
for a sudden change in their way of living.”⁷⁷ Ironically, even for proponents of
desegregation living, breathing black people were not at the heart of the matter. The issue
was something else: their own willingness to accept a few black students, their own
Christian morality, their own freedom to choose their students, their own reputation
among their peers.

The trustees who opposed desegregation saw the question in starkly different terms.
There were no abstractions in their thinking. The concrete was what mattered. The issue
was the physical presence of black people where they did not belong. Like Donald

⁷⁶ There are over a dozen of these letters, and a few responses, in Edens files. For his part,
the president seemed not at all alarmed by the student letters, although he warned the
trustees that they were part of a campaign and suggested they not answer them. He also
defended the students, noting in a letter to one trustee that “I am compelled to treat the
students’ attitude with respect. They are quite naïve but are sincere and by and large are
not the trouble making kind.” Edens to B.S. Womble, December 21, 1956. All the letters
are in Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.
⁷⁷ Rodney Neal to N.E. Edgerton, n.d. but December, 1956, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.
Davidson at Vanderbilt objecting to the admission of a black minister to the School of Religion, supporters of segregation at Duke reasoned from a different, more traditional set of principles than those who objected to it. Most of them came from a generation when blacks received little education, were confined to menial occupations, and were perceived as physically dirty and dangerous. For them, it remained unthinkable that any good could come from the breakdown of the strict bars that kept the dangerous "other" away from whites, especially white youth. One opponent of desegregation thus responded with very concrete and pointed questions, including the following:

1. Should the Trustees of Duke University permit conditions at Duke that are not permitted in the homes of the students who comprise the student body of Duke?
2. Do your father and mother practice social and racial equality with the Negroes in your home?  

The answers to these questions were obvious. No decent white family would allow blacks to socialize in their homes. Duke, likewise, should not allow the presence of blacks within the circle of the "Duke family."  

The importance of these kinds of arguments can be seen in the debate at the February 1957 meeting of the Duke board, which came soon after most trustees had received these letters. It was another letter, from James Cannon, dean of the Duke Divinity School, that provided the catalyst for the first formal vote of the board on desegregation. Edens received this letter on February 13, 1957, exactly two weeks before the winter meeting of  

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78 Edwin L. Jones to Anne Corpening, December 20, 1956; Anne Corpening to Jones, December 6, 1956, Box 33, Edens Papers, DU.  
79 The notion of the university as a "family" was pervasive at all these schools. Students, faculty, alumni, parents, and administrators were ordinarily included in this group, which was conceived of as a community of like-minded individuals. For example, a speech given to incoming freshmen at Emory in 1954 entitled "The Emory Ideal," stressed that the "Emory Family" was composed of these groups and that together "have, since 1836,
the trustees. The timing alone raises suspicion that Cannon and Edens may have colluded in its rather sudden appearance. Cannon, while not a die-hard segregationist, had opposed earlier Divinity School efforts to begin desegregation. His explicit acknowledgement of his reluctance on the issue and his admission that he and Edens had discussed the matter “a number of times” only deepens this suspicion.

The dean’s letter could not possibly have been better crafted to persuade a group of traditionalists. Cannon spent a good deal of time establishing that he himself was reluctant; that he had not been a supporter of Divinity School petitions asking the board to open admissions to blacks. “Even now,” Cannon explained, “I should much prefer to leave this thorny subject to my successor.” He tried to back away from moral arguments, or any arguments based on abstractions, and to argue only concrete, “practical” issues, going out of his way to establish that he was no crusader. “I am not moved,” he claimed, “by the efforts of agitators within the Divinity School or without.” The dean thereby positioned himself as a moderate, a man of reason as opposed to emotion, and one who saw and understood the folly of extreme positions. 80

Only urgent circumstances, he claimed, compelled him to speak out now. “It is my considered judgment that we should not and cannot longer postpone action on this question. Indeed, I feel that we are almost too late even if action is taken now.” Cannon made clear that his foremost consideration was the “standing of Duke University,” not any larger questions about the nature of the Christian gospel or American democracy. Indeed, he was careful to craft his statement so that it was really “about” the standing of

dedicated themselves to certain ideals and maintained certain principles.” Box 21, Goodrich White Papers, EUA. Similar ideas were expressed at all these schools.
80 James Cannon to Edens, n.d. but about February 13, 1957, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.
Duke University (rather than “about” blacks and their rights): “As a national institution it is an embarrassment to be out of step with other institutions of our rank. I think I am correct in the observation that Duke is the only member of the Association of American Universities that does not admit negroes. I am impressed by the fact that all other major theological schools in the South except one (Emory) admit negroes or plan to do so at once.”

Cannon also attempted to minimize the impact of the change he was asking for. “I am convinced that the problem of assimilating the few negroes who would be eligible for admission to the Duke Divinity School is a minor one compared to the problem of further delay.”

The minutes of the meeting indicate that Edens strongly supported Cannon’s recommendation. He declared his concurrence with the dean’s reasoning and asked for “discretionary authority . . . to admit negroes to the Divinity School if and when properly qualified candidates should apply.” Edens was careful, however, to distance this recommendation from the increasingly vocal student demands for change, stressing that the dean’s communication was completely unrelated to a student petition that was also before the board. Edens reminded them that, like Cannon, he was no zealot on desegregation. Although he had brought this matter up several times in the past, he recalled to the trustees, he had never before presented a specific recommendation. He only did so now because he believed the time had come to squarely face the issue.

The board agreed to do so. And when the Duke trustees squarely faced the issue they explicitly affirmed their commitment to keeping segregation. Although the ten-to-thirteen vote was far closer than supporters of desegregation had dared to imagine, the end result

\[81\] *Ibid.*

\[82\] *Ibid.*
was still a firm repudiation of racial change at Duke. The trustees understood well enough, after hearing Edens’s reports and listening to Cannon’s recommendation, all the reasons why segregation was damaging the university. They certainly understood the possibility of even more devastating harm in the future. They were only too aware that sentiment on campus strongly favored the desegregation of the Divinity School. But they were not going to give in. Edens’s careful presentation, his efforts to downplay the broad implications of segregation and its impact on the South and southern blacks and to focus instead on a narrow solution to the specific problem, were wasted on these men.

The trustees who supported Edens’s recommendation were certain that desegregation was both wise and right, and that it would come soon. Sidney Alderman, who introduced the motion to open admissions in the Divinity School, wrote Edens that “[t]he present members of the board will live to be convinced, and very soon I fear, that they took the wrong action and an action which will hurt, rather than help, the national standing and reputation of our university.” This was undoubtedly correct, and Edens certainly agreed. But from the president’s point of view there was something else that mattered almost as much. “I am convinced I was right,” he answered Alderman, but “although the majority of the Board does not agree with me I think it highly important that the membership assumed as it did the responsibility of saying so.”

Edens took his orders from the board, even when those orders were misguided or counterproductive, and the board had spoken. In his 1975 memoir, former Duke chaplain Barney Jones recounted Edens’s struggles with the board on race. Edens, according to Jones, found himself in conflict with the “generally conservative and provincial” board

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83 Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees, February 27, 1957, DUA.
84 Sidney Alderman to Edens, March 1, 1957, Box 33, Edens Papers, Box 33.DUA.
only when he was able to "transcend his own provincialism" on the issue. But in spite of their disagreement, Edens was above all "determined that a wedge not be driven between himself and his Board." There was nothing to be gained from fighting with them, and the ten-to-thirteen vote indicated the potential for serious division among the trustees in addition to possible erosion of the relationship between the board as a whole and the president. To undertake, under these circumstances, a campaign to force the trustees to accept racial change would have been to endanger everything else that Duke was trying to accomplish. Ongoing plans for growth and improvement, an ambitious development campaign, the recruitment of highly qualified faculty and students—everything—would be sacrificed if a battle were to break out. Even if the fight were private, Edens’s ability to successfully pursue these goals would be compromised.

As it was, the 1957 vote, even though it revealed an almost perfect split in opinion, did nothing to damage Edens’s relationship with the board. In fact, his careful presentation of the problem won him the respect of both sides. Letters arrived afterward from supporters as well as opponents of desegregation, all praising the president for his judicious handling of a delicate matter.  

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85 Edens to Sidney Alderman, March 7, 1957, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.
86 Barney L. Jones, "Reminiscences, 1930–1960," DUA. R. Taylor Cole, a long serving administrator, later provost, at Duke also discussed Edens’s efforts to sway the board on this matter. Cole describes the "determined opposition of a large majority of the Trustees," and relates Eden’s conclusion that "moral suasion . . . would not move them toward gradual desegregation, which as a Christian and a realist he had come to favor." The Recollections of R. Taylor Cole: Educator, Emissary, Development Planner (Durham, NC, 1983), 158–59.
87 Sidney Alderman to Edens, March 1, 1957; Edwin L. Jones to Edens, March 2, 1957; Edgar Nease to Edens, February 28, 1957, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA. The supporters of desegregation clearly considered Edens an ally. Alderman, for example, wrote: "I was proud of you at the meeting of the Board on Thursday. I was proud of your courage. Your presentation of your recommendation was superb and won you the admiration of my most bitter opponents. Your recommendation was everlastingly right."
trustees informed about the problems segregation continued to cause at Duke but would studiously avoid creating any conflict over the issue. "I should like to state here what is to me a maxim of administration," he told the board in his discussion of segregation-related difficulties during the February 1958 meeting, "— that the President of an institution must administer with integrity its policies as determined by the Board of Trustees. I shall expect to do no less."  

While the 1957 vote of the trustees thus effectively put an end to serious consideration of desegregation for the rest of the decade, it did nothing to end the demands for change that came from every direction. Applications from black students arrived, to be politely rejected. Students grew more unhappy and more vocal. The law students took up the

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88 President's Report to the Board, February 26, 1958, Box 30, Edens Papers, DUA.
89 Reaction to the board's failure to begin desegregation at this meeting was vocal and sharply divided. The immediate response from the student newspaper to the announcement that "there has been no change in policy" was something akin to contempt. *Duke Chronicle*, March 1, 1957. Some of Edens's correspondents were upset at the announcement, with one prospective divinity student even withdrawing his acceptance of admission. Richard James Wood to James Cannon, March 1, 1957; Mrs. Joseph E. Workman to Edens, March 18, 1957, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA. Others strongly supported continuing segregation, expressing the certainty that it would lead to "amalgamation" as well as suspicion that "the present ministerial are being brainwashed," possibly by "some sinister force behind this matter other than the misguided people of this country." J. Bruce Eure to Hollis Edens, March 1, 1957. Similarly, another writer expressed unhappiness that "some of the Doctors and Professors wearing the cloaks of Duke University have been mighty outspoken for integration and other foreign sounding doctrines." E.J. Burns to Edens, March 4, 1957, Box 33, Edens Papers, Box 33, DUA.
90 Duke received applications for admission from blacks throughout the late 1950s. These applications were simply turned away, although in one case the applicant, Lawrence Hampton, an honor student at North Carolina College, attempted to appeal the refusal to the General Conference of the Methodist Church. This was a complicated affair, involving yet another black applicant to the Duke Divinity School, Douglas Moore. Moore was a minister in Durham, active in the struggle for civil rights, and unwilling to simply accept defeat. When he could get nowhere with his own attempts to attend Duke he took up the cause of Hampton, which also got nowhere. Although he initially had a rather good relationship with Edens, Moore would prove to be a thorn in the president's side for some time to come. Boxes 49 and 33, Edens Papers, contain correspondence between Edens and Moore. See also Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the*
issue, voting in favor of integration in April 1957.\textsuperscript{91} The \textit{Chronicle} repeatedly returned to the issue, and other less formal student publications also took up the cause of desegregation.\textsuperscript{92}

Public attention seemed to be constantly on the university, almost always with painfully embarrassing results. Perhaps the most unseemly race related spectacle came in the fall of 1957, when the Duke delegation to a mock assembly, the North Carolina Student Legislature, introduced a resolution to legalize interracial marriage.\textsuperscript{93} It would be difficult to overstate the intensity of the reaction to this incident. Newspapers throughout the state carried the story, including the reaction of Governor Luther Hodges, who wanted all of North Carolina to know that he had nothing to do with it, and Congressman Harold Cooley, who claimed to be deeply shocked.\textsuperscript{94} Back on campus, Edens was deluged with angry letters. Many of these were absolutely venomous in their contempt for the Duke students, with racial and sexual slurs coming from even the most educated correspondents. Edens’s response was quite mild, essentially a defense of students’

\textit{King Years, 1954–1963} (New York, 1988), 93. Other applications are found at Lorenza A. Lynch to President, Duke University, January 2, 1958; Waldo Beach to Lorenza A. Lynch, January 7, 1958, Box 48, Edens Papers, DU A.and J.E. Markee to Edens, April 24, 1959; Edens to Markee, April 29, 1959, Box 28, Edens Papers, DU A.

\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Duke Chronicle}, April 12, 1957.

\textsuperscript{92} The newsletter of the Methodist Student Fellowship is one example. \textit{The Crusader}, issued weekly during the late 1950s, mentioned the problem of segregation, at Duke and elsewhere, in nearly every issue. Methodist Student Center Papers. DU A. In the fall of 1957 the student body of the Divinity School began publishing \textit{Response}, which likewise displayed a deep concern over segregation at Duke. Although staunch opposition to the racially restrictive admissions policy was widespread in the School, some division of opinion was evident, with a minority taking the position that “any fervent and vigorous criticism of present conditions would alienate our segregationist brethren.” Throughout the late 1950s this issue was turned over again and again, with much agitation, in this publication. Divinity School Papers, “Publications,” DU A.


\textsuperscript{94} \textit{Durham Herald}, November 9, 13, 1957.
freedom to be young and foolish that avoided the issue of race almost entirely.\(^95\) This ugly incident no doubt confirmed in the minds of the trustees the wisdom of their decision to keep black students off the Duke campus.

Divinity students and student religious organizations continued to clamor for change. Edens met with the Episcopal Student Fellowship in April 1957. They had formulated a statement on segregation declaring their willingness to accept and support black students “in their use of every facility of whatever kind the University offers to its students.”\(^96\) Annually at Christmas time the student body of the Divinity School sent a message to the Duke trustees, asking them to reconsider their racially restrictive admissions policy, citing the positions of the Methodist General Conference and the North Carolina Methodist Conference opposing segregation in church institutions and the need for Duke to exercise “wise leadership” on race.\(^97\)

As the decade drew to a close, the situation worsened. In 1959 two more student petitions were sent to the board. One was from the graduate students and many of the faculty in the School of Arts and Sciences. Far more blunt than previous pleas for change, this petition stated plainly that continuing to exclude students because of race “would be morally wrong, practically unnecessary, and incompatible with Duke University’s

\(^{95}\) There are about a dozen of these letters in Edens’s files. Edens wrote to one friend that “Some of the letters which I have received are almost incoherent with hysteria and irresponsible accusations.” This is possibly generous. Edens to Sam B. Underwood, Jr., November 15, 1957, Box 58, Edens Papers, DUA. Edens also sent a statement to the trustees, reminding them that they had also once been young and foolish. With few exceptions, most of them took the incident in stride. Edens, “To Members of the Board of Trustees of Duke University,” November 14, 1957. Letters from individual trustees to the president are alongside this statement at Box 58, Edens Papers, DUA.

\(^{96}\) A Statement of Opinion, The Undersigned Members of the Episcopal Student Fellowship, Duke University, to the Board of Trustees, April, 1957; William C. Morris, Jr. to Edens, April 28, 1957, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.
responsibilities as a community of scholars and a leaders among universities." 98

Approximately 73 percent of the graduate students signed this petition, along with nearly half of the faculty. Petition organizers claimed that another 10 percent agreed with it but feared reprisals if they signed. 99 At the same time the Divinity School student body also drafted and circulated a similar petition, which was signed by 185 of the school's 225 students. Edens presented both petitions to board chairman Norman Cocke in advance of the February meeting. 100 When the board's Executive Committee met the day before, however, they discussed the petitions and instructed Cocke not to bring them before the entire board. It was the "judgment of the Committee that since the matter has been discussed thoroughly in the Board prior to this time the best interests of the University are not served by having the matter brought up again at this time." 101

After the board ignored this latest petition, morale in the Divinity School began to erode deeply. 102 The pleas of both faculty and students for moderate and gradual racial change had now fallen on deaf ears for over a decade. Editorials appeared in two leading

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98 Graduate student petition, "To the Board of Trustees of Duke University," January, 1959, Box 102, Edens Papers, DUA.
99 Duke Chronicle, February 27, 1959. There were, of course, some students who remained resolute segregationists. Often the objections they expressed in letters to the student paper to allowing blacks at Duke revolved around resentment of northerners, who allegedly "decided that the South must kneel down and obey their commands to surrender to integration." Duke Chronicle, November 12, 1958. Another common theme was revulsion at the prospect of miscegenation. These letters usually drew prompt and numerous rebuttals. And, as ever, letters came from off campus, protesting the student petitions and declaring "Let's keep our Methodist schools white and clean." C.W. Rothrock to Edens, January 20, 1959, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.
100 Edens to Edward Opton, Jr., February 20, 1959; Edens to Robert Cushman, February 20, 1959, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.
101 Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting, February 24, 1959, DUA.
Protestant journals, *Christianity and Crisis* and *The Christian Century*, which were highly critical of the Duke trustees' stubborn refusal to listen. A need to respect the opponents of desegregation, *Christianity and Crisis* warned, "should not prevent a small group of powerful men, who have had a wide enough experience of the world to know better, from feeling the full weight of the criticism, from all parts of the nation, of the religious, moral, and intellectual incongruity of their policy."\(^{103}\)

Anger seeped into discussions of desegregation as the faculty thoroughly grasped both the board's intransigence and their own lack of any real institutional power. When Duke professor of Christian ethics Waldo Beach was asked by the Duke *Chronicle* for a response to the published condemnations, his brief reply prickled with resentment of the university's board:

If Duke does lay claim to be a national university it must be willing to be judged by national standards of enlightened Christian opinion. No one of us then can write this kind of criticism off as that of "outside meddlers." The trustees should be sharply conscious of the fact that many of us on the faculty are obliged to live under a policy which goes squarely against our Christian conscience. We regret also to see our national reputation skidding rapidly downhill. Though obviously we respect the conscientious divergence of opinion on this touchy matter, the least we can ask for, locally, is an exchange of views between the "absentee owners" who set the policy and those who must live with it.\(^{104}\)

Divinity School Dean Cushman was driven nearly to despair by these events.

National press coverage exacerbated the situation even more. After the editorials were

\(^{102}\) The *Duke Divinity School Bulletin* captured the mood well: "We should not be hanging our heads in sorrow, but on this matter they cannot droop much lower." May, 1959.

\(^{103}\) *Christianity and Crisis*, April 27, 1959. *The Christian Century* condemned the Duke trustees just as explicitly, claiming that their recalcitrance on race "brings into disrepute the whole idea of what properly constitutes a university." March 25, 1959.

\(^{104}\) *Duke Chronicle*, April 24, 1959. The student paper published Beach's comments on the front page and the entire text of the *Christianity and Crisis* editorial on the second page.
published, dozens of letters came in, some to Cushman, others to Edens. They came from all over the country, from ministers, university professors, businessmen, and alumni. Almost uniformly they denounced the university for failing “to exercise any forceful moral leadership in this area”\textsuperscript{105} and predicted that “the prestige of the school will suffer nationally as a result of the unfortunate action of the board.”\textsuperscript{106}

For Cushman, the timing of these events could not have been worse. In the spring of 1959 the Divinity School was actively seeking to hire new faculty members. The dean told Edens with dismay that the turmoil about the continuing segregation of the school was having a real impact on prospective recruits. “I am afraid that if this situation continues to prevail, we shall increasingly operate under a liability that may materially affect our success in acquiring and retaining self-respecting faculty people.” In fact, the last two hires had been convinced to come to Duke only after extensive correspondence about segregation and the prospect of its elimination.\textsuperscript{107} Further, there would not be any

\textsuperscript{105} Robert C. Byrd to Hollis Edens, March 28, 1959, Box 21, Edens Papers, DUA.
\textsuperscript{106} Walter W. Benjamion to Edens, March 24, 1959, Box 21, Edens Papers, DUA.
Several similar letters can also be found in Box 21. They were answered, by and large, with Eden’s standard obfuscation. To F. Belton Joyner, associate pastor of a Methodist Church in New Jersey, for example, Edens replied: “This is a difficult problem and one which society is going to be wrestling for quite a while. I wish I knew the answer.” Edens to Joyner, April 30, 1959. Cushman, more emotional than Edens, sometimes answered with irritation, especially when the criticism came from outside North Carolina. “I am also sure,” he responded to one minister from Texas, “that at this distance and as uninstructed in the circumstances attending the present policy of Duke University regarding admission of negroes you are poorly equipped to understand the complexities of our situation . . . .” Cushman to Reverend Charles Malesky, March 28, 1959.
\textsuperscript{107} Robert Cushman to Edens, April 1, 1959. The correspondence between Cushman, Edens, and Frederick Herzog, who Duke was trying to recruit for a position in dogmatic theology, demonstrates the lengths that were necessary to induce a young faculty member to come to a segregated school. Herzog declined the offer on April 2, deciding after real soul-searching that he could not associate himself with a university that still practiced segregation. Both Cushman and Edens wrote to him several times after this, and Cushman met with him again in Chicago, trying to assure him that he had something to contribute to the solution of the problem at Duke. After much anguished contemplation,
lessening of the need to recruit, as current faculty members resigned at least in part due to their loss of hope for desegregation.\footnote{108}

Duke’s law school also confronted profound difficulties in hiring that stemmed from the failure to desegregate. By the spring of 1958 the law school had been without a permanent dean for almost two years and no prospect was in sight.\footnote{109} Although potential candidates had varied and often very personal reasons for declining the job, some, including the most prominent, cited segregation as a primary reason for not coming to Duke. In an April 1958 memo to Edens, interim dean E.R. Latty described a conversation with Professor Robert Keeton of the Harvard Law School, who Latty was trying to interest in the Duke job. Keeton refused to be considered. “He frankly admitted,” said Latty, “that one factor in the situation at Duke seriously bothered him, that is, the attitude with respect to Negro applicants. He said that he certainly would not consider taking the Deanship without assurance that the Trustees were prepared to accept a qualified Negro student . . ..” Even more ominous was the warning Keeton gave regarding the effect of Duke’s continuing segregation on hiring generally: “He added, incidentally, that the outside understanding on the Duke attitude on the admission of Negroes is going to hurt Herzog accepted the position in June. Still, the considerable exertion that this required surely sent an unmistakable message. The entire correspondence is in Edens Papers, Box 21, DUA.

\footnote{108}{In May, 1959 William H. Brownlee resigned from the faculty of the Divinity School to take a position at Claremont, partly for reasons of personal advancement and partly because of “the adamant stand of the Board of Trustees . . . with regard to the maintenance of racial segregation.” It was discouraging, Brownlee said in a letter to Dean Robert Cushman, “to find that repeated petitions from our faculty and student body are lightly dismissed by those in authority.” William H. Brownlee to Robert Cushman. May 5, 1959, Box 21, Edens Papers, DUA.}

\footnote{109}{Latty took over after the resignation of J.A. McClain, Jr. in 1956. Duke’s representatives had played a role in the 1957 defeat of the AALS proposal to expel members who maintained segregation and met the compromise that made censure the}
Duke Law School not only in getting a Dean but also, as time goes on, in getting top-flight law professors and top-flight students from outside the South." Barely a week later, Latty confirmed this prediction in another memo. Relating the recent refusal of a young "star" to accept a job at the University of Florida Law School, Latty reported that his sole reason was "not wanting to be associated with a segregated law school."

Apparently becoming more deeply alarmed, Latty stressed his apprehension: "It is apparent that we are running into this attitude with sufficient frequency now to make the matter of admission of qualified Negroes of increasing concern to us." What made this problem especially difficult was that it cut both ways. While Duke administrators saw that maintaining segregation would make it much harder to recruit really good faculty members, they also understood that desegregation would eventually come and that they could not afford to have staunch segregationists in charge when it did.

Asking a friend at Stanford about one possible candidate, Latty received a reply that focused on exactly this issue. Stressing Duke's need for a person who could lead the law school in a "constructive approach" to racial matters, Latty's friend urged him not to hire this candidate: "I don't suggest that you should get a zealot for integration who would barge ahead though the heavens fall, but this is no time for Duke to have a dean who has an unreconstructed rebel's views on the race question." Who was left to hire? The "interim" was removed from Latty's title in June 1958.

punishment with relative equanimity. Unlike Ray Forrester at Tulane, Latty did not expect any awful consequences to follow a censure.

110 Memorandum to President A. Hollis Edens and Vice-President Paul M. Gross, April 14, 1958, Box 26, Edens Papers, DUA.
111 Memorandum to President A. Hollis Edens and Vice-President Paul M. Gross, April 21, 1958, Box 26, Edens Papers, DUA.
112 [ ] Brainerd to E. R. Latty, October 17, 1957, Box 26, Edens Papers, DUA.
113 Latty proved to be quite successful, serving as dean until the fall of 1966.
As the decade ended, impatient alumni also pressed the case for desegregation with Edens. In August 1959 Franklin H. Cook, a professor at Penn State and a Duke alumnus, discovered in attempting to send a black graduate student to Duke for a Ph.D. that the university still barred blacks from all its divisions. "Revelation of this restraint," he gasped, "shocked me profoundly as the secretaries in the office observed." Once over his shock, he sat down to pen a powerful letter to Edens, one that laid out without ambiguity exactly the situation that his alma mater was courting:

If Duke aspires to national recognition, it can attain stature in the academic arena by opening her doors to all students, thus assuming a position of leadership in the south. Duke by submitting to local pressures will tend to become a repository of inert ideas, which will undermine its position in securing excellent students, in attracting outstanding faculty, and in promoting the acceptance of programs such as the Law School's World Law project... As a professor I value those institutions which unreservedly through teaching and research seek the truth. As a citizen and an alumnus of three universities I expect a university to produce graduates to live in a dynamic America.114

The failure of his efforts to bring a majority of the Duke trustees to understand the growing threat that segregation posed to the university left Hollis Edens still unable to answer such a letter candidly. "I have full appreciation of your point of view concerning the admissions policy of Duke University," he told Cook, and it was undoubtedly so. But all he could add was a feeble defense of inaction: "I would not have you believe that there are no complications in the problems which the swift moving changes present in the Southern states."115 The swift moving changes did indeed present problems in the southern states, and the prospect that Duke could retain its conservative traditions while growing in national stature seemed increasingly unlikely. The university was trapped by its own trustees, unable to lead, unable even to follow along behind the public colleges.

114 Franklin H. Cook to Hollis Edens, August 17, 1959, Box 8, Edens Papers, DUA.
III

The late 1950s were a difficult time at Emory University. In March 1955 Goodrich White announced his decision to retire no later than September 1, 1957. Uncertainty and division followed the announcement and did not fade when the new president, Dr. S. Walter Martin of the University of Georgia, proved to be an unpopular choice. The death of the long-serving chairman of Emory’s board, Charles Howard Candler, only two months after Martin’s selection, further unsettled the university. Emory’s chronic financial problems also worsened significantly, at times threatening progress towards national influence.\textsuperscript{116} At nearly the same time, Georgia’s political leaders threatened to close Atlanta’s public schools rather than allow even token desegregation. For the Emory faculty, many of whom had small children, this was deeply disturbing. For the Emory trustees, on the other hand, the disruption in public education was irrelevant. Emory was not bound by federal judicial decisions and thus could simply stand apart from the conflict. The battle, they believed, had nothing to do with them.\textsuperscript{117}

Thus, any public discussion of desegregation in any forum at Emory inevitably drew fire from angry alumni or board members who believed that the university could and

\textsuperscript{115} Edens to Franklin H. Cook, September 9, 1959, Box 8, Edens Papers, DUA.
\textsuperscript{116} For example, in White’s remarks to the board at its November 1955 meeting he stressed that budgetary economies, while necessary to avoid continuing deficits, were coming dangerously close to destroying morale on campus. “Holding the line,” he told the trustees, “has not been easy for a staff and faculty who are eager and ambitious for the University to continue its forward march.” Report of the President to the Board of Trustees, Minutes, Board of Trustees Meeting, November 1, 1955, EUA.
\textsuperscript{117} This attitude was also expressed by part of the student body, who argued to the end of the decade that Emory, as a private school, was “uninvolved” in the crisis over desegregation. For example, one columnist argued that although the law might require the
should stay completely insulated. One revealing example of this viewpoint is the reaction
to a 1956 editorial in the *Emory Alumnus* about Georgia’s plan to close any public
schools that were ordered to desegregate by the federal courts. This piece, written by
editor Randy Fort, likened closing schools in order to prevent integration to “cutting the
throat to cure the cancer.” The effect of such closings on Emory, Fort argued, would be
disastrous on at least two counts. First, it meant “Emory’s student body would deteriorate
in quality, rapidly and steadily.” Second, and perhaps more important, the university’s
faculty would also begin to erode in both quality and number:

Think this is idle talk? You wouldn’t, if you could discuss the problem
with several persons on the campus. A number of young professors already
are laying plans to look for other jobs, should the public school system fall.
And Emory officials already are finding it increasingly difficult to persuade
new teachers to move into the state. A fine faculty is nothing to be put
together or bought overnight. It takes years to build one, and newcomers to it
are attracted not only by the reputation and offerings of the institution but by
the opportunities its community holds out to their families.\(^{118}\)

Predictably, the response was angry and not entirely coherent. One irate alumnus
totally missed the import of Fort’s argument: “My point is that it is no concern of Emory
to become involved in the segregation controversy . . . As time goes by, I believe it will
become more and more apparent that one of [Emory’s] greatest advantages lies in the fact
that, as a private educational institution, it is not beset by the problems of integration and
segregation which necessarily concern public institutions financed by public funds. In
short, I think we are confronted with an excellent opportunity to mind our own business
and stay out of this controversy.”\(^{119}\)

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\(^{118}\) Randy Fort, “Cutting the Throat to Cure the Cancer,” *Emory Alumnus*, April, 1956.
\(^{119}\) Albert W. Stubbs to Randy Fort, May 8, 1956, Box 3, Henry Bowden Papers, EUA.
A copy of this letter found its way to the chairman of Emory's board, Charles Howard Candler. Candler's reply demonstrates his unwavering opposition to any kind of desegregation at Emory and his agreement with the correspondent that the university ought to remain apart from the disruption that surrounded it. "I wish to commend your feeling about the unjustifiable use of the Emory Alumnus as a medium for propaganda," Candler wrote. The letter to Fort, he believed, was "timely, appropriate and eminently in line with the conviction of those most interested in Emory and one which I believe will restrain Mr. Fort if he is ever again tempted to publish in our fine magazine his personal opinion of matters which do not properly belong in it."\(^{120}\)

But Emory was "beset by the problems of segregation and integration," despite its private status. That was Fort's point. And events on campus continued to bear him out. "Outside" pressures were brought onto campus constantly, by students as well as faculty. Throughout the 1955–56 school year Emory Wheel editor Larry Custer argued in favor of desegregation in Georgia and at Emory. He also printed a column written by former governor Herman Talmadge and a long letter by Georgia's attorney general, Eugene Cook, which, while denouncing integration in the strongest possible terms, served to keep the issue prominently visible. A Presbyterian student group, the Westminster Fellowship, submitted a statement to the Wheel that decried the possibility of closing the public schools in order to prevent desegregation.\(^{121}\)

Officially, Emory continued its resolute refusal to consider change. In a meeting with a student development committee in early 1957, Goodrich White answered questions

\(^{120}\) Charles Howard Candler to Albert W. Stubbs, May 11, 1956, Box 3, Henry Bowden Papers, EUA.

\(^{121}\) Still, most Emory students probably remained more concerned with the administration edict that outlawed the traditional "pushball" game than with desegregation.
about desegregation with a succinct declaration of its impossibility: "There is no prospect for the admission of negroes to any division of the University." White’s explanation was likewise simple—admitting blacks would end Emory’s tax exemption and make continued operation impossible. That, it seemed, was that. Unlike Harvie Branscomb and the Vanderbilt board, Emory’s leaders in the late 1950s chose not to question the constitutionality of state laws that required segregation after the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown*.

In the waning days of White’s tenure as president of Emory, the faculty of the Candler School of Theology presented him with its first organized statement on race. While individual members of the theology and religion faculties had long been active in promoting better race relations, as a group they had seemed reluctant to press the case.\(^{122}\) This changed in early 1957 when the dean of the school, William Ragsdale Cannon, appointed a special committee to prepare a statement of the faculty’s views on how to respond to the South’s changing racial situation.\(^{123}\) This report resulted in the adoption of a faculty resolution that was passed by the president to the board of trustees.\(^{124}\)

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\(^{122}\) Boone M. Bowen, *The Candler School of Theology—Sixty Years of Service* (Atlanta, 1974), 112–13.

\(^{123}\) Statement of the Faculty on the School of Theology and Race, n.d. but April, 1957. Robert Woodruff Papers, Box 90. EUA. William Cannon became dean of the School of theology in 1953, replacing H.B. Tribble, who had been dean since 1937. Cannon had been a professor of theology at Emory for the previous nine years. *Emory Wheel*, September 24, 1953. (The records of the School of Theology for the 1950s that are housed in the archives of the Pitts Theology Library at Emory are currently unavailable to researchers, so no copy of the special committee’s report to the theology faculty could be located.)

\(^{124}\) White to Members of the Board of Trustees, n.d. but April, 1957. After consulting with Cannon, White decided that the resolution should be sent to the board before the new president arrived in the summer, thus sparing him having to deal with segregation immediately. Box 90, Robert Woodruff Papers, EUA.
The theology faculty’s resolution was brief and very careful. The heart of their request was that the university—the administration and the board, that is—conduct a study of the “policies and practices” of the School of Theology “as they relate to race, making sure that these policies and practices are Christian.” The basis of this request was the 1956 Methodist Discipline, which urged such a study in all church-related institutions. Looking forward to the admission of black theology students, the faculty also expressed a “willingness and readiness to have them as members of our classes and of the student body.” Finally, the resolution assured the trustees that the faculty understood the “complex and delicate nature of the problems involved in this request” and would thus treat the matter as confidential. Prayers would also be said.\(^{125}\) In perfect keeping with his long-standing reluctance to press this issue with the Emory board, Goodrich White sent this resolution on to the members with a brief note: “I have no recommendation to make with reference to action by the Board.”\(^{126}\) Unsurprisingly, the board took no action.

Perhaps understandably, it was the selection of Emory’s new president, not the statement of the theology faculty, that dominated this board meeting. Immediately after adjournment, Chairman Charles Howard Candler announced the election of Dr. S. Walter Martin as the university’s fifteenth president. Martin was a Georgia native, born in 1911 in the small town of Tifton in the southern part of the state. He attended a Baptist school, Furman, as an undergraduate, receiving his Bachelor of Arts in 1932. Martin was trained as a historian, first at the University of Georgia, where he received a masters in 1935 and joined the faculty, and then at the University of North Carolina, where he completed

\(^{125}\) Ibid. The language of the faculty’s request for a study was taken directly from the 1956 Methodist Discipline, paragraph 2026.

\(^{126}\) White to Members of the Board of Trustees, n.d. but April, 1957, Box 90, Robert Woodruff Papers, EUA.
work for the doctorate in 1942. Martin remained on the faculty at the University of
Georgia, moving steadily up the ranks. He headed the history department from 1943 to
1945 and served as assistant dean of the faculties from 1945 to 1947. In 1949 he was
named the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, a position he held until he accepted
the presidency at Emory. 127

Martin was also a dedicated and active Methodist layman, within his own local church
and beyond. He was Sunday School superintendent at the First Methodist Church in
Athens for fifteen years, chairman of the church board of education, the church-campus
relations committee, and the pastoral relations committee. He was vice chairman of the
board of stewards and a member of that committee for eighteen years. Martin also served
as district lay leader of the Athens-Elberton District and as a member of the Georgia
Methodist Commission on Higher Education. In 1956 he was an alternate delegate to the
Methodist Jurisdictional Conference. 128

This religious commitment, coupled with his record as an administrator at the
University of Georgia, had led several smaller Methodist colleges to try to bring Martin
in as president. Happy in Athens, he always refused. When the search committee from
Emory approached him, Martin was seriously swayed for the first time. Charles Howard
Candler chaired the committee, which included two Methodist bishops, and he was
determined that Emory’s next president be someone who would strengthen the
university’s ties with the church. 129 Martin, nonetheless, was far from certain that moving

127 Emory Alumnus, May, 1957.
128 Ibid.
129 The members of the search committee were Candler, Bishop Arthur J. Moore, Charles
Howard Candler, Jr., James Carmichael, James Malone, Bishop Nolan Harmon, and
George Woodruff, brother of Coca-Cola’s Robert Woodruff. Emory University Press
Release, April 18, 1957, Box 69, Walter S. Martin Papers, Valdosta State University
to Emory was the right thing. He had spent his entire career at the University of Georgia and was successful and very highly regarded there. His family was well established in Athens, and he was comfortable in his church. To pull up stakes so abruptly and take on the presidency of a financially troubled private school, even the Methodist flagship, was not an easy decision.

Assured by Candler that he was needed, Martin could not say no. He was elected unanimously by the board and agreed to a starting date of September 1, 1957. The unanimous vote, however, concealed deep fractures within Emory. It had been over a year since Goodrich White informed the board of his desire to retire, and in that time several internal candidates for the presidency appeared. They attracted varying degrees of support among the faculty, the board members, and influential outside backers of the university. Although no one man had compelling support, these candidates were among the most powerful and able men on campus and several could reasonably entertain the notion of becoming president.

By contrast, when Walter Martin’s name leaked out as a possible successor to White howls of protest went up. Faculty members who could agree on precious little else agreed that a dean from the University of Georgia—a school they considered a “cow college”—was an inappropriate choice as president of Emory. A group of important faculty members, most of them department chairmen, took the rather audacious step of writing to Candler with their objections. Claiming “the support of a substantial majority of [their]
colleagues,” these professors asserted that Martin did not “incorporate personally or professionally that combination of qualities so essential for vigorous and effective guidance of Emory’s future destiny.” Candler and the board simply ignored this letter.\textsuperscript{131}

Oddly, while these faculty members were mistaken in most of their judgements about Martin, in some sense they were correct. Martin and Emory were not a good match, though not because of any lack of ability or leadership qualities on his part. Martin was an accomplished scholar, an able administrator, a dedicated worker, and a thoroughly honorable man. He was, however, a man who chose to remain true to his roots, both social and religious. Martin was uninterested in moving in Atlanta society, unimpressed by his new memberships, provided by Emory, in tony private dining and country clubs. He was, and would remain, a man more at home at a Methodist church supper than at the Piedmont Driving Club, mingling with prominent trustees and businessmen. Fairly or not, this lack of interest in being “one of the boys” in Atlanta’s upper crust would hinder Martin throughout his time at Emory.

Other problems also plagued Martin during his years at Emory and significantly complicate his efforts to move the school forward. Hearing of Martin’s selection, President G.B. Connell of Mercer University sent a congratulatory letter welcoming Martin to “the aspirin fraternity.”\textsuperscript{132} Indeed, even apart from the copious fence mending he would need to do, Martin was in for plenty of headaches at Emory.\textsuperscript{133} Well before he

\textsuperscript{130} Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees, April 18, 1957, EUA.
\textsuperscript{131} Faculty Group to Charles Howard Candler, April 3, 1957, Box 86, Robert Woodruff Papers, EUA.
\textsuperscript{132} G.B. Connell to Martin, April 23, 1957, Box 61, Martin Papers, VSUA.
\textsuperscript{133} Martin had little success in placating his on-campus rivals for the presidency. Both Ernest Colwell, dean of the faculties and director of Emory’s Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts, and Howard Phillips, dean of the graduate school, left Emory soon after his arrival. (Boisfeuillet Jones continued to supervise Emory’s medical branch, but was never
arrived on campus, Martin began to get an idea of the kind of serious problems that the school was facing. In May, even as congratulations were still arriving, he received an ominous letter from Dean Rusk, then the head of the General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation. "I am anxious," said Rusk, "to have a long talk with you about the background and future of the General Education Board’s grant for the development of graduate studies at Emory . . ." This grant, made in 1951, gave a desperately needed $7 million but required Emory to raise $25 million in matching funds. Quite simply, Emory could not do it. This deeply embarrassing situation was a harbinger of what was to come for Walter Martin. Although he managed to come home from his New York meeting with Rusk with a check for a million dollars and an agreement to quietly let Emory off the hook, Martin would be beset by fundraising problems throughout his tenure. In his first brief report to the trustees, made less than three months after his arrival, he identified money as the most critical problem facing the university. Much, probably too much, of Martin’s time and imagination would be devoted to fundraising during his term as Emory’s president. His years at a public university, where administrators worked with a budget handed out by the state legislature, certainly

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134 Martin also quickly began contacting the other southern university presidents, searching for help from others in a similar position. Understandably, he was most eager to talk to former Emory administrator Hollis Edens. Martin to Edens, May 27, 1957, June 14, 1957, November 1, 1957; Edens to Martin, June 7, 1957, September 24, 1957, Box 49, Edens Papers, DUA.

135 Dean Rusk to Martin, May 23, 1957, Box 62, Martin Papers, VSUA.

136 Report of the President to the Board of Trustees; Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees, November 14, 1957, EUA.
contributed to Martin’s difficulties in raising money. He was aware of this problem from
the beginning but almost certainly underestimated it.

Martin’s troubles expanded exponentially when Charles Howard Candler died within
two months of Martin’s selection as president. It was Candler who most wanted Martin at
Emory and who was most sympathetic to Martin’s strong religious views. It was also
Candler who controlled the board. Without his dominating presence, Martin was
hamstrung. Several trustees and prominent outside supporters were less than enthusiastic
about the new president, hampering further his ability to get things done.

The change in Emory’s president yielded no change in the university’s stance on race.
Like White before him, Martin was no advocate of integration and would never
aggressively push the Emory board to open admissions to blacks. Even had he wanted to,
his lack of institutional support would probably have made it unwise. (Still, and also like
White, Martin was not one to give in to calls to muffle the faculty or students. Contacts
with black professors and student groups continued unabated during the late 1950s, and
Martin never considered trying to stop them despite sometimes furious threats against the
university from angry segregationists.)¹³⁷ Rather, as the faculty and many students
continued inviting blacks to university events and meetings while many trustees actively
objected, Martin tried to act as a peacemaker.¹³⁸ Like Hollis Edens at Duke during the
early part of the decade, Martin saw himself as a “moderate” who could best avoid
disaster for his school by keeping open division at bay. This was an incredibly difficult
balancing act, even more so in the late 1950s when any day could bring an incident that

¹³⁷ Interview with S. Walter Martin, April 28, 1999. Notes in possession of the author. In
fact, in response to a student column in the Wheel that suggested Emory faculty members
had simply given in to the administration’s views on segregation, there came explicit
denials from the faculty that they had even been pressured to conform in any way.
would upset one side or another. Not surprisingly, Martin also resembled Edens in his uneasiness about the course and pace of change in the South. The massive economic and social transformation since World War II unsettled him and made him fear that the postwar prosperity would only result in moral decay. In one 1958 speech he expressed this fear and included race relations in a litany of American troubles:

    Last year you and I progressive Americans consumed 20 million aspirin tablets daily. Each night we swallowed 20 million sleeping pills; the next morning chasing them away with as many wake-up pills. American doctors will this year write nearly 40 million prescriptions for the anti-worry pills called tranquilizers, hoping to stave off the anxiety, the depression, and the fear that hamstrings our modern living. Juvenile delinquency is a common topic over our tea-cups; we have all kinds of social problems which we are unable to solve ranging from chronic drinking to integration. Such is the price of our wisdom and our sagacity. Slowly but surely in our land of bounty we are driving ourselves to a sort of prosperous desperation...[M]any of us find ourselves American aliens mentally and spiritually displaced in our own native land.\textsuperscript{139}

Martin said little publicly about race during the late 1950s. He managed, in speech after speech to alumni clubs, parents, students, and religious groups, to discuss in great detail the changes that swept the South after the Second World War and the changes that would have to come to Emory, without mentioning blacks. To Emory's Washington, D.C. alumni, for example, he described the explosive growth of southern industry, rapid urbanization, and the growing need for strong graduate education in the region.
Expressing the conviction that Emory should lead a concomitant growth of "educational and cultural values," Martin claimed that the city of "Atlanta must look to Emory to grow along with the city in stature and service. One of the University's opportunities in the years ahead, therefore, will be to build ever closer bonds of co-operation and mutual

\textsuperscript{138} Interview with S. Walter Martin, April 28, 1999. Notes in possession of author.
\textsuperscript{139} S. Walter Martin, "Civilization's Need: The Moral Touch," April 9, 1958, Box 68, Martin Papers, VSUA.
understanding between itself and the community in which it lives." He never mentioned that this community included blacks.

Also left unmentioned was the fact that the Atlanta community was in increasing turmoil over race. The city had remained an oasis of calm in Georgia for most of the decade despite the turbulence wrought by massive resistance elsewhere. This was due to the desire of the business community, and of both the black and white Atlanta elites, for racial stability and economic expansion. Together with the cooperation of Atlanta's Mayor William B. Hartsfield, these groups had been able to negotiate slow but steady progress in race relations during the 1940s and 1950s. This progress was threatened by the rise of massive resistance after Brown, as the state's pro-segregation leaders gained the support of many non-elite white Atlantans. Still, in the face of the continuing determination of the business leaders to maintain good race relations in the interest of a good economic climate, the threat remained minor. Segregationists like party leader Roy Harris of Augusta had people in an uproar, and the state legislature continued to tinker with its "private school plan" to nullify the intent of Brown. Until matters came to a head,

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140 S. Walter Martin, "Washington Alumni Talk," October 7, 1959, Box 4, Martin Papers, VSUA.
141 Hartsfield was elected mayor in 1936 and, apart from a brief interruption during World War II, held that office until he was replaced by Ivan Allen, Jr. in 1961. Hartsfield, dependant on black votes and the good will of the white business elite, was committed to preserving a sense of racial calm and progress in Atlanta. He provided new services and facilities to black neighborhoods, hired black police officers for the first time, and generally did a masterful job of preserving segregation while allowing change to proceed steadily. Pomerantz, Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn, 161–64, 184–88. A good biography of the colorful Hartsfield is Harold H. Martin, William Berry Hartsfield: Mayor of Atlanta (Athens, GA, 1978). In "The Quest for Freedom in the Post-Brown South: Desegregation and White Self-Interest," 70 Chicago-Kent Law Review 689 (1994), Davison Douglas examines a very similar dynamic in Charlotte, North Carolina. Although much smaller than Atlanta, Charlotte was characterized by the same kind of business ethic and willingness to make racial accomodations in the interest of economic expansion.
however, things continued as they always had in Atlanta. Finally, though, the crisis came.

In January 1958 the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund filed a class action suit in the northern district of Georgia asking for the desegregation of Atlanta’s public schools. The outcome of the case was never in doubt given the trajectory of federal court decisions following Brown, and most of Atlanta was probably ready to begin at least token desegregation. Georgia law, however, with its provisions for closing public schools rather than integrating them, stood in the way. The scene was set for several years of intense conflict, much of it between Atlanta and the rest of the state.

The now very real possibility that the schools would close had a galvanizing effect on much of Emory’s faculty. As Randy Fort had argued in his controversial 1956 editorial, this was an issue that had the potential to uproot a carefully built faculty. The campus buzzed with talk about how to respond to the situation. Finally, in late November 1958, a statement bearing the signatures of the overwhelming majority (250) of Emory professors was delivered to the Atlanta Journal and Constitution. Signers included Goodrich

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142 Atlanta’s representatives in the Georgia General Assembly had difficult lives during this period. United in their opposition to defiance of the Supreme Court and to closing public schools, the city’s seven legislators were isolated and scorned by the rest of the General Assembly. (One of these representatives was Hamilton Lokey, law partner of Emory’s new chairman of the board Henry Bowden.) Jeff Roche, Restructured Resistance: The Sibley Commission and the Politics of Desegregation in Georgia (Athens, GA, 1998), 49. This is an extremely useful study that pulls together the strands of a very complicated political and racial situation. Roche points out that the circumstances that made peaceful coexistence between the rural and urban areas possible in the 1940s and early 1950s had vanished by this time. The explosive growth of Atlanta’s business and industrial interests, as well as its population, made rural dominance, with its often crude racism, unpalatable to the city’s ever more powerful elite. Roche, Restructured Resistance, 64–68.

143 Vivian Calhoun, et al., v. A.C. Latimer, et al., 188 F. Supp. 401 (1959). In June 1959, Judge Frank A. Hooper ruled in favor of the plaintiffs and gave the Atlanta School Board until December to come up with a plan for integration.
White’s son, Chappell, a professor in the music department; Judson Ward, dean of the faculties; William Archie, dean of the college of arts and sciences; Carl Pfeiffer, head of the division of basic health sciences; William Cannon, dean of the school of theology; and Evangeline Papageorge, assistant dean of the medical school. The statement expressed the strongest possible objections to the closing of the schools. The topic of race, though, was hardly mentioned. Again, people saw the argument as being about something other than blacks. Here, the issue was schools or no schools. The statement suggested that closed schools would cause “irreparable damage” to the local community, the state, and the nation. Damage to individual children was certain. Echoing the reasoning of the business community, the faculty also argued that the loss of industry that would certainly follow closure of the schools would harm the economic welfare of the entire state. Any interruption in the educational system would eventually lead to a shortage of trained service providers, from doctors to county agricultural agents. Worse, closing the schools would allow “Russia’s systematic attempt to overtake us educationally” to succeed.¹⁴⁴

The faculty’s arguments were by now pretty standard fare—pragmatic appeals that focused on the increasingly high cost to whites of maintaining segregation. Perhaps more interesting than the statement itself was the reaction to it. It is impossible to imagine Charles Howard Candler responding to such an act with anything other than fury. Indeed,

¹⁴⁴ Text of statement by Emory Faculty, *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, November 30, 1958. Similar statements from the faculty of neighboring Agnes Scott College and from a group of over 400 doctors were presented in December. Emory University Archives Manuscript Box 10. Emory’s graduate students also overwhelmingly favored keeping the schools open. In a May, 1959 poll 94 percent disapproved of closing schools to prevent desegregation and 89 percent favored admitting blacks to Emory’s graduate divisions. *Emory Wheel*, May 1, 1959.
the faculty half expected that there would be consequences. However, Candler’s replacement as chairman of Emory’s board, Henry Bowden, was a thoroughly different sort of person. Affable and charming, Bowden had a trial lawyer’s way with words and relied on persuasion rather than power in his dealings with the Emory trustees. No longer was there “quiet, nodding acquiescence on the part of other members of the Board.” Rather, Bowden reported approvingly that “no sooner are reports made, decisions announced or aims projected than the air is filled with questions, discussions, counterviews and suggestions.” Bowden also had wide and deep ties to the Atlanta’s business elite and shared its concerns and perspectives, including, no doubt, a resistance to seeing the city’s schools closed by the state.

Bowden’s response to the publication of the faculty statement was thus quite sanguine. While he did not publicly express approval of its content, he steadfastly defended the faculty’s right to make it. In a talk to a group of professors he took pains to express his, and the board’s, support for the right of the faculty to speak out, whether individually or as a group, on the issue of race or on any issue at all. He contrasted this respect for the faculty’s rights with the situation at “tax supported institutions in our State,” where professors who wanted to take similar stands were “thwarted by administrations which shuddered at the thought of reduced appropriations, open criticisms from politicians and

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145 In a talk at faculty orientation in the fall of 1962, history professor Harvey Young, who gathered many of the signatures, acknowledged the “thrill that came from the awareness that there was some slight hazard in the venture.” Faculty orientation talk, September 25, 1962, Box 15, James Harvey Young Papers, EUA.
146 Henry Bowden, “The Christian University in a Scientific Age (A Board Chairman’s View),” talk given to Emory faculty group, April 5, 1959.
147 “From ‘Mr. Alumnus’ to Top Trustee,” Emory Alumnus, December 1957.
embarrassing days ahead.” This calm response indicates how changed Emory’s leadership was. Perhaps another subtle gesture of changes to come was an honorary LL.D. awarded at the 1958 commencement to Judge Elbert P. Tuttle of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. Tuttle, who joined the court as a Eisenhower appointee, had already begun to raise hackles in the South for his part in expanding and enforcing the Brown decision.

Despite the clear change in the tenor of the board’s leadership and Bowden’s tacit approval of the faculty statement, no changes were made in Emory’s policy. Fear of losing the city’s public schools continued to fester as state politicians loudly proclaimed that all Georgia schools would close before one would integrate. On campus the waters continued to roil. A forum held during the annual “Brotherhood Week” in February brought several speakers to campus to discuss “What are the Basic Issues of the Racial Crisis?”, including Dr. Harry Richardson, president of Gammon Theological Seminary, and James M. Dabbs of the Southern Regional Council of the Presbyterian Church. Both

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148 Henry Bowden, “The Christian University in a Scientific Age (A Board Chairman’s View),” talk given to Emory faculty group, April 5, 1959.
149 English, Emory University, 257. Raised in Hawaii, Tuttle had practiced law in Atlanta since 1923. Before he was appointed to the bench he had taken on several unpopular causes, including aiding in the defense of Angelo Herndon, a black man from New York who was arrested in Atlanta in 1932 for attempting to recruit southern blacks into the Communist Party. (Interestingly, two Emory professors of economics, T.J. Corley and Mercer Evans, testified for the defense in this case. Mercer established that the same communist literature Herndon was distributing could be read in the Emory library. See Kendall Thomas, “Rouge et Noir Reread: A Popular Constitutional History of the Angelo Herndon Case,” in Kimberle Crenshaw, et al., eds, Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement (New York, 1995).) Earlier Tuttle had worked with black Atlanta attorney A.T. Walden to try to save a black man accused of raping a white woman. On Tuttle, see Jack Bass, Unlikely Heroes (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1981), especially 26–44.
150 Georgia’s new governor, elected in the fall of 1958, was Ernest Vandiver, a Talmadge ally who showed no sign of backing down on desegregation.
men were advocates of open schools and desegregation. A special issue of the *Emory Alumnus*, “Crisis in the Schools,” examined racial problems in Atlanta. Focused on an Emory evening course for adults organized by Dr. John A. Griffin, the *Alumnus* article lauded the university for being one of the very few places in Georgia where all points of view on segregation could safely be expressed.

Both the speakers and the article quickly drew objections, though only from a small number of Emory graduates. One alumnus complained that the university was allowing a one-sided presentation of segregation, from the side that wanted to do away with it. And, although editor Randy Fort was careful to avoid taking sides, a small number of alumni insisted that the kind of open discussion he praised meant that the school had gone over to the side of the integrationists.

In 1956, when faced with complaints about the *Alumnus* pieces on race, Chairman Candler had vociferously agreed with the complainants. Now, Emory officials sprang to Fort’s defense. Alumni Director Walter R. Davis wrote a long letter to one furious

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151 *Emory Wheel*, February 6, 1959.
152 “Crisis in the Schools,” *Emory Alumnus*, February 1959. Editors Randy Fort won the 1959 American Alumni Council award for editorial integrity and courage for this issue.
153 This course was far from the only time this point of view was expressed at Emory, but was probably the only instance that the angry alumni were aware of. Arguments for keeping the public schools open and for opening admissions to Emory to blacks were by now commonplace in the *Wheel*. See, for example, November 14 and 21, December 5 and 12, 1958; January 16, 23, and 30, February 6, 1959. Speakers on racial issues also came to campus frequently, with Brotherhood Week every February an especially popular time to discuss desegregation.
154 Complaints about speakers who advocated desegregation were met with the same responses. Bowden defended the presence of such guests by pointing out that the segregationist viewpoint was also represented in the student paper and in forums on campus. Bowden to T.J. Wesley, Jr. February 12, 1959, Box 3, Bowden Papers, EUA. Vice-President and Dean of the Faculties Judson C. Ward responded in greater detail but to the same effect: “The South is certainly going through the agony of terrific change. If we have any claims to be a true university, we cannot expect our students to go out of the
graduate in which he attested to the critical importance of the issue to Emory. The loss of faculty, already begun and with the potential to snowball, Davis explained, “was of paramount importance here at Emory.” Therefore, the Alumnus had every reason to report on the problem. Furthermore, the charge that Emory had become a hotbed of racial radicalism simply was not credible, according to Davis. Neither Bowden nor Walter Martin, Davis insisted quite reasonably, could ever be called a “wild-eyed liberal,” and “the Emory Board of Trustees could . . . safely be characterized as ‘conservative’ . . .”

Thus, at the close of the 1950s Emory admitted that there was a problem, and that it must be discussed. No longer would the school simply claim that as a private institution it was immune from the racial turmoil that increasingly surrounded it.

Articles in the alumni magazine and seminars on campus, however, were not going to satisfy the proponents of racial change at Emory for much longer. In March the Wheel carried a short but portentous story. Twelve members of the Atlanta chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), including several Emory students, picketed outside Rich’s department store in downtown Atlanta. Emory faculty members were also reported to be involved with the group, which had proceeded with the demonstrations against the wishes of Atlanta’s established black leadership. Holding the peace, so critical to Atlanta’s leadership, was going to require accommodations, and soon. At

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155 Walter R. Davis to Emmet B. Cartledge, Jr., February 27, 1959. No written expression of Bowden’s opinion survives, but correspondence from Davis and Randy Fort to him on this matter indicates that his views were largely the same as those expressed by Davis. All this correspondence, along with a few hostile letters from alumni, are in Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA.

156 Emory Wheel, March 31, 1959.
Emory, the presence of Henry Bowden on the board would begin to make accommodations possible.

IV

By the end of the 1950s Harvie Branscomb at Vanderbilt University was feeling somewhat beleaguered on the race issue. The optimism and sense of control that had characterized his actions and writings on race relations seemed to slowly leak away in the new atmosphere of heightened tension that followed the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown*. Branscomb did not give up—far from it—but his efforts to continue the policy of strategic black admissions took on an increasingly defensive tone. Where he had once envisioned integrated graduate education in Nashville “on a scale broad enough to capture the imagination,” the chancellor now counted heads in the School of Religion, aiming to keep the number of black students to an acceptable minimum.¹⁵⁷ Much of this defensiveness seemed to spring from the 1955 decision of the board to open law school admissions to qualified blacks, or rather from the immediate, furious response to the implementation of that decision.

Although in the spring of 1955 Branscomb was somewhat pessimistic about the chances for success in persuading the trustees to accept black candidates to the law school, there were some good signs. The racial climate in Tennessee a year after the *Brown* decision was nowhere near as desperate as that in Georgia or Louisiana. To be sure, there was resistance to public school desegregation. It was sometimes, in some
places, even disturbingly violent. In Nashville, a cautious grade-per-year plan was adopted, but even this was not accomplished without disturbance. Still, there was no “massive resistance,” encouraged by government and politicians. There seemed to be, rather, a quiet determination on the part of the state’s leadership, beginning with Governor Frank Clement, that the law would be followed, although with the smallest amount of desegregation possible. This attitude would prevail throughout the rest of the decade, even during crises such as the bombing of Clinton High School in 1958 and unrest during the desegregation of Nashville’s public schools in 1957.158

157 The quote is from Branscomb’s “Tentative and Confidential Memorandum on the Establishment of a Graduate Center in Vanderbilt University,” December, 1949, Box 4, Branscomb Papers, VUSC.
158 On the racial situation in Nashville see Don H. Doyle, Nashville Since the 1920s (Knoxville, TN, 1985), 224–43. Cynthia G. Fleming discusses broadly the official attitudes towards public school desegregation and the various major problems that arose in “We Shall Overcome: Tennessee and the Civil Rights Movement” in Carroll Van West, ed., Tennessee History: The Land, the People, and the Culture (Knoxville, TN, 1998). Branscomb was a strong supporter of Governor Clements efforts to peacefully and in a limited way desegregate the state’s public schools. When Clements told Branscomb about segregationists pressuring him to hold the line, Branscomb replied with a letter of support: “there are so many forces pushing in the direction of breaking down the segregation pattern – the dispersal of the Negroes over the United States, the strong propaganda in many centers, the international attention which makes race so sensitie a point, the growing economic improvement of the Negro race – that to try to stand out against this and fight a rear guard action will mean defeat in the long run... I think that within a few years your stand will be an historic one, and that you will be proud of having made it.” Frank Clement to Branscomb, January 23, 1956; Branscomb to Clement, January 26, 1956, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC. From time to time over the next several years the idea was floated, by Branscomb or others, that a group of “thoughtful” citizens ought to make some kind of “moderate, middle statement” condemning violent responses to school desegregation but urging slow, locally controlled implementation. Presciently anticipating federal intervention when local communities resisted desegregation, Branscomb proposed such a statement in 1956 about the growing trouble in Clinton, but apparently never issued it. When Nashville began its own plan to desegregate the schools, Branscomb was approached by Hugh Morgan, head of the Medical School, to sponsor a similar letter, but did not. Branscomb to Edward Lee Norton, December 17, 1956; Hugh Morgan to Branscomb, March 12, 1956; Branscomb to Hugh Morgan, March 15, 1956, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office
In early May 1955 Branscomb decided to try to desegregate Vanderbilt’s law school. Once more, as in 1954, he sought and received a letter from Dean John Wade to present to the trustees. This letter was short, to the point, and requested specific guidance. In light of almost certain AALS action requiring compliance with its antidiscrimination policy, Wade asked “what specific steps we should take in the event we receive an application for admission from a qualified Negro student.” In addressing the board, Branscomb also focused on the strong possibility that the AALS would make desegregation compulsory for its members and emphasized that he believed that, rather than waiting, Vanderbilt ought to exercise the “dignity of voluntary choice.” After what was apparently a very lengthy discussion, the board agreed and unanimously asked Branscomb to inform Dean Wade that “no student otherwise qualified should be refused admission for reasons of race, creed, or color.”

Branscomb and the board saw this resolution as a specific application of the policy they adopted in 1953 when the board agreed to admit blacks to the Divinity School. That

Papers, RG 300; Virginius Dabney to Branscomb, January 10, 1957, Box 154, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.

159 Earlier in 1955 Branscomb and Dean John Wade had tried, in an attempt to provide “cover,” to interest Duke and Tulane in some kind of joint action on desegregating their law schools, but to no avail. Branscomb to David Cavers, February 21, 1955; Branscomb to Franklin P. Gaines, July 15, 1955, Box 237, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.

160 John Wade to Branscomb, May 4, 1955, Box 237, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.

161 Branscomb to Franklin P. Gaines, July 15, 1955, Box 237, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.

162 Transcription from Minutes of Meeting of Board of Trust, May 6, 1955, Box 2510, Secretary of the University’s Papers, RG 900, VUSC. Although the vote was unanimous, Branscomb wrote to David Cavers of the AALS Committee on Discrimination in Legal Education that “a minority of the Board feels very strongly” that the university was still bound by provisions of the Tennessee constitution that outlawed desegregated education. Branscomb to Cavers, June 3, 1955, Box 237, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
is, Vanderbilt would allow the admission of qualified blacks only to those programs otherwise unavailable to them in the Nashville area. Practically, this meant the law school, the divinity school, and graduate programs at the Ph.D. level. (With two of these schools now opened, Branscomb did not anticipate that he would have to “go back to the Board and ask for another action, since the principle they [had given him] is so inclusive.” Rather, “at the proper time and after the admission of a student to the School of Law,” he expected simply “on my own responsibility to admit a qualified graduate student.”)  

Fearing a large influx of applications, the board instructed Branscomb to make no announcement of the decision. He confidentially informed the AALS and a handful of close colleagues at other schools, but otherwise succeeded in his “hope that we can keep it quiet until [the first black student] turns up in the class on the first day of instruction.”

163 Branscomb to Franklin P. Gaines, July 15, 1955, Box 237, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC. A letter from the board to the president of the alumni association, who had apparently been getting some heated responses from members, clarified this understanding as well: “The authorization to the Dean of the Law School in 1955 was not a modification of the 1953 resolution . . . .” W.H. Swiggart to Vernon Sharp, October 19, 1956, V-27, Stahlman Papers, VUSC.

164 Branscomb to Franklin P. Gaines, July 15, 1955; Branscomb to David Cavers, June 3, 1955; Cavers to Branscomb, June 17, 1955, Box 237, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC. Branscomb told Cavers that the board wanted no publicity, that they wanted neither to “place ourselves in the position of boasting in this matter nor of inviting a great number of applications from Negroes . . . .” He also, though, assured Cavers that he was free to inform other “responsible educational officers . . . In other words, I will have no hesitation in telling Rufus Harris or Hollis Edens what we have done . . . but I do not wish to broadcast this action.” Almost a year later the policy change was still confidential. In March, 1956, when Director of Development O.C. Carmichael, Jr. asked to be given some standard response to questions about Vanderbilt’s racial policies he was told by Branscomb that “the [Executive] Committee . . . was unanimous that no statement on this subject had been issued by the Board or its Executive Committee, and that no statement should be prepared and issued.” Branscomb instructed Carmichael that “in every instance possible avoid making any statement on this matter. Our actions will have to express our policy.” Oliver C. Carmichael, Jr. to Branscomb, March 19, 1956; Branscomb to Carmichael, March 30, 1956, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
Thus, the public was unaware of the decision until stories appeared in the Nashville dailies about the admission of two blacks to the law school in September 1956, over a year after the trustees authorized the change.\textsuperscript{165} Within two days a group of Vanderbilt law alumni, led by local attorney and counsel for the pro-segregation Tennessee Federation for Constitutional Government, Sims Crownover, announced an open meeting at a Nashville hotel to discuss possible responses to the enrollment of the black students.\textsuperscript{166} This meeting resulted in the formation of a new group, the Independent Association of Alumni and Friends of Vanderbilt University, which stated its purpose to be the preservation of “the traditions of Vanderbilt University within the concept of a privately endowed school with the power to run its own affairs privately, free from interference of any type from Federal, State and local governments or private philanthropic foundations or associations whose aims may be contrary to the traditions of Vanderbilt University.”\textsuperscript{167} Although this group was terribly angry, it was not terribly

\textsuperscript{165} \textit{Nashville Banner}; \textit{Nashville Tennessean}, September 19, 1956. It is a measure of the care that Vanderbilt exercised in choosing these students that Branscomb and John Wade went to meet with Charles Johnson, president of Fisk, before they decided that he should be admitted. William Waller, Memorandum of Conversation with John Wade, September 21, 1956, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.

\textsuperscript{166} \textit{Nashville Banner}, September 21, 1956; Sims Crownover to Alumni, Friends, and Supporters of Vanderbilt University, September 22, 1956, Box V-9, Stahlman Papers, VUSC. The Tennessee Federation for Constitutional Government was founded in the aftermath of the Brown decision by middle-class whites in order to oppose segregation and to promote state’s rights. Its president was Vanderbilt English professor Donald Davidson. Branscomb occasionally fielded outraged letters from outsiders about Davidson’s activities in this capacity. A particularly interesting one came from a trustee of the University of Tennessee, furious over Davidson’s statements about desegregation at that school. Wassell Randolph to Branscomb, April 26, 1956, Box 154, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.

\textsuperscript{167} Clyde Alley to Vernon Sharp, October 7, 1956, Box V-6, Stahlman Papers, VUSC. This organization never really caught on, despite attempts to contact and recruit all of Vanderbilt’s alumni. The university denied them the alumni lists and the group faded away quickly, never having had more than about fifty members. Branscomb, \textit{Purely Academic}, 158.
effective. Other groups within the school’s official alumni organization, such as local
chapters and the law school division, however, used regular channels to make known
their own similar objections. Several chapters adopted resolutions decrying the admission
of the two black students. Moreover, the university-wide Vanderbilt Alumni Association
and the Law School Alumni Association both planned to meet on campus during
homecoming in October, at the same time as the board of trustees, and the issue was at
the top of both agendas.

Ironically, Branscomb had spent the late summer and early fall in South Africa, where
he sometimes found himself entangled in difficult discussions of racial change.\(^{168}\) He
returned to Nashville at the end of September, just as the opposition to the admission of
the two students to the law school was picking up steam.\(^{169}\) In response, Branscomb
reverted quite consciously to talking out of both sides of his mouth. To those who
supported desegregation, like the AALS and the philanthropies, he stressed the deep
implications of the decision. To those who opposed it, he stalwartly insisted that there
were no long-term implications at all. Urging Law School Dean John Wade to remove
the words “solely because of race, creed or color” from a form letter he proposed to send

\(^{168}\) Branscomb and his wife were touring universities in South and East Africa for the
Carnegie Corporation. He produced a detailed report on his observation of over a dozen
schools, mostly in South Africa, singling out racial issues for special discussion. He also
gave several talks while in South Africa on American racial segregation. In these cases,
he stressed “the progress of the American Negro and the forces working towards his
fuller social integration,” concluding with his belief that there was now “agreement of
both North and South that no limit could be put to the Negro’s progress up the ladder of
full membership in society.” Apart from students, few in his South African audiences
seemed especially pleased by these remarks. “Report to the Carnegie Corporation on
observations and reflections during the course of a tour of these universities in July-
September 1956 by means of a Carnegie travel grant,” n.d. but fall, 1956, Box 134,
Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.

\(^{169}\) Branscomb to Stephen H. Stackpole, September 29, 1956, Box 136, Chancellor’s
Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
to disgruntled graduates, Branscomb argued that this wording should be removed as it "would seem to the readers to be an affirmation of a wholesale program of admissions, that it would undercut the impression of carefully selected admissions we are trying to make . . . ." Unfortunately, this language was in the board resolution itself, but Branscomb wanted Wade to "quote the resolution if you wish only with the more responsible and important people."\(^{170}\)

As Paul Conkin points out in his history of Vanderbilt, the opponents of this change were remarkably consistent in their objections. They did not stand on morality, religion, or the law, or on the principle of upholding academic standards.\(^{171}\) Rather, their argument was the same one that Vanderbilt Professor Donald Davidson had raised in 1952 when the university agreed to maintain its relationship with Scarritt College after Scarritt began admitting blacks. That is, they asserted that the reason it was wrong to admit blacks to Vanderbilt was that it violated southern tradition, which held Vanderbilt open only to whites. When a Fisk University professor defended desegregation and the NAACP while speaking at a meeting on the Vanderbilt campus, Sims Crownover registered his "solemn protest." He lectured Branscomb about both the "Communist sponsored and inspired" NAACP and about Vanderbilt's past: "Vanderbilt has had a proud heritage, one of the outstanding universities of this nation. I am sure that neither Chancellor Garland nor Chancellor Kirkland would have permitted such a meeting as this to take place on the hallowed ground of Vanderbilt University."\(^{172}\)

\(^{170}\) Branscomb to John Wade, October 12, 1956, Box 212, Chancellor's Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.

\(^{171}\) Conkin, *Gone With the Ivy*, 546–47.

\(^{172}\) Sims Crownover to Branscomb, August 10, 1956, Box 212, Chancellor's Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC. The same letter is also in Box V-9, Stahlman Papers, VUSC.
Segregation, for these alumni, was not a matter for cost-benefit analysis. Neither was it susceptible to compromise—the presence of a single black student was as repugnant as the presence of dozens, and to destroy segregation gradually would be just as offensive as its sudden demise. “I don’t like the argument that negroes have been admitted to only two departments,” complained alumnus Wick Stubblefield. “Remember, Jackie Robinson a short time ago was the only black in the big leagues. I feel certain that the law and divinity students already admitted will make it easy to let down the bars in other places. The only place where a line can be drawn and held is where it was drawn in my day – in Dr. Kirkland’s day.”  

To these alumni, any crack in the wall of institutional segregation represented an intentional betrayal of the South’s tradition, the result of cowardly subservience to some outside authority that failed to understand the region’s needs. This meant, of course, northerners, in any of their various and corrupt guises. The federal government, the big foundations, the NAACP (often described as a puppet of subversive whites), Eleanor Roosevelt—all were identified as the sources of pressure that caused the Vanderbilt board to “cave in.” The Independent Association of Alumni and Friends of Vanderbilt University, for example, placed the blame for law school desegregation squarely on the shoulders of outside funding and accrediting agencies. “While we have no facts on which to base our opinion,” they admitted with remarkable casualness, “we have had conflicting reports that negroes were admitted to the University due to pressure from certain

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173 D.W. Stubblefield to Branscomb, October 18, 1956, Box V-16, Stahlman Papers, VUSC. Another alumnus expressed the same idea in 1958, responding directly to Branscomb’s downplaying of the desegregation that had already taken place at Vanderbilt: “What you are trying to tell me is that just a little touch of Syphilis [sic] or just a little touch of pregnancy is not bad . . . and I don’t agree – a little is all the way in
philanthropic organizations and the National Association for Accreditation of Law Schools. We would violently oppose the University prostituting itself to any such groups even though it may mean considerable financial loss for some few years.”

Although many individuals and several chapters of the Vanderbilt Alumni Association voiced similar opposition to the admission of blacks to any part of the university, in the end most seemed to realize that the issue was not really as simple as the pro-segregation rhetoric would have it. No one could fail to understand that there were real costs to maintaining social arrangements that were opposed by the rest of the country. Reflexive resistance to any change that northerners wanted would have destructive consequences, and most people were not truly opposed to weighing those consequences and reaching the best possible decision for the school. One alumnus, speaking at a meeting of the Memphis club, his voice “charged with emotion," tried to untangle what some of the costs might be: “I would hate, just hate, to give the NAACP any more to sink their teeth

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these cases.” Lawrence W. Long to Branscomb, January 20, 1958, Box 191, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.

Clyde Alley to Alumni Association, October 7, 1956, Box V-6, Stahlman Papers, VUSC. The “Independent Association,” furthermore, was convinced that refusing to capitulate to northern demand for desegregation would be to Vanderbilt’s great benefit. With the South’s public universities forced by the federal government to desegregate, “there will be thousands of the highest type and well-to-do families of means throughout the South searching for a segregated school for their children . . . We feel certain that the quest for a segregated school of standing will be so great that people of means from all over the South will donate more than sufficiently to compensate any loss of the socialistic, leftist money from the North.” This statement reveals an almost comic misapprehension of the amount of money it took to run a high-quality university and of the desperate financial straits the various divisions of the university sometimes found themselves in even with a good deal of northern and federal funding.

The Hattiesburg, Mississippi chapter, for example, was not the least bit shy about condemning the action of the Vanderbilt board. Vanderbilt, they argued, as a private school “must stand up as a bulwark against the ever advancing tentacles of Socialism and degradation of the white race. To this end it is essential to the well being of the South and of Vanderbilt University that we maintain separation of the races.” Resolution,
into than they already have. Whatever you do here, do it with a lot of sober thought because if we let this thing go to the point that where Branscomb is run out of Vanderbilt because he let in Negroes, it will be 50 years before Vanderbilt will live it down in academic circles.”

Also troubled by doubts was the board of directors of the West Kentucky Vanderbilt Club. They were clear that “as a matter of personal preference” they did not want any blacks at Vanderbilt. Beyond that, however, certainty evaporated. The group recognized that “some provision must be made somewhere, by somebody, to provide higher education for the demonstrably able negro,” but they did not see why that had to be Vanderbilt. Finally, at a dead end, they decided that Vanderbilt’s board of trustees was “perfectly capable of considering and handling any situation” and must have had good reasons for doing what they did.

There was no danger of Branscomb being run out, though. In spite of all the noise, there was as much approval of the opening of the law school as there was disapproval. More letters congratulated the school for its decision than complained of it, and many of the happy correspondents frankly carried more far weight than the alumni clubs. Dean Rusk, for example, president of the General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation, wrote Branscomb a brief but significant note about the furor raised by the law school alumni. The admission of the two black law students, Rusk said, “was an act of courageous leadership of the sort which one would expect from Vanderbilt.

Conversely, it would be disastrous were Vanderbilt to lead a retreat by changing its position in the face of real and distressing (but perhaps temporary) pressure. A university

Vanderbilt Commodore Club of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, October 15, 1956, Box V-2, Stahlman Papers, VUSC.

176 Nashville Tennessean, October 3, 1956.
reaps much of its harvest in terms of decades. I haven’t the slightest doubt but that
Vanderbilt, twenty-five years from now, will look back with satisfaction to the action
which your Board of Trust took in opening the doors of the Law School to qualified
Negro students.”178 When the Vanderbilt board met in October, in spite of the concurrent
meetings of the Alumni Association and the Law School Alumni Association that at
times seemed mutinous, there was simply no question of not upholding the May
decision.179

The trustees’ understanding of the limited nature of the change, however, was
increasingly apparent. One wrote Branscomb with his hopes for the future of
desegregation: “I thought the Board meeting went off very well and that the Law School
matter was handled as well as possible under the circumstances. As stated, what I think
the alumni are worried most about now is not the two students who are already in but
about any future admissions which I hope we can postpone at any rate now that we have
taken these two.”180 James Stahlman assured several correspondents that there was no
possibility of opening undergraduate admission to blacks. He was, he said “quite certain

177 Minutes of Board of Directors of the West Kentucky Vanderbilt Club Meeting,
October 9, 1956, Box 2510, Secretary of the University’s Papers, RG 900, VUSC.
178 Dean Rusk to Branscomb, October 1, 1956. This letter is in Stahlman’s files, as
Branscomb surely sent him a copy to keep his courage up. Box V-15, Stahlman Papers,
VUSC.
179 Branscomb’s memoirs contain a brief discussion of his and Harold Vanderbilt’s
appearance before the upset alumni and their eventual acceptance of the board’s decision.
Purely Academic, 158–59. A more detailed explanation of the events at and surrounding
this board meeting is Robert McGaw, “A Policy the University Can Defend: in the South
and in the North, in the Present and in the Future,” Vanderbilt Alumnius, November-
December, 1956. The week before the board meeting the Vanderbilt Law Alumni also
held a meeting and overwhelmingly defeated a resolution to censure the university for
admitting the black students. Paul J. Hartman to Branscomb, October 23, 1956, Box 212,
Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
180 Frank Houston to Branscomb, October 25, 1956, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office
Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
that the Board of Trust as it is constituted at the present date would under no circumstances consider ‘integrating’ Vanderbilt University. Personally, I would not be a party to any such program.”

Although the immediate threat had passed after the October meeting, the atmosphere remained tense for years. Under pressure from alumni and with the South still in turmoil over race relations, Branscomb too began to underscore that Vanderbilt’s program of desegregation was “sharply limited.” In a letter to J.D. Williams, president of the University of Mississippi, Branscomb described the course of desegregation at Vanderbilt, making clear how narrowly circumscribed it really was: “In May 1953 our Board of Trust, on my recommendation, approved the admission of a mature Negro minister to our School of Religion. Last year there were two and this year there are four such students. We are watching it carefully, and are not going to let the numbers grow very much, but in this matter one can cause almost as much alarm as a hundred.” His personal views seemed consistent with his vision of Vanderbilt’s proper course.

Discussing the talks he gave at universities in South Africa, he noted that “my lectures pleased nobody, since my view is that one must move steadily in the direction of full opportunity for individuals who qualify for said opportunity, but I don’t go along with wholesale paper reforms by which we embrace all our brothers and sisters, whether or not

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181 James Stahlman to E.E. Wilkinson, October 17, 1956; James Stahlman to J.C. Foshee, November 5, 1956, Box V-2, Stahlman Papers, VUSC.
182 Branscomb to J.D. Williams, March 27, 1956, Box 239, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC. Branscomb wrote Williams offering to withdraw as commencement speaker on the chance that his appearance at Ole Miss might cause embarrassment to Williams on account of the race issue. Williams declined the offer.
they are embraceable. That kind of moral satisfaction is only possible for those who don’t live with the problem in its acute form.”

Still, Branscomb was truly committed to the admittedly limited program of change that he had begun at Vanderbilt. He was one of the few whites whose calls for “moderation” did not ring completely hollow, precisely because his moderation had content. That is, Branscomb was willing to chart a course of action, even though narrow and tightly controlled, that was meant to lead to real changes in southern race relations. Admitting a small number of carefully chosen elite blacks to a small number of carefully chosen academic programs, Branscomb believed, was a reasonable, moderate, step towards the gradual assumption by southern blacks of their rightful place in society.

It was a course, moreover, that he could fairly defend to anyone. When the dust began to settle after the law school admissions uproar, *Vanderbilt Alumnus* editor Robert McGaw convinced Branscomb that it would be wise to explain that decision to all the university’s alumni in an upcoming edition. The result, fittingly entitled from a Branscomb quote, “A Policy the University Can Defend . . . in the South and in the North, in the present and in the future,” focused on the limited nature of the changes and a defense of the notions of voluntary fair play that underlie them. Branscomb himself

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183 Branscomb to Charles Clason, June 14, 1957, Box 134, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
184 Robert McGaw, “A Policy the University Can Defend . . . in the South and in the North, in the present and in the future,” *Vanderbilt Alumnus*, November-December, 1956. This article drew a large, appreciative response from the school’s alumni. Over a dozen laudatory letters are in Robert McGaw’s files. Randy Fort, editor of the *Emory Alumnus*, also wrote McGaw with high praise for the piece and requested several copies that he could distribute to people at Emory: “Although we haven’t faced up to the problem here at all – and thus far there’s no indication that we want to – I know that we must someday. I’d like very much for our president and a few other key men to have in their hands your article giving so explicitly and clearly Vanderbilt’s experience and position.” Randolph L. Fort to Robert McGaw, January 7, 1957, Box 2510, Secretary of the University’s
often appealed directly to southern pride and tradition to justify the controlled changes in
admissions policy. Responding to an alumnus who was still angry in 1958, Branscomb
argued that the admission of “a few qualified Negro students to certain graduate schools
of the University on a formula basis” was done for several reasons, “the major one being
the belief that the race problem in the South should be handled by Southern men, and that
the best Southern tradition has always been to give to individual, worthy Negroes, under
properly controlled conditions, such opportunities for which they could qualify. The
northern politicians have alleged that we will do nothing about the Negro’s needs unless
they compel us to do so by law and by the policeman. As a Southerner, I do not admit
this.”

Aside from this rather dramatic, though brief, episode, Vanderbilt experienced little
real agitation over racial topics during the late 1950s. The same pressures that Duke,
Emory, and Tulane felt were, of course, also felt at Vanderbilt, but their effect was less
controversial because Vanderbilt had already taken steps designed to bleed off the
pressure. In this sense, Branscomb’s strategy of admitting small numbers of carefully
selected black students to a small number of programs actually worked. The token
changes rendered the issue less acute for groups both on and off campus. Thus,

Papers, RG 900, VUSC. At Tulane, Rufus Harris distributed copies of McGaw’s article
to the board members. Harris to Joseph M. Jones, January 16, 1957, Box 99,
Longenecker Papers, TUA.

185 Branscomb to Lawrence A. Long, January 10, 1958, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office
Papers, RG 300, VUSC. Branscomb made this argument several times in the late 1950s.
For example, recounting to an old friend the events surrounding the opening of the law
school, he said “The argument made was that Vanderbilt is a private University and not
amenable to the Supreme Court decision. My answer to this was that the implications of
this argument were that the South would do nothing on this issue until forced to do so by
the law and a policeman, and that this had never been the attitude of intelligent Southern
leaders, and was not the attitude of Vanderbilt University.” Branscomb to Charles
Clason, June 14, 1957, Box 134, Chancellor’s Office Papers, VUSC.
Branscomb usually met with calm the kinds of things that often seemed like dangerous provocations to Rufus Harris.

For example, the student newspaper, the *Hustler*, showed interest in the unfolding events of the civil rights movement throughout the rest of the South but almost no interest in race relations on their own campus. The editors in the late 1950s tended to support some desegregation, but, like their elders, only on the South’s own terms. Editorializing on Atherine Lucy’s attempt to study at the University of Alabama, the paper expressed support for her effort but concluded “as southern students we ask for time to work out our problems without outside interference.”\(^{186}\) From year to year this remained the basic stance of the papers, even as its editors changed. Repeatedly, the paper came out squarely in favor of “patience and cool heads” and condemned “extremists,” “radicals, or fanatics” who pushed too hard. A sort of vague “moderation” without any specific boundaries was set forth as the ideal response to growing demands for racial change. (This moderation, it should be noted, was completely unlike Chancellor Branscomb’s. Where he supported actual, if gradual, change, the student editors had simply no idea of what concrete steps might be considered “moderate.”) Responding to the events in Little Rock, the *Hustler* announced that “we are in favor of moderation, not bayonets.”\(^{187}\) Displaying consistency, it also condemned the segregationists in Clinton for their resort to violence in trying to keep blacks out of that town’s high school.\(^{188}\) Closer to home, the *Hustler* had little to say about desegregation on the Vanderbilt campus. The presence of blacks in the law and divinity schools left little room for agitation of the question. The only controversy to actually hit campus was whether to retain membership in the National Student

\(^{186}\) *Vanderbilt Hustler*, February 10, 1956.

\(^{187}\) *Vanderbilt Hustler*, September 20, 1957; October 4, 1957.
Association, which many students wanted to reject because of the NSA’s condemnation of segregation.\textsuperscript{189}

Otherwise, race-related problems were few. Occasionally there was difficulty when integrated groups wanted to meet on campus, though this was now only an issue when dormitory facilities were required.\textsuperscript{190} Applications from prospective black students arrived, though apparently not in very large numbers, and were scrutinized with great care, not only for qualifications but also with an eye to campus politics. Thus, in 1957 Branscomb turned down a good candidate for the graduate school because he was from Georgia. If Vanderbilt did not limit enrollment to blacks from the immediate area, he explained, “we would have students sent to us from all parts of the country, some of whom might not be coming for purely educational purposes.”\textsuperscript{191} While the problem of

\textsuperscript{188} Vanderbilt Hustler, October 10, 1958.
\textsuperscript{189} This controversy was fairly long running, lasting throughout the late fall and winter of 1958–59 and picking up again the following fall. Vanderbilt Hustler, November 14, 1958; October 9, 1959. Similar debate occurred, with varying degrees of tension and acrimony, at Duke, Emory, Tulane, and Rice.
\textsuperscript{190} This issue arose in 1958 when the Tennessee State Labor Council of the AFL-CIO inquired about meeting on campus for a five-day institute. Branscomb could not allow the meeting, but told the head of the group that it was only because of the need for overnight accommodations. Stanton E. Smith to John Stanbaugh, May 8, 1958; Branscomb to Stanton Smith, May 26, 1958, Box 114, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
\textsuperscript{191} Guy H. Wells to Branscomb, March 5, 1957; Branscomb to Guy H. Wells, March 14, 1957, Box 238, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC. In 1959, though, William Nicholls of the economics department told a potential black applicant for the Ph.D. program, who lived in Connecticut, that his application would be considered “strictly on your merits.” Nicholls also told the man quite frankly what the racial situation was like in Nashville and at Vanderbilt: “Vanderbilt’s Negro students are free to eat in our University cafeteria. However, we are not yet able to provide our Negro students with housing in University dormitories . . . Thus, except for housing you would not find your internal relationships at Vanderbilt difficult. On the other hand, your experiences in the broader Nashville community might possibly be embarrassing at times. As Southern cities go, Nashville is relatively moderate in its racial customs. Public transportation is desegregated and our city schools have made a small start in this direction. However, you should expect to be refused service in white restaurants and admission to major hotels and might run into the racer barrier in various other open or subtle forms.” William H.
retaining faculty was less severe in a school that was partially desegregated, it did still exist and was troubling to Branscomb. The university lost an important sociologist not because of his own qualms about segregation, but because of the difficulty he was having as department chairman in recruiting young faculty to the South. Professional organizations also continued to take stands in favor of desegregation. In July 1956, for example, the National Association of College and University Chaplains wrote to tell Branscomb of its resolution that it was “in full sympathy with the spirit of the Supreme Court decision . . .” This was not a threat, though, to a school that could fairly claim to be taking steps to deal more fairly with southern blacks.

One event that would have major consequences later was the death of Divinity School Dean Jack Benton in the late summer of 1956. Benton had never been as aggressive as Branscomb in matters of racial change, but he had been instrumental in building a powerful and respected Divinity School and was an always reliable and steadying influence and a staunch friend and ally to Branscomb. His loss left a large hole in Vanderbilt’s administration, and replacing him would be difficult. Branscomb, with an

Nicholls to James Maina, November 12, 1959, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
192 Branscomb to Robert Harris, May 15, 1958, Box 175, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
193 Robert H. Bonthius to Branscomb, July 16, 1956, Box 212, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
194 In a tribute to Benton soon after his death, Edwin Mims, head of Vanderbilt’s excellent English department and the author of a history of the university, praised Benton’s stance on desegregation: “He was never a fanatic or extremist, never unaware of the great difficulties of this problem, but he viewed it from the standpoint of morality and religion and not of politics. He recommended the admission of qualified Negroes to the Divinity School. His example is an inspiration to those who are today trying to bring about a moderate and gradual solution of this vexing problem.” A Recorded Synopsis of an Address by Dr. Edwin Mims on Dean John K. Benton before the Brotherhood Class and the Branscomb Class at West End Methodist Church, Sunday, August 26, 1956, Box 159, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
eye to the long-term growth of the school’s influence, settled on a young and energetic man as the next dean, a man who seemed just on the verge of “arrival” as an important administrator and, a Methodist himself, an advocate for ecumenism. Robert Nelson was only thirty-six and came to Vanderbilt not from another academic job but from the staff of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland. Branscomb could not contain his excitement at Nelson’s prospects as well as the prospects for Vanderbilt’s Divinity School under his leadership.\(^{195}\) In a letter to James Cleland, dean of the chapel at Duke, Branscomb almost glowed as listed the new dean’s qualifications, but he did admit to one small twinge: “I know I am gambling again, as you put it. . . . The gamble, of course, is whether he can adjust to the southern scene happily.”\(^ {196}\)

Nelson did jump into the dean’s job energetically and from the first he showed concern for southern race relations. The school continued work on a project begun by Jack Benton, a conference for ministers on racial segregation in the churches, and Nelson gracefully deferred to Branscomb’s judgments about details of the proposal, particularly details that had the potential to accidentally inflame public opinion.\(^ {197}\)

At the same time, dissent over how much change was desirable and who would decide began to emerge from within the Divinity School. In 1958 a new applicant for graduate presented problems that earlier black students had not—because she was woman. Although her credentials were impeccable, Branscomb was reluctant to admit her. He wrote Dean Nelson a long, troubled letter, apparently trying to work the matter out himself as well as to explain it to the dean:

\(^{195}\) *Vanderbilt Hustler*, January 11, 1957.  
\(^{196}\) Branscomb to James Cleland, January 2, 1957; Branscomb to Jack Benton, May 17, 1956, Box 159, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
It must be recognized that the emotional center of the race problem so far as this part of the country is concerned deals with relations between the sexes. Vanderbilt University has undertaken to provide leadership in the South in voluntary action to eliminate segregation. To bring together young men and women of both races into the student body would be to carry out this experiment in the most explosive of all situations.

My fear is that the Divinity School would find itself on the horns of a dilemma, that it would find itself forced into partial paralysis of efforts to weld the student body into a closely knit social unit, or alternatively, it would run the risk or probability of social episodes which would become the subject of wide discussion and violent reaction. It is my judgment that if this latter occurred, it would under present conditions sabotage the entire effort of the University in this area, and no efforts of mine or the Divinity School faculty could prevent this.\(^\text{198}\)

In spite of this pessimistic analysis, Branscomb did not turn the applicant away. She was, after all, qualified. A more pressing consideration, though, seems to have been the fact that “certain members of the faculty had stated that they might resign if their view of this matter was not accepted.” This prospect was a grim one, which caused the chancellor to give perhaps more ground than he would have liked. “I would be very unhappy over [the loss of faculty members over this matter], so much so that my best judgment might be over-ridden by my desires, both personal and official, in this respect. I would do anything which I could to hold together this fine faculty, in which I have the fullest confidence. I would only suggest, however, that a similar confidence is due in return, that the record would not indicate any grounds for the lack of confidence, and that the faculty together with the administrative officers should rather join together in an earnest endeavor to seek what is the wise and good course in this difficult area.” While specifically denying the creation of a new policy. Branscomb authorized the student’s

\(^{197}\) Robert Nelson to Branscomb, November 25, 1957; January 20, 1958; Branscomb to Nelson, February 17, 1958, Box 202, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC. \(^{198}\) Branscomb to Robert Nelson, January 21, 1958, Box 202, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
acceptance as a "special case." At the same time, though, he may have inadvertently created the impression that threats of resignation were an effective way to change his mind.

Thus, in the late 1950s, keeping a careful watch over every admission, Branscomb succeeded in maintaining a very precarious balance in racial matters at Vanderbilt. By allowing a limited number of blacks into two post-graduate programs, he greatly reduced the pressures for change. Through delicate explanations, he kept the opponents of desegregation at bay. This was an exhausting labor, though, and the stress of it was beginning to wear on the chancellor. A few years of peace would have allowed him time to regroup, but the growing determination of black youth throughout the South to take matters into their own hands, the growing anger of many whites over the change they had already been forced to accept, and the impatience of the Divinity faculty with the slow pace of change on campus would soon combine to destroy any semblance of peace at Vanderbilt.

V

Astoundingly, even during the late 1950s tiny Rice Institute, with fewer than 2,000 total students, remained an oasis of calm in the troubled South. Still largely insulated from the currents that swirled on the campuses of the other elite schools in the region, Rice went about its day-to-day business as though there were not a revolution taking place on the other side of its hedges. On campus, things were going well. Several

199 *Ibid.* Although Branscomb gave in and allowed the Divinity School to admit Miss McTyreire, she apparently never enrolled.
important new buildings rose. Rice also instituted a wholly new basis for undergraduate life with the opening of the residential colleges, including for the first time housing for women on campus, in 1957. If the new colleges did not immediately transform the intellectual climate, they still led to a vast improvement in the quality of life for students. The colleges created a warmer, more close-knit environment on campus and even helped begin the process of bridging the traditionally wide distance between the students and a remote, research-oriented faculty. Student life in the late 1950s remained difficult, however, as a challenging curriculum combined with perhaps overly rigorous grading and some professorial indifference to keep students preoccupied with their studies.\textsuperscript{200}

At the very end of the decade new graduate programs in several departments of the humanities and social sciences broadened the scope of academic offerings. Even so, Rice's graduate curriculum was still completely dominated by its excellent programs in the sciences and engineering. Through 1959, Rice had awarded 261 doctorates, of which 246 were in science or engineering. Ninety-one of those, over one third of the total, came from the nationally prominent physics department. By contrast, only fifteen Ph.Ds had been granted in the humanities. Only three departments in the humanities—history, English, and French—offered work toward the doctorate.\textsuperscript{201}

While this intense focus on technical subjects left Rice free from the internal pressures to end segregation that were generated on other campuses by faculties in fields like religion, law, social work, sociology, and economics, there were changes afoot that would soon make even technical institutes vulnerable to social change. In 1954 Rice had

\textsuperscript{200} Meiners, A History of Rice University, 173–87.  
\textsuperscript{201} William Houston, Memorandum on Graduate Studies at Rice, August 10, 1959, Box 2, Houston Papers, WRC. The vast majority of the other doctorates were accounted for
been notified by the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), a major source of government funds to the physics department, of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Executive Order 10557, which provided a new nondiscrimination clause for use in all federal contracts. This clause was directed at contractors' discriminatory employment policies, and no one interpreted it at the time to require open admissions. Thus, Rice's administration continued to sign contracts with federal agencies.202

By 1957, however, federal efforts to enforce the policy of requiring nondiscrimination from its contractors took a more threatening turn. In May, Rice was notified by the AEC that a grant for the purchase of laboratory equipment to be used for training students contained a different nondiscrimination clause. This clause required Rice to agree that "no person shall be barred from participation in the educational and training program involved or be the subject of other unfavorable discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, or religion." President Houston immediately called board chairman George Brown and sent him a copy of the new language. Concerned, Brown instructed Houston to send a copy to each board member. Houston also called trustee Malcolm Lovett, the son of Rice's visionary first president Edgar Odell Lovett and the school's legal counsel. Houston was alarmed, but not panicky. He suggested to Lovett that Rice could still sign

by the departments of chemistry, mathematics, and biology. In the humanities, only English, history, and French had produced any Ph.D.s.

202 Herman M. Roth to Houston, December 31, 1954, Box 5, Houston Papers, WRC. This is exactly the same letter that Roth sent to Rufus Harris at Tulane. Box 99, Longenecker Papers, TUA. The text of the order is at Exec. Order No. 10557, (19 Fed.Reg. 5655, 3 CFR, 1954 Supp.) The relevant part of the clause states: "In connection with the performance of work under this contract, the Seller agrees not to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, religion, color, or national origin. The aforesaid provision shall include, but not be limited to, the following: Employment, upgrading, demotion, or transfer; recruitment or recruitment advertising; layoff or termination; rates of pay or other forms of compensation; and selection for training,
off on this contract, as the only people eligible for the courses involved were fourth and fifth-year Rice students. If no blacks met this condition, Houston reasoned, then no blacks could be discriminated against. The fact that the reason no blacks met the condition was because Rice discriminated against them in its admission process seems not to have occurred to him. Malcolm Lovett agreed with this somewhat strained interpretation, and Rice’s law firm sent Houston an opinion to that effect.

Although this particular contract was executed with no problems, Houston worried about the future. Another order issued by President Eisenhower had created a new oversight committee to help enforce the government’s nondiscrimination policy. This committee, chaired by Vice President Nixon, soon signaled that it would take a far more aggressive approach to contractor compliance than earlier committees had pursued. The handwriting on the wall was visible even at Rice. Writing to Malcolm Lovett, Houston fretted about where this was all heading. “Certainly,” he wrote with

including apprenticeship.” This language was a significant strengthening of the previous requirements, which only included initial hiring.

203 Houston to Malcolm Lovett, May 22, 1957, Box 2, Houston Papers; Houston to George R. Brown, May 25, 1957; Houston to Lamar Fleming, May 25, 1957, Box 7, Houston Papers, WRC.

204 Baker, Botts, Andrews & Shepherd to Houston, May 29, 1957, Box 7, Houston Papers, WRC.

apprehension, “if we are not able to undertake activities of this kind [government
sponsored training and research], we will soon find ourselves lagging far behind the
general development of universities.”

Indeed, the need for federal funding was Rice’s achilles heel. The kind of cutting-edge
technical research that was the Institute’s strength required extremely expensive
laboratory equipment that could only come from the federal government. An important
element was the Bonner Nuclear Laboratory, which opened in 1953 and housed a six-
million-volt Van de Graaf accelerator. Financial support from local and regional industry,
while critical to Rice’s ability to do research, would never be able to provide nuclear
laboratories. The opportunity to work in this kind of facility was a powerful drawing
card for top faculty and made Rice’s physics department one of the best in the country.
Any threat to federal funding was thus a dagger aimed directly at the school’s heart.

Even as Houston and the board were confronted with growing federal insistence on
nondiscrimination, Rice was seeking another large infusion of federal money. In 1956
Congressman Albert Thomas, a Rice graduate and the representative from Rice’s district,
began pushing the Atomic Energy Commission to build a major research laboratory, a
high-flux nuclear reactor, on land controlled by Rice just outside Houston. In spite of
Thomas’s efforts, the AEC turned the proposal down in August 1956. Throughout 1956
and into 1957, Thomas and George Brown continued to pressure the Commission to
change its mind.

206 Houston to Malcolm Lovett, May 22, 1957, Box 2, Houston Papers, WRC.
207 The first reactor proposal was submitted jointly by Rice, Texas A&M, and the
University of Texas on May 19, 1956. Box 7, Albert Thomas Papers, WRC.
208 Thomas to Lewis L. Strauss, January 21, 1957; July 8, 1957, Box 7, Thomas Papers, WRC.
In the summer of 1957 the congressman learned from a newspaper article that Rice was considering different plans for the land, plans that he thought lacked ambition. His inquiry to President Houston elicited an interesting response. Rice now contemplated, said Houston, establishing a center for marine geophysical work on the property, “with enough local and assured support” that the center would not become “entirely dependant” on federal funding. While Thomas had no objections to a geophysical lab, he believed that much more could and should be extracted from the federal government in return for the valuable land that Rice controlled. “May I respectfully offer the suggestion,” he wrote Houston, “that we can get one of the big processing centers as easily as we can get this small specialized center . ..” Apparently, Rice’s board of trustees agreed with Congressman Thomas. Its chairman, George Brown, was an able and astute dealmaker, experienced in national politics, closely connected to Lyndon Johnson, and not one to underplay a winning hand. He and his brother, Herman, had made canny use of government contracts to build their own company, Brown & Root, into an international construction business. Houston’s concerns over the strings attached to federal funding, while accurate, were simply not enough to trump the huge leap in Rice’s fortunes that would come with a major nuclear installation. The idea for the geophysics

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209 K.E. Fields to George R. Brown, August 7, 1956; Albert Thomas to Willliam Houston, July 23, 1957; Houston to Thomas, August 16, 1953, Box 7, Thomas Papers, WRC. The proposal for the geophysics lab no doubt came from Chancellor Carey Croneis, who also headed Rice’s new geology department. See Oral History Interview with Malcolm Lovett, conducted January 21, 1971 by Robert Merrifield, Johnson Space Center Archives, Rice University.

210 Thomas to Houston, July 23, 1957. Thomas Papers, Box 7. WRC.

211 See Pratt and Castaneda, Builders, especially chapters three and four, and Dallek, Lone Star Rising, 175–76, 308–11.
center was soon dead, and Thomas and Brown again pursued the proposal to the Atomic
Energy Commission with vigor.\footnote{Thomas to Lewis Strauss, July 8, 1957; September 12, 1957, Box 7, Thomas Papers, WRC.}

Although Thomas was apparently close to a deal at one point, the AEC once more
refused to fund the reactor after the head of the Commission, Lewis Strauss, resigned in
1958.\footnote{Harold Vance to Albert Thomas, September 11, 1958, Box 7, Thomas Papers, WRC.} Thomas, now more than a little angry, turned his sights on the newly established
National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and its first administrator, T.
Keith Glennan. Glennan had only officially been the head of the new agency for a few
weeks when Thomas called him about the possibility of building a NASA facility on the
Rice land outside Houston. As head of the House Appropriations Committee
subcommittee that controlled NASA’s budget, Congressman Thomas was in a position to
get what he wanted this time. He was not shy about making this clear to Glennan. By
1959 both Thomas and Brown had met with the NASA administrator several times, and
although no deal was agreed on, Rice had every reason to believe that a major federal
research installation would be built on its land.\footnote{Thomas Keith Glennan, The Birth of NASA: The Diary of T. Keith Glennan
(Washington, DC, 1993), p.14; Thomas to Glennan, October 30, 1958; Glennan to
Thomas, November 3, 1958; December 10, 1958, Box 7, Thomas Papers, WRC. NASA
was truly a brand new entity. It was authorized in July 1958 when President Eisenhower}
contracts now seemed to be headed in the direction of the Institute, with only its
segregated status as a barrier.

Thus, by 1958 segregation became a more important issue to President Houston and
the Rice trustees. In July, Houston received a memo from C.A. Dwyer, assistant secretary
to the board and business manager, “with reference to a recent decision of the Supreme
Court relating to the rights of private Trustees to exclude negroes.” At the request of trustee and university counsel Malcolm Lovett, Dwyer had written to the board of Girard College in Philadelphia. “We have been following with a great deal of interest the suit that was filed against your college with reference to accepting negroes,” Dwyer wrote, “. . . [Rice’s] Charter provides for white inhabitants and we will appreciate a letter from you advising us on what basis you were successful in maintaining your school ‘For White Male Orphans.’” 215

If Rice’s trustees were determined to maintain their school for whites only, the Girard College decision would certainly have given them confidence. In 1831 Stephen Girard left funds in a trust for the operation of a college, which was to admit as many “poor white male orphans” as the income would support. The will named as trustee the City of Philadelphia. In February 1954 two black students applied for admission and were rejected because of their race. Their lawsuit was ultimately unsuccessful, even though the Supreme Court ruled that the refusal of admission violated the Fourteenth Amendment. The critical point around which the decision turned was the status of the City of Philadelphia as trustee. Once the city, a governmental entity, was removed as trustee of the college and replaced with private citizens, Girard College was free to discriminate. As now entirely private entity, it was not bound by Supreme Court decisions about discrimination in public education. 216 This decision was important not only for Rice but

signed the National Aeronautics and Space Act (Public Law 85-568, 72 Stat., 426) and formally established on October 1, 1958.

215 C.A. Dwyer to Girard College, July 10, 1958; Joseph P. Gaffney to C.A. Dwyer, July 14, 1958; C.A. Dwyer to Houston, July 31, 1958, Box 16, Pitzer Papers, WRC. Dwyer sent copies of his correspondence with Girard to each of Rice’s trustees.

216 The Girard College case took a circuitous route through the legal system, beginning in Philadelphia’s Orphan Court and ending up before the Supreme Court twice (although it was refused hearing the second time.) The Pennsylvania Supreme Court upheld the
also for all the other private southern universities, who now had legal confirmation that they were still protected from the direct impact and the reasoning of *Brown*. The indirect impact, however, was another matter. While Rice may have been able to protect its legally segregated status, the possibility of the NASA installation made the desirability of keeping the traditional racial barrier doubtful.

On campus there seemed to be little strong desire for change, although neither was there especially strong opposition to it. The student newspaper, the *Rice Thresher*, provided one of the few outlets for campus debate on this topic. It varied slightly in its editorial stance towards race relations, depending on who was editor-in-chief, but was never especially vehement about segregation. Rather, the paper tended to deplore the violence and stupidity that often accompanied defense of segregation. It thus condemned Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus for his creation of the crisis in Little Rock and declared that “what is needed on both sides is less demagoguery and more good faith.”

The student editors were realists when it came to the possibility of desegregation at Rice. When the University of Texas began admitting blacks in real numbers in the fall of 1957, the *Thresher* noted in an extremely astute editorial that “although the Rice Institute should logically be among the first to integrate it will probably be among the last. There are several reasons why integration has a better than average chance of success on the Rice campus. The selectivity of the student body is designed to insure that both Negroes and whites would be of high academic standing if admitted . . . Past polls of the student

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Orphan Court’s refusal to order admission in *Girard Will Case*, 127 A.2d 461 and the Supreme Court overturned this in *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, et al. v. Board of Directors of City Trusts*, 353 U.S. 230. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court then sustained the Orphan Court’s action in appointing new trustees in *Girard College Trusteeship*, 138 A.2d 844. The United States Supreme Court then denied certiorari in June, 1958, letting the change in trustees and the rejection of the applicants stand.
body have each time shown them in favor of integration. Furthermore, Rice is not
hampered by the caste consciousness of fraternity campuses.” The editors, though,
seemed to grasp the unwillingness of the trustees to make any controversial changes:
“Yet Rice has made no efforts toward desegregation and probably will not for some time.
As a private institution, it will not be forced to open its doors to Negroes, and a voluntary
effort in that direction for some reason does not seem likely. Yet, we can not help but
hope that the force of student opinion will soon influence the Rice Institute, and that steps
will be taken to admit Negroes.”\textsuperscript{218}

The \textit{Thresher} soon took steps to demonstrate student opinion to Rice’s administration
and. The paper organized a poll the very next month, and although it admitted that
“desegregation of the campus does not seem imminent,” it stressed (inaccurately) that the
feelings of the student body were important in the decision-making process.\textsuperscript{219} Over 61
percent of the 522 respondents favored desegregation at Rice, most gradually, and about
38 percent wanted to keep the school white.\textsuperscript{220} Predictably, nothing came of this.

On the surface, little had changed regarding the possibility of desegregation at Rice
since 1948. In the late fall of 1959 the chairman of the Commission on Human Relations
of the Student Association of the University of Texas contacted the Rice Student
Association with some questions about desegregation at Rice. The Texas students were
concerned with their own efforts to integrate the dormitories and athletic teams at their
own school and solicited information about the attitudes of Rice’s student body and
administration towards playing teams with black athletes. They also wanted “to more or

\textsuperscript{217} \textit{Rice Thresher}, September 27, 1957; February 22, 1957.
\textsuperscript{218} \textit{Rice Thresher}, February 15, 1957.
\textsuperscript{219} \textit{Rice Thresher}, March 8, 1957.
\textsuperscript{220} \textit{Rice Thresher}, March 22, 1957.
less swap notes with [the Rice Student Association] concerning *any* work, problems, progress, etc., that is being carried on at our two schools relative to racial integration.”²²¹

The response of Rice’s Student Association President Wayne Hanson gives a short but clear view of the university’s public position on desegregation. Hanson began by answering the most immediate question:

> I have talked with the administration and found that integration would not cause a change in administrative policy toward the University of Texas. The integration of the University was discussed in our Student Senate meeting to determine the students’ reaction. Most of the Senate members were either for or didn’t express any strong opinions for either side. Those against integration were mainly opposed to dormitory integration, especially women’s dormitories. Rice does not have any restrictions against playing teams with Negro athletes, and they are treated with the same consideration as any other member of the team.²²²

Hanson’s answer to the more general request for sharing information on efforts to bring about integration was even more revealing. “We do not have a Board of Human Relations working toward the integration problems of Rice University,” he wrote. Dismissing the matter, Hanson returned to the *Thresher* controversy of the decade before. “This integration problem was a big issue on the Rice campus in 1949, and Dr. W.V. Houston, President of the Rice Institute, wrote a letter to the school paper concerning this problem. I believe Rice’s stand on integration can be clearly explained by the following portion of that letter.” Hanson closed with the succinct quote that so quickly closed discussion of desegregation ten years earlier: “The Rice Institute was founded and chartered specifically for white students. The question of the admission of Negroes is

²²¹ Gardner S. Bride, Jr. to President of the Student Association of Rice Institute, October 31, 1959, Series I, Box 2, Rice Student Association Papers, WRC. The president of the Texas Students’ Association was preparing for meeting with the board of regents that November, and was looking for support for a stand in favor of complete integration.
therefore not one for administrative consideration, and the discussion in this connection is entirely academic."\textsuperscript{223}

Just as in the past, Rice simply removed itself from the debate with an appeal to its charter language. Ten years after Houston first made his statement on desegregation at Rice, the school's \textit{public} posture on race had not changed at all. "Desegregate? We can't." Behind this placid façade, though, the pressure of federal insistence on nondiscrimination in contracting, coupled with the ambition of George Brown and Albert Thomas to bring a major federal research facility to the Houston area, was forcing new consideration of racial restrictions at Rice. Houston and the Rice trustees were beginning to grasp an emerging new reality, and though the \textit{Thresher} editors had no way of knowing it, Rice was about to position itself to make significant changes.

\textsuperscript{222} Wayne Hanson to Frank Cooksey, November 9, 1959, Series I, Box 2, Rice Student Association Papers, WRC. Note that the treatment of black athletes seems to have changed significantly since the early 1950s.

\textsuperscript{223} \textit{Ibid.}
Chapter 5

Desegregation

By 1960 the quickening pace of the civil rights movement and the pressure to abandon segregation that was coming from the federal government and major foundations combined to bring all these schools to the same point. The moral strength of the opposition to institutionalized racial discrimination swayed opinion throughout the nation. The Kennedy administration, while far from aggressive in matters of civil rights, did use federal power to advance equality of opportunity in areas where they could do it without getting bogged down in dangerous public debates. President Kennedy issued a new executive order on nondiscrimination in federal labor practices, which included a stronger commitment on the part of the federal government to contracting only with institutions that demonstrated compliance with equal opportunity regulations. This order also included a much stronger commitment to enforcement. The northern philanthropies as well determined finally that they would no longer support universities that practiced segregation.

Three of the presidents who led these schools during the 1940s and 1950s left office in 1960. Hollis Edens of Duke, Rufus Harris of Tulane, and William Houston of Rice left behind campuses that had been transformed during their service. Each of these schools was bigger, more sophisticated, and more highly regarded than it had been on their arrival. Their successors were men of a different generation and harbored the concerns and ambitions of a new era. To them, racially restrictive admissions policies were not delicate issues that needed a fine hand to navigate. They were anachronisms, vestiges of
by-gone days that accomplished only one thing—hobbling the school's ability to get
about its proper business. The issue of elite white control of desegregation, which had
been the keystone of their predecessors' approach, did not carry the same emotional
resonance with these new men. While aware of the need to convince elderly and rigid
trustees that dropping the racial bar was voluntary, they themselves showed little concern
or even interest in the fact that pressure to change was coming from the federal
government, the northern foundations, and southern blacks, the traditional bugbears of
southern whites. They just wanted to do their jobs.

At Vanderbilt, Harvie Branscomb remained, now well into his 60s. In his mind, the
growing intensity of the civil rights movement confirmed his belief that educated white
southerners must control racial change. When the Nashville sit-ins began in early 1960,
led in part by a black Vanderbilt divinity student, Branscomb perceived a threat to
Vanderbilt's slow program of desegregation and to racial peace in the city. The result was
a dramatic and very public confrontation between those who insisted on the right of the
white elite to guide race relations and a new generation of black youth (and a few
whites) who now demanded to be heard. This confrontation was followed by another
when most of Vanderbilt's Divinity School faculty, in full sympathy with the young sit-in
participants, also defied the authority of the Vanderbilt trustees. The national press,
enthralled with the drama of the sit-ins, brought all the events in Nashville to the attention
of the nation.

The early 1960s were the moment of crisis at the South's private universities. The
trustees had twisted and dodged and outrun burgeoning demands for racial justice since
the end of World War II. Now, there was no place left to turn. The matter was presented
for decision. They were left with only a single choice: they could go along with the federal government, the national foundations, and the professors and thrive, or they could defy them and wither. Pushed to the wall, they went along. The power of the boards to control events had vanished. The willingness of others to accept their authority—their right to make decisions for everyone else—was also rapidly eroding. In the end the boards capitulated, but not with particular grace. Many trustees never admitted what had happened. They refused to acknowledge either the authority or the power of “outsiders.”

I

At Emory University, the new decade opened much as the old one had closed. The threat of public school closures still hung over Georgia, intensifying as a clash loomed between Atlanta and the rest of the state over segregation. Following the federal court’s 1959 decision ordering the desegregation of Atlanta’s public schools, the city’s school board submitted a grade-per-year plan, beginning with twelfth grade. Judge Frank A. Hooper approved the plan but waited for the Georgia General Assembly to meet in January 1960 before he ordered implementation.¹ Atlanta’s Mayor Hartsfield asked the legislature to repeal its mandatory school closure law and allow Atlanta to determine its own course on desegregation, warning that it would be “a grave mistake” to hold the city “hostage.” Hooper’s delay gave the state the chance to back off, but it was far from clear that it would do so. Governor Frank Vandiver, though publicly committed to resistance, had no taste for the consequences of closed schools. In 1960, however, most white

¹ Roche, Restructured Resistance, 76–80.
Georgians would rather close the schools than integrate them and most Georgia politicians vocally supported them. Vandiver had to scramble to find a way out.2

On Emory’s campus, the continuing uncertainty took a toll. At the end of 1959, President Walter Martin told the trustees that “[a]lthough it cannot truthfully be reported that any faculty resignation during 1958-59 came primarily as a result of the public school situation, it was without question an important factor in nearly all resignations.”3 Replacing those who left was now a nearly impossible task. The Emory Alumnus reported that “Emory has had turndown after turndown from able young teachers it has wanted to employ from colleges in other states. They simply would not bring their children into a climate where the future of public education is uncertain. Nor will many professors now at Emory stay any longer if the situation grows much worse.”4

In February, tensions began to ease somewhat when the General Assembly, with Vandiver behind the scenes, appointed a commission of prominent Georgians to hold state-wide hearings on desegregation and the public schools. The head of the commission was John A. Sibley, president of Atlanta’s Trust Company Bank, a partner in the law firm of King and Spalding, and former general counsel for the Coca-Cola Company. While Sibley loathed desegregation, he was above all a man of the Atlanta business elite who understood that the economic fallout of massive resistance would devastate the city. In

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3 President’s Report to the Board, November 1959, EUA.
4 Emory Alumnus, February 1960.
complex and subtle ways, his conduct of the hearings during the late winter and spring of 1960 helped avert outright crisis.⁵

Meanwhile, other events created a tense and uncertain atmosphere in Atlanta. Martin Luther King, Jr. had recently returned to the city, bringing with him a reputation that worried and angered many whites. In early March, students at the city’s black colleges, inspired by the sit-ins in Greensboro and elsewhere, published a full-page “Appeal for Human Rights” in the Atlanta Constitution. Demonstrations and protests followed throughout the spring, and students planned a boycott of Rich’s department store.⁶

On campus, the issue of public school closures now merged with faculty concerns about segregation in Atlanta and at Emory itself. One particular incident galvanized faculty opposition to the school’s racial policies and brought into sharp focus their distance from the far more traditional trustees. Oddly, this incident involved the Glee Club. In early March, the board forced that group to cancel an appearance at Tuskegee Institute, citing the possibility of a violent reaction to a white choir singing, and staying overnight, at a black college. This angered and troubled many on the Emory faculty. President Martin responded to their concerns with a letter: “I can understand perfectly the feeling of the faculty about the Glee Club’s date at Tuskegee Institute. I, too, think the

⁵ Roche, Restructured Resistance, 78–95. On Sibley and his relationship with Coca-Cola’s Woodruff, see Allen, Secret Formula, 219–22, 269, 331–33.
⁶ Atlanta Constitution, March 9, 1960; Pomerantz, Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn, 251–258; Sitkoff, Struggle for Black Equality, 69–73. The “Appeal” was truly shocking to white Atlantans, declaring that “We do not intend to wait placidly for those rights which are legally and morally ours to be meted out to us one at a time.” The Emory Wheel conceded, irrelevantly, the the appeal “merits study.” March 31, 1960. Other Emory students grasped the meaning of the statement rather more clearly, and joined the demonstrations. Emory Wheel, March 31, 1960. Emory students remained divided throughout the early 1960s, with most prefering segregation or espousing an empty “moderation,” but an active and vocal minority participated in demonstrations and sit-ins, and condemned the student paper for spinelessness.
entire incident is regrettable. I have been much concerned about it. In this particular case, the Board of Trustees was firm and positive, and there was nothing that the administration could do about it.” Martin also invited faculty members to discuss the matter further with him.7

William Archie, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, read Martin’s letter to a faculty meeting in mid-March, provoking a wide-ranging discussion of Emory’s “policies with respect to interracial occasions.” Dean Archie sketched out what he understood that policy to be: “when professional meetings are held on campus, all members of the professional organizations are welcome at all events. The President asks that his office be notified in advance when plans for entertaining professional organizations are being made. Friends in the Negro community may be invited to speeches.” These policies, Archie, explained, were unofficial, implemented by “informal agreement between the President and the Board . . .” He also warned the faculty that the deans believed the time was not “propitious to have the Board confront these issues officially.” Given the recent Tuskegee decision, this was probably sound advice. But the Arts and Sciences faculty were in no mood to drop the matter. (Indeed, there was strong support at this meeting for publicly endorsing the black students’ recent “Appeal for Human Rights.”) On unanimous vote of the faculty, Archie appointed a committee to meet with Martin and discuss “the Tuskegee episode and related questions of policy with respect to Faculty and student relations with the Negro community.”8

7 Minutes of the Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences, March 16, 1960, Box 2, Emory University Faculty Papers, EUA.
8 Ibid. There is other evidence that this was indeed the school’s policy. At least twice in 1960, the university agreed to host professional meetings that might bring blacks to campus, apparently without any great fuss. In response a request to hold a meeting of the Georgia Philosophical Society, which had black members, Walter Martin quite casually
On March 23 the Sibley Commission held hearings in Atlanta. The Emory faculty seized the opportunity to again take a public stand in favor of keeping the schools open. Faculty from Ogelthorpe and Agnes Scott colleges in addition to administrators from Atlanta’s black colleges testified at the hearing, and Emory English professor John Calhoun Stephens delivered a faculty resolution from Emory urging uninterrupted public education in the city. A large part of the faculty, particularly in the College of Arts and Sciences (which sometimes seemed to consider itself the “real” Emory), pushed on. A faculty group met with Martin but left unsatisfied.

Martin, caught between the faculty and the trustees, had no prospects of satisfying anyone. Emory professors were aggressively and noisily pushing for quick action, inviting students and faculty members from the black colleges to the Emory campus, participating alongside students in demonstrations, and drafting resolutions. The board, though now led by the consummately practical attorney Henry Bowden, still had a preponderance of traditionalists who were unhappy about public identification of Emory professors and agreed. “I don’t think this needs any action from us,” he wrote Vice-president Jake Ward, “but I appreciate [Professor Richard Hocking] calling it to our attention.” Judson C. Ward to S. Walter Martin, January 14, 1960; Martin to Jake [Ward], January 14, 1960 (quotation); Box 8, Judson C. Ward Papers, EUA. Another instance of this nearly routine treatment of such gatherings occurred in October, when an invitation was issued to the Georgia Psychological Association, which could bring “as many as a half dozen Negroes” to Emory. Even the prospect of a luncheon failed to daunt Emory’s administration: “Inasmuch as the luncheon is planned in the private dining room of the Food Services center, if any of these people appear at the regular meeting they will be treated as other members of the professional group.” Ward to Charles T. Lester, October 12, 1960, Box 8, Ward Papers, EUA.

Ibid.; Harvey Young, Faculty orientation talk, September 25, 1962, Box 15, Young Papers, EUA. The text of the resolution is: “Even a temporary interruption of public education in Georgia would have such serious intellectual and economic repercussions that their impact would injure the state’s progress for years. It is the sentiment of this body, therefore, that the Sibley School Study Committee should recommend to the Georgia Legislature such procedures as are necessary to permit citizens in their local
students with the cause of integration. And Martin, a reluctant "gradualist" himself, was 
still hobbled as a leader by campus and boardroom politics.

On March 31 Martin tried to calm tensions with a more formal talk to selected faculty 
members. He first warned them that, although they undeniably had the right to participate 
in important community affairs, that right must be exercised appropriately. That is, "it is 
not fair for any of us to 'use' the University to gain prestige or attention for our personal 
position . . ." He also defended Emory's commitment to segregation, citing the need to 
respect southern mores:

Emory University is subject to the customs and laws of Georgia. Some of 
you may wish that Emory were elsewhere, but it is the South. We simply 
cannot get too far out in front of the community in which we live, or else we 
ruin ourselves. History teaches that; nature teaches that. The climate must be 
right. I can easily see this University on the road to destruction if we get too 
far out front. We are nurtured by our business and church friends, alumni, 
and yes, even the state government of Georgia. Suppose these friends and 
agencies turn their backs on us. . . . It is because of these facts that our Board 
of Trustees has said that we cannot schedule "open meetings" with Negroes, 
and that we must not have integrated meals or provide housing or sleeping for 
Negroes on the campus.  

Martin urged the faculty to back away from their request that the trustees formally 
spell out their policy on race relations on campus, as "The Board would have no choice 
but to rigidly interpret a policy of segregation." In explaining this, he returned to the idea 
that the traditional racial beliefs of the "Emory family" could not be disregarded:

I believe that the people who help provide the resources which pay our 
salaries and buy our facilities are part of the Emory family, too, and are 
entitled to some consideration. There is justification for being as considerate 
of the personal opinion of a trustee as of a professor. We should be willing to 
avoid embarrassing our friends, unless there is an overriding contrary interest

communities to take action that will ensure uninterrupted public education." It passed 
unanimously.

10 S. Walter Martin, Remarks to Selected Faculty Members Concerning Race Relations at 
Emory, March 31, 1960, Box 86, Robert Woodruff Papers, EUA.
at stake. I don’t know how to spell out this policy in great detail, but I can cite an example or two: A formal concert by the Emory University Glee Club at Tuskegee, with an overnight stay in their dormitories, would destroy most of the good will and support our Alabama friends have worked to build up. Picketing of Rich’s store by Emory students was a most unhappy choice, for the Rich Foundation is a member of the Emory family . . . So, I call for an end to any such demonstrations on the part of Emory people, and ask the faculty to help in telling the students the damaging effects of these doings. 11

It is a measure of the widening gulf between the different groups that Martin thought this kind of statement would quiet faculty and student demands for change. The position he staked out here was identical to that of Goodrich White in 1948. He believed that idealistic insistence on racial change actually hampered constructive change and that idealists do not grasp the effects of their actions. Martin quoted with approval Mayor Hartsfield’s recent statement to the black leaders of the boycott and demonstrations at Rich’s: “If this sort of thing is carried on in excess, you are going to endanger the progress Atlanta has made in maintaining good race relations.” This lecturing, both Martin’s and Hartsfield’s, betrays a complete lack of understanding of what was happening. They seemed to assume that if they only explained the situation to those who were upsetting and “embarrassing” their friends and neighbors, they would stop. But those who now aggressively pushed for change did indeed understand what they were doing, and they no longer accepted the authority of the white elite to make decisions for everyone.

Some on the faculty shared Martin’s views. One professor wrote: “I honestly believe that if we followed the wishes of some of our faculty we would not only hurt the University and decrease its effectiveness in these troubled times, but would also actually

11 Ibid.
hurt the ultimate goal of attaining harmonious race relations with equality of all men.”¹²

Martin’s efforts to control internal pressure for racial change, however, had no
discernible effect on the rest of the faculty. Throughout the late spring, the College of
Arts and Sciences pushed a resolution that called for an expansion of the policy of
allowing mixed groups on campus “until it becomes feasible for Emory to make all of its
facilities available without reference to race.” In a direct challenge to Martin’s reasoning
in his March 31 statement, the resolution stated that “in assessing the possibility of
adopting such a policy it should be borne in mind that Emory has a national as well as a
local constituency.” Even within the South, the resolution noted, “patterns of relations
between racial groups . . . are undergoing a process of change, and educational patterns
are particularly involved . . . .” Thus, Emory should take the initiative in “bringing
together representative faculty and administrators from . . . colleges of the Atlanta area,
both White and Negro.”¹³ The Arts and Sciences faculty passed this resolution on May 6,
and conveyed it to Martin for submission to the board. When the board met on May 11,
the resolution prompted “lively discussion,” but the result was a brisk letter from Henry
Bowden saying that “the request . . . that Emory take the initiative in bringing together
the races on our campus for joint work toward bringing about more inter-racial
cooperation cannot be granted.”¹⁴

Still, the faculty persisted. The University Senate had also been considering Emory’s
racial policies throughout the spring but had not yet reached any conclusions. On May 25
the Arts and Sciences representative introduced the same resolution for this body’s

¹² R.A. Day, Jr. to Martin, April 5, 1960, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA.
¹³ Harvey Young to Martin, May 6, 1960, Box 1, Emory University Faculty Papers, EUA.
¹⁴ Copy of letter, Henry Bowden to Martin, May 12, 1960; Martin to William C. Archie,
May 17, 1960, Box 1, Emory Faculty Papers, EUA.
consideration, along with a copy of Bowden’s dismissive letter. This time, there was resistance. Representatives from other divisions had not seen the resolution before and were troubled that they could not get an unambiguous explanation of its meaning. Still, with Martin voting against it, the Senate adopted the resolution by a 6 to 5 vote.\textsuperscript{15}

The Arts and Sciences faculty set up a committee to study ways to implement the general principles of the resolution and to communicate with the administration and board. Summarizing the group’s thinking, Dean Archie wrote Martin that “social, political, and allied changes are upon us. The committee feels that there is no way we can stop this tide . . .[and] the University ought to try to do something to accommodate itself to the change or to channel the changes that are coming in the best possible ways in order that we might not be engulfed by them.” Archie reassured the president that the faculty committee was “not wild-eyed in any sense” and had “its feet firmly on the ground.” The members understood that they needed the cooperation of the trustees and hoped to meet with some of them informally. Probably the best news in the letter, from Martin’s point of view, was that the group did not plan to meet over the summer.\textsuperscript{16}

By the time classes began again in the fall, Georgia’s public school crisis was intensifying again. The Sibley Commission had issued its report in April, recommending that that state establish “a system of education within the limitations of the Supreme Court decision, yet one which will secure the maximum segregation within the law, which will vest the control of its schools in the people of the community . . .” Judge

\textsuperscript{15} Minutes of University Senate Meeting, April 6, April 27, May 25, 1960, Box 4, Emory University Senate Papers, EUA. John Buhler, dean of the School of Dentistry, wrote a furious note to Henry Bowden about this resolution, claiming it had been “railroaded” through the Senate and that the dental faculty was annoyed with Arts and Sciences for trying to speak for the whole university. John E. Buhler to Henry Bowden, June 11, 1960, Box 3, Bowden Papers, EUA.
Hooper again postponed the implementation of his order desegregating Atlanta’s schools in order to give the state a chance to repeal its massive resistance laws. The schools, he ordered, would desegregate in the fall of 1961. Supporters of the change campaigned throughout the summer and fall, arguing that massive resistance could not preserve segregation and would destroy Georgia’s economy. Although many, especially in rural areas and in southern Georgia, still vehemently insisted that segregation was more important than schools, the Atlanta business community strongly supported the Sibley Commission recommendations.17

That autumn also saw the resumption of the demonstrations and sit-ins at downtown Atlanta lunch counters. On October 19 Martin Luther King, Jr. was arrested along with fifty-one students for violating trespass laws after being refused service at the restaurant in Rich’s Department Store. Mayor Hartsfield quickly negotiated the students’ release from city jails and extracted from them a pledge that they would not hold demonstrations for thirty days in return for his efforts to get Dr. King released by DeKalb County (where Emory was located). Although it took an appeal from Robert Kennedy to secure King’s freedom, the students honored their bargain. Demonstrations did not resume until late November.18

On the Emory campus, Walter Martin had an interesting situation on his hands. A vocal contingent of students and faculty members demanded change. Many on the board and most alumni seemed unalterably opposed, and they were just as vocal. And Emory

16 William C. Archie to Martin, May 26, 1960, Box 3, Bowden Papers, EUA.
17 Roche, Restructured Resistance, 162–75.
was desperately in need of money—a lot of it—that he was expected to raise while the campus fought over segregation. Never really happy at Emory, Martin was by now miserably. He received harassing phone calls and tongue-lashings from all sides on a fairly regular basis. Still, doing his best to salvage the situation, he worked to keep communication open between the various groups and helped create a special committee of faculty, administrators, and trustees to discuss the issue of segregation at Emory. These discussions continued during this tumultuous autumn.

At the beginning of 1961, board chairman Henry Bowden decided that it was time to act. On January 12, 1961—the day after a mob at the University of Georgia rioted outside Charlayne Hunter’s dorm room after she enrolled as one of the school’s first two black students—Bowden appointed a committee “to study the policy of Emory University relative to the admission of negroes as students, and to recommend to the Executive Committee at its February 1961 meeting such changes, if any, it feels would be proper.”

The membership of this committee resembled an Atlanta Chamber of Commerce roster, and its deliberations thoroughly reflected the thinking of the Atlanta business elite. It was chaired by Harlee Branch, the president of the Southern Company, Atlanta’s electric

124. On Dr. King’s incarceration and the national political machinations that surrounded it, see Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 351–370.
19 Bowden to Harlee Branch, January 13, 1961, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA. The situation at the University of Georgia was much on the trustees’ minds that day. They sent a letter to that school’s president, O.C. Aderhold, expressing their support and praising the “splendid manner in which you and your staff have handled the unfortunate situation on your campus.” Martin to President Aderhold, January 12, 1961, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA. Quite prudently, Martin arranged for his daughter, who was a student at Georgia, to spend a few nights with family friends in Athens rather than stay in her room in Hunter’s dorm. Martin to Birdie Bondurant, January 17, 1961, Box 4, Martin Papers, VSUA. On the desegregation of the University of Georgia, see Thomas G. Dyer, *The University of Georgia: A Bicentennial History, 1785–1985*, (Athens, GA, 1985), 322–33 and Calvin Trillin, *An Education in Georgia: Charlayne Hunter, Hamilton Holmes, and the Integration of the University of Georgia*, (New York, 1964).
utility. The other members were F.M. Bird (an Atlanta attorney), Morgan Cantey (president of West Point textiles), George S. Craft (president of the Trust Company of Georgia and son-in-law of Hughes Spalding), Pollard Turman (president of J.M. Metals), William Turner (president of W.C. Bradley cotton warehousing), and George Woodruff (Robert Woodruff’s brother). Although Bowden himself was not a member of the committee, he attended the meetings.\textsuperscript{20}

From the beginning Bowden knew what he wanted to do and understood what the obstacles were. Like the larger Atlanta business community, Bowden and the members of this special committee would have personally preferred to keep segregation. Their bottom-line mentality, though, led them to value other things more than racial separation—peace, economic growth, Emory’s national reputation. They would not retain traditional racial restrictions if it meant sacrificing prosperity and prestige. To one alumnus who opposed desegregation, Bowden made this clear. “There are many considerations to be given to this matter of integration and it is not a question simply of whether we prefer it or don’t prefer it ethically. It has to do with our continued ability to operate inasmuch as we are receiving funds from so many sources on which limitations have been placed unless integration is recognized.”\textsuperscript{21}

At their first meeting, on February 1, the committee discussed only a few topics. They briefly considered Emory’s relationship to the Methodist Church, which was becoming more outspokenly opposed to segregation, as well as the faculty’s strong support for

\textsuperscript{20} The biographical information is from questionnaires filled out by the trustees in 1959. Box 7, Bowden Papers, EUA.
\textsuperscript{21} Bowden to Tim Adams, January 24, 1961, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA.
admitting blacks.\textsuperscript{22} The real focus of discussion, though, was money. Bowden called attention to the Georgia legislature’s grant of a tax exemption to Emory and other private schools, which applied as long as the school was maintained for whites only. Admitting blacks would place Emory outside the scope of this provision, potentially costing it millions of dollars and ending its ability to move forward as a university. On the other hand, Bowden pointed out, it was entirely possible that federal tax policy could soon change in ways designed to punish segregated institutions and it was already certain that federal research grants and contracts to segregated schools were being restricted. The president’s Civil Rights Commission had recently called for a total ban on any kind of federal aid to segregated colleges, a possibility that would cost Emory millions of dollars and prevent it from making progress as a university. The committee decided only that it needed more time to make a full report.\textsuperscript{23}

Two days after this meeting, Walter Martin, who had lunch with the committee that day, sent a note to Harlee Branch. “I wanted to state in writing,” said Martin, “that I am in agreement with the principle as set forth by your committee relating to the race issue at Emory. I believe, as most of you do, that desegregation is coming in all of our schools, so we might as well face it now, and in doing so settle it in our own way.” This indeed was

\textsuperscript{22} In correspondence with the Atlanta District superintendent of the Methodist Church, Bowden was informed that the Woman’s Division of Christian Service had decided against giving money to Emory’s nursing school because it remained segregated. Lester Rumble to Bowden, February 7, 1961, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA. The Methodist Church was still not of one mind on desegregation, however, and some individual congregations expressed strong opposition to opening Emory to blacks. Martin had solicited letters from the faculty, and many responded. The special committee looked at these as well. Every such letter strongly supported desegregation, usually with powerful moral arguments as well as arguments about the university’s standing in the larger academic community. Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA.

\textsuperscript{23} Minutes of Meeting of Special Committee of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees of Emory University, February 1, 1961, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA.
the committee’s general position. The members understood the demise of segregation to be inevitable, for financial, political, and social reasons, and wanted to make the change at Emory with the least amount of turmoil. Early drafts of an interim report to the executive committee, in fact, stressed continuity rather than change, citing ongoing faithfulness to the school’s original and primary goal of academic excellence. This, the report suggested, would never change. The only thing that would be different was that a class of applicants that Emory had not traditionally accepted as students would now be considered on their merits.\textsuperscript{24}

The only difficulty was the Georgia tax exemption. There was good reason to believe that even if Emory desegregated, the state would not act to revoke that exemption. Several of the black colleges admitted white students and retained their privileged tax status. Similarly, the now desegregated state universities also kept the exemption. The dean of Emory’s law school, Ben Johnson, argued that any move for the invalidation of Emory’s exemption would have to come from state officials, and he reasonably doubted that they would “invite such a crisis on their own motion.” With the state universities now desegregated and the Atlanta’s public schools about to be, there would seem to be no point to the state trying to destroy Emory University. Still, Bowden and the committee members were hesitant. It was, after all, a lot to risk.\textsuperscript{25}

The final issue was whether to open admissions to all schools at once or to proceed gradually, beginning with graduate divisions. Interestingly, the committee was more willing to make the change university wide than was either the president or the faculty.

\textsuperscript{24} Martin to Harlee Branch, February 3, 1961, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA; draft report, n.d. but February 1961, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA.

\textsuperscript{25} Ben Johnson to Henry Bowden, October 21, 1961, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA. Bowden, of course, already thoroughly understood the issues.
Walter Martin strongly preferred gradual desegregation: "I am a little fearful of throwing open every school and the College to the Negro at one time. I think some of our crusaders, the NAACP, and maybe some other organizations are going to flood us with applications, and they are going to be good applications too, because the Negro high schools in Atlanta are turning out excellent products now." Bowden, and ultimately the rest of the trustees, disagreed, arguing that gradual desegregation would unnecessarily perpetuate the problem.\textsuperscript{26}

In late spring 1961, the executive committee approved the special committee's report and directed that it be presented to the full board in May. By now, both Duke and Tulane had voted to admit blacks, although neither had yet actually done so.\textsuperscript{27} Somewhat mysteriously, however, the committee did not report to the board at its May 4 meeting, "pursuant to developments and agreements taking place immediately before the meeting on that morning." The board did discuss the issue, though. They received a report from the Board of Visitors that called for an end to racially restricted admissions, concluding that Emory "must continue to recognize its responsibility to accept a position of leadership in resolving the problems inherited by the section of the nation in which it

\textsuperscript{26} Martin to Harlee Branch, February 3, 1961, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA. Bowden stated his preference to desegregate the entire university at once several times. He argued that it was best to get the thing finished as soon as possible. Bowden to Ernest Colwell, April 13, 1961, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA.

\textsuperscript{27} Bowden to Harlee Branch, April 14, 1961, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA. Bowden also presented a report from the Emory Board of Visitors on desegregation that closely paralleled the thinking of the Special Committee. Bowden to Hugh M. Dorsey, April 25, 1961; Bowden to F.M. Bird, April 25, 1961; Bowden to Randolph Thrower, May 3, 1961, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA. Bowden was also in close contact at this time with Joseph Jones, chairman of the Tulane board, about their decision. Jones to Bowden, April 13, 1961; Bowden to Jones, April 14, 1961, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA. Walter Martin also wrote friends at other private universities at this time, asking them for details of their plans for desegregation. Martin to Herbert Herring, February 23, 1961; Herring to Martin, March 16, 1961; Martin to Herring, March 20, 1961, Box 2, Herring Papers, DUA.
located."\textsuperscript{28} In the end, the board reserved action, noting only that segregation was now causing many "complications which can materially interfere with the ability of the University to carry out its work."\textsuperscript{29}

Meanwhile, the campus waited expectantly for an announcement on desegregation. In the weeks leading up to this meeting, several groups had moved to make their feelings known to the trustees. Martin received a petition supporting desegregation signed by 444 undergraduates. The Graduate School Student Council conducted a quiet poll that revealed overwhelming support for desegregation. Dean Charles Lester passed this on to the trustees before their meeting. The Theology School Student Council also conveyed its support for "admission of all persons to Emory University without regard to racial derivation and on the basis of qualifications."\textsuperscript{30} When Henry Bowden announced that action was being postponed, the faculty and many students reacted with dismay. Many wrote Martin or Bowden with anxious disapproval. The College of Arts and Sciences Legislative Council passed a resolution deploiring the board's failure to take action: "We regret this situation since Emory University, which ought to exercise moral and intellectual leadership, is thereby left in the rearguard of responsible action."\textsuperscript{31}

To calm the situation, Walter Martin let the faculty know that the board's inaction was temporary. He told Arts and Sciences dean William Archie, who reported to the faculty, that "The Board of Trustees is not against desegregation, nor is he; that the Board of Trustees is worried about the consequences to the University, in view of the Georgia law

\textsuperscript{28} Randolph Thrower to Bowden, May 3, 1961; Report of Special Committee to Review University Policy on Admissions, May 1, 1961, Box 9, Bowden Papers, EUA.  
\textsuperscript{29} Minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting, May 4, 1961, EUA.  
\textsuperscript{30} Charles Lester to Martin, May 2, 1961; J. Zachary Farr to Bowden, February 1, 1961, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA.
on tax exemption, and that a declaratory judgment on the constitutionality of this law is
being sought . . ." Martin also told the dean that he hoped the board would take action by
November, or possibly even sooner, but quite reasonably he made no promises.\footnote{32}

By the time of the fall board meeting, the political atmosphere was far different than
it had been a year before. The January showdown between state and federal law at the
University of Georgia had forced Governor Frank Vandiver to take a stand one way or
the other, and he judiciously chose not to defy federal authority. The state university
would remain open. Almost immediately, support for keeping the public schools open
also appeared and lawmakers overturned the state's massive resistance legislation in a
special session. In Atlanta, after meticulous planning by the mayor and the civic elite, the
public schools opened peacefully on a (barely) integrated basis.\footnote{33} Downtown, relentless
boycotts and sit-ins had paralyzed business through February. White merchants were
beaten down and ready to negotiate. They agreed to a vaguely worded statement,
brokered by Chamber of Commerce president Ivan Allen, Jr., that committed them to
desegregating their facilities only when the public schools were desegregated, six months

\footnote{31} The resolution was adopted on May 9, 1961. Charles D. Hounshell to Martin, May 24,
1961, "Brief Documentary Account," Manuscript Box 10, EUA.
\footnote{32} Minutes of the Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences, May 25, 1961, Box 2,
Emory Faculty Papers, EUA.
Desegregation in New Orleans: A Comparative Study of the Failure of Social Control
(Chicago, 1966) contrasts the calm desegregation in Atlanta with the chaos of New
Orleans, locating the roots of the difference in the failure of the New Orleans civic elite
to take control of the issue. Goodrich White expressed a similar opinion in a letter to the
president of Colgate in 1961: "The mob spirit that has manifested itself in Little Rock,
New Orleans, Athens, and elsewhere can, I think, be kept under control by the kind of
planning and public appeals that went on in Atlanta." White to Everett Case, November
2, 1961, Box 11, White Papers, EUA.
later. This agreement outraged many in the student movement, but by fall the stores were
desegregated and peace had returned.\textsuperscript{34}

In November, then, Emory’s board could safely act. Tensions had eased significantly,
and Emory would not be breaking new ground. The special committee submitted its
report, noting that nothing in the school’s founding documents forbade the admission of
blacks and that the school’s admissions standards would not change. The board approved
the report and indicated that Emory would admit black applicants to all schools at the
university on the same basis as white applicants, but only “when and if it can do so
without jeopardizing constitutional and statutory tax-exemption privileges essential to the
maintenance of its educational program and facilities.”\textsuperscript{35}

Reaction to the announcement was mostly favorable. Many faculty expressed relief
but still worried that the legal issues remained unsolved. Trustee F.M. Bird met with the
faculty on November 21 and reassured them that the board would act at the appropriate
time and Martin issued a statement promising that the board would see the matter through
to its final conclusion.\textsuperscript{36} Only a handful of alumni objected in writing, but they made up
for their small numbers with their remarkable stridency. Most alumni who bothered to

\textsuperscript{34} Branch, \textit{Parting the Waters}, 395–97. Ivan Allen was elected mayor of Atlanta in
November 1961, defeating segregationist Lester Maddox.
\textsuperscript{35} Report of Special Committee, adopted by the Board of Trustees, May 3, 1961, Box 9,
Bowden Papers, EUA. At least one trustee, possibly more, was unhappy with this
decision. United States Senator Spessard Holland of Florida objected vehemently,
arguing that the line must be held or worse things would come: “The pressure groups
which are insisting upon breaking down the racial barriers have made it very clear that
they want to go as far as intermarriage.” Spessard Holland to Martin, November 28,
1961, Box 3, Bowden Papers, EUA.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Emory Wheel}, November 30, 1961. Martin’s statement is in “A Brief Documentary
Account,” Box 10, Emory University Manuscripts, EUA.
contact the school were pleased with the move towards desegregation. The *Atlanta Constitution* praised the decision for moving Emory "a great step forward toward its ultimate position as one of the foremost seats of learning in the nation" and called on the legislature to remove the "punitive restriction" in the tax exemption.

Bowden tried to interest other Georgia private colleges in joining a lawsuit to challenge the racial restriction in the tax exemption, but none would. (Rufus Harris at Mercer was willing, but the Mercer board would have none of it.) After receiving an application to the dental school from a qualified black student, Emory filed suit on March 21, 1962, carefully arguing that the tax exemption was valid but the racial restriction within it was not. Bowden and law dean Ben Johnson argued the case, losing in the district court but prevailing at the Georgia Supreme Court. The final order was entered

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37 Walter R. Davis, Jr., Emory’s alumni director, prepared a form letter to send to disgruntled alumni. Davis defended the board’s decision succinctly, stressing that the trustees were all born and raised in the South, and citing the desegregation of Georgia’s public universities and the South’s other private ones, growing faculty and student opinion in favor of desegregation, and the need to do it before they were forced to by a court decision. Walter R. Davis, Jr. to John Doe, November ( ), 1961, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA.

38 Letters from faculty, staff, and alumni are in Boxes 3 and 4, Bowden Papers, EUA. *Atlanta Constitution*, November 4, 1961.

39 The board adopted a resolution at the November meeting to the effect that Emory should try to cooperate with the state’s other private schools to solve the tax problem. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trust, November 2–3, 1961; Henry Bowden to Robert Woodruff, September 26, 1962, Box 88, Woodruff Papers, EUA.

40 This application and several others are in Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA. Emory’s brief and supplemental brief are in “A Brief Documentary Account,” Box 10, Emory Manuscripts, EUA. The May 1962 issue of the *Emory Alumnus* contains both a reprint of the petition and an explanation of the suit by law dean Ben Johnson. Johnson stressed that “it is not necessary in this action for Emory to champion the rights of Negroes, and this action does not do so; we champion the rights of Emory, and every other private educational institution in Georgia, to choose its own admission policy in this regard . . . .”

41 *Emory University et al. v. Nash*, 218 Ga. 317 (1962). The case was decided on September 14 and Dekalb County filed an appeal on September 24, but the Georgia Supreme Court affirmed its decision on October 1. Henry Bowden immediately notified Robert Woodruff and sent him a copy of the Georgia Supreme Court’s decision. He noted
in October 1962, and Emory admitted one black part-time graduate student, a teacher in the Decatur public schools, that fall. By spring, two black women were admitted to the graduate program in nursing. The campus received them "without any turmoil or excitement whatsoever."42

Although Emory’s trustees made the change with relative grace and calm, there is no doubt that they would rather have kept the school white. In letter after letter to alumni Henry Bowden wrote that he personally would be happier if Emory were to remain segregated, and that he did not want to change the custom because of "pressure from either the government or private donors who threaten to cut us off if we do not integrate." But he also implicitly admitted that this was exactly what had happened. "Whether we like it or not," he acknowledged, "the Federal Government is deeply embedded in private as well as public education. At present there is going on at Emory research involving more than $2,000,000 in Federal funds. We are of the opinion that in the not too distant future we will find Congress acting to cut off Federal funds from institutions which by charter or rules prohibit negroes from attending. If such is done and we lose this money we could continue to operate as a small ineffective college but not as a major university because our faculty will leave us if they do not have the chance to do research work." In another letter he expanded the list of outside actors who had forced the school’s hand,

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42 Judson C. Ward to Roland P. Mackay (quotation), January 18, 1963, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA; Emory Wheel, October 18, 1962. Interestingly, Emory’s commencement speaker in 1962 was John A. Sibley, who spoke on “The Changing South.” June 11, 1962, Box 120, John A. Sibley Papers, EUA.
including the foundations and the accrediting agencies. "I resent [this]," he said, "but must learn to live with it."43

Others on the board resisted to the end acknowledging what had actually happened. In a letter to Walter Martin written after the May board meeting, trustee Harris Purks told the president what he would and would not agree to. He would agree to admit qualified blacks to Emory. But he would not, he proclaimed, support any statement that suggested either that segregation was wrong or that Emory was giving in to any pressure. He would never sign off on anything, he said, that included the following:

1. breast-beating self-righteousness,
2. unbridled implied criticism of the composite previous actions in the South with respect to race,
3. a stampede under the whip-lashing by liberals of church or press or government,
4. use of the word integration.44

Whether they were willing to face it or not, Emory’s trustees had been forced to choose a new path. Outside pressures, and internal ones as well, ensured by 1961 that the school could no longer remain both a major university and segregated. The pragmatic response of the Atlanta business elite to the state’s public school desegregation crisis meant that the battle to resist any changes in traditional racial relationships in Georgia, or at least in Atlanta, was already lost. There was nothing to be gained by holding out alone. Thus, the board, led by Henry Bowden and dominated by members of that same Atlanta business elite, did the practical thing. In a letter to angry alumni, Walt Davis, Emory’s alumni director, pointed out that “[t]he wish to make Emory into a truly great ‘national’ university rather than just a good regional one undoubtedly had great weight in this

43 Bowden to Spencer Walden, Jr., February 27, 1961; Bowden to Hugh Comer, March 8, 1961, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA.
44 Harris Purks to Martin, May 9, 1961, Box 4, Bowden Papers, EUA.
decision.” Emory would continue to advance, growing in size, quality, and prestige throughout the decades ahead.

One other happy consequence of the desegregation lawsuit was that it left Walter Martin free to leave Emory and return to the University System of Georgia.\textsuperscript{45} Martin was not a man to walk away from an unfinished job and would not leave the matter of desegregation unsettled for his successor, but he began talking to friends in the Georgia system at almost the same time as the board announced its resolution on desegregation in November 1961. By Christmas, the discussions were serious. Martin announced to Emory’s board his intention to accept the vice-chancellorship of the University System of Georgia on April 11, 1962.\textsuperscript{46}

Martin’s ability to do the job that Emory needed done, especially the fund raising, had been hampered from the beginning by the campus politics that surrounded his selection as president in 1957, and that never really disappeared. The public school crisis and the tumult that accompanied it at Emory left him even weaker, exposed on all sides to sniping and outright attacks. That he accomplished anything at Emory is nearly miraculous, but he did. In his five years at Emory enrollment grew from about 3,600 to about 4,600, research grants grew from $1 million to over $3 million, and, most remarkably, despite all the controversy and bad feeling, the school’s full-time faculty grew from 276 to 430. Martin had worked assiduously to improve faculty salaries and to

\textsuperscript{45} It would be difficult to overstate Martin’s relief at leaving. He seemed particularly thrilled that he wouldn’t have to raise money anymore, underscoring Emory’s vulnerable financial position. “This institution needs 75 million dollars over the next ten years,” he wrote one friend, “and I am afraid I am not the one to deliver it.” Martin to Claud B. Green, April 25, 1962, Box 65, Martin Papers, VSUA.

\textsuperscript{46} Martin to [all members of the board of trustees], April 11, 1962, Box 61, Martin Papers, VSUA. In 1966 Martin became president of Valdosta State, a branch if the University System, a position he held until his retirement in 1978.
strengthen the faculty’s voice in university affairs. Perhaps his most lasting accomplishment at Emory was that he forced the trustees to face the school’s most overwhelming problem—finances. By the time he left, they understood the magnitude of the fundraising problem and accepted that the trustees must play a major role in bringing the money to campus. Almost immediately, a new development campaign became the focus of everyone’s attention.47

With few exceptions, only after his resignation did people express their appreciation of his quiet but stalwart service.48 Those who wrote often singled out his efforts on desegregation. “I am aware of, and I thank you for, your patient, persistent efforts to move the center of sentiment among the trustees to the point where the suit was possible,” wrote historian J. Harvey Young, one of the faculty’s more vocal proponents of desegregation. “In this touchy area, as in all others, you have won my deep appreciation—indeed, wide faculty appreciation—for your fair consideration of expressed opinion. We have known that, even when we disagreed with you or would push you harder and faster than you thought expedient, you would trust our sincerity. The genuine atmosphere of freedom of speech, with no fear of reprisal, subtle or direct, attaching to divergent views, is greatly to your credit.”49

47 Martin, President’s Report to the Board of Trustees, November 1961, EUA; Sam A. Wilkins, Jr. to Martin, March 13, 1962; Martin to Henry Bowden, March 16, 1962, Box 3, Bowden Papers, EUA.
48 One of the most prominent exceptions was William Cannon, dean of the theology school, who who always communicated that school’s position on desegregation with the greatest respect and consideration for the difficult situation the administration was in. William R. Cannon to Martin, May 29, 1961, Box 4, Martin Papers, VSUA.
49 Harvey Young to Martin, April 19, 1962, Box 65, Martin Papers, VSUA.
II

On February 19, 1960, Hollis Edens announced his resignation as Duke University’s president. His announcement took the campus completely by surprise with its suddenness and lack of convincing explanation. A month later, the surprise was compounded when the board of trustees removed Paul Gross as vice president of the education division. Gross, a chemist who had been at Duke since 1919, had worked closely with Edens since 1949 and was heading the school’s long-range planning effort when he was dismissed. Few outside the circles of the board and high administration knew what had happened.50

Ironically, Hollis Edens, who had so carefully maintained his relationship with the board of trustees, fell victim to internal politics. His downfall, though, came not at the hands of the board of Duke University but rather the board of the Duke Endowment. In the early 1930s President William Preston Few’s fears that the Duke Endowment might cut off funds to the university led him to create an institutional tie between the two boards. Three spots on the Duke University board’s executive committee were filled by board members of the Duke Endowment, who were usually New Yorkers.51 Vice President Gross had cultivated these men, who, like him, believed that Hollis Edens was not pursuing national prominence for Duke with enough aggression. For several months they had been pressuring Edens to step aside and accept a lesser role in Duke’s affairs. Insulted and hurt, wanting to avoid a battle that could only divide and harm the university, Edens resigned. While the Endowment trustees on the executive committee

51 Durden, Launching of Duke University, 49–65. This requirement was dropped in 1968.
may have been pleased, the rest of the board—seeing the door open for Gross to either become or choose the next president—was not. These other trustees, mostly North Carolinians, had had little inkling that anything was wrong. They also had no complaints about Edens, who was popular on campus and widely respected in the state as well as in national academic circles.\footnote{One exception was Bunyan Snipes Womble, from Winston-Salem. Edens had confided in him about the pressures from the Endowment trustees and Gross. Womble tried to help Edens steer through the trouble, an effort that was probably doomed from the start. See Durden, “Donnybrook at Duke, I.”}

The day before the board meeting on March 23, Gross gave an interview to the \textit{Durham Morning Herald} in which he framed Edens’s resignation as a problem of vision, portraying the president as reluctant to allow Duke to transcend its regional status and become a strong national university. This was simply untrue, and it deeply angered the North Carolina trustees. The meeting itself was explosive. After accepting Edens’s resignation, the board asked for Gross’s immediate resignation. Only the three Endowment trustees and two close allies opposed his removal. Before the meeting adjourned, the board also voted that minutes of every executive committee meeting be sent to all trustees.\footnote{Durden, “Donnybrook at Duke, II;” Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trust, March 23, 1960, DUA.}

Neither the board nor Edens made any of this public. The only thing the campus knew was that Edens had resigned and that Gross, who was also popular, able, and a strong supporter of the faculty, had been summarily dismissed from his administrative posts. Not surprisingly, turmoil ensued. The faculty was angry and divided. The trustees of the Duke Endowment publicly threatened to cut off funding to the university because of the board’s firing of Gross. The campus roiled until April, when the board approved the
appointment of J. Deryl Hart, chairman of surgery in Duke’s Medical Center, as acting
president.⁵⁴

When Hart took office on July 1, he faced “factionalism, distrust, anxieties, a
decimated top administrative staff and a resultant deterioration of morale.” An
established Medical Center administrator who was respected by all sides, Hart reached
out to the faculty and staff to rebuild shattered morale, meeting over a period of months
with various leaders on the Duke campus. With the help of a management consulting firm
he began a much-needed reorganization of the upper echelons of the administration and
assembled a capable and committed staff. There were several key members of this team.
Taylor Cole became provost, a new title for a job that encompassed the responsibilities
formerly held by the vice president of the Educational Division. Hart also named three
vice provosts: Barnes Woodhall for the Medical Center, Frank deVyver for the other
professional schools, and Marcus Hobbs for the undergraduate colleges. Although it took
some time for these changes to sort themselves out, Hart and this “provost group” were
established and hard at work by the time classes began in the fall.⁵⁵

During the months that led up to Edens’s resignation, pressure to drop segregation had
continued. Duke students were increasingly active, and many pushed on campus for an
end to restrictive admissions standards. Off campus, the sit-in movement that began just
down the road in Greensboro quickly spread to Durham, and several Duke students were

⁵⁴ Ibid.; Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trust, April 21, 1960, DUA. Hollis
Edens accepted a position at the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation in Winston-Salem,
turning down an offer from North Carolina’s new governor (and later Duke president)
Terry Sanford to become his assistant for special projects. Howard E. Covington, Jr. and
Marion A. Ellis, Terry Sanford: Politics, Progress, and Outrageous Ambitions, (Durham,
NC, 1999), 262.
⁵⁵ Deryl Hart, Presidential Report, n.d. but September 1963, Box 20, Deryl Hart Papers,
DUA; Cole, Recollections, 155–57.
eager and vocal participants. The university's threat to punish students who were arrested in the demonstrations drew fire from all over campus.\textsuperscript{56} In April a Student Senate referendum found 56 percent in favor of admissions based on qualifications rather than race.\textsuperscript{57} The Interfaith and Fellowship Committee of the University Religious Council complained to the president that they and the denominational groups were being forced to abandon activities that sometimes included black students from neighboring colleges because they could not get meals on campus "without causing embarassment to both our guests and ourselves."\textsuperscript{58} The Duke Bar Association adopted and submitted to the trustees a resolution calling for the admission of students to the law school without regard to race. The Divinity School reported "much greater" pressure to admit black students than in the past. Alumni continued to ask when the change was coming.\textsuperscript{59} Black Durham minister and civil rights activist Douglas E. Moore pressed the Methodist General Conference to withhold funds from Duke, arguing that the school "receives money from the church while refusing to live up to its fundamental laws."\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{56} On the sit-ins in Durham see Branch, \textit{Parting the Waters}, 272–76 and Jean Bradley Anderson, \textit{Durham County: A History of Durham County, North Carolina} (Durham, NC, 1990), 437–39. Reverend Douglas Moore was a key figure, and was in close contact with James Lawson at Vanderbilt. The demonstrations and their fallout on campus were constant topics in the student newspaper, the \textit{Duke Chronicle}, that spring, with letters, editorials, and news reports in nearly every issue from February through May. Support for the sit-ins was expressed by the Divinity School student body, the Women's Student Government Association, and the Westminster Fellowship. \textit{Duke Chronicle}, May 18, 1960. The April 14 Divinity School dean Robert Cushman sent the students' April 14 resolution, with his own support, to Edens and to the board. Robert Cushman to Edens, April 15, 1960, Box 21, Edens Papers, EUA.

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Duke Chronicle}, April 11, 1960.

\textsuperscript{58} Anne Thompson to Edens, November 30, 1959, Box 33, Edens Papers, EUA.

\textsuperscript{59} J. Cris Soich to the Trustees and President of Duke University, March 10, 1960, Bunyan Snipes Womble Papers; Memo re: Integration Situation, January 15, 1961, Box 33, Edens Papers, DUA.

\textsuperscript{60} Reverend Douglas E. Moore, Reverend W.T. Brown, Reverend O.W. Burwick to Delegates, Methodist General Conference, April 20, 1960, Box 33, Edens Papers, EUA.
Although the issue was understandably pushed to the back burner during the spring of 1960, by fall Hart and the provost group saw that they had an opportunity to rid the school of what was fast becoming a real albatross. These men, all "old hands" at Duke, were perfectly positioned to bring about the end of traditional segregation on campus. They had close contacts among the trustees and enjoyed the respect of the board. They could not possibly be construed as radicals or outsiders. At the same time, their commitment to national academic norms and to Duke's national reputation was a given. They could reasonably argue, too, that this troublesome problem ought to be resolved before a permanent successor to Edens was named. Once they decided to act, the change came with startling speed.

There was little to suggest that Duke's trustees were ready to back away from the school's traditional segregation, and, indeed, much that pointed in the other direction. In late May, the issue of the racially restrictive covenant on lots sold by Duke to faculty and staff again raised its head. Nine faculty members wrote Duke's business office requesting that the covenant forbidding sale of the lots to "persons of Negro blood" be removed from the deeds. They argued that the clause was unethical, intellectually incoherent, and illegal.\textsuperscript{61} The business manager referred the request to the Administrative Committee, which in turn referred it to the executive committee of the board. The executive committee acknowledged that the covenant was unenforceable but flatly

\textsuperscript{61} The drafters of the clause were careful to insure that the restriction "not be construed to prevent the living upon the premises of any Negro servant or servants . . ." [Nine faculty members] to Gerhard C. Henricksen, May 31, 1960, Box 1, Herring Papers, DUA.
refused to remove it. The business manager wrote each faculty member that the board
“could find no justification for removing the covenant . . .”  

The provost group quickly developed a strategy to convince the board to end
segregation on campus. First, the three vice provosts prepared detailed and dispassionate
reports on the problems caused by the restrictive admissions policy. They then went out,
along with Duke’s vice president for public relations, Charles E. Jordan, and President
Hart, to meet with small groups of trustees throughout the state, selling them on the need
for change before the board met in November. The three reports intentionally ignored
moral or ethical arguments in favor of ending segregation. The provost group well
understood that such arguments were not merely ineffective but positively damaging to
their cause. Still bitterly resentful of “outside” pressure, Duke’s trustees were unlikely
ever to admit that segregation was wrong or that they were forced to abandon it against
their best judgment. The only hope of persuading the board to give up the segregated
admissions policy was to overwhelm them with evidence that it was holding Duke back,
then step aside and allow them to make the decision on their own.  

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62 G.C. Henricksen to Members of the Administrative Committee, June 9, 1960; Minutes
of Meeting of the Administrative Committee, June 23, 1960; Henricksen to [Nine faculty
members], June 30, 1960, Box 1, Herring Papers, DUA. The nine continued efforts to get
the clause removed, but to no avail. Report of a Special Committee to Consider the
Request of Several Faculty Members with Regard to the Covenant About Selling to
Negroes Which Appears in the Deeds of Land Sold By the University, May 17, 1961;
Minutes of Meeting of University Council, May 17, 1961, University Council Records,
DUA.

desegregation, whose author correctly observed that “any effort on a moral plane would
be wasted.” In an interview with Duke student Jorge Kotelanski in 1990, Cole explained
that although the provost group was criticized by some for avoiding moral arguments,
they succeeded in their goal of getting “integration in the earliest possible time.” A partial
transcript of this interview, and interviews with Robert Cushman, Peter Klopf er,
Reverend Douglas E. Moore, and Waldo Beach are appended to Kotelanski, “Prolonged
and Patient Efforts.” Original tape recorded interviews are in Tape Collection, DUA.
The provost group moved cautiously, advocating the desegregation of only the graduate and professional schools. They judged, probably correctly, that the board was far from ready to accept any change that brought white undergraduates into contact with blacks. They consistently underplayed the entire matter, describing their goal as "a slight modification in admissions policy." The first report, written by Taylor Cole, laid out the reasons why "[t]he inability to admit the small number of duly qualified Negroes . . . has created barriers to the fullest development of Duke University and has resulted in a decline in its prestige." Cole zeroed in on several specific areas where Duke was being hurt, presenting evidence of an increasing inability to get grants from foundations and describing the increasingly negative attitudes towards Duke of accrediting organizations, professional associations, and "our own faculty and student body," especially in the Divinity School. Without a change, he told the trustees, matters would get worse. The strict insistence on segregation had become "a major barrier to attaining the national and international recognition which Duke University deserves."\(^{64}\)

Similarly, Barnes Woodhall's report on the medical school focused on practical issues. Woodhall described the obligations of physicians to the community, but he also pointed out that running a major research hospital required resources that were unattainable without federal assistance. "As Dean of the Medical School," he wrote, "it is my opinion that continuation of the existing segregation policy of the University will seriously impair

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\(^{64}\) Admission of Duly Qualified Negroes to the Graduate and Professional Schools of Duke University, January 1961. This report was prepared in November, 1960. Minutes of the Meeting of the Administrative Committee, November 28, 1960, Box 7, Hart Papers, DUA.
the ability of the Medical Center to further its traditional duty of ‘caring for the sick’ and may eventually destroy its credo of excellence.”

Finally, in the third report Marcus Hobbs addressed the effects of segregation on the university’s ability to accept grants and contracts from the federal government and on the morale of the faculty, students, and alumni. Hobbs outlined the historical support of these groups for desegregation as well as their growing urgency. In particular, he stressed that the recruitment and retention of top faculty members was imperiled and that alumni of the graduate and professional schools were hampered as they pursued careers by Duke’s reputation as a bastion of segregation. Moving to more tangible concerns, he assembled financial data that showed Duke received over $7 million in federal funds for research and training in 1960, of which almost $600,000 was collected as overhead. Hobbs then walked through the current nondiscrimination clauses in federal contracts and discussed the probability that they would soon be tightened further. Shrewdly, Hobbs did not simply conclude that segregation was too expensive to keep. Stated baldly, that argument inevitably produced defiant refusals to “sell out” the South’s heritage for yankee dollars. Instead, Hobbs linked the denial of federal funds to other problems:

The effect of reduction of even a small fraction of the indicated revenue on the grounds of discriminatory practices could be very farreaching. The denial of a proposal by a faculty member would then be unrelated to the ability of our staff or students, or the quality of the proposed program, but would be based on a matter of policy of the University that was contrary to law and with rare exception, the strong sentiment of the faculty member. The implication of such a situation for the morale of the entire faculty and student body would be very serious indeed, even if judged in the most charitable degree . . . Though we must be concerned with possible loss of revenue and activity because of decline of funds from this source if present admission policies are maintained, the more important effect may well be the loss of qualified staff and the general morale of the staff and students.\footnote{Ibid.}

\footnote{Ibid.}
In view of all these considerations, the president and the provost group "respectfully suggested" that the trustees allow the graduate and professional schools to "accept for degree programs the small number of obviously well-qualified Negro applicants," adding as a safeguard that each black applicant should be considered by an ad hoc committee of the president, provost, and dean of the school involved.\(^{67}\)

In mid-January, Hart scheduled four meetings for small groups of trustees, including one in Charlotte and one in Winston-Salem, to discuss the proposal.\(^{68}\) Members of the provost group and a few other administrators attended the meetings, sometimes making moral arguments but usually sticking closely to the reports. The trustees had all received confidential copies of these reports and had the opportunity to raise any questions or objections to them at these meetings. Hart and the administrative group succeeded in speaking with nearly all the thirty-six board members before the March 8 board meeting.\(^{69}\)

The provost group's assessment of the urgency of the matter was borne out by several events that took place while the small conferences were being organized and held. On February 8, 1961, Dean Robert Cushman of Duke's Divinity School transmitted a petition and appeal from the faculty of that school through Hart to the board of trustees. Cushman endorsed their plea for quick desegregation, which was posed, unlike their previous communications to the board, in practical rather than mainly moral terms. Cushman too stressed the concrete consequences of the failure to change in his letter to

\(^{67}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{68}\) Hart to Members of the Board of Trustees, January 17, 1961, Womble Papers, DUA.

\(^{69}\) A few trustees were unable to attend one of the scheduled meetings. Hart or Cole met with some individually, or at least spoke with them on the phone. Cole, *Recollections*, 159; Kotelanski, "Prolonged and Patient Efforts," Cole interview.
Hart: “I am frank to state that I do not believe that the Divinity School can much longer sustain, without suffering serious disabilities, the present impasse in the matter of admissions policy. Without an early alteration of this policy, the integrity of the Student Body, the Faculty, and the good reputation and national standing of the institution cannot be assured.”\(^70\)

Also in February, Dean E.R. Latty notified Hart that the law school had received an application from a black candidate who was qualified for admission. If Duke rejected him solely because of his race, Latty warned, the Duke Law School would be censured at the next annual meeting of the Association of American Law Schools. “Such a censure . . . ,” he explained, “would be a great detriment to the Duke Law School in recruiting top-caliber faculty and top-flight students and in general to our national and international prestige.” Hart promised to bring the matter before the trustees and no doubt did so at the meetings.\(^71\)

The report and the conferences had their desired effects. One of the Endowment trustees, Thomas L. Perkins, explained his thinking the week before the meeting: “It seems to me that as much as we may regret it the time has passed when we can permit

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\(^{70}\) Secretary of the Divinity Faculty, To the Board of Trustees of Duke University through the President and the Vice-President in the Division of Education, January 11, 1961; Robert Cushman to Hart, February 8, 1961, Box 11, Hart Papers, DUA. It is not clear whether Hart sent this on to the trustees. His only response to Cushman was that he wanted to speak with him, and they may have decided that anything that even suggested a moral objection to segregation ought not be put in front of the board at that time. Hart to Robert Cushman, February 13, 1961, Box 11, Hart Papers, DUA. The Student Government Association of the Divinity School sent a resolution to the board on March 6, arguing that Duke should desegregate because “the love of God manifest in Jesus Christ reveals the equal importance of all men to God.” Again, it seems likely that Hart, fearful of provoking the trustees, did not share this with the board. Richard Weingart, To the President and Trustees of Duke University, March 6, 1961, Box 11, Hart Papers, DUA.
our personal preferences to influence our decision in this matter. The only consideration as I see it is what is in the best interest of Duke University.” Perkins accepted the arguments of Hart and the administrative group and, further, feared that “unless we go along gracefully with this proposal we will find that something much more unpalatable will be crammed down our throats in the near future.” President Hart reported similar reactions from other trustees in a letter to Bunyan Womble, a strong supporter and soon to be the new chairman of the board. “In general,” Hart concluded after meetings in Charlotte and Winston-Salem, “I believe they hated to see it come, they thought it inevitable, that Duke had much to lose by further delay and although it was contrary to what they had hoped would be the case they would go along with it.”

By the time of the board meeting on March 8, Hart had counted the votes and knew that desegregation would be approved. Because of the earlier discussions, there was not even any debate. Womble, now chairman, stated that the matter had been thoroughly discussed over the past two months and asked if the trustees were ready to vote. They were. Overwhelmingly, they voted to admit qualified applicants “to the degree programs in the Graduate and Professional Schools in Duke University, effective September 1, 1961, without regard to race, creed, or national origin.” A few trustees abstained, and three or four (out of the twenty-six present) voted against desegregating the graduate programs. Two of those opposed the proposal because they wanted to desegregate the

71 E.R. Latty to Hart, February 23, 1961; Hart to Latty, February 27, 1961, Box 11, Hart Papers, DUA.
72 Thomas L. Perkins to Don Elias, March 1, 1961, Womble Papers, DUA. Elias, a trustee from Asheville, North Carolina, wrote Perkins to inform him of an informal trustee meeting to be held the evening before the board meeting. Perkins assumed that the purpose was to discuss the desegregation proposal and thus responded with his views on that matter.
73 Hart to Bunyan S. Womble, February 7, 1961, Womble Papers, DUA.
entire university at once. Even those who remained firm in their support of traditional segregation, though, seemed to feel no real bitterness about the decision. One opponent of the change was not able to attend the meeting, but wrote later to Womble that “I don’t want you to think that I was absolutely opposed to what the Board did. It’s only that I felt it was hurrying the situation too fast.”  

Immediately after the board meeting, Thomas L. Perkins notified the president of the Ford Foundation, the president of the Carnegie Corporation, and the vice president of the Rockefeller Foundation of the change in Duke’s admissions policy. All three wrote back expressing approval, though with just a hint of forbearance. “I agree with you that this is a progressive move,” wrote Henry Heald of the Ford Foundation, “and I am sure it will be so regarded by most of the people around the country. Of course, it would be a little better if it were not limited to the graduate and professional schools of the University, but perhaps this will come in time.” Charles Cole of the Rockefeller Foundation was also somewhat deflating. He understood, he said, “how hard it was to do in some respects,” but otherwise noted only that “it certainly clears the air a lot and will give some other places added courage.” John Gardner of the Carnegie Corporation was the most enthusiastic, commenting with an echo of Branscomb, White, and Harris that “I have always believed that the real gains on this difficult problem could be made only by the best of Southern leadership. And this certainly represents the best.”

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74 C.B. Houck to Womble, (quotation) March 20, 1961; Womble to C.B. Houck, March 18, 1961, Womble Papers, DUA; Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees, (quotation of resolution) March 8, 1961, DUA.
Other response to the decision was overwhelmingly positive. Hart and Womble received dozens of letters from pleased alumni and only a handful from disappointed ones. Many of the most angry letters came from people with no personal ties to Duke at all. Many of the happiest came from Duke alumni who were teaching at other universities and would no longer be subject to the disapproving questions of their peers. Many Methodist ministers, as well as the director of the Methodist Board of Education, sent their congratulations. These writers expressed two common themes: that Duke had done the morally right thing and that it had done what was necessary "for successful completion of the effort to move Duke past the position of being the best school in the South and into the front rank of the truly great universities of this country and the world."  

The provost group's strategy of beginning with the graduate and professional schools was probably critical in getting the trustees to agree to begin desegregation at all, but once implemented it led to some problems. Unlike Emory, where the entire campus was desegregated at once, Duke now faced unremitting questions about which facilities were

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when he wrote Charles Munson, the editor of the Christian Advocate, with the news. Cushman's letter to Munson was apparently too focused on the morality of the matter, and Hart had him retract it and send a more temperate statement that stressed the "removal of surviving barriers to the national standing of the University community" rather than "the soundings of the Christian conscience." Cushman was not happy. Robert E. Cushman to Charles Munson, March 16, 1961; Cushman to Hart, March 20, 1961; Cushman to Charles Munson, March 20, 1961, Box 12, Hart Papers, DUA.  

76 George T. Eaton to Chairman of the Board of Trustees, April 8, 1961, Box 11, Hart Papers, DUA. Most of the letters are in Box 11, Hart Papers, and Womble Papers, DUA. Others are scattered throughout Hart's correspondence files. Hart himself wrote to one correspondent that the change "has been very favorably received on campus by both faculty and the students and a considerable number of our letters from over the country have been favorable." Hart to Norman Gamezy, March 28, 1961, Box 11, Hart Papers, DUA. Gamezy was a professor at the University of Minnesota. Faculty members also wrote from Penn State, Southern Methodist University, the University of Chicago, Florida State, and the University of Alberta.
desegregated and which were not. The school’s trustees and many administrators were panic stricken by the prospect of “social integration,” which seemed to include anything from shared meals in dining halls to having blacks as overnight guests in the dormitories. Many Duke students were impatient with these concerns and pushed back as hard as they could, inviting blacks from North Carolina College to eat with them in the undergraduate cafeterias. Although these difficulties were not especially serious, they did take up administrative time and led to an inordinate amount of handwringing. Otherwise, the desegregation of the graduate programs proceeded without serious incident.\(^77\)

At the same time, Duke administrators continued to talk to trustees about taking the next step—desegregation of the undergraduate college and all campus facilities.\(^78\) Reporting to the board in March 1962, Taylor Cole called attention to unhappiness on campus with the half-finished change: “The question of integration receives a considerable amount of vigorous attention at the hands of faculty and students and poses continuing problems for the administration.” Indeed, the next month the Undergraduate Faculty Council passed a resolution calling for an end to racial restrictions in the undergraduate schools. This resolution was adopted on June 1, the day before the spring meeting of the full board, by the University Faculty.\(^79\)

On June 2, 1962, over a year after the decision to desegregate Duke’s graduate and professional schools, the trustees considered extending the policy to the undergraduate

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\(^{77}\) R. Florence Brinkley to Hart, August 31, 1961; Hart to Brinkley, September 8, 1961, Hart Papers, Box 11, DU; Annual Report of the Provost to the President, 1961, Box 3, Hart Papers, DU.

\(^{78}\) Cole, Reminiscences, 160. Kotelanski, “Prolonged and Patient Efforts,” 137, quotes an interview with Hart, in which he recalled that the administration conducted a “campaign with the trustees for integrating the undergraduate schools.”
schools. This may have been unplanned. Although Provost Cole reported on the smooth
desegregation of the graduate programs and warned the board that “the question of
integration at the undergraduate level receives vigorous attention at the hands of a restive
faculty,” the Duke administration does not seem to have anticipated a vote that day. At
the executive committee meeting the day before, Hart and the committee agreed that the
university faculty’s desegregation resolution would be passed on to the board “for
information only.” A month before, at a meeting of a trustee-faculty liaison committee,
Womble and the other board members indicated that the matter of undergraduate
admissions would “in all probability be brought before the Trustees for discussion and
decision at its November, 1962 meeting.”

In any event, a trustee who was attending his
first meeting, Charles Rhynne, picked up on Cole’s remarks and offered a motion to admit
qualified applicants to the undergraduate colleges without regard to race. After ably
arguing for complete desegregation on legal, moral, and practical grounds, Rhynne asked
that his motion be seconded. It was, and more discussion ensued. Finally, on a secret
ballot the board resolved by a large majority that “qualified applicants may be admitted to
degree programs in the undergraduate colleges of Duke University without regard to race,
creed, or national origin.”

79 Report of the Provost to the President, March 2, 1962, Box 3, Hart Papers; Minutes of
the Meeting of the Executive Committee, June 1, 1962; Minutes of the Meeting of the
Board, June 2, 1962, Box 3, Hart Papers, DUA.
80 Provost’s Report to the President, June 2, 1962, Box 3, Hart Papers; Minutes of the
Executive Committee Meeting, June 1, 1961; Report on Trustee-Faculty Liaison
Committee, May 4, 1962, Womble Papers, DUA. This committee had been formed in the
immediate wake of the Gross-Edens affair.
81 Charles S. Rhynne, Working for Justice in America and Justice in the World: An
Autobiography, (McLean, VA, 1995), chapter 22; Cole, Recollections, 160; Minutes of
the Meeting of the Board of Trust, June 2, 1962, DUA.
Most reaction was again favorable, but Hart and Womble received a few letters that expressed acute anger over the change. Soothing an upset alumnus, Bunyan Womble, who had been instrumental in bringing about Duke's desegregation, downplayed the importance of the new policy:

The new policy will, of course, be administered fairly, but on account of the very high standard of requirements for admission, I am sure very few Negroes will be admitted. In the professional and Graduate Schools, as to which the policy was changed more than a year ago, only four have been admitted for entrance this fall. Two of these are in the School of Religion. The requirements for admission to the undergraduate colleges are much more strict . . . and with the thousands of white students being turned down each year for lack of space, I shall be surprised if any Negroes applying will possess qualifications entitling them to be admitted any time soon.82

A.T. Spaulding, prominent black leader and executive of the black-owned North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, took a more expansive, and challenging, view of what Duke had done. To Deryl Hart, Spaulding wrote:

I sincerely believe that ten years from today every person who was instrumental in this monumental action will find more joy and satisfaction in having been a part of it than in any other one thing done by him or her during his or her connection with the University. This decision has marked a monumental milestone along the highway of Duke's history and I believe it will be looked at as a reckoning point in the years ahead, a point of reference in measuring Duke's future progress and achievement at an ever accelerating rate. For basic to all truly great achievement is freedom. Duke University has now freed itself from an impediment which has militated against its furnishing to the South and to the Nation the great leadership of which it was otherwise capable. May she always cherish that spirit which sets men free.83

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82 B.S. Womble to Dean Boggs, June 13, 1962, Womble Papers, DUA.
III

In 1960 there was a head-on collision at Vanderbilt University between the past and the future. The cautious arguments on racial change that had carried the day at Vanderbilt, rooted in the notion that the white elite must control the pace and scope of the change, came into sudden and direct conflict with the very different ideology of the student sit-in movement. In February 1960 black students from Nashville’s Fisk, Tennessee A&I, and the American Baptist Theological Seminary began a series of sit-in demonstrations at downtown lunch counters. These students were in close contact with the organizers of the Greensboro, North Carolina, sit-ins, which had begun only a few days earlier. James Lawson, a black Vanderbilt divinity student and regional director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, was one of this group. Although he did not participate in these demonstrations, he devoted himself to careful preparation of those who did. Lawson was eminently qualified for this role. He was a serious student of Gandhian pacifism who had been sentenced to a prison term for refusing to cooperate with his draft board and refusing induction into the army. He obtained an early release and travelled to India on a Methodist mission. At Vanderbilt, Lawson was an active participant in the community life of the Divinity School, sometimes worrying Branscomb with his refusal to be bound by traditional racial customs on campus. He encouraged the protesting students and gave them a working understanding of nonviolent methods.\footnote{The episode at Vanderbilt that began with the expulsion of James Lawson is byzantine in its complexity and important enough to warrant book-length treatment. The best detailed chronology of the events of March through June 1960 is in Conkin, \textit{Gone with the Ivy}, 547–74. David Halberstam, \textit{The Children} (New York, 1998), 188–207, also deals with the university’s treatment of Lawson, but is so concerned with painting a portrait of good versus evil that it does not adequately convey the complex motivations and restraints that influenced the outcome.}
On February 27 crowds of what Branscomb called “white rabble” attacked the sit-in demonstrators, some of whom were Vanderbilt students. Police arrested eighty-one students, and much of white Nashville became frantic, fearful that a race war was about to break out. On the night of February 29 nearly 200 black ministers, including Lawson, met with Nashville Mayor Ben West. West argued that the students had the legal right to sit-in as long as a lunch counter was open but as soon as the owner announced that it was closed, they had to leave or be in violation of state law. Lawson, now identified publicly as a leader of the demonstrations, expressed his frustration with what he rightly saw as purposeful legal hairsplitting. He contended that this use of the law was a “gimmick” to break the movement. Nashville newspapers reported this remark, though in different versions. Lawson’s advice to the students—that they continue the sit-ins—many whites in now chose to interpret as intentional lawlessness, and even as contempt for law itself. Although the student demonstrators enjoyed a surprising amount of white support, many in leadership positions opposed them bitterly. The Nashville Banner, under the leadership of James Stahlman, led the charge against Lawson and the sit-ins. Stahlman was beside himself, utterly enraged, and penned front-page editorials that attacked Lawson and the demonstrators with lurid rhetoric.

On campus, Branscomb was deeply worried. As ever, what he was worried about was Vanderbilt. The possibility of mass racial violence certainly frightened Branscomb, but

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85 It is only fair to point out that the sit-in movement was brand new in February and early March 1960, and no one knew what was going to happen. Frankly, expectations of massive racial discord were probably more reasonable than what did happen—the public endorsement of desegregation by Mayor West on April 20, a day after the bombing of the home of black lawyer Alexander Looby.
86 Halberstam, The Children, recounts the Nashville sit-ins based on interviews with participants. Branch, Parting the Waters, chapter seven, places the rise of the Nashville
his main concern was the potential for serious damage to Vanderbilt that went along with having one of its students identified as the leader of a lawless group of riot-inciting black youth. Not the least of these dangers was that the Vanderbilt board’s executive committee, spurred on by Stahlman, might do something rash. In Branscomb’s eyes, more than James Lawson was at stake. The entire future of racial change at Vanderbilt, on which so much of the school’s advancement depended, was threatened.  

Branscomb’s ability to convince the board to admit black students had all along depended on a sense of control and the avoidance of any publicity that would damage that sense of control. Branscomb’s greatest fear was thus always of racial “incidents”—that is, any behavior that might draw hostile attention from either side. The near-revolt that followed the desegregation of the law school in 1957 only confirmed that public perceptions that the university was supporting radical racial change (whether or not it actually was) could destroy the sense of balance and control that Branscomb needed to keep his long-term strategy of gradual desegregation on course.  

The sit-ins, however, represented something far worse than an “incident.” The black (and some white) students who sat in at the lunch counters were far different from the “naïve” Henry Wallace supporters of 1948, who southern university presidents condemned for unrealistic idealism. These new students did not just disagree with acknowledged authority figures about the proper speed of racial change. Rather, with the

demonstrations in the larger context of the civil rights movement as a whole. Graham, Crisis in Print, 199–202, discusses newspaper treatments of the events.

87 Branscomb related his side of this story in a narrative entitled “The Lawson Episode - Twenty Years Later,” November 15, 1980, Box 4, Branscomb Papers, VUSC. This document, while incomplete and self-serving, reveals quite clearly Branscomb’s state of mind—beleaguered, angry, and very worried about the fate of Vanderbilt. His autobiography, Purely Academic, is so brief as to be almost useless on this episode. All it really shows is Branscomb’s continuing anger towards Dean Nelson.
sit-ins, they announced a direct challenge to the authority of the white elite (and, not incidentally, the black elite) itself. They insisted that they, too, had a right to be heard when decisions were made. To a man who worried about problems that might arise from black students playing intramural basketball with whites, this must have seemed apocalyptic.

If Lawson had been willing publicly to disavow any continued leadership of these students, then the episode would most likely have ended relatively quietly. Lawson, while ready to give Branscomb substantial ground, was not willing to end or repudiate his support of the sit-ins. After several days of trying to craft some compromise statement, time ran out. 88 A regular meeting of the board’s executive committee was scheduled for March 3, 1960, Good Friday, and Branscomb raised the issue there. It is not clear why he did this. (Much later he admitted that it was a mistake.) He may well have feared that the board would act unilaterally, or he may have wanted to distribute responsibility. Quite possibly, he knew that there would be no way to avoid the matter. Both Stahlman and Robert Sloan, a trustee whose downtown store was a particular target of demonstrators, were not likely to let Lawson’s status at Vanderbilt go unremarked. Branscomb brought Robert Nelson, the dean of the Divinity School, along to the meeting, hoping, apparently, that Nelson could help persuade the trustees to delay action until Branscomb could figure

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88 Branscomb did not participate in these attempts; in fact, he never even met Lawson during the whole episode. Rather, Robert McGaw, Vice Chancellor Rob Roy Purdy, and Dean Nelson tried to work out a statement with Lawson. Lawson denied unambiguously any intent to promote lawlessness, but could not possibly give Branscomb what he wanted—a repudiation of non-violent protest.
out a solution. Nelson, however, only managed to irritate and provoke the committee with references to Christ standing before Pilate. There would be no reprieve for Lawson. 89

Branscomb probably did not want to expel Lawson. Of all the possible moves that the administration could make, it was the one most likely to focus vast amounts of negative attention on Vanderbilt. But the arguments that he had used for years to persuade the trustees to accept gradual racial change on campus left him ill-prepared to counter their rage at Lawson and the movement in general. Since 1946 he had been arguing that the judgment of educated white men was an absolute prerequisite to peaceful, constructive race relations in the South. Here, young black students openly scorned that judgment, and wrested control out of the hands of the white establishment. Branscomb had no basis for resisting the board’s impulse to punish the “arrogant” Lawson. The executive committee gave Lawson a choice: they would allow him to withdraw from the university or face expulsion the next day. Branscomb must have desperately wanted him to withdraw and may well have been responsible for even giving him a choice, but Lawson chose expulsion. 90

By any measure, this was a bad situation for the university. Still, in ordinary circumstances Branscomb would have been able to temper the negative impact of the expulsion with some well placed phone calls and letters. But these were not ordinary

89 Arthur L. Foster’s chronology of the Lawson case (hereinafter Foster Chronology), in Box 29, Centennial Record Group, RG 101, VUSC, provides a contemporaneous day by day, sometimes hour by hour, account of the events. After a brief introduction to the sit-ins, it begins in earnest on February 25 and ends on June 27. The chronology runs 102 pages.

90 It seems likely that Branscomb would have argued that Lawson should be allowed to withdraw, if only because that action would not draw as much publicity. This is suggested by a letter from James Stahelman, who said that “all the Executive Committee did was to approve the Chancellor’s reported plan to give Lawson a chance to remain as a
times. He tried to manage the story so as to minimize the damage to Vanderbilt, but his explanations seem confused. Branscomb's public justification for Lawson's expulsion was both uncharacteristically murky and singularly unconvincing. The crux of his argument seemed simple enough. "The University's position," Branscomb wrote, "was not to oppose the sit-in movement, nor to discipline the individual for possible infringement of a particular law, but to state that no student could remain in good standing who in a potentially riotous situation commits himself to an organized program of deliberate violation of law."\(^91\) On reflection, this does not make much sense. Other Vanderbilt students deliberately violated the law as part of an "organized program" and the university did not punish them. And Lawson had not, in fact, broken any laws at this time—he did not participate in the sit-ins, he taught nonviolence to those who did.\(^92\) Further, Vanderbilt itself had intentionally broken Tennessee segregation laws when it admitted Joseph Johnson to the School of Religion in 1953. Branscomb argued at that time that Vanderbilt could disobey the state statutes because they were probably unconstitutional. It is difficult to see any principled difference between that decision and Lawson's insistence that the laws requiring segregation in lunch counters did not have to be obeyed. Branscomb wrote letter after letter attempting to make his position clear but

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\(^91\) Harvie Branscomb, "Is Civil Disobedience the Way?" Box 4, Branscomb Papers, VUSC. Branscomb reiterated this basic defense in dozens of letters, changing emphasis based on who he was addressing. The argument never became any clearer or more persuasive, however. Over a dozen of these long letters are in Box 186, Chancellor's Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC. He also continued ad hominem attacks on Lawson, Dean Nelson, and the Divinity School faculty for decades afterwards, a measure of his sense of shocked betrayal at the course of events during these few months in 1960.

\(^92\) Lawson continued advising the students during this early period and began participating in the demonstrations immediately after his expulsion. He was in fact
never succeeded. This was mostly, one suspects, because he did not quite believe it
himself and it was not the real reason for the expulsion. 93

Far more convincing was a statement he made in a letter to Liston Pope of the Yale
Divinity School, who was scheduled to speak at the dedication of Vanderbilt's new
chapel later in March. This letter was quite frank and quite personal, written in a tone that
bears little resemblance to Branscomb's later stiff semi-official pronouncements on the
Lawson affair. He explained to Pope the position that Lawson’s leadership of the sit-ins
put him in as an administrator, charged with the advancement of the institution:

When we accepted Negroes without any legal requirement to do so, the
protest of Vanderbilt alumni was wide spread and threatening. We succeeded
in getting the Board of Trust to support the policy which had been
recommended. We have, furthermore, eliminated segregation in all official
university occasions, and in the dining halls of the University, and in some
other general respects. I had discussed with Dean Nelson moving next on the
dormitory issue, if wise arrangements could be made which would start with
the Divinity School students. I am frank to say that if we must support so
dramatic an insistence upon civil disobedience in the face of the mayor’s
efforts to solve the problem by mediation and legal recourse, I have no hope
of being able to hold the policy on which we are embarked. 94

The second, and far more destructive, phase of this episode began when Lawson’s
expulsion set off a faculty rebellion against the board and the administration. The faculty
of the Divinity School followed the progress of Lawson’s case with rapt concern. To
them, Lawson was a man answering a high Christian call and a powerful symbol who

93 In a letter to a professor at the Yale Divinity School soon after the episode was closed
Branscomb asserted that objections that the laws Lawson urged the students to violate
were unconstitutional were unfounded: "This puts the individual in a position of
declaring what the Supreme Court will decide and acting in advance thereon."
Branscomb to Reverend Roland Bainton, June 22, 1960, Box 186, Chancellor's Office
Papers, RG 300, VUSC. But this is exactly what Branscomb did in 1953. See infra
touched deep chords of moral guilt. They were dismayed and infuriated at the shabby treatment meted out to him by Branscomb and the board. Over the next few weeks there was a tumult in and around the Divinity School. In downtown Nashville, the sit-ins continued and an atmosphere of crisis prevailed. Lawson was arrested as a co-conspirator in violating Tennessee commerce statutes and was bailed out by his former professors. Representatives from the Divinity School faculty, including Bard Thompson, James Sellers, and Lou Silberman, began a series of unsatisfactory meetings with Branscomb and Vice Chancellor Rob Roy Purdy, hoping to find some way to get Lawson reinstated. At the same time, a rift developed between Nelson and the faculty, who were unhappy with his weak leadership. On top of everything, the school’s new chapel, named after former dean Jack Benton, was dedicated on March 21. Liston Pope of the Yale Divinity School gave an address on that occasion that sharply criticized Vanderbilt for expelling Lawson, reserving his only praise for the theology faculty who opposed that action.95

Several tense and often bizarre weeks of negotiations between the divinity professors and the administration followed. The faculty, sometimes consulting with sympathetic trustee Hugh Morgan, tried again and again to find a way to have Lawson reinstated. On May 26 they retracted their request that the board consider reinstatement at its May 20 meeting, and tried instead to readmit Lawson for the summer session through regular admissions procedures. Branscomb responded angrily. Whether or not it was so intended, he took the faculty’s request for Lawson’s readmission by the 28th as an ultimatum and

94 Branscomb to Liston Pope, March 9, 1960, Box 202, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
95 Foster Chronology, 14–19; Branscomb wrote Pope (a Duke Divinity School graduate), as early as the day after Lawson’s expulsion to let him know what was happening. This correspondence and a copy of Pope’s address are in Box 202, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
on May 30 flatly denied the readmission. That same evening eleven professors in the Divinity School sent their resignations to Branscomb at his home. (Dean Nelson had resigned separately earlier in the day.)\(^{96}\)

With the resignation of most of the faculty of the Divinity School a fundamental rupture opened up between Branscomb and the board. Whatever doubts Branscomb may have harbored about Lawson’s expulsion, he was more than half convinced that it needed to do it. The loss of nearly the entire faculty of one of Vanderbilt’s most prominent schools, under explosive conditions and with full national press coverage, was another matter entirely. In these resignations, he saw the rapid destruction of the modern, powerful university he had dedicated his life to building. The executive committee of the Vanderbilt board, though, saw nothing but one more challenge to their authority. And, although there were members of the larger board with a broader view of the situation, it was largely the local, conservative men on the executive committee—including those most committed to retaining the old southern ways—who were faced with the responsibility of dealing with the fallout of the Lawson expulsion. These men were determined above all to maintain their authority, to crush anyone who had the audacity to claim that they too had the power to make decisions at Vanderbilt, whether that person was James Lawson or the faculty of the Divinity School. Some of the committee members actually received news of the resignations with something akin to delight. It gave them, after all, a chance to prove their resoluteness and devotion to principle. “I am personally hopeful,” wrote James Stahlman to a friend, “that the number of overdue resignations will subsequently relieve the situation on campus. You may rest assured that

\(^{96}\) Conkin, *Gone With the Ivy*, 556–60. Documentation of the readmission process and a copy of Nelson’s letter of resignation are in Box 29, Centennial Record Group, RG 101,
the Board of Trust isn’t going to be pushed around by faculty, students, foundations, or what-have-you.”

The disastrous consequences that would certainly befall Vanderbilt did not trouble the executive committee (and a few other board members). As far as these men were concerned, the approval of the northern foundations was a dubious honor in the first place, many of the highly regarded faculty were nothing but troublemakers who would leave Vanderbilt better off if they left, and the good will of alumni in Alabama and Mississippi was more valuable than a reputation for academic excellence in the North. They also dismissed any claims that the faculty, not the board, should control admissions decisions. Trustee Robert Garner, scolding a Divinity graduate student, wrote: “It appears to me that in concentration on what you and your associates consider the evils of segregation you have ignored the duties and responsibilities of the University and your obligation to it.” Garner continued with flat assertion of the board’s authority and an equally unambiguous denial of anyone else’s:

I think it is necessary to realize that the legal existence of the University is based on the authority and responsibility of the Board of Trust. Grants and contributions, including those to the Divinity School, which over the years have made possible Vanderbilt’s growth and progress have been made on the condition that they will be administered by the Chancellor under the authority of the Board. Obviously the responsibilities of the Chancellor and the Board

VUSC.

97 Stahlman to Whitefoord Cole, May 17, 1960, Box V-3, Stahlman Papers, VUSC. The company he now found himself in had to have been galling to Branscomb. Bitter-enders, formerly his worst critics, rushed to embrace the embarrassed and worried chancellor. Sims Crownover, who led the alumni revolt against the desegregation of Vanderbilt’s law school in 1956, sent a glowing letter: “At that time [1956] I was concerned lest our great Southern Institution with a heritage and tradition second to none was in a process of degeneration. However, those fears have now been dissipated by the manner in which you have handled the Lawson matter. Please allow me to retract anything I may have said about you in the past and let me offer you my complete approval and cooperation... I am proud of you.” Sims Crownover to Branscomb, June 2, 1960. Stahlman Papers, Box V-9. VUSC.
extend to insisting that the affairs of the University be conducted in an orderly manner so that its resources can be applied to the purpose for which they were contributed. It seems to me not unreasonable to expect that those who are receiving employment and benefits out of these resources should give weight, not only to their personal sentiments and consciences, but to their responsibility and decent regard for the welfare of the University.\textsuperscript{98}

Vance Alexander, a crony of Stahlman’s, articulated a similar vision of university governance. “Personally,” he wrote Stahlman, “I wouldn’t care if all of [the Divinity faculty] resigned... I really believe that Vanderbilt would be much better off if they had no School of Religion as long as students and the faculty attempt to run the school.” Alexander was not clear about who, exactly, ought to be running the school if not its faculty. Presumably, he thought it was the board’s job.\textsuperscript{99}

Stahlman editorialized in the \textit{Banner} that these resignations were in “the best interest of the university,” but Branscomb knew better.\textsuperscript{100} Newspapers nationwide covered the situation, and outside the South the attention was entirely negative. People from all around the country wrote to Branscomb, with most from outside the South highly critical of the university. Job offers poured in to the resigned professors, seminaries adopted resolutions of solidarity, and condemnations of Vanderbilt were legion. If he could not hold on to this faculty, Branscomb would be unable to recruit a new one of any real quality (although, startlingly, there was no shortage of applicants for the vacant positions). It is also difficult to imagine many new foundation grants arriving.\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{98} Robert L. Garner to Dallas A. Blanchard, May 2, 1960, Box 360, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.
\textsuperscript{99} V.J. Alexander to Stahlman, June 1, 1960, Box V-6, Stahlman Papers, VUSC.
\textsuperscript{100} \textit{Nashville Banner}, May 31, 1960. The \textit{Nashville Tennessean}, May 31, 1960, on the other hand, regretted the resignations.
\textsuperscript{101} In addition to the \textit{Banner}, many southern papers editorialized in favor of accepting the resignations. On June 8, the \textit{Banner} republished several of these. The rest of the country saw things in a different light. The \textit{Washington Post} in particular seemed to regard Vanderbilt, apart from the Divinity School, as a backward outpost of stubborn racism.
On June 1 Branscomb began a new round of negotiations with the Divinity School faculty, now trying to work out some compromise that would allow them to withdraw their resignations. Discussions repeatedly hung up over the issue of Lawson’s readmission, a bottom line requirement for the return of the faculty. Also discouraging was Branscomb’s alarming willingness to discredit the divinity faculty publicly, portraying them unfairly as “unreasonable men who would not even discuss with him and Mr. Vanderbilt [their] differences.”

Ominously, discontent began to spread beyond the Divinity School to the other faculties of the university. Several professors in the medical school and the college now also seemed likely to resign.

Despite Branscomb’s harsh tactics, he did want to end the episode. By June 9, with the help of Dr. Charles Roos, a physics professor, Branscomb and board chairman Harold Vanderbilt worked out an agreement with the faculty members. After all the tumult, the deal was fairly simple. Lawson would receive credit for his spring semester classes by examination, and Branscomb would then recommend to the board that they grant him his degree. The divinity faculty would withdraw their resignations.

That afternoon Branscomb took the agreement to the meeting of the board’s executive committee. In a truly reckless decision, this small group of men, unrepresentative of the larger Vanderbilt

Numerous clippings are in Box 24, Secretary of the University Papers, RG 900 and Box 78, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC. The Foster Chronology also quotes from several editorials.

Foster Chronology, 57, Box 39, Centennial Record Group, RG 101, VUSC. Branscomb also strategically leaked documents to the Nashville press and used the Banner in particular to wage a public relations battle with the resigning faculty.

A sub-drama was going on in the medical school, with four professors committed to resigning and sixty supporting the board’s resolution of the Lawson case. Conkin, Gone with the Ivy, 564.

There was some difficulty about Nelson, who everyone agreed could no longer be dean. Branscomb agreed to reinstate him too on the understanding that he would again resign.
board—James Stahlman, John Sloan, Eldon Stevenson, Cecil Sims, Orrin Ingram, and William Waller—refused to accept it.\(^{105}\)

When the campus learned of this decision, all bets were off. Now, large numbers of faculty outside the Divinity School became involved. On June 10, 161 professors (out of 195 contacted) signed a petition, which they distributed to the press, expressing shock at the committee’s action and stressing the seriousness of the crisis. They urged quick resolution on the terms agreed to by Branscomb and Harold Vanderbilt. The national press returned to campus.\(^{106}\)

Branscomb was left with little choice. He could do what the executive committee wanted and allow Vanderbilt to self-destruct. He could resign, with the same result. Or, he could make a last-ditch attempt to save the school in spite of the committee. On June 13, over the objections of members of the executive committee and in the belief that the larger board would support him, Branscomb issued a statement to the faculty.\(^{107}\) He severely scolded the Divinity School faculty and unfairly placed the blame for the executive committee’s rejection of the settlement agreement on Dean Nelson, but otherwise he dealt with the issues in a clear and straightforward manner. Branscomb’s statement was, in essence, a recapitulation of the earlier agreement. In it, he accepted Nelson’s resignation, allowed the other Divinity School faculty to withdraw theirs, and

\(^{105}\) Foster Chronology, 61–63, 71–73.
\(^{106}\) Foster Chronology, 76–78; Time, June 13, 1960 carried the story of Lawson and the resignations.
\(^{107}\) Stahlman and O.H. Ingramm were meeting on June 13 to plan their strategy, which included announcing that the Lawson case was closed, accepting all preferred resignations, and authorizing the chancellor to immediately accept all resignations that would follow and to “take such other steps as appear necessary to restore tranquility and order to the campus…” Copy of Memo of Meeting, June 13, 1960, Box 29, Centennial Record Group, RG 101, VUSC. Stahlman and Ingramm called Harold Vanderbilt, who
provided that Lawson could receive his degree by either transfer of credits or by examination. He then pronounced the matter closed.\textsuperscript{108}

Branscomb’s statement did in fact end the episode, although the recriminations lasted for decades. Everyone on campus seemed to realize at the same time what a dangerous game they had been playing.\textsuperscript{109} The Divinity School faculty withdrew their resignations on the evening of June 15 and the Vanderbilt board acquiesced. They did not fire Branscomb (Harold Vanderbilt probably saw to that), but many trustees, especially the members of the executive committee and their allies, spoke of him with fury and derision. The chancellor too had now defied their authority. Vance Alexander, on hearing that Branscomb had “backed down,” wrote angrily to Stahlman that “Several Nashville students have written me that the Chancellor has gone back on the Board and has gone back on his word, and some of them are so bitter that they hope he leaves Vanderbilt . . . He did not act in keeping with the resolutions of the Board of Trust and if he had followed the resolutions he could have gotten out of trouble and stayed out of trouble. We gave him a chance but he would not take it.”\textsuperscript{110} Two days later Alexander was still

\textsuperscript{108} Foster Chronology, 79–81; Copy of Statement to the Faculty of Vanderbilt University, June 13, 1960, Box 29, Centennial Record Group, RG 101, VUSC.

\textsuperscript{109} In a breathtaking editorial in the \textit{Banner}, James Stahlman actually criticized Branscomb for not taking this kind of firm actions sooner—in effect blaming the chancellor for not saving Stahlman from himself at an earlier date. \textit{Nashville Banner}, June 14, 1960. Branscomb replied privately that such action would not have worked even days before. He argued convincingly that “[i]t was only after the faculty knew that we had made efforts to negotiate and that these had failed and the situation was in such chaos that some decision had to be made, that it was possible for this kind of statement to be effective.” Branscomb to Stahlman, June 15, 1960, Box 29, Centennial Record Group, RG 101, VUSC.

\textsuperscript{110} Copy of letter to Branscomb from Divinity School Faculty, June 15, 1960, Box 29, Centennial Record Group, RG 101; V.J. Alexander to Stahlman, June 15, 1960, Box V-6, Stahlman Papers, VUSC.
fuming. He again wrote Stahlman, complaining about Branscomb: “Personally, I am afraid Branscomb is a negro sympathizer, he has shown that all along . . . I, like you, believe that the fat is in the fire and it is going to hurt Vanderbilt much more in view of the stand taken by the Chancellor than it is going to help the school. He has made his bed, let him lie in it.”

Several other trustees and prominent alumni exploded with suppressed anger, reaching beyond the Lawson episode to the whole array of changes that Branscomb had brought to Vanderbilt. J.P. Norfleet traced the beginning of the current woes to “one of the greatest mistakes ever made in the history of Vanderbilt University,” the admission in 1953 of Reverend Joseph Johnson to the School of Religion. “I have been a great admirer of Chancellor Branscomb,” Norfleet wrote to James Simpson, “but have never subscribed to his liberal views with reference to the negro problem. I think when we took the first negro into our Theological Department about 7 years ago we laid the foundation for all of the trouble we have been having.” Many prominent alumni, friends of the trustees, confirmed the executive committee’s point of view. One alumnus wrote Stahlman also bemoaning the fact that blacks had ever been admitted: “The fact that they were ‘theologs’ did not affect the social status and that is the seat of all the trouble. Give them an inch and they will demand more . . . That breach with Southern traditions brought no credit and plenty of grief upon the school.” W.F. “Babe” Murrah, a Memphis attorney and associate of both Stahlman and Vance Alexander, also made it clear that he believed the root cause of the school’s trouble were the changes that the chancellor had made over

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111 V.J. Alexander to Stahlman, June 17, 1960. Stahlman Papers, Box V-6. VUSC.
112 J.P. Norfleet James Stahlman, July 6, 1960; Norfleet to James Simpson, September 1, 1960. Stahlman Papers, Box V-14. VUSC.
113 Giles J. Patterson to Stahlman, July 25, 1960. Stahlman Papers, Box V-14. VUSC.
a period of years. These changes were the very ones that had led to steady progress in Vanderbilt’s quality and reputation, but Murrah saw only “radical elements that have infiltrated the student body and faculty at Vanderbilt.” His contempt for the chancellor was pretty thorough: “It takes a strong man with the right convictions at the head of an institution to keep it on the right course and combat such insidious penetration. I think Branscomb has made a miserable failure and shown inexcusable weakness in handling the situations that have arisen at Vanderbilt during the past several years, resulting in lowering the Vanderbilt standard and destroying some of its most cherished traditions.”

These observations contained some real truth. Vanderbilt under Branscomb had become a thoroughly different school than the one that these aging men had attended. Rather than lowering standards, though, Branscomb had raised them almost immeasurably. It was true that northern faculty and students now made up a large part of the campus population, and their talent and ambitions helped bring the university national prestige. The Divinity School in particular, which drew the wrath of several trustees for its betrayal of “old time” religion, was one of the most respected in the entire country. Branscomb’s strategy of easing racial restrictions over time had made it possible for Vanderbilt to focus attention on the business of building a great university rather than on figuring out ways to fight off “outsiders.”

Ironically, though, it was exactly these changes that had left the chancellor so vulnerable during the Lawson episode. Faculty, whether northern or southern-born, had their eyes firmly fixed on their school’s national reputation and would not sit back and watch Branscomb and a small group of trustees destroy that reputation. However well the expulsion of Lawson may have played in Memphis or Mississippi, it was nothing short of

114 W.F. Murrah to Stahlman, June 30, 1960, Stahlman Papers, Box V-14. VUSC.
a disaster in the national academic community, calling into question Vanderbilt’s commitment to fundamental principles of university governance as well as its commitment to racial equality and justice. While the racial issues that surrounded the expulsion were inflammatory, the executive committee’s total lack of regard for the faculty’s authority on matters of admission and student discipline was equally important in provoking the crisis.

When all was said and done, despite the truly horrific national press and the deluge of horrified mail, the damage to Vanderbilt was limited and temporary. Even during the worst days of the crisis Branscomb had kept in close contact with the people who really had the power to hurt or help Vanderbilt—not the Alabama alumni, but the AAUP, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, and the Ford Foundation. He assiduously kept them informed of events and did his best to articulate a reasoned basis for Vanderbilt’s actions. He constantly assured them that the escalating conflict did not call into question the university’s commitment to a gradual program of desegregation, and that there was no chance of backtracking. This effort was quite effective. In September 1960 the Ford Foundation confirmed its support of Branscomb and Vanderbilt with a $4 million challenge grant.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{115} For a while in June, Branscomb was in almost daily contact with Dean Rusk, the president of the Rockefeller Foundation. Rusk’s comments zeroed in on what was at stake: “I did want you to know . . . that if there was any way in which I could be helpful, I would feel a duty to make myself available. I was not thinking of the financial investment which our two Boards have made in Vanderbilt so much as the brooding and affectionate concern of my past and present colleagues that there evolve at Vanderbilt a great university. The possibility that a single incident, occurring in a period of general tension, might deeply injure decades of devoted work by those of you who had built up Vanderbilt was something on which I did not feel I could remain entirely silent.”Dean Rusk to Branscomb, June 16, 1960, Box 186, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC. Rusk singled out the potential “adverse effect on your ability to recruit top men for the faculty” as the most costly repercussion that might follow. Rusk to Branscomb,
The Divinity School, of course, suffered the most. In 1957, when he hired Nelson, Branscomb had confided to Duke University chaplain James Cleland that “my major contribution to education over the years is to be, I believe, the hope of bursting into full flower of the Vanderbilt Divinity School.” This did come to pass, but only for a brief while. Although, or perhaps because, the disgruntled faculty members returned to the divinity school, its reputation was severely damaged. In November the American Association of Theological Schools placed the school on a year-long probation. (Though the AATS investigation was triggered by the expulsion of Lawson, its main concern turned out to be the institutional powerlessness of the Divinity School faculty.) Slowly, its best faculty began to drift away to other schools. The search for a new dean was, not surprisingly, a difficult one. Still, the school held together and eventually recovered most of its strength.\footnote{Branscomb to James W. Armsey, June 20, 1960, Box 186, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.}

In spite of the fact that he shepherded Vanderbilt through to safety, Branscomb’s disappointment was bitter and his sense of betrayal was life-long. Although he received

\footnote{Branscomb to James Cleland, January 2, 1957, Box 159, RG 300, Chancellor’s Office Papers, VUSC.}

\footnote{Branscomb, Statement to the Divinity Faculty, December 9, 1960, Box 158, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC.}
considerable support for his actions, he felt terribly beleaguered.\textsuperscript{118} He was, he thought, unfairly branded as an opponent of black civil rights when he sought only to assure that the Vanderbilt board would not back away from the admission of blacks. His belief that he was the only person who cared more about the university than about a personal agenda, while not entirely unfounded, led him to see his opponents, especially Nelson, as enemies of Vanderbilt who were intent on destroying it. Anger and regret mingled to leave Branscomb defensive about the affair for the rest of his life.\textsuperscript{119}

As for James Lawson, Richard Wolf, one of his former teachers at Oberlin, responded to Stahlman after reading his \textit{Nashville Banner} editorials that attacked Lawson in the most personal terms. Wolf’s brief letter pointed to Lawson’s ultimate victory: “That you will stand fast in your position is to be anticipated, for you are obviously a man of deep emotion and conviction. Stand fast, as you will, Mr. Stahlman. The future is with the James Lawsons, even in Nashville.”\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{118} There are quite a few warm letters of support in Branscomb’s files. Rufus Harris, now president of Mercer, wrote to \textit{The Christian Century} declining to renew his subscription, arguing that the magazine had treated Branscomb unfairly. “I do not understand,” wrote Harris, “how you think it proper to abuse the University for its course of action in this case in view of the firm public declaration of this particular student to persist in a violent and proclaimed course of civil disobedience and disorder. I feel this deeply despite my long sharing of what I think are your general views regarding the civil rights of, and educational opportunities for, Negro citizens.”

\textsuperscript{119} In particular, Branscomb seemed unable to forgive people who supported Nelson and the other resigning faculty members, taking that support to be a personal attack on himself and on Vanderbilt.

\textsuperscript{120} Richard C. Wolf to Stahlman, March 8, 1960. Stahlman Papers, Box V-18. VUSC. The executive editor of \textit{the Banner}, Charlie Moss, answered Wolf’s calm and reasoned letter with a fit of pique: “As to your gratuitous and immature efforts to slur The Banner and its publisher, they are thoroughly characteristic of your type . . . .” Charles Moss to Richard C. Wolf, March 12, 1960. RG 101, Centennial Record Group, Box 29. VUSC. Perhaps the best epitaph for the Lawson episode was written by University Secretary Robert McGaw: “Three of us here, two on the Adminstration side and one on the other side and . . . nobody was closer to the center of it than any one of us, do solemnly and honestly declare that we can name
In the wake of the Lawson episode, Vanderbilt did not retreat from its policy of limited admission of blacks. Branscomb, now worried more than ever about any kind of publicity on racial matters, exercised extreme caution in regulating the activities of black graduate and professional students. In March 1961, he described Vanderbilt’s slowly changing policies to Emory’s president, Walter Martin, who was in the midst of making similar changes at that school. While Vanderbilt did not yet house black students on campus, they now ate freely in the school’s dining halls. Another recent change was permission for black student to sit with their white peers at sports events. Participation in intramurals, however, was still closely watched. When one black law student wanted to play on the school’s intramural basketball team, Branscomb told his classmates that while he could certainly play against the other graduate and professional schools it would be best if he did not play any undergraduate teams, as there might be “episodes or controversies arising out of the heat of the battle . . . .” More than anything, Branscomb wanted to avoid “episodes.” This, rather than any personal feelings of discomfort or abstract disapproval, seemed to be behind his ad hoc regulations. Discussing the inevitable “problem of dormitories,” Branscomb worried only about which students would be most likely to accept black floor mates without drawing public attention. Thus,

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NOBODY who changed sides from the beginning to the (we hope) end, over a period of 3 ½ months. This despite the most energetic outpouring of ‘facts.’ It’s as though a Roman Catholic and a Southern Baptist spent 3 ½ months debating. In the matter of race . . . everybody finds the facts he wants to find, finds the meaning he wants to find, finds the villain he wants to find, finds the hero he wants to find.”

Robert McGaw to Lea Booth, June 21, 1960. RG 900, Secretary of the University Papers, Box 2510. VUSC.
he wrote Emory’s Martin, when the issue comes up “we will probably consider carefully placing the individual in the dormitory occupied by Divinity School students.”\(^{121}\)

By 1962 it was clear that Vanderbilt had to complete its desegregation. Campus debate on the issue was now almost constant. Privately, Branscomb and Harold Vanderbilt agreed that the issue must be finally resolved before the chancellor’s retirement, sparing his successor the problem.\(^{122}\) Branscomb began preparing for action in his usual thorough way. Even in 1962, most of Vanderbilt’s conservative undergraduate students still opposed desegregation. The Undergraduate Senate, after much acrimonious debate, narrowly defeated a resolution calling on the board to desegregate the undergraduate schools. In a February campus vote on the resolution, with about 59 percent of the student body casting ballots, it was rejected again.\(^{123}\) But the student newspaper, \textit{The Hustler}, under its editor Lamar Alexander, urged the university to proceed without delay in removing all racial restrictions on admissions. Alexander was encouraged in this editorial policy by Branscomb, who also had the editor meet with the

\(^{121}\) Branscomb to S. Walter Martin, March 10, 1961, Box 162, RG 300, Chancellor’s Office Papers, VUSC.
\(^{122}\) Branscomb, \textit{Purely Academic}, 165.
\(^{123}\) \textit{Vanderbilt Hustler}, February 9, 16, 1962. In a 1961 report on “student discussion and action on social issues,” the committee stated its belief that “we are in good shape in this area, primarily because we are providing outlets for controversial discussion within the institutional framework, and only secondarily because our student body is essentially conservative.” Samuel Babbitt to Branscomb, April 10, 1961, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC. Vanderbilt, at Branscomb’s insistence, did allow the students (and faculty) nearly complete freedom to form organizations, choose speakers, etc. In part this was from a commitment to academic values, but in part it was a way of avoiding giving students a target for disaffection. Most of the time, the issues that attracted negative attention from the community tended to revolve around alleged student or faculty “socialism,” although activism on racial matters of course also drew flak.
board to discuss probable student reaction to desegregation.\textsuperscript{124} The Graduate Student Council supported an open admissions policy in a March 12 vote, favoring the opening of all graduate programs, including those at the master’s level, to black students. In April 1962, the faculty of the undergraduate college endorsed a resolution that recommended abolishing racial restrictions in the admissions process.\textsuperscript{125}

Also in April, the University Senate unanimously passed a resolution recommending that admission to all schools and programs be “based solely on considerations of individual merit.” This body had been revived by Branscomb in 1958, and its membership consisted of the vice chancellor, the deans, and ten elected members of the faculty. Branscomb served as chairman.\textsuperscript{126} Almost certainly, given the chancellor’s history of behind-the-scenes orchestration, this resolution and the report that supported it were part of the planning for the May board meeting. In it, the Senate rehearsed precisely the same arguments that Branscomb and Harold Vanderbilt were readying for the trustees, underscoring the unanimity of opinion at the school’s highest administrative levels.

Branscomb presented the Senate report to the board in a closed session at its May 4 meeting.\textsuperscript{127} Predictably, the report focused on concrete considerations rather than

\textsuperscript{124} Branscomb to Rhodes Scholarship Selection Committee, November 15, 1962, Box 119, Chancellor’s Office Papers, RG 300, VUSC; Branscomb, \textit{Purely Academic}, 165; \textit{Vanderbilt Hustler}, April 20, 1962.

\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Vanderbilt Hustler}, March 16, 1962. Master’s programs were not opened before because Branscomb and the board feared being “deluged with Negro students who want to go into teaching with a Master’s degree.” Branscomb to S. Walter Martin, March 14, 1961. RG 300, Chancellor’s Office Papers, Box 162. VUSC.

\textsuperscript{126} Excerpt from Chancellor’s Report to the Board of Trust of Vanderbilt University, October 24–25, 1958; Memorandum, “The University Senate,” March 9, 1959, Box 217, RG 300, Chancellor’s Office Papers, VUSC.

\textsuperscript{127} Digest of the Minutes, Board of Trust, Vanderbilt University, May 4–5, 1963, Box V-27, Stahlman Papers, VUSC.
sweeping moral or ideological concerns. (A single paragraph in the six-page document referred to American religious and political thought.) Citing the decisions to remove restrictions on black admissions in the South's other prominent private schools, now including Duke, Emory, and Tulane, the Senate argued that failure to finish desegregating would cause Vanderbilt serious harm. They feared the possibility that the federal government would soon forbid its agencies to grant or loan money, or contract with universities that continued to discriminate in admissions, and understood that accepting federal money might subject the school to federal legal action forcing them to desegregate. Foundations, too, they argued, were now withholding funds from schools that retained any vestige of segregation in admissions policies. The conclusion was clear: "if Vanderbilt is to exert its traditional leadership it must move promptly and decisively." 128

The Senate tried to make this bitter pill easier to swallow. The report stressed that in the eyes of the faculty and administration "the merit principle is paramount to all other considerations in student admissions." Few blacks, they pointed out, could hope to meet Vanderbilt's high standards. Vanderbilt had admitted only twenty-seven blacks since 1953 (a mere seven had graduated so far), and with proper "administrative discretion" could keep the numbers similarly low in the future. The inevitable problems that would arise, such as housing, the use of athletic facilities, and social interactions, were likewise nothing that the administration could not handle with careful planning. Desegregating everything at once would subject opponents to "only one shock." It was critical, argued the Senate, to take this action before the federal government forced it on the school if Vanderbilt wanted to keep its "existing reputation and the good will which the University

128 "A communication from the University Senate to the Board of Trust adopted April 26, 1962, by unanimous vote of those members present and voting," April 26, 1962. RG 300,
now enjoys particularly among the nation’s leading educational institutions and the great philanthropic foundations.”

At the spring meeting of the board, Branscomb presented this resolution to the trustees. He brought in Vanderbilt’s Director of Sponsored Research and Grants to discuss the impact of federal contracts—worth nearly $4.5 million a year at this time—on the finances of the university. Dean Wade of the Law School discussed Judge J. Skelly Wright’s opinion in Tulane’s lawsuit, which suggested that even private institutions could be subject to the 14th Amendment. Although this was not the exact holding in the case, it did hint at the direction of the court’s reasoning, and its implications were ominous. The time had come, Branscomb told the trustees, to end racial restrictions in admissions.  

Harold Vanderbilt took over the presentation of the problem. He was elaborately prepared. He repeated many of the Senate’s arguments, provided a summary of desegregation in southern private colleges, and pointed out the extremely low number of blacks who had successfully completed degrees at Vanderbilt since 1953. “Vanderbilt was the first private Southern university to begin to integrate,” he concluded, “but it had not since then kept pace with many other Southern universities.” He was now convinced, he told his colleagues, that “complete integration of Vanderbilt can no longer be delayed if we are to preserve our status as a national institution.” After debate the board agreed to the change, declaring a new basis for admission to Vanderbilt: “Admission to the

Chancellor’s Office Papers, Box 212.

129 Ibid.

130 Branscomb, “Present Status of this Problem,” May 4, 1962, Box V-29, Stahlman Papers, VUSC. Wade discussed the Tulane case before the meeting in a letter to board chairman Harold Vanderbilt. John W. Wade to Harold Vanderbilt, April 4, 1962, Box 212, RG 300, Chancellor’s Office Papers, VUSC.
University's courses of study shall be based upon evidence of scholastic achievement, intellectual capacity, moral character, and promise of leadership."

The vote, while not unanimous, did not leave any acrimony and the board was not badly split. Still, even though the resolution passed by a comfortable margin, the board was not entirely at ease with the change. They mandated that the chancellor use "care and discretion in implementing this policy, with the view of insuring a continuing atmosphere conducive to learning, study, and good conduct compatible with the high traditions of Vanderbilt University." Even this, though, did not quell their anxiety. They immediately passed another resolution, introduced by James Stahlman, which required that applications from black students, or "any other applications which might be considered questionable," be reviewed by the dean of the school, the vice-chancellor of the division, and the chancellor. They were willing to admit black undergraduates, apparently, but unable to entrust their admission to the faculty.  

There was remarkably little reaction to the change. Only a handful of letters exist in the files of Branscomb and James Stahlman, about evenly mixed between approval and disapproval. The Hustler, under new editor Roy Blount, conveyed its strong approval. Blount got to the heart of the matter in an editorial the week after the decision: "Vanderbilt should be neither a social club nor a social crusader, but a community of

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131 There are several drafts of the data that Vanderbilt provided to the other trustees and a text of his long presentation to the board, which he apparently read largely verbatim, at Box 3, Harold S. Vanderbilt Papers, VUSC.
132 Branscomb to Hubert W. Morrow, May 23, 1962, Box 199, RG 300, Chancellor's Office Papers, VUSC.
133 Confidential Digest of the Minutes, Board of Trust, Vanderbilt University, May 4–5, 1962. Stahlman Papers, Box V-27. VUSC. This requirement was apparently more honored in the breach. Conkin, Gone With the Ivy, 577.
scholars that welcomes other scholars.” The faculty of the Divinity School sent a resolution to Branscomb expressing “its delight over the action” and its “profound thanks [to the Chancellor] for his leadership in the accomplishment of this epochal event.”

Again, Branscomb turned to the major foundations, this time to report the good news.135

Branscomb announced another important decision at the May 1962 board meeting. Eligible to retire since 1960, he took this occasion to declare formally that he would leave the chancellor’s office on August 31, or as soon thereafter as his successor could assume his duties.136 In a speech to the faculty that September, Branscomb, now a “lame duck,” showed more interest in Vanderbilt’s bright future than in its past. In a single paragraph he reviewed the accomplishments of the last sixteen years—faculty more than doubled, thirty-one new buildings, library holdings increased from 470,000 to 840,000 volumes, endowment multiplied two and a half times, a leap in the quality of teaching and research—and recounted the struggles, including the one over the admission of blacks, to define the institution and its relationship to society. In the next ten pages, Branscomb

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135 *Vanderbilt Hustler*, May 11, 1962; Branscomb to John W. Gardner, May 14, 1962, Box 137; William C. Finch to Branscomb, May 14, 1962, Box 158, RG 300, Chancellor’s Office Papers, VUSC.

136 *Hustler*, May 11, 1962. Not surprisingly, James Stahlman knew exactly what he was looking for in a new chancellor. “I have some very definite ideas about the type of man we want,” he wrote fellow trustee Devereaux Lake, “... and I am determined as best I can to see that we don’t get any of the left-wing boys who would like to subvert Vanderbilt, the last bastion of educational conservatism among the better institutions of higher learning.” After a long search, the board settled on Alexander Heard, dean of the graduate school at the University of North Carolina. Stahlman to Devereaux Lake, January 10, 1962. Stahlman Papers, Box V-3. VUSC. On the selection of Heard, see Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 583–87. Heard, certainly no left-winger, went on to have his fair share of scrapes with Stahlman, particularly in 1967 when Stokely Carmichael spoke at a Vanderbilt forum. This interesting incident is discussed in Conkin, *Gone with the Ivy*, 583–87.
outlined the factors that would ensure the university’s continued growth and development. Chief among these were financial matters. The continuing support of the foundations, including the prospect of another $6 million from the Ford Foundation, coupled with now substantial alumni contributions, he was sure, left Vanderbilt in a position to make yet another leap in quality and prestige. The university now measured itself by a national yardstick and competed for money in a national arena, an entirely salutary thing, Branscomb believed.

But Branscomb went on, almost scolding the faculty that it must remember that Vanderbilt was still in and of the South: “[i]n the last analysis, it must be recognized that no university can be built without substantial support in its own region. You cannot build a great university out of New York or Washington. The maintenance and further development of the respect and pride of our own region is an essential for the realization of the aims and purposes of this institution. The administration and the faculty must never forget this; no institution can cut itself off from its society.” Such a reminder would have been utterly unnecessary when Brancomb arrived at Vanderbilt, a deeply southern institution, in 1948.

IV

At Tulane University, the search for Rufus Harris’s successor began in 1959. For the first time, the Board of Administrators authorized the formation of a faculty advisory

137 Harvie Branscomb, Speech to the faculties, September 14, 1962, Box 5, Branscomb Papers, VUSC.
committee to assist in the task. Among the qualifications that this committee deemed necessary for a new president was the ability to lead the school on racial matters. The new president, the advisory committee said, "should recognize that during his tenure of office desegregation will be one of the crucial problems facing educational institutions, private as well as public. He should be capable of furnishing leadership to the Board, the faculty, the student body, the alumni and the general public in arriving at an equitable solution of this problem which will reflect credit on both the University and the region." President Harris's longtime secretary and close confidant Kathryn Davis also took the bold step of writing board chairman Joseph Jones with her thoughts on the matter. Miss Davis argued that the next head of Tulane ought to come from the ranks of Tulane's professoriate. The disadvantages of bringing someone from outside, Davis claimed, were many, "not least of which would be to find someone acceptable to not only the South but also New Orleans. Not only must he -- and his wife who is a most important campus personality -- be accepted here but he and she must accept us and accept segregation and drinking and Carnival (many people are against these things!) and yet go to church and know how to handle themselves with these other things."

The Tulane board did not follow Miss Davis's advice, shrewd though it was. Rather, they hired an outsider, Herbert Longenecker, a chemist by training and head of the

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138 The committee was formed by a vote of the University Senate, which authorized its formation in order to "present to the Administrators the faculty's views as to the qualifications of a university president and to be available to the Administrators, at their pleasure, as representatives of the total faculty, for consultative purposes in the selection of a new president of the University." The Advisory Committee worked closely with the board in the search that resulted in the selection of Herbert Longenecker. Report of the Faculty Advisory Committee on the Selection of a President, April, 1960. Harris Papers, Box 20. TUA.

139 Advisory Committee to Joseph Jones, June 25, 1959. Harris Papers, Box 31. TUA.

140 Kathryn Davis to Joseph Jones, June 15, 1959. Harris Papers, Box 31. TUA.
University of Illinois's professional schools in Chicago (these included a graduate
college, medicine, dentistry, nursing, social work, the University of Illinois hospitals and
related research institutes). Longenecker was a northerner, a native of Pennsylvania,
and forty-seven years old. Longenecker was educated entirely at Penn State. He received
his BS in 1933, his masters in 1934, and his Ph.D. in biochemistry in 1936. He then went
abroad as a National Research Council Fellow in the biological sciences, studying at the
University of Liverpool, the University of Cologne, and Queen's University in Kingston,
Canada. Longenecker taught chemistry for eight years at the University of Pittsburgh,
becoming dean of research in the natural sciences in 1942. He held that position
concurrently with the deanship of Pitt's graduate school from 1946 until 1955, when he
left for the University of Illinois.142

Perhaps most important, Longenecker was a generation younger than Rufus Harris. He
had reached professional maturity in an environment that was far different from the one
that nurtured his predecessor. The new president had spent his academic career in large,
northern public institutions. His style, for both good and ill, was that of a bureaucrat, a
natural one for the head of a massive and complex organization like the professional
schools of the University of Illinois. The kind of personal leadership that had always been
the hallmark of small southern universities was not familiar to Longenecker. Harris's
total identification with Tulane was not to be repeated, was, in fact, probably not
repeatable at all. Harris, though, well understood the situation that Longenecker was
walking into and expressed his thoughts to the new president in a letter he wrote on his

141 Dr. Maxwell Lapham, dean of Tulane's Medical School since 1940, served as acting
president from the time of Harris's departure in March, 1960 until Longenecker assumed
his duties in September.
last day in office. "I wish," explained Harris, "that I could express some measure of the warm good wishes I have for you. I have every confidence in you and in your intent and ability to direct Tulane's course wisely into another generation . . . I do know the stumbling blocks ahead, and believe me, I will be rooting for you and will be on your side, and always available to you for anything you want of me." 143

Longenecker ran into some of those stumbling blocks as soon as he set foot on campus in April 1960. 144 With the New Orleans public schools under court order to integrate in the fall and the city's business elite unwilling to stand up to segregationists in the state government, racial tension was near a peak of hysteria. Pressure from all sides to toe their line was now unrelenting, loud, and very public. 145 The rapidly unfolding crisis became a regular topic of discussion at Tulane board meetings, particularly with reference to faculty concern about keeping the public schools open. In May the University Senate asked the board to make a public statement about the need to continue public education in New Orleans. The administrators refused, saying that "such a statement would be a disservice to the University and would have a detrimental result." They were more open to another Senate request, however, agreeing to look into the possibility of setting up a

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142 Press Release, Tulane University News Bureau, December 18, 1959, Box 42, Harris Papers, TUA.
143 Harris to Longenecker, March 31, 1960, Box 42, Harris Papers, TUA.
144 Longenecker was formally inaugurated in September, but arrived on campus in the spring and attended his first board meeting on April 20, 1960. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, April 20, 1960, TUA.
145 On the crisis surrounding changing race relations in New Orleans, see Fairclough, Race and Democracy, generally, but especially chapter 9; Baker, The Second Battle of New Orleans; and for a blistering assessment of the behavior of the city's elite, Inger, Politics and Reality in an American City. "Massive resistance" in Louisiana is analyzed in Bartley, Rise of Massive Resistance, chapters 10–12
school (to be operated on a segregated basis) for the children of staff, faculty, and students if the public schools should close.¹⁴⁶

Tulane administrators also spent much of May and June dancing to the tune called by the South Louisiana Citizen’s Council, which wrote that it had been “reliably informed” that Tulane was violating state segregation laws by allowing black employees to use “white only” drinking and toilet facilities. With the usual undertone of menace, the Council’s executive director, Jack Ricau, stressed that he was merely trying to be helpful: “we are anxious to hear from you – to know that you will correct conditions in these matters – so that we can assuage those who have complained of the violations.”¹⁴⁷ This letter set off a barrage of fact-finding and hand-wringing on campus, as vice president and comptroller Clarence Scheps had the business manager conduct a thorough census of which maids and porters used which toilets and then contacted outside legal counsel for an opinion. Scheps was stymied—although there seemed to be no problem with the employees, having black professionals eat lunch when they attended meetings on campus was against the law. Despite the lawyer’s repeated assurances that the Louisiana law was certainly unconstitutional, Scheps was troubled that he could only tell the Citizen’s Council that Tulane was in compliance with the “spirit” of the law.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, June 15, 1960, TUA. Plans for a Tulane elementary school are in Box 14, Longenecker Papers.
¹⁴⁷ Jack Ricau to Tulane University Maintenance Department, April 18, 1960, Box 99, Longenecker Papers, TUA.
¹⁴⁸ Memo, Business Manager to Clarence Scheps, April 25, 1960, Box 66, Longenecker Papers, TUA. Each black employee was assigned a specific toilet and given a drinking glass with instructions to draw water from any fountain and drink only from the glass. Clarence Scheps to Edmund McIlhenny, May 3, 1960; McIlhenny to Scheps, May 4, 1960; Scheps to McIlhenny, May 26, 1960; McIlhenny to Scheps, June 8, 1960; Scheps to Max Lapham, June 14, 1960, Box 99, TUA. Scheps finally advised Lapham to bring the matter up before the board, which he did at the June 15 meeting. The board reaffirmed its policy of allowing blacks to participate in professional meetings on
Trouble came from another direction when several Tulane students became active in demonstrations and sit-ins organized by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) at New Orleans' businesses. Although these sit-ins were not as successful as others around the South, and soon ended, public awareness that Tulane students were participating sent waves of dread through the board and the administration. One of the students, Sydney Goldfinch, brought black friends into the snack bar at Tulane's University Center, much to the consternation of the administration. They compiled dossiers on the students, threatened them with the loss of teaching positions, and generally made life difficult for them. They did not, however, expell them. The lesson of the Lawson episode at Vanderbilt was learned well at other universities. In Longenecker's files, a copy of the Christian Century editorial of April 13, 1960 entitled "Vanderbilt Should Reinstall Lawson" is marked with the handwritten comment: "There is a significant lesson in the wide reaction to the hasty drastic step taken by Vanderbilt." Outraged citizens, of course, let Tulane know that allowing these "troublemaking students" to remain enrolled "will surely degrade your institution in the eyes of many." The South Louisiana Citizen's Council once again weighed in, insinuating that the students involved with CORE as well

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149 On the formation of the New Orleans CORE chapter and the 1960 demonstrations, see Fairclough, Race and Democracy, 272–76.
150 A memo entitled "Integration Problems" discusses the attempts to desegregate the snack bar at the University Center as well as the participation of Tulane students in the CORE sit-ins. October 12, 1960, Box 99, Longenecker Papers, TUA
151 Box 99, Longenecker Papers, TUA. Longenecker was also in contact with Vanderbilt administrator Rob Roy Purdy, who sent him a report of the Vanderbilt faculty, written in the wake of the Lawson episode, on proper procedures for disciplining students. R.R.
as two sympathetic Tulane professors were engaged in "subversive or Communistic activity" and that the university would do nothing about it because "Tulane is the recipient of numerous Grants from certain Foundations and therefore Tulane's hands are tied."\textsuperscript{152}

Matters only got worse in the fall. In the face of federal court orders that required the New Orleans public schools to begin desegregating its first grade, the Louisiana legislature enacted a series of laws designed to wrest control of the city's schools from the Orleans Parish School Board and shut them down. A restraining order from Judge J. Skelly Wright prevented enforcement of these laws, but the state froze payroll funds meant for the city's teachers. Nonetheless, on November 4, four black children enrolled in previously white schools. The white parents at these schools reacted violently, forming, along with truant teenagers, jeering, rock-throwing mobs. Mayor Morrison remained unswervingly focused on his own political future and denied any responsibility for the situation. The national press had a field day as mobs gathered to scream and spit at children day after day.\textsuperscript{153}

At Tulane, the faculty was increasingly troubled. On December 14, 1960, the College of Arts and Sciences adopted a resolution that in rather intemperate terms called for an

\textsuperscript{152} Copy of Confidential Police Report, Dave McGuire to Horace Renegar, October 13, 1960, Box 99, Longenecker Papers, TUA. McGuire was Mayor DeLesseps Morrison's chief administrative officer. His death in November deprived Morrison of perhaps the steadiest hand in City Hall during the worst of the school crisis. See Haas, \textit{DeLesseps S. Morrison}, 274, and 249–82 generally on the chaos that enveloped the city in the fall and winter of 1960–61. F.C. Haley to Longenecker, October 6, 1960 (quotation); Jack Ricau and Joseph Viguerie to Longenecker, October 25, 1960 (quotation), Box 99, Longenecker Papers, TUA.

\textsuperscript{153} Fairclough, \textit{Race and Democracy}, chapter 9, recounts the battle between Wright and the state, as well as the battle in the streets of the city.
end to the mob protests in the streets of New Orleans and for the governor and legislature
to help resolve the crisis rather than fuel the discord. On December 15 the Graduate
Faculty proposed a different statement, with the language slightly toned down. This
statement was signed by over three hundred Tulane faculty members but not adopted by
any official university body. The faculty released the statement, which endorsed “an end
to demonstrations in the streets of our city and to the vilification and threats directed
against persons behaving in a lawful manner.” This statement, along with a similar public
appeal from a group of businessmen, was the first hint that someone might possess the
will to resolve the crisis.154

As tense and upsetting as all this was, however, it took money to really get the board’s
attention. Throughout the fall of 1960, Longenecker and Joseph Jones had been
overseeing the preparation of a proposal for a major Ford Foundation “Challenge Grant.”
The foundation had already announced several of these very large grants, including the
one to Vanderbilt, aimed at strengthening private research universities throughout the
country. Talks with James W. Armsey, director of the foundation’s Special Program in
Education, were going well and expectations were high. Tulane, now engaging in deep
deficit spending, badly needed the money.155 The situation in the streets, however, was

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154 College of Arts and Sciences Resolution, December 14, 1960; Statement by Members
of the Faculty of Tulane University, December 16, 1960, Box 99, Longenecker Papers,
TUA. Rufus Harris, now president of Mercer, wrote to Provost Bob Lumiansky of his
pleasure at the publication of the statement. He quoted a prominent New Orleanian who
likewise strongly approved of the faculty’s action: “It looks like decency and dignity
have a chance to come back, which already would have occurred but for the State
Legislature. It would exhaust your imagination to dwell on the amassed ignorance and
prejudice of our law making body. When they speak before the state and nation I have the
feeling that the family half-wit has come downstairs to talk to the company.” Harris to
Robert Lumiansky, December 22, 1960, Box 28, Harris Papers, TUA.
155 For the Ford Foundation program, see Geiger, Research and Relevant Knowledge,
113–15. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, October 12, 1960, TUA.
worrisome. When Armsey visited Tulane, attending the board meeting on November 22 at the very height of the chaos in the city’s streets, the board brought in Mayor DeLesseps Morrison. Apparently, Morrison was there to assure Armsey that the present school crisis was temporary, that law and order would soon return, and that New Orleans was well able to solve its racial problems.\(^{156}\)

Armsey, though, was far from assured. At the December 8 meeting of the board’s executive committee, Joseph Jones reported that he had received a letter from the Ford Foundation “relative to Tulane’s position in the matter of segregation.” The following week, at a meeting of the full board, Jones explained that Armsey wanted a reply in advance of Tulane’s application materials. He offered two possible statements, neither of which survives.\(^{157}\)

One of the few pieces of evidence that sheds light on the board’s debate about how to answer the Ford Foundation is a memorandum prepared by trustee and law committee member Marie Louise Snellings on January 24. She very quickly covered the basic legal quandry—that the original gifts to create Tulane and Newcomb (the women’s college) were bound by restrictions that limited their use to the education of whites, but that

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\(^{156}\) Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, November 22, 1960, TUA. On November 14, Jones also wrote to Dean Rusk at The Rockefeller Foundation, which was considering a grant to the medical school, asking for “sympathetic understanding” of the vise in which Tulane found itself. Joseph Jones to Dean Rusk, November 14, 1960, Box 75, Longenecker Papers, TUA. Also in November Longenecker had his first taste of the Association of American Law Schools pressure, when Dean Ray Forrester of the law school sent him a copy of a letter from the chairman of the Committee on Racial Discrimination, who warned that “unless we indicate some steps are being taken, then those who advocate stronger measures may prevail.” Ray Forrester to Longenecker, November 30, 1960; Longenecker to Forrester, December 2, 1960, Box 99, Longenecker Papers, TUA.

\(^{157}\) Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee, December 8, 1960, Box 99, Longenecker Papers; Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, December 14, 1960, TUA.
Tulane later came to include the assets of the public University of Louisiana, giving the
school a public aspect that would seem to require the admission of blacks. "However,"
she continued, "we have remained a private university, privately supported, and under the
recent Girard Case which we followed with interest, the day is not yet here when the
Supreme Court is ready to invalidate conditions such as Paul Tulane's and Mrs.
Newcomb's as contra bonos mores. The day may come, anytime. But are we ready to
seek it?"

Mrs. Snellings's answer was no. While asserting that she no longer had any personal
objection to "the admission of a bona fide qualified negro applicant to Tulane University
in the Graduate School," she insisted that "I am not going to be able to vote for this
change at this time . . . ." Snellings gave three reasons:

1. I fear the possible repercussions in the form of contests by the Tulane heirs
and angry dissatisfaction among the alumni.

2. I do not see that we are forced to this decision at this point, and when the
state of Louisiana is in a condition of upheaval and unrest in the public
schools because of this question it seems an ill advised time to take such
action. My loyalty to my home, my neighbors, and to the South and the
burden of the problem she has had to bear compels me to say that I must vote
to maintain our status quo at the present.

3. The last reason is very important to me. Any change we would make in our
policy at this time would be caused, to all practical intent, by the possibility
of the grant of money from the Ford Foundation. This I cannot do. Under no
circumstances could I vote for a change which would appear to all the world
as a sell out.

If I had to guess, I would guess that I could vote for this change in good
conscience somewhere from three to ten years hence.159

158 Marie Louise Snellings, To the Board of Administrators of Tulane Education Fund,
January 24, 1961, Addendum, "Policy-Negroes," Harris Papers, TUA.
159 Ibid. While no copy of this reply exists, it is fairly certain The only other person
whose opinion on this matter survives, interestingly, is Rufus Harris. He wrote to Joseph
Jones, hardly his close friend, on January 30, about Tulane's dilemma with the Ford
Foundation: "I deeply hope the Ford Foundation will deal generously with Tulane. I
While there is no record of Joseph Jones’s reply to James Armsey on February 4, 1961, it seems clear that something like Mrs. Snellings’s reasoning prevailed within Tulane’s board. Still, it is unlikely that Jones sent off a ringing endorsement of segregation and southern tradition. Rather, he probably crafted some sort of tepid statement that suggested that Tulane’s hands were tied and the situation in New Orleans was too explosive to consider a change at this moment. In any event, it was not what the Ford Foundation needed to hear. Barely ten days later, Longenecker received a brief letter from Armsey, stating that “it will not be possible for [the Ford Foundation] to consider a grant to Tulane in our Special Program in Education.”

Until this moment, Marie Louise Snellings had been right—the only problems Tulane faced in its failure to desegregate were prospective. Nothing, she argued, might ever happen. But by refusing to take the threats seriously, Tulane courted disaster and disaster

know something of your difficulty. Have you considered having Tulane publicly announce now a decision to admit qualified Negroes in September of 1962, or even in 1963, to the graduate and professional schools, the idea being that it is well to announce now such a decision, even though its consummation is set for a later date.” Harris to Jones, January 30, 1961, Box 64, Harris Papers, TUA. Jones replied only that “I would like to thank you for the thoughtful suggestion which you made in this direction.” Copy of letter, Jones to Harris, February 4, 1961, Box 75, Longenecker Papers, TUA.

In a letter to President Longenecker, Jones indicated that he had sent an answer to Armsey, and a similar letter to the Rockefeller Foundation, on February 4. Neither letter is in the files. Jones to Longenecker, February 4, 1961, Box 75, Longenecker Papers, TUA. Armsey’s letter, like much of this material, is only found in Harris’s papers. James Armsey to Longenecker, February 15, 1961, Box 64, Harris Papers, TUA.

In the intervening board meeting on February 8, Longenecker raised another prospective problem, federal appropriations to segregated schools: “one of the first acts of the new housing administrator [in Washington, DC] will be an attempt to place restrictions on the new college housing loans against those institutions which have admissions policies barring Negroes. It is expected that there will be a strong effort made to attach discrimination clauses on all appropriations made by the government to institutions of higher learning.” Minutes of the Board of Administrators Meeting, February 8, 1961, TUA.
finally came. The Ford Foundation’s rejection of Tulane’s proposal created, finally, a consensus on the board that something had to be done. When they met on March 8, it seemed that the dithering might be over. Longenecker spoke first, reporting that he had received an inquiry from Walter Martin at Emory about what steps Tulane had taken or was considering towards admitting blacks. He then informed the board that the Ford Foundation had denied their grant and reported the receipt of an application for admission from a black woman.\(^{162}\) Joseph Jones proclaimed that reconsideration of the admissions policy was of “the utmost importance” and summarized recent events, [calling] attention to the denials by the Foundations of our applications for help and stated that, in his judgment, these denials were prompted solely by [Tulane’s] admissions policy.” After discussion, the board decided: “it was the sense of the meeting that the Board recognize it is incumbent upon it, to the extent it legally can, to change the admissions policy, which on a controlled basis, would permit the admission of any qualified student to attend any college in the University.” On April 12 the board approved the announcement of this decision. Longenecker also directly notified the presidents of the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation.\(^{163}\)

\(^{162}\) Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees, March 8, 1961, TUA. The correspondence from Emory is S. Walter Martin to Robert Lumiansky, February 23, 1961; Longenecker to Martin, February 28, 1961; Martin to Longenecker, March 1, 1961, Box 102, Longenecker Papers, TUA. In a truly remarkable coincidence, the Duke board of trustees was meeting to decide the same question on this very same day. Duke Provost Taylor Cole recounts in his memoirs that he was called out of the meeting in Durham to answer a phone call from a Tulane administrator who “wished to know what ‘progress’ we were making.” Cole, Recollections, 161.

\(^{163}\) Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, March 8, 1961; April 12, 1961, TUA; Longenecker to Henry Heald, October 20, 1961; Longenecker to George Harrar, October 20, 1961, Box 100, Longenecker Papers, TUA. These October letters informed these men that the lawsuit had been filed, but refer to earlier correspondence about the April announcement.
In spite of Joseph Jones’s claim that “the action taken was bold and courageous,” the statement that the administrators released was a masterpiece of equivocation. “Tulane University would admit qualified students regardless of race or color,” it read, “if it were legally permissible.” But, the administrators maintained that it was not legally permissible. Further, they did not plan to seek a declaratory judgment on the question. If they truly intended to desegregate the university, their failure to file such an action is difficult to understand. In an early draft of an article that was eventually published in different form in the alumni magazine, *The Tulanian*, in answer to the question of why the board did not initiate action to remove the legal restrictions, the writer asserted that “The Board felt bound as trustees to respect the expressed wishes of donors.” This is more than unconvincing. It is incoherent. If the administrators wanted to respect the wishes of the donors they could not admit blacks. If they admitted blacks then they could not respect the wishes of the donors.\(^{165}\)

Although it is possible that the board feared bringing such an action because it would have to be filed in a Louisiana state court rather than in federal court, the most likely explanation of their refusal to ask for a declaratory judgment is that they were afraid of the reaction of their friends, neighbors, and members of the white community in general.

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\(^{164}\) The announcement appeared in the local press the following day. *New Orleans Times-Picayune; New Orleans States-Item*, April 13, 1961. In reaction, the South Louisiana White Citizen’s Council purported to be “stunned.” Given the kid-glove treatment they had received from Tulane in the past, they probably were. On campus, a random sampling of student opinion found a wide range of reactions. *Tulane Hullabaloo*, April 28, 1961. An October 1962 poll revealed the same lack of consensus, with 48 percent favoring integration and 42 percent opposed. Tellingly, 90 percent of faculty members and graduate students wanted the school to desegregate. *Tulane Hullabaloo*, October 26, 1962.

\(^{165}\) Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, April 12, 1961; Draft of Question and Answer article, n.d. but late April 1961, Box 99, Longenecker Papers,
Their concern with this was made clear at the April 12 meeting when they authorized the hiring of a public relations firm to help manage the news of their decision. In August, Tulane's director of public relations, Horace Renegar, and Kenneth Gormin, the professional who had been hired for the job, consulted with a New York public relations company as well. That consultation yielded some excellent advice, which went completely unheeded. Earl Newsom, the senior partner of the firm, identified several possible strategies for dealing with "the spotlight of national attention." The first, and the option Newsom endorsed, was to simply admit qualified black students. Newsom pointed out that the administrators had acted for the past eighty years as if they were not bound by the restrictions in Paul Tulane's gift—except for the restriction against blacks. Admitting the students, he argued, had many public relations advantages. It would "avoid a defensive posture in the face of the threatened lawsuit; it would implement the stated opinion of the Administrators on April 12; it would avoid the criticism inherent in excusing itself by legal inhibitions it had not heretofore recognised; it would align itself with the inevitable; and would take a position endorsed by a majority of the American people." Another option was to institute a suit for a declaratory judgment, which had the disadvantage of being unpredictable but was at least positive action. Otherwise, Newson concluded, the board could only say, when the inevitable suit came, that they welcomed it as a way to "clarify the matter." This was the worst possible choice, he concluded, because "it is inconsistent with the facts of University decisions over the years, and this inconsistency would immediately be exposed by thoughtful people all over the land— including editors and commentators. The Administrators would be put in the public

TUA. The final version, quite different from this draft, merely stated that "The Board does not plan to initiate action." The Tulanian, May, 1961.
position of recoiling timidly from prosecution of a line of action that the University has, in reality, consistently followed."

The last option was the one that the administrators chose. One factor seemed to outweigh all others in their decision—the probable strong disapproval on the part of most white New Orleanians, including the upper crust from which the school drew most of its students, of any action to facilitate the admission of blacks to Tulane. The administrators probably hoped that if they waited to be sued white New Orleans would see them as defending themselves rather than as instigating more unwanted racial change in a troubled city. Rufus Harris later endorsed this explanation with his usual candor. In 1963 he wrote that Tulane had not desegregated earlier because of "a small group of illiberal members [of the board] who wanted a court decision ordering them to integrate, which they could hide behind." In 1962 an article in the student newspaper, the Hullabaloo, entitled "The Ford Foundation and Integration: Money Talks" stated it even more bluntly: "Sensitive as they are to public opinion in this region, [the administrators] were extremely reluctant to make any blatant shifts in admissions policy without having a fall guy on whom to pin the blame." 167

As applications from qualified blacks began to roll in, the Tulane board sat back and waited to be sued. Rather than initiate a legal proceeding in which they would argue for what they claimed to want—the right to admit any qualified student—the administrators put themselves in the position of having to defend the exact opposite. The board minutes

166 Earl Newsom to Horace Renegar and Kenneth H. Gormin, August 29, 1961, Box 100, Longenecker Papers, TUA. Tulane officials readily acknowledged among themselves that "other than 'young white persons' have long been admitted," but took great care to keep this out of their public discourse. Horace Renegar to Joseph Jones, May 11, 1962, Box 87, Longenecker Papers, TUA.
reveal a clear understanding that they would be sued and their carefully drafted response to these applicants now seemed to beg for a lawsuit, confessing that the student would be admitted if it were legal.\footnote{168}

On September 1, 1961, Pearlie Hardin Elloie and Barbara Guillory, qualified applicants who had been rejected, filed suit in the federal district court to compel Tulane to admit them.\footnote{169} Tulane’s administrators responded by vigorously trying to stop what they claimed they wanted. Not, they said, because they meant to keep blacks out—they asserted that they wanted them to come in—but because they wanted to defend the donor’s requirements in an effort to find out if they were valid. Whatever it was they thought they were doing, it did not take long before they found out they were playing with fire.\footnote{170}

\footnote{167} Rufus Harris to Frederick Hard, March 8, 1963, Box 40, Harris Papers, TUA; Tulane Hullabaloo, April 13, 1962.
\footnote{168} At least thirteen applications or requests for application materials were received from blacks by the middle of June. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, June 14, 1961, TUA. Among the first and best of these applications were those of Pearlie Hardin Elloie and Barbara Marie Guillory, both graduates of Dillard University. Dillard political science professor Paul Furey and Rosa Freeman Keller had been quietly working to prepare a legal challenge to Tulane’s admissions policy, and had identified these two women as potential applicants. Keller and Furey were probably unaware of the Tulane board’s decision on March 8 when they undertook this effort. Elloie’s application was dated March 6, and Furey sent it to Tulane’s admissions director, Cliff Wing, on March 13, after the March 8 board decision but before the April 12 announcement. Furey included both a cover letter and a brief personal note. In the note, he acknowledged that he had encouraged the application and that it was his “intention to put Tulane University squarely on the spot . . .” In the letter, he said that he had “selected this student with the same care with which the Brooklyn Dodgers selected Jackie Robinson for big league baseball.” March 13, 1961, Box 102, Longenecker Papers, TUA. On Keller’s role, see Mohr and Gordon, Tulane, 262–65. The rejection letters are in Robert Lumiansky to Miss Barbara Marie Guillory, June 23, 1961; W.L. Kindelsperger to Pearlie Hardin Elloie, April 19, 1961, Box 100, Longenecker Papers, TUA.
\footnote{170} Despite, or perhaps because of, the clear invitation to a lawsuit, the administrators expressed frequent concern that this action not be perceived as a “friendly” suit. There is
On March 28, 1962, U.S. District Court Judge J. Skelly Wright, a New Orleans native and the man who had ordered the desegregation of the New Orleans public schools, granted the plaintiff’s motion for summary judgment. Just as the administrators had feared throughout the late 1950s, Tulane’s undeniable public aspects provided a wedge for a ruling that could strip away the school’s independence. Wright declared that the racial restrictions in the original donations were unenforceable. But he went much farther. Wright ruled, in sweeping terms, that Tulane had sufficient state contact to bring it within reach of the 14th Amendment, and its refusal to admit black applicants was unconstitutional “state action.” He enjoined the university to admit the two plaintiffs. 171 Tulane’s trustees were horrified. They would never acquiesce in a decision that could conceivably make them subject to the whims of the Louisiana legislature, particularly at a time when that body was actively attempting to curb academic freedom at Louisiana State University. Wright’s probably intentional failure to address one of the other issues—whether the heirs of Paul Tulane could now sue for the recission of his donation (or even the present value of that gift)—also caused consternation, in spite of the

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171 In spite of Tulane’s loud claims that Wright had “ruled” that Tulane was a public school, he did not seem to claim that Tulane was a “public university,” only that it had enough public aspects to bring it under the sway of the 14th Amendment. Wright found these public aspects in several areas: Tulane was originally a public university, and its name was changed by the state legislature in 1846; it retained state university property and three state government representatives as ex-officio members of its board; it operated under a special state franchise which provided a tax exemption for state property; and, most arguably, it performed a function “impressed with a public interest.” Guillory v. Administrators of Tulane University, 203 F. Supp. 858 (March 1962). See also New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 29, 1962; Tulane Hullabaloo, April 6, 1962. On Wright, see Arthur S. Miller, A “Capacity for Outrage:” The Judicial Odyssey of J. Skelly Wright (Westport, Conn., 1984).
palpable lack of interest in such a suit on the part of the three Tulane sisters in St.
Petersburg, Florida.\textsuperscript{172}

Angered by Wright's decision and by the sarcastic language he directed at the
university's board, Tulane immediately announced that it would appeal the decision. In a
letter to Rice University's president, Kenneth S. Pitzer, Longenecker stressed that it was
the uncertainty about Tulane's public status that prompted the appeal. "While it maybe
said that Judge Wright's reference to Tulane University as a public institution is 'obiter
dicta,' there is enough doubt about the meaning of his judgment to make it necessary for
Tulane not to accept the decision . . . ."\textsuperscript{173} Tulane's lawyers quickly shifted strategy when
Wright was appointed to the Second Circuit Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C., and
was replaced on the New Orleans District bench by Frank Ellis. Rather than appeal, they
filed a motion for a new trial, which Ellis granted on May 12, 1962.\textsuperscript{174}

News of the board's refusal to accept Wright's decision brought varied reaction.
While it certainly helped Tulane's reputation among staunch segregationists and the
Citizen's Council, it drew anger from other quarters. In correspondence with Mark
Etheridge, a long-time friend and the editor of the \textit{Louisville Courier-Journal}, Rufus
Harris wrote:

\textsuperscript{172} Lida Tulane to Susan B. Keane, June 29, 1962; Susan Kean to Lida Tulane, July 6,
1962, Box 100, Longenecker Papers, TUA. The sisters were brought in as third party
defendants in 1962.
\textsuperscript{173} Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, April 5, 1962; Longenecker to
Kenneth Pitzer, May 29, 1962, Box 102, Longenecker Papers, TUA.
\textsuperscript{174} Tulane's attorneys must have judged, probably correctly, that they were better off with
a new trial under a less liberal judge than in front of the activist Fifth Circuit Court of
Appeals. On the Fifth Circuit, see Bass, \textit{Unlikely Heroes}. Remarkably, just before he left
New Orleans Judge Wright spoke at a large meeting sponsored by the AAUP at Tulane's
University Center, discussing the Tulane case and segregation law in general. \textit{New
And speaking of good old Tulane, I somehow bleed for her. So much of
the image of her stimulating life and action she has lost. That hurts, for it is
so much easier to lose it than to form it. Better than anyone, I know her
difficulty. She is in very bad trustee leadership and action. Too many new
trustees came in who are too juvenile, materialistic and egotistic. They came
within too short a period to be either trained or absorbed. You know so well
that such training is frequently necessary if the fine university is to escape
their basic ignorance and lack of sympathy or understanding of the nature of
a great university and its raison d’etre. Even in the awful segregation
conflagration - not to mention some other juvenile decisions – they have not
permitted the University to manifest any leadership, or prepare the
community for its responsible action and life in a desegregated society. Their
posture of bitter enders is almost tragic.\footnote{Harris to Mark Etheridge, April 11, 1962, Box 55, Harris Papers, TUA. Harris also
wrote Skelly Wright, congratulating him on his appointment to the DC Circuit and on his
decision in the Tulane case. “I regret to observe the assumed petulance of the Tulane
Board over it,” he wrote. Harris to Wright, April 6, 1962, Box 55, Harris Papers, TUA.}

This correspondence is of particular interest because Etheridge was a member of the
board of the Ford Foundation. His reply to Harris indicates that Etheridge believed
Tulane’s administrators had deliberately misled the Foundation about their intentions
regarding desegregation (a problem that could easily have been avoided by filing a suit
for a declaratory judgment):

I share your sorrow over Tulane; in fact, I’m shocked at what seems to be
the board’s turnabout from what I had understood the situation to be. We on
the Ford board were told that this suit was to protect the trustees, that the
outcome was foregone and that the board would not vigorously appeal. That
does not appear to be true. We voted Tulane $750,000, if I remember the
figure correctly, in spite of the feeling of almost all the members of the board
that we were not willing to vote money to private institutions which, if not
legally bound by the Supreme Court decision, were at least morally so. I must
say that in my own case had I known that Tulane was doing more than to
protect itself from Paul Tulane’s will, I would have voted differently.\footnote{Harris to Mark Etheridge, April 11, 1962, Box 55, Harris Papers, TUA. Harris also
wrote Skelly Wright, congratulating him on his appointment to the DC Circuit and on his
decision in the Tulane case. “I regret to observe the assumed petulance of the Tulane
Board over it,” he wrote. Harris to Wright, April 6, 1962, Box 55, Harris Papers, TUA.}

Longenecker and the board faced other complications in the spring of 1962. The local
CORE chapter, reinvigorated after the 1961 Freedom Rides (in which Tulane students
participated), was again organizing demonstrations and sit-ins at downtown lunch
counters. Although internal problems led the now numerous Tulane student members to leave CORE in early 1962, these student were far from defeated. They responded by bringing direct action to the Tulane campus. In January and February, and again in April, they staged numerous interracial sit-ins in the cafeteria of the Tulane University Center. Longenecker and the board stepped very carefully, conscious that their litigation was pending and wanting to avoid any violent incidents. By and large, they simply tolerated the sit-ins, stationing security in the room but otherwise doing little. Only one student, Ed Clark, was suspended, and he was later allowed to return. Much of Tulane’s faculty supported the students. The College of Arts and Sciences passed several resolutions urging that students not be suspended for the sit-ins, that the University Center be desegregated, and that black students be admitted. The board rejected these resolutions and prepared for the trial scheduled to begin that summer.¹⁷⁷

The trial took place in early August.¹⁷⁸ Frank Ellis’s decision, however, was not handed down until December. The months in between were difficult ones on campus. Faculty who favored desegregation suspected that the board was dragging its feet. The faculties of the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Social work both adopted

¹⁷⁶ Mark Etheridge to Harris, April 16, 1962, Box 55, Harris Papers, TUA.
¹⁷⁷ Tulane Police Report, February 7, 1962; Jesse B. Morgan to Longenecker, April 19, 1962; Jesse B. Morgan to Clarence Scheps, January 29, 1962; Horace Renegar, Report to the Board of Trustees, May 2, 1962, Box 102, Longenecker Papers, TUA. Fairclough, Race and Democracy, chapter 10, is a detailed look at nonviolent direct action in Louisiana from 1960 to 1962. Mohr and Gordon, Tulane, 276–86, discuss Tulane students’ involvement with CORE and the sit-ins at the University Center. By summer, Joseph Jones was clearly getting anxious for some resolution. In June, he sent other administrators copies of the announcements of desegregation at Duke and Vanderbilt, along with letter that noted that Emory had also resolved to admit blacks as soon as they had their tax issue taken care of. Jones to Clifford Favrot, June 4, 1962, Box 87, Longenecker Papers, TUA.
resolutions that implicitly threatened resignations if the racial ban was not dropped soon. The College of Engineering, on the other hand, expressed its willingness to abide by whatever the board decided. Students, almost equally divided on segregation, agitated on both sides. Cafeteria sit-ins began again in October, now with tempers flaring, fueled in part by the crisis over James Meredith’s enrollment at the University of Mississippi. After violence nearly broke out during a cafeteria protest on October 8, the campus quieted down, but it was an anxious peace.

On December 5, 1962, Judge Ellis announced his decision. Tulane, Ellis said, was a private institution that could not be compelled to admit blacks under the 14th Amendment. However, following the reasoning of the United States Supreme Court in *Shelley v. Kramer*, Ellis also concluded that the racial restrictions in Tulane’s founding documents were unenforceable. Thus, the court would not force Tulane to open its doors to blacks, but neither would it prevent it. Whether the heirs could sue for return of the gift

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179 Minutes of the Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences, Special Meeting, September 14, 1962; Minutes of the Faculty of the School of Social Work, September 28, 1962; Proposal of the Faculty of the School of Social Work, October 1, 1962, Box 87, Longenecker Papers; Statement of the Faculty of the School of Engineering, Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, October 8, 1962, TUA. Longenecker also received a letter from a group of Newcomb faculty who deplored the university's failure to exercise responsible leadership on race relations. Caecilia Davis to Longenecker, November 5, 1962, Box 102, Longenecker Papers, TUA.

180 Tulane Police Report, October 3, October 8, 1962, Box 102, Longenecker Papers, TUA; *Tulane Hullabaloo*, October 12, 1962. On campus response to the trouble at Ole Miss, see *Tulane Hullabaloo*, October 5, October 12, November 2, 1962. More ordinary problems associated with the continuation of segregation did not dissipate either. In November, for example, Tulane had to turn away a NSF grant for a summer mathematics institute because it contained a nondiscrimination requirement. Edmund McIlhenny to Longenecker, November 15, 1962; Longenecker to McIlhenny, November 19, 1962, Box 99, Longenecker Papers, TUA.

was uncertain, but the disinclination of Paul Tulane’s relatives to do so, coupled with awareness of the federal courts’ refusals to enforce any private racial restrictions, led Tulane’s attorney to believe there was no danger. Two days later the board’s law committee met and decided that Tulane would not appeal. On December 12 the full board endorsed this conclusion and voted to admit Barbara Guillory and Pearlie Hardin Elloie for the spring semester of 1963. Rufus Harris telegraphed his congratulations to Longenecker on December 13.¹⁸²

At Tulane, then, segregation ended with a whimper. Although the university anticipated media coverage and possibly demonstrations at registration that spring, nothing happened. The first black student to register (there were eleven that semester), Percell Church, signed up for classes on January 24. A memo to President Longenecker reported that “It was an overstatement that not an eyebrow was raised. Very quiet. No one seemed to give a damn.”¹⁸³

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At Rice, 1960 began with change. That January, the trustees proposed to change the school’s name, replacing the specialized term “institute” with the broader “university.”

¹⁸² John Pat Little to Joseph Jones, December 13, 1962, Box 100, Longenecker Papers; Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Administrators, December 12, 1962; Harris to Kathryn Davis, December 13, 1962, Box 102, Longenecker Papers, TUA. The administrators announced the decision immediately. New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 13, 1962; The Tulanian, January 1963. On December 15, Mark Etheridge’s Louisville Courier Journal praised Judge Ellis and the Tulane board for removing the “dead hand of the past.”
¹⁸³ Horace Renegar to Longenecker, December 29, 1962, Box 100, Longenecker Papers; Interdepartmental Memo, January 25, 1963, Box 99, Longenecker Papers, TUA.
The new name took effect in July. In August, President William Houston went on leave after a heart attack. He resigned in September, when it became clear that he would not be able to resume his duties with full vigor. Provost Carey Croneis became acting president, serving while the board searched for Houston’s successor.

Determined to bring in a president who could lead Rice to greatness in an era of rapid change, the trustees chose Kenneth Sanborn Pitzer from the University of California at Berkeley. A native Californian, Pitzer received his BS in chemistry from the California Institute of Technology and his Ph.D. from Berkeley. The new president was a distinguished chemist, a member of the National Academy of Sciences and a former chairman of the General Advisory Committee of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). In the late 1940s he was instrumental, as director of research for the newly established AEC, in crafting close ties between the apparatus of government science and the universities. No doubt these ties figured large in the thinking of the Rice board, which had its sights set on a major federal research installation.

The choice proved to be a wise one. Besides being a capable and well-connected administrator and politician, Pitzer, like Rice’s first president Edgar Odell Lovett, was a man of both vision and great energy. His tenure at Rice would be marked by huge gains in the quality and prestige of the school, as Pitzer dedicated himself to the expansion of

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184 Meiners, A History of Rice University, 196–97; Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees, December 16, 1959, March 30, 1960, June 29, 1960. Minutes, Rice University. 185 Houston to Faculty, July 27, 1960, Box 13, Pitzer Papers, WRC; Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees, July 27, 1960, September 19, 1960, Rice University; Rice Thresher, September 10, 23, 1960. Houston was given the title of chancellor and appointed distinguished professor of physics. When Carey Croneis was named chancellor upon Pitzer’s appointment as president, Houston’s title became honorary chancellor. Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees, May 31, 1961. Houston remained a presence on campus and in the city in retirement. He actively supported the board in its decision.
the graduate school, the strengthening of the humanities and social sciences, and the aggressive recruitment of nationally prominent faculty members. He quickly put together a five-year plan that called for targeted expansion of certain departments, including a new department of space science, a substantial increase in the number of faculty, more graduate fellowships, and several new buildings. With his arrival, a sense of excitement also came to the Rice campus.\textsuperscript{187}

Convincing Pitzer to take the job required some concessions. In an interview in 1994, he recounted the negotiations that brought him to Rice. Like William Houston, Pitzer was deeply committed to his field and was determined not to take on a presidency unless he could continue his own research. George Brown and J. Newton Rayzor, the trustees who recruited him most actively, assured him that he could. Potentially more troublesome was the matter of racial restrictions. Pitzer found the continuation of a racial bar in admissions at this time “just ridiculous” and made it clear that he would not come to Rice, indeed could not do the job of improving the school, if the ban on black admissions were not removed. Surprisingly, Brown and Rayzor indicated that “this was no longer a serious matter of controversy with the board.” While the trustees had not actually voted on the issue, Pitzer understood that “Rayzor and Brown knew their colleagues . . . well enough . . .” and that “there was no question in their mind, that once the legalities and . . . alumni relations, community relations, procedure, and so forth, were sorted out, that they would move.”\textsuperscript{188}

\textsuperscript{186} Geiger, \textit{Research and Relevant Knowledge}, 20.
\textsuperscript{187} Meiners, \textit{History of Rice University}, 199–200.
\textsuperscript{188} Interview with Kenneth S. Pitzer, conducted by John Boles and Louis Marchiafava, March 22, 1994, Rice History Project Oral History Series, WRC.
Rayzor and Brown's understanding of the need for Rice to end segregation sprang from the discussions surrounding the nondiscrimination clause in federal contracts that began in the late 1950s, coupled with their ambitions for a major federal research laboratory on land Rice controlled southeast of Houston.\textsuperscript{189} Research and instruction contracts with this kind of facility would provide enormous benefits to Rice in terms of both money and prestige, allowing the school to use the NASA laboratory as a lever to strengthen its advanced programs in the sciences and engineering. Only the Rice charter's requirement of segregation stood as a significant hindrance to these plans. There can be little doubt that George Brown and Newton Rayzor would not walk away from a deal that promised so much to the university in order to maintain a ban on black students.

Even before the board announced Pitser's selection, the issue of nondiscrimination requirements arose again. In May 1961 economics professor Edgar Edwards received a grant from the Ford Foundation for a summer institute to be held on the Rice campus. The agreement required that admission be open to all qualified applicants, regardless of race. Complicating matters was the fact that Rice was considering approaching the Ford Foundation for one of the major Challenge Grant awards. Newton Rayzor and acting president Carey Croneis approved the contract, and two blacks attended the summer class.\textsuperscript{190}

At the September 27, 1961, board meeting, Pitser's first as president, his own research contract with the AEC—the one he had insisted on keeping as a condition of accepting

\textsuperscript{189} In 1959, at the suggestion of NASA director Keith Glennan, Rice was working on a proposal for a $1 million grant for materials research. This grant would carry the standard federal non-discrimination clause.

\textsuperscript{190} Supplementary Statement Concerning the Proposed Institute Sponsored by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, October 16, 1963, Rice files, K-93,
Rice’s presidency—became an issue. Newton Rayzor reported that “in view of the inclusion in the contract of a new and much more stringent non-discrimination clause,” board member and Rice attorney Malcolm Lovett had reviewed the document. The board’s Faculty, Student and Alumni Committee also thoroughly discussed it.\textsuperscript{191} The majority of that committee wanted to approve the contract, but Rayzor (and certainly Brown and Pitzer) wanted the full board to face the issue. After lengthy debate, the board approved execution.\textsuperscript{192}

There was no mistaking the meaning of this decision. On Rayzor’s motion, the trustees now directly addressed the underlying issue, the future of segregation at Rice:

It was also the sense of the meeting that the University’s attorneys should be requested to give consideration to all restrictions contained in its charter and in the Indenture from William Marsh Rice pursuant to which the University was established, including those relating to the class or classes of persons who may be accepted as students, both undergraduate and graduate, and the charging of tuition [following the express direction of its 1891 charter, Rice imposed no tuition charges], and to advise this Board fully concerning their views and recommendations on ways and means of meeting and accommodating the operation and affairs of the University to broader policies of admission and employment more in keeping with the existing policies and requirements of other comparable institutions.\textsuperscript{193}

\textsuperscript{191} Leo S. Shamblin, Rice’s business manager, sent Malcolm Lovett a copy of the nondiscrimination clause in Pitzer’s AEC contract, noting that “Dr. Pitzer is very anxious to execute this contract.” L.S. Shamblin to H. Malcolm Lovett, September 21, 1961, Rice files, K-93, Baker&Botts, Houston, Texas. The new clause, mandated by President Kennedy’s Executive Order 10925 of March 1961, was much more detailed and required much more from contractors, in effect shifting the burden of compliance with federal policy onto their shoulders. It ran to seven sections and filled a full page. While the trustees may have concluded that they could sign this document on some technical basis, there is no doubt at all that they were violating the intent and the spirit of the clause. This was playing with fire. The penalty for failure to comply was cancellation of the contract and loss of eligibility for future contracts.

\textsuperscript{192} Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees, September 27, 1961, Rice University.

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid. Interestingly, several people in the room, among them Rayzor, Brown, Pitzer, and Croneis, already knew what Rice’s lawyers thought. Two days before this meeting
Pitzer must have left his first board meeting as Rice’s president hopeful that the problem of racial restrictions would quickly be solved. It would not, however, be quite as easy as it looked that day. Apart from Brown and Rayzor, two powerful voices, there was no real appetite for desegregation among the Rice trustees, no eagerness to step forward and make what they believed would be an unpopular change.

But the problem of securing badly needed funds kept forcing the trustees back to the issue of racial discrimination. Throughout late 1961 and into 1962 the board was preoccupied with how to pay for the improvements that they had hired Kenneth Pitzer to oversee. In a memorandum to a board committee charged with planning ways to bring in money, Carey Croneis (now Rice’s chancellor) laid out the difficulty. To sustain any improvement, he demonstrated, Rice would need to raise about $33 million over three years, with at least $11 million coming from foundations, including an anticipated major grant from the Ford Foundation. Failure to do this, Croneis suggested, would lead to a very different future for the institution. If the trustees decided that Rice should simply live within its current means, and with its charter restrictions against charging tuition and admitting black students, he was certain that Rice would “immediately lose all standing

Malcolm Lovett distributed to them a 13-page legal analysis of the charter’s racially restrictive admissions clause. Malcolm Lovett to George R. Brown, September 25, 1961, Box 16, Pitzer Papers, WRC. At the board’s next meeting, this decision was reaffirmed when Rayzor submitted another contract for approval. This contract, also with the AEC, was for work to be done by Rice’s biology department, and “provided for additional research, an extension of the period, and certain changes in the contract language including the new non-discrimination clause.” This time the board authorized Pitzer and Chancellor Croneis to execute any subsequent contracts that required compliance with the equal opportunity provisions of President Kennedy’s Executive Order 10925. The trustees also restated their instructions that the school’s lawyers “determine what action is necessary to enable the University to admit qualified acceptable candidates without regard to race or color.” Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees, October 25, 1961, Rice University.
in the academic world. It would remain an unorthodox and altogether extraordinary anachronism in a fast-moving and constantly improving academic world. It would attract few outstanding students, hold few, if any, leading scholars, and deserve and probably receive very little additional financial support.” The committee rejected this vision and reaffirmed their commitment to expanding and improving the university. They also agreed to recommend to the full board that they begin a campaign to increase the endowment by $33 million by 1966.\footnote{Carey Croneis, Memorandum, April 17, 1962; Minutes of a Meeting of Special Committee – Board of Governors, April 17, 1962, Rice files, K-93, Baker&Botts.}

Happily, a major infusion of federal funds was now all but assured. After years of back-room politicking by George Brown and Congressman Albert Thomas—with the help of vice president Lyndon Johnson—NASA announced on September 19, 1961, that its new $60 million manned spaceflight laboratory would be built “on a thousand acres of land to be made available to the government by Rice University.”\footnote{NASA Press Release, quoted in Henry C. Dethloff, Suddenly Tomorrow Came: The History of the Johnson Space Center, (Washington, DC, 1993), 40; Houston Chronicle, September 19, 1961. The announcement made front-page headlines in all of Houston’s newspapers. For a detailed look at NASA’s decision, see William D. Angel, Jr., “The Politics of Space: NASA’s Decision to Locate the Manned Space Center in Houston,” Houston Review, 6 (1984), 63–81.} Well before this decision was made public, Pitzer began work on a comprehensive proposal for Rice to handle part of the new facility’s research and instruction needs. In early August, Chancellor Croneis met twice in Washington with James Webb, NASA’s administrator, and when the official site selection team visited Houston on August 24 they spent a day and a half with Rice faculty, administrators, and trustees discussing possible cooperative ventures.\footnote{Carey Croneis, Memorandum to Members of the Rice Board of Governors, August 31, 1961, Box 2, Houston Personal Papers, WRC; Kenneth Pitzer, Letter of Intent, Rice University and the Manned Space Flight Laboratory of the National Aeronautics and
end of the year Homer Newell, the director of NASA’s Office of Space Sciences, had held discussions with Pitzer and Croneis about the general relationship between Rice and the Manned Space Center, as well as more detailed negotiations with representatives of many of Rice’s science and engineering departments. Although Newell made no specific promises at that time, it was clear that NASA contemplated funding a great deal of instruction and research at Rice.\textsuperscript{197}

At the same time, the effects of the new executive order on nondiscrimination were making their way down to individual contractors. Pitzer’s own 1961 research agreement with the Atomic Energy Commission was the first one that raised the issue of compliance, but it was far from the last. Throughout 1961 and 1962 Rice’s lawyers and business manager struggled with the compliance forms, eager for the federal money but increasingly boxed in by the government’s requirements.\textsuperscript{198} The national foundations also made it known to Pitzer that they had run out of patience, and that desegregation was now a requisite for favorable consideration of grant proposals.

At the board meeting in May 1962, eight months after the initial decision to seek legal advice on changing the charter, the close connection between the need to raise money and the need to desegregate was apparent: “Mr. Brown opened discussion on the proposed fund drive . . . and court action to permit charging tuition, reporting on recent discussions [he] had with three of the Directors of The Ford Foundation. He stated that as a result of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[197] Homer E. Newell, Conference Report, December 19, 1961, Apollo Series Documents, Johnson Space Center Archives, Rice University.
\item[198] John D. McCully, Sr. to L.S. Shamblin, October 23, 1961, Rice files, K-93, Baker&Botts; Malcolm Lovett to Walter Reynolds, April 26, 1962, Box 19, Pitzer Papers, WRC; Malcolm Lovett to Leo Shamblin, October 16, 1961; Carey Croneis to Pitzer, October 18, 1961, Box 16, Pitzer Papers, WRC.
\end{footnotes}
these discussions he was of the opinion that . . . our chances would be enhanced by dealing first with the matter of tuition and racial discrimination . . ..” Malcolm Lovett then presented a report on his firm’s legal opinion regarding the proposed court action. The attorneys concluded that “the matter of a tuition charge was largely a detail of administration and not a departure from the purpose of the trust while the question of integration would be tied in more with the purpose of the trust; that if the Board is going to take this move it must go in for a specific purpose and the consent of the Trustees would be a prerequisite to such action.” More than a simple board vote would be needed to make the change, though the board’s approval was a first step. Rice’s trustees had only deviated from charter language in the past with the express consent of the state of Texas. They clearly believed that such consent was necessary for this change as well. 199

The extent to which financial consideration now set the terms of debate was evident in the discussion that followed. No one, apparently, contended that it was wrong or offensive or in violation of southern tradition to allow blacks to enroll at Rice. Instead, several trustees argued that taking steps to remove the bar on black admissions would actually hinder rather than help Rice’s efforts to solve its financial problem. Pointing no doubt to community opposition to desegregation, they argued that “we would have a much better chance of raising funds without injecting the colored question.” George Brown, however, never wavered. The issues of tuition and segregation, he answered, were secondary. The point was to bring in enough money for the school to aggressively pursue its program of expansion. Whatever it took to accomplish that was what Rice

199 An attorney in his firm presented this conclusion to Lovett in a memo in October 1961, not long after the board asked for a legal opinion on how to change Rice’s racial restrictions. Memorandum, October 21, 1961, Rice files, K-93, Baker&Botts.
would have to do. And Brown, with his deep understanding of Washington, knew perfectly well that raising the money was conditioned on changing the admissions policy.

Newton Rayzor, also thoroughly convinced of the need to change, immediately offered a motion to authorize the attorneys “to proceed forthwith to secure authority from the courts to charge tuition and admit colored people.” It was seconded, but before the vote could be taken several board members asked that before Rice acted “an effort be made to build up sentiment in favor of these proposals.” Brown went along with this but indicated that no more than another month should pass before moving forward.200

The board sent one of the governors, James W. Hargrove, to meet with the executive board of the Rice alumni association. At their June 5 meeting, Hargrove told the officers about the deferred motion to authorize legal action to remove the racial restrictions and the ban on tuition. After he succinctly described the financial and recruiting pressures that led the trustees to contemplate action, the group’s secretary recorded that “the majority of those present felt that due to these changing times, we should set our personal feelings to one side and wholeheartedly support Rice . . ..”201 Hargrove came back to the trustees with the impression that although some alumni would have objections, they were largely sympathetic to the moves. After yet another “full discussion,” though, the board still did not vote on the original resolution authorizing legal action. This time, they agreed that Malcolm Lovett needed to meet with Texas’s Attorney General, who would be the defendant in any suit to change Rice’s charter, to gauge his reaction.

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200 Minutes of Meeting of the Board of Trustees, May 23, 1962, Rice University.
201 Association of Rice Alumni, Minutes of the Executive Board Meeting, June 5, 1962, Box 2, Chancellor’s Papers, WRC. At the next meeting this minute was stricken on the grounds that it was “an expression of opinion by the Executive Secretary and not a statement of fact . . ..” Association of Rice Alumni, Minutes of the Executive Board Meeting, September 11, 1962, Box 2, Chancellor’s Papers, WRC.
While the board debated matters of timing and legal strategy, the rest of the campus remained largely in the dark. Soon after Pitzer's arrival in 1961, English professor Wilfred Dowden, the chairman of Rice's chapter of the American Association of University Professors, approached him about the prospects for integration. Pitzer related his conviction that it had to happen soon and urged Dowden to let this be known to the faculty. He also, however, urged that the chapter not adopt a formal resolution on the matter, which he felt would be a tactical mistake.  

Segregation continued to be an issue in recruiting faculty. Edgar O. Edwards, head of the department of economics and business administration, informed Pitzer of the results of his attempt to hire an established scholar for a full professorship. While the man was “greatly attracted to the opportunities which exist at Rice” and Edwards believed he had an excellent chance of bringing him on, that hope was abruptly destroyed. “When he learned that Rice was a segregated university at present,” Edwards reported, “he terminated the discussion.”

Rice students now debated desegregation almost endlessly, but seemed to have no notion that its demise on campus was near. The sit-in movement captured attention at Rice as it did throughout the country. In April 1960 the Rice Thresher surveyed campus opinion on the “sit downs,” which had spread to Houston in March and numbered several Rice students among the participants. Every one of the nine people interviewed expressed some degree of support for the protestors, although several, including English professor

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202 Kenneth Pitzer, File memo, September 22, 1961, Box 19, Pitzer Papers, WRC. Pitzer also confidentially told Dowden that “Rayzor thinks that retirements from the board will yield a better climate in a year.”

203 Memorandum, Edgar O. Edwards to Kenneth S. Pitzer, January 15, 1962, Box 16, Pitzer Papers, WRC.

204 In April, 1961, a rumor that Rice would soon charge tuition made the rounds on campus. It was quickly squelched by Carey Croneis, who dismissed the idea as “improbable.” Rice Thresher, April 28, 1961.
Dowden, worried that race relations might be damaged rather than helped by the sit-ins. In the same issue *Thresher* staff writer Griffin Smith wrote a long piece that strongly condemned the movement on the grounds that the sit-ins violated the property rights of the store owners and suggested that only the "radical agitators of the NAACP" supported it.\(^{205}\) Throughout April students wrote excited letters taking all sorts of positions, although the *Thresher* itself resolutely refused to take any position at all. At the end of the month, the Rice Forum presented a panel discussion on black civil rights, bringing several Texas Southern University students and leaders of the Houston sit-ins to Rice for the event.\(^{206}\)

While the local scene quickly settled down, with Houston's downtown lunch counters quietly desegregating on August 5, 1960, interest in racial issues continued to grow on campus.\(^{207}\) The new editorial staff of the *Thresher* kept the issue of desegregation alive on campus during 1961 and took an unambiguous stance against segregation. When five Rice students were arrested at a sit-in at the train station in late February, the paper praised them for their strong moral convictions and boldly and completely condemned segregation: "The responsibility for the arrest of these young citizens does not lie with them. It lies with the outmoded and inhumane Southern institution of segregation."


\(^{206}\) *Rice Thresher*, April 22, 29, 1960. Two of the black students who participated in the panel discussion had been appointed to the newly formed "Citizen's Relations Committee" by Houston Mayor Lewis Cutrer. On the workings of this committee, which included Rice students, see Cole, *No Color is My Kind*, 43–46, 53.

\(^{207}\) On the news blackout that accompanied desegregation of the lunch counters, see Cole, *No Color is My Kind*, 54–57. While the Houston press refused to discuss local desegregation, the national press was excoriating them for their failure to do their job. "Blackout in Houston," *Time* (September 12, 1960), p.68; Ben H. Bagdikian, "Houston's Shackled Press," *Atlantic Monthly* (August 1966).
end, it lies with this community and all others like it which tolerate two classes of
Americans.208 In late November 1961 the Rice Student Senate passed a resolution
favoring the elimination of racial restrictions in admissions and the use of Rice facilities.
The Senate then sponsored a campus-wide referendum on the resolution. More than 75
percent of the student body turned out for the vote, the largest total in Rice election
history. The undergraduates approved the call for an end to segregation on campus by a
two-to-one margin, the graduate students by four to one, and the faculty by eight to one.
Hopes were high that the vote would have some influence with the trustees.209

Alumni also pressed Rice for change. "I realize that there are legal complications to
[desegregation] because of the terms of the original endowment," wrote one alumna to
Croneis in late 1961, but "surely these are not insurmountable in a time when the
necessity of our witness to a belief in democracy is so important." Croneis assured the

208 Rice Thresher, March 3, 1961. In September, the Thresher reported that one of the
Rice students had been convicted on charges of unlawful assembly and that her attorney
called several Rice professors, including Herbert H. Lehner of the German department
and Louis Mackey of philosophy, as defense witnesses. Other Rice professors attended
the proceedings. All agreed that she had been unfairly convicted. Rice Thresher,
September 29, 1961. Another Rice student was convicted of the same offense in a
separate trial. December 1, 1961.
209 Rice Thresher, December 1, 15, 1961; January 10, 1962. Rice Student Association
president Reed Martin sent the results to Pitzer with this note: "Although this vote was
termed an ‘opinion poll’ because it was not binding on any university policies, it was
not intended to be an idle expression of opinion. It is our sincere hope that this expression
of student opinion may be useful in an evaluation of this delicate and important
problem." Reed Martin to Pitzer, December 21, 1961, Box 16, Pitzer Papers, WRC. The
data that Martin sent to Pitzer was broken down in several ways—by residential college,
by year in school, and by major. In every case but one, there was a substantial majority in
favor of desegregation. Only the PE-Commerce majors—the athletes—voted against the
referendum. A bare 14 percent favored it.
correspondent, and several others, that the matter was "receiving full consideration" from
the board.²¹⁰

In July 1962 Malcolm Lovett notified the board that attorneys in his firm were
now preparing briefs on both desegregation and the tuition matter and assured them
that Rice would have "the full cooperation of the Attorney General."²¹¹ Finally, on
September 26 he distributed copies of the proposed resolution and the trustees
voted. Unanimously, on a motion made by Newton Rayzor and seconded by Daniel
Bullard, they approved a lawsuit to change Rice's charter to allow them to charge
tuition and admit black students. (At the same time, the trustees also passed a
resolution conveying the land for the Manned Space Center to NASA.)²¹²

Still, months passed and the school's attorneys did not file the petition. Pitzer
grew increasingly alarmed. Sometime in late 1962 or very early 1963 (almost
certainly over the Christmas holiday) he drafted a letter to Malcolm Lovett, which
he may never have sent but which clearly reveals his state of mind. In it, Pitzer
pleaded for action. "I hope you will not misunderstand," he wrote, "if I take this
opportunity to emphasize the urgency of action on our legal proceeding related to
charter restrictions." Pitzer feared several things. First, the delay in filing the suit
was holding back the desperately needed capital campaign. Pitzer worried that

²¹⁰ Kathleen Henderson to Carey Croneis, September 23, 1961; Croneis to Kathleen
Henderson, October 2, 1961, Box 2, Houston Personal Papers, WRC.
²¹¹ Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees, June 27; July 25, 1962. Lovett, who
had been a member of the Board of Governors was elected a trustee at this meeting.
²¹² Unanimity was arrived at by having only the trustees, and not the governors, vote on
the resolution. Still, apparently only one governor objected to dropping the restrictive
admissions policy. James O. Winston, Jr. to George Brown, July 6, 1962, Rice files, K-
93, Baker&Botts. Winston clearly understood the financial arguments in favor of the
change and rejected them on moral grounds. He wrote: "it would seem appropriate that
“enthusiasm related to Rice’s part in bringing NASA to Houston and to our Semicentennial [will be] dissipated before the capital campaign can be started [despite being chartered in 1891, Rice did not open to students until 1912, and hence the academic year 1962>63 saw extensive semi-centennial celebrations].” What made Pitzer really uncomfortable, though, was his sense that Rice was now alone and truly exposed on the issue of segregation. A joint funding proposal to a major foundation from the schools in the Council of Southern Universities had to be revised to make clear that Rice was the only one that maintained segregation in admissions. Pitzer was aghast. “[T]his correction,” he wrote, “cannot help but call attention to the fact that Rice is the last of this group of universities to remove racial restrictions. The longer this situation remains, the more Rice will be labeled as a provincial school apparently out of touch with national or even regional trends and the more trouble we will have overcoming the damage thus caused. One story in a national publication pointing out our slowness in acting to remove restrictions could do very great damage. We have been lucky so far; let us not stretch our luck further.”

Pitzer also feared reaction closer to home. He told Lovett that “the situation with respect to students and faculty is also becoming precarious. By the natural leakage of information . . . most of the faculty and student body are now aware of the situation and many know that the decision was really made last summer. I have been succesful so far in explaining the delay on the basis of the need of legal

the top administration of Rice avoid in every way possible the appearance of sacrificing principle to financial expediency.”

213 Draft of letter, Pitzer to Malcolm Lovett, n.d. but late 1962 to very early 1963, Box 16, Pitzer Papers, WRC.
preparation and later of the change in Attorney General. Frankly, I have no further explanation. I am seriously concerned lest the faculty and student body come to believe that this action is being intentionally delayed." In closing, Pitzer again emphasized the dire consequences of failure to act. He urged "immediate filing of our action and accompanying publication of the Board Resolution. Even a day of unnecessary delay should be avoided."\(^{214}\)

Whether or not Pitzer sent this letter, the Baker&Botts attorneys began to act at about this same time. On December 27, 1962, one of the partners handling the case, Dillon Anderson, wrote the new attorney general, Waggoner Carr, to inform him of the proposed suit and to seek a meeting before it was filed.\(^{215}\) Finally, on February 21, 1963, Rice’s attorneys filed the lawsuit. This suit, more than Emory’s or Tulane’s, went right to the heart of the changes in southern higher education since World War II. The outcome of Emory’s action turned on an interpretation of Georgia tax law; Tulane’s depended on the legal status of the university as public or private. Rice’s lawsuit, though, revolved around the question of whether institutionalized racial discrimination actually destroyed the school’s ability to advance, or even sustain itself at its current level of quality and prestige. Rice’s legal team argued that the vast changes in America and in higher education since the time the university’s charter was drafted in 1891 meant that enforcement of the restrictive clauses would undermine the broader purpose of William Marsh Rice’s

\(^{214}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{215}\) Dillon Anderson to Honorable Waggoner Carr, December 27, 1962, Rice files, K-93, Baker&Botts. Anderson and Malcolm Lovett were both in close contact at this time with Joseph Merrick Jones, the chairman of the Tulane Board of Administrators, about the details of Tulane’s lawsuit. Joseph Jones to Dillon Anderson, December 6, 1962;
gift—the creation of a university of the highest order. On April 20 the Texas
Attorney General indicated that his office had no objection to the charter change.\textsuperscript{216}

Reaction to the lawsuit was swift and largely favorable. Dozens of alumni and
friends of the university praised the decision. Fewer objected, although those who
did were often scathing in their correspondence.\textsuperscript{217} Most alumni seemed to
understand the board’s reasons for the suit and to approve of them. Indeed, many
correspondents expressed relief that Rice had finally taken action. “Certainly,”
wrote one alumnus, “a decade after the decision of the Supreme Court in the public
school segregation cases is none too soon for Rice to begin considering
applications from Negroes.”\textsuperscript{218}

Just as quickly, however, a misconception about the nature of the legal proceedings
crept into the correspondence. Alumni, even the majority who approved of the action,
understood the lawsuit to be a challenge to William Marsh Rice’s will, not a rather
ordinary petition to change the interpretation of trust language. A typical comment was:
“I want to tell you how happy I am over the action of the Board of Governors of Rice
University in applying to the courts to set aside the terms of the will of the late William
Marsh Rice to the extent that students may be admitted to the university regardless of

\textsuperscript{216} Petition, William Marsh Rice University, et al. v. Waggoner Carr, February 21, 1963,
Series 1, Rice trial records, Pitzer Papers, WRC. The same day the suit was filed the
student chairman of the Rice Forum Committee wrote Martin Luther King, asking him to
postpone a planned visit to Rice “due to circumstances that have developed recently . . . .”
Mike Jaffe to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., February 21, 1963, Pitzer Papers, WRC.
\textsuperscript{217} Most of these letters are in Box 16, Pitzer Papers, WRC. Interestingly, most of the
angry letter are in the Baker&Botts files. Rice files, K-93, Baker&Botts.
\textsuperscript{218} John Urquhart to Pitzer, June 21, 1963, Box 16, Pitzer Papers, WRC.
race or color . . . ."219 Opponents of the change made the same mistake, though more vehemently. Two enraged alumni could not wait for the postal service to send their disapproval to the university. In a telegram, they protested: "Highly disappointed and amazed at incredible action of board seeking to destroy basic and crystal clear provisions of Rice will. Trust that court will not uphold this flagrant and arrogant violation of our benefactors desires."220 Pitzer, George Brown, Malcolm Lovett and others tried repeatedly to convince opponents and supporters alike that no one was "breaking" Mr. Rice’s will. In November 1963, at Rice’s homecoming, Lovett gave a talk to the alumni organization in which he carefully stepped through the reasoning that led to the lawsuit and the legal issues involved. These explanations, though well argued, were necessarily long and complex, and were no match for the angry but simple rhetoric of those who wanted to stop change.221

Two prominent alumni were particularly determined to stop the change. On September 20, John Coffee and Val Billups filed a petition in intervention, arguing that the trustees were forever bound by the literal meaning of Rice’s charter, even if a literal reading destroyed the purpose of the charter. Any other interpretation, they argued through their lawyers at the Houston firm of Bracewell, Reynolds, and Patterson, would

219 W. Darwin Andrus to Pitzer, February 27, 1963, Box 16, Pitzer Papers, WRC.
220 Shirley Simons, Jr. and S.A. Cochran, Jr. to Board of Trustees, Rice University, February 25, 1963, Box 13, Pitzer Papers, WRC.
221 Malcolm Lovett, Speech to Rice Alumni, November 1963, Rice files, K-93, Baker&Botts. George Brown wrote the clearest responses to the unhappy letters. In one especially concise note he defended the board’s decision with reference to Rice’s last charter change lawsuit: “Had we not asked the court for changes so we could buy the Rincon Oil Field, Rice University would have been a fifty million dollar loser.” George R. Brown to Fred J. Stanciliff, September 3, 1963, Rice files, K-93, Baker&Botts. Lovett and Brown often sent copies of Lovett’s talk to the alumni to angry correspondents. This "should answer all the questions," Lovett wrote to one friend, “that you or your
deal a fatal blow to certainty in wills and trusts. This intervention prevented the timely
resolution of Rice’s suit, forcing a trial and keeping the university tied up in appeals for
years. The intervenors claimed repeatedly that they did not oppose the admission of
blacks or the charging of tuition in and of themselves, but merely cared passionately
about the sanctity of testamentary documents. It is inconceivable, though, that they would
not have known, if only through their lawyers, that the principle of deviation from the
terms of a trust where compliance would defeat the accomplishment of its purpose was a
time-tested principle of trust law.

While it is difficult to understand exactly why Coffee and Billups pursued this
intervention, there are hints in correspondence between Coffee and a former Rice
graduate student named James Aronson. While at Rice, Aronson had received a
scholarship funded by and named after Coffee. When he heard about the intervention, he
sought to return the money. In reply, Coffee asserted again that he did not object to the
enrollment of blacks, but claimed that the board had the authority to accomplish this
without changing the charter. (Ironically, this also seems to have been Pitzer’s position
all along.) The real heart of Coffee’s complaint, however, was something quite different.
“Investigation has shown,” he told Aronson, “the Trustees decided on this course of
action after repeated urging by Attorney General Kennedy, with attendant promises of
huge Federal grants to our school . . . Rice Institute as you and I know it – and it is a great
school – would be no more if this happens.” It is worth noting that Coffee referred to the

222 Petition in Intervention, June 23, 1963, Series 2, Rice trial records, Pitzer Papers,
WRC. In his letter of resignation in 1968, Kenneth Pitzer singled out this intervention as
one of the chief disappointments of his years at Rice. Pitzer to Malcolm Lovett, August
16, 1968, Box 8, Chancellor’s Office Papers, WRC.
school as "Rice Institute" rather than "Rice University," suggesting that he may have been unhappy with the name change as well. That Coffee was generally discontented with changing times on campus is also suggested in a letter he wrote to the *Houston Press*. Coffee condemned the Rice trustees for seeking to "impose their aspirations for the growth of Rice University over the will of Wm. Marsh Rice," abandoning the undergraduate program in favor of graduate studies, wanting "instant integration," and adopting a new school song. In a note to Pitzer about the intervention, Carey Croneis quoted from a speech given by Robert Maynard Hutchins about twenty five years before:

> All alumni are dangerous. They see their alma mater through a rosy haze that gets thicker through the years. They do not know what the college was really like. They do not want to know what it is like now. They want to imagine that it is like what they think it was like in their time. Therefore they oppose all change. If changes are made without their approval, they are resentful. Since no useful change could ever be made with their approval, few useful changes have been made in higher education. 223

In any event, the delay caused by the intervention created real and serious difficulties for Rice. Although it was trying to remove racial restrictions, there was no longer any guarantee that it would succeed. By late 1963, Kenneth Pitzer was desperate. That summer, the Ford Foundation informed him that they would wait for the outcome of the lawsuit before deciding whether to make a grant to Rice.224 Many other complications arose. In October, Pitzer composed a memo to the board, outlining the acute problems the school now faced. In the summer of 1963, the chief of naval personnel, Vice-Admiral

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223 James L. Aronson to Pitzer, July 12, 1963; John B. Coffee to James L. Aronson, July 23, 1963, Box 9, Chancellor's Office Papers, WRC; *Houston Press*, March 2, 1964. Pitzer cleverly tried to use the opening provided by the conversation between Aronson and Coffee to craft some sort of compromise that would end the intervention, but to no avail. The Hutchins' quote is in Croneis to Pitzer, December 6, 1963, Box 13, Pitzer Papers, WRC.
W.R. Smedberg, contacted Pitzer about Rice’s Naval ROTC program. Smedberg seemed sympathetic but made it clear that he could not allow the program to continue much longer at a segregated institution. To leave the naval unit in a school “where race or color would be a bar for entry to morally, mentally, and physically qualified applicants would not be within the spirit nor the intent of the [federal] equal opportunity policy.” 225

Pitzer was intensely concerned about Rice’s relationship with NASA. This relationship, he said, was “particularly sensitive since the presence and preferred cooperation of Rice constituted a substantial factor in bringing the Manned Spacecraft Center to Houston.” While the university’s current agreements with the Center had been signed before new, more stringent NASA nondiscrimination rules became effective, Pitzer feared that Rice would be deeply embarrassed when these agreements came up for renewal. Pitzer’s fears were justified. In August 1963 NASA sent him a copy of Federal Personnel Manual Letter 410-5, which prohibited federal agencies from selecting for training any facility that discriminated because of race: “The criterion to be applied in each case is whether a qualified NASA employee would be admitted to the facility without consideration of race, creed, color, or national origin.” The new regulations would become effective on August 15, 1963, and included the following: “If training in process on that date is being conducted by a non-Government facility that does not qualify [under the nondiscrimination rule] it must be terminated at the conclusion of the current training unit.” Pitzer worried that “the completion by Tulane of its legal action

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225 Pitzer to Members of the Board of Governors, October 16, 1963, Rice files, K-93, Baker&Botts; W.R. Smedberg, III to Pitzer, July 8, 1963, Box 16, Pitzer Papers, WRC. Both Croneis and Pitzer replied to the Smedberg, assuring him that Rice was trying to remove its racial restrictions but acknowledging that the intervention made it impossible to predict when the restrictions would actually be voided. Croneis to Smedberg, July 12, 1963; Pitzer to Smedberg, August 28, 1963, Box 16, Pitzer Papers, WRC.
with respect to racial restrictions leaves Rice exposed as the last university of its type to complete this action. While our intentions are now clearly on record, and this is most valuable, they alone cannot indefinitely avoid serious detrimental effects upon the University.”

Also in late 1963, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare contacted Croneis about a faculty member’s proposal for a summer language institute, calling attention to the contract’s nondiscrimination clause. In February 1964 Rice’s Director of Placement notified Pitzer that the Internal Revenue Service refused to interview Rice students on campus. “It was inferred from their conversation,” wrote Evans, “as in the case of some other government agencies, that they were not interviewing because of the fact that no negroes are enrolled at Rice University.” Most disturbing to a school in the midst of a new push for broad excellence, the delay left segregation as a major stumbling block in faculty recruitment. Several frustrated department chairmen sent Pitzer copies of correspondence with heavily recruited scholars who turned down job offers over segregation.

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226 Pitzer to Members of the Board of Governors, October 16, 1963, Rice files, K-93, Baker&Botts. Malcolm Lovett took the threat of losing the NASA relationship very seriously. “The NASA memorandum in particular raises problems that will be hard to meet,” he wrote Dillon Anderson. “The next Board meeting will be on October 30. We should endeavor to have our suggestions and plan, if any, for meeting this problem by that time.” Memorandum, “To Dillon Anderson from Malcolm Lovett,” October 14, 1963, Rice files, K-93, Baker&Botts.


228 Copy of letter, Heinrich Schneider to Robert L. Kahn, October 25, 1963; Copy of letter, Francois Treve to Gerald MacLane, December 10, 1963, Box 16, Pitzer Papers, WRC.
Pitzer did what he could on his own authority. At the time the board approved the petition for the charter change, Rice adopted a policy of nondiscrimination in its other relations with the black community. Pitzer outlined this policy in a brief letter to two alumni: "In other areas, such as employment and attendance at special educational activities, lectures, etc., the University is following a non-discrimination policy. There were two Negro participants in a special summer institute for college economics teachers in 1962, and there is now one Negro employee at the professional research level."229

Finally, on February 10, 1964, the case came to trial in state district court. In one particularly revealing turn, the intervenors demanded a jury trial and Rice’s lawyers, probably fearing an appeal, agreed to it.230 The intervenors still sought to keep the trustees bound to the four corners of the document. Rice presented overwhelming evidence that it was no longer possible for a university to be both segregated and "of the first order." The presidents of Southern Methodist University, the University of Texas, Texas Christian University, Trinity University, the University of St. Thomas, and the American Council on Education testified that segregation had been abandoned on nearly every American campus, that foundations would no longer contribute to the few segregated institutions that remained, and that federal funding of research and facilities construction would also be cut off. Pitzer, George Brown, Carey Croneis, and Rice treasurer Leo Shamblin presented evidence that Rice's admissions policy, if continued, would cripple the school's ability to raise funds, keep faculty, and recruit students.231 The jury

229 Pitzer to Mr. And Mrs. L. Kent Bendall, October 28, 1963, Box 16, Pitzer Papers, WRC.
230 Trust interpretation is a matter of equity, which would normally be tried in front of a judge. This jury trial was a real oddity.
231 Memorandum, Croneis to Pitzer, January 24, 1964, Rice files, K-93, Baker&Botts. Congressman Albert Thomas helped compile nondiscrimination requirements of the
unanimously agreed that William Marsh Rice had intended to create an outstanding university through his gift, and that it was impossible to carry out this intention in 1964 while maintaining segregation. The judge, William Holland, entered judgment in favor of the university on March 9, 1964. 232

Although Coffee and Billups pressed appeals of the decision until 1967, this judgment allowed Rice to proceed with both desegregation and its ambitious fundraising efforts. In his report to the board of governors in January 1965, Pitzer detailed the critical steps that had been taken. “One Negro, Mr. Raymond Johnson, with truly excellent academic qualifications, was admitted to graduate study in mathematics . . . . Also, I am signing the certification to Federal Government Agencies that we will comply with the Civil Rights Act . . . .” 233

This insistence that the lawsuit was an attempt to “break Mr. Rice’s will” would prove insidious and nearly impossible to correct. Lengthy explanations of the law of trusts were simply no match for heated rhetoric about the sanctity of a man’s last will and testament. The fact that William Marsh Rice’s will was never at issue and only briefly mentioned the university at all did nothing to dissuade angry alumni from condemning Pitzer and the board for breaking faith with a dead man. The passage of years (even decades) did not put the misperception to rest. At the end of 1966, the president of Rice’s alumni association was still trying to soothe the feelings of disgruntled contributors who

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233 Confidential Report of the President to the Board of Governors of Rice University, January 1965, Box 30, Pitzer Papers, WRC. Before he was admitted to the graduate school, Raymond Johnson was employed as a “research assistant” in the math department, an irregular situation that made Malcolm Lovett more than a little uncomfortable.
believed that Rice had somehow pulled a shady maneuver for its own secret purposes.\textsuperscript{234}

What these purposes might be remained somewhat vague, but more than one alumnus expressed the belief that the federal government—usually in the person of the nefarious Robert F. Kennedy—had struck a deal with the university to strip away its independence in return for cash. Although extreme, this notion reflected a more widespread, if milder, distrust of the national government. This attitude baffled Pitzer, who saw the federal government and its agencies as sources of sustenance rather than a threatening enemy: “I do not fully understand the attitude which seems common in this area in which people regard the Federal Government as a foreign entity rather than something which their own ancestors created and they themselves and their fellow citizens control.”\textsuperscript{235}

By 1961, the decision makers at these five universities were finally confronted with nonnegotiable demands. Whether from a foundation, the federal government, their own faculty, or all of these in combination, they received the message that there was no more room for evasion, ambiguity, or bitter-end posturing. They would either change or not. If they did, they would be rewarded. If they did not, they would be punished. Now. Not some time in the future, after they had more time to weigh and balance, more time to consider the proper course. Now. Finally, it was the threat of immediate bad consequences that elicited a rather sudden change of heart among previously stalwart defenders of southern tradition.

\textsuperscript{234} Charles W. Hamilton to C.F. Johnson, November 21, 1966, Box 1, Chancellor’s Papers, WRC. Examples abound in the files of Chancellor Croneis, Pitzer, and other Rice officials.

\textsuperscript{235} Pitzer to Samuel A. Shelburne, November 16, 1964, Box 13, Pitzer Papers, WRC.
Conclusion

In January 1963 Emory’s vice president, Judson C. Ward, wrote to an alumnus who was disturbed about the school’s decision to admit blacks. In this letter Ward probably got closer to the heart of the long conflict over race on these campuses than anyone else:

I feel certain . . . that the deeper anguish in your soul is really caused by the whole new development that is taking place in race relations in the South. Whether we like it or not, we are living in a tremendously tumultuous new world which is further from the world you and I lived in at Emory than that world was from the world of George Washington. I frequently stop to shake my head to try to orient myself in this sweep of events.

Supreme Court decisions, Kennedy administration, Little Rock, Mississippi - - all of these things notwithstanding, the fact is that one hundred years after emancipation, the United States had finally reached the point where it is completely illogical to deny members of the Negro race equal facilities, advances, and opportunites, purely and simply on the grounds that their skin is black . . . .

As you know, I was born and reared in the South. I have had many fears, apprehensions, worries, doubts, anxieties and the anguish which you describe, but I have also studied history, and I know that we are not living in the days of Napoleon or George Washington. The South is finally becoming part of the nation and, indeed, a part of the world. We cannot enjoy all the benefits of progress - - good business, satellites, industrial development, etc. - - and not also bear the burden of the social and political change that goes with it.¹

After World War II the pace of change in the United States, and especially in the South, did indeed seem dizzying. The region was utterly transformed in these years, becoming more urban, more industrial, and far more prosperous than ever before. Southerners, black and white, were better educated. Ties to the rest of the nation grew stronger as northerners migrated to the South’s cities to work for the major corporations now located there. Old economic patterns vanished and old social patterns along with

¹ Judson C. Ward to Robert N. Cline, January 10, 1963, Box 3, Bowden Papers, EUA.
them. On the region's private campuses, a similar transformation occurred. There was a massive influx of money for research and a major expansion of graduate education. The undergraduate colleges, once all that existed of most of these schools, became less central as the institutions grew into multi-faceted enterprises. The faculties became less southern and more tied to their professional colleagues rather than their local communities. The students became more diverse and more able, challenged by standardized admissions tests and stricter entrance requirements. The campuses themselves expanded outward in every possible direction, sometimes growing into a tangled maze of new buildings with obscure purposes.

The presidents of these schools, largely because their jobs forced them to focus on the future, quickly grasped the changes in the post-war South and nation. They understood that the desegregation of their campuses was inevitable. For them, the central question was who would guide this inevitable change and to this question they had a single answer. The "intelligent white men of the South," they argued, were uniquely positioned to make sober and judicious decisions about how and when to alter traditional southern racial arrangements. They alone—not the federal government, the northern foundations, naïve students and faculty, nor the die-hard traditionalists among the trustees and alumni—understood both the destructiveness of segregation and the deep white southern resistance to relinquishing it. They explicitly refused to base decisions that involved race on abstract principles such as democracy and equality. To do so, they argued, was to replace common sense and their own detailed, intimate understanding of the precise situation on each campus with the "theoretical idealism" of zealots. The agreement that the educated white elite must control the timing and extent of racial change thus allowed
infinite flexibility in application. Each man’s nuanced understanding, they believed, would allow him to navigate dangerous and shifting currents safely and to lead the institutions toward national eminence and regional influence.

Despite this consensus on where authority lay, each of these schools took different paths. Different circumstances at each school shaped the choices that each president made about how, and whether, to approach the trustees about loosening racial restrictions on campus. These circumstances included state, local, and national politics, but above all the composition and attitude of the board of trustees. Thus, Harvie Branscomb took advantage of a very specific situation—including the presence of several strong black schools in Nashville and a sympathetic and extremely powerful board member—to maneuver the Vanderbilt board into accepting a few black students. Goodrich White was hindered by the prominence of race as a political issue in Georgia and, on campus, the dominance of Emory’s board chairman Charles Howard Candler, whose commitment to segregation was total. At Tulane, Rufus Harris shared Branscomb’s aggressive stance on racial reform but was unable to persuade the board to make any changes. The public charges of disloyalty directed at Tulane professors who supported civil rights for blacks and, perhaps even more crucial, the difficult relationship between Harris and board chairman Joseph Merrick Jones, left Harris unable to induce relaxation of Tulane’s strict racial policies. Hollis Edens judged that the time was right to begin discussing desegregation only after Senator Willis Smith was gone from the Duke board, but when it proved thoroughly split he backed away and never tried again. At Rice, it is likely that William Houston, a northerner, was reluctant to even address the racial preferences of the completely southern board.
To the mainly older men who served as trustees at the private southern universities, the changes that took hold in the 1950s seemed like sudden and fundamental upheaval. Before their eyes, the stable and secure world that they had known degenerated into something that they saw as near chaos. As the South opened up, as travel became easy and people more mobile, as a suburban middle class rose up around the cities, as blacks and whites alike owned televisions and refrigerators and graduated from high school, the relevance of the white elite began to crumble. Other influences became stronger. And they did not have the power to do anything about it. They did, however, have the power to stop, or at least delay, change on campus. No new admissions policy could be adopted without their consent. And so, frightened and angry about what they had already lost, they fought with real passion to hold off any "deterioration" in the schools of their youth. Forced to "swallow the camel," they strained mightily at the gnat.

The trustees, while endorsing efforts to help bring these schools into the national mainstream academically, remained committed almost until the last possible moment to preserving the racial status quo in the South. In his memoirs, Duke chaplain Barney Jones described the problem as he saw it during Hollis Edens's tenure: "It had been my conviction for some time that, in particular, a number of clerical members of the Board were men of small stature and limited vision who were holding the University back. The generally conservative and provincial outlook of the Board was nowhere more evident than in its studied, southern-styled avoidance of the integration issue. They were determined to keep Negroes out of the University—at least as long as possible. Edens, who was conservative on the issue but able to transcend his provincialism, was determined that a wedge not be driven between himself and his Board... At the same
time, Edens did what he could to move the Board to take action on racial integration. He told me he would say to his Board that this was an urgent issue and that it was imperative that it be faced and resolved without delay. There would follow a prolonged silence around the table until at last the Chairman would ask, ‘Is there any other business to come before the Board?’”

The trustees’ unwillingness to do what needed to be done only intensified as time went by. The effect of the Supreme Court’s decision in Brown v. Board of Education was, on the surface, wholly destructive of hopes for peaceful desegregation of these schools. Resentment of “outside” interference in traditional southern racial arrangements, fears of the “socialist” leanings of the federal government, unwillingness to bear criticism from their friends and neighbors, and plain old-fashioned racism led a majority of trustees to fiercely oppose lifting the color bar. The turmoil that followed the decision heightened all these emotions. Barney Jones captured this too in his memoirs. “Edens told me,” he wrote, “that in his judgment had he made integration a condition of his remaining on in the presidency prior to the Supreme Court School Desegregation Decision, Duke would have integrated. But after that decision, he conceded, had he made it a condition, the board would have accepted his resignation. He reported that the mood of the Board was, ‘We were about to integrate on our own, but now that the Supreme Court had ordered us to do so, be damned if we will!’”

They did, though. Despite much wailing about “southern tradition,” when all was said and done the trustees traded southern tradition for concrete gain. The only arguments for desegregation that they would listen to were those that they saw as “realistic” or

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3 Ibid.
“practical”—that is, arguments that touched on the impact of segregation on themselves. Thus, moral arguments that centered on black equality in the eyes of God or democratic arguments that focused on black equality before the law fell on absolutely deaf ears. Justice, even ordinary fairness, was not a “practical” consideration. Arguments based on these notions, these men believed, were the hallmark of zealots, of idealists who failed to grasp what the world was really like. Like almost all people, their reality was bounded by their own vision. The fact that it was a “practical” problem to a black man that he could not attend school near his family completely escaped them. Interestingly, almost no one (the only clear exceptions are Harvie Branscomb and Rufus Harris) understood that a zealous commitment to enforced racial separation was, like its opposite, “a wholly doctrinaire position which ignores the facts of history and the realities of the present.”

It was only the imminent threat of harm to something they cared about that impelled the boards to accept desegregation. In and of itself, this is not unusual. It’s the way people act all the time. What is remarkable, though, was that so many trustees were willing for so long to let the university be damaged rather than admit that segregation was a problem (even a “practical” one) or that “outsiders” could influence their judgment about it. A decade and a half of chronic trouble that sapped the morale of the faculty, discouraged new talent from coming to campus, made public relations a nightmare, and lowered the schools’ reputations in the eyes of the nation had little effect. It took the immediate danger of drastic punishment, the prospect of decimated institutions, to make them change their admissions policies.

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By 1960, though, the "outsiders" had indeed accumulated enough power to raise that prospect. The high cost of segregation was finally made starkly clear. Through the relatively politically insulated mechanism of the executive order, every president since Harry Truman had strengthened the federal government's commitment to equality of opportunity. With the election of John F. Kennedy, the reach of federal nondiscrimination requirements in contracting finally extended into the admissions policies of the private southern universities. Failure to comply meant ineligibility for the federal grants and contracts that were the lifeblood of the advanced programs at these schools. In the private sector, the major philanthropies, some dedicated to southern education since before World War II, also ran out of patience with institutionalized racism. Further, many "outsiders" had somehow become "insiders." Faculty members, recruited from all over the nation in the attempt to raise the quality and reputation of these schools, felt entitled to have their voices heard in decisions about who would study on their campuses. Southern blacks insisted that their future was not a matter for the "educated white men of the South" to determine, that the time had come for the "theoretical idealism" of democracy and equal rights to be put into practice.

Where boards were led by chairmen with a broader vision of the world and a clear-eyed understanding of power politics, there was relatively gracious acquiescence. The recipe for change seemed to require both a willing president and at least one prominent board member who would exercise leadership in an effort to coax the more hidebound members of the board to do what needed to be done. Thus at Rice, which had seemed for years oblivious to pressure for racial change, George R. Brown firmly moved the board to initiate a lawsuit to remove the charter restriction on black enrollment. Similarly, at
Emory chairman Henry Bowden steered that board to a calm resolution. At Vanderbilt, still reeling from its open confrontation with the civil rights movement, Branscomb’s final efforts at desegregating the school, aided by Harold Vanderbilt, were anticlimactic. At other schools it was not so easy. Tulane, still led by Joseph Merrick Jones, finally yielded only after it lost a major, and desperately needed, foundation grant. At Duke, it took the ugly loss of Hollis Edens and a carefully plotted battle by his interim successor, Deryl Hart, to convince a majority of the trustees to do what was best for the university instead of what they personally preferred.

But the trustees, even many of those who favored making the change, denied forever that they had been forced to admit black students. “This action,” wrote Duke trustee Bunyan Womble, “did not come as a result of any pressure or petitions but only after careful and intense consideration over the past few months.” This completely ignores the fact that the careful and intense consideration was only necessary because of pressure from outside the board. Although they characterized their lawsuit as a way to battle state coercion, removing Georgia’s control over Emory’s admissions policies, they were effectively coerced into filing the suit by different outside forces. The major exception was Marie Louise Snellings at Tulane, who understood in the most clear-eyed way that a decision to desegregate in order to receive grants and federal money was a “sell out.” Ironically, this more honest assessment of the situation seemed to make it more difficult for Tulane to make the change. Backs stiffened when the force was perceived too nakedly. It took, apparently, some measure of delusion to make the medicine go down. The notion that these schools voluntarily desegregated is intimately tied to the concepts of control and authority that guided their actions during the decades after World War II.
Even more than segregation, the presidents and trustees of the private southern universities were committed to the belief that they had both the authority and the power to control their institutions—and ultimately the racial mores of their entire region—free from any outside interference. Neither yankees, nor “coloreds,” nor the socialistic federal government, they believed, had the smallest right to claim any authority or to exercise any power in interference with the prerogatives of the white southern elite.

The claim that the admission of blacks to these schools was voluntary was widely accepted. An editorial by *Atlanta Constitution* editor Eugene Patterson in 1962 reflects this attitude perfectly. Praising Emory and Mercer (now led by Rufus Harris), Patterson expressed the highest regard for their brave leadership on desegregation. “The church and the school must lead, not follow, in difficult times or the people are left without guiding values. In the current period of social change, Georgians are being well and bravely served by two church-related schools, Emory (Methodist) and Mercer (Baptist).”

Honest as ever, Rufus Harris knew better. Well before the flattering editorial that praised Emory’s and Mercer’s desegregation in 1962, Harris had come to understand the failure of the southern universities on this issue. In a letter to a friend, the chaplain at Southern Baptist Hospital in New Orleans, written in late 1960, he expressed his feelings at length. “I know you must be distressed at the existing school disorder prevailing in New Orleans,” Harris wrote. “It sickens me in many ways and for many reasons. I feel that inadequacy is being revealed in the feebleness of my own years at Tulane. It seems proper to suggest that education should have somehow made the public better balanced and prepared to receive the Negroes in the schools. What should Tulane have done? More pertinently, what did she do? And the other colleges? I tried to lead as far as I thought I
could, but if I could do it over I would do ever so much more, even if beheaded in the try.
I am low and troubled in my mind about our educational institutions . . .

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